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the best in writing from the West

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Department of **Culture and the Arts**

Dedicated to the memory
of Bruce Bennett (1941–2012)
colleague and friend

PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The editors have pleasure in announcing
the winner of the Patricia Hackett Prize
for the best contributions to *Westerly* in 2011.

BLAZE KWAYMULLINA

For his personal essay
'Country Roads, Take me Home; Prisons, Movement and Memory'
Westerly 56:1, 2011

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Professor Bruce Bennett, AO (1941–2012), literary scholar and editor

Westerly mourns the death of Bruce Bennett, *Westerly* editor and founder of the Centre for Studies in Australian Literature (now the Westerly Centre UWA) and great friend and colleague. Bruce's influence in the field of Australian literary studies is hard to overestimate. He taught, encouraged and promoted Australian literature and its serious study in Western Australia, Australia more generally, Asia, Europe and North America for forty years. Bruce began his influential career at UWA in 1968, first, briefly, in Education, then in the English Department, where he championed the study of Australian literature, then a controversial move.

Appointed to the Editorial committee of *Westerly* in 1968, Bruce became co-editor with Peter Cowan in 1975 and remained *Westerly* editor until he left UWA to take up a Chair in English at the Australian Defence Force Academy campus of the University of New South Wales in 1993. He then became Eastern States editor until his death. Bruce published more than 20 books, a number of significant

government reports, and approximately 100 literary essays. He was the recipient of many public honours and a visiting professor at universities around the world. He will be remembered for his ground-breaking work in Australian literary studies, which became his major interest. He is especially central to the study and history of Western Australian literature, editing and authoring landmark works such as *The Literature of Western Australia* (1979) and *Western Australian Writing: A Bibliography* (1990), as well as books on the work of Peter Cowan (1992) and Dorothy Hewett (1995). Equally though, he was a scholar of the Australian expatriate, writing the definitive study of Peter Porter (1991), and a keen observer of international trends. He led the way in seeking to place Australian literature in relation to other world literatures, as in *Crossing Cultures: Essays on Literature and Culture of the Asia-Pacific* (1996), to cite only one of many examples.

In his obituary, Bruce's friend and colleague and former *Westerly* editor Dennis Haskell recalls the extent of Bruce's work, notably as an editor of *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia* (1988), the *Oxford Literary History of Australia* (1998), and *Resistance and Reconciliation: Writing in the Commonwealth* (2003). Some of his most important scholarship was on an Australian sense of place and his *An Australian Compass: Essays on Place and Direction in Australian Literature* (1991) is a definitive text in that area. He remained industrious until the very end and two new books will be published this year; one on an almost unstudied genre, Australian spy fiction and a co-written work on Australian expatriate writers.

Professor Bruce Bennett, AO

Nicholas Birns, editor of the North American journal of Australian American literary studies, *Antipodes*, has written that with the passing of Bruce Bennett, all literary scholars of Australia have lost a friend, a helping hand and an esteemed, guiding sensibility. He refers to Bruce as not only a commanding figure in the field but even more simply a gracious and likable man. He is as much remembered for his always generous support of students and colleagues as for his wide-ranging work. To the end, despite great suffering, he never lost his sense of humour or his passion for his work. His passing leaves a huge gap in our field and in our lives.

Three 'New' Poems by Randolph Stow

When Randolph Stow's English publisher, Macdonald, accepted *Midnite* in June 1966 they were nevertheless concerned about where its readership might lie—some jokes would only be enjoyed by Australian adults, while the basic fairy tale would appeal to children, but of what age? Stow asked Bill and Janet Grono (both teachers) to try the ms out with their classes. Janet read it to a class of 9-year-olds and Bill to a class of 16-year-olds. It was a huge success with both groups, who listened avidly, laughed often and wanted more.

Many years later, Stow wrote these 'Midnite Poems' as a birthday gift for Bill Grono; that occasion and their connection to the original gives them a particular significance.

Midnite Songs

Randolph Stow

For Bill & Janet
the first to try out the story on children

Miss Laura Wellborn's Song

If I were a Countess
I'd sit in a chair—
which, because of my bustle,
would be a bergère—
and embroider a cushion
and daydream and sing,
and ring for a footman
if I drop anything.

for strawberry-leaves go
with strawberries and cream:
and a ghastly old Earl
is but part of the scheme.

But as I am only
A grazier's daughter
I'll sit on a stool with
My lovage and water
And smile at young squatters
With hats two feet wide
And faces the colour
Of crocodile hide:

Knowing strawberry-leaves go
with strawberries and cream;
but a pastoralist's daughter
has no time for dream.

Mrs Chiffle's Song

Pumpkin scones and quandong tarts
wake a joy in housewives' hearts.
Cape gooseberry jam and loquat pies
light the starts in ladies' eyes.
When the jamwood blazes bright,
to bake, to bake is dames' delight.

Umpteen leagues plus half a mile
lies the land called Quandong Isle.
There the gaudy pumpkin blows,
vanilla flower enchants the nose,
a hint of cloves is on the breeze
that haunts the glacé cherry trees.

Pumpkin scones and quandong tarts
wake a joy in housewives' hearts.

In the gardens walled with marzipan
see the melons half the size of man.
Through groves of ginger-plant you stray:
hundreds-and-thousands pave your way.
The music of the bee-loud glade
in falls and founts of orangeade.

Cape gooseberry jam and loquat pies
light the starts in ladies' eyes.

Here is a cot for thee and me,
Nestled beneath a nutmeg tree.
Its bricks are lamingtons, its tiles
are blade of mace in faultless files;
around the windows of each room
twice candied violets in full bloom.

When the jamwood blazes bright,
to bake, to bake is dames' delight.

Trooper O'Grady's Song

A boot-faced wife sat on the quay
fishing like mad for kedgeree.

She fished and fished from dawn till night
but never had a single bite.

The more she fished, the more she sat,
The more she wished she'd worn her hat.

She fished for fifty-eleven years.
For bait she used goannas' ears.

There's nothing, as you may have guessed,
That kedgeree so much detest.

When I am tired and sick of life,
I think about that boot-faced wife.

The more I think, the worse I seem.
Some people make me want to scream.

An Occasional Free Spirit: Randolph Stow's Satiric Streak

Gabrielle Carey

An aspect of Randolph Stow's work that has attracted little attention is his gift for comedy and satire. Throughout his life Stow used satire as a way making fun of pretension, as a defence against what he perceived as insidious influences and individuals, and also as a playful celebration of being Australian.

The earliest evidence of Stow's instinct for satire was a story published in the Guildford Grammar High School student magazine, *Swan*, in 1952, Stow's final year at the school. In it, Stow parodies the school's headmaster. The Head, as he was known, was allegedly unpopular among both students and staff, particularly for his habit of surveillance, which took the form of skulking about corridors eavesdropping or suddenly surprising students from darkened corners.

Stow's story for *Swan*, written under the pseudonym of 'Albion', and titled 'He Snoops to Conquer', starts innocently enough: 'Once upon a time there was a man called Mr. Battersby', but Mr. Battersby soon becomes a tyrant in what Stow describes as 'the little buffer state of Guilgascolia', a playful, portmanteau-style word that barely disguises Guildford Grammar. The story continues:

> One of Mr Battersby's first actions on his coming into power was to institute a one-man secret police. To do this he bought himself a pair of crepe-soled shoes, and delighted to stroll around the market place after dark, listening to the conversation of the peasants and arresting the discontented ones. Because of his habit the simple Guilgrascolians called him 'Il Plop Plop', which means in English 'The Snooper'.

When this edition of the school magazine was released, the model for the protagonist in the story—the then headmaster of Guildford Grammar, Mr Thwaites—was immediately identified, as was the satire's author. A letter of apology was demanded and Stow obliged.

In that same year, Stow published two poems in the *Swan*, also under the name of Albion, and it is clear that, when not preoccupied with despotic headmasters, this precocious student was already taking himself seriously as a poet. A few years later, while still a university undergraduate, Randolph Stow had enough confidence in his own work to write to A.D. Hope, enclosing several of his poems and requesting advice and commentary. Hope took some months to reply—four to be exact—but when he did it was a gracious response:

> 29th Oct, 1956
>
> Dear Mr Stow,
> By now I suppose you have given me up and have laid a curse upon me for an unmannerly devil. The fact is that since your letter and manuscript came in June I have been almost without staff and it has been an unusually busy year…
>
> Even now I am afraid that I haven't time to give anything like the adequate or proper treatment of your poems which I think very highly of and like very much. As you can probably guess, a good many people I don't know send me their poetry and ask me to criticise and comment. In nine cases out of ten this is easy. I take

> one poem and go through it in some details, add a few general comments and that is that.
>
> But I think all the poems you sent me deserve separate consideration. They are all genuine and alive and like all living things each has its separate individuality. You can't just lump them together. If you hadn't told me your age I should have thought you were probably young but not nearly as young as you say. Because the poems have a grasp, a command, an economy of effort, which, savé Rimbaud, suggests a man who has been at his craft for a good while. That, I think, is significant. Early instinctive command and natural verbal imagination are the marks—or are often the marks—of a real poet of power and possibility. And you have them with an exuberance and force that is quite unusual. Please don't take that as a lofty pat on the head, because it is a matter of envy to me. I have always lacked these qualities.

Hope then goes on to say that he doesn't want to offer much in the way of criticism of Stow's work, but nevertheless comments briefly on a few specific poems. He then suggests where Stow might send his work, the first recommendation being *Meanjin.*

Then Hope signs off:

> I hope you will write again if my long silence is forgiven. I should like to hear from you.
> Yours sincerely, A.D. Hope (*Papers of Randolph Stow 1935–2010).*

This seems like a promising start to a genuine friendship, even a possible mentorship between older and younger poet. It is something of a mystery then, when in 1964, in response to a comment by A.D. Hope in *Meanjin* that the journal should publish more satire, Stow submitted a parody of the famous and influential poet, in the form of Augustan prose.[1] Stow's letter to the then editor, Clem Christesen, dated 18 July, 1964 (typed on University of Western Australia letterhead) reads:

> Dear Mr Christesen,
>
> I'm enclosing a parody-satire on the literary pretensions of A.D. Hope—the sort of thing he considers is done too little nowadays.
>
> Would you mind letting me know fairly soon whether MEANJIN can use it, as I won't be around much longer.
>
> Yours sincerely, RS. (*Papers*)

Stow's audacity is impressive. Barely twenty-nine, he was taking a shot at possibly the most powerful literary authority in the country. One wonders if any young up-and-coming novelist or poet would dare to do that now.

Christesen sent a copy of the parody to Hope, asking his permission to publish and whether he wished to have a right of reply.

Hope responded:

> Serves me right, doesn't it, for demanding more satire? But why is Master Stow so prickly about me? I've never sold him an eggbeater or pissed on his forget-me-nots. I don't think I want to reply in kind but you can, if you print the poem with his reason for writing it add:
>
> 'A.D. Hope comments: Mr Stow seems an apt pupil and shows promise.'
>
> That should meet the case, I think. (*Papers*)

Yet despite Hope's claim of having never offended Stow, the omission of the younger poet from his 1963 text, *Australian Literature 1940–1962,* had been a glaring one. As Max Harris commented in his 1966 essay 'Conflicts in Australian Intellectual Life': 'It is bewildering that the dominant academic voice should find substantial qualities in the work of Grace Perry and Roland Robinson, and yet find the poetry of Randolph Stow so utterly worthless as not to be worth mentioning even among the nonentities dutifully recorded in his *Australian Literature 1940–1964*' (*Literary Australia*).

The begging question is, of course, why had the young poet that Hope had once encouraged and even envied, now disappeared so completely from the older poet's survey of the literary landscape?

For whatever reason, Christesen decided against publishing the parody and on September 7, 1964, a letter was sent from *Meanjin*.

> Dear Mr Stow,
> I am writing on behalf of Mr. Christesen, who is away from the office at present. We also apologise for the delay in letting you have a decision on the script you kindly sent to us.
>
> Mr Christesen felt the parody was not suitable for publication in Meanjin Quarterly, so I am returning it herewith.
>
> With compliments. Yours faithfully, [blank] Secretary. (*Papers*)

Less than two weeks later, on September 19, 1964, a lengthy parody by Stow appeared in *Nation* with the unlikely title of *Babbitt Eats Babbitt*.[2] In it Stow attacks what he describes as an epidemic of 'Babbit-baiting Babbits' or 'BBBs'. 'BBB' is the label he has settled on for 'the sallow horde which is threatening to invade the very life-stream of our infant culture' and 'has led to the Messianic cult of A.D. Hope and Barry Humphries.' (11)

Stow describes at length the characteristics and habitat of BBBs. Under the sub-heading 'Recognition', he explains his research methods:

> By blindfolding my research assistants and placing them strategically in foyers…in front of wireless and television sets…I am happy to report that I have proved beyond doubt my earlier hypothetical classification of BBBs. In every case, the voice indicated by the blindfolded assistant as showing BBB symptoms has belonged to one of the following …(11)

Stow then lists nine culprits, including Leonie Kramer and anyone 'who has remarked three times or more that there is only one Hope

for Australian poetry.' By 1964 Stow was convinced that Australian literary and critical culture had become adversely dominated by A.D. Hope and Leonie Kramer and he clearly felt that satire was his only defence in the face of this double-headed monster.

Stow's gift for satire, however, wasn't used exclusively as a weapon. *Midnite* (1967) beautifully demonstrates Stow's natural talent for comedy, satirising all things Australian with a tender playfulness. All the precious myths are sent up, bushrangers, brave explorers (especially Lord Forrest) and even our most respected literary figure—whom Stow also deeply admired—Patrick White. The beauty of *Midnite* is that the slightly bitter tone of Stow's former style of parody has been completely replaced by buoyant humour and cutting wit. There is even a kind of matey affection for his homeland and his fellow countrymen. However, it's not possible to theorise that gradual maturity softened his formally tetchy tone because the period between the publication of 'Babbitt Eats Babbitt' and the writing of *Midnite* is surprisingly short: less than two years.

Perhaps the difference between these two parodic modes—one cutting and one affectionate—is a reflection of the old split between country and city. Stow always identified himself as a rural type, preferring the lifestyle and people of villages rather than cities, whereas 'The habitat of BBBs,' he wrote, 'is exclusively urban or suburban.' The word babbitt also brings to mind rabbit, an imported pest that threatens to desecrate the Australian landscape. Perhaps we can conjecture that what Stow was objecting to was the Australian literary environment of the period, one that he instinctively felt could not nurture his kind of poetic talent. Indeed, perhaps, as Max Harris believed, that environment was incapable of nurturing poets at all. In 'Conflicts in Australian Intellectual Life 1940–1964' he further comments:

> The pervasive dullness of the younger poets … is not a product of natural temperament but of the critical environment which they

inhabit. It is too powerful and pervasive for all but the occasional free spirit like Randolph Stow to escape. (16)

And escape he did.

Works Cited

M. Harris, 'Conflicts in Australian Intellectual Life 1940–1964'. *Literary Australia*, eds C. Semmler and D. Whitelock, Melbourne: Cheshire, 1966, 16–33.

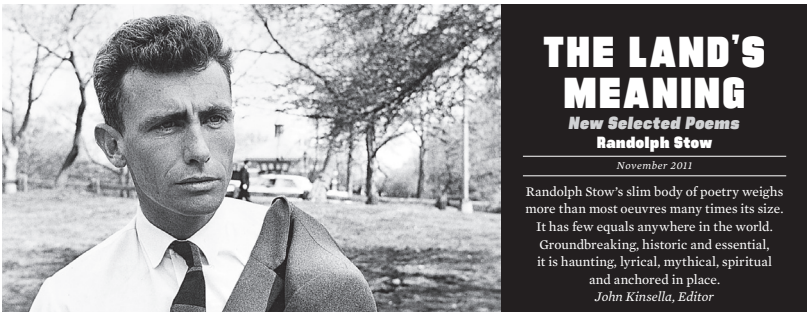
Randolph Stow, 'Babbitt Eats Babbitt'. *Nation*, September 19, 1964.

Papers of Randolph Stow 1935–2010, National Library of Australia, MS Acc. 10. 195.

Notes

1 Unfortunately, despite searches in the *Meanjin* and the Randolph Stow archives, it appears that Stow's original parody of A.D. Hope has not survived.

2 Sinclair Lewis's 1922 satiric novel, *Babbitt,* may well have inspired Stow.



A New Selected Poems of Randolph Stow from Fremantle Press will be published in July.

A Silhouette

William Byrne

A tartan picnic mat
is all that holds
the earth at bay

as your Columbine toes
paddle naked
at the seam of the day.

You sit in the orient
in the first sun
and give a map

Where only the edges
are known, leaving
a mysterious heart.

Fine hairs cling to your wrists
like the place names
of fledgling ports

Like *Vasco da Gama*
perhaps *Cochin*
or *Nagapattinam*.

Near to where piquances
perhaps *ginger*
or *cinnamon*

Were held before their spice
touch our tongues
as morning casts upon

Silhouettes now stitched to
silhouette
Here at the edge of the earth

House in Rain

Ann Egan

Today more of your allure,
halfblown dogroses by the right
of the door that was your hand

opening out in welcome,
shutting with all its finality
thin pages of lives in letters,

their blue and red edgings
pressed into the palm's lap.
the held beat of the heart,

the slow slitting by the knife
blunted from years of peeling
the precious skins of potatoes,

bone handle yellowed in usage,
worn to a shallow arc
guiding the blade to mould

a fair square about the eyes,
memory trail from the famine,
when others of the past reset

such potatoes pieces in the soil,
and prayed for them to grow
to strengthen children's joints,

so they could carry the pigshare
of peels and savings of waste
to scrimp their passage to America.

Letters curl in frail hands
while dollars like potato leaves
stack up the lost years of a family,

children like pressed potato flowers,
plucked before the root grew,
perfume a moment before wafting

when sun and moon interlace,
their voices plash rain on dogroses,
their world a dresser of stacked letters.

lingers

Kevin Gillam

it's a dangerous light near the surface. is-
lands. drawn out silence. and like sails in my hands.
these habits. frail spring afternoon. does not meet
my eyes, gnarled, netted with shadows. a mess of
ripples, the ebb, forecast of loss. using my
own words. hands twitching the jetsam. verticals
surrendered to smart haze. a meniscus of
thought. perfect trajectory. but losing North.
the Sound remembers. the mouth is the eyes. cut
the sea from the beach. squinting against. lingers.
stumps of jetty, reminders. fat matchsticks. flot-
sam of seens. neap. scent of dried weed. gap between
sensation and sense. haphazard paint strokes. then
shirrs. near the skin surface, like doubt. dangerous

The Weather

Sam Byfield

All day waiting for a break in the weather,
    hot and listless as an exile.
        The cat waits by the back door, darts in

given half a chance, still sprightly
    after 15 years. Cicadas throb, loud as anxiety
        while white cranes fly *V*s and *M*s overhead.

The radar flashes rain
    in towns on the other side of the mountains
        like Mudgee, Muswellbrook, Scone;

then straight up the highway in Maitland
    and Broke. A rumble, soft as rumour,
        then heavy drops kick up dirt and clouds

follow the birds out to sea.

***

A friend once said that two people
    playing chess for the first time is like
        the first meeting between two civilisations.

Each board tells a hundred stories.
    Dad's old ceramic set sits in a cupboard,
        cracked and neglected. There were months

and years I didn't know him much,
when he played chess in a ramshackle place
near the Hunter River with a Yugoslavian

named Dragon; battling his own demons,
and to tell from the stories I heard later,
tearing up country towns in search of answers

and absolution. I feel it strongly
when I'm back here, this time—his eyes,
the same blue as mine, the absence of half

a family, Dad's sister gone
from cancer in her 40s, his parents
soon after, and Dad not surviving them

by long, in the scheme of things.
I drive past his grave from time
to time, and don't stop.

***

Dad's Mother was a stamp collector,
left a dozen albums when she died.
First day covers celebrating frogs, birds,

aviators, electricity. Stamps torn
from English envelopes, of queens
and kings bearing stony expressions.

Stamps from her travels—Rhodesia
before it became Zimbabwe, colourful
Pacific islands, Sabah not long after

the Japanese invasion, New Guinea around
independence, a rare Russian space race set
that got lost somewhere in the fall of years.

I was young when she died, though
remember the sound and shape of her,
and have some small inkling of her dreams.

Australian Poetry 2011–2012

Judith Beveridge

In reading forty-five books of poetry *Westerly* sent me for this review/essay, I was struck once again by the variety and depth present in our poetry. Over the last twenty years Australian poetry has stepped into a more encompassing and enabling arena. This is mostly due to the rise of a younger generation of poets who are less territorial because the ground, having been well-worked over by the older generation, has become less shaky and more stable in terms of the kinds of poetic constructions that can be placed upon it. The younger generation of poets is finding new and interesting ways of using influence, innovation, tradition, form, structure, tone and voice; they have refused to be corralled into the old holding pens. It is refreshing to think that most of these young poets do attempt to come to terms with the work of preceding generations as well as of their contemporaries. They may find themselves in dialectical and disputed relationships, or in yielding and acknowledging positions, but without this there can be no confidence or conviction in what they are doing.

From the forty-five books I read, I have chosen twenty-two for this review. Nearly half of these are either first or second volumes. As

space was limited, I have only reviewed the books that most appealed to me. As a reader, I always look for the ways in which a poet comes to terms with problems inherent in their subjects, for the ways they approach form and structure, for the way that their language is 'adequate to the experience' and for the ways they have committed to the transfiguring power of the imagination. These twenty-two books have all done this remarkably well. I am aware that I have not read every volume published during the twelve-month period, and I may well have missed some significant books.

Adrienne Eberhard's third collection, *This Woman,* ranges across natural and human landscapes with tenderness and vigour. Eberhard's love of place, nature, family, human culture and history have resulted in an engrossing volume. Most plangent and moving is the eight-part title poem which maps the emotional and physical effect of the speaker's diagnosis of breast cancer. Here, what is most impressive is the way Eberhard imaginatively transforms the subject matter by using place, art works, Roman mythic history and flotsam washed up on a beach to situate the experience. Her ability to bring in so many layers gives the sequence its weight, yet the poems are never histrionic or overbearing, and because she so deftly balances history, art, geography, the solidity of the past with the intimate and personal, with the evaporative present, she is able to garner much power. Eberhard writes about the natural world as compellingly as any poet I can think of. In the poem 'Heartsease' she demonstrates how well she can move through sensual evocation of place to tenderness and love of the human. This is a book whose language, because of its precision and sensuality, does justice to a wide range of experiences. Eberhard's poems seem expounded wholly from both body and spirit, much like the cave painter's work she evokes memorably in her poem 'Touch':

> … he gathers breath, and as if
> to confess, he expels a mouthful
> of ochre and spit, it flares like blood

and there, on the wall, an imprint:
his naming, sharp and clear as flint.

Chris Mooney-Singh has lived, studied and worked in India and Indian religious communities for a number of years. *The Bearded Chameleon* is an engaging, often satirical account of his time there. With sure-footed control of free verse, blank verse, rhyme and oriental forms such as the ghazal, Mooney-Singh reveals the conflicts, contradictions and hypocrisies that a Westerner can experience in a country that never quite sits comfortably on his shoulders, though he has deep respect for many of its spiritual traditions. Most powerful are the poems about the death of his wife in a rural ashram, and the dramatic monologue 'Mrs Pritima Devi' concerning a woman who has left her son, husband, and his family because she is being slowly poisoned by the mother-in-law. The poem memorably evokes the ongoing struggle that women have for equality and recognition. Mooney-Singh's style is often playful and there are some delightfully humorous poems about characters and Indian eccentricities, as well as the self-mocking ten-part title poem in which the poet, likening himself to a chameleon, reveals how difficult it can be to find purchase on an identity in a place as socially complex as India. Overall, the poems in this volume have a lightness of touch and an ease of style, which combined with strong subject matter, make them pleasurable and rewarding.

Luke Davies' *Interferon Psalms,* like his previous book *Totem,* is a fine achievement, and, as the notes on the back cover say, is that book*'s* shadow companion. Davies has an astounding ability to write grandly, mythically and metaphorically about personal matters. The book, set in the form of thirty-three psalms, enacts Davies' struggle with mortality and emotional devastation during his treatment with interferon. Davies gives his narrative epic proportions, and while this could, in lesser hands, become indulgent and grandiose, the reader is drawn into the drama with awe and wonder. Part of the book's success rests on the shifting perspectives and tones: religious grandiloquence

is set against pop culture vernacular; confessional amplitude is tempered with dipping, self-deprecating humour. Whereas *Totem* was sometimes marred by bathos, in this book the tonal keys seem to be more adroitly played. Davies lets the registers dip and slide with maximum effect:

> I had seen the world from upside-down. I had admired Jughead's bedroom. I had lived lifetimes in atlases. I had frequented dusty diners. Take me out to the ballgame. I had imagined many futures but not interferon. I had watched so many movies under the protection of 3 am and the benediction of dawn. I had dreamed of such vastness that somehow I floated drifted between planets, for years. I was king of the stateless. I came down from the mountain. The unattainable girls become attainable women. O Keeper of Scales, balance Thou mine heroics… (p. 71–72)

Davies is always enterprising with his metaphors and language and this book is rife with imaginatively dispatched motifs and images which recur and stitch ideas and affections together. It is a swirling ride through language, feeling, through the visceral and the mystical. It's a book whose metaphors and music make you feel deeply replenished.

Fiona Wright's debut volume *Knuckled* is strong and impressive for the verve and fizz of her language and observations. Carefully, idiosyncratically chosen verbs and adjectives in particular, give her poems an often bemused, sometimes comic, sometimes satirical tone. It is through this word power that she is able to deliver energy and colour. In 'Mona Street' the station wagons 'herringbone the one-way streets'. In 'Eel Farm' the taste of eels is 'dark and truffled on her tongue'. Many of the poems are about places: Sydney's west, Sri Lanka, sites frequented in childhood and holidays. It is often a specific detail which will nail an attitude, reveal a telling truth. 'We Drove to Auburn' gives a sense of the layered complexity of a suburb,

now inhabited mainly by Arabic migrants. After travelling from affluent Kirribilli, the speaker in Auburn, eating a pastry on a plastic plate, reveals that 'There was a Torture Rehabilitation Clinic/ right next to the delicatessen'. Wright has the ability to choose penetrating, pinpointing words and images that leave no doubt about her poems' intentions.

Michelle Cahill's second full-length collection *Vishvarupa* is highly textured and elegant. The poems probe into Eros, power, mortality, place, dream, culture, myth. The ways in which Australian and Indian experiences are juxtaposed and interwoven make the book an important touchstone for cross-cultural exploration. Cahill has astute control of her diction, a diction that can accommodate formal elegance, the vernacular, specialised knowledge, the mundane world. She can range from words such as: *tumuli, orogeny, haptic, myocardium, porcine, swithering, glutaraldehyde*: to *crow, magnolia, butterfly, motorbikes, possum, rain.* 'The Abbey', an intensely evocative poem full of a strange, unsettling sensuality, attains its power from the way in which beauty and menace play off against each other. There's a sense of the corporeal as well as a ghost-like insubstantiality, which provides tension and suspense. The play of contradictions is a common feature of the book. In the poem 'The Ghost Ship', the scent of the albatross feathers is described in terms of both beauty and disgust: 'a musk pungent as magnolia, tossed with brine and bilge'. In 'A Triptych of Wings', the dead butterfly has one wing 'bright as velvet' the other 'Mendelian, a mosaic sequined with ants'. Some of the most powerful poems in the volume are those which either speak about or assume the voices of various Hindu Gods and Goddesses: 'Kali from Abroad', 'Parvati in Darlinghurst, 'Durga: a Self Portrait', 'Ganesa Resurrected', 'Laksmi Under Oath'. The poet has a great deal of fun with these destructive and capricious deities. She modernises them, flirts with them, taunts them, bringing their faults and foibles to the fore. Her more recent chapbook, *Nightbirds,* is equally impressive, the language uncompromising, beautifully weighted and nuanced.

Outside, David McCooey's full-length follow-up to his 2005 volume *Blister Pack*, continues his penetrating wit and often comic approach to his subjects. There are some hilarious 'Mutant Proverbs' written in an aphoristic style not dissimilar to Peter Porter's clever one-liners meant to be the rejected captions from *New Yorker* cartoons and which do well to get you pondering what the visuals could be; a pithy list of ironies and shallow plot-lines drawn from Hollywood in 'American Movie' and a series of comic vignettes from a South American holiday, 'Inca Kola'. McCooey's gift is for quirky perspectives which he renders clearly, cleanly and precisely. He can distil an idea or a response into telling, affective language, as in these lines from 'Hands', 'When cold, they become incestuous.// They have their own language that everyone/ knows little of.// We turn them against/ each other for the uproar of applause,// or use them to brand a cheek./ They seek out their own kind.' Despite the engaging wit and love of playfulness, I felt that the three-part poem 'Memory and Slaughter', which deals directly with experiences of animal cruelty and suffering, was the most impressive, partly because of the inherently powerful subject matter but also because of the directness of approach, with no punches pulled.

For many decades Philip Salom has been one of our most imaginative and inventive poets and has not had the critical acclaim he deserves. Hopefully his two new books, *The Keeper of Fish* and *Keeping Carter*, will help to rectify this. These books complete Salom's Keeper trilogy, both books assuming the voices of two very different personas. Alan Fish is a widower, obsessed with fish, walking, and the game of GO. His voice is melancholic and nostalgic, his world reduced by sadness and loss. MA Carter is more cynical, more acerbic, often offensive and obsessed by sex, he loves Bach and hates the false affectations of art, though he shows himself to be shallow and self-serving. These books are rich, highly textured in tone and language, and Salom's virtuosic talent for metaphor, language play, and sonic and structural bravura shine through. Salom gives MA Carter more room to move because he isn't so tied down by personal tragedy or depleted circumstances. Fish is likeable, dependable, yet suffering

from the inertia of grief, insomnia and nerve-pain. The poem 'Not being Lazarus' gives a brilliant description of his treatment for sleep palsy. In Carter, Salom seems to have found a tone that persuades us most definitely of the rewards of being cynical and self-satisfied. He is charmless, yet his poetry is so accomplished we can't help but admire him: 'The I is the biggest con-artist in poetry/ reader, so up yours!' (Nasty Poet). These books deserve many rereadings. There are so many finely executed poems in both.

Amphora, joanne burns' fifteenth collection shows her to be at peak power. Her mode is playful, mocking, and at times uproariously funny. She delights in language and poems such as 'counter', 'incubator', 'relief', 'lathe', 'the twitch quartet' and 'oh', which take certain words or common phrases as their subjects, had me chuckling out loud for their inventive and quirky perceptions. burns is able to find comedy in many scenarios and subjects. She writes with such tender awe about a range of saints, from mainly the Catholic pantheon, and ponders their accomplishments with a tongue-in-cheek, yet child-like appreciation:

> don't we love the stories of saints lives…
> saints who survived fire. arrows. starvation. fasting.
> stigmata bleeding. bilocation saints. all the miracle
> healer saints. decapitated saints who created fresh
> springs of water in the spot their heads fell.
> performance artists multiplying the scripts of god.

burns has a genius for throwing into stark relief social oddities and conundrums, for revealing the absurd juxtapositions that she finds in the world around her. The observations are fresh and engaging and are often made buoyant by her ability to uncover the ridiculous or the burlesque in everyday life. burns is a poet who thinks very carefully about her free verse lines, about where to put the line breaks for maximum effect. She has to be one of the most skilful and exemplary of our free verse poets.

Julie Chevalier, in her first collection *Linen Tough as History*, also demonstrates a love of the comic and an admirable facility for word-play. Like burns, she revels in finding odd junctures, in coming at her subjects sidelong and with a raised eyebrow for the gender and social differentials present in our everyday interactions. Her style is fresh, incisive and she has a deft ability to nuance her poems with an impressive tonal range and an eye for weird personal and social milieus, finding imagery and syntax to match. The poems in the second section of the book are mainly ekphrastic, looking at the work of artists such as Anselm Kiefer, Diane Arbus, Cy Twombly and Morandi. Here the poet finds forms, movements and verbal constructions which deftly enact and embody the art works' perceptual fields. There are also poems responding to William Blake, Anne Carson and a brilliant poem built around a phrase from Sylvia Plath, *summer grows old*, whose sounds are utterly mesmerising. *Linen Tough as History* announces a poet whose work is deeply satisfying and accomplished.

I've long been an admirer of Mal McKimmie's poetry, and his second volume, *The Brokenness Sonnets 1–111 and Other Poems,* has further deepened my admiration. The first section of the book consists of twenty-five sonnets written from various voices, but which share a sense of loss and human suffering. 'Icarus, after the fall' ends powerfully and poignantly: 'Man's hope may be the extinguishing fire/ but God's mercy in the extinguishing sea./ And gravity is the pull of God's embrace.' The theme of suffering is taken up in other sonnets which deal with faith and religion, and I would alert readers to 'Agony', 'Station' and 'Crucifixion', spoken in turn by Jesus and Mary. Other memorable poems in the volume are 'Apoplectic', 'The Tao of Smoking', the skilful sonnet-sequence 'The Judas Tree' (all written in syllabics), 'On the Non-existence of Saints', 'Why Homeopathy is not a Science', 'Jubilate Agony' and the remarkable 'The Higher, the Fewer'. McKimmie has the power, through his ability with image and language, to impart great resonance.

In *A Sudden Sentence in the Air,* Geoff Page has collected the poems he has written over a number of years in honour of jazz greats,

jazz compositions, venues and audiences. With his elegant, honed style, Page delivers a variety of subtle effects, mainly through his use of iambic lines to impart lightness and musicality. His lines step deftly and at times beautifully enact the musical pleasure he writes about: 'I like the jazz in coffee bars/half-heard over steam and cream/ the rough percussion of the grinder// the fluency of waitresses/ floating on the beat./ I like the scratch of chairs on hardwood// the music bouncing back from glass/ and outside on the pavement too/ among the flowering of umbrellas// the way a tempo joins the traffic.' Page delights the reader with his elegies to Thelonius Monk, Oscar Peterson, Chet Baker and others, and though I know very little about jazz, I found myself caught up in Page's passion and enthusiasm. He effectively imparts, through his language and metaphors, something of the colour and pizzazz of these great musicians. There is tenderness, humility, humour and much subtlety of line, rhythm and image in this book.

The Yellow Gum's Conversion, Simon West's follow-up to his impressive 2006 volume *First Names,* is a treasure of finely nuanced, delicately sensed moments of perception and cognition. His work gains power through the resonances and shadings he is able to generate through meticulous discrimination. His poems have meditative poise, yet are linked to an urgent intimacy. The tenderness with which he recounts an apricot tree from childhood, and his witnessing of the regeneration of a yellow gum ravaged and ransacked by caterpillars are memorable indeed, while the way his language gains metaphorical and symbolic power in 'Blackwood', the verb 'leaf' opening the poem up to become a psalm to the power of words, shows his impressive movement of mind, his ability to progress through sensation into perception. He is impressively adept at investigating how the sensual panorama is changed by perspective and emotion, at showing how objects from the phenomenal world become objects of thought and are essential to our immersion in meaning. I direct readers especially to 'Out of the Woods of Thoughts', 'A Minor Sense', 'Journey' and 'Volatiles' as superb examples of this.

John Mateer's ninth volume, *Southern Barbarians*, is quite unlike anything I have ever read. It is an entrancing, beguiling book in which Portuguese literature, exploration and language are given enigmatic centre stage. The term southern barbarians is a term used by the Japanese to describe European traders, the first of whom were Portuguese, arriving in 1543. What is intriguing and fascinating is the quick-silver slippage of identity that plays throughout the volume. The poets Fernando Pessoa, and Luis de Camões, Portugal's great national poet, author of the epic poem 'Os Lusíadas', feature as touchstones for Mateer whose own identity is as fluid and as ghostly as Pessoa's. The six poems in the section 'The Humanism of Friends' link literature, language, travel, past and present, and in these poems the speaker explores relationships that in some way delineate his floating sense of self. 'You were an Angolan mother to me, you who are an historian.' ('Ana Paula'); 'You spoke/ JOHN MATEER into the dark of King João library/ and were closer to my name than I will ever be.' ('Eduardo'). The poet as wandering, exiled, without home, disembodied from the claims of a homeland, even of a mother tongue, are central themes of the book. The poet can only ever 'translate' because no place or language can ever truly be home. I can barely do justice to Mateer's book in this short space, but it must be one of the most original and significant books of poetry to be published in the last couple of decades.

Surface to Air, Jaya Savige's follow-up to his highly-acclaimed *Latecomers*, continues his reputation as a fine craftsman. Savige has excellent control of his language, his forms and his subject matter. His voice is confident, sure-footed and convincing. He can cover free verse, tightly organised stanzas using meter and rhyme, concrete poetry, as well as elegies, love poems, poems about place, art and sport, to satire and humour. He can range over short distances, demonstrated in 'Sand Island' which builds through an accumulation of momentary observations and imagistic connections, to more lengthy pieces such as the concluding poem, 'Riverfire', a tour de force for the power of its descriptions, its ability to build and sustain metaphors, and the

graceful movement of the sentences over the lines. The poem is a celebration of Brisbane in all its guises: 'One of those nights that runs its thumb along/ the edge, neatly folding light into its envelope.' Or this, 'On summer days when Brisbane needs to let off steam,/ the sky swells in the west with stygian indignation/ and thick arthritic fists clench above Toowoomba.' Savige is a poet whose work you want to keep returning to for his rich haul of image, sound and rhythmical ease—'Cirrus wisps usurp the tyrant sun' ('Empire Street')—and because his range of subjects makes for dynamic and buoyant reading.

