

**62.1** | **New Writing from  
Western Australia**

Fiction

Poetry

Essays

Reviews

**In this Issue**

Fay Zwicky

Peter Rose

Jill Jones

Tony Birch

John Kinsella

# Westerly



**'The Ones After Them'**  
Peter Rose

'It's hard to put it into words—  
it's been so long.'  
'You should have told me.'  
'I suppose the gist is—'  
'Gist? ..We've got gists.'  
'I guess I'm curious.'  
'Curious?'

## Westerly

Volume 62 Number 1, 2017

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Fiction  
Poetry  
Essays  
Reviews

# Westerly



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Culture and the Arts**

This project has also been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

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Fay Zwicky, in her journal (Notebook XIII, August 2012), documents the experience of rage—a strange contrast with her lyrical prose and elegant hand: ‘I haven’t, however, forgotten my fury about the illegal Iraq war. It belonged to me, and I remember shouting my rage... I can still feel the surge of anger and frustration, no less urgently...’ (25141, see ‘Surprised by Hope’ in this issue). Zwicky extends her rage to a list of social issues and injustices, a litany of various forms of violence in the world that sits at odds with the simplicity of the yellow Spirax notebook. This is the same journal that catches memories, poetry, anecdotes and ponderings, which notes inside its cover the Latinate name of the ‘Moon Orchid carried at my wedding’ as ‘Phalynoxis Orchid’. The passage which records her anger is followed immediately by the memory of a childhood pen-pal.

Writing has the capacity to wrangle with violence in this way. Zwicky’s ownership of her own anger has remained with me as an important response. It is a fleeting but powerful moment in her document, seemingly removed from the general train of thought which surrounds it. It points to the fluidity of the written space, carrying such strong emotions, but in a way also unencumbered by their weight. Reflection and representation, the hope of recognition. Writing can, of course, engender violence and create conflict. But it also can offer acknowledgement. It can hold more than one thing in place. In several of the pieces in this volume, there is a version of anger which points also to the hope for change.

This is not a themed issue, and the material here was not collected with the intention of responding to the wrongs of the world. There is much here too which is playful, beautiful, happy. Several themes are taken up for consideration, including the writing of women, personal relationships and natural spaces. But regularly we found in the pieces submitted for this issue a desire to recognise and respond to violence. *Westerly* has received support this year from both the Australia Council for the Arts and the

Department of Culture and the Arts (WA), for which we are very grateful. (My thanks also to the wonderful team of people who have helped pull this issue together.) It seems to me that the value of this funding is not simply in the Magazine’s ability to continue publication, but in the space it creates for the representation of voices dealing with such anger, and such hope.

This writing, challenging and pressing at sites of pain in our society, suggests we are living in a moment when these wrongs cry out to be felt. Zwicky’s sense of frustration might be a common feeling, enacted generally in silence—the incoherence of indignation, the apoplectic inexpressibility of rage. Writing, it seems here, helps us find a voice for what immediately might seem unspeakable. The violence in this issue may be alarming, met regularly with anger and pain. But at each point, it also demands recognition. This rage is mine, these pieces say. It belongs to me.

**Catherine Noske**, June 2017

## PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The editors have pleasure in announcing the winner of the annual Patricia Hackett Prize for the best contribution to *Westerly* in 2016, to

### **TIMMAH BALL**

For her creative non-fiction essay,  
'In Australia'

Published in *Westerly* 61:2, 2016

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**In the Wild the Male is  
Always the Most Beautiful**  
Stephanie Bishop

Stephanie Bishop's latest novel is *The Other Side of the World*. She is a lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of New South Wales.

When I was a young woman I walked through Paris in a grey woollen coat. It was second hand with a tie-belt, and arms that were an inch too short. I was disappointed by this coat because I thought it made me look like a poor student, which I was, when really I wanted to look like a sophisticated woman in a smart navy dress, sporting dark glasses: someone who might sit in the Café de Flore and think of Simone de Beauvoir.

I was wearing this coat when I went to the Rodin museum, where I watched a small boy run his hands over the marble curves of a naked woman, his touch escaping the attention of the guards, and somewhere there is a photograph of me, standing on Rodin's lawn. The man I was with put the timer on, propped the camera up on a tripod and ran across the grass. I missed the cue to smile. When I returned home, I threw the coat away. Although, by the time I became the woman in navy, I wished I had kept the coat so that I could better recollect that poor young student walking through the streets of Paris.

'It is like a film,' that same man said, years later and not long ago now. 'The movie ends because the transformation has taken place. After that—what, it's just real life.'

I met him in the lift of the department store. Dressed in a suit, he sat on a small stool by the row of numbered buttons and welcomed me as I entered:

'Which floor, Madam?' he asked. I wasn't sure of the number but needed a new pair of shoes. 'Very good,' he said and with a white gloved hand pressed the button with the number four printed in the middle of it. The button glowed. 'Going up!' he called, and so we rose.

He had a deep voice that resonated in the small chamber of the lift. He had fine ivory skin and glossy hair, which made him match, somehow, the scene: it was an old lift, with a complex set of sliding doors that had to

be drawn back each time someone wanted to enter or leave. Then, with a flourish of his arm he'd close the metal grill, and the panelled wooden door with the frosted glass. As the lift ascended he lowered his gaze to the red-carpeted floor, hands clasped loosely in his lap. We stopped at level two (*Menswear and Shoes*, he announced, and level three *Lady's Attire, Designer Labels*).

Of course he was still there when I took the lift back down to the ground floor. This time I was the only customer. He admired my purchase: a pair of yellow sandals for the summer, which I was already wearing, my old shoes in a plastic bag.

'Thank you,' I said and stepped out into a faux marble foyer aglow with fluorescent light.

The shoes soon broke, the sole peeling away from the main. I carried them around in my handbag for a week or so, intending to return them but always forgetting until the man I'd been seeing—an older man with children, whom I knew I shouldn't have been seeing at all, and was not seeing in any official sense—ended what we'd never formally begun. I spent my lunch hour crying in the toilet cubicle and left work early that day, my face red and puffy. While I felt the world had failed me I thought to return the shoes and tell whatever unfortunate saleswoman, who came to my aid, that these shoes had failed me too. I know I should take the stairs, for the exercise, but never do, and so when the doors to the lift were drawn open and the metal grill was pulled back, he was there. I stepped inside, my tears starting up once more. Again I asked for the floor with the shoes, forgetting the number. The doors closed: *Going up!* Again I was the only person in the lift. Then we stopped moving. The box hung in the air. He unclasped his hands and pressed the number four again, but we remained where we were. I continued to cry, although there was no sound, just tears rolling down. I pretended to ignore this: I did not meet his eye, I raised my chin—it was just water. But he pulled a handkerchief from a pocket and, without looking at me, held it out for me to take. It was neatly folded, unused, and I felt oddly touched, not just by the gesture but by the fact that he was a man who carried a handkerchief at all.

'Thank you,' I said. He'd unbuttoned his jacket to take the handkerchief from an inner pocket. His shirt beneath was finely striped, the lines running vertically up and down his torso. It made my eyes go funny, as if the shirt were hiding one of those 3D illusions so fashionable at the time and it seemed that if I stared at him in the right way—slightly dreamy, and cross-eyed—I might see dolphins diving over his chest or a tiger leaping out in full roar.

The lift soon moved again and we arrived at the fourth floor, but instead of getting out I said I thought I might just stay on a while, if he didn't mind, and so for the rest of the afternoon I just rode up and down, up and down, soothed somehow by the deep resonance of his voice and the order of the building to which it responded: Level One, Level Two, Level Three. Going up! Going down! Have a lovely day ladies. Where to, Sir? On and on we went.

We were a man and a woman playing our roles. I have long red hair that falls past my waist like a woman in a Pre-Raphaelite painting. At the end of the day he reached out to push my hair gently back from my face, his fingers brushing against my ear; my ears are small and pink and stick out slightly, ears that I know remind him of the soft ears of a mouse.

Jonathan was an actor, and had been employed as the lift operator because of his baritone voice. Of course I was charmed by his throwback role there, without understanding that a role was what it was. We went out to dinner, made love in the car then drove to the beach and swam in the night sea. When he was offered a role as a footballer in a series of television advertisements for a sports drink he resigned from the department store. He had to master a broad Australian accent, but they really liked his jawline. With the money he made from this we packed a backpack each and bought a round the world ticket: California, New York, Thailand, etcetera. I didn't know how not to agree to the things that he wanted. I had the same problem with my mother. There was a time when women of my generation thought they would never marry, that they would decide against it, because their mothers had married and then rued that fact and so warned us to think of something else to do with our lives. This would be progress. But then these same mothers turned out to want a greater happiness for their daughters, the happiness that they themselves felt denied, and so shortly before we left she said, 'I think you two should get married' and so I said to him, 'Do you think we should get married?' and he said, 'What do you think,' and I said, 'Maybe, why not?' And so by the time I followed him to Poland, because that was where he wanted to go, I was wearing an engagement band on my finger.

On the train from Berlin to Kraków I fiddled with my ring so much that a fellow passenger said: Newly married are we? and I replied, Not yet.

I remember Jonathan saying, *I'm starving*. I remember him pulling his wallet out of his trouser pocket and flicking it open, looking for cash, so that he might buy something from the kiosk. I remember seeing my own tiny face, stuck behind a sleeve of plastic. For a moment I failed to recognize myself: the image was faded although the woman looked young,

as if she, I, had been young a long time ago. My skin prickled: what I felt then was a premonition of my own disappearance, one that my soon-to-be husband had orchestrated by accident, soothed, as he must have been, by this miniature, washed-out version of me. Did we want to become what we are? Is this even a valid question?

I didn't once write to my mother; not about Paris, not about Berlin, not about how, as the train moved deeper into the countryside, the carriage emptied, so that soon we were the only passengers. Not about the sight of horses pulling wooden ploughs through fields, women carrying baskets of goods, a man with a pitchfork shifting a mound of hay. I remember thinking how even the green of the trees seemed to belong to an earlier, less contaminated century: it was so bright, such a pure green, unlike any green I had ever seen before. Where did it come from, this colour?

With the carriage to ourselves Jonathan began to run his hand up my stockinged thigh. We left our bags and had sex in the carriage toilets. I had to straddle myself against the wall, with one foot on the sink and the other on the toilet seat. He wanted it, I didn't mind; the journey was long. Afterwards we dozed in our red seats, the sun on our faces and when I woke the train was pulling into a small village station. Cottages abutted the railway, and in the yard of the nearest house were two large, pink flamingoes, bending down towards the grass. For a brief moment I wondered what they were doing there, so far from their natural habitat, then realised they were made of concrete. A fragment of black and white footage came to mind, in which the artist Jenny Kee stroked just such a flamingo and said to the camera 'Because of course we all live in a flamingo park, really.' It was 1973; I would have been a baby. We talked then, Jonathan and I, of what our imagined future might be like, and once all possibilities for greatness were exhausted I went back to reading my book. There was a passage that moved me so much that I took a pen from my bag and underlined the paragraph heavily. Jonathan stopped what he was doing and watched me.

'You know,' he said, 'that you won't be able to do that once we're married.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'Because we'll share our books then,' he said. 'I'll want to read your books and you'll want to read mine. I can't read books if they've been marked like that.'

It would be dark by the time we arrived in Kraków. We would have to buy water and food. We had practiced saying yes and no and requesting that the water have no gas in it.

‘Funny to think,’ he said a while later, ‘that Virginia Woolf never travelled on an aeroplane.’ I knew what he was thinking: that we could be in Poland by now if only I had agreed to travel on an aeroplane. We could be in our apartment with our food and with the water that comes without gas. But I am afraid of flying and prefer to avoid it if I can. I like to see the land passing. The train stopped at another station. A guard got on. We showed the man our passports. I felt nauseous for some reason and discovered that this passed if I removed my ring.

When we returned home there was to be just a small wedding in a leafy park with a view out over the water. I thought of the vows we had planned; Possession, Augustine reminds us, is not love. And Stravinsky, circa 1939: Whatever diminishes constraint diminishes strength. Jonathan chose that one. But even now I am unsure of what it means. I remember how swiftly the night closed around that carriage and how, by the time the guard returned our passports, I could no longer see the trees.

What is the history of love as it has played out in coaches and their equivalent? Anna and Vronsky in the train, travelling through the snow: one might declare this their love’s beginning. Kate and Mr Densher on the underground: *they looked across the choked compartment exactly as if she had known he would be there and he had expected her to come in*. Madame Bovary riding in the carriage at night through random streets, the torn letter fluttering from the window at dawn: such is the end.

We stayed in Poland long enough to say our words and drink the water, then moved on to a small valley somewhere near the Italian border. We took the train, rather than the bus, which would have been cheaper and this was important because we had so little money, but a fellow traveller told us that small ancient statues could be spotted in the shrubbery beside the railway line, and that this was unlike anything she had ever seen. We took her advice but miscalculated the length of the journey, and the amount of daylight, and by the time we were winding our way down into the scenic valley, through the larches and chestnuts, it was dusk. I pressed my face to the window to better see the worn stone figures between the trees: Mary and her boy-child and Mary alone and Mary again, over and over and over in her faded blue cloak, pale in the coming darkness, the worn stone of her body appearing and reappearing through the trees. Down and down we went, to the valley floor. When the train finally pulled into the station it was pitch dark with no moon and we tried to find our way to the hostel by unmarked roads and a torn map viewed by torchlight. My bag was heavy, I dropped behind my fiancé—as I called him only to myself—and after walking for almost an hour through remote and deserted countryside, I began to cry. He

took no pity and told me to hurry: he could see lights. But it was only where we started from, the train station up ahead. So another route was taken, he chose it, and the road eventually ended in a field. I could see nothing, not even the ground, but there was the scent of wet grass, the slow jingle of cowbells.

‘Stop,’ I said, ‘I can’t go on. I can’t do this.’ I was so tired. I was in so much discomfort from the heavy backpack. We could see no lights now, no houses, we had no idea where we were. ‘Stop, please,’ I said again, for I could hear him walking on ahead of me, into the darkness. I lay down in the grass then and fell asleep and when I woke at dawn a circle of brown cows were watching over me. Jonathan was nowhere to be found. The valley was full of birdcalls, so high and light that I thought for a moment they were being piped: the sounds of nature on repeat. Nearby were footprints in the dewy grass but when the grass thinned out to rock the prints disappeared.

In my real life I will never again own a pair of yellow sandals. I do not go to the Café de Flore, I live in a country where I have no need of dark sunglasses, although by chance and by sheer forgetfulness of what I already possess, I have come to own many different kinds of grey coats: notched collar, shawl collar, belted, single and double breasted, although not the original one, of course. In this way I do and do not experience myself as something continuous: there is a pattern, observable from afar. I know it does not compliment my skin, the grey, but I like the feeling of wrapping myself in something that is the colour of a shadow. Because of this he did not notice me when we ended up in the same café one morning, in a place far away, although I did him. He was writing a story about a fox. This was the fact he reported, when I introduced myself, and asked about his life, what it was like.

‘When you say you’re writing a story about a fox,’ I said, ‘what do you mean?’

‘A fox,’ he told me, came to the window one morning. ‘It was a long time ago. You were asleep and didn’t see it. It lifted its paws to the windowsill and looked in. Our eyes met, the fox and I, and I felt, I don’t know, answered somehow.’

He shrugged, although I had not asked him any further questions. I had not and would not ask him for an answer. He glanced out the window.

‘I don’t know what happens next,’ he said. ‘The fox stared at me, and it was like something was exchanged. Then it ran away. Your mother,’ he said, ‘your mother owned one of those, didn’t she? A fox stole.’ He was right: she kept it in the cupboard under the stairs near the broken weather barometer. The fox’s eyes were made of glass.

'She died,' I told him, as if this fact explained my whole life. Then he said he was sorry, and I said no matter, and thank you, and soon it was time for him to go. As he pushed his chair back he said, without looking at me:

'Why didn't you follow me? That night in the field? I never understood why you didn't come with me.' He met my eyes, fleetingly, as, I thought later, a fox might.

## Everything Becomes Metaphor

Brendan Ryan

Brendan Ryan's most recent poetry collection is *Small Town Soundtrack*, Hunter Publishers, 2015. He lives in Geelong.

Looking down from the kitchen  
into the valley's grainy darkness  
I think of my neighbour who won't return  
from hospital to imprint his side of the bed again.

A scattering of streetlights gives space  
to his absence. Tiled roofs, poplars & magnolias  
emerge to confirm the view. I live by what I see.  
I remember my neighbour in his akubra

clambering along with his dog  
giving me a startled wave, mouthing a wha?  
as I curved past those days I failed to appreciate.  
Trowelling beneath pebbles for kikuyu runners

I see what's beneath the urgency of the weekend—  
damp clay clinging to the roots of weeds.  
The boundaries of the backyard are  
what I hunger for, where everything

becomes metaphor, enlivened and random  
as hummingbirds drooping from blue Echiiums.  
Late evening light softens the corrugated zinc garden bed.  
Only in memory does the voice of my neighbour begin to glow.

**From *The change: some notes from the field***

Tricia Dearborn

Tricia Dearborn's poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals as well as anthologies including *Contemporary Australian Poetry* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2016), *Australian Poetry since 1788* (UNSW Press, 2011), *Out of the Box: Contemporary Australian Gay and Lesbian Poets* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2009), and *The Best Australian Poems 2012 and 2010* (Black Inc.). Her latest collection is *The Ringing World* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2012).

**Perimenopause as a pitched battle between the iron supplements and the flooding**

These spring tides will not be stemmed.

To ward off not just anaemia  
but the scalpel which would loose from me

that generative pocket  
with the moon's horns

and the moon's own pattern  
of increase and decay

I rally the troops:  
long brown powdery tablets

with a faint taste of fenugreek.  
Every six months

an aliquot of what I can least spare  
is taken

to see who's winning.

**Ambushed By Hope**

Extracts from Fay Zwicky's Journal  
(Notebook XIII, August 2012)

Fay Zwicky

(ed. Lucy Dougan)

Fay Zwicky has published eight books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Picnic* (Giramondo, 2006). She has also edited several anthologies of Australian poetry, published a book of short stories, *Hostages* (1983), and a collection of critical essays, *The Lyre in the Pawnshop* (1986). Her awards include the NSW Premier's Award, the WA Premier's Award, the Patrick White Award and the Christopher Brennan Award.

Lucy Dougan's books include *Memory Shell* (5 Islands Press), *White Clay* (Giramondo), *Meanderthals* (Web del Sol) and *The Guardians* (Giramondo), which won the WA Premier's Book Award for 2015/16. She has been poetry editor of *HEAT* magazine and *Axon: Creative Explorations*. She is Director of the China-Australia Writing Centre at Curtin University.

[Editor's Note: Fay Zwicky has kept a journal in longhand since 1975. Now up to its thirteenth volume, it is a combination of writer's commonplace book, poetry workbook, and personal journal. In its pages, Zwicky reflects on what it means for an artist with a cosmopolitan imagination to engage in and sustain a creative life in an isolated place. It is not dated but paginated—the numbering of each extract reflects the page.]

Fay Zwicky's *Collected Poems* edited by Lucy Dougan and Tim Dolin is forthcoming from UWA Publishing in July 2017.

(25125-25126)

A fresh new book. I didn't intend to start another but the anticipation of testing memory was too tempting. Since the passing of the year of anaesthesia and fears of oblivion, I need to patch up the great holes of omission.

Like Frost,

I shall have less to say,  
But I shall be gone.

A gradual going as friends, family, the home, all become less familiar, more remote, and I doubt my ability to remember. Defenceless, solitary, in post-operative shell-shock. The way back is long and hedged with illusion: to reclaim energy, get the blood moving again is the aim... Nothing too much.

Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my Song.

That wonderful line from Spenser's 'Prothalamion', the most memorable in the whole of Eliot's *Wasteland*. It haunts me and re-echoes long after the arid misery of Eliot's nightmare has faded. It was written as a politic gesture to advance his reputation in regal circles with the Queen's current favourite, the Earl of Essex. The Earl of Worcester's two daughters were about to be married and, since the Earl was a close friend of Essex, Spencer thought a betrothal ode was in order—counterpointing joyous occasion with the dark underlay of change and decay, the poet's personal decline infiltrating a public event.

Some people aren't made for 'the long littleness of life'<sup>1</sup>. I always hoped to be one of them yet fear I'm going to have to learn otherwise. My grandmother was a 'stayer', a stoic and a non-complainer: can I match her ending?

How a name can trigger memory, Argyrol, for example. When I was a child, my eyes were often inflamed and irritated. This brown substance was applied with a dropper tending to leave your eyeballs yellowish. Why do I remember it so precisely so many years later? The great curmudgeonly art collector of the finest concentration of French Impressionists, Albert Barnes of Philadelphia, whose father toiled in a slaughterhouse (like Jim Legasse's dad) invented Argyrol... it became part of our regular medical folklore and made its discoverer a fortune. He might have been a crank but certainly had an eye for genius; daemonically driven megalomaniac, he drove his cars as furiously as he drove himself, and died running through a stop sign...

Emily Brontë died, aged 30. Did she take Byron as a model for Heathcliff? If so, she differed from Byron in that he didn't renounce

Christianity entirely whereas she was quite heretical—was it a defiance of her clergyman father? A bit like doctor's daughters turning to alternative medicine. Her last poem, 'No coward soul is mine,/No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere'; flourishes her heresy like a banner. She practically proclaims that godhead resides in her and, in saying so, repudiates all orthodoxies—'Vain are the thousand creeds/That move men's hearts—' Her deity is closer to some self-created pantheistic power anchored on 'the steadfast rock of immortality'. She must have been an extraordinary talent and stoic beyond human limits. Reading such tough stuff makes me realise how little armoury I've acquired for these last difficult years.

I like Louis MacNiece's poem 'Charon', the ferryman who carries the souls of the dead to Hades for the price of a silver obol. The conclusion is so powerful—

We flicked the flashlight  
And there was the ferryman just as Virgil  
And Dante had seen him. He looked at us coldly  
And his eyes were dead and his hands on the oar  
Were black with obols and varicose veins  
Marbled his calves and he said to us coldly:  
If you want to die you will have to pay for it.

Wow! That's how it is: the great Spanish proverb—you can have it but pay for it. The privilege or pain of a life doesn't come free. The consummation devoutly to be wished isn't a freebie.

(25128)

Why did I start singing this in the shower this morning? It comes from school with Miss Short. I remember every word of my part in the Latin play we put on in primary school. I was the Physician and had to ask my young patient the following—

'Manum mihi da, puerum, pulsum sentiam'

My head is a rag-bag of quotes which pop up at all times. If you ask me to recall anything practical, anything real, forget it! I can always remember songs and verses with rhyme and rhythm—the rest is of small import. I surprised the French conversation group with my recall of songs by Jean Tablet and Jacques Pils: 'Couché dans le foin, le soleil pour Témoin' etc., I can still see the faces of that pair on the cover of the sheet music, their black shiny hair slicked down on either side of a clean-cut centre parting, looking for all the world like two card sharps or snooker

hustlers in a fugged-up billiard salon. Memory is strangely selective and comforting...

Strange that I remember Hart Crane leaping overboard into the Caribbean at 32, believing he could no longer write poetry. Even more strange is the fact that he was the only child of Clarence Arthur Crane, a candy manufacturer who invented Life Savers! Life couldn't hand you anything weirder.

(25129)

I was asked out of the blue in the local supermarket by Greg R. who I barely know (but like) to find some poems that might be suitable for his dying wife's funeral. I surprised myself by taking to the task with enthusiasm and found ten for him to choose from. The first, by Robert Creeley, touched me—

[...]  
What did I know  
thinking myself  
able to go  
alone all the way.

He seemed happy with the lot I showed him but I was left feeling sadly inadequate to the task.

(25131)

More and more I've come to realise that each of our 'realities' are shaped in our earliest years and have their own separate validity. Who is to say that one 'reality' is more 'real' than another?

(25132)

Joyce would eventually define his father as 'the silliest man I ever knew' even though he loved him for his singing, his ability as a raconteur, his gregariousness. It's curious that Stanislaus would end up condemning his father and cutting off all connection with him but James never did. Possibly because he came to share many of his father's destructive habits: overspending, drinking, partying, moving often without settling accounts—all those aspects of reality wilfully denied while swinging between extremes of behaviour being simultaneously inside and outside the social norm. Most writers seem to follow this pattern—courting attention while simultaneously rejecting it. Like the cave dweller metaphor I once used: hiding away while craving recognition. It's common enough, and makes for a very difficult life full of misunderstanding.

(25133)

What a great loss is Robert Hughes to the service of art. He was so gifted, such an interesting mind expressing itself with virtuosic power... He loved Orwell for his plain spokenness—or, as said of Chardin in a *Time* review (1979), 'to see Chardin's work en masse in the midst of a period stuffed with every kind of jerky innovation, narcissism and trashy 'relevance', is to be reminded that lucidity, probity, and calm are still the virtues of the art of painting.' I'd say they are equally those of literature. I seem to remember that Lucien Freud was given special permission by the National Gallery to come and copy a Chardin painting whenever he wished and he often came and sat before this late into the night.<sup>2</sup> He (Chardin) painted small canvases, modest scenes and objects from the everyday life of the middle class, a bit like the Dutch tradition, but his work goes beyond matter-of-fact realism and somehow transcends the humble objects portrayed without sentimentality or affectation. It bears a deep seriousness of contemplation, hard to put into words (as is most art or music when one tries to translate images into prose.)

(25134)

Adrienne Rich died this year. I admired her highly trained formidable intelligence. In the old days (my days), she was what was commonly called a 'woman poet'. Looking for one's own voice came hard. She once wrote, 'You must read, and write, as if your life depended on it.' Not something easily said among today's cool customers.

(25135-25136)

Charles Simic writes the occasional minimalist poem that I might have written, had I taken the smallness seriously. The first stanza of his 'Nothing Else' is almost verbatim what I wrote some weeks ago. The only difference is his address to the small-hour 'friends'. I didn't have an audience. Anyway, here's his poem—I like it more than most recently met—

Nothing Else  
Friends of the small hours of the night:  
Stub of a pencil, small notebook,  
Reading lamp on the table,  
Making me welcome in your circle of light.

[...]<sup>3</sup>

I'm sure the local literati don't like to think of a poet dying of diarrhoea (the damage to image would be incalculable) but Robert Henryson apparently did around 1500. Francis Kynaston reported in the 17th [century] that a woman told Henryson to circle a rowan tree chanting 'whikey tree, whikey tree, take this flux away from me.' Henryson said it was much too cold for a dying man to be jumping about outside but suggested instead that he prance around the table in his dining room singing 'oaken board, oaken board, gar (make) me shit a hard turd.' It's said that he died 15 minutes later.<sup>4</sup> I wish I could come up with something as droll and earth-bound. Maybe it would work?

(25137)

Someone called Nissim (Lebanese?) [Nassim Nicholas Taleb] was speaking in the early hours on RN. Teaches at City U. New York something like social engineering... He has written a book called *Anti-Fragile: How to Live in a World We Don't Understand*. He began life as a trader and described the roller-coaster sensation experienced by business people at the mercy of the market, going bust all the time, having to start over, having to suffer loss and shock of poverty and homelessness etc. He spoke of 'post-traumatic growth' and the need for adversity if one were to grow. Ancient Rome knew this and he invoked Cato, Cicero and Seneca, all stoics, and went on to describe how different their attitude to life was from the present day. I was quite gripped by his thesis since I've recently come out of a very stagnant frightening paralysis of the senses, convinced I'd never be able to write again. To my amazement, my last poem, 'Charon', had proved me wrong... I must learn to trust myself more. If I can't do it aged 80, when will I ever do it?

(25138)

There's a Zen admonition: 'Live as if you were already dead'. Exactly what Che Guevara said: 'Live your life as though you were already dead'—we all plagiarize each other. I never thought of Guevara as a Buddhist but maybe he was in quiet moments.

(25139-25140)

Bach, I didn't know he was orphaned at nine and watched ten of his children die young. No wonder he had what Gerd Rienäcker called a 'consciousness of catastrophe'<sup>5</sup>. The church cantatas say it all. And the Masses, human and superhuman sit side by side as if he knows only too well that this life of man is merely a preliminary, a kind of ante-room to the day of judgement of souls. Listening to 'Christ Lag in Todesbanden',

who can't forget an image of Bach's parents attending his baptism in 1685 in the Georgenkirche in Eisenach, wondering what might have gone through their heads. Would this child live? Little did they know.

How ancient language sticks in the mind! In my most recent poem 'Charon', I found myself using the word 'graven' without any conscious effort of resuscitation ('We'd grown up/graven with a sharp dynastic proverb:/Have it but pay for it.')

<sup>6</sup> What a weight of authority lay behind that choice, nothing less than the King James Bible—'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.' (Exodus, 20:4). I said the language of oppression sticks, didn't I!

The unreliability of memory; how we imagine something that never happened to us but which we'd heard of or read about and appropriated it and taken it for our own experience. I sometimes wonder about children given to make-believe and histrionic performance, in love with romantic fantasy to compensate for the boredom & tedium of childhood. I was such a child.

(25141-25143)

Willy Fiévez, a young Dutch airman, my pen-pal in Batavia, contacted after finding his name in the local paper immediately after the war. I had a picture of him leaning, long and tanned, against the wing of a rather small plane. I wrote to him because I wanted to join the world 'out there', where everything exciting happened and was happening. I remember telling him I had a horse which escaped its pen. Cast in the heroic role (as usual) I retrieved it by hanging on to its tail, letting myself be dragged through brambles and thick stubbly pasture before shutting the gate firmly against future escape. What could the young man have imagined his Australian informant to have been? ...[O]ne day he turned up on the family doorstep of 11 Martin Street. I don't remember much except his immaculately pressed Khaki drill trousers, short-sleeved shirt with navy-blue epaulettes. Tall, thin, very blond and sweet and I was dark, moody and furious with my mother and the world in general. I so much wanted to grow up and live a glamorous life and there I was, stuck at the piano with detested plaits, a head full of Caesar's Gallic Wars, and no horse.

[...]

All is vanity all the way[;  
Twilight follows the brightest day,  
And every cat in the twilight's grey,  
Every possible cat.

Where does that spring from?’ I suddenly found myself quoting it under the shower this morning (2/7/2013)—my head’s buzzing with quotations.

*Dossier K*, must read. Imre Kertész, born 1929, was taken to Auschwitz & Buchenwald. When he won the Nobel Prize much later, I was too over-stuffed with material about the war to pay attention. I thought the last word had been said on the subject. I was wrong. For example, Kertész’s comment on Adorno’s ‘To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’ came as a surprise to me. He interpreted it quite differently to the way I’d done. He said: ‘I consider that statement to be a moral stink bomb that needlessly pollutes air that is already rank enough as things are.’ The stink comes from what he sees as ‘the assertion of an exclusive right to suffering, the appropriation, as it were of the Holocaust.’ I took it to mean that the writing of a poem on the subject of suffering was not commensurable with the enormity of the Holocaust & therefore it was an act of impiety to try & give voice to what was beyond human expression. Kertész also said very acutely that ‘the only thing two Jews have in common is their fears.’ He is mordant & unsparing about his own work—‘art is nothing other than exaggeration and distortion.’ He’s equally penetrating about himself: ‘All in all, I’m on the side of cheerfulness. My error is that I don’t elicit that feeling in others.’ I know exactly what that means: are we cursed with something that scares other people because we see through all the ruses of convention? I often think that people who retain so much of their untamed childishness, so very potent a weapon for the artist, are destined to scare those who long ago succumbed to society’s dictates that involved loss of spontaneity, vivacity, energy, and the yielding up of free-will.

(25145-25146)

The Welsh word ‘hiraeth’ means a kind of ‘homesickness tinged with grief or sadness over the lost or departed’. I understand this word, having often reached for its English equivalent when feeling desperately isolated and end-of-tetherish. Usually when I come back home after struggling with the stairs up to the back door, knowing the house will be empty and that the concept of ‘home’ is bewilderingly ambiguous. More often than not, the image that rises in the mind is the home in Martin Street, not my present perch.

John Clare: ‘words are poor receipts for what time hath  
stole away.’

Sometimes I agree. Other times I think some receipts tell much more than others and deserve respect however guarded.

