



westerly^{55:1}
the best in writing from the West

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PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The editors have pleasure in announcing
the winner of the Patricia Hackett Prize for
the best contribution to *Westerly* in 2009:

KIM SCOTT

for his story 'A Refreshing Sleep',
Westerly 54:2, 2009.

Parting Glances

Susan Midalia

She knew it would be the middle of summer, but Moscow was meant to be swirling snow, luxurious furs, huddling by a fire with steaming tea from a gleaming samovar. Even the forecast she'd read at home, 30 degrees and humid, had failed to convince her. So she'd packed three jumpers and five pairs of fleecy socks, even a hot water bottle. When she stepped off the plane, the heat rushed maliciously towards her. And then the stifling terminal, packed tight with prowling men straight out of gangster movies, and busty young women with peroxide hair and '80s platform shoes. There was concrete everywhere and not a word of English on the multitude of signs. Twenty sleepless hours in the air to get here, and a four-hour wait in Dubai, where fat westerners had swarmed along rows of duty-free whisky, diamonds and Chanel. Petra had sat in a café and watched them, these hordes of waddling lords of the earth, coming at her like prehistoric beasts in logo-ed shirts. Now they waited with her in the terminal, their faces unsure, uneasy, in the relentless crowd.

The immigration official was a stout young blonde with gold braid on her shoulder pads, a red star on her cap and a brittle expression. Petra tried one of the few Russian words she'd been able to learn,

zdrhastvooytee, hello, in what she hoped was a friendly tone. She made a point of looking blank, remembering the advice of her translator friend, Marie. *Don't smile*, she'd said. *Muscovites think you're simple, you know, a little retarded, if you smile at them*. Petra handed over her passport, her official letter of introduction, her confirmation of hotel bookings for every night of her ten-day visit, her holiday with a difference. The official glared at her and then looked down at her papers, up again at her face, down again, up again, wordless and stiff, as if I'm a criminal, thought Petra. She's taking her time, making me wait, shuffling my papers grimly. The woman glared at her again, held up a rubber stamp for ten, fifteen seconds, and then thumped it down on the passport. Petra felt her legs untighten. Ah, welcome to Moscow, she thought: mindless bureaucracy, state-sanctioned surliness. Two cultural stereotypes before she'd even left the airport, four if you counted the gangster men and the vaguely whorish girls. It was a relief to be dismissed with a toss of a head and a parting glance of official contempt.

Finding the commuter train wasn't any easier. There were forests of arrows on every wall, indecipherable signs. Petra remembered the word for train, *poheest*, two simple syllables, but people barged past her or shrugged their shoulders when she asked the way. Marie had warned her about this as well: *notoriously unhelpful*, even, at times, *deliberately obstructionist*. *They don't care about our tourist dollars*, she'd said. *They've got plenty of tourists from the provinces, and a hell of a lot of oil*. Petra's suitcase felt suddenly heavy, despite its sturdy wheels, and she gave herself up to the surge of the crowd, let herself be pushed through a turnstile and hoped for the best. And there it was, a platform, open space, blue sky, a gaggle of English-speakers, looking startled by their good luck. An overdressed, middle-aged couple began consulting a map and quarrelling; two red-faced, swaggering young men were loudly thirsty for a beer. Petra cringed, her eyes fixed on the ground. I won't say a word, she thought, I'll be silent, unfriendly, un-Australian. She waited until they'd hauled their luggage up the steps of the train and chose a compartment further down the line.

The journey felt heavy with the whoosh of the engine, the guttural words of passengers, images on an overhead TV displaying Gucci, Armani, Dolce and Gabbana. Through the window Petra glimpsed brutal, decaying high-rise apartments and then, unexpectedly, flashes of leafy, graceful trees streaked by the afternoon sun. Were they elms or poplars, silver birch? She'd never been good with nature. It could easily have been England, she thought, where she'd lived for a year half a lifetime time ago. She let herself blur with the passing of the trees, remembering the green and pleasant land where she'd backpacked and worked and fallen in love, where she'd cried at the airport when it was time to go home, cried in the plane for hours. She'd been clinging and desperate, a chain-smoking wreck; he'd looked relieved to see her go. *I know we'll meet again*, he'd said, like an old war movie, trying to be kind, with the bluest eyes she'd ever seen. They hadn't been in touch for ten or fifteen years, and, of course, they'd never met again. The train braked suddenly and sent her lurching into the seat in front of her. She was aware of a man staring at her, his eyes slitted, and she clutched her handbag more tightly to her chest. She reached her hotel in a daze of traffic and taxi-driver shouts, registered at reception surprisingly quickly, barely saw her threadbare room or felt the baking, stuffy heat as she levered off her shoes and slumped down on the single bed. She was asleep in less than a minute.

What would she write to those back home? Three days in Moscow and an email was due, one of those generic travellers' tales she'd become quite skilled in devising. The sights, of course, in some detail, the food, the weather, a witticism or two, perhaps a bad translation to amuse her literary friends. Like the sign in the hotel bathroom, exhorting guests not to steal the towels: EARNEST REQUEST written in bold capital letters. People seemed to like her emails: *interesting*, *amusing*, they said, although she preferred writing postcards, enjoyed selecting images for particular friends. *Postcards are for old ladies*,

her niece had declared, and then blushed with what might have been contrition. So Petra would be electronic, would comment on the food (rather too salty and potatoes with everything) and mention her health for the sake of her elderly mother, say she was fine, walked everywhere briskly. Anything to avoid the underground, despite what her nephew had told her. *They've got marble floors and whopping great statues of the workers! Stained glass and massive chandeliers, you have to see it, Auntie Pet!* But she would not see it, none of it at all. In London, in her youth, she'd been groped in the underground, a hand sliding up and down her groin. She'd felt sick with the press of humanity and fled from the station in shame. And those were the days of the IRA, bomb scares and actual bombs, urgently wailing sirens. She'd tried again to take the Tube but had stood on the platform, unable to board a crowded train, crying like a fool. A woman had stopped to ask if she could help and Petra had said, stupidly, *I'm Australian*. Now, here in Moscow, she felt the trains shuddering beneath her, imagined the long, steep escalators crawling slowly down into the earth.

But she would try to describe the city for her nephew. Matthew was her favourite, a history boy, fifteen, her sister's youngest. Smart, restless, *dying to see the world*, he said. No one in his family had ever travelled further than Bali (twice), and when Petra told him of her trip to Russia, he'd taken books from the library and showed her what he'd found. Moscow razed to the ground by Napoleon's army and then rebuilt, *a stricken giant* resurrected. St Petersburg, a miracle built on water, and according to legend, constructed in the sky by Peter the Great and then lowered like a giant model onto the ground. In the airport café Mattie had sat slumped and dejected, kicking one sneakered foot against a chair until his mother snapped at him to stop. He'd finally voiced his longing, how *all his life* he'd wanted to see Lenin's tomb. *He's decomposing, Auntie Pet*, he'd explained, leaning forward on the table. *In a few years' time he won't be there at all*. He'd ignored his sister's shrieks and his mother's look of alarm. *He changed the course of history and you can see him, in the flesh. How amazing is that?* Before she knew what she was saying, Petra

had made an arrangement. *I'll go and see Mr Lenin*, she'd said, *and if he's still there in two years' time, I'll take you to see him for yourself*. Her sister had looked even more alarmed and Petra had smiled, the extravagant spinster sibling, the self-indulgent maiden aunt, who'd taken early retirement as a teacher and decided to see the world. She'd gone in two-year intervals to the predictable destinations—Paris, Florence, Rome, each time with a different friend, and had found each journey instructive (she had photographs to prove this). But no one had wanted to travel to Russia: it was, apparently, too dangerous, and none of her friends could see the attraction. Petra had found it difficult to explain. Russian novels and 'Dr Zhivago' (all that swirling snow); a long-ago lover with stories of imperial treasures; some unformed, melancholy sense of a suffering history. At the airport, she'd clasped Mattie's hand. *I promise*, she'd said, knowing her sister thought she was mad, knowing that was part of the pleasure.

The hotel's Internet café was full of high-spirited backpackers who glanced briefly at her lined face as she entered, at her too-youthful summer dress (yesterday's desperate purchase in the searing heat). And then she was invisible, free to compose her news. The days had been very hot, she wrote: diminutive Japanese tourists huddling under bright umbrellas, pretty young women sweltering in stockings and lace. Her hotel room was adequate, and served up ancient episodes of *Skippy*, ludicrously dubbed, on Russian TV. The ubiquitous babushka dolls were, well, ubiquitous. And no, there were no cunning pickpockets or Russian mafia on the streets. The only sign of organised crime was the McDonalds near Red Square, which charged exorbitant prices for indigestible food. She'd queued for hours to see the Armoury: the coronation robes and thrones, studded with turquoise, rubies, pearls, lapis lazuli, were marvels of excess, but the Fabergé eggs she'd found rather crass. The jewel-encrusted wheels of the Imperial carriages could have fed a million serfs. The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts was, unfortunately, closed. Churches everywhere were being restored as part of a religious revival, and she'd never seen so many crucifixes—gold, silver, diamond—in

so many conspicuous cleavages. She'd lingered in a bookshop to watch a man talking to a group of eager listeners. He was tall, with endearingly pixie ears, and had his audience eating out of his smoothly gesticulating hands. They laughed, applauded, laughed some more; one man even toppled sideways in his chair. Petra thought the pixie man must have been a comic writer, or at least an amusing speaker, but either way, of course, she had understood nothing, not a word. As she recalled it now, she remembered how this had pained her, how she'd felt like an imposter, a fraud.

And she had to confess that in the brightness of daylight, Red Square had felt curiously blank. She'd tried to picture it—the tsar and his milling, worshipping subjects, the famous military parades, the jubilant workers' rallies, even, as her niece had enthused, the thousands who'd cheered Paul McCartney and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. But she'd seen only endless, dull paving bricks, tourists being posed for photos—the provocative minx, the scowling son, the squirming toddler—and, flanking one side, the world's largest shopping centre, smoothly marbled, blandly bourgeois, Gum, pronounced Goom, as in *book*. St Basil's Cathedral was an architect's bad joke, its psychedelic onion domes like something out of Disneyland. And no, she hadn't yet visited Lenin's tomb, guarded by impossibly handsome young men, all high cheekbones and military bearing, in sleek dark uniforms. But she had promised Mattie; she would go tomorrow, on her last day in Moscow. As she sent off her email, she had an image of her nephew, long-haired, curious, excited, sitting opposite her at breakfast. They would puzzle over the menu and plan the day's itinerary; he would ask strangers to take their photo in front of famous buildings. It pleased her to imagine such things.

After another hotel dinner of borscht and dumplings (she'd always been unadventurous with food, indeed took little interest), Petra retired to her room. She'd planned another evening walk in Red Square, where it stayed light until 11 and which was packed with desultory strollers, entwined young lovers, parents with pushers

and skipping children. She'd enjoyed her walk the night before, its aimlessness, the pearly sheen of the sky, even the garish lights of Gum, a neon galleon sailing in a sea of happy crowds. Such endless light, such a radiant sky: here, for once, something, some marvellous trick of nature, had briefly met her vague desires. For as she brushed out her hair (looking rather lank, she saw in the mirror, in need of shampoo), Petra had to admit that Moscow had somehow failed her, had not lived up to her expectations, such as they were. She lay down on the bed, the hairbrush hanging loosely in her hand, too tired to meet the evening, wondering why she had come here, where history was mocked by American cafés and icons of Elvis Presley, where waiters ignored her, where she couldn't speak the language. Her feet ached from so much walking and her head was throbbing from too much sun. Petra felt weighed down, tiny as she was, a short, thin, insubstantial woman looking up at the ceiling, knowing she must get up in the morning, have breakfast and queue to see Lenin's tomb. The forecast said 34 degrees and she must take the day more slowly, measure it out before catching the overnight train to St Petersburg, already booked, a first-class compartment. She thought of all this and wished she could stop thinking, could fall asleep, fully clothed, her face unwashed, unsoothed by her night cream, fast running out. She must remember to use it sparingly; they didn't seem to sell her brand in Moscow.

The queue for Lenin's tomb was already long by 10am, the day already hot. Petra was prepared: she'd had a nourishing, familiar cereal and orange juice for breakfast, put sunscreen on her face, neck, arms. But even though the summer crowds were down (the global financial crisis), there were still plenty of tourists to annoy her, for that's what she was feeling now, annoyed, irrationally so, she knew, for was she not one of them, impatient in the blistering sun amid the pushing and shoving and gabbling about their stock market losses, the mile-long queues and their latest camera with an automatic zoom, the one they were forced to leave at some check-in that no one had told them about, how they'd wasted an hour while

foreigners barged in front of them until they got angry and barged right back. At least she didn't carry on like this, at least she wasn't an overstuffed pig drinking Coca-Cola and complaining, at least not out loud. Once again she felt a great weariness in her limbs, and now in her chest, like a sighing wave that didn't drown her, that kept her up just long enough to move forward as people elbowed her along, past the security screen, unencumbered by a camera, released at last from the crowds.

She wandered through the grounds of the mausoleum, looking at the granite busts of Soviet heroes. There were scores of them, and most she'd never heard of. Generals, her guidebook said, political leaders, astronauts, writers, their names carved in the Cyrillic she wouldn't even try to translate. Somewhere, she knew, she would find the bust of Stalin, but what would it matter if she saw him or not, came face to face with his hawk-like eyes and imposing moustache, with his dates of birth and death carved mightily in stone. To tell her friends, tell Mattie, she had seen the image of the brutal tyrant, to be able to say, I was there, I saw it, all these unknown faces, the red carnations on the tombstones, the squealing teenage girls tottering on high heels, their disrespectful chewing of gum. She'd wanted to feel the weight of history, isn't that why she came here, to this place that everyone warned her would be difficult and dangerous, a silly old woman flaunting her rebellion, her scorn of package tours and cruises, her fling with the mysteries of east-meets-west. For it was a fling, she saw it now. What did she think she was doing, standing in a mausoleum, surrounded by the busts of the glorious and infamous, feeling nothing more than irritation. She was no better than the silly girls, the fatly moaning tourists, miss prissy high-and-mighty, she'd been this way all her life, unable to feel what she wanted to feel, whatever you were meant to feel, that even now, especially now, eluded her. Oh she had friends, she loved reading of course, she'd had a decent career of sorts, and now her travels, belated, some kind of treat or reward for something, for endurance, perhaps, when all was said and done. Her sister had admonished her: *You should be*

more careful with your money. Petra had laughed, as she often did in her sister's company. *Don't worry, she'd said, you won't have to pay for my funeral.*

She had reached the black marble steps leading down to Lenin. She was here now; she should make the effort to see, even if it struck her, as it surely had her niece, as rather ghoulish, voyeuristic. V. I. Lenin, the man of letters he had called himself, a man of the people, who had asked to be buried next to his mother. Even in death he had been cheated, thought Petra; revered, embalmed, preserved for posterity, opposite the modish merchandise of Gum. As she stepped down, grateful for the cool, the dark, the unusual silence, she drew in her breath. Around a corner it came into view—deep red drapes, a marble coffin, the body laid out, a ghostly, creamy face in profile. You were not allowed to stop, you had to keep walking in a mute semi-circle, tourists in front of you, tourists behind, you had just enough time to catch a glimpse of the past. As she came face to face with Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Petra saw that one of his hands was clenched, the other loose, and that his face was small, almost dainty and strangely alive, his brow slightly furrowed. It made him look perplexed, as if his dying thought had been a quizzical question, some faint, persistent stirring of desire. Petra felt the hush of her surroundings, the cool of the room on her drying skin, and for just a moment, just the smallest rush of time, the circle of people dissolved around her, everything solid melted into air. She was utterly transfixed, touched by the curled-up hand, the smooth, almost boyish complexion, the expression, above all the expression, of Lenin lost to some dream of history, even, perhaps, to himself.

Then it was over and she was returned to the heat and light of the world, hearing the shudders of people sweeping past her, a teenage girl flapping and shrieking: *gross me out, I'm never gunna look at a dead guy again.* Petra had to smile at this youthful conviction and the flailing girlish arms, at her own sombre, unexpected reflection, her moment of touristic grace. It had all happened in the blink of an eye, the flash of a camera if one had been permitted. Lenin was a dead guy

and she needed to get out of the sun, and tonight she would board the train for St Petersburg, home of the world's largest museum. The Hermitage, she'd read, housed so many objects that it would take ten years to merely glance at each one. As she set off for the hotel, in need of water and rest, she thought once more of waxy Lenin, and wondered what her nephew would make of that strangely moving face. She could picture Mattie's own face, his blue-eyed brightness, as she asked him again to accompany her to Russia, to help her see the sights and to help her with the language, to walk down together to Lenin's crowded tomb. *It's an earnest request*, Mattie, she would say, and they would laugh, already beginning to make their plans.

What Herons Know

Diane Fahey

Ascending from mud-flat to cypress
the herons veer between straight line and curve
as miraculous wings contend with
their own heft. Perched in a green twilight
each wears its body like a disguise:
a retired wizard, perhaps—behind that
shadowy gaze a lifetime of shape-changing—
or an old philosopher culling
minnow-truths by day to be relished
in this half-heaven. Mellow squawks speak of
instinct tempered by time. Real ecstasy,
they know, waits inside the long stillness
or sweeps in with winds that solve puzzles
on the stream's surface, set new ones.

Corvus Coronoides

Diane Fahey

Though, somewhere, a reach of territory,
a stick nest at its centre, ravens seem,
like death, trenchantly at home anywhere—
interlopers who've breached so many
boundaries, they recognise none.
One strops its beak on a crossbar, inches
from stored lightning; another tends road kill,
daring the spaces between cars. Yawps scour
the air, broadcast a raw indifference.
Careening with slow power through spring light
they cannot know they are works of art
but sometimes fly as if they do—at each dip
or sideways scoop, indigo spangles
flash from mirrors of cloud-lit ebony.

To Hold Onto A Map

Jill Jones

To be out of place and to know that other place
is still there on a coast, to remember the colours
of a ridge, now velvet green in memory, to walk
in disagreement with the colours of this place
and to know here too everything
is displaced and skewed with recall, to gamble
with timetables, to misunderstand lineages
within veils of tenderness behind doors,
to argue with the bondage of the breast, to flinch
while witnessing the bruise
in morning, to wake without meaning
in an incredible blue heat, to be disturbed
by the advantages of blue that test the eyes and in
turn veil them in unwanted haze
as though this was a memory bordering on
recall, to appear to die or faint in the straightness
of a road, to adduce this is a way
of describing this place, and to realise the world
moves a little east of itself when elsewhere, and to move
with it, to be
unbecoming
almost casually, to be less casual especially within
the darkness veiling the incredible lostness brought here
by travellers out of deserts, out of oceans, out of
indescribable histories, with bruises that make bodies
faint with remembrance, to apprehend an unbecoming
fear that swells lines of buildings, to discuss
windows as if they could see back into

Jill Jones

an original place, to encounter sun like a glassy star
on a balcony, to appreciate the aqua
dip of stairwells, to stare into the well, to test
absence, to walk a little slowly within a road
while green parrots skew the sound
of trucks and warehouses into the very
wildness that is now transported or dried out
along abandoned river beds and unwanted plains,
and to be followed by a slowness
that now echoes with finitude, to wonder
how that would operate as a sound once familiar,
 memory sharp,
 a blaze in the eyes,
burning leaves along ridges of the hills
stretching into the exactly-blue sky dome, to wish
for clouds, and to know weather is not
will, to misunderstand distances, to understand how
the living and the dead wander
out of history no longer being dreamt, to reject
the bonds of city lore without realising how
it holds things in places that touch each other
in the tenderness of finitude, to recant
 slightly
and thereby avoid tripping,
and to undertake wide streets in the blessedness
of time passing, to know how this place
is, and to lose the gamble with weather and time,
to uninstall memory, the taste of the breast,
to fold and unfold every map, to explore
the wrinkle and fray, the lost timetable
with its excuses for tickets, to finally turn
the corner, to find a place to live and work, that
 is the end
 to everything.

Flying into Perth

Jen Jewel Brown

the shadow of the plane
sprints across the scrub like
a shark across a low reef

after the gasping farms
a green surprise of rounded curls
the long vulva of a river

we hurl across the airstrip
trees burst and bloom from the flat land

Jeffrey Smart sharp wing shadow
two crisp stripes of yellow
archly tilting wing tip lifts

the light here is rigid
so bright it pops

Annual Poetry Review 2009–2010

Bronwyn Lea

The Mary Gilmore Prize is for a first book of poetry. This year there were 39 entries: 33 of them were authored by women. The shortlist of five, perhaps not surprisingly given the odds, is made up entirely of women: Emily Ballou for *The Darwin Poems* (UWA 2009), Helen Hagemann for *Evangelyne and Other Poems* (APC 2009), Sarah Holland-Batt for *Aria* (UQP 2008), Emma Jones for *The Striped World* (Faber & Faber 2009), and Joanna Preston for *The Summer King* (Otago UP 2009).

At the time of writing, the winner of the Mary Gilmore Prize has not yet been announced; however, several of these titles have already won national (and, in Jones's case, international) prizes, in some cases in competition against highly esteemed and established poets. Unfortunately, these particular books were published just prior to the catchment for this review so I was not afforded the pleasure of reviewing them here. But I bring up the Gilmore shortlist in any case because I think it best illustrates a point that poetry critics and reviewers have been making for some time now: the most exciting poetry in Australia seems to be found, very often, in first books by young female poets.

The emphasis on female authors, it's worth adding, has become evident not just in poetry publishing in Australia but also overseas and in other genres. In 2009 all eyes were on the women who swept the heavyweight international literary awards: the Nobel Prize in Literature went to German author Herta Müller who, the Swedish judges said, 'with the concentration of poetry and the frankness of prose, depicts the landscape of the dispossessed'; the Mann Booker went to Hilary Mantel for her novel *Wolf Hall*; the International Man Booker went to Alice Murno for *Too Much Happiness*; and Elizabeth Strout won a Pulitzer for her short story collection, *Olive Kitteridge*. Is it an accident they were all women; stacked judging panels; a mini-trend? Or are the tides turning?

Back home in Australia, similar questions were being posed in poetry circles. Reviews that commented on the predominance of young female talent among poets left some of the authors in question feeling not so much flattered as wondering—in conversation and in blogs—why they were being singled out as female: they preferred, some of them said, to be judged—and categorised if they must be categorised—based on some quality of their writing, not on the particular pairing of their chromosomes. It's not that it isn't interesting to think about the poet's sex (and for that matter his or her gender and sexuality), they argued, but only if such interrogations yield interesting results pertinent to their work. Many of the same poets deemed that this clumping, as they saw it, did not. As might be expected, however, some bloggers (some of whom were poets, some critics) accused them of being overly sensitive: the 'young female poets' were being complimented, not being thrown into a now non-existent gender ghetto. Then one anonymous blogger—a male?—smirked: 'I've heard them referred to as the Ladies of the Lyric'. The condescension was as loud as the phrase is alliterative, and the sexist cat—to stretch the ghetto metaphor—was out of the bag and running down an alley.

This review is not the appropriate forum for interrogating lyricism, nor its alleged linkage to female poets. There are too many

books that need attention to waste space theorising. But some of these observations—and objections—were foremost in my mind as I surveyed a year's worth of poetry books sent to me for review. Having read the books on offer, and thought about them, I feel safe to dismiss the gender question as not particularly pertinent this year. And I would dismiss it immediately if it weren't for the presence of a very striking book in this catchment that happens to be yet another first (full length) book by an Australian female poet: *Ghostly Subjects* (Salt 2009) by Maria Takolander. It's also one of the darkest books on offer.

Takolander's poems are ruinous, diabolical, all the more so for their polish and precision. Here, as in Baudelaire, beauty is inextricably linked with evil: it's 'the dark italics', as Wallace Stevens phrased it, that compels the poetic imagination in these poems. Not surprisingly, it's often night-time in a Takolander poem: night is 'the dangerous time', the speaker says in 'Drunk', adding 'anything goes when the light goes.' In 'Pillowtalk', a devastating poem in which innuendo lingers like poison, 'There is no rest. / Nights are for unreason.' It opens with a stunningly precise if ominous image:

Inside the bedside drawer,

The knife blade empties

Like an unwatched mirror

At night.

The child-speaker's psychological 'bed was made' by whatever happened to her during those long, black hours. We're not told exactly what *did* happen—some words should never see the flood of day—though the father's rifle leaning behind two old coats does lend itself to a Freudian interpretation. The poem closes with the speaker's troubling confession that she hides bullets in her mouth—her invocation as a poet?—and grinds them down like candy. Almost all the poems in *Ghostly Subjects* are similarly menacing, but they're also

stylish and very smart. Don't be surprised if they take up residence in your body after reading them, like 'a tree full of vultures... / hulking like souls' ('Tableaux')—it's just that kind of book.

This year's catchment, in contrast to the previous year, contained few first-time authors but instead saw a number of fine books by Australia's senior poets. In Les Murray's *Taller When Prone* (Black Inc 2010) the poems, as seen in his last few books, are shorter than in his early work, and so is his line. His thinking seems tidier than before, the breathing more relaxed, but this new collection nevertheless showcases Murray's trademark sally and satire, along with the whimsicality and wisecracking wordplay that safeguards his rank as one of the best poets writing in English. The title of the collection comes from the poem 'The Conversations': 'A full moon always rises at sunset / and a person is taller when prone'. As depicted on the cover, these seemingly paradoxical lines are resolved in the image of a man's late-day shadow stretching into a paper-thin giant. But as often is the case with Murray it is also a pean to the imagination, the idea that a person is more than himself when asleep and dreaming: 'a person is taller at night', the speaker also asserts. Or it might also connote that a person reaches full stature only through the canonising processes afforded by death.

It struck me reading this book that it is haunted not only by Murray's old foe, the black dog of melancholy, but also by the spectre of insanity. Like Lear—'O! let me not be mad,' cries the king—the speakers in Murray's poem fear losing their mind. In fact King Lear is evoked in one of the most striking poems in the collection, 'King Lear Had Alzheimer's'—a poem that draws parallels between Cordelia's disinheritance and, to read intertextually, that of his own father's. The poem pushes a bleak, almost Hardy-esque idea of fate and what it does to a human:

The great feral novel
every human is in
is ruthless.

Alzheimer's appears again in the poem, 'Nursing Home'. 'Don't outlive yourself', it warns as the speaker recounts the losses and indignities of old age: 'the end of gender / never a happy ender'. Then, proving he still can dance on bits of paper, Murray conjures 'a lady' in a nursing home who has 'who has distilled to love / beyond the fall of memory':

She sits holding hands
with an ancient woman
who calls her *brother* and *George*
as bees summarise the garden.

'Summerise' is quintessential Murray. Sonorous, yes, but it's also a pun on the season—'summer-ise'—at the same time granting bees the busy work of joining the dots in this bittersweet scene.

Bees bring to mind Dorothy Porter and her seventh and final collection of poetry, *The Bee Hut* (Black Inc 2009). Written in the last five years of her life, it was completed just before her death in December 2008. 'The bee hut became a metaphor for these last years of [Porter's] life', Andrea Goldsmith writes in the Foreword: 'she marvelled at the bees, as she had always marvelled at life, but she was also aware of the danger amid the sweetness and beauty'. In the titular poem, the speaker tells of a swarm of bees that has taken over an old shed:

I love the bee hut
on my friend Robert's farm.

I love the invisible mystery
of its delicious industry.

But do I love the lesson
of my thralldom
to the sweet dark things
that can do me harm?

Even Porter's love cannot forego awareness of the forces that hurt and destroy, even if she would have them subsumed within a celebratory synthesis. Like the Romantics who feature in a number of Porter's poems—Keats, Byron—Porter is often at her finest when voicing contradictory surmises about the relationship between the imagination and the pressures of reality. As Keats did in 'When I Have Fears', Porter stared down her own death in her final poems. But unlike Keats, Porter stays wildly passionate—'exorbitantly flamboyant', even, like the art deco buildings she sees through her window at the Mercy Private Hospital in Melbourne—until the end. Her last poem, 'View from 417', was written two weeks before she died. It's impossible not to love the stubborn optimism of the collection's last words:

something in me
 despite everything
 can't believe my luck

In an earlier poem, 'Early Morning at the Mercy', the speaker, at 6 a.m. in the 'cool-blue cool / of early morning', lets her tea go cold and turns her mind to Gwen Harwood's *Bone Scan* poems. 'How on earth she could write / so eloquently in hospital', she wonders. *The Bee Hut*—poignant, powerful, spirited—has me asking the same question of Porter.

Speaking of luck, Catherine Bateson takes up the theme and spins it on her head in her poem 'The Day Complains' from *Marriage for Beginners* (John Leonard Press 2009). Feeling distinctly unlucky—the speaker in the humorous if unlikely guise of 'a day'—shows, as do many of Bateson's poems, that poetry and comedy are good bedfellows. It begins:

Why can't you take me as I am
 the way I have to take you—
 hungover and foul-mouthed

Bronwyn Lea

in your Cookie Monster pjs
last night's argument with the ex
banging away in your head

'The Day' continues its admonishment of the poet-addressee and concludes with a king hit Dorothy Porter, for one, would love:

So roll over, close your eyes
and sleep me off.
I'll go down to the nursing home
where they're grateful just to see me.

Some say Tom Shapcott's *Parts of Us* (UQP 2010), his fifteenth book of poems, is his best yet. An unflinching meditation on death, aging, and the unheralded losses that come with physical decline, it is at times painfully candid. In the sonnet 'Miranda at Two', just as the speaker's young granddaughter is 'tumbling toward speech'—learning that 'sound is the conduit for all those urgent things inside'—the speaker finds that his own capacity for language, or more accurately his capacity to sound language, is closing down around him:

my own tongue thickens and the muscles distort
language so that I hesitate to express myself and cannot
control articulation. Silence rather than speech
is my new mode.

The final couplet has Miranda laughing up at the silent poet and adopting as her own the poet's task of naming; she addresses him—though we're not told by what name—'with perfect symmetry'. Despite the isolating effect that the loss of speech has on a human life—which is of course the heart of this poem—it is difficult to discern self pity in these lines. Speech is to a poet what hearing is to a musician, and one imagines the loss should be more terrible than it is presented in this poem. But as a poet he is still able to

write—and this he does exceptionally well—but more than this he can listen.

Hearing is a sense Shapcott revels in. Everywhere his love of classical music is evident, particularly in the first section of the book where poems about Stravinsky, Vivaldi, Schoenberg and other musicians abound. But in a startlingly beautiful and enigmatic poem called ‘Nocturne’ it’s not humans who make music, but the ‘night’s full choir / of possibilities’.

Listen. The night is dark
 though it’s amazing how much light
 pretends otherwise—the stars
 could be hidden by clouds but this
 street and advertisement message
 hoodwinks us into believing
 our fate is otherwise.
 We are alone.

The poet says he knows ‘the ultimate of silence’ but still, he says, he ‘cannot believe silence / will truly happen to [him]’. *Parts of Us* tells us it won’t.

With Judith Beveridge’s unquestioned reputation as one of Australia’s most highly regarded poets, even knowing her work well it comes as a shock that *Storm and Honey* (Giramondo 2009) is only her fourth collection of poems. But those who know poetry know that quality and quantity are not necessarily apportioned in equal measure, as Elizabeth Bishop with her small handful of exquisite books illustrated so well. As Bishop sometimes did, Beveridge takes the ocean as her subject and makes it her element. *Storm and Honey* opens with a boy, or what was left with him, being pulled from the steaming gut of a shark, and it ends with a shark in ‘The Aquarium’ that the speaker cannot forget:

how its eyes keep staring, colder than time—how it never

stops swimming,
how it never closes its mouth.

The shark, the ultimate predator whose open mouth causes ‘our hearts [to] burn inside us’, becomes a symbol of unceasing hunger, the cause of so much grief. It’s this philosophical dimension of Beveridge’s poems that gives them resonance beyond her capacity to carve an intricate image or to craft into language the sounds of the nature and the rhythms of work. Though it must be said that she does the latter exceedingly well.

Like Porter, Beveridge also has a poem about a bee hive—hers is in bushland, ‘in an old toppled red gum’:

Sometimes, I’ll picture that old fallen
red gum exhaling bees from the shaft of its cracked
trunk. I’ll picture my hand deep in the gum’s
center, warm with the running honey; the swarm
suddenly around my head like a toxic bloom,
and the noise, the noise in my ears—still wuthering.

These remain among the most intoxicating lines I have read in a long while. As with Murray’s ‘summarising’ bees, Beveridge’s wuthering bees are evidence of her power as a poet to breathe life into forgotten words and show how their presence in our lexicon is earned, not as a luxury but as a necessity that we may live life fully.

Similarly intoxicating, Sarah Day’s *Grass Notes* (Brandl & Schlesinger 2009) is, to adapt a phrase from her poem ‘Fungi’, a ‘beacon of freakish beauty’. The rapturous poem ‘Apples’ opens with a couplet as majestic as any—‘these apples have weathered / the rise and fall of civilisations’—and traces their cultural trajectory along the Silk Route to ancient Persia, branching into varieties ‘illustrious as any dynasty’, passing through art and religion and science to end again as themselves: ‘These half dozen apples on a plate— / currency of Everyman’s pleasure.’

But not all her poems ride such heady top notes: Day is also a master of gravity. As seen in the quiet devastation of ‘Wombat’ in which the speaker attempts to haul the bulk of a dead wombat—his head ‘big as a person’s’, his ‘grey palms big and soft as / a child’s’—off the road.

In the end, the only way to move his bulk
was to hook an arm under each of historical
and haul him like a dead man
off the yellow gravel across the ditch
and leave him on the grass bank
as if in deep repose.

The speaker projects the wombat’s slow decay as his body collapses from within and ‘recedes into two dimensions’:

An arrangement of bones upon the drying grass,
summer warming up his patch of earth;
the forest ravens jawing higher up the hill,
a magpie carolling each lightening morning
and skylarks overhead
rising on each ascending note.

It’s this kind of movement that gives, along with her many other staggeringly good poems, evidence for the claim on the back of the book: Day is indeed one of the most considerable of modern Australian poets.

Ascending notes bring to mind Alan Gould’s twelfth book of poems: *Folk Tunes* (Salt 2009). The collection, filled with rhymes and rhythms that accord with its title, is filled with light: sometimes it glances off the beloved’s ‘head of silver curls’ (‘She Sings Him’); other times it glints from a juggler’s cleaver (‘The Juggler and My Mother’). Music abounds but it’s when the darkness of satire enters the minds of these otherwise romping and playful poems that things

turn operatic. As in the brilliant but biting ‘In Thought They Lived Like Russians’, which begins:

They stripped the furniture from their flat,
and put on gloves to pay the rent,
they scorned their freeholds in the fat
of middle class content.

The poem concludes, like a Russian novel, with a reconciling of opposing emotions, underscored by a dazzling enjambment that spins meaning on its head:

*They were the fate within the novel,
where joy and disenchantment join
at some not altogether sane
not altogether pain-
ful level.*

Likewise Ross Bolleter celebrates, mourns, and charms in equal measures in *Piano Hill* (Fremantle Press 2009). Bolleter—a musician who runs tours at a ruined piano sanctuary in WA—possesses the whimsical ear of a composer, paired (not pared) with a mind ruthless as a zen scalpel. ‘Suite for Ruined Piano’ is a knockout sequence that, as a whole, is an unapologetic ode to the piano. There’s a little bit of jazz in the dazzling ‘Everytime We Say Goodbye’—but it’s mostly about a Sudanese poet who, after sharing with the speaker a meal of ‘chili mutton rice and onion’, recites a poem in Arabic (translated by an English woman). But it’s what the Sudanese poet doesn’t say that gives the poem its crushing ending:

‘Memory’, says the poet, trying not to recall
waking with a gun in his face, soldiers
ripping the coverlets off his children—
who burrowed into their beds abandoning

their bodies like the remains of a feast
not worth touching.

