

61.2

**New Writing from
Western Australia**

Fiction

Poetry

Essays

Reviews

In this Issue

Cate Kennedy

Ouyang Yu

Anne Elvey

Paul Hetherington

Timmah Ball

Westerly



What makes a tree burn like that?
Already fallen, already dead, the other trees
just hurdles to walking.

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Westerly

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The work collected in this issue of *Westerly* was chosen from general submission, without any guiding framework of theme. And yet, common threads have emerged. Many of the pieces collected tease at oppositions simmering within the concept of place. As a body of work, it looks outwards as readily as it turns in. There are pieces which are very much located, writing drawn from an intimate knowledge of a landscape, from close connection; there are works which speak to movement or even to dislocation, intimating and opening vast swathes of space in the reader's imagination. Reading these pieces together suggests the fertile tension between spaces local and national, national and global, and points to writing's capacity to reach across different worlds. Ouyang Yu explores the tensions of bilingual expression in poetry, moving across Chinese and Australian culture. We experience Ethiopia with Yirga Woldeyes and Rebecca Higgin, Chicago with D.A. Hosek, Christchurch with Ignatius Kim. And yet, with Marie O'Rourke, we also experience the space made between mother and daughter by the act of communal sewing.

There is work here that shows us ourselves. The movement between different spaces encourages us to examine the spaces we create through our engagement with the world, the movement between internal and external. Cate Kennedy offers the experience of empathy as crucial to short story writing, in an address which opened October's highly successful Australian Short Story Festival, here in Perth. Prose poetry from Paul Hetherington and Paul Munden pushes at the edges of embodied experience, explores being-in-the-world. In contrast, Timmah Ball's essay asks sharp questions of contemporary Australian society, drawing this tension between people and places out to the scale of nation.

Ball's essay, along with work from Marie Munkara, introduces the involvement of Elfie Shiosaki in *Westerly's* publication, as our first Editor for Indigenous Writing. Her efforts in this issue follow on from our last

print issue (61.1), which was dedicated to a celebration of Indigenous writing and culture. We are excited to have Elfie working with us, and look forward to seeing what her editorship will produce. Many thanks to the Australian Council for the Arts for their support in funding this position.

I feel very lucky to be working with *Westerly*. Support from grant funding like this, alongside the support constantly coming in from our subscribers and readers, has meant that we have been able to keep going at a time where this has proven difficult for many. We have been buoyed by the quality of the writing received in submissions, and will be thrilled in our next issue to introduce the five emerging writers selected to participate in the first intake of our Writers' Development Program. My heartfelt gratitude goes to all the writers and readers who, through your engagement with *Westerly*, make it what it is. Huge thanks also to the team, including our super interns and in particular Lucy Dougan and Nina-Marie Thomas, for all the work that has been done this year.

Catherine Noske, editor, November 2016

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The Empathy App Cate Kennedy

Cate Kennedy writes fiction, non-fiction and poetry. She has twice won *The Age* short story competition, as well as a Victorian Premier's Literary Award for her poetry collection *The Taste of River Water* (Scribe 2009). Her first story collection *Dark Roots* was shortlisted for the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal (2007) and now features on the Victorian Literature syllabus. Her second collection, *Like a House on Fire*, was the recipient of the Queensland Literature Prize (2013).

The following was first delivered as the opening night keynote address at the inaugural *Australian Short Story Festival*, in Perth on October the 21st, 2016.

We're all familiar with the general trend at Writers' Festivals to make some room on the program—sometimes a bit dutifully—for short stories, and by and large the talk seems to be divided between how the form is not as respected as it should be, and its practitioners not given the publication attention they deserve, and discussion about whether or not the short story is experiencing a 'renaissance' of popularity and recognition, or not.

It's great to be at a festival where we don't need to start from a position of defense or as apologists. We're all here as lovers of the form for its own sake. Over the course of the weekend, I am sure we'll talk about the short story 'industry' (such as it is), publication opportunities and the market for our work, our various practices, and so on, but since it's fallen to me to grab the talking stick first, I want to leave those facts and figures and statistics and publications and networking opportunities aside just for now. I want to do, instead, what writing a story demands we do, and that is immerse myself in the why, rather than the how.

What's it for, really? Why do it? What does it give us, that keeps us coming back for more? What's this hardwired impulse to keep pursuing it, or being pursued by it? What makes this form so fascinating, and brings

us all here tonight, round this particular fire, full of this expectation of pleasure and connection and enlightenment?

Here's our speaker/listener contract, pretty much identical to our writer/reader contract: I'll speak for a little while and try to keep your attention, and you'll listen, and hopefully we'll both finish up at more or less the same time.

So, why write stories? Sooner or later in your writing 'career' you'd better come up with some kind of answer for yourself, because you're going to be asked this. You'll be asked by relatives at Christmas lunch or some tedious family reunion. You'll be asked by sardonic kids in Year 10 who simply can't see the point—either of reading, or of you. You'll be asked by people who appear genuinely baffled, then bend your ear for the duration of your encounter with unsolicited story ideas.

It's right up there, in short, with 'Where do you get your ideas?'

I've tried quite a few times to explain how these questions feel indivisible, or how sometimes, there's just the pleasure in the practice of something, akin to playing a particular musical instrument. Or that it's like close up magic; the delight—the glee, almost—of learning how to arrest and control someone's attention, convincing them, just for a moment, that you are showing them something conjured out of the air which still seems possible, and 'real'.

Let's try this for an explanation which people might understand. I've got this app. It's free. When you open it up, you get to be whoever you want. You get to step into the skin of someone else, someone whose inner life you'd never before imagined. You get to look out at the world through their eyes—and what a different place it is—experience their griefs and joys, their limitations, their hidden reasons, their epiphanies. It's a kind of multidimensional virtual reality program, and once you come out of it, you'll never be quite the same again.

Tired of being in your own head? Filled with a restless conviction that surely it doesn't have to be like this, surely we can imagine something better, more coherent, more lucid, less random, cruel and arbitrary? I've got an app for that. We've all got it, taking up a trillion gazillion gigabites on our hard drive—in fact, dammit, it IS our hard drive; it's our mainframe operating system. I want to say that we do it because we've evolved to do it—to use this thing like a prism, like a filter, like a translation engine, to make a bit more sense of the world.

Let's just stop and think about this blisteringly obvious thing for a moment, because God knows life is busy and we spend most of it oblivious or stressed-out or distracted or asleep:

WE GET TO MAKE STUFF UP.

We get to create a three-dimensional world out of the alphabet, out of marks we make on a page. If we do it well enough, that world can feel so real to a reader that we can provoke a physiological reaction in them. We can provoke them to laughter or tears, to psychic pain, to revolution. A reader we will probably never meet, incidentally, but let's stick with the reward of the writing itself for a moment. Not the reward of publication or recognition, or any of those drivers we're taught to value ourselves so completely by in this success-driven world, but the solace of the process itself.

We're our own 'first reader' after all, and I'm pretty sure I'm not just speaking for myself when I say I am driven to write—just as I am driven to read, and always have done—the kind of story that won't leave me feeling disoriented, cheated or disappointed at the end.

It's a very basic drive, and it gets me centred. Everything else wilts a bit into the background in the face of that desire. It lets me see how much I love—need, really—drive and shape, meaning, patterns, fulfilled expectation, things coming out satisfyingly right. Not necessarily happily, but with a sense of causation and proportion and, well, justice. I've got pattern hunger. I want to keep going to get it told, to do justice to it, so I'll transpose that desire onto characters that I invent, and just hope like hell another human being will also voluntarily enter that imaginary world, and absorb those ideas, internalise them, project their own desires onto that avatar of a character.

That's how I get to stop the incoming rush of stimulus and experience, the stuff happening every day that I don't notice and therefore miss. Just occasionally, I don't miss it. Like you, my attention is suddenly seized. I love how the words we use for this moment—being seized, being arrested, being riveted—all suggest being stopped suddenly in our tracks. Something grabs our attention. In a moment of acute awareness, we see the relationships and connections that swirl around us. As Wordsworth said, in 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey', 'We see into the life of things.' We have a little intuitive epiphany. And occasionally, again, we don't just ponder it and let it go. We are moved to want to make something out of it.

We live in a world of flux, in a vast wash of experience and perception, and it sometimes seems to me that the only thing we have any real control over is what we invent. We have our material, and we have our capacity and desire to make something good out of this material. In the life of the mind, how do we get a grasp on all those layers, and stop the material all slipping sideways, and just hold it all together?

We can make a short story. Because a short story, in my opinion, has two very specific things going for it. First, it has a pivotal point. We're

in control of the pivot. We can hold our material, and just breathe for a minute and gather our inventiveness, and we can turn our material, and stitch those slippery layers in place. We can do a 180 degree turn—the most effective and powerful thing a character can do in a story, too, when you think about it—and we can make a reader do that unexpected and beautiful turn as well. We can carry them along on that dynamic change of course, in the current of the stuff we’ve made up, to show ourselves and, in turn, them, something that feels true. Something made.

The second thing a story has is narrative. However you play it, in a story, *this* happens, then *this*, and because of that, *this*. Again, it’s so obvious we grow blind to it, but just consider the power of a medium that can do that. We engage in terms of narrative. That’s different to a painting or a piece of music. All the other art forms can be transporting—and splendidly so—but only prose on the page puts us into the consciousness of someone we’re not. We project ourselves into the story parabolically, thinking not only ‘What are they going to do next?’ but more crucially ‘What would I do, if that was me?’

The story doesn’t work for us unless we willingly enter into this state, of trying another person’s view of the world on for size. Perhaps what we call a ‘suspension of disbelief’ should be called a suspension of subjectivity, or a suspension of limitation.

At the last Perth Writers’ Festival, I read that a highly popular event was a project titled ‘A Mile in my Shoes’:

A Mile in My Shoes is an empathy shoe shop, where visitors are invited to walk a mile in the shoes of a stranger—literally. Housed in a giant shoebox, this interactive exhibition contains a collection of shoes and audio stories that offers a snapshot into the breadth and diversity of who we are in Western Australia. You simply choose a pair of shoes—that may belong to a refugee, a sex worker or a FIFO operator—and walk a mile listening to the personal story of the shoe owner’s life. (Perth Writers Festival, 2016)

I’ve got an app for that. We all do. It’s one we started downloading the day we were born, (or possibly even before) and one humans have been using now for around 65,000 years, the experts tell us. We just keep finding new ways to practice using it.

So while we’re talking about the form, and new platforms for the form, and radical re-imaginings of ways to disseminate it and share our work, remember this—short stories are old. Paper and printing is new—a blip,

really, on the continuum, and digital readers are even newer. But story is old, and a story which can be told and retained at one sitting is the king, because that’s how oral cultures work. The story must be honed to perfection to be passed on intact, with all the crucial elements in place, over generations—that thing’s alive, and useful. Pay attention to those stories. They are immaculate distillations.

Like the Elder story of the small girl who feels torn and conflicted inside, and tells her grandmother: ‘Why do I sometimes feel so full of anger then full of love and pride?’ Her grandmother says: ‘Oh, that’s because two wolves live inside you—one wolf who is fierce and vengeful, always ready to fight, and the other wolf who is loyal and calm, and has learned to sit with its power. And these two wolves fight for supremacy inside you, all the time, each wanting to dominate.’ The little girl asks: ‘Which wolf is going to win?’ And the grandmother answers: ‘The one you feed.’

Five sentences. We are the only species on this planet that can use metaphor in this way, this marvel of parabolic projection. That’s why we’ve evolved the brain we have, this astonishing frontal cortex that allows us to replace ‘fright or flight’ with ‘tend and befriend’. Because the glory of our evolution is empathy.

Consider our capacity for empathy, the ability to be moved by the plight of another as if it were our own, even if that other is a fictional character. We’ve survived this long, I believe, because of our desire to be moved, to be understood, to behave in a way which engenders reciprocity—all the things we get to immerse ourselves in, both in life and in a story.

There’s a quote I love by Barry Lopez, and keep returning to, in which he says:

‘The power of narrative to nurture and heal, to repair a spirit in disarray, rests on two things: the skillful invocation of unimpeachable sources and a listener’s knowledge that no subterfuge or hypocrisy is involved.’ (*Crossing Open Ground*)

Skillfully invoking unimpeachable sources, and the absence of hypocrisy or subterfuge. To me, this is why writing well is so hard. Not because brevity and economy is difficult, or control of phrasing or point of view, or any of the crafting techniques for which we all strive. These things are like learning the tango or the oboe—hard, but achievable techniques we can practice until we’re fluent in them. What’s hard is trusting our instinct, without the safety net of subterfuge or hypocrisy (or pretension, or impressiveness...) It is seeing our ongoing obligation to

own and acknowledge our own material and, stripped of artifice, to write honestly about it.

To trust in the mysterious telepathy that exists between writer and reader when we do try to tell that small flawed version of the truth, trusting the prismatic, almost alchemical way it's possible to render the universal down into the specific, there in our quiet room, hoping some stranger we know only through the story is sitting there in their quiet room, saying yes.

Because the thing is, we don't get to control where our stories go once we let them into the world. You're not in control of that—like a balloon, let go of the string, and it's not yours any more. It's your envoy, carrying your ideas where you can't go.

That's why we have to write them down. All the accumulated recorded wisdom we have now about the state of being human is what's written down, photographed and reproduced in books. Without books, without the almanac of the written record, the sum total of our knowledge about the world and all its history—its complexity, its wars, its medicines, its scientific theories, its parables, its weather patterns—stretches exactly one lifetime. Each human lifetime, we have to learn it all again. Nobody's going to remember in ten years what you tweeted or said or noticed, but if you're lucky, if you've taken the time to skillfully invoke that jolt of experience onto a page, your story might still be in the world, getting passed on, lodging in the mind of someone else and making them see the world just a tiny bit differently.

Which leads of course to the greatest thing about stories, so fundamental it's become clichéd even to talk about—they have the power to transform. How many things in the world, which you have the capacity to create yourself, can you say that about? That you have the power to make something which contains transformational energy?

In this process of trying to skillfully invoke a narrative experience designed to move someone else, you go in one way, and come out a little bit changed by the experience. Just as your character does. Just as, if you pull it off well enough, your reader does. As Robert Frost famously said: 'No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader.' ('The Figure a Poem Makes'). Because the first 'spirit in disarray' that needs repairing is your own, the epiphany and catharsis you create in narrative belongs to you first.

Not through a great generic abstraction about the human condition, but through something small, specific and sensory. The thing we keep circling back and returning to—our real material.

The thing that moved me, I want also to move you. The same thing that one time slapped me sideways, stopped me in my tracks, shifted me. Chastened me. Wouldn't let me go. Has a hold on me still.

That's where I 'get my ideas from'. They come from the same place as that question, actually—bafflement at the same mystery. They come, I have no doubt in the world, from my capacity for empathy, whether I like it or not, whether I welcome it or not, whether I can harness it or not.

They're my blurt about how it feels to be human, and so, thank God, my sources are unimpeachable. When I try harder to ensure that no hypocrisy or subterfuge is involved, I not only feel the parameters of my humanness but the parameters of my talent, which possibly ends up being much the same thing anyway.

Mostly they come to me the way memory works—the small fragments of moments and connections we recall—5% of any given day, on average, apparently. That means 95% is forgotten—scary, because by extension that means I only remember 5% of my life. But we have to trust we have evolved in this way because it's all we can manage to process and make use of, so that somehow, it has to be the right 5%.

What's your 5%? The jolt or realization that knocks us sideways, blindsides us, breaks our hearts, keeps us awake, keeps rising like spring water as we sleep, no matter how we squander or ignore it.

That's where the ideas come from: the 5% distillation, a new recollection in a familiar pattern, songs on an old mix-tape for a lover I don't see any more, remastered now for your listening pleasure. For me, they come as moments, unexpected turning-points, thresholds I failed to notice which maybe now if I can just summon them I'll get a second chance to act on, with a character I invent this time, who's braver and more decisive than me. Back we circle, to the old potent patterns. Someone goes on a journey. A stranger comes to town.

Sometimes they come to me as guilt, as broken bones never set properly that I need to nerve myself to re-break and reset now, or keep limping forever. They come to me as moments glowing like embers that I want to stop and warm my hands by for a minute, and forgive myself.

They come to me with the precision of a pivot, sharp and tempered, and I feel the material shift in my hands as I turn it, knowing I am making mine for you just as you are somewhere making yours for me.

Basically, they come to me as something at the heart of a story, and more often than not short stories, that beautiful, complex, endlessly capacious form that asks us only to pay attention, and to render and distill a pure spirit out of our raw materials, the universal into the specific, the way no other art form can.

It's a rare thing to leave our rooms, to come together like this, all of us in this strange guild, this stubborn subculture of practitioners, admirers, and eternal apprentices. I sometimes feel we're like glassblowers, working away with exacting fascination, learned over a long time, while outside the window some overwhelming Industrial Revolution obliterates and consumes all before it. We look at it, a bit mystified, knowing we're irrevocably caught up and engaged in that larger world, then turn back to the thing we're making; this small, molten thing we're manipulating.

Just for the weekend, let's quit justifying our existence and celebrate the love of skilled practice, and joy in creation. Let's bring those elements together and see what fuses in this catalyst of the festival.

Here we are, my fellow primates gifted with language, still sitting round the fire—such an ancient fire, and one that burns so hot.

I'm honoured to be the first person in my tribe to be passed the talking stick at this great event. Thank you for listening.

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Native Animal Caitlin Prince

Caitlin was born in Perth, raised in Kathmandu and now divides her time between Jigalong, a remote community in the Western Desert, and Chiang Mai, Thailand. She works half the year as an occupational therapist, and spends the rest of her time writing. Her work has appeared in *Westerly*.

I learnt to draw Australia on a big piece of poster-paper that Miss Spicer took out of a huge book. She gave us all one piece. Except me. I got two pieces because when I first drew Australia it looked like a star. I remembered four corners and at least one was very pointy so probably all of them were. It was okay because Isaac next to me couldn't place the states of America and Grishma was hazy on India, which we all laughed at because it's just next door and most of us had been there.

I was proud to be Australian back then. Holly was Australian and she had a trampoline. The Australian embassy had a party and served skinny french fries and hamburgers with mustard. People asked if we rode kangaroos and I said that we did. I couldn't really remember seeing a kangaroo but figured it's like the elephant, you don't ride them every day but for birthday parties you paint one with chalk and all the kids get a turn. But one at a time—kangaroos are smaller than elephants.

In Australia though Ms Penn is *quite concerned* my Australia looks like a star. It also turns out you don't ride kangaroos and *everybody's* seen them usually on the road *SPLAT roadkill dog-meat!*

'Caitlin Prince!'

That's Ms Penn's warning shot. She's got me writing me in pencil because here you need a license for a pen. In Nepal, you don't even need a license to drive a rickshaw!

I'm supposed to write about being a native Australian animal. To *imagine what it's like to hop, crawl, scurry, sniffle in their skin.*

'Be a numbat,' Amy suggests.

'I'm being an echidna,' says Ivan. His pen's already licensed to the page, motoring away.

I tap my pencil on the page, look out the window.

But I'm seeing foothills that aren't there. When my cousin came from Australia she called them mountains which was funny because then we

had to tell her to look up and suddenly she saw the wall of white all the way from left to right. Under the mountains are the green hills and under those are Kathmandu's crazy streets. Nothing runs straight, it all comes round and about. Which is fine, you just can't be in a hurry and when the electricity cuts out right in the middle of them making your chicken kiev you just say *Kei Garn Nay?* which isn't spelt like that but with lines and squiggles that are letters in Nepali, but it means *What to do?* which really means there's nothing to do and just go read an Archie comic in the next door bookshop by torch light and switch your order to *momos*, because they can do that in a steamer.

But this story isn't about Nepal.

It isn't about my guava tree's bouncing limbs. Not about Booka, though I wonder if she's still living down our laneway without me to scratch behind her ears? It isn't about Aneil crying under the stairwell for mummy and daddy who sold him to work for Haju Amma. Not about Haju Amma's strangled scream, making Aneil run to the shadowiest corners of the old Rana house where all the pigeons hide him under their wings and sing a lullaby *Coooo Coooo*. It isn't about *Holii* and the whole city joining in a water fight, pouring buckets and bombs with dyes, red and yellow staining my clothes. Not about Mum frowning even though she doesn't have to clean it because in Nepal we have Beena-Didi for that, who we love and is very happy to have money and not just her drunk husband.

This story isn't about that, which is why my name's on the board with several crosses. The last cross meant *OUT!* Out to bony bench and empty air. Those are the rules.

Dry heat Mum calls this, which she prefers to humidity.

I prefer humidity because it means monsoon which means mud flicking the backs of my legs in tiny flecks unless I wear *Singapore Sandals* which just means that we buy them in Singapore. They have elastic loops that stop the flicking but I don't really mind anyway because I can just wash it off in a puddle, or if it's really rained, wade through the street that's become a river. Sometimes our entire family climbs the wall and we walk single file like ants escaping the flood which I suppose we are.

Dry heat doesn't come with rivers. It comes with shrivelled ground and spiky grass. Somedays if it's really hot we get to take our shoes and socks off in class, but that seems like no big deal because in Nepal you'd *never* wear shoes inside, that's really gross. My Australian classmates tease me because even if I manage to keep my shoes on at the front door, I've

accidentally removed them by the TV. TV is something we only get in Australia and it's a very good thing.

Inside, my desk has been moved away from the rest of the class so I won't be disturbed. So I can write my story.

But I've been writing my story! It's just the pieces keep slipping and it's hard to keep stuff straight. Like should I flush the toilet after I pee or save the water because the supply has been cut off? Do I line up to be served or push right on in because otherwise nothing will happen? Do I say *thank you* or is that like saying *eternal gratitude for saving my firstborn son* when all they've really done is brought me an omelette?

Did you know the planet is made up of moving plates? It's a jigsaw puzzle and God is still jamming pieces in wrong, smashing them together and accidentally making mountains! But I've seen the Himalayas and they're a pretty good accident.

The next cross means you see the Deputy Principal.

You never see the Principal, she's like God, busy smashing continents together. Not like in Nepal. Our principal was Mrs Wilderspin. That's not a pseudonym because it's irreplaceable which means you can't replace it. Really, you can't. She has black curls spinning a wild storm around her and often interrupts our class as far as I can tell just to have a laugh. She always notices something one of us has done and says something so nice your tummy starts fizzing and you think you might just rocket right off all the way to Mount Everest like Tenzing. Sometimes we'd have tea with Mrs Wilderspin at the Summit Hotel, sometimes inside near the fire place, or sometimes just a Fanta at the poolside. It's like that though, everyone knows each other in expatriate communities, which means people living outside the country they're from. Like, I'm from Australia, but really I'm from Nepal. I mean I live in Nepal. Lived. Past tense. Important to correct tenses.

I feel tense. The door of the office has opened with a puff of cold air from the air-conditioning. That's another thing they have here.

'Mr Allen will see you now, Caitlin,' the lady from the front desk says. Of course I can't answer his questions and instead I just start shivering in the middle of all that dry heat. Except the funny thing is I'm so raging hot and I just know my face must be all different splotches.

The Deputy Principal must feel bad for me though because he doesn't tell me off, he just shakes his head and calls Ms Hendridge to take me to the library. She once went to Nepal and even though she says strange things like how Kathmandu looks like a bombed city, while she chats

I can see the prayer flags stretched over the bazaar. I can hear a thousand people hollering in sticky green saris, sweaty and smelling like animals. I could almost cry because I'm so sad thinking of it. Of pressing my way through the crowd, losing sight of my parents, entering the cold flagstones of a quiet alley, mud-brick houses shrugged together, pools of light spilling from inner courtyards. Of climbing up, up a wooden staircase until I'm sitting amongst piles of shawls and bolts of fabric and incense is burning in someone's silent puja. The pigeons are singing me Aneil's lullaby and we are coo-coo-cooing all the way back into the safest most magical place you've never ever seen because you are a native Australian animal. But I am not.

I am not!

I am a stray dog chasing my nose through Kathmandu's windiest streets. I am a pigeon with a secret nest hidden in rafters. I am the Hindu Deity peering out of dimly lit temples, one hundred limbs holding one hundred dancing hands. And for all your poster pages and licensed pens, the only story I'll ever write is the one that shows exactly you and exactly me why I am not Australian and do not ride kangaroos, but do know the sage sway of the elephant.

Mrs Hendridge is holding me and I am sobbing, the continents have shifted and God is playing with mountains and I am stuck on the very wrong side.

Mum comes early which she mustn't like because it's a long drive. They had to choose carefully a school to help me *adjust*. That's what you do when you move continents. When mountains first get made they shake and erupt.

When I get home it's not really home, just a place Mum and Dad had before we lived in Nepal. Outside there's a gum tree bent into a dopey grin that you can lie inside. It's not the guava tree but nothing's perfect. And I have Raj which is Nepali for Prince, which is my second name and a good name for a dog. He's even a bit better than Booka because he's all mine and he's allowed in the house and in the bed even, which is where I take him now. He wriggles and puts his butt in my face when I'd much rather his wet black nose.

So I'm lying here with Raj's butt in my face, staring at the ceiling feeling hot and sticky, and I still don't have an end for my story.

Once in geography Mrs Wilderspin said the eruption of lava was the birth of new land. She said it fires out from the deep, deep earth and explodes all over, obliterating buildings people knew, the streets they had memorised. It wipes out the entire landscape as it travels down to meet the sea. Then something magic happens.

The red hot lava kisses the cold sea, solidifying and making a whole new piece of country. It takes time, like years and years, but slowly things start growing back, green and full of new life.

Mum says she's taking Raj and me down to the beach.

There's waves there as big as the Himalayas, standing tall for just a moment. Then I slide down their melting slope, somersaulting and giggling bubbles up my nose.

'Coming mum!'

Walking Zone Eric Shaffer

Eric Paul Shaffer is author of *Lāhaina Noon and Portable Planet. A Million-Dollar Bill*, his sixth book of poetry was published by Grayson Books in August 2016. More than 450 of his poems appear in local, national, and international reviews. He teaches composition, literature, and creative writing at Honolulu Community College.

You walk beneath trees and a scatter of leaves in the wind from the coast,
along elementary school walls gleaming with a fresh coat of paint.
Stenciled in yellow Army-block letters on the institutional green
cinderblock of the school are the words: 'WALKING ZONE.'
And in that capital font of command, they certainly look like yet another
golden rule, not just a suggestion, but a proclamation,
a decree, a law of paint and plumbing and chain-link fences between youth
and the roads that lead away. When the brazen bells clang,
you struggle to hold yourselves back as you hurry or dawdle
or saunter along the grass and crisscross walkways
between classroom or cafeteria, the library or playground,
the nurse's or the principal's office, your energy crackling within,
bones brilliant, blood gleaming, youth snapping from your soles
to the concrete, radiating visibly and transparently as light from the sun
propagates the nourishing and dangerous heat of the day.
You file along the paths, straight in your gaits, and I wonder
at your fortitude, your dedication to keep the peace and the pace,
when you restrain that bold, emergent force, that rude urge, that wild drive
to fling yourselves head-first into the future as everything
inside you demands that you run, commands you to run. To run. Run.

Travelling to the Motherland Zoe Deleuil

Zoe is a freelance writer from Perth, Western Australia, where she now lives with her family.

Last time I looked, I had ten rose pink toenails. It had been the second manicure of my life, less because I cared what my feet looked like, more because I needed something to do while waiting for a baby that was ten days overdue. Sitting in some grim Hackney nail bar was better than nothing.

But I've just looked down, and one has been stripped clean. How did that happen? *When* did that happen?

'My nail polish has gone.'

'That would have been so they could keep an eye on your oxygen levels,' says the midwife. She's a neat, unflappable woman with a square blonde fringe and she enunciates her words very clearly, as if speaking to an imbecile. 'In case it went to C-section.'

Jesus *Christ*. I stare at my naked toenail in a kind of exhausted outrage. I feel like I should be making a few phone calls, but I have no idea who to complain to.

I haven't slept in days. I need a shower, but this baby—mine, apparently—won't let me put him down.

I've got bloodshot eyes, and burst veins in my cheeks, and far from the transcendental experience I was promised by my *Birthing from Within* book, the birth was mostly strangers shouting at me and doing things to me that in any other context would result in a court case with media attention and extensive, expensive psychotherapy, while I felt very far away from them all, like some small dumb anemone stuck helplessly on a rock, being smashed to pieces by a storm.

And now someone has removed the polish from *just one nail*.

We've given him a name, but to me he's still *the baby*. I can't link him with the being inside me, whose calm presence—on the tube to work, in the London Fields lido, in the early hours—was possibly the most comforting thing I had ever known.

We share one quiet moment, in the dark hospital room, when he lies beside me on the hospital bed and stares into my eyes, before falling asleep. And then the midwife comes in to take my blood pressure, and the moment of stillness is gone.

The first night at home I go to bed early, desperate to put blank dreamless sleep between the labour room and me. I wake up to him screaming in the next room, and walk in on my husband standing over him, hands hovering without touching, the blankets thrown back, looking in confusion at that furious little face.

I feel sorry for all of us. None of us know what we're doing. Eventually the baby sleeps, and then we stay awake, watching him breathe.

We go out walking in the park and the baby screams from the lonely darkness of his pram. His small body vibrates as he howls, with his eyes fixed on mine as if to say, what happened? Where is this unfamiliar country I've landed in? And I can't answer him, because I'm asking the same question.

At night, I stare up at the ceiling and the birth plays endlessly across my eyelids. The white room. The faceless medical staff. The hot blue blur of him being thrown onto my belly with a steaming thud, the tug of his head, the sudden fact of him. And then snatched away. Lifting my head as he was taken and waiting for the cry, then dropping my head to the pillow and closing my eyes as soon as it came. Showering afterwards, almost falling asleep under the water. My husband washing the blood and strangers' hands away with a small pink soap. Looking at the baby, in his heated crib, too shy to ask the midwife if I was allowed to pick him up.

I dream that someone breaks into our house and throws all our belongings down the stairs. When I wake, two overripe bananas have been dragged into the dirty kitchen sink water. London rats have sensed our weakness.

On the bus the baby howls, but the driver is taking corners hard and it's raining, so I can't risk picking him up. He locks eyes with me and screams. An older Afro-Caribbean woman, who reminds me of the calm midwives at the hospital, looks at me with sympathy and I have to hide my face from her. I'm just so tired. My body has finally seeped the last of the adrenalin of the birth, and now there is nothing left to draw on, until I can sleep and let the well fill up again. To tumble into a blank dreamless sleep is all I want, it would take me two seconds and I'd be gone for hours. Somehow, with unbroken sleep, I could get all the files of my unconscious back into order.

I want our old life back, I realise. It's gone, quite simply. I thought I'd still be living it, but with the addition of a happy little newborn. But this is a brand new life, and although it was what we wanted, I miss the life we had. It was a good life, I realise now. I enjoyed it.

When I get home I go to bed with the baby. He sleeps in the crook of my arm, his face as still and waxy as a doll, the curve of his nose and lips so round and unformed and foetal. I stare at him, remembering how peaceful he was, living inside me. Asleep, he looks perfectly contained by his own body. It's only when he wakes that it all unravels.

And now I'm getting a sore throat. I stay in bed with him, breathing in his breath, following him into sleep where we capture again that hushed stillness of pregnancy. Night comes, and my husband comes home and makes us dinner. My temperature is 39 degrees. I sit with the baby on my lap, coughing.

As I make these deep rumbling noises, like someone is dragging heavy furniture across my chest, the baby studies me with a clear, inquiring gaze, his brow wrinkled like a tiny scientist observing some unexpected development in an ongoing experiment. His eyes have a new wisdom in them, and now, as I continue to cough, his expression conveys deep worry.

I sleep away from him, and my sleep is hot and suffocating. I wake sweating for a feed at 4 am and I realise I am having difficulty breathing. Falling asleep feels risky, so I call the NHS helpline, and the woman listens to me for a few minutes and puts me through to the ambulance service, who send around a paramedic on a motorbike.

He arrives looking furious and stomps up the stairs.

'What's wrong?'

'I woke up and I couldn't breathe properly.'

'Got your Strepsils, I see.' He nods over at my bed.

God, why is he here? I'm fine. This is ridiculous. I feel ashamed, for wasting taxpayer's money.

'Any mental health issues?'

'No.'

'Did you think to go to your doctor?'

'No. I didn't feel this bad earlier. I called NHS Direct and they called you.'

'*They always do.*'

He checks my heart rate, and then my oxygen.

'Your sats are very low.'

'That's why I called you.'

'They shouldn't be that low. I better check again.'

I vomit water all over the floor. My husband comes in and hands me the baby so he can mop and I see the paramedic's face change from anger to dismay.

'How old?'

'Five weeks.'

His face softens. 'Bless.'

I pat the baby back to sleep and put him carefully in his bassinette, then lean on the bed, waiting for the ambulance to come. The drivers are kind, telling me not to worry about calling them, giving me oxygen and finding me a wheelchair at the hospital.

We go into a cubicle and I tell the story, again and again, of not being able to breathe properly, to various doctors and nurses. Until finally one comes in who seems to be in charge. 'You can't go home with oxygen that low,' he says. 'We'll find you a bed.'

I feed the baby. He is totally oblivious to the fact that he's back in the hospital we'd left just a few weeks earlier. He looks so small and bright and beautiful, blinking at the doctor, and it feels celebratory in this tiny cubicle.

Eventually he sinks into a dead sleep. I'm wheeled to a room, so fast I start vomiting again, and put to bed in cool white sheets with a drip attached. My husband carries the baby home, bundled up in his jacket like he's kidnapped it, and I sleep the whole day. At some point more doctors come in. My oxygen levels drop further and I'm wheeled to another room, and given a mask to wear.

And now it's as if I didn't have the baby after all.

I've longed for a night's sleep, and now I have it, in this dim room with the snores of eight cardiac patients outside my door, and I can't stop thinking about him.

He's down the road, and he won't know what has happened, and no one will be able to tell him.

I'm in hospital for eleven days, with H1N1 and pneumonia. Swine flu is all over the news, and so the consultant is reluctant to let me go home. On the last night before I'm discharged my husband comes in to see me with the baby and I hold him up against me and feel his contentment chime with mine as the nurses cluck over him.

I think again of his small, worried face that night I got sick. It never occurred to me, before having a child, that newborns are anything more than docile dolls. Yet he was the one who communicated to me that I was so unwell.

At home, the days stretch ahead with no structure, no meals or predictable naps or breaks to hang the hours on. Somehow we get to the end of another dark February day. We're both warmly dressed, the lamp is on and I've made myself tea.

I settle him in his bouncer and sit beside him, watching the news to see what's happening beyond this bubble we're living in. It's such a relief to see the old familiar politicians and newsreaders, to lose myself in their stories again.