I might have known I’d have to wait till 80 to be ambushed by hope. And here I am, a tattered coat upon a stick, reminded of the salmon falls, the mackerel-crowded seas, the sensual music of my youth...

What shall I do with this absurdity—  
O heart, O troubled heart—this caricature,  
Decrepit age that has been tied to me  
As to a dog’s tail? (‘The Tower’)

How in God’s name did I ever believe I understood Yeats when I was 18? The music was always seductive but the meaning was only skeletally received. Now is another story.

### Notes

- 1 A line from the poem ‘Rupert Brooke, 1887–1915’, by Frances Cornford.
- 2 Freud was working inside the National Gallery for an exhibition, ‘Encounters’, which ‘juxtaposed old master paintings with versions by important living artists’: <https://www.artfund.org/supporting-museums/art-weve-helped-buy/artwork/7977/after-chardin-lucian-freud>. Accessed 19/05/17.
- 3 *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 58, No. 1, (13/01/2011).
- 4 See: <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/parkinson-henryson-complete-works-appendix-sir-francis-kynaston-aneecdote-about-the-death-of-robert-henryson> Accessed 19/05/17.
- 5 Ross, Alex. ‘The Book of Bach’. *The New Yorker*, April 11, (2011). <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/04/11/the-book-of-bach> Accessed 19/05/17.
- 6 See also Zwicky’s ‘Reflections on “Charon”’, *Australian Book Review* 351 (May 2013): <https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/abr-online/archive/2013/1457-charon>
- 7 ‘The Tortoiseshell Cat’ by Patrick Reginald Chalmers, first published in *Punch Magazine*, 4 March 1914.

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## Women in fragments Susan Midalia

Susan Midalia is the author of three short story collections, all shortlisted for major literary awards. Her first novel will be published by Fremantle Press early in 2018.

### 1. As time goes by

One day he was kissing me all over my willing body, the next day he was shouting at me to stop bloody moping about the house. Well, it wasn't actually a day between the kisses and the shouting, that's just an expression. You know, one day this and the next day that, when in fact it's been years, the long, slow slide into misery. It was the same with my kids, one day cooing and patting my face with soft pudgy hands and the next day calling me a cow. *Moo*, I'd said, playfully, pretending to have horns. *Cows don't have horns, you moron*, he'd said. The younger boy, that is, because the older one doesn't speak to me from one day to the next.

I work at a charity shop three days a week. I'm only a volunteer so I don't get paid but the women there soothe me with their kind, sweet voices. *That dress really suits you*, they say. *Or you know how to have a laugh. Or doing something special this weekend?*

I'd pretended to be religious to get the job, but what the hell, I thought, when I've been pretending for so many years.

### 2. Who is Sylvia?

Sylvia was the proudly steadfast product of 1960s feminism. Vigorously supporting the empirically verifiable claim that women as a group were subjugated by a pervasively oppressive patriarchal ideology, she also refused to be a victim, valiantly adhering to the social constructivist argument that patriarchal culture could be deconstructed and hence reconstructed to serve the interests of female empowerment. Later in the century, Sylvia eagerly embraced the philosophically liberating belief that the very category of femaleness was ambivalent and provisional, if not entirely untenable. 'Woman', she now saw, was gloriously elusive, defying the epistemologically reductive binary model of gender that had historically rendered the female inferior to the male.

On the morning of June 23rd, 2016, Sylvia noticed that her bedroom mirror was leaning to the side. She stepped back, stepped forward, made the necessary adjustment. But then, as both the subject and object of her disconcerted gaze, she was jolted into studying her reflection: for although her lover called her *comely* and her friends extolled her *dignity*, all she could see was a sadly wrinkled forehead and two listless, sunken cheeks; five deep rows of lines around a tight, scrawny neck; two sagging, dispirited breasts.

She could find no words to rescue her.

### 3. Juicy

We saw an image in a women's health magazine, a picture of a baby girl in a nappy, with a caption underneath: *Does my bum look big in this?* Miranda called it clever and I called it disturbing and we denounced the contemporary female obsession with body image and blamed the media for this appalling situation.

'Fatness in women,' I declared, 'is now deemed a sign of physical laziness, a pitiful lack of self-control, an ugly moral turpitude.'

Miranda then weighed in by pointing out the pernicious influence of haute couture. 'All those designers using skeletal, flat-chested women,' she said. 'They claim it's to make the garments hang more elegantly, but it's really based on a fear of womanly flesh.'

'But don't forget cultural specificity,' I countered. 'Fatness in some non-western cultures is desirable, layers of flesh seen as visible proof of a woman's fertility.'

'Although,' Miranda added, 'research shows that obesity can in fact make it difficult for a woman to conceive.'

She closed the magazine, looked up at me and frowned. Asked me quietly if I thought she needed to lose weight.

'Not that you're superficial, Anna,' she said. 'Or judgmental,' she whimpered. 'It's just that... sometimes...'

I put an arm around her ample shoulder, drew her close and kissed her plump, rosy mouth. Loving every juicy morsel of meat on her beautiful, necessary bones.

### 4. Change

A male politician on TV argued that we needed more female politicians because only women truly understood female experience. My kid sister turned to me, asked me to explain *female experience*.

'Pregnancy and childbirth,' I said. 'Rape and domestic violence. Abortion.'

'But not all women experience those things,' my sister objected.

'Fair enough,' I said. 'And besides, people who say *truly understood* or truly anything are bloody annoying. *Truly* is just a filler word, used to add a sense of conviction to an otherwise spurious argument. And when all's said and done,' I continued, getting into my stride, 'I'd rather have a male feminist in parliament than women like Pauline Hanson or Michaelia Cash, who wouldn't recognise reason or compassion if it jumped up and bit them in their highly made-up faces.'

Then I slapped on a smile. 'Did you ever read about the world's first Siamese twins?' I said. 'They were joined at the sternum and they married two sisters and had twenty-two children between them.'

'What made you think of that?' said my sister.

'To remind me that anything is possible.'

I didn't tell her how the sisters had grown to despise each other.

## 5. Writing woman

The novelist asked me why I wrote such ridiculously short short stories.

'It's called flash fiction,' I told him, 'because it offers a flash of knowledge.'

The novelist raised an eyebrow. 'What on earth does that mean?' he said.

I sighed. 'It means that flash fiction reminds us that knowledge is always slanted, partial, incomplete.'

The novelist pulled back his hefty shoulders. 'The kind of knowledge enacted in a novel is far superior,' he said. 'More complex, more enriching. Its presentation of life as a process of gradual unfolding—its accretion and amplitude of events—encourages the reader to develop an empathetic understanding of the other.'

I pulled back my small shoulders. 'It's not a question of better or worse,' I said. 'It's simply a matter of difference. Novels and flash fiction offer different challenges and pleasures for both writers and readers.'

The novelist smirked. 'So you have readers, then?' he said.

'Many. They write to tell me how much they admire my flash fiction.'

He bared his conspicuous teeth. 'I bet they're all women, then,' he said.

'I just had a flash of knowledge,' I said. 'You placed the word *then* at the end of two consecutive sentences in a feeble attempt to stamp me into submission.'

'Well, aren't you the clever one,' he said. 'I bet you're going to put me into one of your micro whatever creations.'

I shook my head. 'Your kind of misogyny doesn't interest me,' I said. 'I write about domestic violence, the banning of abortion and birth control, the systematic rape of women during war. The big things, you know. About the hatred of women.'

'Get fucked,' he said.

## Les Lollitas Carol Jenkins

Carol Jenkins lives in Sydney. She has two collections of poetry, *Fishing in the Devonian* (2008) and *X* (2013)—both shortlisted for Premiers' Awards—and an illustrated novel, *Select Episodes from the Mr Farmhand Series*, all from Puncher & Wattman.

They are the Les Lollitas, two seasons  
new, pale blue, kid-like leather,  
a pair that fit my feet like dancing pumps,  
they're dirty now from being so down  
to the ground, the toes scuffed at the point.

Baby brogues, sometimes when I tie your laces  
I wait, watching how my hands  
act as automatons, an effect so licentious  
elating, that I've seen myself undo each lace,  
so I can retie your bow, redo that double knot.

## Wellington Location 205 John Weller

John Weller left school early to work in the cray fishing industry for a decade, followed by a number of other physically demanding jobs; until the onset of ankylosing spondylitis. Several years after this point, he returned to study and thus writing. He will turn fifty in 2017.



© John Weller

A story, naturally.

*'That could be them right there... Ask your father...'*

genesis

Dad bites into his fish from his 'senior's special fish and chips', which I imagine is probably shark. My gaze drifts across the gently moving water of Fremantle harbour. It's always busy here—tourists. Yet, oddly enough, always relaxing. Dad finishes his shark and reaches for his coffee.

'Anyway, those ruins; the story goes something like this... We went there in the fifties with a mine detector, but they're designed for large pieces of metal, not small objects, so we had no luck. Still, I imagine there's sovereigns buried under the old fig tree, or somewhere.'

'Sovereigns? What are they made of?'

'Gold. They are gold.'

the notes

By the time I arrived home that evening my mind was set. I'd been looking, and struggling, to find a topic for my project, but this had all the elements of a good story; this seemed perfect. For the next two weeks I immersed myself in history. I found, and read, every old article about anything and everything to do with the story. By the end of the fortnight, I knew it backwards.

- Augustine de Kitchilan, a man of Sri Lankan origin in his mid-twenties, going under the name of Berchman, arrives at Peppermint Grove Farm claiming to be employed by the Police, and on the lookout for certain men. He is allowed to stay.
- Over the next few days several people who visit see him at the farm.
- He murders Leah Fouracre, robs the house of everything valuable, puts the body in the house, sets fire to it.
- He heads south with two of Leah's horses, her rifle, and other belongings.
- Heavy rain falls and quells the total destruction of the house, and bodily evidence of murder.
- The Police find blood-stained earth under a clump of loose barley halfway between the house and the garden.
- De Kitchilan leaves a trail of scattered evidence in his wake. Several people recognise the horse he is riding as Leah's.
- The Police act quickly, securing evidence and witnesses.
- He is arrested at Bunbury three days after the murder on a charge of impersonating Police. This charge is withdrawn when the more serious charge of murder is laid against him.

- He is found guilty at the Pinjarrah inquest.
- He is found guilty at the murder trial in Fremantle.
- He is hanged at Fremantle Gaol at 8am on the 23rd of October 1907.

All pretty straight forward really. The circumstantial evidence was so damning he was always going to hang. You didn't need Conan Doyle's main man to put the pieces together with this one. I spread my notes on the table. Fifty or so A4 pages. I grab a blank page, sit down and start thinking about what I'm going to write. I'm sitting, and thinking, for a while, for quite a while, for a very long time. I don't know where to start, what to do. I have all this information, but no apparent story. Suddenly, the penny dropped—amongst these notes was a story, but, what was missing was *my* story. I placed the pen on the empty page. Time to go for a drive.

#### the book

I have an old book, a dictionary. It was printed in 1909, I got it from Dad, and he from his. It's large, heavy, and five inches thick. Inside it's reddish-brown, morocco bound covers are over two thousand wafer-thin pages covered in very small print. Inside it's reddish-brown covers is knowledge, vast knowledge. It must have taken Mr Webster a long, long time to create such a formidable book. It lives, and rests, in a plastic tub, and has done for over three years—untouched, unconsidered. Recently, I got it out—but not to check spelling. Recently, it's had a purpose beyond that of a dictionary, a purpose beyond words.

#### the button

On a whim, as I am prone to having, from time to time, I decided to visit the ruins. I got lost—or rather, I lost the ruins; they weren't where I expected them to be. The young woman at the Preston Beach shop was very helpful, and very good at Googling on her phone the site I was looking for. She gave me directions, and in no time at all, I was in the completely wrong place looking at a modernish red brick house that had had its roof burnt off in the recent bushfire. I rang Dad, got directions, and found Peppermint Grove Farm.

In the clear, bright autumn sun you could see just how new this fence was from the glare reflecting off the wire and metal posts. This eight foot barrier, topped with three strands of barbed wire, looked like it hadn't even been rained on yet. The ruins were only a metre inside the fence—the barrier. The barrier between me and the ruins. Between me and history. Perhaps, being close to the highway, the owners had tired of people stopping to look at the ruins, then wandering over to other nearby

structures to see if there was anything else old and interesting to look at, or steal. Or perhaps, out of some form of endearing respect for the woman that was murdered there, they wanted to protect what was left from unnecessary damage and vandalism; and just let them settle to the earth in the grace of their own time.

With four lanes of relentless traffic twenty metres away, this was not, or no longer is, a place for quiet reflection or contemplation; but I tried, and stayed a while. As I was leaving, I noticed in the recently disturbed soil near the fence, a rusty piece of long, thin metal with a hole in one end. Perhaps a door catch, or a window prop from the old homestead. I picked it up—a memento. I kicked at another piece of partially buried metal. An eight inch square peg with a head, rusty but recognisable. I added a couple of pieces of coloured glass to my collection, and a piece of mortar, and a piece of limestone from the old walls just to round things out. I was all done and heading back to the car when I noticed one last thing. A small, perfectly round dull-coloured object. An old, slightly convex, brass alloy button. A couple of minutes later, I'm back on the highway heading south and home. On the passenger side floor across from me lie my little assortment of artefacts; and the button.

#### The Somme

Exactly ten years after Leah Fouracre was shot and killed, my grandfather was also shot; but he lived. He was involved in that man-made hell—war. He was returned to England, and spent the remainder of the war training recruits. In 1919 when he returned to Australia, his wounded elbow had completely healed. Leah's wound would never heal. The autopsy revealed that Leah's fatal wound, had been inflicted by an exploding bullet that tore through her lungs and heart before exiting the front of her body as she was in the process of turning. A cold-blooded cowardly murder. It had to be that way. For this was a woman that lived alone on an isolated property. And it was common knowledge that she had great skill at marksmanship. It was common knowledge that this was a woman, who, if given a fair contest, was a woman capable of defending herself against any man.

#### murder

Being mid-autumn, the sky has the deeper blue hue than the harsher, lighter blue of summer. Recent rain has the paddocks beyond the ruins covered with a blanket of vibrant green grass. The large trees that gave the homestead its graceful ambience are gone. Now, only a handful of smaller trees remain, randomly scattered within the paddocks. You can easily see across to where the existing sheds and structures mingle and

rust, semi-hidden, amongst a band of peppermint trees that run north and south. These trees are roughly two hundred metres from the ruins. So Leah's immaculate veggie patch—or kitchen garden—and crop of barley for the calves, would have existed just before the trees. I picture it off in the distance. Then, I fill in the picture, little by little. I add the path that meandered from the house to the kitchen garden. Then the wattles that flanked the path, paying particular attention to having them sway in close to the path about halfway between the house and the garden. I put back all the large and stately fruit and native trees. I turn east and put back the stables, and the old well. Finally, I restore the post and rail fencing that surrounded the house and yards.

*Leah lays the sickle down and scoops the barley into the hessian sack. She stands and starts making her way back. She is where the wattles swing in close to the path when she hears a noise behind her, she begins to turn, she hears the familiar loud 'CRACK' of her Martini Henri rifle, but this time, it is not she firing it, and it is probably one of the last sounds she hears. She falls to the ground, and her hat and bag of barley fall with her. Augustine de Kitchilan stands less than twenty feet away. He slowly lowers his aim, and starts to make plans, hasty plans.*

#### the photo

I didn't even know I had the photo. I'm getting the dictionary out, but on top of it there's a pile of papers and large envelopes. I start going through them. They're family-related things Dad gave me; family trees, articles, photocopied documents, that kind of stuff. Then, as I'm turning through the stapled pages—a photo. Its clarity and sharpness is remarkable for a photo of that era—the caption dates it as '1922?' It's an image of my grandfather at Lake Clifton. He looks quite young; he was quite young. By my calculations—thirty-two. I can recognise myself in him. But his facial features aren't as sharp as Dad's or mine—Grandma probably had something to do with that. He is mounted on a particularly large, powerful looking horse. Even through the black and white photo, you can clearly see the exquisite sheen of the horse's coat. It looks like a very healthy animal at the peak of its prime; both of them do.

#### the button—part two

Sometimes, out of nowhere, and out of chance, a connection occurs. I upload the photos, and start looking through them, back and forth. I figure the more I look at them, something missing in my story, my stalled story, will reveal itself, and give me direction, inspiration, an idea. I'm doing this for a while, maybe twenty minutes, maybe longer. Then, at one point, I

click back one photo too many, and find myself looking at a grainy image of De Kitchilan from one of the old articles. I'd taken a close-up with the phone—added it to the other images connected with the story. He's standing against a wall, the framing cuts him off at the upper thighs. I've been looking at the ruins long enough, so I just leave the image there and lean back.

Then, I notice it. His clothing is drab; featureless—a light coloured long-sleeve shirt, slightly darker trousers. But, on the trousers, there it is—a button. A button that becomes more and more noticeable the longer I look at the image, to the point, where it is all I see. The cogs go to work. Its size is similar, if not exact, to the button in my pantry—probably a rather generic clothing fastener back then. The cogs work a little harder. He'd left his blood-stained trousers at Fisher's—his Sri Lankan friend—and borrowed another pair. Why? A boy staying at Fisher's saw De Kitchilan get up during the night, wash his shirt and dry it before the fire. In one article there had been a ground plan of the homestead, showing the configuration of the eight rooms and their purpose. Why not wash the trousers too—wash the blood out? The cogs are approaching warp-speed, white sparks fly, and a localised magnetic field is being generated.

The button I found was within five metres of what was once Leah's bedroom. The bedroom where De Kitchilan placed the body before ransacking the house and setting it alight. Why not wash the trousers? Unless? Maybe the button was missing. Maybe there was no spare button at Fisher's to repair them. Or perhaps—for a man with a lot on his mind—replacement was the easier option than repair. So my button, my innocuous looking little object, could it be possibly something much more than that? Could this be *the* actual button, that somehow got caught in Leah's clothes and broke away as he was carrying the body? Sometimes a whim pays off.

#### gold

Even though De Kitchilan had a criminal record for larceny, and was capable of violence, it's unlikely he murdered Leah for the petty cash and semi-valuable items he stole. It's most likely he murdered her for the gold. Leah didn't bank her money. Her brother, Robert, always paid her in gold sovereigns for what the farm produced, and it was estimated she had around two hundred sovereigns somewhere on the property. De Kitchilan must have heard about this, known about this. Maybe, when he broke the lock off Leah's bedroom with an axe, and hurriedly searched the room, he was looking in the right place, but just not the right spot. Records show that part of the floor was not boarded. The gold may still lie under that

earthen part of floor, which is now covered in rubble, and covered in time. Or, perhaps, it's buried in the one place where recently disturbed soil would never arouse suspicion or interest—the kitchen garden. Or perhaps it's somewhere else. Maybe it's best not to know, to never know. Maybe, when a mystery loses its mystery, it also gives up its interest, becomes just another story—complete and ended, then fades into nothingness. Perhaps it's best to let the gold lie, and let the story live.

#### the cows

This is an old story of people long since passed. People, who as they fade deeper into history, become mere characters, almost fictional. For the most part, I can no more sense their humanity, or essence as once living people than I can with any tragic figure from any tragic novel. For the most part, I came across one, and only one, piece of text that did put me in that time, where I did, and was able to, sense Leah as a living person, and *feel* the emotion surrounding her murder. It was written by a representative of the press, who accompanied the Police, the Coroner, Robert Fouracre, and members of the jury to Peppermint Grove Farm prior to the inquest at Pinjarrah:

Just as the two parties were preparing to leave, a very sad reminder of the present state of the home was brought forcibly before all present, by a number of cows coming along the roadway, and turning into the gateway near the house, all softly lowing, as if calling for the mistress they knew so well. ('Waroona Murder', 1907)

#### Stanley

I have one vague, and snap-shot short memory of my other grandfather. An elderly man, with a somewhat stooped back, walking slowly up the driveway with my grandmother toward the house where I spent my earliest years.

I have no memory of Dad's dad. He passed years before I was born. We never shared, or were part of the same world. And yet, I guess I can, and do, have a somewhat abstract relationship with him; through a connection and understanding of the country and time when he lived, through my dad—and his stories, through this story, and through, and because, of Leah.

#### the ruins

Just over seventy years ago, my dad first visited Peppermint Grove Farm. He remembers his dad showing him the wooden dowel that held the

window frames together. Recently, I was at Peppermint Grove Farm with my dad. He showed me a few things, told me a few things. There's some nice symmetry here, but also something else. For I now know, albeit across time, that there is at least one place where I have shared a presence with not only my father, but with his as well. And that there is one place the three of us have in common. A place that connects me to history, to my history, and to my grandfather: Wellington Location 205.

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## Sissy Tony Birch

Professor Tony Birch is a renowned Koori writer and academic. He was the first recipient of the 2015 Dr Bruce McGuinness Indigenous Research Fellowship at Victoria University. Tony's writing has been published both in Australia and internationally. His works include *Shadowboxing* (2006), *Father's Day* (2009), *Blood* (2001), *The Promise* (2014) and *Ghost River* (2015).

Sissy had never been on a holiday and didn't know a child on her street or a classmate at Sacred Heart School who'd travelled much further than the local swimming pool. At best they enjoyed a tram ride to a picture theatre in the city, maybe once or twice a year. A girl in the same year at school, Ruby Allison, who lived behind the dry-cleaners with her mother and two older brothers, came back to school after the previous summer holidays and told a story that she'd been to the ocean over summer. Ruby sat in the schoolyard at lunchtime, a circle of girls around her, and talked animatedly about giant waves and seals basking on the rocks above the beach. No other girl in the group had seen the ocean and they had no reason to question Ruby's story. Except she'd been seen most days of the school holidays working behind the counter in the oppressive heat of the dry-cleaning shop, helping her mother. If the story was untrue, and Ruby hadn't been near the sea, she'd displayed a vivid imagination, which was hardly surprising. If the girls from the school excelled at anything, it was storytelling, which was explained by the senior nun, Sister Josephine in an oft-repeated remark that *those who have little or nothing have the greatest capacity for invention*.

Each afternoon, following the final school bell, Sissy would walk to the House of Welcome on the main street, operated by the Daughters of Charity. She'd join a waiting line at the front gate to collect a tin loaf of white bread, fruit bread if she was early enough, and an occasional treat of biscuits, before heading home. She also attended Girls Club at the House on Saturday mornings. The sole reason Sissy's mother allowed her to join the club was that the morning ended with a mug of chocolate milk and a buttered roll, followed by a hot bath for every girl. Sissy didn't look forward to bath time. The girls were required to line up in alphabetical order and the bath water was changed only after the Ks, Sheila Kane and Doreen Kelly had bathed, usually together for the sake of economy. Sissy

was sure that more than one girl on the line ahead of her took a pee in the water, out of either spite or necessity. She'd spend all of thirty seconds in the bath, and never put her head under the water let alone wash her hair, which she preferred to do under the cold-water tap over the gully trap in the backyard at home, no matter how bitter the weather.

One Saturday morning, she was about to leave the House with Betty Reynolds, her closest friend. Sister Mary, who ran the club, took Sissy aside and asked to speak with her. Although she couldn't think of anything she'd done wrong, Sissy worried that she was in trouble. She asked Betty to wait for her out front of the House and went and stood by Sister Mary's office door. The nun occasionally looked at Sissy over the top of her steel-rimmed glasses as she wrote in an exercise book. When she had finished Sister Mary closed the book, picked up an envelope, opened it and read over the details of a typed letter.

'Come in, Sissy,' she said.

Sissy stood in front of Sister Mary and looked down at the navy-coloured habit covering the nun's head. She thought, as she often did, whether it was true or not that Sister Mary, along with the other nuns, had a shaven head. She quickly looked away in an attempt to purge herself of the thought. Sister Mary stood up.

'Let me ask you a question, Sissy. How would you like to go on a holiday?'

The thought of a holiday was so foreign to Sissy she couldn't make sense of what the sister had asked her. 'A holiday?'

'Yes. Exactly. Each year our more fortunate Catholic families contact the Diocese, very generous families offering summer accommodation for those less fortunate living in the inner city. This year, for the first time, our parish has been chosen to nominate several children who we consider suitable. I have nominated you, Sissy.'

The Sister caressed the piece of paper she had been reading from.

'This letter is from a family who write that they are interested in taking a girl for the coming holidays. They have a daughter of their own who is about to turn twelve, your own age, as well as a younger son. I have spoken to your class teacher, Sister Anne, and she tells me that you have been a diligent and well-behaved student this year, with excellent examination results. I see this as your reward, Sissy,' Sister smiled. 'What do you think of the idea?'

Sissy wasn't sure what to think. She was reminded of Ruby Allison's story from earlier in the year. Perhaps she could return to the school in the new year with her own story of the ocean? A true story.

'Are you interested?' Sister Mary asked, when Sissy didn't reply.

'Yes...' Sissy hesitated. 'I'll have to talk to my mother about this, Sister. She's never had me away.'

'Of course you would. And I will speak with her also. Your mother has always been a grateful woman. I'm sure she'll be happy for you.'

The Sister carefully folded the sheet of paper and returned it to the envelope.

'I want you to take this letter home to your mother. Is she able read?' Sister Mary frowned.

'Yes. She reads well.'

'Very well then. The details are contained in the letter. You must inform your mother that she will need to make her decision by the end of the week, as there are many girls in the school who would welcome such an opportunity.'

'Yes, Sister.'

Sister Mary took hold of Sissy's hand, a rare display of affection.

'This could be of great benefit to you, Sissy. Many of your people have never enjoyed such generosity.'

*Your people?* Sissy had no idea which people Sister Mary was referring to.

Sissy walked out into the street and found Betty doing handstands against the front wall of the House of Welcome, exposing her underwear.

'Betty, don't be doing that!' Sissy shouted. 'You'll be in trouble.'

'I don't care,' Betty said. 'I get in trouble anyway, for doing nothing wrong.'

On the walk home Sissy showed Betty the letter and repeated what Sister Mary had said to her. If she expected Betty to be excited for her, Sissy was mistaken.

'I know why Sister Mary picked you,' Betty said, picking a stone up from the gutter and wrapping her fist around it.

'Why's that?' Sissy asked, so pleased with herself she began skipping along the street.

'It's because you have whiter skin than me. And your hair is nicer. Mine's like steel wool and yours is straw. You're exactly what them rich white people want, Sissy.'

Sissy stopped skipping, her cheeks flushed with anger. She stopped Betty from walking on.

'That's not true, and you know it. The reason I've been picked is because I did the best in the class this year. Sister Mary said so. You remember the statue of Jesus Christ I won for getting the top mark for Catechism. The holiday has got nothing to do with my skin.'

'Makes no difference,' Betty smirked. 'It's why you get the best marks too. White skin equals teacher's pet. That's the way it is. Always has and you know it.'

Sissy stamped the heel of her shoe against the bitumen.

'You can't believe that, Betty. I've never heard you talk like this before. You must be jealous.'

'I'm not jealous. I'm...'

Betty aimed her stone at the street pole on the next corner. She pitched it. The stone skimmed through the air and slammed into the pole. She looked pleased with herself.

'Gee, I'd make a good hunter.'

'Not around here, unless you were after a stray cat or a rat.'

Betty stopped at the street corner and sat on the horse trough that hadn't been drunk from in decades. She had a deep frown on her face.

'What's wrong?' Sissy asked.

'I'm scared for you.'

Sissy sat next to her. 'Scared of what?'

'That maybe you won't come back.'

'Don't be silly. Of course I'll be coming back. It's only a holiday. For two weeks.'

'It doesn't matter what it is. One of my cousins, Valda, the Welfare told her mum, my auntie, the same story, that she was going on a holiday. Valda was excited, just like you are now. You know what happened to Valda? She disappeared.'

'I don't believe it. You're making this up, Betty because you don't want me to go.'

'So what if I don't?' Betty shrugged. 'Even more than that I don't want you to disappear.'

Sissy stood up and tried skipping away, but couldn't recover her rhythm. She stopped, spread her legs apart, leaned forward and touched her forehead on the footpath, an exercise she'd learned in gymnastics class at school. No other girl had conquered the flexibility exercise. She looked through her legs at her upside-down friend.

'The story is not true and I won't be disappearing.'

'Please yourself,' Betty said. 'Don't blame me when they powder your face even whiter than it is and force you to church every day of the week.'

Three weeks later Sissy was seated on a wooden chair on her front verandah wearing her best dress, a daffodil print, and a matching yellow ribbon in her ponytail. A small suitcase sat at her feet. It contained another three dresses, a blue cardigan, a toilet bag and new pairs of socks and

underwear. Sissy usually wore her mother's hand-me-down underpants several sizes too big. She was forever hitching them up as she ran around the schoolyard at lunchtime playing netball. As most other girls battled with the same predicament, the situation caused little embarrassment, except on the odd occasion when a pair of underpants fell around a girl's ankles. Sissy had made a visit to the Book Depot on Christmas Eve, where she swapped two paperback novels for four more plus the cost of a shilling. The books were also in the suitcase. She was a voracious reader and never left home without a novel in her schoolbag.

Sissy was admiring her dress when she heard the rusting hinges of a gate shriek further along the street. She looked up and saw Betty crossing the street towards her house. Betty stopped at the front gate, rested her chin on the edge of a splintered picket and looked down at the case.

'So, you're you leaving for your holiday?'

'Yeah. The lady I'm staying with is coming soon to collect me. In her own car.'

Betty leaned a little too heavily on the gate. She hung on, as it swung open.

'Your dress is so pretty, Sissy. I bet you must be happy that you're going away?'

In the weeks that had passed since Sister Mary had offered Sissy the holiday her enthusiasm had gradually faded. She was no longer sure how she felt.

'I am happy. I was so excited last night,' she said, 'I couldn't sleep properly with the nervous stomach ache I had.'

'So, you're really going then?'

'Of course I am.'

Betty hung her head over the fence and tucked her chin into her chest. Sissy heard her friend sob.

'You okay, Bet? What is it?' Betty wouldn't answer. Sissy stood up and lifted Betty's chin. 'What's wrong with you, bub?'

Betty burst into tears. 'I'm sorry what I said about your skin and being teacher's pet. That was mean of me.'

'I don't care about any of that stuff. It doesn't matter to me. Honest.'

Betty jumped from the gate, lunged at Sissy and threw her arms around her.

'I'm going to be lonely without you for the rest of the holidays. Promise me that you'll come back.'

'Of course I'll be back. I cross my heart. Two weeks is fourteen days. I'll be home in no time.'

Betty wiped her face, stepped off the verandah, said goodbye in a rush and ran off down the street. Sissy was about to take her seat again when

Betty popped up again at the open gate. She smiled, *all goofy-like*, Sissy thought. Betty walked over to her, leaned forward and shocked Sissy by kissing her on the lips.

'I love you, bub,' she said, turned and ran off a second time.

A few minutes later Sissy's mother, Miriam, came out of the house and stood in the front doorway.

'Who was that just here talking to you?'

'Betty. She came to say goodbye.'

'She did? It's not like you're going on a world cruise or something. That kid's thick in the head. Like the rest of her mob.'

Sissy was quick to defend her friend. 'No, she's not, mum. There's nothing wrong with Betty.'

'If that's the case, I'm raising a genius.'

Miriam lit a cigarette, sat on the verandah step, waited for the stranger's car to arrive.

When Sissy had presented her mother with the letter of invitation from the church Miriam was not as excited with the news as her daughter expected she would be. Nor did she try hiding her concerns about Sissy going off with a person neither of them had set eyes on.

'We don't know who these people are, Sissy. Or anything about them. Who are they?'

'Sister Mary knows them. She told me that the people who offer holidays are all good families.'

'But does she know them personally? What's written on a piece of paper doesn't mean a thing. One word is all you need to tell a lie.'

'Well, Sister Mary said she is going to come around and talk to you herself. They've had children for holidays before. If they were no good people Sister Mary would know about it. There's nothing she doesn't know, Betty says.'

'Betty doesn't know a whole lot herself. If I ever come to rely on that kid for the safety of my own daughter I'll throw the towel in and let the Welfare take you off my hands.'

Miriam was even more nervous after reading the letter. She twirled a length of Sissy's fringe around her a finger and tucked it behind her daughter's ear.

'So you want to go off with this family?'

'Not if you don't want me to. I can stay here as well.'

Miriam had seen the excitement in Sissy's eyes and didn't want to disappoint her.

'You go, little Sis, and have a wonderful time.'

