WESTERLY

STORIES • POEMS • ARTICLES • REVIEWS

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LINDEN GIRL

A STORY OF OUTLAWED LIVES

PAMELA RAJKOWSKI

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DON'T FORGET!

Westerly Goes to War in December!

The final issue of *Westerly* for each year is a special one devoted to a selected theme or concept. For the Summer (December) issue of 1995, taking note that the year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the ending of World War II, the theme will be War.

Stories and poems concerning any aspect of war (in general, not just the Second World War) are welcome. *Westerly* is also interested in articles dealing with the impact of war on social and cultural life, rather than straightforward histories of campaigns or individual battles.

Contributions still welcome.

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ROBERT LOVE

Family Photograph

This is the past; brothers and sisters all,
stand in black and white upon the grass, behind
the house so new and harsh it smacks the eyes,
its corners still with cutting edges, no trees to hide
that lump of Ayers Rock brick, now civilised
by courtyard, patio, corralled with dark stained pine.
You're looking at the camera, and your eyes
are quizzical slits in sunlight above a battlement smile.
The yards are bare and dusty as your knees,
sticking out below the old, sun faded curtain
of a wider sister's dress. You look uncomfortable as hell!
And your six siblings, the boys with bullet heads,
the girls with basin cuts, stand stiff and self conscious in the light,
just as though they should have gone before they came,
perhaps it's just the glare, but something's missing.
As if, although this city saw your birth,
uncertainty remains from the long trek,
Deutschland to Sydney, Mosman to Melbourne,
names in the playground. You say your mother
regretted leaving the house down by the bay,
'The roof tiles had come all the way from France'.
There is a surety that's settled with the years,
that's missing from this photograph; just the simple knowledge
that here is where we live, that here is home
that I have found. I found a home in you,
but wonder sometimes if that too bright sun
still shines on you. What can I say,
who loves you now. The past's a stone
we flip unthinkingly down a well; it slips away
and leaves us only ripples, rooftiles from Marseilles.

CAROLYN LOGAN

Home for Sundaydinner

I

—It's been so long   you wipe—
her old hands carefully lift dip in out of soapy water
    platebowl   silverknife
—just leave them   I'll put them away—
    servingdish   spoon   saladfork   cakeserver
    grandma's salt and pepper shakers   handpainted
—you   don't know   where they belong—
    crystalbowl
—it's been so long   youaway solong   so faraway—

II

All I ever wanted—
her chin lifts her glance cuts around sharp over shoulder
    knifefork   pickledish
—wanted a daughter who brought her husband and children home
every sunday—
    creampitcher   jellyspoon
every sunday for sunday dinner—
    friedchicken   hot sweetcorn   potatosalad   ham   sweetpotato
    dillpickles   sweetpickles pickled watermelonrind   breadrolls
    strawberryjam   peachpreserves   butter applepie   blueberry pie
    pecanpie angelfood cake devilsfood jello marshmallows cherry
    icecream churned who licks the paddles turning salt and ice
—that's all I ever wanted.

III

can think of nothing to say never could think about all she ever wanted
about husband children father mother grandmother grandfather sitting
around the table pass this here have more of that teeth chew tongue long
lick longing to lap up lips smack smack that hurt that is supposed to hurt
swallowing down down pass this you need more you must eat I must eat
I all I ever wanted I to eat was you

IV

Today three to sunday dinner
mother father daughter
we sit sedatequiet
smiled on by framed in living colour daughter grandson husband brother
sister son hanging from walls stacked on mantle resting on tables smiles
signalling a permanent regret that they cannot be home for sundaydinner.

ANDREW LANSDOWN

Pathos

There is no bound to a father's
suffering and love. Ask our Father.

Ask mine. See how gently he is
tilting my brother's wounded head

to shave the stubble from his jaw.

YVE LOUIS

The Hunted in Orion

In the dream I am running.
Through veins of earth musk flows
where we ambush the game.
My heart beats an echo to hooves,
the drumming on the skin-taut plain, until
the chosen one falters, falls;
our spears bedded deep in its throat.

And after the meat, a patterning,
a danced invocation for what we took.
With blood, with bone,
we plant again the silver pelted herds
to gaze with the moon.
In the dance, our steps
unlock the seed for new seasons' grass.

Limbs raced against fire,
the flame in my lungs
given for the beast's crimson jugular...
awake, I attempt to trace that memory.
As hunters once traced themselves
in revolving constellations:
the sword and the jewelled belt.
Their footprints
laid down in mud
have turned to stone.
Only these images of dream,
code messages

...someone tonight running
for the last truck out of a city, a town
where the musk stinks blood-hot,
and the hunter is the remembrance of himself.

GLEN PHILLIPS

The Bird Market, Canton, II

Old men carry them like closed lanterns
Where flame of song in each throat
Is quenched for coming night;
The birds, portraits framed in bamboo mesh,
The market stacks them one on one
In leaning towers. And everywhere
Between the day's long last pipings,
Last twitters and feeble endings of their songs
Is rustle of ruffed feathers, scale on scale,
And the sleepy heads tentatively checking
The wing will be there to nestle under when
Darkness does finally come. We walk in
And out as the stalls disappear, and hold
Our furled umbrellas against uncertain rain.
Our elbows jostle, our words cross and re-cross;
We search each other assiduously and think:

Buyer beware, seller beware, until in separate
Homeward buses, the night takes us softly
Under its great dark wing again.

ALEC CHOATE

Matilda Bay

We sit together, facing
the unruffled water, my daughter painting,
I searching for words.

Up river, beyond the bay,
the tall city braces its climb on the crest
of its reflection,

a pallor that fades not far
from the shore we look from, or loses itself
in the white oblong

of the small rivercraft, moored
side by side and hemmed by the vacant jetty.
Their masts are naked,

and so still is the water
that at times one edges a city building
exactly, a clash

a good brush cannot allow
and soon is painting away, or astutely
slanting or bending.

Other small falsehoods triumph,
like the brown boat nosing its buoy like a growth
and set mid-picture

to break the bay's overwidth,
or the foreground shag-topped post placed to enhance
the city's cool poise.

Word beside brush stroke, each breathes
with faith, each creates its own scene from a scene
that remains aloof.

JULIA DARLING

The Baboon's Keeper

The baboon is square-jawed and shiny-red-bottomed and swings from his arms, screaming. His cage rusts around him. It is patched with twisted wire. He calls the other monkeys, the dingoes, the koalas, the kangaroos. They stop munching to listen. They scratch their ears. The last group of tourists is ambling through the park. The animals sniff the familiar odours of plastic, coca cola, and sweat as they sleep in the drowsy late afternoon. The tourists stand outside the baboon's cage and try to do what the keeper tells them. His wide leather hat shades his face and they cannot see his eyes. He tells them they must speak to the baboon as if it is a child. They must not move suddenly, or feed the baboon. They must not speak to each other. They are silenced into numb smiles, while the baboon dances and rages. He has given up communicating to these faces. He only watches the keeper. The zoo is closing down. Its emus are mangy, its eucalypts are dry and sagging. It is a dust-bowl of thirsty trees and panting beasts. Only the keeper is smart, khakied and washed. He watches the baboon, who watches him.

The keeper tells the tourists of the day how the baboon stole the keys from his pocket and in seconds opened the door and ran to the monkeys' cage to free them. Only a baboon would think of others, he says; a monkey would only think of himself. When the baboon was recaptured it bit him on the arm and he shows them the scar which is still red and pocked with stitch marks, like a Frankenstein. "Keep back," he snaps. "Don't irritate him."

The keeper's name is Mervin. He looks forward to the time when the last visitors leave, and the padlocks of the park can be fastened. The baboon is too clever for the dilapidated zoo and he frightens the other helpers. He frightens Mervin too, but Mervin doesn't let it show.

A week before a boy made fun of the baboon. He jumped up and down in front of the cage and made monkey noises and flapped his arms about. Mervin was feeding the Tasmanian Devils and he heard the squealing and shouting and ran. The other animals looked as if they were cowering; as if a war was beginning.

The baboon was flinging his wiry body at the boy, rattling the sides of the cage. Mervin grabbed the boy and shook him. The baboon screamed and screamed. The mother cried. The baboon stretched his long arm through the bars and twisted his hand towards the boy's throat. Mervin threw the boy down onto the sand. His parents are suing the zoo. They don't understand, thinks Mervin. They don't understand what the animal sees. He sees more than you or I could possibly imagine.

Mervin was once a soldier. You can see it in his spine. He was in Vietnam, and got out with only a damaged leg that drags a little, but not noticeably. It was what he saw that damaged him most of all. He doesn't remember it unless in dreams. Bad dreams running with bloody tears. Before he was a soldier he was a teenager, growing up in the harsh bush with an Irish farmer for a father. Mervin knows about cages, and about mockery. He has told the boss that the baboon must go to a bigger, stronger cage. Mervin cannot be answerable for the baboon. He is stronger than any of them; but the boss is old and drinks too much and stays at the top end of the park where a waterfall still runs prettily. He tells Mervin it's up to him. Money is his problem, not baboons.

"I get all the shit jobs," Mervin tells his mates at the RSL on Saturday night, drinking the last few moments of happy hour. They nod, and laugh, mirthlessly.

Mervin grumbles to the baboon, "It's him up the top you should be screeching at, not me," but the baboon turns his back and laughs.

No one wants to clean the cage; no one wants to go up close.

"Come on old boy," says Mervin.

The baboon beckons with his leathery hand. Mervin steps back.

"What you need is a wife," says Mervin, who has written to the zoo in Sydney above the boss's head to ask if they would like to buy the baboon.

Mervin has no wife. In the evenings he sits outside his veranda, cleaning his rifle, and talking to his dog. The dog looks up at him and nods. She watches him walk to the fridge to get a beer, but stays very still, as she has been taught. She may only run when Mervin throws the ball. The baboon does not like to see Mervin with the dog, and shakes its fist through the bars.

When the baboon came to the zoo he was small and undernourished. Mervin would go into the cage and play with him; the little baboon would climb up Mervin's body and sit on his head. He would scratch its back and tickle its ears. Together they rolled and teased in the lonely cage with its solitary rubber tyre. One day Mervin played dead; lying with his head on his hands on the floor of the cage. The baboon came up and touched his back gently, and listened for his breathing; it danced around him and looked to heaven. Then it slid its hand to Mervin's belt and felt for his keys. Mervin jumped up, momentarily losing his balance. The baboon screeched. That was the end of the playing, and the beginning of the watching.

The big zoo in Sydney wrote back and said they would send a man over to see the baboon, and that they were looking for a male to replace their older, now impotent animal. Mervin read the letter out to the baboon who squinted at him jokingly. Then he ran to the bars of the cage and shook them. Bits of rust fell off and lay in the sand, and the monkeys next door started hollering and sniggering. Mervin folded the letter up and put it back in his top pocket, shouting at one of the younger helpers to get a move on.

The night before the visitor came Mervin stayed up alone drinking beer. His face was hard and brown in the darkness. He felt mixed up. Like most rural people he resented cities and city people. He knew the big zoo in Sydney would have a cage that was more like an oasis, with trees, pools of water, moats and playthings. He knew too that the baboon had become mad and lonely and that he might change and be better tempered with other baboons. He thought too about himself, and the cage after the baboon had gone; the tired koalas that the visitors longed to stroke and the boss who cared less and less, and he talked to himself long into the night and fell asleep with his head on his knees, and did not even see the grey snake that slid over the veranda, past his still boots, that might as well have been tree trunks, and disappeared off into the shrub. He slept and dreamt of a cage door opening and creaking on its hinges.

In the morning Mervin had a bad head and a stiff neck. He drove to the airport to meet the zoologist; a slippery white man with no muscle and the eyes of a desert rat. When they arrived at the dismal park with its aging roundabout and stagnant lake Mervin became silent and defensive. The trees that lined the driveway were still beautiful and wide and stretched their limbs over the rough track, and the visitor politely commented on them. He became less polite when they reached the animal park, and barely stifled his distaste for the shanty cages and dismal conditions. When they reached the cage the baboon was pressed up tight against the wire as if he expected them. He saw the zoologist and bared his teeth, pointing at him with intent.

Mervin and the zoologist went up to the cage, carrying fists of fresh fruit for the baboon to eat.

"A baboon should never be left alone," said the zoologist.
"He may not adapt in Sydney. He could attack the others. I would say he's gone half insane living here all by himself."
Mervin disliked the zoologist.
"He relies on me for company."
"That's what the rich say, who have them for pets, then they come crying to us because their baby turns on them ... I've seen it happen so often I could weep."
Mervin opened his mouth to answer but the baboon swung close to the bars and fixed his eyes on the zoologist and Mervin.

"He knows what we're saying," Mervin says.
"Does he?" says the zoologist, dryly.

"I've never treated him like a pet."
"No, of course."
Mervin had a sensation that he had not experienced for a long time. He thought he might cry. Tears were charging into his eyes. He turned away. The baboon stretched his hand towards him and crooned softly.
"Can we make some arrangements?" The zoologist was looking at his watch.
Mervin nodded and led him away from the cage to the office where they sat uncomfortably on oil drums talking of aeroplane flights and tranquillisers.
"You'll be moving on yourself?" asks the zoologist.
"Yes, eventually," he looks down at his leg. He is not employable.

From one jungle to another; that's what he thinks. He imagines himself on welfare.

How else do we explain what happened next? The local newspaper ran the story and the nationals picked it up. Mervin went into the baboon's cage, at night, when the moon was a buttery slab in the sky. He took his gun. He didn't know what he was doing. He was drunk from his dreams of crying children and old harmless men hiding in bamboo huts while the soldiers hunted them out like rats. Somewhere he recalls a woman holding his head in the palm of her hand, and a tree with large fanlike leaves shading his eyes. He remembers a nipple and the dark blanket around him. The voices that took him from there and away from the moist milkiness. He remembers hunger.

Once he watched a film about baboons in the wild; a family group that lived on handfuls of sweet root and sometimes meat; grooming each other dreamily in the buzzing greenery. It reminded him of that feeling, and it was perhaps that which drew him to the baboon's cage in the middle of the night with his clean gun and his heavy wide hat that covered his eyes.

The door of the cage was open as he stood there, but the baboon did not leave. He looked at the space, and then back at Mervin. Mervin sat on the ground. The baboon was uncertain. He sidled over and put his square face right up close to Mervin; eye to eye.

Mervin's hard leathery cheeks were wet. The baboon wiped the tears and licked his fingers. Mervin was not sure why he was crying. The baboon took the gun and examined it. He looked down the nozzle; he stroked the barrel. He had looked at the gun before, hanging next to the keys on Mervin's belt. Guns and keys. Keys and guns. The baboon laughed. The other animals laughed too. The monkeys next door tittered. Mervin smiled at the baboon, who pointed the gun at Mervin and shot him cleanly through the heart.

DAVID McCOOEY

"Looking into the Landscape": The Elegiac Art of Rosemary Dobson

I

Although Rosemary Dobson's *Collected Poems* appeared in 1991, it remains true that the majority of criticism still responds to Dobson's earlier work. This means that the place of visual art in the poems is emphasized without reference to later developments, particularly those in the elegiac mode. The interest in art-as-a-theme, however, and the elegiac are to some degree continuous. Howard Nemerov, the American poet, suggests that the connection between art and poetry is in fact an elegiac one. Paintings are silent, and poems attempt to 'speak' this. What is the elegiac significance about this silence? A viewer of a painting knows that

> he is seeing the past, the dead, the irrevocable; and he knows something else, that what he sees is not only the past, the dead, the irrevocable, but something that had that intention of being these things from the moment of its conception: something, that is to say, past from the beginning.[1]

Such a broad focus of course loses detail, and the importance of detail is one of the themes of Dobson's art. Nevertheless, Nemerov's speculation is relevant as a starting point, for Dobson's interest in art is essentially an interest in time and in the "original pastness" of art. In "The Raising of the Dead" the transfigured time of art is not transcendence, as one might expect, but rather an arrestment.[2]

> Angels are free to come and go —
> My pity for the youth who lies
> These seven centuries at least
> Returned to Life; who once had caught
> A wink, a glimpse, of Paradise.[3]

1. Howard Nemerov, "On Poetry and Painting, with a Thought of Music", *Figures of Thought*, (Boston: Godine, 1978), 95.
2. See Patricia Excell, "The Poetry of Rosemary Dobson", *Meanjin* 10, 4 (1951), 375. "The Ship of Ice" is founded on this conceit.
3. Texts quoted are from Rosemary Dobson, *Collected Poems*, (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1991).

Dobson delights in confusing the ontological status of the painting within the poem: she draws attention to "the stiffly painted gown", and the "holy gold" about the angels' heads, the same angels who are "free to come and go". What are we to make of such a poem? It adverts not simply to the transfiguring powers of art, but also to its *fallen* nature. This art, despite its subject matter, is eminently human, sublunary. The represented figure, delightful though it may be, represents human life in which Paradise (for the watcher as much as the subject) is merely glimpsed. It is apposite that Dobson describes her own work as "part of a search for something only fugitively glimpsed; a state of grace which one once knew, or imagined, or from which one was turned away ... a doomed but urgent need to express the inexpressible".[4]

This search is neither systematic nor devotional, and one needs to attend to the plurality of Dobson's aesthetic. Dobson is not a programmatic writer, as she points out in one interview;[5] and elsewhere she overtly emphasizes the Keatsian virtue of "negative capability".[6] Dobson's anti-programmatic nature can be found by comparing "The Raising of the Dead" with "Paintings", in which visual art simply *is* transcendent, a presence which 'speaks' through time. Dobson employs synesthesia (a common device of poems on paintings) to suggest not only something of the mystery of how we intuit paintings, but also the interconnectedness of the grammar of understanding: "This grey and silver Hogarth made / To paint the children as they played / Is silver sound of bells and cries". Silent art simply triumphs over time by its metaphorical (and paradoxical) ability to 'speak'. The poet not only hears the children call, those "who are long since dead", but also hears the painter: "... I speak / Five hundred years ago. You hear. / My words beat still upon your ear". Continuity is emphasized, a consolation found in the elegiac subject matter of transience.

In Dobson's later poetry, beginning with *Over the Frontier*, we can see a widening interest, away from paintings on a canvas to cultural artefacts in general, and a shift in focus, from using images as dramatic icons to using them as part of a search for 'essentials': "And the poem that exists / will never equal the poem that does not exist" ("Over the Frontier"). Similarly, "For the Painter Ben Nicholson" presents a far more abstract 'picture' than her earlier work,[7] which is appropriate as Nicholson's work does not lend itself to dramatic interpretation. "Poems from Pausanias" use fragments of a past to test the sense of continuity and disjunction felt not only in the classical landscape, but also the literary one. "Lost Water-spring" is therefore thematically central to the sequence.

> "The road has not been traced.
> The spring has not been found."
> I name the water-spring
> of Piera, gone to ground,
> contained in a footnote.
> ....
> In the white dust the cool
> cupping of water shone

4. Rosemary Dobson, *Selected Poems*, (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1973), xiii.
5. Paul Kavanagh & Peter Kuch (eds.), *Conversations: Interviews with Australian Writers*, (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1991), 55-56.
6. Rosemary Dobson, "Australian Poets in Profile: 2", *Southerly* 40, 1 (1980), 5.
7. This abstraction, as Gary Catalano points out, is partly to do with the lack of predicates in the poem's two sentences. "The Figure in the Doorway", *Quadrant* 38, 10 (1994), 30.

like love, like poetry,
and like oblivion:
three things that draw me on.

I take that spring for mine.

The spring's textual existence (as a footnote in Pausanias) reflects its apparent material condition; both have "gone to ground". Love, poetry and oblivion are the pivotal nouns here, and ones which form a network across time. They not only 'draw' the poet on (as in a "To-a-Poet-a-Thousand-Years-Hence"), but the figure which describes them is the same for each: water. The search for connection, and the interest in classical imagery is part of a search for essentials; part of a "process of clarification";[8] a search which nevertheless does not slavishly turn to the past for poetic forms.

II

One can see how Dobson's interest in paintings implies an elegiac imagination, and this is best seen with reference to the elegy 'proper'. Whilst elegy has not gained the same popularity (if that is the right word) in Australia as in America, a number of Australian poets have added significantly to our understanding of the genre — in particular Vivian Smith and Gwen Harwood. Dobson is an important addition to these names, and like Vivian Smith, her elegiac art is dependent on the apparently discrepant categories of nature and the art of others.[9] Dobson's elegy, "The Continuance of Poetry: Twelve Poems for David Campbell", begins by positing the connection between not only different modes of artistic endeavour, but also the connections between different times and places. It tests this continuance not just in terms of the poetic afterlife of a friend and fellow poet, but of apprehension across vast distances of time and space, even across cultures. Dobson's use of ancient Chinese poetry (especially that of Wang Wei and Li Po) as an 'intertext' is apt, given her interest in art's relationship with writing. In pre-modern China the connection between painting and writing was closer than in the West. The use of a brush for writing formed an important link between painting and literature, and, as Hans H. Frankel points out, the literati were only interested in calligraphy and painting; the other arts retained their craft status in medieval China.[10] "The Continuance of Poetry" draws upon the evocative brevity of such painting which uses a few lines to suggest mood, rather than 'imitate' nature as such.

"The Continuance of Poetry" opens with "A Goodbye", something which elegy always attempts, but can never wholly accomplish. As Wallace Stevens figures it in his elegy "The Owl and the Sarcophagus", "The ear repeats, / Without a voice, inventions of farewell".[11] The voicelessness in Dobson's case is inherent in the poem's ambiguity, the occasion being not morbid, but social: a description of friends departing. This difference both foreshadows death and deflects it; as if to say

8. "Poets in Profile", 6.
9. See David McCooey, "Still Life: The Art and Nature of Vivian Smith's Poetry", *ALS*, in press.
10. Hans H. Frankel, "Poetry and Painting: Chinese and Western Views of Their Compatibility", *Comparative Literature* 9, 4 (1957), 302-3.
11. Wallace Stevens, "The Owl in the Sarcophagus", *Collected Poems*, (NY: Knopf, 1954), 436.

goodbye 'absolutely' is not only painful, but in reality impossible.

The poem's use of 'weak' line endings (as in, with few exceptions, the rest of the sequence) gives a sense of delicacy, an avoidance of stridency, also perhaps apparent in the shying away from strict metres. Although predominantly iambic or trochaic, no foot is employed systematically, and indeed the final line can be scanned as amphibrachic. This 'freeing up' allows a sense of the spoken voice, but also mirrors a delicacy often present in the translations of ancient Chinese poetry. Vowel pitch and duration are also expressive, being relatively consistent in the quatrain: each line concentrates upon a particular vowel, such as the 'O' sounds in "On the long white clouds low at the horizon". In the final couplet, the sound changes. "There will be time enough and time enough later" employs an effective 'rising' quality: -ere / -ill, -e / -ime, e- / -ough, etcetera. This underscores the sense of emotional urgency, a plaintiveness, as if the goodbye prefigures something more than just a social goodbye.