After a moment I get that pricking sensation of someone's eyes on me. That odd jolt on the tube or in a shop, when you become aware that someone is observing you. I look down at him and his face is turned to me, with an expression of frank affection. He's not smiling, exactly; it's all in his bright eyes. With his expression so alert, so quietly thrilled, it feels rude not to respond. I say *hello*, and laugh nervously. He is silent, apparently needing nothing more than to look at me.

It's so strange, to feel that I am enough for someone, simply by existing.

It makes me shy. It's as if I'm being introduced to someone I've admired from afar, whose approval I longed to win. A secretly loved teacher, or someone I went to school with, but never knew. We've been travelling towards this ordinary dusk together for months, and now—with nothing but a look to mark the moment—we've arrived.

In Australia

White people write my culture for me.

Timmah Ball

Timmah Ball is an urban planner and writer of Ballardong Noongar descent. She has written for *Meanjin*, *Inflection Journal*, *Right Now* and *Assemble Papers*.

In the seventies, Melbourne's counter-cultural landscape erupted. My Mum had just arrived from Perth, where the racism Aboriginals experienced seemed distant and easy to forget. After share housing in the inner north, she headed to the suburbs with my Dad. Walking down Koornang road and other local shopping strips, she stood out. The cosmopolitanism of the inner city vanished as the overwhelming whiteness set in. But by the time I was in school, waves of migration had changed the area. There were families from India and Sri Lanka, and proximity to Monash University saw large numbers of international students settle in the neighborhood. My mother's early self-consciousness eased as multiculturalism began to define Melbourne.

Beneath the shifting demographics, peculiar ideas continued to drift through the quiet, dead-end street we moved to after my parents divorced. Kids rode their bikes around and people introduced themselves warmly but questions followed. Was my Mum just renting or had she bought the property? Was it just the two of us? Would we stay long? Most people in the street owned their homes and there were concerns an unstable rental demographic might alter the mood of the neighborhood. My mum had bought the house with plans to renovate. But our neighbors remained curious. We were liked but assumptions were made.

One woman gave us a half-empty carton of milk before going on holidays; another offered us the use of their pool while they spent the summer in Anglesea. And when VCE results were announced and I received several awards, their shrill reactions hurt, as if doing well was unexpected. To imagine we were disadvantaged was bizarre, but these small instances marked our difference, possibly felt by us more than our neighbors. Whether intentional or not, these acts implied we were different and in need. As Stan Grant suggests 'it seems many non-Indigenous people find it easier to identify us if we are poor.' (np)

More than ever, the socio-economic status of Indigenous Australians is shifting with many of us becoming middle class. But as levels of education and professional status rise, misconceptions continue to scar us, and the growing popularity of Aboriginal culture creates new tensions and unforeseen consequences. Today, Aboriginal knowledge carries cachet, both economic and cultural, and it is often white Australia who is the quickest to exploit this.

...

The thick heat of Barcelona's summer eases the frustration that festered over winter. Sangria-fuelled conversations at the Plaza del Sol with artists and academics linger into the early hours of the morning. I forget the structural racism, which dominated my career. The summer school, entitled 'Decolonizing, Knowledge and Power', is a moment to pause, an intellectual feast where complex ideas thrive.

In one densely theoretical lecture, I drift onto Facebook and I'm not ready for the sharp reality check. Images of young hooded boys strapped to chairs fill my iPhone screen. Who are they? The haunting images look like stills from a grueling film I don't want to see and I wonder why anyone would post them. As I scroll down, it becomes clear that this isn't a film, this is Australia.

The news of Don Dale Youth Detention Centre stung. As I discussed decolonial theory at the University Autònoma de Barcelona, Aboriginal boys in Darwin were tortured. ABC's *Four Corners* program had uncovered footage showing extreme abuse inflicted on young boys held in Don Dale (Meldrum-Hanna, Worthington, np). They were gassed and held in insolation, an infringement of their most basic human rights. These incidents undermine the complacency, which sets in when you have privilege, forcing you to reassess the values and priorities that guide you. In Australia, the rising popularity of Aboriginal culture uncomfortably parallels the sickening number of avoidable Aboriginal deaths. Elijah Doughty, Ms Dhu, Lynette Dayle, Rebecca Maher and many more unnecessary deaths. As Nayuka Gorrie proclaimed, 'Black rage is justified' (2016, np), but it is ignored and ridiculed by a white Australia that assumes we should be grateful for the sudden interest in our culture.

The growing appetite for Aboriginal culture is astounding, at times lulling us into a false sense of security where power is shifting. Moments before I logged onto Facebook and saw the frightening images, I received two emails promoting PhD scholarships for Aboriginal students. Both Deakin and Griffith Universities were looking for Aboriginal candidates to research how Indigenous knowledge contributes to environmental

sustainability. Another email from a University of Melbourne lecturer followed, wanting to know whether I was available to appear on a panel discussing Aboriginal knowledge in the built environment, for a small fee. A sickening situation started to emerge: some of us were venerated by institutions as others were defiled. The disparity between my freedom and the events that occurred at Don Dale filled me with unease. Two different worlds existed and navigating the gulf between them was overwhelming. Indigenous Academic Bronwyn Carlson wrote that we are living on an ‘interface where a range of discourses converge are messy and difficult to articulate and make sense of.’ (204) Her words illuminated the gravitas of our differences, something I struggled to comprehend.

Within weeks of returning to Australia there were more emails and requests. I was asked to be the Aboriginal representative on an arts advisory board and told about another opportunity to peruse a PhD at the University of Western Sydney. The title of the position was *Garuwanga: Forming a Competent Authority to Protect Indigenous Knowledge*. It would enable an Aboriginal person to develop research in governance frameworks for protecting and sharing Indigenous knowledge and culture. Universities and arts institutions were in a rush to secure our knowledge while others were left to die. Meanwhile, tributes flooded Facebook as I watched my friends grieve. Acclaimed Wemba-Wemba and Gunditjmara writer and artist Paola Balla solemnly posted:

Every jangled, ragged strand of traumatised DNA hurts
 I had nightmares about boys dying in front of me last night,
 kissing the tar and concrete with their last breath
 crying for their mothers and grandmothers
 I rush to their little bodies, rubbing their backs and whispering
 comfort and love
 I woke up nauseated and sore
 13 year old Dylan Voller looks like my little 12 year old son in
 the footage of him being choked and lifted by his little neck
 and then held down on a mattress and stripped by grown men
 I sob while trying to avoid the footage yet again
 My fears are not just for the boys and girls inside, but for the
 knowledge we have developed that
 nothing ever changes
 and in fact just gets worse
 This place feels and looks and sounds like the penal colony
 that it is

The white mad men, cruel and vicious and pious are running
 the colony
 (July 2016)

I read Paola’s words over and over, wondering what value PhD scholarships bring as lives are violently destroyed. I wondered what it’s like to be a white tenured academic, free to decide when it is beneficial to include Indigenous knowledge, free from the restless sleep Paola describes. Disconnected from trauma and rage, it is often white Australia who chooses when Aboriginal knowledge is needed, producing programs, research agendas and books celebrating Aboriginal culture when it suits them. Their careers move forward while we scramble in the background doing the work. Occasionally universities create the structures that enable outstanding Aboriginal work. Books by Tony Birch, Gary Foley, Lynette Russell and many more may not exist without the academy. And research by white academics such as Claire Land advance our understanding of decolonial theory and ways to build solidarity across race. But too often, uneven power dynamics spoil what may be good intentions.

I experienced this when approached by two white academics with the request to contribute a book chapter to *The International Handbook of Contemporary Indigenous Architecture*. An opportunity to write about Indigenous art in public spaces felt exciting and flattering. But the opportunity was quickly soiled. I was expected to prepare a 5-10,000 word draft in a month, without payment—conditions which were unacceptable and cruel. Anger seethed through my chest as I wrote to the senior lecturer declining the offer. I refused to work under precarious conditions but I knew the book would push ahead and two white academics would gain further prestige from our stories.

Although there are always exceptions, exploitative scenarios occur too regularly. While Aboriginal communities grapple with death and unfathomable injustice, white people capitalise from our culture, earning fat salaries as they write yet another policy or action plan on how to close the gap. A recent study by the CIS showed that \$5.9billion in annual funding for Indigenous affairs is not delivering notable improvements for Aboriginal communities. (Fitzpatrick, np) Instead, an article in *The Australian* highlighted severe misspending, ‘such as an East Arnhem Land community with no notable history of suicides being required to undergo a suicide-awareness training program.’ (Fitzpatrick, np) The community were not consulted but forced to participate. The stupidity of this situation is shocking though not surprising. In Australia, the opinions of white people are almost always valued over Aboriginal people’s ideas and expertise.

In her award-winning poem 'Expert', Ellen van Neerven describes how her partner becomes the 'expert' in their relationship. The aptly titled piece cleverly conveys the paternalistic control white Australia holds onto. Our suggestions are often muted as the white majority have the final say. In the poem she describes how her white girlfriend 'has the answers because she saw a television ad for Recognition.' (48) She is the expert while van Neerven's 'knowledge is (too urban)—from the black media (not the whole truth I wouldn't trust it.)' (48) Their relationship reflects my own professional experiences, persistently ignored by white bosses who belittle my comments or tell me I am being 'anxious'.

In one particularly challenging role for a government agency, a colleague asked me to provide feedback on an Aboriginal employment strategy she had prepared. I thought it was slightly odd that I hadn't heard about it earlier. I was in an identified position working on projects to improve Aboriginal disadvantage in Melbourne's outer suburbs, but I had been excluded from the early development phase. After reading the draft I had numerous concerns: generic statements about improving economic outcomes were repeated, but there was nothing linking employment to education and the need to create culturally safe environments. Successful Aboriginal employment programs must focus on long-term careers, not on increasing entry-level jobs so that organisations can quickly improve quotas. Too often Aboriginal employment is about ticking boxes rather than investing in the long-term future and talent of Aboriginal people. The most excruciating aspect of the strategy was the award for 'best' local council, judged on who helped the most Aboriginal people into jobs. In a country where white supremacy reigns, did we really need another award for white institutions? My thoughts were ignored. Although I repeatedly sent emails and tried to organise a meeting with key staff, there was no interest. A month later an email was sent to three colleagues asking for feedback before the final draft was released for external consultation. I was cc'ed as a courtesy but not asked to comment. In Australia, only white people have the 'right' to comment on Aboriginal employment strategies.

...

The architect entered the room wearing a black velvet blazer, oozing 'starchitect' cool. Having won the tender to design an Aboriginal health center in Melbourne's outer east, he promised a community engagement process that would incorporate local Aboriginal ideas. A series of co-design workshops between community, government and the appointed architects were planned.

As the first workshop started, a stifling sense of power permeated the room. The architect confidently flicked the switch on the projector. His introductory presentation included an awkward image of a black hand holding a white hand, as if a twee photo could erase colonization and the ongoing racism Aboriginal people endure. A new Aboriginal health center was vital but as people gently started to share their stories, the loudest voices were white. There were no opportunities to unpack the complexity of colonization and the stolen generation, but a white council worker explained to community why she thought the design should reflect the river. White voices drowned others who sat silently by the end. The 'starchitect' left smugly, another project to boast about bringing cultural cred and status to his illustrious career.

American journalist Barbara Ehrenreich recently wrote that 'there's something wrong with the fact that a relatively affluent person can afford to write about minimum wage jobs while people experiencing them can't' (np). A similar power imbalance is rampant in Australia, where it seems that only the white have the power to write, design and make decisions about Aboriginal people. Her article 'In America, only the rich can afford to write about poverty' describes her realization 'that there was something wrong with an arrangement whereby a relatively affluent person such as I could afford to write about minimum wage jobs, squirrels as an urban food source or the penalties for sleeping in parks, while the people who were actually experiencing these sorts of things, or were in danger of experiencing them, could not.' (np)

Her circumstance mirrors how Aboriginal people are regularly disempowered from decision-making processes, and forced to watch on as others write about us, make decisions for us and disregard our views. Lived experience is not valued in this new economy, where there is money to be made from the 'Aboriginal problem'. And as the popularity of Aboriginal art and culture grows, more and more white Australians are desperate to ride the wave.

In the face of these issues Aboriginal writers have exploded onto the literary mainstream. This makes sense given the exceptional talent and stories within our communities. But I am continually perplexed by the bizarre sense of ownership to which white Australia clings. The amount of white people writing our stories when there are already incredible Aboriginals doing so is frustrating. At the opening of the 2016 Melbourne Writers Festival, the Miles Franklin Award nominees were read out. When A.S. Patrić won for *Black Rock White City*, I was thrilled and relieved. We need more stories about the experiences of migrants, written by

migrants. And just the thought of Lucy Treloar's *Salt Creek* winning made my blood boil. The *Sydney Morning Herald* described it as a 'respectful and unobtrusively beautiful homage to the Ngarrindjeri people.' (Goldsworthy, np) But given the urgent issues facing contemporary Aboriginal people did we really need another white women looking back on the past with nostalgia?

The issue of white Australians writing for us, or in fact their obsession with writing on behalf of numerous races, exploded at the opening of the Brisbane Writers Festival when Lionel Shriver confidently took to the stage in her Sombrero. Yassmin Abdel-Magied described how Lionel's critique of cultural appropriation was about 'mocking those who ask people to seek permission to use their stories. It became a celebration of the unfettered exploitation of the experiences of others.' (np) Many white Australians feel that it is their right to discuss, plan and write about Aboriginals, without any analysis of how this privilege maintains oppression and white supremacy. As Abdel-Magied states 'It's not always OK if a straight white woman writes the story of a queer Indigenous man, because when was the last time you heard a queer Indigenous man tell his own story?' (np)

Of course many white writers thought people like Yassmin Abdel-Magied had overreacted. Peter Craven described it as a 'silly frenzy over cultural identity.' (np) But when you are consistently excluded from writing about your own identity sidelined by whites that know better, you get angry. Writers like Christos Tsiolkas and Alexis Wright choose to connect with this anger, believing that 'we live and write and work and love in a world of contradiction, fragmentation and unease and it is through the struggle of this engagement that we can occasionally reach an understanding of our world.' (Tsiolkas, 37) As Aboriginal culture enters the mainstream, engaging with these tensions and contradictions will be vital. Although difficult, we need to challenge the nostalgic white settler narratives and the nebulous Aboriginal employment strategies written by white bureaucrats. The trauma of colonization may be the hardest story to tell, but 'change will require closer and quicker movement towards our understanding of despair.' (Wright, 160)

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As I finished the final edits for a small independent zine, I was struck by a reference to Aboriginal people having 'lived here once, not that long ago.' I had selected the poem based on its interesting reflections on modern dating and managed to skim over the simplistic descriptions of Aboriginals. I immediately contacted the (white) author who wrote the

poem, asking whether we could change the wording, as the statement suggested Aboriginals no longer lived here. I assumed it was a misjudgment on her behalf. I approached the issue with sensitivity but her reaction was troubling. She refused to understand that the statement might offend Aboriginals living in Melbourne. Instead of engaging with a contemporary Aboriginal perspective, she wanted to change the line to 'I am reminded that the Wurundjeri people used to make canoes here once, not that long ago.' In her opinion my comments had no relevance or value, she was just annoyed that I changed her words. She was the 'expert' and in Australia, white people always have the final say.

Note: This essay follows on from writing published in the spring issue of *Meanjin*, 75:3 (2016), 'Who's Afraid of the Black Middle Class?' See: <https://meanjin.com.au/essays/whos-afraid-of-the-black-middle-class/>

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Lessons in the Domestic Arts: A Sampler

Marie O'Rourke

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Brenda Miller,
'Needlepoint'

She knew that sometimes only the simplest actions are feasible, and those are the ones that lead us out of illness and back into the world.

The view from here! Standing tall on the dining table, my head dodging the etched glass light fitting, I look down on the room and see how things fit together—pouffé, couch, bookcase, coffee table, TV—the Medizza lounge room jigsaw, our life of mismatched pieces.

Wood veneer slippery underfoot, bright pearl head pins scratch my legs but move seamlessly from Mum's mouth to the hem. She mumbles through puckered lips as fabric is stretched, measured, pierced, smoothed. Soon I will push my chair close to hers as she sews, legs swinging I'll collect the cast off pins; making patterns on her patchwork pincushion. I love shape, order, symmetry, regularity. Enjoy the way the sections fit snugly together, their colours complementary.

A few hours ago the fabric was spread on the lounge room floor, a cheery picnic rug. We kneeled and crawled, pinning paper to cotton. Then I rested back on my heels, relishing the silent swoosh and click of Mum's best dressmaking shears (sharpened on a bottle neck) sliding, snipping. I followed in Mum's wake, her little shadow, saving scraps I might tack together later for my baby dolls. Under her watchful and patient eye, her smooth broad hands will enclose mine, guiding every stitch.

My sisters and I are always beautifully dressed. Florals, shirring, ric-rac, ruffles and clean white Clarks sandals chase each other past peeling wallpaper. Across threadbare carpet.

• • •

Six children, a heavy drinking father, the Robertson home was also one of scraping by. Making do. My mum, Janice, only ever owned two dresses at any time, boys' singlets (they were cheaper), one pair of shoes, a jumper. No petticoat. *That's why I was determined you girls would have the nicest clothes I could possibly manage.*

As a young single woman, my nan, Stella Ingram, had been a seamstress and knew her way around a sewing machine. Stella Robertson did what she could, but time and money—lack thereof—dictated her utilitarian dressmaking style. Too many children, not enough money, husband Neville a ghostly apparition, floating through the door only after the pub had closed. *He was an absentee in that marriage. Most of the time he just wasn't there.*

When he was home, there were bitter arguments between husband and wife. Neville grudgingly handed over a pittance for housekeeping and kept the rest for himself: only after his death did Stella find out how much he actually earned; how little he had shared. Barely interested in the swirl of family life around him, he was a man who exchanged words in temper, or not at all: *You know, I can't remember him ever talking to me, really.* Yet his workmates waxed lyrical on what a good bloke he was. Niece Marlene declared Uncle Nev someone you could talk to for hours, about absolutely anything. These seemingly incompatible versions of Neville Stanley Robertson puzzled Stella and her children then; still do now.

• • •

In *The Odyssey*, waiting decades for her husband's return, Penelope keeps herself busy at the family loom. Weaving her father-in law's death shroud day in, day out (then unwinding it at night so she can't be forced to remarry) she is the epitome of discipline, stability, constancy and order.

For the ancient Greeks, order was a concept expressed by the word *kosmos* and related to patterning in a way that was inseparable from craft. Ana Arajua notes that craft was practiced in this world 'with the very intent of making *kosmos* appear...the rhythmic process of (pattern-) making denoted a way to come to terms with the universal order of reality'. From consistent movements, a regular pattern: the crafted artefact a material expression of order, invoking the *kosmic* order of things.

• • •

Knitting was a constant in our home, all of us did it—even my brother Eric took up the needles when he was about eight. Made his own scarf. But only after finishing his paper round, of course, because he knew Mum relied on any extra pennies he could bring in.

When you kids were young I did it partly for the joy of making something, and because my mum had always knitted. But it was also...I sort of just wanted to...wrap my love around you girls. I remember always being cold as a kid—probably because I never had proper winter clothes, just a jumper over my usual dress. Even now, I still get a feeling of luxury when I'm really cold and put on something warm.

So when the autumn turn comes, as soon as parching heat gives way to days cool and crisp, the needles and wool appear. After dinner, Mum, Nan and Auntie Julie set up camp in the lounge room; form a knot away from the kids and TV, the husbands downing beer. Circled, knees brushing, the currency here is needles, wool and conversation. Topics loop like the yarn on needles, circling, tightening, tying off.

I covet those knitting bags at their feet. Quilted fabric or tapestry, with fake tortoiseshell handles, to me they are pure sensory delight: I run my hand across the textures of their stitched surface, the shiny smooth cool handles; I pat the soft balls of colour inside, rub the texture of the yarn between my fingertips and see how it fluffs and gently frays. Wedged between Nan and Mum on the couch, if I don't ask too many questions they might forget I'm there and talk about the interesting things I normally miss. I sink into the cushions; the rhythmic whispering clack and click of needles.

When I'm seven or eight, Mum finally teaches me to knit. Sitting on her lap, our fingers meshed and balancing the needles between them, Mum guides me. In this fashion we work—me holding, she winding—two bodies doing the work of one. Purl, plain, purl, plain. The brightly coloured scraps of wool intertwine, vivid stripes of many colours, sometimes even changing partway through a row when we suddenly run out. It's an unorthodox style, yet from these strands of cheap acrylic, something beautiful grows.

My first full garment is a vest for my doll Felicity, a miniature copy of the one Mum made me, using the last of that fairy floss-pink fluffy yarn. Large needles keep an open weave and it grows in a flash, a weekend project. Nan even teaches me how to cast off on my own. My doll's head is huge and we three laugh at her proportions as we try to find a way to hold and stitch the vest's little shoulders together.

• • •

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a pattern as:

1. A repeated decorative design;
2. A regular and intelligible form or sequence discernible in the way in which something happens or is done;
3. A model or design used as a guide in needlework and other crafts;
4. An excellent example for others to follow.

• • •

Washing day sees me set up on the lawn, two buckets—one, warm soapy water, one cool and clear for rinsing—my dolls' clothes in a small stack beside my kneeling self. Pushing up my sleeves I set about scrubbing away the dirt and bodily oils that do not exist.

I string a thin rope between the A-frame ends of my swing set. Pegging up tiny clothes, I mimic Mum: trousers by the bottom of the leg, sideways, to keep the front pleat slicing sharp; bloomers or knickers, two pegs, one at each side of the softly elasticised waist; t-shirts, folded over the line just a little (not too much or they won't be able to dry).

A favourite photo shows me at my washing line, face concentrated, lip bitten, a purposeful curve of my spine as I lean into the task. I am staunchly domestic, a determined little 'mother'.

But of course, I was meant to be a boy. A surprise pregnancy long after the cot and pram had been given away, long after they'd given up on the happy family myth, a son might have fulfilled a lifelong dream of both Jan and Frank. As I swam in warm amniotic fluid, Mum revelled in her vivid birth dreams: *I'd dream I was in the delivery room, and Dr Connaughton would smile and say, 'Congratulations, it's a boy!' I'd wake up, heart thumping, crying. I was so happy. I loved my two girls but just thought a boy might...I don't know...bring your dad back. I wondered if having someone to kick a footy with, fix his car, might make him happier to stay home.* For (like her mother before her) Jan had a husband who seemed to resent the house and his family for keeping him away from his true love: drinking with mates. *Yes, I really wanted a son. But when you were born, and you were a girl, of course I was happy. I loved you and couldn't have imagined things being any different.*

Yet that third pregnancy felt so different. With the first two Jan carried 'all at the front' but not this time. The wedding ring that friends suspended on cotton over her Skin Repaired palm confirmed her hunch, slowly swinging back and forward in a line, not just once, but every time they tried. Everyone knows it circles when you're having a girl.

In the early hours of April 25 1972, when a third girl appears, Jan is genuinely surprised. She's been pondering Michael or John? David or Andrew? She hasn't prepared for this. So, when Frank says he likes the name Marie, it's decided. Jan isn't sure if he's honouring his mother, Maria (who hates her) or his latest 'girlfriend', Ann-Marie: neither seems an auspicious start, yet the name just seems to suit this baby of smooth olive skin, almost black almond eyes. So different to the other two daughters with their blond curls and baby blues. No, it's not a boy, but this baby is just like its father.

My body seems determined to conspire against me. I am almost bald until the age of three, my close cap of curls boyish. Did Mum and Dad look at me and think, 'If...'?

...

The 19th century 'cult of the home' saw a revival of the ancient Greek ideal of the domestic space as the emblem of familial order. Isabella Beeton and many more like her instructed the Victorian housewife in the so-called right way to do housework. As Arajao explains, these 'obsessive and perfectionist' actions of cleaning, washing, ironing, baking, sorting, gardening, storing, sewing, crocheting, lacing, embroidery, knitting, tatting were 'all aimed at order and/or embellishment, they all required a good deal of persistence and patience, and they were all to be performed repetitively but delicately. And they all set up a vicious circle of endless duration, following a pattern which, like all patterns, was potentially inexhaustible'.

...

5 am it starts. Some days—many days—it's not until 11 pm, maybe midnight that it ends. That voice, barbed and bitter, telling her she's useless, lazy. Nothing but a weight around his neck. Once we get up, we'll be told the same, but in these early hours, we three girls lie in our beds, clutching the weight of the covers above us, guiltily enjoying those moments his narrowed gaze is not on us.

She makes him breakfast: the soundtrack starts. She packs his lunch: it continues. By the time he's finding the keys to the F100, smoking his tenth cigarette, it's reached a crescendo. Some days she's silent, moving around the kitchen, smoking, sipping at cups of tea in between tasks. Others, she shouts back, tells him he's deluded, deranged, an arsehole.

He might scream. He might push her. He might threaten to kill her or us kids: we never know precisely what the day will hold, only that while he's in it, life is one of watching. When his truck roars out the driveway, we'll exhale communally, breathe slower, steadier, until evening when the dog's ears prick up, the engine rumbles into the driveway and the screen door slams again.

In the hours he is gone, she will clean as best she can this house which is breaking down around her ears. Each of his mates have built new homes—salmon brick, columns, arches, concrete lions—in the traditional Balcatta way. All that changes at our house is the piles of car parts covering driveway and lawn. Still, the Electrolux is dragged back and forward over

threadbare carpet. Wood veneer and laminate furniture (much of it caved in by his fist or heel) is Mister Sheen-ed with circling motion and soft cloths. Clothes are soaked, scrubbed, though try as she might, the grease and diesel stains on his overalls won't ever completely budge.

She will cook: pasta, rissoles, roast; rich, heavy, dense with flavour, these foods will fill the emptiness, say what she can't. There's always a cake in the oven, cooling in the tin, or nestled in the square, pale green Tupperware box. Chocolate cake, tea cake, lemon coconut, date and walnut loaf—these are the staples. But the most requested recipe is her apple cake: a simple fusion of butter, sugar, flour, milk, just a pinch of salt, produces a cake mix so meltingly short that it has to be patched together by hand, pushed into place so the softly stewed fruit can lie between. The scraps she rolls out and smooths across the apple surface look like they will never make a solid whole. But in the oven's heat it all shifts, melds and fuses together. By the time the passionfruit icing has been smothered across that lumpy bumpy surface, its flavour is otherworldly. So much from so little.

It sounds small to you, maybe, but to look after my family was paramount. All I lived for. I had no money to do anything else. Had no cooperation from your father to do anything else. He wouldn't let me get a job, didn't want me to have friends. I only ever had three girlfriends after I was married, and he made it his mission to sleep with them. Took away even that.

A realisation hits: Mum was strong in her own way. I suddenly remember all those days, nights I wedged myself into their knitting circle. Remember how, if Nan or Julie ever messed up their pattern or dropped a stitch, they'd always hand it over to Mum. Jan was the best at finding the wayward loop, picking it up and smoothing over the mistake so you wouldn't even notice it was there. If you weren't looking for it.

...

I read last year about the Rajah quilt, a project undertaken by convict women on their journey to Australia's penal colony in 1841. Over 2,800 pieces brought together by the hands of many women on board the ship. A symbol of industry, cooperation and hope.

An article on the V&A website informs me there is 'a longstanding affiliation between confinement and creativity'; needlework specifically is 'a tool which offered not only a practical skill, but also an enlightened state of contemplation, whereby the focus required for the act of stitching would have allowed the maker to enter a mental space removed from the everyday.' A process of creation and renewal.

...

It is 1977 and Stella is getting used to being a widow. Neville's death was sudden and unexpected—an aneurism brought him down in the family hallway—but her six children are all married and caring for children of their own. She's learned to drive now. Travelled overseas to see her two eldest daughters for the first time in many years.

The quilt is a true family project. Jan always had a gift for arithmetic, and she is charged with calculating how many yards of unbleached calico will be required. Mother and daughter visit Boans together, descending the escalator, heading underground to the Fabric and Haberdashery. An hour later they re-emerge, arms laden: crisp, creamy fabric, navy blue binding, a fresh card of needles, spools of complimentary threads. They eat lunch at the Coles caf in companionable silence, the prospect of a grand project ahead.

Son-in-law Pat makes Stella special templates for cutting, to keep her lines straight. Fabric is collected from all five daughters and the one daughter-in law: no mean feat when two have laid down roots in the Netherlands. The lives of thirteen grandchildren are thus scattered across the table; will be sorted and ordered in a way that pleases Stella's eye, just so.

Nan crafts a collective history for her family, shaping, pinning, stitching our childhoods into place. Birthday parties, graduations, school socials, clothes from the kindergarten sandpit, smeared with sauce at family picnics: these are now memories you can see and touch.

Quick to get rid of the double marriage bed, on her single mattress Stella sleeps soundly, tucked under the glorious riot of colour and love sewn into neat rows of cathedral squares. Under the roof that used to house eight but now protects just one, she has never felt more secure in her life. She knows there are worse things than being alone.

...

Abigail Thomas' memoir tells of a life rebuilt on three dogs, friendship and knitting. Among all those words of love and hope and fear and guilt, one passage highlighted, on the page and in my mind: 'I look up the word *acceptance*, and ... discover this comes from the old English for 'a thread used in weaving' ... You can't keep pulling out the thread. You have to weave it in and then you have to go on weaving.'

...

In adulthood, the Robertson girls are accomplished at many handicrafts: knitting, crochet, tapestry, dressmaking and embroidery. Strange throwback to the ideal of leisured Victorian womanhood, these

working-class women take base ingredients and work them into things of beauty.

My mum and aunties can make something lovely out of almost anything it seems. Except relationships, perhaps: of the six Robertson children, there will be five divorces. Sometimes no end of craft or skill can turn around a project based on ill-matched materials.

As they sat and knitted and sewed and talked, shared tales of absent or abusive husbands, money denied, happiness on hold; as they wove their particular sad story, I wonder: did they realise all along they were reading off the same pattern?

• • •

Ours is not a family of heirlooms. When Nan died there were few treasures to share around: a tarnished silver tea set, a cut crystal salad bowl or two, a badly tuned upright piano and the like. My mum's inheritance? The patchwork quilt. She is delighted.

Craft is generally admired for the amount of time its makers have invested. Personally, I value the way it removes me from my everyday routine: slows time and offers space for contemplation; a gateway to memory. Simple acts of repetition build to something more. In the long nights after my sister's death, I cross-stitched samplers for the female family I held dear, then Christmas stockings for my young children. With each row of tiny stitches, each square crossed off the pattern, I could slowly see the original give way to the shape of my new creation.

Boxes of Mia's clothes still spill from my cupboards. Patterns and textures I recognize, see in particular rooms, with specific boyfriends hanging off her arm, I can't bear to let these memories of my late sister go.

Perhaps I should make a quilt of these clothes, bring these clashing colours and textures to an uneasy harmony. Through careful calculation, measuring, stitching, I might just make sense of this jumble of scraps and memories. Stuffing the layers with wadding could make it comforting and warm. Small intricate stitches—a second, less obvious pattern to trace with the finger—could create an unbroken series of swirls. Connections.

Wrapped in such a quilt, surrounded by memories of the sister whose touch my skin has forgotten, I might be reminded again how our relationships continue, even after the final thread is cut, the last stitch knotted and tied.

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Bond Cleaning Ella Jeffery

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You never get it all back. Not the whole bond,
not the days spent worrying with a sponge
at tidelines of dirt where you've toed the wall
behind your desk for years. You're shocked
at the messes you've made, the piles of paper
grown huge and useless, skirting boards cuticled
with your muck, you who've always been so clean.
The furniture shoved aside as though suddenly,
after years in the house, you can't get enough space.
Even your toes have betrayed you, the prints
of dirt behind the desk you didn't see yourself
making, guiltless as animal tracks. You want
to leave those marks. Without the desk
they could mean anything.

Love in Two Parts Donna Mazza

Donna Mazza was joint recipient of the Patricia Hackett Prize 2015 for 'The Exhibit'. Her first novel *The Albanian* (Fremantle Press, 2007) was awarded the TAG Hungerford Award. Her second novel, *Dark Little Ghost*, was shortlisted for the Dorothy Hewett Award (2016). She teaches writing and literature at Edith Cowan University South West.

The scar on her upper lip was faded: a thick, pale tracery from lip to nose. Her mother told the story of reconstructive surgery in the seventies to anyone who'd listen. It seemed a turning point in her life, but to Angela it barely registered, except when it came to lip liner. Concealer was a habit. The itch that started the day Michael left with the kids was unexpected. She told herself it was a cold sore coming, stress induced.

She swallowed zinc and lysine. Scratched it in the car at school, where she waited in the silence at the side of the road. Every day he took them to their classroom. Held their hands very tightly, as he had held hers and she had held theirs, most days. One on each side, dear little warm hands with broken-off dirty fingernails from backyard digging and potions. She didn't want them to cry so she watched, scratched. She knew he saw her there but he never turned to look. The girls would recognise her car but he probably distracted them with some observation on the other side of the street so they looked away. Once they had passed she drove off, not ready to meet him alone outside the school. Only her mother was her ally. It seemed she had to be.

'You'd better stop scratching at your lip Angela, or you'll end up with a sore.' Her mother was rarely still and kept her house dust free. Spotless, with an 'outside' dog and a late husband.

'Leave off it, Mum. It's the stress.'

Claire arched a brow, made tea. Angela knew her mother's look of latent disapproval. The silent anger pulled her lips in like a drawstring bag. Angela could almost hear the unspoken line that she'd 'brought it all on herself'.

Orange, flowery canisters from her childhood, now vintage, on a kitchen shelf with photos of Sophie and Jade. Double babies on the windowsill, top of the fridge, the TV cabinet, bookshelf. Sometimes with

her own tired face. Beautiful babies and she, a flat eyed mother. The dream husband drenched in adoration. Even to herself she appeared dull and absent, and he too handsome. Something never felt right about her body, her face. These images were not her real self and having them all around in her mother's house, reflecting back at her, they shook her inside where, in fact, she was already broken.

Hot tea hurt a little on the roof of her mouth. The scars were tender, as if all her nerve endings were alight with damnation. Her mother sought words, threads of inane chat working at restoration. Eventually they retreated to television.

She left, but avoided school and any public reckoning she might launch if the children spotted her in the car. She had asked Michael to take them with him. The affair was a crack in their family that she had to fix. It was her fault, this shattering of children. She drove too quickly. Shivering tremors ran through her. At home she swallowed tranquilisers and fell asleep in front of MASH re-runs.

She woke late in the morning to the answering machine. Grant wanted to see her again, but she was in retreat. He was never going to be worth all this breakage. Four lives for him—not much of a triumph. Nothing you'd call love.