Africa looms large in Marcelle Freiman's *White Lines (Vertical)* (Hybrid 2010). 'Mercy' is a powerful and moving portrait of a nurse in Johannesburg who each night 'comes from Soweto / to the white suburbs' to look after the speaker's father. The end is amazing:

When he died she walked
into our house with its candles,
her hips arthritic, bent with stroke, still massive:
round the family table, she held our hands, opened her Bible
closed her eyes, and sang,
her voice like a bell—
you could feel God at her shoulder,
waiting over the horizon.

While some poets stare into darkness for inspiration, Andrew Taylor looks into the light. *The Unhaunting* (Salt 2009) is Taylor's fifteenth book of poems—his first since confronting a severe illness in 2003—is brilliant. The collection takes as its title, and overarching theme, the idea that ghosts are real and live among us—not as spirits but as fellow humans, whose torment is our haunting. Death is their—and our—only release.

Taylor plays with the idea in 'The Carillon Clock', a gorgeous poem in which time haunts literally and figuratively. It describes an old pendulum clock that came from France, 'possibly in the time / of the Second Empire' but which 'neither trilled nor peeled / ...rather it breathed'. One night the speaker in his insomnia—'already awake'—hears the clock 'in barely audible words' offer up its final wisdom before settling into silence forever:

And to you—
my lonely listener—I say, try to live

Bronwyn Lea

beyond time, in that dimension
no one can measure. Then the voice fell silent
and for many years the clock stayed
hanging on the wall. Probably
its outline is still there on the plaster.

You can feel, in this collection, Taylor getting closer and closer to the things he wants to say in his vocation as a poet. In ‘The Impossible Poem’, the final poem that serves as a coda of sorts for the collection, the poet—or ‘lonely listener’—conjectures:

There are only two poems—
the one you write
and the one always undoing
your words

As you get older, he continues, the latter, that impossible poem, ‘stretches its fingers toward you’ and you can maybe, just, feel what that poem might actually be:

as Adam might have felt it
when God reached across the Sistine ceiling
toward his touch.

In this impossible poem, all things—a warm stone, a stranger’s smile—become a word or a phrase, a kind of living language we can learn to appreciate even when we can’t quite fully comprehend it.

In Gillian Telford’s *Moments of Perfect Poise* (Ginninderra Press 2008) the poem ‘Hunted’ is a standout. Taking up an activity dear to the heart of Dorothy Porter—driving fast, that is—the speaker is ‘alone / late at night’ with a pack of cars close behind and ‘coming closer’: and that’s when you know, the poem ends shifting gears

into metaphor, ‘how it is / for a gazelle / losing ground’. There’s a sense of urgency, too, in Susan Hawthorne’s *Earth’s Breath* (Spinifex 2009), which takes cyclones—local and mythical—as its subject. Perhaps one of the most haunting poems in the collection is ‘Storm Birds’, which opens with the image of storm birds at rest, looking like ‘a boat stranded in a tree / in flight a crucifix’. In part two of this poem:

Curlews are calling
presaging wind wail out of stillness.

Silent for weeks
their cry is an agony
the keening wind of dispossessed souls.

With *Birds in Mind* (Wombat 2009), Andrew Landsdown joins Judith Wright and Robert Adamson, among others, in dedicating a whole book largely to poetic birds. But it’s as much a book about the imagination and memory as it is about animals: ‘Now they’re gone I see them / again’, the speaker says in ‘Kangaroo Crossing’—‘kangaroos bounding / through the troubled water // and a heron flying up’. Birds abound—cockatoos, corellas, pelicans—in unexpected water in Mark O’Connor’s *Pilbara* (John Leonard Press 2009). Meanwhile Vivienne Glance goes underwater in her collection of luscious and imagistic poems, *The Softness of Water* (Sunline 2009), as best seen in the end of ‘Desire’:

A golden fish
brushes her leg
slips into the folds
of her floating dress.

By contrast Nathan Shepherdson, enigmatic poet that he is, sometimes seems more concerned with unseeing than seeing in his second book,

Apples with Human Skin (UQP 2009). Poems for Shepherdson are not images, nor are they answers, nor even questions: they are simply possibilities and alternatives. Like a zen koan, a Shepherdson poem can be pondered for months or it can be grasped in a flash—there's no telling when it will release its ore. The idea, the axiom, the paradox is paramount in his work, as asserted in section '5' of 'the easiest way to open the door is to turn the handle'—a long but straightforward title for a poem whose numerical sections run, quite naturally, backwards:

The idea of a wall
is defeated when the wall is built
tearing it down does not defeat the idea of tearing it down

Perhaps the most handsome books in the catchment are the signed and limited-edition chapbooks produced by Whitmore Press. Barry Hill's *Four Lines East* (Whitmore 2009)—rife with the 'incessant vigor of thought'—is a small book intent on interrogating big realities. Hill is not afraid of abstractions—'no self no soul no being no life'—but he always drags them down to earth, as in the gorgeous poem 'Noodles' that succeeds in shattering such concepts with its final image:

In a blue sweater, pants maroon
like Tibetan robes
the man stands with a golden net
hauling it up like noodles.

Also from Whitmore Press's chapbook series, *The Pallbearer's Garden* (2008) by A. Frances Johnson is, to use the words describing her Aunties garden, 'caught by wind / and singed by fire' ('Floracide'). Each poem is a 'repeatable beauty', even when the poet is in the midst of grief and horror. The heavyhearted poem 'Pallbearer' ends with unexpected levity: 'I lift, helft and hold—shore up / howling

lightness, lifting'. Then there's Brendan Ryan's *Tight Circle* (Whitmore 2008) which, though a compact chapbook, carries the weight of a full-length collection. The collection is named for a devastatingly good poem the centres on an uncle's burial: the undertakers ask the family 'made straggly with grief' and who 'need distance from the hole' to form a tight circle around the grave. They 'mutter / through the Lord's Prayer' as the farmer-undertakers 'lower [the] uncle into darkness'. The poem ends with a portrait of the speaker's father (the dead man's brother) that proves that life moves in concentric circles:

Burying has aged my father
 softened his handshake.
 He wakes in the night to exercise his new replacement knee.
 Each afternoon he leans against the front fence
 with his crutches talking to anybody who'll stop;
 he has to know what's going on,
 and when he'll be allowed to drive out to the farm
 to see the cows
 bunched up in the yard
 in a tight circle.

Sadly, there are two posthumous books—in addition to Dorothy Porter's discussed earlier—in this year's catchment: *la, la, la* (Five Islands 2009) by Tatjana Lukic and *Beautiful Waste* (Fremantle Press 2009) by David McComb of the post-punk band, The Triffids. Although she published four books of poems in her homeland, the former Yugoslavia, *la, la, la* is Lukic's first collection of poems in English since she migrated to Australia in 1992. The title poem appears to be a conversation, perhaps by telephone, in which she assures a worried querent that, no, she was 'not in the square when a grenade hit'; nor was she 'forced from her home' nor taken to 'the camp'. But she did see 'corpses floating along the river' and 'someone changed the locks and lay in [her] bed'. 'Yes', she admits,

she ‘remembers everything’ but, like survivors who want to survive must, she tucks the memories in a place in her mind where the trauma cannot hurt her:

the whole day
what did I sing?
about a cloud and a bird
a wish and a star,
la la la,
yes, nothing else

The speaker’s levity may not convince, but the psychological realism is chilling. Lukic writes of her war-torn homeland with such directness that even when she turns her attention to her new life in the sleepy Canberra suburbs, the scarring—darkened by the contrast—still shines through. Lukic died of cancer in 2009.

Many of the poems in McComb’s book (written over the course of his short life) hold a fascination with mirrors: doubling is everywhere. It is as if speaker can’t quite hold himself together in a single psychology. In ‘You’re My Double’ the speaker is scared to sleep by the mirror; in ‘You My Second Skin’ the speaker wants to ‘peel you off me’; and a quatrain called ‘Nature’s Warning’ has the poet driving through the mist of Northern England imagining his ‘belated and her substitute’ for him, lying in ‘a double bed somewhere, kissing’. If you like Leonard Cohen’s music you’ll enjoy *Beautiful Waste*. The two lyricists share an aesthetic that embraces the ceremonies of suffering, finding great beauty in trauma and addiction, full release only in brokenness. In ‘Ode to January 1989’, McComb writes that ‘everything sins, suffers, grows’.

Which brings to mind the closing lines of the first poem in Chris Mansell’s sixth book, *Letters* (Kardoorair 2009), which puts the reader by the Mediterranean Sea, drinking ‘thick, sweet coffee’ and thinking of those ‘who have gone before’. Then the poem would have you ‘visit Cavafy’s house / and think’:

why poetry is filled to the heart
with humanity and this grief
shall be long and strong
and you will weep
one more time and the world
will be laughably fresh
as it has been
this old world
all along.

Detail: Bird's Nest

Yang Xie

*Written in Chinese by Yang Xie, a poet born in the early 1970s,
now based in China. Translated into English by Ouyang Yu*

In the lift my young bird
could hardly suppress its jump

the absurdity was she in the same lift
was a half-old woman

hands inserted in my pants pockets, I
muttered a curse: she generated a devilish air from head to toe

my hands rolled into fists
I muttered: she had a devilish body that turned this way and that

when even my fists failed I had to
bend double putting my buttocks on the railings in the lift

as it ascended to Level 18 she twisted her body on the way out
her devilish eyes
took a careful glance at my fatal bird's nest that kept expanding

the lift kept ascending staring at the large-framed mirror facing me
I saw a man trying hard to conceal only to reveal more

this man was so dejected he pulled his hands out of his pockets
by then the irrepressible bird was a-wing

The Bee Whisperer

Duncan Richardson

The beekeeper
helmeted and gloved
senses the humours of the hive

knows each bee
better than the tourists
on the far side of glass

detached
by microphone and wire
his voice spills secrets

the endurance of tiny wings
the meaning of the pollen dance
and how it is to live
in a colossal
seething
sisterhood

where only the queen
lives longer than the memory
of flowers

holding the swarm
 within her amber mind
 keeping the mysteries of wax
 and the perfect hexagon.

The beekeeper walks in a honeyed dream
 and watches the visitors go
 clutching their souvenirs

 then laconically
 smokes himself free
 of the last clinging bee

before he begins
 another
 metamorphosis.

Putting Words in the Buddha's Mouth: An Analysis of Judith Beveridge's 'Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree'.¹

Mike Heald

1. From Victor to Vanquished

Siddhattha Gotama, the Indian sage who later became known as the Buddha, would be a recognised figure to most, along with some of what he stands for: compassion, and meditation, for example. However, the precise discoveries he made in the field of meditation, which led to his teaching career, and subsequent fame and often deification, are relatively little known. In some ways this is not remarkable. Most people would know who Einstein was, yet have only a vague idea of what he discovered, and little understanding of his theories. The situation is further complicated, of course, by the fact that no written record of what Siddhattha said or did was made until after his death. Add to that translation after translation, and the problem of describing accurately what the Buddha taught is apparent.

Recent work in the fields of cognitive and neuro-science is suggesting that the modes of consciousness attained in meditation practice are different in kind from other modes.² This lends substance to the view that a narrative, such as that of Siddhattha's life, which arises from such practice, may be quite distinct from narratives stemming

from other modes of knowing: the representation of the nature of his journey may vary considerably, depending on the specific way it is being apprehended. The proliferation of meditative techniques in the contemporary scene will also lead to differing versions, and the intersection of these techniques with cultural and artistic values and practices will in turn produce further variation. Past poetic versions of the Siddhattha story and of buddhistic experience have included, for example, Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879), a work which is heavily inflected by Protestantism, in which Siddhattha's own radical rejection of the Brahminical dogmas of his day is transposed so that he may be seen as representing Protestantism's struggles against Catholic orthodoxy. During the nineteen fifties, the 'Beat' poets voiced a version of buddhistic experience very much entangled with post-war American political and social protest.

In this essay, I am proposing that, while Beveridge's poems do show an engagement on some levels with both buddhistic values and practice, her version of Siddhattha's story is most strongly the product of a way of knowing usually termed imaginative. Beveridge describes 'Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree', in her collection *Wolf Notes*, as 'an imaginative depiction of the time Siddhattha spent wandering in the forests and towns before achieving enlightenment.'³ My argument is that this imaginative approach, strongly bound up with the senses and emotions, is actually one which is quite distinct in some ways from the meditative, and leads to a representation of Siddhattha's story which contrasts quite markedly, in some respects, with one emanating from the meditative tradition. I argue that the imagination produces a conception of transcendence very different from that found in the meditative tradition. It produces what I call a utopian vision, which has unrealisability built into it, as it were. This means that Siddhattha's pursuit, in 'Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree' of transcendence, so conceived, fundamentally alters the tenor of his journey, the tone of his story, and his import as a character.

The story, or myth, if you like, of Siddhattha, is that of a quest to find a way to emerge from the seemingly irremediable suffering of human



Limestone relief carving from the Great Stupa at Amaravati Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, India. Side 1: Throne under the Bodhi Tree (1st century BCE) (AN00030472) Side 2: Great Stupa at Amaravati (3rd century CE) (AN00030473) (Courtesy British Museum.)

life, to *transcend*, and Siddhattha is traditionally the triumphant figure who rediscovers⁴ a means of doing this, thus becoming known as a *buddha*, or fully awakened being. In Beveridge's depiction of Siddhattha's story, however, I am arguing that she has produced a radical variant, in that Siddhattha, rather than figuring as the triumphant embodiment of the reality of transcendence, becomes the embodiment of its elusiveness and implausibility. Thus her Siddhattha frequently voices exclamations of longing tinged with hopelessness: 'O, I don't know / if I'll ever wake, changed, transformed,' ('In the Forest', 96); '*O my Yasodhara!* Then do / I know how emptiness makes / a grove an unquiet place.' ('The Grove', 54). And he yearns, for example, to 'lift on viridescent wings' ('In the Forest', 96), for insight to 'faultlessly deliver some absolutes' ('Benares', 91), and for a reflexive, visceral belonging, 'a home I could call to with / the quick

of my mouth...’ (‘Monkey’, 62). This version, I am arguing, can be read as creating a radically different perspective on the limits and possibilities of human consciousness from that evident in versions based in the meditative tradition. It also, in certain respects, recasts Siddhattha in Beveridge’s own image as lyric poet.

My method, then, is comparative, but what I am using as the basis for comparison is not one specific text. I will refer mainly to ‘traditional’ versions of Siddhattha’s story, or versions arising from ‘the meditative tradition’. My grounds for using a general reference like this are that the two major departures Beveridge makes which I focus upon, related to the form of transcendence, and the successful / non-successful tenor of Siddhattha’s journey, are both departures from general features which traditional versions, despite their many more subtle differences, have in common. My generalisation, then, has this specific functionality, and does not incur any compromise of the various traditions’ individual differences on other levels. In general, my textual sources are those which draw upon the Pali Canon, or *Tipitaka*, the large collection of documents relating to the Buddha’s life and teaching written in the Pali language, which are the oldest records of that time. Nanamoli’s *The Life of the Buddha*⁵ has been my main textual reference.

I would say, also, that I am not claiming that Beveridge is not aware of, or does not understand, the difference I am seeking to describe here between imaginative and meditative ways of knowing. My claim is a literary-critical one: that the text she has produced displays this difference. Furthermore, I do not approach this analysis with the attitude that the kind of buddhistic tradition I am using for my perspective leads to a dismissal or devaluing of other bodies or modes of experience. Rather, it is *difference* I am concerned to describe and preserve. This certainly does not mean that the particular contribution and quality of the work examined is not valuable in its way. I am arguing only that its contributions are *different* from other alternatives. In this particular case, it is my view that Beveridge’s poems contain numerous excellent images of the natural world, moments of subtle

psychological understanding, and comprise overall a very interesting sequence. I do note that Ann Vickery made the comment about the poems I am examining here that ‘their Romantic presumptuousness left me rather cold.’⁶ I also examine the role of Beveridge’s aesthetic lineage and orientation, but my aim is analytical and comparative, rather than that of forming an aesthetic judgement (though the latter is of course also a legitimate procedure).

2. Two Kinds of Transcendence, and Siddhattha’s Changed Journey

The kind of transcendence we have in Beveridge’s poems I will call utopian: the world is appraised with the senses, emotions, and intellect, and then a state is imagined in which all of the imperfections which these faculties perceive have been rectified. In this way, an end to unsatisfactoriness and suffering is imagined. It is a state, then, in which there is the peace which the emotional state presently lacks, the absolute meaning and coherence which the intellect presently cannot find, the sustained comfort and pleasure which the senses lack, the all-pervasive goodness which the moral faculty aspires to, and the perfectly efficacious art which the aesthetic faculty is in search of. Transcendence in the meditative practice tradition, on the other hand, while similarly a state without suffering (if one takes ‘transcendence’ to refer to the final state of complete liberation, known as *nibbana*: transcendence may also refer, however, to an ongoing process through practice) is achieved by an examination of how the perception of and reaction to imperfections, or unsatisfactoriness, arises and causes suffering in the first place. This examination is undertaken via the practice, which develops the specialised form of meditative concentration known as *samadhi*, whereby the mind is trained to remain focused on its habitual processes, which feed into our responses, in a sustained and non-judgemental, or non-reactive way.⁷ Such concentration is then held, by the practice tradition, to progressively facilitate interventions in habitual reaction, and

also to reveal, somewhat like the steady focus of a microscope, the impermanence, or substancelessness, of all physical and mental phenomena. This latter realisation of impermanence, known as *anicca*, in turn leads to a realisation of selflessness, known as *anatta*, which in its turn leads to the gradual, or sometimes sudden, re-perception of suffering, the experience being that there are no solid entities to be desired or averted from, nor any solid self to desire or be averted from them, which is the usual process generating suffering.⁸

In short, then, meditative transcendence is not defined, even inversely, via conventional perceptions or faculties, but by the different faculty of *samadhi*. Nor is it postulated in the abstract and desired from a distance, but rather worked progressively towards through practice and the personal physico-mental experience which that yields. These are two very different forms of transcendence, and are clearly going to have a significant bearing on how Siddhattha's story is represented.

There have been many formulations, of course, of exactly what the imagination is and is capable of. Here, as with the neurophysiology of meditative states, science is making some efforts to redress the lack which Francis Bacon perceived when he said that he found 'not any science that doth properly or fitly pertain to the imagination.'⁹ It would appear that Beveridge has accepted, at least to some degree, William Hazlitt's high estimation that it can enable one to 'foreknow and to record the feelings of all men at all times and places'.¹⁰ The issues involved in defining imaginative mental activity, as against meditative, are of course highly complex. Perhaps, however, it is possible to succinctly indicate in what way differences might arise between an approach like that of Beveridge's imaginative one, and that of the meditative tradition.

In an interview in the *Encounter* series on Radio National, Beveridge says that poetry 'brings us back to the fundamentals of consciousness. That is, back to our creativity. It seems to me that our human nature is such that creativity lies at the heart of what we are about. We are programmed for creative self-discovery through a

dialogue with our environment.¹¹ Beveridge then identifies imagery as a tool enabling this self-discovery, and goes on to speak of how she feels that metaphor allows her, in a poem, ‘to make the active perceiving central rather than have the perceiver as the motivating influence, which is a position or a central position, to a lot of Buddhist notions where the eye slips away and what is foregrounded is the Web of Connections, where the qualities of one thing are dependent on those of another.’¹² Having thus established a connection between her technical aesthetic practice and Buddhist ‘notions’, Beveridge then goes on to describe, using terminology associated with Buddhism, her hope to ‘attain a particular type of awareness, penetrating, focused, yet also permeable and open.’¹³ And a little further on she states that writing ‘for me is a relinquishing to the unknown, to the unpredictable, to uncertainty, and paradoxically, *concentration or absorption* does seem to appear at the moment that deliberate effort vanishes. There’s great joy in *falling into* the object of one’s attention, in vanishing into awareness itself [my italics].’¹⁴ Beveridge then reads the poem ‘The Kite’, from ‘Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree’, in part to illustrate her point.

In order, then, to give a brief indication of how the meditative tradition’s approach may diverge from Beveridge’s articulation of the processes of self-discovery and awareness, and to raise the possibility that she may not, in fact, be talking about the same kind of experience which that tradition is referring to, I will briefly point out some specific distinctions which the tradition makes on the subject of awareness. Firstly, the phenomenon of ‘absorption’ has a specific place in the meditative tradition: a distinction is drawn between meditative states which are the result of feats of absorption, or ‘vanishing into’ the object, usually known as *samatha* (calm abiding) and those in which the mind retains a kind of lucid perspective, realising the conditioned nature of the meditative state itself, usually known as *vipassana* (insight). Where Beveridge is endorsing the former, for the tradition, one of Siddhattha’s most distinctive meditative achievements, along with the rejection of extreme asceticism, is the

realisation that absorptive states alone *do not* lead to the desired goal of enlightenment. For the tradition, Siddhattha's unique contribution was the development of a meditative state which is not merely a form of intense awareness, (*sati*), or absorption, but rather is characterised by the maintenance of what is called 'constant thorough awareness of impermanence' or *sampajanna*, along with a firm moral basis. This latter kind of meditation is traditionally seen as the breakthrough which Siddhattha made, which allowed him to finally get to the roots of suffering. This *vipassana*, or 'insight' meditation, is seen as providing the 'wisdom' component (*panna*), missing from merely absorptive states, which allows the final liberation from suffering. Thus, buddhistic awareness is specifically *not* a 'falling into the object', as Beveridge describes, but rather the observation of the object with a very specific and firmly self-aware orientation.¹⁵

The poem which Beveridge reads in the interview, 'The Kite' (82–3), is presented as an instance of buddhistic awareness:

The Kite

Today I watched a boy fly his kite.
It didn't crackle in the wind—but
gave out a barely perceptible hum.

At a certain height, I'd swear I heard
it sing. He could make it climb in
any wind, could crank those angles up,

make it veer with the precision of
an insect targeting a sting; then he'd
let it royal in rapturous finesse, a tiny

bird in mid-air courtship. When
lightning cracked across the cliff—
(like quick pale flicks of yak hair

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fly whisks)—he stayed steady. For
so long he kept his arms up, as if
he knew he'd hoist that kite enough.

I asked if it was made of special silk,
if he used some particular string—
and what he heard while holding it.

He looked at me from a distance,
then asked about my alms bowl,
my robes, and about that for which

a monk lives. It was then I saw
I could tell him nothing in the cohort
wind, that didn't sound illusory.

The boy's absorption, or concentration—his seeming oneness with his activity—is presented as a kind of exemplar of buddhistic consciousness. Yet it could only be taken to illustrate, if rather approximately, the absorptive state I have described above. The comparison is often given, to illustrate this point, that a murderer may be utterly concentrated and absorbed in his task, yet be in a state of the worst ignorance and moral depravity, and quite oblivious to connectedness of any sort. It is also significant that 'The Kite' ends with Siddhattha daunted, and as regarding his own transcendental project, 'that for which / a monk lives...', which presumably includes his knowledge of awareness, as insubstantial, to the point where, if he tried to voice it, it would 'sound illusory'. Beveridge's own conception of sensory, physical absorption, here, as the way to transcendence, is seen as proving itself more real and compelling than a monk's implicitly less engaged activities.

In raising these two comparisons, then, between what Beveridge on the one hand, and the tradition on the other, present as buddhistic consciousness, whilst I have not provided a great deal of detail, I have aimed to at least give a sense of the specificity of the experience which

the tradition is dealing with. In doing so, it may perhaps become more apparent how certain distinctions become extremely important. I hope also to show, of course, that Beveridge's own conception of imagination and creativity, and how this is linked to buddhistic consciousness, does result in a particular narrative dynamic for Siddhattha's journey. My main point here is that Beveridge's adherence to absorptive states, and her reliance on often sensory-based imaginative procedures, means that although Siddhattha makes some specific kinds of forays towards his reconceived goal, overall we see him in stasis, rather than progressing.

In terms of the actual content of the narrative, first of all, many key events, found in traditional versions of Siddhattha's journey, such as his change of clothing, cutting of his hair, visiting other teachers, rejecting asceticism, his first normal meal, and confrontation with the disillusioned followers, do not appear in Beveridge's sequence. This creates the impression, I would argue, of a demurring from participation in a celebratory spirit of *progress* of the story, and, by implication, of a withholding of acknowledging the credibility of such progress. These omissions also tend to mean that the sense of momentum, of Siddhattha passing symbolic markers on his way towards full enlightenment, is not present. Based on a reading of these poems, the title, 'Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree', I would argue, could well be taken to indicate not a transitional zone at all, but rather to define the state in which the poems regard us as always *inescapably* existing. This has been recognised, I think, in Jennifer Strauss's comment that Beveridge has 'a fine ear for the internal contradictions of human desire—for the way we are pulled between palace and bodhi tree, flesh and spirit, earth and sky',¹⁶ invoking those dualisms, (flesh / spirit, earth / sky) and the predicament they incur, characteristic of utopianism.

Siddhattha's stasis also results from his portrayal by Beveridge as, if not quite an 'ordinary guy', then very much closer to that than the meditative tradition would suggest. Beveridge's Siddhattha is clearly distinguished, in the sequence, by a very refined sensibility. Yet he

is also wracked by doubt, nostalgia, longing, and guilt. Although we cannot, of course, verify exactly what Siddhattha did experience at that time, nevertheless a contrast arises when one considers the meditative tradition's view. In that tradition, Siddhattha at that stage was a *Bodhisatta*, a person who is able to take the final step to full enlightenment, and whose mind is therefore at a highly extraordinary level of development.¹⁷ Again, one cannot make the pronouncement that Siddhattha would not have experienced the emotions attributed to him by Beveridge at all. However, my point is that, to the meditative tradition, Siddhattha's journey would both be characterised by the specialised activity of meditation, subsequent *unusual* responses to experience, and also by identifiable progressive stages of development as his practice changed and proceeded. He is said, for example, as a small child to have sat down under a tree and spontaneously attained the meditative state known as the first *jhana*, a state of deep absorptive concentration. And according to the tradition, soon after he left his home, and therefore early in the period Beveridge's poems deal with, he visited several renowned teachers, quickly attained the most advanced meditative states which they taught, and yet struck out on his own again, convinced that their techniques did not remove suffering at its very roots in the psyche. The first teacher visited was Alara Kalama, and his meditative attainment is described as the jhanic realm of 'Nothingness'.¹⁸ The second was Udaka Ramaputta, whose attainment is described as the state of 'neither perception nor non-perception'.¹⁹ If one considers, then, as the traditional story relates, that Siddhattha, well before taking his ultimate seat under the bodhi tree where *nibbana* is said to have been achieved, easily mastered such rarefied meditative states as those of these teachers, one gets an idea of how unusual his mental processes are traditionally regarded as being during the transitional period between palace and bodhi tree. One may also see how, for the tradition, the development of meditative technique and the specialised experience it yields really *is* the story, and that when this experience is by and large excluded, the story looks very different indeed.

In Beveridge's version, then, we tend not to get a sense of someone located in an unusual psychological terrain, and of having specific means to gain purchase on and traverse such terrain, and therefore of being poised on the brink of an extraordinary discovery. One effect of this, I would argue, is to make the kind of radical change implied by transcendence seem highly improbable. Siddhattha seems *becalmed*, rather than developing any specialised kind of calm that may allow transcendent insight—a kind of renunciate without a cause, as suggested by his comment in the poem 'At Urevala (1)' (80): 'I keep to myself and idle away / the time...' This immobility is a symptom of utopian transcendence, in that one is caused to pursue intrinsically unreachable opposites to present reality. To the meditative tradition, on the other hand, Siddhattha's task during the time period Beveridge deals with is seen as highly specialised, in keeping with his special status and capacities, and also extremely arduous, rather than allowing for idleness. He is regarded as fine-tuning his meditation, already of a virtually unparalleled efficacy, by realising that the techniques he had used thus far had left the very roots of suffering in place, dormant, and therefore persevering to discover and extract those.

In Beveridge's version, Siddhattha is not well underway like this, but rather is placed far behind the meditative tradition's starting line, a situation that is further exacerbated when he seems to retain a fascination with self-imposed suffering, for example in the poem 'At Urevala (2)', (80):

Yama, disfigure me. Blemish me with thorns.
 Give me a cough as sharp as a leper's clapper.
 I will eat only dust swept up...

Beveridge here, and in a number of other poems, articulates the extreme ascetic drive, which does play a role in Siddhattha's efforts in traditional versions, but only a *preliminary* one, as a dead end. Yet the momentous turn *away* from extreme asceticism, and consequent

opening of a clear way in which to progress, so vital to the meditative tradition, does not receive conspicuous mention. The significance of such a modification of emphasis in the story is very difficult to overestimate, since the rejection of self-imposed suffering in favour of a more moderate ‘middle way’ is traditionally one of Siddhattha’s most spectacular and definitive technical discoveries. The key decision to take a meal, rather than persist with severe abstinence from food, is narrated in the traditional versions, followed by the negative reaction of Siddhattha’s followers, which provides a crucial turning point in his journey: ‘As soon as I ate the solid food, the boiled rice and bread, the five bikkhus were disgusted and left me, thinking: ‘The monk Gotama has become self-indulgent, he has given up the struggle and reverted to luxury.’²⁰ These episodes are excluded from Beveridge’s narrative. It would seem that just as Beveridge’s Siddhattha appears closer to ordinary in terms of his emotions, as I described earlier, so here he remains conditioned by conventional psychological dynamics—in this case the dialectic of the drive towards pleasure, yet fascination with its opposite, suffering—rather than the *unconventional* psychological dynamics of meditation practice, where the experience of suffering is progressively modified.

Finally, of course, the truncating of the story to omit the triumphant ending, the attainment of final liberation, or *nibbana*, and presentation of what remains as a complete literary structure, has significant consequences for narrative impetus. The climax of Siddhattha’s struggle for transcendence is traditionally encapsulated in the ‘house-builder’ verses:

House builder, you have now been seen;
You shall not build the house again.
Your rafters have been broken down;
Your ridge pole is demolished too.²¹

Stopping the narrative before transcendence is a natural gesture of humility on Beveridge’s part: an acknowledgement of the inaccessibility

to her, and ineffability generally, of ‘enlightened’ experience. Yet at the same time, a strongly operative effect, I would argue, is that of casting great doubt on the possibility of transcendence, by placing it in permanent parenthesis, or even sealing its fate as untrue ‘myth’. Certainly, Siddhattha’s quest is de-coupled from the engine traditionally drawing it onwards, and the ending Beveridge has chosen tends to strand Siddhattha permanently in his sufferings and uncertainty, as if that situation were these poems’ conclusion about the human condition.

One of the changed directions in which Beveridge takes Siddhattha in his pursuit of transcendence is that taken by the lyric poet, so that he voices his progress, in the poem ‘Path’ (100), in terms of being increasingly able to ‘give each feeling the subtlest form’, the implication being that it is by the increasingly subtle formulation of given feelings that the human spirit is developed, in contrast to the practice tradition’s analysis of how givenness itself occurs. An image from ‘New Season’ (57) illustrates these values, as Siddhattha, wracked by memories of his wife, remarks ‘I can almost hear you wiping away your tears / with your sari hem’. This lyrical absorption in sense-experience intensifies to the pitch of shamanism at times, launching Siddhattha on another alternative route out of the ordinary, yielding avatars in the form of horses, for example in ‘Horse’ (63), and here in ‘Dark Night’ (68):

...Even its eye

was loosening mine with sand.
And when I touched its landscape
of wild waters, I felt

hooves of a thundering godhead
and lightning whips of warlords
ravage my deltas...

This *merging into* the animal world contrasts with the increasing *distinctness* within (though not *from*) the world of nature which buddhistic practice is held to develop, in its cultivation of uniquely human qualities of consciousness. Beveridge says in the *Encounter* interview that ‘the predominant theme that emerges’ in ‘Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree’ is ‘the importance of finding a connection with the natural world’.²² She goes on to say that ‘that’s certainly one of those fundamental tenets of Buddhism, a vision that our place is within an overarching system of relationships, that life is simply a flowing interactive exchange, between a myriad number of life forms.’²³ Clearly, these are complex ontological and epistemological issues, which Beveridge’s term ‘simply’ rather understates. My point here is that the kind of connection humans have with the natural world, and how this connection may be perceived, are highly specific matters in meditative practice, and that this specificity is not accommodated by either the kind of general formulation of interconnectedness which Beveridge gives in the interview, or by the responses to the natural world which the poems articulate. A reference which could serve to indicate how far the meditative tradition is, in its aims and experience, from a kind of absorption into nature, is this catalogue of what Siddhattha aspires to attain, as he sets out from home on the meditator’s path:

Then I thought: ‘Why, being my self subject to birth, ageing, ailment, death, sorrow and defilement, do I seek after what is also subject to these things? Suppose, being myself subject to these things, seeing danger in them, I sought after the unborn, unageing, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefiled supreme surcease of bondage, Nibbana?’²⁴

Siddhattha is here resolving to *disassociate* himself from what could be considered the natural world’s natural tendencies and characteristics. An image emblematic of Beveridge’s contrasting move here is one where Siddhattha is literally enveloped by animals, when

he is covered in bees: ‘A long robe of bees flows about me’ (‘Tree’, 67), which can also be read, if one were to assume that the bees are seen as more or less yellow, as an ironic subversion of the distinctness symbolised by the yellow robes of buddhistic practitioners.

The association of lyric poetry with shamanism is of course well-established. The view that Beveridge’s portrayal of Siddhattha is in some respects a poetic self-portrait, and that in this sequence she is dramatising specific preoccupations that have long been central to her work, is lent substance by a look back at her earlier poem ‘Girl Swinging’, for example, from her first book *The Domesticity of Giraffes*.²⁵ This poem contains many of the key characteristics of the transcendental drive in the form in which we see it exhibited by her Siddhattha. The terms in which this earlier poem envisages transcendence, and indeed its very movement, is strikingly similar, for example, to ‘Quarry’ (52) from ‘Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree’: in the former we have ‘Quietly, I wait, / listening to myself’, and in the latter ‘For a long time I looked into myself’; then in ‘Girl Swinging’, ‘when, suddenly innocent of misery— / that feeling comes / of being lifted into the air’, and in ‘Quarry’, ‘Then I let go of all thought— / and I felt like a bird / floating in the clear, excavated air’.

The transcendent process is figured and developed, in ‘Girl Swinging’, in the recognisably symbolist terms of music, as being a kind of absorption into pure aesthetic form— ‘I long to be a symphony / levitated by grace-notes’— a figure also prominent in ‘Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree’, as in this example from ‘The Krait’ (58): ‘...I thought the world should / be in harmony with my every act.’, or this, from ‘Grass’ (86–7):

...wishing
I too could find precision among

unweighable songs; here where
the river curves, here where the moon

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dies, here where the wind eddies—
and here where the men poise—
then scythe their absolute measures.

Martin Duwell has, persuasively I think, spoken of the ‘Rilkean strand’ in Beveridge’s poetic sensibility.²⁶ In their aspirations towards what Charles Chadwick defines, in recognizably utopian terms, as ‘a perfect supernatural world’²⁷ both the symbolists’ lives and poetic careers are often represented as object lessons in the misguidedness of pursuing transcendence. Chadwick’s comment that Valery ‘returned to reality and...recognized that the mind cannot remain turned in on itself’²⁸ is characteristic, as is, to bring matters closer to Beveridge’s poetic home, Adrian Caesar’s on Kenneth Slessor: ‘Slessor’s great articulation of failure in ‘Five Bells’ might then become for us a means to understanding the necessity to forge a poetry and poetics that do not depend upon transcendentalism...’²⁹ And with regard to Rilke himself, Robert Hass echoes these judgments when he says of the later poems that it ‘is wonderful to be able to watch *the world* come flooding in on this poet, who had *held it off* for so long. [my italics]’³⁰ It is a plausible reading then, that in the poems in ‘Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree’, Beveridge’s poetic lineage has contributed to transforming Siddhattha from an embodiment of the reality of transcendence, to the avatar of a ‘frustration’ she may feel at its inaccessibility, a frustration Martin Duwell remarks upon thus, in the context of transcendence, symbolism and musicality:

Carefully placed at the poem’s [‘The Herons’] centre is a single bird which can serve to introduce what might be called the Rilkean strand in Beveridge’s poetry. This bird [in ‘The Herons’] stands as though it ‘saw and heard the single / far off, crystal note’. It recalls the language of a poem from earlier in *The Domesticity of Giraffes*, ‘For Rilke’, a poem which expresses the drive towards transcendent unity in the poems. It celebrates the poet’s ability to

transform the multiple noises of contingent reality into a ‘voice pure as a tuning fork / independent / of what it’s struck off.’ The poem includes its author in the category of those unable to do this, those who are overwhelmed by the noisy world’s ‘blaring decibels’ and whose voices reflect this by their ‘severe grating, unbearable / dissonance’. This inclusion looks, originally, like a kind of modesty, a way of acknowledging the vastly greater poet, but it may be a little more genuine than this— an expression of high goals and creative frustration.³¹

The preeminence of imagination rather than *samadhi* as a way of knowing results in a changed tone for Siddhattha’s journey. Rather than the tone being one of positive attentiveness to palpable modulations of consciousness which provide the basis for an expectation of further change, as in the meditative tradition, the tone becomes that of a yearning fraught with intimations of its own futility. The images of the transcendent state which Siddhattha produces are essentially intensifications of dissatisfaction, being inversions of present conditions, and as such are imbued with a doleful sense of impossibility, proclaim a tacit affiliation with the non-transcendent as the only real site of vital existence, or seem to betray, in their unconvincing poetic realisation, Beveridge’s underlying lack of conviction with regard to the positive and achievable transcendental project as we find it in the meditative tradition.