Tucked into the pocket of Sissy's floral dress were a telephone number and a sixpence coin that Miriam insisted her daughter take with her. Sissy was not to spend the money, under any circumstances, she had been told several times. Miriam explained that the coin was only to be used for an emergency. The telephone number was for Mrs. Pellegrino, the Italian woman who ran the corner shop, who was happy to take messages for locals who didn't have a telephone at home.

'I won't need the money,' Sissy said. 'I bet the family will have their own telephone. Sister Mary said that they are *well off people*.'

A car turned into the street, a rare occurrence in the neighbourhood. A couple of boys standing on the street corner who'd been playing with a rusting three-wheeler bike chased the car along the street. Miriam dropped her cigarette and ground it under the heel of her shoe. The car stopped in the middle of the street, a powder blue sedan that shined like new. It was a small car, Sissy noticed, a two-door without a back seat. Few people on the street owned a car and Sissy had never ridden in one. She raised herself slightly out of her seat to catch a glimpse of the driver. The passenger side window was so clean and shining all she could see was her mother's apprehensive olive-skinned face reflected back to her.

The car door opened and woman got out. Although it was a hot morning she wore a mauve coloured woolen suit and a straw-hat with matching mauve flowers sewn into the brim, shading her pale skin. She was so white Miriam was certain the lady was ill. The woman walked around to the front of the car and remained on the roadway. Miriam stepped onto the footpath and half curtsied before realising the stupidity of her action.

'I'm Miriam Hall, Sissy's mother.' She turned to the verandah. 'Sissy,' she called. Sissy refused to move from the chair. 'Come and say hello to Mrs ...'

The woman stepped forward and held out her hand. Miriam looked down at a set of manicured and polished fingernails.

'I am Mrs Coleman.'

The woman spoke in a tone simultaneously husky and delicate, in a voice that appeared it might shatter at any moment.

'And this must be your daughter.'

Sissy stared at the sickly-looking woman standing in front of the car.

'Come here and say hello,' Miriam ordered her daughter.

Sissy stood up. 'Hello,' she coughed.

The pair of wayward kids on the trike circled the car several times before Miriam ordered them to get back to front of their own place. She did her best to be polite to her visitor, all the while resenting the self-conscious deference she displayed toward a person she did not know or

care for. Sissy felt the shame of being both embarrassed of and for her mother. Mrs. Coleman opened the small boot at the rear of her car and stood back as Miriam loaded Sissy's case into the boot. Sissy could not take her eyes off the woman's face. Her skin was so opaque that lines of thin veins could be seen running down the sides of her face.

When it was time to say goodbye to her daughter Miriam did so with as little display of emotion as was necessary. She nudged Sissy toward the open passenger door.

'Go on, bub. You be off.'

Sissy only relented and got into the car when Miriam stepped away from her daughter and retreated to the verandah.

'Go,' she said, with the wave of a hand. 'Off you go.'

It was only after she had buckled herself into the passenger seat and was driving away, seating next to a cold-looking woman in a funny hat that Sissy grasped the reality of what she'd wished for so desperately weeks earlier. She turned her head and looked back at her mother, standing on the verandah with a hand to her mouth. The car turned the corner, out of the street and stopped at a red light at an intersection. The corner was crowded with local people, none of who would ever take a holiday to the coast, the mountains, or anywhere else. Some would never leave the suburb. Mrs. Coleman leaned forward and peered out of the spotlessly clean front windscreen at the crowd. Sissy watched her face. The woman appeared to be in shock. She pushed the button down on driver's side door, then turned to Sissy and ordered her to do the same.

'Lock your door, dear,' she said, her voice rising slightly.

Sissy turned to lock her own door and spotted Betty standing on the street corner, staring at her.

'Lock the door,' Mrs. Coleman repeated, her voice crackling like a poorly tuned radio station.

As the light turned green, Betty smiled at Sissy and shook her head up and down. The car lurched forward, broke suddenly and stalled. An elderly man had walked in front of the car. Sissy grabbed the door handle and jumped from the car before Mrs. Coleman realised what was happening. Sissy bolted past Betty, screaming.

'Come on, you slow coach, come on.'

Betty had always been the faster runner of the two girls. She drew alongside her friend within a block.

'Where, we running to, bub?'

'I don't know,' Sissy gasped, 'I'm just running.'

'Come with me then, and hide.'

Betty took off and Sissy followed. They didn't stop running until they reached the local football ground several streets away from where the

small car had stalled at the intersection. Sissy followed Betty behind the old grandstand at the far end of the oval. They crawled on their hands and knees into the darkness beneath the grandstand. Betty climbed into the stand's wooden framework, followed by Sissy. They gathered their breath and squealed.

'You're going to be in such big trouble,' Betty said. 'Sister Mary will kill you.'

'She sure will. I don't care.'

'And your mum, she will probably kill you too. After Sister Mary's finished with you.'

'No, she won't. My mum didn't want me to go on the holiday in the first place.'

'You sure of that? I thought you said she was happy for you to go?'

'She was only trying to be happy. It wasn't working. You know them worry lines she has above her eyes? Well, they were bulging out of her head today. I've never seen them worse. It was a sign.'

Betty grinned, as wide as a girl could.

'Well, even if Sister does kill you I'll still be happy that you never went away in that car.'

'The car! Oh bugger,' Sissy said. 'My case is in the boot of the lady's car. I'll never get it back now.'

'Did it have anything good in it?'

'Yeah. My dresses and some books. And, hey! New undies and socks. I mean brand new underpants from *The Junior Shop*.'

'New undies!' Betty screamed. 'I wish I had a pair of new undies, instead of wearing my mum's bloomers.'

'Me too,' Sissy laughed. 'But it's too late now. And it doesn't matter.'

'Why's that?' Betty asked.

'Because I'm home, Betty. I'm home with you.'

'I knew you wouldn't go off with a strange lady.'

'No, you didn't.'

'I did so.'

Sissy climbed down, sat in the dirt and looked up at Betty.

'Tell me the truth. Did your cousin, Valda really disappear, when she went on a holiday?'

'Of course she did.' Betty jumped and landed next to Sissy. 'She disappeared for a week. She ran away and showed up back on my auntie's doorstep.'

'You never told me that part of the story.'

'No, I didn't. It was better to concentrate on the best part. That's how stories work.'

**Redtails**  
Renee Pettitt-Schipp

Reneé Pettitt-Schipp is an award-winning writer currently exploring the theme of connection and disconnection in Australian culture.

In the morning in the sun  
the redtails  
calling across canopy  
see-saw songs a ping-pong game  
two notes played—sky's  
unoiled door

in morning sun  
after days of rain  
the world remembers  
itself expands  
while the redtails  
drunk with sun  
curl into each other  
dark commas  
in stanzas of blue

ping-pong notes  
see-saw songs  
lift my eyes  
to the unoiled morning  
sun-lazy the small flock  
let me close  
bodies turn in light  
set leaf and limb  
on fire.

**Moon at Midnight**  
Dick Alderson

Dick Alderson's poems have appeared in various journals and anthologies. His first collection, *the astronomer's wife*, was published by Sunline Press in June 2014.

Moon at Midnight  
missing the strong enjambments  
of trees, all that falls here  
on roof and yard is flat  
now, cardboard or tinsel  
and the evening's finished

take no notice of that  
moon, it's only going west  
in some dark umbrage

do you feel now, what's left of  
night: its small dark  
integers, how vast and slow it  
goes, how we must eke and  
hold it, bear with it  
till dawn

**Immolation**  
Nandi Chinna

Nandi Chinna is a poet and research consultant. She was recently Writer in Residence at Kings Park and Botanic Garden Perth. She won the 2016 Fremantle History Prize.

**Immolation**

A 24-year-old woman had died after setting fire to herself in Kings Park, Perth, yesterday.

*The Canberra Times*, Monday 23 October, 1978: 3.

That algorithm when heat  
and cold become the same sensation;  
singeing the leaves of the flame trees  
along Mounts Bay Road  
before they deaden and fall  
and the kaarak rises, compelled

to screech its name;  
a cacophony of feather and flame  
burning through the canopy.

Glowing coals contain rooms,  
cities, universes, brighter, more articulate  
than this mornings slow offerendum.

Spreading from ember to hands,  
heat enters through the mouth, raining  
sparks that ignite the eyes

of the seed; black holes,  
opening, defiant,  
through a shroud of smoke.

**Westerly**  
**Writers' Development**  
**Program, 2016**

**Smoke**  
Amanda Gardiner

It is written on an old airmail  
writing pad. The paper is wafer-thin,  
like tissues or skin, and each page  
is threaded back and front...

**A Note on the Writers'  
Development Program**  
Miah De Francesch and  
Catherine Noske

Catherine Noske is the Editor  
of *Westerly*. Miah De Francesch  
is an editorial intern with  
*Westerly*.

*Westerly*'s inaugural Writers' Development Program was designed to guide and support emerging writers, and to aid them in developing work for publication. In partnership with Margaret River Press and with the support of the Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund, the Program selected five emerging writers from applications and paired them with a relevant professional author as mentor. The Program not only offered support, consultation and feedback for these writers, but the chance to have their work published both online and in a *Westerly* print issue. For five months in 2016, they developed and fine-tuned work for this purpose.

In their online publications, we challenged each participant to consider their own writing process. Alexis Lateef returned to poetry produced during her high school student days with retrospective wisdom and experience, while Chris Arnold drew on his skills as a software engineer to shatter the boundaries and conventions of how poetry is read. Sophia O'Rourke and Rachelle Rechichi both reflected on what it means to be a writer, in ways that oppose yet compliment each other: Rechichi's soft introspection on finding words in the everyday and in absorbing and 'being present' juxtaposed with O'Rourke's position as an extroverted writer, as she jumps from one story to the next with vigour and tenacity. Amanda Gardiner's work moved alongside her curating of an exhibition on the trauma, violence and shame of infanticide, neonaticide and concealment of birth in colonial Western Australia. This work is free to access on *Westerly*'s blog, 'The Editor's Desk': <https://westerlymag.com.au/editors-desk/>

And now, their writing appears here. Each work collected is something very different, a point which shows the depth of new writing emerging in the state. Under the guidance of our wonderful mentor authors and editors, Susan Midalia, Marcella Polain, Laurie Steed and Lucy Dougan, we have had the privilege of watching these writers tune their pieces into

something incredible. The Program aimed to create a supportive space for emerging writers, and we have been delighted with the enthusiasm with which these writers have taken on the challenge to produce new work.

Emerging writers are the future of Australian literature. *Westerly* has a long-running history of publishing emerging writers, and this engagement and investment in emerging writing is one we feel to be central to the Magazine's remit to support and foster Western Australian literature. Our most recent Online Special Issue, *Westerly: Crossings*, is a showcase of the literary talent in students in a collaboration between the University of Western Australia and the University of Canberra. Free to download online, this issue positioned its contributions as signalling the future of Australian writing. The Writers' Development Program comes out of the same desire to represent and support the next generation of writers as they commence in their careers.

The process of 'becoming' and 'being' a writer, as Rachelle Rechichi points out in her reflection online, is a role occupied and perceived in a variety of ways. Each of our writers has brought something different and inherently unique to the definition of writer, weaving their own distinctive thread through the ever-growing tapestry of language and work woven by writers before them. It is with pride and pleasure that we include the works of these talented individuals in this issue.

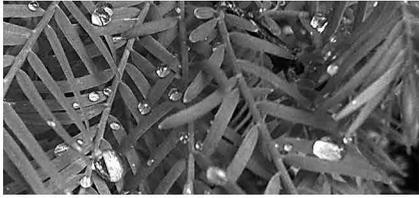
## Chris Arnold

**Chris Arnold lives in Perth and currently works as a software engineer. Chris completed his honours in English and Cultural Studies at UWA in 2016, and he has begun his PhD project in 2017.**



he walks to work on monks worn  
down at their heels,  
looks left past glass  
—an upmarket bar  
he only entered once  
one winter said to the staff  
part of their roof had come loose  
lifted away in the wind—  
closed so early he wonders  
why its coat stand still  
hangs jackets bags umbrellas;  
feels red baked brick  
rough through his soles  
as he turns  
crosses the road  
takes an unnamed lane  
and allows trees to breathe him in.  
away from asphalt edges  
traffic light vertices  
angry wagtails snap wings  
over ravens' backs  
and he counts out his alphabet  
on agapanthus flowers.  
her name pitches from petal  
to petal drops off  
the first flower hovers returns.  
his name never rests  
against a stamen.  
he turns steps over

a sandgroper lost in sunlight  
walks locked on concrete  
like blue aggregate  
wearing his shoes;  
reaches the rail bridge  
thinking in ligatures—  
how her name, in Cyrillic,  
would contain less letters.



Chris Arnold

the tension of air under halogen crush—your voice and the scent  
of your hands on the counter top: damiana, mint, vanilla—  
steel and hinge twinned in your eyes. clocks wrong—unlike dials  
we walked beneath unseeing—resonant crystal,  
NTP leaked under eaves. gone, the base metal snap  
that tape-measured necks for the long flow of moonlessness.

you move through bias-cut light—angle and curve  
my first language—your hips twisted, radius drawn floorward.  
your hand turns porcelain and my napping cygnet fingers  
unready for air. I walk three bridges, think heat of teacups—  
the evening moults: sugar distilled from the sun  
and tumbled. your wrist switches behind mine,

the weight of your frame: you pick twigs from your shoes  
and step into air where the bridge is missing.  
I—brickworks converted to wetland where clocks only visit,  
shamed beneath sleeves: sheared springs and dried Li-ion—  
your feet where yellow steel hollowed water, green rain  
slants about you. your fingers moorhen red bark, take hold;

your arc on the pepper scent of swamp cypress: photographs  
of flowers, hand-made frames. rain dried, and I—hundreds of megacycles  
late—measured hip to heel in strelitzia, liquidambar, honey  
locust growing whiskers like plagued ghosts on beds of October.  
I walk three bridges with one hundred sonnets. pink jacket cinched in  
left fingers and right—remember your hand.

## Hundred Acre Rachelle Rechichi

Rachelle Rechichi's short stories have been published in *The Trouble with Flying & Other Stories*, *Award Winning Australian Writing* and *Shibboleth & Other Stories*. Her poetry has been published in *Poetry D'Amour*. In 2014 Rachelle was awarded the Margaret River Readers and Writers Association South West Writer's Prize, with the short story 'My House'.

Brown stuff settled in the water at the bottom of the pot. Jake stared at it. He knew that Mum was watching him from the balcony. He stared and she stood. She had the wind in her ears; she heard it there, the dry-burble sounds as it passed, and she heard it in the trees. They were dry sounds too, the shushing together of brittle leaves, banksia and jarrah, the swishing of blood as it passed through the body. It seems a lifetime ago that she first heard the sound of her baby's blood, his heartbeat coming through the doppler in the doctor's office.

He stared and she stood, then he kicked the ceramic pot with his foot. It was a solid pot, heavy, and his kick barely rippled the water.

She let out a breath of air. Not a laugh: it would have been better if it had been a laugh. She wondered if it would be better if she could remain unrippled like the water, when he kicked her; if she could laugh at absolutely everything. Every stupid bloody thing. Who would care? What would it matter? If only she laughed more, and everyone with her, that would be better. She didn't smile at the thought. It was far too impossible to imagine as reality. She couldn't think how to move the muscles of her face to turn them around, how to make them pretend to laugh. Even the imagined noise of it grated on her eardrums, drowning out the scrubby wind. Her head twitched a little, shaking the imaginings away, and the crease on her forehead grew a little deeper.

He knew that she was still watching, because he felt her eyeballs nailing him in the back. He felt her thinking about him, like bugs running all over his skin. Very soon, she would tell him to do something, tell him not to do something, tell him that something he was doing was not right, not good enough. Wrong. Bad. He kicked the pot again, harder this time. But he still only caused the edge of the brown mass to fray. A stick would do it. He

looked, and thought of Winnie the Pooh. It would be with him forever, he thought, from his childhood: that special connection between sticks and the tubby, sickly-sweet, dumb-arse bear. Once upon a time this could have been the Hundred Acre Wood, even though this bush seemed mostly dead when it was alive. It was strange that they had kangaroos in the Hundred Acre Wood. He never thought to ask about it, when it was being drilled into him; the stories, the poems. The ups and downs of the voice, hearing the voice through her chest as he rested his head. He could never take too much of it, even as a little kid.

Fuck the Hundred Acre Wood.

The stick was fat and grey and it messed the brown sludge pile up, stirred up the water so it didn't have a chance and perhaps it might never settle again. *That'll teach you*, he said to it privately. Then he scooped some sludge up on the end of the stick. He inspected it. It smelled like poo. He wiped it on the outside of the pot and went in for a second dip. This he flung across the pavers and up the glass door.

Jake, no.

What? It's not shit.

I don't care, it's still making a mess.

It doesn't matter. It's just leaves. It's just nature, Mum. Get out into it.

He pretended to wipe it all over himself. Awkward hands, arms. He thought this was the way it would be done, but he wasn't sure. It didn't feel right. It felt wrong. It felt bad. He didn't like nature. He didn't even like the word *nature*. Nature didn't like him either. It vomited him up and wouldn't take him back for a second try at digestion. Nature scared him.

Fuck this.

He threw the stick, spear-like. It struck a young jarrah and fell to the ground, not making much of a mark, while he stormed into the bush.

Jake, you need to stay here. This is meant to be together time.

It's fucked, Mum. Don't bother. Isolation. Crap.

Only footsteps, thrashed through the bush, thrashed at her ears. Amongst it, a gentle trill of sand spilling, caught up in heavy stitched boots and abandoned. Falling, falling, down to the earth again, like when blood pools in the feet. It falls from the heart, it drops, and it seems to take so long to get back up again. She seems to take so long to get back up again. So many things falling: the blood and the tears, the rain—*shit*, she remembers thinking, *when's this bloody winter going to end?* And then it did, and that was bad, too. That Footrot Flats dog, what was his name? There was a cartoon of him, sitting there (it was from so long ago, back when kids read the cartoons from the newspapers because, well, what

else could they do?) Poor old dog, sitting there all depressed. *It's winter*, he says, *everything is dying*. Maybe so, but hadn't anyone noticed that things keep dying all summer long, too? In fact, so many things don't make it through the summer.

And there went her baby, waltzing through the bush like the most unbush person, the most unjolly unswagman. Just wrong. She watched and he didn't look back, although he felt nails and bugs. *Her loss*, he thought. *My loss*, she thought. That heavy-hearted feeling had been the one thing that kept her here; kept her alive. A fear of separation. She stayed with it, let it come, let it tease her out, fray her edges. The tears would come; great big body-shaking sobs, face contorted. All the outward signs of anguish that she knew well. She'd practised for years, since her first tortured episode at the family dinner table when she was twelve:

What's wrong with you?

I don't know. I'm just sad, that's all.

What a fantastic piece of equipment is the reel-to-reel tape recorder? She would love to get her hands on one now. And that's how the mind shifted enough to bring her forward. It's funny how things are often not thought about, once they're gone. Only occasionally, a thought of them will pop up. A disembodied sound, like one recorded on the reel-to-reel, caught in her ears. The actor had left the stage. Now, only footsteps.

He often couldn't believe his own strength. *Just do it*, the voice in his head told him. *You can if you want to. What's stopping you? Only you, Jake*. And then, he could do things. There was a switch, the thinking switch, and it could easily be turned off. *And then the world is your oyster!* And then. A pause; a quiet time, a something. The world shifted about so much, it was always difficult to keep track. *I don't care*, he told himself when the switch tuned on again. When the brain was active, alive, the circuit complete. *I don't care, and I'll run, run, run and never stop. I'll run, run, run and never let anyone catch me*. He felt that sometimes his footsteps weren't just imprints; they were part of him; wafer-thin slices of him that were left behind. Grains of sand that bled out of him like an hourglass. He wasn't sure exactly what substance he needed to fill that empty space. But something. *Run, run, run*. Something. A fall.

All of a sudden it occurred to her. What the fuck had she been thinking? All this pain that she felt inside, the love she felt for her baby and how she would miss him terribly should they be parted, that is, should she part herself away from him, from everything (although everything else didn't matter at all, not one bit), all of the thoughts coming at once, she could see that nothing! Nothing would hurt her. She wouldn't have to miss

him terribly and be sad and tortured for all eternity. She wouldn't feel a goddam thing. She'd be just plain gone.

Her eyes widened and at once she stopped looking into the bush, staring after him. Blood pumped fast. It was a rush, like she'd had in the old days, before she was a mum, before she had to be a mum, without asking to be, without knowing how. But now, here was something new to feel, a new idea. She trotted into the cottage. Skipped. Danced. She danced inside from the balcony and flew down the steps from the mezzanine.

*Let's think about the future*, she thought to herself. *Let's do the do. Let's live like we've never before, and will never again.* She made a plan for tomorrow, to get them home safely, to get him home safely, to get him settled, get him okay. *He will be okay.* She piled a plate with the fancy treats she'd brought, as the counsellor suggested for their mother-son time. Stuff they both liked. He wanted microwavable chocolate pudding with aerosol cream and runny custard. On her plate were her favourites: raw broccoli and asparagus, a gourmet dip, cheese-stuffed peppers and wholemeal rice crackers (lightly salted). A handful of salted cashews and a glass of very special red. Very special red, a favourite of that very special person; the one who was not there now. The one she used to share things with. She plugged in and set her playlist playing. Her favourite songs gave away her age. Her really favourite songs: she never played them in company in case people laughed at her, but now was the time. Now was the perfect time.

She chose the best sofa to sit on and sat, not allowing herself to sink in just yet. Too many thoughts kept her upright. She looked about. The cottage was unfamiliar to her. She'd booked it as recommended by a friend. In fact, it was owned by a friend of a friend. In these rural areas everyone knew everyone else, but it was lucky she knew at least someone, and this is where she ended up. It was nice, homely, and she couldn't have thought of a better spot in which to celebrate this secret celebration. She knew she would have to work on keeping her celebrating under wraps. Disguise herself as herself. It would be too obvious, otherwise. Suspicious. She felt far too overflowing with everything good and wonderful. Gorgeous. It was absolutely not a word that she used, but she could use it right now, perfectly without discretion. Everything was gorgeous. And she could tweak it and say, simply gorgeous, and her thoughts were like little bubbles in a champagne saucer, they got to the top and disappeared very quickly, only to be replaced by new, completely different ones. People would think, *That's not normal.* People would ask, *What's wrong with you?*

It took a few glasses to soften her, to melt her thoughts and sprawl her body. After the second bottle was opened her chin rested on her chest and

apart from her breath she lay still. Future plans lost their hold; instead she was absorbed by tapestry cushions, tracing their intricate patterns, rhythm for the eyes. Over and over. The cottage was unfamiliar enough to unsettle her when she suddenly realised the sun had disappeared. She was in total darkness except for the wood fire. She stood. Stretched. Stared and thought. She switched on some lights, switched off the music and checked the time on her phone. *Shit*, she thought. *My playlist is fucking awesome.* She'd listened to it on repeat, and never tired of it once. Any of it. Logically, she knew she shouldn't be surprised at how good the list was, seeing as she had compiled it herself. Old songs. Good songs. Songs that sang everything under the sun, and some things even the sun didn't know. It made her feel like she was young again, listening to all that stuff. Young; so much more than the sum of its letters. She was all marshmallow and buzzing in the ears.

Jake?

The cottage was still now. Quiet without music. Her ears adjusted and the bush wind came back. It didn't ruffle her as it had earlier, but she was inside now, and she'd finished a bottle of red, a cider and two small bottles of fancy liqueur that her sister had brought her from Europe. She didn't feel the bubbles she'd felt earlier. She felt fuzzy. She felt that she needed to do something, to be something more than she was. She had to look after something, besides herself.

Jake?

There was a sigh deep in her chest. There was falling, there was blood pooling and not pumping and not breathing and not seeing straight. She sat quickly and hit herself on the head. She shook it to get it working again. Hadn't he come back from the bush? Was he still out there? *Fuck that boy*, she thought. She put her shoes on. *What time did he go out?*

In the morning, that is to say, when the sun finally came up, she put her shoes on again. Her euphoria had evaporated entirely. Within minutes of being out in the scrub last night her voice had failed. She had stumbled and bled. Her skin was a web of scratches from grey sticks, branches that had threatened to gouge her eyes out. The rustlings, the bumpings, but they were never him. Heart racing at the start of the fight, then falling to nothing. Almost nothing. Tears and sobs and collapsing onto the bed that wasn't hers; nothing was hers in this godforsaken, heartless, unforgiving.

Now she continued, quiet and heavy. She fumbled the laces. Outside. She wandered around out the back, in the direction he'd gone. She wandered up the front way, up towards the road. She sat down on bristling leaves, banksia men falling about her. So quiet. So isolated. She could die

out here and no one would notice. No one would find her. She leaned against the banksia tree; it didn't comfort her, not the way a mother would. A great mother tree would reach its arms down and wrap you. They'd be all paperbark, those arms, smooth and spongey. There came a wooshing in her ears, tighter than gentle blood and getting louder. It was something familiar, something from the city; the school bus, stopping to get her. She never wanted to get on. Never ever. The sound spurred her on and she stood. Up the drive she traipsed, all along, looking and calling. She broke out from the thickness of the scrub and onto the street, haggard, weary, worn. Daylight was even brighter in the street. Civilised and real. It felt okay and good. A rubbish truck wheezed along and as the driver leaned out.

You right there?

She searched for her voice: I've lost my boy.

How old?

Fourteen. Went out last night, in a huff, before sundown.

Giving you trouble, hey? If you're staying in the Collins' place, I'll bet he's bunkered down in the caves. Line of sinkholes out back there, you know? He'll be back for food.

Oh. Trouble, yes. Thanks.

She waved at the driver and put on her fake smile. Her face resisted. The wheeze of the outside world drowned in a whisper of dry jarrah. Just a whisper, a trickle, a weak pulse this morning. It looked to be a still day.

## Skip-A-Rope Sophia O'Rourke

Sophia Rose O'Rourke is a writer who has worked in film, television, radio and journalism. She was shortlisted for the 2015 Lifted Brow Experimental Non-Fiction Award, her poetry has been published in Plumwood Mountain and she was a 2016 recipient of *Westerly's* Writers Development Program with Margaret River Press.

Her feet pound the pavement. She gasps for breath. Her keys, iPhone, loose coins and work shoes thrash around in her handbag as it bounces off her shoulder and smacks her in the ribs. All she can hear is the dog's bark and the sound of its rapacious paws, as it closes in on her. Finally, the front door—locked.

'Stop! Stop! Get away!'

The dog launches itself and nips the side of her thigh. Adele screams.

Fight or flight?

Defence.

She pulls her bag off her shoulder and whacks the dog across its muzzle, twice. Yelping, it retreats and Adele fumbles for her keys, tipping the contents of her bag out onto the ground. She drops to the pavement and scuttles around.

A shadow flashes past her, she jumps up and presses her back against the door.

It's a girl wearing a school uniform and carrying an oversized backpack. She stands on her scooter with one foot on the break.

'Hey! Nipper! Come 'ere! Nipper!' the girl yells at the dog.

'Come HERE!' This time she deepens her voice and lifts the metal scooter, dropping it with a smack on pavement, demanding the dog's attention.

The dog walks backwards, still snarling, eyes on Adele.

Adele tries to find the lock with her hands behind her back, afraid to turn around, afraid the dog will get her when she can't see, but she can't find it.

'Nipper! Get over here!' says the girl. The dog reluctantly turns to look up at the girl and begins to slowly wag its tail.

Adele turns and runs on the spot, forcing the key into the lock, breaks inside and slams the door behind her. Inside, she presses her back

against it as a barricade. Her bag and belongings lie discarded on the ground outside.

'Come on! Go home!' Adele listens until she hears the wheels of the scooter on the pavement as the girl rides off.

'Did you see that Mike?' Adele calls out to her boyfriend, who is slouched on the beanbag, watching his iPad with headphones on. 'The dog from across the street just attacked me! I *smiled* at it when I was walking past, and it chased me to the door! Snarling and frothing at the mouth.'

Adele walks over to her boyfriend and lifts one side of his headphones off his ear. She lets it snap back in place and lifts her skirt. 'See that! It bit me!' She screws up her face, snarls and bites like a dog, commanding a reaction.

Her boyfriend presses pause on the TV show he is watching and looks at the red shape on her thigh.

'Whoa—what happened to you?'

'I was really scared! I couldn't run fast enough! I pulled my sling bag off my shoulder and whacked it in the face. With my bag!'

'Didn't break any skin. It'll go away. What were you doing across the street anyway? I told you not to pat dogs you don't know.'

'Well, I've always liked dogs. I didn't know it was going to do that.'

Mike rolls his eyes, and goes back to his screen.

Adele kicks off her ballet flats, checking her legs for damage. She reaches down to her swollen feet and presses her thumb gently into the skin blisters, careful not to break the surface.

'That bloody dog. Why do people have dogs like that?'

Her boyfriend lets out a laugh at the video he's watching, and holds out his glass for Adele to fill with water. She grabs it from his outstretched hand and walks back to the kitchen, manoeuvring around the pile of cheese encrusted dishes that rise in a menacing mound from the sink.

'Jesus! Couldn't you have at least done the washing up?'

Adele runs the tap on full and squirts out more washing liquid than necessary. She shoves the pile of dishes in, watching as they refuse to sink to the bottom. She starts scrubbing the plates so vigorously that water splashes out of the sink and onto the floor.

Across the street, a car pulls up, and someone turns up the music.

'Now they're having a party!' she calls out to Mike.

Adele tunes her ears to the neighbourhood sounds. Two men are laughing, and a woman, the subject of the joke, defends herself.

'*Yeah and you can do better aye? Go on then...*'

The laughing gets louder. Another car pulls up. Someone yells something out and the woman yells back.

'*Everything's a fucking joke to you aye? You wanna take life seriously for once.*'

Adele focuses on the plates, rinsing them off at speed in water that's a degree too hot for her hands.

'No wonder that dog went for me. Listen to how that family across the street talk to each other.'

The yelling gets louder. Someone says something about 'someone's woman' and Adele hears a bottle smash.

'I don't want to hear this!'

Fed up, she walks across the room and tunes the radio. It's a country and western song, with a rhythmic and repetitive chorus.

*Skip a rope, skip a rope,*

*Oh, listen to the children while they play,*

*Ain't it kinda funny what the children say,*

*Skip a rope, skip a rope!*

The radio is loud, but not loud enough to drown out the yelling.

'*Next fk'n car that comes past here—I'm gonna THROW YOU in front of it—right in front of that fk'n car.*'

Adele, next to the window, pauses to listen and look out.

'*And you'll be dead! Ay? Ay? Is that what you want?*'

Adele looks away and turns to face her boyfriend.

'Hey, can you hear what that man's saying across the street?'

He nods at her, apathetic to the situation.

'He's saying he wants to throw the woman under a car!'

No response.

'Babe, don't you think we should call someone? It's getting really loud. And I think there are kids in the house.'

Her boyfriend stares at the iPad screen.

Adele bends down, lifts one earmuff off and puts her hand over the screen.

'What? What do you think we're meant to do about it? The police probably already know. I'm trying to watch something, Adele.' He pushes her hand away from the screen.

'I don't care what you're watching!'

She turns the radio up louder. The rhythm of the song mimics a skipping rope, swinging through the air and hitting the pavement. Adele nods her head, attempting to lull herself into the rhythm and goes back to the dishes in the sink.

*Skip a rope, skip a rope,*

*Daddy hates mommy, mommy hates dad,*

*Last night you should've heard the fight they had...*

But across the street, the man yells louder.

*'I'll fuck'n throw you....*

*ANSWER THE FUCKING QUESTION*

*I asked you one fuck'n thing...*

*DROP THE FUCK'N CHARGES.'*

'He's walking away from her now... No, he's walking back towards her... He's holding something... I can't see what it is... Oh, it's a skipping rope. What? What's he doing? I think he's going to hit her with it. No! He's standing right behind her... I think he's going to strangle her! Hey! He's going to strangle her with that rope! Call someone. Call the police!'

Mike doesn't react.

'Give me your phone!'

Mike takes mobile out of his back pocket and chucks it to Adele. 'Don't overreact.' He readjusts his headphones.

Adele dials ooo.