The sound of his voice made her shake. Her body prickled from her scalp, right down her spine to the crack of her bottom. She told herself it was anxiety, or herpes. She didn't care if it was. It was well deserved.

Claire played veterans soccer. Sometimes, Angela and the girls came along with their folding chairs to watch her play. They distracted her from the game and seemed to miss each heroic passage of play with toilet trips and snacking. The coach's three-legged Staffy constantly needed its belly scratched by the children. Having them there was enough to swell her heart. The team all smiled and greeted her lovely little family. The angelic twins.

Training was Wednesday night but Claire was too fidgety to go. She knocked. Several times. The car was there. Knocked. Again. Under a pot of dead succulents she rummaged for the spare key. Neglect and death, fading plastic toys cracked from summer. Some unwrapped on birthdays. And winding amid dead leaves, the shed skin of a snake. No wonder she was always so depressed; living like this just made it worse.

Inside, Claire might have found her daughter in flagrante delicto and for a moment that thought made her step softly, but Angela was asleep on Sophie's bed. Claire put on a load of washing. She had beaten this path before in her daughter's house during postnatal depression, which

seemed to last for years. Scraping dead flies and Rice Bubbles from a dry milk crust. Bathroom. Sheets. Tranquilisers on the bench, a murky glass. Not enough self-care for the girl she raised and nursed through ups and too many downs. Suffered for. When Angela was born she was not normal or right. Those doctors were demi-gods but they could not erase the image of the cleft face. She needed no photographs. The red crying mouth trying to suck her tit with tongue and open nostrils and snot and milk spraying all over her. She went home and left the baby to be fixed and bottle fed. After many weeks she could finally love her repaired baby, all healed—no signs of a stitch, of a break. But there was some cold cushion of air that kept her heart from enclosing this child. Much as she tried, she could never give the girl as much affection as she seemed to need.

But, Claire was a believer in forgiveness and grace. Michael was the grace in her daughter's life and forgiveness did not come easily. Claire tried to love through action. Evening began. The dryer spun. She made a pot of soup and cleaned out the fridge. Missed training.

Eventually the tingling in her lips woke her and she found herself running her tongue across the roof of her mouth. It felt different, like licking the segments of a mandarin where they join together. Underneath her a creeping lightness spread through her abdomen. In a waking haze she recalled the damp of early maternity—one on each side. Pretty lips sucking after her raw nipples. Women are supposed to forget the pain and shames of childbirth and be consumed by love for the baby.

In the single antenatal class she could stand going to, the animation in the video was supposed to comfort anxious mothers in the lead up to birth by making it seem natural for all the bones in the pelvis to move apart. Ligaments softened by hormones. The sacrum and pelvis not solid or whole but broken by design. She recalled the feel of knucklebones in her hands, rubbing together then tossed. In the animation, a silent moving apart and bringing together belied the impact of this on a real body. Michael had instinctively rubbed her lower back.

In truth, birthing twins was more like the knucklebones and she was enclosed in the tight fist of a greater force, grinding her parts together and tearing them apart in turns. Something of her was lost forever, gained forever.

It was nothing like the video, which never mentioned episiotomy or diastasis recti; never warned that the doctor might take a scalpel to her perineum, or that her stomach muscles could part like a broken zip.

She thought vaginas would be stitched back together with a thread of forgetting, like cleft lips and palates. Hers had come undone. The cells

were remembering her true form. No stitches would mend a wound such as this. Working away beneath the sheets.

She sat beside her mother on the couch. Snuggled into her and cried like a small child until she was quite emptied. Claire stroked her warm hair with tender fingers, running them over the part until the feel of it caused her to shiver. This mother love was a kind of discomfort between them but she had never said the things she felt too deep down for them to find a way up.

‘Go and have a shower, love.’

‘Sorry Mum.’

‘For what?’

‘Being like this, doing stupid things, ruining our family. I don’t know why I did it.’

She had never intended to apologise to her mother because she had not earned an apology. In fact she might have blamed her, in part, so she stopped herself from continuing to run down her own behaviour and felt a little angry instead.

Strange sensations in the shower. She sluiced and washed but there was nothing to touch. She was numb. Her fingers seemed to disappear into her vagina without sensation as if it wasn’t there, but Angela wasn’t worried, particularly. She dried her body carefully and as she pressed the towel into her pubic bone it felt mobile, ligaments loosened. The thread of forgetting had unravelled and she observed herself, dispassionate but somehow satisfied that this justice, however rough, was a kind of reality. The animation of her pelvis as it spread in childbirth had split her skin—popped like a bitten grape—and a rending such as that should never go back to the shape it was before. There was nothing to gain for her by staying stitched and pretending it never happened. It had never felt right.

She touched her navel gingerly and stared into the mirror at her scarred lip. These two places had broken too. She threw on ugly flannelette pyjamas for women of any shape to present to her mother, knowing she would be waiting for some sign of wellness to set her free. Claire was nicer when she was out playing soccer, her grey ponytail a banner of cloud in the winter sun. Angela saw this energy and felt proud that her old mother still played soccer.

Sad mother-eyes smiled at her in the kitchen. She infused worry into the tea as she stirred, dissolving non-existent sugar in a savage swirl. Angela knew the words before they aired.

‘I think you should go to the doctor.’

She refused the predictable answer and stayed silent, awaiting the follow up statement.

‘I’m worried about you Angela.’

‘A doctor can’t stop that Mum. You will worry because I am a worry.’

Her mother closed her eyes for a moment, an expression styled to feign a search for spiritual strength, common among parents of that generation.

‘I can see you won’t listen to me and I’m not going to push you.’

‘I brought this on myself. I deserve to suffer. Look what I’ve done—and for nothing. For a moment of awkward lust with an uninteresting man.’

‘Why, Love?’

Angela gazed at the darkened windows. ‘I’m not a very good mother. And really, I never deserved Michael.’

‘He doesn’t deserve this.’

‘See, we agree. But he’ll let you see the girls Mum.’

‘They’ll be missing you, I wish you’d call him and sort it out.’

‘I’m not ready.’ And she knew it to be true in ways beyond her mother’s imagination. Ready was something beginning to form deep within herself like an assemblage of all that had gone before. Things had to find their right place.

Claire had the girls’ dry washing folded and packed in her car to take to them tomorrow. She did this while Angela was in the shower. Some things can’t be shared. Preserving her relationship with all of them was top priority. She would drop it all off to Michael in the morning before they went to school. She had called him. She had to.

I will forgive her, Claire, but I need some time to get there, he had said.

It’s depression, darling, she had said. She’s never kept an even keel for long, you know that.

She needs more than the girls in her life now they are at school full time. I told her to try some study or work. I didn’t tell her to try out our mechanic.

She’s sick, Michael.

I know that Claire, give me time.

I don’t know if she has too much in her, Love.

She knew he was a good man. Stupid girl, didn’t realise how lucky she was. Two lovely little daughters. So affectionate to their granny. Tears slipped out silently when she dropped off the washing to their motel room. She whisked them off and waved goodbye with a forced smile.

Claire’s fragile baby gave her much worry: drew a spirograph of it on her forehead and cheekbones. Some patterns seem permanently etched, no matter how we try to remodel them.

By late morning, Claire was back at the house to check on Angela.

Anything could happen to her like this and there was nobody to keep a close eye on her except her mother. The mound of her in the child's bed appeared still. Quietly she touched her cheek. Warm. A little too warm perhaps. A small sound, sigh-groan.

Then Angela turned and Claire's gasp cut through her throat like a blade.

Thirty years dropped beneath her like an avalanche. The face she could not bear to remember blended into one she loved.

'What?' Angela sat up.

Claire could barely utter a thing. 'My God.' Eyes filled with tears, she trembled like an old woman. 'My poor baby.'

Claire bawled. Panic and fear and memory blended in a turmoil and she shook her head as if to refuse the image.

'It's alright Mum. I don't feel bad at all. This is the real me, after all.'

Claire's horror. Right there.

'You need help! This is not normal.' Hysteria wasn't far away from her. She willed herself to calm down.

'Mum, I don't want you to worry so much. Listen, I feel better. That's good, isn't it?' All the order Claire had tried to restore was gone in a moment.

Silently, Angela ran careful fingertips across her lips and nose, which had formed pale petals either side. New fissures formed down her chin, between her eyes. Her mother retreated to the kitchen in a 'state' and Angela rose cautiously from the bed. The looseness yesterday had bifurcated and now there was emptiness, where once her flesh was knitted. It was a clean break. A rendering of two segments. Fear and excitement rippled through her. *So, this is what I am, what I am meant to be. I am broken and I can't be stitched back into one.*

She was a little shaky on her legs, but dressed for her mother. She really wanted to walk naked through the house and test this strange body. The elastic waist of her pants held together her rent navel. Of course it was opened, it made perfect sense to her. Her link to her mother was a wound; how either of them thought it was ready to be sealed up was unfathomable. She had been hollowed out and grown into two branches, right up to her diaphragm. How it was possible, she did not know. But she was strangely relieved at this.

They ate a quick eggs-dinner by the light of the television. Claire's sideways glance, in the dim light, deep and heavy.

'You can go if you want to Mum. I'll be fine.'

'I won't relax until you've seen a doctor and those girls are with you again.'

'A doctor will probably stitch me back together again. I think my body

has other plans. I'm almost ready Mum, I'll call them soon. Tomorrow, probably.'

But her mother just shook her head. Her eyes red with tears, her face grim with suffering. There was no way Claire could accept the unstitched vagina, the animated pelvis, her split navel.

'It's alright, Mum.'

'How is this alright? You have a cleft palate worse than when you were a baby. They fixed it. How does this happen? And how the hell is it alright?'

'Mum, love is not love which alters when it alteration finds.'

'Bloody hell. Thanks for the reminder.'

Angela let her mother clear the dishes, tidy up and put wet clothes in the dryer. She accepted her mother's need to work when things got stressful and lay on the couch, watching reality television, breathing in the reality of her new self and its becoming.

After her third night of deep sleep, Angela woke to a feeling of completeness. This remaking of her had run its course.

What seemed impossible had become her new truth.

She walked as one, but fully segmented into two parts. Before these days in exile from her children, her skin had hidden the tears in flesh and muscle. But healing, so it seemed, was only skin deep. Now her outside and her inside agreed and the muscles, which had split like a swelled cherry during her pregnancy, now unzipped completely.

She entered the quiet house ready for her mother's horror but found instead a note:

I have gone to speak to Michael about what is happening to you. I know you wouldn't consent to a doctor, but I think you are seriously ill and he needs to know about it. He is a lovely man and he will forgive you. You must forgive yourself too. I forgive you, darling, and I love you with all my heart. Mum.

All weeping had been done and the salts of it rushed down the plug hole in a churning torrent from the shower. Her unease was gone and her new skin a healthy pink. Fresh as babies. A fine membrane had grown over her parting. This was not ruination after all. All the way down she was created anew as symmetrical pieces. She dried between her two halves with a fresh towel, careful to avoid the single bond between her left and right.

No diagnosis would be proper or possible but she suspected this was an artery or maybe an umbilical cord. The one thing that remained to hold her to herself. Somehow in her new self, Angela stood straighter and more robust but she anchored her halves with a bra just in case.

She hung the towels out in the sun. Branches of the pomegranate sagged with the weight of fruit. Fractured when ripe. In the sun, she plucked a pink orb and cracked it down the middle. Seeds burst on her teeth, the red syrup of the fruit dripping between her cleft lips. She was sweetened again, ready.

Claire was worried what the kids would think when they saw their mother but they both just ran up and threw their arms around her. Once the cuddling eased, they stood back and began to touch Angela's face.

'Wow. Have you been sick Mumma? Did it hurt?'

'Well I was born like this sweetheart—'

Claire tutted, 'Not exactly.'

'—and I've been sick trying to hide it but now I feel better.'

Sophie ran her bitten index finger over her mother's divided lips and nose to her chin. She traced fingers into her hair, down the outside of her parted forehead then put them in the narrow crevice between the two halves of her head. Little fingers just fit.

'Feels just like skins. No hair in your brain Mumma—lucky. It would be hard to cut in there. Is your brain working okay?'

'Great. Better now you two are here.'

Jade sat quietly watching her sister touch her mother's face; stared at her partitioned throat.

'You are twins like us now Mumma. We can have half each.' She held her left hand tightly. 'Are you like this all the way down to your bum?'

Claire tried to hide her reaction to this question. 'Bottom not bum,' she croaked with ruddy anger.

'I don't think your grandmother can deal with this, but yes.'

'Can you eat like normal Mum? Where does your blood go?'

'Everything works fine girls, don't worry. I feel happier.'

'Can we see?'

Angela stood and dropped her dressing gown on the couch. She met her mother's eyes.

'Don't watch if you don't want to deal with the truth Mum.'

Claire sat slowly on a chair, breathing raggedly, her face still reddened. Angela dropped the pyjama pants on the floor. Nothing to see but two elegant legs. Slowly she unbuttoned the pyjama top and finally the bra.

The cleft through her throat spread between her two breasts. Claire could see a sliver of the bookshelf behind them through her daughter's chest. The division was neat and healed, bloodless. A clear break in two. A narrow fissure divided her torso, through her navel and down her pubic bone.

The two children walked around her, staring at their grandmother through the canyon in her middle.

Finally, Angela stood smiling and naked in the lounge room, divided in two parts through her whole body, held together only at the stomach by a purplish-red cord. It visibly pulsed. She spread her arms wide.

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Making
After 'Digging' by Seamus Heaney
Lea McNerney

Lea McNerney's essays and poetry have been published in *Griffith Review*, *Meanjin*, *Cordite*, *Southerly* and *Australian Poetry Anthology 2015*.

In the corner of my desk lie scraps of paper.
I tuck them away in the old sewing basket.
My grandmother could sew anything from a salvaged
yard of cloth. A glance at a picture of a frock
in a magazine held up by one of her girls—
in a morning she'd have it made. No pattern,
just kitchen table skill, a mind quick with the maths
of straight lines, curves and darts, her eyes
sharp as the slice of her scissors on chalked
lines, sending tiny clouds into the air. My mother,
tape measure round her neck, ends swinging,
a metre of fabric before her, in her hand the good
scissors, bottom blade gliding over the laminex,
top blade cutting round the tissue-paper edges
of the pattern we picked out from the shop
down the street. The old sewing basket is full now,
scraps of paper spill over the brim, words and lines
that pop into my head at work, on the train,
on the bus, on the weekends, scribbled fast
before they fade. I'll make with them.

The Atheist's Prayer
Stuart A. Paterson

Stuart A. Paterson is a widely published & anthologised Scottish poet. His 2015 collection *Border Lines* (Indigo Dreams) was voted Best Poetry Pamphlet at the 2016 Saboteur Awards in London. His latest collection is *Aye* (Tapsalteerie), and he has recently had work included in *APJ* and *Arena*. He lives in Galloway by the Solway coast.

At the end of it all I hope there's nothing,
not something I haven't prepared for
like endless fields of back-lit poppies,
halo-wreathed family members, pearly gates,
decomposing bodies, drooling pets
that died when I was 8, or Belgium.
Better nothing envelopes me,
a suddenness of everything
just stopping, a final blink.
No point in romantically hoping
that my ghosts of eye will open
to an afterlife of desperate
expectations. At the end, if anything,
I hope there's no beginning, coming back,
reincarnation in tiny halting breaths
already sighing away the days to death,
no tunnels or blinding lights,
just glimpses of fellow star stuff
praying that Sagan had it right.

Born Free, Created Poor: Coming of Age in Ethiopia

Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes
and Rebecca Higgle

Yirga is a writer, researcher and poet from Lalibela, Ethiopia. He currently lives in Perth, Western Australia, where he is a Lecturer at the Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University.

Rebecca is a writer and poet from Perth. She currently fosters childhood literacy as the Library Officer at Guildford Primary, WA's oldest public school.

Poverty is not the lack of food or shelter. That is destitution. Poverty is a concept that creates you as a different person, a different being. Through knowledge, you come to know you are poor.

...

I was born in Lalibela, an ancient holy town in rural Ethiopia. I was born at a time when the traditional monarchical system was overthrown by a military power—the Derg. I was called Yirga, which means ‘let it be’. My name was a wish of stability, a hope that the world would settle around us. But I never knew stability was needed. The world was beautiful and I was free.

So little of Lalibela is level. Even the fields slope up and down like waves in the earth. It seems that long ago, rock sprung out of the ground and mountains erupted from parallel plains, carrying greenery and life. From this rock, my people sliced into the earth and carved eleven churches, mighty feats of architecture and faith cut from single pieces of stone. Ethiopia adopted Christianity around 300 AD, long before Europe, and these churches were crafted in the 12th century as testaments to our long-held faith.

I grew up on the body of mountains. Our house, a circular hut made entirely by my father's hands, nestled at the foot of *Zayit Woyira*¹, Mount Olive. It was a very simple house of wood, grass and mud. Ethiopia imported one thing from Australia: eucalyptus. My father used the heady-smelling wood to build our home. The roof he made from a long, strong grass called *sembalet*. Sometimes, the inside of the house was painted with *ebet*, cow dung. The excreta of cows were not regarded as something dirty. Before I can even remember, I learnt how to collect it, dry it in the sun and use it as a fuel.

We kept animals, first ten sheep and later two cows. Our most beloved cow, Maskala, was named for the beautiful cross on her forehead. She

loved my mother, the only person she allowed to milk her. Whenever she heard my mother's voice, she came running. She was affectionate to me, too. Whenever I scratched her neck, she licked my frizzy hair like a cat grooming its kitten. I took her and the other cattle to the fields and as they grazed, I played games with my friends.

The mountains, the churches, the fields and the grass: they were all mine. I could run to any house, go to any person, and be given food. I learnt to cultivate the land from my father. In the cool rock churches and out in the fields, monks taught me stories of creation, history, philosophy, poetry and over 200 characters from the ancient Ge'ez Fidel alphabet still used today. I began to play with my native language of Amharic, twisting sentences into rhymes.

Everything I learnt, I passed on. I picked up songs, riddles and dances from neighbours, snatching them and adding them to my collection to share with whoever crossed my path. I stood on a rock above my friends, reciting songs I'd heard from church leaders:

*'Nitfiker eskenimewut hale hale luya!
Nitfiker eskenimewut hale hale luya!
Alem halafi nat kemetselalot.'*

‘Let us love each other till we die. Halle-Hallelujah!
Let us love each other till we die. Halle-Hallelujah!
For the earth will pass like shadow.’

In the same breath, I chanted communist slogans I'd heard from the Derg:

*'Esey esey dess maletu!
Keminged laay tezergito metayetu
Ya mindegna ye'ehapa kitregna
Bekey shibir temetito sitegna
Esey esey dess maletu!
Keminged laay tezergito metayetu.'*

‘Victory victory how sweet!
The sight of a body razed on the street
That sly treacherous rebel
Hit by ‘Red Terror’² and sent to the devil
Victory victory how sweet!
The sight of a body razed on the street.’

I never felt the discord between the two messages. I only wanted to share what I knew.

...

There was a Western elementary school very close to our house. It was a collection of small rooms made of wood, with corrugated iron sheets for a roof. I would walk past the school and see all my friends collected in one room, sitting quietly and paying attention to the teacher. I was not allowed to attend the school, I was only five, but to me this was no barrier. I would run to the school and *bang bang bang* on the great metal gate with my tiny fists until they let me in. All the students rushed out, chanting and shouting.

‘Yirga metta! Yirga is here!’

The teachers quickly learnt that just as I wouldn’t stop banging on the gate until it opened, I would not go away until they let me take over their class.

‘It’s my turn! I want to teach!’ I shouted, stamping my feet. ‘I want to teach them now!’

And the teacher let me. I took the chalk and wrote on the board, all nonsense scribbles as I was too young to know how to write. I said a few words, turned to the students and pointed at what I had scrawled. They laughed and repeated what I said. Then, when I had finished, I would run home, leaving the teacher with a room of giggling children.

In a town where every house was my house, where every classroom was a pulpit for me to preach or teach or tell stories, I never knew that we lacked anything. Late at night, we would be sent to cut grass or fetch water. We didn’t have pipes in the house back then. Water was collected from small springs across the mountains. As time went on, the climate changed and the water started to disappear. We were asked to fetch water from further and further away. We carried water in plastic bottles, big ones that came to the country in 1984 when there was famine. Aid workers brought oil in these large plastic jugs and we continued to use them long after they had gone. As we went about our errand, the bottles became drums. We beat them as we sang and danced. We picked freshly sprouted seeds from fledgling crops—wheat, beans, chickpeas—snacking as we went. Depending on where we’d go, the grass tickled our toes or the dust of the earth turned our brown feet red.

We never questioned the distance to fetch water. The lack of water in the neighbourhood, I never saw it as poverty. It was simply just that ‘there was no water’. As children, it was an opportunity for another adventure.

‘Oh, today there is no water. So what are we going to do?’

‘Let’s go and get water from that *far far* place!’

We saw it as a simple fact of life, a mere inconvenience at most.

It was only when I became a student in the modern Western school, the one I had so eagerly demanded to be let in to teach, that my world began to change.

...

My father knew many things. He knew how to cultivate the land, build houses, make furniture. Just as I enjoyed teaching, my father loved to learn, and accumulated many skills by acting as an informal apprentice to many builders and carpenters in the area. When the Derg came, they started opening government offices and were looking for recruits. My father was eager to find a job.

‘Have you been to school at all?’

‘No.’

‘Have you received any certificates?’

‘No, but I can farm, I can make furniture, I can build—’

‘You may have many abilities but the only thing you can really become is a security guard. We cannot employ you for anything else.’

Because he didn’t go to school, all the things my father knew were reduced to nothing. The man who built my family home, grew every grain and vegetable and raised every animal that would grace our plates, he knew nothing in the eyes of this new system. He became a guard, but he was so wounded by his newly discovered ignorance that he decided to go



Me as a child (front row centre). My father stands directly behind, looking off into the distance (back row centre). The sign on the door is a poster from the Derg. It is a revolutionary call to defend the motherland. Image provided by the authors.

to school. So when I went to the modern school with all the other children, I went with my father. He studied up to Grade Nine until he became too busy with the four brothers and one sister that came after me. I went all the way to high school and beyond.

In Ethiopia, all high schools and universities teach in English. It is not a matter of simply learning English, we are expected to learn, to be instructed and assessed in a language that is not ours. When I asked why I had to learn in English, I was offered a simple explanation: it offers us an escape from poverty. If we can communicate in English, we can attract foreign investors or receive aid funding. But this policy was, and continues to be, one of the strongest creators of poverty. When I was made to study in a foreign language, I became a child again. I started by simply repeating everything that was said to me. We call it *shimdeda*, mindlessly parroting foreign words without knowing their meaning. Suddenly my friends and I, we who had already mastered a language, mastered philosophy, mastered songs and games and dances, mastered the best way to carry water or create fuel from cow dung, were told to stop, go back, and start again.

Our minds became impoverished.

So we started again, and we were taught the history of far away places. We learnt about the West, a place where paradise seemed to be. We were told of all the glorious things the West has—machines, industry, science—and were made to notice the lack of such things in Ethiopia. More insidiously, we were made to see the wonders of our own land, our very existence, in a new light. We started to forget that we never needed those things to carve churches out of mountains, to make food or warm shelter, to defeat Western attempts to take the only soil never colonised in Africa. And in this process of forgetting, slowly we were remade as new beings, poor beings. I learnt poverty through education.

Just like my father, I sought out foreign knowledge to address this newly acquired realisation. My two worlds began to merge. When I would go to the fields with the cattle, I would take my exercise book and practice my English. I always loved reading *loud*. I started to talk to the cows and the trees, trying to teach them.

'How are you, Mr Tree? Hey, Maskala, what are you doing?'

I would sing so many songs, but now I added English ones.

'Listen to the cock, *coo coo*!

Listen to the dog, *woo woo*!

Listen to the cow, *moo moo*!

Listen to the cat, *mew mew*!

Listen, listen, listen!'

As the years went on, play in the field fell away. Even adults yelled at us for singing our local songs. When we dug play churches out of sand and took turns as the wise old priests, adults now loyal to the Derg screamed at us for practicing the backward religion that they had once so proudly taught us. Lalibela had been such a very big school to me. But now my time was consumed by a small room and a teacher who kept pressing on us to repeat foreign words and concepts that had no reference to the reality we lived. We were no longer teachers to one another. We were all just students, permitted to move from one grade to another through tests, shut out completely from the entire community.

...

The realisation that I was poor—that my country was poor—didn't just happen at the individual level. Before I was born, our last Emperor, Haile Selassie, became friendly to the West and brought Western knowledge and institutions to a people who would later use such tools to overthrow him. Ethiopia went through a re-education process that saw not only education but government and law all replaced by cut-and-pasted foreign imitations. University students, as the first bearers of Western education, became aware that they were poor in the eyes of the world. It's like somebody makes your clothes and then you have to find a way to fit into them. The elders became old fools, the farmers mere tenants, the old leaders feudals, and the church scholars reactionaries.

The students viewed their people as slaves of an old monarchical system and decided to abolish it through violence. Yet, even when the military took over, slaughtering the students and taking over their cause, the Derg never had complete control. Civil war raged in the country, quietly in Eritrea at first, and then in a great climax where a group of rebels known as the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) started taking large parts of the country. In 1989, Lalibela fell into the hands of the rebels and my father's position as a guard for the Derg became perilous. The Derg withdrew from the town and my father went with them, all the way to Dessie, some 240 kilometres away.

At this time, classes made way for weapons as the modern school became a storeroom for rebel arms. I committed myself to the wisdom of the traditional education system and became a preacher at Sunday School. I was a scrawny teenager, short for my age, but I spoke with authority at the church, encouraging young men not to give in to violence during this time of war. The rebels began to notice me, questioning why this little boy had the ear of men who could become soldiers in their army.

The rebels were not brutal like the Derg and tolerated my numerous lectures about God, but every time I turned a potential recruit away from them, my mother became afraid that they might come for me. The laxity I was granted as virtue of being a child was starting to fade. I was sent to Dessie to join my father and resume my education.

I went to Dessie on foot. It took four long days over those rolling mountains of my country. I could not possibly take a car, for the rebels controlled all the vehicles in the area. Even if I was offered a ride, I would not take it. The Derg screamed overhead in their jets, bombing any car that came towards their stronghold. Slick fighter jets—*migs*—filled the air with fire. In Lalibela, I had hidden under the bed like a child hiding from monsters. On the way to Dessie, the squeal of the jets was constant. Every time, I dropped to the ground.

When I finally made it to Dessie, I found the town crowded, full of people who had fled the rebels who now occupied Eritrea, Tigray, Woldia, Lalibela, and much of northern Ethiopia. I started my final years of high school there, among thousands of displaced students. In 1991, just as we finished our Year 10 exam, the rebels took control of the entire country. The EPRDF formed government but the Western systems of education, law and governance remained. I passed the national entrance exam and secured a position studying law at Addis Ababa University. In the same year, I had children of my own, beautiful twin girls. I supported my family by working as a health assistant, but with two babies we struggled so much. The girls' mother encouraged me to go to university. Western education, once again, was seen as the escape from poverty.

• • •

I studied Law in English, despite the fact that law in Ethiopia is written and practiced in Amharic. My lecturers all taught in a language that was not theirs. I began to notice how utterly irrelevant my education was to my world. To learn laws and legislation in a language in which I would never practice law; this seemed to be the height of pointlessness.

I started to search for meaning again. I set up a club called Afroflag, where students could come together and discuss social and political issues. I stumbled across US President Harry Truman's 'Fair Deal'. He spoke of such seemingly noble things:

'We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in

conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant... For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people.'³

Suddenly, we had become an 'underdeveloped area'. So much of Africa had been ravaged by colonisation, but Ethiopia had not. We had escaped the 'underdevelopment' that occurs when a country and culture experiences genocide. And yet, my lecturers and fellow students believed in this Truman-esque vision of development for the country. None of them ever realised that their definition of poverty was not about lacking food, water, shelter, education or the ability to access all these things; it was about the lack of industrial agriculture, the lack of foreign investment, or the lack of Western-defined benchmarks like certificates or degrees.

After my studies, I passed up the opportunity to become an assistant judge at Ethiopia's Supreme Court so I could to develop Afroflag from a student club into a national NGO. We conducted programs which sought to bridge the gap between the traditional elders who held so much of the country's local knowledge and the young people who had been educated in the new Western system. Though I valued the work, I also felt a growing sense of responsibility to my children, who had moved to Australia with their mother a few years before.

The following year, when I left Ethiopia to come to Australia, I was not destitute. I was a well-educated director of a respected NGO. Yet the label 'Ethiopian' made me poor in the eyes of almost every Australian I ever met. Despite having Western qualifications and experience, I was still not Western enough. Like my father, my knowledge and experience was reduced to nothing. Like my father, I became a security guard.

Years later, I again chased education as a solution to my poverty. I am a lecturer now, back as a teacher scribbling on the board. Though I know I am blessed in so many ways, I often reflect on what I have become and how I was made. Lalibela has changed with me. It is still beautiful, but it has been modernised, and behind all modernisation is something that has been murdered. The traditional teachers and priests are looked upon as custodians of a dying knowledge, good only for tourists. The land itself is scarred, the springs and rivers dried up, cleared for new hotels. Satellite dishes swivel upon rooftops, transmitting to youth whose play in the fields have been replaced by Hollywood movies. The menus in local restaurants are often exclusively in English. My parents cannot read them. The modest houses and rich traditions, the fruits and vegetables we would gather and eat: all of these things disappeared in the name of development.

As a child who did not own shoes, who fetched water in plastic bottles left by aid workers, I was never poor. When my white fiancée tells someone that her future husband is Ethiopian, they furrow their brow in sympathy and mutter heartfelt condolences for some unspoken perceived struggle. Others are more direct.

‘Oh, was he a refugee?’ they ask. ‘He must love being here.’

I cannot blame them. Their knowledge of Ethiopia was informed by the very same thing that was once my fiancée’s only reference to the country—a simple thing, that common phrase said to stubborn children at the dinner table: ‘Think of the starving Ethiopians.’

As a child who thought nothing of hunger, I was taught the very same thing.

Notes

- 1 The Amharic and Ge’ez words through this piece are written here using the English Latin Alphabet. They would normally be written using Ge’ez *Fidel* (ፊደል), but the authors have used English characters so that non-Ethiopian readers may get a sense of how the Amharic and Ge’ez languages sound. Using English characters has become more common among Ethiopians who are educated in the Western school system, but they may spell the same word differently. For example, the word ከጎጂራ (a staple bread used to eat stew) may be written as injera or enjera, depending on the individual. The reader should therefore note that the use of English characters has been approximated. The true sounds of Amharic and Ge’ez are also difficult to replicate, given that *Fidel* has so many characters with pronunciations that do not appear in English.
- 2 The Red Terror was the name given to a Derg campaign that involved the mass killing of political opponents.
- 3 Truman’s Inaugural Address, 20 January 1949. Text accessible at https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/soyr_archive/inagural20jan1949.htm

Christchurch stopover

Ignatius Kim

Ignatius Kim has recently returned to poetry. He has been published in *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*. He has poems forthcoming in *Southerly* and the 2016 *Grieve Anthology*. He was commended in the 2015 Melbourne Poets Union International Poetry Competition and the 2015 Robyn Mathison Poetry Prize.

Boarded shopfronts strike a sickly pose
as we eat mod Mex not far from Cashel Street.
Around us buttes of hotel glass jut
from vacant blocks sporting warning signs

like medals on a veteran’s chest.
We sip margaritas and imagine
some macabre mock-up
of Monument Valley.

The cathedral, a cracked carapace,
gasps with throat wide open to heaven
a soundless scream from Guernica.
Past walls like torn skin,

sapped and flaking, crowds slowly clump
as they would at the zoo.

Stopped station clocks, clear as time capsules
await the honour of ruins.

Life has decamped to the suburbs
where surgery continues
five years on, streets still cut
open for vascular repair.

We cough at the acrid black of fresh sutures.

What hapless god could know
the caprice of this city at the seam?
Whose name’s coarse consonants catch and chafe
to echo the scrum of earth’s restless plates;
where words like liquefaction seep with such ease
from the chatter of young children.

Chicago Sonnet #5

D. A. Hosek

D. A. Hosek is a graduate of the MFA program at the University of Tampa. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Southampton Review*, *Headland*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Every Day Fiction* and elsewhere.

This is where Fermi split the atom:
it should have been in the woods
outside the city—far from the ones
it was meant to protect—not below

the stands of an abandoned stadium.
Afterwards, the pile (and it was, in fact,
little more than a pile of uranium
and wood and bricks) did end up in

the woods, buried beneath a stone marker
that warns, ‘do not dig here,’ that says, ‘you’re safe,’
even though the remains of Fermi’s
experiment still burn deep in the ground.

Here in the city another marker, a plaque
that signifies a spot and nothing more.

Cartography

Alice Allan

Alice Allan’s poetry has been published in *Verity La*, *Cordite*, *Rabbit* and *Australian Book Review*. She records the weekly podcast ‘Poetry Says’.

Curled segments fit tight to the grid

Plate 165:

Map Showing Indian Reservations Within the United States

black outlines orange

Rosebud in Dakota

Crow in Montana

Red Lake in Minnesota

Mission in California

The gape of it is beige
moves over space to see from floating
grasp direction

Blue line tells time and distance
head west turn left

The gape of it is green

hides limonite under Augusta, Cardiff

Westdale, Seabird

admits limits

Curled segments wired hard to the grid

Woman in transit
Liam Ferney

Liam Ferney's most recent collection, *Content* (Hunter Publishing), was shortlisted for the Judith Wright Calanthe Award. His previous collection, *Boom* (Grand Parade Poets), was shortlisted for a number of national awards. He is a media manager, poet and aspiring left back living in Brisbane, Australia.

the same crescent moon
& you're the royal flush
laid triumphantly over
my book review obligations

& while beijing dips
brisbane blisters into lightning
power outages cancel futsal
the week's pram tumbles

& i build you a day
full of berries and morning sun
we go out to a park
& yesterday's rain stays away

**'A Bilingual Force Moving
in Between':¹ memories of a
bilingual animal²**
Ouyang Yu

Ouyang Yu now teaches literary translation and creative writing at SUIBE (Shanghai University of International Business and Economics). He has to date published 83 books in both English and Chinese.

I was going through my decades of writing, mainly in Chinese, and entirely of poetry, dating back to the late 1970s, about 30 years ago, when a poem I wrote at the university emerged, in its bilingual form, as follows:

月moon浴夜的深静³

Dripping
Drip
哗哗的flow清幽

Scent声隐约soon vanishing
Sweetening
Sweet
叶下gather碎影

忽断忽起sudden smooth
Coocooing
Coocoo
Crystal bird可意亚忽隐

月moon夜的深静
Sleeping
Sleep
缓缓波动着broken银

This brought back a sliver of memory. In those days in China, students majoring in English at the university were encouraged to learn the language in a saturated manner until they were submerged in it and forgot their own mother tongue. The result, though, was just to the contrary. By the fourth year, no one in my dormitory spoke English to each other anymore. I couldn't help noticing the phenomenon without recalling what they had been doing till then: speaking English while trying to or pretending to forget their own mother tongue.