The poem ‘Monkey’ (62), illustrates this, as well as how the imagination’s fusing of senses, emotions and intellect, which contrasts with *samadhi*’s aim to disentangle components of mentality, constructs its utopia. Siddhattha listens to the ‘whimpers’ of an injured, isolated grivet, which suggest that its relatives in the mountains may be waiting to welcome it back. This in turn leads to the envisaging of a kind of organic, perfect belonging, which then becomes a component of the utopian transcendence Siddhattha yearns for:

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And I wish I too had a home I could call to with
the quick of my mouth, the madness of my tongue.

Siddhattha's continuing affiliation to the sensual as the real alternative to suffering is epitomized in 'A Vow' (70), where the transcendent state is imagined as one in which even the most apparently deprived forms of life will receive maximal physical comfort, so that

bindweed, burdock, beggar's ticks
and burr will know the perfume of asphodel
and the softness of lamb's tongue...

And sensualism gets, rather spectacularly if implicitly, the very last words of the whole sequence, when Siddhattha resolves 'to sit until I no longer want / to burgeon in paradise.' ('Ficus Religiosa', 102): the word 'burgeon' connotes all manner of sensual, vegetable expansions of pleasure, so that the word 'paradise', when it occurs in this sentence, rings with its full range of hedonistic resonances, which overwhelms the renunciatory tone. The body-language of the language, as it were, contradicts its explicit meaning. Thus we leave Siddhattha under the bodhi tree not, as in the meditative tradition, about to conclusively overcome dependence on sense pleasures for happiness, but rather expressing a tacit declaration of their irresistibility. It is interesting to note, in this context, that Beveridge has herself been aware of her attraction towards the senses, and how this may possibly draw her away from buddhistic consciousness. In an interview with Greg McLaren in *Southerly*, Beveridge says that if

you're a serious practitioner [of Buddhism] then everything you do should be practice. Everything. But in reality I find this very difficult, and sometimes I feel that my writing may be a kind of anti-practice in that my work is very sense-oriented, and so much of a Buddhist practice seems to be about getting away from the senses.

I often feel I revel in the senses because they fuel my writing. I simply love the physical world and I'm extremely attached to my visual sense. In that regard I feel a real conflict, and I worry that I may be falling deeper and deeper into a sense of dependence.³²

Even though highly important objections may be raised, from a traditional point of view, to the dualism implicit in Beveridge's description of Buddhist practice as involving 'getting away from the senses'—since, for example, many forms of meditation involve not a departure from, but a re-focusing *on*, sense experience, such as the touch of the breath and other bodily sensations—her disquiet over the way she reacts to and values the senses, in relation to Buddhism, is interesting in the context of my observations here.

The poem 'Doubt' (76) exhibits the utopian desire for intellectual, as against sensual, comfort: for the intellect's dilemma of contingency to be resolved, when Siddhattha says that he will sit 'until the edges that implicate my doubt— / faultlessly deliver some absolutes.' In 'Benares' (91), the intellect similarly projects a transcendence conceived on its own terms, as Siddhattha searches for what he calls 'my implicate law'. In this poem, the repetition and rhyme create the sense of an endlessly recurring longing, perennially part of the human spirit, for which the musicality of its expression is the real consolation. In 'Ganges' (97), this music seems almost to turn Siddhattha's story into something reminiscent of Bollywood, when he is given the line 'But you know me, I can't agree. Yet, vis a vis / ...' The push towards transcendence seems to wilt, here, into self-deprecating humour.³³

When Siddhattha's uncertainty is given direct expression, in 'In the Forest' (95–6): 'O, I don't know / if I'll ever wake, changed, transformed, / able to lift on viridescent wings', the senses and spatiality are the dominant conditioners of the image of transcendence as one of *ascendance*, accompanied by the intensely visual 'viridescence'. The result is a perhaps over-familiar image, recalling many ugly-grub-to-beautiful-butterfly motifs. We also seem to be in the presence of a wistful sentimentality, rather than moral confidence, when Siddhattha

vows to sit until ‘the nests of all birds / are given gifts by the cuckoo.’ (‘Ficus Religiosa’, 101)

Finally, later in ‘In the Forest’, Siddhattha expresses his experience of an intimation of transcendence, when he says that he feels his ‘mind enter / a vast space in which everything / connects.’ This is, again, an image of the intellect’s dream of perfect coherence. And yet its expression is conspicuously abstract and formulaic, perfunctory here almost to the point of caricature. The poetry appears merely to be going through the motions. This seems echoed in the lines’ aural quality: the first two enjambed beats of the line beginning with the word ‘connects’, seem to enact a twofold mechanical connecting: *ker-clunk*. The effect is that a strange *disconnect* is created, between the notion of ‘everything’ somehow coming awesomely together in a cosmic unity, and this incongruously banal structural event.

Concluding Remarks

My argument has been, then, that in the representation of Siddhattha’s journey found in ‘Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree’, certain philosophical, artistic, and personal orientations have played a part in its construction such that the reader’s experience may well be quite at odds with that which would be gained from traditional versions. The reader, that is, may feel that they have encountered, in Beveridge’s Siddhattha thus recast, a figure who bodies forth the ineluctable suffering of the human condition, and thus the perennial elusiveness and implausibility of transcendence, rather than one who embodies the promise and indeed successful realisation of transcendence. Since Siddhattha is a figure who focuses these fundamental issues of the limits and possibilities of human consciousness, and the nature of suffering, such a transposition of his journey and import may be viewed as very significant.

It is perhaps prudent to say, however, in these times of literalism, and its off-spring, religious fanaticism, that an idea of ‘heresy’ has nothing to do with the analysis I have been undertaking here. This

paper has not drawn upon a 'Buddhist' perspective, for example, in the religious sense: it has drawn only upon the meditative tradition, which eschews dogma. A writer should be at liberty to adopt any persona, but the critic is also at liberty to comment on the result.

I have not proposed, either, that the two cultures, the literary-imaginative, and the buddhistic-meditative, are necessarily opposed or in conflict, or that the imagination and *samadhi* are thus. My claim has been that they are, in important respects, different. The particular insights into human nature which Beveridge's sequence may contain, therefore, will be valid on their own, imaginative terms, and a valuable part of the spectrum of understanding, of which meditative insight forms another part.

Notes

- 1 This article is based on a paper given at the conference 'Refashioning Myth. Poetic Transformations and Metamorphoses', held at the University of Melbourne, October 2–3, 2008.
- 2 The literature on this subject is now extensive. Two perhaps better known examples with regard to the imagination and *samadhi* respectively are *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, New York: Basic Books, 1999, by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, and *Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998, by J. H. Austin.
- 3 Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo Publishing, 2003, p. 48.
- 4 The tradition lists twenty-seven other Buddhas, of which Siddhattha is the most recent.
- 5 Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society Pariyatti Editions, 1992.
- 6 'Discordant Tones: Judith Beveridge's *Wolf Notes*,' *Australian Women's Book Review* 16.1 (2004), p. 3.
- 7 Descriptions of the meditative process are found throughout the many texts of the Pali Canon. One *sutta*, or discourse, where the subject is substantially treated is the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta*.
- 8 A traditional textual reference for this process would be the descriptions of Conditioned Arising, one of which is to be found in Nanamoli (1992) p. 25.
- 9 Vickers, B. (ed.) 2008, *Francis Bacon. The Major Works*. London: Oxford University Press, p. 218.

- 10 'On Dryden and Pope' in *Lectures on the English Poets*, London: J Templeman, 1841, p. 138.
- 11 '3 Writers: 3 Beliefs', *Encounter*, ABC Radio National, 19th February 2006.
- 12 *Encounter*, 2006.
- 13 *Encounter*, 2006.
- 14 *Encounter*, 2006.
- 15 The *Mahasatipatthana Sutta* is the main primary reference for this distinction, but it is dealt with in numerous other parts of the *Tipitaka*. One commentarial reference among very many is *The Importance of Vedana and Sampajanna*, Igatpuri, Vipassana Research Institute, 2003.
- 16 'A Weighted World', *Australian Book Review*, March 2004, p. 38.
- 17 Paul Williams summarises this situation by noting that Siddhattha, at his birth, was 'already a supremely advanced Buddha-to-be (Sanskrit: *bodhisattva*; Pali: *bodhisatta*). The life story of the Buddha shows a quite superior (albeit still human) being...'. See Paul Williams with Anthony Tribe: *Buddhist Thought. A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*. London: Routledge, 2000, p. 27.
- 18 See Nanamoli (1992), p. 13.
- 19 See Nanamoli (1992), p. 14.
- 20 See Nanamoli (1992), p. 21.
- 21 Nanamoli (1992), p. 29.
- 22 *Encounter*, 2006.
- 23 *Encounter*, 2006.
- 24 See Nanamoli (1992) p. 10.
- 25 Wentworth Falls, N.S.W, Black Lightning Press, 1987.
- 26 'Intricate Knots and Vast Cosmologies: The Poetry of Judith Beveridge' in *Australian Literary Studies*, May 2000, pp. 243–53, p. 244.
- 27 *Symbolism*, London: Methuen, 1971, p. 6.
- 28 Chadwick (1971), p. 47.
- 29 *Kenneth Slessor* (Oxford Australian Writers) Melbourne: OUP, 1995, p. 112.
- 30 Stephen Mitchell (ed) *Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, New York: Random House, 1982, p. xl.
- 31 Duwell (2000), p. 244.
- 32 Volume 62, Number 3, 2002, pp. 50–61, p. 51.
- 33 Humour is not alien to traditional texts, but tends to occur in different forms and contexts. A very interesting discussion of this can be found in Richard F. Gombrich's *How Buddhism Began. The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*, London, Athlone Press, 1996; in particular the chapter 'Metaphor, Allegory, Satire'.

Liturgy of The Hours

Rhodora Penaranda

To reach the church still open at four a.m.,
you'll have to pass through the bloodiest place on earth,
the Bogo meat market in San Pablo City.
Wade through in your rubber boots, how much
can you stand to stop, flick the tiny boats
of fats and flesh in your toes? Be fearless
as the Master from Galilee. Walk
without staggering like a drunkard
on this scarlet sea through the storms of smells,
smear of skin, scales, hooks and bones,
the glassy eyes, gasps before gagging
on the good ghost. Death comes a-slashing;
a finger holds up; the clawing mutes
are cleaved on the block.

In true nature economy, nothing is wasted.
Fish heads on ice are salted dry in basins,
a hog's head—eyes gouged out, and teeth filed—
spread spiritless on a banana leaf. Hoof, feet, ear,
rib, tail, tongue, tentacles—each weighed, priced
for what it's worth to the disparate taste
of a higher feeding hierarchy.
Without sinking, tread gently in this torrent
of bloody engagements with that self-command
that'll fix fishmongers to abide by your word,
thieves to cower before you. It's as though,
for the price of worship, you must lay down
your sacrifice of pride at the slaughtering
altar where Saint Peter presides

just beyond the fence.
Finally you come to the place, shadows of roots
thick between stone walls, name the thing you've come for,
but offer only vexation, served-up Job-like.
On the frosted window, the blue aureole
of an acanthus vine brims with fruits,
goblets of wine. The leaves curl
going forth from its cross to fill the world.
To think that this image will outlast us all!
Might not this tree of life wind round this barren heart,
even crack it open, send forth a shoot?
Imagination gave us our art, enlarged
our desires, our sense of incompleteness.
The indefinable knots complicate evermore.

But there's the silence too,
like this, which composes the mind,
settles my Byzantine bearings among
this foliage. Grace flows with life's speed,
even as St John—of soft and ductile gold
on the old iron doors, his head swoon
on a silver platter—is served up to me

by an unknown hand.

Patricia Hackett: A Life (1908–1963)

Charles McLaughlin

Editors' note

In *Westerly* 1, 1965, the editors announced 'the establishment of an annual prize, the Patricia Hackett Prize of one hundred guineas to be awarded "to the writer of the contribution which in the opinion of the Editorial Board of *Westerly* is the best original creative contribution published in an issue of *Westerly* for the previous year"' (p. 6). The prize was to be awarded from 'a sum of money...presented to the University to form an endowment for a prize in memory of Miss Patricia Hackett' (p. 8). The prize has been awarded annually since then from that endowment, and although its value has increased the spirit of the award remains unchanged. With the announcement in this *Westerly* of the 2009 Patricia Hackett prize-winner it seems timely to review the life of the woman in whose memory this award was established.

An engaging way to gain an appreciation of the woman who was Patricia Hackett is to read her volume of poetry, *These Little Things* (1938). Many of her values and attitudes about life are discernible in its 42 poems. They include musings on physical and emotional

pain, falling in love, death of a loved one, self-esteem, workaholics, sexual politics and many other timeless topics, along with a sequence of eleven poems proclaiming her enduring love affair with the Solomon Islands. The meticulous taste and care that is evident in the presentation of this book also says more about its author than any biographer could tell. It is a book that is difficult to obtain (only 200 copies were printed) but the search is worthwhile. Also included are five drawings by Rex Wood, a South Australian painter and printmaker, who was little known when the book was published.¹ Wood found fame after leaving Australia to live and work in Portugal. His work is now represented in the National Gallery of Australia Collection.²

While Patricia Hackett wrote poetry, her principal focus in the arts was on theatre and drama and this coincided with a busy career as a lawyer. Born in Perth in 1908, she was the daughter of Sir John Winthrop Hackett, proprietor and editor of *The West Australian* newspaper and principal benefactor of the University of Western Australia, and Deborah Vernon Drake-Brockman. After her father died in 1916, her mother married the prominent South Australian lawyer and politician, Sir Frank Beaumont Moulden, and moved with her children to Adelaide.³ Hackett's study for a law degree had a shaky start at the University of Adelaide when she was dismissed, in 1925, for sitting her sister's Latin examination. After recovering from this setback she successfully completed her studies in London and was called to the Bar at the Inner Temple in 1930 and admitted to the South Australian Bar in the same year. Hackett made her theatrical debut two years later with Adelaide's Repertory Theatre, and scarcely two years after that, in 1934, she opened her own 150-seat theatre, the Torch, in Adelaide's Claridge Arcade. Her first production was Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, a play that was then still widely banned.⁴ The new impresario favoured anti-naturalistic, physically stylised productions and this did not sit well with some of Adelaide's conservative theatregoers and critics.

Two encounters between Hackett and critics attracted considerable publicity. The first occurred in September 1934 shortly after the Torch

opened. When Sidney Downer, a Cambridge-educated journalist who worked as a parliamentary reporter and theatre critic for *The Advertiser* newspaper, panned Hackett's staging of Geza Silberer's *Caprice*, she hit back by seeking him out at Parliament House and flinging a bottle of ink over him. Downer, who was also a member of the family that owned *The Advertiser*, brought charges against her for assault. In her defence, Hackett claimed that she had simply used the same weapon (ink) that had been used against her. She received a hefty fine, considering relative money values then and now. The second incident involved Max Harris, Adelaide's youthful *avant-garde* poet, proponent of modernism and co-publisher of *Angry Penguins*. In 1944, just days after the Ern Malley literary hoax had made Harris a world-wide laughing stock for publishing the 'Malley' poems in *Angry Penguins*, another mighty blow fell upon him as a result of a critical attack he launched on Patricia Hackett in the University of Adelaide's student newspaper, *On Dit*. The Harris attack was centred on Hackett's involvement with a series of plays for the University's Theatre Guild and, in particular, her performance in *Guild the Mask Again*. It was a scathing piece and some injudicious use of language landed Harris in serious trouble when Hackett threatened a libel action. Harris at first pleaded poor proofing and typesetting, but Hackett rejected this and issued a writ for libel. Facing possible financial ruin, Harris agreed to publish a public apology in newspapers designated by Hackett in which he admitted that he had attempted to shield himself from the consequences of his actions by claiming printing errors. Hackett then discontinued the libel action and declined to accept damages.⁵

The outbreak of World War II established new priorities for Patricia Hackett when she assumed responsibility for caring for her sister Verna's three children who had been sent to Australia from England for safety. To accommodate them she purchased a disused house in the Adelaide suburb of Hackney, at 69 Hackney Road, that had been owned by Wilhelm Nitschke, a prominent Adelaide identity who had established South Australia's first distillery, operating from adjacent



Self portrait, Patricia Hackett

premises. There was a large cellar below the house that had been used to store wine and after refurbishment of the property over a number of years, this below ground area became home for Patricia Hackett's second Torch Theatre, in 1952. Critics were banned from attending performances at the new 50-seat theatre.⁶ Actors appearing in the various productions included the poet and Professor of English at the University of Adelaide, Charles Jury, and the young lawyer and future Premier of South Australia, Don Dunstan, who shared her law chambers from 1952.⁷ Hedley Cullen, who lit the theatre and served as its official photographer has recorded an account of Hackett's working methods. According to Cullen, recorded music or sound effects were never used. When music was required, 'live' musicians provided it and sound effects were created manually. Hackett designed and painted all of the scenery and made or supplied costumes from a vast collection of period garments she had accumulated, including authentic Chinese costumes. There was no



Patricia Hackett reproduced her drawings on Torch Theatre program covers. This illustration was also used on the cover of *Westerly* 1, 1965.

prompting and if an actor got into a mess, he or she had to get out of it one way or another. Productions recalled by Cullen included *The Motherly and Auspicious*, *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, *The Sons of David*, *The Gioconda Smile*, *Spring in Laos*, *Medea*, *Lord of Three Worlds*, *The Old Ladies*, *And So to Bed* and *Tobacco Road*.⁸ The second Torch theatre staged about four productions a year from 1952 until 1958 when its program was wound down.⁹

Patricia Hackett's involvement with the Solomon Islands began in 1936 when she was invited to perform some legal work in Tulagi. This led to the forging of a strong emotional link with the natural beauty of the Solomons and her decision to take out a 99-year lease of the small island of M'bangi in Tulagi Harbour. For the next six years she spent up to four months on M'bangi each year, until forced to evacuate the island with minutes to spare by the Japanese invasion in

April 1942. Some of the fiercest battles of the Pacific war were fought in the Solomons and Hackett never saw 'her' island again. Patricia Hackett died in August 1963 after some years of ill health.¹⁰

Notes

- 1 Patricia Hackett, *These Little Things* (Hunkin, Ellis & King Ltd., Adelaide, 1938).
- 2 Wood, Rex, National Library of Australia, @ <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/2356783>
- 3 Stephen Atkinson, 'Grande Dame of SA Theatre,' *The Adelaide Review* @ http://www.adelaidereview.com.au/archives.php?subaction=showfull&id=1181267524&archive=1182472766&start_from=&ucat=2&
- 4 Jo Peoples, 'Hackett, Patricia (1908–1963)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography—Online Edition* @ <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A140397b.htm>; Atkinson, *Grande Dame*.
- 5 *Ibid.* (Peoples; Atkinson); Michael Heyward, *The Ern Malley Affair* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993), pp. 167–171; Max Harris, 'East Lynne at Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Plays at the Hut,' *On Dit*, June 30, 1944, p. 2; Max Harris, 'Apology by Max Harris,' *On Dit*, 21 July, 1944, p. 3.
- 6 Atkinson, *Grande Dame*; Dr Andrew Brown-May, 'Our House: Histories of Australian Homes,' Australian Heritage Council Publications, @ <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/ahc/publications/commission/books/ourhouse/sa02.html>
- 7 Peoples, 'Hackett, Patricia (1908–1963)'; Atkinson, *Grande Dame*.
- 8 Cullen, Hedley, 'The Torch Theatre at 69 Hackney Rd.' *Westerly*, no. 1, May (1965): pp. 41–44.
- 9 Atkinson, *Grande Dame*.
- 10 *Ibid.*

Dusk

Kit Brookman

We set out at dusk, down to the dock,
heavy with line and tackle and lures.
Our targets are the squid that clump
like worshippers at the base of the jetty.
Every year they can be counted on
to throw themselves onto a subtle jag
in a surge of fanaticism; the urge to eat.

While the others set up the battery lamp
I take my rod to the edge of the dock
and peer down into the black of water
and weed, looking for the bright patches
that spell sand, squid, good fishing.
There is nothing to see, no light
to see it in—but then squidding's a night ritual.

(You trust to luck.)

We settle in for the long, dark shift.
The click and whirr of a released reel,
the distant splash as a lure dives
in, grinning with its metal tail.
Every so often a pulse of excitement as the line
goes tense, then a frustrated jerk of the hands
to break out of the weed and hurry the line in.

Soon we've got one, struggling against the shock
of being trapped, of prey turned vicious.
It comes in close beneath the water like a wraith,
a poor drowned ghost in floating white shift,
then snapped up into the lamplight, convulsing
in a shit of ink that dribbles down its tentacles.
Smacked on the concrete it writhes, a hopeless grind,
a dancer without gravity.

An Interview with Antonio Casella
'On leased land': *The Sensualist* by Antonio Casella

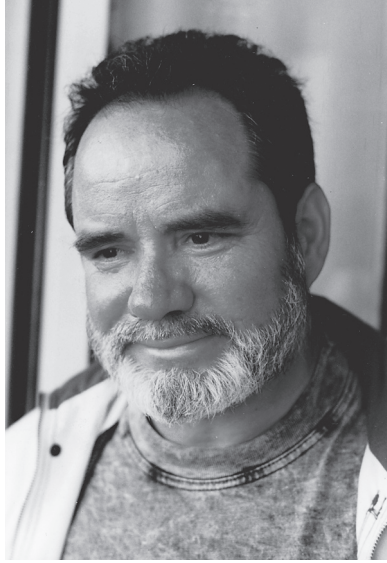
Giovanni Messina

Introduction

Antonio Casella was born in Sicily in 1944. In 1959, his family migrated to Western Australia. Unable to speak English, he spent five years apprenticed in an iron foundry before working in the asbestos mines at Wittenoom. He returned to Perth and attended night-classes whilst working as a house-painter during the day. In 1970, at the age of 25, he enrolled at the University of Western Australia, where he studied English literature and European languages. From 1974 he worked for a number of years as a secondary school teacher.

Casella's literary works include the satire *Southfalia* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1980), and *The Sensualist* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), a novel centred on the lives of Italo-Australians living in Perth, written with the assistance of a Literature Board grant in 1988. Most recently, Casella completed *An Olive Branch for Sante* (2006), as part of the attainment of his PhD in Creative Writing at Murdoch University. An extract of this work (when still in progress) was published in *Westerly* in 2005 (November, vol. 50, pp. 76–81).

In the following interview, Giovanni Messina, a PhD student in Catania, Sicily, who is carrying out research on Sicilian ethnic minority



Antonio Casella

writing (written in English) in Australia, revisits *The Sensualist*, noticing in the work postcolonial concerns that eluded the novel's early reception. It is useful to include Messina's characterisation of *The Sensualist* as a prelude to his interview with the author, which was conducted at the University of Catania in May 2009.

'In *The Sensualist*, a well-off builder, Nick—defined as a “top dog” by Australians and a “kangaroo” by Italians (already a diasporic subject, even though he is not aware of it yet)—is married to an Anglo-Australian woman and has two children, Nella and John. The novel is divided into five parts (following the classical Greek drama division) and develops in three days—from Friday to Sunday—recalling Christ's passion, death and resurrection. In fact, at the age of fifty-four, Nick experiences the ‘death’ of his present identity and the uncanny return of his past through ghosts and projections of his mind. The projection of a pair of black trousers is the uncanny element through which the truths of the past (that his uncle Saru is his biological

father and that his grandfather shot his mother) come back. However, these truths bring about his awareness that he is a foreigner living “on leased land”; that is, in a *liminal* space.

Joyce, who moved to Perth after getting married to Nick, is another ‘migrant’ character in the sense that she feels displaced away from the place she grew up as a child. Through dreams and memories, she is taken back to the north-west of Western Australia, depicted as a vast, alien world feared by many white inhabitants. Joyce always wishes to be somewhere else, she feels eternally displaced like her parents do when living on the station at Binji Cross (north-east of Geraldton).

Two major aspects of the novel should be highlighted: firstly, Nick’s childhood experience is just a symbol of the past. In other words, he has not rejected the past because of his trauma—at least not consciously, that we know—but because of the Australian policy of assimilation which asked immigrants to cancel their ethnic identity and become completely new ‘Australian’ subjects. Secondly, immigrants’ feelings of displacement mirror those experienced by Anglo-Australians (Joyce and her parents) by virtue of the elisions in the *foundation myth* of colonial settlement (of which the life on the Binji Cross station is a symbol). In fact, Joyce’s parents—especially her mother—feel as if they were foreigners living on a land which is not really theirs. This *bastard complex* (Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), is literalised by the baby which Joyce’s mother bears to an Aboriginal man, and which she has to renounce.’

~

‘It’s your home, the birthplace of your children and yet you feel a foreigner, as if you lived on leased land, a land you can never own, can’t entirely trust and maybe fear to know too intimately. He worked in the bush, cleared thousands of acres, thought nothing of it.’ (Casella, 1991, p. 297)

~

Antonio Casella visited Sicily in May 2009 with his children who ‘had a burning desire to be acquainted with the land of [...] their ancestors’. After giving a lecture on the theme ‘The Sicilian Presence in Australian Literature’ at the University of Catania, Antonio Casella kindly granted this interview to Giovanni Messina.¹

~

*Let's start with your writing style. I know that you have been influenced by, among many other writers, James Joyce. You say—I'm quoting from your critical study *The Italian Diaspora in Australia*—that «imitators too have their own way of imitating». What is your way of imitating James Joyce's writing style in *The Sensualist*?*

Well, to start from the end, the final section of *The Sensualist* is a monologue spoken by Nella, one of the main characters. In writing that section I was influenced by Molly Bloom's soliloquy at the end of *Ulysses*. The narrative style of *The Sensualist* also owes something to Joyce. It's not stream of consciousness though, for which Joyce is justly famous, and which gives his work such psychological intensity. In *The Sensualist* I employ a ‘restricted’ point of view, that is to say that the perspective the reader is given is confined to that of the three characters: Joyce, Nick and Steve, who narrate the story in turns. Even though two of them narrate in the third person, the reader is not allowed an omniscient, all-seeing perspective but a closed-circuit view, limited to how that particular character apprehends his/her world.

You say that we have the points of view of these three characters, but while Nick and Joyce use the third person, Steve narrates in the first person, and yet he keeps the reader at a distance.

That's true, even though Steve narrates in the first person, he is actually the least accessible of the three characters. We get closer to Nick and

to Joyce, at least I think we do. Steve, on the contrary, manages to keep his distance. This may have something to do with the fact that his view is relatively superficial. He just looks at the surface reality and has no inclination to get beyond that. This may also be a ploy, on his part, to avoid recognising his latent homosexuality. Nick too shows faint signs of homosexual latency, but he could never acknowledge it, least of all to himself. Nick uses sexuality as an instrument of power and control, to get what he wants from his wife, his mistress and Steve.

In The Sensualist the reader discovers the characters' pasts through revelations. What connection is there with Joyce's 'epiphany'?

I wasn't consciously thinking of James Joyce's epiphanies when writing certain scenes. Most characters in *The Sensualist* live in denial of their true self. Therefore you can argue that part of their survival kit is the avoidance of self-illuminating epiphanies, settling instead for the comfort of pretense, self-delusion and oblivion. In the book's journey Nick and his wife separately begin to uncover long-buried incidents. The process strips them of those pretenses layer by layer, and leaves them 'naked'. So each memory uncovered is not so much an illumination of life, but a form of self-divesting that leads to a raw, but truer vision of self.

For example?

For example, Nick's realisation that his childhood experiences back in Sicily constituted a more authentic reality than the present. Or his wife, who is more introspective and to some extent more cynical than Nick, arriving at the shocking realisation that the only possible life for her is through Nick. When he dies, much of the life-force drains out of her as well.

The Sensualist contains a mixture of forms: poetry, fiction and drama. Although it is written in prose, it was first conceived as a play. Why did you change your mind and why did you choose to write one scene as a piece of drama, complete with stage directions?

That's true, I had initially intended to write a play, but once I began writing I found the novel form better suited to the kind of story I had in mind. That scene you refer to, on the other hand, just seemed to work better as a self-contained theatrical interlude. For me it works, but others might disagree.

Also in the way that Florence and Harold speak and judge the guests at the party, they are not unlike a Greek chorus...

Yes, that was a deliberate piece of 'staging'. The two of them sit up on the balcony and look down on the guests in the garden, who are mostly migrants, in a superior, condescending way. Their function is similar to the way a chorus is used in a Greek play in that they comment in a critical, judgemental way on what goes on in the garden. They are the voice of 'mainstream Australia', if you like.

The device is also meant to invite the reader to consider the relationship between the migrants and the established Australians. Flo' and Harold are Anglo-Saxon Australians and university-educated. They represent the dominant race, who feel socially and intellectually superior to the people they are looking down upon (in both senses of the word). Hence each of the three elements: the physical positioning, the attitudes that Flo' and Harold display, and the language they use, invites the reader to reflect upon the relationship of power that existed between migrants and the established middle class, who, ironically, were themselves descendants of former migrants and colonisers.

In your critical study you also say that 'writers write themselves [...] in their books'. What experiences in The Sensualist are based on your own life, if any?

Lots, but I'm not sure you want to hear about them. I could tell you, in any case, that my private life was in turmoil at that time, as my marriage was breaking up. Let's just say that the problematic relationship that Nick and his wife have, reflected some of the unhappy stuff that was going on in my life in that period.

Would you consider the writing process, at least in your case, as a way of healing, a sort of therapy, for the dilemma of the 'here' and 'there' lived out by the diasporic subject?

Yes, particularly in *The Sensualist*. Writing is many things, among them, a kind of therapy, a purging of your innermost fears. That's not to say that a person living in a Diaspora has to write in order to be able to survive because, obviously, a lot of people don't write. But certainly, writing is one of the channels that allows you to air certain views and purge certain toxic feelings, if nothing else because the writing process tends to bring them to the surface and perhaps sublimates them.

I'm very proud of my Italian heritage and of the fact that I was born in Sicily. My origins are very important to me. But within the context of everyday living I don't feel that I'm being—certainly not today—victimised. So, to some extent, living in a Diaspora suits me, I feel comfortable in it. Writing for me is not a means of escaping a difficult reality. But it certainly allows me to give form to those inner fears, conflicts and experiences which have marked my life.

Starting with *The Sensualist* and subsequently, I've returned to that theme of people living simultaneously 'here', as in the physical space they inhabit, and 'elsewhere', in the world of memory and dreams. That for me is the state of living in a Diaspora.

What is the function of the gothic elements of the novel, such as ghosts, shadows, voices?

I didn't aim for a gothic element in the novel or considered that there was one. Again, it's interesting that you should see that aspect. I guess

any work that deals with buried memories, guilt and inner fears is bound to have shadows, voices and ghosts, for instance, *Hamlet* and *Wuthering Heights*.

As far as nostalgia is concerned, many late twentieth-century critics describe it as connoting a mistake or an evasion because it meanders away from the truthful, the historical or the precise. Isn't nostalgia, at least from this point of view, a longing for a place that exists only in one's memory?

That's absolutely so, in my case at least. When we recreate the past, and the incidents we experienced a long time ago, we give them different nuances, new colours, fresh smells...so that the past becomes ours again. In other words, we don't just recall things, we recreate them. In this process we take ownership of our past, transforming it into a more significant reality than the one we live everyday, which can often seem monotonous, empty of meaning and therefore less real. Even when there is a purpose in our actions, like planning a project, we are not inclined to find, or seek, meaning in those actions. The physical process of completing the action becomes the purpose. The past, on the other hand, is completed in itself but, paradoxically, more amenable to being reshaped, reflected upon and hence, to give meaning to our present reality.

If a migrant identifies with a past which doesn't exist any more isn't his/her identity a sort of mimicry?

I think a lot of literature, drama in particular, is built around characters who are self-delusional, living a false life, in some cases inhabiting an accommodated virtual reality. On the one hand, the landscape that we imagine, that we describe, that we attach ourselves to, is most likely very different from the landscape that existed then, and from the one which exists now. So that the migrant in remembering relives an illusion. On the other hand, who is to say

that the present is not an illusion? Because what you see and what I see are different things and yet we live this same moment together. What we call reality is really a personal interpretation, coloured by such elusive effects as mood, past experiences, cultural codes and so forth. So I don't think that the present reality is any less constructed than the past.

Nostalgia is interpreted from many different perspectives. Amelia De Falco (2004), for example, distinguishes between 'experiential' and 'non-experiential' nostalgia, depending on whether a migrant has lived in the homeland or not, such as second generation migrants. Do you agree with this distinction and how far does it go?

Well, second and third generation migrants get to know about their heritage through the stories they hear from others, usually the parents. So their information is second-hand. But that doesn't mean the effect is not as powerful as the experience lived first-hand. Again, if the recipient of those stories, the child of migrants, then applies his or her imagination to it, his or her dreams...he recreates that experience all anew and appropriates it. The result can be just as powerful.

I have known second-generation and third-generation Italo-Australians who have never been to Italy but long for it as much as their parents. In most cases these children and grandchildren of migrants cannot speak the language, but they still have a very strong desire to visit the land of their cultural origins. My two daughters, who are visiting Sicily with me, are a case in point. They were born in Australia of an Anglo-Australian mother, they speak no Italian, and yet they have had a burning desire to be acquainted with the land of my, and their, ancestors. That's because when they were young children I used to speak to them about the landscape and about certain events. So they experienced Sicily second-hand, through my stories. For them those stories were a powerful inducement to come and experience the place for themselves.

Would you agree that Nick's nostalgia for the past might be interpreted as a reaction against the Australian policy of assimilation, which he had fully embraced when he arrived in Australia, as a boy migrant?

In opting for assimilation Nick buried much of his past. Even his choice to marry a local girl can be interpreted as an act of rejection of his roots. The journey of the book is one of return to those roots. However, I don't think he is consciously attempting to bring back the past. If anything the past forces itself upon him, advancing inexorably as the world he has believed in, and worked for all his adult life, begins to collapse all around him. He retreats in his memories and seeks refuge into the world of his childhood back in Sicily, which suddenly appears to him to be more real and more dependable than the crumbling edifice of his present reality.

Does the novel construct an opposition between past and present?

Not overtly. If the reader finds such a construct in the novel, that's his/her privilege. If a book has managed to give form to some of the ideas that the reader has brought to it, or even to add to those ideas, then the book has done its job.

When speaking of nostalgia we have to speak of the relationship between migration and territory. What does it mean for you?

It's a very good question and quite central to *The Sensualist*. As Nick begins to remember, it's not so much the people that he identifies with but the landscape. Even when he recalls his beloved Nonno, the old man appears more like an iconic figure of that world. The overwhelming imagery that characterises the novel is that of the land and its power to capture and possess us. This is not simply the call of the land, it's the recall of a world in which Nick felt safe, and which more authentically reflected whom he felt himself to be, even after an absence of some fifty years.