'Hello, I'd like to report a domestic. 18 Gill Road... Um I think so... I hear yelling—a man yelling at a woman... Yes, the family has kids... Armed? He's got a rope! A skipping rope! I can't see from here... How long? Ok. Thanks. Thanks.'

Adele takes the phone away from her ear and stares at the screen for a moment, blinking and holding her eyes tight shut, nodding—as if she's confirming to herself she has made the call. Realising the call doesn't stop the problem like in the movies, feeling silly that she thought it would.

*'Drop em! You drop em or I'll choke ya and throw you in front of the next fuck'n car that comes past.*

*'DROP THE CHARGES YA CUNT. Drop em...*

*'I'll fuck'n kill ya! I Fuck'n will.'*

Adele turns the radio up another notch. She walks back towards the kitchen and starts doing the dishes again. But she can't block out the noise.

*Daddy hates mommy, mommy hates dad,*

*Last night you should've heard the big fight they had,*

*It gave little sister another bad dream,*

*She woke us all up with a terrible scream.*

The dog is barking. The man is yelling. The woman is crying. Adele tries to ignore it.

*'STOP IT!!'*

It's the girl. The girl who called the dog off.

Adele drops the china bowl she's holding. It shatters at her feet. She turns to look out the window. She can see the girl across the street, standing behind the fly screen door, watching on.

*'Ah, fuck off you! What you crying for? You're just a fucking kid. Get back inside. Get!'*

The girl across the street persists though tears. '*St - st -st stop. STOP!*'

But Adele can't watch. She pulls the curtain over the blinds. Cups her hands over her ears. She sinks down onto the floor, curling up like a child. Rocking herself to the rhythm of the song. It is as if she is recalling something she doesn't want to remember.

She hears the beginnings of a police siren; it gets louder, louder, louder. Red and blue police lights stream through the windows. The sound of the siren is piercing. The dog across the street barks. The song keeps playing. Adele curls up tighter on the floor.

Her boyfriend, seeing her curled up, pauses his TV show and, stretching his foot out, nudges Adele in the ribs with his toe.

'Baby—what are you doing?' He's almost laughing—the kind of laugh that reveals discomfort by masking it.

'Don't fucking *kick* me!'

'Don't swear at me like that when I'm trying to help you! I told you to ignore it! It's not your problem!'

Adele hears the police car pull up. The siren stops.

*'Who called them? What they gonna lock me up? Is that what you want? Fk'n good. You dumb bitch I asked you one fucking question. Drop the charges... and you done the fucking opposite!'*

Adele hears the man across the street being dragged into the police car. The door slams. The woman across the street is wailing.

*'I don't want to press charges! We just had a fight.'*

The officer responds, officiously: '*It's alright. Our job is to ensure your immediate safety. We're sorting something out for tonight.'*

*'No. No. It's alright we can sort it out.'*

Adele hears another car door open and shut. The police car speeds off. The dog howls. Adele unfurls herself and sits for a moment, looking at the mobile phone in her hand. She stands up. Her foot is bleeding, she has stepped on the china bowl that she dropped.

Adele reaches for the radio, turns it down a few notches.

*Never mind the rule just play to win,*

*And hate your neighbor for the shade of his skin,*

*Skip a rope, skip a rope.*

She walks back to the window, trying not to put weight on her cut foot. She opens the curtains, and inches the blinds open.

The house across the street is quiet now. Silent.

And then, she hears the fly screen door open. The girl across the street walks out and picks up the skipping rope in driveway. She starts.

The sound of the skipping rope as it thwacks the pavement is repetitive.  
Almost comforting.

*Skip a rope, skip a rope,  
Oh, listen to the children while they play,  
Now ain't it kinda funny what the children say,  
Skip a rope, skip a rope.*

## **Bonfire on South Beach** Alexis Lateef

Alexis Lateef is a Perth writer. She has studied English Literature and History at The University of Western Australia, and her work has appeared in *Westerly*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Southerly*, *Island*, *Australian Book Review*, *Cordite*, *Collapse Board* and in other places. She is editing her first collection of poetry.

A bonfire on South Beach  
is our boldest love,  
our freest of freedoms.  
We coax twigs like stray hairs  
out of stubble scrub,  
escaping Freo's lethargy,  
the shuttered shops like  
a row of eyelids along High Street.  
Paint peels from shop signs  
the way dead skin does,  
and newspapers tacked to windows  
are useless dressings on gangrene.  
In between Town Hall  
and the curve of Market Street,  
small businesses go to die.

Coffee prices hike in hasty chalk,  
scrawled on boards  
that we smudge  
with our disappointment,  
and scaffolding, like errant nerves,  
heralds shiny, new apartments  
that run like electric shocks  
along the roughened forearm of shore  
Granted, they shield us from public view,  
as we trudge through  
the supple dunes, sand slipping  
like secrets between us.

Someone jokes about this  
ugly façade of wealth,  
and we laugh while bruising embers.  
If we had money, we'd take over  
our beloved Market Street,  
make coffee for love, not money.  
It's all about good intentions.

But, in three years,  
some among us will have bought  
into the great Australian dream,  
like mortgages are what we  
long for, as we look into this fire.  
It is a racehorse fed on high stakes,  
but for our generation,  
it is thin, and gaunt,  
and Phar Lap has been dead  
for nearly a century now.

For now, we peer into flames  
with dream-sticky eyes,  
toying with a future  
where we are still reading Sartre,  
still confident  
that there are no chains.  
This is our ritual, this bonfire,  
one of the last times  
we tell ourselves we are free

A kind of purity, unchanged in our changing,  
despite overbearing steel,  
sky-rocketing prices of 'stunning beach views'  
and 'on the doorstep of a thriving town'.  
We chortle, superior in the knowledge  
that we would do it right,  
that we are not our parents.  
As with our predecessors,  
this tonguing ocean quivers,  
tastes our words and knows,  
that when the time comes,  
we'll take our places  
and our love for this town won't hold

As sure as life, we'll trickle out  
like apologetic water  
from a bust tank pipe,  
dripping into the sort of choices  
Sartre warned us about,  
his words trapped,  
in the ashes  
of our South Beach defiance.

**Peacock**  
Alexis Lateef

In the sun, Peacock parades  
as if in limelight. The quills of his neck  
glimmer like fish scales.  
He seems an ancient, hybrid god.  
We recognise him, as he turns  
and struts in a deliberate way.  
We have seen him in ourselves.  
His mad tail sweeps,  
the mesh of bright eyes  
repetitive, unblinking.

Peacock's feathered, perverse stare  
is too direct,  
and tunnels into delusion.  
Peacock has no need of it, not now—  
It is not yet Spring.  
A hen, pecking nearby, ignores him,  
ascribes no meaning.

But Peacock is a beacon  
for total attention.  
He is extravagant with his colours.  
Our own greens and blues  
barely keep up  
as he flounces across the subdued day,  
outdoing our drab century—  
a reminder of a prettier,  
more violent time.

Some of us point out Peacock's  
ridiculousness,  
but also, his graveness.  
His plumed head bobs at us—  
such a tiny appendage, so unnecessary.  
As if he reads our thoughts,  
Peacock, with dignity, straightens himself.  
He juts into bush and rose,  
that close behind him like rough curtains,  
to where we can't see him  
hang up his elaborate costume.  
We mill around, seduced without knowing,  
as the hens peck on.

## Smoke Amanda Gardiner

Amanda Gardiner is a postdoctoral research fellow at Edith Cowan University. Her work has been published in *dotdotdash*, *Outskirts* and *M/C Journal* and she was the winner of the Magdalena Prize for Research.

### Memory

My only memory of my Auntie Fenella is standing next to her on the warm pavement outside my Mum's beaten-up brown Datsun in Broome. I didn't want to have to sit next to her in the car and I was ashamed of feeling this way. Even though I must have been only four or five, I knew I should disguise what I felt and pretend I was comfortable sitting next to my Auntie. I was fiercely hopeful that Mum wouldn't make me.

Mum and my other Aunties moved about, chatted, as if everything was normal. As if Auntie Fenella was normal. I remember getting into the back seat, squeezing as far away from her as I could and feeling guilty for my behaviour. I was afraid to have any part of me touch her. She was so thin and her skin was very scary, like plastic. She didn't have any hands. Or a real face. I'm not sure if we spoke.

Extracting that memory and looking at it now I feel sad for both of us. Maybe she was used to it by then. Do you ever get used to little kids being scared of you?

I have tried hard to find the woman she was before the accident, to visualise smooth olive skin and thick dark hair, but I can't. This is the only memory that has chosen to stick.

I can recall other things. Like the phone ringing in the night. Mum answering, then sliding down the wall to sit on the ground with her legs bent up and her head leaning back on the wall as unfamiliar noises wrenched themselves from her body. It was deep crying, as if it lurched up from the centre of her stomach. She screamed at my Dad, *She's dead!* and I remember being transfixed by the vision of her and frightened by the sounds, of teetering precariously on that child's tightrope of being helpless and desperately wanting to help.

I see myself sitting with all the other cousins around a table, waiting for our parents to come back from what must have been Auntie Fenella's funeral. I watch Mum return through the dining room door and smile at me with eyes made different by weeping.

Then there was my cousin Bianca, Auntie Fenella's daughter. She was small and annoying and because Fenella was unable to look after her she lived for a while with my other Auntie, Marlena. But we don't see Bianca anymore.

Just as you cannot help who you love, you can't help what you remember. As with love, memories can punch themselves inside you. Bury their fist in your gut. Reach up, grasp hold of your heart and wrench it around to places you do not want to go. Like ghosts and dreams, trust and pain, they are portals to another realm. Shoving us from one way of being to the next, they pierce the core. And for her, my Auntie Fenella, all I have are these treacherous offerings. What does thirty seconds of 1980s Broome summer say about her? What does it say about me?

### Trust

For a few weeks in late 1984, my Mum kept a diary. In November of that year she had flown from Western Australia to Victoria to be with her younger sister, Fenella, who had been in a car accident.

When I told my Mum I wanted to know more about the accident she loaned the diary to me. I felt the weight of it so much, I couldn't read it properly at first.

It is written on an old airmail writing pad. The paper is wafer-thin, like tissues or skin, and each page is threaded back and front with spidery-tight, slanted writing. With both sides covered it is difficult to read because my mother pressed her pen so hard that the imprint of the first words on the paper carries over to shadow the inscription on the back. The dark scrawl is nothing like her usual, elegant hand. This writing feels like someone else had been pushing down the words; that the events she was living through changed the way her fingers held the pen, touched the paper, and the pages were too fragile to take the burden. The pain had to haemorrhage through.

But I want this struggle with Mum's strange handwriting. The process should be tough. Sharing her diary is an act of trust. A tacit acquiescence to my need to rip open this old wound and climb in.

#### 24 November, 1984

When we arrived, Melbourne was already stinking hot at 8am. We took a taxi straight to the hospital. Heat slowed everything down, as if we were moving through milk. Mum was waiting

at the gate. She had lost a lot of weight. She was so pleased to see us.

We went to visit Fenella, and on the way the doctors said again that it was more than likely she would lose the whole left hand and the fingers up to the knuckles on her right.

I was distressed by the time we reached her room. I was petrified I would upset her with my reaction.

She was in isolation, in intensive care. I had to put on gloves, mask, hat and a gown. There was a window in the door between and as I got dressed I was trying to peek, to get used to her before I went in, when she looked up and saw me.

I was so relieved that she could recognise me that I rushed straight in. I was talking to her for a few minutes and she mouthed out, *I didn't think you would come.*

Aunty Fenella mouthed the words to Mum because after the accident an ambulance driver inserted an emergency tracheostomy to allow her to breathe. He slit her throat and saved her life.

People who have a tracheostomy cannot speak in the same way as other people. Air goes into a hole cut just below their Adam's apple and can no longer pass through their vocal chords. Mum has simulated for me how Fenella spoke and it must have sounded like an invisible pair of hands was squeezing the words up from her throat. A bubble-pop of sound dying on the tongue. A fish yanked up, hook-in-lip to the shoreline, desperate for breath.

(As I write this I remember the glint of a silver tube in her neck...)

### **7.30pm Wednesday Night October 1984**

I had put the girls to bed when the phone rang. It was Marlena. She said, 'Fenella has been in an accident. She's been very badly burnt. They don't think she's going to live.'

It's difficult to describe the feeling. I didn't cry. I said, 'Perhaps somebody is being stupid and having you on?'

'No, it's true, and Anna is dead.'

When I closed my eyes there was a white light behind them. My heart beat hard, as if I had been running, or had woken up from a bad dream. My beautiful niece. We had only ever known her from photos. My little sister.

When I hung up the phone, Amanda and Elle were watching me.

I put them back to bed, got them out, put them back two or three times then decided, *yes, I'd better go to Hillary's.* I put

them into the car and drove over. When Hillary answered the door, I was hysterical. Elle was in my arms and I held onto Amanda's hand. I handed Elle to Hillary, let go of Amanda and sort of crouched in the doorway like I'd been punched, trying to speak, trying to breathe.

They said Fenella's face wasn't burnt. I presume we were told that as she was expected to die and there was no point.

My little sister Elle and I are in this story, but I don't remember any of it. How could something branded so deep upon the psyche of my mother have made no imprint on me? Maybe it did. Maybe what I witnessed burned itself into my bones. The kind of wound you cannot see.

### **Truth**

The accident happened in the morning but because Fenella had third-degree burns to fifty-five percent of her body, the hospital staff were unable to identify her and she was admitted as 'unknown female'. Some of the people who came to help her after the crash thought she was a man. The heat of the fire was so intense, the passenger seat of the car burnt down to its springs. Anna, my baby cousin, was burned to death in the back seat. It was the day before her big sister Bianca's birthday.

### **December 1984**

Fenella was travelling home with Anna. The car crashed, caught fire, and both of them were trapped inside. Anna lived for 20 minutes. Fenella heard her crying as they burned.

Across the bottom of this last diary entry is a notation in Mum's more familiar writing:

She recalls the doctor or the ambulance driver saying, 'Shall we let her go or shall we try and save her?'

One of the ambulance officers who saved Aunty Fenella visited her in hospital. Mum said Fenella mouthed to him, 'Why did you save me? Why didn't you let me die?'

### **Pain**

Skin—our largest organ. Guarding us, holding us together, it filters our world.

In Fenella's medical records there is a letter from the hospital in Melbourne to her new doctor in Perth. She was finally being transferred to Western Australia. The letter includes a list of medical procedures she had endured since the accident:

October 1984	Tracheostomy
3 November	Grafting of face
5 November	Hickman's catheter
13 November	Grafting of neck
26 November	Grafting left arm
6 December	Grafting eyelids
7 January 1985	Grafting right arm
17 January	Grafts to eyelids
24 January	Grafting right thigh
11 February	Grafting eyelids, left knee and both wrists
25 February	Grafting left trunk
8 April	Amputation all fingers and grafting hands, also releasing elbow contractures
29 April	Grafting eyelids, releasing of left side of mouth, grafting of scalp

Recovery was complicated by hematemesis, laryngeal stenosis, episodes of septicaemia, contracture formation, recurrent ectropions and colonisation with MRSA.

Hematemesis means vomiting blood.

Third degree burns go down to fat. The body can't make new skin to grow over the injury because all components of the epidermis are destroyed. That is why the list of grafting operations that my aunt underwent is so long; each time her doctors needed to graft over the permanent wound that was her chest, face, scalp and back, they had to harvest skin from the small portion of her lower body that remained undamaged. For more than six months the only parts of her that survived intact were re-assaulted. They would scrape those layers off, wait, just long enough, then do it all over again.

Contractures form because the scarred, fibrous tissue that results from a burn cannot bend and stretch, particularly when underlying muscles and tendons have been destroyed. The release of these scars is repeatedly required; otherwise a burns victim can become trapped by their own skin.

#### 6 December 1984

Fenella had some grafts done on her eyes today so hopefully she will be able to close them. Apparently the constant light may have caused ulcers.

I wasn't able to see her until 6 pm. She was still sleepy with anaesthetic. All I could see of her face was the end of her nose, and about an inch around her mouth. The rest of her

was covered in special dressings. The bottom of her nose is gone and her left ear looks beyond repair.

I sit in the chair. Fenella lies on the bed. Sometimes I read to her, or myself. A lot of the time I watch her sleep. Once she was so still I crept over and stood guard, willing her chest to rise and fall.

Moving hurts her. Being still hurts. The operations seem to stir everything up. So does the physio. It hurts to watch. She never says anything but I can see how she holds her body. They change the dressings every day and it takes two hours each time. We are not allowed to stay but when we come back into the room she holds herself like there are knives on her skin. Her skin is painful to look at.

I love her so much. The love is painful too. I carry it around with me thick and heavy. I was scared she would be dead and now I feel so guilty that I am glad she is still here. We don't talk about the baby.

I have been given the gold hoop earrings Fenella was wearing during the accident. They are in a clear plastic case, nestled on tissue, and the metal is still charcoaled from where they were burned black while in her ears. When I hold these delicate objects, I swear I can smell the smoke.

#### Tuesday 30th November

The nurse was cleaning the tube or something. I was sitting in the chair next to the bed, waiting, and the plastic got caught in the crust around Fenella's nose. Fenella didn't speak but she flinched and made a gasping sound. The nurse didn't seem to notice and just wrenched it out. I watched her do it and as the plastic came away there was a smear of blood on it. I saw the blood and something broke in me.

I cried and cried. Fenella was really very good, because I thought I would upset her more, but she just put her arm around me, to comfort me, and said, 'I will get better.'

Years ago a bushfire broke out in the vacant block near my Mum's friend Hillary's house. We all went over and stood across the street to watch air ripple and tree flame. I remember my fascination with the physicality of the heat and the way its presence reached out to us across the bitumen. Tendrils danced and ate. Snaking across the ground to annihilate the grasses, leaping high into the ether to run orange-gold fingers up the

spine of eucalyptus, their radiance drank the air, their touch drew infinite shades of autumn bushland colour back to black.

We knew the fire brigade was coming to put the fire out. We didn't think it would hurt us, or anyone else. But maybe my real fascination with the flames was that it might.

Fire sees us. Obeying no hierarchy, bestowing no privilege, she serves only the spark. Crackling between humans and the dark for millennia, she pares us back to elemental forces; her essence transforming blood, fat, organs, nails to ash. Metaphysical transubstantiation, fragile omniscience, we warm ourselves at her hearth, we think we can put her out, but she is always waiting. Cataclysmic forest fire. Intimate candle flame. Biding her time to be born again. No pity at all.

Mum said when Aunt Fenella got burnt her fingers split open like cooked sausages.

### **Power**

She had been a beautiful woman. People used to look at her because she was gorgeous. Now they just stared.

#### **2 December**

Fenella moved to the burns unit today. I went up with her and one lady watched us closely. She came over to me and asked, 'Is that your husband?' I said, 'No, my sister' and she said, 'Is she very old?' and was very shocked to think she is only 27.

I guess we're all going to have to get used to comments of that type.

Words hurled at you in anger, negotiated above you as you lie dying, whispered in hushed tones to your sister as if the way you look eradicates your personhood, are weapons. Silence too is a blade, both for those who suffer and for those who must watch.

#### **Wednesday, 1 December**

Fenella asked me today if I had a mirror and I said, 'No... do you want one?' and she said, 'No.' She also made me have a good look at her hand and then looked at it herself and said, 'Isn't it horrible.' So goodness knows what she is thinking.

Sometimes she's very happy and other times she's very distressed and upset.

She really wanted me to look at her hand and I didn't know what to say so I just nodded and didn't say anything. Her

fingers don't look like fingers. I made my face calm, tried to think about something else. She slowly turned her hand over, front to back. She didn't look at the hand, just my eyes. Then she looked and I watched her.

Mum said Fenella wasn't allowed a mirror or too many shiny things.

Held hostage by hidden knowledge yet protective of its pain, the secret-bound can be burdened by their family history even if they are not aware of it. Love, shame and kinship ties can make us feel responsible for another's suffering, or complicit in their mistakes.

Someone outside the concealed information, on being told about Fenella's injuries thinks, *what caused her car accident?* This is a simple question, but whenever I asked my relatives about Fenella, I sensed their unease and retreated. The smallest gesture clapped as loud as thunder. I learned how not to ask.

That is why I turned to Fenella's medical records. Records define: the operation happened, we injected this drug at this time. Always willing to share more of the forbidden, the papers were so patient.

My Aunt's medical records document a woman's loss of bodily sovereignty. When you are critically injured you become a helpless bystander at the crossroads of your life. Set adrift from all that came before yet anchored by her vulnerability, she surrendered her body to strangers in order to survive.

The pile of pages thick as my forearm is stamped with the professional reserve of the hospital staff. People wash Fenella, prick her with needles, anaesthetise, wake, cut open, sew up, wrap, unbind. Peel off skin, staple it back, take blood, transfuse. Observing, preparing, measuring, listening to her lament, quantifying her despair, compartmentalising her moments of hope, writing it all down. For me.

Here was a different kind of truth. Clean, cool sentences pressed against the daily agony that was a life. And I kept returning. Asking to feel those words over and over again. Because they did not give me silence. They did not ignore me, put up walls, tell me lies or make me feel like a traitor for wanting to know. They didn't judge. When you don't need to directly inflict hurt on the living to understand a secret, the only person you have to hurt is yourself.

## Grief

In the medical records, the same letter that supplied the detailed list of Aunty Fenella's operations also provides a summary of her accident:

### 21 June

...after being trapped in an exploding car, sustained 55% full thickness burns. (Her youngest child died in the fire). Burns involved her face, scalp, arms, thighs, back and chest. The fingers were assessed as unsalvageable.

*The fingers were assessed as unsalvageable.* Six words; a reasonable description. What else was the Matron supposed to say?

I have exactly the same hands as my Mum. I look down at my fingers, turn the pages of the records, and I think about that.

### 21/2 Hospital Nurses Report

Hands demarcating, fingers shrivelling—attention will be needed soon.

### 11/3 Hospital Nurses Report

Fenella talked about her hands today while they were being dressed—said they were 'terrible' and 'revolting' the nursing staff agreed that this was so but would not always remain the case. She refused however to discuss what might be the future treatment necessary.

### 23/3 Hospital Nurses Report

...also L thumb noted to be sloughing off and pt distressed.

### 25/3 Special Services Request Report

(L) thumb has fallen off.

### 28/3 Hospital Nurses Report

...was told today...that she will lose her fingers.

*(L) thumb has fallen off.* Mum has told me that when she found out Fenella's fingers were going to be amputated she rang up and spoke with her doctor on the phone. She talks of how she cried and begged, pleading with the doctor, *please don't take my sister's hands.*

This was what they could not tell me. Who would want to know about it anyway?

I would. I kept opening up those records and I opened up myself. I put myself in a burned and broken body in 1984 and tried to understand what was done.

I stopped asking the living.

## Truth

The family story goes that the accident happened on a bridge. Fenella was driving along, saw smoke, and the next minute the car caught alight. Because the bridge was busy she was trapped and couldn't escape. Overcome by smoke and the heat from the flames, she passed out.

Yet every time I talked to someone who knew Fenella, they said a strange thing:

*There was a rumour...*

*I heard that...*

*We always thought...*

Couched in muted tones, camouflaged as afterthought, they murmured it at me from the edge of conversations, then pretended that they hadn't.

The rumour? My Uncle Quinn, from whom my Aunty Fenella was separated at the time, was a skilled mechanic. Everyone who knew them suspected he had tampered with her car to cause the accident.

I'm so familiar with this information that I don't remember who first told me. When I asked my family they would say:

*He was good with his hands...*

*It was an older car and there was a defect in the fuel or electrical line...*

*Cars catch on fire sometimes. We did wonder though...*

In a letter Fenella sent to the family, two years before her accident, she wrote:

Dear Everyone,

This is a community letter so you all hear from me [...] Quinn is away until February... I think he'll miss B. She's very much like him in personality. It's pretty cool at nights here, lovely in the day. My car caught on fire the other morning when I tried to start it, gave me a fright. Always happens when Quinn's away.

My mouth was full of dust and ash.

*He was a very good mechanic.*

## Shame (or Love?)

My Aunt and Uncle were separated because a few months earlier, Fenella had accused Quinn of sexually abusing my cousin Bianca. Bianca was put into foster care. My Aunty moved into a women's shelter with Anna and applied to court to get custody of both of her girls.

It was because Bianca was in foster care that she wasn't in the car at the time of the accident.

## Silence

At the State Library of WA, I spent days going through Victorian newspapers on microfilm. Surely Anna's death in a car explosion would make the news? Sitting in that dark room, staring at the blurry screen, I found nothing. Did I have the date wrong?

I emailed the State Library of Victoria, requesting assistance. When they wrote back, the librarian said they had located an article on the accident in a small weekly paper. They went on to explain that this was the only commentary they had been able to find. The details were so different from what I knew:

**Baby killed.** A baby girl died and her mother is in a critical condition in hospital after a fire broke out in the car which was being driven by the woman along Smith's Road last week. Police report that the fire was first spotted by a group of DMR workers who were on the side of the road when the 26-year-old woman drove past. They saw the car go off the road and overturn. Using their water tanker, the workmen moved in quickly to extinguish the blaze. The woman and her child were taken to hospital, but were later transferred to a specialised burns unit. The child later died.

Two by eight centimetres of writing. It was not enough. Anna's death snapped my family off at the knees. Why wasn't the story on the front page of newspapers across Australia? *She was one of us!* each heading should cry out in a devastated chorus, *and she is gone, forever.*

I knew I shouldn't ask, but I had to: If the car caught on fire, why didn't Fenella just get out?

There were a lot of different answers:

*It was an older car and there was a defect in the fuel or electrical line.*

*It was going too fast for her to stop.*

*The car was smoky, hot. The smoke overwhelmed her and she couldn't brake.*

*The seatbelt was too hot, and she couldn't open it to get out.*

*It happened so quickly...*

*She was on medication or drugs and couldn't react fast enough.*

She was on a busy bridge.

He was a very good mechanic.

Anna would have been a woman now.

## Loneliness

I searched for over six months. Papers from a lawyer mentioned a custody case: Fenella had been to court the day before her accident. Why did she need a lawyer? What had happened in court? Had Quinn lost the case and tried to get revenge? I applied for access to the records but was denied. My family couldn't tell me either. Instead, they gave me more of Fenella's stuff.

She began to manifest around my house: in a shoebox on the coffee table; a folder on a chair; the photo album and letters in the bookshelf. With every gift, it felt like my relatives were letting these possessions speak for them. For her.

Some of the papers said Fenella had been sent to a mental health care facility. She had been doing 'reasonably well' until eighteen months after the accident, when she was notified about a coronial inquest into Anna's death and told she would be summoned to Victoria as a witness. 'Following that she had some rather strange behaviour and appeared depressed.'

### June 1986

#### Recent Happenings

- Has wandered from her ward to the maternity ward picking up the babies there, giving staff some distress.
- Has also spoken about her baby *not* being dead after all.

Fenella died 6 months later on the operating table due to complications. They held the inquest without her.

One of the witnesses who attended the scene of Fenella's accident said in his statement to police, 'The episode of the baby has upset me a bit.'

## Truth

Then I found the notes the psychiatrist made when he visited Fenella in hospital soon after the crash.

### 1984

The story that she attempted to burn herself and baby and history of husband's interference with daughter needs to be verified if possible and discussed with her. It makes for quite a complex psychiatric problem if true. I will continue to see her to explore these issues.

## Truth

Oh, what to do? What could I do? What had I done? *What had she done?*

## Bearing Witness

1984

In my need to find her I feel a kind of quiet inside the hiss of steam.

The car hurled past, fishtailed. I ran to it as it overturned, burst open like a terrible flower. Tried to get close, but the heat rolled me in a wave that singed my hair, made my skin too tight. More fire surged from the upturned bonnet, forcing me back, and two shadows struggling within the grip of wicked flame brought me to my knees.

From my knees I watched the DMR workers pour water til their tanker emptied. Took in staccato bites of sound as shouts pierced the vapour haze. One man yelled into the truck radio, the others darted in, fell back, wrenching at a door fused with heat, crushed by momentum and a handle still too hot to touch.

There's been an accident. A crash. The car, it was on fire. Can you call the ambulance?

*Fuck. Try the other side! No, yeah, that's it. Fuck! Do it again.*

Shit. Yeah, a fire. It ran off the road. Yeah. Near the stop sign. I dunno why. Hurry.

*Wrap this around it, should we smash the glass?*

We put it out but the water's all gone and there's still smoke. I dunno where from! Hurry, mate I think the driver's still alive.

*Can you reach? What'daI do? Can't pull him through the window?*

The car rocks on its back.

They don't see me crawl over the fallen glass to the rear passenger door. Crouch down to peer inside. My eyes take a moment to adjust from the sear of the sun. Inside is otherworldly. Thick. Topsy-turvy, floor-on-the-ceiling, each surface drips. A fug of damp smoke, blood, shit and piss, cooked vinyl, charcoaled cloth, flesh. The awful caustic stab of burnt hair.

I've found her.

Before I can reach her, Fenella's door gives in with a shriek of metal. Midday light and the faces of two men appear in the space. They hover, hesitate. Their eyes afraid but pretending not to be. Each gaze carefully shuttered against the sight that is her face. She is prone, stretched out across both front seats. One arm raised, protective. They can't open the other door and they don't know if they should reach into this one and pull her out. They don't want to make it worse, hurt her. They don't know what to do.

'Hello?' asks the shorter one, gently. 'I'm Travis.' He squats lower. 'You've got in a bit of trouble haven't you mate.' It is not a question. He pauses. Coughs. Has to tilt his head almost imperceptibly to the side to fill his lungs with clean air. Turns back. 'What's your name?'

Fenella is trying to move, to speak, but a burnt-out voice box and no lips make words a strangled gargle. She tries to show him, but her fingers don't work and her mouth won't either and her mind can't think of anything else. Consciousness flits. He thinks she wants to hold his hand.

'Don't worry, the ambulance is coming.' Travis moves out his own hand, to reassure her, then his eyes catch against her arms, those fingers. He looks over his shoulder at his team.

'Where the fuck are they? He can't breathe. Does anyone know CPR? Should we call again?'

The taller man hurries back to the truck, snatches up the radio receiver, barks into it. Travis keeps talking to Fenella in a low, calm voice.

'It's ok mate. We've just gotta wait until the doctors come. We don't want to move you in case we...'

'Fuck.' He says that to himself.

He leans back, turns to the others.

'Should we just try to get him out?'

Between the four of them, they could do it. Edgy and clipped, they speak fast, make decisions. If the ambulance isn't there in five they will try. There is so much smoke they are worried the car might re-ignite.

Fenella tries to push herself up. She is suffocating and what breath she can take pulls with a thin rattle that only she and I can hear. Her movements judder. The men outside keep talking. With a strangled cry Fenella tries to turn in her seat, to scream, to show them the most important thing, what they have missed, but pain makes reality slip.

We both know the workers have not seen the little girl burned black and held suspended in the air by the straps of her baby capsule. She isn't crying any more.

I see her.

Lying down in the crush and glitter, I force my torso through the window frame. Wriggle forward on my stomach. Stretch out my hands, supplicant. Blood trickles round my wrist as I carefully reach up and in between her body and the sopping fabric of the capsule, wrap an arm around her tiny frame, pop the clasp on the belt and back out with her clutched to my chest.

The light blinds me. Overwhelmed, I hunker next to the back wheel and there on the ground beside the car I cradle Anna. Nurse her up. Releasing her from the seat pulled her skin off in my hands. It curls in sheaves

behind shoulders so small they fit inside cupped palms. Underneath the burnt-grey and blood I can see that she is perfect. Perfect.

This precious being. This feather-light counterbalance on which the whole nightmare hinges. The beauty and the pain woven into the centre of everything.

With infinite delicacy I touch the tip of my nose to her tiny snub. Curve my spine to gather her closer, to brush fingers lighter than a butterfly kiss over the stubble of burnt hair, the closed eyes. *I have been looking for you*, I whisper into that tiny seashell ear. *I see you little one. I feel you. Please. Just open your eyes. Just take a breath. Just tell me this is all a mistake.*

We are only permitted this moment. My hopes brush her face and she flies apart like leaves. Rises up on the wind and disintegrates—the velvet-soft wings of a thousand silver moths. Her cinder, her ash, all that remains, melds into the air and I have no choice. I have to let her go. I watch. Tilt back my head. Breathe her in. I promise. *I will remember you, little one, and your mother.*

Midday breeze delivers the wail of sirens and the world comes back. The tall man greets the ambulance officers, directing them with anxious gestures. The fire brigade arrives. Travis leans in to tell Fenella that help is here and the ambulance officer asks him to step aside as she snaps on rubber gloves and squats before the open doorway. Even her practiced face is shocked.