The theme of domesticity is central to much of Dobson's work. In "A Goodbye", the domestic scene is, significantly, allied with the natural. Trees, blossom, and clouds, and the reference to the courtyard, give a suggestion of finding something of the courtly, as Wang Wei did, in the domestic. This connects us with past ways of living, allowing a strange sense of continuity between not only the past and present, but also the domestic and the elegiac.

"The Messages" makes the note of continuity plain, by figuring the continuity between poetry and the world. The poem presents a dialectic between presence and absence. The latter is found in the houses of friends; the former in Campbell's poems.

> When you set out on your long journey
> The houses of your friends became empty,
>
> Rooms resounded with the need of reassurance.
> But here on the page are your messages.
>
> Here are poems: stones, shells, water.

Significantly, the presence alluded to is not *Campbell's* presence, his spirit within his poems as it were, but rather that of the natural world in his poems: "This one weighs in the hand. This one is shining. / This one is yellow", and so on. The poem ends on a note of apparent contiguity, but one which is not necessarily indicative of a simple metaphorical reading: "Poems are set about in the empty rooms of houses. / Windows open on clouds in the blue distance". The windows refer to those of the houses, but the stark positioning of the two statements implies a more mysterious relationship; the poems are windows on the natural world, or the clouds somehow stand for something numinous.

The sense of timelessness within the historical time of Campbell's death is present: death is "a long journey", the friends' houses are empty. Despite the poem's brevity, it seems to say an awful lot, as a few brush strokes can represent a landscape. The sentences (ll. 5-8) slow down the poem, as if emphasising the need to read poetry slowly, to slow down our apprehension. The periods tell us to wait and consider. The sense of mourning is muted but recognisable. The houses are empty ("Rooms resounded" gives a faint onomatopoeic sense of emptiness), and their emptiness

evokes inner emptiness; though the poem also turns to the reassurance of the 'work' of mourning: both the poetic work of David Campbell and Dobson's rendering of that work in her own work.

Onomatopoeia is also present elsewhere (and indeed, its primitive nature points to one sense of the continuance of poetry). For instance, "White Flowers" begins "White water pours down the hillside". The sense of descending in the vowel pitch mimics this descent. Indeed, the whole poem is concerned with the dialectic between nature and art. Two fish are seen under water and then the poet presents all four elements of the poem — water, flowers, rock, and fish — in a kind of state of equivalence:

> Flannel-flowers splash in a falling torrent
> Push aside boulders, spill over the ledges.
>
> Held still in the eye like a fish carved in sandstone
> They become a white cloud visiting the rock-face.

The delicacy and reticence of this poetry also produces its strength. The image of flowers splitting open boulders is not pressed into metaphorical service, but the abundance of metaphorical transfigurations leaves the elements open to a number of metaphorical changes which, as it were, appear 'immanent' in the poem. Indeed, the poem adverts to the 'innate' metaphorical structure of language itself, with the reference to the rock-*face*. The link between the flowers and Campbell is not made (there is a reference to Campbell's poems on rock carvings), but is suggested in the white cloud, the image of immateriality which haunts the sequence like a ghost. The clouds, significantly, are both real and immaterial (literally), and also, through the poetry of Wang Wei in which the image appears, refer to a past culture.[12] The flowers also evoke an elegiac commonplace, that of the wreath. Dobson significantly makes the wreath natural, and not human-made. The flowers are also subject to metaphorical transformation: they are like water, like fish in carved stone, like cloud on a rock. The logic here is strictly poetic; the rock-fish-water image is knitted together by the flowers in a wreath.

In "Exchanges" continuity is considered through the idea of 'return' and through the inscriptions of culture: "We exchanged whole art galleries / Museums, sculpture, encyclopedias", and through the books which the poets exchanged "All, all were returned long ago. / Now they are gone I hold them". The indirection of the poem figures an aspect of the work of mourning: the fact that the poet can no longer give to the subject any more, and further, that the 'gift' of the elegy cannot be given either. Nevertheless, the continuity is represented not only through objects, but also proper names: Popa, Berryman, Manet. This metonymy, it is implied, is what connects us with the dead — the names and the work of those named are equated in an almost mystical way (and hence the name of Campbell in the title). Thus the sense of loss is undercut by the sense of return — of names to works, of books to owners. The suggestion also is that Campbell's work is part of the continuity implied in the

12. In fact, the Brindabella Press edition of the poem (Canberra, 1981) gives some guidance on the matter of clouds. Dobson quotes G. W. Robinson, Wang Wei's translator, on Wang Wei's use of the words "white clouds": "My own feeling is that the white clouds or, sometimes, *beyond* the white clouds, represent some incorporeal, ideally pure country of the spirit ...". See *Poems of Wang Wei*, trans. G. W. Robinson, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 18.

objects of culture. The poem is not simplistic, however, as the paradoxical ending ensures. The relationship between "returned long ago" and "I hold them" is obscure, and holds within it the whole problem of the connection between the living and the dead, the way in which we 'hold' those whom we have lost.

"Translations Under Trees" adverts to known biographical data of Campbell and Dobson: their work together in the 1970s translating Russian poetry.[13] Working outside with wine to drink, poems blow about. The human and the natural world are connected in the imagery: "Poems blowing about, / Some we stalk like Li Po and the moon in the stream".[14] This seemingly casual analogy becomes the central image of the poem.

> Pollen brushed from the table
> Flies off to make forests
> In faraway countries;
> May change a landscape.

The poem makes clear the analogy: "Poems blow away like pollen" and "Can seed new songs / In another language". Poems as pollen obviously afford comparison with translation, but the image also suggests that the poems of the dead pollinate the poems *for* the dead, whose songs are always, even when in English, 'in another language'. In this poem, too, there is a translation from 'life' to 'art', as well as the expected dialectic between life and death.

"Poems of the River Wang", with its objectification of the poetry of friendship, is one of the few places where 'strong' line endings are employed, underscoring the anecdotal and dramatic quality. The two poets offer poems 'courteously' to each other, again employing the 'courteous' / 'courtly' association. Wang Wei's question becomes an implied question of 'Dobson' to Campbell: "Could you join me once more?" This is so not only through apposition, but also as the 'two poets' referred to initially need not, because of the syntax, be Wang Wei and P'ei Ti. The ending is both disciplined and moving. "Out walking now I see blond grass, / Wild orchids, black cattle, and the daylight moon". The climax is unexpected and the dramatic quality of the situation suddenly spills out of the original frame — that *distancing* effect — into the present, and the subjectivity of the poet. The adjectives are expressive, giving both a sense of the unchangeable nature of nature and a sense of the Australian context. The style of these last two lines, the pastoralism, invoke Campbell's work or perhaps his world. The poem, Campbell's poems and the land he worked are ontologically indistinct in the final lines of the poem. They move into and out of history simultaneously, and the wonderful everyday image of the "daylight moon" (wonderful *because* it is there, everyday) expresses this paradox.

By the penultimate poem, "The Good Host", the various strategies of the poems are familiar: a concern for mute, but strangely enigmatic, objects; a dramatic situation, often transfigured to something timeless with reference to events of the past; a catalogue, and a brief summing up, or further analogy to end. This is satisfying, given the often numinous nature of the poems and the fluidity of the prosody. The images in "The Good Host" of *la dolce vita* are by now familiar, and resonate in the

13. See Rosemary Dobson, "Imitations and Versions of Russian Poetry: The Record of an Experiment", *ALS* 11, 1 (1983), 94-99.
14. The moon was Li Po's most characteristic image; see Arthur Cooper, below.

context of the sequence: sunlight, wine, trees, painting, the river. This is slightly undercut by the "mists of evening". Dramatically, there is nothing sinister about this: the guests have stayed on, the sun has begun to set. But such an image is the merest suggestion, like a shadow over the page, of mortality. Or perhaps, in fact, the use to which the metaphor is put is unexpected. "Re-reading the poems / We are all late-stayers; / Guests in your country". This country is not simply the country Campbell is known by, but also — as the mist suggests, and as poetry has always suggested — the country of death. Campbell is both Orpheus and Eurydice, as is Dobson; for poetry revives not only the dead, but also one's own dead self, as the continuity of elegy suggests. Dobson visits her friend through poetry, but the poetry is also a visitation. The point she makes about Campbell's (and Wang Wei's and Li Po's) poems she makes simultaneously *in* her own. This then is the continuance of poetry; not only through time (as the references to Chinese poets make clear) but also through the handing on of poetry from poet to poet (idealized here as poets-as-friends). But also there is another sense: the *contiguity* of poetry. Dobson's own Orphic power exists because her poetry is contiguous — alongside — that of Campbell's, and thus poetry is a kind of network, as much as it is a succession of 'great' poets through time.

This may have been an appropriate end for the sequence. However, the final poem furthers the idea of both continuity and contiguity by glancing away from Campbell (for elegy is always a leavetaking as much as a homage and lament). "After Receiving the Book of Poems by Li Po" is the most diffuse (and thus most testing) example of the continuance of poetry. The opening quatrain is the supreme illustration of the brimming tension of Dobson's descriptive passages: there is a sense that the river, oaks, air, and clouds are merely 'themselves', for there are no overt signals to read symbolically. Yet in the context of the sequence they resonate and impinge upon our imagination as perhaps meaning more than themselves. The river may remind us again of the Styx; the fallen needles of the she-oaks that all flesh is grass, the white clouds have previously been associated with the spiritual. But there is no overt textual basis for reading this here. Perhaps, then, even when things are just 'themselves' they echo their other, stranger selves, with their mysterious excess of meaning.

Indeed, this poem is about seeing beyond simple constructions of real and imaginary, realistic and symbolic, for it is all about seeing. As Nemerov reminds us, poetry and painting are continuous in as much as "the poem, like the painting, lies flat on a plane surface, the surface of the page" (96). The land lacks Campbell, it even lacks his 'presence', but by looking 'deeper' into the landscape we "find your poems". This then is the consolation as well as the continuance of poetry. Not that the subject remains in them, but by looking more deeply into the world, we see beyond the world, we see the subject's poetry all around us. So too, in true elegiac form, do we find Dobson's poems. Such a reading is consistent with the poem's 'intertext'. As Li Po's translator, Arthur Cooper, states, "'Visiting a Hermit and Not Finding Him' is a very common theme in Chinese poetry... Making present to the imagination the relationship of things in the landscape itself is as much the spiritual meaning as any guess that the reader may make regarding the hermit's whereabouts".[15] The hermit teaches through his absence, and so Dobson's concluding poem, whilst drawing

15. Arthur Cooper, translator's note, *Li Po and Tu Fu*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 105.

attention to the subject's absence draws upon a tradition in which this alone can be illuminating.

The connections with the Chinese poets is in itself telling, and while Dobson is clear that her understanding of them is through translation, the 'translation' of the work of grieving into the work of elegy is also a theme of her poem. Dobson's choice of Li Po and Wang Wei for her meditation on the 'continuance' of poetry is particularly apposite as they belong to a tradition of continuity, which according to Cooper is "a continuity of tradition unknown in any other of the world's literatures" (20). Dobson presents thematic continuity then, through her use of themes common to her analogues: Wang Wei, for instance, is a poet of friendship, of partings and absences, of the domestic life and of the faint echo of the courtly life heard there.[16] It would be churlish to want to deconstruct Dobson's use of continuity here, to 'lay bare' the discontinuities present in Chinese 'tradition' and the impossibility of translation, since it would ignore the emotional importance of continuity to Dobson in this sequence. The echo of this continuity can be heard in the first poem of the sequence. Dobson's "A Goodbye" is related to a poem of the same title (in translation, of course) by Wang Wei, which reads: "Our parting in these hills is over / The sun sets and I shut my door / The spring will be green again next year— / Will my good friend come back too?" The relationship between this and Dobson's poems shows that the latter do not make simplistic and absolutist assertions about the continuous and unimpeded translation of 'tradition'; rather they highlight the dialectic between absence and presence, continuity and discontinuity, and so the point made is that even in the face of discontinuity and absence, one can intuit their twins, their opposites, just as we might come to some understanding of poetry by looking deeply into nature. Dobson's "A Goodbye" is continuous with Wang Wei's in as much as both speak of loss, of death, amid the endless reproduction of nature. Poetry, like the natural world, then, needs to reproduce as much as it needs to produce. Thus, if deconstruction can said to be a process by which the problematics of our categories are laid bare, then Dobson's text in fact deconstructs itself.

III

If enlightenment has any currency, then the other side of its coin is death. In the late poems of Dobson this is made clear, and the expressive tension between the free and disciplined in these poems reminds us of Dobson's interest in both the past and the need to evolve new artistic forms.[17] This makes the desires of some critics to secularise or modernise readings of Dobson (such as James Tulip[18]) somewhat problematic, since Dobson implicitly attempts to dissolve such traditionalist — *avant garde* oppositions, so dear to Australian critics. For instance, "The Three Fates", which Tulip sees as propelling Dobson away from myth and towards modernism, may evoke Thomas Hardy's "The Clock of the Years", with its interest in fate and time reversed. However, Dobson adds the decidedly modern touch of the film analogy, and the perhaps more disturbing notion of endless repetition, rather than Hardy's climax, "It was as if / She had never been".[19] This modern — traditionalist approach,

16. See for instance, "To repay my friends for their visit", 117.
17. See, for instance, Rosemary Dobson, "Over My Shoulder", *Island* 39, (1989), 57-58; Kavanagh & Kuch, 63-64.
18. James Tulip, "Rosemary Dobson's Modernist Elegies: A Reading of *The Three Fates*", *Southerly* 45, 1 (1985), 45-53.

then, is too simplistic for Dobson, who has described herself as a 'flexible traditionalist';[20] her interest lies in both the continuity of culture and the need to find new forms.

These tensions can be seen in some of the more recent poems. "The Eye" (i) employs a kind of 'sprung rhythm'; the lines are tetrameter, but there is no definite foot. The lines mix trochaic and iambic feet with great dexterity, and the middle section uses the dactyl and anapestic feet to give a sense of emotional urgency. The triple rhythm is brought up swiftly with the iambic gravity of "morning gravely". This technical felicity is at odds with the poem's subject matter, which is explicitly elegiac: "one day, the dark fell over my eye". Paradoxically, the poet describes this darkness with a metaphorical richness. The injured eye is covered by a "holland blind", a "sheet of shadow", which are in turn like birds and clouds. These shadows are signs of mortality: "dark birds" and "undeciphered omens".

"The Eye" (ii) continues the image not of blindness as such, but light washed away of meaning. The poet's physical surroundings, the calico across "The single window of the room", echo her inner existence. The blurred vision is a prefiguration of something which cannot be directly named, but which speaks implicitly of infinity and of death: "As when a wave that's edged with white / Recedes into a shadowy sea". The poet inhabits a dual world; one in which the earthly and everyday are seen, and one in which the numinous and deathly are glimpsed. Her physical ailment lends itself to spiritual insight, even as it literally half-blinds her. But such a paraphrase merely does violence to Dobson's 'lightness':

> If you should come to find me here
> I will look up with one good eye
>
> From these my books, this pen, this chair,
> Table, thin-curtained window-pane
>
> To greet you. In the other eye
> That edge of light, that shadowy sea.

The sentence referring to that "other eye" lacks a predicate: what it does or is cannot be directly stated. Also, the reference to her physical surroundings takes on an archaic turn ("these my books") hinting at a kind of monastic existence, a withdrawing from the world to the inner world of the mystics and scholars of the past.

Whilst the delicate status of messages across time and space is considered in "The Continuance of Poetry", in these mortality poems, messages are either dimly apprehended or simply absent. And as the relationship between the domestic and the courtly heightens both the sense of loss and the sense of society, here the domestic furthers the elegiac tone. In "The Eye" (ii) and "Grieving", daily living is linked with daily dying,[21] and this putting out of the lights is most forcefully seen in "Learning Absences, 1986". Where the natural world is the chief form of consolation in "The Continuance of Poetry", here it does not reveal itself. The poet lingers at the window,

19. Thomas Hardy, "The Clock of the Years", *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson, (London: Macmillan, 1976), 529.
20. Graeme Kinross Smith, *Australia's Writers*, (Melbourne: Nelson, 1980), 333.
21. One is reminded that the original title of "Daily Living" (from *The Three Fates*) was "Daily Life and Daily Dying", Kavanagh & Kuch, 68.

Continuance of Poetry", here it does not reveal itself. The poet lingers at the window, as she has been lingering in the other poems (seated before material or immaterial blank canvases of shadowy whiteness), "Not being certain where to find Halley's Comet / And looking a long time at the darkening sky". There is a greatness about this poetry even as it withdraws into the house and the body, "shutting / The doors and windows". It is a poetry of leave taking. There is a restrained power inherent in the lines' musicality in the face of death, which now is viewed keenly but indistinctly; the sky darkens, the light in the eye becomes indistinct.

In terms of Dobson's earlier work this is significant, since the canvases which are silent and made to speak in those poems are rich and culturally significant; they are *connected* with the historical world and the innumerable networks of images of which they are a part. The blank canvases Dobson makes speak in these late poems are the reverse; their muteness speaks more of the muteness of things in themselves. They speak of interiority; and the blank canvas of the poet's bad eye gives her a double-vision on life, a vision which can see both "undeciphered omens" and the brilliance of the sun. Turning to an earlier poem we can notice how such indistinction is related to a sense of despair, perhaps, or at least morbidity. In "Reading Mandelstam", the cultural pleasures of the city are distractions. 'Following' the Russian poet we are left with the snow of Siberia (where it is presumed he was killed), not only as an historical image, but also as an image of blankness, a kind of terrestrial blank-page which has the last word on the poet and his readers:

> His steps went over the edge and into darkness,
> the line of the type broken, the letters scattered
> like cramp-irons, as he called them, pincers, staples —
> like bird-marks printing the page's final hard-packed
> snow-drift. The journey ended in snow and silence.

These aspects of Dobson's imagination suggest that Hope's characterisation of Dobson's "passionate serenity" has too often been used to emphasize the serene.[22] McAuley, too, noted a passion; he believed there was a balance of decorum and passion.[23] This is true, but the later, elegiac poems of Dobson, show just how much the serenity and decorum have to wager, and have to lose. The passion is real, in the sense that suffering is present in the serene and decorous framing of art. The passion suggests also an engagement with the world; the poet is 'passionate' about something. Artful though these poems are, one gets the sense that they are passionate about life.

To conclude we might consider "The Almond-tree in the King James Version". This poem seems to give so much away that it leaves little to interpret: the almond-tree flourishing is "An Image of Age in the Book of Ecclesiastes". The whole poem is imbued with the language of the twelfth chapter of that book, down to the voice of the bird and the dimmed windows. The poet calls to herself not to be afraid, and in this act she sees connection with the past in the most fundamental way we have, probably the only 'universal' or 'real' connection we do have: the connection through death. In considering our own death, we share the understanding of mortality which

22. A. D. Hope, "Rosemary Dobson: A Portrait in a Mirror" (1972), *Native Companions: Essays and Comments on Australian Literature 1936-1966*, (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974), 187.
23. James McAuley, "The Poetry of Rosemary Dobson", *ALS* 6,1 (1973), 7.

others have also faced: "... it is always as I have been led to believe: Premonitions, recognitions, the need for acceptance". Dobson's use of Ecclesiastes, culturally specific though that book is, is given particular force by this paradoxical sense of connection, amid the discontinuity of death. Rather than choosing a movement from Book to Self, from general to specific, Dobson switches between the two — Book and Self — and thus the poet is portrayed as synecdochic for all others who are going to die. This is the reverse of what we might expect. The life does not 'justify' the book, rather the book justifies the life; the poet's experience stands in for that of others. As with the landscapes, and the canvases — both blank — Dobson habitually 'looks into' two dimensional planes which both obscure and illuminate our fallen sight. The book and the world, in Dobson's book, are different things, but we read them in similar ways, each with reference to the other.

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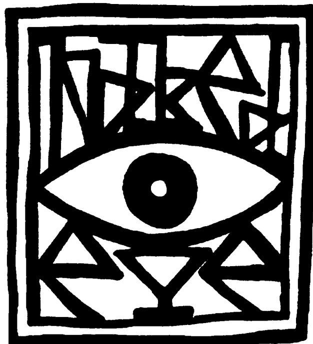

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GRAEME KINROSS-SMITH

Curriculum Vitae

He puts down "Born"
but he isn't sure.
He remembers the forties
as the smell of talcum in a drawer
and sunlight washing a wall
studded in Japonica.

He taps out "Place of Birth"
and it becomes Melbourne
growling behind the hill, and closer up
the smell of oranges and chocolate
and the crack of cellophane.
He hears someone say POW and a sob
breaking against the tick of the kitchen clock.

He types "Honours and Awards", so that he sees
his Swimming Certificate in the dark
on the back of the door
beside a Prefect's badge
of ridiculous intricacy.

He puts down "Professional Experience"
and has to dodge the flood of paper,
all those self-important stabs of a pen,
the rivered screens of words,
and a whole sea of faces
who once meant matters vital
in rooms where wattles parted the window-light
and unctuous hands, posing like mannikins,
described the clever future. He recalls
uttering immutable words that turned to salt.

He types "Accumulated Wisdom"
and feels the silk of skin
against his chest, glimpses the misty
cypress hills of Florence, hears a girl's voice
entreat in Spanish in the next room,
watches the patient Moscow queues
like streams of faces stroked by wind.
Beyond his window a cat stretches.
The Scribbly Gum, planted before the rain,
puts out green pleas.

Checking it all through
he finds no place for a name.

SHIMON WEINROTH

Bittersweet

I checked her poetry
grew jealous
grew furious
grew spiteful.

How did she get it right?
she got it so right
put down on paper
all the things
that I have felt
and could not
quite get right.

I loved and hated her
for having said
what I should have said
could have said
so much better —

TRACY RYAN

foetal

without moving you
break all my bones tell me
this is necessary
for resetting O excellently
smooth operator

loosening loosening
sinews / my strings
unknotted & played
upon a curious music

unfolded am an
insect pinned here hardly
beautiful

will
shed it &
leave
nothing but shell

evolving backwards through
the foetal
all kinds of
animal
you do not mean
to kill but
your wordlessness is
surgical

fall

however close we
get there are laws that
exclude collision don't
understand them want
some disaster cosmic not
this occasional syzygy
& attendant eclipse
am sick
of this imagery too
global precise want
a smaller scale
the folly of
Icarus the reek
of burning
feathers of hot
wax

echo's chamber

this is that box of noise
it goes
no further

pain rebounds here
a policy of
containment

she has
a very small voice
it's all that's left of her

she is willing
to reproduce
your silences

exactly

JOHN L MALONE

Thursday 4 a.m.

the street empties
into a

black hole of fog :
cars, letter

boxes, houses; only
street

lights remain, haloed
in grey;

I stand in the driveway
breath

plumes the air; I can
hear water

dripping off the blue
gums, power lines

fizzling in the damp;
I go indoors

outside : the cat's
plaintive cry.