The same goes for me. I've come back to Sicily time and time again, not so much to see relatives, but to re-live an elusive experience, to breathe in the air, to smell the earth and hear the noises. I just want to take in that indefinable atmosphere which, in a visceral way speaks to me of identity, of who I am. That's not to say that my ties with Australia are not equally strong. Both of my parents are buried in Australia, my children were born in Australia, so my family attachments are in Australia. And yet, my desire to return has not diminished.

So it would appear that I have an incurable case of nostalgia that makes me want to reconnect with the physical landscape. On another level, of course, I want to return to the emotional landscape of dreams and memory. Just like Nick Amedeo I keep wanting to return to a world reconstructed in my imagination. In one sense I am chasing an illusion. And yet, just as the mind realizes that such a remembered world never existed, the heart believes in it with utter conviction. And there we have it, the classic diasporic condition: opposite realities co-existing simultaneously, despite the contradictions.

Migration is associated with the idea of mobility. In The Sensualist Joyce is often described looking out from windows. They are the only connection between two spaces: the inside of her house and the outside world which represents her freedom. But as soon as she crosses that threshold, I quote from your novel, 'it does not take long for the outside to become the inside, for new walls to go up, for new windows to frame the space and shut [her] in again'.

Well, the thing about Joyce is that she's trapped. It's a trap of her own making and that's not unusual. If the outside represents, as you quite rightly put it, freedom, it also represents the unknown, the possibility of having to confront one's demons. Joyce fears the state of being free, she does not believe herself capable of coping with freedom, so she latches on to a strong, decisive, uncomplicated man (or so she believes) like Nick. She desires his control because she doubts her

ability to control herself. But when, thirty years later, Nick's world proves to be just as fragile and vulnerable as hers, she can do nothing to rescue him. She simply lets go of him.

There is a strong self-destructive undercurrent in the novel. Joyce's mother self-destructs (but not before attempting an escape, both literal and metaphorical, by running away with an Aboriginal man). Joyce too prefers the inside to the outside, self-incarceration to freedom, immobility to mobility. Even though at the beginning of the novel she talks about leaving Nick and escaping to Melbourne, we know that her attempt will be just as futile as her mother's a generation before.

And, paradoxically, she gains a sense of freedom at the end of the novel when she is paralysed. It's as if physical mobility corresponded to an internal immobility and vice versa.

That's a very good point. For a personality like Joyce's paralysis represents a release. Now she doesn't have to take decisions or make choices. Obviously her immobility is also a metaphor for her inability to contend with true emotions. Several times over the three days of crisis, she could have come to the rescue of her husband but she does not, and perhaps cannot. On that last morning after the party, when he asks her whether she thinks he should postpone the fishing trip with his son, he really wants her to say, 'don't go'. At this point of extreme vulnerability he needs her warmth and protection. Instead she tells him to go.

And so she sends him to his death...

In a way. By saying 'you go', she's condemned him. But in another sense she has no choice. She married Nick for his strengths, for his certainties, to compensate for her uncertainties. Now he is in deep existential crisis, he has allowed himself to be visited by the demons of his past and doesn't know who he is any more. This is not the Nick she married. This Nick is of little use to her or to himself.

Can this relationship between mobility and immobility be a metaphor for Nick's 'Australian' life, so that he is perceived as free only after his death when Joyce sees him on a hill which recalls the Sicilian hills of his childhood?

The interfacing of the relationship that exists between Nick and his wife, with stillness and mobility, is certainly an interesting one. Joyce's stillness—which is only a perceived stillness, because it hides inner turmoil—does seem to contrast with the restless mobility of her husband.

You can likewise argue that Nick's constant 'mobility' is his way of running away from unresolved conflicts with his host society, with himself and, more importantly, with his past. At the opening of the book we find a character who has all but rejected his past. He has buried Nicola Amedeo and what has surfaced is a hard-drinking, fornicating, arrogant man caught in a spiral of self destruction.

Joyce's conflicts are, if anything, even more deep-seated. Her way of coping is to take refuge in self-negation, passivity and self-destruction. (And/or destruction of her marriage). Her stillness, her muted despair, is a form of nihilism. Nick's mobility too is on a fast track to self-destruction. First he takes a mental journey back to his childhood, while the pig roasts, then, significantly, he meets his death on a boat, whilst wrestling with his son.

And migration, which is connected with mobility, can be a sort of mobility towards a better life but sometimes can become a kind of immobility and stillness if we reject our past.

Stillness—understood as a state of contemplation of our place in the present and of our past—helps to make us richer human beings culturally and emotionally. On the other hand, *mobility*—in the sense of change, striving and goal-setting—is equally important in life's journey. Too much stillness—that is, introspection and living in the past—and we risk remaining blocked, trapped by memories.

Like Oreste Ancelli?

Like Oreste Ancelli, exactly.²

*I would like to ask you about the second generation Sicilian migrant writer Venero Armanno whose novel *The Volcano* you have analysed. Are there any similarities in the way you both deal with Sicilian migration?*

I think both novels reflect our respective migrant experiences. Armanno was born in Australia and brought up in a Sicilian migrant household. He must have received his Italian identity (and love for Italian culture) second-hand, through the stories he was told, and the behaviour he observed around him.

I was born in Sicily and migrated to Australia at age fifteen. My experiences were first-hand, but, due to my long absence from my birth place, those experiences have been distilled by time and oblivion.

Armanno, quite wisely relies more on research, on his background readings, on formal mythologies about Sicily. His Sicily is perhaps more of a cultural concept, mine is memory filtered through time and distance. I wanted to capture a lost world. Armanno, I think, creates his own Sicily. I would suggest that neither are recognizable as the Sicily of today. But then, I wasn't really interested in contemporary Sicily. The Sicily of *The Sensualist* isn't even the Sicily of my childhood in the fifties, it's the Sicily of my grandfather, whom I never met because he died before I was born.

Armanno's novel is more literary, at least I think so, mine is more personal. His spans a vast landscape which to some extent attempts to bridge Sicily and Australia. My novel, I think, keeps the two worlds quite separate and focused, and relies more on contrast than on bridging. *The Volcano* is more political than *The Sensualist*. Armanno tackles the theme of migration overtly, he deals with discrimination quite extensively, while my book hardly mentions discrimination. The preoccupations of my characters are more existential in nature.

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Notes

- 1 This is an edited transcript of the original interview. I would like to thank Mr Antonio Casella for reviewing it after my editing.
- 2 Oreste Ancelli is the kind of immigrant nostalgically longing to his mother country and living trapped into the past. He sees Nick as a someone who betrays his past and calls him 'a kangaroo' (Casella, 1991, p. 41) meaning, in this case, someone who has been assimilated to the new country.

The Navigations of Rose de Freycinet

Judy Johnson

(In 1817, Rose de Freycinet, dressed as a man, stowed away on the ship Uranie to sail with her husband, Louis, on a scientific expedition to the South Pacific.)

1. The Windswept Cliff of Gender

I swayed for a while at its edge,
breasts swaddled like patients
beneath the institution of a navy's uniform.

Felt the flesh of my tongue stinging...
with what? Salt air? The irresistible tickle
of an old sailor's oath?

I boarded the boat at Touloun as a man.
Announced myself throat-deep in the subterfuge
as one of the officers' sons.

Then, all too soon, the conceit was done,
the harbour cleared. Ambition shrank back
beneath the plain cloth of petticoats.

Laced into my corset again, I realised I had learned
two lessons. The first: that the body
is more self-contained than the mind,

adrift, indifferent to gender, or even species.
What drives it is weather: the subterranean summer
it would maintain at all costs,

pumping the warm breeze of blood
from port to port.

And my second enlightenment?
That God preferred my dissident garb.
He'd been a shark, circling, when the scent of new male

was on me. His message clear:
there is no such thing as too many

martryrs-in-the-making
when a ship sets South for savage islands.

But who's voice was it that whispered
those uppercase words—*Sacrifice* and *Redemption*—
man-to-man in my ears?

God dressed as the Devil?
The Devil dressed as God?
Even Moses hedged his bets.

Crafted our first sunset at sea
by igniting his own burning bush on the horizon.

2. Nautical Itch

Louis' itch would be familiar to many a nautical wife.
It comes from too many visits to the brothel

of his wanderlust. He wants no more
than any boy does: to play warships on a basined sea,
cleave the waves, his cannons constantly prepared to boom.

I have called this syndrome: *Bludgeoning Naivety*.
(Look no further than Napoleon for the dryland template).

But the ocean does not exist to be conquered.
It is a mirror. In the middle of which is a bandaged heart.

Judy Johnson

Should the sea's length and breadth be unravelled,
our wounds would be revealed.

Which does not preclude the masculine urge
to take on suffering: yaw to yaw and pitch to pitch.

3. A Polarised Look at Romance

Terrestrial magnetism. Pronounced quickly,
it sounds like an explanation for attraction between the sexes.
So who's to blame if the intensity of its resultant force

varies at certain parts of the day,
different places on earth.
Louis' devotion to science ebbs and flows

as he peers through the magnifier
of each singular task. Runs a finger across the small,
cool palm of his looking glass lens

as though to wipe off the smear
of our voyage's hidden agenda.

There, I've said it.
There is a whiff of planned self-abuse in this trip.

As though we have been organised to visit a circus,
with the sole intention of gawking at the bearded lady.

The rigging swarms with tropical pollens.
Louis unfolds his charts with whip-crack efficiency.

The surgeons Quoy and Guimard prepare their traps,
ready their formaldehyde.

Gaudichard, the botanist, clears his nose of snuff
and textbook dust so that he may stop and sniff
the South Pacific roses.

All is activity, which is not the same as moral purpose.

The Minister for the Interior
knows as well as we do that the hemispheric
girth of the planet has already been measured
by that sea-going tailor, Baudin.

He has pronounced it amiable
to expansion and contraction.

Our directions, so far as I can tell:
to shove the hand of our ship down the trouser front
of this fertile new territory,

test the heft and lightness
of the low-hung jewels therein.

Calibrate whether they would be inclined to flinch
or swell in the capturing palm.
To wit (and *sotto voce*),

a suitable site for a French penitentiary. And reportage
on British military strength in New South Wales.

No wonder Louis paces at night. The titles line up in his head,
and none so melodious as 'Distinguished Explorer'.
Masturber. Molester of young colonies.

And part time French chef,
as it's impossible to make a decent *jus*
without boiling up a mess of bones.

4. Statistics

Uranie is 112 feet long, 28 wide and 14 deep.
She carries two cannons, 125 crew.

Conditions are so cramped that I am forced,
when writing letters home
to straddle the astronomical equipment.

Although Louis agreed to smuggle me on board,
the rest of our all-male contingent
are uneasy in their deference.

When I venture on deck,
they leave me the port side. Roll their unsavoury songs

and swear words of eighteen syllables, like rum barrels,
aft, to a spot where thunder beats sly drums of mutiny.

I do not imagine for a moment to be raped nor murdered.
But the colour of the sunsets worries me
as we near the equator.

Something to do with sowing, and reaping.
If it is indeed true that the Good Lord

has thrown down islands on the ocean
as he throws down seeds in a field,

then I draw his attention
to an overdue harvest. As far as the eye can see,

a crop of wheat is left to rust,
each dusk on the water

only cleared with the rising of a sickly
sickle moon.

5. Headache

Oh the melodies of pain!
The smooth hours arrive like a barbed punch
right between the eyes.

First mate is adamant that I be bled at the heels.
I can only conclude I am a boat

which needs the bungs pulled out at the stern
to be drained of the bilge,

which will in turn
magically reduce pressure
on the figurehead at the bow.

6. Inheritance

The old King has died in the Sandwich Islands.
We stand on shore in air
that tumbles like feverish straw.

The hot weather is a turgid novel,
never progressing beyond a description of itself.
The natives greet us with cocoanuts and a bucking goat.

They smile and smile till their faces turn rictus.
Am I the only one who sees the light steeling
like weapons in their eyes?

Louis chides me for rudeness when I refuse
the palanquin at my beck and call.

But I have seen suckling pigs delivered to the fire
in exactly this way.

Despite my disquiet, I admire the vigour and depth
of the natives' resentfulness.
The new King demands that every person, of whatever rank,
prostrate themselves as he goes by, regardless of mud, or manure.
Who would desire to be the meek, inheriting an earth
that must be eaten face down,
like swine, one sour mouthful at a time?

7. Custom

It is customary to accept livestock as gifts.
Louis has been presented
with two young children from Timor.

Boy and girl. A breeding pair?

For fear of offence, we have agreed to take the boy.
We shall baptise him on board,
then drop him off at the first port
where I sense he will be dealt with kindly.

Last night, a native concert, where a girl held
a violin horizontally.

Her fingers were cats' tongues,
licking raspy at the strings.

The women wear barely any clothes,
hence no pockets.
They use slits in their ears to carry cigars and fishhooks,

and are constantly bare breasted,
which pleases our men no end.

The crew peer so insistently that it is rare
not to see the reflection of a soft mountain

Judy Johnson

So what of our reckoning?
No new geographical discoveries,
but the cages and crates line up.

The abacus tilts by sheer weight in our favour.

25 mammals, 313 birds, 45 reptiles, 164 species of fish,
countless shells, 30 skeletons (including that of a Papuan),
1300 insects, 300 plants, 900 rocks.

And as for our casualties?
Seven crew from dysentery. One midshipman

who broke a vessel in his chest, and choked,
unable to cough up the clot.

A septic wound on my arm (a bite from the pet monkey
I was given in Rio de Janeiro).

And a certain slow leak of courage from my heart.

The minister for the Interior has written his report.
The work accomplished on our voyage, he says,
is not negligible.

10. On the Outside Looking In

All seems ludicrous to me now: dinner parties and protocols.
Women tied into corsets like fermenting sausages.
Men powdering their fussy pompadours.

I brood constantly on the cockfights
we witnessed in the Marianas.

Those poor creatures, bound to each other's ankles.
And their owners, not content with the destructive potential
of beak and claw,

tying small knives to the birds' heels
so that an opponent
 may be killed with a single blow.

I am fearful of where all this striving
for adventure and intensity will lead.

Will it eventually
drive humanity to eclipse itself?

What else would be left,
having searched and plundered every corner

of the earth's vast pocket
but to turn it inside out
 and expose the black lining?

I wake deep in the night,
pushing the glittering band of my wedding ring
around my finger compulsively.

The gesture is not one of faith in light's
triumph over darkness.

 Just unconscious, habitual turning.
Like a bewildered mouse

who suddenly finds herself
on the outside looking in
 to the cage that holds her wheel,

still running around in circles,
for want of a new idea
 to deal with an impossible freedom.

Science Writing as Literature

Carmen Lawrence

‘Our ability to understand the universe and our position in it is one of the glories of the human species. Our ability to link mind to mind by language, and especially to transmit our ideas across the centuries, is another. Science and literature, then, are the two achievements of Homo sapiens that most convincingly justify the specific name.’

Preface to *The Oxford Book of Modern Science Writing*,
Richard Dawkins, p. 3.¹

Invited by *Westerly*'s editors to write their annual review essay of recently published Australian non-fiction, I had two responses. First, I confess to struggling with the very idea of non-fiction (not to mention the shifting landscapes of its various sub-genres) because as a category of literature, it is effectively defined by what it is not, by what it lacks. As U.S. English Professor Rob Nixon observed in a recent review in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*,² ‘The genre emits a whiff of the déclassé, served (especially in literature departments) with a garnish of condescension. The problem starts with the word: Like ‘childless’

(why not ‘child-free?’), ‘non-fiction’ packs a lot of social judgment. Nonfiction may be real, but in matters of creativity, it’s not quite the real thing.’

Second, as I scanned the books sent to me, although I read the works and inspected them from many angles, I could not satisfy myself that it was possible to connect them without a crude and very obvious shoe horn and without insulting the authors in the process. What did emerge from my thinking about the Australian ‘non-fiction’ writing sent to *Westerly* was the realisation that scientific writing was completely absent. And perversely, perhaps, I decided to write about what was not in the mix.

Maybe there was no scientific writing in the collection because nothing of note had been published in Australia in the last year. This conclusion seemed unlikely given the observations by Martin Rees, speaking in 2006 as President of the Royal Society who sponsor the Aventis Prize for Science writing. He said, ‘We are enjoying a golden age of science writing, and the entries for the book prize have set new standards of excellence as well as reaching new levels of popularity.’ As evidence he cited the fact that the ubiquitous Nielsen BookScan data on the sales in the UK of the four largest-selling entries on the shortlists of the major books prizes showed that for 2004, the Aventis general prize (1,612,858) was ahead of the Booker (577,691), Whitbread best novel (1,065,026) and Orange (919,621) prizes. I could find no comparable figures for Australia, partly because there is no national equivalent to the Aventis Prize (the Eureka Science Book Prize seems to come and go), nor is there anything like the very fine *Oxford Book of Modern Science Writing*³ edited by Richard Dawkins. However, there is no obvious reason to think that Australian writers would be less likely to write or readers less likely to appreciate quality science writing.

Especially puzzling was the absence of anything dealing with the science of the big practical and moral concern of our time, climate change. It seemed strange that there was nothing dealing with the enormous challenge to human viability that we have visited on our

descendants—to reverse the impetus toward destroying our habitat, to transform our cultural narratives in ways which will moderate our insatiable consumption of the planet’s resources. Having recently read Ian McEwan’s allegorical (fictional) and very funny treatment of climate change in *Solar*, I know the subject has all the necessary dramatic elements to absorb even the most jaded reader. I also know that several Australian non-fiction authors *have* tackled the subject in recent years—Tim Flannery and Clive Hamilton being the most notable—and my search for works published over the past year turned up several works, apart from Hamilton’s *Requiem for a Species* (2010) and Flannery’s *Now or Never* (2009), Ben McNeil’s *The Clean Industrial Revolution* (2009), Tony Kevin’s *Crunch Time* (2009), Will Steffan’s *Australia’s Biodiversity and Climate Change* (2009) and Barry Pittcock’s *Climate Change* (2009), the last two written by respected climate scientists and published by the CSIRO. The climate change story is especially difficult because of its intangibility and remoteness in time; plotting the slow, largely imperceptible changes in ways that wrestle people’s attention away from more immediate preoccupations would severely test the skills of any writer. But close and patient observations of changes in the natural world which reveal the cumulative losses of our cherished places and stories may be more potent than apocryphal predictions and shrill hectoring.

Perhaps publishers do not normally categorise science writing as literature and the absence of science writing is a contemporary illustration of novelist C. P. Snow’s ‘two cultures’⁴—the disjunction between the sciences and the humanities. Snow famously asserted that science and the humanities had so little in common in both their research methods and the way they thought and spoke, that they could be said to be separated by ‘a gulf of mutual incomprehension.’ In opposing the study of science and literature in this way, Snow firmly placed the two areas of inquiry in opposition, asserting that they had little or nothing in common. Like Ruston, it seems to me that we ‘should neither dismiss the literary from the scientific nor the scientific from the literary’ (p. 12).⁵ Although the tide may now be

turning in favour of a more inclusive understanding that science and the humanities are as one in seeking to capture human experience, for many it appears still to be assumed that science writing is simply a record of things scientists do and that they need not concern themselves with literary niceties.

Without replaying this by now well-worn argument, it is true that the degree of scientific specialisation (and academic specialisation more generally) means that very few people can lay claim to even partial knowledge of the scientific findings that shape our lives from gene therapy to bioterrorism. Even people researching related subjects within the same discipline appear not to understand one another; researchers seem to know more and more about less and less. The results of such research, however, often impinge (or are imposed) on us without our understanding or acquiescence. Equally, many of the analyses of the state of our planet and the solutions suggested derive from scientific inquiry which a great many of us find unintelligible, even when we know where to find it. At a time when science illiteracy is very costly, effective and engaging writing about science appears not to get the attention it warrants in the world of literature, partly perhaps because it labours under the pejorative label of ‘popular science’.

Although I am an avid reader of fiction—in part as a release from my day jobs which have required me to read vast quantities of non-fiction, much of it written in one or another variant of diseased English—I do appreciate well written non-fiction. There are, it is true, more than a few writers who can translate the often unreadable research published in science journals into serviceable English—they do a businesslike job of taking difficult ideas and making them intelligible to the average reader, a not inconsiderable skill and one which is evident in the Australian offerings on the subject of climate change over the last year. However, it is rare to find scientists writing for a general audience who can capture the excitement of discovery and the wonder that comes from creating new ways of looking at phenomena which we otherwise take as given. Even more

uncommon is the writer who can reach into our hearts and fire the desire for change—something much needed in the climate change debate. When the recent Australian offerings by climate scientists on climate change are examined in this light, they disappoint, although the writing and exposition are admirably lucid. They are workman-like and to the point, but for the most part, in the writing about climate and the natural environment, the language is stripped bare of emotion—and power. For example, Pittock, in explaining the effects of climate change on ocean circulation writes as follows: ‘A study by Michael Vellinga and Richard Wood with the UK Hadley Centre climate model suggests that weakening of the overturning in the North Atlantic may also lead to large shifts in precipitation in the tropics due to shifts in the thermal equator. Using an ecosystem model, they find that weakening of the oceanic circulation causes worldwide changes in ecosystem structure and function, including expansions of desert in the north of South America, West Africa and Australia, but reductions in desert in North America.’ (p. 123) I’m pretty sure I understand the very important point he’s trying to make, but it’s hard to care. I don’t mean to single out Pittock’s writing for criticism, because it’s fairly typical of writing on the subject intended for an ‘educated non-specialist audience’, but simply to illustrate the problem.

From my reader’s perspective, I know that even complex scientific concepts can be presented so that they are understandable, yet as gripping as fiction. Oliver Sacks and Jared Diamond come to mind. As O’Connor argues throughout his remarkable survey of the popularisation of geology in the nineteenth century (*The Earth on Show*), the best science writing does more than convey information; it can be a form of ‘creative non-fiction’ which uses storytelling techniques typical of fiction—plots with conflict and resolution, complex characters, extensive scene setting, illustrative anecdotes and a distinctive narrative voice. Good science writing, like all good literature, works by transporting us into worlds where we have never been or which we have not fully understood; our imagination is

engaged so that we are participants, part of the story. While we are not asked to suspend disbelief as we are with fiction, being confronted with the facts of our universe may upend our conceptions of ourselves and our world every bit as much as science fiction. Writing of this kind is memorable and far more likely to be persuasive than the anaemic style that permeates much scientific writing.

Primo Levi's *Periodic Table* (1984), for example, while autobiographical in intent, celebrates the poetry of chemistry while remaining faithful to the actual qualities of the elements. As he says, 'Mendeleev's Periodic Table was poetry...and come to think of it, it even rhymed!' (p. 40) His personification of the elements of the table, which might offend the more pedestrian amongst his scientific colleagues, is truly extraordinary. His characterisation of the elements—the 'aloofness' of argon, its 'unwillingness' to combine with other gases reminds him of his ancestors; the 'volatility' of potassium, the 'affability' of tin, the 'gregariousness' of carbon—is more likely to engender enthusiasm for the subject—and recall of the table—than the usual mechanical recital.

Rachel Carson is captivating in describing the seasonal changes in the oceans in *The Sea Around Us*⁶ (1989): 'A hard, brilliant, coruscating phosphorescence often illuminates the summer sea. In waters where the protozoa *Noctiluca* is abundant it is the chief source of this summer luminescence, causing fishes, squids, or dolphins to fill the water with racing flames and to clothe themselves in a ghostly radiance. Or again, the summer sea may glitter with a thousand thousand moving pinpricks of light, like an immense swarm of fireflies moving through a dark wood. Such an effect is produced by a shoal of the brilliantly phosphorescent shrimp *Meganctiphanes*, a creature of cold and darkness and of the places where icy water rolls upward from the depths and bubbles with white rippling at the surface.' (p. 44)

Or consider the reflections provoked by a storm in the Amazon by noted biologist E. O. Wilson: 'The unsolved mysteries of the rain forest are formless and seductive. They are like unnamed islands hidden in

the blank spaces of old maps, like dark shapes glimpsed descending the far wall of a reef into an abyss. They draw us forward and stir strange apprehensions. The unknown and prodigious are drugs to the scientific imagination, stirring insatiable hunger with a single taste. In our hearts we hope we will never discover everything. We pray there will always be a world like this on at whose edge I sat in darkness. The rain forest in its richness is one of the last repositories on earth of that timeless dream.'

Or the science luminary, Carl Sagan, on the transience of life from *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1992):⁷ 'Each of us is a tiny being, permitted to ride on the outermost skin of one of the smaller planets for a few dozen trips around the local star... The longest-lived organisms on Earth endure for about a millionth of the age of our planet. A bacterium lives for one hundred-trillionth of that time. So of course the individual organisms see nothing of the overall pattern—continents, climate, evolution. They barely set foot on the world stage and are promptly snuffed out—yesterday a drop of semen, as the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote, tomorrow a handful of ashes. If the Earth were as old as a person, a typical organism would be born, live, and die in a sliver of a second. We are fleeting, transitional creatures, snowflakes fallen on the hearth fire. That we understand even a little of our origins is one of the great triumphs of human insight and courage.' (pp. 30–31)

Despite the examples I have cited, a lot of scientific writing erases the awe and wonder of inquiry and observation, making it difficult to understand what motivated the researcher in the first place. The best scientists are passionate—but paradoxically, may go to inordinate lengths to remove any traces of emotion—and their personality—from their report of the inquiries that fired their imagination. Some understand that how they write may be as important as what they write if they are to do more than converse with a coterie. The best science writers appear to understand that it is not enough for science writing to merely convey new information; it should also be 'a cause for reflection, even revelation, as in a poem or painting.'⁸ As Nobel

laureate, molecular biologist Max Perutz wrote in the preface to his book, *Is Science Necessary?*, ‘Imagination comes first in both artistic and scientific creation.’⁹ (p. 204)

Despite the proliferation of text, on and off-line, our concept of literature seems to have narrowed while our willingness to eschew any judgment of the aesthetic qualities of writing seems to have expanded. One of the tragedies of the proliferation of writing which is designed principally to communicate facts is that it is rarely subject to examination for literary merit. But non-fiction can be as exciting and as aesthetically pleasing as good fiction; it can be as emotional, unexpected and absorbing as the best novels. Fine writing, no matter what the genre, is fine writing.

It would seem that ‘literature’ was once a much more inclusive concept than it is today. Educated nineteenth-century readers regarded works of history, philosophy, political economy and science as ‘literature’ in its broadest sense, as much as they did the poetry, novels and drama. As O’Connor reminds us, ‘science writing was an integral part of nineteenth century literary culture—not that science writing and literature enjoyed a fruitful relationship, but that scientific writing was literature.’ (p. 13). The contemporary practice of exempting non-fiction works from any serious criticism on the basis of style and literary merit diminishes the demand that writers, no matter what their subject, should cultivate and employ techniques which enliven their writing. A general, or even a specialist reader confronted by language bled of all colour and a structure which breaks all the rules of good story telling, will be less likely to follow a complex argument to its conclusion. In the novel *Solar*, McEwan who is noted for his grasp of scientific concepts, has his character, the appalling Michael Beard, Nobel Prize winning physicist and self-indulgent profligate, address an energy conference of institutional investors on the subject of climate change. In that speech McEwan illustrates the persuasive power of poetry and the ease with which complex ideas can be communicated. In explaining the concept of global warming he has Beard cite the pioneering work of John Tyndall who was the first to

describe the hothouse or greenhouse effect. Tyndall's original words, referring to the consequences of removing the blanket of water vapour and gases from the atmosphere, were 'You would assuredly destroy every plant capable of being destroyed by a freezing temperature. The warmth of our fields and gardens would pour itself unrequited into space, and the sun would rise upon an island held fast in the iron grip of frost.' It's hard to imagine many science writers of today using such language, despite the fact that climate change presents such apocalyptic possibilities.

A skilled writer can also assist us in seeing the practice of science as a human activity, fraught with the sorts of dilemmas and dramas we expect from people grappling with the big questions. The now notorious, cranky e-mails from climate scientists at the University of East Anglia were greeted with apparent disbelief by some sections of the community, perhaps because they conceive of science as some sort of black box operating automatically, unsullied by the fallible guidance of human minds.

Unfortunately, we appear to have succumbed to the idea that to enhance objectivity and avoid subjectivity in science means to eschew the techniques that make any writing interesting; many scientists seem to have forgotten the 'power of the word', using instead a desiccated shorthand understood by a few insiders. Too often the language of the scientific academy seems incapable of escaping the self-imposed bonds of 'objectivity', the abandonment of an authorial voice in favour of an impersonal style without agency; technical, bland and boring with no place for wit and satire. Aspiring scientists (and for that matter, academics, in general) are often exhorted to expunge any trace of their own personality—and any admission of errors and mishaps along to way—from their writing. As Locke has observed, "The Promethean scientist may uncover the secrets of the gods, but must whisper them—like someone with an artificial larynx—in a voice devoid of emotion so as not, as the Fiesers¹⁰ put it for their fellow chemists, to 'divert attention from the story we are trying to tell'. Above all, scientist dare not run naked through the

streets shrieking ‘Eureka!’ or they will, as the Fiesers say, ‘violat[e] principles of good usage.’¹¹

We know that bad writing shrinks readership but some of the bad writing in the scientific academy, indeed the academy in general, is intentional. Novices have to learn to write badly to earn their professional standing; indeed failure to do so will leave them stranded at the margins, manuscripts rejected. They resist using the vernacular because it doesn’t sound smart enough. It is true that some things are hard to say in ordinary English, but not so much as many specialists pretend. The obscure language is a form of boundary riding—it keeps out the uninitiated marauders, but it may result in scientists speaking only to each other. While it is almost certainly necessary to write badly in the approved style to get published in some journals, it is also a guarantee that almost no-one beyond a vanishingly small ‘peer group’ will read the research. And once bad habits are learned, they are extremely difficult to break. As Shapin has argued, ‘More and more academic monographs and papers are written for the ‘files’—as aids in the construction of a career—and not to be read.’ He notes the comments of the *U.S. News & World Report* survey of graduate schools that ‘academic monographs (are) well suited for tenure committees, but ill-suited for bookstores,’¹² He goes on to say about historians of science, but it applies more generally, ‘We are increasingly successful in not being read’ unless someone with the skills to write takes the trouble to translate the barely readable prose into material suitable for the ‘educated common reader’.

While understanding the need for scientists to communicate precisely to their colleagues about their subject matter in what is sometimes called ‘technical writing’, perhaps we need to challenge the idea that language is no more than an instrument for conveying precisely delineated facts. It can be so much more; it might move and instruct, fascinate and astonish. Sagan, as he so often did, captured the essence of the argument about the importance of science literacy: ‘In exchange for freedom of inquiry, scientists are obliged to explain their work. If science is considered a closed priesthood, too difficult

and arcane for the average person to understand, the dangers of abuse are greater. But if science is a topic of general interest and concern—if both its delights and its social consequences are discussed regularly and competently in the schools, the press, and at the dinner table—we have greatly improved our prospects for learning how the world really is and for improving both it and us.¹³ (p. 12). If we were to subject science writing to the same scrutiny—and appreciation—that we extend to other forms of non-fiction—and fiction, the results might astound us. The ideas and discoveries of science could become a precious legacy we all share, not the defended province of a few.

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Flick Chick

Joanne Riccioni

You don't like dusk. Everything turns monochrome and the day gets heavy with conclusion but isn't quite done. Like one of those deep and meaningful films shot in black and white—the arthouse sort. You like the idea of them, but then you remember watching the black and white set as a child, and why would you want to go full circle? Like flares or platform shoes—not quite as appealing the second time around. At home, you always give dusk the flick. That neat little click of the light switches breaking the silence is comforting. You usually check the clock then: yes 6.05pm, so you pour the first glass from a bottle of red that's breathing on the counter. It's never quite as good as you've anticipated, perhaps because you're too busy inspecting the yeasty loaf of skin swelling over the top of your work heels, or counting out the last seconds of daylight against the throb of the varicose vein behind your knee. Then again, it could just be the preservatives in those mass produced wines. You remind yourself that's what you get for buying specials by the case.

You make sure you don't drink every night. Usually Tuesdays. It's discount night at United and you go straight there from work with takeaway sushi from *Ginko's*. You don't always choose the latest

chick-flick or blockbuster, but sometimes you just need something easy that takes your mind off the MSG in the *miso* or the metallic taste of the raw tuna that's a prescription for Alzheimer's. At least in the dark you can't see that rainbow sheen on the fish that reminds you of oil slicks and the state of the planet. Anyway, sushi's about the only low-fat takeaway you can buy in under a minute: something to dilute the *réduction* of guilt that slowly simmers when you're watching Angelina Jolie's buttocks on the big screen. On the way home you lament the state of modern cinema: the formulaic stories, the female role models, the special effects budgets that could feed an African nation, and promise next time to make the effort and choose a subtitled movie at the Dendy. Something Robert would have approved. It's not that you mind going to the cinema alone, it's just that you don't want to let your mind sag along with everything else.

Of course, you didn't always go alone. You used to like the cinema for first dates. It avoided those restaurant dinners of insufficient silences and furtive mutual scrutiny from the bathroom door, the tiring bravado of first date flippancy. You can get a good sense of someone in the dark, without conversation. There's the size and the weight of their presence; the quality of a coat or sweater against your wrist; the snorts and chuckles to the screen; the smell of a whisper. By the time the film was over you always know whether it was going anywhere. If you can't sit next to someone for two hours in the dark, what hope is there for the light of day?

Well, that's been your rule of thumb, anyway. Admittedly, there have been exceptions: Robert for one. With him, you almost got up and left halfway through *Baraka*. He twitched and fidgeted, scrunched and sighed so much, you assumed it was doomed. But during the credits he took your hand and spoke so convincingly into your ear, 'When something's this good I can't sit still.'

'Oh,' you said. 'Yes, it was good, wasn't it?'

'I'm not talking about the film,' he said.

You lived together for three years. You had preferred seating at the Orpheum and nearly always agreed who should have won the Oscar.

And then one day he didn't live with you any more. Everything else was there, looking tired and rather smaller than before, but not him. He left a note saying something about life not being a dress rehearsal. After that you couldn't believe you'd spent three years watching Indie films with someone who could end it on such a cliché.

After Robert, the years of same-sex cinema outings made a comeback. At the time it seemed the grown-up version of the sisterly solidarity you'd relied on at 15: all us girls feigning annoyance through third and fourth viewings of *Greece* or *Saturday Night Fever* while boys in the back row threw popcorn down our imagined cleavages. Secretly, you were thrilled they found you more interesting than the film and worth the popcorn. Twenty-five years later, you needed that strength in numbers again. Only this time it was less about attracting attention, than being able to blend into the queue behind those same boys who had married other, younger girls; to sit in the dark next to the small habits of long-term monogamists. Of course you weren't the only one who needed the support of shared sugar hits and no judgements to see you through the highs of a vicarious screen life, where you re-inflated your ideals of manhood and steeled yourselves against compromise for the sake of conformity. How else could you have dealt with the key in the lock of the silent flat, the vaguely interested cat, the bedtime wine and a couple of Zolof? There's nothing wrong with having high standards.

But you really do prefer to go to the cinema alone now. No need to be magnanimous about the choice of film, no need to pretend your friend has not put on weight, or that her latest cyber date is more interesting than the trailers. No need to suspect that your dismal sympathy for her might be self-pity. Which, of course, it isn't, because you have so much more in your life than she does. There's just a point when solidarity of the spinsterly sort becomes too close for comfort. It reminds you of that awful euphemism of your mother's: *women of a certain age*. She probably got it from Jane Austen or the Brontes. But you only truly understood what your mother must have meant by it when you were with Nicole watching *Million Dollar Baby* and you

bumped into Stuart Simmonds. You'd been holding Nicole's handbag in the foyer while she went to the Ladies. Stuart had his arm round his new wife, who looked too small and young for the enormous belly that swayed before her. She spoke a few bubbly sentences about the baby's due date and probable names, but all you could look at were her straight, unstained teeth, like a teenager's with the braces just removed. He asked if you had come alone and you laughed and said, 'Oh, no!' That was when Nicole returned, taking her bag from you and tucking your coat label into your collar at the same time. Stuart raised his eyebrows and pulled his lips taut into what was meant to be a smile. But it was the way he so diligently held out his hand and pointedly said, 'Nicole, is it? *Very* pleased to meet you,' that made you see what he was seeing. Two women of a certain age. Sometimes, you wish it were that simple.