Twenty years later, in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, I went back to China as a professor to teach a class of postgraduate students. One would assume that the level of education twenty years down the track would have been higher, with the country more open to the rest of the world than ever before and students in daily contact with ‘foreign’ teaching staff but one was proved wrong. I spent hours marking student papers and correcting their grammatical mistakes, easy ones that we would have avoided committing in our days as undergraduates. I wrote a poem to commemorate this:

Bad English⁴

Teaching English in China
The old professor can’t help
The fact that his hair is turning grey

An email letter leaves him
Upset for days without knowing why
That begins with this: ‘Dear Mr professor Richard’

Student papers are written in such a way
That how much effort goes into fixing them
He invariably sees a new English cropping up
postgraduateswise:

‘I felt boring when days after days were spent meaninglessly’
‘He doted him and he doted her’
‘Grandma cared me so much she does something out of
expectation’

The professor decides that it’s probably just as well
His grasshopper arms powerless against the onslaught
Of an English in spite of itself

So, in his last class, he found time to speak
Their language: I felt exciting at the thought
Of returning to Oz as living here I often feel boring

I objected myself speaking such bad English
Although I do care you and I admire you

For things like this: ‘On that day’s noon’
And your brilliant slips of pen, like this:
‘We must all uphold human tights’

(14th January, 2007)

Having lived over 20 years in Australia since 1991, and catching up with the number of years spent in China, 35 in total since my birth in 1955, I am enjoying a new sense of balance that felt to be extremes a few years ago. Back then, I regarded the Chinese-speaking Chinese and the English-speaking Australians as two vastly different species, the former heart-soft and the latter, heart-hard; the former generous and the latter, stingy; and the former friendly and the latter, hostile. Their vastly different languages show this, too. If we in Chinese say *baba mama* (dad and mum) [爸爸妈妈], they say in English ‘mum and dad’. If we say *buyao luanreng laji* (don’t cast the rubbish everywhere) [不要乱扔垃圾], they say ‘do the right thing’. If we say *xuerou* (blood and flesh) [血肉], *xinxian* (new and fresh) [新鲜] and *shuitu* (water and earth) [水土], they seem insistent that these must be ‘flesh and blood’, ‘fresh and new’ and ‘earth and water’. It is almost as if they must contradict whatever we say, in a language that willfully and stubbornly contradicts the other no matter what. To this day, the class roll of the students I teach in Melbourne bears the convincing evidence of the contradiction, with all the cultural and ancestral traces erased in a brutal effort at correct alignment with the Australian way of calling: Pengcheng Deng, Tian Xin, Hui Ding, and the list goes on. I remember the poignant absurdity of someone I know whose name, Ma Ye—which possibly means ‘horse also’, became Ye Ma, a wild horse in sound, when reversed in English.⁵

Twenty years on, after a long sustained period of linguistic torturing and suffering, I have become more and more aware that we are essentially the same, in our own different ways and hidden behind our own different skins and facial features. Reading Maugham, I was reminded how vastly close we really are, even in the expressions we use. In Chinese, we may describe the act of love as *shufu* or comfortable, exclaiming, ‘hao shufu ah’ (ah, it’s so comfortable). In English, in Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*, when he steals an arm around Mildred’s waist, Philip tells her in words that sound so Chinese, ‘I’m so comfortable.’ And when Mildred, abandoned by a married man, declares she would never go back, she says, ‘I’d sooner beg my bread’, which is so evocative of the Chinese expression, *taofan* (begging for rice or begging my rice) that one ceases to be amazed by the differences anymore⁶; instead, one feels closer to the human nature across the gaps of culture and language.

In daily Australian-Chinese discourse, you can’t speak Chinese without a mixture of English, sometimes to the degree of merging, such as *pa che* (parking), with *pa* for parking and *che* for vehicles, *qu yangcha* (go yum cha), *qu* for go and *yangcha* for yum cha, and *ma sha ji* (massage), which literally back-translates as horse kill chicken. It is this that gave

me the inspiration to invent a new name for the Chinese *tangyuan* [汤圆] or glutinous rice balls. Based on the Australian-Chinese variety of short soup (won ton) and long soup (noodle), not so called elsewhere outside even Melbourne, I coined mine: round soup—that has yet to find its way into the language.

Now, with these crosscurrents of bilinguality at work, the old impulse has returned with an insistent request that the two languages be comingled to create the new even if the attempt may meet with failure as anything fresh and new or ‘new and fresh’ is bound to run into difficulties in this country and elsewhere. Here is something that I have recently written:

《双/Double》

Beautiful morning

美丽的清晨

A bird walks up to me

一头鸟朝我走来

Like a chook

像只鸡

Black across the breast

胸脯全黑

Right up to the hip

一直黑到屁股

I thought he might attack me

我以为它会向我发起攻击

With his heel-like beak

用它像高跟的鸟喙

But he walks away

但它走开了

And shits

拉了一泡屎

Before he takes flight

然后飞走

Leaving a pool of snow white

留下一滩雪白的东西

To be bilingual is to live in two countries and two cultures at the same time, thus able to kill the illness attributable to having lived in one language for too long, as I put it in a Chinese poem: ‘长期生活在一种语言中/对人是有利的’ (to live a long time in a language/is harmful to one).⁷

And, ultimately, it is an indulgence, a practice akin to suicide, or, on a sublime level, sacrifice purely for languages’ sake that only ‘foreigners’ seem capable of making, as shown in this unpublished poem, based on an email communication:

‘You’ve got to be a foreigner’: an email fragment

dear s,

thanks for sharing that ‘translation’ with me. i don’t know how much the poet knows chinese as a language but the ‘luminous one’ doesn’t seem to be right. i’ve written a number of poems, in chinese, around the naming of li bai, which is literally ‘plum white’, bai meaning ‘white’, a common chinese surname, this plus the fact that li’s origins had been traced back to suiye (broken leaf), a place in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan, so, a non-han foreigner, like geoffrey chaucer, like me, so to speak. but that’s the thing: you’ve got to be a foreigner to a language to create it anew.

best,

oy

Something strange is made new and will be continuously made new in the years to come, in the Chinese of English, or the English of Chinese.

• • •

More recently, I found myself back at my old trade, of teaching translation and creative writing again, as a professor, to native Chinese-speaking students, both BA and MA, in Shanghai. Things have taken a more drastic turn and unexpected, too. The fact that the students have more freedom today means that English majors (MA) can choose to write their theses in Chinese, about Australian literature, for example, something unimaginable 20 years ago but understandable, given that monolingual Australians are hardly ever required to produce a thesis in a language other than English. My creative writing classes in English seem to act as an impetus for my English majors to produce work in Chinese. At the end of the spring-summer semester in 2014, for example, I had, at my call for submissions, dozens of poems written in Chinese by my students, some of the poems of quite stunning quality, too.

I, too, allow the carcinoma of bilinguality to spread throughout my poetry the way I did 30 years previously, the difference being that I do

that more deliberately than ever before and without concerning myself about whether my readers understand them or not. After all, I never had a reader in mind when I wrote my first poems. I still don't. As I penetrate into the core of poetry, the depths of it, I beg to be left alone, absolutely alone, and to be absolutely alone is to be free, as shown in one of the poems I wrote recently,

《Fly机》

这些密密
这些麻麻
这些麋集
这些蝇拥
这些、这些、这些墨渍

这些疑团
这些凝血
这些胶质
这些fly行物
这些、这些、这些欲死

这些弹着点
这些出生入
这些微拟像
这些大祸临
这些、这些、这些拉黑

这些brains垂体
这些half音符
这些poison蘑菇
这些death搏
这些、这些、这些菲thin的命

(December 2014)

But I was not alone. I never am. Because I had the students and I shared this poem with them. Despite their resistance to expressing themselves in English—who wants to be constantly picked on for endless grammatical mistakes when they can do something twice as good in their own native tongue?—they showed their appreciativeness in understanding the subtleties of the English words inserted/embedded in the Chinese lines, of a poem that plays on the idea of fly as an insect and as a flying machine about an oil painting that features flies as insects in a war. While the

poem may baffle the English readers without the knowledge of Chinese language, my students, most of them born in the 1990s, didn't seem to have a problem understanding its surface meanings even when they did not know that the poem was about a painting.

Still, one never ceases to be surprised that a bilingual poem, in its slightly adapted form, may win an appreciated reader, as demonstrated by the acceptance of the following poem:

Voices

One said it's a tewu guojia, a Nation of Secret Agents
One said wo xiang ni, I think you
One said it's fulan touding, rotten through
One said wo fachu, I grew timid
One said chizao yao wandan de, it's going to be finished
sooner or later
One said wo zui taoyan bianpao, I most heartily detest
firecrackers
One said wo haishi xiang ni, I still think you
One said da chengshi you shenme hao, what's good about
big cities
One said that's jew in you
One said labuchu jiushi labuchu, if you can't pull you can't
pull
One said shi er houyi, poetry till you end
One said but you are kidding
One said niandu shiren buxing, poets of the year no good
One said bu fazhan yeshe ying daoli, non-development also
a hard reason
One said shui huaile, xin jiu huaile, bad water, bad heart
One said wo xiang ni, I think you
One said wusuowei, past caring
One said fuzhou, city of comforting
One said linghun zai jiao, soul calling
One said yiqie guiyu wu, everything gone to nothing⁸

The very acceptance of the poem above shows what a long way Australian poetry has gone since I first arrived in this country in early 1991, in its acceptance of my self-translations, first dressed up as original writings, then, a couple of decades after, presented as self translations, culminating in the publication of my book, *Self Translations* (Transit Lounge, 2012). I'd like to show a Chinese poem I wrote below,

《激情一种》

那时，一种激情犹如创痛
电击了他的肉体
他不由自主地激动颤动悸动颤动乃至飘动浮动
在另一个肉体之上
他体会了一条鱼
临死前的所有表现
仿佛从透明中观望了
那根贯穿鱼体的黑线的中断
然后把嘴中涌出的所有唾液
收回

This was turned into English by John Kinsella in what he calls ‘trans-version’, as follows,

Ardour

Also, I divide along the line,
want to arrive swiftly
with light shining through to a depth we cohabit—
plimsoll, lateral, fish lines to keep
us upright in water cold
as heat, refulgent
and opaque; through it all
I dart, I lengthen my stroke, slice
through turbulence with my fins wide wide
awake

And, finally, for my own interest, I turned the Chinese poem into English in an attempt at self translation,

Passion

Then, passion, like pain
Struck his body like electricity
He couldn't help being excited trembling shivering vibrating
even floating drifting
Above another body
He was experiencing all
The expressions of a fish before it dies
Feeling as if he was watching through the transparency
The breakage of the black line going across the fish's body
Before he retrieved
All the phlegm that had surged to his mouth

And the acceptance has also extended itself to my poetry with bilingual elements, such as my sequence, ‘Soul Diary’ (2007)⁹ and more recent ones that have yet to find an acquired taste.

I'd like to conclude by quoting the first four mini-parts from ‘Soul Diary’:

1.

| | | | | | | |
|-------|----------|--------|-------|-----------|---|---|
| night | rain | drum | beats | | | |
| wife | cooked | beef | with | something | | 雨 |
| green | | | | | | |
| and | we | shared | white | wine | 酒 | |
| from | tasmania | | | | | |

2.

| | | | |
|-------------------|--|---|--|
| in the afternoon | | | |
| with rain outside | | | |
| she didn't come | | | |
| i did | | 來 | |

3.

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| between lines 2 and 3 | |
| i removed a line: | |
| ‘we made love’ | 愛 |

4.

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| morning | 灰 |
| my heart so grey | |
| the sky greys all over | |
| or | |
| is it the other way round? | |

As I now recall, I would have begun writing the sequence in the first couple of years in the new century. Perhaps it's time I took stock and moved further down the bilingual track by breaking more new sky.¹⁰

Notes

- 1 Ouyang Yu. 'Translating myself'. *Moon over Melbourne and Other Poems*. Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2005, p. 73.
- 2 The first half of this essay is based on a talk I gave at the China Australia Literary Forum, University of Western Sydney, held 30th August to the 2nd September, 2011.
- 3 I attach a note of explanation in brackets to each Chinese or pair of Chinese characters below, as this is a poem that defies easy translation either way:

月(moon) moon浴 (bathing) 夜的 (night's) 深静 (deeply still)
Dripping
Drip
哗哗的 (girgling) flow清幽 (clean gloom)

Scent声 (sound) 隐约 (faintly) soon vanishing
Sweetening
Sweet
叶下 (under leaf) gather碎影 (broken shadows)

忽断忽起 (now broken, now up) sudden smooth
Coocooing
Coocoo
Crystal bird可意亚忽隐 (ke yi ya hu yin)

月(moon) moon浴 (bathing) 夜的 (night's) 深静 (deeply still)
Sleeping
Sleep
缓缓波动着 (slowly rippling) broken银 (silver)
- 4 Ouyang Yu. 'Bad English'. *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal* 4 (2008) Sourced at: <http://www.asiancha.com/content/view/216/110/>
- 5 This, in fact, is amply paid back in Chinese. In a natural reversal, when Victoria Beckham is reported to wear sky-high heels, I was told that in Chinese it is *hen tian gao* or hating-the-sky high heels. See: 'Sky's the Limit for Posh'. *Essential Baby* (September 12, 2011) at: <http://www.essentialbaby.com.au/life-style/family-entertainment/skys-the-limit-for-posh-20110912-1k4kv.html>
- 6 Somerset Maugham, W. *Of Human Bondage*. New York: the Modern Library, 1999, pp. 292-335.
- 7 Ouyang Yu. '1999 nian 5 yue 13 hao zhe yitian (The Day on 13 May 1999)'. *xiandu (The Limit)*. Otherland Publishing, 2004. [English translation mine]
- 8 Ouyang Yu. 'Voices'. *Australian Poetry Journal* 5 (2015): 26.
- 9 Cooke, Stuart, Bronwen Manger and Ouyang Yu. 'Soul Diary'. *Triptych Poets: Issue Two*. Canberra: Blemish Books, 2011, pp. 66-100.
- 10 A reference to the title of my translation, See: Yu, Ouyang. *Breaking New Sky: A Collection of Chinese Poetry in English Translation*, Melbourne: 5 Islands Press, 2013.

INTERWOVEN

A selection of essays and artwork
from the recent exhibition
'INTERWOVEN' (2016),
the Berndt Museum,
Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery.

Thai Miniatures Vanessa Wiggin

Vanessa Wiggin has worked in the heritage sector for over 20 years, mostly as an objects conservator. She currently divides her time between working as a registrar at the Berndt Museum, and running her own business, ArtWorks Conservation.



What is it about miniatures that draws the eye? They speak of a certain whimsy in human nature. The luxury of perfecting something for its own sake, rather than utility. Perhaps they offer a view of a perfect and controllable tiny world.

I have written 'controllable', but these items are really as slippery as the tiny fish they will never contain. Their story is elusive. I enjoy the research aspect of museum work and pride myself on my ability to chase down obscure information. Of course I hit plenty of brick walls too.

The Museum's Curatorial Assistant, Sarah, hands me a tower of files as my penance for choosing several objects. I make some room among the general clutter on my desk. Surely these files are too big and awkward to relate to these delicate works? Each contains the same thing, which is almost nothing.

All we do know is that the miniatures were once owned by Ronald Berndt. They were sent to him in a brown paper wrapped package from Thailand by his former students Srisakra Vallibhotama and Rote Sodesiri. A note indicates that the miniatures were made by 'Valli and Sode'. I wonder whether this is true—such items could easily have been bought at a tourist market.

Sodesiri published a book in 1972, which is still cited in other publications. There is an eerie silence after that. Vallibhotama has forged a distinguished, if controversial, career as an anthropologist and archaeologist. He has spent much time with local communities, striving to understand their prehistoric origins. He is a strong supporter of traditional crafts, and has sought to empower people by reconnecting them with their cultural roots.

He is still an active man, and it is not too difficult to imagine him taking up the challenge of learning miniature bamboo work in his younger years. Maybe the gift is saying that only by doing, can we truly understand and appreciate.

I could email Vallibhotama to ask about the origin of the miniatures. But not yet. I am enjoying the mystery.

Accession Nos. 11620, 11625, 11628, 11644, 11648, 11652: Attributed to Srisakra Vallibhotam and Rote Sodesiri, Thailand, *Miniatures*, c. 1968–1970, woven bamboo. R.M. & C.H. Berndt Collection, Berndt Museum.

Kain Songket

Siti Sarah Ridhuan

Siti Sarah Ridhuan is a curatorial assistant at the Berndt Museum, having graduated from UWA with a BA (Anthropology & Sociology). Her interests include exploring postcolonial discourse in the exhibition of Asian cultural material and contemporary art. She is currently completing an Honours degree.

Kain songket in its various forms is most prominently woven throughout Indonesia and Malaysia—areas that share linguistic and mercantile linkages. The production of this type of textile can also be traced to other parts of Southeast and South Asia. Thus, the *kain songket* embodies an international and intercultural mobility—in terms of material trade, cultural relations and the commodification of luxury goods—that can be seen to this day. As the lyrics poetically explain:

| | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Oh abang yang manis</i> | <i>Oh sweet mister</i> |
| <i>Oh nona yang lawa</i> | <i>Oh pretty miss</i> |
| <i>Pakailah kain songket</i> | <i>Wear the kain songket</i> |
| <i>Pakaian budaya</i> | <i>That is your cultural clothing</i> |

(*Kain Songket* by Saloma)

Taken from the song 'Kain Songket', immortalised by the late, great Malay icon, Saloma, the lyrics capture what the *kain songket* means to me. Whether an antique piece in a museum or as emblematic of contemporary fashion, the various forms of the *kain songket* play a vital role in maintaining and reproducing cultural life and identities.



Accession No. 5165: Unknown artist, Lombok, textile with metallic thread.
Gift of Peter Bridge under the Tax Incentive for the Arts Scheme. Berndt Museum.



Accession No. 5167: Unknown artist, Lombok, textile with metallic thread.
Gift of Peter Bridge under the Tax Incentive for the Arts Scheme. Berndt Museum.

Traditionally a luxury cloth worn by royalty, owning a *kain songket* now is not uncommon in many Malay and Indonesian families. Growing up in a Malay-Singaporean family meant celebrating Hari Raya (Eid) every year, an occasion that saw everyone dressed in the traditional attire that often consisted of *kain songket*. *Kain songket* is also commonly worn at weddings, where the bride and groom often wear beautiful pieces in matching colours. Despite commodification of this textile, it continues to evoke a sense of occasion and ceremony.

I chose these three pieces from the museum's collection because I feel they represent an interweaving of custom, identity, aesthetic practice as well as cultural and material exchange. At a personal level, the *kain songket* grounds me in my culture, family and identity in both its materiality and symbolism.



Accession No. 5164: Unknown artist, Lombok, textile with metallic thread. Gift of Peter Bridge under the Tax Incentive for the Arts Scheme. Berndt Museum.

Child in a Suitcase for Khandalyce Pearce Josephine Clarke

Josephine Clarke is a member of Out of the Asylum Writers' Group and helps run Voicebox—monthly poetry readings at The Fremantle Fibonacci Centre. In 2016 she was a guest of the Perth Poetry Festival and had a chapbook of poetry, *between white*, published by Mulla Mulla Press.

what puppeteer
unburied you
folded you like a marionette into a travelling bag
as though to un-fold time
to have you back tugging at their thigh
pulling them away from the road?
who is the ventriloquist
who put silence into your mouth?
how many borders
did you have to cross?
you and your tutu
your slipper
left on a highway named Karoonda
far from any stage
the notes on your quilt
the only music
to score the rushing cars
through the long hushed nights

**From 'Notes toward a
lesser consolation'**
Anna Kerdijk Nicholson

Anna Kerdijk Nicholson's most recent book is *Everyday Epic* (2015). Her second book, *Possession*, received the 2010 Victorian Premier's Prize and Wesley Michel Wright Prize.

Embers like debt

We seem a part of it, with shells and possum teeth,
black hammerhead portent, acid green
boiling on a grey.

But we're answering to
a god whose name we forgot, not chrome,
not electric, out of our slithering grasp.

Someone has rung village bells, gnawing at the issues,
a masterful radius for the things we hide in books*,

for the swaling and froth-bounded. Understanding embers
like debt. A sign says no bloggers, no through road.

* After Nathan Curnow

Abrolhos (after Batavia)
Lucy Czerwiec

Born in country WA but now living in Perth, Lucy Czerwiec is new to poetry. She has been published in the *OTA Anthology*, *Jukebox 2013* and *The Long Paddock*, Vol. 75, No. 3, 2015 War & Peace edition, *Southerly*.

here where sea moves
restless with the gulls
and sailors know
to look for reef
below the drift

shipwreck ghosts
guard the stones at West Wallaby
where storm and petrel
pass without regard
to any past

here horizon looks like bones
and careless graves
echo in a wind

on Seal Island
half a dozen on a gibbet noose
for sun and seabird
to unmake a wretched shore

Everybody Knows Karen Atkinson

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Louise knows this place, where turtles gather. But still she can't make it out. Five hundred metres from the shoreline a dark shape bobs up and down, spins and turns on a broad, flat, turquoise sea. A big barrel of a thing. She stands bare feet on burning sand, bare skin unlocked by the biting sun. Alone on this long wide beach, straining to see.

With each roll it shifts in shape. A horizontal plane folds to an apex, a curved line draws straight, extends, morphs into something different altogether. At this distance she can't make out if it is organic or a lump of debris from passing vessels that move oil and gas along this coastline.

Gulls squabble overhead, dive like silver bombers into the sea. The breeze shifts. She watches, and waits. Waiting's easy—time lingers on a beach, free, unquantifiable except in the ebb and flow of the tides. And the sun, of course, sliding back and forth where the sea meets the sky. Under brilliant sunshine, moments pass deliciously unbound. The thing drifts slowly in the tranquil sea, draws closer shoreward.

She makes out the tiny head extended on the long neck. A female turtle floats just beneath the surface of the water. Covering her, fastened to her back, clings a penetrating male. At least twenty males are racing towards them. Yes, racing, resolved to win. So brutal. Smelling, hearing, intuiting? She wonders how they know?

Louise sinks to her knees on the sand, mind shifting, crashing in waves. While she doubts the turtles are aware that she is here, it feels wrong somehow, to watch this extreme intimacy—a voyeur, observing something so very personal over which the turtles have no control. And yet she can't take her eyes off them.

The coupling turtles roll in the surf, bracing against the force of the waves, accommodating the position of the other to consummate the mating. Every few minutes the female raises her head to breathe the air. In these moments she seems most vulnerable, her head lifting up above

the ocean swell before she's pulled again by gravity and the overwhelming weight of his body, back under the water. The turtle has returned to this beach. At some deeply cellular and proscribed level—as if she knows this act of coupling is her only chance at survival. On this same stretch of coastline, her offspring will struggle from a soft-skinned egg buried deep in the sand as she did twenty years earlier. With nothing more than luck to cross the hazardous shore to the equally hazardous sea. Then there's the complex ritual, the sacred dance she will perform before the ductile eggs plop one by one into the massive hole she's prepared, burying them prudently beneath the mound of sand. Louise has seen this over many seasons, finds herself moved to tears for the beauty in it. She's even allowed herself, once or twice, to feel the pain of the mother's loss, that so few of her young survive, even make it into the ocean. The turtle though, duty done, makes her way back to the sea without a backward glance.

Louise tires of straining. The morning sun hammers down on her back as makes her way southward towards the rocky point that marks the path through the dunes to the house. Thousands of skeletons of sea urchins litter the sand. Her eyes begin an obsessive search for a perfect one, unbroken, tinted softly in pale mauve, one that she can nestle in the palm of her hand, take home. But they're crushed, pounded by waves, ground against rock, beginning their manifest return to sand, to their reconstitution, new form, new life.

'Leonard Cohen. I've touched him,' she says over the last track.

'Where?'

Louise shrieks, reaches quickly to punch him but he's too fast, is off the bed in a flash. She sighs, lies back, arms and legs stretched open. Jamie bends at the waist, collecting clothing. She reaches again, hands pleading—to let her touch the smooth, lean haunches.

'You north-west girls are insatiable,' he grins. 'A bit of self control, Lou, eh, a bit of discipline wouldn't go amiss.' Jamie pulls on shorts, walks from the room. She hears him muttering, shifting CD's, clinking glasses. '*Everybody knows the fight was fixed/ The poor stay poor and the rich get rich.*' His voice drowns out Leonard. She loves to hear him sing, his voice deep and mature though in so many ways he's still a boy.

'Better get moving.' He yells over the music. 'Before the rest of the day goes.' Leaf-filtered light plays shadows around the walls, on the ceiling. She follows the fan with her eyes, the periodic clacking of the fixture reminding her he's right—time is passing. She's never liked swimming in the dark, and she does want another swim. She uses the sheet to wipe sweat from her body, between her thighs.

Jamie dances into the room, sings into her eyes, *‘That’s how it goes... everybody knows.’* He thrusts a long glass into her hand. Lemon, tonic, with a good splash of gin. ‘Did you really touch him?’

‘Yeah!’ Feigning indignation that she could lie about such a thing.

‘Well? Spill!’ he says with equal exaggeration.

‘Oh, ages ago. Before you were born.’ She giggles. ‘Worthy Farm, great name eh?’ He’s too young, doesn’t get it. ‘Glastonbury Festival. June 29th 2008.’ How could she forget? Rick bought tickets for her birthday—never explained why he chose to celebrate it against a wall with a gypsy woman from Andalucía. ‘He sang this, you know. I never dreamed I would hear him live.’

‘You got close—went for the lunge?’

‘I was walking by. He strolled out the stage door.’

‘You mobbed the poor bugger.’

‘No.’ She smiles her most lascivious smile. ‘Discreetly approached.’

‘Wish I’d been around when those old guys were young,’ Jamie says. ‘The old girls, too.’

‘Watch it.’ She does feel old, though. At forty-five she knows what life can deal. She’s shocked at the envy rising in her, when she considers his youth, his optimism—that she can never have these again. On the edge of the bed, Jamie works her toes, the arch of her foot, with long fingers. Louise glances hopefully. He laughs, stands up, heads for the door.

She scoops a sarong from the pile on the floor, wraps it around, takes a look in the mirror, ruffles her hair. No sunscreen or hat, the sun’s dropped low. The light’s soft, the air thick and warm, sticky. They walk, hand holding hand. The dog trots ahead, through scrub that backs the pindan dunes. They climb the sandy track. Once at the top, Diesel pelts down the other side, barking deafeningly, spinning back up and round their heels, then off again in giant leaps.

It takes her breath away. It always does. Standing above it, looking down. A chalice of white sand holds the brilliant, turquoise sea.

Soon they’re in the water, bobbing like little nothings in the expanse of ocean; that’s how she sees them, Jamie, herself, the dog—little nothings. On her back, spread-eagled, floating like a manta ray. Imagining stars, countless constellations, all that’s unknowable above and below.

She wishes they’d come earlier and snorkeled but in their haste they’ve not brought their gear. Below, the reef is impossibly alive with damselfish, butterfly fish, wrasses, angelfish—when she dives they swim so close she could kiss them. Millions of years of life, millions of years of spawning, the coral growing and dying and reproducing. Every time new things to see, everything in a constant state of change.

When she breaks through the surface of the water, she hears Jamie calling. Her eyes follow the line where he’s pointing. She studies the dark shape as it draws shoreward, makes out the tiny head extended on the long neck. A female turtle. She wonders if it could be the one she saw earlier.

‘Diesel,’ she yells. The dog’s bounding over the dunes, barking. She doesn’t want him disturbing the turtle.

She swims to Jamie. The water is shallow and warm. They sit motionless, sea lapping thighs. Watching the turtle. The action of the little head extending above the swell, reaching for air, touches her soul. Seabirds circle noisily overhead, watching.

Jamie had offered her turtle meat once, on a trip up the coast. She’d felt compromised, not wanting to offend his family’s hospitality, not wanting to seem priggish. Every bite was anguish. She’d cried later, told him she couldn’t bear it, the turtle laid on its back under the searing sun, flapping wildly, ensnared without water until the family were ready to eat in the evening. She’d tried talking to Jamie about it, about the vulnerability of the turtle’s femaleness, a gentle creature, yet so tough, so resilient. At least he’d listened, and in the end they’d agreed that a sea turtle’s life was not for sissies.

Jamie strokes her arm. She looks into his face, her smile shy, appreciating his sensitivity. Had his brothers been here, the fate of this turtle might’ve been different.

‘Time to go,’ she says.

The sun’s touching the arc of the horizon, the tide peeling the silver sheet of water back to the other side of the ocean. They wade ankle-deep to the widening shore. The pindan is on fire. Red rivulets of water, like blood, run into the sea. Sometimes, Louise thinks, this place is too much. The wildness of it, the silence, for even the sea makes little sound. Its tidal rhythms a steady motion, the surf spilling white, rolling foam onto the shore. The air, gorged with moisture, hangs heavily, dampening noise, or so it seems, so that the landscape has the feel of something separate, not of the world.

‘Diesel, bloody hell, Diesel!’ Jamie yells. The dog finally appears above, races towards them. The sound of the chopper comes faintly at first.

‘Diesel! Diesel!’ Louise holds the dog at the back of his neck. ‘Wonder what that’s up to?’

‘Military.’

‘Can’t be.’ She turns her head to look at him. ‘Really?’

‘Yep. Americans, I reckon.’

‘Here?’ She shields her eyes, looks skyward to try and make out the helicopter. ‘Jamie?’ But her voice is drowned out by the chopper, and the dog’s agitated barking.

'Oh come on, let's get the fuck out of here.' Jamie hands her the sarong. They begin the climb. Louise forgets about the turtle until it's too late to see if it's still working its way across the bay in search of food. It feels like a bad omen. That she didn't pay due respect.

High on the dune they watch the chopper land. Sand swirls around the base as it settles onto the beach. In no time dark figures are pacing about. It's impossible to know what they're doing. Louise can just make out voices. It's growing dark. Even as they watch, the sky blackens. Water, sky and land merge into one shadowy mass.

'What's going on, Jamie?' This is his country, the traditional home of his people. He must know something.

'Dunno. No, really. There's been talk but...'

'Talk? What talk? Why didn't you...?'

'Oh, you know, Lou. It's gunna happen sometime. That council meeting the other day, government mob, my mob—talking big money.' He stretches his arm around her bare shoulder, caresses the curve above her breast. 'The navy.'

'The navy? For god's sake what're you saying? American base? Here? Why didn't you tell me?'

'Just talk, Lou. How many times you seen them do anything? Talk. That's all these fellas do. Talk.' She pulls away. Eyes him with some distance between them.

'Jamie, you don't agree with this? Do you?' And when he doesn't answer, 'A nuclear base, you know that, don't you? Here? On this beach?' He's looking back at her. A slither of silver moon hangs above them. It's too dark. She can't make out his expression.

Closer Caitlin Maling

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I take myself out
past the end of the Target-Walmart-Loews
to find the green.

Like a tourist
fumbling for language in a guidebook,
I look for home

and find translation.
Not dune but forest uprooted by a wind
long blown to brown gulf sea.

On the rustling pine-needle floor
a log slow burns, ember without fire.
From tip to tip its path is ash.

What makes a tree burn like that?
Already fallen, already dead, the other trees
just hurdles to walking.

They have no fire
unless it starts at centre, and all around
lit candles lie

making light where it can't be seen.

Feeling through Form: Kim Scott's *Benang* and the Romantic Poetic

Jo Jones

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Some stories are hard to tell. Kim Scott has dedicated much of the past two decades to enabling difficult acts of telling. This includes his two Miles Franklin winning novels *Benang* (1998) and *That Deadman Dance* (2010). It also includes Scott's work as a respected member of the Nyoongar Wirlomen Community where he has been an active force in the work of linguistic and cultural recovery.¹ There is little doubt that a productive aesthetic symbiosis exists between Scott's literary work, the poeticism of Nyoongar language and the stories of Nyoongar ancestors—stories of oppression and survival from the inward spread of white settlement and other older 'mythic' stories of riding whales, adventures and homecomings, psychic journeys, and the primeval origins of a people. Scott has become an increasingly impressive literary figure in Australian cultural life and his most recent novel, the celebrated *That Deadman Dance*, figures largely on both university and high school English course lists and syllabi: the striking figure of Bobby Wabalanginy, mentally dexterous, resourceful and a consummate survivor works as a perfect and poetic conduit for the epistemic and ethical dilemmas of national history and present-day Indigenous identity.

While it may be that Scott's 1998 novel *Benang* is, perhaps not as mature, as stylistically assured as *That Deadman Dance*, it remains one the most important artefacts of formal and linguistic negotiations in Australian literature. During the narrative Harley (clearly based to some extent on Scott himself) laments, 'I wear my little black heart on my sleeve' (1998: 374). Here he is both lamenting the pain of his own mixed race and divided identity—Harley has Nyoongar and European ancestry, but has been raised white without knowledge of his Nyoongar forebears—and also expressing the labour of narrating interior pain and the most intimate negotiations of selfhood, making the felt, invisible world visible

to the outside. Scott's response to this process is the dense narrative web that articulates the interrelatedness of form and language.

The intricacies of construction in *Benang* call for more critical attention than they have so far received. Hilary Emmett has begun this process in her perceptive discussion of *Benang* as an example of Deleuze and Guattari's minority literature, which they argue can work to deterritorialise a dominant culture's hold over minorities. Emmett claims that what she calls the 'miscegenation' of genres alone cannot achieve this; rather, a text must produce an 'intricate narrative origami' (180)—represented by the notion of the rhizome, where the root system of a plant is planar and has the ability to adapt to and join other species, rather than the more vertical structure of a tree root—in order to disrupt ideas of hierarchical political power of racial and national sovereignty. The novel read thus is not simply an amalgamation of tales but is shaped by a meticulously constructed patterning of scenes and modes that invites contrast and comparison.

A further investigation of textual hybridity in Scott's novel offers an extension of Emmett's thesis, and suggests that it is not only the complexity of interwoven narrative/stylist/aesthetic/formal elements of the novel but also the prioritising of particular formal and linguistic modes that give the most politically useful insights into Scott's artistic and political negotiations. Among the various modes within the novel, the privileging of the Romantic poetic expresses Scott's hope for cultural retrieval and recovery; in particular, the novel connects to an early Romantic conceptualisation of *genius loci*, or the spirit of place. These moments are vital within the text because of the ways in which the dominant culture makes any vision of a positive Noongar future so difficult. A text such as *Benang* demonstrates the possibilities attached to re-engaging the aesthetic mode. The complex interaction between emotion, sensory perception and artistic representation, as theorists such as Isobel Anderson assert, is an important space for dealing with the damages of modernity and invoking politicised responses to them (Anderson 5).