One Perfectly Round Ear

Locked
between his headphones
like a teenager
to a Walkman
the scraggly haired
beachcomber
scours the beach
with his detector
its one perfectly round ear
listening
to talkback from
the sand
music to his ears :
dollar coins, gold ear-rings
or bottle tops, tin cans —
relics from summer's empire;
On and on he goes
an archaeologist of the littoral :

in his hand a miniature spade
and a blue bucket
of hope.

Euglenae

Green as envy, they congregate
at the edge of ponds,

shy equally from the razor glare
or morning and loitering

smudges of night; little Buddhists
they prefer the Middle Way
the demure light beneath overhanging
trees; gradually they spread —

a green bloom across the canvas
of the pond, an emerging

abstract : Equanimity In Half Light
perhaps but they are

anything but still, whipping themselves
into a frenzy of motion

towards that perfect mix of warmth
and light, miniature

brushstrokes continually reconfiguring
themselves across the watery

skin of their planet; from space we
must look much like them.

STEPHEN HALL

One of Versalius's Models

Things we could not have known about him:-
how, beneath his chest, the lungs clustered
and muscles that fleshed his arms, how
they were tied to the bones, like archer's thongs.
Now hanging delicately slack, the lines of his
interior world are mapped and shaded. And he,
half dissected, leaning casually on a fence post,
enjoys the effect of his revelations. Head
thrown back — the depth of laughter seen through
a cut-away cheek and wine-rotten teeth. We knew him
from the intact half face, pierced ear, a ring.
Knew the silent laugh, but not the rest.

KATE LYONS

Back To

I don't like these white bread towns. J. says they make him nervous but they just make me bored. To travel for hours over isolated countryside against the sternness of it — flat as a tack, red earth, bushes thin as veins against the sky — and then to come to these shopping mall places is a great disappointment. J. goes stiff and watchful, he's scared of the yobbos. I feel a large dullness in my stomach as if the lawn mowers and TV antennas and Saturday football voices have won.

We stop at a milk bar for lunch. This is the sort of place which has coloured plastic strips hanging over the doorway to keep out the flies. Outside the heat and glare is atomic but in here it is musty and cool, with RSL carpet and dingy walls. Nothing is happening in the same way that nothing happens when you visit old aunties and sit in their living rooms, surrounded by lace doilies and perfectly aligned framed pictures of the family. Nothing happening. The clock ticking. The carpet swirling in precise patterns between your toes.
We can't find anything to eat. There are Coke signs in every conceivable place. There are pies and vanilla slices and finger buns and everything hot is fried. We order salad sandwiches — white bread of course — and get lettuce, tomato, beetroot which turns the bread pink and a strange mixture of grated carrot and processed cheese we keep encountering in these towns. J. thinks it's a code, like a Mason's handshake; if you look surprised, they know: you're not from here.
"You from Sydney then?"
The woman behind the counter is fat in a nubile sort of way. She wears slacks and has wings of hair on the side of her head. She stares: with our dreads and tatts and careful angst, we are as exotic as mangoes in June.
"Yes, yes," we nod.
"Which part?"
"Newtown."
"That's near Penrith isn't it? My sister lives at Penrith."
We try not to laugh. I'd hoped to establish my credentials; see, I'm from the inner city, look at my hair, look at my clothes. Here it's just City and Country and that's enough.
"I drove to Sydney once," she says.
Yes, we agree, it's a long way.

"Did you do it all in one go?"
Yes, we did.
"We stopped at Dubbo the night, of course. They've got some really nice motels there. The Sundowner, you might know it. I was going down for my sister's wedding. She looked so beautiful. She didn't have a proper dress, though, more like a cocktail length. She bought it in Town, in this shop where they make them to measure. It wasn't white either, more a kind of creamy pinky shade..."
Her fingers left pink prints on the white bread. We paid our money, nodding. We lifted our hands in farewell. Her story petered down. I turned back as we were climbing into our car and she was standing beside her son outside the shop, holding him by his jumper with her face very close to his and yelling. He'd knocked over the perpetual motion sandwich sign on the pavement. She cuffed him over the head with the flat of her hand and then we drove away.

"Is this the desert yet? How far to go?" J. says.
I sit up with a jolt. I must have been asleep. All around the light is falling and spreading in a long, low rush. Between the towns, trees are thinning, bushes flattening, leaves turning slowly from green to grey. It's that dead time of long sun, when my mother would sleep too, mouth lipsticked and partway open, box of food square between her feet.
"Well is it?"
I shake my head. This earth is dun-coloured and coastal; if you picked it up and squeezed it, it would still stick together in your hands.
"Long way yet", I say, in a parent's voice.
I like to watch J. drive. His hands are both strong and delicate-looking, the veins standing out from playing guitar. They grip the wheel casually but with a lithe watchfulness: I know if some idiot came up the wrong side of the road he'd react. My father's hands were different. They were thick and calloused and the skin was dry, having settled into big ridges along the joints. The thumbs were flat from many hammers and the nails so thick and yellow, they looked like an alien substance. My father's hands did not lie loose like an athlete's but gripped the wheel so tight, the knuckles were white even under the dinosaur skin. His whole body hunched forward and focused on the road, as if sheer force of will propelled the car, nothing else. When I was small, I thought this grimness was because the job of looking after us was so difficult, it required the utmost in concentration. Now I know it was the same joyless panic he applied to everything he did. The other difference between the hands of my lover and the hands of my father is that when I look at the hands of my lover, I want to sleep with him.
Soon I'll make him let me drive.

"We've been up for eleven hours" J. says, forty miles on. "That's almost a whole day." The enormity of it excites him; he keeps talking about "the desert" in inverted commas and he has his hat pulled down low over his forehead like John Wayne.
Getting up early was part of the blueprint, I explain. Every year we went for a holiday "home", at least until I was eight and it was a big adventure. We used to roll out of bed in the middle of the night and dress in ragbag layers like escaping Jews. I remember clean Formica, curried egg sandwiches in plastic, the comfort of toast and kerosene. The dark pressed in at the windows and the porridge steamed. While

we ate, Dad listened to the news by the hour, on the hour, waiting for floods, hurricanes and other harbingers of doom.
He was practised at this: show him kids playing on the swings and one was always about to crack its head. Give him an uninterrupted view of the sea and he worried about the lack of a fence. The car was always ailing, the kettle about to fuse, the candle in the bedroom will topple and burn us all to death.
Like him, I packed the car the night before: spanners, spare water, food, maps and sweets, a blanket for the cold. In my head, I could hear him say "No, not this, take that" and "Don't forget the other" and I did the same. Out of habit, I nearly made up the back seat as a bed, cleverly disguising suitcases with pillows and rugs and pulling over a sheet. I did this in the same way that daughters of mothers roll socks and clean baths identically, as if hypnotised. Until I realised that there was no-one to sleep on this remembered bed, that it used to be for me.

Night. Lying flat in the back seat, the stars and the sky and the moon are moving, not you. The sky is huge, it makes you want to eat it, to drink it, and it's not until you've had too much that you know you've had enough. And here is this feeling unfurling for you: telegraph poles on their mission to the horizon, the sky wheeling on its pivot of stars, a yellow moon keeping pace. The arrogance is delicious, like a strange-tasting drug you have invented yourself.

I suppose it was boredom. Driving past these last few towns, I have the same feeling. They are picturesque, arrived for my benefit. We laugh at the quietness, the backwardness, the abysmal RSLs. We are safe.
"Don't they get bored?" I say. We keep boredom at bay with books and sex and films and indulgence, with writing and music and the odd casual flirtation.
"What do they do all day?" I ask, looking at the corner stores and the golf links and the motels and the tractors and the cows. Then they have gone, they have slid from view. I am still at the centre of the world.
There's a great difference between travelling and the traveller, measured by the time it takes for the road to roll out from under the car.

It's a "Back To" week in the next town, where the houses lie low to the ground like panting dogs. Very neat though. A Tidy Town. What's going on behind those walls, the drawn curtains, the lawns so green and certain they look like a patient child has cut and pasted them with small scissors and glue? I remember the Lions Clubs, the Rotary meetings, the men in pubs betting on flies crawling up the wall. We drive up the main street. The Town Hall is decked out in ribbons and rosettes, there's signs everywhere announcing the big event. There's even a huge banner, "Welcome". Not a soul to be seen.
At the Sunrise Motel, I ask the unsmiling woman behind the counter, "How's business?"
"We've been rushed off our feet."
Mouths twitching, we take our keys and crunch across the deserted car park, order bad Chinese, and go to bed.

"I didn't really want you to come you know. I wanted to do it by myself."
We're lying in the chilly chenille and seascape room after peas in plum sauce,

listening hopefully for noise. But there's only the burr of the air conditioner and the odd lazy car in a wide, wide street.

"It's not as full on as I thought'd be," J. says by way of reply. "It's not really desert. More like tacky scrub."

I ponder this for a while, feeling personally responsible for the lack of camels and hundred degree heat.

"We're not there yet," I say. "After this town, there's 200 miles with nothing in between."

J. looks unimpressed.

"We never even used to sleep the night you know, when we went back. We just used to drive straight through."

We shift uncomfortably in the narrow bed, trying to avoid the springs. Continental breakfast, I'm thinking, remembering the grim woman in her fluffy slippers and pilling cardie, her martial steel-fixtured perm. Toast, UHD milk and Vegemite, she means. "What was it *really* like? Before." J. asks, staring at the ceiling and smoking his cigarette.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, back then. Before it got civilised."

I don't know. So I switch on the light and scrabble in my bag for the photo I've brought as a talisman. It's from the old blue cardboard box where we stored all the snaps, disordered and slippery and with faint black scrawls on the back: "Summer, 1942." It always seemed to be summer, much as you can tell from black and white; even so, the heat seeps out in its overcoat of grey and formal tones. This picture shows our house or our house when it was merely an idea, just a wire fence and a flat stretch of grey dust, red if you use your imagination. Far off in the distance is an old A-model Ford and the amputated stumps of what will be a home. Even further off, like an afterthought, is my brother, tow-headed and knickerbockered, driving his Depression-era toys through the dust.

"Why didn't they ever get the person close up?" J. asks. He is a photographer of sorts as well as a musician and examines photos with a critical eye.

"They had a bigger sense of space I suppose, a different perspective."

Even to me, this sounds like a lot of rubbish. Personally, I think they thought the house was more important.

"If you really wanted to come by yourself, you could have. I could have stayed at home you know, done my own thing."

"Mum was worried. A woman alone, and all that sort of thing. She wanted me to go on the train. But she calmed down when I said you were coming too."

We both look at each other and laugh. J. doesn't know a piston from a spark plug and couldn't change a tyre to save his life.

"Anyway you were into it. You said you wanted to see the outback."

"I did. How far did you say to go?"

Seven bridges in all, I used to count them, grey wood with black and white signs, like a metaphor for old danger. Water here is only an abstract idea. My family often camped in these dry creek beds after travelling all day in the old A-model Ford, small babies wrapped in wet towels against the heat. Once, after they'd boiled the billy and eaten tea and gone to sleep in the tent, Dad heard a noise, a loud rushing out of place in the big silence of the desert. He grabbed the kids and the billy, no time

for the tent or the clothes and scrambled up and out, just before the flash flood came thundering through, furious and unheeding, another alien element in a land so dry, no water can be absorbed.

Twenty miles out, we see an emu. I feel redeemed. It was raining when we woke, J. staring mournfully as the big drops turned the motel carpark dust to mud. He's used to rain and mud, he's English; it's the dust he came for. But it cleared up as I knew it would and as we drive out on the straight flat road with blue sky and red earth in between, crunching butterscotch and cracking bad jokes, there it is on the horizon, long and gangly, like a graceful boat on a bad sea. J. swerves to the side of the road and he's out and running through the blue-grey scrub before I can ask what's wrong. I follow more slowly, eyes on the ground. Emus are nothing much to me. They're even eating them now, farming them like cows. Battery-fed, they seem less authentic, almost obscene. Like breeding dinosaurs for dinner.

Fake is big out here. Fake forests are planted to keep the dust from wandering; fake lawns are rolled out in town centres. They even constructed a fake lake about 50 miles out of town, ostensibly for the water supply; with pipes running for great distances from the coast, they pumped it through and the desert bloomed. One of the greatest feats of engineering this country every saw, my father said. But underneath mere survival there is another message, harder to hear and smothered, something about the way all those people in town from the tidy red brick houses so unlike the miner's shanties cobbled together from stolen iron and tin brought their caravans to the water like flies to meat, constructing as if this was a logical thing their picket fence gardens, complete with blackfella gnomes.

They would sit in deck chairs, these people called Harold and Faith and Kay, and drink their tea and talk about the holiday weather, watching the sun set across that lake, sullen in its flattened skin.

This earth, this redness, that's another matter. It's real, as I remember. When you pee, it turns dark in splotches and in hot weather is almost dry by the time you do up your jeans. The dense rust colour gives off a certain heightened and heroic glow, like Technicolour in old Westerns. Further in, away from the Coke cans and the bits of old tyre, there are kangaroo skulls bleached white and thin as china, perforated by the sun.

We broke down somewhere here once, in the middle of summer. The fan came loose from its mounting and went right through the radiator. We were stuck, with no water, in hundred degree heat. The car bubbled and smoked. No help for miles.

My father stayed calm. His face was very red under his old hat. I remember thinking it was the same colour as the earth, that somehow he and it were of the same harsh, inhospitable substance. With an air of authority — of knowing — he told us to follow him and we did, trudging through the spinifex like squaws. We trusted in his determination that something would be there. And sure enough, as if by an effort of will, we found a homestead, the only one for miles. It had a windmill and a water tank, some mangy dogs. The family that lived there listened unsmiling to our tale of woe. Yet out of some grim unhappy code, they made my mother and I sit down with them to a burnt Sunday dinner in the heat while he trudged off down the straight, straight road, black in the red, the broken radiator on his back. I tasted a dry fear in my mouth along with the greasy lamb, not at the arduousness of what he was attempting but at his determination. I watched him recede, straight-backed and

implacable, his face shadowed under his hat. The burden of responsibility lay, incarnate, across his shoulders. Soon he was a small black dot on the horizon. At that moment, everything swung into place. I had him in perspective.

"That was brilliant," J. enthuses, breathless from his run. When he tilts his head to drink, his Adam's apple bobs elegantly up and down. "They looked so...you know, real."
"We should get going though. We shouldn't leave the car just running in the sun."
"Why not?"
He's genuinely perplexed. We are travelling in a brand new Ford that vacuum seals. The weather is bright and friendly, a soft wind riffling through the scrub. If we get into trouble, we'll call in on the mobile and drink the mineral water stashed in the boot. Somehow I know this is illusory but I can't say why. J. squints out to the horizon, still looking tirelessly for the authentic.

At Wilcannia, it comes a little close. I laugh at the way he glances from side to side as he fills the petrol tank, body tensed for flight. He refuses to get out of the car to eat and taps his fingers on the steering wheel behind the central locking. I tell him not to worry, we've made good time.
I walk over the bridge and look down at the river. The place is all boarded up, sullen in the fading light. Underneath the silence there is a faint hum of tension, like wind in telephone wires. Unlike the town before, which is new and prosperous and suburban, this place has had no money spent on it. No K Marts here, just a petrol station selling grease and postcards, bolts adamantly on the till. Up the road, there is a general store and a sandstone pub, where the inhabitants congregate in silent pairs. They wear broad-brimmed hats, sitting slouched back in the verandah's meagre shade, their boots sticking dustily up to the sun. They are shifting, restless, one dark organism within many fists and legs. Pockets of laughter and drunkenness keep breaking out in spurts. In the gloom, you can't tell if they are looking at you or not, so you look quickly away. No point looking for trouble, there's been trouble enough, and it broods in residue, as if the place is just waiting for night to come and it will boil over.
"Shiftless, a waste of time," I can hear one of my aunts saying as she rolled and patted and kneaded white flour to scones. Tales of violence and jagged bottles, houses burnt wastefully to the ground. She picked up every little bit of dough, kneaded it back into the whole. Children with sand and flies stuck to their eyes, she whispers, and toilets that were just holes in the ground. Fear and distaste my aunt rolled in with her scones. I ate it with homemade jam and cream.

We travel the last stretch at night, leaving one town behind and heading for the next, 250 miles with nothing in between. We follow the white line in the black road like it's a rope thrown to those lost at sea. Except for the dotted line and our headlights, there is nothing to the left or right, a void so dense you can almost taste it, like velvet on the tongue.
"I remember we broke our windscreen along here. A semi overtook and threw up a stone."
J. groans. "Do you have to? Can't we just sing songs instead?"

He stuffed a towel in the hole and pressed the heel of his hand hard against the glass. His hand was cut, the skin so old and weathered, it was alien, and he never noticed the blood dripping from finger to thumb.
"I hope the bloody petrol holds out, no Seven 11s out here."
His face was set in stone in the glow from the dashboard; he talked of "making good time", carrying the endeavour like a necessary weight, his rough hands fairly crackling as he took control of the wheel.

We come to the place near sunrise. J. laughs wearily at the street names — Oxide, Bromide, Chloride, Crystal — at the sheer literal mindedness of it all. Lack of imagination is a blessing out here, I say. Besides, the names are comforting to me. They mean shopping trips into 'town', pies and cakes for lunch, lime spiders for afters and bike rides with thorns in your tyres. I keep trying to talk about these things and then fall silent, afraid of his polite incomprehension, that they won't mean anything when they fall out of memory and into bright air.
J. asks me about the slag heaps which tower over the centre of the town like someone has taken the earth and turned it out like a sock. I say I don't know why they've been left like that, why they don't crumble, why someone doesn't do something about them. They are ugly but spectacular and I can't keep my eyes off them as we head toward the main street. I think about unions and black bans and accidents and BHP and McCarthy and emphysema and they are all as black and forbidding and comforting as heavy brows of slag which frown over this town. No matter where you are in this place, they are there, and they are always as big; there is no hope of putting them in perspective.
We book in at the caravan-place, we look at the heritage-coloured Town Hall. We walk up the main street with its ancient department stores and curly verandahs, we buy things. We visit the relatives, mostly dead or dying, sit among their pot plants and in their kitchens, smaller than I remember, commiserating and eating soup and cake and quandong pie. It's tasteless and over-sugared as always but you have to be polite. We dutifully admire the art galleries which have sprung up in an attempt to transfuse with something known elsewhere as culture a town already shrivelling, its halcyon days documented faithfully on Tourist Centre walls. Having seen the sights and taken snapshots against backgrounds endlessly red and unsure what else to do, we head toward the house.

The street is so wide it takes my breath away. At least that hasn't changed. The earth too smells familiar, but the gate hangs on its hinge like a broken jaw. Someone had warned me that the new people have let it run down. Still, I'm not prepared for this. The paint licks halfway up the path and falls short, and they have painted the verandah, once red with Roman pillars, a bright and acidic blue.
There is junk everywhere — an old air conditioner, boxes of tools, piles of newspapers. I spring forward hopefully but they are recent, they are not dated 1942. J. is nervous, tapping his fingers, pulling at his hair. He stares out at nothing in the distance, still looking for something else. I knock at the door and wait. I knock again. No answer. We close the gate carefully and we go away.

"What happened in the end? When the car broke down?" J. asks despite himself. It's four in the morning, I'm driving home, and only the secret symmetry of my hand

and foot keeps us spinning off into space.
"He was picked up by this truck driver who drove him into the next town. And do you know what? Even though it was Sunday and all the shops and garages were shut, he found this little junk dealer place with dirty windows all full of cobwebs and old trash-lampsticks, old tea sets, horseshoes, God knows what else. And when he peered through the window, right at the back, under this old tarp, there was a radiator. It was in perfect working order and the serial number was exact."
"So?"

I don't know. I never knew what the moral to this story was — that strange things happen or that effort will be rewarded. I only know I'm back on this road, keeping carefully to the rules like a mantra for success. At times I feel I am peering through that window with you, looking for clues, and sometimes you are the window, obscured and dark and full of secrets. Sometimes I feel you are the secret thing I am trying to find, the configuration of numbers I would like to crack. And at other times I feel you are peering over my shoulder, like I used to yours, asking how far is it to go, listening to my story for once, mile after mile, silent and respectful, enthralled. The stories and the miles knit together, they make a rug for my knees and a pillow for your head.
As the sun starts to come up over the desert — flat, flat, raw, with buses tracing arteries in the glare, and the faintest hint of blue in the red rocks, sheer as babies' eyelids or stubble — I remember sitting with you in the middle of many nights while everyone else slept and you drove tirelessly through the dark. You said I could keep you awake. You told me stories about the ghosts of swagmen by the side of the road. I believed every word. It was a secret and special place in the dark there with you. There was only the glow of the instruments, the road and the moon keeping pace. I remember pretending that it was the telegraph poles not us which were moving and became so convinced it was hard to return to reality, like staring at a pattern which contains a face and being unable to see what everyone else instantly perceives.
Your face in profile was closed over and hard. Each word you spoke glittered invisibly in the soft air. I wish that you could sit beside me now, that it was dark, that we had no need to look at one another, that silence between us had the same meaning as it did then, and that when I was tired I could lay my head in your trouser lap in the green glow from the dashboard and feel the secret symmetry of your hands and feet and hear your voice threading the vacuum rush like a rope.

CHRISTINE EVANS

Between Love and Castration: On Brenda Walker's novel *Crush*

I Lines of Sight

> *Sometimes the light shone on events produces a kind of darkness, a refusal to reflect back to the dissecting gaze its own projections.*

This writing begins, like a good detective, by pursuing certain themes which Brenda Walker's novel *Crush*[1] develops, in the photographic as well as the narrative sense. These themes are foreshadowed in part by Roland Barthes' questions (here abbreviated), with which Walker prefaces *Crush*: "... If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories? Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus?..."[2] However, it is not my intention to pin *Crush* down, like an investigator who reveals a corpse in the beam of a probing torch: to dismember it (the inert text) and make it reveal its secrets. For one thing, *Crush* changes the subject too much, sliding between love and castration: in these scenes, as Oedipus warns, lingering looks can send you blind. For another, *Crush's* Anna, positioned ambiguously both 'within' the text as writer/character, and 'outside' as writer of the text, sometimes looks back, unsettling our relationship, catching me watching: found wanting.

> Tom was interested in my lithograph, but it need not concern you ... I'll tell you all you need to know, trust me. I made it all up, I made it for you on the lurching bus, for you at the kitchen table holding the magnifying glass above the print, for you with the wedding/ pregnancy/ divorce/ dirty dishes you wish to avoid, even for you (38).