After that you thought about Stuart for a long time, how still he was during your first date—*Dangerous Liaisons*—the way he made love to you on your stairs afterward. You never needed the movies much, you and he, just each other in the dark. Or perhaps that's just your memory of it. It was a long time ago, after all. You might be confusing it with a film you saw. Anyway, it doesn't really matter. Four months after it began he told you he was going back to his wife and kids. That cut. But not as much as being overlooked in the running for the new family.

And now you're losing your teeth. Last week the dentist mumbled through his mask that you needed two root canals and a crown. He held that little stainless steel pick on the exposed nerve of your molar as he told you the cost. It's not the money that matters. You've done all the things single women of a certain age should do these days: private health insurance, topped up your pension, paid off your apartment, invested in blue chips to cover the nursing home fees. The financial adviser tells you that you're in good shape. You remember his eyes on your breasts and feeling a little excited, even as you cringed at the nylon crackle your thighs made rubbing together on the way out. In the mirror of the Ladies afterwards, you saw a shirt button had

popped off and was dangling by a thread, the mockery of a favourite bra, once white, now dishrag grey, peeping through. Well, perhaps that blouse has shrunk a little since you bought it. That's what you get for buying cheap clothes made in Asian sweat shops. It's amazing what the poultice of a Belgian Chocolate *Connoisseur* ice cream and *27 Dresses* can do for burning embarrassment.

Really, it's not like you've never had a proposal. Marriage, that is. When you worked in Singapore in your thirties, your housemate proposed. Michael, the American architect, found the 1920's black-and-white terrace, which crumbled and cowered under the shadows of condominium blocks, and told you he could only share with someone who truly appreciated it. On Sunday afternoons, the two of you would escape the clack-clack of *mah-jongg* games from the balconies overhead to watch anything at the *Lido*, luxuriating in the air-conditioning that didn't come with the colonial charm of your house. You'd collapse into the velour seats that smelled of pandan leaf and *hokkien mee*, refusing to let your hangovers take hold by sipping the margaritas that Michael poured from a chilled thermos into plastic martini glasses. The cinema with Michael was never just about watching the film. Half way through he'd be shouting insults, perhaps at the projectionist for cutting the sex scenes in *Leaving Las Vegas*, or perhaps at some unsuspecting Singaporean for dealing with phlegm during the great kiss in *Before Sunrise*. Afterwards you'd toast your superiority with more margaritas at *Harry's* until you fell into a taxi and then into the gutter outside the little house, the last vestige of architectural integrity in the jungle of development which you were both being paid to fertilise. One night he sang to you in the smooth tenor voice that Mom and the Lutheran choir back in Iowa had so carefully nurtured. At the end of *Abide With Us, the Day is Waning*, he sang, 'Marry me, marry me, marry me, Sarah. Have my babies and make it all OK.' Then he dropped his head onto your lap and fell asleep, while you pulled out his tight child's curls, listening to the mosquitos under the strelitzias. You really did love each other. It was such a shame you had to refuse him. 'We could get married,

Michael,' you said, 'but you'd still be gay.' Anyway, you could never have married anyone who talks during the movie. Eventually he met a nice Jewish boy. They still send you Hanukkah and Christmas cards from Seattle.

Yes, you really do prefer to go to the cinema alone these days. Then you can concentrate on the stories. No black and whites. Just the glorious technicolour ones that stop a little short of real life. You don't mind going home in the dark. It's the dusk you can't stand.

The Year's Work in Fiction: 2009–2010

Elizabeth Webby

Despite the GFC, the twelve months covered by this review have produced another strong crop of fiction by Australian authors, both new and established. Given recent emphases on the cosmopolitan and international contexts of Australian literature, it is interesting to see others following David Malouf, whose *Ransom* was discussed in last year's survey, in seeking inspiration from earlier literary works as well as from contemporary trends and events. Thankfully, however, the self-conscious intertextuality of the 1970s seems to have been largely abandoned in favour of a focus on the enduring problems and joys of the human condition, on life rather than art.

Steven Carroll's *The Lost Life* follows hot on the heels of his Miles Franklin-winning *The Time We Have Taken* but takes us to a completely different time and place. Like several other recent Australian novels, Carroll's mixes imaginary figures with characters from history, in this case the poet T. S. Eliot and two of the women in his life, his estranged first wife Vivien and Emily Hale, an American loved in his youth. On an autumn day in 1934, Eliot and Hale visit the rose garden at Burnt Norton to carry out a private and belated

ceremony. But they have been preceded there by two much younger lovers, Catherine and Daniel, and a light-hearted prank by Daniel has consequences for all of them. The narrative is mainly presented from the point of view of eighteen-year-old Catherine, as she discovers the wonders of first love but also becomes increasingly involved in the lives of Miss Hale and her 'special friend'. In a particularly strong episode, Catherine travels to London to deliver a message from Miss Hale to Vivien Eliot. The description of the latter's flat, its walls covered with pictures from her life with her husband, beautifully illustrates the dangers of living in the past, as in a different way does Miss Hale's attachment to her role as Eliot's first muse. Daniel leaves Catherine to study abroad, just as the young Tom Eliot had done earlier with Emily Hale. But through the events of that autumn, Catherine has learnt the necessity of living in the moment rather than the past, the dangers of being the muse rather than the creator. Far from being a footnote in someone else's story, she is to go on to an independent and fulfilled life of her own. In this elegant novel, Carroll demonstrates that he can evoke the England of the 1930s just as stunningly as he depicted Melbourne suburbia of the 50s in his much-praised trilogy.

While *The Lost Life* takes place primarily in the past, Kirsten Tranter sets her highly accomplished first novel *The Legacy* very much in the present. It does, however, also refer back to the work of a canonical author, Henry James, specifically his *The Portrait of a Lady* which, as Tranter's epigraph reminds us, earlier inspired a poem by T. S. Eliot. But it is also a 'post-September 11' novel, though unlike most others in this category its focus is on home-grown violence rather than the external threat of terrorism. Most of the main characters—Ingrid, Fleur, Gil Grey, Maeve, Ralph—parallel James's Isabel, Pansy, Gilbert Osmond, Madame Merle and Ralph, as their names make clear, and as in James's novel the plot is set in motion by an unexpected inheritance which leads to an unwise marriage. But *The Legacy* is, unlike *Portrait of a Lady*, mainly told from the point of view of a young woman who is not the ostensible heroine and whose descriptions of student life in Sydney and the streets, buildings and institutions of New York

clearly draw heavily on Tranter's own experiences in both cities. Julia Alpers, a university friend of Ingrid and Ralph's, who has been strongly attracted to them both, travels to New York to try to unravel the mystery of Ingrid's life after her marriage to Grey, and her apparent loss of it on 11 September 2001. Through discussions with Ingrid's supervisor at Columbia University and other friends of hers, as well as Fleur and Grey, Julia gradually begins to piece together the reasons for Ingrid's unhappiness, and discovers the secret which links Grey, Maeve and Fleur. In keeping with twenty-first-century attitudes, this involves far more than concealment of a sexual scandal, the mystery at the heart of Henry James's novel. *The Legacy* also concludes on a note more attuned to twenty-first-century expectations of female agency and empowerment than was the norm when *Portrait of a Lady* appeared. There may be a bird cage on the balcony outside Julia's New York apartment but, significantly, it is empty.

Another very impressive first novel, Cate Kennedy's *The World Beneath*, takes a wry look at many aspects of contemporary culture: desire for a wilderness experience, nature photography, popular music, alternative life styles and spiritualities. As in Joan London's *The Good Parents*, Kennedy's starting point is the very different world views of baby boomer hippy parents and their teenage daughters. But for Kennedy's fifteen-year-old Sophie, only her mother has tried to be a good parent, her father having walked out when she was a baby in order to continue travelling the world as a photographer. Now he decides to try to reconnect with her via a visit to Tasmania to walk in Cradle Mountain National Park, where things go badly wrong when he ignores warning signs. Presenting her narrative from the alternating perspectives of these three characters, Kennedy subtly reveals their preoccupations and shortcomings. Initially we are encouraged to share Sophie's view of her parents: her mother Sandy, seemingly still mired in the past, making jewellery to sell at the local market; her much more glamorous absent father who works in television. But we soon discover that Rich's glamour is built on shaky foundations. His work involves editing infomercials and his attempt

to seduce a glamorous presenter comes to naught. For him, as for Sandy, the high point has been participation in the fight to save the Franklin River; both of them also have unresolved issues with their mothers. Thanks to Kennedy's skilful characterisation, however, we are ultimately able to sympathise with all three characters as they are forced to reconsider their priorities: Sophie recognises the value of her mother's love, Rich proves that he really does care about the wilderness and his daughter, and Sandy gives up some of her old beliefs to move more confidently into the future.

Relationships between parents and daughters are also central to Alex Miller's *Lovesong*, his ninth novel. As its title might suggest, *Lovesong* is less complex and much less political than some of Miller's earlier works, though it still displays his interest in traditional cultures and his masterly ability to evoke other times and places. At its centre is a story told to the narrator over a series of meetings in a Melbourne café: that of an Australian man, Jim Patterner, Sabiha, the Tunisian woman he met and fell in love with in Paris many years earlier, and 'the beautiful and terrible story of their little daughter Houria.' The narrator, we learn, is an aging novelist who lives in Melbourne with his divorced daughter and who, before meeting Jim, believed he had written his last novel. This framing device allows Miller to have some fun at the expense of the literary establishment. The narrator's last novel had been called *The Farewell*:

I thought this was a pretty direct hint for reviewers and interviewers, who are always on the lookout for metaphor and meaning in what we do. I waited for the first interviewer to ask me, 'So, is this your last book then?' I was ready to say, 'Yes, it is.' Simple as that, and have done with it. But no one asked. They asked instead, 'Is it autobiographical?' I quoted Lucian Freud: *Everything is autobiographical and everything is a portrait*. The trouble with this was that they took Freud's radiant little metaphor literally.

So of course *Lovesong* is not autobiographical, despite one of Miller's more recent works being called *Landscape of Farewell*, and despite his acknowledged use of stories of friends in many of his novels. Indeed, the driving force of the narrative is something no man could have direct experience of, the desperate desire of a woman for a child, specifically a daughter. Sabita has been very close to her own father who, recognising her special qualities, sends her to Paris to help her recently-widowed aunt run a little café. When she falls in love with Jim, Sabita is convinced she will soon have a daughter to take back to El Djem and place in her father's arms. But the years pass without any child and when Sabita's father falls seriously ill she becomes desperate. Inspired by some of the old songs of her grandmother, she takes a radical, though it is suggested also a traditional, action. This essentially simple story is made vivid through Miller's skills in characterisation, especially of the quiet, book-loving Jim and the more passionate and resolute Sabita. The beauty and terror of their story is also nicely set off by the humour of the framing narrative, as the novelist finds himself far from happy over his own daughter's choice of lover and discovers that Jim is also planning a novel. But he knows that Jim's story will inevitably be different to his: it is hard not to read the final sentence as Miller's direct address to the reader:

Sabita's story had come out of her and been carried to me; now, after I had lived in it jealously myself for a while, I would carry it to others, and in the end would let it go and be done with it, like all the other stories I have carried.

Although many novels have turned upon unwanted pregnancies and the desperate measures women have taken to resolve these through abortion or suicide, and many others dealt with the effects of adoption and illegitimacy on both mother and child, few have attempted to convey the suffering experienced by a mother who is unable to give birth to a child. It is therefore surprising to come across two recent Australian novels where this thwarted desire

is the driving force. Interestingly, both also use a double narrative structure, allowing past events to be viewed from a new perspective. In Enza Gandolfo's first novel *Swimming*, seeing her former husband at an exhibition of photographs leads the central character, Kate Wilks, back to a novel she had written twenty years earlier. There she had tried to describe the impact on herself and her marriage of her repeated failure to give birth to Sarah, the daughter of her dreams. Skilfully shifting between the chapters of 'Writing Sarah', told in the third person, and the first person of the framing narrative, Gandolfo, like Miller with Sabita, tellingly conveys the intensity of Kate's desire for a daughter and the pain of her repeated failures to carry a child through to term. While the two novels differ in their outcomes, Kate also takes a radical action and must live with the consequences. By the end of the novel, however, she has come to terms with her past, accepting that creation takes many forms, as do daughters.

In Kristina Olsson's *The China Garden* we are in more familiar territory of babies who arrive when they are not wanted or even expected. The novel opens with a brief prologue describing news of an abandoned new-born baby and the impact of this on three of those who are to become its central characters, before taking us back two weeks in time to an orchard in Italy. There Laura, one of characters briefly introduced in the prologue, hears of the death of her mother Angela in a northern New South Wales coastal town. As Laura flies home, we learn more about the other two characters through whom events are to be focalised, the elderly Cress and her grandson Kieran. Olsson's portrait of Kieran is one of most original features of this novel; while physically an adult, in many ways he remains a child, capable of simple tasks in a sheltered workshop but not of holding down a regular job. We are never told exactly why he is the way he is and Olsson's avoidance of labels helps to engage the reader's empathy for Kieran, with his intense interest in words, his careful observations of both people and the natural world and his special friendship with Angela. Olsson delicately unfolds the ways in which Angela has made a life as a painter, and has helped, and been healed

by, those around her, especially Kieran, after giving up her own son for adoption. The title refers to Angela's garden and its broken pieces of china, an evocative image suggesting that beauty can be created from what is broken and apparently irretrievable, but also the danger and sharpness of buried secrets. Without feeling the need to resolve every absence or mystery, Olsson gently suggests that it is always possible to make new things out of the past, however apparently fractured or painful.

In contrast, Andrea Goldsmith in *Reunion* looks at the problems that arise when four friends are reunited in Melbourne twenty years after their brilliant days at university there and later in Oxford. All but one of them have since become part of the Australian diaspora: Ava a well-known novelist, Helen a cutting-edge molecular biologist, Conrad a philosopher and TV personality; only Jack, held back by his unrequited love for Ava, has failed to build on his earlier promise as a historian of Islam. Ava's husband Harry, though regarded with disdain by her friends, especially Jack, has also done well and, as the head of a new organisation, the Network of Global Australians, has provided the funds to bring Conrad, Helen and Jack back to Melbourne. Of course, it is never possible to relive the past, and the reunion goes far from smoothly as each of them has to face up to new challenges: changes in their bodies as the result of aging, changes in society and culture which make different demands on their expertise. After September 11, there is a new interest in Jack's specialisation in Islam; conversely, Connie's style as a TV guru no longer appeals to a generation immersed in new media, and even his serial seduction of young women is becoming harder to keep up. Helen is forced to compromise her beliefs in the independence of science in order to continue doing the work that is her lifeblood. When Ada's challenge becomes too much for her to bear, help comes not from her husband or friends, not even the enamoured Jack, but from someone even further back in her past. Although the novel's main focus is on Jack and Ada, Goldsmith makes us share the dilemmas of all her characters, and care about the outcomes. Along the way, there is much witty

commentary on contemporary life and culture and some great set pieces, including the NOGA cocktail party and the disastrous pilots for Connie's proposed TV series.

One of the many current issues raised in *Reunion*, that of the right of an individual to choose when and how to die, and the impact this can have on their relatives and friends, is central to Susan Varga's *Headlong*. Although written as fiction, it is clear, especially to those who have read Varga's earlier *Heddy and Me*, which centred on her often difficult relationship with her mother, that this is a novel with strong autobiographical underpinnings. After the death of her husband, Julia, who like him had managed to survive the Holocaust, decides she no longer wishes to go on living and searches for ways to commit suicide. Her doctors and members of her family, believing Julia is just depressed and grieving for her husband, make unsuccessful attempts to talk her out of this. Varga provides a thought-provoking portrait of a mother-daughter relationship always fraught with guilt and pain that is intensified when Julia survives an overdose of pills supposedly guaranteed to end her life. After her daughter refuses to provide any further help, Julia, with the resoluteness that has earlier helped keep her alive, takes things into her own hands in a final brave if shocking act. And the novel's title and the image of the diver on its cover take on a new and much blacker meaning.

Loss and suicide are also strong undercurrents in Emily Maguire's third novel, *Smoke in the Room*, in which three ill-assorted characters share a flat situated on Sydney's Broadway. The flat belongs to Katie's grandmother, whose attempts to be choosy about who shares it are regularly thwarted by Katie's self-destructive behaviour. Adam, a visiting American still recovering from the death of his wife, is no match for Katie's alcohol-fuelled powers of seduction. The second tenant, the much older Graeme, works at the nearby office of the Refugee Assistance Foundation, where he remains a loner, concealing his life and plans from his colleagues. It is Graeme, however, who is able to show true empathy for Katie and to take the, for him, radical step of asking one of his colleagues to help her. By the end of the

novel, it seems that there may be a future for her, even if it is too late for Graeme. *Smoke in the Room* demonstrates a new maturity in Maguire's work, with convincing portraits of three very different and complex characters grappling with the impact of depression, personal loss and a sense of hopelessness in the face of the widespread misery and violence of the contemporary world.

The suicide of the Harvard professor who is supervising her doctoral thesis forces Simone Harlowe, the heroine of Larissa Behrendt's *Legacy*, to reassess her own life and especially her relationship with her father, a prominent Aboriginal rights activist. As in Behrendt's first novel, *Home*, there are strong emphases on Indigenous history and politics and clear autobiographical elements. But these are set within wider questions of individual responsibility: how does one balance personal needs and desires and the needs of others; how does one balance the needs of family members against the needs of the wider community? Publicly, Tony Harlowe has been a hero since the days of the Tent Embassy but, as Simone discovers, he has been far from heroic as a husband. Paralleling this is her discovery that Professor Young, whom she has also greatly admired, has been a failure as a husband and father. *Legacy* is a much stronger novel than *Home*, with Behrendt confronting complex, contemporary issues which impact on both the Indigenous and wider communities.

While the history of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy plays an important role in *Legacy*, two first novels are less successful in attempting to combine historical material with a contemporary story based on the author's personal experiences. In the engagingly-titled *A True History of the Hula Hoop*, Judith Lanigan writes equally engagingly about the life of burlesque performer Catherine Barnier, drawing on her own experiences as, to quote her bio note, 'an international street theatre and circus artist'. The intriguing little interspersed notes about the history of the hula hoop culminate in Catherine's discovery that hoops were indeed being manufactured in Australia two years before they were supposedly 'invented' in America. Less successful is the parallel story of a troupe of *Commedia dell'Arte* actors who

are trying to travel from Italy to Paris in 1572. Despite a few half-hearted attempts to link these episodes with Catherine's own travels through Europe, this historical material does not add much to the novel, especially as there are too many jarring anachronisms in language and incident. I would have much preferred to learn more about Catherine and her adventures, though others less familiar with the history of street theatre may feel differently.

In Robyn Mundy's *The Nature of Ice* the parallels between the contemporary story, based on the author's own regular travels to Antarctica, and the historical one, based on Douglas Mawson's expedition of 1911–14, are more obvious. Again, however, the very different styles of the historical and the contemporary sections seemed to detract from rather than add to the novel, coupled with the fact that Mawson's story is now a fairly well-known one. In contrast, the contemporary story is very engaging, thanks to strong characterisation and a fast-paced narrative. Mundy provides vivid and original descriptions of the Antarctic environment and the difficulties of working there, with many insights into how this affects human relationships. It is pleasing to see she has recently been awarded the Watermark Fellowship for environmental writing.

In another first novel, Goldie Goldbloom's *The Paperbark Shoe*, the problem is not one of a mix of historical and contemporary material, since the novel as a whole is set in the 1940s, but of a mix of styles. It is told in the first person by Gin, an albino and champion pianist, who has grown up in comfort in Perth but has been forced to marry Toad, a short, misshapen person with strange sexual preferences, to escape from the asylum where she has been sent by her wicked stepfather. Together, they slave to develop Toad's farm, situated on third-class land near Wyalkatchem; then their subsistence existence is considerably enlivened by the arrival of two Italian prisoners-of-war to work as farm labourers. Gin falls in love with Antonio and, believing that he also loves her, is devastated when he leaves her without a word. After the war, she manages to raise enough money to travel to Italy in search of him. In the final chapter, with its abrupt

switch from the grotesque comedy of the earlier episodes to the historical realism of the massacre of Antonio's wife and children by German soldiers, we are in very different fictional terrain. Gin is forced to reassess Antonio's feelings for her but the reader is forced to question the overall success of Goldbloom's novel.

Andrew McGahan's *Wonders of a Godless World* is perhaps the most unusual novel to be published in Australia recently, one that demonstrates yet again McGahan's ability to combine literary fiction with more popular genres. After making his name as a writer of grunge fiction, McGahan went on to win the Miles Franklin with his pastoral epic *The White Earth*, followed by *Underground*, a satirical thriller. All his work, however, has had a political edge and *Wonders*, which can perhaps best be described as an ecological fantasy, is no exception. At the most basic level it is about the age-old conflict between man and his environment in a world where, as the title indicates, there is no such thing as a benevolent creator. In a mental hospital on an unnamed island, a man and a woman come together. She is an orphan, who cannot speak, read or, indeed, understand any form of symbolic communication, though she has peculiar powers that allow her to manipulate matter; he, known only as the foreigner, is in a coma after a horrific accident. Thanks to the foreigner's special mental powers they make amazing journeys through time and space, and the orphan learns about many of the world's wonders as she experiences the earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions that have destroyed so many lives. Ultimately, however, McGahan suggests that men, in their determination to survive whatever the cost, represent the real threat to the future of life on earth.

If McGahan is a writer of literary fiction with a popular twist, then the publication of *The Broken Shore* in 2005 drew widespread praise for crime novelist Peter Temple from literary circles. *Truth* is billed as the sequel to *The Broken Shore*, and does feature some brief appearances from its central character, Joe Cashin, as well as an even briefer one from Jack Irish, hero of several earlier Temple novels. But Inspector Stephen Villani, first met in *The Broken Shore*, is a less

original and compelling figure than Cashin, despite struggling with the breakdown of his marriage and other family problems while trying to solve two violent crimes. *Truth* also lacks the wonderful evocation of the Victorian countryside that was one of the highlights of *The Broken Shore*, though Temple again shows his skill in appealing to all the senses in his vivid depictions of contemporary Melbourne. One of Villani's own special skills, his sense of smell, proves crucial in solving his cases but in other respects this is a fairly conventional crime story, though a well-plotted and fast-paced one which will certainly not disappoint lovers of the genre.

2009 also saw new novels by Gerald Murnane, David Forster and Brian Castro, for Forster and Murnane, the first for many years. Indeed, Murnane devotes most of *Barley Patch* to the question 'Must I write' and to describing the fictional work he gave up writing several years ago. In the process, he claims he has no imagination and does not create characters; as those familiar with his work would know, Murnane also does not believe in anything resembling a plot. Nevertheless, *Barley Patch*, a title explained in the last few pages, is always fascinating, especially in its accounts of Murnane's early reading and how he began to explore the images suggested to him through comic strips like 'Mandrake the Magician' and serialised fiction in the *Australian Journal*. It is of course the images, many of them recurring throughout Murnane's work—racecourses and horses, the colours of jockeys' silks, houses of more than one story, grassy plains—that link the various parts of this fiction. In the face of Murnane's frequent reminders that what we are reading is fiction, only a brave or foolish reviewer would note that *Barley Patch* seems to be strongly autobiographical. This of course is part of the problem of representation. As Murnane reminds us, he 'can never be any more than a personage in the mind of any reader of this writing.'

Problems of representation are, as one might expect, central to Brian Castro's ninth novel, *The Bath Fugues*, which consists of three interlinked novellas, 'Beckett's Bicycle', 'Walter's Brief' and 'Sarraute's Surgery'. These titles point to some of the novel's literary

references; their epigraphs indicate others: Baudelaire, Benjamin and Montaigne. The two epigraphs to the novel as a whole provide some further clues about to how to read it: a Wikipedia entry describes Bach's Goldberg Variations and pianist Glenn Gould, best-known for his recordings of this work, notes that it is 'music with neither real climax nor real resolution, music which like Baudelaire's lovers rests lightly on the wings of the unchecked wind.' In novella three, we find what seems to be a fairly clear statement of the novel's structure:

Bach wrote fugues. The important thing about a fugue or 'flight' is that all the voices are equal and independent in counterpoint. They are all relative to each other, and in this organised complexity, they speak together, drop out, become fellow travellers, form pairs of dialogues, and in general, mutilate the subject by inverting, augmenting, truncating or copying it.

Of course, the speaker here is not Castro but Dr Judith Sarraute, one of these 'equal and independent voices' through whom the novel is narrated. Others include Jason Redvers, artist and forger, Walter Gottlieb, academic and would-be biographer, Camilo Conceição, a Portuguese poet and art collector, living in Macau in the 1920s, Julia Grace, an Australian cubist artist with whom he has a liaison, and an unnamed man who lives off what he can garner from others and is perhaps closest of all to the author figure. All of them are related in various ways, come and go throughout the novel, and interact as described above. But what is the subject? There is much here about art and poetry, the anxiety of influence, copying as against authenticity, madness, opium and baths, not to mention bicycles and jellyfish. And plenty of the puns and game playing which, as Bernadette Brennan notes in her book discussed below, have always been part of Castro's work. Perhaps it's best just to immerse oneself in the writing, enjoy the wonderful descriptions of life in Sydney, Macau and North Queensland, and admire the intricacies of Castro's counterpoint.

David Foster's thirteenth novel, *Sons of the Rumour*, also pays

tribute to literary forebears, especially Richard Burton's translations of the *Arabian Nights* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, but unlike Murnane's and Castro's moves well beyond questions of representation. As other reviewers have noted, the most brilliant section describes a pilgrimage to Ireland by Al Morrissey, failed scientist, failed jazz-drummer, failed husband, in which Foster the satirist gets stuck into such contemporary horrors as long-distance air travel and the decline of once great cities. It is hard not to see this 100-page tour-de-force as a male equivalent of Molly Bloom's soliloquy, though one that ends in death rather than sexual delight. Likewise, the novel as a whole reverses the main premise of the *Arabian Nights*: the Shah finds Shahrazad's tales boring rather than enthralling. Instead, he spends his 'Iranian Days' in visits to the Sons of the Rumour. From them he hears tales and sermons that range through many religions and regions, in which sexual desire jostles with the desire for enlightenment. 'The Man Who Fell in Love with His Own Feet', for example, gives a marvellous account of the origins of the Chinese custom of female foot-binding while 'Blue Melons' combines the wonderful, the horrific and the abject in true Foster fashion. Foster claims in his 'Author's Note' that *Sons of the Rumour* was inspired by his presence at the Cronulla riot of 2005 and aims to explore the current conflict between '(fundamentalist) Islamic man and (anti-Christian) secular Western woman.' This is clearly a topic of vital importance and one can only admire the immense amount of erudition, imagination and passion that has gone into this novel, though at the same time wondering how many readers will make it through to the end.

Despite the success of Nam Le's *The Boat*, collections of stories are still thin on the ground in Australia and published mainly by smaller presses. The winning book in the University of Queensland Press's 2008 David Unaipon Award for a manuscript by an Indigenous author was however a collection of stories, Marie Munkara's *Every Secret Thing*. Set on an Aboriginal mission in northern Australia run by the Catholic Church, much of Munkara's humour and satire is reminiscent of *Bran Nue Day*, though her vision is ultimately a much

bleaker one. The somewhat over-insistent ironies in the opening story 'The Bishop' made me fearful that this would be a one-note work in which the whites could do no right and their ostensible charges no wrong. But Munkara spreads her sympathy and her criticisms more widely. 'Pwomiga' reveals some of the problems that can arise in traditional cultures when a man with little interest in women and children inherits the wives and offspring of his dead brothers. In marked contrast, 'Mira' tells the story of one of the nuns, who has taken to the veil after being betrayed by her lover, only to find him turning up many years later to die at the mission, so ensuring that even after death she will not be revenged on him. 'Marigold' describes the even sadder life of a mixed-blood woman, sent to the mainland as a child, who later returns to the mission to find her mother. Marigold's education in white ways, however, has left her stranded between cultures: 'As a product of the bush mob and the mission mob Marigold's place was with neither of them and it was with a heavy heart that she watched her dreams of a life with her family disappear.' Behind all the comic bumbling of the missionaries and the often subversive activities of the 'bush mob', is the inescapable pain caused by disruption of traditional cultures and failures of love and understanding.

Marie Munkara's stories, for all the variety of their themes, share a common time and place. In contrast, Archie Weller's collection, *The Window Seat*, brings together stories written over many years, including ones commissioned by various publications. Early stories, 'Stolen Car' and 'Dead Dingo', are similar in style and subject matter to Weller's first novel, *The Day of the Dog*, describing the misadventures of Aboriginal youths as they hit the big city. Later ones, though still mostly dealing with Indigenous issues, naturally take on the genre and themes of the anthologies in which they appeared. So 'Dead Roses', named by Weller as one of his favourites, is a murder mystery and 'It's Only a Game' a comic piece for an anthology on Australian Rules football. '67 Yagan Way' is a futuristic story along the lines of Weller's more recent novel, *The Land of the Golden Clouds*, while

the zany ‘Confessions of a Head Hunter’ was also inspired by the story of Yagan, though here it is Aboriginal youths who collect the heads from statues of white men. Other stories in a more realist mode describe personal relationships that rarely have happy endings, as in ‘The Island’, where an idyllic love is only possible in a brief escape from normal life. Since Weller is not a prolific writer, this collection of his short fiction is especially welcome.

Unusually for a collection of stories, Richard Rossiter’s *Arrhythmia* features not one but two family trees as an appendix. Despite some initial confusion caused by the characters ‘Emily’ and ‘Ellen’ having different husbands in family tree 1 from those they have in the stories, the appendix is useful in keeping track of who is who, since the stories feature people from four generations and do not follow a strict chronology. Many of them, however, focus on two characters, Roland, the grandson of Samuel and Emily, whom we meet in the opening story, and their great-granddaughter, Laura. As Roland is the product of a later, second marriage, he is probably much the same age as Laura, daughter of his half-sister Leah, although the two never intersect. In ‘Roland’ he reflects bitterly on his parents’ disastrous marriage, blaming them for all the problems in his life, and things do not improve for him in the following stories. ‘Present Tense’, for example, describes his increasingly more bizarre attempts to live wholly in the moment, something he perhaps achieves, though in an ironical way, in the final story, ‘Roland Redux’. Laura’s life appears to have a more hopeful trajectory; introduced to us while involved in an unsatisfactory relationship in ‘Her Next Lover’, by the end of the collection she is settled on her father’s farm. Despite the mystery of his disappearance it is possible her rootless life is at an end. While the 26 stories in *Arrhythmia* are all quite short, recurring themes and characters allow Rossiter to explore many of the complexities of family and contemporary life.

Mainstream publishers seem more prepared now to publish new anthologies of short fiction, one of the most recent being Mandy Sayer’s *The Australian Long Story*. In her introduction Sayer discusses

differences between a long story and a novella, provides a brief history of the short story in Australia and explains why she has not included any works written before the 1970s: it seems they were too short! (There are in fact some great long stories by nineteenth-century women such as Tasma and Ada Cambridge: see another 2009 publication, *The PEN Macquarie Anthology of Australian Literature*). Sayer has, however, selected some wonderful long stories, including Elizabeth Jolley's chilling 'Grasshoppers', first published in a shorter version in *Westerly*, as well as other established classics by Malouf, Garner, Carey, Winton, Mears and Goldsworthy, along with Nam Le's more recent 'Halflead Bay'. Indeed, the only real surprise is a story by Louis Nowra, known more for his plays and memoirs than his fiction. Sayer claims Nowra's 'Ten Anecdotes About Lord Howe Island' is 'a rare example of the comedic long story' but also acknowledges that he is her husband.

Meenakshi Bharat and Sharon Rundle, editors of *Fear Factor*, an anthology of fiction relating to such current issues as terrorism, refugees, and fear of the other, present an intriguing mix of work by Indian and Australian authors, new as well as established. Alongside extracts from novels by Tom Keneally, David Malouf, Salman Rushdie and Kiran Nagarkar one finds stories presenting very different aspects of the main theme. In 'Packing Heat', for example, Devika Brendon provides an insight into the mind of a female suicide bomber; in marked contrast, Meenakshi Bharat's 'Compensation' shows that an act of terrorism can sometimes have unexpectedly positive outcomes. Picador Australia are to be congratulated on releasing this book originally published by Picador India.

If short fiction is generally out of fashion with mainstream Australian publishers, works of literary criticism, especially comprehensive studies of our leading writers, now get published overseas if at all. In 2009, UQP bucked this trend with David Callahan's *Rainforest Narratives*, a study of Janette Turner Hospital's fiction, perhaps because they publish her novels. Despite his title, Callahan does not confine himself to Hospital's Australian novels but covers all of her

work—eight novels and three collections of stories—up to *Orpheus Lost* (2007). He also includes an excellent bibliography, listing her uncollected stories and numerous articles and reviews, as well as publications on her fiction. As a title, *Rainforest Narratives* is used metaphorically, to refer to ‘the bewildering oversupply of information’, the ‘networks of connection, entanglements of involvement’, and the sometimes disorienting questioning of time and identity found in Hospital’s fiction. In contrast, Callahan’s approach is clear and lucid, providing interpretative guides to Hospital’s fictional labyrinths. As he indicates, problems of identity, related especially to cultural and gender issues, together with the use of unreliable narrators and an increasing emphasis on violence, are hallmarks of Hospital’s work. He notes, in her two most recent novels, a move to a more accessible style and more linear structure, one that perhaps mirrors the move away from postmodern reflexivity in contemporary fiction generally. Nevertheless, Hospital’s novels continue to make many demands on the reader, besides offering much in return, and Callahan’s comprehensive study will be welcomed by her admirers.

In *Messengers of Eros*, French scholar Xavier Pons presents the first extended study of ‘representations of sex in Australian writing’. Despite the subtitle, with the exception of a chapter on A D Hope’s poetry, his focus is on fictional representations, primarily from recent decades. In his conclusion, Pons admits the impossibility of demonstrating ‘an identifiably Australian way of writing about sex’. This may explain why the most interesting of his sixteen chapters are the later ones that look at one or two texts or authors in detail. Although Pons demonstrates wide reading of both Australian and international literature in his more general chapters, there is some repetition and no sense of a developing argument. Another difficulty is that some novels that were much discussed when first published because of their highly erotic nature—such as Linda Jaivin’s *Eat Me* and Justine Ettler’s *The River Ophelia*—have not lasted. The best chapters, however, offer new insights into works that have not received much critical attention, such as Peter Carey’s *The Tax*

Inspector, discussed alongside Christos Tsiolkas's *Dead Europe* as representations of sexual abjection. Another valuable chapter selects three very different historical novels, Tom Keneally's *Bring Larks and Heroes*, Philip McLaren's *Sweet Water...Stolen Land* and Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish*, to discuss the use of sexual encounters as metonymic representations of the colonial process. These chapters demonstrate the value of an external perspective on Australian literature, one that also allows Pons to address what has seemed a taboo topic locally, 'Homoeroticism in David Malouf'. In a sensitive reading of Malouf's fiction, Pons sees him as concerned to 'free his characters from an imposed binary categorization of sexualities', pointing out that difference as it relates to sexuality can be regarded as just as much part of the postcolonial condition as racial difference.