Fenella stirs, digs into the present, and with her last breath mouths your name: *Anna*. Ethereal as smoke.

## tachycardia Grace Yee

Grace Yee's poetry has appeared in *HEAT*, *Meanjin*, *Sleepers Almanac*, *Going Down Swinging*, *Eureka Street*, *Island*, and *Southerly*. She teaches creative writing at the University of Melbourne.

they're tearing down the house,  
sucking out her dried up fibroid sack of a womb.  
the doctor says it's no longer fit for human habitation.

I was thirteen when she told me: *I don't know what love is.*  
at the time I thought it was a good line for a song I couldn't hear  
on account of the hairpins she stuck in my ears.

she had a doughy white face like a *cha siu bao*.\*  
we didn't know that inside she steamed from all that shit some uncle  
made her swallow back in 1952.

we could tell by the way she padded her chest  
that there was no chance for closeness.  
she had a feeble little heart, it beat too fast.  
it skipped, not with joy, but as if in a hurry  
to get to the end.

\* Steamed BBQ pork bun

**Marri and Milk**  
Marjorie Main

Marjorie Main hails from Torbay,  
WA. She currently writes and  
studies in Melbourne.

I

How must it have been for her—  
those nights when she had to keep  
an infant quiet, and so lost sleep, and so sought  
distance, pursued it through the marri,  
going further with each step  
toward a point of rest,  
that space clear of shadow  
where she might stand and catch her breath.

Perhaps sleep lies in the calm after a walk  
to the summit of a hill in the unseen hours,  
babe at breast, the house behind her,  
and still child enough herself to be scared of shadows,  
so singing—something from her girlhood,  
the Coventry Carol.

II

Sometimes, we'd go down the road for milk,  
to the dairy where everything smelt sweet—  
the vats of cooling milk, split bales of silage, fresh dung,  
and she would dip a shining jug, pour milk out to bottles,  
showing us how she held her hands clear,  
then send one of us off, rubbing gold coins together,  
while another drank the last drips from the jug,  
licked lips, and on her hip, the baby sat fat as butter.

In the years before our house had electricity,  
standing out alone in scrubby young jarrah,  
we seemed to exist as one being, by night  
settled together in the gas lamp's ring,  
or drinking milk from the dairy down the road  
in the porridge light of dawn.

## Memory Refrained Stevi-Lee Alver

Based in the Northern Rivers region of NSW, Stevi-Lee Alver has had her fiction, poetry, and reviews published across Australia and the United States. Rochford Street Press published her chapbook *Cactus* in 2016.

This morning in Amherst it was minus seven degrees Celsius. And as I walked to campus, I was surprised to find myself feeling grateful that the days were beginning to warm up.

On the flight from Sydney to Los Angeles, I sat beside a Scottish man. 'If ya don't want to feel the cold,' he told me, 'collect a bucket of icy-water and slush each morning, take it to the bathroom, strip off, and throw it over yourself,' his long rusty beard hardly moved as he spoke.

I haven't yet attempted to accelerate acclimatisation in this way and am skeptical that after being here for only three weeks, I've physically acclimatised to the North American winter. It's more likely a shift in perception rather than a physiological adjustment.

When I get home later today, my room will still be in a state of liminal chaos with clothes, adapters, chargers, books, pens and photographs still spilling from suitcases and onto the floor, unsure of whether they are coming or going. In the midst of the mess I'll clear a space, boot up my computer and Skype my brother. We'll talk about the magazine we're going to start, about the recordings we'll make when Lindsey gets out of jail, about books, surfing and poetry. And, for a little while, I'll forget that the only thing separating me from the glacial age lurking outside is a sheet of glass. This is memory speaking.

Often, I swing between memories like sugar-gliders briefly gripping boughs as they fly through trees.

Sometimes, not-so-long-ago is also a-lifetime-ago. Not so long ago, I had a crush. It was incidental and accidental, it was impossible and unbearable. It was that unavoidable hill on the walk home. Only when my breath is catching, my chest is pounding, and my muscles are burning, am I aware that I am exercising. Or, to be more specific, that exercise is being done to me. I'm not sure what is more memorable, doing things or having

things done to you, either way, tomorrow, I will remember her in a million different ways. This is memory jogging.

Often, I like to define.

**Memory** *n.* 1 the faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information.

Three weeks ago I sat tracing lines of mirages in sweltering heat and reminiscing over the springtime, when my brother and I caught waves beneath blossoming-blue clouds. It had been my birthday and watching my brother glide over green-reef and crystalline-ocean is an image I cherish. This is memory clinging.

Often, memory deviates definition.

Through the kitchen window I see squirrels eating apples fallen from the tree and Blue Jays eating seed, proudly perched upon the backyard bird-feed. I wonder why my brother and I remember things differently. Does he remember the smell of padded-walls, or air gasping as heavy doors shut behind us? I won't ask him; instead, I'll tell him about the time that I cultivated curry leaf twigs in dense tropical dew and sent them off in packages, flying in water-soaked rags and stamped envelopes, to land at her door. This is memory meandering.

Often, remembering is no stroll down memory-lane.

One year ago, with wet eyelashes, my brother told me the smell of gunpowder reminded him of blood-splattered walls. Those walls, I don't remember. With dry eyelashes I told him, 'the smell of gunpowder reminds me of skinned rabbits, smoked kangaroo and baked duck.' This is memory redefining.

Often, remembering is walking through valleys-of-death.

Two years ago, on the night of the supermoon, she was gone. I recently read that supermoons can cause all sorts of earthly explosions, cyclones, earthquakes, and erupting volcanoes. The moon was her favourite thing, and this one brought tsunamis of grief. This is memory enshrining.

Often, I remind myself that I am only one in the city of battered-yet-still-beating hearts that she left behind. This is memory relapsing.

Often, I remind myself to forget.

Sitting on my bed with pages of my manuscript sprawled about me I wonder whether I'm genetically inclined for longevity, certainly not on my father's side and it's doubtful that my current lifestyle is in any way compatible with longevity. And so it occurs to me that perhaps I've lived longer in the past than I can expect to live in the future. Perhaps I have more to remember than I have to look forward to. Perhaps this is memory becoming.

## Let the Heart Move the Hand Rosemary Stevens

Rosemary Stevens has a doctorate in Creative Arts from Curtin University, where she teaches creative and professional writing. Her short stories, travel books and articles have been published nationally and in S.E. Asia.

The girls swarm towards a cut glass vase overflowing with chrysanthemums, and claim their seats around the central table, leaving Anne stranded and feigning indifference with half a dozen others. The flowers are pink, white and mauve like the *Les Sylphides* ballet skirts on the tablemats at Anne's home.

Mrs Richards delves in her bag to retrieve another bunch of chrysanthemums, this time with the russet sheen of hen's feathers. 'I have these too. Fresh from my garden,' she says, laying the flowers on a smaller side table before rummaging under the sink for another vase. This one is celadon green, made of broad-bellied pottery with a faint web of cracks. She fills it with water, picks up the entire bunch and stabs them into the vase before fluffing them into a more studied arrangement.

The breakaway group who didn't fit around the main table drag their chairs before the green vase and measure the russet blooms with their pencils to gain perspective. Anne smooths her paper over a flat wooden board with its archaeology of paint spills and splintered edges. She dips her brush in the water jar, making figures of eight before considering the miniature paint bottles clustered next to it; yellow, blue, black, white and red. *Primary colours are all you need*, Mrs Richards had said. But Anne begins with no colour. Just water, spreading it on like glue until the wood pattern in the board comes through.

'Anne! If you make the paper soggy, you won't have control over the colours.'

'Yes, Mrs Richards.'

'Don't forget to mix your paints on the saucer first.'

'No, Mrs Richards.'

Anne pulls out her paint cloth—the bit of Dad's cut-off vest she keeps in her art bag—and dabs at the paper until it goes pliant and damp. The wood grain appears now as a watermark and Anne is satisfied that this is a

good starting place. A blank page, no longer pristine and perfect, but with a ghost of something that connects her as if through an umbilical cord to a feeling she can't yet define.

Red. She will begin with red. Raw on the page. Anne hesitates at the rim of the pot. No, not yet. Yellow. She pours a dollop onto the saucer. How much blue should she add to reproduce that subtle green of the vase? But when she looks, it isn't entirely green. It has an arc of light; a distorted oblong of window with square panes and tree shadow; a suggestion of clouds. Anne wants to look behind to check if the shapes captured in the vase *are* trees and clouds. And if the window is divided into six panes as the reflection suggests. But she won't turn to look, or else she'll break the spell.

Anne stares at the reflection on the vase. How hard it is to see what's in front of your eyes. And how much harder to paint it. She must be an alchemist like the one in Paulo Coelho's book who helps the shepherd boy find his treasure. Her art will be that treasure, this vase her pyramid. That's why the invisible strokes first; to feel her way into it; she sees that now. It's why she must work quickly and not stop to think.

*Let the heart move the hand.* That's what her dad says when she struggles with her bow on the strings of the violin. Is *this* what he means? This waiting and listening?

And now there *is* green, after all. It is a calm green, neither hot nor cold, and she will start there with yellow, mixing the colours on the saucer as Mrs Richards insists. And then a tinge of blue. She leans back to admire the effect against the bone-white china, sun and sky facing off from either side of the circular imprint made for the cup. Anne fishtails them with her brush until they bleed into each other. But it's too green. So, she takes a pinch of cloud and offers it to them to see if together they will give birth to celadon, the precise shade she is after. She watches and waits. Then, the holy trinity embraces and her chest expands. Yes. This colour. But how to make enough of it? And how not to spoil it with too much sky or sun? Too little cloud?

Holding the brush loosely, she lets the movement come from that sweet spot above her navel, the small flame that she has fanned with the paper-water ritual and colour-homage. *Think with your gut*, Dad would say, which is where the umbilical cord comes in. Teasing the paint with the tip of her brush, she has just enough to begin on the paper, tracing the colour down the left-hand side of the imagined vase, observing as it feathers out on either side.

'Look! Your paint's going all over the place! You should have drawn it first.' Sarah's page is covered with a geometry of strong, leaden lines,

squaring off the shoulders of the vase, creating an elliptical refraction of petals raying out from circular centres. 'That way, you know what you're doing.'

'Not everyone works your way, Sarah,' Mrs Richards says.

Anne ignores Sarah as best she can. She's too busy listening for messages pulsing from the flame, all but extinguished now by Sarah's breathy advice. Anne takes up a dry patch of her father's vest and pats at the curve where she envisages the outer edge of the vase, pushing the feathery tentacles east to where the light will rise in the window. But now she has run out of green, and if she tries to make more it will not turn out the same. Her stomach twists as she eyes Sarah's work, which is so much more advanced than her own, more defined.

'Girls,' says Mrs Richards from the gulf between tables, 'paint what you see. Not what you imagine.'

*And keep an eye on the flame.* Doesn't Mrs Richards know about the flame and how it connects you? It sends warm fingers under Anne's ribs and spreads into her abdomen. It doesn't matter that she's run out of colour. There is more blue on the saucer, more yellow, more white. She dallies with the brush, immersing herself in blue and yellow play. This green is darker, even with a dash of white. But it pleases her, and on impulse Anne splashes it on the edge of the paper vase. It rushes towards the celadon green, the two tides advancing until they merge and flow in a single hue towards the shoulder of the vase. The real vase has a yellow-white reflection on this side, not the bluish shadow of the paper vase. So now Anne understands she's painting a mirror image.

She dips her brush in the water, sending green cumulus into its clear depths, then pats it dry on the damp vest. Now white. But with a different brush. The thin one with the red plastic handle. She daubs on white in raw curvy lines to mimic light from the window. Two squat ones at the top, a long one in the middle with an arched back and laughing belly, then a medium-sized one underneath.

And now the flowers, which have been incubating in the flame all along. Fine-tipped red, then thin black lines applied direct to the place where the shadows will fall, even though Anne never thought about that, so that she will now flick yellow and white on the opposite side to make runways for the bees. These too are flames, these chrysanthemum canoes, and from now on Anne will know chrysanthemums and love them, which she never did before.

When she has finished, she steps back, amazed to see that the flowers spill way beyond the page, seeming to go on into eternity. It is not what she imagined. But the flame inside is dancing.

'Hmm,' says Mrs Richards, eyebrows raised above the rim of her glasses. 'Lovely colours.' She picks up Anne's work, pinching the top two corners between each index finger and thumb so the class can see. There is a seething sound in the room, which could be wind creeping in through ill-fitting panes of glass. Or silence.

'It has a nice sense of movement,' Mrs Richards says.

'There's no table underneath,' says Sarah. 'Looks like it's floating in space.'

'You could add that afterwards,' says Mrs Richards. 'Or not.'

'A bit smudgy,' says Katherine from the table opposite. 'And the flowers are the wrong colour.'

The flame flickers.

'Impressionistic!' counters Mrs Richards with a decisive nod.

Is it what Anne intended? What *did* she intend? All Anne knows is she didn't turn to look at the window; she did not break the spell.

Anne eyes the empty trunk retrieved from the nursing home, and sighs at its grubby contents scattered over her lounge room floor. Her dad's bow tie, funereal and frayed beside the broken violin, the golf ball scuffed from that last triumphant swipe. And now this. She opens her hand on a pink splice of gum, two teeth embedded either side of a gap, the wire still seeking the line of his jaw. A shudder erupts from her gut and she raids her sleeve for a tissue.

*A good innings,* he had said, his eyes glassy with knowing, the knuckles of his hands like stones in her palms.

Anne stares into the abyss of the trunk; at the near-perfect fit of the paper her dad used as a lining, and the geography of stains into which it gradually resolves. Picasso shapes and shadow marks where his Bible had lain, rust from his bicycle clips and dentures, the bow of his violin. It's all that's left. She shifts her gaze to the pile, runs her hand over the pigskin Bible, and sets it aside with the other book, *Falling Upwards: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, by Richard Rohr. The rest she tips into a bin liner: denture fragments, golf tees, initialed handkerchiefs, fragments of violin. She covers her nose and mouth with her hand, choking on dust, then fishes for the paper lining at the bottom of the trunk. *This* she will keep, this shadow of a life that has grown into art; a timescape to cherish. She will hang it on her bedroom wall and watch as its patterns shift with the light.

It transfers easily to the glass coffee table, where Anne considers its curling edge. What *is* that on the underside? She crawls over to lie with her head on the floor, looking up through the glass. Red and green swirls

rain down, and her lip slackens at the sight of that voluptuous green vase with its bright canoes of colour. Her old school painting. She squeezes her eyes against the memory of her teenage ambition, and the questions that come flooding in with a sting. Why had he set it face-down like that, with everything piled on top? As a mere expedience, perhaps? A containment for life's leavings? Or did he mean to keep it? To treasure it, the way she should have done? Anne can't remember the last time she picked up a paintbrush. The picture blurs in her vision, setting the red flames dancing over the jade-green vase, as she gives in to the salt caress on her lips and cheek. She sees the broad palms of her father's hands, the quick, long fingers positioning the paper face-down. It's a protective gesture towards those red flame-petals, still vibrant with promise: *hers*.

## Public Relations Helena Kadmos

Helena is the Krishna Somers Postdoctoral Fellow in Literary Studies at Murdoch University. 'Pilgrim Statue' is drawn from a short story cycle written as part of her PhD project.

Stacy clenched buttered toast between her teeth, pulled her hair back into a ponytail and stooped to refresh her Facebook page. A string of random shares appeared from her sister Emma, back in Perth. There was also a post from her mum, a photo of a gorilla nursing a snow-white kitten. The caption read: *Keep your f#%\*ing paws off!* To encourage her, Stacy liked it.

She checked the time on the bottom of the screen. She was determined to beat Rupin into the office today, but couldn't shut down without checking one other page. Blocked from his news feed, she enjoyed looking at his cover photo nevertheless. His grey eyes drew her closer to the screen. She moved the cursor over his *add friend* button, but left it there, her finger above the track pad. Of course she didn't press it.

She buttoned her jacket and flicked crumbs off her shirt. She readjusted her black tights and skirt. A bit of powder on her cheeks, a swipe of eyeliner under her eyes.

Five minutes later Oxford Street engulfed her in an oily brew of petrol fumes, cigarette smoke and cooked breakfasts. She walked fast in her flat shoes, past a designer clothing store, massage parlour and Gloria Jean's. The seediness of inner Sydney could still rattle her, like the sign above a bottle shop that read 'Lick her here'. She blushed anew and walked hurriedly across the intersection into Hyde Park. Leafless branches laced the sky. Wind whipped her calves, lifting dry leaves into the air. One hooked on her jacket, and, a second later, loosened and twirled away.

On Elizabeth Street she passed through glass doors into the pink-tiled foyer of the office building, which housed Bloom and Penny on the fifth floor. She moved from one darkened room to the next, turning on lights and opening thin, venetian blinds, relieved to have arrived first. Cathy, the senior consultant, was on her honeymoon. That meant new opportunities for juniors ready to grab them.

Stacy had been working in a small children's charity in Perth when Ros Penny called to offer her this job. Unable to control her excitement she'd gushed her thanks into the phone. At first, the pace excited her. She'd lie awake at night, mulling over clients' names, projects and new ideas. But at some point, things slowed. She'd wondered if she'd just grown used to everything, or if she'd gone as far as she could, come up against a wall that wasn't going to yield in the foreseeable future.

Then, three months ago, Rupin joined the team. Much was made of his first-class Honours from Monash. Jeremy liked having another man around. A fellow rugby-nut, an ally in a field of women. Melanie made a fuss about his tight-fitting suits, dusky cinnamon skin, and rich brown eyes. She said he was like a Bollywood movie star. Within days, he was sharing jokes with Melanie that left them both giggling, and Stacy feeling excluded. It had taken her months to feel truly comfortable with the directors, and though Melanie was friendly, Stacy couldn't let go of a suspicion that the younger intern judged her to be wanting. Her shabbier clothes, perhaps? Uninspiring social life? Rupin's arrival had reignited something, a flicker of ambition she'd allowed to dim. She wanted to remind Ros and Jeremy, and herself, that she hadn't yet shown them all she was capable of.

Twenty minutes later she, and the rest of the team were gathered on deep-cushioned couches at the heart of the office. Everyone, even Jeremy, waited for Ros to kick off the meeting.

Ros was nearly sixty. Her short bob had been allowed to grey. She wore pantsuits, bright beads and colourful earrings. Stacy thought her make-up seemed just right for a woman her age, hiding the blemishes without being too obvious. She looked up to Ros, but felt she had a way of looking at her, which made Stacy uncomfortable sometimes, as though she wanted something from her. If Stacy had to name it, she'd have said sisterly solidarity. Something old-fashioned like that.

More than a decade younger than Ros, Jeremy was more casual with the team than his partner, but whereas Ros's intensity made Stacy brace herself sometimes, Jeremy's easy manner left her floundering on the sidelines of a tighter circle that seemed to knit Jeremy, Melanie, sometimes Cathy, and now Rupin together, and to which she was eager to belong. Appearing to embrace that circle now, he sank into the cushions and stretched his arms along the top of the couch, winking at Stacy with the same grey eyes she'd stared at on her laptop screen that morning. She cringed at the memory of checking him out online, a habit she couldn't shake. Not a crush exactly. A search for something, though she wasn't sure what.

If anyone was to see through her it would be Melanie, who was savvier, Stacy thought, than people gave her credit for. In a light-coloured mini skirt and black, tight-fitting top, Melanie sat beside Jeremy. Her heels were so high they thrust her bony knees upwards, upon which teetered the notebook she'd type the minutes into. Her blue-painted fingernails pecked the keyboard. Her blond hair fell in front of her face and she tossed it back. Beside her Jeremy rolled his head from side to side as if easing a crick in his neck. His arm disappeared behind Melanie, who stopped typing. Stacy sensed she'd missed something. She tried to recall Ros's item—something about a nursing home—but Rupin had taken the cue.

'An old guy was throttled by another resident on Saturday, right? Bruised badly.'

'Southside Homes,' said Jeremy.

'No charges were laid,' Ros added, 'but the press picked it up, and Southside's CEO, Mark Collard, has an interview on community radio tomorrow morning. He wants our help.'

Stacy didn't miss this time. 'A research brief?'

'This is damage control, so we've got to push the best story we can about Southside.'

'Local, community-focused...' Stacy began, but Rupin cut across her.

'Dementia care's the core issue, isn't it? Lack of specialised training...'

Stacy appealed directly to Ros: 'Federal budget?'

'All good points. Stacy, check recent press releases, the allocation to aged care, and where the money's going, but we need to push Southside's unique approach.'

'Euthanasia?' Jeremy quipped. Rupin guffawed and Melanie groaned.

Ros cut in: 'Gardens—involving residents in their design and care. I'll email Cathy's notes to you, Stacy. See what you can do with them.'

'Sure.'

'I'll need it by four. I'm out this afternoon. I'll come back here to proof and send it before I go home.'

Ros moved onto other portfolios. She kept discussion tight and brought the meeting to a close. But over the chatter of the dispersing group she added: 'The Women in Business Cancer-Care Breakfast is tomorrow. Gillard's speaking. Cathy's ticket's available. You interested, Stacy, or you, Mel?'

Stacy's heart skipped at the offer, but a tweak behind her knee made her twist around. Jeremy lifted a dried leaf from her tights. She pulled her leg away. A thread of nylon snapped.

'Oops,' said Jeremy, grinding the leaf between his fingers and catching the crumbs in his palm.

Ros was addressing Melanie. ‘You’ll meet useful contacts, so bring a notebook. And the food’s good too.’

Being distracted by Jeremy and pipped by Melanie was too much for Stacy. Stupidly, tears threatened. Ros went to her office, Melanie to reception. Rupin followed Jeremy; the two talking over each other about the Rabbitoh’s game at the weekend. Stacy settled at her own desk, determined to reconnect with her resolve to make an impression.

On Southside’s home-page, a slide-show rolled across the screen: silver-haired men and women, all white-skinned, some with nurses by their sides, outdoors in sunlight near plants and flowers. In one picture, an ancient-looking man in a wheelchair was positioned near a raised garden bed, a small spade across his lap. The brightness of the graphics made Stacy uneasy, as though the light was actually hiding something. The reality that this might be her one day was too removed to take seriously. She couldn’t even visualise her parents that old. The pictures brought to mind imperfection. Decay. She shrugged the idea away.

Ros checked Stacy’s progress before she left in the early afternoon. Stacy wished Jeremy would pass by her desk too, but he only came out twice to give instructions to Melanie. By mid-afternoon she was close to finishing, but also starving. She ducked downstairs for a bite to eat.

She returned with a sushi combo to see Rupin walking out of Ros’s office, hands in his pockets, one shiny black-pointed shoe stepping smartly ahead of the other. Melanie was right. He *was* good looking. But Stacy couldn’t get past a caginess she detected, something in the way his eyes flicked about the room when he spoke.

‘Wondered where you’d gone,’ he said, quickly. ‘I found a local government report. It’s there if you want it.’

‘On Ros’s desk?’

‘Your inbox.’ Almost nervously, he slid onto his seat and pushed the ear buds from an iPod into his ears.

His interference jarred with her. The file was there, but Stacy scanned the document and noted smugly that it didn’t add anything to what she’d already found. She felt she’d nailed the brief: clean, clear, punchy. The time was three forty-five. She emailed it to Ros.

Elated, she looked around, half-expecting to see the others cheering on. Jeremy was at Melanie’s desk, hiding her from view. Stacy thought about joining them, but he pulled away, throwing a line behind him that only Melanie heard. Melanie let out a tiny squeal. While hating that kind of girlishness, Stacy felt a pang of envy that Melanie could switch between that and the serious, ambitious persona that had grabbed the opportunity Ros offered that morning. Jeremy stopped beside her desk.

‘How d’you go with Southside?’

‘Done. Sent to Ros.’

‘Good girl.’ He stepped backwards a few paces, pointing his index fingers towards her like pistols. ‘That’s my star.’

Stacy smiled, but his praise felt lacking. As the hour passed, and Ros didn’t show, Stacy’s upbeat mood faltered. Jeremy emerged from his office, briefcase in hand, at five fifteen. ‘Get outta here,’ he announced, with a grandiose wave. He left, with Melanie on his heels, but Rupin waited for Stacy to shut down her computer. In spite of herself, she was grateful. As she and Rupin left the building, a sharp wind blew past, making her hesitate. In that brief second, she saw Jeremy and Melanie disappear into the underground car park. Rupin had seen them too, though neither of them said anything. They parted in opposite directions. Stacy’s phone rang. She yanked it from her bag. It was her mother. She switched it to silent, braced herself against the whipping breeze, and headed home.

The image of Melanie and Jeremy stayed with Stacy. Sullenly, she picked at her toenails, half-watched the muted TV, and listened to her new *Boy and Bear* CD. She drank two passionfruit Vodka Cruisers with her bowl of instant noodles. She intermittently commented on Facebook posts and chatted with friends. But without Ros’s feedback to mull over, her sense of accomplishment waned. She opened a third Cruiser, let the fizzy liquid pool in her mouth until it flattened and warmed. When it was finished, she rubbed her hands over her face and eyes until her skin tingled. Yawning and scanning for any final, juicy titbits, she saw a post from Rupin: *gotta love the rabbitohs*. Uninterested in rugby, she would’ve scrolled past it, but the first name in a string of comments caught her eye: Jeremy Bloom. A panicky feeling rose inside her. How long had he and Rupin been friends? She clicked and when Jeremy’s page loaded, checked his friends list. Scanning it quickly, she found it. Melanie’s name. The sight of her familiar thumbnail picture sent a jolt through Stacy. She pounded on the track pad, sending the cursor across the screen to the *add friend* button, and clicked as soon as it got there.

She sat on the edge of the bed in her underwear and black tights, her shoes in her hands. They felt heavy; the soles thick. It seemed to her that those shoes, along with everything else about her, had failed. How were they helping her impress her bosses? What could she learn from Melanie who, at that moment, was enjoying the breakfast and chatting up the contacts that should have been Stacy’s? Disgusted, she tossed the shoes

back into the bottom of her wardrobe and took out the highest-heeled pair she had—black with tiny bows at the toe. She yanked the thick tights off, stepped into the shoes and assessed the impact. She craved to feel lighter, fresher, to own that particular brand of ease that girls like Melanie had.

She fished out a pretty, cream blouse that she rarely wore. She left the top two buttons undone and drew her blazer over the top. She took longer than usual with her make-up, applying foundation and lipstick, though lost her nerve when she saw how bright it was and dabbed it with a tissue to lighten it. She pushed her hair forward, parted it with her fingers and ruffled it back again. It was boring brown, not blond, but in that moment, it crowned a figure in the mirror who she hoped looked more self-assured.

The morning was still and cold, and without the tights, goose bumps popped over her skin. She walked fast to warm up, but the heels made it difficult. Still, she reached the office early again, in time to stream the Southside interview through her computer. It took all of six and a half minutes, but Mark Collard got in the points Stacy had highlighted for him. She clenched her fist, willing her success to boost her mood. She checked her emails and logged into Facebook. Jeremy's acceptance was there. So, she thought.

If Rupin noticed anything different about her when he arrived, it didn't show. He seemed preoccupied with his own thoughts. Strangely, Stacy couldn't muster the ill-feelings towards him that had dogged her for weeks. She had more than two years' experience on him, after all, and her inability to hold on to that said more about her, she knew, than him.

Jeremy arrived and called them together. Sitting down, Stacy's legs, propped up by the heels, felt alien to her. She thought of the friend request too, swirling in the space between them. But Jeremy's face didn't reveal any sign that it was of consequence to him. Rupin, however, was unusually quiet. He bit his thumbnail. Stacy hadn't noticed him doing that before.

'Mark's interview went really well this morning,' Jeremy said. 'Nod to Stacy for that.'

This was more like it, almost a relief. How grateful Stacy felt towards Jeremy at that moment.

As was customary they reviewed the interview, trying to guess at possible listener reactions, favourable and otherwise. Rupin thawed as the discussion continued, contributing, Stacy admitted to herself, perceptive observations. But afterwards, back at her desk, Stacy felt unsatisfied. She wondered if she could prod anything more out of Jeremy, some idea of other opportunities she might reasonably expect. She leafed through her in-tray for something plausible to seek his advice on, and pulled out the draft of a publicity brochure.

She stopped at his door. The extra inches of heel altered her view of the room.

'Jeremy, can you spare a minute?'

He spread his arms across the desk. His eyes wandered over her.

'You look very nice today, Stacy.'

Her stomach fluttered uneasily. She patted the collar of her blouse, instinctively closing the opening. He tapped the space beside him.

She edged around so they both faced the door. She felt too tall in the heels, and buckled her knees to lower her height. She pointed to the first page of the leaflet.

'Here. I'm not sure about the grammar.'

'That's not usually a problem, is it?'

'Sometimes. I don't *know* this stuff, like you and Ros do.'

He drew a line across a couple of words. 'You can't leave this sentence like that.'

She wanted to ask why, but the question caught in her throat. While he talked about clauses and active voice, his hand was doing something odd. He was possibly just drawing her closer, like a father would, and it seemed childish to resist. But what started as a solid, firm pressure behind her knee, travelled upwards, reaching under her skirt. She began to panic, realising that she should have pulled back at his first touch, but now wasn't sure she could. Her chest grew tighter, her breathing more rapid. Her face burned. She lowered it; her hair fell forwards. She felt small. The fingers of one hand curled around the edge of the paper, folding the corner into a triangle. The other clutched the back of her skirt. His hand continued proprietorially. His voice was steady, as though attempting to calm her, but his breath had a raspy edge to it.

Then a cough broke the tension. Jeremy's hand stopped. His fingers touched hers through the fabric of her skirt.

Shaking, Stacy raised her eyes. Rupin stood in the doorway, his face anguished and even inkier. She imagined the three of them from a distance, a tableau. That Rupin didn't look away, that Jeremy's hand didn't recede, repulsed her. Her eyes shut tightly to block them both out. She was transported to the crowded intersection on Oxford Street, under the bottle shop sign. She pictured Jeremy's hand on her leg as gnarled and wasted, like the old people's on the Southside website, and it was ugly to her.

She wordlessly pleaded with Rupin. He returned a suffering look, and understanding thudded inside her constricted chest. She saw now that these past months she'd been looking at Rupin from all the wrong angles, and missed something vital. The way he'd seek Jeremy out and appear

eager for his opinions. The fragile desperation she saw in him now was so raw it accentuated her own helplessness.

In barely a whisper, he stammered, 'I... I wanted...'

The pressure on her leg lightened to a sickeningly friendly rub, and Jeremy's hand reappeared on the table.

'Give us a minute, will you mate?' Jeremy said coolly.

Stacy backed around the desk, leaving the copy where it was.

'I'm done. Thank you, Jeremy.'

'Stacy!' He sounded flustered at last, a twinge of panic in his voice. 'Wait.'

She squeezed between Rupin and the door. She was going to throw up. Swaying unsteadily on her heels, she rushed out to the landing. She was pressing the elevator button when it opened and Melanie and Ros stepped out, Melanie babbling enthusiastically.

'That was awesome, Ros. That woman from BizLinks—so cool!'

Stepping aside to let them pass, Stacy felt her legs wobble. Melanie reached out to support her.

'Are you okay?'

Ros edged between them and nodded to Melanie to go inside. Melanie hesitated; Ros added, 'We'll talk later.'

When the elevator began to close, Stacy pushed the button to stop it.

'Whoa,' said Ros. 'Wait on.'

The tears Stacy'd held back now flowed. Ros took in her shoes and loose hair. She glanced to the office doors and, gently, pushed the hair back from Stacy's face. Stacy flinched.

'What happened?' Ros asked.

Stacy sniffed. 'Were ... you happy with the research brief?'

'I was. Eventually.'

Stacy wiped her nose with the back of her hand. 'Was there something wrong with it?'

'It wasn't attached, Stacy.'

Ros's words seemed surreal to Stacy.