At times like these, caught red-handed, it's hard to know where to look. Dissection, penetration, insight: these particular kinds of the "violence we do to things"[3] require submissive bodies for the masterful gaze, ones that don't look back.[4] Anna's ironic

1. Brenda Walker, *Crush*, (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1991).
2. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), cited in *Crush*, 11.
3. Paul Patton refers to the Nietzschean conception of thought as a "violence we do to things", in "Art and Philosophy", *Agenda*, no. 33, Sept. 1993, 18-20.
4. See Bob Hodge and Alec McHoul, "The Politics of Text and Commentary", *Textual Practice*, Vol. 6 no. 2, Summer, 1992, for a discussion of the continuum of political relations between text and commentary.

aside unsettles this schema; it invites dialogue, insists on the reader's complicity in revving up the motor of the text, animating its parts; in Deleuze and Guattari's words, "desire is always assembled",[5] or, from a different angle, a "question from another answer":[6]

> If in the realm of textual pleasure it is difficult to separate subject from object, that dilemma might render it impossible to write objectively on the subject.[7]

Crush takes form in the space opened up by this 'dilemma'; it is a ficto-critical space, where 'writing objectively' is problematised by questioning the relations between 'subject' and 'object'. If we follow *Crush* down the road to Oedipus by pursuing Lacan's trail, it leads to the notion that subjectivity is produced as an effect of language; its holistic reflection therefore cannot be found *in* language, as a mimetic view of realism might suggest; assuming a pre-textual, fully formed self outside the text who might generate this reflection.[8]

Tom says "Anna, Anna ... Your name folds back on itself", suggesting an interiority which Anna rejects: "I corrected him, my name consumes itself" (53). Between the mirroring syllables there is no core, or originating moment; "one can only rewrite a self that is always already written".[9] In a subversive re(in)flection of Lacan's mirror stage, the moments of straightforward identification in the novel (for instance, Tony Avery as Tom's father) are characterised by misrecognition.

Indeed the textual surfaces of *Crush* act more like the lakes in Perth's Hyde Park than like mirrors. 'Surface tension' produces an illusory skin: shimmering between transparency and sudden opacity, changed by a breath of wind, the rumour of a body, a glimmer of theory breaking the surface. *Crush* plays with the textual production of subjectivity through its ambiguities, its 'underdeveloped' characters and its shifting narrative positions. As characters, Tom and Anna remain in certain respects 'undecidable', existing as volatile stories each tells to, and hides from, the other. Although *Crush* is nominally 'Anna's story', this formula "folds back on itself". 'Anna' the writer describes the process of her writing, which simultaneously 'produces' the textual Anna, the protagonist. There is a further ambiguity in the subject positions of *Crush's* protagonists: it is never clear whether Tom's narration is 'really' his own, or whether Anna is inventing a Tom-who-writes-about-Anna, just as she rewrites his paternity in the stories she shows him. When Anna leaves, Tom's lines are "I was crushed like paper in her fist" (122). In a conversation about fathers — and Tom may be Anna's — Anna tells him that "We construct our own fathers. Out of whatever materials we have to hand" (106). In these movements between textual 'depth' and sudden surface, between narrative transparency and its undermining critique, the characters in *Crush* gesture knowingly towards the materials and concerns from which the novel is constructed.

The novel is set in the back alleys and 'mean streets' of Northbridge, Perth, a setting where the city's underclasses and street kids tell different stories from the

5. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 531.
6. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 110.
7. Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 101.
8. See Candace Lang, "Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism", *Diacritics*, Vol. 12, 1982, 2-16.
9. "Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism" 12.

bland suburban lines delivered along the main street; where the summer light can dazzle as well as illuminate. The counterpoint to concealment in *Crush* is not penetrating insight, but blinding revelation; a dangerous vision that cuts up its object. Love and castration are fatally coupled. Anna sings along with an old song "I've got a crush on you sweetie pie"; Tom remarks that where he comes from, a crush is where sheep wait to be castrated (25). Sophocles' Oedipus,[10] who stalks the pages of *Crush* accompanied by other theoretical ghosts, blinds himself following the moment of guilty insight; in *Crush,* Anna wittily appropriates the male gaze, cutting the eyes from a famous man's painting after overhearing him tell a misogynist joke. The louvres, through which she watches Tom approach, dissect him: "They chopped him to bits.... A line of metal. The throat. Why do we want to damage the ones we love?" (37).

The relationship between seeing and revelation is problematised in the stories which nestle inside each other within the pages of *Crush,* refusing to form legitimate families yet disturbingly familiar.

Crush takes issue with the possibility (or lack of it) of telling stories which "exist in tension with other, more central ones",[11] and faces a familiar dilemma: How can those stories, marginalised by their class or gender orientation, be made to appear other than in a 'false light' — the deceptively transparent light of the 'central story'? The shadows cast by *Crush's* narrative dodging and weaving, its shady alleys and changes in subject position, begin to form a strategic outline in dialogue with this question: a 'figure of speech' perhaps. Or the 'complicated and shadowy' outline of a woman's body.

II Woman as Shadow

When Tom is cleaning out his house, he finds in the main bedroom,

> ... a photograph which I didn't know what to do with. In fact it wasn't a photograph. It was a camera-less exposure. The photographer had induced a woman to lie across a sheet of light-sensitive paper in the darkroom, then switched on the light. You would expect a hard edge around the body, like the outline the knife-thrower makes around his assistant in the circus. But the silhouette is complicated and shadowy. I didn't want it above my bed.
> I put it in the empty cellar (24-25).

The savage cutting edge of vision is summoned again by the image of the knife-thrower. *His* knives produce a silhouette of woman/assistant, through striking the points where she becomes absent.

The cellar to which the image is banished is referred to by Tom as the "hidden interior, the unconscious of the house" (24). This blurred photographic body, "complicated and shadowy" (25), is not mentioned again. However, it casts its 'complicated' shadow across the text, suggesting the feminine as the necessary exile

10. Sophocles, *The Theban Plays,* trans. E.F. Watling, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974).
11. Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives,* (London: Virago Press, 1993), 22.

in the cellar, the unconscious of phallocentric narrative: perhaps even of deviant narratives, such as the one 'Anna Penn' is trying to write, which question the notion of paternity as the authorising signature enabling writing. When the Name of the Father becomes the focus, even in order for its primary status to be challenged, what happens to the mother? Does she stay in suspended animation, in the Imaginary cellar of the (male) unconscious? Or perhaps the liberated daughter is an immaculate conception like Athena, sprung from the brow of Zeus (a mindfuck) without the sticky, abject mess of the maternal body to deal with.[12]

The shadow woman in the cellar stretches the textual skin of Fiction very thin. The submerged image repertoire of the novel's other 'parent', Theory, becomes visible through this stretched skin, like the predatory turtles Anna can see on a clear day in the lakes at Hyde Park.

Here is the woman in the other parent's cellar (it's Derrida writing now)

> The mother is the faceless figure of a *figurant,* an extra. She gives rise to all the figures by losing herself in the background of the scene like an anonymous persona....She survives on the condition of remaining at bottom.[13]

It is also difficult to know how to read the mysterious figure of Winifred Chong, except as another aspect of this figure which gives rise to all the others. Winifred Chong, a mother, and ethnically marked as Other, appears in *Crush* only to be murdered; to provide a false lead, a shadow to complicate the other stories. Of all the bodies which haunt the pages of *Crush,* she is the only one (outside the cellar) divested of any trace of her own story, appearing in abject form as *all body.*

In reference to the 'sterile text', Barthes cites the story of the "Woman without a Shadow". He writes "the text needs its shadow; this shadow is a *bit* of ideology."[14] The woman *as* shadow turns into "a bit of ideology"; Derrida's 'mother', the faceless figurant, provider of what the text needs.

The novel itself also develops as a 'complicated and shadowy' form in dialogue with (or against) another text: the excerpt from Roland Barthes' writing with which Walker prefaces the book.

> Death of the Father would deprive literature of many of its pleasures. If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories? Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus? Isn't story-telling always a way of searching for one's origin, speaking one's conflicts with the law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred?[15]

These questions usher in an interwoven set of narratives, tracing its genesis back through a line of Fathers who haunt the text: Barthes, Lacan, Freud; and way down in the cellar, a figure adopted or exhumed by these theorists: Oedipus.

12. Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), discusses the notion of abjection in relation to the mother's body.
13. Jacques Derrida, quoted in Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions,* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin),1989, 35.
14. *The Pleasure of the Text,* 32.
15. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* cited in *Crush,* 11.

III A Problem of Utterance

In Lacan's reworking of Freud, successful traversal of the Oedipus complex provides an entry for the (white) male subject into language and the Symbolic order. The subject produced by 'having' the phallus, which signifies access to the Law and to language, is normatively masculine, produced through identification with the father and rejection of the mother. The male subject's accession to this regime is based on a *fear* of castration by the father, should he refuse to relinquish his desire for the mother in the Imaginary realm of their symbiosis. For the female however, *acceptance* of her castrated status, or primary lack, is the precondition of access to the symbolic order. [16]

If the answer to Barthes' question ("Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus?") is yes, if narrative itself stems from the formation stories of a masculinity which posits the feminine as lack, as castrated, then how can woman write herself into language which is premised upon her exclusion? [17] Some readings of Lacan [18] argue that the 'phallus' is a signifier belonging to neither men nor women; both are 'castrated' in the sense of being alienated from full presence in language. However, as Jane Gallop argues,

> As long as the attribute of power is a phallus which can only have meaning by referring to and being confused with, a penis, this confusion will support a structure in which it seems reasonable that men have power and women do not.[19]

Within this scenario, the question of woman's place in language frames the impossibility of its own answer. *Crush* seeks 'lines of flight' from this question, unsettling the singular phallic signifier through introducing multiplicity.

The multiple versions of events and the dual narration in *Crush,* however, are also accompanied by a consistent gesture of *refusal* — of narrative closure, of 'well-rounded' characters, of climactic trajectories. This refusal may be a sign of 'castration'; perhaps the preferred feminist writing option, in a Lacanian world ruled by the phallic signifier, is a kind of narrative anorexia, a refusal to reproduce a tainted story. Or it may spell banishment to the shallow end of the pool; reduced to ironic commentary on the conditions of narrative production, with no chance to dive in and grab a story for *her*self.

But this refusal might also signify a different set of tactics which Anna employs to address the problem, which "may be a problem of utterance".[20] Perhaps the unusual 'lack' of destination (if not of design) in *Crush's* stories might indicate a different drift from Lacan's 'lack'. Not lack as castration, or as the engine of desire, but as a generative space, a kind of Echo chamber which 'seduces' Narcissus through its mimicry;[21] destabilising his singular status through the very faithfulness of its returned voices.

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16. Jaques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis,* trans. Alan Sheridan, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977); also Elizabeth Grosz, *Jaques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (NSW: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd., 1990).
17. See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* Gillian Gill [trans.] (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
18. See Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism,* (London: Allen Lane, 1974).
19. *Thinking Through the Body,* 127.
20. [The doctor] looked at me. I waited for diagnosis and medicine. "Perhaps you're trying to say something" she said. "Your problem may be one of utterance"' *Crush,* 65.
21. In Baudrillard's sense of the word 'seduction'; see "The Evil Demon of Images", (Sydney: Power Institute, 1987).

IV Genre as Alibi

Crush as an 'Echo chamber' is full of familiar voices, but like good detectives, they refuse to divulge their sources. In rejecting a singular origin ("*the* paternal metaphor") *Crush* adopts the gestures of a range of genres to produce a subversive simulacrum of generic fiction. The novel echoes Tom and Anna's shady paternal origins with its own. *Crush* is a ficto-critical bastard, a hybrid made up of borrowed and discarded gestures from a range of literary genres. Tom invokes scraps from Raymond Chandler novels, but with a self-referential, literary twist: "She stood on the mat and looked at me hard out of black-rimmed eyes, like someone who has read about hard looks in cheap novels" (17).

Later, he describes himself alone in his new house, "reading Raymond Chandler and listening to the rats in the roof" (25).

Anna declares that for Perth, the right kind of a story is one with "firmly established conventions. A murder mystery" (26).

In a description which seems to fit *Crush* suspiciously well, Ann Cranny-Francis writes: "Paradoxically, the literature of detection operates most commonly as the literature of concealment, of displacement and false resolution." [22] The 'concealment and displacement' to which she refers is the bourgeois ideological production of self and society in which detective fiction is traditionally complicit. *Crush*, however, adopts the guise of the genre itself to effect a different kind of displacement; that of narrative expectation. The 'central story' of Oedipus which prefaces the book itself functions as a kind of alibi. Under its cover, *Crush* develops its shadowy bodies and marginal stories which play tricks with the falsifying light of the 'central story'.

Although *Crush* raids a range of genres, including the Anglo-American feminist novel of self-discovery popular in the seventies,[23] and the terrain of the Baudelairean *flaneur*, Anna's 'rewriting' refuses their trajectories. Generic endings vary, but they have in common the phallocentric conventions of narrative resolution through a singular climax. *Crush* uses the initial tension required to set up these conventions, but refuses its 'normal' release: the text plays prick-tease with the phallic signifier. Its mode of interaction with genre is referential and dialogic. Rather than disavowal or adoption, which are strategies that lead straight back to the patrilineal family and its either/or romances, *Crush* exists in the generative disjunction, the tension between its own conditions of production and the 'central stories' of Oedipal narrative; between love and castration.

V "Return of the Repressed"

These kinds of ambiguous, strategic displacements within genre seem necessary for dealing with the sneaky pervasiveness of the Oedipal scene. The father cannot be disposed of simply through refusing his founding, ejaculatory moment. Illegitimate children may have fathers, but it is the Name of the Father, rather than the biological link (or the single climax, as in happy endings which then have nowhere else to go)

22. Ann Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 149.
23. Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics", *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, (London: Virago, 1986), 125-143.

which ensures continuance through accession to the Law. In fact, the best father is a dead one; as Elizabeth Grosz writes: "The real father's authority is never so strong as in his absence or death". [24]

In writing of the 'primal father', murdered by the 'fraternal hordes' to whom Freud refers in *Totem and Taboo,* Lacan writes:

> ... if this murder is the fruitful moment of the debt through which the subject binds himself for life to the Law...
> the symbolic father, insofar as he signifies this Law, is certainly the dead father.[25]

Although Tom, who may be Anna's father, practices the Law, it is at its shady interface with crime: he is a 'bush lawyer', a bastard son. It is through Anna's uninvited detective work that his own surrogate access to paternal authority is undermined: Anna reveals the fiction of Tony Avery as Tom's father and produces the disreputable Albert Flower as an alternative. If this is a story of patrilineal succession, then like many of *Crush's* stories, it is a thoroughly ambivalent one. By default, Tom inherits a place where sheep wait to be castrated; 'marginal country'. In the process he is disinherited of his claim to the central story, guarded by the perfect symbolic father, the dead war hero.

The means to these 'blinding' revelations produced for Tom by Anna return us to the cellar, and the outlined body of a woman, and to the beginnings of an answer to an earlier question: When the 'Name of the Father' as a way of founding narrative is challenged, what might happen to the mother? Tom has left his past behind, but Anna reinvents it, through an apparently chance encounter on the road with his mother (and possibly her grandmother) Tessa. Tessa runs a roadhouse between Perth and Geraldton, which is where Anna's adoptive mother comes from; so, rather than being located in the immanent, imaginary past, she forms a link between the place of 'origin', which she has herself left, and the present.
In Tom's words:

> When she isn't bustling between the counter and the tables she's yarning with the customers. She strikes up conversations with everybody: hitchhikers, carsick kids, caravanning geriatrics, bikies, crayfishermen on their way down to the big smoke to blow the season's earnings (32).

Tessa provides an information channel for the streams of story which pass through and sustain her livelihood; in turn, she supports a tribe of 'new settlers'. She does not live in a state of suspended animation in the Imaginary cellar, which is where Tom has buried his own history until Anna turns up. Tessa occupies a different sort of suspension: afloat in a sea of stories, the endless tracings of narrative produced by people on the move. Tessa, like Derrida's 'mother', "gives rise to all the figures by losing herself in the background of the scene like an anonymous persona",[26] but not as an abject body. Instead she participates in the production of story as a kind of fluid, non-destinational force; an abstract story machine, rather than the Oedipal

24. Elizabeth Grosz, *Jaques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction,* (NSW: Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd., 1990), 68.
25. Jaques Lacan, *Ecrits. A Selection,* (London: Tavistock, 1977), 199.
26. Derrida, quoted in *Sexual Subversions,* 35.

machine whose grinding trajectory is always already written, the ink dried, unable to flow.

Tessa provides the raw materials, the means by which Anna rewrites Tom's past. The materials Anna has to hand are not 'subjective' in the sense of being gleaned through personal insight; Anna plugs into stories from everywhere, many of which don't fit together. Anna as 'writer' is part of a story machine whose engine revs up at Tessa's road house, just as the car she borrowed from Tom breaks down after 'blowing the head'. Tessa's place is a refuelling point for story rather than a destination or point of origin.

Unfortunately for Winifred Chong, however, Tessa's story machine isn't one she can plug into. She is left as a hit-and-run, an expendable Other. Despite Tessa's reclamation from the Imaginary cellar, there's still a body in the basement.

Just for now (and tactics are always provisional, "out of whatever materials we have to hand"[27]) short of replacing the blinding and concealing light of *Crush* with the careful beige tones of political Tippex, tying up all the threads in exactly the way that *Crush* resists, I don't see what can be done about it. Perhaps the best thing to do is leave Winifred Chong as a raw spot, a seam where *Crush* is jaggedly stitched onto the kinds of phallocentric narratives it critiques.

VI "My name consumes itself"[28]

In the course of the novel, Tom loses his fictional symbolic father, Tony Avery; his undeclared biological father, Albert Flower, and his daughter. When young, he left a girl who became pregnant to him, and worked in a Perth slaughterhouse instead. Later, his own actions 'blind' him: having chosen the slaughterhouse over paternity, he cannot recognise Anna as being possibly his own daughter, and she refuses to claim the relationship.

In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*,[29] Antigone, the faithful daughter, follows her blind father into exile. At the end of *Crush*, Tom sits alone by the lake in Hyde Park, unable to make out the shapes in the water. Anna watches, and writes:

> Even now, I have considered swinging into step beside him. But where would it end, this matching of my steps with the other's? I have chosen the way it should end, it must end along these lines (127).

Near the end of the novel, in Tom's words: "Sometimes there is no killer, only death" (123). This is probably tragedy, but whose? The narrative shifts and displacements, the rejection of certain kinds of romance, if not of their modes of speech, have introduced a new element into this familiar, psychoanalytically recycled scene: Anna's writing of it. Although overdetermined endings loom before Anna, "even now..." (127) her own interventions, recharged by the stream of stories which pass through Tessa's roadhouse, locate points of potential departure. These points might disappear off the Oedipal map, but not into 'nothing' as the anorexic death of all story.

27. *Crush*, 106.
28. *Crush*, 53.
29. *The Theban Plays*.

This particular story ends 'along these lines', in the characteristic gesture (a gesture which undermines 'character') of Anna's refusal to "match ... my steps to the other's " (127). But after the end, when Winifred Chong is left for dead, when Tom sits staring into the dazzling ruins of a certain sort of story, there is still Anna, writing into the elastic void.

CAROLINE CADDY

Reading Chinese Poetry

A man
at the chosen stone edge
baits a short measure of line
lifts the pole thick as his arm
tapering out two or three
boat-lengths over the lake
where the dip and tremble of water
and his concentration
meet.
He has spent many years learning
the thousand permutations
is still
caught
by the unexpected
gulp.

JOHN CATLIN

12 Nyoongars in a ute

and 12 Nyoongars in a ute? it's not
as if they owe the land

maybe attrition and the songlines
occasionally snag on one another
in the mind of the Flatland

so when a utility
full of kids and aunts
and uncles
warmed by two flagons of McWilliams
and the existentialism
which is part of the cool night air in the
back of a ute with
Uncle Jack telling the kids another
scary story and Auntie May singing
two bars ahead of Dolly Parton on the
radio in the cab

so when it passes
a point in the road at a point
in time

shit who knows why?

the ute jus pigroots like the road
slipped   the steering wheel jus
spins and the front end
ploughs inta the gravel

12 Nyoongars outside a ute

seen this fillum at school which had
a mercedes bends ram inta a wall an
four dolls, a mummy and a dad an
two kids lost their heads.   an Lenny whispered
that those dolls were wadgelas cos black kids
woulda turned inta magpies and flown away

so Uncle Jack told him

besides we never saw a blackfella drive
a mercedes bends

seen Auntie May fly right past me singing
an giggling with her new red dress
so pretty under the stars an dad still turning the
steering wheel even though the
ute was yards below doing headstands

we was like a flocka cockies up there
set loose in the night

PHYLLIS PERLSTONE

Place

her things
herself
her pleading
(unplanned words)
the planned meal
I've left the soup cooking on the stove
the stranger ejecting
onto the pavement
of liver-coloured bricks
objects we thought we lived with

my mother still on the path
inside the gate we can't enter
holds the youngest of us
like a flag no-one will pay attention to

run home from school
I put my case
among the rest outside

our untidy things
the house *we can't go back into*
my mother repeats his words
and moves
in front of the gate

later all of us can stay
for rent
for a while
in a neighbour's house
where my mother and father
walk through a hall
in the night
and say

excuse me
then recognise each other in the dark

the end solution
an inner city tenement
slipping mud of a slum backyard
my mother gardens
vegetables
corn lettuce tomatoes
later a passionfruit
she watches the first white flower fly
on the vine
like another flag

From *eviction*, a series of four poems about place.

VERA NEWSOM

Bird Singing

A clear voice articulates
in the grey dawn.
I cannot catch the words
nor spell their meaning out.
Yet the sound teases my ear,
riddles the dark with light.

Nameless, the bird that calls.
Some stranger sinking back to dreams
it sprinkles out its notes —
like crystals slowly melting
that streak the water blue,
then make it absolute;

or the full sun absorbing
its canticles of light.

ROBERT EDMONDS

Superman

When I was ten
The comic that gave me greatest pleasure
was one where Clark Kent got amnesia
and spent a whole issue in a monastery in Tibet.

Lost and upset.
Wearing robes and sitting in the dust.
He didn't use his super powers, just
his X-Ray vision, turning inwards, focused on himself.

In perfect health—
bald, cross-legged, staring out of frame.
No thought balloons, each panel showed the same
unnerving picture of a haunted super-human trapped inside

a normal mind,
and grappling with the super-questions.
No answer lay within his invention
and he carped at his creator without hope of being right.

The kryptonite
thrown up by his endless introspection
weakened him but, on reflection,
something about his immobile power seemed so right to me.

STEPHEN LACEY

Red Line

The moon funnels its light along the wharf
where I lie out here suspended,
a conjuror's stooge
above the khaki water.

My father is standing near the boatshed.
He is Heracles
dropping the blue crabs into the pot
where they scuttle and wave
their flat legs
in the pastel scum
and rise like orange suns.

As he walks toward me
the glow of his cigarette traces a red line.
I feel his footsteps on the wooden planks
shudder through my chest.

ROBYN IANSSEN

An old man wandering — the exhibition postponed

An old man carrying a flat parcel wrapped in brown paper is walking in a street of terraces and restaurants in Sydney. In the middle is an art gallery with a big window and carved dark wood door. The old man pauses, his knuckles showing unwashed through his worn mittens. Across the window diagonally is a wide strip of paper saying "Today's Exhibition — Postponed". There are pictures in the window, resting on a black velvet backdrop so the street lights reflect the scene outside perfectly. A gentle light plays across the pictures, moving sometimes.