Given the subtitle of Bernadette Brennan's *Brian Castro's Fiction: The Seductive Play of Language*, it may seem surprising that Castro's fiction is not discussed by Pons, especially as he was the French translator of Castro's first novel, *Birds of Passage*. But, as Brennan makes clear, Castro has always been more concerned with linguistic seductions, with the play of words and meanings rather than lips and limbs, with death rather than sex. She provides detailed analyses of his eight novels published between 1983 and 2008, reading them chronologically and in conjunction with his own essays and a wide range of fiction and essays by others. Her emphasis is on Castro's imaginative concerns and strategies, especially his celebration of language, as seen in his love of puns and literary games, his breaking of narrative and genre conventions, his linking of writing, desire and death. Castro, as she notes, runs the risk of alienating readers through his constant playing with and subversion of our desire to impose meaning or anything in a way of a unitary interpretation on his fiction. Autobiographical readings, in particular, are rejected, especially of his 'fictional autobiography' *Shanghai Dancing*. Brennan's chapter on this, arguably Castro's most important work to date, is one of the highlights of her monograph, though she is concerned to stress

that her readings of Castro's novels are not to be seen as in any way definitive. This first extended study of Castro's fiction is a welcome addition to Australian literary criticism and offers many insights into his work, as well as an excellent bibliography.

In conclusion, a brief mention of a novel written in 1864–65, though published only this year: *Tom Hurstbourne or A Squatter's Life* by John Claverling Wood. Gerard Benjamin, a descendant of the author, was given the manuscript by a family member, and has edited it in conjunction with his wife, Gloria Grant. Originally believed to be a diary, the manuscript was in fact that of the second novel to be written about Queensland and offers some fascinating insights into colonial life, despite an over-melodramatic plot. Even in these cosmopolitan times, history returns in unexpected ways.

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Blood Bank

Syd Harrex

We visit them all, the banks of Mysore,
climb grimy stairs to enter each time
a room with a cashier's cage. Rows
of key-hole eyes suck specks of figures
from brown sheets and tiers of ledgers
out of which paper and cardboard
have been made infallible, cash-flow temples.

Each of my smiling supplications
meets the same routine reply...
'No, don't have arrangement
with your bank.' (Polite, they
won't admit my bank does not
exist, our pilgrimage useless.)
'No, no cable transfer of dollars
Australian has been received.
But the next bank, on contrary,
is certainly having correspondence
with your bank. Please to enquire there.'

That day, apart from a shared one-cone
ice-cream, we ate no lunch.
We lose our way among burnt-
toast houses. Beggars missing
limbs or organs, branded with disease,
blotched, nibbled by leprosy,
must be joking!...Don't they know
our money hasn't arrived?

This day, for once, we are saving
even our lightest coins.

Finding our Guest House at last,
its fronds of soothing shade, our feet
feel hot and flat as spitting irons.
I sink onto my hard bed, doze
in parchment of bankrupt myths,
stories of financial asceticism,
neither hearing nor seeing mosquitoes
amend my thrift, mosquitoes en masse
filling their black bellies,
withdrawing my only currency,
my bountiful, my profligate blood.

Word

Jazra Khaleed

Translation from the Greek by Sarah Katherine McCann

I have no homeland
I live within words—
Words of mourning
Words enchained—
You hear, Mustapha Khayati?

The power lies in language
And police patrol up in there—
No more poetry series for us
No more Seferises—
In my neighborhood, they sacrifice virgin poets

Dust-eyed rappers in baggy pants
Push rhymes on kids sniffing words

To fall down and get back up: the poet's Art
You hear, Jean Genet?

My words are homeless
Sleeping on the benches of Lamentation Square
Covered with IKEA cardboard

My words don't make the evening news
They walk the streets each night
My words are proletarians, slaves like me
They work the sweatshops day in, day out

No more dirges for me
No more verbs from those not fighting

I need a new language—no more pimping

I'm waiting for a revolution to invent me
I'm longing for the language of *class struggle*

A tongue with the taste of revolt—
I'll cook it up!

What arrogance!
Alright, I'm out.

But look: the dawn of a new poetry etched in my face

No word left chained

I'm searching for a way through

the seduction

Adrian Flavell

the bird

with its eye torn
and hanging like a
cherry

has no choice

but to shuffle
within broken shade
and tremble

to the pleasure of cat

The Snake

Graham Rowlands

I was late pedalling to soccer practice
on my green semi-racer bicycle & guessing
I'd just have to make do with parking it
on its side in the dust or in the gravel
when I noticed one side of just one tree
free of the bikes leaned against the others.
In the second I took to see snake, snake
I saw live snake twisting down on me—
no more than a medium-size carpet snake
aimed, dangled & literally dropped dead.
So becoming a snake-charmer wasn't for me
& any career in snake-catching or milking
to face & stare down the stares of snakes
could have ended up a statistic on the news.
Now, after forty-nine years, I find myself
reaching up into the branches of that tree
& bringing down the snake, dead or alive.

Shortened Cigars Stained with Nostalgic Tears

Myint Zan

Foreword

This is a translation of a poem written by Maung Swan Yi (actual name Win Pe) (born 1937), a Burmese poet who has been residing in the United States since late 2002. The poem was written in remembrance of two of his fellow poets Tin Moe (actual name Ba Gyan) and Kyi Aung (actual name Kyi Lin) who died respectively in Los Angeles in January 2007 and in Mandalay, Burma, in March 2009. All three are Burmese poets with perhaps the most prominent poet being Tin Moe (who had lived in exile mainly in the United States and other countries since about July 1999 till his death in January 2007).

Tin Moe wrote his last poem on the night of 21 January 2007 just about 18 hours before he died the next day. Among well over a thousand poems written by Tin Moe, one of the most famous, due both to its brevity, enigma and beauty as well as its philosophical significance, is a poem which can be entitled as 'The Guest'. In the original Burmese it runs thus:

Myint Zan

ဧည့်သည်ကြီး

ဆေးလိပ်လည်းတို

နေလည်းညိုပြီ

ငါ့ကိုပြန်ပို့ကြပါလေ။

တင်မိုး

In my translation it reads:

The Guest

By Tin Moe

Translation by Myint Zan

The cigar's burning down

The Sun's brown

[Will someone] Send me back [to my place]

The translator is unable to do (full) justice to the original but an attempt has to be made. In place of the 'burning down' a more literal translation could be 'the cigar is shortened'. In a translation by Maung Tha Noe (born circa 1933), who is also a friend of Tin Moe, Kyi Aung and Maung Swan Yi, first published in the early to mid-1960s, Maung Tha Noe (from this translator's memory) translated the first line of the poem as 'The cigar's burnt down' but the cigar has not (totally) 'burnt down' as yet. Though syntactically and perhaps grammatically 'the cigar's burnt down' would seem a better translation, in order to get as 'proximate' as possible to the original, I have translated it as 'the cigar's *burning* down' partly to rhyme with 'the Sun's brown'. A more literal translation though would be 'the cigar is shortened'. In the original poem the phrases [Will someone], and [to my place] did not appear.

On the few occasions that this translator met the poet Tin Moe in the 1970s in Rangoon, Burma and in December 2000 in Melbourne, Australia, I did not directly enquire from him as to the 'occasion' or

the ‘trigger’ which prompted Tin Moe to pen this enigmatic poem, though I have heard a few stories about the ‘origins’ of the poem. These include the claim that Tin Moe penned it at a road-side tea shop when someone ostensibly stated ‘The cigar’s shortened, the Sun’s brown’ and Tin Moe supplied or added the last line of the poem of ‘sending back’. After Kyi Aung, whose native place Ava (Inwa) which is several miles from Mandalay, Burma’s second biggest city and considered its cultural capital, died in March 2009 at the Mandalay General Hospital, the news was mentioned on several Burmese websites including at Moemaka media (www.moemaka.com a mainly Burmese language website). Maung Swan Yi wrote and published the poem in remembrance of his two departed friends at the above website.

It was only around early August 2009 several months after Maung Swan Yi’s poem was first published that I came across the (to me and in the original) affecting reminiscence by Maung Swan Yi of his two friends. Only after reading Maung Swan Yi’s poem did I become aware of the actual circumstances pertaining to the composition of the poem. ‘Shortened Cigars Stained with Nostalgic Tears’ confirms the ‘story’ that I have heard that some person other than Tin Moe composed or at least stated the first two lines of the poem. Until I read Maung Swan Yi’s poem I did not know the identity of the person who uttered them. In early 2004 and 2005 I had the chance to meet Kyi Aung twice in his native Ava and also in Mandalay briefly but had never asked and did not know that he was the ‘protagonist’ of Tin Moe’s ‘The Guest’ poem. Based on my incomplete knowledge I had written in my tribute of Tin Moe in ‘Tin Moe: An Exiled Burmese Poet of Simplicity and Humanity’ (*Bulletin of the Burma Studies Group*, 79 (2007), 18) about an ‘apocryphal’ story of how Tin Moe composed the poem in a tea shop (which apparently was not the case since he actually he composed it in the ‘Tamarind Villa’ in late 1958 or early 1959 where he and Maung Swan Yi were housemates) and that Tin Moe collapsed and later died in a cafeteria (‘teashop’) in a suburb of Los Angeles on 22 January 2007 which was what had happened. The story I heard that Tin Moe composed the poem in a ‘teashop’ (in late

Myint Zan



Tin Moe, 2006



Kyi Aung (centre facing camera), 2008



Maung Swan Yi at his New York apartment, 30 March 2010

1958 or early 1959) turns out, from Maung Swan Yi's account, not to be true.

Tin Moe, Kyi Aung and Maung Swan Yi, all natives of upper Burma and all aspiring and later established poets and writers, attended Mandalay University from the mid-1950s to the late 1950s and beyond. They became friends during the course of their studies. This tribute and the 'nostalgic' poem by Maung Swan Yi indicates the way they 'discoursed' among themselves about poetry and literature. Tin Moe's first published book of poems *The Lantern* won the national prize for poetry awarded by the then Burmese government in 1959 and Maung Swan Yi helped include 'The Guest' poem in *The Lantern*. In a phone conversation with Maung Swan Yi in September 2009 from his current residence in Queens, New York, Maung Swan Yi indicated that he had to persuade and almost cajoled Tin Moe to include 'The Guest' in the *The Lantern*. Maung Swan Yi indicated that Tin Moe was initially quite reluctant to publish a three-line 'doggerel' in his collection. Hence Burmese poetry lovers owe it to all three persons, Kyi Aung, Tin Moe and Maung Swan Yi for 'The Guest' being published soon after its composition.

Since some of the terms and contexts used in the poem do require elaboration or explanation in order to highlight the cultural, contextual, at times etymological meaning and connotations I have—at the possible risk of effecting an aesthetic and smooth reading of the translation of this poem—inserted explanatory notes at the end of the translation.

လွမ်းမျက်ရည်စို ဆေးလိပ်တိုများ

Shortened Cigars Stained with Nostalgic Tears

မောင်စွမ်းရည်

By Maung Swan Yi

ဧပြီ ၁၆၊ ၂၀၀၉

16 April 2009

Translated with foreword, annotations and afterword

by Myint Zan

မန္တလေးမှာ In Mandalay
 ဆေးရုံကြီး တောင်၊ ရွေးတဟောင်မှာ on the South of the [Mandalay
 General] Hospital, a ‘dog-bark’s away’¹
 မီးရထားရပ်ကွက် အရှေ့ဘက်မှာ at the eastern side of the railway
 quarters
 မြေနီကျင်းရပ်ကွက် လမ်းတဖက်မှာ on the other side of ‘the red dirt
 road’ quarters
 တမာပင်နဲ့ near the tamarind tree
 နှစ်ပင် နှစ်ခန်း [there was] a two-roomed house with two trees in the
 compound
 အိမ်တခြမ်းမှာ [in] part of the two-roomed house
 ဘဂျမ်းနဲ့ ငါ နေပါတယ် there lived Ba Gyan and I²

အိမ်အမည်မှာ the name of the house was
 ‘တမာရိပ်သာ’ တဲ့၊ ‘tamarind villa’
 စာတန်းမထိုး there was no signage at the house
 နှုတ်ကျိုး တွင်ကျယ် though verbally, people have referred to it thus
 ဘယ်သူက စ I don’t know who gave this name to the house
 ဘယ်တုန်းကလဲ or when it started
 ငါ မမှတ်မိ ငါမသိပါ။ I do not recall, I do not know

ငါသိတာက what I know is
 ဒါမျိုးလေ့တာ တင်မိုး ပါပဲ။ Tin Moe is the person who was wont to [give
 such names]
 တင်မိုးဆိုတာ ဘဂျမ်းပါပဲ။ Tin Moe’s name is also Ba Gyan

ဘဂျမ်းနဲ့ ငါ Ba Gyan and I
 ကဗျာ အတူစပ် [while staying at ‘Tamarind villa’] composed poems
 together
 ဖျာအတူ တချပ် slept on the same mat
 နံစပ် ချည်စောင် used the same cotton blanket
 ခြင်ထောင်တလုံး and the same mosquito net
 ခေါင်းတအုံးတည်း အိပ်ခဲ့တယ်။ and used the same [set of] pillows

တနေ့တခါ once a day
 ကြည်အောင် လာရင် Kyi Aung visited us
 ကဗျာတအုပ် and he brought along with him a book of poems
 ဆေးလိပ်တဆုပ်နဲ့ [also] clutching a packet of cigars
 ကုပ်ချောင်းကုပ်ချောင်း he arrived furtively
 ဦးထုပ်ဆောင်းပြီး wearing a hat
 “ကျောင်းမသွားဘဲ လာခဲ့တာ” တဲ့။ stating ‘[I] have come without going
 to school [classes at Mandalay University]’

ဖန်မီးအိမ်ရှင် [the owner of ‘The Lantern’]
 ကဗျာတင်မိုး Tin Moe, the poem³
 အိပ်ရာ နိုးစ has just awoken
 မီးခိုးထောင်းထောင်း amidst puffs of [cigar] smoke
 ချောင်းတဟွတ်ဟွတ်နဲ့ coughing
 “ဂွတ်တမောနင်း [he said] ‘Good-Ta-morning’⁴
 သူငယ်ချင်း လာ လာ” friend, come, come’
 ဆီးကြိုပါတယ်။ welcomed him

မုန့်ဟင်းခါးဆိုင်သွား [we] went to the vermicelli soup
 [moant-hingar]⁵ shop
 စကားဖောင်ဖွဲ့ talked a lot
 လက်ဖက်ရည်ဆိုင်သွား went to the teashop
 စကားတွတ်ထိုး talked some more
 ထမင်းဆာရင် if we are hungry for rice [and curry]
 ဆိုင်ကိုဝင်စား went to the food shop
 အစားပြီး အစား eating followed by further eating
 စကားပြီး စကားပေါ့။ talk continued after talk

စကား စကား talk and talk
 ပြောပါများတော့ when one talks much
 စကားထဲမှာ ကဗျာ ပါမပေါ့။ out of the talk poems arose⁶
 မောတော့ အိမ်ပြန် tired, we would go back to the house
 အိမ်နံရံပို slouched on the house’s wall
 ထမင်းလုံး စီရာ to ease digestion

ဆေးလိပ်ဖွာတော့ they, [Tin Moe and Kyi Aung] would puff the cigar
 ဖွာတာရှိက်တာ though in the puffing and inhaling [of cigars]
 ငါမပါလည်း I did not join
 ကဗျာခံအုပ် [I joined the talks] based on and sentiments about poetry
 အလုပ်ရှုပ်ကြဲ busy with poetry talk
 ပျော်မှ ပျော်လှ how happy we were!
 ဪ - အဟောဝတ O! How beneficent it was
 ငယ်တုန်းကပေါ့။ that was when we were young

တနေ့သောခါ one day
 ကြည့်အောင်လာပြီး Kyi Aung came
 ပြန်ခါနီးတော့ and was about to leave
 မီးခြစ်ကို ဆုပ် grasping the match-box
 ဦးထုပ်ကို ဆောင်း wearing [his] hat
 ခါးညောင်း ကိုယ်ဆန့် stretching body and limb
 ဖိနပ် တပ်မျှော် wearing his slippers, gazing and whimsically [stated]
 'ဪ - ဆေးလိပ်လည်း တို [Kyi Aung said] 'Ah—the cigar is
 shortened

နေလည်း ညိုပေါ့' တဲ့ and the Sun is brown'
 ဒီလိုတုန်းမှာ while this was being said
 တင်မိုး ပျာလာ in a hurry, Tin Moe
 ထိုင်ရာက မှောက် rose from the seat, laid [on the floor]
 ကလောင်ကောက်ပြီး picked up the pen
 တောက်လျှောက် စာစီ impromptu and straight away
 ကဗျာသီရင်း composed poetry
 "သူငယ်ချင်းတို့ —my friends:
 မင်းတို့ ခဏ၊ နားထောင်ကြစမ်း you listen to this for a while
 ဆေးလိပ်လဲတို၊ နေလည်း ညိုပြီ 'the cigar is burning down, the sun's
 brown

ငါ့ကို ပြန်ပို့ကြပါလေ" တဲ့၊ send me back' thus was the poem
 ကဗျာခေါင်းစီး 'ဧည့်သည်ကြီး' တဲ့။ the title was 'The Guest'

ဧည့်သည်ကြီးက the guest [Kyi Aung]⁷
 အံ့ချီး တက်ခေါက် in amazement, clicked his tongue

လက်ဖျောက် တီးကာ snapped his fingers
 “ဟာ ဟာ တယ်ကောင်း” hah! ah! Such excellence
 ခေါင်းတညိတ်ညိတ် မျက်ရည်ဖိတ် nodding his head, tears flowed
 ပီတိသုံးပန်း လွမ်းအတိတ်။ three persons rejoiced⁸ as though three
 flowers bloom, the past is nostalgia⁹

‘ဖန်မီးအိမ်’ မှာ In ‘*The Lantern*’ [collection of Tin Moe’s poems]
 ဒီကဗျာကို this poem
 ငါက ချိတ်ခဲ့၊ I have ‘hooked’ it [arranged to put into print]
 အတိတ်ဇာတ်လမ်း the story from the past
 လွမ်းလည်းလွမ်းချင် I want to be nostalgic
 မလွမ်းချင်ဘူး yet I do not want to [be so]
 လွမ်းလျှင် ကြေကွဲ [since] grief follows nostalgia:
 လွမ်းမစပြီ unending nostalgia
 လွမ်းမြဲလွမ်းရစ် နှစ်ပေါင်း ငါးဆယ် this sustained nostalgia, left behind
 by nostalgia [of events] fifty years ago
 ဟယ် - မြန်လိုက်တာ၊ hey—how quick[ly] [time moves]
 ဧည့်သည်ကြီးတွေ the great Guests
 နေညိုတိုင်းပြန် whenever the Sun is down, have left
 ငါ့ကို ချန်ခဲ့ leaving me behind
 မပြန်လမ်းကို မြန်းကြပြီ။ following the path of No Return

ကျန်ရစ်တဲ့ ငါ I, who is left behind
 ယောင်ချာချာ နဲ့ fumblingly
 ကာရန် ရှာတိုင်း whenever in search of rhymes
 ရင်နာ ရန်ပြိုး with heart aches, and grievances¹⁰
 ဆေးလိပ်ခိုးတွေ the smoke from the cigars
 လေတိုးဝေ့လာ would blow through the wind [:]
 တင်မိုး ပါသလား do they include Tin Moe?
 ကြည်အောင် ပါသလား do they include Kyi Aung?
 လန့်တကြားနဲ့ startled
 နား တစွင့်စွင့် ကြိုမိသည်၊ I strain my ears to welcome [them]
 တံခါးဖွင့်လို့ ငိုမိသည်။ ။ I open the door [only] to weep

Notes

- 1 A colloquial Burmese usage meaning a place where a dog's bark can be heard.
- 2 In or about the years 1958 and 1959 Ba Gyan and Win Pe (Maung Swan Yi) lived at the same house in Mandalay 'a dog's bark away from Mandalay General Hospital'. About forty years later starting from mid-1999 Tin Moe became an exile first in Belgium (where one of his daughter lives) and later in the United States, living most of the time in either a suburb of Los Angeles with another of his daughters or occasionally in Fort Wayne, Indiana' where a large expatriate or exile(d) Burmese community lives. It was in Los Angeles that the guest's (a refugee from Burma) cigar's burnt down and the lantern-owner died. Maung Swan Yi came to the United States in late December 2002 and the two poets did meet in the United States fairly often though Maung Swan Yi was living in Queen's (Quarter) in New York, a far place from the 'Tamarind Villa' in Mandalay of yore of fifty years ago and from Baldwin Park, a suburb of Los Angeles where Tin Moe lived some of the time during his exile—and where he died. Kyi Aung, who had never left Burma, met his end in Mandalay quite near his native place of Ava.
3. The phrase is literally translated as 'the poem Tin Moe' ကဗျာ တင်မိုး rather than the 'poet Tin Moe' ကဗျာဆရာ တင်မိုး for that was the term Maung Swan Yi used inferring that Tin Moe, in a metaphorical sense, was 'poetry' or at least produced or embodied poetry.
4. I have exactly transliterated 'Good morning' as 'Good-Ta-Morning' as it was the wont of some Burmese perhaps including Tin Moe to pronounce it that way.
5. *Moant-hingar* a Burmese food, if not delicacy, is loosely translated as 'vermicelli soup'. One website states that *Moant-hingar* မုန့်ဟင်းခါး 'is a mix[ture] of the thick fish soup and thin rice noodles [together with] roasted chilly powder, a squeezed lemon, fish sauce and coriander' [are added to it] 'Myanmar food' <http://www.uniteam-travel-myanmar.com/food.html> (accessed 4 September 2009). The food is available in road-side stalls and the customers usually eat it from low-lying tables while sitting on stools.
6. This is a 'play' (though not a pun) of two Burmese sayings one of which asserts 'talk, talk, too much talk, from the talk [one's] origins (literally 'birth') စကားစကားပြောဖန်များ စကားထဲကထုတိုပြု is revealed' and another which reminds that 'talk, talk, too much talk, by talking too much mistakes are made' စကားစကားပြောဖန်များ စကားထဲမှာအမှားပါ။ Maung Swan Yi, appears to be asserting (apparently going against the 'grain' of conventional wisdom) that 'out of talk, too much talk' (and for those with a poetic bent) poetry or at least talk about poetry and poems can also arise.

7. The ‘guest’ to the Tamarind Villa all those years ago was, of course, Kyi Aung and the guest helped Tin Moe write *The Guest*. In this particular paragraph Maung Swan Yi narrates how the guest was affected by *The Guest* poem. And it was the guest Kyi Aung’s words that inspired Tin Moe to compose *The Guest*.
8. Initially I was uncertain about the phrase ‘three flowers’ and thought that it might have been a typographical error. With the removal of two ‘dots’ in the phrase သုံးဝန်း *thone-pann* (‘three flowers’) in the Burmese spelling the phrase could be transformed into သို့ဝန်း ‘*thoant pan*’ (‘prisoner’). Hence I have translated the poem initially as ‘prisoners of joy’. When I telephoned Maung Swan Yi in early September 2009 to check the meaning of the phrase he stated that it was ‘*thone-pann*’ (‘three flowers’). As a translator, I am of the view that the phrase ‘prisoners of joy’ rather than ‘three flowers’ [rejoicing at the fruition of the poem] could be equally—if not even more—appropriate. This is so since the next phrase ‘nostalgic past’ (the past as nostalgia) could be construed to indicate that by being nostalgic of his two departed friends in remembering things past (or ‘in search of lost time’—to quote directly from Marcel Proust’s masterpiece) the poet’s memory can be held ‘prisoner’ to the joy and later (see the end of the poem) the hurts emerging from them. It is said that when one translates poetry one ‘loses’ but also at the same time ‘gains’ from what is stated in the original. Though the phrase ‘prisoners of joy’ rather than ‘three flowers rejoiced’ is a modification or innovation of the translator it is indicative of the addition or ‘spill-over’ that occurred in the translator’s mind in reading this part of the poem.
9. A more literal translation would be ‘Nostalgic Past’ or simply ‘Nostalgia Past’ since Maung Swan Yi juxtaposed together these two words. I have taken the liberty and paraphrased the statement ‘[t]he past is a foreign country’ to ‘The past is nostalgia’. Indeed from a foreign country (the United States) Maung Swan Yi expressed his ‘nostalgia’—with acknowledgment to Marcel Proust—in ‘Remembrance of Things Past’ or ‘In [Nostalgia] for Lost Time’.
10. I have proximately translated the Burmese phrase Yan Hnyo ရန်ငြိုး as ‘grievance’ when it can also mean, in the context of the poem, a sustained sense of grievance and ‘unforgiveness’ arising out of hurts done and received. Just as time moves unforgivingly and relentlessly the heartache and the sense of grievance equally relentlessly cloud the memories of the poet through the suffocating and grief-inducing ‘cigar smoke’ which makes the poet—as the last lines of the poem movingly states—open the door(s) (of cognition and nostalgia)—only to weep.

Afterword

A few weeks after the editor(s) sent the translator a lightly edited translation of Maung Swan Yi's poem and my comments for possible emendations the translator met Maung Swan Yi at his studio apartment in Queens, New York, in the United States on 30 March 2010. I did not discuss with the poet much about my translation of his poem beyond stating that it was scheduled for publication and that the editors and publisher wished to obtain a better copy of the photos of the two late poets Tin Moe and Kyi Aung. During our conversation Maung Swan Yi also 'reminisced' about the late Tin Moe and Tin Moe's (charming) almost child-like idiosyncrasies especially when they were students at Mandalay University in the mid to late 1950s. When at the end of the meeting and while I was about to leave his apartment I casually asked him whether he has written his tribute of his departed friends with 'tears as investment' (or 'capital') မျက်ရည်နဲ့ရင်းနှီးပြီး Maung Swan Yi did not reply—perhaps the only time during our conversation he had not responded to my questions. I might add here that there is a Burmese saying that 'silence means admission' ဆိတ်ဆိတ်နေဝန်ခံ My (perhaps for him as well as for myself) slightly embarrassing and partly self-conscious query—as I was moved and touched each time I re-read, even when I occasionally think about the last lines of the poem—was answered by Maung Swan Yi in silence. I would also point out that the phrase 'tears as investment' or 'investing in tears' was used by Maung Swan Yi himself in one of his article/reviews published in the mid-1990s. When the Burmese writer Paragu (born 1921) published a book reminiscing about some of his writer colleagues, a chapter of it was a touching tribute by Paragu of the late respected, leftist Burmese writer Bhamo Tin Aung (1920–1978). Maung Swan Yi in his review of Paragu's book stated how moving Paragu's tribute of Bhamo Tin Aung was and that he (Maung Swan Yi) 'wondered' whether Paragu 'invested' *his* tears in writing the tribute. As I asked Maung Swan Yi the question I used the exact phrase he had used in describing Paragu's tribute of Bhamo Tin Aung.

The next day, on 31 March 2010, I attended a partly religious ceremony near Maung Swan Yi's apartment in Queens, New York, where he held a ceremony to feed food to Burmese Buddhist monks ဆွမ်းကျွေး as is his wont to do so every Wednesday which is the day of the week he was born. I briefly discussed with him my translation of the heading of his poem as to whether it should be 'Shortened Cigars Covered with Nostalgic Tears' or 'Shortened Cigars Soaked in Nostalgic Tears' or 'Shortened Cigars Stained with Nostalgic Tears'. This thought has been on the back of my mind, so to speak as to which particular phrase covered/soaked or 'stained' I should use. Partly due to the fact that he was hard of hearing and (had to) use a hearing aid and partly due to the intricacy of the language barrier and also due to shortness of time the poet said that he was unable to respond or suggest. After much 'internal conversation' (almost) struggle I have decided to use the word 'stain' instead of the more literal translation 'Shortened Cigars Covered with Nostalgic Tears' or 'Shortened Cigars Soaked in Nostalgic Tears'. For the tears may have soaked the cigars (metaphorically if not literally) but the theme of the 'stain' of nostalgic reminiscences and hurts was the enduring poetic imagery, impression and cognition that I felt as I read and reread 'Shortened Cigars Soaked in (and Stained by) Nostalgic Tears'.

My Time in Vietnam

Barry O'Donohue

It's long ago now, that jungle. I grew up
there, the changeling from a young man to madness,
when Saigon took a knife to its own throat.
Once you have seen the flat pain
of a country bleeding to death, you
accept your own, not as a matter of course,
but a matter of time. Land of lush grandeur,
you peeled back your skin again and again,
bringing the leeches of your leaders up from
the paddies and canals where they breed.
I am better now than before, of course
time heals, etcetera. I wanted to see then
the blue-black night asleep with stars,
not spring alive with flares and tracer rounds.
I wanted to hold his hand and say to him,
you are me, and I am you. But the night closed
in with much smoke and noise that I tried
to let you go, young man, but instead
I lowered myself into your flesh.

Kythera

Geoff Page

He has the language well by now
although the word for *thalassa*
is hardly like the sea—

or not the sea at Kythera.
'Ocean' has the wash-and-toss
of Bondi back before he came

up here to help out cousin Loukas.
2:30 at the Paramount
(he loves that Hollywood allusion)

is like the lull between two waves:
first the farmers; then the kids;
the farmers with their wives at lunch,

toasted sandwich (ham and cheese),
with milky tea to follow,
in here from the morning sales,

the man's white line of forehead as
he's taking off his hat,
the wife's mouth harder from the years.

The kids who come for 'spiders'
or malteds after school
will offer some relief, it's true,

their gossip and their mooning.
It wouldn't do in Kythera—
no time there to flirt or dawdle,

those fathers with their fiercer eyes
and life so much more serious:
not just the Nazis in the war

but also what came later,
the fighting which had sliced through towns,
brother killing brother.

Kythera was rich with myth;
its paddocks, though, were small and stony,
especially for surplus sons.

This town's an island too at times,
surrounded by its sea of wheat;
its summer days are much the same,

though even dryer in the mind
without the sea at evening.
Kythera to Eurandangee.

Quite a way, he thinks,
looking at the booths,
the green formica tables,

the vinyl seats, the Worcestershire,
the salts and peppers, bowls of sugar.
Odysseus himself stuck here

would soon lose heart, he reckons.
Tonight there will be travellers
and stock and station agents

looking for their T-bone steak
with chips and peas and carrots.
Once he wondered why his cousin

always served a piece of steak
longer than the plate it sailed on.
'No need to be stingy, Niko.'

Such meat back home would be a treat,
would have a saint's day's name attached;
the vegetables, more slowly done,

would not be broken in a saucepan.
'You give the people what they want,'
said Loukas six years back,

seeing Niko staring at
the fare he brought in from the kitchen.
'Forget your moussaka.

Forget your baklava.
It's steak and chips out here,' he'd say.
'We want them coming back, OK?'

But now it seemed they'd all lost interest,
out there driving straight roads home
or still at school and watching time

go slowly round the clock.
They'd had those Latin numbers too
back there in Kythera.

Time's what they grow out here, he thinks.
But don't they have enough by now?
He looks along the cubicles

and suddenly he's seen two ladies
up there, second from the front,
waving for their scones and tea.

Grave Rubbing

Jesse Patrick Ferguson

Just grave robbing with different tools,
and O they come for the kindred dead,
these pilgrims tramping through rows
of white crosses for long-lost blood
relations, or else hunting down Byron's
or Keats's granite slab to squeeze
poetry from stone.

They haul rolled butcher paper
and charcoal, which one can buy
in a handy kit at the tourist boutique.
And, bent on taking, they bend
to their task, feel for the depression,
watch epitaphs appear under the coal-dark
conjuring wand. For best results
use a figure-eight motion:
symbol of infinity, rubbing off,
rubbing out.

Superstitious, you may shiver,
wondering if some alternate-reality self
is running fingers over *your* headstone.
But shake it off and head home
through French, English or Roman
afternoon sunlight. Your rubbing rolled
and tied with twine, parcelled carefully
beneath an arm like tenderloin
or T-bone, the paper's rough edge
reddened by a small escaping trickle.

Blinded by the Light

Martin French

Then there, mid-paragraph, as he read the final lines of Joyce's 'The Dead', Yukio decided that this would be the work that he would copy. He had read of others who had copied works by Soseki and Tanizaki and many other famous writers; others who had copied their favourite work by their favourite author numbers of times and reported things like: 'during the sixth copying something magical happened.' The magic had not been explained but Yukio did not doubt that it existed. It was all tangled up in the language spirit, the kotodoma, that he believed would come alive during the copying process.

Yukio had fantasised about kotodoma for a long time. He had been waiting to find the right work to copy—copy over and over, if necessary, until he experienced the magic for himself. Then there, in the late hours of a stifling July night, as he sat in shorts beneath the slow moving fan and read the vital sentence, the hair on his neck prickled and goosebumps rose on his chest as he realised that this, this would be the work that he would copy.

It mattered not that his copy was a translation, nor that the original was by a Westerner. It was something to do with that line:

'seibu e no tabi ni shuppatsu suru jikan ga kitanoda'—'Westward journey...depart...time came'. It was like Proust. And it was not.

But Yukio realised that he *could* copy this; could copy 'The Dead' and be the first Japanese person to make that connection, to feel that magic. When he read the line: *'The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward,'* Yukio nodded to himself. Yes, depart time had come, and his journey westward was in his hands, waiting to be copied.

That sentence: the syntax itself marked the difference between the languages and cultures of East and West. In Japanese, sentences ended with the verb—the means; while in English, the sentences ended with the object—the goal. Japanese and English; East and West; Means and Ends. Yukio decided on a brush and ink, rather than pen; wanting his characters to flow down the page, into one another, as he copied. It would be messier and more time consuming, but the end result, Yukio hoped, would be an artefact worthy of 'The Dead'.

He fantasised that, one day, odd pages of his copy would be found in galleries and museums all over Japan—or even on postcards that would be sent around the world. Like the poems of Shiki and Soseki, corrected by one another—such beautiful writing. Then Westerners would see how beautiful their literature was when written in such a beautiful, flowing script. Yukio nodded again to himself. A magical script. 'The Dead' would remain still, but his copy would add much—his copy would be alive.

Yukio decided that his third copy would be written in brush and ink. He would do two draft copies in old school notebooks and then buy good paper, ink and a new brush for the final copy. Laying back under the fan, his arms folded behind his head, Yukio virtually dreamed himself to sleep: thinking about the snow, the feet stamping on the doormat, Freddy Malins, and that boy who had died. The unintelligible singing drifting down the stairs...Gabriel was like a ghost; his wife like a painting of a ghost; the snow falling in the night...laughter...the clopping of horses...the silent chopping of the fan above in the thick darkness.

First Copy

As he writes the first copy, Yukio double-checks each character to make sure that nothing's missing. He prints the copy, so unlike the cursive one he dreams of producing. It's a beginning. The process so slow that it takes almost two months to complete. Yukio has plenty of time to think as he copies. Too much time. He wonders about Gabriel's mother; how she died. He notices in fact that there are quite large numbers of dead peopling the story—dead that he hadn't noticed on his first, fateful reading: Gabriel's mother, his uncle, those monks who slept in their coffins; the dead opera singers and absent faces of Gabriel's speech; grandfather Patrick Morkan—going around in circles behind Johnny The Dead Horse; and, of course, Michael Furey—the singer of the *'distant music'*—more distant than the music Gabriel could hear there that night. Even the living dead Aunt Julia, *'arrayed for the bridal,'* as it were. Time.

Yukio's paperback had been given to him as a graduation present by Megumi, his High School sweetheart. It was more than a graduation present but Yukio neither appreciated that at the time, nor thought about it now. When he read the passage where Gabriel was watching Gretta at the head of the stairs, and Gabriel asked himself *'what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to music, a symbol of,'* he answered aloud, just in response, without remembering and without emotion: 'Death'. Which death and whose, and how and why, did not blip on his radar. It was a dead death he spoke. Dust. Or snow.

When Megumi had given him the book, Yukio had given her nothing. He was going away to Tokyo and she was not. He had decided that he wasn't coming back, but he did not tell her. He was seventeen. He expected her to have understood as much. Perhaps she did.

When she died he did not visit her parents as he should have. He did not even go to her funeral. Rather, he pretended not to have known. When he did think about it, he thought that he never would understand what he'd done, or not done. From everything to nothing,

just like that. Instead he had picked up the neglected copy of *The Dubliners*; held it rolled in his hand like a magazine; imagined it being held and wrapped by Megumi, his thumb tracing an arc across its cover. He opened it and read it through the summer.