'My meeting ran over, so I tried to access the brief on the laptop. Your email was there, but no attachment. I called straight away but you'd already left.'

'Ros. I'm sorry ...'

'It's okay. I came back and got it off your computer. I arranged to meet Mark at the Palace and after a couple of drinks—my shout—he was pretty happy. It was good work.' Ros pressed for the elevator to come back up. 'But what's this about?'

'I just feel funny today. I don't know why.'

'I think you do.' And then, with more urgency. 'And I need you to tell me.'

Stacy shook her head from side to side. 'I can't.'

Ros sighed. 'Maybe now isn't the right time. But I don't want you to come back.'

A guttural cry escaped Stacy. Unsure if Ros meant the stuffed-up email, or what had passed between her and Jeremy—but *how could she know?*—or both, she pleaded, 'Please, Ros. It won't happen again.'

Ros pressed Stacy's hands between her own. 'Stacy. I mean, not today.' As if struggling to maintain her composure too, she added, 'But listen. The woman I want back tomorrow is the one who works her butt off like no one else. The one I have my eye on.'

Stacy tried to take in Ros's meaning.

'There're a lot of pricks around. But you can't let them drag you off course.'

Sure now that Ros knew something, Stacy sobbed again. Ros held the elevator door and Stacy backed inside the panelled interior.

Ros's final words, as she'd let go of the door, replayed in Stacy's mind several times as she walked dumbly home, across Hyde Park and along Oxford Street, past the bottle shop sign—where she stopped to glare into the face of the man behind the counter.

*There are going to be changes at Bloom and Penny. Things Cathy and I have spoken about.*

Her feet ached in the stupid, bowed shoes. And she was tired. She couldn't think about what Ros meant right now. But when she reached her unit and pushed her key into the front door, she was startled by the sight of her own hand. Her skin was smooth and unlined. Not a wrinkle, not a blemish.

## Of Windows and Mirrors

Ambelin Kwaymullina's *The Tribe* series, transformative fan cultures and Aboriginal epistemologies.

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Indigenous people lived through the end of the world, but we did not end. We survived by holding on to our cultures, our kin, and our sense of what was right in a world gone terribly wrong (Kwaymullina, 'Edges' 29).

Young Adult Australian post-apocalyptic speculative fiction carries with it a number of expectations and tropes: that characters will exist in a dystopian, ruined landscape; that a lone teenager will rise up and rebel against institutionalised structures of repressive power; and that these youths will carry hope for the future in a destroyed world. In her trilogy *The Tribe*, Ambelin Kwaymullina (of the Palyku People of the Pilbara region of Western Australia) approaches the speculative fiction genre through transformative narratives that engage with, and demonstrate, Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing. In grounding this post-apocalyptic speculative young adult series in Aboriginal Australian epistemologies, Kwaymullina challenges preconceived and often narrow mainstream ideas of what Aboriginal cultures and literature offer the reader, and simultaneously subverts the conventions of the genre. *The Tribe* trilogy reimagines the genre to reflect an intersectional space of listening and hearing voices, stories, and knowledges that transcend a binary understanding of the organic and technological, the mainstream and the margins. Here the landscape is not ruined, but is rather imagined as a vibrant, thriving space of survival. The single teenage leader of the rebellion draws on the support of her community, and her connections

to all beings in the world are pivotal to her ability to make change. While the teenagers lead the rebellion—alongside supportive adults—it is the underlying Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing that guide and feed the themes of hope, survival, and connections, for the future. Through this process, Kwaymullina allows readers to interact with the novel's ideologies on a number of levels as they become complicit in shaping and reshaping meaning. Kwaymullina finds organic intersections between the natural and technological in the series; these same connections extend to the readers' online engagement with the series. Focusing on children with special abilities who are considered 'Illegals' and treated as such, the novels have given rise to a mob of passionate and vocal cyber-voices that challenge dominant hegemonic perceptions of Aboriginal technology, epistemology and connections to land. In this paper, we argue that Ambelin Kwaymullina's *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* (2012) and *The Disappearance of Ember Crow* (2013) from the *Tribe* series, and her use of Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing, demonstrates significant transformative power, allowing readers to become active agents of change in intersubjective dialogues that create new opportunities for an expanded understanding of Aboriginal Australia, where technology is in dialogue with nature.

Cart and Jenkins (qtd. in Epstein) stress the importance of readers being able to access representations of themselves in the texts they read, while emphasising the necessity of reading different voices, cultures, and beliefs from their own. Kwaymullina, in an interview, concurs:

Imagine a world where no mirror ever shows you your own reflection. You search in vain for a glimpse of your face, your eyes, your existence. Instead you are met again and again with blank glass that shows a world without you in it. There are images enough, of other people, of faces and voices and peoples unlike your own. But never of you, never of your face and what it reveals about your hopes and dreams and fears. It is as if you make no impact on the world and have no importance to it. And it leaves you feeling lost. Bewildered. Alone [...] They deserve, in times of trouble, to hold in their hands the story that will tell them, *you are not alone* (Binks np).

Kwaymullina highlights the very human, very personal impact felt by a lack of diversity in YA literature, a visceral loss of identity and connection. Her comments reflect the central theme of the final novel in *The Tribe* series, *The Foretelling of Georgie Spider*, the importance of connections.

'I closed my eyes, and imagined a world. A world of connections, where everyone understood that the difference between good and bad was the difference between the people who valued those connections and those who didn't' (Kwaymullina, *Georgie Spider* 418). Kwaymullina's work engages readers as both window and mirror text, an exploration of imbued Indigenous epistemes, validated and validating simultaneously.

Epstein (111) places YA and children's literature into two categories: window texts (where readers see into a different perspective or experience than their own), and mirror texts (where readers may see characters and stories reflective of their own lives). Kwaymullina uses first person narration with focalisation in *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* through Ashala, who acts as a vessel for the reader to experience both window and mirror insights into Aboriginal ways of knowing. Ashala immediately introduces the reader to internalised and naturalised connections to ancestors and the land. Her later discovery of her cultural heritage through Grandfather Serpent offers dual meaning to Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers, filling the mode of the window and mirror text simultaneously, allowing the reader to cross between the two freely. By framing Ashala's engagement with Aboriginal knowledges as an ongoing journey of self-discovery, the reader is allowed to cross between window and mirror frameworks as they directly experience Ashala's own growing understandings.

Kwaymullina's first two novels in *The Tribe* series, *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* and *The Disappearance of Ember Crow*, allow their audience to engage with them in a virtual space to create new modes of understanding. The environmental foundation to Kwaymullina's *Tribe* series' future setting means that it can best be described as post-apocalyptic speculative fiction. While dystopian fiction often features strong moral messages around ecological or environmental protection, presenting uninhabitable worlds, where humans have destroyed the Earth, and the Earth has now become their enemy, Kwaymullina's texts produce a world that is only partially dystopian. She subverts the themes of dystopian fiction with her subtle exploration and employment of Aboriginal knowledges. Her writing moves beyond dualistic conceptions of human/non-human, culture/nature and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal to a more complex, hopeful and transformative space that engenders new forms of cross-cultural dialogue.

Kwaymullina subverts the conventional post-apocalyptic speculative YA narrative through the underlying Aboriginal Australian epistemes that shape the ideologies of the series. She engages standard tropes—the dystopian wasteland, the conflict between technology and nature, the

single hero, the conflict between teenager as rebel and adult as gatekeeper of power—but is able to unsettle and repurpose them. The ongoing endurance and vitality of Country depicts survival and harmony with those who attempt to understand and respect it. Technology and nature are not in oppositional disharmony, but can merge into hybridised forms that complement each other. In acknowledging Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing as having strong intersections with technology, the text and reader shift away from a unilateral and static understanding of its epistemologies. In contrast to the more familiar isolated, solitary figure of resistance, Ashala's rebellion is centred on connections, and the Tribe and her extended community prove vital to her ability to realise and enact this connectedness in the final novel. The Tribe form alliances with adults who possess significant social and political power, and who share their vision for the future. This subversion can have a heightened impact for the reader if they are familiar with the genre, which in turn is made possible, and has its foundation in, Aboriginal Australian epistemes.

Set hundreds of years in the future, after the 'Reckoning' has destroyed the world as we know it, the earth has formed one solid land mass surrounded by water. The narrative never specifies Australia as a place, nor any other existing country or continent. The 'Reckoning' is a holy judgment on humanity resulting from humanity's abuse of the environment (*Ashala Wolf* 12). To restore 'Balance', the new world developed 'Accords', for instance the Benign Technology Accords to prevent the development of harmful technology, and the Citizenship Accords that are meant to stop 'Illegals' from disrupting the Balance (*Ashala Wolf* 33). The female protagonist is an Illegal (a person with special powers who is discriminated against in this new society) and the leader of the Tribe of the Firstwood, who fights for the inclusion of people like her as part of the Balance.

Ashala's Aboriginal Australian descent is signified by her relationship with Country and Grandfather Serpent, one of the creators of her people. 'There weren't any Illegals back then. Except there were different peoples, different 'races'... After the end of the old world, when there were so few humans left, everyone stopped worrying about things like that' (*Ashala Wolf* 122–3). It is not her dark skin or her heritage that Ashala is fighting against, restricted or judged by; rather it is her ability to sleepwalk that is deemed illegal. This status as an 'illegal' is reminiscent of colonialist attitudes and policies affecting the traditional custodians of Australia and reflective of on-going debates in Australia about the arrival of 'Others'. A reader who is familiar with the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples, can draw many parallels between the treatment of the Illegals and the

historical (but continuing) discrimination against Aboriginal Australians. For example, the Chief Administrator in the novels is named Neville Rose, resembling the name of AO Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1915 to 1940 (Haebich and Reece). The 'Illegal' characters are 'othered' and discriminated against (unless they are 'Exempted'), which further parallels the treatment of Aboriginal Australians, who could historically also be exempted from their Aboriginal identity, for example by marrying a white Australian (Castle and Hagan). Aboriginal Australians continue to fight for real recognition in the Australian constitution—a fight that has been ongoing since the 1967 Referendum where non-Aboriginal Australians voted to finally include Aboriginal Australians in the census. However, historical awareness is not essential to understand the story, as the narrative engages the reader with an understanding of discrimination that does not rely on racial, ethnic, or gender stereotypes and representations. Instead, characters are 'othered' due to their special abilities, such as sleepwalking, sharing memories, and flying.

Kwaymullina's texts present elements of an Aboriginal Australian worldview without once using the Western word 'Aborigine', therefore avoiding an implied assumption of the norm (i.e. the 'non-Aborigine'). It is precisely because the Aboriginal worldview does not need to be named in the text that it signals the potential for transformative change in the reader, whether they identify the similarity with Aboriginal experiences in Australia or not. However, what makes Kwaymullina's texts so powerful is that she introduces Aboriginal ontological concepts subtly, and uses metaphor to help non-Aboriginal readers engage dialogically with the agency of the world around them, or at the very least with the idea that the world around them has agency. For example, in response to Neville Rose's statement that he does not need to know his story, Ashala wonders:

Maybe he didn't realise how important it was to understand your own story [...] 'Ember says everyone has a tale they tell themselves about who they are. And, if your tale is true, then you see yourself clearly, like looking into still water. But if it's not, then it's more like the water's all rippled, so you can't see yourself at all.' (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 143).

Embedded in this clear reflection is the ability to see the interconnectedness of all things, human and non-human: to be able to place ourselves in the bigger picture of the awesomeness of the Earth and the cosmos. It is not only human beings that possess story and a voice but all of nature and its non-human entities. While post-colonialism has been concerned with making space for historically marginalised First

Nations, emerging ecological lenses acknowledge an inter-species ethic. Rather than assuming or reinforcing a hyper-separation between mind/body, nature/culture and human/non-human, ecological philosophers and 'warriors' such as Val Plumwood recognise the kinship between all things, which in turn 'opens the door to a world in which we can begin to negotiate life membership of an ecological community of kindred beings' (121). This has clear parallels to the world that Kwaymullina has created in *The Tribe* series.

Thus, Kwaymullina's texts do not engage with an idea of Australia as (at) the end of the world because it is the land itself that matters and not the imagined nation state transplanted onto it. When Ashala first meets Grandfather Serpent, he explains to her that his 'kind':

took many forms [...] When the great chaos began, I was sleeping deep in underground water. My resting place broke apart and I was cast out into the end of everything. I journeyed for a long time, gathering all the scraps of life that I could find [...] I brought them here. Then I sang, reminding life of its shapes, strength, and its many transformations. Until life remembered its nature, and grew [...] I made things grow here (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 123).

The narrative allows the reader to engage with an epistemological worldview of earth and place that hasn't been shaped and presented via colonial or Western paradigms and lenses. This worldview is derived from Aboriginal epistemology without having to set it up as 'Aboriginal' (a colonial term used to name, label and control). The narratives present this epistemological paradigm that has emerged from Ashala and her tribe's dwelling place alongside the recognition that there may be other worldviews and creator spirits of the earth elsewhere.

Post-apocalyptic fiction often springs from the concerns of contemporary reality, a reflection of concerns heightened to a plausible extreme (Kennon 40). Through the development of the protagonists as active participants in shaping or reshaping their world and their place in it, the post-apocalyptic world can be reimagined as a potential future or opportunity, not simply for its heedful warnings, whether they be ecologically grounded or political, but for the culminating triumph of the teenage protagonists as they discover and utilise their own transformative socio-political power. The young adult's journey within a typical post-apocalyptic novel may reflect a hopeful future in and outside the text, as they traverse diverse worlds and work towards changing the mistakes of society's past.

In *The Tribe* series, young adults fend for themselves. The imbalance of power between adult and child, or adult and teenager, as outlined by Rose and by Cadden, is explicitly represented in Kwaymullina's story. When Ashala is first captured by Chief Administrator Neville Rose, she 'opened her mouth to tell him that the kids I knew could think for themselves better than most adults could, and then decided against it. I didn't want to confirm there were no adults in the Tribe' (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 27). Later, fellow Tribe member Ember tells Ashala:

There's a word [...] to describe people who believe so fervently that Illegals are a threat to the Balance that they can do the kinds of appalling things to us Neville is supposed to have done.' 'There're two words', I said. 'Nasty. Bastards.' She smiled and shook her head. 'No. Mad.' Her strange eyes—one brown and one blue—grew shadowed. 'It's even a *necessary* insanity, for a society like ours. They couldn't keep the detention system going without it. (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 37).

In efforts to battle this insanity, the young Tribe warriors must fight discriminatory and disempowering structures, systems, and beliefs, with regular affirmations of survival: 'I live! We live! We survive!' In a world that is fast depleting the earth's natural resources, where materialism, capitalism and economic rationalism uphold a single worldview that separates humanity from the natural world, and humans from each other, where wasteful consumption and 'third world' poverty increase on a daily basis, notions of what is sane and insane must surely need to shift. In Australia the statistics that describe the conditions and experiences of Aboriginal Australia—infant mortality rates, cardiovascular diseases, youth suicide, low unemployment, incarceration rates—are seen as an 'Aboriginal problem', not as symptoms of a larger societal fault, an indication that Western industrial nations have gone insane, or at the very least find themselves in an ideological stranglehold that prevents them from addressing such faults. As Meyer argues, 'do you see that when we understand larger systems that are working, we begin to understand more of what's happening within and around ourselves. And because of that knowing, we are singing our own liberation' (61).

Literature, especially children's and YA literature, exposes and produces social and cultural ideological meanings. Throughout Kwaymullina's texts, an insight into dominant society's power over marginalised groups is revealed without the reader needing to have an awareness of colonial and Aboriginal Australian histories. Challenging dominant discourses is a central theme of *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* without once having

to rely on notions of race or Aboriginality/non-Aboriginality. Within post-apocalyptic speculative YA fiction, adolescents hold the potential to reshape the future of their societies, to imagine a utopian world of belonging, acceptance and equality. Through the inclusion and validation of Indigenous epistemes, these themes can be emulated beyond the text amongst an active and diverse audience. As popular cultural resources, Kwaymullina's works provide references that reinforce Aboriginal identities, belongings, and a sense of validity in oppositional epistemes.

Teenagers, the primary target audience of YA literature, find themselves in a situation where they have inherited a world that appears to be out of kilter, at the same time that they are trying to come to terms with their own identities. In this context, literature can provide powerful windows and mirrors to engage with, often in much more active and direct ways than were available in the past. According to Johnston, 'there is a new topography, as well as new ontologies, new pulses of reading power, and different literary and aesthetic ways of exploring the endless striations of inner and outer tabernacles of spirit.' (97) In Kwaymullina's text, the earth is the central tabernacle of spirit, and young warriors fight for the right to live and hope. This new topography now includes the voices of readers of YA literature in ways that challenge the traditional boundaries of identity, literary reception and critique, and locate pleasure in reading as an Aboriginal cultural pursuit. This is clear in the discussions in online communities that surround the texts—all discuss Aboriginal connections, and view the texts as an empowering and informative exploration of ancient knowledge, as well as an affirmative representation of an Indigenous protagonist. *Goodreads* user and columnist for *Kill Your Darlings*, Danielle Binks, under the name 'Alphareader', writes

My appreciation of the novel's Indigenous ties goes deeper than merely having an Aboriginal protagonist. It's something that is at the very heart of the novel—indeed, just as Ashala has a connection to the land, so too does this story [in] being a unique Dystopian [story] with a focus on environmental disaster and mankind's fault in killing the world some 300 years ago with greed and negligence. (30 August 2012)

Even more succinctly, user Kirsti ('Melbourne on my mind') writes 'HURRAH FOR A DYSTOPIAN SERIES WITH AN INDIGENOUS PROTAGONIST!!' (7 August 2016). Thus, readers are clearly able to recognise and celebrate the embedded Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing, and indeed acknowledge them as a shaping force for the series and its ideologies. A productive space is thereby created, in

which Aboriginal connections are acknowledged as diverse, rather than narrowly defined.

Contemporary Young Adult (YA) literature includes a vast array of genres and subgenres, as well as discourses of difference and multiple voices (from different genders, races, classes and ethnic spaces), thereby deploying heteroglossia—the use of multiple forms of speaking and knowing within one language (Bakhtin). At the same time, young adult readers have developed online communities to share their ideas and feelings towards texts in an open, supportive forum where they can be heard (Hellekson and Busse 13). Within these digital ‘imaging communities’ (Levy 125), fandoms are expanding in terms of both critical and creative content (Jenkins). These emerging voices challenge and resist the established discursive norms of hegemonic culture on their own terms.

The fan cultures around Kwaymullina’s texts add another layer of voices full of potential, hope and change that contribute to challenging the ways in which Western anglo-centric discourses have (mis)represented, and even denied, the validity of Aboriginal ways of knowing. Their responses to the world the author has created subvert traditional, Western attempts to define and categorise Aboriginal knowledges. For example, one user called Skip, on the book review and fan website *Goodreads*, writes, ‘Ambelin Kwaymullina is a breakout author, an Australian aboriginal [sic] writer and illustrator, who is part of the Palyku people of Western Australia... Ashala herself is a idealistic indigenous protagonist, including themes such as living in harmony and tranquility, with respect for all living creatures, and sympatico with the land’ (9 August 2015). Responses such as Skip’s demonstrate an unprecedented global access to Aboriginal knowledge and representation, one which can continue to expand and affirm Aboriginal knowledges by Aboriginal voices—and be accessed and understood, and even contributed to by a wide range of voices.

Furthermore, there is an increasingly direct involvement on the part of authors like Kwaymullina, who use blogging as part of both fan engagement and writerly practice. Authors answer questions, promote their books, and sometimes even change future projects to reflect their readers’ preferences and desires (Green), pointing towards more diversity and new voices (Czochor; Kwaymullina, ‘Edges’). As Kwaymullina herself acknowledges, ‘to the media, especially the mainstream and literary media: I’m afraid you’re largely being outdone by bloggers on these issues’ (Kwaymullina, ‘Edges’). A US-based campaign called ‘We Need Diverse Books’ has encouraged participants to finish the sentence ‘We need diverse books because...’ (mostly via *Twitter*) to publicise a need, desire,

and reason for more diverse voices (*We Need Diverse Books*) in literature. The organisation ‘promote[s] literature that reflects and honours the lives of all young people.’ Kwaymullina has completed the prompt as follows: ‘We need diverse books because a lack of diversity is a failure of our humanity. Literature without diversity presents a false image of what it is to be human. It masks—and therefore contributes to—the continuation of existing inequities, and it widens the gulfs of understanding that are already swallowing our compassion for each other’ (Kwaymullina, ‘We need diverse’ np).

Kwaymullina places a lack of diversity and visibility as an ongoing trauma that silences marginalised communities, and distances readers of all backgrounds from bridging gaps in representation, knowledge, and human connection. Her response acknowledges the human impact of a lack of diversity—the erosion of empathy and increased distancing that delineates the *us* and the *them*. Fan cultures, and the reciprocal nature of their communication, potentially deepen understanding and even appreciation of diversity, when such diversity is embedded in the literary texts themselves. These online spaces where fan cultures exist create an intimate community that can encourage opportunities to explore genres through alternative ways of knowing, and through exposing the reader to new and old perspectives. It provides them a space to ask and learn more from authentic voices, further dismantling Western repression or revision of Aboriginal Australian stories, representations, and knowledges. It has the hallmarks of a grassroots campaign, forging connections between the reader, publisher, author, and larger literary community, and exposing the vocal need and desire for diverse texts.

As Jenkins argues, ‘far from demanding conformity, th[is] new knowledge culture is enlivened by multiple ways of knowing [...] The dynamic, collective, and reciprocal nature of these exchanges undermines traditional forms of expertise’ (Jenkins 160). Fans become active participants in the creative process, in forums where their voices are valued, in turn validating the world that is being created. Thus, many fans/reviewers, even those with only a passing knowledge of Aboriginal history and beliefs, make a connection to Aboriginal ontological concepts through the narrative. Furthermore, online fan communities offer the opportunity to continue pursuing this knowledge as it extends beyond the text, as readers share their interpretations of the Aboriginal epistemes that guide the text’s ideologies.

The intersection between the post-apocalyptic speculative *Tribe* series and the online fan culture provides an interesting reflection on themes within the texts. Traditionally, (eco) dystopian fiction creates a dichotomy

between technology and the environment, where the former is ultimately represented as alien, sterile and dehumanizing, and the latter as an ally—wild and beautiful—which offers sanctuary and proves to be the utopia within the dystopian world. Drawing from Aboriginal ways of knowing, where consciousness is attributed to all creative forces and everything in creation, the texts reinforce the underpinning interconnectedness of all inhabitants of a place, or ‘an ecological community of kindred beings’ (Plumwood 121). Kwaymullina’s texts explore these motifs through a post-apocalyptic world, allowing the reader to engage with Aboriginal understandings about Country and metaphysical dimensions. For example, an intersubjective dialogue between Christianity and Aboriginal knowledges recurs throughout the series through Ashala’s relationship with her partner, Connor, who is regularly described as an ‘angel’ (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 11, 67, 256), and who represents the Christian voice. The character of Hoffman, a creator figure who literally wrote the history of the ‘Reckoning’, and created the ‘aings’ or cyborgs, allows for an exploration of an artificially created religion or belief system. The conflation of the technological and artificial structure of beliefs is heightened in *The Disappearance of Ember Crow*, yet is still valued as legitimate in its own right, through the depiction of the cyborg Ember who displays clear human and moral qualities. Embedded within the narrative is the appreciation of non-human agency being as integral to the interconnected web of all life as human agency.

In providing this knowledge outside mainstream didactic teachings, or without a primary focus on colonial Australia, Kwaymullina creates potential for expanded understandings of Australia, as an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal space and place, one that allows for intersubjective dialogues between multiple belief systems outside a dominant singularity. That readers engage directly with technology in order to shape their discussions and understandings of an eco-dystopian (or post-apocalyptic speculative) series adds another layer of depth and pleasure to the novels. The Internet provides another space and a voice for many, regardless of their status outside the cyber sphere. Fan communities have dissected, gained knowledge, and ultimately promoted Kwaymullina’s novels through further discussion and recommendations, and thus gained an alternate knowledge to that of the mainstream. As ‘Alphareader’ on *Goodreads* puts it: ‘*The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* is proof-positive that the post-apocalyptic genre is still a fascinating one, but only if you have as good a story to tell as Kwaymullina does with *Ashala Wolf*.’ (30 August 2012)

*The Disappearance of Ember Crow* takes the interrelating connections between the natural world and the technological world further, merging

elements of science fiction and technology with the natural, myth, and human, while still exploring Aboriginal beliefs. Significantly, Tribe member Ember and her brother Nicky can be read as symbolic of the creation of this particular online culture. The characters themselves are hybrids of the technological and organic, and, significantly, are intended to carry on humanity. These hybrids create a new, positive force as they come together and allow for new ways of thinking and imagining. For example, the acquired understanding of Aboriginal knowledges by a predominantly non-Aboriginal audience occurs in a cyber space that is entirely removed from the natural world, and as a new, technologically infused system, is itself contrasted with the organic nature of Aboriginal cultures. Nicky in particular comes to symbolise this. He is first featured in *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* as entirely symbolic of the technological and unnatural, as an invasive form of technology that infiltrates Ashala’s mind to seek out her memories. Ashala’s interactions with the ‘machine’ (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 1) demonstrate her ingrained naturalised connection to the land and her culture. She recognises in the alien, invasive machine a ‘dog-spirit’ (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 339), changing it into a living creature that represents its true form. In *The Disappearance of Ember Crow*, it is re-built by Ember, reinforcing this positive connection between the organic and technological, and symbolizing the idea that ‘nothing ever truly ends, only transforms’ (Kwaymullina, *Ember Crow* 141). Nicky and Ember act as a symbol of the formation of an online culture by merging elements of the technological and natural world to create a new, positive force. This mimics the readers’ online engagement with the technological and Aboriginal content to create a positive and powerful ‘organic’ space that allows readers to begin a discussion and form a new, more in-depth, understanding of Aboriginal knowledges that goes well beyond pre-conceived ideas about what is Aboriginal and what is not. Again, this offers readers windows and mirrors that are not static but can be influenced and actively engaged with.

Within *The Tribe* series, memory and stories are a central component of identity. In *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf*, Ashala’s memories are pivotal to her identity, relationships, and safety: the novel centres around her enemies’ attempts to extract them to mine their information. The stories of Ashala’s ancestors, in particular her grandfather, are fundamental to her identity and understanding of the world; they carry thousands of years of knowledge and Aboriginal heritage. Kennon argues that within dystopian (or post-apocalyptic) novels, storytelling can be a form of bonding and create a sense of community, as well as an individual connection of forming identity and creating contextual

connections to past histories and stories. Kwaymullina extends this theme with the inclusion of Dreaming stories and the integration of Aboriginal knowledges and beliefs, where Ashala demonstrates a deep, enlightening and transformative connection to the land and her people. This connection allows the character to overcome the obstacles of her dystopian world while fighting for a new future where all voices are valid.

YA post-apocalyptic novels often feature an overarching allegorical message to tell a story that reacts to contemporary societal issues, but Kwaymullina's texts expand on this allegorisation of the present in a vital way. She indirectly provides knowledge on the past, present and future of her people, encouraging readers to see a new world—not just a fictional post-apocalyptic one, but one that has been sustained for more than 40,000 years. This clearly aligns with Aboriginal world views that do not recognise clear separation of past, present and future. As such, time is depicted in the series as non-linear, while events and memories are not separated but rather occur simultaneously. With regards to difference and diversity, anthropological and scientific knowledges have been built on hierarchical notions of who is human (or 'the norm') and who is Other. As cyborgs, Ember and her brothers and sisters face major issues due to the public's perception of them as inhuman, and one of them is destroyed for this. In her revelation of her non-organic status to Ashala, Ember's primary concern is rejection based on the inauthentic—that she will be judged as inhuman and insincere, a 'machine... a collection of circuits' (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 320). Ashala, arguably the most contextually organic character, claims Ember as human, or 'real'. 'You were always real. You were always human. I didn't change that. I just helped you to see it.' (Kwaymullina, *Ashala Wolf* 306).

In conclusion, it is widely accepted that post-apocalyptic (or dystopian) fiction contains messages for contemporary society, and shows what could happen, often containing environmental messages by showing a destroyed world that needs human help if it is to heal. Kwaymullina subverts this trope. Humans still destroy the world, with technology and development taking their toll on the natural world, but here the Earth has adapted and healed on its own, as an active and connected agent in the process. The hybridisation of human, non-human and technological forms is socially transformative, offering a re-envisioned relationship between humans and earth, between readers and primary texts and between a multiplicity of different voices in cyberspace, questioning and challenging dominant norms and expectations. Kwaymullina's texts allow readers access to alternative epistemologies and literary

experiences and via online communities, a multiplicity of voices can now be heard speaking about *The Tribe* series, accessing and engaging with the windows and mirrors that the texts provide, and being transformed in the process. As the author puts it herself: 'The way we use our voices is one of the processes by which we create the future' (Kwaymullina, 'Reflecting').

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## For Judy Cassab: portrait artist (1920–2015) Maureen Gibbons

Maureen Gibbons has a Doctor of Creative Arts from Curtin University of Technology. Her verse-novel *The Butter Lady* was published in 2016 and her poetry has appeared in *Cordite*, *Rabbit Poetry Journal*, *Strange 3* and *The Weighing of the Heart: An Anthology of Emerging West Australian Poets*.

unable to write, i read of your mother & grandmother's trip by cattle truck to auschwitz, of your husband's conscription to a labour-camp; how after a day's grind in a factory, cloaked in your catholic maid's identity, you rode the tram to a candle-lit basement to scribble missives on toilet paper testifying to the terrors of being jewish in a place bent on your annihilation; how hand-in-hand with your husband jansci you sprinted through a flame-licked budapest, ears battered by machine-gun-fire; eyes fixed on spiralling-smoke-filled-skies, you side-stepped dead bodies, dolls, gramophones...

later at your grandmother's house where you were raised, you discovered dark rooms emptied of treasures, the floors encrusted with excreta & in the garden, the chandelier shivering in the sycamore put you in mind of a flock of fledglings scanning the stars in search of navigational cues & how that evening you asked that your obsession with painting, your blue bird of passion, would not tire or fly off-course & you were heard...

**Titanium**  
Jessica Wright

Jessica Wright grew up in country Victoria and gained her Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne in 2007. She currently lives in Fremantle and works in the community arts sector.

My mother is preparing her spine for the ocean.  
Long fingers work a rail of fused lumbar parts  
teasing out strands of old argument, garnering  
cursory hurt from pain. Arms bent  
with her head bowed into a westerly  
she stalks the drawing tide.

A slow wade sways the skirts of her burden.  
Ten years had fastened to her tilting form.  
It began with a chisel to the hip  
collecting fine bone samples to knit  
the titanium site of her injury.  
It happened in the wince  
of each new step  
towards a slipping husband  
down the quiet end of a private-ward corridor.

Sly plaque swept the house of his sound reason,  
disturbed table settings and ruined acquaintances.  
At drinks, she propped his nonsense  
on her veering arm. She was never to bear  
no more than two bricks of butter.  
In the avenue, his mirth snagged to wild utterances  
trailing her walks down the gravel drive;  
the brisker her stride, the tighter his fray  
wound through her recovery.

Now she's further,  
half-turned and caught between the scenery  
palms raised above the white wash, steadying  
the world of its strange kilter, bracing the union  
of that first glass wave  
and the parts which never mend.

## The Ones After Them

Peter Rose

Peter Rose is a poet, novelist and memoirist. He founded The Highly Strung Players, an occasional ensemble dedicated to the performance of works of absurdist drama. He is also the Editor of *Australian Book Review*.

'The Ones After Them' is one of several duologues (or short stories in dialogue) in a suite called *The Ones*. There are two characters—married publishers—who work for different publishing houses. The Man starts the first and third sections; the Woman starts the middle section.

'I've been meaning to ask you something.'

'Yes.'

'For quite a while.'

'That's not like you.'

'It sort of welled up.'

'Ask!'

'It's hard to put it into words—it's been so long.'

'You should have told me.'

'I suppose the gist is—'

'Gist? ...We've got gists.'

'I guess I'm curious.'

'Curious?'

'What do you expect me to feel?'

'How do you mean?'

'Just what I said.'

'What do I expect you to *feel*?'

'Yes.'

'When?'

'When you go on about it.'

'Go on about it?'