Any discussion of 'hybridity' in *Benang* must take into account the power of the pseudo-scientific eugenicist discourse in the twentieth century in an Australian and specifically Western Australian context. Western Australia was not only legally and politically geared toward assimilation, but genocidally intent on 'absorbing' Indigenous groups into the white population through policies that encouraged marriages between white men and Indigenous women for more than half of the

twentieth century. One successful mode of resistance to this virulent form of deracination is the recording of stories. This process suggests that the ultimate failure of this policy was due to the Noongar cultural capacity to creatively adapt to change and adversity, particularly through the preservation of culture by women. Although Noongar women like Fanny Benang (Harley's great grandmother) married outside their culture, they raised their children in the traditions of their people. The act of adaptation in itself is a vitally Noongar cultural characteristic and is by no means incompatible with cultural integrity or authenticity. While these adapted and improvised ways of telling are ostensibly 'hybrid', they do justice to the complexity of the mode and the historical/cultural context from which they emerged.

Emmett's essay on rhizomatic kinship in *Benang* provides important insights through her discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minority literatures and their claims that language and history can be deterritorialised by constructing a minor literature within a major language: thus, majority language can be used to disrupt both static, State-sanctified history and the (realist) novelistic form. Emmett claims that it is not the miscegenation of genres alone that makes a minority literature; the work must also be intrinsically *rhizomatic*, disrupting the linearity of narrative form and the continuity of character. Like the rhizomatic root structure that can be broken at any place and regrow from a fragment, often joining to other root systems, *Benang* inscribes a pattern of political and ideological resistance and cultural regeneration through a literature that, through its non-linearity and complex narrative patterning, subverts the assumptions of traditional histories. Emmett's conclusions can be extended further to account for the formal, aesthetic and political strategies of the novel, particularly the way in which some modes are allocated a type of aesthetic and moral priority. The intermittent emergence of a distinct Romantic mode during the narrative is one example. The traditional European poetic is annexed and adapted to suit the aesthetic and political purpose of the novel. Scott states in *Kayang and Me* that he seeks to:

devise an expression of spirituality from within ourselves, with whatever means at our disposal and arising from our histories. Personally, I don't think that anything need be rejected simply because it came from non-Indigenous sources. (2005: 258)

What gives a text the ability to express the adaptive quality of the rhizome is the complex interactions between parts. Such interactions reject the

fixed belief that particular cultural modes are 'owned' by particular groups, but always considers instead how different modes are best combined and altered to meet a specific political need: whether it is to communicate past hardships to an ignorant outside world, or to reconnect traditional culture from a point in history where traditional expressive modes have been lost.

A pattern of shifting between moments of an intense Romantic lyrical poetic of place and starkly realist depictions of violence and bleak realities is an important and extensively used formal device characteristic of Scott's rhizomatic construction. His use of the Romantic poetic is usefully described by Chris Baldick's account of early English Romanticism as engaged in an expression of 'sincerity, spontaneity and originality', centred on 'creative imagination [...], and which replaces the "mechanical" rules of conventional form with the "organic" principle of natural growth action' (260). It is also impossible not to notice the very Romantic connection between a poetic of place and Harley's ascent and initiation into the natural world. Scott describes this new visual perspective and its insights thus:

I rose and fell on the currents of air like a balloon, like a wind-borne seed. The horizon moved away so that the islands no longer rested on its line, but stood within the sea, and it seemed that the pulsing white at the island's tip was not a mere transformation induced by collision, but was a blossoming and wilting at some fissure where sea met land. (1999: 164)

Episodes such as these, in which individuals receive insight through a transforming experience with the natural world, emphasise the primacy of connection to place and, in another Romantic gesture, the need for poeticism—where language evokes response through sound, suggestion and complex associations—as the correct language of *genius loci*. As Geoffrey Hartman has astutely described it, the *genius loci* is the specific gravity of place combined with the inward poetic. He explains that the Romantics sought to preserve *genius loci* in a context of the rational abstractions of modernity. In keeping with this tradition, this passage evokes the beginning of Harley's new way of seeing not only the natural world but his place within it, represented in his view of the island, seemingly isolated on the horizon, rising into the emptiness of sky, to a vision of it surrounded by the endless contact of the ocean. The island, while still distant, is alive and in endless interaction with that to which it connects. Similarly, Harley has begun to see the benefit of connecting to his culture and place: the fulfilling, invigorating possibilities this entails.

Scott has explained how much of the densely sensorial poeticism of *Benang* is inspired by the richly onomatopoeic Noongar language, in which the language of place is so directly related to the sounds of specific locations (2007: 121-123). *Benang*'s poetic is similar to early expressions of Romanticism in which, as Hartman notes, poetry held a privileged position, similar to the sense of place and authenticity represented by the native vernacular or 'mother tongue'. In the episodes in which Harley floats in the sky, the ideas and emotions evoked through consonantal words and a steady, gentle rhythm evoke not only the beauty but also the reassurance of a natural and cultural continuity, and which contrast markedly with Harley's recent anguish. This is evident in the description of the incoming surf as 'blossoming and wilting at some fissure where sea met land' (1999: 164), and his perception of some distant cultural memory in 'the call of quails in the dune grasses, and the call of curlews crying from moonlit chalky paths' (1999: 165). After many such visions Harley slowly leaves the hazardous period of his youth where, floating on wind, he drifts uncontrollably in reckless enjoyment, risking annihilation.

Increasingly, the Romantic poetic becomes the language of Harley's cultural reconnection as he visits the important cultural spaces of Dubitj Creek and Dolphin Cove, returning to the campfire sights of his forebears. In such locations Harley no longer experiences a sense of isolation; rather, there is always an evocation of community and ancestors in the shape of the land and sea. Harley describes a significant place as a:

small granite headland which the sea wraps around [and where] the banksia trees grow thickly on its slope. Fresh water seeps slowly from the granite, the south-west wind is kept away, and the banksia cones are like little heads looking out from between the serrated leaves. (1999: 454)

Harley's description of the natural world illustrates his newfound appreciation for its power, beauty and vastness, and the interconnectedness of all of its elements. It is also significant that the dramatic scenes of cliffs and coast in earlier scenes give way to scenes in which a closer connection between Harley and the place is evoked. This sense of intimacy with the healing capacities of nature is expressed through the use of figurative language through which the narrator makes unusual connections—itsself an expression of 'seeing anew'. This is evident in the metaphor of the sea that 'wraps' around a headland, for example, and in the personified banksia cones described as being like 'little heads'—all of the Noongar lives lived out in this place—that see out from their hardy shelter of 'serrated' leaves. The 'fresh water that seeps slowly' not

only mimics the sound of water slowly trickling, employing the musical properties of language to enact nature's power, it also symbolises the freshness of renewal. Further, such descriptions function as projections of Harley's interior life. The use of the pathetic fallacy, through which the outer landscape symbolises the inner 'landscape', enacts Harley's newly-won sense of psychic renewal and emotional and cultural connection to his land. This connection is reinforced by the fact that Harley's children, only recently discovered, accompany him. In this way, the novel suggests that such renewal may be enduring.

Within the rhizomatic operation of *Benang*, Scott continually uses an interplay between the harshly realistic and a poetics of place to suggest the healing potential of the natural world to reinvigorate Noongar culture in the knowledge of past abuses and constant despair: it is a space of hope. The bleakness of Indigenous experience is made clear, for example, in Harley's narration of the events before the death of Ern's first wife Kathleen. The disturbing nature of Kathleen's experiences is conveyed through the use of an intimate second person point of view, the horror intensified through its emotionally flat tone. Kathleen, who has lived as a white woman, is now cast out to the 'Black's Camp' where she is ridiculed for her 'white woman' ways (1999: 141). Falling into dysfunction, self-blame and self-loathing, she goes to collect water in the town after curfew and is raped by police, just as she had been as a girl.

It was a long mad walk.

So mad, in fact so mad that when you felt a hand on your shoulder...you might think that, well, you had it coming. It was your own fault. The man wore a uniform like Sergeant Hall² had, and even if he looked like Sergeant Hall, this man leading you into a cell, unbuckling his belt. Well, maybe that was the way that things had to be for us, the same thing happening over and over again. (1999: 141)

By contrast, the scene which follows represents the emotionally and psychically healing potential of the natural world, expressed through a Romantic poetics of place. Thus 'Harriet's Place' is:

Within the dunes the scent of salt and the only peppermint leaves of our country, there you can sleep. You hear the many heartbeats among the rippling grasses, the many whispered voices, and your own is somewhere among them. (1999: 142)

Through the use of resonant imagery and the soft vowels and consonants in 'rippling grass' and 'many remembered voices', Harley evokes the place

where the telling of such stories of despair happens, yet where the place itself gives the men the reassurance of their ancestors to continue delving into the pain of the past.

The use of the Romantic poetic in *Benang* also demonstrates the political potential of the category of the aesthetic—that important nexus between sensory perception, emotion, language and art. Language that works in this realm is necessarily creative and poetic, working through implication rather than any easy correlation between signifier and signified. The realm of the aesthetic is an expansive exploration of the possibilities of language to connect with human affective and emotional response that is sometimes inexpressible, ineffable, sublime. The subtitle of *Benang* is ‘From the Heart’, and the motif of hearts and the profound need for the ability to feel is both powerfully insistent throughout the narrative and used to convey the complex interaction of knowledge, emotion and sensation. Engaging the category of aesthetic—here, speaking from the ‘heart’—is vital in a project of social recovery. Isobel Armstrong in *The Radical Aesthetic* claims that resistance to affect can be creatively and politically limiting and, conversely, that affect can mobilise thought (2–18). The aesthetic not only has the potential to spark radical action but also to connect experiences of place and ontologically diverse belief and value systems while positively recognising difference. Within a context where a racial minority still suffer such marginalisation, the aesthetic can thus be powerfully political.

Any argument for the politically enabling effects of the aesthetic in *Benang* must also take into account the fraught history of literary Romanticism in an Australian context—a history powerfully and lucidly theorised by Andrew McCann (see: 2004, 2005, 2006). His argument, like many Marxist materialist analyses of the aesthetic, is suspicious of a reliance on emotion and/or sensation. His condemnation of Romanticism in an Australian context is inflected by studies such as Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious* which claims, put simply, that the aesthetic locates human experience beyond politics and material history. One of McCann’s key contentions is that the development of Australian literature from its very earliest moments has been characterised by a politically dubious negotiation of an authentic relationship with place. What McCann sees as a repeated cultural trope of Romantically-rendered ‘settler melancholy’ through a poetic exploration of place, replaces the materiality of historical effects with the reconciling effects of a transcendent poetic. Thus, he argues, the ‘horror of colonisation ends up generating the melancholic pleasure of elegiac literature [where] colonial investments in place manage to survive a knowledge of colonial

violence’ (2006: 54). In McCann’s formulation, the poet is the location of a series of transfers through which the settler subject, made uneasy by the compromised circumstances of his presence, experiences the consolation of an uncannily evocative landscape. In this circumstance, an aestheticised loss delivers the pleasure/pain effect like that of Romantic representations of European ruins in a landscape, or the exquisite nostalgic sadness of a mysterious yet somehow ideal world that has now past. Thus, art is able to remove the subject from the material realities of genocide and relocate him/her in an aesthetic space in which a brush with colonial violence, rather than disrupting the social/political/physical space the reader inhabits, manages to align it with European versions of authenticity and autochthony. In its most politically problematic form, such texts can advocate a type of settler indigenisation in which the coloniser now makes a perceived spiritual or innate connection to landscape of his/her own.

If one is to use McCann’s criteria, any expression of a Romantic aesthetic and poetic in an Australian context is inevitably compromised. However, a text like *Benang*, for which there are valid political, social, cultural and personal reasons for maintaining a connection with the land, calls for a rethinking of McCann’s critique. When an Indigenous writer such as Kim Scott wishes to explore the possibilities of the English language and its artistic traditions—*genius loci* for instance—is he necessarily involved in some kind of ethical compromise or betrayal? This widespread condemnation of Romanticism in Australia implies an insensitivity to the material realities of Indigenous Australians, many of whom have not only a vital cultural connection to place but also a greater degree of expressive control of the language (English) in which they have been formally educated. McCann’s line of reasoning leads to a type of impasse whereby Indigenous Australians are both without traditional linguistic and artistic modes and are silenced by the compromises involved in using the ones they know; exactly the kind of dilemma articulated by Scott’s novel. What seems lacking in McCann’s critique is both sensitivity to the diverse contexts in which literature is produced and a recognition of the complexity and ambivalence of literary texts themselves.

While McCann’s disapproval is directed at Anglo-Celtic writers as they manoeuvre to create an Indigenised relationship to land (and, clearly, Scott represents a different subject position in terms of race/culture), Scott’s work has some similarities to the writers McCann targets. Does this mean that Scott has the right to engage the Romantic poetic tradition to evoke a spirit of place, but that non-Indigenous writers do not? A number of politically vexed and perhaps unanswerable questions follow. Scott’s

capacity to create this vivid and affective poetic comes from the light-skinned appearance that allowed him to be educated and integrated as a 'white man'. Is there a Noongar 'blood proportion' that an individual may contain that makes it acceptable to claim an Indigenised relationship to place, and thus the right to attempt to communicate the spirit of place? Can only dark-skinned Indigenous people convey a poetic of place? And then only in their own language? This type of questioning leads to essentialising and problematic ideological terrain. I would suggest that Scott's more politicised aesthetic demonstrates that there is a space within Australian literature for a Romantic poetic that is at once about achieving a meaningful relationship with place, perhaps having been inspired by Indigenous culture, and the circumspect acknowledgement of the fraught nature of doing so. Rather than being derived from having Indigenous 'blood', Scott's right to engage a Romantic poetic comes from the type of novel he writes, connecting to material history through a series of aesthetic and modal shifts.

What is significant in a text such as *Benang* is that one can see a Romantic poetic operating differently from the kind of Romantic aesthetic that McCann condemns. The particular form of *genius loci* within the novel, as it works alongside other affective, aesthetic modes, is disengaged from the process of nation-making in which eighteenth-century Romanticism quickly became enmeshed. Geoffrey Hartman explains how the *genius loci* originally worked to re-ground the abstraction of modernity; yet, taken up as a program and dispersed through modern communication systems, the Romantic sense of place and locality became attached to the increasingly powerfully juggernaut of nationalism (qtd. in Livingston 150). While a 'spirit of place' is ostensibly ahistorical, a text like *Benang* can be interpreted as reversing the cultural symbiosis between Romanticism and militant or colonial versions of nationalism by reconnecting a Romantic poetic of place with the horrors of colonialism enacted on its soil. Here, the dimensions of place appear together in all their contradiction and complexity. *Benang* contrasts moments of heightened insight and perception informed by an experience of the natural environment with the existence of extreme violence.

The realist/romantic juxtapositions of *Benang* powerfully evoke the materiality of history that McCann suggests are erased by the use of a Romantic poetic and the realm of the aesthetic. For Harley to disconnect from the world of the coloniser that he has until now uncritically inhabited requires a mode of expression outside of, even at odds with, the type of Enlightenment ontology that always emphasises the primacy of reason. Harley's dismantling of Ern's house, first removing the mortar then the roof, is like his 'drifting'. It represents a distancing from the most virulent

expression of colonisation—people and places. It is significant that it is also from this location that Harley drifts, his poetic narration expressing an alternative and politically preferable mode of existence.

Not only is *genius loci* prioritised in the novel because of its particular affinity with past Noongar traditions and ancestors, it also works as an imaginative space that is future-oriented, that envisages Noongar lives without despair. It is important not only to recognise the rhizomic strategies of *Benang* but also to examine the meaning and value behind the various modal variations within the text to achieve the specificity of place and experience Scott strives to express. The example from the Deleuze and Guattari model central to Emmett's thesis involves a very different context from that under investigation here. However, if one speaks of the *rhizomatic* text deterritorialising a language, making it more amenable to the political and cultural needs of a minority group, what is being communicated in *Benang* is a different notion of *territory* and place than in the European context from which Deleuze and Guattari argue. Scott's project of cultural connection and revival is dependent on his ability to convey understandings and perceptions of a particular natural environment—the specificity of place. It is the richness of the experience of place, a fundamental aspect of traditional Noongar culture, conveyed through a Romantic poetic, which makes the "civilising" coloniser's mode seem so very impoverished.

Relatedly, a politicised aesthetic expressed in the novel is the extension of the *genius loci* to *prospopoeia*, in which the land is represented as responding in a process of dramatic animation to violence to evoke the shocking materiality of history.³ Susan Gubar has noted how *prospopoeia* is often used in the attempt to communicate extremes of violence; that which is sublime in its horror 'conveying what it means for the incomprehensible to occur' (194). One extremely graphic episode in the novel shows the process at work: the episode in which Harley's great-great-grandparents Sandy One and Fanny Benang become involved in the events of a massacre. The settlers at the Gebalup station claim that it is retribution for a murder but, as Fanny finds out, the killing of the white man itself was retribution for the continued molestation of the women of the local Noongar group and the abuse of captured Noongar individuals confined there, sometimes in chains. Sandy One is forced to ride out with the settler party, although he does not kill, and Sandy One and Fanny escape the scene as soon as they can. Bodies of Noongar men hanging from a tree can be seen as they approach the station. The white men shoot at the bodies in grotesque sport. As they attempt to pass, the wheels of their cart turn too slowly, making 'a sucking sound... the mud filled the

space between the wheels' spokes' (1999: 136), as if attempting to stop them from passing, forcing them to bear witness to what has happened and is about to occur that very night: the escalation of the settlers' actions into extreme and savage sadism, as they cut flesh from the bodies as trophies. The animation of the natural environment as a dramatic response to these atrocities is shown in the description of the dawn after the night of massacre as 'a red stain spread upwards and across the sky' (1999: 186). The political importance of this animation of the natural environment is reinforced by the fact that Fanny and Sandy cannot speak in their shock and despair. Rather than the 'spirit of place' signalling a retreat from worldly corruption, the land itself appears to Harley and the ancestors as morally animated. Certainly a number of events in the novel evoke a type of mysticism that is not the 'spurious' transcendent aesthetic to which McCann refers in his critique of the use of Romanticism in Australian literature. Events such as these are necessarily depicted by engaging with a type of sublimity or transcendence to evoke both the extent of the violence and the materiality of such incidents.

To conclude, I return to the recurring symbol of the telling of stories around the campfire, as both resistant to the colonising culture and also an inspiring act that conveys profound connectedness to place and community. A sense of joy is communicated in the act of telling, and in finding the best way of telling in terms of mode, form, poetic: this is so important in communities that can be paralysed by despair. This sporadic return to joy occurs most often for Harley in what are Romantic moments of inspiration—singing and writing, the joy of articulation and communication. As Harley sings imperfectly in the ashes of the campfire, still learning Noongar songs, Harley's need to sing suggests how the energy of communication and artistic creation had also sustained Noongar culture and its people through the many hardships they have faced. Scott connects Harley here with one of the most famous Romantic tropes—Shelley's claim in *A Defense of Poetry* that 'the mind on creation is as a fading coal' (1.53). Harley discovers the value of the intense and assuring glow of creative expression (and Scott of poetic expression), even if it is only momentarily. This is not only through singing but through the act of writing Harley refers to the 'tap tap' of the keyboard (1999: 27) as a manifestation of the satisfying 'tap tap' (1999: 26) at the walls, expressing the exhilaration of writing stories that dismantle the structures of colonialisation, just as Harley demolished the coloniser's house. In this way writing becomes a political act, an act of dissent, as seen in *Kayang and Me*.

Through a Romantic poetic Scott thus finds a mode whose vitality comes from its connection to fundamental human desires—purpose,

hope, joy—derived for Scott and others through a connection to place. The reconnection to traditional culture that this evokes also envisions a Noongar future where the past is recognised and respected without the despair that leads to self-destruction, and which creatively articulates what one knows and feels is a personal and cultural imperative.

At the centre of the artistic and aesthetic vision of *Benang* is the powerfully political uncovering of hidden histories, layers of violence and identity confusion within colonial and modern Australian society; within town communities, within families, within individual subjects. In this process of uncovering, the confusion about racial identity is represented as potentially politically enabling; it suggests a permeability of the individual subject which gives rise to opportunity. Like the narrator Harley, one has an important vantage point if one has access to more than one culture and can creatively adapt elements of both to survive and thrive in the world, even when one has been so deeply damaged. Significantly Scott does not believe that non-Indigenous people should be closed off from access to Noongar culture and place, believing the right to revision and adaptation is not race-specific but universal. If Noongar culture does this well, he implies, why should it not set the example for those who wish to follow?

To take a broader view, what Scott does provide is a Noongar-based vision for surviving late-modernity; when all one values seems lost, there is space for political and imaginative engagement and also for re-visioning. This partly involves acts of retrieval not only from one's own cultures but also from other cultures, other histories, as long as one is circumspect, strategic, creative. Scott does not believe that non-Indigenous people should be excluded from this process, provided that they, in a distinctly non-Western manner, walk lightly down the sandy beach paths of traditional country without ambition and hubris, open, like the curlew, to the sense of connection and identity offered by the natural world.

Notes

- 1 For more information about the Wirlomen Nyoongar language project see <http://wirlomin.com.au/>.
- 2 Kathleen had lived with Sergeant Hall and his wife as a 'domestic' since she was a girl. Sergeant Hall had repeatedly raped her and she was pregnant with his child when she married Ern.
- 3 This is explained by Karen Patricia Pena (see: *Poetry and the Realm of the Public Intellectual*, 2007) in relation to Indigenous cultures worldwide.

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Southern Boobook Owls Brett Dionysius

B. R. Dionysius was founding Director of the Queensland Poetry Festival. He has published over 500 poems in literary journals, anthologies, newspapers and online. His eighth poetry collection, *Weranga* was released in 2013. He teaches English at Ipswich Grammar School and lives in Chapel Hill, Brisbane.

His *book book* cry was so close it could
have pealed inside our kitchen; as if some
poltergeist had tapped twice beside our ears
on an enamel mug, or a doomed sailor struck
his wrench on a bulkhead. Torch-lit, I bungled
the kids onto the back lawn, where we shone
our dull yellow beams up into the fig tree's
submarine darkness, first picking out the male,
then a metre along the branch, his female lead.
He repeated his deep notes, a lusty bugler whose
clarion call was greeted with a growl of approval.
He moved then at the speed of night, the flurry
of wings more a scuffle, than a feathered union.
Extinguished, the owls fled from our light.

Flora Abundance

Bossiaea Linophylla

Rose van Son

Rose van Son is a poet and prose writer whose work has appeared in journals including *Westerly*, *Cordite*, *Australian Poetry* and *Rabbit*. In 2015 she was a guest poet at both Perth Poetry Festival and Corrugated Lines Festival of Words (Broome). Her work appears in *Sandfire* (Sunline Press, 2011), *Three in the Campagna*, and *Three Owls and a Crescent Moon*. She is Editor for Creatrix Haiku online.

in cluster you weave
colour transparent light
heart seemingly in your mouth
veins follow capillaries
rivers run to source collect
strings along the path, penned
your mouth split like tongue

as water falls
as marathon wanders
seamless through the aisle
feather-stitched
a garment feasts your eyes

in Sunday's clouded light
bruised cherry

Linophylla's narrow leaves

massed in holy prayer

I could not taste you
for you kept yourself apart
calling silent to be seen
in another light one dark
where in swamp or sand
like pendulum intimacy grows

The Gardener

Raelee Chapman

Raelee Chapman grew up in The Riverina and studied Creative Writing at Monash University. Since 2011, she has lived in Singapore with her family. Her most recent fiction appeared in *Southerly* and *Mascara Literary Review*.

The egg did not belong in the nest. Rakesh knew this because the koel egg was different, ruddy, flecked, it rested among the lacquered sea-green eggs of a crow. The koel mother had simply tipped one egg out and replaced it with her own.

How happy he was to find the egg here in Singapore, the koel being the state bird of his hometown. Often heard but rarely seen, they were his alarm clock here as in India. He would tell Neeta about the egg later when he called her. She'd like that. He began pruning the trees that bordered the condominium driveway from the canal, struggling with the garden shears on the ladder. Rakesh was pleased he'd been given the shears today, he preferred the shade. On the ground lay the sad, smashed shell of the discarded egg. Ants marched through a stream of spilt yolk. He was not surprised; he had always known the elusive songbirds were cunning.

Waxy leaves brushed against his beard as he climbed higher. He tilted his head back to watch a plane move directly above him, blotting out the sun. The engine rumble was so loud he almost lost his footing on the ladder. It had only been thirty days since Rakesh took his first flight. He spent most of the journey white-knuckled, heavy with sweat, gripping his tray-table or in the restroom sluicing water over this face. How did five hundred tonnes of steel stay up in the air like that?

His brother Sunil, a good-for-nothing drunk and gambler, had pushed him to it. A new agency had set up back home. Sunil as eldest son said his place was with their mother but that Rakesh should go. It all happened so fast. He was able-bodied, clear of infectious diseases, young, fit—they needed him. Agencies were sending men to Singapore to earn Sing dollars! He didn't even need to buy his air ticket; it would later be deducted from his salary. Back home, he and Neeta slumbered in a single room with Sunil, his sister-in-law, his nephew Ajith, and his mother. Sunil spent any money he had, leaving Rakesh to support everyone else. His mother,

going blind, spent her days praying at the temple; they had no money to scrape the cataracts from her eyes. Now Neeta was pregnant, there were more expenses to cover. Singapore was a fresh start for Rakesh, a place where he could earn big money. Where nobody cared about his caste or the unfortunate accident at the jam factory where he last worked.

The factory had been a shadowy building; the only light came from the jaundiced glow of low-watt bulbs overhead. In the unsettling light, the jams looked like congealed blood. But here, he worked outdoors. The condo was freshly painted and its exteriors shone in an ivory blaze. Several of his co-workers were dotted around the garden beds on either side of the drive, their faces mummified in *Good Morning* tea towels, ripping up weeds or snipping at sunburnt plants, just the way Mr Lim, the condo manager, liked.

‘Must look tidy. Cut all away from driveway. Monsoon come cannot have branches dropping down on people’s Mercedes,’ Mr Lim had instructed him earlier in person as the foreman was off sick.

‘Yes, sir,’ Rakesh gave a nod to each rapid-fire instruction.

‘Trim it all back... everything. That bird nest must destroy also. Disturb the residents, lah. You also don’t disturb, okay. Don’t go close to people’s apartments,’ Mr Lim added before walking away.

The shears were dotted in rust and in need of oil. Rakesh, not good with his hands, was unwieldy in his effort to trim the thicker branches. Neeta was excellent with her hands. He thought of the way those lovely brown fingers would knead chapattis, slamming small mounds on a wooden board, sending clouds of flour into her face. The way she swiftly did her hair, parting it in three, weaving an inverted plait she called a fish-tail. He would watch her wrap sweets in the evening on the floor of their hut. A mound of rainbow fruit jelly that he lugged from the jam factory lay at her feet. They got a small sum for each sack of sweets she wrapped.

Thinking about the jelly made him hungry though it was still early. The morning sun seared as it rose. His long-sleeved green shirt was already drenched with sweat. The grounds were quiet and the only noises came from the bordering canal. Occasionally a slight breeze blew and he could smell stagnant storm water. A small pile of branches fell to the ground as he cut away an aperture, which gave him a good view across the driveway into a ground floor unit. The lace day curtains were open. A child’s play mat with candy-cane striped arches was spread on the floor. A marbled grey couch lined one wall and a large flat-screen TV was flickering. A young Caucasian couple lived there with a new baby. He’d seen the baby, pink and hairless in its mother’s arms as she strolled around the condo. Elderly Chinese men with sweatbands and bamboo sticks powered along the path outside,

chanting vocal breath exercises as they went. Rakesh listened to their ‘Oooh Ahh Hum’, as he tried to make out the hanging felt animals on the play mat. He would tell Neeta; perhaps she could sew some just like that.

Rakesh returned to lopping a thick branch as a dog bounded down the drive without a lead, a tall man jogged beside it, heading for the canal. Rakesh scrambled up a rung or two higher. He hated dogs. Even the sight of them caused a gnawing pain in his stomach. The memory of sixteen injections in the abdomen after a deranged dog bit him at a cricket game. He’d been staring at the sky waiting for the ball to drop into his hands. The dog also wanted the ball. Neeta had been there, seen it happen. They were teenagers then. She’d rushed over to stop him making a mud compress for the wound saying, ‘No, water is better.’ She made him go to a clinic. Get the shots. His stomach had swelled up hard like a pomegranate. He’d got lucky that time. ‘No rabies in Singapore,’ Neeta told him before he left for Chennai to get the plane to Changi. She had been standing at the train station, crying rivers of kohl, her red kurta straining against her swollen belly.

From the canal, a bicycle bell pealed and a flock of pigeons scattered, their grey-purple tinged wings beat in the clammy air. Rakesh realised he’d been doing nothing, daydreaming again. His arms rested, slumped over a rung of the ladder. Lucky Mr Lim was not around. ‘Daydreaming causes accidents,’ Neeta always said. Just like the last time, he thought, as he examined his hands. His livelihood, intact, unharmed. His cousin Kommaluri, at the factory, was not so lucky. The thick, sweet smell of jam had made Rakesh dizzy, swirls of dust motes in the factory air made him wonder if he was actually breathing in sugar. He had let a pile of labels slip into the labelling machine. Kommaluri was quick to retrieve them and lost two fingers in the process. It was impossible to work there after that. Marring his mother’s brother’s son, a blood relative that lived two doors down. There was no end to the shame. Rakesh would go to the factory only once a week to collect the sack of jelly for Neeta and returned with it, wearied as though it were lead.

Rakesh arched his back a little, feeling the sweat run in rivulets down his spine and shook off that memory. He cut a larger viewing hole amongst the branches, confused by Mr Lim’s instructions. He was no longer sure if the trees were a border to stop people from outside looking in or whether he should actually give residents a view of the canal and the pocket of jungle beyond. The glare reflecting off the buildings now hurt his eyes and he was thirsty.

‘Rakesh, that tree is a mess already. Move to the next,’ a co-worker called up to him from across the drive.

‘I nearly finish,’ he replied.

‘Mr Lim tell you to cut it like that?’ another called out. Rakesh nodded. He could hear his co-workers laugh from the garden bed. They often laughed at him. He was the newest. When the next-off-the-plane joined their work crew, Rakesh will join the others to laugh at him. That is how it was. He wouldn’t tell Neeta that. These were not the things he told Neeta at night, in the dark of the dormitory when the others were grunting and passing wind in their sleep. He would tell Neeta how today, he saved a bird’s nest. He reached out to touch the fragile eggs and wondered how to hide the nest from Mr Lim. The koel egg looked similar to the others but was smaller, speckled. Why couldn’t the crow mother tell it apart from her own? He would ask Neeta. They looked for commonalities whenever they spoke.

She would ask, ‘What do you hear in this country?’

And he told her, ‘Every evening when I finish my shift. I hear no packs of street dogs whimpering and whining such as what we hear at home. But I hear koels roosting at dusk, the male’s ku-oo, ku-oo and the female’s kik kik as they sing to each other and get ready to sleep.’

‘I hear koels too. They are shy, hidden in the bael fruit trees outside, but their song is strong. We hear the same thing,’ Neeta replied.

When he complained about how far apart they were, her reply was always the same, ‘Same sky we sleep under, Rakesh.’ As if a blanket stretched so far and they were in fact still enveloped together.

In the ground floor unit, across the way, the mother walked into the living room, carrying the baby, which was dressed only in a diaper. Her brown hair was wet, dripping as if she had just stepped from the shower. She sat on the couch and flicked through channels with the remote, the baby in her lap. The baby reminded him of when his nephew was born. His sister-in-law, that dull ugly woman from the countryside, wouldn’t hold him. A black cloud fell upon her the day Ajith was born with a harelip. Rakesh carried and jiggled his nephew, rocked him in his hammock. Neeta would water down condensed milk and bottle-feed him. Since birth, Ajith had never lain with his parents but slept nestled into the arch of Rakesh’s back, murmuring softly. He knew Neeta would make sure Ajith, who was still young, would not feel supplanted by the new baby. He said a quick prayer for blessings for his child and an uncomplicated delivery. He dropped the shears to the ground beside the ladder feeling uneasy all of a sudden. He wiped the sweat from his brow. His hand was covered with rust filaments and smelt metallic. He should say a quick prayer for Ajith, who would sleep where...? Nestled into Neeta’s back, while the baby rests in her arms?

He watched the woman reposition the baby in the nook of her arm. She pulled down a strap of her singlet, exposing one creamy, full breast. The baby turned its head towards her, its little mouth opening in a wide pink O as it fish-gaped to latch on. His sister-in-law had her milk dry up, she couldn’t stand the sight of Ajith’s cursed little mouth, she’d said. While baby and mother melded together in the living room, Rakesh’s chest seized as he pictured Neeta with their child. How could he leave her alone? His body was dissolving in sweat and tears, he thought as he swirled and spat brackish bile that rose like a tide within him. He rubbed the rust filaments into his eyes. The ladder swayed though there was no breeze. He should not have let Sunil persuade him Singapore was best. He realised his sister-in-law, who had nothing to do with Ajith’s day-to-day care would have to help more and more with the new baby. Maybe even care full time for the baby. Is this why they pushed him away? He must go home. He would tell his foreman, pay back his ticket in instalments, and find a job in the next village. In his mind, these things were possible, and at that moment, quashing the hurt was not.

Then he remembered Neeta, on the platform at the train station, already thanking him for the better life he would give them. His mother, whose prayers dutifully chanted with milky downcast eyes had been answered. Her cataracts, Ajith’s harelip, support for Kommaluri, Neeta’s hospital fees, and delivery—little by little his money would help all. He swallowed, coughed, the ocean receding inside him; the sick feeling replaced by pride. He puffed out his chest, took a deep breath, retrieved the shears, and was ready to begin work again.

The gate to the canal clanged shut as the man he’d seen earlier returned from his jog, dragging his mutt up the driveway. Rakesh paused a moment on the ladder, waiting for the dog to pass. Mr Lim was at the foot of the drive, calling towards him, ‘Get down. Get down this moment! You cause big trouble. Disturb resident,’ he shouted. In the ground floor unit, the baby had been moved to the playmat. Rakesh hadn’t even realised it had finished feeding. The mother paced while she talked on her mobile phone. She waved her hands as she spoke, pointing at Rakesh, and scowling as the curtains were hurriedly drawn by a maid. Mr Lim stormed towards him, furious. Rakesh wanted to get down but with the dog loitering near the spilt egg yolk, he couldn’t let go of the ladder. *Daydreaming causes accidents.* He didn’t know how he would explain this all to Neeta. As he turned to face Mr Lim, the shears dislodged the nest. Already before it hit the ground, he could hear the shattering of the delicate shells.