When he finishes the first copy it is Autumn. He hadn't noticed the trees starting to change. When he looks at the finished copy, it doesn't seem to have been written by him. The characters are too neat, too formal. Like little statues, row upon row. If he closes his tired eyes he can still see them. When he rubs the ache is no better, his vision blurs a little. It doesn't seem to have been written by him at all.

At night he is haunted by the little things: Freddy Malins's '*tumid*' lips—'but Freddy was alive,' he thinks, 'or was he?'; Gabriel's dead mother—'how *did* she die?'; the feet on the floor overhead, shuffling and scraping; the '*indelicate clicking*'. When he sleeps he has a nightmare of a rabid dog with paralysed hind legs, dragging itself across the wooden floor, panting and slavering towards his own sleeping form, toenails clicking, scraping. In the dream he watches himself asleep on the floor before the dog, as if dead. He wills himself to awaken. Yelling. Yellering.

When he awakens, eyes aching, he rubs them with the knuckles of the backs of his fists. He thinks of Freddy Malins.

Second Copy

When he begins the second copy Yukio wonders how 'The Dead' managed to reach in and grip at his heart—that swelling fist, un-punching—a strange, empty blow. So much talking going on, so much babble—a whole crowd. A gaggle. But so what? As he copies, so much seems to be preamble, seems to be nothing at all. Some old geese and a few drunk ganders, and Gabriel getting paranoid over the hissing and flapping. What is it? Yukio thinks that Gabriel gives far too much importance to the outbursts of the various women he encounters through the night. Even Gretta near the end, what is that? It makes no sense.

Yukio cannot think, he just keeps copying. Copying faster and faster. Copying as he reads.

It is no good. It isn't working. His characters slip, they start to flow into one another, draining down the columns. Eddies and pools, puddles of slush. He doesn't care. He isn't watching his copy, just the original. His pen scrawls down the page, even abandoning some characters into unintelligible swirls or scrawls at the ends of lines. No time. No time. What he thinks is that Joyce was hen-pecked; that he couldn't and didn't order his 'bath, meal and bed' in sharp enough barks. Too busy trying to insinuate. Yukio nodded when he arrived at the serpentine verb; started drawing scales on the back of his hand; waved it back and forth at 'The Dead', as if weaving a spell.

'Joyce is a snake,' he thinks to himself, 'a little garden viper trying to wriggle between two rocks in the garden of the world. 'The Dead' is just his shed skin.' Yukio decides that it is in what comes after that he lies. That there is yet more for the eye to meet. Elsewhere. In the shadows. In the past even. That there's more to copying than simply copying. That all the circumstances need to be right in order that the experience rings true; that the copy becomes truer than the original. That it becomes a more complete work of art in itself.

There is a kind of life in the second copy—a venom. The confused fury with which he wrote seems to rain itself down the pages. Its unreadability, indecipherability, gaps and tails, swirls and scrawls, all bespeak Yukio's confusion, his anger. It's a copy that's ready to be screwed up and thrown in the wastepaper basket. There's something in that. Gabriel should kill himself. That's what Yukio thinks. Fuck him.

The same dream again. Yukio, the body, before the slavering dog—closer, inexorable. But before he can scream out, before he can wake, his sleeping form opens its mouth and a tree sprouts up. Shoots up. A Spruce, like a spear, shooting up, forcing his mouth wider, wider, stretching it. He cannot scream out for the tree—his jaw opening further, dislocating, like a snake eating a head. His sleeping form snaps open its eyes—wide open, startled. And Yukio is there. In there. Looking up at the tree growing out of his mouth. He cannot shout,

cannot scream. A breeze caresses his cheek, he can smell mushrooms sprouting nearby.

When he awakens, for fear of sleeping again, Yukio turns on the light and stares at the motionless ceiling fan.

Third Copy

He begins it by closing the shutters, locking down the house. The blinds are lowered, the drapes are closed, the world outside is muffled.

He has decided to write this third copy by candlelight, in lieu of the appropriate gas lamps that he imagines the original story was written under. Instead of sitting on the floor and writing at his usual table, he has set up his kitchen table with a wooden chair, three candles, ink, brush and the most expensive writing paper he can find. He has a supply of Irish Breakfast tea and several new bottles of whisky to help him through the work. He does not intend to do anything else until the copy is finished; thinking that this work will become him, in the flattering sense, when it is complete.

On the appointed morning, after his first shot, he begins: '*Kanrinin no musume Ririi wa...*'

Each stroke of his brush has a history, is a history. The whole of his history, his language's history, the history of Japan—Yamato. The whole of the earth resonates with each stroke: mountains, rivers, heaven, man; from a time when the very rocks and trees could speak. A whole ancestry in each stroke and character.

It may be the whisky. From the outset Yukio feels drowsy. Blinking, dry-eyed, he brushes on, one character after another. When he gets tired he naps, when hungry he eats onigiri or rice cakes, whatever he can grab or warm without effort. When he wakes or finishes eating, he has his Irish Breakfast Tea and whisky and continues to copy.

When he sleeps, when he closes his eyes, when he rests, all he can see are Kanji. All he can see are the strokes and the copy in his mind's eye. It is no longer a story. It is an object, an artefact, a dream. In the poorlight, bent close to the page, Yukio copies in a world of

ghosts. Kanji float off the page, adrift in his eyes. Tired eyes like he's never had. Motes of Kanji float in his eyes as if burned there by the candle flames at the edges of his vision. Among those blind spots the Kanji swim like bacteria, shifting, changing, colliding, linking: 'ki, hon, inu'—tree, book, dog. 'Hito'—man.

In the dim room, smelling of candle wax and smoke, time passes. For Yukio, time is unwinding; it too has floated off its moorings. Where he is, inside his language, it is timeless. When his copy reaches the last paragraph—his last paragraph—he knows what will happen. As he writes that line: '*seibu e no tabi ni shuppatsu suru jikan ga kitanoda,*' he understands where his journey westward is going to take him. As soon as he finishes that last line: '*the snow falling faintly... and faintly falling...*' Like the Shiki poem: 'forming then falling / falling then forming'. He can almost feel himself, at once forming and falling. Fallen as he forms—like the raindrops in Shiki's Garden Pines. Ah.

And out into the December day he wonders how the seasons could have changed. It has been snowing overnight, but now the sky will clear. He walks out alone, '*first along by the river and then through the park.*' Snow lies on the branches of the trees; down the avenue of bare Sakura that lead into the bowl of the park where the great Pine stands. The old tree, with snow on the branches—drooping moustache and milkshake.

As Yukio begins his descent the sunlight cuts through the clouds, a sword of light slicing into the day and spreading across the bowl of the park. The glare stabs into his eyes as two square blocks of pain. Such pain: reaching and swelling into his head, making him blanch and reel. Yukio raises his hands like a defeated, falling boxer. His mute hands, like mits, one shading his eyes, handback against the brow; the other fending off the reflected light as if it were a small dog about to leap and snap.

Yukio staggers towards the Pine, seeking the shelter and the shade of its trunk. But it isn't Yukio. The sun melting the snow. It starting

to drip from the branches. The whole tree dripping, beginning to rain down. 'Ahhh, Shiki...'

The glare is too much for his eyes, the pain in his eyes too great. Now he understands. Yukio, the young man, now the form of a young man, standing under a dripping tree, blinded by the light.

Sky Burial

Ali Alizadeh

for John Kinsella

I really want to be fed
to vultures when I'm dead. My toddler

on the verge of using spoon
will be assigned to serve, when I'm done

his father's cadaver, sliced and spread
to sky's black scavengers. Why not

—my wife often asks—cremation
à la her desired dissemination

of charred fragments in the breeze
wreathing a mountain range? I answer

to confess. To a lifetime of feasting
on birds. (She's baffled, a vegetarian

alien to guilt accumulated
in the gullet of a carnivore hooked

on the thighs, breast and wings
of the avian.) A concatenation

of culinary memories. Chicken
kebab: grilled squares stabbed

onto a bayonet-like skewer
at my uncle's wedding just before

the War. Poultry so scarce in Tehran
the viscous taste became a hunger
for an end to Saddam's bombing raids
and when Mum did somehow bring home
a frozen, beige clump and cooked us
khoresht baadenjan with *morgh*
the other three in the family gave me
—without my comprehending
the complexity of their munificence—
all the tender, fatless, skinless fillets
and I devoured. When we finally fled
the acerbic scent ('secret herbs, spices'
and all) of cheap deep-fried flesh
a vital emblem of the American empire
galvanised my senses upon arrival
in Australia. Chiko Rolls at the tuck shop
(made with mutton, I later discovered,
despite the name) diverted, occasionally
from the howls—'Speak English!
Say something, camel fucker!'—and then
smoking with a surfie dope-dealer
who worked at Red Rooster between art
classes at university. I lived off
bread, baked beans and starchy noodles

but for a treat—to recover
from rejections by girls, ridicule by lecturers

who found my thoughts and paintings
pointless—I'd resort to a sodden

marked down BBQ chook
wilting below the deli counter, late

at night at a Gold Coast supermarket
biting the singed bird's sinews

with terrible anger. Finally I left
for Melbourne to 'make it' as a poet

and to locate a hypothetical woman
who'd tolerate me. When I did find her

I also found (to my gastronomic
terror) she was a vegetarian. The end

of my fetish for feathered beasts? Hardly
could you call her a proselytiser

but what a traveller. Honeymoon
in Vietnam: tofu tossed with lemongrass

for her, pieces of quails and other murdered
birds decked my chopsticks. In China

I struggled to order without
embarrassment at the restaurants

since 'chicken' in Mandarin
distanced by one tonal accent from

'prostitute'. And so on. Tavuk
shish kebabs in Istanbul, turkey strips

(ersatz bacon) in Dubai. Can this
addiction be assuaged by the virtues
of ethical consumerism, barnyard
fowls? My wife looks away. The truth
hurts even more because what's wasted
on feeding me meat becomes heat
and melts the world. And I had
a pet rooster once, regal with his red crown
fierce after the targeted killing of my
sister's speckled hen by one of Tehran's
infamous crows. I can still hear
my rooster's sad, lonesome howl
piercing from his quivering beak
when I enjoy *murgh tikka masala* (or shamefully
for an anti-capitalist, a Zinger). I cringe
past the glistening corpses of Beijing ducks
but my mouth moistens. So please
a secular sky burial for me. A machete
doing the work of the maggots' teeth
on my dead body. And proffer the chops
to the vultures to apologise for a life-
time of eating their kind. Aquiline beaks
tearing morsels of my muscles
and then tenderised and regurgitated
for frenetic, squawking chicks.

Us & Them

Ali Alizadeh

after Judith Beveridge

A familiar emptiness for me
left others sad, enthusiastic

to signify his departure
for a purpose: to raise awareness

of a so-called illness (funded
by a drug company?) a tribute night

touching eulogy by his girlfriend
but most directly his portrait

enlarged, framed, panoptic
behind the microphone and lectern

signposted the simulation
of the ceremony for the suicide

of a classmate on the Gold Coast
in early 90s. Yet, superimposed

on blonde people in blue jeans
swarthy *Basijis* in khaki and women

in chadors, lachrymose, lamenting
another working class adolescent

charred by another Iraqi chemical
attack. Such wailing intermingled

with such macabre elegiac Arabic
from the mullah's loudspeaker

and the boy-soldier's solemn face
festooned by votive candles

of the funeral shrine in Tehran
near my primary school in early 80s

demonising a distant killer
(the apostate Saddam or the infidel

West?) precisely as malevolent
as manic depression (or was it

bipolar disorder?) that martyred
the promising Creative Arts student

who threw himself under the train
one sunny day, at Southport Station.

44th and Broadway

Marc Swan

She seems to be pushing the white wine
and then I realise she just needs
someone to talk with about her life
in New York City; how many countries
away from Bulgaria? We talk of Sofia,
the red-tiled roof buildings, so different
from the flat squat dingy buildings
she sees every day out the train window
on her way to Astoria, and back again
night after night to Times Square to a bar
cum *trattoria* where she serves strangers
glasses of red and white wine, bottles of beer,
and vodka drinks; New Yorkers do seem
to love their vodka drinks. At that moment,
the hostess screams. The bespectacled
manager in white shirt, black vest jumps
up and runs over to squash what to my
jaundiced eye seems to be a giant roach. I ask
the short, dyed-blond with the black jeans
from Sofia about the roach and she tells me
that every week, every bar, every restaurant
in Manhattan sprays for bugs, that every week
one shift begins with removing all the bottles,
all the glasses, all the ice from the bar
and after spraying she places them all back
together again. I look at my glass, no ice,
just white wine and I look at the place where
the ice lives, and I think for just a moment

a bad thought then I turn to this bright-eyed resourceful young woman who works three jobs, has a degree in advertising from Bulgaria matched with an incredible will to survive in New York City, and I drop an extra five on the bar and bid her goodbye.

The Disappearance of the Mother

Sari Smith

Rituals: In a small country town these include the bringing of food, the visit, with soup, a cooked chicken, a chocolate cake and then, avoidance, the crossing of a street to avoid meeting, necessary since the subject itself will never be mentioned.

The past is a place. A one-pub, one-wheat bin town with perhaps ninety towns-people and many surrounding farms. A shop and a shire office, a bank and a tiny library that can be read in three weeks by a thirteen year old if she reads a romance in the morning and a gardening guide in the afternoon.

My sister Jill and I are standing on the side of the road in front of our house, waiting. Our house is the first or the last house in the town, depending on which direction you're coming from. Next to our place is the bush, the road further east. As we stand, an old Renault drives past, backs up, veers over the wrong side of the road and parks next to us. Angie leans out of the car window.

—Hey you two. If the wind changes you'll stay that way.

We look twice. Angie's bare arm rests on the door ledge. She's wearing bathers. In the back of the car Tara and Sam are grizzling in their baby seats.

—I'm going for a swim, Angie says, leaning even further towards us. Want to come?

Jill and I look at each other. We're in the middle of the worst drought the wheat-belt as seen for decades. The ocean is hundreds of miles away. The lake might be an hour away, if it hasn't dried up. None of the locals would dream of swimming in the lake. I say no thanks. Angie drives away.

I like Angie. She's tall, thin, yet squarish with white skin and floppy black hair cut in a bob. Sometimes I babysit. Not so Angie can go out. Just so she won't go mad, she says. So she can get on. Getting on is Angie's term for her endless home decorating. Her husband, Eric, is the new bank manager and they live in the only brick house in the town. The rest are transportable or asbestos and weatherboard. It seems to Angie that she has a duty to renovate.

Angie is wallpapering the lounge room with Regency wallpaper. She has begun, also, to re-cover the dining chairs, bought on a rare trip to Perth, in red velvet. Several of the chairs have no seats, are always waiting to be assembled.

I keep the children at bay in the kitchen, feeding them, singing, making faces with the boundless energy of one who still lives in the present.

Angie calls constantly through the doorway, talking half to herself, half to me.

—Poop! she says loudly if she makes a mistake. And,

—Of course I love the little devils but they are a bloody nuisance.

—Are you growing tits yet? Look at this, she says, touching her own flat chest. Nothing there. You'd never believe, when I'm pregnant my breasts become simply enormous.

Angie has a visitor. Alina comes all the way from the city. Alina has long white frizzy hair and green eyes. Angel's wings, says Angie. Alina dresses in pale voluminous skirts and skinny tops.

Angie and I put a lace cloth on the table. I take Sam and Tara for a long walk until they fall asleep, then I serve sandwiches cut in triangles, scones with sultanas and pots of tea.

Angie winks at me.

—We can pretend we're at the Savoy. She has shown me how to cut the sandwiches, to place them on a doily, to add a sprig of parsley.

Alina and Angie sit among the seatless chairs and the half-covered walls. Alina talks constantly about men.

—I like him but did you ever notice his eyes? They drop as you speak. I can't bear a man with dropping eyes. When I was with John I took taxis everywhere. After I'd been with him I'd say, —I'll just pop over and see so and so. Just put me in a cab. I'd turn up all over the place saying,—I have a wealthy lover. I'm being a lady today. Only taxis for me.

—Angie, Alina would say. Look at you. I hope you aren't going to be one of these women who has to have a man's baby every time she feels she loves him.

—It's lucky you aren't like that, Angie would answer. Or you'd have ten children with ten different fathers.

For a dollar and to be with Angie I go when my services are required. My mother wonders why I go so often when there are children at home I can be looking after. I go, guiltily, sometimes to escape our house. One day I'm returning late from Angie's and as I walk towards our house I can see straight through two windows to the bush at the back. I remember watching my mother walk into that bush late one night when she'd had enough. There was nowhere to go. Was she coming back? Now my parents are two shapes caught in the light at the window. The light is hardly a glow, hardly the breadth of a candle-flame against the black of the bush.

Soon afterwards I begin to dream of a child, a small girl who jumps in and out of a coffin like a jack-in-a-box. First in, then out. First alive, then dead. Then it's all been a mistake and she's alive again. I wake up and there's my mother standing at the bedside. She's there and yet somehow so familiar that she's invisible.

What I like about Angie is that she keeps some things for herself. An old cracked china cup. If my father ever saw a cup like that he'd

insist on it being thrown away. A bottle or two of perfume. A Japanese doll, white-faced doll in a red kimono with silky hair and bound feet. Prettily bandaged satin feet. Between her feet, caught in with the satin, Angie points out a tiny wooden stick that cements her to the stand.

I believe that Angie will keep her things hidden, even when her daughter is my age. She'll never give in and let her children play with the things and then be sad and disappointed when they are broken or lost.

I tell Angie stories, half made-up, half true. I say, the reason I wear my hair like this, covering up one eye, is that in the school photo I noticed that my eyebrows were too thick. I decided to pluck them but I ran into difficulties getting them even. I ended up with only half a right eyebrow so now I have to cover it up with my hair until it grows again.

Angie doesn't laugh.

She listens to everything I say, then she replies with something like,

—I must cut back the blue salvia. Did you know it regenerates? No, perhaps it sows more seeds but anyway I think if we cut it back it will help the blooms to grow again.

Or,

—Let's make a cake and let's eat it.

I tell Angie my fantasy. We're on the school bus, all of us who take the hour-long trip to the next town. The boy I like is on the bus too. On the way to school there's a terrible accident. Everyone is dead except the two of us. As I say the word dead I stop. Everyone is injured, I say, rewriting the scene. Angie smiles with mock relief. —Good. No deaths please. No killing for love, and she finishes the story for me. She has me ministering to him, maybe a kiss, at least a declaration of love.

One day as I approach the brick house I hear Eric and Angie shouting at each other with phrases I've heard before.

—What the hell. We have to stay at least three years, Angie... You know that... But you just don't know what it's like for me.

Angie is pregnant again. I watch her through the pregnancy, becoming bigger and more resentful. But she stitches, by hand, a fine cotton brunch coat for herself. Her needle goes under, over, dives into the cloth and comes up again, making straight sloped lines of thread.

She prepares everything, wants everything done. I see that she is like a bride, waiting for the moment, suspending everything until she is delivered, after which the course of her life seems uncertain.

The day before she goes, she tells me there is some chocolate hidden at the back of the mantle-piece and I'd better take it because Eric doesn't like sweet things and there'll be no-one else to eat it while she's away.

After the baby is born Angie comes to the door with the baby in her arms and Tara and Sam hanging on to the brunch coat. She asks if I want to watch her bath the baby. She talks softly and seriously, asking me if I know about the umbilicus, where the cord has been cut, how a little of the cord remains, how to treat it, how to test the water, how to unwrap the baby. I listen and watch the tiny slippery baby crying and wet and the way Angie's hands are dipped in and out of the water until at last Angie is silent and the baby clasps its mouth onto Angie's enormous breast.

One morning very early my mother asks me to go with her. She wants me to help her with Angie's children. I ask why but she refuses to speak until we're out of the house. In her hands she holds an enamel plate covered with a tea-towel. I'm afraid. I follow her down the road to the only brick house, noticing on the way, as if to record the facts, that it's a clear October day and that Angie's blue salvia is in full bloom.

I wait for my mother to speak. —Angie's left, she says. I shiver with relief. She's alive, I think.

Inside, Eric is sitting at the table with his fists in his eyes. Tara is playing noisily. Sam is throwing toys around. The baby, by now ten months old, is sitting in a wet heap on the floor. My mother motions me to take the children out. I bathe and dress them and when I come back into the room my mother has uncovered her plate to reveal eggs

and chops. She cooks these, talking to Eric all the time, explaining how food is cooked and what's best for the children. Eric's face is mottled grey, white and when my mother tells him to eat he eats, taking one mouthful after another, slowly, not looking up from his plate.

Two years later I see Angie in the city. She smiles brightly for a moment then she looks hard at me and I watch her glance at my small breasts, my slightly rounded hips, the way my hair has grown. —Ah, she says, I see you've become a little woman.

Eric stays in the town. He hires someone to look after the children while he works. For a time the women bring food. The men cross the street. I pass the house sometimes and one day I'm walking, looking through the fence at Tara and Sam on their swings. Then I see Eric, behind the swings, watching me and I say to myself, that man has dropping eyes.

An Australian Germanophile: Formative Influences in the Early Development of the Writer Catherine Martin

Enid Sedgwick

Catherine Martin (1847–1937) was a South Australian writer whose first novel, *An Australian Girl*, published in 1890, remains her best-known work today. The novel received a mixed, though generally favourable response from the critics. It is a serious novel of ideas, rather than a romance, and the inclusion of quite extensive German material in an Australian novel appears unusual. It has been described recently as ‘a novel which celebrated German literature and philosophy’,¹ but in 1891 it was republished in an abridged version (reprinted in 1988 and 1999²) which removed 50,000 words, including much of the German material. This aspect of the novel was consequently lost to the reader until the publication in 2002 of the Academy Edition which restored the full text. The following account concentrates on those aspects of Martin’s life which are relevant to the genesis and development of her enduring interest in German culture and, in particular, on her youthful contacts with German literature and thought. It also traces some of her uses of German elements in her total oeuvre.

Catherine Martin was born in Scotland on the Isle of Skye as Catherine Edith Mackay, the second youngest of ten children, and



Catherine Edith Martin with her sister; Mrs Bethune, c. 1900.
(Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia. SLSA B 14456.)

came to South Australia with her family in 1855, when she was eight years old. As the Mackays were assisted migrants, they were sent to the South-East of the state to work as farm labourers. Catherine's father found work on a property in the Naracoorte district, an area in which both English and Gaelic were spoken, as on their native Skye. He died soon after their arrival and the elder sons supported the family for about ten years until Mrs. Mackay and the younger siblings eventually moved to Mount Gambier. Catherine was then about eighteen. There her mother and an elder sister, Mary, opened a girls' school, in which Catherine later taught. Catherine was apparently educated privately, at home for the most part, and the family atmosphere in which she



Panorama of Mount Gambier; c. 1880. (Image courtesy of Mount Gambier Library. 23A21.)

grew up appears to have been sympathetic to her intellectual activity and to have encouraged her studious habits.

Catherine Martin's most formative years were thus spent in Mount Gambier and it was almost certainly there that she first developed her deep interest in and knowledge of German culture and literature. She became acquainted with the local German population which made up a significant proportion of the town and its surroundings. She also learned German, although it is not clear when or how she learned the language. She may have had private tutors, perhaps clergymen, as she grew older. This possibility is suggested by her description in *An Australian Girl* of the heroine's learning German and philosophy during bi-weekly visits to a Lutheran pastor.³ During these early years in Mount Gambier Catherine would have had a range of opportunities to improve and extend her education, by means of the libraries at the Literary Institute and the Mechanics Institute; public lectures and evening entertainments organised by various groups and institutions in the town; and the private tutors and evening classes available in the town.

Mount Gambier is not generally thought of as a German settlement, yet it is evident that the town included a well-established German community. The picture which emerges from contemporary descriptions in the local newspapers, in particular the *Border Watch*, between 1861 and 1875 reveals the interaction between the different cultures which coexisted in the area. The various groups maintained their own traditions but were interdependent. The reasons for Martin's interest in German culture are more easily appreciated when viewed in the context of the society which had evolved there. Catherine's choice of subject matter, while unusual in an Australian novel, nonetheless appears a natural development given the environment in which she grew up.

The Mount Gambier in which Catherine Martin lived and worked, from the ages of eighteen to approximately twenty-eight, was a rapidly developing town in a fertile and productive agricultural and pastoral district. It was remote from both Adelaide and Portland, the nearest Victorian port of any size, and became the foremost business and commercial centre in the South-East region. The district was first settled in the 1840s and Germans are recorded as established there in 1850.⁴ The first local newspaper, the *Border Watch*, whose name reflects the Scottish presence in the region, periodically printed descriptions of this burgeoning centre. These emphasise the speed of the town's development, the solidity of its public buildings and private residences alike, the range of commercial, cultural and social facilities available in the town, and the ethnic and social mixture in the population.

An article by a former inspector of schools provides a description of the town and district in the early 1850s. He writes of a visit to the township

containing, perhaps one hundred inhabitants, farmers and tradesmen. Throughout this oasis, for ten miles round, a number of other farmers raise their crops and feed their cattle. Most of them are Germans or Scotchmen; the former from the Adelaide side, and

the latter from Portland, away in Victoria. Their nearest market is Portland, a fearful road through the sandy waste for sixty miles; thence their produce is shipped off to the colonial capitals.

So long isolated from civilization as to be for several years without the visit of a clergyman of any kind, they have not wholly neglected their religious interests. The Germans met for Sabbath service among themselves...⁵

In 1862 there is the comment: 'There are a large number of Germans on the Mount'.⁶ Other descriptions underline the speed of the town's growth and in January 1869 the editorial of the *Border Watch* recorded that

...the development of Mount Gambier has been not only steady but rapid... Around the wooden hotel and the unpretentious store have sprung up costly and elegant places of business, and the streets that not many years ago were grass grown in summer and a series of mud holes in winter, and on which at the most a few stray horsemen, and perhaps a team of bullocks, might be seen, now team, we might say, 'at morning, noon and night,' with eager buyers and sellers. We have come to assume all but city proportions, with city habits and interests.⁷

It is clear that, at this period, Mount Gambier was a flourishing town growing out of its recent pioneer past and attracting an increasing number of residents. By 1871 the town had a population of close to 6,000.⁸

Although it is difficult now to know precise numbers, there are indications that the number of Germans living in and around Mount Gambier was significant. For example, in 1867, when a delegation was formed to make representations to the Governor of South Australia regarding Mount Gambier, nine gentlemen were selected, but when one of these withdrew he suggested that a German farmer should be included so that this section of the community would be represented.⁹

Attendances at events organised by the German community also give some general indication of numbers, though it should be emphasised that the English and German speaking populations were in many ways well integrated, so that many German social events were attended by members of both communities. In 1867 a picnic arranged by the *Deutsche Liedertafel* [German choir] had an attendance of over one hundred, while an evening performance by the *Liedertafel*, given in aid of a Lutheran church, attracted an audience of over two hundred. The number of Germans in Mount Gambier fluctuated over time, with some leaving Mount Gambier for cheaper land around Hamilton and, later, for areas in the Wimmera district of Victoria near Horsham, while others arrived from areas closer to Adelaide which had become worked out. In 1868 the *Border Watch* recorded the unexpected arrival of a group of fifty to sixty members of German farming families.¹⁰ In other articles it is suggested that at least one hundred German families might leave the district.

A particularly significant indication of the importance of the German community in Mount Gambier is, however, the agreement arrived at in the matter of the establishment in 1873 of a secular boys' grammar school there.¹¹ (A Church of England boys' grammar school had closed a year or so earlier.) The arrangement was that the school would have an English-speaking master as principal and a German-speaking assistant master, who would be suitably qualified to teach German as well as English. It was even suggested at the opening of the school that its establishment was in fact an initiative of the German community. All students in the school learned German and were examined in the language at the end of 1873, three months after the arrival of the German master.

Although there are frequent references to the German farmers as a section of the community, the farmers were not the only Germans there; German professionals, businessmen and skilled tradesmen were well represented in the town. The *Border Watch* features regular advertisements for a German doctor, a veterinary surgeon, music teachers, a steam flour mill, a tannery, a brewery, manufacturers of

aerated waters and cordials, a wheelwright and carpentry business, cabinet-makers, saddlers and harness makers, boot and shoemakers, a watchmaker and jeweller, bakers and pastry cooks, butchers, at least one general store, specialist stores, a German boarding house, and German hoteliers, while German pastors and teachers are frequently referred to in items of local news. It is clear too from news reports that these townspeople were integrated into the total community and participated in general local activities of many kinds.

The degree of integration of the German population into the general community is illustrated by the number of marriages between English and German speakers, and the number of naturalisations of Germans reported in the *Border Watch*. In this respect the German community in Mount Gambier was very different from the closed, rural communities of Hahndorf, Lobethal, Tanunda and the other communities in the Barossa Valley. The Mount Gambier German residents formed a group which was self-sufficient in its own right, while retaining its cultural identity. In its openness and ability to integrate, it probably more closely resembled the city-based German population in Adelaide. Where there was no language barrier, the two groups worked and socialised together, and entertainment and music offered many opportunities for harmonious integration.

The German community was marked by its two Lutheran churches, its impact on schooling in certain parts of the town and district, its German Club, with its Hall and its strong links to the Farmers' Club, all of which helped to underpin the maintenance of their common German culture. While there appear to have been no schools exclusively for German children, there were a number of schools in which German teachers taught and German children predominated—in at least one case eighty percent of the pupils were German. In all of them, however, instruction was given in English and, to varying degrees, in German as well. In these schools all children learned both languages, and were often examined in both languages, but, in all other respects, the curriculum appears to have been the same as in the English-language schools. A few schools offered an

almost bi-lingual approach; in most, German was taught in addition to the basic curriculum. Some private schools—including the majority of the small academies which came and went, and the two boys' grammar schools—offered German as an additional attraction, frequently together with Latin, Greek and French. In the licensed schools with English-speaking teachers, German was sometimes offered, usually taught by a German speaker.

In 1873 the Mackays' school offered German for the first time, and it is possible that it was Catherine who taught it, since there is no mention of a German teacher having been engaged. It is not clear, in general, whether learning German was considered an advantage from a cultural point of view or from a practical and business-oriented standpoint, but the presence of the German population in the district certainly affected the curriculum of many of its schools. At various times German classes for adults were also offered by several institutions, such as the Mount Gambier Institute, and by individuals.

The German Club was probably established in 1866. The Club had a number of functions apart from a purely social one: it was one of the numerous Friendly Societies active in Mount Gambier, it had strong ties to the Farmers' Club, and it contributed to the maintenance of German culture in the district. The *Liedertafel* was associated with it, and early in 1870 performed at a concert in aid of the German Club Library. This library of several hundred books was later offered for sale to the Mount Gambier Institute and hence became available to a wider readership in the town. The removal of these German books from the Institute Library during the First World War later aroused the ire of Catherine Martin.¹² The German Club was also very active during the Franco-Prussian War in raising money for the relief of war wounded, and for the widows and orphans of fallen soldiers. News of peace prompted a German service in the Evangelical Lutheran church, a torchlight procession and a fireworks display.

In 1872 some of the more intellectually inclined German citizens formed a *Fortschrittsverein* [Progress Association], the objects of which were to be: 'the social and mental improvement of its members

by means of dramatic, conversational, and vocal and instrumental musical exercises, &c.' and the proceedings at meetings were to be conducted 'solely in the German tongue'.¹³ Their first public entertainment, to raise money for a library, consisted of vocal and instrumental music, together with the performance of scenes from Act V of Schiller's *Maria Stuart* and a melodramatic comedy. The evening attracted an audience of almost two hundred persons, despite the fact that all the items, including the prologue and epilogue, were presented in German, with only a printed synopsis of the comedy supplied. A very detailed account of the whole evening, and the text of the prologue in German, were printed in the following edition of the *Border Watch*. Numerous similar evenings followed where admission was by invitation only.

Several traditional German celebrations are repeatedly reported in the *Border Watch*. One is serenading which was, as the *Border Watch* reports, 'one of those pleasing continental observancies, indicative of respect towards the individual to whom they are offered'.¹⁴ Another is tin-kettling, not always appreciated by the non-German section of the population.¹⁵ German Golden Wedding celebrations, with which English settlers were unfamiliar,¹⁶ and German Christmas customs, including the tree and decorations, are reported on in detail.

Frequent reports of news of importance to the German community in the Mount Gambier district appeared in the local newspapers, including news from the various German states in the quite extensive international coverage. Notices of special events pertinent to the German population, such as church notices, calls to vote in elections, appeals for support in patriotic matters, such as war relief collections, for Schleswig-Holstein and during the Franco-Prussian war, and some social events, were all published in German, and this appears to have been accepted without comment. Some English-speaking advertisers also added a segment in German which was presumably intended to appeal to German customers and so increase business, though some of these attempts were couched, unintentionally, in comically bad German.

It is interesting to note that, in the general South Australian and Australian news reports in the *Border Watch*, the names of Germans appeared quite frequently, as acknowledged authorities in particular fields, and they were apparently sufficiently well-known to require no introduction. These included regular reports concerning the botanist Dr. Richard Schomburgk and Dr. Carl Mücke, in particular. Others mentioned include the botanist Baron Ferdinand von Müller, the musician Carl Linger, the scientist Professor Georg Neumayer, the botanist Ernst Bernhard Heyne, the journalist Dr. Ulrich Hübbe, the politician and land agent Friedrich E. H. W. Krichauff, the zoologist Gerard Krefft, and the journalist Karl Eggers.

Another feature of the German community in Mount Gambier which is brought out in reports in the *Border Watch* is the intense loyalty of its members to the British royal family. The attitude of the early settlers towards the various German heads of state had been mixed, since many had left Germany because of conflict with authorities arising from religious and political differences. While many would not have felt that they could ever return to Germany, they nevertheless valued their German cultural heritage and still felt strong ties to their country of origin. The royal families of Great Britain and some of the German states had been interrelated since the accession to the British throne of George I of the House of Hanover, and had been brought closer together by the marriage of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. There may well have been a certain perception in the Australian colonies that Germans could be considered in some sense 'cousins' of the British. Certainly Germans, rather than other Europeans, were actively recruited as settlers. Since the Queen was more than half-German, her husband was German, and her children were raised speaking German and understanding German culture, it was probably natural that the Germans in Australia should demonstrate loyalty to members of the British royal family. This was expressed in the form of separate formal addresses in German, torchlight processions and fireworks displays, such as those during the visit of Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh.¹⁷

This is the environment in which Catherine grew up. Mount Gambier was a prosperous town in a fertile area in which a strong sense of identity had developed among its townspeople. The population was formed of people who came from many different environments and from different educational backgrounds. A leading figure in the town was Dr. Edward Wehl, a medical doctor who was one of a group of German intellectuals who left Germany for Australia after the failure of the 1848 revolution in the German states and became known as the Forty-Eighters. The presence of such a person in Mount Gambier, together with the two Lutheran pastors, made a significant contribution to the intellectual climate of the German population and of the town. From a relatively early age Martin's interests went well beyond simply learning the German language. These well-educated Germans must have influenced her studies and creative beginnings. In later years she referred to Mount Gambier as the place 'where some of the friends to be valued as long as life endures were Germans, who fostered an intimacy with all that was best in the immortal literature of their country.'¹⁸

The stimulating endeavours of the German Forty-Eighters and the religious beliefs and practices of the Lutheran church all formed part of the fabric of the community and contributed to the intellectual climate in which Catherine Martin lived and began her literary career. It was there that she developed her abiding interest in German literature and culture, and the resources were there to both arouse and foster those interests. The residents who chose to live, work and socialise together harmoniously must have been enriched by the sharing of the cultures in Mount Gambier, as in South Australia as a whole.