'Go on about *them*.'

'Who?'

'The others.'

'Others?'

'Don't be coy?'

'I can't whistle, and I'm not coy.'

'Anyone can whistle, and I think you whistle prettily.'

'Go on, then.'

'I was just wondering if it ever *occurs to you*. It occurred to *me* just now. About the forerunners—and the ones before them.'

'Stop being tautological.'

'And the ones after too—and the ones after them.'

'Stop it.'

'But *does* it ever occur to you—that I might ...you know ...*wonder*?'

'Wonder?'

'Might, you know, be capable of feeling, might even have had them, once or twice—*feelings*.'

'Do you realise you sound just like a politician when you say "you know"?''

'Which politician?'

'Don't ask me that. Not after the day I've had. Some stupid former PM who was incapable of uttering a sentence without "you know" in it. You know the one I mean. He was always in trouble.'

'Am *I* in trouble.'

'I'll let you know. He was always fending off rivals and "crunching the numbers".'

'He should have gone into publishing. But let's not talk about numbers, shall we?'

'I warned you I was numerate.'

'When did you warn me? When did you ever warn me you were numerate?'

'When we met.'

'Oh, that's going way too far back for me.'

'I remember, we were sitting in a club we never went to again, and you kept buying us gin and tonics as if there was no tomorrow—that's just what I thought. No tomorrow. I counted five. I'd never had so many in my life, not even at university. Not in one night. That's when I warned you I was numerate.'

'Oh yes, *very* numerate.'

'You laughed then too. It was the first time you did. I liked what it did to your throat. That's when I decided I could trust myself to look at your hands.'

'Christ!'

'Would you have preferred us to play Solo?'  
'I don't know what I might have preferred. I never did, and it's too late now.'  
'I like to think you prefer *me*... You seem quite—'  
'How do I seem?'  
'Rueful. Agitated.'  
'They're different states.'  
'Perplexed then.'  
'Perhaps. You see, it's just occurred to me.'  
'What just occurred to you?'  
'Hang on. Give me a moment.'  
'Take as long as you like—but while you do, can we have the other half?'  
'Bad day?'  
'Shocking.'  
'That bad?'  
'A shemozzle.'  
'You'll have to tell me all about it.'  
'With the other half.'  
'I'll fix it in a moment.'  
'I do think something might need turning over in the kitchen.'  
'Really? You're probably right. I've lost my sense of smell. The house could be on fire and I wouldn't know.'  
'That's why we should have a dog.'  
'I don't want dogs. They whine. They might even whistle.'  
'A new author of mine argues that childless couples should have at least one dog.'  
'American?'  
'Dutch.'  
'Two's better. Then they can bitch about you while you're at work, earning enough money so they can be spayed and have their creature comforts—their stupid toys and hip replacements.'  
'What is it, by the way?'  
'What's what?'  
'What's burning in the kitchen?'  
'Pork, I think. Yes, pork. It seems a long time ago.'  
'Done slowly?'  
'Very slowly.'  
'How long?'  
'Eight hours.'  
'You jest.'  
'I can't whistle, and I don't jest.'

'I think you jest very prettily.'  
'Snap.'  
'Excellent pork, by the way.'  
'Thank you.'  
'Really excellent pork.'  
'I'm glad you enjoyed it.'  
'Outstanding.'  
'Okay.'  
'I think it was your best pork yet.'  
'Cut it out.'  
'Succulent. That's what it was. Falling away from the bone.'  
'Time helps.'  
'Clearly.'  
'Eight hours.'  
'Was it really? Eight hours.'  
'I bet they could smell it upstairs. That would really piss them off.'  
'Again.'  
'They could probably smell it in the foyer, poor bastards. I bet it pervaded the whole block—put them off their tucker. Their football. Their greasy politics.'  
'You're such a snob.'  
'Well, you wanted to live here.'  
'Did I? That's an awful thing to say.'  
'You did. You told me, that first time we met, over the gin and tonics—four or five, however many there were.'  
'What? I told you I wanted to live in this particular apartment?'  
'Not in so many words, not yet. But you intimated that you wanted to live in an apartment block somewhere.'  
'Christ! And you went on with it.'  
'I did. I asked you out again—to another club.'  
'Much tonier, that second one, I thought to myself.'  
'I did lash out.'  
'Remember when we did that—*lashed out*. Bought each other foie gras and expensive champagne. Dressed up. Showed off.'  
'Though never cut flowers. I drew the line at that.'  
'I'd never done it before.'  
'Lashed out?'  
'Never foie gras and Roederer.'  
'What did you feed them then? The forerunners?'  
'I'm not sure we did much of that.'

'What? Eat?'

'Not often. Not together.'

'Just talked, I suppose.'

'Talked, yes. Drank too—quite a lot of that.'

'Always propitious.'

'What did we eat, though?'

'Who?'

'You and me. At the tony club, that second time. I'm intrigued.'

'I'm not sure I can remember. I'm not like those blow-hards who can recall what they ate at their fourth birthday party—how many wretched sausage rolls they stuffed down their gullets, like geese.'

'You've had a bad day too.'

'Well, do you remember all those stupid fourth and fifth birthday parties you were made to attend?'

'I remember one cake, that's about all. I forget the year, but it must have been quite early.'

'Before puberty?'

'Certainly. Mummy had laboured over it all day, and god knows she wasn't a natural cook. We'd laugh about that—how "unnatural" she was in the kitchen. Eight hours it took her.'

'Like my pork.'

'What?'

'Like the pork you liked so much. Perhaps everything takes eight hours... But tell me about your cake.'

'I can't really say, I don't have your piercing recall, but I do remember that she brought it in on a tray to infantile applause, willing but soundless, and then it sort of, just, well—lurched.'

'Lurched?'

'Lurched.'

'You mean collapsed—all over your spotty little dress?'

'Polka dot please!'

'Did it fall onto the floor? Did it stain the carpet? Did it leave a mark you always remembered?'

'The bizarre thing was it stayed intact. Even as it lurched, even as the cream filling began to ooze, it held its shape, and the little polka dotted shepherd girl on top went on spinning.'

'Unnatural or not, your mother clearly knew a thing or two about cakes.'

'You would have loved my mother, if you'd met her. Do you really remember my polka dot dress?'

'How could I forget?'

'Angel! And what did we eat at the club.'

'I'm still racking my brains.'

'Offal?'

'Never.'

'Lamb perhaps?'

'We *didn't* have lamb. I've never had lamb in public. I'd stopped eating lamb long before you came along, in your polka dot dress.'

'You know very well I was wearing one of my little black dresses—just how you like it.'

'What, you took me for a little black dress fancier, did you—second time round?'

'I had a hunch.'

'It's coming back now. I'm pretty sure I had rabbit.'

'Bunny!'

'And you ordered the pork.'

'I did no such thing!'

'You did. I swear you did.'

'A girl does not order pork the second time round—not in a tony club—and certainly not in a little black dress. That's a pathway to disaster.'

'Perhaps you thought it would turn me on.'

'What, the sight of me with fat down my front.'

'Perhaps it had worked in the past.'

'Did it work for you? Did it "turn you on"?'

'I don't think I want to say. You'll have to wait and read my diaries.'

'Tease! That won't be for years.'

'Not at the rate we're going. Not the way we live now. All that crackling.'

'I love crackling.'

'We *all* love crackling.'

'Why don't you let me publish them?'

'My diaries! You must be joking.'

'They'd really go.'

'As if I'd give them to a rival publisher. You've got your own fiction list.'

'Well, I'm sorry to say, there was no pork. It wasn't even on the menu.'

'How do you know?'

'Haven't I told you?—I have a photographic memory.'

'That's the first I've heard about it. You've kept that lens under a bushel.'

'A girl doesn't like to boast.'

'Prove it. Recite something. Recite a sonnet backwards. Regurgitate one of those first chapters—the one from the latest manuscript.'

'Which one? There are so many.'

'The new one—from your Wunderkind.'

‘Oh him. I haven’t even tackled it yet. I can’t get past the string.’  
 ‘He still uses string? Quaint.’  
 ‘He’s very retro. He’s been to Paris. He’s twenty.’  
 ‘Very retro.’  
 ‘It’s the title of his novel.’  
 ‘I hate to tell you, but it’s been used before.’  
 ‘I know. My colleagues in marketing are thrilled. They say it helps.’  
 ‘I’m not convinced.’  
 ‘About *Retro: A Comic Lamentation*?’  
 ‘I’m pretty sure that sub’s never been used before.’  
 ‘I hope not.’  
 ‘But I’m not convinced about the pork. I’m quite agnostic when it comes to photographic memories. I’ve been deceived before. Maybe you thought it would turn me on. The pork. Maybe you thought it would turn me on as it had turned on the others.’  
 ‘Stop this. Why are you always going on about these others?’  
 ‘Because you told me. You’re not going to pretend they didn’t exist, the “others”? Not after everything we’ve been through—all the talks, all the narratives, all the nights.’  
 ‘I thought you liked pillow talk. I thought it’s why you fancied me.’  
 ‘That’s a terrible thing to say.’  
 ‘Honest pillow talk. Loving pillow talk. Well into the night. You smoking. The red tip of your cigarette. Me smoking even—before I stopped, before we both stopped.’  
 ‘Now you’re being nostalgic.’  
 ‘I like to, now and then.’  
 ‘It’s coming back to me.’  
 ‘What is?’  
 ‘Our dinner. That first dinner, the second time, for we never bothered with lamb or crackling after the several gin and tonics. When we arrived they brought us two tiny brioche rolls, two each. I’d never had brioche before. They said the butter was churned at a particular time of day. We were both young, impressionable. The waiter seemed to have a kind of photographic memory. He went on and on about the specials. Then—it’s coming back—you ordered Chicken Chasseur. That’s right. Never in my life had I dated someone who ordered Chicken Chasseur. Even your pronunciation was right.’  
 ‘Thank god for the Sorbonne! But did I really order Chicken Chasseur? How greedy of me.’  
 ‘It took an eternity.’  
 ‘How long?’

‘All fucking night.’  
 ‘You’re joking.’  
 ‘Well, that’s what it felt like to an impressionable youth.’  
 ‘You should have said something—encouraged me to order something different, quicker. Tripe, say.’  
 ‘Tripe’s even worse. Tripe’s like going to Thailand for a week. Oh no, there was no putting you off your photogenic Chicken Chasseur. I’d finished my rabbit or whatever it was long before your poultry arrived. I’d eaten my brioche rolls—I even knocked off yours, without you noticing. I had to ask for more, to keep me going, to stop me from fainting.’  
 ‘Did they bring you more?’  
 ‘Frowningly.’  
 ‘You have such a keen memory.’  
 ‘Yours isn’t bad.’  
 ‘Do you think so? Sometimes I think I’ve lost some of the sharpness, some of the savour.’  
 ‘Clearly, if you can’t remember Chicken Chasseur.’  
 ‘If that’s what it was.’

‘We’re such suggestible animals, aren’t we?’  
 ‘That’s a bright start to the day.’  
 ‘Really suggestible animals.’  
 ‘Have I ever told you that’s one of my favourite words of yours?’  
 ‘“Animals”?’  
 ‘“Suggestible”.’  
 ‘That’s quite suggestive—for the morning.’  
 ‘I have ears—and quirks.’  
 ‘I know. You’ve told me all your quirks.’  
 ‘You said you wanted me to—needed me to.’  
 ‘Need is a strong word.’  
 ‘Back to your morning pensée. Why are we so ...suggestive?’  
 ‘*Suggestible*... Well, dreams for example.’  
 ‘You haven’t been dreaming again.’  
 ‘I’m afraid I have. I usually do.’  
 ‘Every night?’  
 ‘Unfailingly.’  
 ‘You’ve never told me that.’  
 ‘You’re always too busy telling me about your quirks.’  
 ‘I hope it wasn’t one of your *long* dreams—not like *Heaven’s Gate*.’  
 ‘You want the cut version?’  
 ‘Where’s it set?’

‘Venice.’  
‘Venice! You cad, you didn’t take me.’  
‘You were elsewhere?’  
‘Where?’  
‘Portofino—with one of your cads.’  
‘What were you doing in Venice without me? Shopping for glass—drinking Bellinis?’  
‘I was on the lagoon—in a gondola.’  
‘What were you doing on the lagoon—in a gondola? I know, you reread *Death in Venice* last week. That’s it. We played Mahler after the pork, then I watched you move to a bookcase and take down the Everyman version. You lay on the sofa and read it right through. You didn’t move once. It was uncanny.’  
‘It wasn’t Mann.’  
‘Are you sure?’  
‘Positive. It was something one of my new young men told me yesterday, at the pub.’  
‘You take your young men to the pub now?’  
‘I’ve got into the habit. They can still smoke there, and it’s cheaper than Di Stasio.’  
‘God knows that’s true. I was there twice last week with my young men and it cost me practically more than their advances.’  
‘Do you think they’ll earn it back?’  
‘One of them, I hope. He’s got potential.’  
‘The twenty-year—from Paris.’  
‘*Retro* man. But tell me about *your* young man. Tell me about your editorial afternoons. I want to picture the two of you smoking there—two blokes in a pub on a Friday, talking about football, who’s going to win.’  
‘Women, too, don’t forget.’  
‘Oh, you do that too, do you? Smutty talk.’  
‘This one does. I have to guide him to the back of the pub, where no else goes. He wants to—tell me all about it.’  
‘What a cad!’  
‘Look who’s talking.’  
‘I bet he’s twenty as well. I bet he’s been to Paris.’  
‘He does lay it on.’  
‘Does he? That will sell.’  
‘I hope so.’  
‘Oh yes, he’ll earn back his advance. You’ll be taking him to Di Stasio before you know. Perhaps we could meet—well, not exactly *meet*. Separate tables and all. Our young men wouldn’t even know we were married—married rivals. They wouldn’t twig that we’re in the same business.’

‘That’s quite suggestive.’  
‘I hoped so.’  
‘But are we?’  
‘Married? I thought we were.’  
‘Rivals.’  
‘You wanted it like this—wanted us to be hunters, competitors. You thought it would be more honourable. But tell me what your young man said that was so suggestive. What did he say—at the back of the pub, in your smutty Tardis. What took you to Venice—on the lagoon?’  
‘I’d almost forgotten my dream.’  
‘They do vanish. Just as well perhaps. But now you’ve woken me up, I’m avid to know.’  
‘I love what that word does to your mouth.’  
‘“Put away your Penguin Freud”.’  
‘Darling! Well, there I was on the lagoon—’  
‘We’ve established that.’  
‘—and I was drowning things.’  
‘*Drowning things.*’  
‘Yes, drowning things. Really pushing them down—plunging them under the water—keeping them submerged.’  
‘Cats? All those mad fucking cats?’  
‘Not cats—not this time.’  
‘What then?’  
‘Gowns.’  
‘*Gowns!*’  
‘Yes, gowns. Weird isn’t it. I’ve never had a frock dream before. I’m not that kind of guy.’  
‘You’ve been reading Henry James again. I told you not to. He’s not good for you. It’s too...’  
‘What?’  
‘Habitual. And it raises the bar. You’ll only be disappointed.’  
‘Disappointed?’  
‘By young men at the pub.’  
‘We do have some women on our list I’ll have you know!’  
‘Not enough, or so I’ve heard.’  
‘I detest those tedious statisticians with their bloody quotas.’  
‘You would, wouldn’t you! I think they’re raising the bar.’  
‘What a vile expression.’  
‘I think it’s perfectly valid to talk about unconscious prejudices.’  
‘Now you sound like a politician—“barren of new pride”.’  
‘Tell me about the frocks.’

‘You know I’m hopeless with frocks.’  
 ‘What did they look like? Were they full ...crinoline ...Did they have farthingales? What century are we in.’  
 ‘Victorian, I guess. I know they were *plunging*.’  
 ‘That’s a start.’  
 ‘There I was, trying to drown them—*suppress* them really, when...’  
 ‘When?’  
 ‘When it happened.’  
 ‘What happened?’  
 ‘That’s when the wolves loomed at me, through the mist.’  
 ‘Wolves! This is a Wolf Man dream?’  
 ‘There were three of them—each on his own skiff—standing up. And they were after me.’  
 ‘Christ!’  
 ‘Yes, they were after me. I knew that.’  
 ‘Like the police? Were they *carabinieri*?’  
 ‘They were *wolves*. I’ve told you that. And they were after me.’  
 ‘So what did you do there, on the lagoon—isolated? Or weren’t you alone? Did you have one of your young men with you, swimming beside you, with a flare in his mouth?’  
 ‘There was no young man. I’m not Byron. And they were after me.’  
 ‘Stop this! I just got a frisson.’  
 ‘Don’t you wish our authors wrote like this—gave us frissons in bed.’  
 ‘But I must know now. What happened? Did they catch you—eat you?’  
 ‘I thought they might. The frocks had attracted them—the scent. And they wanted blood.’  
 ‘So what did you do? Swim away?’  
 ‘I knew that wouldn’t work. No one could outswim those wolves, not even Byron—not in a lagoon, at night, with all those frocks and farthingales to get in the way. So I took another tack—humoured them.’  
 ‘Humoured them?’  
 ‘Yes, *humoured* them?’  
 ‘You sang to them—recited something backwards?’  
 ‘Not that. I knew they weren’t musical—or literary. Not these ones. So I reasoned with them, very gently, lowering my voice, like Othello. I knew one false note would inflame them.’  
 ‘And it worked? You avoided the false note.’  
 ‘Somehow. It was a complete fluke.’  
 ‘They just—*tolerated* you.’  
 ‘Sort of. I knew they could turn at any moment.’  
 ‘So capricious.’

‘But they just floated past me, on their skiffs. Standing up. Very regal. Beautiful. Terrifying, but beautiful. Like Napoleon.’  
 ‘Napoleon! Was he in it?’  
 ‘No, but I thought of him.’  
 ‘*Everyone* thinks of Napoleon.’  
 ‘Do you, in your dreams?’  
 ‘Sometimes. When I’m exhausted.’  
 ‘Henry did.’  
 ‘Henry?’  
 ‘Henry James. On his deathbed. He thought he was Napoleon, in the Tuileries. He was raving of course, delirious. This was after his stroke. He even called for his secretary, so she could take it down.’  
 ‘Ah, “the last distinguished thing”.’  
 ‘Quite.’  
 ‘You must stop reading James.’  
 ‘I haven’t started.’  
 ‘Now I’m completely shattered.’  
 ‘Darling!’  
 ‘Is it morning yet?’  
 ‘It’s long past morning.’  
 ‘Shall we just lie here, in each other’s arms.’  
 ‘Do you want me to read to you?’  
 ‘Not yet. Let’s just lie here—all day. Remember when we’d do that—lie here all day in each other’s arms.’  
 ‘And you’d tell me one of your stories. Not dreams though. Real stories. About the forerunners, and the ones before them.’  
 ‘And the ones after them too?’  
 ‘And the ones after them.’  
 ‘All day.’  
 ‘In each other’s arms.’  
 ‘Full of feelings.’  
 ‘You do believe in them? I mean, you do believe I have them?’  
 ‘It *occurs* to me.’  
 ‘I wondered.’  
 ‘Anyone can whistle.’  
 ‘So they say.’  
 ‘And the ones after them.’

Peter Rose and Francesca Sasnaitis will perform two duologues from *The Ones* (including ‘The Ones After Them’) at fortyfivedownstairs in Melbourne on Monday, 31 July.

## When in Rome: An Essay in Ruins

Danielle Clode

Danielle Clode is a nonfiction writer and essayist. Her books include *Killers in Eden* (2011), *Voyages to the South Seas* (2007) and the essay collection *A Continent of Curiosities* (2006). She held the inaugural Dahl Trust Fellowship for her essay 'Seeing the wood for the trees', published in the *Australian Book Review*.

### Book One

I. From the air, Rome pans flat across the coastal plain, a mosaic of fragments. Tiny squares radiate in concentric rings around ovals, bisected by vectored roads: patterns of organic growth within the linearity of ancient order. Swathes of green abut the orange, white and grey of clay, stone and concrete. As the plane tilts, the tiles resolve into rooftops, piazzas, cars and pavements, drawing me into a smaller, more human dimension.

II. Visiting Rome I have a 'sense that, because one has not read Virgil and Horace in Latin (or perhaps not at all), and cannot say, without consulting a guidebook, when Augustus was born or what buildings other than the Pantheon his backer Agrippa constructed, and does not know the names of the Antonine emperors or who the Dioscuri were or what the *lex talionis* was, one has no business being there.' Although Robert Hughes would have read both

Virgil and Horace, in Latin. The authorial conceit of humility.

III. The Romantics come from Rome. From the Latin *Romanicus*—of the Roman style. Made in Rome. The romance of adventure, imagination and heightened senses—heroic religious epics. The eighteenth century Romantics transformed the genre for themselves. Into an adoration of grandeur, nature, the picturesque, doused with passion and individuality.

IV. Why do writers even need to travel? Art critics like Hughes had to go to Europe to see the art they critiqued for themselves. Reproductions will not do. But words are endlessly reproducible, in print, in the ether. Writing is eminently portable, never more so than in this instant download world.

V. Small wonder Rome was such a favoured destination for the Grand Tour, this centre of

civilisation, the European finishing school for Oxbridge schoolboys requiring the final touches of cultural enrichment. Such a romantic pilgrimage for painters and writers, who came for their health and died.

VI. My parent's generation fled Australia—like Robert Hughes, Germaine Greer, Clive James—complaining loudly of 1950s constraint. But a generation later, in the aftermath of free love, free education and multiculturalism, Australia felt far from confined. It was Europe shackled by complex social hang-ups and ancient class warfares. At the time, I couldn't wait to go home.

VII. Byron, Keats, Shelley—a recurring English trio in Rome. Where is Mary in this trinity of patronyms? Present, but amalgamated with her husband. I am drawn to Mary's account. She survived her pilgrimage, succeeded, against the odds: a successful writer, a mother, who lived to a moderately old age.

VIII. I recite the litany of Australian writers in Rome. A. D. Hope, Morris West, Peter Porter, Patrick White, Robert Hughes, Germaine Greer, Shirley Hazzard, David Malouf, Peter Robb, Martin Boyd, Kate Grenville, Robert Dessaix. Most of them didn't stay long. They moved to Naples, to Tuscany, where living is cheaper.

IX. We walk where other writers have walked, seek what they saw,

blowing on the cold ashes of their fire. We follow those who've gone before to Rome. For Mary Shelley's *Last Man*, Rome was 'hardly more illustrious for its heroes and sages, than for the power it exercised over the imaginations of men.' We are all on a pilgrimage—kissing the Blarney Stone and hoping that some eloquence, some brilliance, will rub off.

X. How much have the Romantics influenced our view of Rome, with their picturesque ruins in the dying light? The light, the light! So attractive, I suppose, to visitors from cold, grey lands. Like Claude Lorrain's *Capriccio with the ruins of the Roman Forum*—a utopian pastoral landscape with the Colosseum lit by the rays of an eternally setting sun.

XI. I did my research first. The bright southern light dazzled as I emerged from the dim halls of the South Australian Art Gallery. From beneath the colonnaded portico, I looked along a boulevard of classical public buildings: university, library, museum, parliament. All columns and pediments, arches and apses. Adelaide is a provincial capital, peripheral and parochial, emulating an English elite half a globe away. Following a classical ideal that the English modelled on their own ancient Roman overlords from half a millennium ago when they too were peripheral and provincial. A hall of mirrors

endlessly reflecting back through time.

XII. As I fly across the Mediterranean, I look down over exquisite islands in a turquoise sea, little villages tumbling down towards rocky shorelines and tidy harbours with tiny boats carving white wakes across the water. I think of those other boats, overloaded and unwelcomed, with uncertain destinations and shift uncomfortably as breakfast is served.

XIII. When the Shelleys' journeyed to Italy—by coach, carriage and ferry—they travelled into the aftermath of a climate-changing volcanic eruption in Indonesia—Europe's year without summer. Across France, Switzerland and Italy, the roads were filled with walking skeletons and animated spectres, children hideously deformed and diseased by hunger and deprivation.

XIV. I downloaded the complete works of Mary Shelley for free on my phone from the lounge in the Dubai airport.

### Book Two

I. Mary's journal of her first week-long visit to Rome in November 1818. Monday, Nov. 23—'Visit Monte Cavallo, Baths of Diocletian, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Santa Maria Maggiore, Le Sette Salle delle Terme di Tito and again the Coliseum and Forum.

Read Montaigne, and write to Papa.' Her itinerary could be that of any modern tourist—unchanged over two hundred years. I follow Mary's itinerary but read Malouf and Dessaix, filtering my experience through the lens of my own literary culture.

II. From his travels in Italy, Montaigne argued that the piling up of ruins, the overbuilding and repurposing, destroys their integrity and chronology. In their efforts to destroy the terrifying power of Rome, the barbarians shattered the past to rubble. Only the sky remains the same. Forever after we have been searching through the ruins, piecing together fragments, building anew from the spoils, making afresh.

III. We tour the Baths of Diocletian. Inside, shattered marble and stone is impeccably ordered, catalogued, interpreted. Outside, remnants scatter the courtyard, stacked in corners. The rusted clawfoot bath in my garden is a mass-produced turn-of-last-century replica of an 18th century hygiene innovation, downsized from a Roman garden fountain.

IV. The Colosseum emerges between the buildings, unfurling layers of arches as we approach. Even at this early hour, a sea of tiny figures surge around its foundations, the tousled red and gold of a gladiator-helmeted

guide breaking the waves of white t-shirts and sneakers. I imagine the vast velarium of sails, like a fully rigged space ship sailing in from antiquity.

V. We rush past Caravaggios fenced by tasselled ropes. Priceless Michelangelos reflect behind glass. Sea-monsters, gods and heroes do battle unnoticed beneath our feet. Intricate works of art created from broken fragments and shards. Ancient mosaics, unprotected, undimmed in their pragmatic brilliance a triumph of both style and substance.

VI. When Mary visited, Rome was a town of just over 100,000 souls. The countryside dotted with the ruins of an older, richer, bigger metropolis. A lost civilisation; a loss of civilisation. A lawless hinterland of thieves and vagabonds into which wealthy tourists launched themselves to worship at shrines and monuments. 'I see the radiant Orion through the mighty columns of the temple of Concord, and the mellow fading light softens down the modern buildings of the Capitol, the only ones that interfere with the sublime desolation of the scene' (*Letters from Abroad*). Percy's modernity is old now, softened by time and perspective more than light. The heritage overlay tucks modernity behind closed doors. A lack of advertising soothes frenetic eyes. Sidetrack down cobbled

alley steps and the traffic noise disappears. Householders water plants, ride bikes, cook and gossip. Not so much a city as a cluster of villages.

VII. Each day, more people visit the Vatican, than lived in all of Rome in 1818. Today, every single one crowds into the Sistine Chapel. We pour down corridors, gawp at marvels, snap shots of other people's heads and all but weep for deliverance when released into the gilded halls of St Peter's. It feels like salvation.

VIII. A flock of tourists trail behind a bobbing silk scarf waved aloft. Comfortable shoes and clothes encompass overly comforted bodies. The tours drift by with languid indifference, colour coded by earphones: an effortless ease, a right to be here.

IX. Michelangelo's *Bound Slave* struggles to free itself from the stone that binds its unfinished form. 'Carving is easy, you just go to the skin and stop.' A work in progress. Imperfect. The effort of culture to emerge from nature.

X. Mary, wilful and impassioned with teenage idealism, ran away with a married poet at sixteen. Practicing what her philosopher father preached, living in her mother's ideal image, only to find that, for his daughter, Godwin had lost confidence in his principles.

XI. The Colosseum housed 50,000 and Circus Maximus five times more. No-one built stadiums this size again until the Strahov Stadium of the 1920s in the Czech Republic. Today Circus Maximus is rivalled only by the Rungardo May Day Stadium in Pyongyang. State-funded spectacles and nationalistic fervour—Juvenal’s bread and circuses.

XII. ‘Everything that totters does not fall. The contexture is so great a body holds by more nails than one; it holds even by its antiquity, like old buildings from which the foundations are worn away by time, without rough-cast or mortar, which yet live and support themselves by their own weight.’ (Montaigne, *Of Vanity*).

XIII. Mary does not mention baby Clara’s recent death in her Rome journal. Nor her strained marriage, her estranged father, the family suicides, her sister’s obsessions. Nor any mention of *Frankenstein’s* reception, published anonymously on 11 March 1818, with a foreword by her husband, a dedication to her father, Godwin. A visit to the Coliseum ‘with William’ the only concession to the domestic.

XIV. The floor of the bath—vast mosaicked swimming pool—slips beneath a 16th century church. A Perspex cut-away reveals the technology for the hypocaust, delivering heat to the calidarium.

The grandeur of Rome built, not from marble, but concrete and bricks. More industrial than classical.

### Book Three

I. Rome is the capital of capitals. An over-abundance of over-sized, over-scaled architecture, built over, atop, alongside, cheek by jowl, crowding out the sunlight, overshadowing their citizens with monstrous grandiosity. Small wonder Hughes thought ‘the overarching metaphor for all later imperialism—French, German but especially British—was the Roman Empire.’

II. A green lizard freezes into a verdigris statue. The Roman Wall Lizard (*Podarcus sicula*)—at home on concrete, brick, plaster, stone or rock long before any walls existed. Tiny dragons, cast in bronze and studded with emeralds. Not even a legion of cats can dent their abundance. There is no scale missing from their chest.

III. A friend of mine posts a picture of herself at the Capitol, all doric columns and domes in the background. I am momentarily excited by the prospect of meeting her for coffee, until I realise that she is in Washington.

IV. A fat-bottomed cherub clammers over the gilded frame on the ceiling, grinning wildly, breaking the fourth wall. We step inside

an inverted wedding cake, ceilings and walls iced with pale pastel plaster. The shadows shift on a painted perspective, a deceptive depth. Even the mosaics are optical illusions.

V. Mary told her friend she preferred Rome to the natural beauty of Naples: ‘Rome is formed by men, a city in the midst of a desert, its associations and being are entirely human’. For Percy the death of Rome is the triumph of Nature: ‘Rome has fallen, ye see it lying / Heaped in undistinguished ruin: Nature is alone undying’ (*Poetical Works*). Perhaps Nature was not so comforting for a young mother, bereft of a child and her own mother in childbirth. As Freud would later put it ‘The principle task of civilisation, its actual *raison d’être* is to defend us against nature.’

VI. The pine trees flatten across the setting sun as if streaked by wind. *Pinus domestica*—their formal association with humans. Quintessentially Mediterranean, even in the city looking as if they had sprouted from a cliff edge against bright skies and crystal waters. An artifice, sculpted by chainsaw. Giant bonsais mimicking nature’s sublimity.

VII. Few now remember Godwin for his novels or Percy Shelley for his prose. *Frankenstein* was roundly praised for its boldness

and power when critics assumed it was written by either the father or the husband. Once Mary claimed authorship it became a ‘crude and ill-digested’ teenage work, so full of inconsistencies, so ‘grotesque and bizarre’, absurd to the point of being ‘wicked and immoral’.

VIII. Everything in Rome is monumental, a monument. Built not for people, but for gods, emperors or bureaucrats. Vast doorways, porticos, foyers, stairways, high ceilings. For D.H. Lawrence, in the semi-autobiographical persona of Richard Somers, Rome’s giant buildings ‘were a nightmare. Even the cathedrals. Huge, huge bulks that are called beauty. Beauty seemed to him like some turgid tumour. Never again, he felt, did he want to look at London, the horrible WEIGHT of it: or at Rome with all the pressure on the hills. Horrible, inert, man-moulded weight. Heavy as death.’

IX. A shortcut takes us through the Porticus Octaviae and Theater of Marcellus. Ancient columns rise broken and crumbled before an apartment block. Marble-clad to impress the gods, later used as slabs for fish. Scaffolding bandages the half-healed wound between an old arch and sharp-edged modernity. Mesh-fenced paths keeps us safe from the infectious decay of age. A curtain in an upstairs room swishes shut, above a colonnaded ruin.

X. Montaigne deemed ‘that an ancient Roman would not recognise the site of his city were he to behold it’. And indeed, Mary’s Valerius does not. Her reanimated Roman despairs, ‘Alas! Alas! Such is the image of Rome fallen, torn, degraded by a hateful superstition; yet still ... still awakening in the imaginations of men all that can purify and ennoble the mind.’