Today's exhibition is postponed. Was today an exhibition? He looks at the sandstone around the window. The walls crack and reveal the stones underneath. The sand and cement don't hold together. The black of the fire. A feast of fire. Fire cannot be postponed. Old age cannot be postponed. Exhibitions can be postponed, but not at his age. His canvas is painted and framed like his grained and wrinkled face. In the window he sees his face. Its hooded eyes and dark irises. Short lashes almost gone. Hair in the nostrils. Dark blue ragged coat. Iron grey hair.

His left hand fondles the smooth stone in his pocket. He becomes aware of the stone and takes it out of his pocket to look at it. He turns it around in the light from the gallery window and examines it carefully. It is very white and perfectly round and smooth. It gleams in the reflected light. He closes his fingers around it, and it nestles in his palm, safe as an egg in a nest. He looks at it there safe and warm. His fingers caress the stone a little as his gaze lifts to the window again.

He sees his reflection. It's a little straighter than before. And younger. And better dressed. Wearing a stylish bottle green overcoat and red scarf. His beard is trimmed smartly and he is carrying a flat parcel wrapped in brown paper. It must be the picture. But it's his eyes. They are darting with life under the hooded lids. His mouth turns up in a little smile at the corners. And he moves towards the gallery door, pushes it open and goes in.

"Good morning Herr Bohme."

Two young men spring to their feet from beside the door.

"Good morning Herr Bohme. Let me take the picture."

He hands the parcel over. "Thank you Hans. Is Herr Spritz in?"

"No, Herr Bohme, he's not in yet."

"Ah," he says and crosses to the desk. He puts down his gloves and loosens his scarf. "Hans, can you tell Herr Spritz that this is the pair for the picture I brought in yesterday. They go together, the two stones, the white and the black."

Yes. This is how it happened.

He sat down on the gilded chair with the Dresden Blue velvet seat and looked around the gallery. *His* gallery almost. On every wall there was one of his paintings. All mountain scenes. High summer green meadows with cows, dark forests, deep green lakes beside cliffs and carved wooden house facades. In all of them there was a figure or two in the foreground wearing an armband with a black insignia on it. The figures seemed to be at play in the landscape. They *were* at play. They *owned* the mountains.

On the wall above the desk was the most spectacular of the paintings. In this one, the figures in the foreground were very large. They weren't dwarfed by the scenery. In fact it was the other way around. The expansive arm of the tallest figure reached out in a gesture of creation. The man's hair was slicked down to one side of his head and his moustache was small. His piercing eyes told of the power of this man. His clothes are the colour of the earth, thought Bohme.

Bohme's eyes rested on this picture a long time. Drinking it in. Drawn to it even though it was the work of his own brush. The world was behind this obvious leader and he, Friedrich Bohme, had put it there for all to see.

The gallery door opened in a whirl of cloak and snow and Herr Spritz entered. Everyone sprang up again except Bohme. He lolled back in his chair and waited. Herr Spritz took off his cloak and gave it into the waiting arms of Hans, rubbing his hands together for warmth, then turned, with extra joviality to the visitor.

"Welcome again Herr Bohme. So happy to see you today. Sorry I wasn't here yesterday." He stretched out his hand long before he was across the room. Bohme half rose and shook it. Then settled back again.

"And to what do we owe...?" Spritz said.

"I've brought the second of the pair ... the picture of the other stone." Spritz pretending he has forgotten, Bohme thought.

"Of course!" Spritz looked towards the far room. "The matching pair. I await it eagerly." He looked around as it wasn't in sight. "Where is it Hans?"

Hans got the picture and put it on the desk. He and Herr Spritz stood over it waiting. At last Bohme too stood and walked over to the desk. Spritz began to undo the string and the brown paper wrapping.

Bohme interrupted him. "Careful. It's only just back from the framers. The gilding on the frame may still be soft."

Spritz turned and nodded smiling, "Of course Herr Bohme." His hands moved deliberately more slowly loosening the string. He made a grand gesture opening the last fold of the paper. There it was. An alpine view again.

"It's Untersberg!"

"Yes. You see right across to Untersberg. But you haven't noticed the stone."

"Ah yes. The stone."

In the centre of the picture, half turned away from the viewer, stood the Fuhrer, regarding the distant view, one hand on his hip, the other on an alpen stock. His right foot rested on a large stone sticking out of the brown earth and part lichen covered. The stone was jet black.

"So unusual. A black stone at such height," Spritz said.

"Yes. A touchstone. Very powerful. The shepherds revere it. No one is allowed to chip it or dig it up. The Fuhrer has decreed it is a sacred spot. It commands a view of the world."

"Is that why he likes the colour black so much?" Spritz sucked his breath in as soon as he had said this.

Bohme turned to look at him before replying. "I think so Herr Spritz. I think so."

Spritz hurried on, "Now we'll just put this one on the wall beside the one with the white stone," he paused, "but will the two go together?"

"He said they must, he sees a link."

"Of course, Herr Bohme, of course. At once. Hans, take down these two pictures and move them to the front room." Hans, hovering, ran to do as commanded. Bohme and Spritz walked on and stood in front of the now empty wall in the front room waiting for the pair of stone pictures to come.

Hans put up the black stone picture first.

"It looks excellent here over the desk with its gilding. Excellent, Spritz. Now let's see the white stone." Softening a little, "You know I have a pebble from the white stone." Bohme lifted his chin and half turned, looking at Spritz out of the corner of his eyes. "I chipped it off myself. Look here, I have it in my pocket." He handed it to Spritz.

"What a perfect piece of quartz," Herr Bohme. Spritz flashed a smile as he turned the jagged stone in his fingers, admiring it.

"Yes, isn't it."

The picture was on the wall now, and Hans stood back to adjust it straight.

"Herr Bohme, it is marvellous!" The picture showed an alpine meadow at the mountain top with two children. Away in the distance near the woods was a mountain house. There were pine woods and a great white stone on the very pinnacle of the mountain, like a diamond in a gold ring around which the children danced.

"But I've been wondering ... where is the Fuhrer?" Spritz asked.

"Here. This is him just emerging from the woods on his morning walk."

"So tiny?"

"Yes. Well he wanted it that way. Give me back the stone." Spritz handed it quickly back, and Bohme pushed it into his pocket doing up his coat and looking at the picture with his head on one side then the other. "I'll be back on Monday with a group to show the new picture. Three o'clock. Have champagne ready, Herr Spritz. Goodbye." He pushed open the heavy door and went out. It closed softly behind him.

"For how many, Herr Bohme?" But Bohme was already gone. Hans ran after him with his gloves.

* * *

The stone in his palm is warm and smooth. As smooth as an egg in a nest under the feathered breast of its mother. His fingers caress the stone, share its warmth. In my hand, he thinks, this stone lives. His palm feels caressed by the stone, its smoothness. It belongs to him. It gives him something and he gives it care and love. This stone is my child now, he says to himself. My only child now. All the rest ... gone.

He turned away from the gallery window shuffling his feet. His parcel under his

arm. The paper seems loose. He tries to adjust the parcel with the white stone still in his hand. Not possible. Have to put the stone away in his pocket where it will get cool.

He slides it into the pocket of his long coat and hitches up the parcel. His last picture. Got to hold onto it. No one is going to take his last picture. It is his.

He turns to go. The light in the gallery window switches off. His gallery closes. His life snuffed out? He stares into the gallery window again, but it swallows his eyes. He has to turn away. I am an artist. I must walk further.

He looks around thinking of his favourite park, but it does not satisfy him. So he walks on until he comes to an overpass. The bridge. Under it is a group of men lying on newspapers with bottles in paper bags. Strangers to him.

"Hey Henry," one calls. "What have you got there Henry?"

"I'm not Henry, I'm Frederick," he insists.

"You're Henry to me," says the other. "What've you got in the parcel? Come on. Open it! Show us." The other grabs at the parcel and half pulls it away so it falls to the ground with a crash sound which means the frame has broken. He cries out in dismay and opens the parcel to check.

"Ha Ha Henry! Did you paint this?" They are all laughing. "Ha Ha. Who's this? Hitler?" They take the picture and pass it from hand to hand keeping it out of his reach.

"Give it back!" He grasps at it. They hold on and the frame stretches the canvas into a diamond shape, tearing it away at one corner.

"No!" he screams.

"OK Henry, OK." They let go. He wraps the painting back in its brown paper and puts it inside his coat against his chest. He walks off as fast as he can until he comes to the wall of the naval base near the harbour. Must get near the water. He walks down the streets with the 1930s houses. His era. I was someone then. At the jetty his image is distorted in the water by the red and blue neons of the city, ruffled by ferries, water taxis and silent sailboats. It is after all the way he had been in those days. Always on the move.

His hand seeks the stone in his pocket. He takes it out and sees how its shiny surface reflects the lights from the water. He sees red reflections. The blood. It was not my fault. It was not me.

* * *

Three women with shaven heads wearing grey dresses carried pails of water to the kitchen hut. They emptied the pails down a drain in the ground. A guard told them to pick up their mops. "Now do the pathways between the huts. Fill up again." Their heads down, they picked up their pails again and walked around the back of the hut to the water pump, filled the pails and began mopping the concrete pathway.

Other guards walked mud across their new work, smiling with fun at the clarity of their foot prints, admiring. Until one, a man with a well trimmed beard stopped. He kicked the pail from in front of Lucienne. "Get up!" he ordered her.

She got up and stood head bent. "Look up!" She lifted her head but kept her eyes for herself.

Slap! He slapped her across her mouth. "Look at me when I tell you!" She looked.

He saw the hate and felt his power. He could make people hate him. He smiled. "You can work in my house as my maid with my two children. Go there, tomorrow."

She frowned. He motioned with his shoulder to the bodyguard. His bodyguard took Lucienne by the shoulder and forced her to go with them. He turned with irritation to the guard. "Wash her first! Delouse her first!" Lucienne struggled slightly, a howl of agony squashed in her throat.

The next day she began her first task in the commandant's house. She wasn't to wash floors or clothes or mind children, she was to smooth a rough white stone by rubbing it against a rock in the path. It was going to take her years. Maybe he would keep her alive while she did it. He must be mad. A rough stone and he wanted it smoothed.

He took the stone back from her every evening and gave it to her every morning. A guard watched her while she worked. So she wouldn't steal a piece of white rock!

After three days there was still no change in the shape of the rock. Although maybe one corner was a bit less sharp.

After three months three corners were slightly rounded. The guard made sure she worked all day without stopping. She scraped the skin off her knuckles often, but it was nothing compared to what others were enduring. And she had food.

She found one day, after a year, she even liked the stone. The three smooth corners began to feel good in her hand, and she rubbed them with her thumb and fingers often. They were soft. And soon they were warm and seemed to like her fingers caressing them. They fitted into her fingers. They warmed her hand. She looked down at the stone. It lay in her palm like a wounded bird and looked at her with still eyes in its dark crevices. She closed her hand around it and looked up at the window of the house beside which she laboured every day. She saw her grey shadow on the wall. It moved and took her into her parents' house, into their drawing room on the night of her twenty-first birthday. She was wearing her grey silk dress with the pink velvet collar and her new pearl necklace. She stood straighter and younger. She saw her birthday guests and her mother so proud. Her father drinking a little too much schnapps but giving his heartwarming speech about loyalty: now she was twenty-one, her first duty was to be loyal to herself, then to her parents, then to God and her country. Her father went around filling everyone's glasses with champagne then held his up in a toast.

"And now my dear family, I ask you to drink a toast to our lovely daughter Lucienne who is twenty-one today. Our only child, who my wife and I are so proud of. I am honoured to announce tonight that she will follow in my footsteps. She has just been selected to play with the Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra in its first spring concert." The whole family clapped with excitement and turned to Lucienne smiling and congratulating her. They threw her kisses and laughed with happiness. She felt she couldn't stop smiling.

Her mother took her hands and turned them over, looking at the palms and stroking them. "My musical daughter!" she said with love. "You must look after your hands always." She kissed Lucienne on the forehead.

"Play for us." The guests began to chant. "Play. Play. Play. Play. Play," laughing.

Her cousin, Piet, took her arm and led her to the shiny baby grand piano. She didn't resist. Everyone left the dinner table and formed a circle around, sitting and standing.

She settled herself slowly and without any nerves put her fingers on the smooth keys, ivory white, while she thought a moment. Then she began. It was a Liszt piece. There were the three slow chords, one in each hand, echoing from the bass to the treble, and then the rippling of the left hand counterpoised with the singing melody in the right. She felt herself transported. Her emotion heightened nearing the climax of the whole work, her fingers caressing the notes and touching so gently that it seemed she only brushed by them and the notes died away leaving a faint echo in her soul. Her body rocked slightly as she lent back in the final chord, eyes closed.

The room was silent. No one wanted to break the mood — the ecstasy — the peace — the communion with the spirit. She opened her eyes, looking up at the moulded cherubs on the ceiling where they sat on a swing of white roses around the chandelier in the centre.

Her eyes moved around the circle of leaves until they came to the cherub with the arrows. Cupid with his bow. She felt again how the arrow pierced her heart when Piet kissed her in the arbour last Sunday. She looked down and saw him looking at her from where he sat, but not with the adoration she had hoped, more with curiosity. Maybe even envy. Her hands moved from the keys to her lap.

Everyone began to clap and praise her playing. They crowded around her, patting her shoulders and saying how wonderful she was. But the only one she wanted there did not come. He did not pat her shoulder, nor put his arm on hers, nor kiss her. She couldn't even see his eyes.

When she freed herself from all the others, he was not even in the room. She panicked and ran to the other room. She didn't care if anyone saw. She searched for him. He was in the kitchen pouring himself more schnapps and biting into a dried fig, his hand at his mouth.

"Piet ...," she stopped, not knowing how to go on. He brushed past her and went back to the other room.

She stayed in the kitchen staring at the sink. She picked up a knife and an orange and cut it in half. The knife slipped in her hand nicking her thumb slightly and drawing blood. She watched the flood ooze out. She let it drip onto the orange. It changed colour there as it spread out over the segments, losing its strength, its individual droplets. Its life.

* * * *

The rounded corners of the white stone warmed her hand, but the sharp pieces interrupted. They forced her hand to touch them, guiding her fingertips into their valleys and dark crevices, like her tongue seeking the holes in her teeth. And there were many. Her teeth were loose and she had bad breath. They all did, but no one cared about their breath. Their teeth, yes.

She rubbed the white stone gently on the rough one again. What this stone needs, she thought, is proper handling, a real machine to polish it like a precious jewel. So that it shines. She held it gently between her thumb and forefinger while she looked at it.

"Don't stop!" The guard prodded her with the tip of his boot. "Keep going." She cast a condescending look his way and began to rub the stone again. Dark smoke rose from the chimney of the shower hut behind her.

* * * *

Was it 1993? There was a trial in progress in a courtroom in Sydney. Nearly ended. In the public gallery sat the press artists sketching the faces of the judge, the defence lawyers, the accused. Holding their sketch pads on their laps out of sight. Their newspapers' placards outside already stating, "Verdict today — The butcher of Treblinka".

He felt the stone in his pocket. He had it polished, here in Sydney. And now it was smaller and round, and perfectly hidden in the palm of his hand. He was not guilty. He never had been. No way was it him. They had made a mistake. All those overlays of his photographs with a photograph of fifty years ago. They showed nothing. Proved nothing. "You have the wrong man." No way. In fact his compatriots even today wanted him back there. Not that he wanted to go.

And so he was acquitted and allowed to go free. Out into the street where crowds awaited. Jostling and shouting, hating him. In the crowd he saw the face of a young woman which jolted his memory.

He felt his age. He couldn't keep his feet. His solicitor rushed to his side, but it was not quick enough. He slipped and fell and lost his grip on the stone. It rolled away under the feet of his attackers and he lost sight of it. He was helped to his feet by the police. He tried to explain, but they just hurried him into a car and away.

The next day a girl aged four who was passing by with her mother saw an extra white stone in the gutter outside the Supreme Court. She bent and picked it up before her mother could stop her. Her mother shook her hand until finally she had to drop the stone. "Too dirty to pick up things from the gutter."

But she had held it just enough to feel how smooth it was and warm. As her mother took her hand to go she looked back over her shoulder at the stone round and white and smooth in the gutter, all alone now. She resisted her mother pulling her away for a while. She felt so sad for the stone. She hoped someone would find it and take it home.

CATH ELLIS

A Tragic Convergence: A Reading of Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo*

Many commentators and critics of Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo* have referred to it, in some cases rather incidentally, as a tragedy.[1] A clear definition of the operations of tragedy within the novel *Coonardoo* is, however, for several reasons, difficult to establish. For instance, none of the characters can be defined as a tragic hero or operating within a tragic dimension. It is possible, however, to establish a perspective on the tragic operations within *Coonardoo* by examining the larger forces which are at work in the novel. An Engelian reading of the text enables us to apprehend one of these forces. This examination will focus particularly on Aboriginal Australian and European Australian family structures as they are outlined by Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,* and the ways in which they differ and converge. This reading of the novel identifies the convergence of these two family structures, analysed through Engels's text, as providing the *hamartia* which leads to the tragic resolution of the novel. Marx, writing in 1859, refers to the "axis on which a modern tragedy turns" which I feel comes close to what is meant here by *hamartia.* This convergence of family structures occurs on both a primary and a secondary level. Primarily the convergence occurs within the character of Coonardoo who travels a peripatetic journey to her eventual death. However, on this level it is difficult to identify her as being the tragic hero of the novel in any Aristotelian sense essentially because as the novel progresses the reader becomes aware of a shift which transposes her into a symbolic dimension. The reader can see instead, on the second level, the family structures themselves operating as these elements of tragedy, with Coonardoo providing the *hamartic* 'axis'.

A vital aspect of the novel is the problem of determining the parentage of the character Coonardoo. The information regarding her parentage is, I believe, deliberately ambiguous. Details are omitted or presented in a vague manner or are confused by apparently unquestionable statements, made by the narrative, which contradict each other by supporting each of two possible explanations. In the first,

1. See Aileen Palmer "The Changing Face of Australia: Notes on the Creative Writing of Katharine Susannah Prichard" *Overland* (June, 1958), 28; J.A. Hay "Betrayed Romantics and Compromised Stoics: K.S. Prichard's Women" in Shirley Walker (ed.) *Who is She?* (St Lucia: 1983), 106; G.A. Wilkes "The Novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard" *Southerly* 14, 4 (1953), 224; and Henrietta Drake Brockman "Katharine Susannah Prichard: The Colour of her Work", *Southerly* 14, 4 (1953), 218.

Coonardoo is born as the result of a sexual union between Joey and Maria.

However, a close analysis of the text reveals this is in fact not as valid as it first appears. Early in the novel, the reader is given some vague information about Coonardoo's parentage through the comments of Sam Geary who says: "'Coonardoo, old Joey Koonarra's kid, isn't she?' [...] 'Maria, her mother ... the one that died and there was all the fuss about, couple of years ago?'"[2] So Coonardoo's parentage immediately becomes somewhat controversial. Later, in chapter two the reader is given further information regarding this 'fuss' to which Geary refers.

> Mrs Bessie prided herself on treating her blacks kindly, and having a good working understanding with them. She would stand no nonsense, and refused to be sentimental, although it was well know she had taken the affair of Maria to heart. Ted Watt was as good natured a man as stepped, until he got drunk, everybody agreed. But he could not stand liquor, went mad, ran amuck like an Afghan, or a black, when he had got a few drinks in (8).

At many points in the novel the narrative follows the train of thought of a particular character. The variations of this narrative style are subtle but, upon close examination, quite distinct as the narrative utilises the idiom of the particular character whose "train of thought" or "stream of consciousness" is being followed.[3] By utilising this narrative style, Prichard is able to establish some significant points which would otherwise remain unarticulated. In this case the narrative follows Mrs Bessie's thought processes. Here we are able to establish a connection between Maria's death and Ted Watt through these adjacent sentences which have no other apparent connection apart from being connected in Mrs Bessie's mind. This establishes her as an authority on Coonardoo's parentage.

The explanation for Maria's death which has been generally accepted by the Aboriginals on Wytaliba appears to be authoritative:

> Ted had shot Maria's dog and she was badgee with him about it, back-answered and refused to do something he told her when he was drunk. He had kicked her off the veranda. Maria died a few days afterwards; no more was heard of her. And as Ted walked over the balcony of a hotel in Karrara and was killed, a month or so later, the blacks believed justice had been done (8).

However, this explanation is immediately *preceded* by a sentence which renders its authority problematic: "Few people knew what had happened about Maria, except Mrs Bessie, and she held her tongue" (8). So we now know that the Aboriginals' story is not the whole truth and that we are probably not going to be told the 'truth'. Their explanation would undoubtedly contain some elements of 'truth' having been derived from observations made from the uloo. So Maria being badgee or upset about something and Ted Watt kicking her off the verandah are probably close to the 'truth'. However, it is doubtful that the cause of this dispute was the shooting of a

2. Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Coonardoo*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1993), 5. All further references to *Coonardoo* will be taken from this edition of the text and will be denoted by page numbers immediately following the relevant passage.
3. For example, when the narrative follows the train of thought of Coonardoo, Hugh is referred to as You or Youie.

dog. Instead it is suggested that what 'really' happened to Maria was the result of a much more sinister event: that perhaps Ted Watt had initiated an affair with Maria and that he had become violent with her. A comparison of the two violent acts of Ted Watt and his son Hugh against Maria and her daughter Coonardoo respectively, lends further weight to this assumption of the nature of the relationship between Ted Watt and Maria. However, for the moment it is possible to assume that Ted Watt could be or is in fact the father of Coonardoo which makes her, of course, Hugh's half sister.

It is impossible to establish, without any doubt, the actual parentage of Coonardoo. This can be seen as either clumsiness on Prichard's part, or, as a deliberate and artful emphasis of the ambiguity which is delicately sustained throughout the novel. It is here that the first connection with Engels can be established.

One of the bases of Engels's argument concerning the evolution of the family throughout human history is that of the determination of the physical parentage of children. In structuring his study he divides human development into seven basic stages moving through three stages of savagery and three stages of barbarism into civilisation. He places the Australian Aboriginal people in the middle stage of savagery and the European invaders of Australia in the civilised stage.[4] So within the novel of *Coonardoo* we are presented with the convergence of two cultures and peoples who, according to Engels, are situated in very different and distant stages in the development of the family.