One of the most compelling poets to have emerged over the past few years is John Watson. Though Watson has been writing for many decades, he has only recently begun publishing books. *Four Refrains,* his sixth collection to appear in the last eight years, is full of wit and sophistication. It has his hallmark explorations into art, metaphysics and philosophy. The central section, 'Four Ways to Approach the Numinous', won the 2009 Blake Prize for poetry. This poem is rich and highly textured. It investigates appearances and questions where one might best find truth: in art, silence, objects, or nature. Watson's thoughts are often complex; he has a marvellous ability with his sentences and their unique cadences find elegant deportment over his lines. The first twenty-one lines in 'By Approaching the River' are one long, magisterial sentence. Also in this volume are two hilarious sequences, 'Magritte Poems' and 'Phaedrus', which take as their starting points odd occurrences in the art world. Watson then extrapolates, extends, re-visions, riffs upon these moments using a variety of forms which include haiku, limericks, prose poems and others to create sets of quirky perspectives and interpretations. The imaginative force of these pieces is delicious, as are the forty poems and a coda dedicated to Wisława Szymborska, whom he talks to intimately in his peregrinations through landscape, poetry and finally mathematics. Watson's poetry both engages for its intellectual astuteness and for its sensual pleasure.

Anthony Lawrence's twelfth book, *The Welfare of my Enemy*, is astounding for its sustained spotlight on dark, unrelenting themes. Using his exemplary narrative and descriptive skills, Lawrence

investigates the phenomenon of people in society who go missing, whether through misadventure or choice. The cast of voices is large: detectives, murderers, parents of missing children, partners of missing people, omnipresent narrators, sufferers of mental illness, victims, psychiatrists; there's even a poem written in the voice of a sniffer dog. Lawrence has set himself the formal challenge of using rhyming (sometimes half-rhyming) couplets in every poem; this constraint for the most part, adds extra interest and linguistic resourcefulness to the poems, whose emotions are raw and affecting. Lawrence, through tone and carefully chosen detail, is able to make this wide array of voices convincing, even mesmerising and he can elicit sympathy for the perpetrators as well as the victims. The naturalness of the speaking rhythms, even though constrained by rhyme, goes a long way towards establishing authenticity of voice. Lawrence seems astutely keyed in to many of the psychological imperatives that underpin the narratives:

> Hammering at clouds is what it's like, coming down
> from the sierra some call mania, others a blown
>
> fuse or the blue touchpaper of desire.
> Medication is one option, but so is to punch a hot wire
>
> to the right hemisphere of your dream-
> acquired brain injury…

Lawrence's abilities with narrative, drama and character first came to the fore in his ground-breaking 'Blood Oath' sequence published in his 1992 volume, *Three Days out of Tidal Town*, this new book can be seen as extending and building upon those powers and reaffirming his reputation as a poet who is artfully versatile, and whose work is compassionate and humane.

Concrete Tuesday shows David Musgrave at full sail, ranging from moving lyrics, to dramatic, sometimes surrealistic narratives,

employing the resources of both free verse and more formal structures. I was especially taken with 'The Poet's House', a fourteen-part sonnet sequence in which the reader is given a tour through the fourteen rooms of a famous poet's house. Time and space are intricately connected in this poem, the life of the poet revealed as we progress through the rooms, each room serving to build up a portrait of the poet. It's a most effective structuring device and allows for dramatic layers to be added step by step, the various rooms—Library, Sunroom, Kitchen, Basement, Conservatory etc—providing emotional intensities through suggestion and implication, as these final lines from 'Observatory' show: 'During that time, bent on self-destruction/ he'd spend his night up here. He'd use the telescope to see// into those houses. It was only later in his hydroponic/ phase that he found the love that moves the sun and other stars.' Musgrave, in previous books, has paid fervent homage to water and in this book he continues to deliver the same lyric intensity to this subject. 'Ripples', 'Watermark' and 'Snow' are the standout poems here, the imagistic elements giving buoyan*cy* to larger philosophical concerns. Overall, this is a book with a wide range of subjects and technical approaches. Musgrave finds a sure-footing with whatever narrative, structural, or compositional challenges he sets.

Michelle Dicinoski's first volume, *Electricity for Beginners*, is clear and lively. The poems fuse together delicacy and potency, they have a lightness of touch and engaging and distinctive lyricism. Dicinoski's poems cover childhood memories, love, and situations of the here and now of urban life: nights at dances and at pubs, riding a bicycle on Brisbane streets, listening to the rumble of traffic, and learning to drive. Dicinoski takes the reader into areas of rich simplicity and tenderness of tone and insight. The poems are squarely located within Dicinoski's own history, but she steers clear of being merely confessional or documentary, and gives us communion and dialogue. Her poems are written out of a respectful attitude towards others and the dailiness of the self with all the concomitant hopes and desires. I enjoyed the way the images seem unfettered yet resonant, speaking

beyond their literal levels, as in 'White Flags', which captures so poignantly parents calling their children in from play at day's end: 'They surrender,/ climb stairs,/ scrub their hands and offer them,/ these clean white flags.'

Error, Elizabeth Campbell's follow-up book to her very impressive first volume, *Letters to a Tremulous Hand,* is both powerful and unsettling. Her subjects are fear, doubt, brokenness of body and mind, loss and love. Campbell's poems yield tremendous rewards for the way in which the thoughts and emotions are layered and delivered. Campbell unflinchingly tackles questions that time and history, even religion, pose to the individual human life. Her poems are complex and proceed often by posing unanswerable questions: 'What part of your mind should you give to the past'; 'What is madness and can horses have it?'; 'What is justice. Who earns pain?'; 'But why should brokenness be truth?'; 'What is ignorance?'; 'What is a soul made of when it is made?' These poems are explorations into human pain and suffering and I am unable to forget two poems in particular from the second section of the book, 'fear': 'iii the diving bell' and 'v brain', for the way in which they vividly delve into human frailty and vulnerability. Campbell's poems are deft, finely executed and always thoughtful, her voice has both dramatic and intimate intensities, achieved in this book most effectively in the final section 'A Mon Seul Désir', which takes as its starting point six medieval tapestries and investigates worldly and spiritual love.

Stuart Cooke's first full-length volume, *Edge Music*, is impressive for its variety of forms and styles. Many poems explore 'edge' territories, physical and emotional, and his ability to capture the movement that binds outer weather to inner is dynamic and convincing. Cooke often achieves this through small topographical shifts, forcing connections and alternative readings, showing the mind moving through and across its perceptions. 'It began clamber c/ lambering up the up the lum/ pen grassy slope' ('Leaning Gum Eulogy'). This is obviously not a new technique, but Cooke employs the breaking up of words and meanings to parallel the interrupted rhythms of Australian landscape

in particular. The six-page title poem 'Edge Music' weaves narrative and dramatic episodes into a powerful poem of loss and recuperation. In much of this book, it's the dramatic awareness in the poems that draws the reader closer and closer inwards; places and landscapes act as the stepping-off points into memory and an enlarged sense of intimacy, reverence and loss. Cooke's work is never static but gathers force through lineation, shape, and a careful attendance to the balance between seeing and dreaming, which is especially strong in the last section. I direct readers to 'Broome Song', 'Litchfield Shout' and 'Darwin Entropy' as particularly fine examples.

I would also direct readers to two important anthologies of younger poets published in 2011 which would seem to show that the younger poets do believe in the importance of their own inheritance, no matter where they might position themselves in relation to some of its procedures. *Young Poets: an Australian Anthology* (John Leonard Press) edited by John Leonard and *Thirty Australian Poets* (UQP) edited by Felicity Plunkett. I haven't reviewed these books here because they deserve more space than I can give them, but I would like to alert readers to their excellence and variety. Similarly, I also chose not to review the *New and Selected Poems* of Gig Ryan and Diane Fahey because they too deserve lengthy responses. Both these books are remarkable achievements and speak to the diverse approaches poets in Australia are willing to explore and adopt.

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*Cahill, Michelle, *Vishvarupa*. Parkville: 5Islands Press, 2011.
*Cahill, Michelle, *Night Birds*. Sydney: Vagabond Press, 2012.
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*Chevalier, Julie, *Linen Tough as History.* Sydney: Puncher and Wattmann, 2012.
*Cooke, Stuart, *Edge Music.* Queensland: Interactive Press, 2011.
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*Eberhard, Adrienne, *This Woman*. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 2011.
Hart, Libby, *This Floating World.* Parkville: 5Islands Press, 2011.
Hawthorne, Susan, *Cow.* North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2011.
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*Lawrence, Anthony, *The Welfare of My Enemy.* Sydney: Puncher and Wattmann, 2011.
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*Page, Geoff, *A Sudden Sentence in the Air.* Melbourne: Extempore, 2011.

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Klopperesque*

Josephine Wilson

Vaulted but not revealed
—no glass curtain for a bloodless Snow White—
flesh, bone, a little fat,
a practical monument to poetic impulse,
as kiln and windmill are to clay and air.

Closed to the eye yet open to clutter
—mine, yours, ours—
butted, fretted, bricked and beamed,
it's aperture olive green, ruby red
round rimmed in lead light above
a slow combustion stove,
a tan Tessa chair on a black slate floor
with a chocolate Labrador.

It is all a little fictive—
a building about a feeling
or a story about a fact
made of bits of other fictions.

Yet
it smokes,
drinks red wine
does Yoga
likes a bit of pot,
and a bit more.

It has read Marx and Lenin
and opposes development,
it cites Leonard Cohen,
is depressed at Christmas,
is single, married, divorced
and has a handful of children
with interesting names.

It smells like the seeds of fennel
in a limestone crust
and does not believe in bedtime
or too much formal schooling.
It is tuneful, musical,
rides a bike to work,
votes, not the way of its parents
but other ways—
Green, pink, donkey
it is anti-nuclear and anti-American
(Hoorah!).

It kisses other women
on Turkish kilims,
serves soft-boiled eggs
from orange kitchens
on jarrah tables
from hand-thrown plates.

It eschews serifed fonts heavy with history—
Times Roman, Century Schoolbook,
preferring the round plasticity and
playful clarity of Helvetica Light
or—for a bit of fun—Mock Gothic.

It is too young too die;
none of its friends are dead.

It is forever knitting heavy sweaters
from undyed wool that
hand-washed and laid out to dry
should hold their shape forever.

* (written on the event of the retrospective of the work of Perth architect Brian Klopper, displayed at the Cullity Gallery in 2012)

Three New Works on Paper

Luke Beesley

Light in Anne Carson

I can't eat rosemary the south Sudanese boy had a thorn embedded in his shin for more than a year before light surgery, like an opening line by Anne Carson. Wound light or wounded light from a choppy bay—afternoon. It has been some time. She talked of a slipped disc or simply *back pain* reaching around to the small of her waist I thought pain was finite. Drinking water. Thirsty iridescent elk in the boot of a Jaguar.

The Jaguar

After taking pencil shavings (green) out of the sharper than the air. Sharper. We put our hands on flags or flags put their sails on cough. We have each other medicine. Mine a piss coloured lozenge yours somewhere in your mouth—opened up—was about to sing melancholy Johnny Cash. We were at the ticket counter. Ordered two tickets. They were pieces of paper so we crossed the road. Passed a Jaguar after that I shaved and surprised bees calling the keeper to the sign—*removal of bees.* Half a beard! I said. Biro leaked into the ocean swam the dugong elderly in swimsuits hot water bottle thick!

Bees Nudge the Mouth of a Feathered Rose

Handing my friend a new book of poems there is an object at the centre of beauty, too. The tomatoes are the same colour as her scarf—neckerchief. The violence around the neck in cinema. The red in gun-timber. Making a bowl to crush herbs in, keep oil, a door open. Hold old change. If we fall in what's called *love* can we what's called *matriculate* into invisibility? It's not about bees. There are no bees. Just delicious honey, a table, vowels sizzling like warmed oil sliding through changes in the seasoning.

The Hallway

Nathan Curnow

I remember the hallway, a minefield
of creaks we negotiated on Saturday mornings.
One false move and we'd be sent back to bed,
missing the early cartoons. We were young
operatives of the seventies—orange carpet with
mission brown swirls—skirting the tail ends
of an era for some black and white television.
My brother stepped first with a bidding toe.
My sister followed shifting perfect weight.
I was strung to their timing as if we balanced
a house dangling over the edge of a cliff.
And it might have been our greatest act, even
greater than the family portrait—lined up
in our new blue safari suits, we smiled
harder than mum had saved. Tight
were the skivvies, wide were the pants, loose
our limbs in the hall. We are creaking now,
moving just as slowly to keep our age a secret
from ourselves. What became of our dance?
The hallway stretched on, spreading into years.
Now history is loaded with issues that spring,
rising quicker than mum ever did. We are
choosing silence, eluding the groans, our foundation
riddled with flaws, as if we can't trust each other
unless the stakes are high, drifting further
and further apart.

Strained Lucidity

Rabindra K Swain

The only thing not posthumous
is 'obituary'.
It comes handy
when a poet dies.
He has his own ready.

***

The only thing clear
and sure is that
the top beginning with
the passing of senior poets,
A. K. Ramanujan,
Nissim Ezekiel, Arun Kolatkar,
is getting thinner.

No bald head it is
to strum one's fingers.
Plateaus scarecrows,
incredulous.
The foothill tousled
by the nervous whistling
of a train
passing in panic.

***

Early in the morning
you are awakened
by the sound of utensils
in the kitchen.

Rain an epilepsy
through last evening
till this morning.
In between
your limb
limp.

You look at her.
she wards you off:
you had it enough.

***

As you begin to write
you have déjà vu:
you write again
what you have already written.
You tear the piece.
Again you glare at her.
Again she seems to say:
there will be a wife;
there will be children.

***

It is not the question
whether why she is off the bed
before the birds have
left their nests
or why your ‘you’
is not your ‘I’
as Geoffrey Hill’s ‘I’
is not Geoffrey Hill himself
or if there’s at all
a poet who has never
used an ‘I’ ,
but why should getting into
others’ skin be sexual
as dipping one’s quill
in the inkpot.

***

A poet is a pilferer,
a thieving crow, a sleepwalker
into others’ sorrow.
Joy is what
he does not know;

a palimpsest,
darkly;

a seer through the eyelet;

lucidity,
strained.

Strange Fruit

Nadine Browne

Three hours from the West Australian border she starts losing it about the fruit in the car. 'Settle down' I say, 'they're not gonna run out holding guns to our heads if we've got a few oranges in the car.'

'Well!' she turns to face me, one hand on the steering wheel, '*I* don't want to be paying the $2000 *fine*!' and with her free hand she reaches onto the back seat and whisks a bunch of bananas out the driver's side window.

'I was gonna eat those' I say, but it's the third or fourth time she has mentioned fruit and she is beyond listening. The windows are down, the Dolly Parton CD turned up and we are flying along the eastern plain of the Nullarbor.

And what will this desert do with such strange fruit? Animals might die; the entire precarious ecosystem that surrounds us may well turn on its head. She pulls out another cigarette, lights it, and aims the car down the very centre of the Eyre Highway. Without her noticing I lean back to get a glimpse of the speedometer. It is well past the '120' mark. Her head quivers slightly and she moves her jaw around the way people do when they are grinding their teeth.

The banana incident is nothing. It was only the day before she had threatened to leave me on the shore in Ceduna. I had attempted to go for a swim, not such a stupid idea considering it was February and the car had no air-conditioning. As I walked to the shore, she yelled out: 'There's sharks in that water. *Your* funeral … not mine' I could see her sitting in the driver's seat poking erratically at the car stereo buttons, 'Oh yeah' she yelled out, 'and don't expect us to make it back to Perth for Christmas lunch either.'

It was funny her saying that. Back in Melbourne she said she never wanted to go near Perth again. How any sane person could live there was a mystery to her; just one endless suburb of rednecks in her opinion. It was time to move on she said, and with that she went and spent her last $300 on a lime green leather jacket and disappeared for two days. I traipsed across Melbourne looking for her, spurred on by a vague sense of duty that came with twenty years of friendship. I looked for her at the houses of various acquaintances and fellow West Australians in exile. When I did find her she was asleep on a couch in Brunswick. It was three pm on a Saturday and we were already two days behind schedule.

As I was standing knee-deep in that cool, green Ceduna water she yelled: 'I'm going! This place is shit, at least we know there is some place more boring than WA: South Australia!' And with my back turned, I heard the screech of my car's tyres on the gravel. I turned around and ran for it.

Adelaide onwards it hadn't been easy. I did most of the driving and she refused to answer simple questions like: 'Would you mind passing me the map book?' or when I asked, 'Did you see what that sign said?' she snapped back: 'How the *fuck* should I know?'

Every CD I put on was either too mainstream, too happy or it was 'foreign shit.' We argued about the past, about the Bible, about whose mother was more depressed and whether it was better to have an alive father or a dead one. But it wasn't long before I realised it was futile talking to her. I shut up; it was too hot to argue. She looked at me with something akin to disgust and I evaded her gaze the way

I'd seen people avoid drunken Aboriginals at the shopping centre. I looked everywhere but at her.

Perhaps, I think as we drive across the scrubby plain, this is what happens to children whose parents teach them that society is something to separate themselves from. Perhaps they grow up angry and hate everyone. Then, as if reading my mind she says, 'You know what your problem is? *You're* stuck in the past, you can't get over it, *you're* fuckin' obsessed with it.'

I ponder this for a while looking out to endless silver salt bush and the mysterious red desert tracks which trail off toward the faded blue sky. Finally I say 'Well, I think it might have had some, you know, *influence* on our lives.'

'Bullshit! *That* is bullshit, I don't even believe it was a cult, I liked growing up there, in fact I wish I was back there right now!'

'Great' I say, 'Good for you.'

She sleeps a lot, it's a kind of tense, knotted-up sleep which she wakes from with a shiver and squints with revulsion at the road in front. 'I hate driving' she says, waking up as we leave Yalata 'My whole childhood was one fuckin' long drive after another' she puffs on another Dunhill Blue, 'Always off with Dad, building some church in the desert, for some boongs who couldn't give two shits about Jesus. Why the fuck you'd want to drive thousands of k's across the country.'

It wasn't like I'd forced her to come, in fact it was her who had called me from Perth at two am one morning begging to stay with me in Melbourne. 'I need to get out of here' she'd said, 'I can no longer remain here.' She used that overly formal way of speaking which told me she was either high or drunk or both, 'It's just not a conducive environment to my mental and spiritual well being.' I hadn't talked to her for months, I explained that I was packing up, heading back home, it wasn't a good time.

We stop at the Nullarbor Roadhouse and it is here that I see the familiar red and white of the *WA Freightliners* truck. It is the very same truck that has been tailgating and intermittently overtaking us

since Adelaide. Entering the roadhouse I pass what can only be the driver: shorts, thongs, an inordinate amount of body hair.

While she is pacing up and down out the front of the roadhouse, this truck driver, in a moment of acute folly, wolf whistles at her.

'You fuckin' prick!' she screams throwing a fist in the truck driver's direction, 'You can *fuck off*!' Luckily, at this exact moment, I am walking out of the roadhouse into the hot wind and blinding light with my $7 Cornetto. I manage to grab her arm as she lunges for his faded blue singlet. Her screaming disturbs the vast dusk silence that lay all around, from the veranda of the roadhouse to the furtherest horizon. She lunges at the truck driver again almost knocking me to the ground. A couple of grey nomads look up from the petrol bowsers, trying to assess the situation through their semi conscious Nullarbor dazes.

Physically, I realise, there is something wrong. As I try to pull her back I feel her muscles and cartilage pulsating under my hands. It is the shock of touching her cold, clammy skin that gets my attention; it's a hot day, at least 38 degrees. Her anger is not the hot rage of a young angry woman, but the cold, septic anger of someone sick and desperate. I look at her far too skinny frame, the greyness around her eyes, the glistening cut of her muscles formed like they belonged to someone much older than twenty three.

Back in the car I polish off what may have been the most expensive ice cream in Australia. She sits in the passenger seat filling the car with obscenities and cigarette smoke. 'They should have all their dicks cut off' she announces and then, almost abruptly, she falls asleep and stays that way for a good few hours. I keep to the 110 speed limit and rummage around the car in search of a CD I haven't heard seventeen times.

The car, even with all the windows down reeks of cigarettes, a pack a day no less. At every roadhouse I had bought a packet, sometimes two. I calculate: thirteen dollars times three, no four, what's that? $52 dollars, *that's $52 dollars*—isn't like I'm going to see that money again. But if she is like this with cigarettes, I don't want to see what

she's like without them. Even I have started smoking, which isn't helping the situation, I hadn't checked my bank balance in four days, but it didn't bode well. I pick up a CD from under her feet, '*The Sounds of Spain'*, it is badly scratched but still plays and I try to preoccupy myself with the sounds of Flamenco music. Of course it doesn't work; trying to distract yourself from emotional angst with a musical version of it would never work. As I listen to the wailing and the stomping of feet a dark mood swirls and lands over me, big and full as a flamenco skirt.

I have crossed the plain several times but I cannot remember, or even imagine how it ends, it seems it will just go on forever and I fantasise, while meditating on the beat of the dotted white line, that Perth must be some kind of special, secret place to be on the other side of all this. Only some place that was truly great could be this hard to get to. That I still fill my mind with such ideas of a Promised Land, that I still consider suffering as being worthwhile, is disappointing. I know in reality I will feel let down, I know that Perth, like always will seem like just another rest stop along the way to a more proper, more well rounded, more fulfilling place.

When we finally make it to the border, the woman at the gate has on more make-up than her face can actually contain. It is all running off down her neck on account of the heat and her eye lashes look like some sort of modern outdoor verandas with black shade cloth over them. My travelling companion tells the lady that she looks nice, she calls the lady 'honey' in that fake, high pitched voice she uses when she wants people to think she's from some place where chai lattes and baked cheesecake are served. When the lady asks us to pop the boot she jokes that there is nothing to see but sixteen ounces of coke. 'Oh,' she says with such a dramatic flourish that the lady raises her heavily pencilled eyebrows 'but I'd never dream of bringing *fruit* into our beloved state'. I stare on, daunted, after three days in the car, at the exhausting complexities of human interaction.

Miraculously, we are granted entry into our home state. The lady and a thin, leathery man are mainly concerned with fruit, not our

emotional wellbeing. They say, if we have any fruit we should put it in the tray, and they both point to it. They say it twice, they say 'dried fruit, stone fruit, honey or nuts.' The lady's eyes dart between the two of us as her make-up continues its escape down her cheeks and toward the gold chains around her neck. I look out to the desert on either side of us, out on the red infertile earth, the low lying orange sun, the straight, grey road ahead, and I think how fruit should be the furtherest thing from my mind.

'*Well*, I thought she did look nice' she says when we are back in the car, 'at least she made an *effort*, I mean it can't be *easy* in this dump, waking up every morning making a fucking *effort*!' She spits out the words like I'm the one that's holding the whole of society back, like I'm the enemy of any one in the entire world who has ever made an effort.

At Eucla, I pull up in front of the giant whale and get out to fill the car. She sits with the door open and her feet on the ground, she has that same faraway look that she had when I found her on the couch in Brunswick, it's as if she's just arrived in a dream, here on the side of the Eyre highway. She asks if she can borrow some money and I hand her a fifty dollar note telling her to pay for the petrol as well.

I stand in front of the ridiculous Eucla whale and I remember a long time ago, at another equally desolate roadhouse. The two of us were heading to a Christian mission near Kununurra. Amos, the pastor's son was with us. It was the middle of the night and the trip had taken more hours than our teenage minds could comprehend. At this one particular roadhouse, she had wanted to buy a *Guns and Roses* tape. We looked at the tape for a long time, trying to interpret some iniquitous meaning on the cover, some subtle, devious message from Satan himself. Soon Amos came and told us to get back in the truck, he was on the lookout for just such worldly distractions.

I remember that night, how she did a half skip back to the truck and waved to some Aboriginal boys standing in the darkness nearby, how her eyes had sparkled in the dim lights of the roadhouse. Even then I remember thinking how bold, how happy she had looked. That

night it was the other side of midnight, we were sixteen and it was the first time we had been allowed to leave the community without our parents.

Amos had not been impressed, he went on for a while about the path of wrong doing being wide, how its gates were always open. 'Rock music is one of Satan's favourite lures' he said, 'it all seems cool and fun until you realise Satan's got hold of your life, oh he's got a good strong hold on it then,' and with his hands still resting on the steering wheel, he curled his fingers around as if he were throttling something. Her and I took turns sitting in the window seat and sometime during the night, while I had my arm out, the desert air went from warm to cold so suddenly that I drew back my arm in fear. I wanted to tell her, but when I turned she was looking so intently into the blackness, she whispered, 'I haven't seen any lights so far, not one.'

There are parts of Western Australia where you can forget that the world is actually filled with billions of people. You think that the entire world should know you, because your entire world does. They know your mother, your father; they know your kitchen table, the size of your feet and how your voice sounds when you are frightened. You can't imagine a world where people don't. The world that she and I came from was like that, and while the outside was exciting and full of new and compelling things, it was also full of disappointment.

I stand by the Eucla whale for a long time, just me and the whale and that sky I think about how Eucla always makes me feel small, like I've been shrunk in the wash or sapped of all my power, what I thought was power. I look up from the car park and stars are already appearing in half the sky, the other half is still filled with the sun, about to go down over those snow white dunes to the South.

Overseas, I once met a man who had never seen a shooting star, he wasn't exactly a young man and I felt quite bad for him. I wanted to tell him about Eucla, that Eucla means 'bright star' in Aboriginal. I wanted to tell him that in Eucla the sky is so big it makes you feel you're nothing at all. I wanted to explain to him how the night skies

in Eucla are filled with more shooting stars than you can count. But where do you start to tell someone about Eucla, especially when you're both in some cold, claustrophobic place like Cardiff of Manchester or wherever I was. Eucla is always far away, Eucla is close to nothing.

With the money, she had bought almost everything the only bain-marie in Eucla had to offer: two Chico rolls, a sausage roll, a pie and hot chips. I drive on towards Balladonia while she sits sullenly stuffing her face. The sun now a red glow on the horizon, I watch as the grey plain to the right side of the road shifts, the entire plain begins to hop, glide and bound at the side of the car, in front of the car and then all over the road, red and grey, big and small, the whole landscape teems with them. I slow down to sixty and hold down the horn, even then I have to ride the brake to avoid hitting them, a few still careening into the side of the car as they make their irrational escape to the other side of the road.

At Balladonia the eight official residents of the place are sitting around a large bonfire, they are full of Christmas cheer and a few cartons of Emu Draft. 'Geeze you girls must have seen some 'roos', one of them says. We sit a while and eat the lamb chops they offer, drink the beers they hand us. After an hour or so we announce that we must keep moving, 'Perth isn't getting any closer' we say, they say we are crazy, we don't disagree.

I have developed the same itch as her, scratching at my arms furiously with one hand on the steering wheel. My head churns over and over with its circular, nagging chatter—the few cans of Emu Draft make it churn faster. A feral cat the size of a Blue Heeler appears on the dark road side and the bone white trunks of the ghost gums are illuminated by our lights. 'So' I say, feeling uncomfortable with the unfamiliar sound of my own voice, 'why'd you have to get out of Perth?' She sighs and props her arm on the window sill, up ahead small, faded signs, some hand written, appear in the headlights, they point to mines or drilling operations off the road. 'I don't know' she sighs, 'I was staying at the Duxton with Ben, we were on a bender'. Ben had grown up with us, his parent also raging born again Christians

and the weight of such a circumstance had made us like brother and sisters. 'I went to sleep, left a tap on after he'd gone. It flooded the whole penthouse' she scratches her arm, then tucks her hair behind her ear, 'Ben says I owe eight grand in damages, says it was my fault.'

I doubt this is the real reason. Ben, since growing up with us, had gone from a quiet, sulky, fat kid to becoming a fully patched member of the Coffin Cheaters. On a big night he could spend eight grand on drinks alone. I don't say anything, I tax another one of her cigarettes, or in fact my cigarettes, and keep driving.

'Perth is not where I wanna be right now' she says, 'but, I dunno, where is there? I mean where is there to get to?'

I ash the cigarette out the slit of the open window, I mumble that I don't know, how should I know? Nobody knows? What I want to say is that I've also been moving, I haven't stopped. What I want to say is maybe we got given the wrong message, some inaccurate piece of information that keeps us moving, searching incessantly. What I want to say is I don't see what the point of it is, I don't see where there is to get to either. When you spend most of your life waiting for the Lord to return, maybe this is just what happens after, maybe this is what you're left with.

At close to one a.m I go in to get a coffee and use the toilets at Norseman roadhouse. When I come back to the car she is gone, the cigarettes and her bag are gone too. There is no movement in the car park, the street in front is quiet, only a gentle breeze moves the leaves on the trees. A street light shines on the highway out the front of the roadhouse, it forms a harsh white triangle of light; so bright against the blackness it seems like it could be picked up and moved elsewhere. I imagine her running under the light with her bag over her shoulder, running into the darkness somewhere, anywhere, as if I was the enemy.

late poem

Steve Brock

awake at 3.30 am
head full of worry

I finally get up
to piss

my wife says
look at the stars

I look out the window
then go outside

& there's the Milky Way
awash overhead

Orion dipping
toward Moonta Bay

I'd forgotten the stars
beyond city wattage

the memory of a poem
comes to me
lines by Li Po or Wang Wei?

no, Lu You's *Late Poems*
I was reading
before we left
for the country

the Milky Way, soundless,
*sweeps over the earth**

& if the Queensland floods
weren't enough
to shake you out
of your solipsistic doom

the Milky Way does it

& I've wandered barefoot
onto the wet grass
outside our cabin

& once back in bed
I feel the stars
burn hot & cold
into the soles of my feet

I dip into
deep sleep.

* "Sitting at Night, Drinking a Little", *Late Poems of Lu You, The Old Man Who Does As He Pleases*, translated by Burton Watson, Ahadada Books, Tokyo, 2007, p. 47.

pruning

Josephine Clarke

the crisp crack, sometimes a pop, of dry wood
the sliced tongue green stem
cutting with one hand, discarding with the other

you crept up on me
under the branches away from the light
years of dust spiders' webs
and the empty nests of wrens
five years dead wood
you joined me there in the spell of repetition
cutting with one hand, discarding with the other

I saw you reaching out with your left hand open
sweeping under the top growth
cutting with your right hand, discarding with the left
snapping long stems into smaller ones
both hands meeting in prayer around the dry sticks
making an even stack
with one hand, with the other

together we filled the bin raked the space
allowed the sun to reach in onto old wood

five years dead and you
are still teaching me how to garden
with one hand, with the other

De Grey

Tim Edwards

We got there in cars you'd never dream of selling
in the big smoke, red dust too deep in the lining

of their blood. And my blood it is, that remembers
that river of my youth; a sacred place

of seventies cassettes and warm beer; of a blue
esky in a green station wagon; of threadbare shorts

trimmed with frangipani leaf; of a broken glove box
tied shut with white bikini lace.

Once off the hot black monotone of highway one,
we would follow powdered tracks between moulting

paperbarks to a small circle of blackened stones,
covered by large hotplates busy with bull ants.

I remember bush smoke and the snap of kindling,
the dash across burning sand to sun-varnished

river stones, the cold sink into clinging brown boots
of mud—the taste of iron in water.

Mine was a Kmart special, an air mattress
complete with red drag stripes and side handles—

and on this warm pillow of dimpled rubber,
I'd drift in circles for hours, tasting the talk

of half dreams, floating past trees that had never
been taught to grow straight,

their lower limbs a tangle of storm wood.
Out on the green polish of deeper water,

I'd roll off and pedal the warm shafts,
those mysterious channels among the cold.

It was the sea breeze that eventually carried
the sound of distant surf through the leaves

of the white gums—that late afternoon signal
to pack up. Back through darkening trees

we would follow tail lights in the dust, a dry red dust
the same dust still in the blood, three decades later.

Workshopping West Australian Poets for the Chinese Reader

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This article offers a brief account of the Translation Residency undertaken by ASM (the Association of Stories in Macao) at the Westerly Centre, in November/December of 2011. The residency coincided with two conferences being held at the University of Western Australia—the Fourteenth Biennial Symposium on Culture and Society in the Asia-Pacific, and the annual meeting of Asia-Pacific Writing Partnership. The purpose of the residency was to workshop with West Australian poets being translated into Chinese, with a view to publication in the fourth of ASM's series of large-scale bilingual (English-Chinese) parallel-text anthologies of Australian poets. In the workshops, poems under translation were discussed—given close collaborative reading—so as to come to an adequate understanding of the text in question for the purposes of translation into Chinese.

The personnel from ASM were the author and two poet/translators, Iris Fan Xing and Jo You Chengcheng. The West Australian poets were Lucy Dougan, Andrew Taylor, Dennis Haskell, Philip Mead, Fay Zwicky, Andrew Burke, Coral Carter, Barbara Temperton, John Kinsella, Shane McCauley and John Mateer. We were able to meet in Perth with all but John Kinsella and Shane McCauley.

A Note on ASM and Poetry Translation in Macao

ASM, a non-profit NGO operating in the Macao SAR of China, has over the last seven years published around seventy volumes, in the genres of poetry, fiction, theory, life writing and pedagogy. ASM is a community publisher, dependent on sales, subscriptions and arts body funding for budgets for printing and various publishing and translation-related activities. Many of ASM's titles are first volumes of poetry or fiction by young Macao authors. The brief of the organisation is to promote writing and other artistic expression in and about Macao. An important part of the ASM's ongoing activity is poetry translation by Macao poets, involving English, Chinese and Portuguese languages and in all possible directions. The function of ASM's various poetry translation projects is to facilitate the East-West cultural crossing entailed in bringing poetry to the non-native reader; equally important is the goal of providing Macao poets with a cross-cultural apprenticeship in poetry, through the vehicle of translation practice. ASM's ethos is democratic and inclusive. Seeing poetry and publishing as empowering cultural processes, ASM aims to teach and encourage new Macao poets, translators, publishers, artists, cover and book designers, event organisers and others involved in the business of publishing, through hands-on cooperative experience. Working largely in (and to and from) English in a non-English speaking environment, ASM's counter-intuitive goal is to build a culture of reading for a new literature, through the creation of a circle of new writers. The activities described take place in and out of Macao, with the participation of and for the benefit of Macao citizens.

Macao is a city in south China, a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic. In 1999 it was the last of Europe's colonial possessions to be returned in the Far East. Macao is a mere dot on the map. Yet this 28 square kilometres (at the time of writing), current population 600,000, is among other things, the world's most crowded territory. Macao has historical and historical-political importance far outstripping any first impression given by the collection of facts

just cited. That importance has to do with Macao's various kinds of uniqueness, for instance in intercultural terms, as the only place in China where gambling is legal. Macao is also, for its size, home to a remarkable number of poets and also visual artists. ASM's 2008 anthology *I Roll the Dice—Contemporary Macao Poetry* represented work of more than 120 Macao poets, of whom roughly 100 were still living at the time of publication. That English-language collection included roughly twenty Portuguese-language poets and about thirty (mainly ethnically Chinese or Macanese) writing in English. We can say that, as with Hong Kong, in the case of Macao, a quite particular sub-national identity is at stake, and in evidence in cultural production. Macao has borne the symbolic burden of being for several hundred years (till the establishment of Hong Kong as a British colony in 1831) the principal portal between China and the West. There is a powerful sense of the place *in toto* as transnational, and as liminal East-West space.

Macao, as portal space, as a city of poets with cross-cultural credentials, is a particularly appropriate site for the work of poetry translation. ASM's work has been, since inception, centred around the teaching of Creative Writing at the University of Macau, with a number of graduate students publishing their thesis work as first volumes. Various poetry workshops (on and off-line), including the *1958 group* and *flying islands poetry*, have provided mentoring and encouragement for young Macao poets and translators of poetry. An annual Creative Writing competition, an Asialink Writer-in-Residence position at the university, regular booklaunches, readings and other fundraising events and activities ensure ASM's continuation at the forefront of a vibrant creative publishing culture in Macao.

Over the past five years a major emphasis in ASM's work has been on the translation of classical Chinese poetry into English and of contemporary poetry in both directions (English-Chinese, Chinese-English). These activities have resulted in the publication of numerous volumes of poetry in parallel-text format. They have also provided dozens of young Macao writers with a valuable apprenticeship in both

poetry translation and poetry writing. Classical poetry translation projects have focused on the writing of women from various dynastic periods. (Parallel-text) volumes of poetry by the following Chinese classical poets have been published: Meng Jiao, Xin Qiji, Li Yu, Nalanxingde, Li Qingzhao, Yu Xuangji. Collections of the poetry of Liu Ru Shi and Zhu Shuzhen are on the way. As well there have been anthologies of women poets of the Song and Tang Dynasties (the most extensive ever published in English), and more general anthologies of Yuan and Han Dynasty poetry. The reason for focusing on women poets has been two-fold—firstly, they have been under-translated (and under-represented in, for instance, dynasty-based collections); secondly, most of the project participants are women, so important role-modelling is facilitated by having young women poets engage with women's poetry down through the ages.

Resulting from residential workshops in Australia over the last three years, ASM has to date published three large-scale parallel-text (English-Chinese) anthologies of Australian poets: *Fires Rumoured about the City—Fourteen Australian Poets* (in 2009, 460pp) and *Wombats of Bundanon—Twenty Australian Poets* (in 2010, 520pp) and *Noise of the Exchange* (in 2011, 452pp). A number of single-author volumes of Australian poets in parallel-text Chinese translation have also been published. Over the past three years, through ASM, ten young Macao poets have enjoyed residencies in Australia, sponsored by the Bundanon Trust, and now the Westerly Centre. Further down the track, a volume of Australian expatriate poets and a bilingual volume of poetry for children are planned.

First Principles for Poetry Translation

A good translator is a poet's closest reader. This helps explain why translation has been one of the great apprenticeships for poets down through the ages, and no less today. By reading closely and with a productive purpose in mind, one comes to an intimate understanding of how a text works. By understanding the intimate workings of a text

one gets an idea of how such a text can be made. The fact that one works in or into another language, another mindset, to make a new poem, guarantees that the process is, to the extent that it succeeds, more than merely imitative. Making a poem, from any kind of other-language model, must be a creative process, if the procedure has any value at all. The production of a successful translation necessarily entails reading with particular strategies in mind; one reads with a view to enable carrying across cultures ideas and images, tone and emphasis, conviction and meaning. No one reads more closely than the good translator because no one has a more exacting task.