Kyeemagh's Sunny April Les Wicks

Les Wicks has toured widely and seen publication in over 350 different magazines, anthologies & newspapers across 25 countries in 13 languages. His 13th book of poetry is *Getting By Not Fitting In* (Island, 2016). <http://leswicks.tripod.com/lw.htm>

The sun wears skin
she's here for the medicinal salts.
A magenta stingray
is finger-painting at the edge of this canvas sand,
it will take him some time.
That water is as clear as paper waiting
for the poem one never quite wrote.

Ignore the clouds out across the bay,
the traffic—it's just that cheap ambient mix
that lulls all purpose to slumber.
This is my begging bowl
the offerings of tranquillity
while I am alive
& pain is managed.

There is always risk
in excessive wonder.
Like my *wealth & beauty*
it's just a memory of names.
There are strategies plus
measured delusion does only a little harm.
Children collect driftwood to assail
so many magnitudes. Dunes knell
at the altar of local government.
This frangible splendour
has no contracts with time as the air warms.

To my left an A380 lifts from the tarmac—
miracles—you see what I mean.

Skydiving for Twenty-Two Year-olds (and Thirteen Year-olds, and Forty-Two Year-olds)

Heather Taylor Johnson

Heather Taylor Johnson's fourth book of poetry is *Meanwhile, the Oak*, (Five Islands Press). Her second novel, *Jean Harley was Here*, is due out with UQP in February. She is the editor of *Shaping the Fractured Self: Poetry of Chronic Illness and Pain* (UWAP, 2017), and the poetry editor of *Transnational Literature*.

Out the door from 13000 feet, I was a world, me, falling toward the other one. I was lithe; the Earth staunch. I was naïve; Earth too old for human foolishness. If I didn't do this thing right, my world would make quite an impression on the unforgiving one below.

Bone free, fleshless, freefall cuts away the cloak of it, leaving only core. How often in life is a person presented with a stripped body? How often can we truly call ourselves elemental? For me it was five to ten times a weekend, as many weekends as I could afford.

I waitressed, half of my money going out the door of a single-engine aeroplane. I packed parachutes so that I could jump parachutes, at home and abroad. I worked behind the manifest desk, organising skydivers and pilots and taking money. There was a community of us, working to jump, living to jump, *dying to jump*.

| | | | |
|-------------|------------|----------------|--------------|
| doctors | artists | soldiers | plumbers |
| programmers | musicians | firemen | students |
| teachers | builders | bartenders | nurses |
| accountants | architects | horse trainers | grandparents |

A subculture coming together on weekends. Like-minded renegades of a scattered commune crowding Cessna 182s by day, we gathered around bonfires by night. We were full-throttle, our arms wrapped around each other in complete comradery. When I left my home dropzone in Virginia to move to Arizona and when I left that dropzone to find another in Adelaide, I knew I wouldn't be alone.

• • •

Two days before we set off, a friend, my Buge Sister, Nancy, came from America to see my new Australian home. Together we'd part the Salvation

Jane and scout out koalas on our road trip to Corowa, New South Wales, where skydivers from as far as Slovakia and Zimbabwe, the Netherlands and Canada, Israel and Thailand had registered to compete in the 1999 World Championships.

We'd been to my new dropzone the night before. A desolate place called Lower Light, just north of Adelaide's city beat. We'd had moonshine. Home-brewed tequila. And though I hadn't been the one to swallow the worm, I was the one the next day in bed, the spinning room, the noise in my ear, for hours—for hours—back and forth to the share-house toilet where the previous night's booze, the morning's cereal, any and all water to fight off dehydration, the bile, more bile, then nothing, came and came and came *for hours*. Nancy, not even hungover. Nancy, bored in my small rented room.

'I'm so sorry I'm ruining your trip...This is the worst hangover I've ever had...It must be alcohol poisoning.'

But it wasn't alcohol poisoning or even a hangover. I know this now because it happened again, two months later, on a walk with a friend. On her couch and in her toilet. *Hours*. Three months later, on the overnight ferry to Tasmania. The seasickness that was not seasickness. Then again, another three months later, in a room I rented from my future husband. *For hours*. My feeble knock on the wall separating me from him. My feeble cry for help. His help. Why we fell in love.

• • •

Meniere's disease crashed in hard like all the times I'd imagined I would if my canopy never opened. *'Here is a new world smashing into mine!'* it would say as I crumpled my body into another dead leaf. Brittle or mulch, depending on season. My world becoming Earth. Compostable. Rakeable.

Snub-nosed and secretive, I fought every sign directing me to quit: the broken toes—one, two and the little one, too—a tender puffy purple knee, the elbow bending in muttered curses, always the left, it always happened to the left side of my body-world because it was the left ear that caused all of this.

Didn't want illness, wanted the sky.

Told myself that in freefall, the whooshing in my ear wasn't a *thing*, and dizziness even less, so why stop? Like this: when your body pushes against the air at 120 miles per hour, noise becomes everything you know. Two plus two is four; noise is nothing more. And this: when gravity is too much to grip, you give into it. The sky is a lake, so float. The sky is a thin, cool broth, so fill your hunger now. *'What some call denial is nothing of the sort but rather the strongest affirmation of life I can imagine: normality and ordinariness against a background of absurdity.'*¹ Next to the absurdity

that was Meniere's, skydiving was normal. It was so ordinary I'd convinced myself it was a healthy antidote for disease.

And if they could do it, I could do it.

Speedy, showy, cool, slick. Watch me tumble (not so hip) and the dust wraps its shroud around me. Late night parties, all sorts of shit going in and out of my questionable body. Watch me vomit in the bushes then keep on going. All sorts of self-finger-wagging and self-middle-finger-raising. Even the meats and cheeses at the party tables, the salt I was told to avoid: if they could eat it, I could eat it. If they could do it, I could do it.

I could do it; couldn't do it. At all.

Sky is endless until it isn't, and acceptance is nothing more than telling the truth. It *'involves recognizing that your life has not turned out as you wanted. What went wrong must be acknowledged and examined; mourning will attend this examination.'*² Accepting Meniere's meant rejecting skydiving and I'd been in it for seven years. 879 jumps. Mettle-making stuff. Meeting fear and sharing a round of shots with it. Five rounds. Eight. 'My name is Heather and I am a skydiver.'

Mourning attended. I was a snail. I was pale with pity. A rope in a desert. A hook in a puddle. What could I make of myself now? I was desperate for the good shit at 13000 feet but with Meniere's, I couldn't compete. *An ethics of failure takes failure not as an ending, but as a beginning.*³ I had no choice but to give it up, so I sold my golden parachute and threw myself into healing.

Then writing.

Then mothering.

Always dreaming. And I still smell jet fuel in the idle car and yesterday, I thought of them:

They made a new *Point Break* though I'll never watch it.

Some movies have you because of who you were.

I say there's no getting over the *Buge* and that time in the desert when we camped by the lone tree—

A Eucalyptus:

The Sweet Spot:

The Buge.

Steve Action howled it and Jim Adams made us stand in a row
take notice of the sky as if we hadn't been doing it *all day long*.
'This is big,' he said, the planets hanging in a straight line like never
before
(not quite, it'd happened a million years ago (or a hundred or something))

and when we saw the space

between Venus and Mars

we knew that it was us.

Buge.

Elmo might have been there—I'm sure Elmo was.

He's not on Facebook so we've lost touch but I think about him
now-and-then like I'm thinking about him *now*, thinking about
Dan Fabulous (who is dead), but Elmo and Dan and Jo Doody and the
Mattman

they were always 'there'

Howdy Doody / I'm Mattman

Dan's last name was Fabio.

Didn't Stuart Dooby hijack a plane and jump out with \$200,000
like something out of *Point Break*? No—that was DB Cooper
who I'm sure was our very own Stu Dooby though he never upgraded
to a square parachute and he never did fix his teeth.

Everyone survived

the smoke and fire,

unlike the King Air.

I hate that Ned is paralysed.

Twenty-two is a perfect age to talk about sex, or to have it all the time
and we were ruthless. Tessie once got a chocolate bar

from Jean-Guy, who wasn't 'getting any' but said he was in love.
He's dead now too. We all remember him differently

and none of us

imagine

angels.

Fingas became a Born Again while hooked up with Nancy—
that must've been a blow (though we laughed about it for years).
Eight of us in a circle, crying as if he'd suddenly died
but there he was, smiling: 'I know! This is *big*!'

For me it was always Fletch.

Fletch Fletch Fletch Fletch.

It's a funny name to repeat out loud.

*(Some people said skydiving was better than sex; in Point Break it was big
wave surfing.)*

He and I slept in a bus that once had 'God's Kids' painted on the back
but rubbed out said 'Go Kids' instead (the bus was pink,
he called it *beige*). Not to be confused with Lambert's L.U.S.H. Bus:
those long drunken road-trips, Virginia to Montana (Shane naked in the
doorway)—

When a body falls from the sky

and a canopy *doesn't* open

the 'bounce' is a muffled bang.

And a body's ashes falling from the sky look like thousands of silver birds.

I bet every one of us has a Bobby P (*nus!*) photo somewhere in their house,
probably on their refrigerator door. We're freefalling in ours:
The Buge Sisters, cooler than Swayze and Keanu Reeves.
Nancy has her hair in plaits and Tessie holds us together.

We must've had
an endless supply
of sports bras.

Venus, Earth and Mars: so tiny and so big.

...

Our eldest is going for his first skydive this winter, when the air is at its crispest, when a canopy slices through it so perfectly you can hear it. Strapped to the harness worn by the son of parents I used to jump with, this crazy world rages on and together, with him, my son will fall from the sky. A tandem jump, not a solo. He'll depend on the experience of another—a man who was a five-year-old I once knew.

My husband will skydive too. A tandem, not a solo, because he almost died on his 240th jump (did die on his 240th jump, twice) but life for him, miraculously, thankfully, rages on. All agree a tandem is his best option. Our friend who runs the dropzone—the father of the boy-man who will be responsible for my boy-man—says it is his only option.

I will skydive, too. We'll be a hand-holding airborne family, and I will do a solo. I think it's jealousy when my husband says, 'Maybe you should do a tandem, with your Meniere's and all,' because he can't be *serious*. Over the past fifteen years I have lived with my illness and tested its limits and succumbed to its power and questioned its motives and wrestled its abstractness and sucker-punched its abjectness and begged its forgiveness and studied it, confided in it, ripped it up, stuck it back together, wore it round my neck like a tattoo, a decoration, a scar.

I know this illness because this illness is me.

*'Some years there exists a wanting to escape—
you, floating above your certain ache—
still the ache coexists.
Call that the immanent you—'*⁴

No, a tandem won't do. I want total control over this jump because I get control in the face of anarchy. Audre Lorde says,

*The tensions created inside me by the contradictions is another source
of energy and learning. I have always known I learn my most lasting lessons*

*about difference by closely attending the ways in which the differences
inside me lie down together.*⁵

It begins with a bitter seed in pure soil. Then, a blossoming. An eco-system of paradise and natural disaster. Finally, there must be a strategy to contain it. Here is my strategy:

A drive to Langhorn Creek, my family of five in the car. Our dog, too. A refresher course with my friends' son who has become my friend, who is my son's friend, and two or three (or four) jumps with him; fitting the student rig to my body—it will hold within it a large and forgiving canopy so I can land on the left side of my body and get back up, unharmed; a feeling of belonging among these (*so young*) strangers who will not be strangers because nothing can be stranger than this strange sport; a plane ride to altitude and trying to swallow my son's excitement and fear but getting it stuck inside my throat because my own will be rising from my gut. *I can't believe I'm doing this*, because it will be like the first time, the thirtieth time, the three-hundredth time. How many times had I said that to myself on the plane ride to altitude? I will catch my husband's eye, so happy he's alive, and we will look at our son together, so happy *he's* alive. Then ready-set-go: my son. Ready-set-go: my husband. Ready-set-go: me.

I will be a world, me, falling toward the other one. I will be older; the Earth newer. I will be wiser; the Earth no less forgiving than before.

And then it will be over.

And then it will be done.

Notes

- 1 Milano, Joan. 'Remembering Dan: Excerpts from my Journal'. *Stories of Illness and Healing: Women Write Their Bodies*. Eds. Sayantani DasGupta and Marsha Hurst Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2007. (168–171)
- 2 Frank, Arthur W. *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*. The University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London. 1995. (63)
- 3 Diedrich, Lisa. *Treatments: Language, Politics, and the Culture of Illness*. Minneapolis and London: Minnesota Press, 2007. (116)
- 4 Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2014. (139)
- 5 Lorde, Audre. 'A Burst of Light'. *A Burst of Light: essays by Audre Lorde*. Firebrand Books, Ithica, New York. 1988. (117–118)

The filament of the body

Anne M. Carson

Anne M Carson's poetry has been published internationally and widely in Australia. She is also an essayist and visual artist. Currently she is looking for a publisher for '*Massaging Himmler: A poetic biography of Dr Felix Kersten*'.

T E Lawrence | In speed we hurl ourselves beyond the body

From the bike, clouds scud silently across a muted sky. Long sustained, sometimes vibrato notes played to an audience of mountains and trees. Wind paints colour on the sky's immaculate ceiling; imprinting the canvas, like landscape imprints the motorcycling body. A mountain's height and girth write contour lines on a map. Riding pillion they become degrees of lean and rock-a-bye motion. Ascent is incremental—traversing the vertiginous side of the slope, then manoeuvring switch-back bends when the bike doubles on itself, slows to almost stalling speed. Momentum and sticky tyres keep us from bitumen. We leap out of the corner in a flamboyant burst of acceleration. Adrenaline floods, fizzles along synapses. Fear and delight open and close me, my sometimes antagonistic fellow travellers. On the flat, we meander across flood-plains, movement as fluid as river, as liquid as untethered thought. Both of us part of a single flow. The rider shrinks to a pinpoint of concentrated vigilance, expands into multiple pathways of muscular memory, rides them in taut practiced concert. We weight and unweight in balletic grace—we are *not earth-bound*. I lurch between trust and panic at my total lack of control. Plunged into the body then, alchemically, beyond it again. On the ground

but flying; the whoosh as wind rushes past. We keep pace with the birds, nothing but a thin shell of helmet-plastic between us and them. *Not the conquest of air but our entry thither*. Landscape's physicality, feelings'

pitted, porous surface, their substance and tangibility, registered together in the body's fine-tuned filament. And beyond—speed, infinite sky, transcendence—all part of a single flow.

Quotes from T E Lawrence *Confessions of Faith*

**Performing 1971:
Dorothy Hewett's
The Chapel Perilous
Nicole Moore**

Recent publications by Nicole Moore include the edited collections *Censorship and the Limits of the Literary* (Bloomsbury 2015), *Australian Literature in the German Democratic Republic: Reading through the Iron Curtain* (Anthem 2016, with Christina Spittel), and with Nicholas Birns and Sarah Shieff, *Teaching Australian and New Zealand Literature* (forthcoming MLA 2017). Her ARC Future Fellowship at UNSW Canberra funds a biography of the Australian writer Dorothy Hewett.

It is eight o'clock in the evening on the 21st of January, 1971, and the heat from an 100-plus degree day dissipates in the night air. Dorothy Hewett's third serious play, *The Chapel Perilous*, is opening at The New Fortune Theatre. Built as a fourth wall to the Arts Building at the University of Western Australia in 1964, The New Fortune is a multi-storey outdoor space designed as an Elizabethan stage. The play's director is Aarne Neeme, a young, sympathetic collaborator with whom Hewett has been working closely in rehearsals. Helen Neeme, Aarne's wife, is in the demanding central role, and between the Acts she feeds their new daughter, only a few months old. Hewett's twenty-year-old son Joe Flood is among the musicians tuning up at the side of the stage and his future wife Adele Marcella has a role in the Chorus. Hewett's other four children, the youngest eight years old, sit in the audience with her husband, writer Merv Lilley. Also attending are some of her students and colleagues from the English Department at UWA, which a week or so earlier had finally awarded her a permanent tutorship, after first appointing her in 1964. Friends of Hewett's from literature and politics have come too: T.A.G. Hungerford, Hal Colebatch, Dorothy and Bill Irwin, and Nicholas Hasluck among others, as well as a reviewer for the *West Australian*. As Hasluck recalls, in the front row, in seats reserved especially, are the prominent left-wing lawyer Lloyd Davies, Hewett's first husband from whom she'd divorced in 1950, and his wife Jo. With a clap of thunder, the action begins in darkness, and a chorus of young actors in school uniforms, with dual

roles as ushers, listen to a declaratory female voice: 'I rode forward through the blackened land. I saw the forests burning and the fields wasted, waiting for rain. Upon a slope I saw a glimpse of light. Then I came to the Chapel Perilous.'

In one measure of its immediate success, by 1972 Currency Press in Sydney had published a formalised text of the play, with prefaces from Aarne Neeme, the critic Sylvia Lawson and the playwright herself. In her piece, Hewett notes of the heroine: 'For many young women Sally Banner is the first modern liberated feminist in our literature: I believe this is an historical and literary accident' (xix). This essay attempts to conjure the performative moment of *The Chapel Perilous* in order to think further about the relationship between this complexly provocative play and its extraordinary times. 1971 is at the apex of the period once described by historian Donald Horne as Australia's *Time of Hope*, when the new social movements, including feminism and sexual liberation, gained mainstream consensus for transformative political and social change. 'At times, everything seemed to be changing,' wrote Horne in 1980. It was also perhaps a peak moment for Australian print culture, in an accelerating, mediatised social world, with widely-read newspapers, loosening censorship, new demotic technologies and a strong domestic publishing industry running influential agendas of reform. But looking back, for Horne the new ideals had been realised in a notably performative, 'theatrical' dimension of Australian politics: 'It was by theatricalised episodes that, during the post-Menzies era, new issues crashed through into our attention' (8–9). Protest culture was having its greatest effect through staged and dramatic interventions into a shared public culture on the streets. The boundaries between theatre and drama, stage and audience, culture and politics, were being ruptured, with effects well beyond the realm of the literary.

Yet Hewett's Sally Banner is an equivocal, if not tragic figure, her liberation a chimera exposed not only by the reactionary forces of church and state, and by what is presented as the judgmental social control exercised in a provincial city, but also by her own limitations: her tortured failures and insecurities as a woman and a poet. Her representativeness in those roles is an accident, according to Hewett, reflecting the effect on the creative process of what seemed to her to be the determining social forces of the period, as well as the play's chequered performance history—the key question of whether Sally is required to bow at the play's climax or allowed to stand. Placing *The Chapel Perilous* in its moment can tease out the ways in which what can seem quite an ahistorical play, with its rich mythic citation, inter-medial experimentation and iconoclastic

theatricality, becomes history or, more precisely, performative history, in so far as we can conceive such. Simultaneously, we can ask how this play represents, perhaps in an opposite way, a 'literary accident'. What might we mean by the accidental literary?

Kelly Oliver's work on what she terms 'witnessing otherness in history' gives us a foundational distinction with which to clarify the relationship between history and performance, drawing on some developments of Derrida's from J. L. Austin, perhaps the most influential linguist on performative language. 'We could say,' Oliver suggests, 'that the saying, or the temporality of time, corresponds to the realm of *performance*, while the said, or history, corresponds to the realm of the *constative*' (51). Oliver relies on Austin's understanding of descriptive utterance on the one hand, in nominating the constative, which is epistemological, in the realm of true or false, and already removed, or we could say laggard, registering that which is past or displaced—the representative distance between a telling and its object: 'Dorothy Hewett wrote this play'. On the other hand Austin identifies performative utterance—'I apologize', 'Welcome!'—which occurs as it is spoken, or makes and performs itself in one iteration. Austin demonstrated that these two categories are interdependent, never wholly separable, and Oliver uses this point to tell us some more about history: 'performativity destabilizes history by showing that the constative element central to historical truth is dependent on the process of temporality, which can never be fully captured in that constative element' (51–52). The now of the utterance is always in abeyance, as Derrida showed.

In a further step, Chandra Mohanty's distinction between history and *historicity* explains how history can be open to difference. '[H]istory operates according to a "Eurocentric law of identical temporality"', declares Mohanty, as Oliver quotes from her work, and this, 'is in some sense always already written; historicity can never be written in that sense because it is a dynamic process of negotiating the positions or perspectives that make writing history possible' (50). For Oliver, 'how the performative challenges the constative, or how temporality challenges history, returns the *historicity* of struggles over social norms to history' (52). This question of *historicity* is what examining *The Chapel Perilous's* place in history opens up for us—its role as the performed past in distinction from its place in the past. The struggle over social norms is exactly what is highlighted, not only in Sally's quest (which is generically temporal if not historical, as a *bildungsroman*, even though it is also mythic) but in the play's role as history, as an instance of cultural reflection and performance that we now regard from inside its future.

Temporality is heavily encoded across the surface of the text of *The Chapel Perilous*, furthering its Brechtian interest in defamiliarising the seeming natural order of the past. Hewett knew Brecht's work early in her theatrical career, having spent time in the German Democratic Republic in the early 1960s: by the end of the decade she was reading Beckett, Artaud, Orton and other expressionists (Sheridan 178; Kiernan 49). At the end of the prologue and again at the play's conclusion, a chorus of girls intones this preoccupation explicitly:

AMPLIFIER in HEADMISTRESS'S VOICE: "Sally is a rebel in word and deed. The latter usually tones in time."
 GIRLS: "Till we have built Jerusalem...
 [Girl's voices on amplifier modulate into a chant.]
 With time, with time, with time... with time...
 [The girls begin to march out. Sally follows them, chanting.]
 With time, with time, with time, with time...
 [The AUTHORITY FIGURES are left alone on stage. The stage darkens to a red glow, the chapel bell tolls. The droning beat of amplifiers rises and dies away.]
 Time... time... time... time...time... time...

But numbers of performance theorists have worked hard to show us that performance is not fundamentally linguistic or reducible to grammatical structures, and in so far as a piece of theatre is an event it occurs in space as well as time. A performance has visual and kinetic elements as well as aural effects, its phenomenological presence in the world is both experiential and ideational, it is produced in an elastic complex of material and social environments, and its ephemeral existence does not disperse an ability to resound with a realised theatrical place. Stepping beyond the materialist allegorical model of history and culture—history figured in culture as ground and cause (Jameson on Althusser)—the element of performance allows into this relation a dynamism, an interactivity, and a level of self-recognition that marks its difference from mere reflection or transference, or even representation. As history, its disruptive function is foremost—its challenge to certain social norms—and this is what enables it to count as such.

And this is also where we can identify the accidental literary, perhaps. The accidental resides not just in the fact that Hewett's theatre enjoys an experimental dimension, trying out occasional unpredictable elements that introduce chance. And neither is it confined to the biographical, in so far as the play's dramatic success propelled Hewett in new directions to some degree unintended. Broadly, conceiving of the play's effects as

accidental records the important of incidence and particularity in the literary's role as history, its ability to challenge smoothed teleologies of narrative history with the momentary and the unexpected, with disagreement, taboo matters and disruptive dissent. The accidental performative, moreover, can offer a way to account for the full import of intertheatricality, allowing for the complex and determining work of context, production, precedent, circumstance, audience and reception in the function and impact of any piece of theatre.

With a two week season produced by the university's very active Graduate Dramatic Society, *The Chapel Perilous* was staged to coincide with the Perth Festival, which included no Australian plays that season. It was the third of Hewett's plays at the New Fortune Theatre and by far the most ambitious, in its expansive use of the large and multi-storied Globe-like stage (which Neeme called a 'great square boxing ring' (xiv)); its 18-member cast; its repertoire of more than twenty songs and a number of dance pieces; its oversized set, featuring looming, plaster-cast figures and a chapel tower; its rapidly intercut dialogue, dynamic structure and fluid changes; and language that was both poetic and sardonic. The plot follows the questing life of an unconventional woman from her school years to age sixty-five, as the *AustLit* database's integrated entry summarises: 'who attempts to find fulfilment—whether through her gift of poetic expression, through her sexual relationships, or in later years through political activism—and ultimately finds it through self-acceptance.' The quest motif is explicitly sourced in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and the extract from 'The Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake' printed in the New Fortune's program describes 'How Sir Launcelot Cam Into the Chapel Perelus', facing ghostly knights and ominous portents: 'therewithall he feared'. The performance also included extracts from *The Order for the Burial of the Dead* from the *Book of Common Prayer*, Marvell's 'Come Live with Me and be My Love', Hubert Parry's hymn of Blake's 'Jerusalem', 'What the Thunder Said' from Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the 'Hokey Pokey', the 'Internationale' and the 'Red Flag', and the notoriously obscene ballad 'The Good Ship Venus', with all its 'friggin in the riggin'. These were in addition to new lyrics by both Hewett and composer Michael Leyden: where not matched to traditional tunes, Hewett's words were set to music by the experienced composer Frank Arndt. Reviewing the published version in the *Canberra Times* in 1972, Jo Gibson began 'I think this play is magnificent in conception' and ended 'It offers almost insuperable difficulties to producer and actor. Almost. They are a challenge. Let them be met' (Gibson, 12).

The immediate verdict on the New Fortune production was that Neeme had managed to do that. 'Beautifully told in the form of poetical musical

drama ... [with] a poetry that is rare in any modern play,' declared the *West Australian's Weekend News*. Its review gave 'much of the credit' to the director, lauding Neeme's ability to get '18 young people to move, sing, dance and act with a flourish that probably surprised even themselves. Mr Neeme's production was full of life, intelligently staged and meticulously timed. It is a rare event when talents such as his and Miss Hewett's are allowed to fuse in such a joyous happening' (20). Reporting on Hewett's premiere in a letter to their mutual friend and former colleague Carol Bolton, the poet Fay Zwicky declared it: 'a huge theatrical success + I don't think I've ever seen the Fortune Theatre better used'. She too emphasised Neeme's role: 'he achieved a nice balance of vantage points, helped by a particularly lively young chorus whose emphasis continually set Sally's "immortal soul" against a society and against an audience identifying with that society and identified with it.' *The Australian's* theatre critic Katharine Brisbane was clearest about the play's dramatic achievements and gives us our best sense of its place in Australian theatre history:

Miss Hewett is a poet whose compulsion to write plays about life as she knows it denies all caution, circumspection or nice arrangement of the mind. *The Chapel Perilous* is a play of vivid poetic imagination and awesome poetic memory... There is no doubt that Sally Banner [...] is a memorable expression of the Australian's blind struggle towards emotional maturity. It places Miss Hewett with this, her third play, at the forefront of Australian writing. (152–4)

Brisbane's husband Philip Parsons was an old university friend of Hewett's who had been prominently involved in the building of the New Fortune Theatre and had directed her previous play, *Mrs Porter and the Angel*, with Neeme in Sydney in 1969. By mid-1971, Brisbane and Parsons had established Currency Press, the first and only Australian publisher to subsist on the performing arts, as it remains, and they did so on the strength of Australian drama from that year. In a survey of the scene from March 1971, with a typical nationalist interest in the big picture (investing as the arts then were in rewriting Australian 'identity'), Brisbane declared: 'in its more outrageous aspects, the theatre is beginning, just beginning, to take a realistic look at who we are; and audiences are responding in recognition of that view' (165). Grouping with Hewett's the work of newly staged playwrights Rodney Milgate, Jack Hibberd, Alexander Buzo, John Romeril and Rob Inglis, Brisbane articulated, forcefully, the character of what is now known as the New Wave: 'They are rorty, wasteful, intensely colloquial scripts and they make one realise how foreign to us are clever

construction, eloquence and precision. They also show, to an awesome degree, how rich, vivid and accurate our colloquial tongue is' (166). It was not just a change in content and language: for her, a whole new vernacular style had arrived. 'Gradually and inevitably this style has begun to creep into the serious theatre. This broad, loud, extremely agile and all enveloping theatricality is reaching out into our theatres which have protected themselves from it for so long, bringing a vitality which is totally Australian' (166). 1971's momentum for change was evident in Brisbane's praise for the 'maverick characters, outlaw heroes who by their very existence impress upon us the extreme conformity of Australian society' with the sole caveat that 'except for Dorothy Hewett's Sally, whom Melbourne saw this month, there are almost no good women's roles in the contemporary writing' (209).

Perhaps the most telling response—for our question as to how accidental was Sally's liberation, how formative—is contained in a fan letter to Hewett from Shirley Knowles, a young woman from Hewett's own suburb, who effused:

I think Sally Banner is a completely beautiful character. Set against the line upon line of embarrassed girls playing at being sexy and pink-eyed wives with borrowed attitudes, atrophied brains and dry cunts, Sally is a woman. She is honest, good (in the true sense of the word) and she is real. (She might be too real for some people.)

[...]

Just as the play was obviously the work of a woman, it has particular meaning for other women (and not just those who write poetry). Sometimes we wonder whether we're misguided in 'kicking against the pricks' and refusing to join the masses of little women in housing homes (and all that goes with this). On the surface, Sally Banner would appear to be too much involved with herself, but I think she has to be to survive! That army of little grey women is always seeking converts. ...

So, Dorothy, I think your play is wonderful (and not just by local standards). Above all, I think Sally Banner as a character is magnificent. She is quite a woman—I salute her!

Knowles is the example we have of the young women Hewett referred to; the group that saw Sally as an exemplary liberated woman and needed to write to her to tell her. The first newsletter from a Women's Liberation group in Perth was published more than a year later: Sally was 'the first'

in that sense. And it was not just Perth. After a big student production in Melbourne in 1972 and a season at the Sydney Opera House in 1974, and especially after the release of the Currency Press edition in 1972, there was national press. 'For women, a work that will make things suddenly and blindingly clear' declared the banner headline in the *National Times* in 1972, celebrating a play that 'will put up Hewett's name in lights along with Greer' (Kemp 20, cf. Sheridan 180–81).

The parallel with Greer was not incidental: both were literary academics produced by Australian English departments dominated by Cambridge-educated Leavisites and both were keenly interested in the literature of the early modern period. *The Female Eunuch* was released in Australia and the UK in October 1970, just a few months before *The Chapel Perilous* premiered. It was Sylvia Lawson, the reviewer of the first edition of *The Female Eunuch* for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who clarified their shared central concerns, in her essay for the first edition of *The Chapel Perilous*. "It is exactly the element of quest in her sexuality which the female is taught to deny," Germaine Greer writes in the *Female Eunuch*; and it is exactly this that Sally will not deny, just as in the school chapel she will not bow down' (x). The blasphemous link between sexuality and creativity 'is why her adventures are perilous indeed,' explained Lawson, identifying the Romantic tendencies of Hewett's version. 'The artist is necessarily on a pilgrimage: this is the relevance of Dorothy Hewett's dominant symbol and title.' In the original program, due to deliver a set of lectures on Blake in the Romanticism course at UWA, Hewett expanded: 'We are all, particularly the young, inheritors of the romantic agony with all its attendant problems of the ego, free will, and anarchy... [sic] Blake's four-fold vision and Coleridge's milk of paradise, which often makes us absurd. 'The Chapel Perilous' is about snatching a kind of victory from that inevitable defeat.'

Here we gain some sense of the expansive ways the period's conception of 'liberation' can be decoded, and especially how literary enactments complicate and enrich political versions of the idea. Sally's arrivalist role was hailed by Lawson as symptomatic of the production's political moment. As it would for Whitlam almost two years later, Sally's time had come: 'She could not, in fact, have arrived any earlier [...] it is only in an age when emancipation has given place to liberation that the Sally Banners of the world can begin to tell us who they are' (Lawson ix). It is not just in the impertinent equivalences drawn between chivalric quests, epiphanic visions and a late twentieth-century woman's confused desires for autonomy or recognition that we see a bid for freedom, moreover: the play's deliberate vulgarity and brash satire, as well as its free-wheeling

structure and language play qualify it for what Mary Spongberg identifies as the 'feminist larrikinism' of early 1970s Australia, with Greer as the most high-profile practitioner (Spongberg, Chaundry). For Hewett, having quit the Communist Party of Australia in mid-1968 after the jailing of Sinyavsky and Daniel and the Prague Spring, this meant challenging the available structural answers to the moment's urgent social questions, especially about women's sexuality, and an anarchic embrace of satiric debunking.

The Sydney women's liberation journal *Mejane* appeared in early 1971 too, and featured some similarly anarchic and expressionist material, while poets such as Vicki Viidikas and artists such as Vivienne Binns had produced powerful work. Hewett had helped organise International Women's Day celebrations in Perth through the early 1960s, as a CPA member, while the equal pay cases of 1969 had been confined to the eastern states. At the IWD march in Sydney in March 1972, a performance of a piece of street theatre titled 'The Stages of a Woman's Life' began with a coffin and finished with a woman's use of Bex powders (Stevens). It took until 1975 for Kate Jennings's edited collection *Mother I'm Rooted* and the lesbian bildungsroman *All That False Instruction*, released under the pseudonym Elizabeth Riley, to claim substantial literary territory for other outspoken women, however—their titles are indicative. Anne Summer's *Damned Whores and God's Police*, also from 1975, took up where Lawson left off, hailing Sally Banner into history as 'the only potentially revolutionary woman in Australian literature by women' (Tompkins citing Summer, 42).

With roots in Sydney libertarianism, larrikin 'vulgarity' meant treating topics of the moment, such as abortion and homosexuality, with a frankness that was then shocking and a levity that compounded any offence: it was received as legally obscene. In 1971, obscenity, exactly in so far as it was identified and policed by forms of state and federal law, cultural gate-keepers and religious institutions, was a potent weapon for social subversion (Moore 251-60). In Act 1 of *The Chapel Perilous*, Sally's mother finds Henry Miller's then-banned *The Topic of Cancer* in Sally's locker, along with packs of 'Chesterfields and contraceptives'. Her father slaps her and she declares 'I'm going now ... with a copy of D.H. Lawrence and a spare pair of pants' (29). Such bibliographical details were shorthand markers for the new forms of politics, with censorship debates at fever pitch through the months immediately before the performance. A series of court trials prosecuting distributors of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* in four states had starred in the news pages since the previous September, and WA's case was heard between Christmas 1970 and the

turning of the new year. For Perth's relatively small literary community, it was high political drama, as Horne might couch it, and Hewett was a high-profile player. The legal defence was run by Lloyd Davies, her ex-husband, and with Hewett a phalanx of local writers and academics stood up in court to testify in the book's favour, including Merv Lilley and Fay Zwicky. The trial's outcome—in which the magistrate found *Portnoy's Complaint* obscene but had to allow it under the protection of a literary merit clause—was reported in the *West Australian* two days before the premiere of *The Chapel Perilous* ('Ban that Failed', 6).