In *The Origin of the Family* Engels refers to the family and marriage structures of the Australian Aboriginal within his chapter on the Punaluan family.[5] This family structure is distinguished by being the first to eliminate inbreeding by initially disallowing sexual relations between parents and children, and secondly between natural brothers and sisters (that is on the maternal side) and finally between collateral siblings (that is first and second cousins). The Punaluan family structure is situated after the Consanguine family (the first stage of the family, according to Engels, with marriage groups arranged by generations) and before the Pairing family (the first stage of family structure where, according to Engels, a certain pairing takes place for a period of time which demands strict fidelity on the woman's part but which allows polygamy and infidelity on the part of the husband). So the stage of family development where Engels places the Australian Aboriginal family structure involves a kind of marriage where the fidelity of wives has not yet been strictly enforced. So Engels sees it as the last stage in the development of the family where the women were able to exercise, to a certain extent, an amount of sexual freedom. What distinguishes the Australian Aboriginal family structure, according to Engels, is the predominance of class marriage. This understanding of class mating practices is explained in chapter three of *Coonardoo*. Engels's understanding of the practice of lending wives to strangers who are visiting the tribe is also detailed in *The Origin of the Family*. This constitutes a much more important aspect of the novel. Within Engels's explanation of the Aboriginal family structure, any children born into a marriage are automatically

4. In establishing his study Engels uses as an authority the work of Lorimer Fison, an English missionary who studied Australian Aboriginal anthropology in the Mount Gambier region of South Australia. From this study Engels developed an understanding of Australian Aboriginal anthropology which is singular and homogenous, and which must be acknowledged as a crude and ethnocentric understanding of Aboriginal kinship. However, the ways in which this understanding of Aboriginality corresponds to those which are found in *Coonardoo* is of great interest and renders the use of Engels's work valid regardless of its ethnocentric nature.
5. Engels, F., *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1948), 39-46.

considered to be parented by the couple who form the marriage, regardless of whether the wife has had other sexual partners.[6] It follows from Engels's argument that what, by European Australian standards, would be denounced as adultery or infidelity and accompanied by anger and jealousy, is here considered to be a natural practice of hospitality and is accompanied by a sense of pride on the husband's behalf. As a result, any notion of heredity or inheritance has nothing to do with conception but everything to do with parenting. What is important to note is that the Australian Aboriginal family structure is a direct result of a non-materialist, pre-capitalist societal structure in which notions of inheritance have very little importance. Engels's argument in *The Origin of the Family* traces the development of materialism and capitalism as it parallels the growing importance of heredity and legitimacy and therefore monogamy through human evolution and development. What he eventually arrives at is the rise of monogamy in industrialist, capitalist society. Engels observed that by this stage of human development, monogamy did indeed exist, but only for women. Husbands were still able to enjoy polygamy by having affairs and buying prostitutes. Engels observes: "What for a woman is a crime entailing dire legal and social consequences, is regarded in the case of a man as being honourable or, at most, as a slight moral stain that one bears with pleasure."[7] And with respect to infidelity on the part of men he states:

> Although, in reality, it is not only tolerated but even practised with gusto, particularly by the ruling classes, it is condemned in words. In reality, however, this condemnation by no means hits the men who indulge in it, it hits only the women: they are ostracized and cast out in order to proclaim once again the absolute domination of the male over the female sex as the fundamental law of society.[8]

Within *Coonardoo*, then, we witness the convergence of these two very different attitudes to infidelity and extra-marital sex: the Aboriginal society which lends its wives to strangers and the white-European society whose men are involved in hetaerism. In *Coonardoo* Aboriginal wives are lent to 'strangers' — in this case, all of the 'strangers' are non-Aboriginal — and each male member of the non-Aboriginal family, through two generations, has an affair with an Aboriginal woman — or, within the idiom of the novel — "takes a gin". In addition we notice that no non-Aboriginal women or Aboriginal men indulge in mutual sexual activity or in fact any sexual activity which falls outside the bounds of marriage which, again, is in accordance with the observations of Engels regarding these two family structures.

We have then, in *Coonardoo* a situation where two societies' family structures converge, interlock and, I believe, clash. The situation between Hugh and Coonardoo is an interesting example of the incompatibility of these two notions of marriage, and we can see it moving through a process of cause and effect. Coonardoo and Hugh are childhood playmates. They establish a connection of mateship and mutual admiration early in their lives. After his fiancée leaves him and his mother dies Coonardoo is lent to Hugh by her husband Warieda in accordance with Aboriginal Australian notions of hospitality as they are outlined in both the novel

6. Engels, 39-46.
7. Engels, 75.
8. Engels, 67.

and in Engels's work. Coonardoo conceives a child whose physical father is Hugh but whose actual father, according to the Aboriginal beliefs outlined in the novel, is Warieda. Here we have the two different fathers acknowledging parentage of the child using their respective cultural beliefs of parentage as equally infallible authorities. Having discovered the physical parentage of Winni, Mollie uses what she sees as an affair between Coonardoo and Hugh (even though it occurred before they had met and married) as an excuse to leave the station and travel to Perth. So she utilises jealousy and notions of disgust at miscegenation which are in accordance with the European Australian notions of monogamy. After Warieda's death Hugh takes Coonardoo as his wife to stop her being claimed by Warieda's brother and leaving Wytaliba but, because of the pressures of white society and its opinions of miscegenation, which are symbolised in the bet which Sam Geary makes with him, he does not re-establish any sexual relations between them. Sam Geary has sex with Coonardoo when he visits the station during Hugh's absence. Even though Coonardoo loathes Geary she accepts the act because of her state of severe sexual frustration. It can be said that the sexual union of Coonardoo and Geary coincides with both Aboriginal notions of lending a wife to a stranger as well as European Australian notions of hetaerism but at the same time can be seen as almost parodying both of these societal beliefs. The confusion and convergence of Aboriginal and European Australian attitudes to extra-marital sexual activity are a result of, and indeed are symbolised by, the confusion and convergence of the two family structures and traditions in the marriage of Coonardoo and Hugh. Although both of them regard their union as a marriage they also both recognise that it does not constitute a marriage in either of their traditions because of the lack of sexual consummation. Hugh's vicious attack on Coonardoo when he drags her through the fire is motivated by his discovery of the sexual union between her and Geary. This emotion of jealousy rather than compassion as a result of her experience and the notion of ownership of her as a wife even though he was not allowing a proper marriage to exist are again a result of, and symbolised by, white European marriage structures.

In addition to the incompatibility of the two notions of marriage *Coonardoo* also presents conflict between the two different cultures' notions of parenting. Within Engels's understanding of the Australian Aboriginal family tradition, the children of a marriage are considered to be parented by the couple who form that marriage regardless of the wife's sexual union with other men. Hence, the situation arises where there is assumed parentage[9] — where a father assumes the parentage of the offspring of his wife even though they may not be physically fathered by him.

In contrast, the European Australian notion of parentage is that it is vital that the physical parentage of offspring from a marriage be from the couple who form that marriage. The express aim of such a marriage is therefore, "the begetting of children of undisputed paternity, this paternity being required in order that these children may in due time inherit their father's wealth as his natural heirs".[10] This is a specifically capitalist notion. In addition to both of these forms of parentage we have

9. In utilising a term such as assumed parentage I am, of course, operating from the perspective of the European Australian notions of parentage, but this is only as a matter of convenience. It is important to keep in mind that within the context of each of the relevant family structures, both physical and assumed parentage are ascribed equal validity. It is also important, however, to differentiate between the two and to do so from the same perspective as the narrative of the novel.

10. Engels, 62. An important point to note is that inheritance is passed through the male line establishing the birth of a male child in a position of great importance within this tradition.

adopted parentage — where a person adopts a child who is deprived, for whatever reason, of a parent and then assumes the parenting role. This adoptive parenting can be witnessed in both the Aboriginal and European Australian family structures within the novel.

Coonardoo is implicated in many of these convergences. Ted and Maria are (probably) Coonardoo's physical parents. Joey then becomes her assumed father. Mrs Bessie takes an adoptive parenting role with Coonardoo, which may be because she is conscious that her husband was Coonardoo's physical father but is also because she was particularly fond of Coonardoo's mother, Maria. This is another example of the authority of the text problematising itself and adding to the ambiguity of Coonardoo's physical parentage. Meeni, Coonardoo's husband's first wife, who is a great deal older than both of them, also assumes the role of Coonardoo's adoptive mother but this time within the group. Coonardoo gives birth to three children — two girls who are physically fathered by Warieda and a boy fathered by Hugh. So Warieda is Winni's assumed father and Hugh also takes on the role of adoptive parent — first looking out for the boy and then, after Warieda's death, taking on the role more fully. Hugh fathers six children — one boy, Winni, with Coonardoo and five girls with his wife Mollie. And finally, Coonardoo takes on an adoptive parenting role with Mollie's five daughters when Mollie is unable to look after them. In fact each of the characters who form the first generation have some form of parenting relationship with Coonardoo and each of the children of the third generation are parented, in some form, by her.[11] Again, we can see the convergence of the family structuring of Aboriginal and European Australians falling on the character Coonardoo. It is in her, then, that we can find the fracture point, or fault line which is an inevitable result of the clashing of these two incompatible family structures.

Having established these lines of parentage in their various different forms, we can then turn to the problems of responsibility of children and in particular the pairing of these children in marriage. Engels observes:

> Among all historically active classes, that is, among ruling classes, matrimony remained what it had been since pairing marriage — a matter of convenience arranged by the parents. And the first form of sex that historically emerges as a passion, and as a passion in which any person (at least of the ruling classes) has a right to indulge, as the highest form of the sexual impulse [...] was by no means conjugal love. On the contrary, [...] it steers under full sail towards adultery.[12]

Bourgeois marriage then, according to Engels, always remains,

> a marriage of convenience [...which] often enough turns into the crassest prostitution — sometimes on both sides, but much more generally on the part of the wife, who differs from the ordinary courtesan only

11. A couple of observations can be made here. We have an interesting shift from the first generation where miscegenative sexual union produces a girl and sexual union within the same race produces a boy. Hence inheritance does not provide any problems until the next generation where the miscegenative relationship provides a boy and the same race relationships provide girls. Suddenly the issue of inheritance becomes a problem. In the end, Hugh has nothing to pass on as he is bankrupt — the station does, however, make its way back to his eldest daughter Phyllis through her husband. On the other hand, Hugh's son, Winni, inherits five pounds which he takes to go and find his mother.
12. Engels, 70.

> in that she does not hire out her body, like a wage-worker, on piece-work, but sells it into slavery once and for all.[13]

Running concurrently with these aspects of marriage within the ruling or bourgeois classes is the need to secure a suitable marriage partner for the offspring, in order to continue the legitimate line of inheritance of that family. These suitable marriage partners must also be securely established within their own legitimate line of inheritance. Alternatively:

> Sex love in the relation of husband and wife is and can become the rule only among the oppressed classes, that is, at the present day, among the proletariat, no matter whether this relationship is officially sanctioned or not. But here all the foundations of classical monogamy are removed. Here, there is a complete absence of all property, for the safeguarding and inheritance of which monogamy and male domination were established. Therefore, there is no stimulus whatever here to assert male domination.[14]

In the light of these observations it is important to try and establish where the Watt family fits. We discover, as the novel progresses, that the match between Ted and Mrs Bessie was not one based on convenience or capitalist materialism but rather on sex love — a love that is, according to Engels, able to flourish only in the oppressed classes. Ted and Mrs Bessie, at the time of their marriage, are indeed established within what Engels would have seen as an oppressed class, working as drovers throughout the nor' west. It was when they, as a couple, acquired land and took up a position within a ruling class that the marriage began to flounder. Any remnants of sex-love or comradeship disappeared as Wytaliba prospered and Ted collapses into an alcoholic self-annihilation and initiates an affair with another woman. We have, then, the evolution of a marriage from an oppressed class being based on sex-love and comradeship, into a ruling class marriage where the wife is deserted by her husband as he pursues a polygamous lifestyle. It is the knowledge that her marriage was unsuccessful that motivates Mrs Bessie to have control over the marriage of her children — which of course includes, adoptively, Coonardoo.

The unconsummated marriage between Coonardoo and Hugh is perhaps the most crucial and focused aspect of this convergence of cultures: it establishes a situation where Hugh suffers and forces Coonardoo to suffer sexual frustration in order to conform to the expectations of his society and family structure. In doing this he is both obeying and ignoring the advice of his mother. Mrs Bessie on the one hand tells her son: "'I don't want you to go mucking around with gins'" (64). This he tries to obey. He initially uses his relationship with Jessica to protect him from it but, just as Geary predicts, as soon as he is on his own — after Jessica leaves, after Mrs Bessie's death and before his marriage to Mollie — he "takes a gin" — Coonardoo. However, having disobeyed the dictates of his mother and his family structure once, he repents to the point where, even when he is married to Coonardoo and the knowledge of this marriage is known throughout the country side, he obeys it steadfastly. Yet, on the other hand, Mrs Bessie goes on to say: "'Sex hunger's like any other. Satisfy it and you

13. Engels, 71.
14. Engels, 71.

don't think about it. I mean ... it won't get out of proportion'" (65). This he obeys in his marriage to Mollie even after the fragments of sex-love disappear. However, he ignores it in his marriage to Coonardoo even though there is a strength of feeling between the two which eventually could be seen to constitute sex-love. And finally Mrs Bessie advises Hugh on what sort of wife to find. She says: "'I couldn't have borne you to marry Jessica, Hugh. She's all right in her way ... but not for here ... and not for keeps. I'd rather you took a gin than a white woman like that for keeps'" (64). She acknowledges that a suitable non-Aboriginal woman would be difficult to find and that in some ways an Aboriginal woman would be more appropriate. However, her conviction that sex hunger must be satisfied with a non-Aboriginal woman is drawn from the white European notions of inheritance — in this case not only the inheritance of property but also of genetics. This leads her to suggest that Hugh search the stations and farms for a non-Aboriginal woman that he likes "well enough" (pp. 64-65) to bring back as his wife. In doing this she is essentially ignoring sex-love as an important basis for a marriage which corresponds to her position within a ruling or bourgeois situation of property ownership.

The culmination of Mrs Bessie's advice to Hugh is that marriage is important for the satisfaction of sex hunger but that it must also be established with someone with whom he can secure the heredity of his children as both bourgeois and white. Hugh's marriage to Mollie is disastrous — something which is echoed throughout the novel with observations and comments from various characters. Sam Geary observes that "Gins work out better in this country. They don't rouse and you know where you are with 'em" (109). And Phyllis observes that her father took her mother "like most men take a gin, and Coonardoo's always been a sort of fantasy with him" (223). This again is an acknowledgment that the marriage between Mollie and Hugh is based on sex-hunger rather than sex-love and that the relationship between Hugh and Coonardoo is based on sex-love, without the satisfaction of sex-hunger. It is possible, by tracing the relationship between Coonardoo and Hugh throughout the novel, to assert that they do in fact have the sense of mateship, or comradeship which Mrs Bessie hopes that Hugh will establish with a wife. However, Mrs Bessie fails to acknowledge that such mateship cannot be found easily and is, in fact, a remnant of the sex-love which operates between a working class couple who exist as comrades rather than husband and wife. This is still desired but is impossible to achieve within the propertied, bourgeois ruling class in which Hugh is established. Jessica and Mollie are both attracted to marriage with Hugh because of his wealth whereas Coonardoo is attracted to him as a man and as a working partner. She takes pride in his skills as a worker and he takes pride in hers.

Mrs Bessie's reaction to miscegenation is drawn essentially from her position within a European Australian society but is further complicated by her husband's miscegenative sexual activities. On the first level she has a sense of disgust which is of course drawn directly from the European Australian societal expectations which are demonstrated in her attitude to Sam Geary and his harem but also from witnessing the actions of her husband in the affair with Maria. On the second level she has a sense of jealousy; the jealousy of a wife who is caught in a monogamous relationship towards the women that her husband chooses sexually in preference to her — in this case, again, Aboriginal women. It would also be possible to assert that Mrs Bessie's specific advice to Hugh with regard to the taking of an Aboriginal woman as a wife is motivated by the knowledge that he and Coonardoo, whom she

knows would be his choice of partner in such a situation, are in fact half siblings. And, finally, on the third level she has a sense of concern and perhaps even protectiveness as they are "her blacks". She protects the Aboriginal women, and particularly Coonardoo, from the lustful advances of Sam Geary because they are her property. In doing so, she is attempting to protect the Aboriginal Australians from the tragic results of this convergence of cultures. It is here that we can witness the tragic power of this convergence, which is beyond the scope of any of the characters, even the strongest, Mrs Bessie, to escape.

This protective urge extends to a desire to keep Coonardoo from being married to Warieda until she is sixteen. In turn this leaves Coonardoo to wander around the uloo unmated and flirtatious, which establishes her as a desirable mate to the Aboriginal men of the surrounding districts and to Sam Gear. This contributes to the fights which rage over Coonardoo when Warieda dies and provides the impetus for Hugh to take her as a wife. Hugh is again obeying Mrs Bessie's orders never to let Sam Geary take Coonardoo. So here we again have a clash resulting from the convergence of cultures. Mrs Bessie's desire to exert her power over the marriage of Coonardoo derives from her European Australian sense of morality and her desire to stop Hugh from taking an Aboriginal woman as a wife because of her situation within the ruling or bourgeois class which clashes and culminates in the tragic denouement.[15]

Thus *Coonardoo* must be read as a tragedy. The axis on which the tragedy turns, I suggest, is the clashing convergence of two family structures which are quite distinct within the process of human societal evolution. The character of Coonardoo is both actually and symbolically the focus of this convergence and, as such, carries the tragedy to its conclusion. By reading the tragic structure of the novel according to the symbols with which the reader is presented we can establish that Coonardoo is the focus of the Aboriginal and European Australian family structures as they converge and clash. Having been the focus of this tragic convergence, Coonardoo cannot survive. Hugh, on the other hand, can be seen as symbolic of the non-Aboriginal people who have come into direct contact with the Aboriginals. Despite his benevolent desires he is still unable to escape the fact that he is caught up within the class struggle of capitalism. Being a part of this struggle leaves him powerless to act against the forces of this tragic convergence and, instead, establishes him as a destructive operator within it. It is significant that the name he is called by Coonardoo, is Youie, or You. It is almost as if Coonardoo points out of the pages and directly addresses "You" the reader, implicating us in her tragedy.

As we can see, the tragic operations within the novel prove to be not only poignant but strongly persistent. They even resist the influence of the most powerful and well meaning character of the novel. This indicates that the tragedy of Coonardoo is anything but incidental and is in fact of a scale much greater than the characters or even the events of the novel and lies in the convergence of two traditions which are essentially incompatible.

15. To ascribe so much importance to the wishes of Mrs Bessie even after her death is not as tenuous as it might appear as her spirit remains potent in the novel in the form of a flock of white cockatoos.

GLENYS COLLIS

"Loving Husband of Jean, Loved Friend of Susanna"

I had never met Henry. In fact I had never been completely sure that he had really existed, that he was not merely a fantasy lover, a phantom that Susanna had invented. Although one should never say 'merely' in reference to phantom lovers. They can shine very bright in the minds of the mad or the lonely. They can shimmer in pale light behind a cloud and then they may suddenly catch fire and light the night sky, glowing for years, warming the air around them. Never mock a mad woman's phantom lovers.

And there was no doubting that Susanna could be mad at times — if only nor' nor' east, like Hamlet, and no worse than the rest of us.

But her lover had once been real flesh and blood if, alas, no longer so. His mahogany coffin was very real and so was his death notice in the *Age* — "Loving husband of Jean, loved friend of Susanna". The two middle-aged women were tucked away neatly together in the one paragraph, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

As I told you, I never met Henry. Henry is a very solid, three-dimensional name. Susanna showed me his photo and he had a very respectable, handsome face. I would expect someone named Henry to be buried from a bluestone church, or at the very least, a funeral parlour with smart leather and blackwood chairs and a mushroom carpet. The funeral of someone named Henry would not be celebrated outdoors in a town park, blown about untidily by violent wind and rain.

But there he was, in his coffin, under a large oak tree whose branches ran like gutters. The trees were distraught with rain and a ferocious wind bounced the agapanthus and the pink lilies in their beds and clawed at the red and white carnations on the coffin, turning them brown at the edges. Even the coffin seemed to rock in the wind,

but that must have been an illusion caused by nervousness or the whisky or two beforehand.

Mourners clumped in forlorn groups — water trickling down the backs of necks, feet sinking into the mud so that people clutched at each other from time to time, in search of balance rather than comfort.

Susanna wore grey kid buttoned boots with very slender heels. I noticed them first because they made her teeter in the wet grass and seem more fragile and insubstantial than ever. Her pale hair, the colour of quinces, stood out wildly, like a nimbus around her scoured, bony, beautiful face. Her dusty lilac silk suit was quite beautiful, too, but most unsuitable for the chill and wet.

Her children, showing a sensible, if rather selfish measure of self-protection, had fled as far away from their mother as they could, right across the other side of the park, indeed.

Three other friends I did not know stood with me by her side, protective, kind, at a loss. We were a rather shabby lot, with hems just too short or too long or hanging skew-whiff, in bland colours that merged into dowdiness. I had made an effort with my best green and white spotted shirtdress, but I hadn't counted on the deluge and had had to borrow a stained and ancient anorak at the last moment. My sensible shoes leaked hopelessly. I felt I let down the side.

And there was certainly the sense of sides being drawn up. The other side was large — a full-bodied team of dark-suited men and expensive women displaying all the panache that David Jones and Estee Lauder could provide. Once or twice the wind tugged at their velvet hats and whipped their umbrellas inside out. But they definitely looked as if they had respectability, legality and sympathy on their side. They were bona fide mourners. Henry's wife, Jean, wore a navy blue suit, an elegant shirt and a blue and red scarf tied just so. Everything about her was the essence of good taste. Jean stood strong and square, bolstered by her four children and her many friends, dry-eyed, brave and standing straight, her rightful place assured in the moral hierarchy of things.

The watery, rolling air was creating an atmosphere of ocean depths. Movement seemed slow and deliberate like that of divers walking on the ocean bed. And there were plenty of old mines here to be looked out for. Even sound was unpredictable. Voices ebbed and flowed in the wind and sometimes there was a roaring in your ears and sometimes an almost indiscernible whisper.

When the eulogies began, this was just as well.

"Henry loved doing things with his family. " The voice had a definite, determined edge to it. "He was the ideal family man."

I felt Susanna beside me draw a dangerously deep breath.

"His family always came first with him," the authoritative, Menzies-like voice continued.

"That's a bloody lie! My children were just as important as his own to him."

Ignoring amazement, the speaker went on.

"He and Jean enjoyed twenty-four years of happy marriage. They enjoyed many interests." The banalities blew around in the wind.

There was a snake-like dart of Susanna's head and then her acid tongue spat, the wind pushing her words towards the official mourning party.

"But it wasn't like that at all. It was me he took overseas, you fool. We went every year. We did everything together. He bought me my house. He shared my bed."

His family and friends stood firm. It was simple to see who knew all about Susanna, because they didn't look our way. Those who didn't know her couldn't resist the fascinated half-glance or even the undisguised stare.

"It's alright!"
"Sh!"
"It doesn't matter."
What foolish things we muttered. Of course it mattered. But what else was there to say? No wonder her children had edged away again, distancing themselves still further from passion, from lack of control, from Mother's Madness.

But Susanna was unanchored, weightless, despite our tight hands on her arms. She was in some dimension of her own making.