The objective of poetry translation is to produce a good poem in a target language,[1] one that is also faithful to an original text in a source language. These demands need to be acknowledged as at least potentially contradictory. A good poem is an original poem; a good translation is a faithful translation. Fidelity and originality are *prima facie* at odds because we think of fidelity (in the translator's sense) as imitative. We might discuss endlessly the criteria for fidelity; indeed, along these lines, there will be ways to upbraid any translation effort. In the present case, we are trying to produce good poems in Chinese which can be thought of as translations of, or Chinese versions of, the original Australian poem written in English. At the risk of stating the obvious, the text under construction through the workshop process is a new poem, with a life of its own, but with a special relationship (a relationship of trust, one might say) to another, original poem, the product of a different context.

Should translations be free or tightly reined to originals? It is important to insist on a distinction between the text which can be called a translation and various other kinds of response to an original, as for instance: imitation, adaptation, variation, reply. The target-language text which is *too* free is not a translation; the one which is *too* tight is probably a gloss, because it will be more structurally constrained than the original on which it is based. A way between Scylla and Charybdis? The translator's most fundamental task is to carry meaning across from one context to another; this

rubric brings us precariously close to the idea of metaphor—another 'carrying across'—one which for Aristotle, we will remember, was the most essential thing to poetry (694). The point of interest here is that poetry and translation have an affinity as processes, again explaining from another angle the value of any kind of translation as an apprenticeship for poets.

The target-language poem resulting from the process of translation needs ideally to be as open to interpretation, as nuanced a work of art, as was the original text in the source language. Strictly speaking, effecting Eco's openness (1984, 75) in the new—the derivative—text is a Tantalus task; one where horizons recede in the measure that we approach them. The target-language text will always and necessarily lack something that was in the original. So one might regard the realistic goal of poetry translation as heroic failure, were it not for the legion examples of translations better than originals, were it not for the source-language poems (not least from poets who are translators) which emulate a foreign (i.e. 'translated') style in delivery, were it not for the numerous examples (in my experience) where poets have changed their 'original' poem as a result of what transpires in the translation workshop. From the fundamental dilemma in maintaining the openness of an original text (one acknowledged as worth translating) arises the famously quoted-out-of-context Frost[2] assertion that poetry is what is lost in the translation. The rejoinder to this is very simply that poetry is also what has to be found in the translation. Poetry is found in the translation because poetry is in the act of carrying across; it is in other words in the acts of what Lefevere calls rewriting (1992b) and refraction (1981, passim), processes which necessarily involve seeing with new eyes, re-visioning what was apparently known, 'making the stony stony' as the Russian Formalists would say (Shklovsky, 6). So it will be fair to say that the contradiction between originality and fidelity is productive, in the poetic sense.

In terms of the visibility of the translator (Venuti, passim), it is tempting to think in terms of a simple formula—the more visible,

the more poet we are seeing; the less visible, the more the text is the work of a translator we are *not* seeing. But such a formula underrates translation as an art, and its importance to the art of poetry. In making a new poem with the confidence of the original, subtle intuition needs to be exercised. The good poet/translator will neither be uniformly self-effacing, not universally 'in your face'. In terms of the continuum one may imagine from foreignisation to domestication (Venuti, 307–313), the poet translator needs to find her own means of locomotion; remaining at one consistent point on the scale is apt to make the poet translating feel safer because less visible, but good poems are full of brave acts. You have to be brave to walk on a tightwire with a life-threatening drop below. The poet/translator will always do best when s/he looks straight ahead because s/he knows where s/he is going. S/he is there for an audience but s/he must not be distracted.

Poetry's affinity with, not only translation, but with the foreign word, is as deep as it is generally unconscious, unacknowledged. Randall Jarrell writes, 'When you begin to read a poem you are entering a foreign country whose laws and language and life are a kind of translation of your own' (23).

Poetry's has been conceived as a community of foreigners or even of strangers to themselves. The position of the poet in the modernist—and later—conception is like that of the foreigner in a new culture, one we might see as foreshadowed by Lewis Carroll's Alice, who—in *Through the Looking Glass*—enters a wood where things have no names (55). Yet the poet finds names in this space beyond, and names the things of one world as if they were in and of another. Innocence recovered, the poet's world is one being named again, re-named as if for the first time. There are long continuities inherent in this position. Think of Homer's Odysseus, washed up on an unknown shore, praying to an unknown god for the help Zeus offers, as god of borders and strangers (83). In such cases an act of openness is demanded and it is received.

Openness is the key to the interpretive acts which are entailed in—and forestalled in—translation. From the point of view of the

text produced, the role of the translator is not to interpret but rather to present to the target-language reader the ideas and images which were there in the original. By contrast, to interpret is to (not produce a poem but rather) create a gloss (or series of glosses); this will generally amount to telling the poem what it was meant to mean. The effect in such a case would be the opposite of openness; it would be the closing down of the text, its reduction from engaging possibility to a correct answer. This would amount to a making redundant of the poem, and for the simple reason that imaginative works are only worth being with to the extent that they remain open to interpretation. This is precisely why literature terrifies so many.[3]

But how can the reader/translator understand enough of the text to translate without first interpreting? This may be possible, for example, where the poem is so simple (e.g. some poetry for children) there is nothing to get wrong; and it may also be possible in the case of heavily image-based, for instance surrealist, poetry. The fact that such texts are able to be translated without much interpretive effort need not deprive them of an engaging openness. The interpretive possibilities of such works play out on levels other than the word or phrase. Generally however, the understanding of the source poem required of the translator will entail an interpretive process—a process of trying to understand the range of possibilities implied in the poem. The general paradox at which we arrive is this: in order to not interpret (i.e. to produce a poem rather than a gloss) one must first interpret.

To keep the poem open in its journey across cultures (that journey in which it becomes another poem), one needs to understand enough of the source and the target culture (and enough of their differences) to know what works and what will not work in each. Between languages as vastly separated as Chinese and English, it is unlikely that the parallel sets of homophones or homonyms will make themselves available. In such cases one may however strive for equivalent effects. Some poets work deliberately with ambiguity, some strive for clarity; my experience of workshops suggests

that often what makes a poem work is subtlety despite or beyond authorial intention. Translating Chinese classical poetry into English foregrounds the problem of ambiguity and the difficulty in keeping translations as open as originals. The dynamism of the classical text tends to either/or openness, result of which may be that variant translations will be unrecognisible as of the same original. In the case of Tang poetry particularly, the poet/translator needs to be looking for all kinds of equivalence (in image density, in clause forms, speech mode, tenor). This is not a science but an art in which one exercises intuitions of a kind for which the skills of a poet are essential.

Poems are produced by poets; this is no less true of translations than of originals. There being so few true bilinguals in the world who are also poets, it makes sense to look on the process of poetry translation as ordinarily collaborative. Ideally there should be a native-speaking poet at either end of the process. If this can be organised, then the space in between these native-speaking poets will be a fertile ground for poetry's intercultural apprentices. This has been the normative setup for ASM's poetry translation activities over the last six or seven years.

To take this one step further, in the terms just now elaborated—poetry translation is a necessarily collaborative process, one which actively engages the poet—not because of any adherence to intentional fallacies, rather because the poet's expert knowledge with regard to the text s/he has created, will generally (though not always) be the best possible starting point for the discussion.

To recap. We need a poet to make a poem and that is what the translation of a poem is. The process of making a poem (original or translation) is largely intuitive and only so much light can be cast on it. A nice example of the limits of discussion would be John Mateer's poem, 'The Premonition', a piece which, I would argue, is much less straightforward than it first appears.

I attempt to peel the newspaper, but
it's soaked through with invisible

blood. I suppose there are birds to
knock their airy shells, though
I only hear crows creaking. Yesterday
seemed to be something else. I went
and saw art in an old asylum. The blue
and iron along West Coast drive had
been scoured by thunder and mutely
glimmered. The people I saw stood up inside
their shadows, elongated thoughts of people
stretching to thoughts of bright day.
The premonition was that I'm asleep,
sleeping sensibly, believing it takes more
violence to wake us than daybreak.

At a glance one might note the apparent trickiness of 'I suppose there are birds to/ knock their airy shells, though/ I only hear crows creaking', and 'scoured by thunder and mutely/ glimmered'. The expression here is puzzling but will probably stand a more or less literal translation.

Time requires careful handling in this poem, especially when translation is into a language which, as in the case of Chinese, lacks tenses. Consider: 'The premonition was that I'm asleep'. 'Was that I am' is quite challenging in English; it seems to flow but it jars the native-speaker's temporal logic. This one example reflects an oneiric quality throughout the poem, which gives the feeling—a premonitory feeling—that reader and writer are on unsteady ground. How easily can that unsteadiness be conveyed into Chinese through a translation? Two opposite dangers are suggested: one is that the target-language reader is alerted to the jarring, courtesy of some rhetorical sledgehammer (in which case all subtlety is lost); the other is that the jarring is smoothed away, glossed off the text as if there were nothing remarkable in the original. Illustrated here are key potential dangers: in the latter case that the translator makes smooth and flowing in the target language what was disjointedly problematic in the original;[4] in

the former that the reader is instructed in the unexpected, and so has nothing to discover for herself. The problem in Mateer's poem raises the stakes; what he gives us in English is an unsteadiness which feels smooth, but leaves the reader uneasy as to whatever it was that had to be assumed in order to get to the end of the poem.

We strike another kind of problem in Shane McCauley's 'Do Not Sleep Beside A River', a poem responding to a Chinese original.

'Time is like a flowing river—
one day, we wake up old men.'
—Han-shan

Do not sleep beside a river
or you will wake surrounded
by people who do not recognise you
who say you are not as they knew you
for now your moon eyes
have grown cold and old
and your hairs a grey field
of wilted wheat
and where you once strode
like a tiger you shuffle
like a dog too tired to reach its food.

Do not sleep beside a river
its eddies will giddy you
into dreams of never waking
of never finding your place again
among those who once thought
they knew you and who will not
recognise you for there is too much
danger of seeing in your changing

so much of themselves
who have never slept
have never dreamed.

Should we back-translate the epigraph or go to the original? The obvious and easy to choice is to find the original poem; however, back-translating might give us more of a sense of the modern poet's understanding of the ancient. The only unusual expression to contend with in McCauley's text is the use of giddy as a verb in 'its eddies will giddy you'. The meaning is easily enough understood; the problem with Chinese being that grammatical categories in that language are much more fluid than in English and so it is difficult to get a sense of the expression as anything out of the ordinary. Perhaps this is a good point at which to note that ASM's English to Chinese translation of contemporary poets has been firmly focussed on semantic intentions and effects, with relatively little effort devoted to mirroring phono-aesthetic effects, like rhyme or rhythm. The effort to rhyme, particularly, might distract from the business of carrying the meaning across. In this case though the aim has been to reproduce in Chinese something of the river-like flow of the original. Again, what seems to be called for here is a poetic fluency between languages, allowing parallel intuitions of form. Training for this comes largely in the form of preparing, seeing, reading poems of the two languages in parallel. There is no grammar or dictionary which can make up for a lack of training as a poet. Nor are there any perfect translations; the success of translations will be measured by the adequacy with which meaning is carried from context to context.

Now, to bring us to up to the current encounter. The workshop (typically around three hours with each poet) is the key moment in the translation process which was undertaken with the West Australian poets. This author's role was to facilitate the process.

The next section illustrates the range of problems dealt with in the process of translation, by looking at poems workshopped and

translated during Residency. The method might be described as something like 'talking the poem through'. The hope is, through this means, to give the reader an experience something akin to the Q and A dialogue which took place in the workshop. My intention in discussing the poems in this manner is not to come to any critical judgement, but rather to get an understanding of what is involved in the effort to translate and so create a new poem, a poem which breathes its own air but with the confidence of an original text from another climate.

Let us begin with Lucy Dougan's poem 'The Lost Girl':

When the trains flash by
the books about her tremble.
They shake the lives held tight
in print and in the spines
of bodies in compartments.

The girl serving has just spilt fizzy water.
It spritzes pages of 'The Lost Girl'
and she forgets to mark her place
just as he enters asking
for an impossible book.

Her fingers trouble
the frayed corners
of an ancient index
that resists her efforts
though it smells of hope.

The search is long enough
to dream the way her hands
would look in hair or water.

She works until the next train
agitates the shop, their hearts
or what is filed there,
almost to the surface;
the books, their lives, are set to fall.
At dusk she closes up and leaves the Lawrence
to its sticky fate.

The girl in the book and the girl outside, the custodian of books and the form a reader fleshes out, colours from the black and white of the text on the page: there is a persistent doubleness to entities throughout this poem, and this doubleness reflects the reality/fiction divide between life as lived and the vicariousness of reading. The bookshop in this circumstance is a magical portal space in which the rules of fiction and the rules of life might ambiguously apply, each to the other state. As in the dream where what would be waking oddities go unchallenged, these circumstances appear in the poem as arbitrary fact. Dougan has written in her (yet to be published) 'notes for the translator' to accompany the poem,

> At the time I wrote this poem the material world of books was significant for me as I worked in an antiquarian bookshop on the train line in Swanbourne, a mysterious old building with green carpets and large glass fronted bookcases (book, books everywhere ceiling to floor) and a spindly steel staircase that lead to a mezzanine floor. When the trains passed by the whole structure would shake and this is really the key image of this poem—the analogy between the 'lives' of characters in books with those bodies in the passing trains. It's important to me that the language of this poem has a sort of controlled but agitated (almost nervous) feel to it. The persona is 'shaken up' by a surfeit of feeling for all the lives in the books, the passing strangers on the trains, and also for a customer who is searching for a book that can't be found.

There is a lot for the translator to approach with wariness in this piece. 'Sticky fate', 'spritzes pages', 'an impossible book'—we have the cliche brought to life, a new verb, a subtly rendered ambivalence between gruff attitude and a bit of Borgesian magic (as in 'The Library of Babel'). Various things in the poem might seem normal, but are not. How can a search be long enough to dream? Who does the dreaming? The translator's job is to make sure that the reader in the target language also gets to do the work of finding these things out for herself.

Fingers trouble—a slightly old-fashioned verb-from here ('may I trouble you for a light?') in a metonymy directed at the book catalogue and implying it has human characteristics (which, as a product of human effort, it metonymically has). The index has an anthropomorphic quality (of resistance) but it is also symptomatic of something (hope). The translator needs to take care not to normalise these poetic usages in the target language. Metonymy and anthropomorphism are, I think, the rhetorical keys to this poem. Each serves the other as a cross-current: so that we remember text is not flesh, neither is life something which slots between covers on a shelf. We are reminded of these things and yet we doubt them because the magic of the poem is to challenge the separateness of life and fiction.

All of these things can be done in Chinese; but the needful equivalence will not be achieved in word-by-word form. Rather it will be best to intuit an underlying rhetorical pattern. The only fixed phrase in the poem, for which the translator needs to find an equivalent, is 'sticky fate'. The pun with the spritzed water should be easily enough achieved; the hard thing to render is the de-automatising of the cliché, the reversal implied here. The old story between the covers (and long-since finished) surely is past the vicissitudes of fate. By contrast, we cannot know what will happen to the people implied in the poem. But here the text is subject to the whims of readings yet to take place. Its 'life' is in the hands (and the hearts) of the living.

To some specific issues as we talk the poem through. Structurally, 'the girl serving' is the persona, put at a distance (self-objectified) by her interest in, and proximity, to fiction. The poem depends for its effects on a blurring of what it means to be in, and to be with, fiction.

The books 'tremble' when the train 'flashes' by. But tremble is something distinctly human (at least animal). So the books are shaken by the train but there's something of their own perhaps involuntary response in the fact that they tremble. Rather than seeing the books as mere objects, we have a sense of their imperfect passivity; as if braver books might not tremble at all.

Compartments: this is a way of making the train/book link between the world out there, passing and the world in here, reliably available because fitted to a permanent shape, with a labelled spine. So we see the world out there compartmentalised as well; that is to say, also circumscribed. I think what is happening here is that the one word, fitting from one context to another, brings those contexts into a circle of mutual implication, ultimately asking the reader to question what such a word as 'compartment' could do in any context. One should however not be misled by this train of thought. The poem is not about the meaning of words or their context dependence; it is about books and lives set to fall. The stakes are high and yet they have a self-parodic quality about them. If we find ourselves taking things too seriously, there is a 'just a story' edge to the deliberation. Over-reading is encouraged; we must go too far in order to step back.

Lives held tight. By whom? By tradition, one might say—the canonic fact of a work's finishedness, its finality; but more importantly the lives in the books are held tight by reader to whom those fictional lives are precious and full of meaning. Now note that these two senses of tightly-held lives are almost diametrically opposed. The first meaning is something in the real estate agent's vocabulary (the focus is on property and propriety); the second meaning is about feeling, human proximity.

Set to fall. Like what? Like a house of cards. And why? Because the physical precariousness of the bookshop (its evanescent magic)

serves as metonymy for the precariousness of life lived in the shadow of fiction. As Dougan writes:

> The poem takes its title from the novel of that name by D.H. Lawrence in which the heroine pursues a love that's not condoned by her family. It's just a very loose reference to being at that time when privileging romantic love over everything else has a lot of appeal. But the poem also holds the layer of an older self writing back to a younger self and I don't want there to be a sense of 'happy endings' but the reverse instead: all the mess of life that books can never quite contain. I'm drawn to poems that hold a sense of openings at their ends. Here, it's important to leave the books and the shop (all that high romance and all that feeling) to live that messy life, even if we are all 'set to fall'.

But surely the relationship between life and text is more reciprocal than Dougan suggests here? Books cannot quite contain life; but neither can life live up to the expectations of fiction. The 'sticky fate' of the Lawrence (synecdoche for Lawrence's novel *The Lost Girl*) is nicely ambiguous because it refers to what happens to characters in that text and what customers/readers will do with the physical object which is the book (i.e. buy it and read it or not).

Can these subtleties be precisely captured, re-enacted in a language other than English? Perhaps, perhaps not. What is clear is that the translator who cannot glimpse such subtlety will have little chance of reproducing it. I think this poem provides a nice example of the principle: to not interpret we must first interpret.

Here is the draft Chinese text, translated by Jo, You Chengcheng:

迷失的少女
當火車呼嘯而過時
她周遭的書抖動不已。
它們晃著紙背上和一節節
車廂緊緊相挨的生命。

女店員剛濺出了一些泡沫水。
灑在《迷失的少女》的書頁上
但她忘了做標記
因他剛好走進來要買
一本離奇的書。

她的手指翻亂了
古老的索引下
磨損的書角
卻依然不得所蹤
雖然它散發出希望的味道。

搜了很久，久得可以
想像得出她的雙手
在頭髮裏或水裏的樣子。
她忙著直到下一趟列車
顫動了商店、他們的心，

或那裏整理好的書籍，
幾乎快擦邊了；
書本、它們濃縮的人生，註定抖落。
黃昏，她關了店，把勞倫斯的書交給

Next, we worked on an untitled poem of Philip Mead's.

a single dissonant spectrum of sound, randomly chosen
it's not as though lost days belong in any municipal plan
where people end up is always unpredictable
I can only respond on a very inarticulate level
like the state, a rock-pool, a suitcase of subtitles
the light breaks and moves in intentional fractals
across the inlet, as the surface rolls in tile-pulses
without any tonal or atmospheric centres, a leafed
zephyred space of sub-climatic, plural lives.
Beyond our daily ken, a mantle of tiny, flocculent clouds
hovers above the distant ninety-mile, the sky is an off-print
it's only indicative, not regulatory, in the sense
that you overhear only a tiny segment of any conversation
from the jetty: dull clunks of a starter motor being put back together

At a glance, this work is difficult principally because of image density (the poem's kaleidoscopic shifts) and because of the trouble in seeing the relationships between images, perhaps between topics. Where things seem cryptic, the best initial approach may be word-for-word translation. We can look at how results of that strategy appear in the target language and then try to see what has been missed. Still, we need to carefully unpack the most puzzling lines. There is a challenging sentence in the middle of the piece: 'I can only respond on a very inarticulate level/ like the state, a rock-pool, a suitcase of subtitles/ the light breaks and moves in intentional fractals/ across the inlet, as the surface rolls in tile-pulses/ without any tonal or atmospheric centres, a leafed/ zephyred space of sub-climatic, plural lives'. To assist the word by word process we first need a gloss to reveal what is possible in these lines. Let us try. The persona is responding to the generalised uncertainty/dissonance set up in the first three lines. The response avows to be self-effacingly 'inarticulate', a statement of limits. In fact the response is complex and densely layered, and we would be wise at least to suspect that at stake here is self-reflexive allegory in the postmodern style. We need to ask ourselves what kinds of relationship can exist between (or among) 'the state, a rock-pool, a suitcase of subtitles'. We can unpack much before come back to that conundrum. 'Under the climate' (i.e. below the level of climate patterns)—could mean with the weather, this weather, occurring in the here and now of the poem. It is important for the translator to know though that there is a fixed phrase, 'under the weather' being de-automatized here. If 'under the weather' suggests 'feeling worse for wear', a little tired, worn out, then what should 'under the climate' indicate? Possibly, that the day-to-day malaise, analogous with the weather of the moment, ought to be recognised as part of a larger pattern in life.

So much for the initial unpacking. What is missed through this approach? The most obvious thing lacking would be an understanding of how point of view is functioning in the piece. In the poem there is an 'I', an 'our', and there is much apparently objective observation.

Perhaps the time has come also to ask—what is the poem about (?). A dangerous question, when there is so much reflexivity in the air. In a sense the poem is about landscape, or more generally it is about the difficulties which inhere in the effort to represent. The landscape implies a singular ocular-centric viewpoint—but in this piece any such unifying possibility is undermined by the plurality of lives, by the fact that conversation is only captured in fragments which might not make any sense as or in a whole. There is an opposition throughout the piece between the sense of imposed necessary order (order of the kind which functions best by going unnoticed) and chaotic reality (no 'municipal plan' for lost days). Here government which should be local is opposed to speculation about what could be taken to entail life, the universe and everything; but which might equally suggest the minutiae of daily life (how days are lost). We are left with indications or symptoms, rather than any overall pattern; the general effect is of a machine which ought to but does not quite make the picture go. It is the last line of the sonnet (if we are entitled to call it this), which gives us the picture of the machine which will not go, we hear the sounds of the starter motor being reconstructed. Over-reading? I think this kind of poem makes the concept redundant.

In Mead's 'notes for the translator' he writes:

> I guess the poem is one of those that emerges from the idea that poems are occasions, rather than topics or things (Montale probably stands somewhere behind this as a ghostly presence: coastlines, close-ups of everyday objects, internalised rhetoric). Its untitledness is an initial sign of this, and there is a tension of course because a poem is a linguistic object, on the page, even though we experience it, as readers, as an occasion of meaning. There is obviously a scene, vaguely holiday and coastal, a place of non-routine space and time—an inlet, a rock-pool, the ninety-mile (which gives it away, really, there being only a few such coastline places in Australia), a jetty. But it's all loosely experienced, and viewed. The point is not the subject of the holiday, the break from

> routine, the non-everyday place, or even the sense of place itself, but the state of consciousness these seem to create, pretty much unintentionally. There's no way of conveying this in its entirely or as a whole: any language, even poetic language, is inarticulate in its comparison to the dimensions of consciousness, we kid ourselves if we think we even hear the conversations we're part of, let alone those we overhear. Someone's tinkering, whether successfully or not is unclear, with a necessary part, the starter-motor for the boat. But people (I guess males though) muck around with machinery without actually any intention of getting things to work. Or maybe one day. There's no hurry though, no plan, no point. There's only this moment of experience.

In a sense then the text is about a failure of governance, at multiple and mutually implicating levels. One feels (and this is characteristic of Mead's work) that one has to work at certain key points to uncover a governing pun that lurks a little below the surface—so that in the case of 'lost days (mot) belong(-ing) in any municipal plan', we get a sense that local governance is demonstrated to fail at a profound as well as at surface level. It fails in the poem as in the scene the poem purports to describe; there is no centre to hold. We recognise a familiar universe in which intelligent design seems to be a generally unremarkable lack. Turn off the reflexive circuitry for a moment and one recognises the ironic achievement here is that the poem as artwork does indeed hold together; it poses questions on multiple mutual implied levels and offers resolution in the final image. This image serves to represent the activity of the poem—it is a motor being put back together. Art achieves what reality cannot. In Renaissance terms, one might say, the circle is squared; but there has to be a trick here.

We, as readers, are two steps removed from a seamless progression across still waters, bringing the landscape with us in our unique view. Firstly, the machine is bung, we are not going anywhere; secondly the mechanism which ought to enable a view without being noticed

becomes the focus of our attention. Even ocular-centrism fails—we *hear* the starter motor being perhaps lackadaisically attacked by the unknown party who has to fix it. The paradox here is though that the reader sees what s/he is told to hear (the starter motor being fixed). In other words, the ocular-centrism might not be working, still one does not get to switch it off—one *needs* the motor to go—and at various levels we go about clunking around with the mechanism until it does. So there was indeed a trick—the *mise en scène* of the poem is functional despite human/textual interventions; the text is functional despite its apparent engagement with the world made dysfunctional through the effort at representation. The circle is squared but you do not get off the merry-go-round.

Here is the draft Chinese text, translated by Jo, You Chengcheng:

一種單獨的、不和諧的音域，被隨意選中
這並不像歸屬於市政計畫里遺失的日子
計畫裏人們最終始料未及
我無法對答如流
像州、岩石潭、裝著字幕的手提箱
光躍進來，並穿過入口
刻意的斑駁光影，當平面捲進瓦片微光中
沒有任何音頻或大氣中心，葉茂過西風過的空間裏飽經風霜的複數生命。
超出我們的常識,一大片細微絨毛狀的雲朵
在遠方 90 英里處上空盤旋著，天空是單行本
它若有所示，並不統制，在某種意義上
你無意中從突堤聽到
任何對話的隻言片語：起動電動機組裝在一起
發出沉悶的聲音

How does one become a poet?

We should not expect disparate cultures to anwer this question in the same way; perhaps more to the point different cultures will adopt different strategies to avoid answering such troubling questions. In the West—and particularly since Romanticism—the assumption has been that the artist cannot be taught, but finds a way to negotiate between what Eliot described as tradition and the individual talent (21–22). Any literature will seem in some degree opaque and amorphous to the outside observer; the Chinese tradition has not been short of adoration for the genius of those it has canonised. In the Chinese tradition, various balances have been indicated in the life of the writer. Consider Lu Juren's observation (collected in the Song Dynasty volume *Poets' Jade Splinters*) that 'inspiration enters at the border between hard work and laziness' (in Barnstone and Ping, 49). Inspiration is in large part *from* the tradition. It is of the kind Lu Ji describes when he writes:

> I roam the classics, a forest of treasures,
> and love their elegant balance of style and substance.
> Inspired, I lay down the book I was reading
> and let the words pour out of my brush.
> (in Barnstone and Ping, 8)

It is after wandering in the forest of treasures, inspiration can come to the poet, and then the poet can make his own way. Among the *Poets' Jade Splinters* of Wei Qingzhi—a collection of aphorisms recorded in the Song Dynasty—we read:

> If you just repeat clichés and imitate old works without any change or original ideas, how can you become a famous poet? Huang Luzhi writes that if you follow someone you will always be behind. The first taboo in writing is to walk behind others. (in Barnstone and Ping, 48)

Making a way of one's own should not be a matter of following; and yet it takes account of paths and maps already made. Should all of those charts and ways be from and of one's own culture?

Where does translation practice fit into the apprenticeship of the poet? How important is the process of translation to poetry? In *After Babel*, George Steiner contends that the processes of translation and of language itself,[5] are ultimately identical: 'the interpretation of verbal signs in one language by means of verbal signs in another, is a special, heightened case of the process of communication and reception in any act of human speech' (436). In this contention, Steiner echoes Schlegel:

> objective poetic translation is true writing, a new creation. Or if it is maintained that you should not translate at all, you would have to reply that the human mind hardly does anything else, that the sum total of its activity consists of precisely that … the aim of artistic recreation for Schlegel is 'nothing less than to combine the merits of all different nations, to think with them and feel with them, and so create a cosmopolitan centre for mankind. (Lefevere, 1992a, 17)

In his essay, 'The Task of the Translator', Walter Benjamin writes:

> The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue… He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language. It is not generally realised to what extent this is possible, to what extent any language can be transformed…Particularly when translating from a language very remote from his own he must go back to the primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image and tone converge. (81)

And, in an uncharacteristically metaphysical moment, Benjamin writes that, 'if there is such a thing as a language of truth … then this

is the true language (77). Truth of the poetic kind is something we will discover in conversation —the kind of conversation which takes place between reader and writer on and from the page, and the kind that happens quite literally when poets sit down together to work out what it is they mean and how this can be meant in another language.

In the process of entering another language a certain amount of experience is lost and a certain amount of innocence is automatically recovered. This is an exemplary and helpful experience for the poet, regardless of which language/s s/he eventually wishes to compose in. Although we may regard the translation workshop as a case of apprenticing (thus implying master/acolyte relations), the workshop has an importantly democratic aspect as well. Those participating are equally the makers of poems, each brings a distinct and vital expertise to the table, the conversation between them is an open one, based on the asking of genuine questions (questions asked on a need-to-know basis); most importantly, the parties to this conversation are engaged on a common task—the translation of the one work. The translation workshop is a way of turning students into colleagues.

What of this non-native-speaking student's distinct and vital expertise? It is this author's contention that the non-native speaker of a language has a natural advantage in poetry over the native, and in these particular terms—that poetry (since the twentieth century particularly) has an affinity with foreignness: that it does to one's own language what a foreigner cannot help but do to another language.[6] In these circumstances, the non-native has a kind of *idiot-savant* knack of making poetry without much effort, certainly without the effort to be 'poetic'. This (largely unacknowledged) fact makes the non-native an interesting person for the native-speaking poet to spend time with; the non-native poet will be even more interesting company. Or to be more precise as to the possibilities here: the exchange between poets who lack fluency, each in the other's idiom, will be naturally productive, in the poetic sense. This will mainly be because it will press each side in the encounter to see, in their own words and works, strategies of meaning which they could not otherwise have seen. The

non-native poet needs the guidance of the native-speaker poet in order to approach fluency, in order to 'get into' the new language; the native-speaking poet learns from the non-native's questions just what it was s/he must otherwise take for granted. Here is a perfect opportunity for reciprocal assistance—to think poetically these two characters need each other. And we need to help them to meet more often.

What I have discussed in this article is a key stage in a potentially lifelong journey. Translation is valuable training, but not the only training for the poet. The production of translations for a target-language reader is an activity with intrinsic value; making contemporary Australian poetry available to the Chinese reader is worthwhile because there is so much great poetry being written in Australia today, and the Chinese reader of poetry has thus far had very limited access to this literature. The broader picture outlined in this article though is of a range of pedagogic activities, the goal of which is to produce poets with a bilingual practice, in this case poets who write in both Chinese and English. My hope is to have offered some inkling of the ethics and the nuts and bolts of this important activity.

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Texts of the West Australian poets dealt with in this essay are as supplied in m/ss by the poets.

Notes

1 Or, to look at things negatively, here I echo Dante Gabriel Rosetti's self-styled 'commandment', 'that a good poem be not turned into a bad one' (in Lefevere, 1992a, 67).

2 Frost, Auden notes, made the more straightforward claim that poetry is the untranslatable element in language. Auden argues convincingly against this in his essay on writing (1956, 33–4).

3 It is also why the keepers of literature have shown great wariness of translation. As Lefevere writes:
'And here we discover the deeper reason for the animosity the corpus concept displays towards translation: translation represents a threat to the uniqueness of the literary work in a way criticism, e.g., does not. Translation is reproduction, refraction' (1981, 71).

4 Suggested here is recourse to Venuti's resistance strategy (300).

5 In a similar vein Auden writes 'to read is to translate' (1956, 9).

6 This is a position I have elaborated in a number of articles since a 1997 paper in *Text* titled 'Poetry as a Foreign Language' (http://www.gu.edu.au/school/art/text/april02/kelen.htm).

white cloud mountain minnows

Meredi Ortega

are from splendid mountain of cloud
one of the former eight sights of guangzhou
named since the song dynasty and regularly changed
because sometimes
a person can get tired of murmuring pines and monks

i don't know how they made their way here, only that i
drove home slowly, a mirage in my lap
that they are swimming
in reduced circumstances

this rock pond can be carried under one arm
to the beach and why not
those sand moats never hold the sea

i could go the full grotto
cascades and stalactites, pulhamite a new world but these
small fish are already sceptical

mercurial, everywhere gone, winking in and out
they go home in those moments

green natant hearts, fringed petals
fast deliquesce and sink into a slow gathering mulm
choke of algal tresses into a depression

white clouds do not like to be alone so spawn and spawn
kaleidoscope into a brilliant cut sump

and i too want to return to
the river's source and that night moon over the goose pool

Bronze crane, displayed

from the tomb of the Qin dynasty's First Emperor, 259–210 BCE

Virginia Jealous

The caption says it's a little fish
caught in your snapping beak,
but it looks more robust—
an eel? a frog? You're still
so unutterably present though all those years
have passed. Paint moulted
in feathered flakes and drifted
from your folded wings as you waited
on his pleasure, waited
by his pretended river underground,
waited in that dark pastoral for the day
when amber sunlight would filter
through the layers of time,
until your fixed eye was caught
by archaeologists' torches
—as cameras catch you now,
in another darkened space.

The Return

after WS Merwin

Rose van Son

let me imagine we are back
in our garden, the hoe unsettling
soil around the crab apples

the butterflies turning plumbago white
the jacaranda growing taller by day
her flowers purple, almost blue out of loyalty

let me imagine we are there in the spring
worms soiled in their tilling
father's hoe turning clay to crumbled beds

made and remade
as we walk the old arbor arm-in-arm
treading feet, softly tuning wedding bells

let's sit on the stone seat, crescent moon
under the *Olivacea* you pruned into a tree
unsung lavender in rings around our feet

let me imagine bees murmuring within us
butterflies lifting again a white veil
the soil sifted and turned, yet unchanged

silent as we

Damage Control: Australian Literature as Translation

Nicholas Jose

Australian writing in English contains a fair amount of translation, and more that can be read as translation in a less literal sense: writing that transports forms and expressions from other languages and cultures into an Australian literary field. The *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature* (2009), for example, includes many such instances. There's an extract from *My Life and Work* by Taam Sze Pui (c. 1853–1926), first published in a bilingual Chinese and English format in Queensland in 1925. The translator is a Chinese scholar, younger than Taam, working in Innisfail, who may also have been the publisher. His name is unknown, as is often the case with translators. Then there are the songs 'Ngalalak/White Cockatoo' and 'Muralkarra/Crow' by Frank Malkorda (c. 1930–1993) that appear both in a transcription of their original Anbarra, a North Central Arnhem Land Australian Aboriginal language, and a translation into English by Margaret Clunies Ross, working from Malkorda's recordings, made in 1982, with Malkorda's approval. There's '7 Last Words of the Emperor Hadrian' by David Malouf, the original Latin and seven different English versions. And there's 'After Hölderlin' by John Tranter, subtitled 'a version of Hölderlin's 'When

I Was a Boy'' that freely interprets the German original. There's Yahia al-Samawy's 'Your Voice is My Flute', translated from Arabic by Eva Sallis (Hornung), and there are bilingual English and Aboriginal (Yawuru) poems by Pat Torres.

If the idea of translation is applied more broadly, to include transposition, adaptation and imitation, there are parodies too. John Clarke, for example, renders classic English poems into Australian idiom and context, turning 'A Child's Christmas in Wales' by Dylan Thomas into 'A Child's Christmas in Warnambool' by Dylan Thompson:

> One Christmas was so like another in those years around
> the sea town corner now, that I can never remember
> whether it was 106 degrees in 1953 or whether it was 103
> degrees in 1956. (1–4)[1]

Like so many Australian authors, Clarke was born outside Australia—in his case, in New Zealand. In a biographical sense too, authors can live in translation.

Each of these instances points to a space that lies behind the text, and a process of repositioning. The extract from Taam Sze Pui, for example, is a reminder that many people have spoken, written, read and published in varieties of Chinese over a long period of time in Australia, very little of which has been available in English. For those people to survive and participate in Australian society, a continual translation back and forth was required. Sometimes that produces an articulation in English of Chinese experience and cultural form that is new, as in the work of William Yang, a later relative of Taam Sze Pui, who relates Chinese family history in his documentary performance work *Sadness* (1996). The form of Yang's work, a monologue that recounts oral history accompanied by a double slide show that documents the past and the performer's search for himself within it, is a unique hybrid, as befits the traverse of crosscultural narrative.

Ouyang Yu, who moved from China to Melbourne in 1991, only to return to China later as part-time professor of Australian literature,

creates a distinctive Chinese Australian voice as persona in 'The Ungrateful Immigrant' (2005):

> You expect me to speak English and write English
> Which I can do but not so that you think I am English (8–9)

Here Ouyang breaks open the problem of the English language in Australia, as both colonial inheritance that refers back to the fixed authority of an imperial power, distant in time and place, and the changing, changeable medium of daily life here and now, adopted and owned by its users as a means of expression within society at large. Ouyang's work is restlessly experimental and generative in its shifting forms and frames. His handmade chapbooks, such as *Wo Cao* (2003), for example, collage gumleaves, torn images and pieces of Chinese and English text in order to locate the personal within a layered detritus of nature and culture. Here the necessity of translation is the ground for creative innovation.

If migration to Australia consists of languages and cultures as well as people, Indigenous writing insists that English language and culture itself migrated into Australia by way of invasion and occupation. Though English may be 'native' to many of us who use it—we're born with it—it's not home-grown. Translation from Aboriginal languages into English can be a form of sharing—crosscultural communication—but also risks being an appropriation, a forced conversion, as incommensurable difference is managed linguisticially, performatively, within structures of unequal power where one side wants something from the other.