Censorship of theatre itself was big news too. An actor in Alex Buzo's play *Norm and Ahmed* had been arrested for uttering the word 'fuckin' as the second last word of the play in a Brisbane performance in 1969; *Hair* was at the end of its two and a half year season in Sydney but its sound track was banned in Queensland. Jack Hibberd's one-act *Customs and Excise*, a protest against both censorship and pornography, ran simultaneously with Hewett's play, at the nearby Dolphin Theatre also on UWA's campus. The inclusion of 'The Good Ship Venus' in *The Chapel Perilous* (44) was highly provocative in this context, while that choice suggests that the play's closest obscene intertext was actually the public theatre contemporaneously being staged around the *Tharunka* prosecutions in Sydney. Summoned first for the publication of the obscene ballad 'Eskimo Nell' in the University of New South Wales student newspaper, and then for other obscene material, Wendy Bacon and her fellow editors attended protests and court dressed as nuns, cardinals and Bugs Bunny through late 1970 and into 1971. Protestors supporting the Wave Hill strike in the Kimberley made similar points by wearing colonial dress, while guerrilla street theatre was a feature of east coast anti-Vietnam protests (Scalmer 33), drawing on the 'living newspapers' of an earlier political generation. Horne says, though his metaphor often wears thin: '[b]etween 1966 and 1972 the greatest theatrical events were not *Hair* or [David Williamson's] *The Removalists* (although these had political importance) but shows such as the Vietnam marches and the green bans of the Builders' Labourers' Federation—dramatisations of social change by the people' (10).

Sean Scalmer maps the rise of what he terms 'staging' and 'the performance of disruption' in Australian political dissent through the mid-1960s into the early 1970s, as activists looked for new ways to keep the attention of the press in the drawn-out struggles on the big issues of the period (34). These were also sourced in an impulse to break down the boundaries between politics and art, however, as Scalmer details, from the all-encompassing performance of 'living theatre' to the 'university

wizard' funded by the University of New South Wales to disperse political tension on campus (34). Hewett's contemporary John Romeril had written a play dramatizing ongoing conflict at Monash University, and it was this play, the surrealist *Chicago, Chicago*, that Melbourne's Australian Performing Group, later to become the Pram Factory, took to the Perth Festival in 1969. At the festival, Hewett read to the group the first act of her uncompleted play *The Chapel Perilous* (Novakovic np).

This is not mere intertextuality or 'context'. Jacky Bratton's exploration of what she terms 'intertheatricality' in her study of early Victorian theatre in Britain is useful in thinking further about the kinds of multidimensional connections we can trace between Hewett's play and its time. As an approach, Bratton's idea necessarily 'goes beyond the written' and widens further than the immediate time frame of a single performance or theatrical event. An intertheatrical reading emphasises a mesh of interdependent factors, reliant on memory:

It seeks to articulate the mesh of connections between all kinds of theatre texts, and between texts and their users. It posits that all entertainments that are performed within a single theatrical tradition are more or less interdependent. They are uttered in a language, shared by successive generations, which includes not only speech and the systems of the stage—scenery, costume, lighting and so forth—but also genres, conventions and, very importantly, memory (37–38).

There are questions that can be asked about the viability of a 'single theatrical tradition' in a settler context, where Shakespearean drama shares a stage with forms of traditional corroboree, which it could in Perth in this period. More precisely, and more usefully for Hewett, Bratton identifies a: 'web of mutual understanding between potential audiences and their players, a sense of the knowledge, or better the knowingness, about playing that spans a lifetime or more, and that is activated for all participants during the performance event' (37).

In January 1971, Katharine Brisbane noticed, as did many, that Hewett's play 'took Perth by the ears' (152). *The Chapel Perilous* was launched for a participating audience and, beyond Hewett's voracious appetite for literary citation, it restaged aspects of their lives, theatricalising and performing the (auto)biographical in modes of performance that were at once highly self-conscious and richly connected to its audience's experiences. It was networked into complex sets of conventions, staged systems and cultural memory that were literary, theatrical, historical and local, but which were being performed in order to be simultaneously

challenged and flouted. Interviewed by the *West Australian* a month before opening night, Hewett disavowed any autobiographical dimension for her play, deliberately but perhaps not carefully enough:

...“it is not autobiographical—there are people in it who are purely imaginary and events which never happened to me. I have tried to capture the atmosphere of life in a provincial Australian city, like Perth, as I felt it when I was growing up.

I wanted to get the feeling of the social fabric of life as it was in the war and post-war years in Australia. ... I wanted to see how a creative individual, especially a rebellious girl, could fit into an essentially limited and uncultured society,” Miss Hewett said. ('World Premiere')

By 1972, in its Currency Press edition, though, Hewett would declare that it 'is the closest to autobiography of all the plays I have written' (xvi). In her note for the New Fortune program, she locates its origins in the discovery by her son Joe of a diary from her teenage years, 'with the most uncanny verisimilitude, the attitudes, dreams, agonies and limitations of that girl at that time.' But 'I don't mean by all this that Sally Banner is ME. Sally Banner is a created character, a montage, close to me, born of my womb if you like, but cast out to act as a symbol for myself to try and make sense of the world I've inhabited.'

The Chapel Perilous departs from Hewett's earlier theatre in its conscious address to the manifestation—the symbolic performance—of people in history, including herself, asking how culture characterises us; turns occurrence into performance and relations into community, personhood into individuality, singularity, and so on. Its interest in memory as a medium through which individual experience becomes history is never simply confessional or testimonial: the complex work done by what Brisbane identified as 'poetic memory' is always apparent. And in so far as the play is about Dorothy Hewett, it is an indictment of the world around her, private and public, intimate and social, and thus biographical as well as properly historical.

With an audience made up of many people known to Hewett and each other, especially for opening night, the biographical elements of *The Chapel Perilous* thus perhaps inevitably entangled and identified people in the play's intertheatrical mesh, and perhaps inevitably against their will. Even before it opened, Hewett and Neeme had been forced to change Sally's name from Thunder to Banner, after the Thunder family of Wembley in west Perth protested following initial publicity, despite Hewett's insistence that the coincidence was accidental (Brisbane 154). The play relies on

a recognisable (auto)biographical register in various instances (that audiences know Hewett was brought before the Petrov Royal Commission on Espionage, for example (78)), while the prominent disclaimer inserted on the front of the original script and in the program, presumably after the ‘Thunder’ controversy (‘All characters in this play are wholly imaginary and have no reference whatever to actual people’), was clearly false.

And the mesh of consensus that sustained opening night failed drastically four years later, when Lloyd Davies sued Hewett and Currency Press for malicious libel in the portrayal of Tom, Sally’s husband, ‘with whom he identified certain incidents’—perhaps the most libellous of those being drunken impotence on their wedding night. Targeting some more recent poetry of Hewett’s and another play too, ‘the matter was settled out of court, one condition being that *The Chapel Perilous* be prevented from performance, or sale in book form, in Western Australia during his lifetime. The ban lasted until his death in 2004’ (Brisbane 155). The question of what a successful defamation case means for auto-biographical theatre is productive for thinking about performance in history—is it a genre failure? Is there too much biography or is the biography inadequate? Is there excessive truth or too much fiction? Is it that performative history has been overwhelmed by historicity—by accident? Or is it the other way around?

Besides its later ban, there are other extraordinary extra-biographical details from its moment that show how linked this performance was into the larger historical stage. Aarne Neeme was sent into compulsory national service two days after its opening and the production was forced to continue its season without him, while his new company foundered (Brisbane 153). He had to leave Helen and his new daughter too, of course, and Zwicky wrote to Bolton that ‘there was a distressing departure scene and the last we’ve heard is that Helen has moved across to be near him in whatever induction centre he’s been placed. A sad business and one more disastrous mark against conscription.’ Neeme refused orders, as a conscientious objector, and was ‘successfully defended by Ken Horler, barrister and co-founder of the Nimrod Theatre’ (Brisbane 155)—in a great instance of interventionist performative law—and finally excused from service. By Christmas 1970, at least 13,000 men were draft resisters. According to Horne, after the adoption of the policy of scaling down and ultimate withdrawal earlier that year, ‘prudently the government ignored almost all of them and the commonwealth police tried to make an example of only a few’ (55).

When *The Chapel Perilous* was produced at La Mama in Melbourne in 2007, the director Suzanne Chaundry reported that its historical arch

was a key part of its contemporary appeal: ‘...it [is] a fantastic chronicle of Australian history at the time, going through all the music and looking at that period of World War Two going into the Cold War and the communist period in Australia’ (Chaundry np). But it is more than a chronicle—history enters the action in multiform ways: the outbreak of war is announced on the radio; the discourse of mid-century international communism is delivered verbatim; the Chorus mouths anti-nuclear chants, shouts ‘Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh!’ Towards the end of the play, the properly historical public sphere appears as itself, in Brechtian disembodied announcements that work, we might say, particularly for contemporary audiences, as *constative performance*: bald yet ritualised descriptive utterances of notable past events. To move us from the Kafka-esque ‘trial’ in Act II, Sally sings part of Hewett’s lovely lyric ‘My Love on Whom the Good Sun Shone’, and then we hear:

AMPLIFIER: April fourth, Martin Luther King murdered in Memphis.

[Sally moves right and sits. David comes from behind SISTER Rosa’s mask, dressed only in underpants, carrying his trousers. He sits beside SALLY, looking ill at ease.]

DAVID: You’ve got a marvellous set of muscles between your legs, darling.

[...]

AMPLIFIER: August twenty-first, Czechoslovakia invaded.

[...]

AMPLIFIER: September third, Ho Chi Minh dead.

[...]

AMPLIFIER: September twentieth, Luna Ten softlands on the Sea of Fertility; and Sally Banner, OBE, flies home by Qantas.

[The scene dissolves into an airport reception....] (86–89)

This is 1968, so only just historical for 1971—and these announcements situate the action, for the New Fortune production, exactly where they are—Sally comes home to Perth. As utterances they develop from the constative to the performative, the past to the present tense, and while forcefully placing the fictional Sally Banner in history, these also form the moment at which she becomes wholly fictional: older than the autobiographical Dorothy Hewett and doing what her playwright has not yet done. To finish the play, Hewett stages Sally’s/her own return to Perth as a feted and senior author flying in from overseas. Hewett and her family did leave to live in Sydney, but not until 1973, and Hewett would also return (from the Eastern States) to a reception in Perth as an

established poet and playwright in the mid-1980s. On Sally's return, she is asked immediately:

CHORUS: What are your plans for the future?

SALLY: Cremation.

Importantly, the amplifier's set of constative announcements was not included in the script when the play was staged in 1971. They were added in a set of revisions that Hewett sent to Aarne Neeme for comment on March 11th 1972, as she worked to resolve the ending (MS6184, Series 4.5, Folder 16). Hewett wrote in her preface about her difficulties with the play's conclusion—how does one imagine oneself into the future? If your plot is a life there is only one way to finish; death is the end (xvii). And we see that the threat of the impossible fictional future is a danger of the biographical register; the way in which autobiography as a genre threatens to overdetermine its own performance. The play does escape that logic finally—its biological teleology—but Hewett's struggle to achieve that is evidenced in what Chaundry identifies as the play's several 'false ends'. At the conclusion of the New Fortune production, Sally kept her back straight as she passed the school chapel's altar on her way to the tower, where the play finishes. In a production for the Melbourne University Student Theatre a year later, the student actor playing her decided that Sally should kneel, 'not humbly, but proudly, head held high' (Hewett 'Why', xviii). Hewett reports being outraged when she saw this on opening night and the gesture provoked significant controversy: 'Why does Sally bow?' But this was the ending incorporated into the Currency edition. Finally, 'she makes a kind of peace', explains Hewett, 'not with the Church, not with the State, not with temporal authority, but with life itself, which includes authority' (xviii).

The play's opening scenes also stage Sally's return to her school as a feted poet, proleptically, with the stained glass window erected in her honour centre-stage above the altar. As is much of the action, this event is ironised, any poignancy dependent on the satire delivered in its performance:

HEADMISTRESS: It is rarely given to meet a student who has the recognisable instant quality ... genius ... major poet.

AMPLIFIER: [HEADMISTRESS'S voice] Minor poet! Major poet in a provincial town.

AMPLIFIER: Big frog in a small puddle.

HEADMISTRESS: We were all privileged to know her and as I look about this great hall inscribed with the names of famous

women in history I rejoice that the name of my pupil stands among them.

[Spotlights SALLY]

SALLY: Queen Elizabeth, Madam Curie, Florence Nightingale, Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Joan of Arc, Boadicea, Grace Darling, Queen Victoria, Elizabeth Fry, Helen Keller, Daisy Bates ... [whispering] Sally Banner ... Sally Banner ...

HEADMISTRESS: I believe I always knew it would be so.

SCHOOLGIRLS: [singing]

Poor Sally.

She never made it.

No matter how hard she tried.

She tried hard not to know it,

But she was a minor poet,

Until the day she died. (5–6)

This repeated moment, performed at the beginning and the end, moves us between proleptic and dramatic irony, to take us into sarcasm, with Sally's self-discovery a puncturing revelation along the way. These layered ironies are further multiplied in biographical register, via intertheatricality, in that the play both satirises and performs the function of literary biography: to assess a writer's legacy, or worth, after the day she died.

There is no stained glass picture of Hewett in the chapel of Perth College, her own high school, and no listing of her on plaques, though the school archives keep a clippings file. The school drama program has never produced the play. In so far as we work to think about a play's historicity, perhaps it will always appear multidimensional, but in *The Chapel Perilous's* case we are returned dramatically to 'the historicity of struggles over social norms', as Kelly suggests (52), and it seems clear that is because ultimately it is a play about cultural authority. Authority is explicitly (dis)embodied not only in the unpeopled amplifiers but in the large figures that loom from the back of the stage, and these are supplemented by personalised comment and accusations delivered by the identified 'authority' characters through loudspeakers at other points, as well as by an unidentified radio commentator. These loudly overlay the action, dialogue and singing with ironised comment, pointed criticisms of Sally and de-authorising satire. At the opening of Act II we are treated to an array of side show elements and the overblown sexualised fetishisation of women in a carnival, vociferously parodying Sally's attempts to be taken seriously.

Authority is a gendered problem in this play, with a Romantic frame: is rebellion necessary for art? Could it be possible for seventies Australia to accept a female 'genius'? How does such a figure grasp and hold authority? How is she given such—or is she never? The play lampoons all the major forms of established authority to which young women were subject in 1971—school, church, the capitalist police state, the law courts, fathers and husbands, headmistresses and nuns. And set up in opposition are not only romantic passion and expressive sexuality, but utopian political fervour and commitment, somatic bodily desire and forms of poetic experience—authenticity: 'I want to feel everything. To tell everything, to walk naked.' Hewett's attack on authority reveals *The Chapel Perilous*, only seemingly 'accidentally', as on song with the performance of dissent characteristic of its political moment. Its Romantic impulses and literary subjectivity, while grounded in Hewett's work for the English department, chimed with a younger generation's move away from the collective values of the organised labour movement, and its full-voiced challenges to taboos about sex and embodied desire bridged the gap between older forms of feminism and the new guard in ways that seem to have taken Hewett by surprise. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir asked: 'How, in the feminine condition, can a human being accomplish herself?' (17). In 1971, the kind of liberation Sally asks for is autonomous self-realisation and the freedom to authorise a future. For Hewett, the playwright, it is a capacity to perform futurity, and perhaps make history.

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For my father, at last
Robbie Coburn

Robbie Coburn was born in Melbourne in 1994. His work has appeared in publications such as *Poetry*, *Overland*, *Cordite Poetry Review* and *Going Down Swinging*, and his poems have been anthologised. His second collection of poetry, *The Other Flesh*, is forthcoming.

The paddocks couple with the sunlit clouds
and make you a landscape. transfusions of orange
setting behind the mountains
you walk the circled track
dogs of sand run beside you, the turf beneath a pale
mist expanded with grating weeds

down by the fence line the greyhounds start to climb
your arms, as much a part of you as I should be. the things
that alter on the property slip into memory
you foot the inconsistent slabs of sand as
the night comes passed the cracked banks of the dams
eroded beside reeds floating in the water

always the revolving wind gathers all over the surface
of your face, your cold skin
worn away by years of work. it could be this side of dawn
that sees us meet in the track's centre. I weaken
as the grasses settle and turn into sleep
back at the house.

you stay out all night watching the sky
wishing it was already morning.

link
Dick Alderson

Dick Alderson's first collection, *the astronomer's wife*, was published by Sunline Press in 2014.

I speak to my cat by satellite
she is worlds away, an emissary

establish eye contact
say *fish*

it goes out, bounces off moons
slight lowering of gaze
searching, comparison
of signal, 3 seconds

then response—

throaty, emphatic
landline

her eyes
copper network

New Wine
Ron Pretty

Ron Pretty's eighth book of poetry, *What the Afternoon Knows*, was published in 2013. A revised edition of *Creating Poetry* was published by Pitt Street Poetry last year. He now judges the Ron Pretty Poetry Prize, sponsored by FIP.

I hope, when I am as old as this, as
round as this, someone will dig me up
& carry me halfway across a continent
to bury me again under a different
sky & dance attendance for posterity on
the full bottle & spindle limbs & even
a few yellowing leaves not yet fallen.

Was it yesterday, perhaps the day before
a narrow head poked out of the red earth
& looked to the curved horizon, antmen
scurrying through a world unchanging.
Here, now, on a hillside that slopes to the river
there are borers & bulldozers to fear.
They wouldn't dare. Centuries of drought,
of heat & downpour were always negotiable

but now the sun sucks water day on day
deep underground from a fickle well;
another century to survive now seems more
than anyone might reasonably expect.
Deep in the roots there's a fragile trembling:
the bearings of the world are running hot
& in the breathless heat before the Doctor
the ancient bottle is slowly, stoically, drying.

The Literary Ant
Tim Edwards

Tim Edwards has published in a variety of Australian journals. He is currently in the process of compiling a collection of his work.

Like a poppy seed on steroids
It raced the vertical edge
Of my open book
To cut a sharp left
In an upside down sprint
Straight to the spine.

Barely a letter in length
It remains entombed
Somewhere between Frost's
Mending Wall
And The Road Not Taken.

**Inchings and Belongings:
After Paul Strand**
Paul Hetherington

Paul Hetherington has published ten collections of poetry, most recently *Burnt Umber* (UWAP, 2016). He won the 2014 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards (Poetry) and was shortlisted for the 2013 Montreal International Poetry Prize. He is professor of writing at the University of Canberra.

1.

The building's torn down—an irreducible light, a blow to the knee you received there, flights of literature in stacked paperbacks. We saw books gather our balcony, glancing from slow pages to that grimy world. We shook traffic noise from ears. So much to keep that we couldn't possess, silos of being and memory suddenly at odds. When a blue-inked notice arrived we stood in outrage, debating what to do—we would not have our lives resumed. But we'd no rights in the matter and months absorbed us in shifting away. On the day of demolition *Thomas Crimmins Contracting* moved equipment in. Walls fell on our doings; light flooded damp ground. I saw a paper bird that looked like one you'd made last Christmas, among rubble. You'd already walked into the alleyway where the baker had been, riddling our mornings with yeasty smells. 'No,' you said. We left dust to permeate that air and gathered the spectral into our seeing. We found no further words in the broken morning.

2.

Every morning light gathered us in avenues; each evening we swam in yellowed glass. Summer pressed us down like someone fixing a stamp. Regularly we bathed in the dirty sea near the harbour mouth. We knew love like twitchings of light at the end of bed frames. We gathered being like those fisherman netting fat, glistening prawns. The city steamed and glowed, summer stretching out like a body on a bed. In the morning we saw ourselves as a photographer might see us. On evenings we were pale fish swimming and turning.

3.

Roots spilled on dark sand like wild calligraphies. We climbed, slid back, clambered again, grasped the long tendrils. You held on to my ankle and hauled yourself up my leg. Our backs held down sand even as wind gathered it. We scrabbled forwards and upwards, finally within reach of high ground. A pathway and cottage, a broken window allowing us in. Two stones on a bench and a smashed porcelain statue. On the cottage's other side, a cliff face and cleft sandstone. A painted gathering of sheep. We stood above fluctuations among fingers of sun and irascible air.

Night Road to Ceduna Joanna Morrison

Joanna Morrison is a writer and freelance editor based in Fremantle, WA. She completed her creative writing PhD at Murdoch University in 2014.

It's the first time for any of us, crossing the Nullarbor Plain. The sun sets behind us, spreading like melting butter across the sky. Dave Gilmour sings *there is no pain, you are receding* and joy wells up inside me because I love this song and we're driving through the night; no one expects us back for months.

The stretch of land beyond our windows is dissolving into blackness. It's as though we're in the ocean now, sinking deeper and deeper, down to that depth that knows no light. I turn on the headlights.

'Look out for roos,' Max says, drumming on his knees.

I smile at him sideways. 'We've talked about this.'

Jonno shifts in his seat in the back. He's been writing a new song but he won't share it yet. He keeps checking the trailer out the back window, making sure it's still there with all our gear in it.

'You both have to look out for roos,' he says, arranging himself for sleep though he's too long to lie comfortably back there. 'That's your job up front.'

It plays with your mind, driving on a dead-straight road in the dark. Nothing changes. It's just the same stretch of foreverness slipping past the window and the road gliding in under the car, like a dull sheath of ribbon running in from outer space.

'How many CDs did we sell at the Norseman gig?' Jonno asks. I glance at him in the rear-view mirror. His eyes are closed. His hair stirs against his face in the night breeze.

'About ten,' Max says, leaning forward, looking up. 'Doesn't feel that huge anymore, does it?' And it's true; the night has drawn in around us.

Dave Gilmour's guitar solo kicks in and for a moment it's as if you can see the sound, as if it's being poured into the night sky. But you can feel how quiet it is out there, beyond the outline of the car.

Max tilts his seat back a little and stuffs a balled up jumper behind his head. The wind is cool now. I want to close Jonno's window but this isn't one of those cars with electric windows you can control from the driver's seat.

There's something on the road up ahead, something round. I can't take my eyes off it... can't seem to turn the wheel either, even though the thing is on track to go straight under the left wheel. Just before we reach it I know what it is: a kangaroo's head, severed from its body by some big vehicle, a road train probably.

It comes closer in the headlights and then the wheel goes right over it, *thunk*, and I feel sickened, amazed, like some kind of dark miracle has just been and gone.

'Did you see that, Max?'

'Hmm? What?' He has his eyes closed now too.

'Never mind,' I say. 'You sleep.'

But I feel unsettled, as though something with a sword were roaming the desert now, decapitating animals for fun. I sit up straighter, blink and take a sip of water, but only a little one. The thought of slowing to a stop out here—for any reason—is not enticing.

Out of the blackness, to the left again, I see something else, something glowing: a cluster of shining green things. I'm going quite slowly now but it seems our lights aren't picking up much because the glowing things turn out to be eyes; we glide past them, a band of water buffalo, just standing on the side of the road like they want a lift. We pass by them so closely it's a wonder we don't get a scratch from one of their horns on the paintwork.

'Shit,' I murmur, 'that was creepy.' I glance at Max and Jonno: both asleep. 'It's just me and you guys,' I whisper to the stars.

We sail on a bit and I'm about ready to put more pressure on the accelerator, but then I see more eyes. It's so dark they're just disembodied gemstones on black velvet until we're almost upon them, and it's only then that I see one of the creatures has its rump out in the road. We're not going fast, but it's fast enough for Max and me to be flung against our seatbelts and for Jonno to be shunted off the backseat as our left front crumples into the hefty beast in the blackness. The car pivots on that crushed corner. The headlights lift shrubs and low trees out of the inky backdrop. The music keeps playing: the scratchy old-radio sound of the opening chords of 'Wish you were here'.

'What the hell?' Jonno says, pulling himself up, trying to orientate himself in the dark. 'Have we stopped? Is that the... where's the road?'

I check Max's side to see if the impact has crushed in on his legs but they're fine; he's stirring.

‘We have to get off the road,’ I say. ‘No one would see us here till it’s too late. That’s what happened with the bloody buffalo.’

They’re still within view, though they’re ambling off now... *nothing to see here.*

‘You hit one of *those* fuckers?’

‘Yes... didn’t see it, just these eyes coming out of nowhere.’

‘Jesus Christ.’

‘Let’s get off the road.’

‘Put it in neutral,’ Jonno says, climbing out and going round the back. ‘Steer it off while we push. Max, take the other side.’

Max groans, stumbles out and around to join him heaving against the sullen weight of the car. You can’t believe it was moving along like it had wind in its sails just moments ago. It starts to roll at last and I steer it slowly off the road, not pulling too hard in case the wheel locks.

I leave the lights on but I turn off the music. It’s better to hear this silence than try to fill it. You’ll never fill it out here; it’s too big. The darkness is less intimidating though, now that we’re not moving. It’s different; your eyes can adjust to the black shapes of the trees and patches of spiny grass.

‘Nature calls,’ I say.

‘Stay close,’ Jonno says.

I walk away from the road, not far, but it feels like I’m alone in all the world. I stand in the wide space between trees, black against the sky, and look up at the stars. I’m smaller now than I’ve ever been. The wind reaches me across the vastness and moves on past as though I never existed. I’ve never heard a wind like this, a wind that is huge and free, covering distances I can’t even imagine. I lie down on the ground, feel its compressed warmth beneath my hands. Pressed against the planet with an incalculable stretch of sky and space between me and the low swollen moon, I feel like I’m barely myself; I’m just a shape, just a small mass of perception, buzzing with awareness. I feel like the world has strummed a chord that resonates with my own frequency and my body is singing a note I’ve never heard before.

They’re sitting on the roof of the car when I get back.

‘This is fucking wicked,’ Max says. ‘I feel like I own the universe.’

‘Tell us something we don’t know,’ Jonno says.

‘Look,’ I say, pointing west to where lights have appeared on the horizon. We watch them approaching, long minutes that dwarf us and make the wind eerie as we whisper to each other: *Is it a road train do you think? Will it stop for us?*

It is a road train. Must be. We can feel the weight of it somehow—in the air, beneath our feet—as it approaches.

‘Get off the car,’ I say, ‘in case we’re too close.’

They slip off and then it’s thundering past, making the ground shudder. It doesn’t stop, either because the driver doesn’t see us in time or because he doesn’t want to lose momentum out here.

‘Still own the universe?’ Jonno says, smiling at the look on Max’s face.

More lights appear. They take forever too, drifting closer like something floating in the sky.

I go out on the road, right in the middle, and hold my arms up. I’m ready to run out of the way if it doesn’t slow down, but it does. It’s not a train this time, just a twin-cab ute with a hefty roo-bar. I see the driver’s wary face in the cab as he slows to a stop up ahead.

He leaves his lights on and comes around to check the damage to our car.

He’s not a tall man. Not a young one either. He wears corduroy pants and workman’s boots and his pinstripe shirt is not done all the way up—hangs open on one side so that the light catches the line of his clavicle disappearing into the cotton of his collar. His hair is long and unruly, flaps against his face in the wind like rigging against a mast.

‘You seem to be in a spot of bother out here,’ he says, his gaze shifting from us to our car with its trailer, then out into the night.

No one speaks; we all stand there, lit up by the beams of light reaching out from our vehicles like fuzzy antennae into the darkness.

The man says he has a towbar but he stops short of offering us a ride, as though he can’t quite get the words out.

‘Thanks mate,’ Max says anyway. ‘That would be a lifesaver.’

The three of them bolt our bashed up old car to the back of the ute, our rescuer glancing several times at the tarp strapped down tightly over the tray. He studies us too, taking our measure, but he can’t back out now, any more than we can. There’s a smell of kerosene and something like burnt toast, and it seems an important detail, but it’s too late for questions. And we can’t stay out here on our own. So we grab our things and climb in, me up front and the guys in the back. And we’re on the move again, this time to a different soundtrack. Bob Dylan is with us now. His voice holds me like the brittle hands of someone I love so that I feel glad but not quite safe.

There’s no music when I wake up. I’ve missed the sunrise but the day is still new out there, fresh and wide open. I stretch my arms out straight in front of me and look over at the man who picked us up. His grey-blue eyes look tired, but he smiles at me and his left cheek creases into a dimple, a line that makes me want run my finger along it, top to bottom. There’s that faint kero smell again. Reminds me of twirling fire at house parties or

on the beach. Been a long time since I've done that. Maybe that's what's under the tarp—fire sticks and pois.

Max and Jonno are sleeping in the back, Max leaning against his balled up coat, Jonno straight back against the headrest; they'll both have cricks in their necks to complain about when they wake up.

'Where are you lot headed?' the man asks quietly. His shirt is still hanging open and now I can see it's because there are two buttons missing.

'Ceduna,' I say, trying not to look at the small holes in the fabric where they've been ripped off. 'And then on to Coober Pedy; got some gigs lined up there. Melbourne after that. Maybe we'll settle there and never go home.'

My secret hope, unspoken till now.

'That might be a mistake,' he smiles, and a light flares inside me, as it does on the horizon sometimes, just before the sun is gone. 'Home is good.'

'Not if you live where I live, it isn't,' I say, picturing my nowhere suburb with its patches of browning grass and pea gravel, asbestos fences cracked and lethal in the heat. 'And where are you headed?' I ask, though there are other things I'd rather know about him.

'Home,' he says. 'I live outside Byron Bay. Got some land out there in the rainforest.'

'Sounds amazing.'

'Better than that.'

I study his face as he watches the road. I want to know what his skin feels like; it's dark and worn and unshaven though you wouldn't call what he has there a beard so much as faintly greying stubble. The grey seems out of place because his eyes are young, gleaming with unspoken things I want to hear. That's when I notice the blood on his forehead. Above his left eyebrow. A dried up smear about the size of my thumb. I'm about to point it out, to ask if he's okay or bleeding somewhere, but I don't. Maybe it's not his blood.

He reaches across to the tape player and pushes the eject button so it spews out the tape. His hand trembles just slightly as he pulls it out and I see then that the skin is rough and torn across the knuckles.

There's more blood, caked on his corduroy thigh.

'You been visiting Perth?' Jonno asks.

I wonder how long he's been awake. I'm glad he is because I'm cold all of a sudden. I feel far away from him and Max, up here in the front.

'Yeah,' the man says, fishing for another tape in the compartment below the radio. 'I had a couple of friends there.'

He slots it in then sits back, doesn't elaborate. We listen to 'Songbird' by Eva Cassidy and pass a sign that says we're not far from Ceduna.

I'm trying to figure out if he said *have* or *had* about his friends. Starting to wonder again what's under that tarp.

I get my phone and take a few shots of the view from the window. Trying to act normal, as if my head isn't thumping with paranoia. You can see the land's edge now, outside the driver's side. I take a shot of Jonno, who smiles obligingly before rearranging his gangly limbs with a grim look on his face. I snap Max's sweet sleeping form and then—stupidly—I steal an image of the man. The cool horizon beyond him is almost still. I take another picture. This one catches the look he gives me right before he reaches across the cab and, almost gently, takes the phone from my hand. I don't say anything, even as he winds down his window and drops it out on to the road.

There's a small thwack behind us. I picture my phone hitting the tarmac at speed, shards of plastic flying off on impact. How long will it lie there, I wonder, glinting in the sunlight, its screen covered in cracks like a web, before a road-train comes along to finish it off?

Jonno speaks. Calmer than I've ever heard him.

'Why did you do that?'

I flinch at his words. It seems dangerous to challenge this man, whoever he is. I'd go for silence now, for shrinking back into the leather of the seats and hoping he'll forget we're even here. He's quiet for some time then he looks at me. He smiles again, but this time there's no light.

'I'm sorry,' he says. 'I don't like people having my image to play with. Weirds me out.'

No one says anything then for the longest time, but I can feel the energy pulsing from all of us, all of us but Max, snoring gently in the back.

The man clears his throat. Scratches his head, then speaks again.

'I shouldn't have picked you lot up,' he says. 'Should've let someone else do it, spare you all this. But you were in the road, and...'

'Spare us all what?' I say.

'Best you don't know,' he says, glancing in his rear-view mirror. 'Anyway, we're nearly there.'

He pulls in at the servo on the edge of town. Wordlessly, he unhitches our car as we clamber out with our bags. Then he climbs back in and drives away, his blue tarp flapping over the edge of the tray.

Jonno and Max stand behind me as we watch him go. I can feel they're waiting for something, some sign that I know what we're going to do next, but I have nothing to offer. Just the shaky aftermath of fear. And relief. Whatever that was—that *situation* we just brushed up against—it's gone now, like an uprooted shrub, tumbling along, carried off on the wind.

I sit on the low wall outside the shop, drop my head into my hands and breathe. Jonno's converse shoes scuff along the concrete as he goes inside, past a scattering of cigarette butts and an orb of spit near the door. Max puts an arm around me and we sit there, looking at our crumpled car.

'That was too fucked up,' I say.

'What was?' He missed everything, slept through it.

'That man... I think he must have done something really awful.'

I tell him about the blood and my phone and the look on his face when I took his picture: fear and fury and regret all at once.

'Not everyone likes having their picture taken, to be fair,' Max says.

'But my phone,' I say, then I look and see he's joking. He can do that because he wasn't really there. He hardly even saw the man, the stranger whose smile meant so much and then so little.

Jonno comes out with iced coffees and we drink them as if we've never had them before, as if our insides are as dry and empty as the plains we've just driven through. And I wonder if I'll ever do that again, take the night road to Ceduna. See how small I really am.

Kick/Recall Paul Munden

Paul Munden is Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Canberra, and Director of the UK's National Association of Writers in Education. *Analogue/Digital*, a volume of his new and selected poems was published by Smith/Doorstop in 2015.

Putting it to wash, he finds his old maroon t-shirt still holds the ghost of sticky white tape that fixed the electrode to his chest, a fibrous square with a penny-sized absence at its centre somehow meshed to the cotton, even after all these years. He closes the door and watches the machine kick suddenly into reverse—as does the ambulance, taking him back from city hospital to rural dark, the blue revolving light an alien presence in the sleepy village. He's slumped at his desk, mumbling answers to questions, questions, watching the empty bottle reacquire its pale orange allure, and feeling the strange jerk of his body twisting the child-proof cap of the plastic container into place. Then there's another kick, a further reverse of the machine, back into the future, saving him from himself.

Lunar Alyson Miller

Alyson Miller teaches literary studies and professional and creative writing at Deakin University. Her short stories and poems have appeared in both national and international publications, alongside a work of literary criticism, *Haunted by Words: Scandalous Texts*, and a collection of prose poems, *Dream Animals*.