"Remember the street market in Apt and all the olives — black and green and pickled and hot and the quince paste and the little round goat cheeses wrapped in thyme leaves?" Her voice skittered across the park. "And we would gasp at their beauty and put them in the red and blue hessian bag and take them home, gathering red poppies and white lacy weeds on the way to put in the old copper jug on the table and we would look through the window and watch the dogs and children going home for lunch and all the bells chimed because it was twelve o'clock and because it was the first Wednesday in the month the sirens would blow too because they all had to be tested in case war broke out again. And I took your hand because that dreadful sound frightened me and I thought something terrible might happen to you and I might lose you.

"And now I have. Now I have."

The loud voices from both sides became lost as they called against the high-edged wind. Their words became meaningless, losing their shape in the wind and the rain,

trailing amongst the tangled gum trees, puffing themselves up and then bursting into nothingness.

I found myself remembering the funeral of my friend's aunt at Templestowe cemetery, where, in a flurry of rain and sliding of mud, the vicar slipped into the grave, too, fracturing his wrist and shattering his dignity. I felt, with horror, the gaping grin on my face and fought to slap it back into lines of suitable seriousness.

Someone was now playing a flute. I waited for Susanna to call out, "He hated the flute," but her mouth was shut, although from the look in her eyes, words glittered in her head.

"I feel like a house without walls," she said quietly, taking my hand.

The rain stopped for a moment as they carried the coffin across the grass to the hearse. The leaves raced into heaps behind them and then lay still. Jean moved away and, for the first time that day, she glanced at Susanna, with just a semi-quaver of a shrug.

Susanna ran after the hearse as it moved off to the private burial of this man who had needed two families, two households, two women. She was excluded from any further farewells, which were for sanctified family only.

Sometimes she tells me she was with him when he died. Sometimes she says she wasn't. An unreliable woman, our Susanna. But two years later, the slow unrolling of a nightmare will still pass over her face from time to time.

I don't know how she really feels about Jean. I wonder how Jean feels about her. It seems they both could love this greedy man, loving husband of Jean, loved friend of Susanna. There may have been other women there, too, hidden in the bushy margins of the park, who were shouting into the wind, "It wasn't like that at all", if only in their heads.

Love grows on female trees, after all.

CHRIS ANDREWS

Aqueduct

The curtain rings clack together and there

Cordilleras, archipelagos of cloud
Sheer light no yesterday can stick on
Wet city, broadening storm-water drain
Distance washed out of the intervening air

Like a cup of real coffee in 1943
the one day of childhood distilled
or winter sun on the south coast of Chile

The paint on the casement is blistered but there

A double rainbow thrown up
the darker air between traversed
by a one-legged silver gull

One end of the brighter bow falls
behind an impregnable shirt factory
Overlockers smoking on the fire escape
laugh and two or three crowns shine

The other end of the inner bow
is hidden by a hospital
like the brisk traffic of linen and long words
behind its mirror windows

Stiffer every time this latch come on

The double arch is ruined already
The dark has broken its red bands
Gulfs have opened the coasts of light
rifts the great plateaux

Like the tailored stones of an aqueduct
tumbled in the bindweed
broken and hauled away for hearths

Cold air pours over the table and there

On the fire escape only a man in a suit
he lifts his wrist and it shines

RAMONA BARRY

A day I know will go badly

I picture myself smacking against
a windshield, causing a media event —
"Live-At-Five Pregnant woman causes
seven car pile up." I walk close to
the curb. All nerves, the city jangles
me. Weak as breeze, heavy as stone.

Avoiding clams of teenage girls who
hang like baubles in the mall. Skin and
bone poking fun at gangster boyfriends
whose language I do not recognize as my
own. Cold to peers at 22. My belly
makes obvious my life choices.

See old women approve of my wedding ring,
young women look for heartbreak or reason.
I am a disappointment to everyone except
myself. The strongest has fallen first, my
friends say they knew it would happen. My
cousin says I'm fat. And he's right.

RON PRETTY

Turning Off

Now when he's finished and turns out the light
he glances around the silent office.
Shadows play on the wall from the traffic outside
there's a distant wail of a siren, fire or police,
he can't be sure. The insistent dental hum
of the air drills through concentration,
reminding him he's tired and shivering
with the compulsion of departure.
Now he turns to the door. The calendar there
flaunts a beach and bodies browned
by nakedness beneath the palm trees. It registers
no more than the closed drawers behind him,
the shredded files festooning round the bin,
the empty screen dull on the desk.
He opens the door and listens. The building
sighs in its silence, the corridor
its walls inching together in the gloom
draws him out of the room, his sneakers
squeaking on the polished floor. He walks
his long goodbye with no-one there
to notice or object. You can't just up and leave
no matter what your politics, without
some warning of intentions, it isn't done,
the system cannot function. And yet he walks
along the squeaking tiles, not looking
at the walls his movement forces outwards
until they open to the street, the rush of traffic,
the flash of lights and busy-ness, the squeal of tyres.
And there's the squad car waiting at the steps.

NORMAN TALBOT

Thirty Years Back

O.K., I was wrong. You see
I wanted to be good with nails,
wood, wire... Failing, I wrote
these poems,
just a voice to call voices with.

Discovered in my first city library:
books in grainy covers bound
to be set, glowing, on the syllabus,
those poems,
signed with a name I never made.

At home a rough-hewed adzer of posts,
broad-printed with dirt and ample sweat,
a human hand not past, like Dad's,
those poems
of blister and callous and scar.

Years later, I tense my fingers,
tap consonant keys, strike into
a rhyme, then strike it out again.
These poems
build henruns in the backyard of my mind.

IAN TEMPLEMAN

A Few Words

Your words are angry on the telephone, you weep.
These blunt words bruise, blemish
but not break the skin, stain and disturb sleep.

The voice on the wire in anguish
understands the subtlety of language, you select
words which wound but not punish,

determined to share the moment of pain, deflect
the sharp blade of desolation.
The words we trade, shape or break apart, collect

in poems, seed in conversation,
although chosen with care, conceal an ambiguity,
power to defer our isolation.

Deliberate wisdom builds respect for rationality,
ensures the impulse is restrained,
allows words to be tasted, rehearsed and fidelity

to precise meaning be maintained.
Despite the scholarship, occasionally words escape
in speech, will not be constrained

or hidden in neatly drawn metaphorical landscape.
Recklessly these words spill, slide
from the lips, caress the skin or fiercely scrape

raw a love language is unable to hide.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

Benjamin

If he didn't pump iron &
tow his boat to the river
he would just appear at dawn
& disappear at dusk
like a water rat.
But he pumps iron &
jump-starts from nowhere
onto his ski &
takes up the slack of
his rope &
zigzags angle after mean angle.
Now & then
his tug of war gives way
to slack nylon & he
somersaults full foetal.
Ready, set, go
in a deep-water start
decades of outboards blast
him up
like a human conning tower
until he's flat out again &
pulling away from any conception of
how much yesterday remains
in today
as he pulls across the wake
high on the power of speeding
& the speeding of power
high on oil & petrol
petrol & oil.

REVIEWS

Paul Hetherington, *The Dancing Scorpion*, 70pp. **Jan Owen, *Blackberry Season*,** 64pp. **Elizabeth Riddell, *The Difficult Island*,** 55pp. Edited by Ian Templeman, Molonglo Press, Deakin ACT, 1994. Each is published in a limited edition of 500 copies, signed and numbered by the poet. Available through direct subscription from the publisher.

This series is an example of the quality publishing which should be accorded to distinguished poetry, but which is all too seldom encountered nowadays. Each volume is an art object in itself. The cover of Jan Owen's *Blackberry Season*, for instance, is in the rich colour of ripe blackberries. The title is embossed, and the book is enclosed in a matching slipcase. The handsome endpapers and graphics (by Romola Templeman) follow the theme. Such unusual attention to quality is appropriate to the poems themselves, for these collections each contain examples of the best of Australian poetry today. Yet each collection is totally different, demonstrating varying degrees of engagement with objective reality, of abstraction and refinement of the image. Each collection is concerned with a quest: for the dissociated self and its freight of memories (Hetherington); for the development of the self during an Australian childhood (Owen) and, in Riddell's case, with the search for an elusive and mysterious reality accessible only through symbol, dream and fable. Meanwhile each poet is a quite considerable craftsperson; each spinning words, images and sequences in an excitingly different way.

Jan Owen evokes the idyllic world of Australian childhood and adolescence in a sequential yet discontinuous verse narrative. Though apparently casual and artless, each poem is finely crafted, and many are sonnets. Though they speak through the consciousness of a child, these are poems for adults, gradually revealing the child's apprehension of its environment, of death and of sexuality. A comparison with Lowell's *Life Studies* could well be made, not only in the carefully naive tone and the accumulation of factual detail, but also in the evocation of family conflict, of the pressure of time, of the impingement on the developing consciousness of illness, decay and death. Time and death, though carelessly accepted by the children, are constantly present, even in the first poem, "The Pram", which deals with the presence of a new baby and the resolution of the speaker's curiosity and jealousy. "There was room for us both. It was agreed", and the world is preserved:

> Across the parlour I could see
> a smiling sun, the golden pendulum
> of the marble clock, still making time
>
> so everything was the same.

In "Apple" the child is convinced that the picture of herself and her baby brother that the mother takes with her Box Brownie will preserve the father, who is "high off at the war/ in a Lancaster plane", and it does:

> The plane caught fire,
> our father jumped in time:
> the smile was in his pocket,
> he came home.

Meanwhile the killing of snails, a visit to the nursing home and the cemetery, the killing of a chook and the death of a neighbouring child ("Nowhere") provide a counterpoint to the paradisal aspects of childhood. Sensuality is a mark of these poems, for instance the exhilaration of riding the wind in "Tree-houses":

> We claimed the dappled middle air as home;
> the trees believed that we might fly,
> gravely they danced us half-way to the sky.
> Our palace was the fir, our ship, the plum.

There are many sensual images, such as that of the child's first experience of the sea; it "snuffled round his feet with little sighs—/ Ssshhh ssshhh it whispered like a secret". The poems are replete, too, with nostalgic reminders of an earlier Australia, of Box

Brownies, Phantom comics, of families of canisters on the mantlepiece, of learning to write with ink, of picnics, bonfire nights, beach holidays — all the rituals which are distinctively of their time and place.

There are many reminders of the seasons and the passing of time which seems endless to the child. Yet there is progression: the father returns from the war, quarrels with his wife while the grandfather soothes the children, a third child is born, and the developing awareness of sexuality in the female child is conveyed in a series of poems — "Riddle-Me Ree", "No Hands", "The Hollow Gum", and finally the most delicate and sensitive poem in the collection, "Drawing Mermaids". Here a man or boy, "him from across the road", corrects the anatomical detail of the girl's childish drawing (a mermaid) changing it into that of a woman:

> When she got home
> she took her clothes off in the front bedroom
> and looked in the scalloped glass:
>
> two points, anemone-pink, and a seaweed patch.
> She didn't mind it after all.
> Besides *she* wasn't fat.
> She stroked it softly as a small stray cat.

This is typical of Owen's collection: the subtle appreciation of the child's reactions, and the reaching out to more universal truths through glimpses of the developing consciousness of the child.

Paul Hetherington, on the other hand, speaks from a mature, often disillusioned point of view, attempting always to approach the self, or an earlier unspoiled version of the self, through the recovery of location and memories. The title, *The Dancing Scorpion,* taken from the poem "Scorpion", refers to the recovery of love, which is seen to be as "beautiful and dangerous" as a dancing scorpion. However, apart from the final section "Answering Love", the poems are overwhelmingly concerned with the emotions of the male persona. This is especially true of the poems of the section entitled "Wildwood Road". External places are named, but undifferentiated; they are simply "ciphers that suit my current territory,/ ciphers for a life I hope to build", and the landscape is an inner one. The movement of the poetry is fluid, ebbing and flowing, imaging always the restlessness and obsessiveness of the questing mind. Imagery of water, light and music are interchangeable in the poem "This Voice that Sings", which stands alone at the beginning of the volume. This hymns the muse (the "Voice that Sings") but also the human lover (the "you" of the poems) who inspires the muse:

> It surges and subsides, but always stands
> like a beam of light, pulsing, radiant,
> and now your hands partake of pulsing song
> as you describe a graceful arc along
>
> this boundary of your gesturing ...

Yet even this poem is predominantly concerned with the self, for the muse sings "inside my being/ and chants my life". This is typical of the collection's focus on personal consciousness.

The sequence "Wildwood Road" suggests a journey into the subconscious: "a place of chaotic dreams/ we hardly suspect, which hang in the air and trees/ as we walk, a chorus of faint, kept desires/ and subtle longings". Though the lover seems to be present, and is at times addressed, the speaker is travelling, he says, "to myself,/ a hideaway of refugee desires". This is the place of lost opportunity:

> of plump, dark berries, close entangled stems,
> a place now choked and overgrown with
> thoughts
>
> I planted here, and never returned to curb.

The obsession with past failure is imaged through rooms and buildings: the "house of nurtured wishes" for unrealised desire; the "one-roomed hut" for isolation from the beloved; and the recognition of lost opportunities and failure in the

stuttering tale of poor foundations laid
long ago by people long since gone.
But then I see that I erected them,
each wall and garden now returned to sand ...

The comparison with Brennan's landscape of unrealised desire in *Poems 1913* is irresistible. There is a similar sense of claustrophobia, due probably to the solipsistic nature of the search. The imagery of over-ripeness and decay, of "fruit of wishes red and bruised/ gashed with their own ripeness" suggests too the unhealthy nature of remorse and the quest for unachieved desire.

The next section, "Mapping the Territory", opens up the psychological territory (the metaphors are from geography) and includes memorable love poems such as "Bombay Creek". Here the landscape is beautifully realised:

Where the Bombay Creek runs under willows
scarlet roots mesh against the current
holding their earth tightly along gradations
over which the glistening water bounces ...

Along with the visual detail Hetherington captures the movement of the water, the swirl and eddy, the surge and flow of the creek. Within this setting he pictures the lover, "hitching up your skirt, white legs/ dipping in and out the skittish water". Landscape and emotion coalesce in a moment of epiphany:

all our years seemed suddenly dissolved
into a closeness as of playing children.

"Grasslands" and "The Clearing" are also beautifully realised love poems, both organised around the metaphor of a journey, but other poems in this section return to the self, to the "shifting archipelago" at the "imagination's isolated centre":

an exotic group of islands, a group of selves,
each hardly known, each of which is me ...

The "City of Shadows" of the next section is Venice, usually considered to be the city of light, but here, despite a love affair, darkened by the speaker's shifting allegiances and doubts. He is "entranced", he says in "City of Shadows" by his own "perplexity", yet the quest for self-knowledge is in vain. The caress of the city of shadows, and of the woman he meets there reveals only

... disturbing shapes that thirty years
of living close to daylight have concealed.
Strangely probing, it shows identity
an obscure outline tantalised by words,
nothing certain except its mystery.

The final section "Answering Love" contains a concentration of love lyrics, tender yet complex. The earlier imagery of water, light and music is interwoven with the mapping imagery, which refers to the exploration of love's territory, and metaphors of language which image the give and take, the easy converse of achieved and answering love, the antidote to the solipsistic self-absorption of many of the earlier poems. All three systems of imagery coalesce in the first poem of the section "Images", which traces the progress of their love "taking them into a territory/ we had known only as a rumour", yet the beauty of the poetry is not sacrificed to the complexity of the imagery. The image of

a rowboat swaying near an empty jetty,
rusty rowlocks, an oar upon the surface
of a hazy, mist-hung river; a water bird
waiting as if throughout eternity

suggests both the journey, the quest for identity of the earlier poems, and a natural world waiting to be invested with meaning through love. The "mutual trust" which "identified/ both of us, embodied in its phrase" which concludes "Images", though an abstraction, is a progression towards the epiphany which concludes the next poem "Weather", where language is no longer necessary:

and you embraced me with your voiceless arms
...
In the water-filtered light we turned, we swam,
and shed our vowels and consonants like scales.

The Dancing Scorpion then is a memorable collection, despite a tendency in some of the

poems towards abstraction: abstraction from the external world in images which reflect the self-absorption of the speaker; and an abstraction of language. The majority of the poems are of a fluid and lyrical beauty, relating the quest for and the achievement of love to memorable images from the natural world.

The Difficult Island, Elizabeth Riddell's collection, explores different territory, that of fable, dream, symbol and myth. Though some poems, notably the first, "Frolic", deal with the contingent world, this is rare. Meanwhile "Frolic" is a wonderful example of Riddell's linguistic and imagistic dexterity. Take, for instance, this description of the frolicking cat:

> What oh, the cat said (or would have said)
> and trashed the pretty wings, the flying cat
> amid the jasmine, carolling cat,
> teeth glistening over the glistening wing.

Quite a triumph! I don't need to emphasise the mimetic movement of the verse (frolicking like the cat), the stunningly appropriate choice of "trashed" and "carolling", or the strange conjunction of the cat's savagery and its "nest" in the perfumed jasmine. What I do want to point out is a typical Riddell poetic ploy: the rapid accretion of meaning through breathless lists, here of "a blue butterfly/ and a brown moth and a gilt and ginger wasp/ and a fluorescent fly beating the pane/ and the cricket on the wall behind the pane". A better example comes from "Maps" with its heterogeneous listing of topology, events and emotions which, with remarkable compression, summarise a life:

> Someone has drawn blue lines between borders,
> determined to remember, linking city to city,
> the disposition of kisses, partings, tears,
> lies and devices, rages and regrets and a salute
> to pragmatism and the next pillow.

We are in the presence here of a considerable and flexible poetic skill dealing with a range of concerns from the domestic, to the personal, to the exotic. The collection begins and ends with a cat poem and there are a number of poems which deal with personal relationships. In "The Other Face", for instance, the subject confronts her mirror image and notes, with fear, not only the growing physical resemblance to her mother — "the vain and challenging look,/ her mother's look" — but also recognises, with remorse, that she may well have inherited her mother's coldness:

> She feels guilty now, herself having learned
> how cold the heart can be. She should have
> touched,
> at least have said goodbye.
>
> Now she fears to look in the mirror and see
> the face behind her face.

Other poems deal with the cruelty of a kill-joy in "Bus Stop"; with the loneliness of life in "The Old Couple" ("Living like bachelors, the world drifting about them"); and with bereavement in "Deceased Estate"; but always with a subtle appreciation of the complexity of human interaction.

The title poem "The Difficult Island" is probably a fable (Riddell says so!) of a "dollar man" intent on buying an "unspoiled island" to change the natural, to stamp it with a human pattern:

> This island was nameless,
> indifferent to the indifferent Pacific,
> with an inhospitable cove
> crowded by cliffs,
> and alamanda vine and purple flowers
> also nameless.
> But there were butterflies.
> four kinds of birds, ten kinds of plants
> that fluttered, sang and blossomed nowhere else.

The conclusion is indeterminate and deliberately so, although it seems that, after ten years, the "dollar man" is still pursuing his fable of a story-book island ("a sailor hanged/ in the vines, a monkey by his side"). Another poetic fable, "Bluebeard", reinterprets the traditional tale and is perhaps a little more explicit. It casts Bluebeard's victims as complicit: "Klimt enchanters, mothers who were also adulterers,/ they were all there, each for a reason." This poem, like "The Diffi-

cult Island", defies a literal resolution. Is Riddell implying that certain women, because of their longing for beauty, or longing for the unknown, are fit victims for whom "Everything, already, waits ... in the castle"?

> Should you meet a woman who stares beyond
> your shoulders
> at nothing, she is Bluebeard's. Her eyes slip away
> from yours
> and her hand, and her thoughts slip away
> to the staircase with stair rods made of jade
> and a silk carpet scrolled with unicorns,
> she is Bluebeard's.

Like many in this collection this poem is mysterious and exotic; its figures seeming to emerge from the unconscious, or from myth. The figures in the poem "Unwelcome" are also enigmatic; they could be family members (they are "my people") but they could also be the inhabitants of the unconscious, relentlessly challenging, intruding on the speaker's daylight world:

> I put my people behind me but back they come.
> I hang them from trees, drown them in lakes,
> bury them. Here they come with their chattels,
> bales of clothing, hoofed animals.

"When it Rains" is similarly mysterious, speaking perhaps literally of refugees, perhaps figuratively of people who have suffered so much that they run to meet their fate, the "next hurricane, volcanic disturbance":

> They wish for the next catastrophe, they invite
> drought or fire.
> They want the next train to the border to move
> slowly
> so that children may clasp hands
> running beside it, holding hands, slipping away
> ...

What is certain is that Riddell exploits to the full the resonance of mystery and enigma, and this is a major factor in the appeal of her poetry.

These are three completely different collections, superbly presented, which will surely become collectors' items.

Shirley Walker

Maryanne Dever, ed., *Wallflowers and Witches: Women and Culture in Australia 1910-1945,* Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1994, pp 175.

The photograph on the cover of Maryanne Dever's collection of essays makes a pertinent summation of the material contained within. Thea Proctor, in a large felt cloche hat with gangster overtones, stares directly at the camera with eyes that have an edge of defiance and a mouth set in a downward sloping line. The masculinity of the hat, banded and dark, contrasts with the filigree femininity of her earrings. The ambivalence of her gaze and the gendered contradictions of her fashion reflect the problematic intersection of culture and sexuality that is the focus of the book.

In her introduction Dever clearly identifies the aim of the collection: "Central to such a project is an acknowledgment that the patriarchal nature of culture has fostered an association between masculinity and creativity, effectively obscuring or displacing the achievements of women". While she gestures toward such displacement, Dever is careful to place her collection within a wider debate, one that does not merely discuss women as victims of a pedagogic masculinity.

Using the cultural theory of Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, Dever explains her methodology as one that seeks to analyse "the particular strategies available to women in different periods for negotiating their positions as cultural producers". The essays that she has collected analyse and celebrate the variousness of both the strategies employed and the modes of production. The result is a collection that analyses the work of 'known' women like Thea Proctor and Dymphna Cusack as well as the 'invisible' work of Ethel Carrick Fox and Margaret Fane.

The opening essay by Angela Philp, "From Wallflowers to Tall Poppies? The Sydney Society of Women Painters 1910-1934", is a good choice that clearly follows the precepts established by the introduction. Philp's analysis of the Sydney Society of

Women Painters is concerned, not so much with its invisibility in the annals of Australian Art History, but the possibility that the marginalisation of this "woman's work" was inherent in the work itself. Philp argues that rather than being a victim of patriarchal artistic devaluation, the Society "represented a necessary transition stage for women, creating a position in the established art world which, in its very conformity to that world's norms, condemned it to the second rank". According to Philp the elevation of the Society out of this nadir did not occur until 1935 when it changed its name and style.

The interest in Philp's essay lies in the historical details of the women and their art. The essay is theoretically important in what it suggests about the women artists. Philp argues that it was a society based more on mutual support and a love of art than an organisation wanting to challenge artistic orthodoxies or patriarchal ideologies: "Their devotion to art was probably as strong as that of women who sought artistic careers elsewhere, but their commitment did not entail relinquishing any of the 'feminine' values which defined them as women". According to Philp the structure of the Society allowed middle class women to move a domestic pastime into the public space of the exhibition hall where some were able to achieve a public profile, while others simply enjoyed the affinity of the group.