Yahia al-Samawy, born in Iraq in 1949, came to Australia in 1997 after fleeing his country. Again the act of translating and publishing his poetry in English makes the claim that Australian literature, like the society around it, is produced from historical rupture, political conflict, cultural and geographical dislocation, and the subsequent impulses of recovery and reiteration, memory and hope, that dispossession demands and mobility allows.

All of this makes for a plural and dialogic literature, which the translations of David Malouf and John Tranter celebrate in their metamorphic remake of classic sources. Malouf's play with Hadrian's question about where the soul goes on the death of the body is a many-sided recognition that an idea needs its local habitation to exist, just as that local habitation is unimaginable without its animating imported idea: 'without you, my sweet nothing, / I'm dust' (7: 9–10). On a larger scale the same could be said of Australia without its translation into language, where such translation also gives birth to a sense of loss for the unknowable, the unrecoverable: what 'Australia' was before that name was affixed.

Some authors in the Macquarie PEN anthology quote literary tags, often the Bible, Shakespeare or the English poets, to add the lustre of lineage to their writing. Sometimes these are foreign references that need translating. A significant example is the line from the Roman poet Horace that occurs in two different contexts. In *Australia Felix* (1917), the first volume of her novel trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, Henry Handel Richardson has Mahony's interlocutor, who is bitter about how Australia has failed to deliver on its promise, say:

> There was a line we used to have drummed into us at school—it's often come back to me since. *Coelum, non animum, mutant, qui trans mare currunt*. [This can be translated as: 'the sky, not the heart, they change, those who cross the sea'.] In our green days we gabbled that off by rote; then, it seemed just one more o' the eel-sleek phrases the classics are full of. Now, I take off my hat to the man who wrote it. He knew what he was talkin' about—by the Lord Harry, he did!' (293)

The argument is about whether Australia, rather than change the spirit, the mind, has any use for it at all. For Tangye 'the hardest and cruellest country ever created' only has use for an imported European as 'dung' for the land, only as matter devoid of spirit. Mahony sees it differently. For him, mind and conscience can survive, but through the

exertion of human will, in opposition to the circumstances inflicted by the change of skies. For neither of them does the translation from one environment to another nurture an entirely positive cultural change.

Writing much later, the art critic Robert Hughes quotes the same line of Horace in order to challenge it:

> One of the most disagreeable moments of my education [in Australia] was having to stand up and speak ex tempore in Latin for four minutes, before other schoolboys and our Jesuit teacher, on Horace's famous tag, *Coelum non animam mutant qui trans mare currunt*—'Those who cross the sea change the sky above them, but not their souls.' I resented this, not only because my Latin was poor, but because the *idea* struck me as wrong—the utterance of a self-satisfied Roman, impervious to the rest of the world. Hegemonic Horace.
>
> But most Australians were on his side. The motto of Sydney University expressed contentment with the colonial bind: *Sidere mens eadem mutato*, another version of Horace's imperial thought—'The same mind under changed skies.' (928)

Australia has changed, Hughes argues, its mentality changed by its circumstances, to which immigration—the experience of change in many individuals—has itself contributed powerfully, creating, at least from the optimistic perspective of a writer resident in New York in 1993, and by contrast with the United States, an 'intelligent multiculturalism [that] works to everyone's social advantage'. In the translation of culture, a new culture forms through inflection by and of what is already there, forms lastingly, or temporarily coalesces and then drifts apart. Hughes might be pleased to learn that Sydney University has recently removed the Latin motto from its crest.

To see and hear the process of renewal through translation requires a reading that doubles back. In 'Ahh… Bush-Honey There!' from *Story About Feeling,* Bill Neidjie (c. 1913–2000) tells his listener how to read an Aboriginal painting. He compares it to a newspaper,

full of story, but story that comes with feeling, with spirit, where it's the feeling, the spirit, that transfers. It can become like a dream, as it came from the dreaming to begin with, creating the country and the beings, 'mother, granny, grandpa, grass, fire, bird, tree', that are present again in the picture. In the translation from one medium to another there is transmission, dynamic circularity, a renewing offer of exchange:

All that painting, small mark …
they put cross, cross and over again.
White, yellow and little bit charcoal, little bit red clay …
that's the one all small meaning there.
They put it meaning.
They painting fish … little mark they make im, you know.
That's the one same as this you look newspaper.
Big mob you read it all that story.
e telling you all that meaning.
All that painting now, small,
e tell im you that story.

That meaning that you look … you feel im now.
You might say …
'Hey! That painting good one!
I take im more picture.'

That spirit e telling you …
'Go on … you look.'
…

No matter who is.
E can feel it way I feel it in my feeling.
You'll be same too.
You listen my story and you will feel im
because spirit e'll be with you. (23–39, 76–80)

Bill Neidjie comes from Arnhem Land. His language here is a version of Northern Australian kriol, a mediation between traditional language and English. He was a member of the Gagadju language group. The Gagadju tongue died with him, remembered today in the name of the park we call Kakadu. It's also present in Neidjie's writing, as he translates for us—'You got to put charcoal / because e got "business" there, what we call Dhuwa'—not only language but the world understanding of that language, otherwise lost. Neidjie's language goes back to what is lost in order to re-constitute it and carry it forward, as a gift of communication. His language, his idiolect, enacts an open and reciprocal imperative: 'No matter who is.'

The authors in the Macquarie PEN anthology are ordered by date of birth which puts Bill Neidjie, published in 1989, next to Donald Friend (1914–1989), writing in his diary in 1952. The two contemporaries could not have more different backgrounds or life paths. Friend writes from Toledo in Spain, after he has seen paintings by El Greco. Something about the country has spoken to him, dry like the country around Hill End that he painted in Australia, and something of the spirit too, in that fabled cosmopolitan centre:

> The place is sheer enchantment, magic. I won't speak of the Grecos, which are beyond belief. As much of his art, I imagine, grew out of this environment as was born in his Byzantine origin. The folds of hills and rocks suggest, quite as much as the enclosing womb shapes of ikons, the peculiar swooping and folding-in forms he used. (587)

Friend's language quickly moves from casual to probing, as he folds in the interaction of environment, culture, spirit and artistic expression, with his own situation as subtext, in a way that uncannily parallels Bill Neidjie's and seems distinctively Australian in its translational moves.

The first collection of poems to appear in colonial Australia, in 1819, contained 'The Kangaroo' by Barron Field, New South Wales

judge and friend and correspondent of London essayist Charles Lamb. The poem entertainingly applies the sophisticated tropes of late eighteenth-century/early Romantic English pastoral poetry to the unique animal: 'Kangaroo, Kangaroo!/ Thou Spirit of Australia…' (1–2). A fond paradox of the aesthetic theory of the time was that the best art transcended art to become as if natural. So Barron Field pushes to the limit of precedent in trying to describe the kangaroo—it's not a mythic beast, nor is it like a giraffe. The poet can only credit nature, at play, as the artist of a creation that cannot be improved: 'be as thou art; thou best art so' (59). In other words, the uncomfortable translation of contemporary English poetics to the fauna of Australia enables the recognition that Australia can only be understood on its own terms—which the poem then attempts to translate back:

> For howsoe'er anomalous
> Thou yet art not incongruous …
> Happiest Work of finest Hand! (51–52, 63)

Many later writers and artists have responded creatively to the ecology of Australia, none more so than Les Murray in his collection *Translations from the Natural World* (1992) where he declares his abiding concern with giving voice to others, including the spectrum of non-human others, and those that some would denigrate as 'sub-human' others too. His poems verbalise the non-verbal, or translate from one side of the limits of ordinary speech to the other, extraordinary side. This is not immodest, not sublimely egotistical in the Romantic sense. On the contrary: 'The miming is all of I.' The phrase occurs in a poem called 'Lyre Bird' about the bird that patches together its creativity through spirited imitation of the sounds of others. For Murray that becomes a way of speaking of the poet as medium, in communion with the non-verbal or differently verbal world he writes from. Mime here can be taken to represent the replacement of one language by another, a language paradoxically without language, apparently radically diminished, but then richly

re-invented through embodiment and gesture. Murray might call it the 'natural' world that he mimes, working to find an equivalence in language, but in the poet's articulation it becomes something else too. His language is a human overwriting, which makes the natural world also non-natural, a damaged world that carries history, culture and loss.

What if the idea that 'the miming is all of I' were applied more pervasively to Australian literature? Can we recognise a translational process of imitation and adaptation, decomposition and recomposition, going on all the time, allowing us to experience the new creation as also measuring a distance, a space of travel? In moving forward, the new turns and invites dialogue with where it has come from, and does so from a position without precedent. Here the new, created in translation, also creates the untranslatability that Naoki Sakai recognises in his fertile aphorism: 'It is translation that gives birth to the untranslatable' (Sakai 14).

In this way translation is an index of incommensurability, and, in its contingency, an invitation to further attempts at translation, in the knowledge that such translation is also invention in the Derridean sense: 'a new way of translating in which translation doesn't go one way but both ways.' (Derrida 1997). Commenting on that passage, the philosopher Saranindranath Tagore adds, 'for the cosmopolitan, neither the self nor alterity are transcendentally anchored … The welcome [from self to other, same to different, known to unknown] is founded on a translation, an invention, precisely because the stranger cannot remain a stranger but must become a friend.'(Tagore 2010). To this I would add that in this context, the cosmopolitan can be understood as the Australian, for whom neither belonging nor not-belonging is stable, not 'transcendentally anchored'. The Australian is always self and other, in endless oscillation.

So we arrive at a richer understanding of the provisionality, the mobility, the reflexivity, the infinite speculation that is culture, by responding to Australian literature through translational practices of reading and writing, as it invites us to do.

The Macquarie PEN anthology concludes with *Vietnam: A psychic guide* by Chi Vu. It is the text of a performance piece that consists of letters back to Melbourne in English from a Vietnamese Australian woman who is alert to the textures of language crossing around her. In what the speaker calls the 'café of Babel', English, Hebrew and different kinds of Vietnamese mingle. It's like the place in the river where fresh water and salt meet: 'In this zone a special type of fish thrives. This is the meeting of east and west. It is the mixing of two mediums. It is where the other fish die.' (1402). Chi Vu presents a performative and strongly gendered interplay of modes: writing, speaking, dancing, seeing, hearing. She finds expression for herself, as other women have done in Australia before her, particularly but not exclusively migrant women, through projecting a new artistic language in an act of transformative translation.

Tom Cho, in *Look Who's Morphing* (2009), makes a different kind of play with that delta zone, where some thrive while others die.

'AIYO!!! An evil group of ninjas is entering and destroying a call centre!!!' begins one short fiction that ends when a girl in the call centre remakes herself with computer parts into a deadly cyborg and destroys the ninjas in turn, a hybrid contemporary heroine with language to match:

> Aiyah! She even eating the remains of all the ninja warriors! Wah, and now she is offering to buy cappuccino for everybody!!! So polite-ah-she!' (Cho 95)

These are the zones where literary innovation articulates new personal and cultural possibilities.

But it's always happened in Australian literature, requiring only a certain kind of attuned reading to see it, which might be called translational in registering where elements have come from and how they are changed in the process of creation. John Shaw Neilson (1872–1942), for example, a poet close to the country and the hardships of itinerant rural life, drew on folk ballad, the Bible and high lyricism

to communicate his oneness with nature as a new fusion. His poem 'The Poor, Poor Country', written in 1934, concludes:

> The New Year came with heat and thirst and the little lakes were low.
> The blue cranes were my nearest friends and I mourned to see them go;
> I watched their wings so long until I only saw the sky;
> Down in that poor country no pauper was I. (21–24)

In this idiom Neilson is synthesiser and conduit for different traditions and perspectives, a translator of the natural world, an interpreter of himself as 'no pauper was I'.

Neilson was born in the same year as David Unaipon, the Ngarrindjeri man whose *Native Legends* (1929) is credited as the first book authored by an Aboriginal person. Unaipon's work can also be understood as cultural transmission, continuing an Indigenous tradition while translating it into literary English form. 'From a very early age,' he writes in 'The Voice of the Great Spirit', 'the mothers and the old men of the tribe instruct the children by means of tales and stories. This is one of the many stories that is handed down from generation to generation by my people.' (320) That requires, in part, a process of finding language for what is untranslatable, a spirit beyond words: 'Thalung is everywhere, and manifests through the colour of the bush, the birds, the flowers, the fish, the streams; in fact, everything that the Aboriginal sees, hears, tastes, and feels—there is Thalung.' And through this language non-Aboriginal readers become aware of what they might apprehend by substituting their own understanding of a supreme deity. As in Neilson's work, we are given an intimation of what might be understood through translation back. In this way Unaipon can be read simultaneously within the history of the English literary forms he adapts and within the modes of Aboriginal culture.

Bill Neidjie is his successor, as is Alexis Wright in her novel *Carpentaria* (2006) which opens with a magnificent rendering of a

'tidal river snake' that is both the environment and its living spirit: 'it permeates everything'. But to understand it that way requires an inside kind of reading which the author invites us to in a voice that transfers knowledge, at once local and immemorial, to the listener, 'you':

> Can someone who did not grow up in a place that is sometimes under water, sometimes bone-dry, know when the trade winds blowing off the southern and northern hemispheres will merge in summer? … It takes a particular kind of knowledge to go with the river, whatever its mood. It is about there being no difference between you and the movement of water as it seasonally shifts its tracks according to its own mood. (1221)

Carpentaria imaginatively translates Aboriginal law to the extent of the permissible, the limit of the possible, in its bounty of politically charged stories and characters from particular country.

Like Chi Vu's river where sweet and salt water mingle, like Les Murray's lyre bird language, Wright's river speaks for a way of being in the world that is greater than any fixed or singular perspective can express. And that recognition is liberating, revolutionary and a call to justice. She explains:

> This is the condition of contemporary Indigenous storytelling that I believe is a consequence of our racial diaspora in Australia. The helix of divided strands is forever moving, entwining all stories together, just like a lyrebird is capable of singing several tunes at once. These stories relate to all the leavings and returnings to ancient territory, while carrying the whole human endeavour in search of new dreams. Where the characters are Indigenous people in this novel, they might easily have been any scattered people from any part of the world who share a relationship with their spiritual ancestors and heritage, or for that matter, any Australian—old or new. (Wright 6)

It is such territory that the creator inhabits, where disintegration and reconstitution are double sides of a process, where translation from one state or condition or language to another is continuous, unpredictable and generative. So Elizabeth Costello, fictional Australian novelist, discovers (in J.M. Coetzee's work of the same name), when asked what she believes:

> But the Australian continent, where I was born into the world, kicking and squalling, is real (if far away), the Dulgannon and its mudflats are real, the frogs are real. They exist whether or not I tell you about them, whether or not I believe in them …
>
> She thinks of the frog beneath the earth, spread out as if flying, as if parachuting through the darkness … Yes, that she can believe in: the dissolution, the return to the elements; and the converse moment she can believe in too, when the first quiver of returning life runs through the body and the limbs contract, the hands flex. She can believe in that, if she concentrates closely enough, word by word … (982–4)

That generative zone, the moment of crossing, of formation, through translation into new language, is where Australian literature comes into existence.

A more extreme example is the hoax poet Ern Malley, conjured into being by James McAuley and Harold Stewart in 1944, literally patched together by transposition and remix of language tags from one context into unlikely new creation. In the recent *Cambridge History of Australian Literature* (2009), one writer (Peter Kirkpatrick) claims Ern Malley as 'the ultimate triumph of modernism' (Pierce 222) while another (John Kinsella) suggests that 'a definitively postmodern moment is located' there (Pierce 476). Philip Mead, in his important book, *Networked Language*, draws on the Shakespearean entanglement with the Ern Malley hoax. McAuley and Stewart used fragments of Shakespeare in their concoction, which were at issue in the subsequent obscenity trial of Ern Malley's publisher, Max Harris.

Shakespeare was invoked on all sides as yardstick and arbiter of poetic value. Mead concludes, provocatively, that 'this is the sense in which Ern Malley is a national poet, or, even, Australia's Shakespeare' (Mead 185). The cultural translation of Shakespeare has been an enduring imperial project. Here it comes back to haunt, from beyond the limits of what authorship has conventionally been taken to be. '…I have shrunk/ To an interloper, robber of dead men's dream… I am still/ the black swan of trespass on alien waters', concludes Ern Malley's poem 'Dürer: Innsbruck, 1495' (627), itself a translation of an image of a distant reflection.

In *My Life as a Fake* (2003), Peter Carey's fictional variation on Ern Malley, where the imaginary poet becomes as flesh and blood as Frankenstein's monster and runs amok in Malaysia, the maker comments on the creative transformation that has taken place: 'What had been clever had now become true, the song of the autodidact, the colonial, the damaged beast of the antipodes' (Carey 82–3). For Carey, Ern Malley's poems are a postcolonial comeback, a self-made literary expression from the other side of the line.

Literature comes from somewhere and goes somewhere, which may also mean that it returns as gift or reflection to the place it came from. The circulation of manuscripts, the movement of type, the portability and durability of the book through many hands, the ceaseless back and forth of interpretation and translation, across time and space: this is the life of literature. Australian literature participates in these processes and contexts too. Does that make it part of world literature? Or can it only be part of world literature if it stops being *Australian* literature?

Perhaps Australian literature can be thought of as literature at the limit of world-literature. Here I adapt the title of Ranajit Guha's *History at the Limit of World-History*, his densely suggestive retort to Hegel's comment, in 1839, that 'India has no history'. World-history—Hegel's term—could only be the history of nation states and their institutions. Since India was not a state in the Western historiographical sense, it lay beyond the limit of World-history.

Australia, for Hegel, would have been outside World-history too, certainly before 1788. World-literature—*Weltliteratur*—is Goethe's coinage from around the same time (1827), as the German polymath looked to an encyclopaedically inclusive commerce between the literatures of recognised cultures. He might have included Aboriginal songs in World-literature, had he known them—the inconceivability of that speaks for itself—but English writing from Australia would have been compiled as British literature in Goethe's world-literary world-historical scheme—until a point of differentiation emerged that qualified it as the writing of a recognisably separate language and community. That might have been marked belatedly when Patrick White was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1973 for introducing 'a new continent into literature', or when David Malouf won the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2000, or even when that other Nobel Literature laureate, J.M. Coetzee, relocated to Australia in the same year. But such appearances have not secured Australia's place in *The World Republic of Letters* (1999, English translation 2004), French critic Pascale Casanova's influential analysis of how authors from the periphery achieve metropolitan (read: Parisian) success, nor in the various other schemas that seek to move outside or beneath hegemonic Anglophone (or Francophone) literary domination. Third World, postcolonial, anti-orientalist: to include Australia in these frames requires a degree of special pleading. It's not an easy fit. In practice such globally aspirational paradigms become catch-all categories in which Australian and other 'small' literatures figure as merely following suit, the limit term at the end of a sequence of repetitions, a place marker.

Oddly China is in the same boat, only marginally present in most discussions of world literature: hardly a small literature, but a major, ancient and continuing literary stream from an alternative empire. I am reminded of Derrida's recognition of the 'Chinese prejudice' in Western thought, which prompts an awkward question from his translator, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: 'the East is never seriously

studied … in the Derridean text. Why then must it remain … as the name of the limits of the text's knowledge?' (Derrida 1976: lxxxii).

Spivak's question appears in the later corrected edition of *Of Grammatology* and is investigated by critic Sean Meighoo who suggests that if Western thought since the Enlightenment, including Derrida, reaches a limit point in the way it misreads Chinese as a language ('the Chinese prejudice'), as Rey Chow and others, following Spivak, have shown, it is only doing what Derrida himself critiques so insightfully in relation to Levi-Strauss's chapter 'A Writing Lesson' in *Tristes Tropiques*, asking 'up to what point it is legitimate not to call by the name of writing those 'few dots' and 'zigzags' on their calabashes, so briefly evoked'. Derrida thus implicitly recognises 'a form of writing that is not phonetic or alphabetic, a form of writing that does not bear the imprint of logocentrism' (Meighoo, 180). That would paradigmatically include forms of inscription in Australian Aboriginal cultures, from 'time immemorial'. It calls for an expansive conceptual revisioning of the ground in which Australian literature exists, a further horizon.

China and Australia: an unlikely pair of boundary markers.

Part of the argument for reading Australian literature as translation is to make visible the polysemic readings that co-exist across diverse constituencies as part of the dynamics of interpretation. This depends not on a text's value being measured by how convertible it is into the gold standard of pure literary autonomy, but rather on locally embedded qualities that work against such convertibility.

'American exceptionalism', as identified by de Toqueville, refers to the qualitatively different capacity of an unprecedented democracy to make up and live by its own rules and values, *as if* they were universal. It's a lofty kind of obliviousness. Almost as a parody of this, turning handicap to advantage, Australian literary exceptionalism might be the obverse. Let us read with an eye to what does not lend itself to prevailing systems of valorisation, to what is not easily generalisable. With no power to make the rules beyond its borders, can Australian literature be read for its resistance to the universalist

paradigm? To use Derridean language, let us ask what it means if Australian literature itself, as a field, is a kind of aporia. 'In globalized capitalism, can a tendentially aporetic state structure serve as damage control for a persistent rewriting of 'they' as 'we'?' asks Gayatri Spivak in a recent essay. It's a powerful question, a 'double-binding question, making internationality itself aporetic with regard to the linguistic diversity of the world' (Spivak). Can a set of relations constructed in terms of the national, such as Australian literature, with due self-critique, work to undermine the hegemony of a homogenising and hierarchical globalisation, such as some versions of world literature might represent? The exceptionalism of Australian literature might be one such case of 'damage control' in which 'the linguistic diversity of the world' is uncovered once again, but this time from within the international English that overwrites it, from below its horizon. It's a way of doing what Spivak calls elsewhere 'to translate before translation … not the content but the very moves of languaging', in order to find 'a different kind of commensurability' from 'the uniformisation necessary for globality'. 'Globalisation takes place only in capital and data;' she writes, 'everything else is damage control' (Spivak 2010: 36–37). It's an argument for highlighting the translational mobility in literature, which calls for proper transnational literacy, where the 'trans' is a form of action. It's the 'damage control' that Australian literature performs against globalisation.

Criticism of the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature* has focused on who's not there, or not there in the right way. It's often an author close to home—a family member, someone from the locality, someone whose work was loved at school, someone from a cohort: a favourite author. The notion of a pet author of this kind, a proxy for ourselves, is a reminder in the face of globalisation and internationality that local attachment is strong, and that a primary affiliation is with your own. This relational participation extends to writers as well as readers, who connect with each other locally, within communities of interest, whether virtual or geographic. A gathering such as the anthology makes us aware of the hold of our

specific and personal identifications. We register exclusion as a sense of injustice, wistfully or furiously.

The exclusion is contrapuntal: the exclusion of Australian literature, and the exclusions within Australian literature. As we put right the latter by greater inclusiveness, we encourage the former by valuing texts that are less and less convertible into the currency of universal recognition. Clive James has suggested that success in international competition should be the criterion for identifying Australian writers of merit (Delingpole). That seems to miss the point.

The German romantic philosopher Herder had a more complex understanding than his friend Goethe of how world-literature might work. 'Each [culture] is what it is, of literally inestimable value in its own society, and *consequently* to humanity as a whole' (Berlin 182). For Herder, the creativity that makes such culture comes with 'belonging'—to a 'nation, region, community' … to 'a group, a culture, a movement, a form of life'. 'Without such belonging there is no true creation' (Berlin 194). Yet to connect those various communities, to enable them to converse, from one belonging/not-belonging to another, requires translation: historicised, politicised, languaged. If anything has been learned in the two centuries since Herder, it's how tricky that process is. Australian literature, deciphered, transported, interpreted, can help. Reading Australian writing with attention to its translational pulse decentres and horizontalises, tumbles hierarchy, adds dimensional curve to the flat map of world literature.

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Notes

1 Quotations are from texts as they appear in the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature*, to which line and page numbers refer.

Wearing Ourselves

Susan Adams

You dare to part the grass to find the mirror.
Pain carves you out of different stone
but you fight to become similar,
to know the thrill
of fence posts standing in lines
where only the nails are bent
in strange positions.

Few accept themselves.
Turned by the views from others
the light that bounces us is cracked
distorting our image.
We can't find the buttons of ourselves
yet stories are made and told as truths,
fodder with teacups passed around, chewed.

We hide in our banners, furled.

Minerva

Sue Clennell

Zeus tried swallowing my mother
as a unique form of contraception,
but it turned out as effective as a burst rubber
with me as nuclear fallout, and Daddy was
the one left with hapless sky-blues.
No naked babe, I was armed and ready
to argue with any other god or man
desiring to down me.
And oh yes, I have bite.
I've had a mouthful of Zeus's sperm
to help me tweak battles, twiddle with wars.
Where you find a cock, I'm not far behind.
When it's up to deciding which hero sails
on calm seas or polishes a sturdy shield,
look no further.
The buck stops here.

The Mason Jar: A Valentine

Jesse Ferguson

I'll be yours, she valentines,
when you will climb a bare oak
in sharpest winter night, but quietly,
quietly to bottle
with some old Mason Jar
the brittle croaking
of two crows roosting there
among creaking branches,
and leave them only
the slight tocking
of their two wooden beaks.

And if you will keep it
in the freezer's back corner
until August's thickest evening,
opening only then the jar
to cup it to your ear,
its frosted rim like a lover's
moist lip, only then
will its smell of cold, its sound
of black feathers ruffled by wind
remind you that you are mine.

Found Cat

Lucas North

I found the cat one evening on the road.

She could have been snoozing, blissful,
her white-and-ginger fur unblemished, but
for the angle of the right front leg, one paw
pointing the way of the car that had struck.

In the coming dark she would be run over,
and over. I did not want to see that,
so I knelt on the road, took off my jacket
and dragged the floppy body onto the stretcher.

The cat was not cold, and I might have found her
just hours or minutes after she had nearly crossed
that road. I left the body on the grassy corner by
the school, hoping somebody would recognise her,

claim her, do the right thing. Two evenings later, I
came back with a shovel, and lifted her onto my jacket
cartoon-stiff, her fur matting; that paw still accusing
the sky. I dug a hole her length, and lowered her in.

I removed the jacket from beneath her, carefully,
as one might remove a table cloth from a fully laid table.

T

Elizabeth Tan

There is Ulysses, heavy across his knees—the weight of a cat, somehow so paralysing. Tim lies in bed a half-hour more than he intended, legs baking, watching a slit of sky turn bluer. He can perceive the main road lacquered in traffic; he can perceive himself waking, a moment he has narrated ten times or more; the loneliest moment of the morning, non-unconsciousness, crusty and overripe. He moves his legs out from under Ulysses, and Ulysses, pretending he chose this moment to rouse himself, arches his back and vanishes over the edge.

The day of the month floats to the top of Tim's mind. He wanders to the bathroom, takes a syringe from the cupboard, and slides the needle into his skin.

Tim feeds Ulysses a bowl of hard kibble, die-cut into shapes like fish and bones. Tim always wonders: for whose benefit are these shapes cut? Can a housecat appreciate what a representation of a fish looks like, or a bone? Tim pours himself a bowl of brandless cereal and tries not to think of them both, this cereal and the cat food, as being produced by the same process of extrusion, maybe even on the same factory floor, injected with steam, cooked by friction, sprayed with fat.

Every now and again, both in the cat food and in Tim's cereal, there will be a piece that evaded some part of the extrusion process, and will seem to have melted together with another piece. Tim will always feel a peculiar sympathy for them, these odd ones.

Today is the day of the stranger, the hard knock at ten o'clock. Tim wipes his mouth on his sleeve and opens the door. The stranger is perhaps a shade older than him, a little more clenched, holding a cat in one arm.

'Do you have a cat?'

Tim blinks. 'Yeah, I do.' He looks over his shoulder, at Ulysses in post-breakfast lickdown. 'He's over there.'

The stranger looks past Tim. 'No, no. That's not your cat. *This* is your cat.'

It is only when the stranger foists the cat into his arms that Tim realises the cat is a dead ringer for Ulysses. The cat is even wearing a faded leather collar that Ulysses used to wear, but Tim assumed he had recently lost. In his surprise Tim takes a step back, unintentionally permitting the stranger to step inside the house. '*That's* my cat,' the stranger says, pointing at Ulysses.

'Whoa. Wait.' Tim fumbles with the cat in his arms.

The stranger scoops up Ulysses with familiar confidence. 'I live in the next street. My mother's been house-sitting while I've been abroad. Her eyesight's getting real bad. She didn't notice that the cat wasn't mine.'

'But this guy's been living with me for…' Tim stops. When did the collar go missing?

'It's Ulysses, right? Your cat's name is Ulysses. It's on the collar, right there.'

Tim looks down at the cat in his arms. He overturns the label on the collar. ULYSSES / 29 SIGMUND ST.

'Oh,' says Tim. The cat formerly known as Ulysses, curled against the stranger's chest, looks at Tim balefully. The cat labelled Ulysses yawns. 'Gee. I'm terribly sorry. I had no idea. They look identical to me.'

The stranger shrugs. There's something unforgiving in his face, that clenchedness. 'Cats like to wander.'

'When Ulysses showed up without his collar I just assumed he lost it. I mean…' Tim falters. It hardly seems worth correcting himself. 'Uh. It won't happen again.'

The stranger gives Tim one last searching look. 'Well.'

Ulysses begins to struggle. Tim gathers Ulysses close to his chest and uses his elbow to get the door. 'Thanks for returning my cat.'

When the door is closed, Ulysses jumps down, trots to his food bowl and begins crunching kibble. Tim watches. There's a jet engine building behind his ears.

The manuscript he's been working on is full of enigmatic one-sentence paragraphs.

In our haste we left two stones unturned.
There were too many things living in the water.
We didn't have a plan.

When Tim can't tell which one of two readings sounds the best, he Alt-Tabs to the pictures supplied by the artist and scrutinises them for five minutes. He hasn't seen anything quite like them before; such tall, shrivelled figures, claustrophobic with detail, melded with teapots, tables, trees; melded onto each other. They must move leglessly, or perhaps they are rooted to the landscape. Tim switches windows.

Little did he know that a slow, interior catastrophe was underway.
A collision of sorts.
A miscalculation of cells and their trajectories.

He stops the recording. Swivels out of his office, to the kitchen, and depresses the kettle switch. To get there he must first pass

Ulysses, occupying the sofa, eyes convex with half-sleep. Tim hasn't said one word to Ulysses since the stranger left. Not one word. He's not sure where to begin, really. He hates to think of all the private, stupid things he's been saying to that other cat.

'Bet you had fun, didn't you,' Tim says as the kettle boils and clicks itself off. 'Lording it up in some old lady's company.'

Ulysses's eyes shrink. The cups of his ears rotate away from Tim's voice. Tim retrieves a chamomile teabag from a crumpled box. Shields the hot mug back to his office.

He returns to those one-sentence paragraphs.

It was not our intention to lead the others astray.

We used to be right for each other.

Our blood carried messages that our organs misunderstood.

By the time the sky turns purple Tim has collated all his recordings into a Zip folder, which duplicates itself in some faraway inbox, along with his message:

> Hi Ursula,
>
> Please find attached the audio files for your project. Let me know if there are any problems.
>
> Best of luck,
> Tim Spiegel

It might be said that a recording is a documentation of sound events. A sound event can be a cat's meow, a dropped pencil, a passing jet engine, a warning bell. Like stories, every sound has a beginning, a middle and an end. Some people refer to these as the attack, the sustain and the decay. To plot a sound event on a graph would therefore produce the shape of an envelope—the attack being the sound's journey to peak volume; sustain, the peak's constancy; decay, its recession. The sound of boiling water might have a slow attack,

a long sustain, a gradual decay. A cymbal might have a fast attack, a short sustain, a long decay. One bounce of a basketball might have a fast attack, a quick sustain, the scantest decay. It is the task of some recordists to capture all these minute violences that comprise a soundscape, while for others, it is the erasure.

Recorded speech is made perfect by the removal of hesitations, blunders, breath intakes—noises that betray the body. One way to look at it is that recordings of speech, edited in this manner, gesture to a kind of dead space; a neutral, unechoing context, a voice without a human. Another way to look at it is that sound must always gesture to space, even if that space is an envelope plotted on horizontal and vertical axes.

Tim used to have a theory that cats can slip in and out of a parallel dimension; a realm which permits them to move invisibly, to reappear without sound. To swap places, even. Certainly, looking into Ulysses's eyes, those blurry hexagons, Tim knows that Ulysses has seen more than he has seen, that Ulysses is acquainted with a separate, softer world.

In the morning, Tim receives an email from the artist.

> Hello Tim! Thanks for these! They sound great. I knew you'd be perfect at it. I'll send you details re: the opening night soon! Take care, U

They have never met in person. Her emails are cheerfully incongruous to her artwork. It makes it impossible for Tim to construct any mental picture of Ursula at all.

Today Tim has to update some tech support options for an old employer, a job which he thinks will take less than half the day. He knows he has to start sniffing out new work soon. For a while he's had the luxury of being picky, taking small projects that he can record at home, but perhaps it's time to put himself out there again.

Thank you for calling technical support for your Seed product.
Please listen carefully, as our menu options have recently changed.
Please hold. An operator will be with you shortly. Please note
that for training purposes, your call may be recorded.
To hear these options again, press 5.

It had occurred to Tim just two weeks ago, when he was riding a late train home from the city, the reason why his Seed recordings never sounded quite right to him. It was one of the newest trains, with the names of each passing station spelled out as red dots on long, visor-like black screens. *Doors closing*, said a male voice, startling him—and he realised, everywhere, in elevators and telephonic menus and train stations, he was accustomed to hearing an automated female voice. As if city planners built around themselves an elaborate uterus of thermoplastic and cables and signals, presided over by an unseen mother, her permeating voice, maternally omniscient. He started to feel sinister about his work then, like he was impersonating the voice of the father, or the Devil. Some *in vitro* ventriliquism act.

Tim hooks his headphones around his neck and pinches his eyeballs. Time for a cup of tea.

Ulysses is sitting on the windowsill, contemplating the outdoors. Tim strokes Ulysses's spine with a cupped hand, which Ulysses does not acknowledge. Ulysses, Tim has discovered, is impossible to spook. Even on the day that Ulysses was first brought home in a cardboard fruit carton—a gift from a well-meaning neighbour, who knew that Tim was recovering from surgery—the cat's emotional tenor did not rise above anything more than mild interest. Tim walks to the kitchen and starts unravelling a chamomile teabag.

For some reason, it's only from this distance that Tim notices the object of Ulysses's gaze. Standing in Tim's overgrown garden is the stranger's cat, the Ulysses doppelganger. The two cats stare at each other, chiselled, impassive as chess pieces. Tim crosses the room to stand by Ulysses again, as if seeing things from Ulysses's angle would make the situation legible, but the cats simply look on,

neither of them bristling. Tim lifts a hand to Ulysses's neck, to feel his leather collar, to overturn the nametag once more. ULYSSES / 29 SIGMUND ST.

Tim wonders if he ought to catch the cat and bring it back to the owner, but he realises that the owner never gave his address. And Tim doesn't know how he could possibly catch a cat that has already outsmarted him for weeks. It doesn't matter though, because, when the breeze picks up, the doppelganger rises on his haunches and departs.

No fairytale characters have been so fooled and foiled by a voice as Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother. Perhaps this story strikes even children as improbable. The wolf, at the grandmother's door, pitches his voice high: 'Oh Grandmother! It is me, Little Red Riding Hood!' And the grandmother, her borders so penetrable, invites the wolf inside, and in turn finds herself inside the wolf. Little Red Riding Hood emerges from the woods some time later and enters her grandmother's house. This entails a different performance from the wolf, and one that is received with a little less conviction. 'What big eyes you have,' Little Red Riding Hood will say. 'What big ears you have. What big teeth you have.' In some versions of the tale, Little Red Riding Hood wonders at, but does not enquire about, the difference in her grandmother's voice. Perhaps it is because Granny is sick, she reasons. In some older versions, in which the grandmother is not swallowed whole, the wolf even feeds a part of the grandmother to Little Red Riding Hood. In the darkness of the cottage, the girl is none the wiser. As if a little darkness is sufficient for any kind of deception, culinary but especially auditory.

Two weeks later Tim is on the train again, heading in the opposite direction to the peaktime commuters. The carriage is almost empty, even with the Friday night partygoers clustered at the longitudinal seats; guys glistening with hair gel, girls adjusting their strapless

tops. Their chatter is excited enough to penetrate the techno gloom of his iPod music. The shuffle has decided to score this moment with 'Clubbed to Death', a song that instantly teleports Tim to 1999, to glowing green kana streaming like rain behind opaque sunglasses. And he remembers that deja vu visited Neo in the form of a cat.

Tagging off out of the station, climbing the vertiginous escalator two steps at a time, jaywalking to the Horseshoe, plunging into the Cultural Centre, weaving around buskers. Down the lurid candy steps outside the State Library. The gallery is already humming like a beehive. Tim winds his earphones around his iPod and tucks it into his jeans pocket. He enters a foyer clogged with friends and family of the exhibiting artists; everyone is holding plastic cups of wine or orange juice, glossy programs rolled up under their armpits. Sponsors' marquees teeter on black A-frame stands, wobbling every time someone brushes past. On the reception counter there's an abandoned program, fastened to the laminate with a dried circle of spilled wine—Tim peels it off as he edges by.

Stationed outside Ursula's installation is a table of freshly baked bread, cartoonishly loafy, the kind with bulbs of overflow at the top. *Visitors may feel free to eat the bread or scatter the crumbs around the site, like Hansel and Gretel leaving a trail of crumbs to find their way home,* advises the program—so Tim rips off a communion-sized piece and chews on it. The main delight of the installation, which has primly-dressed and even elderly visitors getting down on their knees to inspect it, is a low tunnel constructed of mattresses, pillows and stacks of chairs draped with blankets and quilts. Tim waits for a gap in the flow of visitors, tucks his program into his back pocket, and crawls through the entrance.