It is clear that by 1871 Catherine was well acquainted with German literature, especially of the Classical and Romantic periods. To this she added knowledge of the works of the German philosophers Kant, Fichte and Hegel. Shortly after her arrival in Mount Gambier she began to publish poems in the local newspapers, the *Border Watch* and the *Mount Gambier Standard*. An early poem written for the

Total Abstinence Society's Temperance Column, appeared under the initials 'C. M.' in the *Border Watch* in 1865.¹⁹ Over the next few years more poems appeared under the initials 'M. C.' As Martin published almost everything she wrote under a variety of pseudonyms, it is difficult to trace all her work with certainty. By the beginning of 1872 she had combined her interest in German language and literature with her activities as a writer, and began to publish translations of German poems and dramas. The first of these translations to appear under the initials 'M. C.' was 'Dolce Far Niente', adapted 'from the German of Gustav Pfizer'.²⁰ This was followed by translations of poems by Ludwig Uhland, Heinrich Heine, Joseph von Eichendorff, Wilhelm Müller, August von Platen, Gottfried Kinkel, and Johann Wolfgang Goethe. An earlier poem, entitled 'More Light',²¹ inspired by the reading of a biography of Goethe, had appeared in 1871. This poem, appearing under the initials 'C. E.', may also be attributable to her because of its theme and subject, and the fact that she seems to have been the only person in Mount Gambier at that time publishing translations from serious German literature. To these she later added translations of French poems and drama as well. In these translations she shows a thorough mastery of the German and French languages.²²

In 1874, at the age of twenty-seven, Catherine published a collection of poetry entitled *The Explorers and Other Poems*.²³ It is difficult now to gauge its reception, but a review in the *Leader* states that it contained 'not poetry of the highest order, it may be, but poetry sufficiently genuine to arrest the reader's attention'.²⁴ Michael Ackland identifies major themes and preoccupations in her work, noting that the three quite different sections 'have in common a concern with issues of faith and related moral predicaments: all with potentially contemporary application'.²⁵ The final section of the anthology consists of a diverse collection of Catherine's translations of poems by Adelbert von Chamisso, Johann Gottfried Herder, Ludwig Uhland, Muehler [sic.] (probably Wilhelm Müller), Heinrich Heine, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, and segments of dramatic works by Friedrich Schiller and Jean Racine. Some of these translations had already been published

in the *Border Watch* in Mount Gambier. Ackland finds the last section to be significant to the structure of the total work in that ‘it affords an “archeology” of the poet’s ideas’²⁶ and an indication of the literary heritage from which many of her leitmotifs developed.²⁷ However, the influence of German literature is not limited to the section comprised of translations. It is evident too in poems in the first two sections of the collection, such as the poem based on the German legend of the Mouse Tower, and another entitled ‘Heimweh’ [Homesickness]. An opening dedication concludes with five lines in German taken from Goethe’s drama *Torquato Tasso*,²⁸ a feature which serves to emphasise the esoteric nature of her preoccupations, and in which she expresses her feeling that she is writing for a limited and perhaps elite group. Clearly, the influence of German literature played an important role in her creative work at that early stage of her life.

Around 1876 Catherine decided to move to Adelaide to try to earn her living as a writer. There she developed a circle of friends and acquaintances who included writers, teachers and people who were deeply committed to social issues. In 1882 she married Frederick Martin, and her husband’s sister, Anna Montgomerie Martin (Annie), who ran a progressive school for girls, was a close friend. Annie’s love of learning, of English and French literature, her passion for Germany and German culture, love of travel and interest in serious religious and social questions must surely have influenced Catherine Martin. Other significant friends were Edith Hübbe, who had attended Annie’s school and had married a German, and the writer Catherine Helen Spence. Catherine Martin clearly moved in a group of independent-thinking, innovative and socially-aware people. In Adelaide she continued to write and publish literary articles and shorter works of fiction, probably including an article, or work, entitled ‘The Life of Heinrich Heine’, listed in Macmillan’s records of manuscripts received, prior to 1888, from Catherine’s husband.²⁹ In mid-1888 Catherine travelled alone to Europe and continued writing there.³⁰ Her first major novel, *An Australian Girl*, apparently written largely or entirely in Germany, was published in London in 1890. On that

trip she visited Freiburg im Breisgau (mentioned by the heroine of *An Australian Girl*), Dresden and probably also Berlin, of which she gives some detailed descriptions in the latter part of *An Australian Girl*.

The picture of Australian society that Catherine Martin gives us in *An Australian Girl* appears to have been informed in part by her experiences of growing up and living in Mount Gambier. Stella Courtland, the heroine of *An Australian Girl*, lives in Adelaide, and while some of her German acquaintances reside in Adelaide, some have their homes in small German settlements to the north of the city beyond Gawler, in the fertile vine-growing district. Martin's nostalgic descriptions of these rural townships and their inhabitants evoke the German life-style in Australia, comparable to that of the Mount Gambier district, some fifty years after their establishment. An appreciation of the history of German settlement in South Australia and of the forms of integration between the German and English-speaking populations as described in Mount Gambier assists the reader's understanding of the place that German farmers, pastors, and educated men occupied at that time in the South Australian milieu.

Stella's learned German teacher, Pastor Fiedler, with his 'little sitting-room...and the big bookcase that took up the whole of one side of the room',³¹ resides in Blumenthal [Valley of Flowers]—an 'old-world charming little German-looking township' with 'quiet, shadowy woods all round, broken up by farms and vineyards and numberless homesteads, nestling among fruit-trees'.³² It has, of course, its small Lutheran church. The extended Schulz family is also to be found there, grandparents, parents and grandchildren, reflecting the usual pattern of German migration in which whole families and whole villages moved together. There is also a description of a *Dankfest* [Harvest Thanksgiving Festival] at the little church, and mention of an imminent golden wedding celebration.

Dr. Stein, a long-time friend of Stella's deceased father, lives in Adelaide and thus represents the city dwellers. His home is named 'Rosenthal' [Rosedale] and Stella returns from there one day appropriately laden with roses from his garden. Dr. Stein plays host to the

Berlin-based Professor Kellwitz, a friend from their student days in Germany, whose field is archaeology and ethnology. There is a strong suggestion here of the intellectual world of the Forty-Eighters.

Finally there is the figure of Frau Kettig, an elderly German woman, ill and left alone in the world, whom Stella visits and to whom she reads a comforting hymn. Cheerful and long-suffering, Frau Kettig illustrates the fate of some of the immigrants who have lived out their life in Australia but who have no family to care for them in their old age. Martin draws some very affectionate portraits of the members of the German community with whom Stella interacts in Australia. These appear to reflect Martin's own experiences while growing up in Mount Gambier and in later life in Adelaide.

Stella greatly admires the works of Goethe, whose writings she translates in order to understand them better, and whom she describes as 'One who is not only among the most majestic sons of light, but a frontier savant of life—who penetrated to the outposts of human nature, und flinchingly noted the vantage-ground of good and evil'.³³ Stella falls in love with a doctor who is half English and half German. Her sister comments, tellingly: 'You do so love the Germans'.³⁴ The earlier examples illustrate the variety of immigrants and lifestyles in Australia and provide touches of local colour. More significantly however, the original novel draws widely on German philosophy, literature and contemporary political and social conditions in Germany. Stella discourses at length on Kant and his *Critique of Pure Reason* and introduces allusions to writings of Fichte, Schopenhauer, Heine and Goethe. Stella's eventual renunciation of her love for the doctor can be traced back to these philosophical and ethical underpinnings. A significant portion of the latter part of the novel is set in Berlin, where Stella becomes aware of political unrest, poverty and suffering as Social Democracy makes increasing inroads on the political *status quo*. In this section Martin's acquaintance with Marx and Engels also becomes clear. Seen in this light *An Australian Girl* is clearly a novel of ideas.

After the publication of *An Australian Girl* Catherine and her husband made extended trips to Europe of three to four years and

travelled widely in Europe and England, staying for lengthy periods in various places in Germany, France, Italy and Spain. Another little-known work by Martin, *The Old Roof-Tree* (1906), is also intellectually oriented and in part describes travel through Germany. She again writes in praise of German scholarship and the selfless dedication of German professors. In passages strongly reminiscent of the descriptions in *An Australian Girl* of Dr Stein and Professor Kellwitz, Martin writes of

the men that have made the Universities of this country so renowned—who make the influence of German research, of German thought and knowledge, so deeply felt in every centre of intelligence in the modern world. Living so obscurely, so simply, as indifferent as Anchorites to the dignities of a good position.³⁵

After her husband's death in 1909 Martin continued to make prolonged trips to Europe, where she appears to have made England her base, but in 1932 she returned to Adelaide, where she died in 1937.

Although Martin also read widely in other languages, German literature and culture remained one of her abiding interests throughout her life. In 1920, aged 73, she described the writings of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing and others as 'some of the noblest productions of human genius.'³⁶ The years spent in Mount Gambier clearly provided experiences which formed the basis of Catherine Martin's on-going and ever more intensive study of German literature and philosophical thought, which found expression in her early writings and in the novel which made her name.

Notes

- 1 *An Australian Girl*, ed. Rosemary Campbell. St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, Academy Editions, 2002, [hereafter *AAG*] p. xxxix. All references in this article are taken from this edition. The article itself is adapted from the author's PhD thesis, '*Kulturelle Beziehungen: German-*

Australian Literary Links in Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl* and Henry Handel Richardson's *Maurice Guest*'.

- 2 *An Australian Girl*. Abridged. Rpt., with an 'Introduction' by Elizabeth Webby. London/New York/Sydney: Pandora, 1988 and *An Australian Girl*, ed. Graham Tulloch. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press (World's Classics), 1999.
- 3 *AAG*, pp. 75–77.
- 4 Charles Meyer, *A History of Germans In Australia 1839–1945* (Melbourne: Monash University, 1990), p. 86, also map, p. 43.
- 5 The *Border Watch* [hereafter *BW*], 19 November 1864, Supplement sheet.
- 6 The *BW*, 18 April 1862, p. 2d.
- 7 The *BW*, 06 January 1869, p. 2ab.
- 8 The *BW*, 30 August 1871, p. 2e.
- 9 The *BW*, 05 June 1867, p. 3a.
- 10 See *BW*, 18 April 1868, p. 2b.
- 11 An advertisement states that: "The School will afford a thorough English and sound Classical Education; the subjects in which instruction will be given comprising—Greek, Latin, French, German, Arithmetic, Algebra, Euclid, Trigonometry, and Ancient and Modern History and Geography, the elements of Statics, Dynamics, Optics and Acoustics, Reading and Elocution, Writing and Composition, and Drawing. The *BW*, 05 July 1873, p. 1f.
- 12 See the *BW*, 03 February 1920, p. 2.
- 13 The *BW*, 25 May 1872, p. 2e.
- 14 The *BW*, 16 October 1867, p. 2d.
- 15 See the *BW*, 04 September 1869, p. 2d.
- 16 See the *BW*, 18 November 1865, p. 2d.
- 17 See the *BW*, 06 November 1867, Editorial, p. 2.
- 18 Quoted by Margaret Allen in 'What Katie might have learned in Mount Gambier or some early influences on C.E.M. Martin', *Margin: Life and Letters of Early Australia*, Catherine Martin Commemorative Issue, No. 43 (November 1997). (Canberra: Mulini Press, 1997), p. 8.
- 19 The *BW*, 02.09.1865, p. 4a.
- 20 The *BW*, 27.01.1872, p. 4a. Any doubt as to whether M. C. and C. M. are the same person is dispelled by a report in the next issue of the *BW*: "C.M.' draws our attention to the fact that the sixth line of the third stanza of her translation of 'Dolce far niente' in our last was omitted, viz.—'With unsatiable eyes and rapt soul to behold,' and that 'words' in the fourth stanza should have been 'viands.' The word 'adapted' was also misprinted 'adopted.'" *BW*, 31.01.1872, p. 2c.
- 21 The poem has the following introduction: '*To the Editor of the Border Watch*. SIR - The subject of the following lines, was suggested to me by reading a life of Goethe, the poet, who, it is said, on his death bed, kept continually calling for 'MORE LIGHT'. *BW*, 02.09.1871, p. 3a.
- 22 Michael Ackland sums up Martin's competence in German: 'to judge from her translations and scattered later comments, she gained a high

- proficiency in the language, and a deep appreciation of German cultural attainments'. Michael Ackland, *That Shining Band. A Study of Australian Colonial Verse Tradition* (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1994; hereafter *TSB*), p. 94.
- 23 M. C. *The Explorers and other Poems* (Melbourne, George Robertson, 1874).
- 24 Ackland, *TSB*, p. 93.
- 25 Ackland, *TSB*, p. 97.
- 26 Ackland, *TSB*, p. 97.
- 27 See Ackland, *TSB*, p. 98.
- 28 See M. C. *The Explorers and Other Poems*, Dedication, p. iv. These lines from Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*, Act I, Scene 3, lines 444–448, addressed to those whose good opinion she wished to gain, run:
'An euch nur dacht' ich, wenn ich sann und schrieb:
Euch zu gefallen war mein höchster Wunsch,
Euch zu ergetzen war mein letzter Zweck.
Wer nicht die Welt in seinen Freunden sieht,
Verdient nicht, dass die Welt von ihm erfahre'. [Typographical errors in the original corrected.]
[Only of you did I think when I mused and wrote, / To please you was my highest wish, / To delight you was my ultimate aim. / He who does not see the world in his friends / Does not deserve that the world should learn of him.] The German word used for 'you' is a plural form. See Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, *Goethes Werke*, Erich Trunz, ed., vierte Auflage [Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden] (Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag, 1959), Vol. 5, p. 85.
- 29 See Margaret Allen, 'Three South Australian Women Writers, 1854–1923: Matilda Evans, Catherine Spence and Catherine Martin' (PhD Dissertation—Flinders University of South Australia, 1991), p. 288, fn. 1.
- 30 See Margaret Allen in 'Fred' in *Members and Friends of the Martin and Clark Families, The Hatbox Letters* (Adelaide: Rapid Document Centre, 1999), p. 101.
- 31 *AAG*, p. 75.
- 32 *AAG*, p. 125.
- 33 *AAG*, p. 110.
- 34 *AAG*, p. 255.
- 35 [Anon.] *The Old Roof-Tree: Letters of Ishbel to her Half-Brother Mark Latimer (August–January)* (London, New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1906), p. 231.
- 36 Quoted by Margaret Allen in 'What Katie might have learned in Mount Gambier or some early influences on C.E.M. Martin', p. 8.

Ariadne on Naxos

Graeme Miles

(for Ali, on the corner of Ariadne and Dionysus Streets)

1

The girls dance a silent circle
around my gravid tomb. They know
the story: that I was left here by accident
or design, that I died with the baby
still feeling its way through a puzzle of bones.
They know their grandmothers forged letters
from him to me, which I pretended
to believe.

They think this grave holds me,
this recurrent image to which I turn
and return. The girls and little, young men
dance their maze-dance for me
because their lives belong to mine.

2

This island isn't mine. I came ashore
morning-sick and sea-sick, and the wind
took the hero's ship away. Then the god arrived
with his sleek cats and drums in crazy rhythms
as far from a heart-beat as the planets'
odd arisings, his harmonies that were just as much discords.
I could never have married the city hero
whose muscle would slowly go to fat,
courage to cruelty.

My soft body was made
to be clothed in stones.

3

What else remains of me is rumour.
I'm a doll to grieve for, a cup
to squeeze a little bitter into.
Each year they sing their dirges over me,
and in the right season hold their celebrations
in my name. The children sing what they've never felt
and in the grove they name for me
a pubescent boy is lying, miming labour pains.

4

They say I killed him, my brother who was
shaggy and strange as a father to an infant,
say I guided the hero home
with a trick of thread. It would have been
the last of his betrayals. He was a thing rejected
who could stand bullish and unafraid
in the Cretan daylight.

At night we heard him snuffling,
feeling his way along blind walls,
wearing his fingers numb.

5

All through these islands: the traces of my feet
and fingers. There are manikins of bronze
and gold, the wooden statues whose stories
have shivered into uncertainty.

These are outsiders
among the white figures with just a hint
of face, hip and breast. There are bones
and the shore where I disappeared.

6

Through the echoing sea and bones of islands
that ring with underwater sounds

like xylophones, I hear others
of my mixed nature, who are lamented
and placated to avert their returns.
I hear Achilles' broad, violent hands
plucking a blues for Homer, hear
the son and mother caught forever
in the giddy horror of their leap
and quiet in the rocking of the sea.

Blood Plums

Anthony Lynch

We collect mail, and the years pass
Dark plums swamp the neighbour's tree
Vampires in the shed she has no key for
Then the starlings, the driveway paved with bloodied stones

Dark plums swamp the neighbour's tree
I found this black box at the end of the garden
Then the starlings, the driveway paved with bloodied stones
The rooms of that house never seeing sun

I found this black box at the end of the garden
By the side fence where a tricycle rusts
The rooms of that house never seeing sun
At night he fed her fear spoonful by spoonful

By the side fence where a tricycle rusts
These white plastic beads like somebody's childhood
At night he fed her fear spoonful by spoonful
One day I saw her mouth open and silent

These white plastic beads like somebody's childhood
Vampires in the shed she has no key for
One day I saw her mouth open and silent
We collect mail, and the years pass

Migration

David McCooey

Houses contract in the night,
and relax in the ivory morning.

The roots of plants travel
through the secret world of earth.

Brilliant parrots colonise the
foreign trees of winter.

Each Wednesday morning rubbish
is collected by the noise of trucks.

People walk or run past windows,
from one part of an hour to another.

Throughout the day, rooms are
occupied and then left, like memories.

A child's goldfish migrates from
one piece of food to another.

The river at the end of the road,
and everything thrown into it,

makes its way to the coast, where
the sea unravels into rain clouds.

David McCoey

Rain flushes out suburban cats
and the sound of metal roofs.

At night, headlights measure walls,
and citizens fall into their sleep

as the moon moves across the sky,
or the sky moves across the moon.

Hague

John Saul

We no longer dress them with ribbons, nor do outriders ride before us and after. We arrive on our red bicycles without fanfare. Yet the more humble we become, the more the public holds us in exaltation. Our response has been to expand our numbers and increase direct contact with the thousands upon thousands who turn to us in need. All else is as before: the training, with its rightly famous seminars, the internal oral examinations. There were murmurings for change, but they were no more than murmurs. They were so quiet it became impossible to truly identify their source, and then they blew away. There was never doubt that our bicycles would remain our insignia, our calling card. They are still shined for us in the night, under bright lights at the depot. Into homes across the land we go. The bicycles are a national institution, as telephone boxes once were. Wherever they appear we cannot be refused entry, but it is years since anyone wished such a thing, and he was struck and paralysed by a sudden illness of the ear.

I left my three-speed across the street, in the glory of its crimson livery; it seemed leant against a column of air. The roadway, long and winding, down-dipping, was empty, but even as I looked a knot of

people headed this way. The fact it was a weekday made no difference. One of the pleasures of the Order is the effusion, the delight of people at the sight of our gleaming roadsters.

I remember taking stock: this is an unusually finely painted door, a wealthy Georgian home. Who will it be this time?

Shadow me, is my advice to the curious.

No one answers the doorbell. At an upstairs room a cardboard tube props a sash window open. A Mrs Rochester in the attic? I would like to know what goes on the other side of this door. Are millionaires more or less passionate than the rest of us, give me the hard data Henderson.

A click.

Yes? she says holding the latch. She is all handsome head above darkness—clear-eyed, grey, alive at sixty; while I wait for my esteemed entrance. Yes? I reply, faltering at her sudden energy, yes I have come for your consultation. Consultation? Yes, you must be Clara, yes that is my bicycle propped next to a column of air. Ah, she says registering it, smiling, dazzled momentarily by the bright model of the Order but without her eyes being all bolts and blazes, setting the doorway alight as some can—but I'm losing it, an infatuation has descended on me like sunstroke and in the upside-down instant it is me looking admiringly at her hairslide.

Come in, she says. In view of her photogenic looks, health, Bardot at sixty, she deserves italics. Garbo, Monroe, Bardot: all three find an echo. *I thought you wanted to know the colour of the door so you could paint yours the same colour. We get asked that regularly.* She runs her fingers over the paint. *The name has a Dutch connection, what was the name of this blue, I do know it's Farrow and Ball, Clara would know.*

I check my diary, clawing to regain authority.

Let me see. It's Clara I've come for.

My daughter. She's very busy.

Clara is writing?

Not directly, not *physically*. Reading rather than writing. She mustn't be disturbed. I'll consult you on her behalf.

In her kitchen Ms Bardot seems a little less special, well, enough to drop the italics; but still an incipient Dame of the Empire. We have lived here fifteen years, she says setting an expensive kettle on a hob—and you will have a cup of tea, or something, you can't just advise and walk off—

We don't. We stay until all is said.

Oh well, I must be out of touch. Anyway, make the most of it, life is soon over and you have to squeeze all you can out of every situation—

Flett, says my diary, Cumberland Street.

—be it writing like Clara, she continues while reaching for a tin on a shelf—or swapping yarns, paring a lobster, making love, bearing babies. Or like you, splendidly advising us how to live and breathe our fictions—I hope you'll be splendid. Trading shares, fetching the children, meeting the challenge of not getting what you want when you want, now don't tell me none of that applies to you. It does apply, I say; tea will be fine. I'm not surprised you called by, she says, do you believe in horoscopes, do you read them, tell the truth. I read them sometimes, I tell her; apart from which I had an appointment.

Distracted by shadows at the window she says, Who are those people outside?

A crowd always gathers, Mrs Flett, I should lock my bike. Lock your bike? she repeats irritably, touching up at her Bardot hairslide. Oh well. Then lock it, go. Or could I bring it in here? Very well, you shall do that, and I shall shut the door, we may proceed from there, but quietly. Go go.

I make my way through the knot of people—as such gatherings go, small and unusually still: it was that kind of area. Not a hint of those whoops or shouts. I cross the street and return pushing the three-speeder, shaking a quick few hands.

This is the first bicycle to enter these premises, neither I nor my husband had a use for them, she says with the door wide open and curious heads at my shoulder. Oh *my*, come in and I'll shut the door, what a *noble* machine. Is it true they are all made in Durham and cost

thousands of pounds? And did you use to have *tandems*? Is that true? Just wheel it over the carpet. I could never manage handlebars with such a plunge like that. Mind my desk, my one precious thing. Other than Clara.

You're busy writing yourself I see?

Occasionally. We all do. But you didn't tell me your name—your first name. Second names always sound more dangerous. Are you dangerous?

It's Barry.

Is it. I haven't told you mine; I'm not sure it's fitting. Aren't you supposed to produce some credentials? Sugar? Say yes and one day you will see it on a database—Barry, two sugars in tea. I am not serious. Besides, there is no sugar. Not within spooning distance. Do you go street by street? Have you seen my neighbour Geoff—he is a writer. I don't know anyone who isn't a writer. Do you?

Certainly.

A writer is such a busy bee. Having to know so much. Take Geoff across the road. Where your bicycle was propped up. Why didn't it fall down?

It was on a kind of stand. Titanium. Very thin.

Oh titanium, vanadium, London Palladium. Clara is the busiest bee of all. What do you think she's up to now? Guess.

I'll try. If Clara is as young as I was told—I can't guess.

Guess.

All right. She is reading Tolstoy to find out how to write a great novel.

You really are guessing. Will you be taking notes?

When I can find my pencil. Where did I put my rucksack? Here it is. And we never had tandems, not that I know of.

Well well, the myths that rise and fall. In fact Clara is upstairs not reading Tolstoy. She is reading, though. What would you advise? The other day she just sat at her keyboard, a sphinx all morning. She says wanted to get someone through a door so everyone could get on with things, but they were stuck outside in some interminable reverie.

That may have been when she called the hotline.

The whatline? I told her she should read Hemingway to get her person through the door—Hemingway, to know how to get the cat round the corner, as Gabriel Garcíá Márquez said. Do you agree? Anyway, since you mention Tolstoy, I think she should read Gabriel Garcíá Márquez to find out how the objects Tolstoy...so quietly enlivened...can be filled with wonder. Then she will get her person through the door with bravura and everyone will be delighted. Well, we'll see how it goes.

Indeed. There are no hard rules.

Exactly, it isn't as if there's a syllabus. I tell her: Clara, read all writers known for their poetry. Read Hardy to learn how to make the countryside unfold. The lanes—

She could read DH Lawrence for the messages in flowers.

Yes! And Carson McCullers, because no one knows how Carson McCullers puts a story together and *she* will find the secret. Flannery O'Connor to see how fear grips and builds...What do you say?

I don't think she needs me in the least. Not at this juncture. I will dispatch a set of books from the depot tomorrow. From our top shelf.

Top shelf? Well I suppose you know what you're doing. Meanwhile I will see she studies all of Shakespeare to make sure she has missed nothing. Have her watch the films of Truffaut and that Finnish director and the Pole who was so good. We can watch together. Her with some *dip* or raisins, me with a double gin and tonic. Only the best will do, don't you agree? There is so much to do but she is young. And you can count on it: she will learn Portuguese to be able to breathe in António Lobo Antunes. Italian for novels by Celati lost to English. Can you follow me? Say something.

So—what blue is your door exactly? Here, says Ms B producing a Farrow and Ball paint chart from a drawer which she jerks shut. She folds the chart with firm new creases. What did I tell you? Hague. *A strong blue, reminiscent of Dutch external woodwork*. Clara? What are you doing on the stairs?

Clara in a long red cardigan holds a paperback floppily about her hand. I listened, she says. I do have to read Tolstoy. I have to read

Tolstoy for these fields that are greened over and quiet, which no one dares touch, years after the battle.

Yes dear.

I have to read Julio Cortázar to see how to become an animal; to not just sleep like a fish, but to be a fish asleep.

Hello Clara.

Hello. You are from the Order. I saw your bicycle from the window. The sun was flashing off it just now. I had a beam on the ceiling.

You were at the window propped up by the cardboard tube.

Oh that. Everybody needs air.

That's enough now Clara.

I think I have enough advice already. Some questions do not in any case have answers. I'm going back upstairs.

All right, Clara.

What about Onetti, mother? she says turning on a stair. Should I read Onetti?

Of course. Onetti. Lispector. Buarque. Now off you go, darling. Where were we—Barry? Don't you at least have a card, a badge? A silver star would be a fine thing.

Nothing. As for where we were, I asked about your door. As well as wondering about the cardboard. Now I know. And I must cycle back to the depot. I will arrange that dispatch right away.

And to think I imagined—I did know you were coming, it has been the gossip of the street. I expected you in a long dark coat. Like a buildings inspector. I do find you a bit stiff, if I may say so. But I see you have a rucksack. How about spilling the contents across the table?

I have to go.

Until all is said, you say.

I've three more appointments. Two in Castle Street, one in Victoria Road.

I lift the bike and open the door onto the reverent gathering, which turns as hushed as carol singers between their carols. I have decided I would simply swing into the saddle, be on my way.

A red delivery van charges by, squeezing the throng back onto the pavement. I look back to where Ms B still stands at the doorway; to the cardboard tube.

Clara will do it, I call to her as I put my feet to the pedals. She will.

I see your bicycle has no bell, she calls back across the street. What happens if you need to ring one?

Happens? I slow down instead. The world is quieter on my account.

An appreciative *Ah* seems to float through the air. I steady the handlebars ready for off.

Really? calls Ms B. I make it *sparklier*. With a Dutch door. The writing life.

Faces look at one another in delight.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ALI ALIZADEH's latest book is a fusion of memoir, history and fiction titled *Iran: My Grandfather* (Transit Lounge Publishing, 2010). The poems appearing in this issue of *Westerly* are from his forthcoming collection of poetry *Ashes in the Air* (The University of Queensland Press, 2011).

KIT BROOKMAN is a Sydney-based writer, although at the time of publication he will, by a strange twist of fate, be somewhere in Tasmania, or in Griffith.

JEN JEWEL BROWN is a widely published writer across many genres whose poem 'breath', is in *Best Australian Poems 2009*. She has won several awards and her poetry has been published in *Cordite*, *Going Down Swinging*, *Meanjin*, *Salt-Lick*, *The Age* and numerous anthologies. She wrote *Skyhooks' Million Dollar Riff* and poetry books *Marsupial Wrestling*, *Alleycat* and *gutter vs stars*.

DIANE FAHEY's eighth collection of poetry, *Sea Wall and River Light* (FIP, 2006), was co-winner of the ACT government's Judith Wright Award in 2006. *The Mystery of Rosa Morland*, a verse novel, was published by Clouds of Magellan in 2008. *A New and Selected Poems* is forthcoming from Puncher & Wattmann in 2010.

JESSE PATRICK FERGUSON is a poet who currently resides in Fredericton, New Brunswick. He is a poetry editor for *The Fiddlehead*, and he plays the guitar, mandolin, bodhran and fiddle with varying success. In fall 2009, Freehand Books published his first full-length book, *Harmonics*.

ADRIAN FLAVELL's poetry has appeared in a number of magazines, journals and newspapers in Australia and New Zealand. McGraw-Hill has published his series of three children's books ('Dan's Days') in their Signature Series.

MARTIN FRENCH is a Melbourne writer and scholar whose time is divided between caring for his health, his sons Haruki and Hikari, and teaching in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Melbourne.

Tasmanian by birth and upbringing, **SYD HARREX** lives in Adelaide, South Australia. His poetry and critical writings have appeared in national and international journals, anthologies including *The Oxford Book of Modern Australian Verse*, and his six collections of poems. He is currently working on his seventh collection, tentatively titled *Where Grasshoppers Fly*.

MIKE HEALD teaches Foundation Studies at Trinity College and Poetry and Poetics at Melbourne University. His last collection of poetry, *Body-flame*, was shortlisted for the Queensland and West Australian Premiers' Awards, and his next collection, *The Witness*, which explores the articulation of meditative experience, will appear in July 2011 with Fremantle Press.

JUDY JOHNSON has published three volumes of poetry and a verse novel *Jack* which won the Victorian Premier's Awards CJ Dennis Prize. A novel *The Lizard* is forthcoming from Harper Collins.

JILL JONES' most recent book is *Dark Bright Doors* (Wakefield Press, 2010). In 2009 she co-edited with Michael Farrell, an anthology, *Out of the Box: Contemporary Australian Gay and Lesbian Poets* (Puncher and Wattmann). She lives in Adelaide.

JAZRA KHALEED was born in Grozny, Chechnya, in 1979. He lives in Greece, writes and publishes poetry in Greek mainly in samizdat and online, and is known both as a poet and boxer. He is an editor of the Athenian literary magazine *Teflon*, where he has published, among other things, translations and features on hip hop poetry and Australian Aboriginal writing.

CARMEN LAWRENCE is a Professorial Fellow in the School of Psychology at the University of Western Australia where she is working to establish a centre to research the forces driving significant social change in key areas of contemporary challenge as well as exploring our reactions to that change. A former Premier of Western Australia, and the first woman Premier of a State government, she entered Federal politics as Member for Fremantle in 1994. She retired from politics in 2007.

BRONWYN LEA is series editor of UQP's Best Australian Poetry series. Her most recent book of poems, *The Other Way Out* (Giramondo 2008), won the SA Premier's John Bray Poetry Prize. She lectures in poetics at the University of Queensland.

ANTHONY LYNCH writes poetry, fiction and reviews, works as an editor with Deakin University and is the Whitmore Press publisher. His short story collection, *Redfin*, was shortlisted for the 2008 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards. A collection of his poetry will appear late 2010.

SARAH KATHERINE McCANN's poetry has been published in many journals including *MARGIE*, *New Voices* (ed. Heather McHugh), *Broken Bridge Review*, and the *South Dakota Review*. Her work also appeared in an anthology on Robert Frost, *Visiting Frost*, and she edited *Tertium Quid* by Robert Lax. McCann has several translations in *Poetry International*, *World Literature Today*, and *Words Without Borders*.

CHARLES McLAUGHLIN is a researcher of Western Australian Literature for AustLit, based at the University of Western Australia.

DAVID McCOOEY's book of poems, *Blister Pack*, was awarded the Mary Gilmore Award in 2006, and was short-listed for four other major awards including *The Age* Book of the Year Award. *Graphic*, a chapbook of poems, is forthcoming with Whitmore Press. He is the deputy general editor of the Macquarie PEN *Anthology of Australian Literature* and is an associate professor at Deakin University in Geelong.

GIOVANNI MESSINA is a PhD student in Catania, Sicily, who is carrying out research on Sicilian ethnic minority writing (written in English) in

Australia, particularly the work of Venero Armano and Antonio Casella. His focus is on the ‘uncanny’ aspect in minority writing.

SUSAN MIDALIA is a fiction writer, freelance editor and teacher. Her collection of short stories, *A History of the Beanbag*, was published in 2007 by the University of Western Australia Press and was shortlisted for the Western Australian Premier’s Literary Award. She is currently writing a second collection of stories.

GRAEME MILES grew up in Perth, where he studied classics at the University of Western Australia. After various travels in Europe and India he is now a lecturer in classics at the University of Tasmania.

GRAHAM NUNN is co-founder of Small Change Press and Brisbane’s longest-running poetry event, SpeedPoets. He blogs fiercely on all things poetry and music at, Another Lost Shark: grahamnunn.wordpress.com. He has published five collections of poetry and a spoken word CD, *The Stillest Hour*, with local musician, Sheish Money.

BARRY O’DONOUGH lives in Brisbane. He was conscripted and served in the Vietnam conflict in 1968–69, and his poem is a reflection of how he was changed from a ‘country kid’ into a man virtually overnight, courtesy of a war. He harbors good feeling towards the Vietnamese people, and offers this poem as a part of himself given over to reflection.

GEOFF PAGE is a Canberra-based poet. The most recent of his eighteen collections are *Agnostic Skies* (Five Islands Press) and *Seriatim* (Salt). He is also the editor and author of the recently-published *60 Classic Australian Poems* (UNSW Press).

RHODORA PENARANDA was born and raised in the Philippines. ‘One self to the other: Why Poetry? It’s constitution. We can’t escape from it in the end, can we? In attempting to express—with poetry as my means—I enter a process to understand my own distinction. I am—as we all are unto ourselves—a great mystery worthy of that process.’ Rhodora now lives in the Hudson Valley in New York.

DUNCAN RICHARDSON has published poetry and prose in magazines

and books since 1982, including work for children. His verse play ‘The Grammar of Deception’ was produced and broadcast by ABC radio in 2008.

JO RICCIONI has a Masters in Medieval Literature from the University of Leeds in the UK. Her short fiction has placed in competitions in Australia, Ireland, the US and the UK. Her story ‘Can’t Take the Country Out of the Boy’ placed second in *The Age* Short Story Competition 2010.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS is an Adelaide-based poet who chose 245 of his 1000 individually-published poems for his *Collected Poems* (Lythrum Press).

JOHN SAUL lives in Suffolk in England. His first collection of short stories, *Call It Tender* (Salt Publishing), was well received in *The Times*. He published his second book of stories, *The Most Serene Republic*, in 2008, and his third collection, *As Rivers Flow*, appeared in 2009.

ENID SEDGWICK has a PhD from the University of Western Australia and studied German language and literature at Freiburg University on a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service. She lives in Perth where she has worked as a teacher and later lecturer in languages.

SARI SMITH (formerly Sari Hosie) has published short fiction, critical work and memoir. She taught Creative Writing and Autobiography most recently at the University of Melbourne and is completing a PhD at LaTrobe on Women’s Memoirs of Sibling Bereavement.

MARC SWAN lives in Portland Maine. His work has been published in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Rattle*, *Takahe*, *Slipstream*, among others. *Simple Distraction*, a collection of his poems from 1989 to 2009, was published in fall 2009 by tall-lighthouse in London, England.

ELIZABETH WEBBY AM FAHA is Emerita Professor of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney. She has published widely on Australian literature, with an emphasis on writing from the nineteenth century and work by women. From 1988–1999 she was editor of *Southerly*, and from 1999–2004 a judge of the Miles Franklin Award.

YANG XIE is a Chinese poet born in the early 1970s, now based in China.

OUYANG YU is a poet and novelist based in Melbourne, Australia, whose forthcoming novel is *The English Class*.

MYINT ZAN is currently an Associate Professor in the School of Law, Faculty of Business and Law, Multimedia University, Malacca, Malaysia. He has taught in a wide range of law topics to law and non-law students at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels in Universities in Australia, Malaysia, South Pacific and the United States. He has published extensively in scholarly law and non-law journals including in literature and philosophy journals that are published in Australia, India, Italy, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States and Vanuatu.

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where only the queen
lives longer than the memory
of flowers

—Duncan Richardson
From 'The Bee Whisperer'



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