This carefully measured essay, following the gender paradigm established by Dever, does not celebrate or vilify the women of the Society or the art they produced. It does, however, make an important contribution to the debate regarding female artistic practice.

The other essays in the collection that deal with women artists are just as theoretically engaging, with the possible exception of Elin Howe's essay, "Ethel Carrick Fox: The cheat or the cheated?". Howe is overly descriptive, offering a great deal of biographical information without establishing firm connections between these details and a thesis. The other essays in the collection dealing with women artists include an excellent piece by Geoffrey Batchen, "Looking through the prism: The sculpture of Eleonore Lange", and an analysis by Mary Mackay of the 'decorative' art of Thea Proctor, "Almost dancing: Thea Proctor and the modern woman".

Among the essays dealing with women's writing Julie Wells analyses the intersection between communism and women's fiction in her essay "'Red Witches': Perceptions of communist women writers". Wells provides ample historical details regarding the status of the communist party in 1930s Australia but she balances these broad observations with detailed analysis of the creative work and political ideologies of Katharine Susannah Prichard and Jean Devanny. This essay is an exploration of the ways in which these women "located their lives and work outside the Communist Party as well as within it".

Wells suggests that Prichard and Devanny faced obstacles both as communists and as writers because of the way in which these activities confronted gender stereotypes: "Their work challenged capitalism and with it conventional notions regarding the role of women and the relationships between the sexes". However, Wells also details the problematic relationship these women as writers had within the Communist Party. The integration of a political and creative sensibility were confounded by prejudices that saw writing as a middle class enterprise that was contradictory to the oppositional nature of the Party. Wells suggests that this conflict was further compounded by gender stereotypes which saw the Communist Party adopt a similar ideological position toward women as that of mainstream society: "Women were the mothers of the working class: a point reinforced repeatedly in the *Communist Review*".

The value of Wells' essay lies in her measured assessment of the difficulties faced by Prichard and Devanny within the Party as writers and as women. Yet Wells is aware that both women remained loyal to the Party and spent their literary lives trying to reconcile the creative with the political.

Wells's essay reflects the quality of the articles dealing with women's writing. Importantly these include work on modes of writing other than fiction. Carole Ferrier analyses the significance of women as letter writers in "Women of letters and the uses of memory" which recognises the cultural significance of the domestic female voice. Maryanne Dever's excellent piece, "Conventional Women of Ability: M Barnard Eldershaw and the question of cultural authority", examines the ways in which two women, Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw, contributed to the shaping of an Australian literary identity.

Dever's essay, like the entire collection, recognises the important contribution that women made to cultural production in the first half of the twentieth-century. It is a well organised and effectively edited book that contains lucid and theoretically astute essays that attempt to shift "the focus to women's role as active cultural producers and consumers".

Sally Scott

Maryanne Dever (ed), *M. Barnard Eldershaw: "Plaque with Laurel", Essays, Reviews and Correspondence.* St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1995. Pp. xxiv+283 $19.95.

Although this volume is, as it claims, a selection of Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw's collaborative writing, it would be much better described as a reissue of their fourth novel, *Plaque with Laurel* (1937), together with a modest selection of their nonfictional work. The University of Queensland Press series "Australian Authors" decrees it otherwise, alas, and so anyone relying on the title as recorded in the formal Cataloguing in Publication Data ("Selections. M. Barnard Eldershaw") for guidance would be forgiven for supposing that this in some way comprises a representative selection, or indeed that the novel remains still out of print. Neither is the case.

'Representativeness' is never a straightforward affair, tending to assume as it does some sense of a fixed core identity within a corpus of work. But, just as we have become cautious about supposing there is (for example) some core essence of what it is to be Australian, so too have we become wary of imagining that the coincidence of the authorial proper name over a range of texts is itself evidence of some deeper identity. In the case of Barnard and Eldershaw the question of representativeness is even more vexed, though: each of their five novels seems quite unlike the others and, without a single corporeal self to provide facile warrant for one or another projected identity, it seems that theirs is a corpus that, more than most, resists such closure.

There is more than a little irony here. After all, in their nonfictional work — as evidenced in this selection — Barnard and Eldershaw argued for both the importance of finally identifying the essence of Australian writing, and for the function of authorship to be wholly understood in terms of communication, a direct line from author to reader:

> Writing is a medium for conveying ideas or images and not in itself an end. People who tell you they want to write are therefore also suspect. To write should never be thought of as an intransitive verb. A writer wants to write because he has the urgent need of communicating something to his fellows.
> ("The Writer and Society", 223)

"People who want to write ... are suspect" because, I take it, there is no foundational necessity for their writing, their work conveys no inner vision that needs urgent communication and so, craft without anchor, it wanders the textual seas without point or purpose. It is at least arguable, though, that Barnard and Eldershaw were themselves "people who want to write", and that the unsteady movement from their first book *A House is Built* (1929) to *Green Memory* (1931), then *The Glass-*

house (1936) and *Plaque with Laurel* is symptomatic of the absence of any core sense of just what is was they wanted to write about. At any rate, it is not altogether surprising that, as was to be the case with their last novel, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1947), for all their differences both *The Glasshouse* and *Plaque with Laurel* focus on writers unsure about themselves and unsure about the very point of their work.

While *Plaque with Laurel* is not, perhaps, their best work, its reissue here is nonetheless a welcome one. The plan, as Barnard indicated in a letter to Nettie Palmer, was to write a novel based on

> ... a three day literary conference in Canberra at which a plaque is unveiled in the National Library to the memory of a writer, dead five years or so. His story is to piece itself together behind the comedy, inconsequence & vanity of such a gathering. Behind it all the beautiful & naturally decorative background of the Canberra scene. (October 8, 1935; 267)

His 'story' is of double failure. Despite the success of his work, he suffers the corrosive memory of wartime failure (a miscalculated direction leading to the deaths of a company of men under his control); despite his love for the younger Imogen Tarrant their relationship ends in unhappy impasse. That remembered story finds a parallel in the events of the conference where the aimless chatter of the delegates finds a dark counterpoint in the lonely despair of one of their number — Owen Sale — who seeing nothing beyond his own personal failure but a horror of the violent meaninglessness of ordinary life, kills himself. The "literary conference" setting ensures much dialogue about the nature and function of writing, and that appears to have been the chief feature of the text that has recommended it to Maryanne Dever, the editor of its reissue. In essays like "Liberty and Violence" and "The Writer and Society" Barnard and Eldershaw, she notes, reveal themselves

> to be strong advocates of the need for writers generally to play a significant social and political role in contemporary society. Some of these issues are also taken up in their novel *Plaque with Laurel*, a work which demonstrates their considerable wit and skill as satirists, in addition to capturing something of the genuine difficulties Australian writers faced trying to establish themselves in the 1930s. (ix-x)

The interest of *Plaque with Laurel*, however, is not really with "their considerable wit and skill as satirists" which, as the embarrassed 'considerable' suggests, was hardly that. Situations tend to be stock, the satire unexceptionable, the writing fluent rather than startling. Much more revealing is the unresolved tension between the earnest discussion about the function of writing and the importance of communication, and the two writers we see in any detail, both of whom despair at the disparity between the signifying ambitions of their own work and the novel in general, and the final insignificance of all life. In the end neither has anything to communicate, and both die alone. Indeed, the most striking scenes in the novel are not of communication, but of the flight from the failure of communication, which becomes the flight from the recognition of the absence of foundational signification itself. Sale, especially, is caught well with a stark, lunatic intensity as he crashes through the bush, fleeing the tourist coach and its gregarious company, or strides purposively to nowhere in particular in the desert of the Canberra night:

> He stood in the garden irresolute, sickened by the futility of existence. At the beginning he was always faced by the emptiness and disappointment of the end, and this so sapped his vitality and resolution that he had to drive himself to the simplest actions. He wondered how others had sustained the terrible boredom of living, how he himself had once borne it so lightly. ... Standing in the garden, he had though, 'A Sign,' and a faint pulse of excitement had begun to beat in his mind. He had walked away from the hotel briskly, as if he had a desti-

> nation. No one had noticed him. He had walked with a long swinging stride, thinking of nothing: it was not yet time to think. Soon — for this was not far from the edge of the city — he had been walking between paddocks, their film of grass laced with sheep-tracks chrome yellow, scrabblings without meaning, beginning nowhere and ending nowhere. (143-144)

"To write should never be thought of as an intransitive verb", and yet here — as in Gerald's surrealist flight in *Green Memory,* or Harry Munster's in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow,* or in Barnard's haunting story "The Persimmon Tree"- their writing is at its most intense, most communicative, if you like, when faced by the possibility that signs, like the tracks Sale passes, might best be described as "scrabblings without meaning, beginning nowhere and ending nowhere," and that communication itself is as much about failure as success.

Ian Saunders

Hilary Fraser and R. S. White, eds, *Constructing Gender: Feminism in Literary Studies,* with a preface by Penny Boumelha. University of WA Press, Perth, 1993. 305 pp. Price $24.95.

Extending from an examination of medieval virgins to an intriguing discussion of Angela Carter's postmodern gender bending, *Constructing Gender* examines the role of literary texts in contributing to specific cultural and historical constructions of gender. The essays in this collection present a stimulating and varied selection of critical perspectives on the social and literary processes of gender construction. They illustrate how gender is a significant element of all aspects of literary experience, including the writing and reading, the techniques and structures used within texts and the selection and criticism of texts.

Constructing Gender, published by the University of Western Australia Press and edited by Hilary Fraser and R. S. White, is a collection of essays by writers who are or have been working in the English Department of UWA. It confirms, as the Introduction by editors Fraser and White states, "the vigour and diversity of feminist criticism and gender studies in the 1990s". The essays cover a variety of approaches, historical periods and theoretical perspectives: Dougan, Beckerling, White and Couche examine how imagery constructs women in texts; Lynch considers the gender of the audience; essays by Collin, Fraser, Saunders, Midalia and Brady examine the social and generic constraints on women writers across a range of historical periods and the various methods used by the writers to challenge them; Chance and MacDonald-Grahame explore the implications of restrictive gender stereotypes; Southwell and Nettelbeck celebrate gender subversion in texts by Carter and Jolley and, while Segal analyses the unstated gender bias of the writer of criticism, Dolin writes his sex into the text. As Penny Boumelha states in the preface "The range and variety of this collection helps to show that there is no element of reading or writing which is not permeated by issues of gender." (Preface, xi)

Some essays, such as Lucy Dougan's, redefine traditional representations of woman, for instance images which associate woman with nature. Dougan's essay, "Women's Bodies and Metamorphosis" suggests, by an analysis of mythical representations of Daphne, that women artists may refocus the conventional association of women with nature so that it becomes the site of a productive process, a becoming, rather than a passive state. Dougan shows how the reappropriation of old myths offer radical new possibilities for representations of women's bodies.

Andrew Lynch focuses on textual assumptions concerning the gender of the audience and suggests that secondary narratives may be at work, which in the case of

Chaucer's and Henryson's texts, function to advise and control women. Such texts need to be read resistantly to reclaim the silenced woman's perspective.

"Perceval's Sister", an essay by Philippa Beckerling, shows how traditional images of women, such as the virgin archetype, are constructed on masculine models of need and function and are subordinated to the dominant patriarchal ideology.

Representations of women which conflate women and death are discussed in Ann Chance's essay "Black Widow". Her reading of the widow figure in early modern English texts suggests the possibility of the independent widow figure becoming a subversive figure, and she shows how the widow is therefore often textually represented as a figure of evil and accorded at least a social death to quieten her presumption in outliving her husband.

R S White's essay provides a valuable reading of *Hamlet*, examining the complex interplay of dramatist, director, actor and audience in constructing meaning. Traditionally women have been played as silent and inconsequential in *Hamlet*. White examines the ways in which imagery in the text functions to construct negative images of women as a means to enhancing positive images of men, such as in "What a piece of work is man..." White also explores the question of whether Shakespeare was complicit with this silencing of women or whether he was obliquely challenging it. He suggests a possible space for a gendered re-reading of *Hamlet*, concluding that how one reads *Hamlet* reflects more the reader than the play.

Shakespeare's imagery is also examined in Christine Couche's essay, "Tears and Tushes". She explores the way Shakespeare's imagery constructs particular representations of women as objects of sexual attention through images of women as fortresses to be breached, soft wax to be impressed or food to be consumed, thus establishing a model of power based on man's ability to penetrate and woman's passive role, represented by images of female penetrability.

Women may need to appropriate genre to reclaim power according to D. W. Collin. She demonstrates how traditional textual representation of time and space construct woman's place as limited and narrow. However, she shows how Gaskell's use of space in the pastoral genre allows the writer to re-construct a place of space, power and fertility for her heroine.

Hilary Fraser's essay, *"Love's citadel unmann'd"*, reclaims love poems written by women. Fraser argues that these poems have been occluded because the woman is represented as a speaking subject, as lover and love poet, rather than as the silenced object of desire, as "mistress and muse of a male poet".

The reader's involvement in the construction of meaning is explored in Tim Dolin's interesting ficto-criticism where he asks "how does a man read as a feminist?" Dolin's analysis of the melodrama in Hardy, which sits inside the frame of himself as father, critic and tourist, provides a revealing insight into the multi-layered implications in the construction of writers, texts and readers: "Melodrama makes explicit the displacements entailed in the interpretive act of reading." (p 162)

The feminist strategy of a "resistant reading" is used by Carmel MacDonald-Grahame to challenge the dominant male gaze in D H Lawrence's writings. She examines how Lawrence's imagery positions the reader to prioritise the information given by some characters rather than others, thus manipulating the reader to construct a dominant patriarchal reading.

Ian Saunder's article on Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* explores how stereotypes of gender constrain men and women and how writers and readers struggle to find a new way to construct society and gender identity, however 'difficult' that task may be.

Some of the works examined reveal how gender stereotypes may be subverted. Jane Southwell's analysis of Angela Carter's novel, *The Passion of New Eve*, suggests that gender is

constructed through "repeated performative acts", and thus can be disrupted through acts of intertextual and social dislocation, where what may have been viewed as chaotic can be "turned on its head" and become order, as suggested by the image of the mobilus strip, or Irigaray's representation of woman as "the sex which is not one".

Amanda Nettelbeck, in "The Ambivalence of Women's Experience," explores how women in Elizabeth Jolley's texts are represented as multiple, ambivalent and subversive and how they escape constraining stereotypes of gender to find their own space from which to speak.

While Fraser's essay reveals the ways in which women may write within traditional forms, the essays on some of the contemporary women writers, such as Jolley, Carter and Grenville, indicate the need to redefine genre as well as gender structures. Susan Midalia suggests that at the heart of *Lilian's Story* is a "terrible silence". Language is shown to be inadequate as a means of representing female experience. Midalia claims that genre and language itself must be reformulated to enable women to speak.

In "Gender, Ethics and Literary Theory", Alex Segal examines the bias of the critic revealed in Paul de Man's complicity with patriarchal values in his reading of Rousseau's *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse.*

While *Constructing Gender* is strong on different historical constructions of gender, Veronica Brady's article explores an under-represented area, that of differing cultural constructions due to the implications of race and class as they intersect with gender issues, an area explored by post-colonial critics. Brady's essay examines the relationship between geography, ideology and power. She contrasts 'masculine' European models of colonisation with emerging new models of the land and the self which draw on traditional 'feminine' imagery and involve an affinity with Aboriginal people and their culture.

Constructing Gender provides an interesting survey of the diversity and wide-ranging implications of feminist criticism. The historical and theoretical range of the essays will appeal to a variety of readers. The essays fill a need for students who are demanding resistant readings and questioning the assumptions of writers and critics. They demonstrate ways in which students might incorporate strategies which take cognisance of issues of gender. A variety of critical perspectives are used, including contemporary feminist critics such as Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous. The essays in *Constructing Gender* show interpretive diversity and richness and affirm the critical and social value of feminist criticism, making this text a useful resource for teachers and students.

Pamela Bagworth

Dennis Haskell, ed., *Tilting at Matilda, Literature, Aborigines, Women and the Church in Contemporary Australia, dedicated to Veronica Brady.* Fremantle Arts Centre Press in Association with CSAL, 1994, 219 pp $14.95

To compose such a volume for Veronica Brady, covering all her multiple activities and interests, is indeed no easy task, for I can scarcely think of any university scholar in the humanities who has ranged more widely. A theologian much nearer to the *teología de la liberación* than to Vatican conservatism, she has boldly criticised and equally boldly defended her church, as she perceived it should be, though always respecting those who do not share her religious beliefs. As a scholar, extremely well-read in old and new philosophies, she has known how to extract what is of permanent value, discarding the merely fashionable or ephemeral together with the jargon that afflicts many academic publications today. A fine detector of good

literature, she illuminates rather than destructs or deconstructs, and has, over the years, given much encouragement to emerging writers. Never enclosed in the ivory towers of academe, she keeps a sharp eye trained on the outside world, ready to pounce with energy and conviction on all social injustices, like her admired Don Quixote, regardless of the personal consequences. In addition to all these virtues, I should add that Veronica Brady is a loyal friend and a fine conversationalist.

Owing to her long association with The University of Western Australia, it is natural that the majority of the contributors to this volume come from or are connected with that region, a land beautifully evoked by Tim Winton, whose work is perceptively commented on here by Bruce Bennett. It is a land to which, as Winton says, a white Australian may feel strong attachment but in which the black man "serves as the conscience of the people, a 'guardian angel' who is rejected". The defence of this rejected angel has, of course, been one of Veronica Brady's particular crusades and it is, therefore, fitting that a fair section of this book should be devoted to *Aboriginal Australia*, for, as Delys Bird says, as a preface to her transcription of Lorna Little's narrative, "Veronica Brady has been a vocal supporter, friend and political ally to Aboriginal groups in Western Australia over the past decades." Though my own first encounters with Brady took place in Europe, I clearly remember our first meeting on her home ground in Perth, in 1880, when she was deeply embroiled in the Mining Rights dispute. Her quite recent writings in *Caught in the Draught* (1994) on the Mabo issue confirm that her involvement in Aboriginal causes has in no way declined.

Apart from this particular "guardian angel", celestial beings seem to hover about this book in other ways. David Brookes' delightful catalogue of what he calls "airy intermediates" may surprise a foreign reader who is not in the way of imagining Australian angels, while Dennis Haskell's description of Veronica as a "larrikin angel" makes me wonder what she herself would think; knowing her I suspect she would happily accept the first part of the definition and quite decidedly reject the second!

In her essay "The Shape of Stillness", reproduced in *Caught in the Draught*, Veronica Brady has written about the many women in the Church today who "feel themselves to be on the frontier ... between order, custom and the grace and ease of habit and a feeling of darkness, confusion, doubt and anxiety." Jeanette Lawrence and Agnes Dodds take up this concern here, reflecting on the "ambiguous relationship of women to contemporary church culture in Australia", while Pamela Foulkes observes that Christian women, increasingly alienated by conservative patriarchal Church structures, "are beginning to question the continued relevance to their spiritual lives of the sacred texts and traditions".

For us outside observers of the Australian scene, it has always seemed striking that Australian women do not play a more important role in public life. So early enfranchised, already in the 1890s, with such an exceptionally high number of excellent writers, it does appear strange that women are still so under-represented in positions of power. In her interesting analysis "Republics, Citizens and Women", Patricia Crawford considers this matter from a historical point of view and offers some surprising statistics — only 14.5% women in Parliament, 19.2% teaching and research staff in The University of Western Australia. Clearly, as she says, on the eve of a new century, a probable republic and a new constitution, the women of Australia should have a greater say.

Apart from her great activity on the literary and social scene in Australia, Veronica Brady has been a tireless traveller in Asia, Europe and America, and perhaps it is this aspect that is least reflected in this book. There are indeed hints of her European attachments in Philip Salom's Italian poems or the contribution of Vasso Kalamaras as a voice from Greece, but it is only María

Suárez's reflections on Furphy and Cervantes that speak for the important work that Veronica has done over the years in extending Australian literature and culture overseas. Having been with her on many occasions in many countries, I can testify to the way in which she has transmitted her own energy and enthusiasm to teachers and students and helped so many to visit and research in Australia.

On occasion Veronica has astonished me by describing herself as "an old lady" or "an old person", particularly as her retirement from the University was approaching. These are wholly inappropriate descriptions for this small but powerful dynamo who will, I am sure, continue to tilt not only at Matilda but every other world injustice for a long time to come, asking unpopular questions and sharing in Don Quixote's dream of a world in which, as she once wrote, "words like 'chivalry' and 'human' mean something, and in which it is the task of those who are educated, privileged or powerful to respect, care for and empower the powerless and vulnerable".

Doireann MacDermott

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YVE LOUIS is one of the three poets whose work is featured in *Friendly Street New Poets: One* published in February by Friendly Street Poets / Wakefield Press.

ROBERT LOVE is a Melbourne archivist and poet.

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ROB PRETTY has published two books of poetry. A third, *Half Way to Eden* will be published in 1996. He teaches creative writing at the University of Wollongong.

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TRACY RYAN's first book *Killing Delilah* was published in early 1994 by Fremantle Arts Centre Press, who will publish her next book of poetry due out in 1996.

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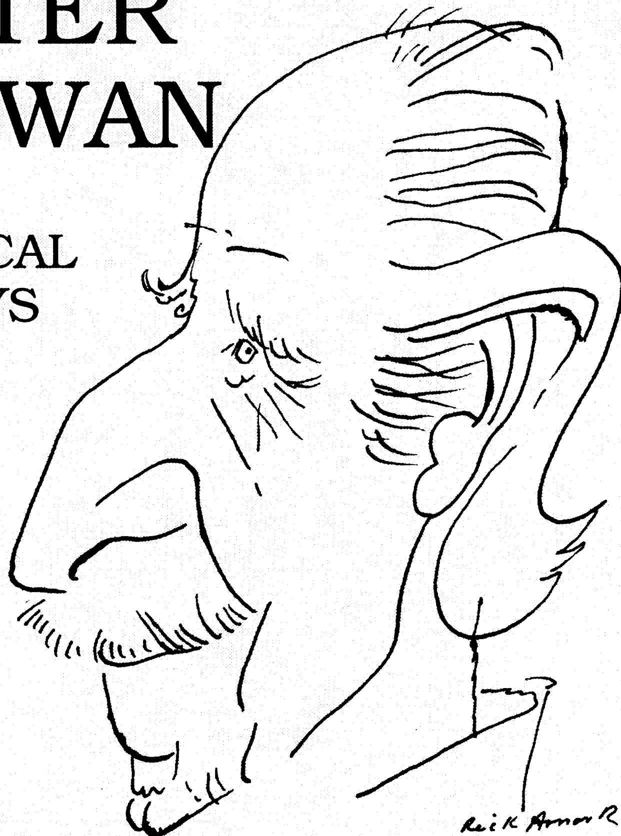

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