And what greets him is his own voice, emanating through the tunnel via secret speakers hidden like witches' spies—

Little did he know that a slow, interior catastrophe was underway.
A collision of sorts.
A miscalculation of cells and their trajectories.

Tim crawls over the spongy terrain. It is humid and airless. The gallery lights outside the tunnel illuminate the weave of the blankets until they look membranous, heaving and organic.

'It's like a pillow fort,' Tim hears somebody giggle.

The tunnel delivers Tim to a wide room, ringing with his own voice—*Opportunities winked all around us like stars*. A slide projector casts Ursula's drawings onto the wall in a square of yellow light. This one features a Roman general, his arms dissolving into root vegetables, his legs thin as stilts.

Click.

A trio of babies, sharing the same thick woody torso, playing a game of cards. *Our trades meant nothing; it all came from the same hand.*

Click.

A woman in a tall hat with a trumpet for lips. *We had to escape.*

Click.

A long-faced man with a merry-go-round as a ribcage. *We had to cut off the limbs that were holding us back.*

Click.

The other viewers, made so small by the scale of Ursula's projections, drift into Tim's blind spot and disappear. Even though it's his own voice, and even though he's seen all the images before, Tim is filled with a strangely delicious terror, standing here with his back to the sagging, breathing portal. Like he's a child, peeking through his fingers, at a movie he's too young to watch.

There's an email from Ursula in the morning:

> Hi Tim! I saw your name in the guestbook from last night, but I didn't see _you_. Sorry I didn't say hello—I'm not quite sure what you look like! I hope you enjoyed the installation. I'm quite happy with how it turned out, and I hope you are too. Thank you once again for making such fabulous recordings at such short notice, and take care! U

Today, thanks to an obscenely good special at the supermarket, Ulysses is eating canned food. He is happier than Tim has seen in days, his round head bowed over his bowl, eyes closed in ecstatic concentration. Tim crunches his cereal. He tries to compose a reply to Ursula in his head, but he feels peculiarly unready to communicate with her. As if he is one of her characters, without fingers to type with. Without the privacy of a singular body.

The residue of visiting Ursula's installation has yet to evaporate entirely, still present enough for Tim to look at Ulysses not as Ulysses but as a collection of ink strokes and tessellated green hexagons, gathered together loosely and inadequately with collar and nametag.

As it happens, Tim—as Ursula wished—is taking care of himself. He has secured a job, the best kind, he thinks, the kind you can linger over without impatience from the employer—a novel to be turned into an audiobook. The manuscript has just arrived in the mail today.

It begins, as many narratives do, with a moment of waking. Despite their repetitiousness, Tim never tires of narrating them; it takes him back to his favourite awakening, the one after the surgery that would shortly deliver Ulysses to his doorstep. Never had consciousness been such a relief. There was still all the post-surgical therapy, of course—the capsules, the injections. He could not work for almost a year as his voice stabilised so gradually, undergoing its own adolescence, slipping semitone by semitone into the voice Tim uses today. Ulysses would have listened to his voice's many fluctuations during post-surgical therapy, would have endured Tim testing out his new vocabulary. Cricoid, thyroid, epiglottic. Arytenoid, cuneiform, corniculate. The vocal folds, that other sonic envelope, thickening and lengthening in slow motion.

Perhaps Ursula's drawings have refreshed that just-woken feeling—the excitement of Tim's consciousness in Tim's body, edited by scalpel and stitch. Not one of Ursula's figures, for all their anatomical encumbrances, looks unhappy.

In cinema, the relationship is inverted: a little bit of sound can achieve the greater deception of continuity. Even if the sound is unexceptional—just the empty blare of traffic, for instance—a scene composed of multiple shots filmed over irregular days in different locations can pass as chronological, can create a coherent space. The sound and the scene need not even have the same duration—the sustain segment can be lengthened, looped, so that its decay coincides exactly with the scene's conclusion. A film is not completely unlike actual perception, anyway. A series of discontinuities assimilated into a provisional whole. Whatever can make sense. Close enough is good enough.

Sometimes an image can be reassigned a new sound. The trick is to forget the names of sounds. To believe that they are manipulable frequencies with no real special identification. A squeaking violin can be a bird. A waterfall can be an explosion. A boot heaved out of mud can be an organ pulled from a body.

Tim has one last encounter with the stranger—this time unaccompanied by cats—as he walks through the park on the way home from a doctor's appointment. The stranger is sitting on a bench smoking with a friend. 'Hey, you're that guy,' the stranger says. He blows smoke out of his nostrils, tapping his friend on the shoulder and gesturing theatrically to Tim with his cigarette. 'That's the guy I was telling you about. The one who swapped cats with me for a couple of weeks.'

The friend snorts and takes a drag.

'I saw your cat in my garden,' Tim tells the stranger. 'About a fortnight ago. Just staring at my cat.'

The stranger smiles, to Tim's surprise. 'They must have some sort of secret. A telepathic understanding.'

A mobile phone rings brightly. The stranger's friend jumps up and walks away to take the call. He cups one hand over his ear when he says hello. The stranger watches him. 'Hey. The other day I realised I knew you from somewhere.'

'Where?'

The stranger balances his cigarette in his mouth and rummages in his back pocket. He holds up a Seed phone. '*Thank you for calling Seed technical support*,' the stranger says.

'*Please listen carefully,*' Tim obliges, '*as our menu options have recently changed.*' The stranger chuckles. Tim says, 'You have a good memory for voices, then.'

'How do you stand it, man? Having to hear your own voice every time you call tech support.'

'Easy. I don't have a mobile phone.'

'Oh. I would've thought they'd just *give* you one. Seeing as you're the voice of tech support and all.'

'I freelance. I do other stuff.'

The stranger pockets his phone. 'I'll have to keep an eye out for you. An ear.'

Tim smiles uncertainly. He's about to head off, but then he asks: 'What's your cat's name? And where do you live? In case I have to return your cat someday.'

The stranger crushes his cigarette. 'He's Max. Unoriginal, I know. We live in the street next to yours. Kent. Number 18.'

Tim nods. He thinks about asking the stranger's name, but it feels unnecessary. 'Max,' Tim echoes. 'I'll keep that in mind.'

Later, when Tim arrives home, Ulysses jumps down from the windowsill and paces in front of his food bowl. And how Ulysses can pace, can dramatise hunger; making every part of him small except for his eyes, tail raised in expectation. 'Hello, Ulysses,' Tim says. 'I saw our friend today.'

Tim breaks the perforated spout of a new box of cat biscuits, and jiggles it over the bowl. The last biscuit has not fallen when Ulysses rushes in, breaking a fish with his teeth. Tim strokes Ulysses's spine. A purr creaks through his body like an old wooden ship.

The Year's Work in Fiction

Annabel Smith

These days it seems that everywhere you turn people are lamenting the death of the novel, the demise of publishing, the impossibility of getting published. And yet, in Australia at least, many small, independent presses are still taking risks publishing debut novels by new and emerging writers, and in fact, these offerings were among the best things I read this year—largely more enjoyable and innovative than the fare produced by larger publishers.

Peter Docker's *The Waterboys* is both a historical novel and a speculative fiction, an adventure story and a contemporary myth or 'dreaming'. The relationship between Indigenous Australians and white settlers is made so new in Docker's telling that the shock and horror of it hits you as if you are learning it for the first time.

Set simultaneously in the future and in a reimagined past, the novel tells the story of a young whitefulla named Conway, who has taken on the ways of the blackfullas. In a not too distant future in which whites control the nation's water through a military-style corporation, Conway and his spiritual brother Mularabone are part of a movement waging guerrilla warfare on the whites, stealing the water and returning it to Country, where it belongs. At the same time,

Conway's 'dreaming' takes him back through history, a member of Captain Fremantle's crew, sailing into the Swan River for the first time. In a deeply moving retelling, Conway's dreaming of these events sees Captain Fremantle throwing off the mantle of Empire and embracing the way of life of the Nyoongar people who meet him off the boat.

In both content and scope the novel is thrilling. The action sequences are fast-paced and exciting and are beautifully balanced by the poetry of Docker's descriptions of the way of life of the Countrymen, and their profound connection to the land. There is terrible brutality in the story but there is also much humour and tenderness, especially in the relationship between Conway and Mularabone. The complex ties of family and kinship are explored both through this relationship and through Conway's relationship with his biological brother, and the gradual revelation of the violence and cruelty of their shared history.

Throughout the novel, Docker returns again and again to the image of a spider web to explore the idea of the connectedness of all things, the oneness, as Mularabone calls it. The spider web is the perfect metaphor for the novel itself, in which everything is connected—the past and future, blacks and whites, water and desert—and in which anything that happens affects everyone and everything else on the web. This sense of connection pervades the novel and yet does not fell like a construct in which ideas were cleverly inserted at strategic points in the narrative via the use of a detailed Excel spreadsheet. Instead it feels deeply organic, intuitive. Though *The Waterboys* grapples with immense concepts—time, destiny, human nature, Docker never loses control of the material. It is an important novel but also a deeply satisfying read.

Stephen Daisley's *Traitor* was the winner of the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Fiction 2011. The novel opens with E. M. Forster's famous quote 'If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country', and I don't think I've ever come across an opening quote that so neatly encapsulates the very heart and soul of a book.

In *Traitor*, a young New Zealand soldier in Gallipoli, David Monroe, makes exactly such a choice—choosing to desert the army after striking up an unlikely and life-changing friendship with a Turkish prisoner of war named Mahmoud. Mahmoud is a Sufi, whose life philosophy transforms David's worldview, and though David's desertion leads to brutal punishment and humiliation, the lessons he learns from Mahmoud sustain him for the rest of his life. The novel opens with two powerful scenes set fifty years apart, both dramatic and intriguing: the first in Lemnos, 1915 after David has been injured on the battlefield, and the second, at the end of David's life, on the New Zealand sheep station where he has worked since returning from the war. By page eight, all the secrets of the plot have already been revealed so the novel is exploring not so much what happened, but why, and the repercussions on the rest of David's life.

The prose is nothing less than gorgeous, the words of Mahmoud, in particular, like poetry: 'And that which was will echo in us like the whispering of that companion who was always with us and always will be with us. Exquisite delight, our hands touching once again as if for the first time.' Daisley has a knack for detail, and an ability to capture the beauty amidst the horror: 'the rainwater beading on the steel of the bayonet and running down the blood groove'. This is the first book I've come across in which a male writer tackles the subject of a powerful, loving relationship between men and it is handled with great sensitivity. That Daisley sets this friendship in the context of a war story makes it all the more amazing.

The war scenes, though few, and never gratuitous, are graphic and shocking. Daisley captures the terror and loss of humanity in war as well as the brutality and cruelty of the armed forces. Without diminishing the horror of David's experiences, the beauty of the language and the compassion of the main characters carry the reader through the novel's darkest moments, to emerge with a deeper understanding of the terrible impact of war.

On a much lighter note, Clare Corbett's novel *When We Have Wings* explores issues of money and class, against the backdrop of a future

society in which through surgery, drugs and gene manipulation, flight has become possible, but only for the rich. Peri, a poor girl with a shadowy past, earns her wings when she becomes a nanny to the Chessyres, a rich and powerful flier family. But when her only friend dies under mysterious circumstances, Peri flees the world she worked so hard to become part of, taking baby Hugo with her.

Peri's tale is revealed gradually, partly from her own perspective, and partly from the perspective of Zeke Fowler, the ex-cop turned private investigator hired to track her down. Both characters are sympathetic and complex but the voices of these two narrators are not wholly convincing. Peri possesses a maturity and intelligence which seem unlikely in a girl of her background, and there is something feminine in Zeke's persistent analysis of his own fears and anxieties. The world of flight, in its physical and technical dimensions, is skilfully rendered and the emotional element—the exhilaration and terror of flying—yields some of the novel's most beautiful prose, though as the book progresses the repeated extended descriptions become tedious.

Some of the most satisfying passages in the novel are those which explore the bond between parent and child; the intensity of both the anxiety and pleasure inherent in this relationship are conveyed by Corbett as convincingly as in anything I have read. The plot is complex and gripping, with an intriguing mystery at its heart, though there is a loss of momentum midway when Peri disappears, and some of the confrontations feel anticlimactic, let down by dialogue which lacks subtlety and fails to convey an authentic sense of character. However, the tension rebuilds through a series of exciting action scenes towards a dramatic and inventive denouement. *When We Have Wings* explores the ethics of human modification with intelligence and originality; a compelling and satisfying read.

Meg Mundell's debut *Black Glass* also tells the story of young women leaving regional areas for the city in search of a better life. However, where Corbett's Peri manages to secure a tenuous place for herself among the rich, Mundell's characters, teenage sisters Tally and Grace, are 'Undocs'—without papers—and as such are destined to

become part of the city's underbelly. In Mundell's version of the city of the not-too-distant future, control is paramount. The black glass of the title is the glass of surveillance. Those who inhabit the city's various zones are not only watched but manipulated by 'moodies'—technicians who subtly influence behaviour through the use of scents, sounds and lighting at a subliminal level. The text includes email exchanges, transcripts of conversations and internet search results, adding to the sense that in this brave new world nothing is private.

The novel is richly detailed, containing brief, beautiful descriptions and surprising metaphors. Mundell's dialogue is one of the novel's great strengths—witty, pacey and authentic, it positively crackles with energy and renders the characters perfectly. The stories of the two separated sisters and their search for each other are skilfully connected through the narratives of supporting characters, including a moodie and a journalist who, unlike the Undocs, can move freely through the city's zones.

A former journalist and government advisor, Mundell conveys a great deal of cynicism about the relationship between the media and the government. Anxious, vain and ambitious, hack journalist Damon Spark's willingness to do anything for a story is both humorous and horrifying. At one point, Spark reflects on how the media relies on 'an endless supply of human folly and greed, criminality, bad luck and exploitation'. And this is exactly what Mundell serves up in her exciting debut: a blackly funny, sinister and gritty exploration of marginalisation.

Kim Westwood's second novel *The Courier's New Bicycle* is another speculative fiction, set, like *Black Glass,* in a vaguely recognisable version of Melbourne. In the wake of a flu-pandemic and a vaccine which has rendered most of the world's population infertile, an ultra-right-wing government has come to power, outlawing fertility treatments and surrogacy and marginalising sex and gender non-conformists. In the underbelly of this repressed society, self-described 'genderbent' Salisbury—'too girlish for a boy and too boyish for a girl'—is a bicycle courier, delivering contraband fertility treatments

to a desperate market, and a member of a group of animal protection vigilantes, who rescue animals from illegal hormone farms.

There is a little too much going on in *The Courier's New Bicycle*. There are three plot strands, which are slightly difficult to follow and major revelations in the story lack dramatic impact due to a general sense of confusion about what is actually going on. In addition, the plot gets lost in the cloud of issues which the novel is attempting to address, including climate change; religion; sex and gender and animal rights so, though the novel explores some interesting ideas, and the use of a transgendered protagonist is a daring and original move, *The Courier's New Bicycle* doesn't quite pack the punch that it seems to promise.

A Common Loss is Kirsten Tranter's second novel. Set in the USA, it is the story of five friends, who have visited Las Vegas together every year since college, and are now visiting for the first time without the lynchpin of their group, the charismatic Dylan, who has died in an accident. Though focusing on the trip to Vegas, the novel spends a great deal of time revisiting the friends' university days together, and in its preoccupation with university life feels somewhat like a rehash of Tranter's first novel, *The Legacy*.

The writing is polished but the novel lacks emotional depth. The US setting seems inauthentic and pointless. Both past and present events are narrated by the insipid and unconvincing Elliot. I was ten pages into the novel before I realised Elliot was a male character and it came as a shock. As the novel progressed I was struck again and again by the 'femaleness' of Elliot's thoughts and actions, in particular, his analysis of his friendships.

Intended as a thriller, the novel's plot pivots on the idea that Dylan was not quite what he seemed. However, given Elliot's obsessive dissection of his friendships it seemed utterly implausible to me that Elliot could know so little about his friends, and that the revelations which take place in Vegas could come as such a surprise to him. *A Common Loss* was a disappointing follow-up to Tranter's more solid debut.

Wayne McCauley's third novel *The Cook* is a satire about a group of disadvantaged youths who are given a second chance to make something of themselves at Cook School. The novel pokes fun at the cult of celebrity chefs and reality television but it also engages with class issues and the impact of the global financial crisis.

The story is told from the point of view of Zac, a ruthlessly ambitious Cook School student, who is so single-minded in his goal of changing his life through this opportunity that he will literally do anything to succeed. He is an unreliable narrator with a strange and sometimes disturbing worldview. Reflecting on his relationship with the school's meat supplier, Zac says 'We cultivate a friendship for one purpose…that's cruel thinking I know but if I'm going to crawl out of the swamp and climb my way up cruel thinking is what I need.' Zac's strong voice pushes the story forward at a compelling pace and McCauley has astutely captured the vernacular of a damaged and disadvantaged but driven young man in a status-obsessed world. 'TV makes you or breaks you', their teacher, Fabian, tells them and Zac buys into this absolutely, retorting to a heated put-down by saying 'if all goes well, one day I'll be on the telly'.

There is a great deal of description of cooking processes, and a fascinating insight into the work which underlies the production of an amazing dish. The descriptions of the rearing and butchering of animals were not for the faint-hearted but were essential to the novel on a number of levels. Zac's philosophy of cooking is 'Surprise is everything … show them the left then hit them with the right' and this is exactly what McCauley does in this original, entertaining and thought-provoking novel.

Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* won the 2011 Miles Franklin Award and was the regional winner for the Commonwealth Writers' prize, and deservedly so. The novel is a fictionalised account of early contact between the Noongar people of Albany, Western Australia, and Europeans settling in the area in the early 1800s. It covers the years 1826–1844, and centres on the story of Bobby Wabalanginy

and his family and their gradual process of coming to understand both what the settlers seek, and what they offer. The story begins when Bobby is just a child, and Dr Cross, administrator of the tiny settlement which becomes King George Town, has established a warm, respectful relationship with the local Noongar people. Cross is keenly aware of the problems European settlement may pose, and the fact that land which is being 'granted' to settlers, is in fact being stolen from the Indigenous people of the area.

After Cross dies, Bobby forms a close relationship with Geordie Chaine's family. But where Cross related to the Noongar as an anthropologist and friend, Chaine relates to them as a capitalist and boss. When they are whaling together he sends away the cook who calls Bobby and Wooral 'niggers' and refuses to serve them, saying 'we are one here, we judge people on what they do, not their skin.' But when the whaling ends, and Chaine no longer profits from their skills it becomes clear that he does not have any true respect for their culture, nor does he view them as equals.

Bobby is a loveable character—smart, funny, perceptive, and warm, with the gift of the gab. Not only is he able to pick up English and mimic perfectly the accents of his teachers, he has the special talent of telling story through dance, building on the traditional dances, such as the emu dance, with dances that illustrate the new experiences of the Noongar as they interact with the Europeans. The descriptions of the dances provide opportunities for some delightful understated comedy and the novel beautifully evokes the Noongar people's sense of humour, and their connection with place, and there is some stunning metaphorical language, such as when Bobby tries to describe his relationship with his own people:

> Sheltered like an insect among the fallen bodies of ancestors, he huddled in the eye sockets of a mountainous skull and became part of its vision, was one of its thoughts. Moving across the body, journeying with the old people, he drank from some transformed, still-bleeding wound.

The full impact of European settlement on the Noongar way of life unfolds gradually. As an old man, Bobby, with a kangaroo skin draped over his European clothes for tourists, who 'wanted a real old-time Aborigine, but not completely' tells his story, acknowledging 'me and my people … are not so good traders as we thought. We thought making friends was the best thing and never knew that when we took your flour and sugar and tea and blankets that we'd lose everything of ours'. At the same time he understands that in storytelling it is 'never good business to stray too far from laughter', and thus the depth of the tragedy has gone untold. *That Deadman Dance* however does much to disclose what so often remains hidden and renews our compassion for the plight of the Noongar people and the annihilation of their culture.

Sarah Thornhill, Kate Grenville's sequel to *The Secret River*, also tackles the issue of European settlers' relationships with Indigenous Australians, in the Hawkesbury region of New South Wales. The youngest child of a man who was once a convict but is now a landowner, the title character grows up in a life of relative privilege. 'Blacks' are at the edges of her world but their way of life is largely unknown to her, and she makes no connection between that world and the man she falls in love with, Jack Langland, the son of her father's friend. But Jack's mother was Indigenous, and eventually Sarah realises that he will never be truly accepted in her world. The novel is a coming-of-age story in which Sarah's maturity is gained through her understanding of the true nature of the relationship between blacks and whites and the part her own family has played in this relationship.

Grenville has a real gift for characterisation and Sarah's voice—intelligent and inquiring, though uneducated—never falters. *Sarah Thornhill* is beautifully written, distinctively Australian in its language and setting, and from the very first paragraph there is that sigh of relief that comes with being in the hands of a writer who is in full command of her material.

In *The Street Sweeper*, Elliot Perlman weaves a number of narratives together against the backdrops of the Holocaust and the Civil Rights

movement in America. Like Peter Docker in *The Waterboys*, Perlman has the gift for telling a story you think you already know but making you feel it as though you are hearing it for the first time.

The Street Sweeper begins with the story of Lamont Williams, a young African-American man from the Bronx, who has spent six years in prison for a crime of which he was innocent. Seemingly worlds apart, Adam Zelegnik, a history professor from Colombia University is facing a crisis both in his career and in his personal life. The stories of these two men are underpinned in surprising ways by the stories of two men who lived decades before: Henryk Mandelbrot, a Holocaust survivor, and Henry Border, a psychologist who recorded the experiences of Jews liberated from death camps after the Second World War. The connections between the four stories emerge gradually and with great suspense. Despite the many plot strands and continual movement between past and present in the action of the novel, Perlman handles the shifts of chronology and point of view with such dexterity that the reader is never left behind.

Perlman obviously did an enormous amount of research to write this book and displays great skill at using real historical events to create a riveting and deeply emotional narrative. But what is perhaps even more impressive is Perlman's phenomenal talent for imagining people's inner lives, and doing so with such compassion. A series of anecdotes about Lamont's childhood seem so casual as to have been selected at random, but gradually they reveal a complete picture of a complex and likeable character, whose dreams and concerns reverberate throughout the novel.

The novel draws subtle parallels between the racism against African-Americans in the USA in the mid-century, and the racism against the Jews in Europe which eventually led to what is now known as the Holocaust. There are some harrowing scenes in the novel, of both clashes between black and whites in America and of the Nazi death camps. The stories of the Sonderkommando, Jewish prisoners who were forced by the SS to work day after day herding their own people into gas chambers and then burning their corpses,

were particularly difficult to read. The novel sheds light on the fact that in the years immediately after the Second World War, most people did not want to know about the atrocities suffered by European Jews, while to the survivors, nothing could have been more important than for people to understand the indescribable horror of what they had experienced. *The Street Sweeper* is an incredible achievement for Perlman and the questions it asks about history, about humanity are as relevant today as they have ever been.

It is difficult to know where to begin with a review of Ouyang Yu's *Loose: A Wild History*. I am not even completely convinced that it belongs in a fiction review because it seems to be substantially autobiographical. However the line between Yu's own life and the world of the book is one of the ideas he plays with, so I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt. The back cover blurb refers to the fact that the book includes the story of Yu's brother, a Falun Gong practitioner who was tortured to death. Unfortunately, that is only a small component of the book which strikes me as a lost opportunity. Because, though harrowing, it would probably have made a more narratively satisfying book than the one Yu decided to write, which is essentially a musing on the writing life.

For a writer it holds some interest, as Yu expounds on the difficulties and unfairness of publication, the relationship between writing and earning a living; the periods of paralysing self-doubt alternated with delusions of grandeur; resentment of other writers' success. He vacillates between humour and vitriol in describing these aspects of the writing life. Sometimes he rants, at other times he is philosophical. Sometimes he seems arrogant and at other times self-deprecating. After reading a book of Yu's poems, a neighbour asks him 'are you brilliant or mad?' to which Yu responds 'probably the latter'.

Loose is frequently funny, especially in the transliterations of Chinese expressions, for example, 'er nai' or 'mistress'—literally *Second Tits*. It has some acute observations about people and fascinating comparisons of Chinese and Australian culture: 'Whenever

someone talks about China he or she will mention 'tradition' and 'censorship'. These two things never seem to be associated with Australia, whereas the longer you live in Australia, the more traditional and censorial you will find it to be.'

Yu perceives Australians, and Westerners in general, to be disinterested in, and ignorant of Chinese culture: 'It came as a revelation to some Australians in a business conference that China is not just Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. It also has provinces.' Though initially interesting, Yu returns to this topic so frequently that it eventually becomes tiresome. And this, for me, encapsulates the problem with the book in general. Though at first I was highly entertained and compelled to keep reading, eventually this gave way to a feeling of boredom, and a desire for something more to happen.

It seems to be generally understood that 'short stories don't sell'. And yet small independent presses, and even large publishing houses continue to publish short story collections. One of these was Amanda Curtin's *Inherited,* her first publication since her 2008 debut novel *The Sinkings.* Like the novel, these stories are tender and compassionate, giving voice to the damaged, the marginalised, the otherwise forgotten. There is a precision to Curtin's prose—every word has been selected and placed with the utmost care, and yet there is a warmth here, a humanity, rather than that feeling of alienation that can sometimes come with writing that is too restrained. Her words ensure an absolute clarity of understanding, and yet still provide a space for the reader to make their own connection with the ideas.

History is a preoccupation in the collection, especially through unwritten or untold stories, and Curtin has a capacity to find the stories that reside in places and objects as well as in people's lives. The stories explore loss, hollowness, and the complexity of relationships and are underpinned by a sense of wisdom when it comes to matters of the heart.

The collection is thoughtfully arranged in groups of two or three stories on the themes of keeping, wanting, surviving, remembering,

breaking, leaving and returning. 'Hamburger Moon' reveals the thoughts of a woman struggling with an eating disorder on the eve of her release from a clinic. The lives of a sound engineer and a homeless teenager intersect in a dark, original and wholly surprising way in 'The Sound of a Room'. And in the 'goldfields gothic' story 'Rush' two school leavers take the road less travelled with chilling results.

Neatly bookending the collection are two stories of small boys and great loss. In the opening story, 'Dance Memory', a woman who has lost her husband, her home and her job, takes her young son to a new home on the outskirts of town. There she receives an unexpected and precious gift from her new neighbour. Mignette, an ex-dancer, now confined to a wheelchair, teaches students 'uncontainment' or how to 'build a story in your body … write it into your blood—and let it go.' Beautifully written, with a deeply moving finale, 'Dance Memory' provides a wonderful introduction to a strong and diverse collection.

Thought Crimes is an inventive and disconcerting collection of short stories by Tim Richards. Many of the stories fall into the science-fiction/speculative genre, asking, *what if?* questions whose answers are sometimes uncomfortable to contemplate. 'Club Selection' manages to combine an interrogation of what it means to be Australian with a warning about the pitfalls of environmental irresponsibility, as well as lampooning the agonising process of incessantly repositioning oneself to 'get ahead' career-wise. With its unreliable narrator and psychological games 'On the Make' is a perfect story—funny and dark with a wonderful twist.

'Dog's Life' is structurally innovative, unfolding through interviews and email exchanges. The story, of a sinister corporation experimenting on speeding up and slowing down human development, has the potential to be developed into a much longer work. In 'The Darkest Heart' a Christian family gets an unexpected and unsettling education when they offer their hospitality to missionaries returned from Africa. Seen through the eyes of a sheltered Australian teenager, the missionaries' experiences are shocking and the humour is a kind of guilty pleasure.

Tim Richards admits 'the stories tend to exist in the space where the creative imagination tips into the red zone and becomes destructive and endangering' and some of the stories go too far. In 'The Enemies of Happiness', students are encouraged to overcome psychological problems through highly unquestionable methods. The humour in this story was just too dark for me to laugh at, and my unease while reading it was physical as well as psychological.

Some stories have interesting ideas but fail to satisfy narratively. In 'Suspended Animation' the comic-book character Charlie Brown is interviewed by a talk-show host about the exploitation of being forced to remain a child for fifty years. Though witty, the story lacks an emotional engine. Elsewhere, the characters can be somewhat two-dimensional, functioning as vehicles for ideas rather than as fully fleshed-out characters. A few of the stories, like 'The Grease', were frankly, incomprehensible to me. However, on the whole *Thought Crimes* is an interesting and thought-provoking collection, well worth a read.

Finally, *Shooting the Fox* is a new collection of short stories by Marion Halligan. Though it is a beautifully presented book with some lovely descriptive writing, I struggled to relate to the mostly middle-aged characters or to the themes, which revolved primarily around explorations of male/female romantic relationships with a particular preoccupation with marital infidelity. The narratives are tightly constructed, the language polished but on the whole I failed to connect with these stories. There is a sameness about them which quickly becomes tiresome. Of the nineteen stories, sixteen are written from a female point of view, and thirteen in the first person. Even those stories narrated in the third person focus on interior perspectives, creating a sense of intimacy which feels oppressive.

Some of the stories experiment with meta-fiction: the virgin narrator of the title story converses with the reader; the adulterous husband who is the central character in 'Valiant' provides a commentary on his own story; in 'Bingle' the victim of a road-rage incident exits the story to argue with the author about the development of plot and

character. These experiments do nothing to enhance the stories, in fact, they served to further disconnect me from narratives I was already straining to engage with.

The best stories are those which manage to break the mould established in the book overall. In 'A Grove of Olives' the problem of disposing of a dead body reflects the deeper issue of navigating troubled family relationships. In 'Letters from Eden' a diplomat's wife's descriptions of a fictional version of Australia throw the nation's current social and political failings into sharp relief.

Despite the grim prognosis for publishing in general, a close look at some of this year's fiction from both emerging and established Australian writers suggests there is every reason to be positive about the future of Australian fiction, whatever forms it may take.

Fiction received 2011–2012: titles marked with an asterisk are referred to in this essay.

Carey, Peter. *The Chemistry of Tears.* Melbourne: Penguin, 2012.
*Corbett, Clare. *When We Have Wings.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011.
*Curtin, Amanda. *Inherited.* Crawley: UWA Publishing 2011.
*Daisley, Stephen. *Traitor.* Melbourne: Text, 2011.
*Docker, Peter. *The Waterboys.* Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2011.
Finn, S.J. *This Too Shall Pass.* Melbourne: Sleepers, 2011.
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Egypt

John Saul

My daughter was doing her horse dance all afternoon. She was pawing and prancing on her approaches to the swings, inducing her friends to copy her, and she resumed the moment she leapt off them. Alone the park railings halted her. Her front quarters clawed at the air and her head was up whenever the girls went in and out of the bushes. She cantered at speed past the ancient beech. All without words. Occasional clippety-clop clicks came from her mouth but no neighing or whinnying, no scuffing at the ground: a clean performance. At the statue of the man with the woman Mimi added silent braying, turned it into a sort of worship ritual, which at the adventure playground she repeated around the lookout tower. She even managed to incorporate the dance into crossing the rope bridge.

Finally Ian arrived with his motorbike and offered to take all five girls to the zoo. I don't have Ian's degree of commitment. Not that I thought about that at the time, or now. I might later. I was wondering more at the creases in his brown leather jacket. Had they always been there. He said he'd fetch the bike before dark. My daughter simply said 'bye' and about-turned in one jump, neatly, in a kind of packaged goodbye. She was back to the horse dance beside Ian, down the path

towards the exit, her friends mimicking her more and more closely until they disappeared in a perfectly choreographed formation at the far corner of the park. Gone without a backward glance; without dust. Something like this happens in the dance of the dead. I don't know where I get the idea from; I don't even know which culture I'm moving in: dance of the dead. But as Bumble (aka Alexandra) is always telling me, you can't help whatever runs through your mind, some things scamper in and out before you can properly catch them, and that was one of those things. So I did look down the path as it tapered to the corner of the park and wonder if I would see Mimi again. It was deserted. Not even a blackbird was hopping. I looked all around. The place had emptied itself like a bath. The motorbike gleamed on the grass by the beech tree. The swings barely stirred. The rope bridge was still.

I could go home and sleep half an hour but I preferred to look over the bike. Ian had left it illegally parked. I was on and off in a flash, trying the saddle. It was still warm and, as expected, very comfortable. I sat on it long enough to imagine broken white lines racing on tarmac. I stood back from it some yards to see it glint in the last of the wintry sun. That was some chrome. Gleaming things have got into the news recently; into the atmosphere, Bumble calls it. (Sometimes everything goes into the same mood, don't you realise? Things are shrill; things are pale; things are gay. Now they're shining.) She says fashion models have been walking up and down in silver foil. There's that great propeller at the docks, attracting people. Apparently it's gleaming as if it was white gold. It's stuck because the lorry carrying it couldn't make a corner with its wide load. Now it's in such an awkward spot they can't lift it off.

Ian takes away my daughter leaving me with free time and what do I do with it? I look at a bike. I think about chrome. Still, chrome is not nothing. It isn't what Bumble would say is a mirage. Our ancestors coming back for the day would be sure to notice it. Chrome might offset some of the worries they'd have about other things, like the noise and our casual ways. I'd have someone like Ian show them

round. A day would be enough for most of them. He could take them to the propeller. He would know about ships' propellers, propulsion, axial flow, and pitch, castings.

As for the bike, Ian'll have to arrange all the girls' homecomings, then come back for it. It may not take long. The zoo isn't that big. It's easy to turn it into feeding a few goats, watching the raccoons and retreating—in summer, on the back of an ice cream. That's not so simple in December. I could go home to Bumble and listen to the buzz in her head. The docks, the banks, the government, the country's at a standstill, she said yesterday, but they're selling socks again in Egypt. I challenged her of course. What socks? On the ground, in an underpass, she said. I could hear the full stop in her voice. In Cairo, she added eventually, I saw news pictures. What do you know about Cairo? For a short while in the 1980s, she said, all roads led to Cairo.

Ian must have rubbed away at it late at night, made it gleam by his garage doors while the rest of us were asleep. Correction, were hoping to sleep. I was awake with Bumble's lecture on the propeller still rumbling around in my head. There are tailbacks on the alternative routes, loads being re-routed across the old bridges. The blades have been scoured to look good. I don't know why they don't cover it. And what about the ship that's waiting for it?

I get a shudder, not just on account of a falling temperature. I can't stand the empty park. I look around hoping to see others who are not shivery. Apart from the bike and the statue there isn't much human. The statue makes no sense without Mimi and I don't like the story the motorbike is telling, a story of Ian. Ian can park it—the story goes—take the girls to the zoo, go home and play with his daughter, make supper, do the washing, iron shirts and fix some tap, at some point return for the bike and clean it again, make sure it's properly tuned, make progress on the family tax returns, read a bedtime story and make love to his wife, all in the run of the day. Meanwhile I could wander the streets wrapped in distractions, appearing unshaven and short on words, like a Scandinavian with a problem. I could be sauntering past

shop fronts, weighing the pros of visiting the Pyramids against the cons of airline travel. Or be at home watching an old black-and-white film, playing cards with the Belgians downstairs. I won't though, despite the prospect of occasionally drawing an ace and the pleasure that goes with that. So I'll walk around, keep warm by walking, how's that. Hoping for an event.

She's Bumble and you're Crumble, Mimi said, and I'm Tumble. For a moment I felt she had made us into this fine triangle. Like a circus act, said Bumble, managing to sound encouraging and sceptical at the same time—before adding she wouldn't fancy that: your dad might drop me. The moment with the triangle was over. That's Bumble: give her a subject and she will wreck it. I fancy a tin of peaches, I said the other day. Opening a tin of peaches, she said, can be transformed into a multicoloured dream. I just fancy eating them, I said, I'm not concerned with the opening of the tin. Oh but I would be, said Alexandra—another word on Egypt and I will call her Alexandria—it would make such a dream, a dream in the kitchen, a dream in blue and bronze. By this time Mimi was in her room, pretending she was a horse returning to the dark of the stable.

It seems the passions I had when we were childless were more than peaches and the sight of chrome. We had more time then, more money too. Surely money has nothing to do with it. Once again I contemplated my imminent lottery win. I had no good ideas for spending it. All I could think of, if I suddenly had unending suitcases of money, would be to get in a taxi and say Abdul, drive anywhere. I asked myself what Ian would do if he suddenly had lots of money. Ian would commission a great viola teacher for his daughter. He would raise that ship's propeller and get it delivered to the ship. This time next week the ship would be cleaving the waves on its proud way to the Antarctic. Ian, spending unhesitatingly on things which would not even occur to me. He would still shine up his own bike and cook and read the bedtime story.

It was the suppertime following the Mumble and Crumble discourse. We sat with our plates of pasta. My daughter was opening and

closing her hands, making flashing signals. What does that mean? Alexandra asked. I will put on my own cheese, she said. I gave the game another try. You are Rumble, I said to Mimi. Your mother is Jumble and I am Fumble. My daughter made rumbling noises. She sounded like an old man unable to decide between two puddings. Why? Alexandra asked. Mimi intervened: yes, why is mummy Jumble? Why, because you jumble things. Oh really, says Alexandra. Yes really, I say back—the state of the nation, socks in Egypt and peach tins, you didn't use to be like that, you weren't like that when we lived in Doncaster; someone says a word to you and off you go. What word? says Alexandra. Any word, I say, how do I know.

Come on, don't fumble.

I look at my plate. All right, I say: cook.

Cook? Funnily enough, the Belgians told me last night there was such a fog a cook stepped into the river.

There you go, I say, you're a jumble.

There was such a crowd by the river on account of the propeller, that someone jumped in to save him. Only he didn't need saving. He wasn't like you. He swam back to the bank by himself.

It would be easy to guess who said what next.

I want to see the propeller. (Tumble)

I wouldn't have fallen in in the first place. (Fumble)

Oh no? (Mumble-Jumble)

Anyway, why don't you take her to see the propeller?

Why don't you?

Somehow Mimi had left her plate and disappeared. She's not a great eater.