During the Harvest moon, he says, dog bites are twice as common, something about the magic of the lunar cycle and lycanthropy and the canine tug of the cosmos. He says it's about opposites, the hemisphere of the moon facing off against the sun, a difference of 180 degrees, he says, not to forget the synodic month, 29.53 days, but the relevance is hard to remember when you stare into that orange peel surface in the night sky, the brightness a mystery against a blackness that promises only a vacuum of space, and a suffocating memory of eternity. He says it's the beauty of science to fall in love with composites of hydrogen and helium that burn so hard your bones evaporate before your skin gets close, and yet give no warmth to a universe that freezes because there are no molecules against which to bounce; conduction, convention, radiation, he says, which are words that bite in the wet spaces of your mouth. It's -270.45 Celsius out there, he says, which is -454.81 Fahrenheit and you're not sure, because you're still trapped in knowing that heat is also a kind of cold, like a fever from an infection, or a wound.

Skin world Anne Elvey

Anne Elvey is author of *Kin* (2014) and *This flesh that you know* (2015). She is managing editor of *Plumwood Mountain: An Australian Journal of Ecopoetry and Ecopoetics* and chief editor for Melbourne Poets Union. Anne holds honorary appointments at Monash University and University of Divinity.

These things break
to feeling—the sister's

limbs in myoclonic
seizure, the parent's

delirium, the coast's
erosion in the king

tide, the body's
flesh. The body's

memory of event
where skin

and world fuse.
The self is rent

by yes, by the makings
of toward, the face

that calls—a summons
in the interstices

of becoming (she gulps
as her limbs engage—

her father called it
a fling) like a wound.

**Prose Poetry and Painting
with Words: in Conversation
with Paul Hetherington**
Amy Hilhorst

Amy Hilhorst is a Perth-based writer and doctoral candidate at the University of Western Australia. Her poetry, essays and reviews have appeared in *Verity La*, *Writ*, *Westerly* and *Cordite*.

Burnt Umber (UWAP, 2016) is Paul Hetherington's tenth full-length collection of poetry, and he has also published five poetry chapbooks. He is head of the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI) in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra. Paul recently returned to Perth to launch *Burnt Umber*, and he spoke with Amy Hilhorst at the University of Western Australia about prose poetry, ekphrasis, and the tangibility of language.

AH: Congratulations, Paul, on the achievement and publication of *Burnt Umber*. One of the things I noticed about the collection, along with your previous publication *Six Different Windows*, is the way your craft has evolved over the years. You seem to have moved away from regular stanzaic structures, to prose poems or to poems with longer enjambed sentences, with comparatively little in the way of rhyme, for instance. Can you talk a little bit about how your poetic form has developed since your earlier collections?

PH: Yes, what you say is true. This collection represents a significant new departure for me in terms of my books—in a couple of ways, actually. One of them is the presence of prose poetry in the collection. Until November 2014—as far as I can remember—I'd never written a prose poem in my life. I don't think I'd been deliberately avoiding prose poetry, I just simply hadn't seen it as a form that had particular appeal to me as a writer. Even now I'm not quite sure why I started. I thought about this the other day and I can't remember specifically what motivated my first prose poem but I've been writing them mainly since—for about the last eighteen months. And there's the Prose Poetry Group, which has 21 members at the moment and which is an initiative of the International Poetry Studies Institute at the University of Canberra. I started that, really by

accident, by sending a prose poem to a couple of colleagues of mine at the University of Canberra. Since then the group's grown, anthologies have been published from it and some of us are writing academic papers about prose poetry. I've become quite immersed in the form and feel that it's opened up a whole range of new avenues of expression—and I'm not really quite sure why. The form seems to do a whole lot of things—as I think with it and through it—that I sometimes have trouble putting my finger on, but which I find exciting. *Burnt Umber* publishes some groups of prose poetry and I think that's a real point of difference with it. These prose poems have moved me away from lineated poetry, and there's an attractive informality about the way sentences run-on, which I love playing with. I also try to make my prose poetry very poetic as well, and given that's in prose it's a really interesting tension. It feels to me like a bit of an in-between space; it's not traditional poetry and it's not traditional prose, and I love that in-betweenness.

The other thing that's different is the ekphrastic poetry in the book. Some of the poems that are in the two 'Pictures at an exhibition' sections are based on paintings I have seen at various points. Others are paintings that I've imagined, they don't exist, so those I guess would be referred to as poems of notional ekphrasis. I've really thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of writing a response to actual or imagined paintings—bringing a second art form, poetry, to a kind of conversation with another form. Between the two art forms I think there is a kind of dialogue happening. As you would have noticed in my ekphrastic poems, the paintings are very active: they're coming at you, they're speaking to you, they're moving into the room. They have a kind of independent life. I've partly written those poems because for a long time I've felt that visual art has real energy; that it's a mistake to see paintings in a gallery as somehow passive, believing that we merely look at them and somehow divine what's there. I think they engage with us very actively. They can almost seem alive; they're like a living presence in the room. Anyway that's the idea I'm working with, and it fascinates me to think about the implications of that.

And you know, more generally, in terms of the question you asked about my poetry having changed, I spent decades trying to adapt some of the traditional techniques of prosody—rhyme, metre, particularly metre, and you talked about enjambment and so on, some of the ways I could play around with lineated poetry. I wanted to get what to me were the most appealing formal effects in poetry but also to achieve a relaxed quality of utterance, or a sense of informality. I'd played around a lot with trying to get that balance and I loved experimenting with metre—using iambic pentameter or tetrameter and other metrical forms—partly to try

to discipline my language and get some of the musicality and rhythmic effects which I love in reading poetry. And yes it's true, more recently I've moved away from metre and some of those effects. However, they are always in my mind as a kind of guide. So even if I'm writing free verse poems, many of which are in this book, I'm trying to listen to the music, to a hidden metre within the lines. I still care about every line I write—trying to shape every line in every poem—as well as about the poem as a whole. It's a challenge to make free verse interesting in a kind of rhythmic and musical sense, but it's something that I'm playing with.

AH: What you said about prose poetry brings me nicely to my second question. This collection contains three sections of prose poetry, and you have written elsewhere of the 'unstable genre boundaries' implicit in this term. (Hetherington and Atherton 265) I'm curious as to what factors are at play in your drafting process when you make the choice to write the poem in either verse or prose form?

PH: Well, partly at the moment because I'm writing a lot of prose poetry I think I tend to default to prose poetry if I've got an idea. Having said that, I have also been writing some loose sonnets recently, which have all sorts of challenges quite separate from the challenges of prose poetry. And that's often because I'm thinking about what might seem appropriate in terms of subject matter or the sound of the poem or the idea that's driving the poem. My poems often start with a single word or a single idea or even a rhythmic sense, or a weird intuition that a poem is waiting to be written. So I tend to write first drafts quite quickly and then, once I've got something, I try to hear the form or intuit the form through the process of writing. Often it will emerge in the writing process. With the prose poetry I'm writing at the moment, I'm often consciously working with the prose poetry form and so that form is partly driving the ideas. For example, I was in London recently and I went to see an exhibition of Paul Strand's photographs—partly by accident because I was going to meet someone at the V&A, and we got our arrangements mixed up so she didn't turn up—and I didn't know where she was. I thought I'd go and look at this exhibition instead, and I had my iPhone with me, and I was really struck by some of the photographs. I started writing ekphrastic prose poetry on my iPhone as I stood in front of these photographs. The prose poetry form enabled me to write quickly, in a way that I felt enabled me to respond quite immediately to the images. I ended up with a small five-poem suite, which acknowledges the Paul Strand collection. The contained discursiveness you can get in prose poetry seemed absolutely

right for how I was responding to these photographs. The photographs themselves weren't always discursive, but the exhibition was quite a large retrospective of Strand's work. I felt as I was going through it that I was being given a kind of discursive way of seeing his art. My poems were sometimes responding to a whole group of images and sometimes to an individual image, and in every case I wanted to capture a feeling I had that his images were telling me something poetically. In that instance, the prose poem form seemed perfect. More generally, it's often just an intuited sense or a particular occasion that will seem to demand a kind of writing.

AH: Your ekphrastic poems in *Burnt Umber* seem to delve into descriptions of paintings, and out to the event of experiencing or seeing the painting. Sometimes, such as in 'Painting 4: Doppelganger', you even write the speaker into the painting, blurring boundaries between visual art and poetic language, and between art and 'reality', as it were. How do you find the process of balancing these considerations when writing of visual art?

PH: I think it goes back to something I said a bit earlier. I've loved the visual arts for all of my life—nearly as long as I can remember. I can still recollect as a child my parents taking me to a gallery where some of the Sidney Nolan *Ned Kelly* paintings were shown. I don't really remember—because it was such a long time ago—exactly what I thought of them. I think I found them strange, I think I found them weirdly impressive and weirdly moving without really knowing quite the story they were narrating. But they were also puzzling and curious. They seemed to be very immediate, they weren't simply paintings that I was standing back from and examining as aesthetic objects, they were almost pressing on me. Their meanings were pressing on me. The weirdness of their imagery—the strangeness of the flat textures, and the weird geometric shapes, and the unruliness of them were pressing on me. I still have that sensation in art galleries. Many of the works are almost speaking to me. I don't mean in actual words—instead each work deploys its own shaped calligraphy. To me looking at works of art is not that different from thinking about poems or other kinds of literary forms. The ekphrastic poems I've been trying to write are trying to present, in various different ways, the speaking-out of the paintings, their pressingness, the way they move into the spaces we inhabit, the way they connect to the imagination. When writing about them the poet is performing a speech act in front of or in company with the painting. That in itself can be examined. Because every act of utterance—whether it's a painting's notional utterance, or the painting's actual and speaking image,

or the poet talking about poetry, or the words of the poem itself—they're all forms of trying to grapple with that elusive thing we call reality. But I always think reality is the thing that we can't quite hold. People might say if you're going to write about reality, write about the brickwork or write about the person you're talking to, or the trees in the park or whatever. But I suspect those things are frequently distant from us, and often forms of art connect us more closely to reality or give us a pathway into thinking about reality, whatever that is, in a much more immediate way than walking around our quotidian world. And if you think about our language, a lot of our quotidian language is functional, useful, it can be engaging, but it's often not all that inherently interesting. It's aimed at achieving a purpose: 'Can you shift the chair?', 'Can you cook a meal?', whatever. I think visual art and poetic language share a number of things, and one of them is that they're transforming reality and often putting us more closely in touch with it. If it's good art, good poetry, it's at least potentially a way of taking us closer to the deeper, more interesting, more elusive things about what it is to be alive, to understand a sense of who we are, and to understand what being in this world might be, if we could only say it. I think we never quite say it. At best, we're kind of getting slantwise at one part of what that might be, but it's a very slippery thing. So paintings, for me, are a way of thinking and feeling, 'Oh, actually yeah, I feel closer to what the world feels like.'

AH: In your 'Rooftop' prose poem, there is a wonderful line: 'he was moved by abstract paintings that had no more narrative than poems'. Is there some significance in this shared quality—this resistance to narrative—in writing a poem that is inspired by a painting?

PH: That's a really great question. A lot of my poems—like the 'Rooftop' poem, which is a sequence of prose poems—narrate a story. I've always loved that quality about poetry. Poetry can give narrative to the reader. And I've enjoyed playing with narrative in my poems. Jonathan Culler said something about how in lyric poetry, even narrative sits in a kind of timeless present of the poem—whereas in a conventional novel for example, the narrative will take you forward and in that way unfold meaning to you. It takes you through imagined time, not only the time of reading, but also the time that the narrative encompasses. With some of my prose poems and some of my ekphrastic poems, I'm trying to suggest some degree of narrative in the works, but to hold that narrative in the presence of the utterance of the poem. And I think a lot of paintings do that too. If you look at them superficially, they give you one image or one

set of images, which seem still and fixed. I'm saying, of course, there's much more; that if you look at them they start to move and tell you things. But it's that sense of the continuing present and presence of a painting that I was trying to get at in those lines from the 'Rooftop' poem, and which in writing *Burnt Umber* I've been to some extent trying to encapsulate. Because even the 'Rooftop' prose poems, which do give a narrative of a love affair, and other connected issues around time and intimacy, I've tried to render that experience as a series of moments which sits a little outside its narrative implications, so that you can also read the whole poem as something that's sitting frozen in its own timeless expression of events while also offering a dynamic engagement with the reader—a kind of paradox, I suppose. The imagery, and its poetic gestures, and the suggestiveness of the poem, sit in counterpoint to the narrative and hold the narrative in a poetic place.

AH: Yeah, I think that's a really good way of putting it. I'm researching Bruce Beaver's work at the moment and one critic described what you're talking about as the 'momentaneous' quality of poetry.

PH: That's lovely, I hadn't heard of that.

AH: One of my favourite poems in your book is 'Angels at Nedlands Primary School, 1968', where you write of a childhood belief in the supernatural. Childhood, in fact, is a theme explored in several of your collections. What is the role of memory in writing such poems, and how do you balance the voices of adult and child?

PH: Yes, that's a great question. I have been very interested in childhood, always as a poet. That's for lots of reasons. It's an obvious thing to say, but a lot of really important events in anybody's life happen in their childhood. I think there's a lot of misremembering by adults of their childhoods, and also a kind of sentimentalising of childhood. I think childhood's a fascinating place partly because it can be a brutal, untamed and deeply unruly place. Childhood is full of all sorts of experiences, which later are very hard to name. Adults can try to name them, but I think the nouns we use for childhood experiences often misrepresent them; we turn them into an abstract thing, which we are recollecting in hindsight. And yet, the actual experiences are deeply visceral and often quite animal-like, instinctive, instinctual and quite driven. I think children are often strongly driven by whatever idea is current with them at the time. They tend to do things as a way of thinking through them. That doing and thinking nexus

is fascinating. With my childhood poems I've tried to get what I think of as some of the truths about childhood, which can be difficult or elusive truths. Those poems are trying to suggest certain kinds of experiences but not trying to hold those experiences tightly in the poem. That is, not to say in the poem, 'This is what happened', but rather saying well this is the kind of thing that happened and to leave the reader with perhaps the implicit question, 'What are the implications of the nature of this kind of experience?' I did go to Nedlands Primary School; I was there in 1968, but the specific details of the poem are to some extent made up, in order to make a poem out of them. But the feeling, the kind of construal of meaning that I've tried to get into that poem, is a way of trying to represent something of the strangeness of being a young boy and believing in the possibility of things which the adult world was trying to negate. And an environment where becoming older, learning your lessons and so on, represented a kind of loss of the dreaminess and imagined possibilities of existence. I think as educators we should try as hard as we can not to squash the dreams of children, because the dreams of children (if they remain alive and active) make better adults, by and large. My childish dreams inhabit me very strongly and I think they're a significant part of the best of what I am, as a person.

AH: You have included in *Burnt Umber* a section called 'Viscera: poems from WWII'. What does it mean to write and publish World War II poems in the 21st century?

PH: I think it can mean a whole lot of different things, depending on what you're trying to do. In my case, it was partly a way of memorialising my father, who died in February 2015, and who was a very important person to me. He had been through World War II, and that experience had changed his life in all sorts of ways. He had left school as a working class kid, and after he came back from the war, because of opportunities available to returned servicemen, he got a place at university, he met my mother, he became an academic in the end, and his whole life was changed. It was also changed, perhaps much more deeply, by what he saw and went through during his service in the war. So my poems in this book are partly a way of memorialising him, partly trying to capture... not the stories he told me, he didn't tell me that many stories about the war. He tended to be relatively silent about a lot of his experiences. He brought back a lot of jokes, which he told my mother a great many times, and she kept on laughing at them all throughout their relationship, that was important. But for me it was about trying to capture some of the sense of what he conveyed to me as

a person, both some of the really bad things that happened and some of the not so bad things. It was a way of entering into his world. And one of the poems, which is about when he was bombed in Darwin and thought he was going to die, is a version of an actual story that he told me about a real event. When I first heard that story as a child, of course I had that thought: if he had been killed by the bomb in Darwin, I wouldn't be here listening to the story. It is very interesting how poems can pick up narratives which have all sorts of significances and try to relay them into another space, which is the space of a poem.

AH: *Burnt Umber* has, like your former collections, the occasional image of language as concrete or tactile. An example is in 'Furniture', where 'words baulked at spaces we'd filled with speaking', or in 'Bundle', where 'language, once ordered, was as liquid as water'. Can you talk a bit about your descriptions of language as a tangible thing?

PH: Yeah, that's a very interesting question. I find it a little bit hard to talk about this. I think for me, language—I suppose I *can* say—words, particularly nouns, often seem like something I might be able to hold in my hand. I remember once, in a relatively early poem I connected writing to a child who was kicking a football, and bouncing a football, and so on. I've always thought of language and meaning as going through my hands and, to some extent, my feet and my body. If I'm writing a poem, in some way I'm handling language, and that language might be like a tool I've picked up, or a clod of earth I gathered as a child—there is a kind of tangibility about it. I can't quite justify that connection in any actual way. Words are words and I'm writing them on a page or typing them into a computer or whatever. However, when I'm writing creatively, when I'm imagining words, it's not very different from being out in the garden with a spade or being on an oval with a football. In one way it's not very different... in another way it's very different indeed. But I've always felt that strong, physical and almost visceral connection to words. I think it's one of the reasons I love writing poetry, I feel like I'm handling words again, and it's really pleasurable.

AH: I think Lucy Dougan, at the Perth Writers Festival this year, spoke of dealing with people's poems as an editor as dealing with 'handmade things', in the sense that language is the material of a poet's craft.

PH: That's a lovely idea.

AH: My final question is an informal one. I have a friend who is reviewing the collection and she messaged me the other night and said, 'I want to know who the lady in the green coat is in this collection.' I looked through the collection and motifs of green clothing seemed to come up a few times. So I'm wondering if you can talk about that at all?

PH: [Laughs.] I'm not telling you the identity of the woman in the green coat, partly because the idea behind that motif in the poems, the greenness of it and the presence of that figure, is important to me as a kind of gesture towards the quotidian. In other words, there is a sense in which poetry even at its most abstruse or abstract often speaks best when it touches the daily stuff we know, whether it's the table or a coat, or whatever it may be. The green coat is a small repeated motif in the book, for those who are observant enough to notice it, to say: here is an emblem of something. For me I suppose it's an emblem of residual intimacy, loss, the idea of otherness, the way we often remember or understand things through a kind of metonymic process—we remember the whole through either a part or an association. The green coat and its association with some other poems also speaks of mystery. There's a Shakespeare sonnet where he talks of his feeling of disgrace, though he never specifies what causes this feeling. I think that's an exemplary poetic gesture, he leaves the reader to ponder what that idea might be. In a very small and modest way, my green coat is a gesture at the mystery of poetry and its connection to the daily things that we all know.

Works Cited

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Hope ascends with a foot in each world

A poetic prose response to *SPEAR*

Lika Posamari

Lika Posamari (Bree Alexander) is a non-Indigenous woman born on the land of the Awabakal people. She is currently completing a Master of International Development from RMIT University. She was coordinating editor of *Here Be Dragons* vol. II, a contributor to vol. I, and is forthcoming on *Kitaab*.

SPEAR, dir. Stephen Page, written by Justin Monjo and Stephen Page, with Bangarra Dance Theatre, 2015. 84 mins.
<http://www.spear-film.com.au>

Three times I have seen this film. I could watch it many more if only for the different sensations and intricacies that jump out at me each time. Before the first viewing, we, the audience, were advised to just surrender to the energy. Open up to the spirit. To not expect a linear narrative. This is not a storybook. This is storytelling in a different language. It is a sharing. An evoking. A transportation. An immersion. A journey spanning thousands of years encapsulated in a three-week shoot. From waves washing against pristine jagged rock formations to the 'industrial womb'. A battle ensues. *He's an Abo don't need much waste it all on wine and such! Don't need tucker it's all in bush goanna, grubs and nardoo mush! Dirty Abo!* The worded narrative drawn from Kevin Gilbert poetry. Woven between sequences of great complexity, communicated through mastery of movement full of spirit and feeling. The incredible beauty of Djakapurra Munyarryun singing in language folded throughout. Through this journey, an entry into the mind of the young protagonist, Djali. As he traverses the terrains of a harsh world. Welcome to men's business in the 21st Century. Explorations of masculinity. The complexities of belonging. From Sydney to Arnhem Land. Cockatoo Island to Carriageworks. As he delves beneath the earth to look spirit in the Wedgetail Eagle's eye. A rite of passage that does not skip a beat. In motion from the heart of the land to the tips of the fingers. The Suicide Man, a character who presents us with a reality that many Indigenous people face. At one point, he is lost at the rear of a triangle formation. Thrown toward the head of the spear by his dancing peers. *A foot in each world a heart in none*. More of Gilbert's

words that linger purposefully. A melange of powerful imagery. Artistry. From a campfire atop an overturned car. Bottles of alcohol poured out in ritualistic dance. Homelessness, exclusion, death. As the physicality speaks loudly. Alongside the subtleties of gesture. The ritualistic painting of the chest, forehead. Guidance emerging from characters who reside closer to traditional culture. From feminine energies. Escalators, a bowling alley, a white-washed apartment block. All sterile. The perils of modernisation. The 1961 hit 'My boomerang won't come back' parodied and paraded in a hall, highlighting the disturbing racism within it. The shame this evokes in me thinking that my family would have listened gleefully. Movement and expression that destroy such a reductionist view of culture. A shattering of the notion that a Welcome to Country and dance are the only purpose the oldest of cultures serve in this society. Detectors blaring when met with gum leaves and ochre. Incarceration. Finding where identity lies. Indigeneity not in skin colour, but spirit. And heart. The shedding of skins. *You have beautiful skin*. The loss of life that comes all too soon. Witnessing actualities that are impossible to stop. The protection, the maternal. The healing of wounds. The re-birth. Taking us back to the source; a rich history that lives on, strong. The strength and vitality of culture drawn forward. Ochre lines. To move onward, to channel pain towards salvation. From people to land and back again. A symbiosis toward survival. With thanks to the spirit that we are invited to feel. As she walks us back to a place of hope. The Spirit Woman, makes her way through a forest of eucalypts. A guide. In motion. She soothes us and shares a precious energy. I urge you to come face to face with this film. Enliven your senses. See it. Feel it. Touch it. Hear it. Taste it. No sense will be left wanting. Let your mind run wild, interpret and create meaning from this amazing opportunity of immersion. An outstanding educational experience for the whole self of all ages; heart, mind and spirit. The first feature film produced by an Aboriginal producer. May there be many more.



Photo provided. © Cara Bowerman

Photo provided. © Benjamin Ryan



**There is Life Here:
A review of *Two Sisters***
Marie Munkara

Marie was born on the banks of the Mainoru River in Arnhemland. Her first novel *Every Secret Thing* (UQP) won the David Unaipon Award (2008) and NT Book of the Year (2010). She has authored two children's books *Rusty Brown* and *Rusty and Jojo* (Laguna Bay, 2014), a second novel *A Most Peculiar Act* (2014), and a memoir *Of Ashes and Rivers that Run to the Sea* (2016). She is currently working on another memoir and a TV mini-series.

Every once in a while I will read a book and be haunted by it. Images of that story will float through my consciousness at the least expected times, like in the shower or when I'm feeding the cats. I will lie awake in bed thinking about the placement of the words and the characters and the beautiful mind that created it. I love these books because they impact on my life and they let me see a parallel world through the filter of another person's eyes and heart. They have been profound and profane and sad, they've been awe inspiring and as uncomfortable as a spinal tap. And I love them because they move me. The book *Two Sisters* occupies this space that I reserve for The Amazing and The Profound. It is about the stories of two sisters, Ngarta and Jukuna, born in the Great Sandy Desert south of the Kimberleys. Their descriptions of everyday life in the desert, and the way they walk with a calm and dignified grace through the loss of family in leaving the desert for the cattle stations, facing as well the imminent demise of their ancient lifestyle, is both lyrical and disturbing in equal measures.

Written in the third person, Ngarta's story begins with her birth during Parranga, the hottest time of the year, near a waterhole named Walypa (which means wind). She describes a life that was shaped by the availability of water and her family's journeys from one jila or waterhole to the next. But this wasn't a simple nomadic existence where Ngarta and her family aimlessly wandered the desert looking for food, water and shelter. Every feature of this land was as familiar to each and every one of them as the palm of our hand is to us and their knowledge of each waterhole was an ancient survival song of the land sung by countless generations before them. As keepers and carers of their country Ngarta

points out that there was purpose to their movements as no waterhole or hunting area was allowed to be overexploited or misused, this was the law of their land and to not be mindful of it was to die. Ngarta's story shows a deep reverence for this land that had sustained her and her family for millennia and which as a small child was her whole and completely self-sufficient world.

But this story is not all about the desert landscape and Ngarta also speaks of the death of loved ones and the pain of their loss. It is a beautiful reminder that even in the extremities of the desert there is love. But forever in the background are the two Manyjilyjarra brothers from the east casting a shadow on their peaceful lives. Notorious murderers, they roam the desert looking for victims until they eventually capture Ngarta's small family group of women and children. After the murder of her younger brother, Ngarta tries to talk her mother in escaping, but she is resigned to her fate and so Ngarta slips away from her captors and sets out alone. Her survival in the desert for twelve months as a twelve-year-old child leaves the reader in no doubt about the tenacity of Ngarta's spirit. But there is no bravado here. Ngarta tells her story with the pragmatism and candour of a person who is completely at home in her environment and her place in it, with the full acceptance of her circumstances. In this part of the story, there is a subtle shift in the telling. Ngarta is no longer talking about a child here—to live alone in the desert without the protection of her family she had no choice but to leave her childhood behind. She is a woman now, and she is a hunter and a survivor. And how lonely it must have been. As human beings, we are driven by an innate social impulse to be around other humans and so for Ngarta to place herself in this position shows that she must have possessed extraordinary strength of purpose and character. Ngarta is eventually recaptured by the two brothers only to discover that in her absence her mother and another woman and her children have also become victims. But Ngarta seems to accept the news of her mother's death with the same stoicism that helped her to survive alone. Soon after this the group make their way to Christmas Creek Station where Ngarta eventually escapes to Cherrabun Station with another group of people and is reunited with her sister Jukuna. And this is where Ngarta's story ends.

Jukuna's story is equally remarkable and covers the same period of time as Ngarta's, when the last of their family were heading north and leaving the desert. Jukuna opens her memoir with the waterholes where her parents were born and like Ngarta she also talks of the jilas and their relationship with the people who used them. There is a similar reverence for the land and what it provides. Jukuna speaks of the age-old practice

of harvesting the seeds of the desert and storing them for later use when food supplies got low. Taught how to winnow the seed in a coolamon by her grandmother, Jukuna would have been among one of the last of the Great Sandy Desert people to know this procedure and sadly when she died this ancient knowledge passed with her. Older than Ngarta, Jukuna is married at the time that Ngarta is living in the desert with the last of their family, and having been taken to Cherrabun Station in the north by her husband, Jukuna is spared the trauma of bearing witness to the cold-blooded murders that Ngarta experienced. But this doesn't mean Jukuna had things any easier. The loss of the way of life she had been born into when she went to live on the cattle station and the knowledge she would never return to the desert to live like she did in her childhood would have been equally devastating. Jukuna finishes her story by talking about going back to the desert to live. There is a longing in her words as she speaks about returning to her homelands and the jilas where she played as a child and learnt the ways of the desert. There seems to be an empty place inside her that only the desert can fill.

Beautifully told, these two sisters' stories are a testament to their courage and resilience in the face of overwhelming trauma and change. Protection from insurgents in the form of the two murdering brothers and by white men looking for land to run their cattle was a motivating factor in the movement of people leaving the desert and settling on the stations for work. That combined with the resistance of those who chose to stay expresses the deep struggle between stepping into the uncertain new world of the white man and the loss of their old ways. There seemed to be a sad and lingering acceptance by Jukuna and her family that this change was inevitable, although this wouldn't have made the loss any easier to bear.

Originally written in Walmajarri, Jukuna's story would have to be one of, if not the first memoir written in an Australian Indigenous language and it reads like a song. It rises and falls with the cadences of music. It is poetry. It is beautiful. Unlike the English language, where extraneous and ill-fitting words catch in the sentences like burrs, both Ngarta's and Jukuna's stories are written with the sparseness of a language that is born of the desert where they came from. There are no words wasted here, nothing to crowd the mind or the senses and this was due in part to their own natural and fluid ease of storytelling and the skill and sensitivity of Pat Lowe and Eirlys Richards who assisted Ngarta and Jukuna in recording their stories. In translations or assisted memoirs, there is always the danger of losing the essence and the nuances of the spoken words as the meanings of words in two different languages seldom shift smoothly

or transpose directly from one to the other. But credit to them all, both stories were an absolute joy to read and in English they still captured the spirit of the two sisters.

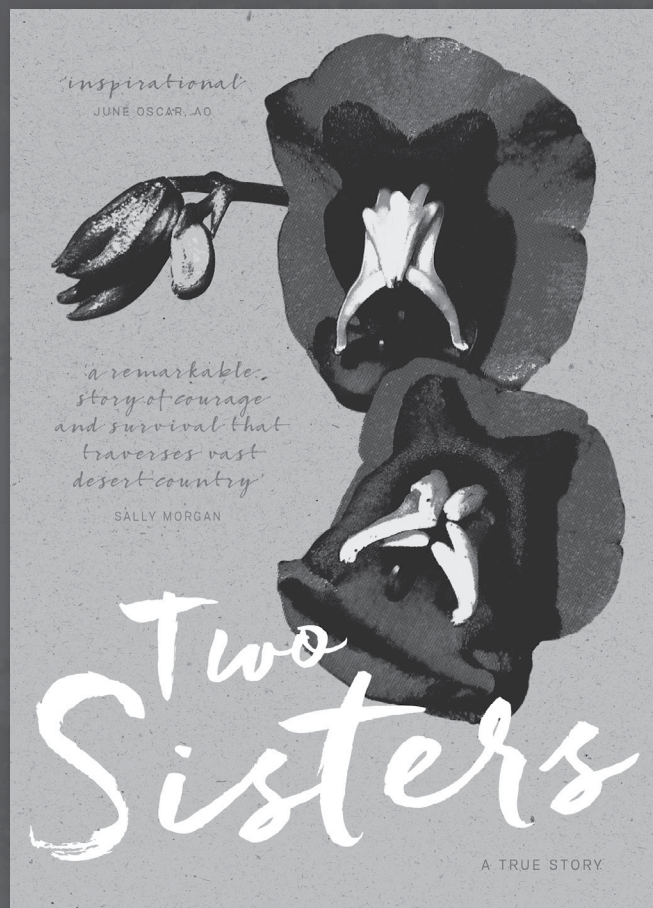
But where does a work like *Two Sisters* fit into Indigenous women's writing? With their traditional content, do Ngarta and Jukuna have a place among our contemporary writers? Sadly, works like this are mostly consigned to the realms of the anthropological and Australiana. But they are not museum and anthropological pieces, they are the works and words of two Indigenous women with powerful and moving voices who have an enormous contribution to make to contemporary Indigenous women's writing. They are a link to both the past and to the present and if not for Magabala publishing house new edition*, I suspect this story—which resonates with the resilience of the human spirit—would have remained unknown, except by the families of these amazing women.

Ngarta and Jukuna did not only express their stories in words, they expressed them on canvas as well. As well-known artists their paintings are exquisitely rendered and studious depictions of the jilas they grew up around in their childhood. The colours are the colours of the desert, and they rest assuredly on the canvas like the sun settling over the landscape. In their words and their brush strokes, you hear the wind through the spinifex and you feel the red sand between your toes. You feel the heartbeat of the trees and your eyes take in the ancient rocky outcrops and sand hills. There is life here and there is love, and there is the memory of two beautiful women who gave their stories to the world.

* *Two Sisters* was originally published by Fremantle Press, in 2003.

“Unwavering courage shouts resolutely from the pages of this lyrical but gutsy true account of two Walmajarri sisters as they are pursued by murderers and face the loss of their ancient lifestyle.”

Marie Munkara, author



NGARTA JINNY BENT, JUKUNA MONA CHUGUNA
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December

- 2nd Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 4th Katharine's Birthday Open Day and Awards Announcements, 11am-4pm, KSP Writer's Centre
- 9th OOTA Writers' Christmas Party, 1pm-4pm, Fremantle Arts Centre

January

- 16th KSP Writers' Centre Press Club for junior cadets, 9.30am-4.30pm
- 17th Setting Writers Resolutions workshop, 10am-12pm, KSP Writers' Centre
- 20th Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 29th KSP Sunday Session from 4.30pm, KSP Writer's Centre
- 30th Voicebox poetry readings at the Fremantle Fibonacci Centre, 7-9pm

February

- 3rd Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 10th Prose Workshop with Helen Hagemann, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 17th Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 21st Three-course Literary Dinner with Miranda and Alexandra, from 6.30pm, KSP Writers' Centre
- 24th Prose Workshop with Helen Hagemann, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 26th KSP Sunday Session from 4.30pm, KSP Writers' Centre
- 27th Voicebox and FAW(WA) present the winners of the 2016 Tom Collins Poetry Prize

March

- 3rd Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 10th Prose Workshop with Helen Hagemann, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 11th Reaching Your Reader workshop, 10am-12pm, KSP Writers' Centre
- 17th Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 24th Prose Workshop with Helen Hagemann, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 26th KSP Sunday Session from 4.30pm, KSP Writers' Centre
- 27th Voicebox poetry readings, Fremantle Fibonacci Centre, 7-9pm
- 31st Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 31st Deadline for Submissions to *Westerly* Magazine

April

- 7th Prose Workshop with Helen Hagemann, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 14th Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 17th KSP Writers' Centre Press Club for junior cadets, 9.30am-4.30pm
- 21st Prose Workshop with Helen Hagemann, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 24th Voicebox poetry readings, Fremantle Fibonacci Centre, 7-9 pm
- 28th Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 30th KSP Sunday Session from 4.30pm, KSP Writers' Centre

May

- 5th Prose Workshop with Helen Hagemann, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 7th KSP Writers' Centre Open Day, 11.00am-3.00pm
- 12th Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 19th Prose Workshop with Helen Hagemann, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 26th Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 28th Writer-in-Residence workshop, 1.00-4.00pm, KSP Writers' Centre
- 28th KSP Sunday Session from 4.30pm, KSP Writers' Centre
- 29th Voicebox poetry readings, Fremantle Fibonacci Centre, 7-9 pm

June

- 2nd Prose Workshop with Helen Hagemann, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 9th Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 16th Prose Workshop with Helen Hagemann, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 23rd Poetry Workshop with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers
- 25th KSP Sunday Session from 4.30pm, KSP Writers' Centre
- 26th Voicebox poetry readings, Fremantle Fibonacci Centre, 7-9 pm
- 30th Prose Workshop with Helen Hagemann, Fremantle Arts Centre, OOTA Writers

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