But I am in the same corner of the park where I saw her last, Mimi light on her hooves. I'm trying to work out which way they must have gone to the zoo. The such as it is zoo. I didn't even realise it was open in winter. They must have got a bus. I have to say, when Ian gets a bus it won't be the same as me getting a bus. The whole bus would shape up somehow. Ian sets the context for things. I'd get on and people would continue as they would have without me.

That's it: I'm nobody's context. For me and Ian even a stroll down the road wouldn't be the same stroll. I will pass libraries closing and businesses folding, sad affairs, people holding on to the last of their ventures in the same sad way, dwelling on the past and staring at dust on the shelves. Ian will see the splendid enterprises that will open in their stead. I'm fumbling but I'm getting somewhere. I was going to say about the propeller being left where it is, it's a sign of an industry in decline. It won't get to the ship on schedule and could become a memento on the docks, high and dry because nobody wants it.

I'm on the bus. I could have gone with them. But at the moment of decision I was exhausted. It took until now, passing the cemetery Ian would have noticed was bright with graveside flowers, to realise there had been a moment of decision. I wasn't ready for a raccoon. I didn't even get as far as considering a raccoon. He is a dedicated father. How do you summon dedication? You can't. It comes from somewhere, but where. The question is interrupted by a throng of football followers stopping the bus at the lights. Are they real? Of course. They wave a lot of blue. So it's Saturday, a home game against a team in blue. I hope my daughter isn't caught up in this. Horse dancers and football supporters don't match. She can't be more than two buses ahead. Ian will know what to do. Ian, if anyone can, can persuade supporters the only fight is on the pitch, that's where all energy must be concentrated. Anything else, Alexandra would say, is a mirage.

Had I known at the outset she was keen on the word mirage I might well have reconsidered. Too late. There are mirages everywhere, she recently claimed. Mirages everywhere? I quizzed her. Where exactly? Where is there one now? Her reply was to sigh and open a book. Wherever did she get a book, I said, still angry at the word mirage. And when did she find the opportunity to read it? Sh, she said, I'm reading. Reading what? If I tell you will you stop your inane questions? she said. I agreed. There was a religious picture on the cover. She read out: Oh great city, useless steps, oh ways through the unforeseen infinity! Now leave me in peace. I hadn't an idea

in hell what was going on. It's like that with her sometimes. Often. Only when Mimi appears does it turn vaguely sensible. I kept to my agreement not to ask more. Meshchanskaya, I read carefully down the spine. Alexandra's face was behind the book. There was the book, her large hands, her large self below, her unexpectedly attractive legs.

Just at this interesting point there was drunken banging on the windows. How can I help it if the blue team lost. If they were so keen to win why didn't they play themselves. Instead of downing beer and scoffing bags of crisps. I banged back from my side. The bus lurched forwards. As Alexandra has pointed out, a drunken man can't run for toffee. In the distance I could see the tower block where I work. I don't go there on Saturdays, though some people do. On the floor below there's an environmental group. If you saw how hard they worked you would think they would have saved the world a score of times, but still it is not saved. Alexandra doesn't help. She wants *more* climate change. She hopes the aurora borealis will make its way southwards. I tell her *borealis* means above the tree line (I don't know if it's true). The tree line is edging north, so the aurora is moving further and further out of reach. I say this to annoy her. There isn't much I can talk to her about sensibly. I can't talk about work. The dedication, the commitment. Even if you do summon it, it doesn't solve everything. Your child can still become a dealer. Still drive a car into a tree. Even Ian knows that. I didn't say he was stupid. Did I mention he's a Justice of the Peace.

Evening isn't far off. The sky looks stodgy. Or as Alexandra says, when the sun is setting pinkly behind the pines, the river pinkens. She and I can refer to somewhere without it sounding remotely the same place. She sees bright postcards when I feel it's Arctic. There's a call on my mobile, Ian. He hands me to Mimi. It's snowing, she says. It isn't here, I say, how's the zoo Tumble? We didn't go, she says, we're at the front of the crowd. Football? I say. The crowd watching the propeller, she says. They've got great chains around it. We have to keep back.

Why?
It's up in the air.
Are you OK?
Ian says you can come and fetch me.
What do *you* say?
It's very shiny. They're lifting it onto the ground.

The Nest

Karen Atkinson

'She's no oil painting,' her father was fond of saying, not particular whether she was within hearing. They saw her entirely devoid of feminine attributes. Mathematical aptitude, the talent for words, scholarly triumphs, jobs in faraway places, even the affectation, *Dr.*, attests her separateness, her strangeness.

She's flown over land, parched, fashioned and fired in time's kiln. The plane drops into a bowl of blue cloudless sky, arcs over vivid, turquoise sea. Anxiety stirs, not fear of flying, but what's ahead.

Below, Darwin, insignificant at the edge of the vast landmass, toes in the sea. The entire population might fill the MCG.

In the terminal, her brother Todd mocks her luggage.

Through the dark-mouthed exit into blinding sunlight a solid wall of heat presses against her. In the reek of rotting vegetation, remembered smells of place bite with the pungency of searing chilli, careful mouthfuls of *stinky fish,* ripened mango; her childhood etched into flesh, tangible as genetic imprints, the weight of those early years formidable. There's unexpected physicality in these reminiscences. Her legs tremble. She pushes expensive sunglasses along her impressive nose, grateful there's something between her eyes and the memories that assail her.

So long since she was home. Home. Even that her clever brain questions.

Sweat from armpits to linen trousers. She's dressed badly, the silk shirt, she sees with dismay, spoiled. She's thankful for the icy interior of the car. Neither mentions her mother, though it's for this she's come. Victoria concentrates on containment. It'll be over soon.

'Dad?'

'Ah, you know. What'dya think? Darwin's gone mad.' He's obviously pleased.

Along the Esplanade stark units line the road, one time a beautiful boulevard, quintessentially Darwin. You could be anywhere.

She remembers. Satay at the Asian market, mucking about with the *Larrakia* kids. Watching. Fascinated. Their openness, relationships free of coded ambiguities and thwarted expectations. Where have they been relocated? She doesn't know; they're local matters, not of national interest.

They turn in, the house at least untouched. Exactly as she remembers. She follows her brother through to the backyard.

'Dad, we're home.' As if they're kids, from school.

The old man emerges from the chookhouse, warm eggs in each hand. 'Vicki.' She thinks they're a ploy, that holding the eggs he won't have to hold her.

Lips touch dry cheek. 'Dad.'

'Bin awhile.' Father turns to son. Victoria knows the rules. They speak of weather, football, never of time passed, the life she lives, of the mother, dead.

Victoria showers in tepid water as she did as a child, in the makeshift bathhouse off the veranda. A flush toilet's been installed; you don't have to trek outside, that's something. A girl, she was terrified traversing shadowy, fetid undergrowth, though such fears were kept to herself. It wasn't just her father and brother's disapprobation she dodged; her mother disapproved, too, of female hysterics.

She looks in the mirror; a strong and beautiful face she struggles to love, tracing the features, fine features her lovers have said, noble and

striking. Such disparity with her father, even her mother. Nothing like her brother. At first she'd imagined she was adopted, but as she grew older she came to comprehend, though never articulate, her circumstances.

Her crushed mother would never speak of it now. This unexpected death serves her well, for the truth is Victoria could not have borne a sordid deathbed confession.

The sounds of frogs, cicadas, the sensations of the bush beguile. There's something of home in the familiarity of these things, however fleeting. She hears the television from inside the house, but it seems a long way off.

Shadow of the Dead: Stories of Transience in Tim Winton's Fiction

Hannah Schürholz

> And now you sit there, saved from her needs, and your responsibilities, because she sorted herself out, swam out past the breakers after they had left her to recollect herself, maybe it was a shark or maybe she swam to Atlantis, either way you will never see her again. (Bradley Smith 4)

Death and the Woman

Death, in the novels of Tim Winton, does make a sound. It is the elemental sound of air and water; the sizzling, 'wheezy' rasp of Eva Sanderson's breath (*Breath* 174); the 'horrible wet noise' of Sally Fox (*Dirt Music* 117); the 'wheatbag noise' of Bird (*Dirt Music* 118); Bess's premonition of her own mortality in Arvo's death music (252); and the laughter of Maureen Coupar as she falls over a cliff into a great nothingness (*Shallows* 82). Indeed, death as a gendered metaphor in literature and the visual arts is a Western tradition. And thus, a portrayal of women as closely related to death and dying in canonical narratives has been a source of considerable critical interest. Death as proclaimed feminine, and sharing with the female the space of

the Other—both common narrative elements in many classical and modern texts—is frequently used by women writers as a matrix of subversion, promulgating female agency and autonomy denied them in a large range of male texts with oedipal narrative structures (see Worthington 243–63; Bronfen 395–435). But despite these attempts to write back to the dominant discourse of female representations in male writing, it is still very much the case that women are persistently portrayed as images, as objects to be looked at, and thus, they convey socially-determined norms and standards of beauty and abjection:

> The representation of woman as image (spectacle, object to be looked at, vision of beauty—and the concurrent representation of the female body as the *locus* of sexuality, site of visual pleasure, or lure of the gaze) is so pervasive in our culture … that it necessarily constitutes a starting point for any understanding of sexual difference and its ideological effects in the construction of social subjects, its presence in all forms of subjectivity. (De Lauretis 37–38)

The academic discourse surrounding female death in contemporary literature, especially when it comes to death and dying as a gendered sphere, is small in comparison with the extensive scholarly attention paid to death and the female in nineteenth to early twentieth-century literature. This paper contributes to the deconstruction of female literary representation by considering the female corpse and the dying, decaying body. It explores the female characters in Tim Winton's *An Open Swimmer* (1982), *In the Winter Dark* (1988) and *Shallows* (1984) to elucidate the significance of the ephemeral—fragility and death, both caused by suicide, disease or accident—imprinted upon the women's physique. As such, motherhood is brought into relation with the idea of the woman as lacking self-containment—a point discussed in Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies*. The deaths of the angelic mother figure (Mrs. Coupar, Ida) and the maternal femme fatale (Jewel)[1] are shown to demonstrate how femininity, motherhood and death are interlinked in Winton's fiction. It further underlines

how the female body, as 'Madonna' or 'whore,' is 'always already transgressive—dangerous, and in danger' within these literary representations (Russo 217). Death here becomes an allegory that exposes femininity as simultaneously a threatening and regulating force within dominant socio-cultural discourse and a pre-condition for the healing and maturation of the male protagonists.

Consider the image of the dead woman in *An Open Swimmer*. Jerra Nielsam is a young man who embarks upon a journey of self-discovery. He quests to define his masculinity, to come to terms with a past heavily shaped by a love affair with his best friend's mother, Jewel. Traumatised by her alleged suicide, Jerra seeks difficult answers to the presence of her violent death in his dreams and memory. She becomes a ghostly female presence dominating Jerra's past and present. Her memory is most poignantly captured within a painting-like impression of her corpse floating in the water (113, 177), a nexus wherein facets of impressionism, surrealism, realism and naturalism converge; in short, a postmodern creation.[2] This image of death evokes a traditional binary, displacing the woman from the corporeality of her decaying body while placing the male viewer (Jerra) on the side of life. Here the female corpse is depicted as a crucial memory trail for Jerra: the 'non-visible [that] is given figure, visual presence' (Bronfen, *Dead Body* 123). It reaffirms security, control and empowerment, all of which are linked to the visualisation of what has hitherto been out of sight, absent. Jewel's body, apart from being a signifier of fractured maternity, is an allegory for the woman as other and thus becomes a decisive matrix of self-realisation for the male protagonist.

The association between violent death and heroic enterprise in Western societies is repeatedly linked to masculinity and war. We need look no further than John Howard's insistent adoration of the ANZAC tradition to recognise its prevalence in modern-day Australia. By contrast, women are still aligned with the private act of suicide and its attendant mystification. Anne Sexton once remarked: 'When (to me) death takes you and puts you thru the wringer, it's a man, but when you kill yourself it's a woman' (Sexton and Ames 231). In the

Australian post-colonial context, Allan Kellehear and Ian Anderson argue that the way death is represented in literature and the arts is a telling of existing dominant values and norms in the broader context of history, society and identity itself:

> There has been, and there continues to be, a masculinist, European tradition of death in Australia but it has dominated the Australian imagination at a cost. That cost can be seen in the way broader experiences of death are hidden away from popular view. The hidden nature of that broader cultural experience of death serves to remind us, yet again, that dominating images of death reflect dominating influences in life itself. For national history and identity, the politics of death reflect the politics of everyday life. (Kellehear and Anderson 13)

But unlike the *Bulletin* masculinist tradition that excludes female death from the surface of literary and artistic representation (9), female death in the novels of Tim Winton establishes a network of 'lost' women—lost to death, disease or addiction.

Death, according to Foucault, is the domain and the instrument of power at the same time (137). Through an insistent dichotomisation of life and death in Western cultures, both can only exist in relation to the other; death is mythologised as a form of the Other—the constant representation of the unknown that stands in opposition to the immediacy and practicality of life itself (James 10). Life is strictly demarcated by the exercise of power and the limitation of death, turning death, in Jean Baudrillard's words, into an evasive 'form in which the determinacy of the subject and of value is lost' (5). In the attempt by postmodernism and post-colonialism to examine the role of women in Australian fiction, both alongside the nature of their representation in male writing and with reference to their sociological reflection of present Australian gender relations, I follow Elisabeth Bronfen's idea that the woman is a 'symptom of death's presence, precisely because she is the site where the repressed

anxiety about death re-emerges in a displaced, disfigured form' (*Dead Body* xi). Bronfen argues that the association between woman and death, which, from the side of patriarchal imagination, is seen as a mysterious, ambiguous, non-representable, silent and threatening stability—a metaphor of disruption and transgression, constructs masculinity as life that lacks death (110–12, 216–18).

In this context, Australian scholar Susan K. Martin contends that death or dying stands in for and negates the threat of female sexuality—a twofold danger defused by dominant representations, which invoke fantasies to reclaim power (33–34). '[L]iteral or symbolic death represents one of the ways that the 'perverse' body can be removed from the sexual economy (and thus work to reinforce the heterosexual norm)' (James 17). Sexuality is therefore loaded with meanings and power: 'the body is not 'sexed' in any significant sense prior to its determination within a discourse through which it becomes invested with an 'idea' of natural or essential sex' (Butler 116). Rather, the body is given meaning within discourse merely in the framework of power relations. In the process of transforming sexuality into a cultural discourse, norms are created and defined along the Western Christian tradition of reproductive sexuality which brand-mark deviations from the 'normal' as perversity and monstrosity (see Foucault 36–37, James 17). To refine the discussion about the female body as a site of memory, subjugation and power struggle within and outside the narrative, the issues of death as gendered metaphor and woman as cultural symbolic have to be kept in mind. In this paper, they are aligned with the vivid transience inscribed upon the bodies of Winton's female characters.

Suicide in *An Open Swimmer*

In *An Open Swimmer* the single explicit description of Jewel's body is granted immediately after her decaying corpse is fished out of the sea. Jewel's lifeless body, as perceived through the eyes of Jerra, is rendered a monstrous, postmodern Ophelian symbolic:

> Jerra hated. And he would not forgive—not even her—that grinning slit that cleaved open the skin of her throat which was cracked, black and green, with her seaweed clump of a head half-buried in the sand that the storm had heaved up. On the same beach. 'Didn't they know she would?' he called out to the darkness. 'She was gonna go back all the time!'… Green plastic peeled back to show her grins. 'Been in the water a long time,' said the man next to him … Jerra looked down at the naked legs and scarred, slack belly. A jade tinge to the blown fingers. 'Slit herself and went for a swim,' said the man beside him, adjusting his coat in the drizzle. 'Crazy.' 'Yes,' said Jerra. 'They reckon.' 'Know her?' 'No,' said Jerra. Gulls hovered. The other man cocked his head at him. 'Not personally, no,' said Jerra at the man (177).

The female corpse is exposed in its nakedness—an act that posits the body as a faceless, clinical object to be investigated. Jewel's 'scarred, slack belly' is reminiscent of Dolly's in *Cloudstreet*: 'She [Dolly] fell back on the floor, breaking her nails in the rug, foaming and spitting and squealing till she was hoarse. Her breasts flapped on her, and her nightie rode up to expose her naked, mottled body, her angry slash of a vagina, her rolling bellyfat and Caesar scars' (*Cloudstreet* 338, see 143). Dolly's body is described as grotesque, even repulsive, during hysterics at the death of her favourite child, Ted. The exposure of her pain and shame is concentrated in the literal and metaphorical uncovering of her aged body. Her body is no longer the epitome of female sexuality with 'curls and lips and hips and everything' and 'a deep vee between her breasts, big as a drinking trough' that left men (in this case Lester Lamb) speechless and feeling like a 'dumb animal' (48). Instead, the markings of time are literally inscribed upon her flesh as caesarean scars and rolls of fat. Similar to Dolly, Jewel's scarred belly is marked by violence and age, symbolising the 'omphalic death baby' that is carried in the womb from the moment of birth (Bronfen, 'The Knotted Subject' 329).

The inherent ambiguity in the slitting of the throat compared to more common methods of suicide like hanging and gassing has metaphoric significance (ABS).[3] Jewel's grotesque grin is commensurate to the 'grinning slit' in her throat, a disfiguring smirk that resonates uncomfortably with Jerra. This grin invokes Winton's earlier intertextual allusion to Sylvia Plath's poem 'Lady Lazarus'. Echoes of Plath arise through this impression of female death as visualised in her poem 'Edge': 'The woman is perfected/ Her dead/ Body wears the smile of accomplishment' (80). Jewel is now situated amidst a group of well-known female artists who have sought redemption in death: Virginia Woolf, Anne Sexton, Alfonsina Storni, Alejandra Pizarnik, Sara Teasdale and Sarah Kane. The image of the dead female as the seductress, a 'madwoman' or hysteric, responsible for the protagonist's personal tragedy (in which she resembles Eva in *Breath*) is taken up in *An Open Swimmer* and eerily aligned with the maternal: 'The memory of the loved and cherished aunt—the incestuous partner—along with the echo of her own voice through the text, which is very much comparable to the chant of the siren, possesses Jerra to the point that he consciously transgresses the confines of reason' (Ben-Messahel 52). Jerra is caught in the thrall of a Homeric Calypso (198) while Jewel lapses into the phantasm of her own secluded world: 'a queen, dainty in slippers that scuffed the lawn' (167). To Jewel, Jerra is both lover and child juxtaposed against a destructive, suffocating arena of marital and maternal unhappiness, a remnant of reality that gradually merges with her 'insane' dreams and unfulfilled maternal desires (176, 168).[4] By contrast, Jewel is both Jerra's muse and critic, sharing his deep love of poetry and language. But when suffering exceeds personal values, meaning becomes irrelevant and is replaced by final surrender: 'Let's not have ideals, let's surrender to the men of *Ends*' (97).

What is striking in the aforementioned passage is the difference between life and death: the 'living male' protagonist (who, rather interestingly, is surrounded exclusively by other men, see *An Open Swimmer* 177) and the solitary 'dead woman', immobile and fixed.

Here, female suicide is a necessary development within the male protagonist's rite of passage—the cliché whereby knowledge of the Other leads to knowledge of the self (see De Lauretis 118–19). As such, Jewel's body is merely an instrument, 'a matrix and matter' (119) for Jerra's maturation. He learns to see himself as part of the systemic oppression, driving Jewel to suicide. The memory of Jewel's death pursues Jerra through his darkest dreams helping him to realise his failings toward her:

> He went in darker and found something soft. It trembled, the skin almost tightening. He rolled it over, the legs fanning wide, and saw the open slit reflecting green on the backs of his hands. Scars of old slashes gathered, pale on the flaccid pulp. Navel a stab-hole. In a dowdy gown, she was arching pathetically, spreading her speckled hair, clutching … But she wasn't her. Just a bald slit and light showing through. They hadn't made her different, or even someone else; just nothing…he was no different from the others taking advantage, helping to destroy, helping her in the delusion. (113)

Jewel's inability to transcend her social environment paints an imaginary reflection of a striking Western frontier that separates male survival and female death as two distinctive domains in Winton's narrative.

Stories of Madness and Transience in *Shallows* and *In the Winter Dark*

In *Shallows* (1984), it is Daniel's wife, Maureen, who commits suicide under the shadow of patriarchy. Like Jewel, she is ascribed all the hallmarks of female hysteria as she succumbs to mental and physical deterioration:

> For weeks Maureen had been depressed and restless, wandering about the house clutching her gown about her in the night, sitting

> out on the veranda where thick nets of mosquitoes descended upon her … He [Daniel Coupar] began to wake in the night with her flailing about beside him, calling out, sobbing. He found her sleepwalking, tearing her hair. (80)[5]

Moreover, she is troubled by a dream: a girl—whom she identifies as either her granddaughter, Queenie, or herself—attempts to swim in a parched waterhole but succeeds only in writhing upon the sun-blasted red dirt. The girl's bony ribs are noticeable on her starved, naked body. Her desperate hunger is expressed through a dry and swollen mouth whose teeth have turned black. Unable to make a sound, she begins to bite herself; she bleeds 'like red dust' (81). This bleak, grotesque and almost surreal expression of anorexia and self-mutilation is directly linked to the state of being mute, of being unable to voice basic feeling. The dream, as brought forward in Maureen's consequential question: 'What's going to happen to our Queenie? And me?' (81) signifies an existential crisis, reflecting the perilous topography of Maureen's social and geographical isolation. Her existence is emblematic of the privation of love and respect, leaving only a suffocating void. Carrying signs of death and dying on her body, the girl in the dream foreshadows Maureen's own death a few hours later when she falls off a cliff after experiencing the first moment of happiness with her husband in thirty-four years (81–82): 'When she stumbled and was taken, Coupar heard her laughter, saw a hand, and was conscious of his trousers flapping from a nearby bough. He heard a shallow sound that might have been her impact or the shock of a magpie leaving a tree' (82). If Daniel sees the fall as an accidental stumble, Maureen's laughter as she tumbles toward her death suggests suicide has been invoked in order to eternalise one fleeting moment of bliss. But the ambiguity of her death stands in stark relief when compared to Daniel's explicit suicide (also preceded by a nightmarish dream) nearly twelve years later (266). Daniel's realisation of his family's complicity with the oppressive forces of patriarchy begins the process of regret and healing; he has obtained

a deeper knowledge of his world and his destructive role within it. Eventually, Daniel comes to the conclusion that both he and his grandfather are guilty of 'sins of inaction', (98; see also Murphy 73–84). As such, his death is constructed as a means of reconciliation, an act of redemption to free the world of the darkness within him.

Ida Stubbs in *In the Winter Dark* (1988) bears a stark resemblance to Maureen. Both women suffer oppressive marriages and the tensions associated with the inherent isolation of rural life. Like Mauren, Ida has given birth to girls but is unable to conceive a son. She links her failure to have a boy to 'the sins of the fathers'—Maurice's guilt for setting fire to Minchinbury House, and consequently, the killing of an old woman (see 90–95). But unlike Maureen's death, which, in its ambiguity offers suicide as a possible motive, Ida is accidentally gunned down by her husband before being buried in the forest with Ronnie's still-born baby son (109). Once again the maternal is paired with death. Ida's 'lack' or 'failure' is assuaged through her spiritual unification with the son who never lived. Critics see in the dead child the reflection of the inhumane: the life-negating effect of an environment that borders the supernatural and hence prevents Ronnie from successfully delivering the child (Ben-Messahel 112). But more important, however, is a question of guilt and redemption, which, in this instance, carries Faustian overtones. When Goethe's Gretchen receives godly forgiveness for her earthly sins she sees her innocence restored through divine redemption. Similarly, Ida's sins and corresponding shame, derived through her marital bonds, are alleviated in the moment of death. She embraces innocence through Ronnie's still-born child, who functions as both a symbol of forgiveness and deliverance. From her husband's point of view, Ida is presented as precariously clinging to sanity: 'pretty damn wild' (89); 'her breasts rolled about in her nightie'; 'crazy woman's scream'; 'her eyes shone madly' (90). Thus, she follows the trajectory of Jewel and Maureen in being depicted as 'hysteric' and 'wild'. Maurice's account contrasts deeply with Ida's own sense of alienation, a dark and suffocating habitat she resolves to leave behind: 'Ida shook. She

looked at Maurice. She didn't know him. Not the way a wife should know a husband. There was a terrible cold rushing into her, a winter wind blowing right through. She was a stranger here, and they were impostors. There was just a hollowing wind and she was going' (99).

The competing voices of the narrative reveal an intense gender struggle. 'Blood [is Ida's] only voice', a 'hollow gurgling' (107), the sound of death. But Winton invariably leaves the final articulation of this struggle to Jacob and Maurice, neither of whom can escape the 'Darkness' of their own past and secrecy. For the men, 'Darkness' is at once master, confidante and accomplice. It swallows the deaths of Ida and the baby, serving as Maurice's playground of confession; although it denies him, at the last, redemption: 'I can't redeem myself. That's why I confess to you, Darkness … Listen to me!' (110)

The Last Act: Morbid Performances and Deadly Fluidity

In all these stories, Winton exposes the societies depicted in the narratives as fractured, unaccommodating for both his male protagonists and female characters. The obvious limitations imposed by patriarchy are presented as the foundations for the characters' feelings of displacement and unease within their communities—feelings that often manifest as diseases for women. Looking beyond the issue of mental illness and self-harm, this feeling of 'dis-ease' can be seen in a lengthy line of female characters, their physical condition weakened by chronic illnesses: Rachel Nilsam's asthma, Debbie Buckridge's cancer, Bess's bowel cancer, Vera Jutland's cerebral haemorrhage, and various other conditions which claim female life. Ultimately, female death is appropriated as a narrative tool for the maturation of the male protagonists, who are given ample opportunities to reconsider their past, present and future in order to make significant improvements. Thus Jerra eventually moves on, able to see through the hypocrisies of his society and finding happiness with Rachel. Similarly, Daniel creates a space for regret through his awareness of generational guilt. He nonetheless sees himself as being

too old to make a difference and therefore decides that the greatest contribution he can make toward putting old stories to rest is by taking his own life. In the end, he ruptures the family dynasty of male egocentricity by leaving Queenie, a woman, as the sole inheritor. This tendency of Winton's characters to mature and reach a state of higher understanding is captured in Maurice Stubb's confession from *In the Winter Dark*: 'That's how I live now, knowing I'll only have this time for a little while. I should have known earlier to always live like that' (109).

Elizabeth Grosz argues in *Volatile Bodies* that the female body is often culturally represented as lacking containment, as being fluid and thus transgressive (203). This idea is taken up by Susan Martin and transferred from the living to the dead body of the virgin: 'The status of the virgin body as representing the closed system, the intact body, contests the supposedly available and open body produced by death, even as death, literally, breaks the seal, and removes this illusion of closure' (33). Winton's representations of the dead female body denote this lack of containment.[6] This is most poignantly described in *Dirt Music* when Sally Fox, Lu's sister-in-law, dies in a rollover:

> He can hear Sally now but not see her in the darkness of the cab. She's just a horrible wet noise in there … He smells shit and Juicy Fruit, gropes one-handed until he finds her wedged under the steering column, bits of metal protruding from her trunk … He feels the breath go out of her before he can pull his hand away. The hot rain of her urine sluices his face. (117)

These elemental characteristics of wetness, excrement, exhaled breath and urine define Sally's dying body, impaled by pieces of metal, signifying the moment it transforms from living organism into dead waste product. Trapped within the wreck of the car, Sally's death image is similar to Jewel's body when it is found on the beach. What both have in common is the 'wetness' that permeates

their close environment—sharp metal and entangling seaweed—in addition to the absence of heavy bleeding. Sally's accidental death finds symbolic expression in the suffocating interior of the smashed car; Jewel merges with the living, breathing ocean, and in doing so, transcends the gruesome nature of her own death; Maureen's death evokes the waterfall (*Shallows* 82), its fluidity serving to symbolise the symbiosis of the female, the maternal and transience (a point suggested in Winton's other stories as well).

There is something further to be said about the deaths of Jewel and Maureen. Both women seem to have staged their deaths in exemplum, theatrical performances promulgating a cathartic purification of the self; an emotional and spiritual release through death. Bronfen argues convincingly that '[d]ying is a move beyond communication yet also functions as these women's one effective communicative act, in a cultural or kinship situation otherwise disinclined towards feminine authorship' (*Dead Body* 141). Such acts are defined by a considerable amount of self-reflexivity as 'death is chosen and performed by the woman herself, in an act that makes her both object and subject of dying and representation' (141–42). The woman, therefore, constructs herself in an autobiographical fashion by 'undoing her body' (143). But this merely allows fantasies of gender to re-emerge in the textual mythologisation and fetishisation of death and the female body. Consequently, through the act of disembodiment to escape the constraints associated with the stigmatisation and cultural mythologisation of her body, the woman only re-emphasises her materiality and thus confirms pre-existing cultural attitudes and stereotypes (143). The narrative focalisation in both *An Open Swimmer* and *Shallows* filters the perception of female death through male consciousness, a cultural reclaiming of the female body, occurring in both the signification of the event itself and in the memories of the male characters. The female is literally positioned between self-inscription and an inscription of otherness (Bronfen, *Dead Body* 143).

Maureen's death occurs during an ecstatic, eroticised dance with her husband. Plagued by embarrassment and guilt, Daniel recasts

her death to the wider community as the tragic outcome of a tractor accident (*Shallows* 98). The theatricality of her death is more subtle than Jewel's in *An Open Swimmer*. Jewel's return to the scene of the boating accident as the stage of her 'final performance' dramatically enacts her alienation and mental confusion. She is trapped between life and death, imagination and reality. The beach embodies this hybrid space, a mediating position between land-as-finite and ocean-as-infinite. As Alistair Rolls and Vanessa Alayrac argue, the beach does not only function as a 'bridge from self to alterity' (157), but also as an edge that leads the way into dreams, fantasy and evasion—a point well illustrated through Jewel's suicide. Notwithstanding the inherent morbidity of what the sea washes up onto the shore, the body with the 'seaweed clump of a head' (177) evokes the curiosity of a show. This is the last 'Act' of her tragedy. A crowd of people gather in the distance watching intently while gulls circle the scene from above. Jewel's husband, Jim, cries into the coat of Jerra's father (177). The death of the heroine exposes order as a hypocritical farce, its unveiling serving as a source of catharsis for both bystanders and the reader. The novelty of the body discovered on the beach corresponds with the events of the ill-fated party on the boat:

> He saw the red lights in the sky, fizzers and rockets cartwheeling red, red, red up into the vast blackness with their spent, smoking carcasses hitting the water with quiet smacks … The tide rose, edging them off the reef and into the deep, sinking quickly as Jim fired flares up into the sky with all the other gay lights … Hurrahs and hoots on the beach … (176)

Overwhelmed and inspired by her near-death experience of the boating accident, Jewel chooses this beach for her final goodbye. She comes back to this environment to die and thus reconnects past and present, pain and desire, intoxication, fear and excitement with each other in a final showdown, staging suicidal fantasies in the corporeal. Her suicide is 'both the literal attainment of alterity through

death and the performance of an autobiographical desire' (Bronfen, *Dead Body* 142). Jewel thus seizes authorship of her own life through death, which is ambivalently settled between self-construction and self-destruction (142). Now it is the woman who exceeds the boundaries of social and marital constraint and creates a form of autonomous authorship that positions her within a power of her own (401). This moment of self-chosen exile from a life-long displacement re-unites her fractured self and reinstates a creativity that finally allows her to articulate her story. However, it is once again only men who surround her body, interpreting her death, her story, as a fatal outburst of lunacy (177). Thus, the chasm is reemphasised between what is, on one hand, life, normality, rationality—the male, and, on the other hand, death, abnormality, lunacy—the female. Instead of perhaps nurturing the autonomy she achieves in death, Winton resituates Jewel within the domain of otherness, reduced to a mere body, a grotesque grin, deprived of voice and identity.

Conclusion

The female body in Winton's fiction, both living and dead, is a hypertextual, cultural allegory that provokes a necessary discussion of gender and power relations in Australia.[7] It communicates discrepancies between male and female authorship and artworks as highly gendered battlefields of representation. In its material and metaphorical function, the woman's body becomes, in Pierre Nora's words, a '*lieu de memoire*', a repertoire of cultural realities that define social relations in their historical significance and present constellation. Individual, collective and cultural memories merge within the allegorical textuality of the woman's body—a contested site of controversy and conflict. The unbalanced relationships between personal, social and gendered power struggles are visibly inscribed upon the flesh of Winton's female characters. Winton's underlying critique of family, colonisation and patriarchy is effectively compromised by a masculine appropriation of the female

body as a nexus of male experience and enlightenment, reducing the woman to a site of trauma, transience and otherness. It should be noted that Winton continues to present the female on the periphery of society and always bordering the extreme and the dangerous. They are consistently depicted as broken characters, infused by elements of hysteria and depression, unable to articulate their emotions verbally and thus compelled to measures of self-harm and suicide. The novels of Tim Winton, more often than not, reaffirm the very gender stereotypes they seeks to undermine in the first place.

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Notes

1 However, despite a clear tendency in Winton's portrayals towards the Victorian dichotomization of 'good mother and bad mother', 'Madonna and whore', many of the rather promiscuous women characters are also mothers, e.g. Jewel, Sally, Dolly—a role, however, that seems rather secondary to these women's sexual adventures.

2 All these elements of style refer to Jerra's dream sequence in combination with the actual discovery of Jewel's corpse later in the story. Both depictions combine the beauty and shock value of the dead female body in an analogy to Renaissance mythical figures (Ophelia), surrealist simulacrums of interiorities, impressionist observation, realist/naturalist depiction of death in all its detail and horror.

3 Jewel's suicide is a self-harming act that again reappears in *Dirt Music* when Georgie dreams of her mother: 'Vera Jutland had the doll-like rosiness of complexion that only a mortician could supply. There was an uncharacteristic look of concern on her face. In one hand she held a shard of mirror. The fingers of the other hand lay on the wattles of her neck. As Georgie came close she looked up a moment without recognition. I don't feel anything, she murmured' (416–17).

4 In her letter to Jerra (*An Open Swimmer* 175–76), Jewel alludes to an alleged miscarriage, which poses a deep psychological dilemma for a mother and is one of the reasons contributing to her precarious mental situation. Also, she considers her relationship with her 'Jeremiah' (98) as indestructible, and thus transcends their sexual relationship, eternalising their spiritual bond—possibly beyond death (98).

5 A similar passage that evokes the connection between women and 'madness' can be found in Winton's *Lockie Leonard: Legend* 51: 'Her hair hung down in strings. Her legs were like sticks in the bleary light … At the end of the drive Mrs Leonard stood with the empty pram, singing quietly … Hair hung all over her face. She hardly looked like his mum.'

6 Vera Jutland's death is also associated with lacking containment, expressed in a big urine stain on the living room carpet where she died (*Dirt Music* 175); Bess's cancer is related to spasms of diarrhoea etc.

7 In this respect it is fair to mention that the male body has an equally metaphoric function, though, in my view, less controversial and complex as the female body. It is expressed within the various momentums of crisis for patriarchy, the need for the re-definition of maleness within the discourse of the 'man-in-crisis', as well as in the challenging and confronting activisms of the feminist, queer, indigenous and whiteness movements. The dialectics between the male and female bodies as memory places need to be considered in this context—a discussion, though, that exceeds the scope of this essay and needs to be discussed elsewhere.

Were I the wind

Were I the wind I'd blow no more on such a wicked, miserable world.
Melville

Tim Vallence

Were I the wind perhaps I would blow
through the cold nests of rooks in winter trees,
black holes in the winter sky.
I would hear their dark deathly cawing

and maybe judge it a service
but they have their place
so probably I would not.
And so if I were the wind

perhaps I would blow gently through summer days
casually lifting the leaves and flowers
but summer can be a cold time
its unfailing promise of ending

and the bleakness of winter to come
so perhaps I would not—pain is always,
and we each have our cross, rage spread thin across our backs.
Perhaps then I would blow like an avenging angel

through these pollutions, our cities, our graveyards,
lost in loose connections
caves to slink into and hide
where we are become grey shadows on walls

searching for something like shared spaces,
believing that once we really did soar in the spheres of beauty
lost now in the bleakness of our vision
the poverty of our speech.

I would blow through the unutterable sadness of streets
where the woman is beaten
the child abused,
drowning in screaming innocence.

All like Job in his filth, our minds are sores in the
teeming cities of the plain where
we can't escape our half-forgotten myths
and will not try to temper our blistering ambitions

in these cankered black gangrenous wounds of the earth,
so mean-spirited the gods themselves
have turned their backs on us, and the
ruined landscape of our minds.

And were I the wind I know
the four angels would no longer hold me back
for they too have turned their backs
and would let the wind run free

and I would blow with outrage
on the rabid certainty of half-coherent religious savagery …
But as it was and is and always will be,
we are cruel selfish and blind, cowering in desperate iniquitous
solitude.

And so now I know that
were I the wind I could blow no more.

In the Mire of Doubts

Alexander Tan Jr

We came to the city in times of stress
After the war years and sulked in boulevards
Having nothing to do but poke our inquisitive
Fingers in the dark corners of our lives.
It was a brutal year, this time,
And you yourselves were not sure whether
You were heading straight to limbo
Or just getting yourselves tied down
To driftwood and fleeting desires.
The streets were full of beggars and vendors
And the slums reeked of false talks.
And then you told us: Be wise!
But we were trapped by the tyranny of our time
And wisdom to us was for people sinking
In the mire of doubts and unbelief.
We recall the ruins of our on-and-off creation
Like old women with greying hair
Who recoil from daylight and dread
The sound of footsteps.
This was really a time when we marked
Our shiftlessness and found it as disorganised
As our thoughts. But we were young gods
And did not mind, for we know we could
Still think of beauty and harness the power
Of our minds, or fashion our desires
Without which we would not find ourselves
Nor give meaning to a star.
But why question the immensity of regret?

You had not been there
In the writhings of our hearts —
So distant were you to see that the embodiment
Of our dreams was as flimsy as the cravings of our hearts.
So all we wished to say was said in silence
As we sat amid the deepening night to feel
What a grieving time it was to be thinking of truth
And beauty. But now we know that we were slow
In seeing the swift turn of noontime
Exploding in salute to those who delved into wisdom
And also cared for time.

The Laryngitis Game

Noel King

Daddy was a bank manager, a small local branch, just Daddy and four uniformed girls in our little town, the kind that raiders in the mid-seventies hit for an easy rob. Whenever another bank robbery came on the news it terrified us, I'd have nightmares and my young sister would wet the bed. The fear would pass after Daddy told us 'they' had been caught.

We had a nice house, our own rooms, a big garden. Daddy was great for building landscapey things, ponds and rockerys and the like. Then Mammy would get bored with whatever the thing was, so Daddy would demolish it and build another, better one.

After school we used to go to the bank carpark to wait for Daddy. My older brother kept a key to the passenger door in his pencil box. We kept our boredom at bay imagining innocents passers-by as potential robbers and 'shooting' them from the slightly open—and of course 'bullet proof'—smoke windows of our parents' Hunter car.

Mammy worked in textiles, a local factory in Gorgonstown, with 659 employees. She travelled all over the world buying the raw materials, doing deals and trades in countries you'd normally only read about or see on TV. We were proud but hated her being away so

often. We went wild when she was away, but as she neared home there was a routine in us: a production line of cleaning, polishing, tidying before she arrived, always with odd little presents from wherever.

We often played 'laryngitis game' on Fridays, my brother, my little sister and me, but only if Mammy was away. We would take it in turns to get a 'doss day' off school. Daddy was soft; we could twist him.

We loved Gorgonstown, had great fun making up stories of where it got its name for visiting cousins from England. Daddy chastised us for 'terrifying the shit out of them'. Daddy was a terror for cursing. Daddy even used his bad language in the bank. I went in one time with my savings book after school—just like any regular customer—and I heard the 'f' word from him to a customer at the counter. You didn't normally see Daddy at the counter, he was much too important for that. The man was a rough, farmer type who must have had loads of money in the bank for Daddy to be out talking to him. Daddy saw me and winked. I put in 75p I'd earned from a 'bob-a-job' and the girl who served me recognized me, I heard her say to another girl: 'Image of him, isn't he!'

Mammy used to give Daddy a hard time about his double chin, telling him that there were exercises he could do to get rid of it. Sometimes his picture was in the paper after he—well, the bank in fact—had sponsored a sports day or some such, and he was taken presenting the prizes. Mammy kept a scrapbook of Daddy in the newspapers.

Anyway, as I've said we always managed to fool him with our laryngitis game. 'Christ, ye would get it now just when ye're mother is gone away,' he would say. Like any child we each loved having the house to ourselves. One of us could get away with it of course, but all three of us! There was one such day. 'Ah come on now, come on,' Daddy'd said, 'Jesus, how could ye all get it so fast.' We laughed at that years later but on the day itself there was anger among us over the breakfast table, the stupidity of it, I mean we could've decided beforehand, flipped a coin even.

Daddy's warnings about being at home alone were always in our heads: to be careful cooking, to answer the phone but not the door unless we knew who was there. There were several phone calls from him during the day and always just after three o'clock when the bank closed.

Once Mammy had to go on business to America and she took in her holidays first and we all went. She was with us for the first week, and the second week Daddy took us to Disneyland. That was great fun but it wasn't like we were a family there without Mammy. We enjoyed it though, knowing the money they'd spent, still have the photos shared out among the three of us.

We had Disneyland without Mammy and the next year we had life without Daddy for good. He left us for a girl in the bank. He told us with Mammy by his side one Sunday after lunch. He was gone before nightfall. My image is him and Mammy holding hands while telling us. I never saw the unlocking.

My father got a transfer to the city. He'd been a devious bastard, worked out his own and the girl's transfers before even telling Mammy. I couldn't hold money any more; went into the bank one last time and drew out my all: £86.40 including interest. I kept my head down, mumbled what I wanted, never said 'thank you'. I didn't want to know which one of the girls he had gone with—they were nameless things in uniforms anyway.

I bought my first packet of cigarettes from the money. To then I was an O.P. smoker—other peoples, other pupils in fact, at my school, you know what I mean. That day I could offer around. The packet was gone before I knew it. I bought another.

Daddy stopped being Daddy, we referred to him by his Christian name, Spenser. Mammy stayed home, sought less responsibility in the textile company for a behind-a-desk job with no travelling connected to it. She changed; became a dull Mammy, no more nice presents from far off places, no reunions. It was different, difficult even—although I hate to admit that—having her home all the time.

We stayed on in our little town although attitudes changed to us. I wished for Mammy to move us on, go to another town, we could

tell kids in schools there that our father was dead or something. But Mammy's company was in Gorgonstown and in Gorgonstown we stayed. We never got another Friday off for our laryngitis game either. Mammy wasn't foolable.

The new bank manager was a surly, hot-shit kind of fellow, and it was him that came to our school to present our sports prizes. Even though I'd had a third place in Track & Field, I mitched from school the day of the prize-giving. I went to the river where Daddy used to take us fishing, but I didn't fish, just hung around for a few hours and smoked; even amused my mind considering a hoax bomb scare call to the local bank.

My father had left in January and it was the Easter holidays before we saw him next. Mammy sent us to his new nest. He'd done as Mammy had pestered and had worked off the double chin. He was wearing a hair wig too, which looked ridiculous. My brother passed a direct remark on the wig to him. It might have hurt him, I don't know. But he had hurt us, hadn't he? So I started too, being sullen and difficult.

She was away. Our father spoke about her a lot, had a 'don't you see how good this is for me' attitude about him; blaze; fickle. The smell of her was in the place. I sneaked into their bedroom and slit their duvet down the middle. My brother spilled yoghurt all over her couch, and put whiskey in her budgie's water tank. My sister started to cry on the bus home, said that it was bad—the things we'd done, that it was our father's house too. I lent my sister my Walkman but she didn't like Wings or Led Zeppelin, wanted to listen to Abba, but I had no Abba, they weren't cool any more. She cried more. I whispered to my brother my fear of our father, Spenser making the girl pregnant, the stigma of a step-bastard? He shut me up, for our sister's sake.

It was tough on Mammy when we got home that day. She collected us from the station in the Hunter car that we'd thought was so cool when Daddy bought it, but it had dated quickly. We were all silent. Eventually she asked if 'Daddy was well'.

About a weekend or two later a handyman went into our attic to fix a leak. While he was down having tea with Mammy, my brother

went up. Although I was terrified of heights, he dared me to follow. There was lots of junk up there, or so it seemed. In a chest-like box were old photographs, ticket stubs for classical music recitals, weird looking clothes, a receipt for accommodation in a seaside B&B, a racecard from Punchestown twenty years earlier. Mammy raged at us. Her voice broke up and she started to cry. We had exposed her relics of her time with Spenser before us.

There was one other holiday: in a caravan in Kerry that same summer. Spenser came for a weekend, slept alone in a tent outside. I refused to talk directly to him. He played with my sister a lot, and the brother warmed a bit too I think. Mammy went for long—very long—walks on the beach, and spent time painting—a hobby she had just taken up—on the sand hills. We never saw the work. It went straight into the attic when we got home. I played a game of tennis with Spenser, but it was silent tennis, I stayed stone-faced, concentrated, wanting to win; but he did. There were subtle moves by all us children to patch things, get Daddy back, but by Sunday evening he was gone.

Spenser sent pocket money 'til each of us turned seventeen. I spent all mine on cassettes and cigarettes. Mammy got money from him for us too. I took less and less interest in school, and left early to get a trade in the buildings, specialised in carpentery. She wanted me to visit him again then. I refused. I still knew nothing of Spenser's woman, except her Christian name as mentioned by my sister who had become close to them. My brother went the odd time too, but I hated hearing any details.

My brother went to college, financed by Spenser, and when my sister finished school she studied languages and worked for a while as an au-pair. Now she is in a bank but not the same one as Spenser retired from. He had two other daughters. My sister sees them as sisters, even baby-sat when they were younger. Me, I'm doing well with my carpentery, though things are tougher than they were a few years ago. I live with my girlfriend and we have a baby too. I'm doing well, I do the job, get paid, no bullshit.

I haven't seen Spenser since I was eighteen, at my grandmother's — his mother's — funeral. Mammy started playing bridge and met a nice man there. She lives with him now in the same house in Gorgonstown. We are all happy for her, he's a man with heart, goes fishing and has taught her to fish too. They've made their bed in my old room. We sleep in my sister's old room now when we visit. What was Mammy's and Daddy's room is a nothing room now, full of junk.

Spenser got cancer of the throat a few years ago. He had this attachment thing fitted to enable him to speak. Now he's dead. The funeral is today. I seek my first sight of his partner. She doesn't resemble any of the girls in the old bank. I suppose I expected a blue-uniformed ageless witch. Her smile at me sickens me. I think I'm making her nervous, am trying hard not to laugh. I hand my daughter to my girlfriend, pray the baby won't throw a tantrum.

I look at my father in the box and feel a slight guilt for playing the laryngitis game on him, on Fridays, all those years ago.

In the Formal Wear Shop

Susan Fealy

His tie has fallen
from a paintbox:
a flock of parrots
flew and left
a kind of raucous cheek.

His plumage gleams
navy sleek,
his tape a mannered snake,
well-pressed and white.

He is a bowerbird
collecting
satin jewels in rows,
each facet's edge
he dips to fold;
a tidy bowerbird.

He darts forward
and a little back,
he is guarding, showing,
pecks my eyes
and then he looks.

I'll propose to him (I think)
let's sail to Marrakesh,
unfurl the shirts,
cast into blue,
stain our souls
vermilion.

His eyes meet mine
(a borrowed blue)
he pecks and then he looks.
Slowly, I think again,
better to hem dreams up.

After-kiss

Fiona Hile

Sometimes we begin as though we mean to end.
The after shock of your quiet kiss could be
the trammeled thought of rapid musings
distending unfound tributaries, the leaked
intention of us not being new.
I thought my body's thinking could be true—
that channels quickly built could not contain
the introduced. O cruel life. The night's sweet
solitude alone could not produce what Spring
has made in your sly mode, the ache unfound
in contrition and deceit is curious panacea to
the symptom of your advance—the swell
of your articulate retreat

Asleep in the Afternoon

Jonathan Hadwen

I have a memory of you,
the language of a dream creeping across your lips,
like the sun towards your eye,
like my hand towards your hip.

I go back there sometimes,
pour myself into the dream,
mouth a single word,
sleep to watch you sleep.

Untethered

Warwick Sprawson

He sits alone with
laugher like sarcasm
and music like insults,
one hand raised
for a beer.

Under fluorescent light
the dregs of coffee
dry hard;
a thousand papercuts
can kill.

She folds her clothes
like origami,
eyes down,
while he waits
on the bed.

A Faithful Dog

Wayne Strudwick

I'm looking out the kitchen window at our dog in the backyard chewing my wife's new leather boots. My wife is in the bedroom preparing to leave for work. She is a lawyer. She bought the boots in New York on a recent work trip—a trip on which I was not invited. While she won't admit it, my wife had an affair on that trip with Simon Maddox, a senior partner at the firm. Simon is married to a woman with conspicuous breast implants and a face hoisted into a look of bewilderment. Simon can never remember my name.

I'm standing quite still because I don't want the dog to see me; I don't want it to stop. I want to see the dog chew those boots to bits of wet rag. And I want to see my wife's reaction when she discovers what has happened to her New York fucking boots.

Ha. The dog was her idea. I never wanted it. Not that I don't like dogs. I had them growing up on the farm. But they were working dogs—dark, lean, sullen animals that slept under rusted sheets of iron and ate raw meat off the dirt. This dog in our yard is yellow. It is big and yellow and I have to harvest its shit off the verge with a poop scoop. The dog cost one thousand dollars, and that's without the shots and the toys and the subcutaneous tracking chip inserted behind its

ear so that if I want to dump it, say, down at the swamplands or out past the abattoirs, and someone finds it and takes it to the pound, the Dog Ranger or whoever can scan its head and retrieve the details of its negligent owner on a database.

I remember the day it arrived. It was one of those mornings when you least expect everything to turn to shit. Cool, bright, a light breeze. I was in the yard hoeing the vegetable patch. The smell of turned earth reminded me of my childhood. I wouldn't say I was happy—that would be a stretch—but at least that feeling I often get, a feeling of being backed into a corner, was just a trace of what it could be. My wife was out, I don't know, buying stuff she'd seen in the pages of Home Decorator. We hadn't fought in over a month, which had to be some kind of record. My teenage son was yet to come out from his bedroom. I was alone in the cool air on my small plot of land in the suburbs, working the soil, indulging in the fancy that I was somebody else from a simpler time—a settler in a vast field, something like that—when I heard the car pull up in the drive.

My wife got out and spoke in a strange voice, high pitched, as if she was talking to a small child. I stopped hoeing and turned around. The hedge obscured my view and all I could see was her head, which moved in sudden jerks, the expression on her face changing rapidly between smile and grimace.

She came through the gate. That's when I saw the dog. It was muzzling the ground, hard on a scent, pulling powerfully on the leash. It wasn't a pup, nor was it fully grown, but its paws were large and furry, much too big for its body, and they seemed to give it tremendous torque on our freshly mown lawn. It surged forward and dragged my wife to the ground. She let go of the leash and the dog came barreling towards me, tongue flapping loose and wet. It swerved and tore across the vegetable patch and then ran laps of the garden in fast wide arcs.

'Christ, Michelle, what's going on,' I said.

'Don't start, Ray,' she said, picking herself up. Her face was flushed, her hair in a mess.

'Tell me that's not ours,' I said.

'It's ours alright,' she said, 'and its name is Benjy.'

'No, no it isn't,' I said, shaking my head. I drove the hoe hard into the ground to make my point. 'It's not ours and it's not called Benjy.'

The dog had stopped running and was shitting in the corner of the yard. It had an embarrassed look on its face.

'I thought you went to buy a rug,' I said.

'Oh, I bought the rug,' she replied. She moved slowly towards the dog, hands up by her hips, ready to pounce. She started using the baby voice again. She called the dog 'darling' and 'precious' and 'my sweet'. I leaned on the hoe and watched them. At the time I was too annoyed to see the humor, but looking back, picturing my wife chase that dog around the yard, diving full stretch only to see the leash slip through her fingers, I find it very funny. Brings a smile to my face.

I told this story about her chasing the dog to a bunch of her lawyer friends at the firm's Christmas party, and everyone laughed except my wife. Simon Maddox started to laugh, but then my wife shot him a look and he stopped. This was more evidence of them fucking behind my back.

The dog has moved onto the other boot, trying to sever the heel, gouge a hole through the toe. I'm starting to admire the animal. I walk slowly to the bench and switch on the coffee machine. The dog doesn't see me; it keeps on chewing, tearing, thrashing the thing around like captured prey. Entertaining stuff. I cast my eye across the yard. Debris is strewn everywhere. In three months the dog has tripled in size and destroyed the yard, turned it into a scarred wasteland. The vegetable patch: gone. The lawn: what lawn? Potholes and piles of shit everywhere, literally shit—some of it old and white, some of it brown and fresh, and some of it hidden under leaves waiting to be trodden on and dragged through the house.

My wife comes out of the bedroom and I turn on the radio. She's putting a diamond stud into her left ear, tilting her head away so

that she doesn't have to look at me. She walks past without saying a word and goes clack-clacking down the hallway, dragging with her a waft of perfume that I don't recognise. The dog looks up, a thread of leather hanging from its jowl, and comes bounding up the stairs and pushes through the hole in the fly-screen door—a hole it made; a hole I stopped bothering to fix weeks ago.

I go to the laundry and grab a tin of dog food from the crate. I'm buying the stuff in bulk now, shipping it in by the pallet. When we first got the dog, my wife cooked it vegetables, cracked eggs over prime meat from the butcher, and fed it three regular human meals a day. But since the dog has wrecked her couch, pissed on her new rug, and bitten through the leg of her mother's antique settee, she has pretty much disowned the thing, and its care and nurturing is up to me. I take the budget, no-hands approach.

The dog doesn't seem to mind. It eats the stinking meat as it comes sloshing out of the can, swallowing the lot in seconds. It licks it lips and looks hopefully up at me. I toss the can in the bin and say No.

My wife circles back through the house, her steps loud on the jarrah boards. She loves this house. She loves the street and the suburb. She says the name of the suburb with vulgar pride. That's why she won't leave: she wants me to leave first. It's a war of attrition. Who will be the first to blink? Not me.

I turn up the radio and pour myself coffee. Once-upon-a-time I would've made her a cup as well. Jesus, I would've brought it to her in bed with the newspaper and words of love. Not now. Not since the dog. Not since Simon Maddox. That's another funny thing: the dog has symbolized the destruction of this marriage when really it was meant to bring us closer together. How have I arrived at this exotic conclusion? I saw the page in Home Decorator, the glossy photo where my wife spotted the expensive rug. On the rug sat a Golden Retriever—much like the thousand-plus-dollar specimen in our yard—looking pensively at a happy couple snuggling on a couch drinking coffee. Go figure.

She takes her car keys from the hook above the microwave and says, 'Breakfast meeting,' and then walks towards the front door. Before leaving she says, 'Out tonight. Clients, interstate.' The door slams behind her.

Yeah, right. Interstate clients: code for boning Simon Maddox in a posh motel.

The dog is back out in the yard chewing the boots. My wife didn't get to witness it, and by the time she gets home tonight they'll be destroyed beyond recognition, just threads of evidence scattered in piles of fresh shit around the yard. The impact will be lost. I'm greatly disappointed.

Speaking of disappointments, my son comes shambling out of his bedroom, scratching the loose skin that flops over the elastic of his pajama pants. He changes the channel on the radio; I change it back. I like classical and jazz; he likes DJs talking inane shit. My son is a product of Generation Want—a generation of kids brought up where everyone wins a prize. Pass the Parcel, Treasure Hunt, Pin the Tail on the Donkey—you name it, they all win. So by the time they reach their teens, these objectionable kids, they're afflicted with perpetual want. It's incurable. The whole world owes them a favour.

What they really need is some major catastrophe, something big to shake things up, get some goddamn perspective on things. Spanish flu, nuclear blitz, I don't know. At least I grew up through recession and drought …

He glares at me through a mess of curly hair, his mothers, and does this pout, his own, that's slightly feminine, slightly nasty, that makes me want to pick up the radio and throw it at his face.

Where did it go wrong with Jayden? That's my son, Jayden, my wife's choice of name, not mine. I wanted to call him Frank, after my grandfather, a stockman, but my wife thought it too harsh, the lone syllable, the hard k. She wanted only one kid because of her career. I wanted three because I grew up with two brothers and loved it, and I couldn't care less about my career. Still don't. I'm a public health dentist. I fix people's teeth, people who can't afford proper

dentists, which my wife thought I would one day become and make us lots more money (bad luck, babe). I took the job in the health clinic because there was nothing else going. Jayden had just been born, the hours were short and flexible, and the job suited having a newborn kid. I never left.

Around the age of eight, when all the books say boys start turning to their father's for guidance, inspiration, that kind of thing, Jayden steadfastly stayed under his mother's wing. At that time my wife was moving up the ranks in the law firm, so she didn't have the time for him. As a substitute she bought him X-Box, Wi-Sport, and a flat-screen TV for his bedroom, and I haven't really seen him since. Yeah, don't worry: I tried all that cricket-on-the-street stuff, footy-in-the-park. Nothing. I tried to get him to read. Why would he read when he had all that electronic shit to keep him entertained? He even said, 'What's the point of reading?' And get this: my wife backed him up. She said kids learn so much these days through interactive media. Interactive media. Oh, please. The kid gets bored with one game and then wants something new. You guessed it: my wife buys it for him. Hell, what would I know? I'm just a public health dentist. My wife, she's a lawyer! A lawyer. Don't you just love the way lawyers are the first people in casual conversation to drop in their occupation?

Anyway, the kid is now in high school and he thinks he knows it all. He doesn't even call me dad. He calls me Ray, and he shapes his lips into that infuriating pout when he stresses the R.

Jayden eats his Coco Pops (that's right, Coco Pops … I've tried, I really have, but my wife … anyway) and returns to his bedroom. Ten minutes later he's back, dressed in school uniform, his hair set fast in a tangled mess with some kind of product my wife buys for him at her hairdresser. Don't get me started about hair. The thing is I have none. It started falling out in my twenties, just after I met Michelle. So I just shave off the stuff that remains around the sides. I haven't paid for a

haircut in years. My wife and my son? You don't want to know. She won't tell me, but I know. I check the credit card notices.

Jayden goes to the fridge and drinks juice straight from the carton. He turns to me and says, 'I need you to drive me to school.'

'What's wrong with the bus?' I say.

'I'm, like, late.'

'Then, like, catch the next bus.'

'There is no next bus, Ray.'

Again, the pout.

He leaves the juice on the bench. 'Like, now,' he says.

'Put the juice away,' I say.

He leaves the juice on the bench and grabs his school bag.

Do you see what I'm saying?

I drive the kid to school.

A block from the school he tells me to stop. He wants to get out. He doesn't want to be seen with his father. Like my wife, he is embarrassed by me, and has been since about grade two. It's funny you know, people say this happens to kids, they start feeling awkward around you, they start treating you with disdain. It's the hormones, they say. Well it never happened to me. I loved being with my father. I loved how he ran the Parents Club and refereed the soccer games and built the cricket nets at school. I loved how my teachers called him Mack and shook his hand whenever he came to pick me up. My father died when I was eighteen, but even if he were alive today I'd still think he was stronger and kinder and wiser than I ever could be.

I'm driving towards the community clinic where I work, but this feeling comes over me and I start to shake all over. It's that feeling I was talking about before — about being pushed into a corner — except this time it hits hard. I have to pull over to the side of the road. It's like I can't catch my breath, no matter how hard I try. I just can't get

enough air into my lungs. This invisible hand is shoving me in the chest, shoving me backwards, and each time I try to breath it shoves again, harder. My wife says they're panic attacks caused by a midlife crisis. That's what she said: a midlife crisis, and she said it with a curl of sarcasm on her top lip. She said if I'd just get over this midlife crisis, or whatever it is you're going through, then they'd stop. If they don't stop, she said, then it's probably some kind of heart condition. I asked her if she knew a good cardiologist. She didn't.

I turn on the radio, try to find some soothing music, some Bach, to steer the focus away from the feeling in my chest. And what I get is my wife's voice on the radio. I kid you not. The law firm where she works does commercials on the radio, and she does the voice-over for the commercials. 'If you're in an accident, come and see us at Maddox Baker and Finch.' That's what she says. That's the kind of firm she works for. That's the kind of lawyer she is. Simon Maddox, apparently, thinks she has a voice like honey. I switch off the radio.

Clubbed into dank submission. Where did I read that? Anyway, that's the feeling that settles over me in the car, the windows up, the muffled sound of traffic on the street, the engine ticking as it cools.

I'm stopped next to a parking lot for a large hardware store. Magnet Mart. Strange name for a hardware store, but that's what it is. I watch two men leaning against the tray of a small truck. They are dressed in work clothes—stained and torn khakis—and their faces are whiskered and ruddy. They have this ease about them. Or so it seems to me. It's in the way they lazily gesture with their hands and smile with their eyes. The way they slowly swat at the flies. Of course I have no idea what they're talking about. There are planks of wood piled on the back of the truck, a cement mixer, a few shovels. I watch them for five minutes, and then start to wonder when will they stop talking. When will they get in the truck and drive away, go about their business? But they keep talking. They aren't going anywhere, these two men. I get out of the car and go into Magnet Mart.

The place is enormous. For a moment it feels as if I've lost my sense of scale. I walk down a wide aisle flanked by rows of wheelbarrows strung up on ropes. There are chainsaws by the hundreds, eight kinds of shovels, drums of fertilizer stacked to the ceiling. I pass men in deep thought staring at paint, others counting screws out into weather-beaten hands. Serious men. Men with projects.

I find myself in the timber section, smelling the sawdust, listening to the banter of the carpenters. A big man in a black apron strides up to me. His nametag says Harold. Harold says, 'You got something on?'

'Pardon?' I say, confused by the question. Fights outside pubs have started with these words.

'You putting something together, garden box, pergola?'

'No.'

'Something bigger then? What, a cubby for the kids, garage extension?'

'No, but …'

'But you need some timber, right?'

'Well, I …'

Harold is looking at me, nodding his head, coaxing the words out of me.

'C'mon, what are you building?'

What am I building? More to the point, what am I doing here? What am I doing in Magnet Mart when I should be at the Health Centre extracting teeth, scraping plaque? I look up at the tall stack of timber. I picture my brothers and me with hammers and saws, laying planks, knocking in nails, building stuff—billycarts, tree houses, chicken coups. All three of us boys helped my father build a cattle yard in two days one summer. We dug holes, sunk strainer posts and belted 12-inch bolts into thick lumber. For breaks we drank tea and ate patty cakes in the shade of a box gum while my father spoke quietly of the plans for the next stint. Good honest work …

'A dog kennel,' I say.

'Good,' says Harold. 'Big, small?'

'Big. Real big. I want a palace for this thing. I want it big enough for me to fit in as well.'

Harold takes out a note pad and pen, starts writing a list. 'Right then,' he says. 'Let's get started.'

Harold follows me home in the Magnet Mart truck and we unload the materials in the driveway. He helps me carry them into the backyard.

The dog comes over and sniffs Harold's leg and he reaches down and ruffles its ears. 'Are you the fella getting the new house?' he says. Harold looks at me. 'They're good dogs, these Retrievers,' he says. 'Good, faithful dogs.'

I look around the yard and then look down at the dog. It looks back at me—big round eyes, warm and glassy. 'Yes, I suppose they are,' I say.

Harold wishes me luck and gets in his truck and drives away. I phone work, tell the receptionist I'm sick and to cancel my appointments for the day. I go back outside and start building the kennel.

The timber is cut to length and some of the joins are already fixed, so the kennel goes up fast. I have the floor laid in a couple of hours and by mid-afternoon I have the walls up. For a break I drink tea in the shade of the pear tree and listen to the Jazz program on the portable radio. The dog comes over and sits at my feet. I feed it pieces of my oatmeal biscuit.

I am about to start on the roof when Jayden (I didn't even know he was home from school) comes out into the yard eating a sandwich. He's about to ask me something, but then his mobile phone rings. He takes the call, says the words 'like' and 'no way' about ten times, and then goes back inside, laughing into the handpiece. I erect an

A-frame and start nailing down the corrugated iron. The sun is sinking into the hills and a golden light seeps into the yard. The radio says showers later in the evening. I like the sound of rain on an iron roof.

I'm woken at 2am by a car that stops out front of the house. Lights and motor go off. There are voices talking low, giggling, female and male—my wife and Simon Maddox. The dog, which was asleep at my feet, lifts its head and gives a low growl. I put my hand on its head to silence it. We listen.

There is a period—maybe five minutes—of quiet; then the banter continues, but softer now, more subdued. What was it: a kiss, a quick fuck? After a while the car starts and drives off, and my wife comes walking down the drive. She enters the yard and climbs the back steps, trying not to make a noise, I can tell. She's fumbling with her keys. Then she stops. Silence. A couple of slow paces back down the steps.

She says 'What the—?'

Now she's walking towards the kennel. The dog tries to stand but I hold it steady. Through the entrance to the kennel I can see clouds moving rapidly across the face of the moon and a soft purple light flickers over the yard. But then the light goes dull and my wife's head fills the entranceway. She reaches for her phone and shines the screen-light at my face. She recoils in surprise. 'Jesus Christ, Ray. What are you doing?'

I say nothing. I can smell the alcohol on her breath. The dog growls again.

'Be weird then,' she says. 'As if I care.'

I put my hands behind my head and recline against the wall of the kennel. She takes the light off my face and looks at her phone as a text message arrives on the screen. She steps away from the kennel, thumbing her reply on the keypad. She says, 'Seriously, Ray, what are you doing?'

I crawl forward on my hands and knees, poke my head out the doorway, and look up at her. 'I'm being faithful,' I say. And then I retreat inside the kennel.

I lie down, and the dog puts its head on my feet. Rains starts falling. I close my eyes and listen to the soft beat on the tin roof. A strange comfort comes over me. I could be anywhere.

The Virtue of Self-Discipline: Reading Tsiolkas and Foucault*

Peter Mathews
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The Slap (2008), the fourth novel by Greek-Australian writer Christos Tsiolkas, has proven a sensation in Australian literary circles since its publication. The book has won prizes and critical acclaim, and was recently adapted as an eight-part television miniseries. Tsiolkas structures his novel around the consequences that follow from an incident at a household barbecue, in which an unruly young boy is slapped by a man who is not his father. Each chapter focuses on a different character, with the central figures of Hector and Aisha surrounded by a diverse cast of characters that allows Tsiolkas to portray a wide cross-section of contemporary Australian society. The picture that emerges is hardly complimentary, with racism, religious prejudice, homophobia, and misogyny all rearing their ugly heads across the pages of the novel. While the consensus is that *The Slap* has captured the zeitgeist through its searching evaluation of 'the soul of multicultural Australia in the 21st century'—the words of Neil Mukherjee, whose review in *The Telegraph* epitomises the observations made by many other reviewers and critics—there is

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also a more subtle critique at work in this novel, one that centres on the broader ethical question of discipline and its ambiguous place in the modern world (Mukherjee).

Although this idea presents itself most conspicuously in the form of Hugo, the spoilt, undisciplined child who is slapped at the barbecue, Tsiolkas is equally interested in forms of discipline directed at one's own self. In the early pages of the novel, for instance, Tsiolkas describes the various forms of self-discipline to which Hector submits himself. When Aisha is around he 'had learned to rein his body in, to allow himself to only let go in solitude' (Tsiolkas 1). Tsiolkas describes in detail Hector's morning routine of exercises, a ritual he undertakes with relentless devotion:

> The routine was a series of exercises that he executed without fail every morning. At most, it never lasted more than twenty minutes. Occasionally, if he woke with a headache or hangover, or with a combination of both, or simply with an ennui that seemed to issue from deep within what he could only assume to be his soul, he managed to complete it all in under ten minutes. It was not strict adherence to the routine that mattered but simply ensuring its completion—even when he was sick, he would force himself to do it. (1–2)

This display of self-discipline, the narrator reveals, stems from Hector's sense of sexual self-esteem, his handsome features drawing attention from women of varying ages and attractiveness. Hector is embarrassed that his son Adam, who is obsessed with video games and other sedentary forms of entertainment, fails to emulate his physical achievements. 'He couldn't help but see his son's corpulence as a slight,' writes Tsiolkas, a strain that expresses itself as an unspoken mixture of hurt and aggression (6).

This pattern repeats itself, in turn, in the tension between Hector and Aisha over his smoking habit. Hector's daily exercise routine pales next to his wife's ability to balance her high-pressure job as a

successful veterinarian with her home life as a wife and mother, all while maintaining her own striking physical beauty. When Hector emerges from his routine looking, in the words of Aisha, 'like a bum,' Tsiolkas informs the reader that she, by contrast, 'would never leave the house without make-up or proper clothes on' (3). Just as Hector looks down on his son for failing to live up to his own standards of physical self-discipline, so too Aisha chastises Hector for his lapses. When Hector fails to quit smoking, falling back into the arms of his 'malignant lover' (4), it leads to a bitter row that again hinges on the issue of self-discipline: 'The fight was cruel and exhausting[.] […] He'd accused her of being self-righteous and a middle-class puritan and she had snapped back with a litany of his weaknesses: he was lazy and vain, passive and selfish, and he lacked any will-power' (5). For all of Aisha's self-righteousness, however, when she meets with her friends Anouk and Rosie for lunch she hypocritically lights a cigarette to calm her nerves. She later takes a second cigarette 'furtively, guiltily' from Anouk's pack, at which point Anouk observes pointedly to Rosie, foreshadowing Aisha's later infidelity: 'Has it struck you that smoking is the new adultery?' (79). Beginning with Hector and Aisha, then, Tsiolkas presents the reader with a series of characters who are caught in cycles of addiction and recovery that entangle even the most strong-willed among them.

What is new and innovative about *The Slap* is the insightful way that Tsiolkas connects discipline to the body, especially through the motif of sexuality. This line of thought resonates strongly with the work of the French theorist Michel Foucault, who similarly interprets the rise of modern disciplinary mechanisms, especially in the realm of sexuality, against the grain of his reader's expectations. While both authors are interested in the repressive effects of a puritanical approach to life and sexuality, they are equally critical of the way in which conventional attempts to overcome such a mindset can be ineffective and self-defeating. Foucault, in particular, warns his readers that guarding rigorously against puritanism can itself lead to

a kind of police mentality—'the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that […] causes us to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us,' he writes in the preface to *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) (xv). Such caveats have largely fallen on deaf ears, it seems, for Foucault's best-known concept continues to be the panopticon from *Discipline and Punish* (1975), a work that is often read simplistically as a call to arms to be 'vigilant' against the forces of repression that are inflicted on the modern individual.

Yet the addictions and flaws that mar the lives of the characters in Tsiolkas's novel can hardly be said to have been imposed from the outside. There is no external authority 'forcing' Hector to smoke, just as there is no one coercing Gary, Hugo's alcoholic father, to drink. While the easy assumption would be that these characters lack the required will-power to give up their addictions, such a conclusion stems from the problematic assumption that they possess an unqualified free will that allows them to throw off the chains of addiction simply by making a conscious choice to change. Tsiolkas, however, does not subscribe to such a simplistic view of human decision-making. All choices in the novel are shaped by a mixture of desire and circumstance, a symbiotic relationship in which one factor shapes and informs the other.

Tsiolkas underscores this idea, for instance, when he writes that the initial confrontation between Hugo and Harry's eight-year-old son Rocco occurs along familiar lines because 'they were all their fathers' sons' (Tsiolkas 34). At lunch with Anouk and Aisha, Rosie similarly observes that she and her friends are 'turning into our mothers' (68). People cannot choose their parents, and yet the palette of their personality—emotionally, culturally, genetically—is shaped by this basic relationship, a point that Tsiolkas reiterates throughout the novel by highlighting the impact of parents on their children. Thus, in the light of his domineering mother Koula, the reader can see that Hector's cigarette addiction is a compensatory means of gaining a measure of emotional control in his life, that Connie's acceptance of Richie's homosexuality arises out of her own unusual upbringing,

and that Hugo's overbearing narcissism is the combined product of Rosie's misguided indulgence and Gary's self-hatred.

This model of influence is replicated, in turn, at the broader, cultural level, so that Hector and Harry are shaped by their shared Greek heritage, Aisha by her Indian parents, and Bilal by his status as both an Indigenous man and a Muslim. These influences are social currents that affect the parameters of their particular personalities. It is not a rigidly deterministic worldview, but one that is grounded instead in an evolutionary notion of chance and probability. In Tsiolkas's vision it is certainly possible to take charge of one's life—Bilal, who successfully converted to Islam in order to reform his character, is an excellent example of such a transformation—but the self-discipline required to be capable of such a step in the first place is something that also derives from one's upbringing. The capacity for self-discipline, to take hold of one's own destiny, is a learned condition that, in a paradoxical twist, is only inscribed onto people by the circumstances that educate them into this mindset—that is, by social forces are largely out of their control. Even then, self-discipline does not guarantee success, for it can easily become another twist in the history of a bad habit; with the litany of relapsed drug addicts, backsliding smokers, incurable drunks, and serial adulterers scattered throughout the pages of *The Slap* providing telling examples of this self-defeating cycle of failed reform.

Foucault's insights into the function of disciplinary practices are particularly helpful in understanding the prevailing mood of Tsiolkas's novel. Throughout his work, Foucault expresses his concern that modernity has led to a series of social controls that are grounded in the combined discourses of science (including medicine and psychiatry) and the law. In *Discipline and Punish*, he looks at some notable examples of how prison inventions, have become commonplace instruments of discipline. The repressive effects of these new technologies have been well-documented, but the deeper interest of Foucault and Tsiolkas lies in how society *produces* the individuals that inhabit its communal space. In *The Slap*, the only

visible intervention of the state occurs when Harry is put on trial for slapping Hugo, a moment of external 'correction' that Tsiolkas presents as a farcical, almost inconsequential event. The real concern lies with the ways in which his characters have been conditioned to think and behave by the various factors that shape their personalities, from social class to cultural heritage to sexual mores. The self-inflicted miseries that permeate the lives of Tsiolkas's characters are largely the product of a mindset that, in the name of liberation, has short-circuited its own logic.

Tsiolkas's characters have an ingrained suspicion of anything that compromises their autonomy, but seem blind to the slavish way in which they respond to these threats. It is this subtle shift from the critical to the ideological that Tsiolkas highlights throughout the novel, examining how discourses that formerly held out the promise of freedom and equality have led, through a perversion of their own logic, to the opposite outcome. One example is Tsiolkas's representation of feminism in the novel, such as the scene where Anouk finds herself accosted by a trio of teenage girls who shove her to one side without a word of apology. Anouk laments the situation: '[A]s much as I hate to say it, I think we feminists have helped create it. These little bitches think they have the right to do anything they want but they don't care about the consequences' (68). Tsiolkas is not condemning feminism as such, but is pointing out instead how a mode of social critique can be hijacked, transforming the logic of female affirmation into a means for turning women against each other, in direct contradiction to its original goals. Such perversions of logic occur at the expense of legitimate analysis, with the teenagers that Anouk encounters, for instance, representing the end product of this ideological simulacrum of feminism. It is as though the propagation of critical messages, rather than providing society with the capacity for insight into its problems, has succeeded only in inoculating it from the process of genuine reform.

In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1976) Foucault, ever a sceptic about the possibility of uncomplicated liberation, puts

forward the more subtle thesis that discipline is an *ambivalent* tool that may be used for a range of outcomes and purposes. Perhaps the most startling of his observations occurs in Chapter 4, in which he attempts to trace a timeline for the development of modern sexuality. Dismissing as simplistic the popular view that sexuality underwent a phase of increasing repression beginning in the seventeenth century from which the relative sexual freedom of the twentieth century has slowly released us, Foucault instead points to the latter part of the eighteenth century as a crucial transitional period:

> It was during […] the end of the eighteenth century … that there emerged a completely new technology of sex; new in that for the most part it escaped the ecclesiastical institution without being truly independent of the thematic of sin. Through pedagogy, medicine, and economics, it made sex not only a secular concern but a concern of the state as well; to be more exact, sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance. (116)

Writing at the end of a century that had spent the bulk of its fury on condemning the banality, greed, and puritanical hysteria of the bourgeoisie, Foucault unexpectedly seeks to overturn the conventional view of this class's ambitions. For that narrative to fit, Foucault argues, the new disciplinary technologies ought to have been aimed primarily at the lower classes in an attempt to place them under the watchful eye of the state. Instead, it was the exact opposite that occurred:

> If one writes the history of sexuality in terms of repression, relating this repression to the utilization of labour capacity, one must suppose that sexual controls were the more intense and meticulous as they were directed at the poorer classes; one has to assume they followed the path of greatest domination and the most systematic exploitation: the young adult man […] had to be

> the primary target of a subjugation destined to shift the energy available for useless pleasure toward compulsory labour. But this does not appear to be the way things actually happened. On the contrary, the most rigorous techniques were formed and, more particularly, applied first, with the greatest intensity, in the economically privileged and politically dominant classes. (120)

At first, such a move appears to make little sense—why would the ruling classes apply repressive techniques to themselves first? Wouldn't it make more sense for them to use these mechanisms to control the working classes instead? The answer, explains Foucault, lies in the ambiguous nature of discipline, which is not only repressive, but may also be used as a positive tool to attain other goals, a function that is all too often overlooked and ignored.

Foucault dismisses as absurd the notion that the ruling classes are 'repressing' themselves. Rather, the bourgeois class embraced self-discipline as a mode of self-empowerment, stifling their desires in order to gain in control and efficiency. It is thus the 'idle' woman of the household, Foucault points out, who becomes the first target of sexual discipline, leading to a 'hysterisation of woman' that could be used to justify a constant process of monitoring and surveillance for the sake of protecting her 'health' (that is, her sexual virtue) (121). A parallel concern surrounds the adolescent children of the upper classes, 'not the child of the people, the future worker who had to be taught the disciplines of the body, but rather the schoolboy […] who was in danger of compromising not so much his physical strength as his intellectual capacity, his moral fiber' (121). While the initial implementation of these strategies might at first glance seem repressive, Foucault argues, their actual goal appears to be to inculcate a kind of 'inner' virtue in their subjects that transforms them into self-empowered, disciplined individuals.

> It seems in fact that what was involved was not asceticism […] but on the contrary an intensification of the body, a problematization

> of health and its operational terms: it was a question of techniques for maximizing life. The primary concern was not repression of the sex of the classes to be exploited, but rather the body, vigor, longevity, progeniture, and descent of the classes that 'ruled.' This was the purpose for which the deployment of sexuality was first established, as a new distribution of pleasures, discourses, truth, and powers; it has to be seen as the self-affirmation of one class rather than the enslavement of another[.] (122–3)

It was not until well into the nineteenth century that this bourgeois phenomenon of the deployment of sexuality began to be applied to the lower classes. Despite the extension of these ideas and practices into the general population, 'sexuality is originally, historically bourgeois, and […] it induces specific class effects' (127). The key insight that Foucault provides is that this quest for control is not primarily about sexuality—it is about an affirmation of the self, a will to power that, through self-discipline, seeks to stake its own political claim on society.

It is the widespread failure of Australian society to cultivate the virtue of self-discipline that has led to the self-defeating behaviours on display in the novel. When Aisha points out that 'Hugo is only a child. He doesn't know better,' for instance, Hector replies: 'Exactly the damned problem. He doesn't know better because he has not been taught to know better' (Tsiolkas 338). Hugo has not been socialised into the standards of behaviour expected by the rest of society, leaving him to flounder in the self-indulgent waters of his own narcissism. Thus, 'the supposed enlightened and child-focused philosophies that underpinned Rosie's approach to motherhood' (392) are undermined by the fact that Hugo is deprived, by his parents' indulgence, of the internal capacity for self-control that will allow him to succeed later in life. When the protective veil of his parents withdraws, Hector points out, Hugo will likely experience a reality check that will damage rather than correct him. Robbed of a sense of virtue by his parents, Hugo stands as a testament to a society in which liberalism, in the name of freedom and personal choice, defeats its own stated goals.

The way in which this problem of self-discipline cuts across disparate communities shows that the issues in *The Slap* go beyond the particularities of any one culture and reflect instead the broader complications of modernity. That is why Tsiolkas's novel connects so strongly with Foucault's work, even though the latter's historical focus is largely drawn from French culture. In the same way that Foucault traces the way in which the modern tools of prison culture (timetables, examinations, surveillance) can cross over cultural lines and contexts, so too the shift in class values outlined in *The History of Sexuality* also resounds, at different local speeds and variations, across the modern world. Because Australia is a relatively young society, it lacks the deeply entrenched hierarchies and traditions that mark the old world societies of Europe and Asia. To 'be an Aussie,' as Manolis envisions it in *The Slap*, is to lack any formal ties to the past, to inhabit a living space that, from the perspective of his upbringing, makes it equivalent to being 'cultureless' (347). The apparent freedom that such an escape from the old ties offers presents a different kind of problem: with no standard of behaviour, how can Australians possibly formulate their own set of values? The flaw that Hector identifies in Hugo's character—that he 'doesn't know better because he has not been taught to know better' (338)—echoes the broader condition of Australian culture.

But the key battleground for Tsiolkas, as with Foucault before him, lies with the body and its relationship to desire, especially sexual desire. Tsiolkas, as we observed earlier, presents a challenge to the notion of an unfettered free will by examining the influential role played such factors as class, education, ethnicity, gender, and family. Sexuality is important, Foucault explains in 'A Preface to Transgression' (1963), because it makes us acutely aware of the liminal space of our existence, where it becomes impossible to determine the difference between inside and outside:

> We have not in the least liberated sexuality, though we have, to be exact, carried it to its limits: the limit of consciousness, because it

> ultimately dictates the only possible reading of our unconscious; the limit of the law, since it seems the sole substance of universal taboos; the limit of language, since it traces that line of foam showing just how far speech may advance upon the sands of silence. (30)

Not only are the objects of human desire external to our existence, but so too are the social forces that have shaped us to want those things in the first place. As Foucault points out in this passage, it is the unsettling origins of our sense of intimacy that, in desire, can make us feel alienated and distant from our own selves.

For Tsiolkas this question of agency has enormous practical and ethical consequences. When desire seizes us, it does so without our consent. Desire is thus never a straightforward matter of choice, and so it is crucial, from an ethical perspective, that people are capable of distinguishing whether a desire accords with or violates their sense of themselves. At the most prosaic level, the reader can see this dynamic in the slap that is inflicted on Hugo, especially when viewed through the ambivalent eyes of Aisha. Even though Aisha maintains outwardly that Harry should not have hit Hugo, the reader suspects that she is not entirely sincere in this matter—as it turns out, she secretly harbours resentment against Harry for beating his wife, and she allows this feeling to trump her deeper belief that Hugo needs to be disciplined, a sentiment she lets slip in a later conversation with Connie. The slap thus functions in the novel as a metaphor of how desire seizes hold of its object without asking any kind of permission. What ultimately matters is how the slap is received: whether it is rejected as a brutal act of injustice (as in Hugo's dubious case) or whether it is accepted as the expression of just indignation (such as when Aisha later slaps Richie). The perceived justice of the slap thus stems from whether or not its recipient internalises the implicit behavioural critique that accompanies the physical blow.

Tsiolkas pushes this issue further by examining the question of agency at its most controversial points. Tsiolkas frequently has his

characters take drugs, for instance, as a way of experimenting with their intentionality, probing to what extent chemicals (external) influence his characters' moods (internal) in ways that cause them to step out of their normal mindset: it is under the influence of amphetamines, for instance, that Aisha summons the courage to commit adultery with Art Xing; Harry is shown taking cocaine in the lead-up to his sexual encounters; and Connie shares what 'was close to a lesbo moment' with Jenna while on ecstasy, shortly before she proceeds half-heartedly to have sex with Ali (Tsiolkas 198). Even without the involvement of mood-altering chemicals, there are sexual moments in the novel that walk a thin line between rape and passion, perhaps none more so than this ambiguous encounter between Harry and his wife Sandi:

> 'Fuck my mouth,' she urged and took his cock once more inside her. He closed his eyes again and this time he thrust his body into her mouth. 'This it, honey, that's beautiful.' Silently, not wishing to offend her, he mouthed words to Kelly. Suck me, bitch. Come on, bitch, suck me off. […] He could see her gagging but when he stopped his thrusting she clutched his arse and pushing him deep into her. He blew his cheeks out, stifled his shout and came with savage force. Sandi refused to release him. (112–13)

Although this scene represents consensual sex between married partners, Tsiolkas subverts its intimacy by revealing to the reader that the true source of Harry's excitement comes from silently pretending that this is an act of violation and, rather than focusing on Sandi, imagining that he is being pleasured by his mistress, Kelly. The relationship between these two characters is clearly abusive, but Sandi supports Harry implicitly, imposing an internal justification in her own mind for his actions.

These examples reinforce the novel's mounting evidence that there is a widespread resistance in Australian culture to even the healthiest forms of corrective. The lack of self-discipline displayed

by its characters has infected their basic capacity for critique, often leaving them struggling violently against the very medicine they need in order to overcome their problems. Hugo is the prime example, with the slap he wails about so loudly paling in comparison with the other questionable things he encounters in the novel, such as his parents' constant fighting and his exposure to pornography. The refusal to accept criticism breeds a reactive form of aggression, the seeds of which have clearly been planted in Hugo when he proclaims: 'No one is allowed to touch my body without my permission' (43). Hector provides a silent response: 'How about when he kicks someone or hits out at another kid? Who gives him permission to do that?' (43). Hugo's words show that he is learning to justify his own bad actions, a rhetorical trick that will allow him to fend off genuine attempts to correct his conduct. The worst example of this kind of behaviour in the novel, though, is when Connie tells Richie that Hector raped her. Motivated by pain and confusion over Hector's decision to end their affair, Connie's lie allows her to create a fantasy in which she is in charge of events. Tsiolkas reveals the full extent of Connie's duplicity as the narrative unfolds, for not only does she later seem unruffled by the dubious consensuality of her sexual encounter with Ali, but she also allows a traumatised Richie to be an unwitting scapegoat when he tells Connie's story to Aisha—an incident that ends, in a gesture of poetic irony, with Aisha, a loud critic of Harry's original strike against Hugo, slapping Richie. In the cases of both Connie and Hugo, Tsiolkas is not downplaying the horror or injustice of either rape or physical assault. Instead, he is pointing the way in which the selfishness and lack of discipline of these two characters are a form of crying 'wolf,' drawing attention to their purely imagined mistreatment in a way that distracts from the prevention of actual abuses.

The most successful characters in *The Slap*, from the point of view of self-discipline, are Bilal and his wife Shamira, who together have 'shed their pasts and grown new, vastly different skins' (71). Tsiolkas provides these two characters with lowly starting points in the social order: Bilal, known as Terry before his conversion, is an Indigenous

man who struggled with alcoholism and violence throughout his youth, while Shamira, who has also escaped from a family beset by similar problems, humbly tells Gary and Rosie that she is 'really just a white-trash scrubber underneath all this' (272). The novel charts their steady rise, from the couple's newfound happiness in the discipline of their religion to the upward mobility that allows them to buy a new 'house in Thomastown' (289). The social reversal is completed when Bilal severs his family's connection to Gary and Rosie after recognising the lack of virtue in his former friends. 'You've got bad blood,' Bilal tells Gary. 'We've escaped your lot, me and my Sammi' (287). The key to Bilal and Shamira's success comes from the way they break with the empty illusion of control employed by many of the other characters. Instead, Bilal and Shamira submit their 'inner' beings to the external force of their religion—the word 'Muslim,' after all, means 'one who submits (to God).' What matters is not the particular form of their compliance (it is unlikely that Tsiolkas is trying to convince his readers to convert to Islam) but the larger truth their example reveals: if we want to gain power and self-knowledge, it is necessary at times to humble ourselves, to admit that there is wisdom and knowledge that is greater than our own, and to submit ourselves to learning its ways.

Tsiolkas thus pinpoints a crucial paradox of modernity in the course of *The Slap*, wherein this policy of strategic submission, as Foucault highlights in *The History of Sexuality*, remains the domain of the privileged classes, an idea Tsiolkas hints at in the novel's occasional ruminations on the value of a private-school education. The larger population, by contrast, is fed a message of false autonomy, told that they are in charge of their lives even though they are often lacking the necessary foundation of learning and self-discipline that makes freedom possible. Therein lies the familiar sense of ambivalence at the heart of modernity. For while the virtue that proceeds from self-discipline makes possible a meritocratic egalitarianism that could not exist before the bourgeois age, as the example of Bilal and Shamira demonstrates, these two characters are,

in truth, the exception that proves the rule. Tsiolkas shows in *The Slap* that the democratic ideal of Australian society continues to split and crack along the all-too-familiar lines of class, so that those who need the virtue of self-discipline the most are the ones least likely to be exposed to its rigours.

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Sleeping with Rivers

Cath Drake

Every morning she wakes up with rivers
and their hair-thin capillaries freshly cut across her face.

Yet her pillow is soft down, its cover brushed cotton,
and she's tried orthopedic beds. Her father says she sleeps hard,

that the force of her sleep creates currents across her cheeks,
that she craves the heavy suction of sleep drawing her downward

towards the earth like a heavy stone thrown down a well.
She says she travels in her sleep, first rivers then oceans,

enveloping dunes, forest canopies, snow-crusted mountains,
along muted seabeds and the muffled linings of clouds.

She speaks with tiny plovers and godwits on their annual pilgrimage
thousands of miles for winter food, the electric tentacled

siphonophores sunk deep in the sea, and the once-thought extinct
fanged-frog teetering on a crater. In the mirror, she traces

the furrows of her searching, and as they fade during day
she feels lost, young and plain again. It won't be long,

her father tells her, when you wish you hadn't ground
down a path, and every morning was just as pink as the last.

But she wants blemishes, she wants to speak of wingtips,
the languages of light, the shock of oxygen-less worlds

where creatures are created by their impossible
journeys through air, water, earth.

point and line

Jesse Shipway

1

thumbs chewed off and pinned at the corners like pegs to the edge of a camp-site world at the washing line in zinky lips the endless suck and kiss the fly meat pies the sea the grass the stones the shells, a marriage bed my daughter's twigs and nut-pink flowers are pretty—she likes ice cream at the beach the wavelets there reflect the sun like a new highway or saltbush at the heads or a little sandstone mill. Perhaps the tooth of cottage graft is good to sharpen folds of steel or coax a family into rock like rigid gloves

the database has powered down first impressions of a deep-sea port missile tests that froth the shore the loyal fuse starts burning out every sign you thought was sweet every misread sign of age every sign of misread age every fake précis every orphaned tone the shallow faces brut mirage—me and my city and our past; a prisoner can be *happy* should be happy he said and signed my release. the city lost its tail to bliss- waiting for glass blowers on small mountains rust red rivers running to a whale of massive sludge.

2

The trucker relays shots of you beside the road cooling off with a girl he's seen before under pressure at the tap he snicks his blade next morning a toneish girl leaning up against the red curvy car parked next to the road closer to the hood than the trunk pushing off from the shoulder and walking round to the passenger door bending toward the seat holding on to the roof for balance steam rising from the radiator he could see to the horizon, keen to the differences between himself and the kids who hung around the hawthorn lane.

3

Free inside his pompous rig—to scratch his leg or pick his nose—a microwave to heat his food if for some strange reason he's further than a drive-through place than he thinks he should be but worlds unfold he prays the fluid chord of anchor's time the flick of light in a cobalt cage prising open gummy lids (*vishnu, aton*) and thought streams back to Carthage dreams and being, the tempered self, the store of voice and nothing left the pegs the wind mountains mean more men! pegs in the dirt somewhere new horizon square holes round holes plastic pegs wooden pegs made in guangzou (sic) he feels his wings begin to stir the spine of feathers fanning out.

4

or else you break down—coiled around the maypole water coloured belts set free lions sea and sex; platelets of salty thought—none outside we breathe Charybdis. Hegel-Marx; Lacoue Labarthe the front of horse its withers cracked. Can a world without bearing turn back on its feet? the world is heads for that they matter both ways up for other minds kaput in peace contract reframe tyger's eye Expand or hover end and cast again our gilly patient chalk stream bank (on cliff's edge leaning in, counting being with rector's eyes)

> *some time ago i worked at a pizza shop in*
> *a suburb south of hobart. i lived there too*
> *on and off when i was a kid—my father*
> *had a new family and they lived there. but*
> *i had lived there before them too so i felt*
> *a certain claim to the place that I knew*
> *would be demobbed.*

then an architect friend of mine hired me to write about a house his firm had built down there. *impressions inches thick, the delicate crust, above a creek, that deltas out, the grains like cake that show the smooth, soft underneath more thorough beds of ocean sand.*

Time Travel

J. K. Murphy

I will step back to the bank of Deep Creek,
Its surface a still-scape: sun-oiled, steep heat.
I'll hang out to press steadfast flesh:
Old-timers, eyes bright

As blue crystals in suspension.
And I'll stand on a grass-fat rise
Overlooking houses, doors unlocked.
Cradles on verandahs rocking and chuckling

Back and forth, as if beginnings have no endings.
Cameron's grocery is busy: the grocer flicking
And fastening a string around a pound of flour.
Akubra on my head—and wondering how

The hare wears heavy heat—
I'll be that stockman read about,
Unjust heat on him, hat on head.
Riding furiously to save his neck.

Largely it will be a sedate step back
Standing on the bank in Billibellary's footprint:
He who lifted a fat trout on cotton thread.
And if my angled line borrows

The splashing curve of an otter,
I'll admire the rainbow's tinge
Then slip it back
Into the swim of its beginnings.

Bay

John Kinsella

He'd lost his car key in the sand between the car and the great granite boulder that jutted into the sea at low tide, surrounded at high tide. He cursed himself for removing it from the key ring so his new girlfriend could use the house keys. He was going to get a third set (his son had the other set) cut the next morning. It wasn't a big expanse of beach, and he could probably reduce the key's 'drop zone' to a straight if thick line, zeroing in on where he'd been sitting near a rocky ledge, but there was still enough sand to mirror the infinitude of the cosmos. He was in no mood for appreciating the irony of this place being called Little Bay.

Yet it was an exquisite place. It was where he most enjoyed being. If it were possible, he'd have lived on the beach. It was isolated, and there were rarely more than a handful of people on its brilliant white crescent at any given time. But this was a warm day, and school holidays, and everyone who knew about it, plus tourists who'd been surfing the internet, seemed to have turned up. In the time he'd been down there—what, an hour?—how many people could have trampled the key, the solitary key, deeper into the vacuum?

He thought about the rest of his keys as he began slowly and methodically to retrace his steps, back down from the car to the beach. He thought about them being in Ania's over-sized handbag, sloshing around in the bottom with other keys, lipsticks, a compact, used cotton-buds, stale cough lollies. He shuddered under the warm sun as sunblock melted on his nose. He could taste the chemicals in his mouth. Ania wasn't much tidier than his seventeen-year-old son who'd be waiting for the car, looking out of the window for the car, playing the stereo louder and louder as he got more frustrated. Pissing the neighbours off, for sure. He was a kid with no respect.

Either side of the sandy track sloping down to the beach, a thick screen of vegetation threw shadows across the path. A southerly breeze was picking up, producing a strobe effect of shadow and light on the sand as melaleuca and wattle worked against each other. A red-eared firetail made itself known, overloading his senses almost to the point of shutdown. He kicked at the sand, which was an annoying greyish colour at this point on the climb. Why am I trying to start over again now? A 'new life'—what a joke! he said out aloud, scaring a couple of young girls traipsing up to the car park, with their parents hand-in-hand a few metres behind. The kids were still wearing ski-diving masks with snorkels dangling at the sides of their heads. Their parents looked painfully happy, leaning against each other, walking a three-legged race with poise and equanimity.

She really *is* too young for me, he suddenly thought. I mean she's over twenty-five, but I've still got fifteen years on her. Fifteen long bloody years.

And then he thought he saw a silver glimmer. The key catching the sunlight. He fell to his knees and sifted the almost dirty sand. Shit, only a bottle-top. Makes you sick, people rubbishing such a beautiful place. Should be some serious punishment for littering a national park. Not just the pat on the wrist they give out when they even bother at all. He was feeling vindictive. He wasn't usually that way; it wasn't how he saw himself. He continued to crawl on his

hands and knees, wanting to bite the ankles of curious passers-by who had been churning up the sand ahead of him.

Pulling himself up to his feet, he scanned the bay, as much out of habit as anything else. He was at the point where the beach joined the track, his favourite spot. He loved coming here in the early mornings and looking out at the sun sparking the ocean. In all weathers — even winter, when great breakers lifted from the deep and sucked the sand away, replacing it with another cycle of sand laundered on the most heavy-duty wash. It would be good to have someone sharing the running of the house. She wasn't doing much yet, but she was still settling in, making friends with the boy as he lazed around, slouching. He said, Dad, she's too hot for you!

Where the greyish sand of the track mingles and blurs with the pristine white of the beach. A nexus. A decision had to be made. He needed to be systematic. He'd always been that. Meticulous in his habits.

He shaded his eyes with one hand, and surveyed the sand. I've never noticed how *messy* people make the sand. He thought of the long-jump back in his school days, his delight in raking the pit flat, ironing out the impressions of the previous jumper. The satisfaction. How indecisive people are on beaches. Back and forth, wandering around, pushing it one way, then the next.

The sand scratched his toes as he slowly moved forward. He would never delight in bare feet on a sandy beach again. The great granite boulder beckoned. Already, small waves frothed around its sea-edge. The light blue shallows with their moody patches of weed were changing. The tide was ever so slowly returning. The dark blue of what quickly became very deep sea was lapping and gurgling forward. The southerly would bring the chop and waves that would help propel conical shells up with the swell, surging onto the beach to glint pointedly in the sun. Sometimes it brought weed, but mostly that was sucked back as it left the clear shallows where King George whiting darted around, camouflaged by light and rippled sand.

He gently parted the sand with his feet, half forming letters and numbers, then rubbing them out. He yelled at a teenage boy, who ran past laughing, to have some respect and stop churning the beach up like a trail-bike. The kid ignored him or said something like: Fuck off … but he couldn't decide, because it merged with the sibilance of the breeze.

As for his ex-wife, she would have been chewing his ear off. Wouldn't she *love* to see him now, desperate for the key. That's why I left you, loser, she'd say … it's why I married a better man, one with the foresight to own a metal detector! Yes, he thought, but what good would that be, locked in the boot with no key to get it out. He laughed, pulling up short with another thought: his supervisor at work … No point keeping your desk so orderly if your work is never completed on time. We have deadlines, deadlines, deadlines to meet! It's got to add up, it's got to balance out. The supervisor was full of platitudes like that.

A plastic blow-up beach ball bounced its harlequin course in front of him, and he gave it a hard kick. It bounced down to the beach and into the water, tapping at the shore cocooned in a bed of froth. Hey, mate! someone yelled, That was a prick of a thing to do.

He didn't take any notice. *Key key key*. His father had put a fork through mother's inflatable li-lo during a vacation at The Bay. Barbecue the bloody sausages, he'd shrieked at her. Stop lounging about on that thing in the damned sun, turning yourself into a beetroot. And I am sick of seeing those stretch marks. That was thirty years ago, and they'd been the *only* people at The Bay. He'd been a sickly child, and the tattoo of an anchor and a mermaid on his father's left bicep terrified him. His father loathed hysteria, so the boy should have known better than to shriek: he'd seen a pod of dolphins and yelled SHARKS! SHARKS! His father had kicked him up the pants and called him a girl. But he admired his 'old man', who could build a boat or a cabinet or a cupboard better than anyone else. The glue in his workshop stank like cat's piss, a bit like the coastal vegetation of The Bay. There was something dead about it all. Long dead and

stinking to high heaven. Invisible fish corpses littering the *beautiful* white sand.

The trick of loving a place, he decided, is being able to leave it. He no longer wanted to live on the beach, at The Bay. It was an epiphany. He was big on non-religious epiphanies. Couldn't abide religion. He'd seen his cousin Lucinda eaten by a sect. They're all sects, he said to his auntie, who belonged to a gigantic sect. He didn't need to say God when he saw something as immense as the Southern Ocean stretching out beyond the headland all the way to Antarctica. That ineffable volume of water. That curving expanse all held in like swinging a bucket of water around your head. Swoosh swoosh swoosh. If the rope had snapped, the bucket could have killed someone! His dad never found out.

Hey, mate, you looking for something?

He was about to say, What does it fucking look like? when he saw the key, *his* car key, held out in front of him like a talisman. But it looked dull, not even a glint in the roaring afternoon sun. Just dull and flat and burnished by sand. A teenager held it in one thin-fingered hand. A hand so white it would be bright red after a day in the sun, smarting with protest. He vaguely recognised this teenager from somewhere. Maybe something to do with the ball he'd kicked out to sea, the ball that dribbled back to land. Yes, that teenager *was* there, on the edges … the edge of the continent … maybe he'd spoken to him. A family game of beach ball. All ages mucking around, having fun. Laughing.

He reached out to take the key, half expecting it to be snatched back. Thanks, he said instinctively, then turned back to the track and his car, turning his back on the rock, the water, the blue and the bay. He wondered how much fuel was in the tank. How far it would take him before he had to refuel.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Susan Adams is an Australian poet who has been published extensively in literary journals both in Australia and internationally. She has been read frequently on ABC Radio National. Recent publications have included *Eureka Street*, *Nth Position* (UK), *Great Works* (UK), *Eclecticism* (Aus), *Sugarmule* (USA), *Bacopa* (USA), *Hecate* (Aus,) *Social Alternatives* (Aus), *Ascent Aspirations* (Ca), *Cordite* (Aus), *The Chaffey Review* (USA). Her first book has been accepted for publication.

Karen Atkinson is currently working on a book *Kurunpa Iwytjanutjara: Stories of Anangu Teachers from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands*. She enjoys writing prose and poetry and has a story 'Myfanwy' published in *Cat Tales*, Spinifex Press, 2003. *Once In Broome*, published by Magabala Books, 2007, was a collaboration between Karen and Broome artist Sally Demin. 'The Nest' was the winner of 2011 Peter Cowan 600 Short Story Competition.

Luke Beesley was born in Brisbane and is the author of *Lemon Shark* (Soi 3 Modern Poets). He has received numerous awards for his poetry, most recently a Creative Fellowship from the State Library of Victoria. His second book, *Balance*, will be published by Whitmore Press in 2012. He lives in Melbourne.

Steve Brock lives in Adelaide and is both translator and poet. His first collection, *the night is a dying dog*, was published in 2007. Steve received a grant from Arts SA to complete his current poetry manuscript, *Double Glaze*.

Nadine Browne is a writer and performance poet published in *Antipodes*, *Blue Giraffe*, *Page Seventeen* and *Crikey!* She won the 2009 Maj Monologues and the 2011 WA Poetry Slam, coming runner-up in the National Poetry Slam finals. She has performed at Cottonmouth spoken word night and the popular Barefaced Stories in Perth, WA. She is the founder and facilitator of Writer's Block Party, a weekly meeting for writers at the Katherine Susannah Pritchard Writers Centre in the Perth hills. Her most recent writing residency was spent at the beautiful Varuna Writers House in NSW 2011, where she worked on her novel due out in 2012.

Sam Byfield has published a chapbook (*From the Middle Kingdom,* Pudding House Press) and is finalising his first full-length collection, *Borderlands.* His work has appeared extensively in Australia and internationally. He has also published articles on foreign policy and international development in a range of newspapers and journals.

William Byrne is an emerging South Australian poet in his mid-twenties. He has always lived in rural and costal townships, excluding an urban interlude for university study for degrees in architecture and design.

Gabrielle Carey teaches non-fiction writing at the University of Technology, Sydney. She is presently working on a book about Randolph Stow. She delivered the inaugural Randolph Stow Memorial lecture at UWA in 2011.

Josephine Clarke writes short stories and poetry. She is an active member of the Fremantle-based Out of the Asylum Writers' Group and helps run Voicebox—monthly poetry readings at Clancy's Fish Pub, Fremantle. 'Pruning', was commended in the 2011 Tom Collins Poetry Competition.

Sue Clennell has recently released a poetry CD *The Van Gogh Cafe* and has had poems published in *The Weekend Australian*, *Indigo*, *Poetry NZ*, *Unusual Work*, *Dotdotdash* and *Best Australian Poems 2011*. She has also had a short play performed at Sydney's Short & Sweet Festival 2012.

Cath Drake is an Aussie lured to the literary delights of London who has been published in anthologies and magazines in UK, Australia and US. She has performed her work in cafes, bookshops, theatres, festivals, at Southbank, Tate Modern, and for unsuspecting passers-by. She's also a non-fiction writer and award-winning journalist. http://cathdrake.wordpress.com/

Ann Egan is a poet and historian from the borders of counties Laois and Offaly, now living in Kildare. Ireland. Her poetry collections are *Landing the Sea* (Bradshaw Books) and *The Wren Women* (Black Mountain Press). Her third, *Before,* is forthcoming. A novel, *Brigid of Kildare*, was published in 2001.

Tim Edwards is a Perth poet who has published in a variety of journals including *Quadrant, Eureka Street, Island, Heat* and *Indigo,* as well as *The Australian* newspaper.

Susan Fealy is a poet and clinical psychologist who lives in Melbourne. She began writing poetry regularly five years ago. Her poems were published last year in *Axon*, *Etchings*, *Island*, *Meanjin* and *The Weekend Australian* and have been anthologised in *The Best Australian Poems 2009* and *2010* (Black Inc.).

Jesse Patrick Ferguson has published poems and reviews in ten countries, in both print and online formats. Some highlights include: *Canadian Literature*, *The New Quarterly*, *Prairie Fire*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Walrus*, *Poetry* and *Harper's.* His work has also been anthologised in *Best Canadian Poetry in English 2009*, edited by A.F. Moritz. Jesse has helped to edit several Canadian literary journals including *The Fiddlehead*, and in fall 2009 he published his first full-length poetry collection, *Harmonics* (Freehand Books). He is also a folk singer and multi-instrumentalist.

Kevin Gillam is a West Australian poet with three books of poetry published, *Other Gravities* (2003) and *Permitted to Fall* (2007) both with Sunline Press, and "Songs sul G" in *Two Poets* (2011) with Fremantle Press. He works as Director of Music at Christ Church Grammar School.

J**onathan Hadwen** is a poet from Brisbane. He has been published in *Southerly*, *Overland*, *Westerly*, *Eureka Street*, and *Page Seventeen* as well as other publications in Australia and overseas. In 2010, his micro-collection *Night Swim* was published as part of the Brisbane New Voices series.

Fiona Hile's poems have been published or are forthcoming in *The Age*, *Overland*, *Shearsman*, *Rabbit* and elsewhere. Her chapbook, *The Family Idiot*, was published by Vagapond Press in April 2012. She is currently completing a PhD on Michel Houellebecq and J.M. Coetzee at the University of Melbourne.

Virginia Jealous is a poet and travel writer. She lives out of a suitcase and on the road when not at home in Denmark, WA.

Nicholas Jose is Professor of English and Creative Writing at The University of Adelaide and a member of the Writing and Society Research Centre at the University of Western Sydney. He has published novels, short fiction, essays, translations and a memoir and was general editor of the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature*.

Christopher (Kit) Kelen (客遠文) is a well-known Australian scholar and poet. The most recent of Kelen's ten volumes of poetry are *God preserve me from those who want what's best for me* (Picaro Press, 2009), in conversation with the river, published in 2010 by (VAC, Chicago, USA, 2010), and *China Years — Selected and New Poems* (ASM, Macao). In 2010, Kelen's poem 'time with the sky' was placed second in the Newcastle Poetry Prize. For the last eleven years Kelen has taught Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Macau in south China. He is currently on sabbatical, writing a book about national anthems.

Noel King was born and lives in Tralee, Ireland. His poems have been published in over thirty countries in numerous journals such as *Busswrable*, *Fresh*, *Jamm*, *Masque Noir*, *New England Review*, *Otherland*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Polestar Writer's Journal*, *Quadrant*, *Reader's World*, *Spin*, *Social Alternatives*, *Studio, Tamba* and *The Mentor*. His collection *Prophesying the Past* is published by Salmon Poetry. He edits DOGHOUSE Books, a poetry imprint.

John Kinsella's many volumes of poetry include *The Silo: A Pastoral Symphony, The Hunt, The New Arcadia, Divine Comedy: Journeys Through a Regional Geography, Peripheral Light* and *Armour*. He is also the author of volumes of short stories, novels, plays, and criticism. He is a Professional Research Fellow at the University of Western Australia and an Extraordinary Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge University. He most recently edited a selection of Randolph Stow's poetry for Fremantle Press.

Peter Mathews is an Assistant Professor of English in the Department of English Language and Literature at Hanyang University in Seoul, South Korea. He holds a PhD. in Comparative Literature from Monash University. Exploring the intersection between ethics and literature in his work, he has published extensively in the field of twentieth-century and contemporary fiction.

J.K.Murphy has had verse published in Australia, the UK, Ireland, Canada, the USA and New Zealand. Puncher & Wattman Press published his latest collection.

Lucas North is a Melbourne-born, Western Australian-based writer. His stories and poems have been published in Australia and North America. In 2007 he was awarded a Longlines Fellowship at Varuna Writers' House in NSW, and in 2008 was a Writer-In-Residence at the FAWWA's Tom Collins House. He is currently writing his eleventh novel, 'White Phosphorous'.

Meredi Ortega lives in WA and her poetry has been published in *indigo*, *Westerly*, and the *Science Made Marvellous* chapbooks.

Perdita Phillips is a contemporary West Australian artist who often works with places, finding traces of accidental beauty and exploring the boundaries between humans and the environment. Her media include photography, walking, sound and installation. The cover photograph was taken at the terminal moraine of Athabasca Glacier, Alberta, Canada, and comes from *A Simple Rain* (2012) by Vivienne Glance and Perdita Phillips, Lethologica Press.

John Saul has had three collections of stories published (Salt Publishing, UK). *Call It Tender* was described by *The Times* as 'witty and playful', proof that 'the short story is not only alive but being reinvigorated in excitingly diverse ways'. He has a website at www.johnsaul.co.uk.

Hannah Schürholz completed her MA at the University of Bonn, Germany, focusing on Irish drama and Australian literature. She is now a PhD candidate at La Trobe University, Melbourne. Hannah works on contemporary Australian fiction, the novels of Tim Winton in particular. In her thesis, she gives a deconstructive reading of Winton's women characters, aligning theories of self-harm, feminism and memory.

Dr. Jesse Shipway is an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Tasmania. He is currently employed as a Project Officer in the Community Mental Health Sector. He has published poems, essays and reviews in a range of publications and has work forthcoming in *Cultural Studies Review*, *PaleHouse, Beard of Bees* and *Do Not Look at the Sun.* He edits the literature site, *Anastomoo* and lives with his family in Hobart.

Annabel Smith is a West Australian author whose first novel, *A New Map of the Universe*, was shortlisted for the WA Premier's Prize for fiction. She has had short fiction published in *Westerly* and *Southerly*, been a writer-in-residence at Katherine Susannah Prichard Writers' Centre and holds a PhD in Writing. Her latest novel, *Whisky Charlie Foxtrot* will be published by Fremantle Press in November.

Warwick Sprawson writes short stories, hiking articles, corporate guff and the occasional poem. He won a second prize in a beauty contest. More mind-fluff available at www.warwicksprawson.com.

Wayne Strudwick has published in several magazines including *Wet Ink*, *Quadrant*, *Verandah*, *LiNQ* and *Famous Reporter*.

Rabindra K. Swain has had poems published in *The Times Literary Supplement, Critical Quarterly, Orbis, Acumen, Wasafiri, Contemporary Review* (UK); *The Kenyon Review, The Literary Review, World Literature Today, Shnadoah, New Letters, Verse, Quarterly West, Weber:*

Contemporary West (U.S.); *Ariel and The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad* (Canada). She is the author of four books of poems, the latest one being *Susurrus in the Skull.*

Alexander N. Tan Jr, MD graduated from the University of the City of Manila (Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila) with a Doctor of Medicine Degree. He also holds a Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy from Our Lady of Fatima University. He was a fellow at the 36th Dumaguete National Summer Writers' Workshop (1997). His short stories and poems have been published in several literary journals throughout the Philippines and the United States. He is a member of MENSA Philippines. A practising physician and physical therapist, he writes and lives in Mandaluyong City, Philippines.

Elizabeth Tan is undertaking a Creative Writing PhD at Curtin University in Perth. Her work has been published in *Voiceworks*, *dotdotdash*, *Nth Degree*, and in FableCroft's forthcoming anthology *Epilogue*.

Tim Vallence was born in Bacchus Marsh in Victoria and attended Melbourne University. He has lived in Hong Kong, Mumbai and Geneva and is currently resident in Oxford, UK.

Rose Van Son is a WA poet. She loves language and the way sounds fit together. Her poetry collection is titled *Sandfire* (3 poets) and published by Sunline Press (2012). She has been published in many journals and anthologies.

Josephine Wilson is a Perth-based writer. Her novel *Cusp* is published by the University of Western Australia Press. Her performance works include *The Geography of Haunted Places* and *Customs.* Her essays and reviews have appeared in *RealTime,* and *Artlink* magazines. She is currently writing a second novel as part of her PhD at UWA, and continues to explore poetic form.

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