XI. Rome is city of bones. A city of the dead, for all its living and vibrant presence. Everywhere I walk on mountains of debris from past lives. My feet ache under the relentless hardness of paving through the thin leather soles of my Italian sandals. Not so much the eternal city as endlessly recycled. What lies beneath this city, beneath the catacombs and the crypts, with ancient bones stacked fifty deep? Trapdoored beneath the mosaic floor of Santa Maggiore basilica lies a Roman villa, marking time with calendared frescoes. Layering over Etruscan, Bronze or Stone Age foundations.

XII. Critics be damned. *Frankenstein* was a monster that grew ever more popular. Translated, republished, adapted, reprinted, filmed. A cultural icon, universally known if not read. How many teenage girls have founded not one, but two, modern genres—gothic horror and science fiction?

XIII. The Cemetery for Non-Catholic Foreigners lies in the shadow of the tomb of Gaius Cestius, a Roman magistrate whose passion for all things Egyptian inspired him to build a pyramid, 125 (Roman) feet high, for his cenotaph, aptly guarded by a legion of impassive cats.

XIV. In 1820 malaria was rife in Rome. Mary and Percy’s poor ‘blue-eyed Wilmouse’ suffered in the grip of the deadly *falciparum*. *The Last Man* gives voice to Mary’s regret, fearing neither weather, starvation nor predation, but of disease: ‘I had been a fool to remain in Rome all this time: Rome noted for Malaria, the famous caterer of death.’ English tourists weep quietly at the tomb of Keats, or Shelley. William is buried alone in the old garden cemetery, his grave a flat stone behind the pyramid.

‘that fair blue-eyed child  
Who was the lodestar of  
your life:—and say—  
All see, since his most swift  
and piteous death,  
That day and night, and  
heaven and earth, and  
time,  
And all the things hoped for  
or done therein  
Are changed to you,  
through your exceeding  
grief.’ (*The Cenci*)

XV. Would Shelley or even Byron have been half as famous had it not been for Mary? Mary tirelessly anthologised and published her husband’s work after his death. Painstakingly transcribed Byron’s illegible handwriting, allowing *Don Juan* to be published. Writing is a fickle form of immortality.

#### Book Four

I. The Eternal City—perhaps not reference to the gateway to heaven, but for sheer determined survival and longevity. The evidence is scattered everywhere, in empty fenced lots filled with fallen columns and piles of masonry, overgrown with weeds and guarded by cats.

II. The ancient Romans determined their fates by consulting the auspices—looking to the birds. The birds revealed Jupiter’s will, dictating all private, all public action. What does it auger for world peace when the Pope’s white doves are savaged on release, one by a crow and another by a seagull?

III. It is not ruins but writing that has immortalised Rome. The Greeks gave us encyclopaedic knowledge—how to think. The Romans bequeathed technical writing—how to build. How to build a better aqueduct, how to build a better empire, how to build a better world: a blueprint we have followed ever since.

IV. Trams rumble beneath the arches of the Porta Maggiore aqueduct. An imperial triumph over nature. Reworked into the Aurelian wall, now filled by tiny compartments of domesticity. Stall holders shelter beneath ancient brickwork built to barricade Germanic hordes. Breached, not by force, but by destruction of the aqueducts and their ‘aqua vitae’.

V. Rome is famous for migrations of starlings, sweeping autumnal murmurations over the Tiber. It is autumn. I listen carefully in the early dawn air, before the rumbling roar of daily life becomes deafening. There are no birds. Tired of cleaning up, the city council hired noise-makers to scare the birds from their roosts, moving the migrants on.

VI. Before I left home, a wedge-tailed eagle had circled low over the house, a vast shadow sweeping across the window, trailed by the shrieks of galahs and a steely contingent of magpies locked into its slipstream like tiny black and white fighter pilots escorting an alien intrusion out of their airspace.

VII. If not the light, then what do Australians seek? We have enough sharp-edged clarity beneath a vast sky. Peter Porter believed that we lacked the human dimension. In Italy, ‘man himself is the measure of beauty’. Australians grow weary of our constant losing battle with

Nature. In Italy ‘people and landscape remain in agreement’, they have achieved a ‘peculiar truce’.

VIII. The train dives through boltholes at ear-popping speed, emerging breathless for glimpses of countryside—neat fields, olive groves and rivers. Still life from a speeding bullet. Shallow-pitched tiled rooves squat over half-shuttered windows like elderly guard-dogs barely alert for intruders. Landscape tilled, drained, divided, edged, mounded, flattened, retained and conformed. An uneasy *Pax Romana*.

IX. You can smell them before you see them. Crisp medicinal volatiles evaporating in summer heat. Alien evergreens, reverse immigrants, a forest of Tasmanian blue gums planted to suck dry the malarial swamps of the Campagna. Italian now, not Australian. Subtly different, lush, less chewed, more twisted. Assimilated. What would the Shelleys have seen in this foreign forest? Would Percy have seen the dryad forms of these gums—pale limbs lifted in supplication to the pleasures of ancient gods, sheathes of blue green wafting as they step naked from earthly tunics that pile discarded on the forest floor? Mary would see beyond the trees, to the Tre Fontaine monastery, where some imagined visitor from distant shores rests a while and shares his tales of alchemical meddling

and misguided dreams of eternal life with his increasingly horrified hosts.

X. Life transmogrified in stone. Nature’s sculptures, concealed by eons until wind or weather strips them bare, exposed to air. Secrets nestled into limestone, shrouded by sediment. Compressed, heated, metamorphosed into marble. ‘Every block of stone has a statue inside it,’ declared Michelangelo, ‘it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.’

XI. We visit a town in the Alps, cradled by steep-slabbed mountains scraping cloud-spume with their peaks. I imagine Mary’s monster among ‘the dark crags and rugged mountains throwing awful shadows.’ But the only giant footsteps are those of dinosaurs. Humans leave no footprints, just the refusia of 100,000 years.

XII. In a local museum I wander past the swathes of flint arrowheads, beaded necklaces, iron buckles, red, black and cream ceramics with a thousand tiny figures dancing stories in never-ending circles. Material as culture. What does this mean for Australia where 40, 60, 80 thousand years of occupation has left barely any refuse at all.

### Book Five

I. I can see now, why the wealthy English went to Rome to

complete their education, to be ‘civilised’. How did it feel, at the birth of industry, to see the ruins of a society so much more advanced, so many centuries ago? Did they see it as a warning? This waxing and waning, this rise and fall. Rome is not the only great city and civilisation to have fallen, but it is the only one to revive itself, to have dragged Europe out of the Dark Ages that followed its fall and into the brightness of the Renaissance. And now, arguably, into its Third Age—finally exceeding, by the 1930s, the boundaries of its ancient greatness. I think of the lost cities of Angkor, of Machu Pichu, of the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde. Carved by hand, by generations, from solid stone. With blood, sweat and pain. Overgrown, abandoned, reclaimed by nature, eroding back into the landscape.

II. Michelangelo was not interested in the forms nature hid in the marble, only the ones in his imagination. Fossils create weakness in the stone. Fossil marble is discarded, not even recognised by the name, but rather as prosaic ‘limestone’. Culture must be free to imagine its own forms.

III. A malformed magpie lurches across the footpath, all oversized beak and grimy grey. Perhaps it is unkind to judge a juvenile Hooded Crow by Australian avian standards. Perhaps it is justice, after centuries of European

misnomers for our feathered fauna, for all the tiresome clichés about squawkers and screechers, in the heartland of songbirds.

IV. I once thought England unimaginably rich in antiquities. But their treasures are pillaged from scrapheaps of far greater civilisations. Crude brutalist castles, a scattering of summer-houses and bare grey cathedrals now seem provincial and derivative. Edge, not centre, of empire after all.

V. An escarpment in far north Queensland looks across what was once an ancient inland sea. Swathes of sparse blue-green eucalypt stretch unbroken to the far horizon. In the caves behind, paintings of long absent animals adorn the walls—swordfish and thylacines. Figures of men and women, walking the land lightly.

VI. I recognise Lawrence’s ‘super-incumbent’ Roman buildings, depressing the national psyche. We have them in Canberra. Spaced apart on sweeping lawns—monolithic, oversized—dominating space, absorbing funds. A feature of capitals, proximity to treasury, snouts in troughs. Architecture of excess. Like Dubai. A feature of wealthy men out of control, with a desire to impress for posterity.

VII. In the cool shade of the Villa Borghese Gardens something scratches urgently in the shadowy leaf litter by the path. I pause,

waiting for the bird's brown speckled form to resolve against the monochromatic background. The bird pauses too—head tilted, dark eye fixed on me, foot upraised—and waits for me to leave.

VIII. Dessaix's *Night Letters* concludes with fatigue at 'the accumulation of stories, battles, treaties, families, duchies, paintings, churches, palaces—all the things the antipodean finds so exciting on arrival'. The known is tiring, a recitation of catalogued facts and knowledge. No room for imagination. Look for the less well known, the untold, the undocumented. Find the space between the rocks, the crack, the crevice that gives you foothold. Take your story from there.

### Book Six

I. The plane creeps across the darkening landscape, in flight from the setting sun. We look out across a black Australia. Uluru rises from the darkness, majestic and imperial, clothed in reds and purples, catching the last of the dying light.

II. 'Australians are the only people in the world who will drive for hundreds of ks just to see a funny looking rock,' declares Greer. With so few structures, a few buildings, remnant villages, fish traps, and rock art, we worship Nature's architectural wonders. What we lack in material culture, we boast of in material Nature—the tallest

trees, the largest reef, the oldest rocks—rich, rare and splendid.

III. 'Geography trumps all' in Australia, 'a place with more land than people, more geography than architecture'. Despite the obligatory writer's pilgrimage, Europe seems to have left little trace on Tim Winton. As if it was too pale and shadowed for eyes long squinted against the brightness of home.

IV. A dark pelt of vegetation has been stripped away from the surface near the Western Australian coast. Golden wind-sculpts glow beneath a bright clouded sky. An alien city of rocky pinnacles from another planet. Endlessly covered, recovered, revealed by warm cadmium sand driven under south-westerly winds. We drove through the Pinnacles as if they were villages, pausing in lay-bys for closer inspection. Nature exposes her own architecture, her relentless disregard for creation or destruction. The atmosphere is saturated with the long-dead forest, an inhuman city that defies our presence and our comprehension.

V. D.H. Lawrence could not reconcile with the Western Australian landscape. Somers pines for 'Europe with hungry longing: Florence, with Giotto's pale tower: or the Pincio at Rome'. Europe's gravitas was inescapable. He 'could understand how the Romans had

preferred death to exile. He could sympathise now with Ovid on the Danube, hungering for Rome and blind to the land around him, blind to the savages.'

VI. For Malouf, Ovid's exile from Roman civilisation is a return to nature, to his true self. Ovid imagines himself out of stone into the different creatures we've become. The Child walks back into his inheritance, into the society of his own kind. Can we walk the landscape back in time, unpacking human impact, undoing civilisation? Or does the stone remain, evidence of past lives? Ruined symbols of where we've been, how far we've evolved, improved, progressed?

VII. How can one be civilised—define oneself against Nature—in a place where Nature has been domesticated, tamed, subdued beyond all recognition? Dessaix returned to Australia to have space to think, to imagine, to be somewhere freer, warmer, kinder.

VIII. Mary's *Last Man* seeks comfort in Rome. Companionable amongst statues in human form, in libraries of human thought. But culture gives way to nature. 'The seasons have made their wonted round, and decked this eternal city in a changeful robe of surpassing beauty.' The last man heads south, to the new world, to the lands beyond the Indian Ocean.

IX. We have left behind the spreading webs of light tangling Europe and the Middle East. We fly over black ocean and dark desert, seeking the thin thread of jewels strung along the south coast, a continent illuminated by civilisation. Unexpected light punctuates the western deserts. Wildfires burning uncontrolled and unremarked, as if for 100,000 years.

X. Lawrence, or Somers, thought Australia's lightness was a new world, in which mistakes had yet to be made. But we all carry the burden of our past with us, no matter how far we flee. 'The Australian landscape, with the remote gum-trees running their white nerves into the air, the random streets of flimsy bungalows, all loose from one another, and temporary ...the frail, aloof, inconspicuous clarity of the landscape.' What he saw was the fragility of the landscape, the need to step lightly: a premonition that our efforts could be effortlessly swept away by flood, fire, drought or wind.

XI. There is no human monument that can triumph over nature's grandeur. Visitors come here for wildness, space and a sense of isolation few other places seem to offer. Far from seeing this as a lack, Winton wonders whether architecture is 'what you console yourself with' when the wilderness has gone.

XII. Perched on the edges of our continent we try to forget how much we are contained by our climate and unpredictable ecology. For all our efforts, we remain restricted, in time, space and temperament, to the good seasons, the sunny days, making the most of what comes when it does, for it may not come again for years, or decades. Neither man, nor woman, has the measure of this beauty. We travel to find where we belong. Only to find that we belong everywhere, and nowhere. This land requires no civilising, needs no owner, no improvement or cultivation. It resists belonging, resists culture. Perhaps it is enough, not to master, not to conquer. Perhaps it is enough just to be here. To be grateful.

XIII. In the corner of an exhibition in Perth celebrating 400 years of European contact there is a small necklace of shells, 32,000 years old.

XIV. The plane breaks through a dense bank of clouds to reveal

a familiar landscape. A mosaic of farmland, bush and town: gold, greens and ochres. A Mediterranean palate. Tiny islands dot the turquoise seas of the gulf, with fishing boats carving white wakes across the water.

XV. From the air, Adelaide pans flat across the coastal plain, a mosaic of fragmented terracotta tiles. Geometric, planned, orderly lines radiate from the central square, surrounded by blocks of green parkland. Unrepentant creek-lines meander untidily like cracks on a tiled floor, the edges butting haphazardly against the rumpled green of the hills. As the plane tilts, the tiny tiles resolve into rooftops, swimming pools, cars and pavements, drawing me back to this alien place I call home.

XVI. 'We are all of us exiles in one place or another—even those who never leave home...'  
(Malouf 'At Ravenna')

—FINIS—

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## Dumping Ground Tanya Dawes

Tanya Dawes is an emerging writer from Melbourne. Tanya received second place in the 2016 FAW Forest short story competition. She has published short fiction and poetry in a number of regional anthologies over the past eight years.

As Sophie said goodnight to the last of her clients, I sent Malcolm out for a half-kilometre run.

'I'm heading off now, Ella,' Sophie said. 'Sure you don't want me to hang around?'

It was our workplace policy not to train male clients after seven pm. If Malcolm had been any other male client, I would've asked her to hang around, or had not accepted his booking request at all.

'I'll be fine,' I said.

Sophie nodded as she pushed open the glass front door. 'I'll see you tomorrow, but text me when you get home, okay?'

I gave Sophie a soldier's salute as the door closed between us.

I looked around the gym. The space had a different feel in the evenings. It felt used, somehow full of the day's conversations and people's sweat. I watched clients every afternoon, walking in wearing suits and pencil skirts before changing into expensive gym clothes, swapping one uniform for another. It was a place between other, seemingly more important, places.

I used the few minutes I had before Malcolm came back to grab the cleaning products from under the kitchen sink. As the last trainer to leave it was my job to wipe down the equipment.

As I sat the stuff next to the exercise bike Malcolm pulled open the front door. The evening breeze shoved its way in before the door swung shut.

'I thought we could keep going with your weights program—'

Malcolm shook his head and marched down the length of the building, as though searching for something. He halted in front of the boxing gloves and picked up a pair.

His breath was heavy and fast. 'No, Ella, I just want to box.'

He paced the room like a circus lion inside its cage as he strapped on the gloves.

It was Friday. Maybe he needed to let off some steam. I picked up the boxing pads and slipped my fingers in.

We ran through sets of one hundred and fifty punches, alternating between upper-cuts, hooks and straight punches. He didn't say a thing.

As I counted each round I thought about the usual Malcolm who trained with me on Monday and Wednesday at six am, the one who would ask how my psychology course was going and I would ask how he was going with the latest arts program he was putting together.

Most of my middle-aged male clients were divorced, but Malcolm was one of the few who were married. He had no children. He'd only spoken of this once, telling me his wife, Whitney, had chosen her career in finance over having a family. The level tone in his voice sounded well-practiced.

The divorced men took up personal training because they were either angry or depressed. We called them gym-rats. My pet-theory was that they came to the gym looking for a pseudo-wife, lover, whore or secretary. I found myself listening to them indifferently as I knelt on the floor counting Russian twists.

I thought back through the last few weeks and remembered something Malcolm had called 'The Amalgamation'. Did the relentless boxing have something to do with that?

My arms started to ache after twenty minutes of jarring hits.

I stepped back and let my arms droop.

'Are you okay? I'm sorry,' Malcolm said.

'I'm fine, go grab a drink.'

As he walked over to the lockers I let the boxing pads fall to the ground. My fingers throbbed as I squeezed them into fists.

'Ella, your arms look like they might fall off.' Malcolm gently pushed at my bicep with his gloved hand. He looked less like the circus lion and more like himself.

'I'm okay, we can keep going if you need.'

He took off his gloves and let them drop to the floor. 'I'll finish with the weights.'

After the weights routine he ended the session with chin-ups. I knew his right shoulder was beginning to ache by the way he strained to favour his left arm. As he pulled himself up, I gave his foot a little lift to take some of the weight. He managed fourteen chin-ups before finding the platform beneath him.

Malcolm caught his breath. 'I was demoted from my position at work today.'

The tone in his voice was bitter and made me swallow rather than respond with my usual *It'll be fine in the end* comment.

'I'm sorry,' I said. 'Is it because of the amalgamation?'

He nodded. 'I had a meeting with them today. I'm no longer the Arts Director.' The words came out sounding new, unpractised. 'When two councils merge, someone has to step down. You can't have twin positions in every department.' Malcolm picked up his towel and wiped the sweat from the back of his neck.

I'd never been involved in a council office shakedown. I'd never even worked in an office. I'd been oblivious to such things during my four-year-long gap year as I waited on tables, saving for my next overseas trip.

'Do you feel a bit better now? After the boxing, I mean.'

He nodded but seemed distracted, like he had only fixed half of the problem.

As I finished cleaning the exercise bike and walked over to the weights, I tried to remember some of the techniques we studied in my social psychology class. When nothing came to me I opted for a quote I'd read.

'When you think your life is falling apart, it's usually falling back together in disguise.'

'You're taking "Philosophy for Teens" at uni now?'

I gave him a wide-eye nod, the way a child convinces their parent they've definitely brushed their teeth. 'It's called Instagram. Its knowledge is endless, and totally free. You should try it sometime.'

Malcolm was playful, rather than patronising, about the seventeen-year age difference between us. He asked about my gap years with a sense of inquisitiveness and I called him a social media Luddite. He had no Facebook account, no pseudo-name on Instagram and not one board on Pinterest. When I found his profile on LinkedIn, he claimed it was his PA who organised it, not him.

Malcolm sat on one of the benches and loosened his shoelaces. His t-shirt fell forward to show the black hairs on his chest. I wondered how old he had been when he'd begun to feel like a grown man. When we trained he never complained about his shoulder injury or his bad knee. Before tonight I'd never known him to come to the gym for anything other than physical training.

Malcolm picked up the spare cloth and started wiping down the bars that usually carry the heavy weights.

He noticed me looking at him.

'If I help you out, we get to go home sooner, yeah?'

'Thanks for hanging back,' I said.

In the silence I heard the wind rattle the unlocked door. I walked over and locked it.

'Do you get the jitters when you're here alone?' he said.

I knelt down and picked up my cleaning cloth before looking up at him. 'I can talk myself out of fear, it is one of my many gifts.'

'That's quite a statement for a Psychology major,' he said as he took the spray-bottle out of my hand. 'Don't they teach you about self-awareness when you take "Introduction to Sociopaths and Psychos"?''

'I don't need to study a unit in awareness, Malcolm, I've worked here for eighteen months. I know all the signs.' I stood up and walked over to the wall of mirrors.

As I cleaned the glass, I thought about the text messages and photos I received from the gym-rats. Photos of new shirts they just bought and pictures of tattoos from Pinterest, asking for my opinion. I'd send an emoji of acknowledgement, a thumbs up or smiley-face. This seemed to keep them happy, a small substitute from the nightly meals and freshly-ironed shirts that I imagined they had lost.

In the mirror, Malcolm watched me from across the room.

I looked at his reflection and smiled. 'And FYI, I got a HD on my sociopath essay.'

'I'm pretty sure you get HDs for every essay, Ella. But, you see, it's not always about knowing the other person. It's about knowing yourself.'

I stopped cleaning the mirror glass and turned around. The gruelling workouts and the conversations of the day seemed to hang in the air like invisible dust-particles that filled the space between Malcolm and me. I looked through them to where he stood on the other side of the room. The sweat on his grey t-shirt had dried. By the way his still-damp hair curled next to his ears, it looked due for a haircut. I had a sudden impulse to walk over to him and wrap the curling strands around my finger. I squeezed the paper towel in my hand so I could feel something else until the urge passed.

Malcolm seemed to watch each small movement I made.

'It wasn't me who sent the text message for a late session, was it?' I said. 'If we're going to talk about knowing ourselves, then I should ask why you're here.'

He walked across the room and sat on the bench next to the mirror wall. If he'd wanted to, he could have reached out and wrapped his arm around my waist. He breathed out with an exhausted sigh. His breath was warm on my arm. I squeezed the paper towel in my hand.

'I was pissed off.'

'So you're here just to vent?' I said.

It had been warm in the gym and I was wearing my running shorts and a singlet. Did my bare legs and arms make me look childish, or look feminine? He'd never seen my Facebook photos. Never seen me looking

glassy-eyed from too many cocktails. Would our conversation be any different if I were standing in front of him wearing five-inch heels?

He leaned back along the length of the bench before looking up at me.

'Vent, escape,' he said. 'Have a different conversation before the one I'll go home to.' He ran his fingers through his hair. 'Stop off somewhere between my work and my life.'

'Life, or wife?' The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them.

He sat up and laughed, a breathy chuckle that made him sound like I had guessed the answer to something.

'It's always been easy talking with you, Ella.'

He glanced at the mirror. Maybe he was looking at my reflection.

'You have this knack, you know, this way of listening to my problems and then flipping the conversation to something amusing. You make me forget my troubles.' He brushed the back of my hand with his finger. I felt it travel from my wrist to my knuckle. 'It's one of your many gifts.'

He stood up. I tilted my head to look up at his face. The stubble on his neck was peppered with white hairs.

'I wanted to be here,' he said. 'Does that make me just another one of your hopeless, middle-aged gym-rats?'

Our faces were only inches apart. It only needed a slight turn of the head, or stretch of the neck.

I squeezed the paper towel in my hand.

'No,' I said. 'I think it makes you human.'

I thought about Sophie and what she said to me when I first started working with her. She'd compared personal training with hairdressing. They came here to have themselves fixed up.

'I think the drive from here back to your life will help clear your head. Take care of that shoulder. You might have strained it a little.' I let the paper towel drop to the ground.

My arm brushed against his chest as I turned. In the reflection of the glass I saw him reach out but, when I looked again, his arms were hanging loosely at his sides.

I stopped at the office doorway. 'I can lock up. I'll see you on Monday.'

He seemed to wait for me to move. I held onto the doorhandle to stop myself from running back over to him.

After a moment he nodded, as if he was agreeing with some silent pact we'd just made. 'Goodnight, Ella.'

I stepped into the office and paced the small room until I heard the swish and click of the front door. I leaned up against the wall, feeling

breathless, and studied the back of my hand. My logical brain told me there would be no mark on my hand, but I looked for one all the same.

As I left the office I noticed the paper towel still lying on the floor next to the mirror wall. I picked it up on my way past and squeezed it one last time before throwing it in the bin.

## Rejection (behind a thin grey curtain) Christine Burrows

Christine Burrows is a Melbourne poet, originally from New Zealand. Recent work has appeared in a number of anthologies and literary journals, including *Audacious*, *Poetry and Place Anthology*, *Cordite Review* and *Australian Poetry Anthology* vol. 5. Her work explores diverse aspects of human experience including identity, trauma, grief, dislocation and social justice.

I'm juiced up on steroids. Awake as fuck in a ward of sleeping sick people. Electrical things drone, beep, hum, drum lightly in my head. In darkness sprayed with glow spots of orange, yellow, green, blue from power-points and devices. I don't even know what the noise is. It's just everywhere. My skin crawls like a mass of maggots. I want to scratch the shit out of it. Bilirubin, apparently. High levels in your blood make you itchy. High levels indicate rejection. My right arm throbs from an awkward cannula in the inner elbow. The nurse missed the first time. Popped through the vein on my wrist. Bunged it in my inner elbow instead. Sore. But fine.

If I deep breathe, pain pings from the biopsy incision site. They stuck in a long needle just below my right ribs. Punctured through skin, fat, the liver capsule. Pop. You feel it. Through the anaesthetic. Pop. Through the protective capsule, into the soft liver tissue. Ouch. They punch out a tiny sample. Ouch. This is the up-close, bug-eyed, kohl-smudged, blood-streaked, black-head-infested, bulb-nosed face of rejection. I know rejection. More failed relationships than I care/dare to account for. But this? This is my body rejecting its saviour.

Soft, rhythmic snores penetrate the surround-sound electrical purring. Penetrate the thin curtain separating the next bed from mine. The kidney guy. His light is on, but he's asleep. He doesn't eat or drink enough, he's bleeding from the small bowel. The doctors are baffled. He's got a 2% chance of a match for a third kidney transplant. They've removed two. Rejection. I heard this through the thin, grey curtain, before they wheeled him away for dialysis, sighing. His wife dark eye-ringed and thin as him. Pallid. Grim. Trailed behind the gurney.

The night nurse has been handed our clinical care. Our troubles, handed over. He pads softly down the wide corridor. He'll come in soon and take everyone's blood pressure, then four hours later. Wake up the

sick sleepers. I'll be awake. Buzzing from steroids, despite the sedatives. Steroids to treat rejection.

You don't know when your body's rejecting the transplant. The bloods pick it up. Certain enzyme levels go up for no other reason. You still feel fine. Well, as fine as you can in the new 'fine'. The new normal. You tough out the borderlands, the wasteland, between 'terminal illness' diagnosis and living through it. You're a lucky one. Lucky for getting this far. Lucky and guilty and not always grateful as you should be for the transplant that saved you. Actually, not fine. You told the doctors you're not fine; but they don't really care/listen unless/until the blood numbers go/show up. Then they pay attention. When there's a problem with your bloods, it's not fine anymore.

Humans are, mostly, adaptable and adaptive. Just look around. At all of it. Peak hour train commuters. Squashed all the way to their mortgage-murdered dream homes in desolate outer suburbs. Human rights held to ransom in refugee detention centres; camps; children enslaved in sweatshops and chicken factories the size of medium towns. Plastic-choked marine life. Monsanto. All of the wrong. Humans adapt to atrocity with surprising complacency and obedience. It becomes a new normal. Convenient. Easy. Slyly erasing the old normal. For better or worse. It's fine. It's normal. That uneasiness in your gut, that's something you ate. Or a side effect.

Thin grey curtains. You wouldn't (normally) use thin curtains as walls between bedrooms or neighbouring homes. In hospital, thin curtains separate total strangers. Doctors, nurses and sometimes visitors (but never the patients) act like these thin curtains are walls, are sound-proof, give privacy to highly sensitive conversations. A nurse might stop mid-sentence; pull the curtain (curtain hooks merrily roll along the curtain track; invite you to share the delusion of privacy). Ritualistic. Conspiratorially. Then, in a loud voice, state your name, medical situation, the medicines you're getting. All the private stuff. Or ask, for all the world to hear, if you've opened your bowels and was it solid, hard, soft. Did you strain?

The night nurse enters quietly. Unplugs a machine from the wall, then wheels it squeaking from bed to bed. He whispers through the curtains (when lights are off, they whisper). He arrives to take my blood pressure. It's normal. My temperature is normal. My heart rate is slightly elevated. My oxygen is normal. My bowels are normal. He gives me a disposable plastic medicine cup containing two pink sleeping tablets to counteract steroids, which fight rejection of the transplanted liver by my medically-suppressed immune system. This is the new normal.

I know why they pull the curtains. It's not for privacy of information. It's so you can cry in private.

## ***Travelling Through the Dark: Six Weeks in Oregon***

Caitlin Maling

Caitlin Maling is the author of two collections of poetry, *Border Crossing* (2017) and *Conversations I've Never Had* (2015), both out through Fremantle Press. She is currently pursuing a PhD in comparative ecopoetics at the University of Sydney.

'William Stafford's complete works constitute a testament to living' (Kitchen, *Understanding William Stafford* 9).

'For a poem is not the end, but the beginning, of an excursion' (Stafford, *Writing the Australian Crawl* 5).

It was coming to the end of my time in America. PhD applications still ongoing, I didn't know where I was going but the movers were booked, the cars and furniture in the process of being sold. It was back to that space of deciding what is necessary and what is easy to replace. I had done a lot, seen a lot, been twenty-something across twenty-something states, tried out their names in my mouth. I liked the South, the long vowels and how the rusting history on every street hung low, like a flag off a pole.

It was November on the Pacific Coast. It was cold. When I flew into Portland, I realised the clothes I had brought were not enough. My bags fell off the cart in an indictment of their useless contents. So many books and not one truly warm pair of pants. I drove into the centre of Portland to shop, not knowing what I would find further south on the coast. Portland was sleet and rivers. I wandered in and out of Foyles without buying anything. The Portland of *Portlandia*, of Foyles, of coffee and artisanal practices, left-leaning indie companies and expat Australians, is a place I am meant to like if not immediately sink into and declare myself at home. But it was sleeting and the Wholefoods I entered was like all the other Wholefoods I've found myself in city to city. Except this one checked my ID before allowing me to buy kombucha.

It was like under everything there was this sadness. There's a Franz Wright line (via Basho), 'When I hear the dawn gulls cry/ even in New York/ I long for New York—' (62) that I take with me everywhere. It's in the absence when I think to listen for my heart. In Wright's poem, a person

sits still while aching for the places the train moves through. One of the ways I start to write a new poem is to ask a question. Day after day when I lived in the UK I asked myself, how is a poem like a train? My fiancé caught them through the sleet and snow to work and back, leaving and returning in darkness. Right now in Sydney, as I'm writing this sentence, the barista starts to say 'every Australian I've ever known has said it's too dark in the UK, the sun rising at 11 and setting at 3'.

It was a two-hour drive from Portland through hills to the SITKA Center for Art and Ecology where I was to spend six weeks on the Oregon Coast. As I made my way further south, lanes emerged and narrowed through towns growing smaller with the road. The night was coming in fast when I hit the big trees and curves outside of Otis. When night falls heavy over unfamiliar roads, I always get a keyed up feeling similar to when we would take dexies (Perth after dinner-mints) in Freo to study as teens. In both situations I sense that there's some danger and I won't be sleeping that night.

It was late in the day to be arriving at the residency. The property manager showed me around generously with a hushed rush. My house was away from the central complex. A rich artist's summer place. A high loft bedroom, small bathroom and a large open space, walls sparsely populated with masks and sculptures. A leather couch and the real versions of the leather chair and footstools that IKEA recreates in mass. Out the uncovered windows there were views I couldn't see. With lights on, the cape unpopulated in winter, I was the only bulb nestled in the dripping pines.

It was hanging, the precipice of feeling I needed to write. I was very tired. My first book had been all adolescent feeling, abandon and music. I was mealy mouthed and adult now. The back of my throat felt closed. I sucked cough lozenges and rested. I had been resting for the six months since I had finished my MFA. Resting my way across America, in RVs, cheap motel rooms, residencies and my home in Houston. 'I just need more sleep,' I kept saying.

It was to be my second book. Whatever I made of the MFA thesis I had just spent the past 3 years living in Texas completing. I was at SITKA to finish it. I had written in my application that I wanted to write about place outside of my places. Which were Western Australia, the Turquoise Coast, coastal dry and desert. A poet whose name I've lost, writes about how all her poems bring the same few words (*bone, white, empty*) together in different orders. In bed, I twist mine like rings around my fingers: *dune, rust, dust, red, sand, dirt, sky, stone and river*.

It was clear I needed a new way of writing. What wasn't clear was if I could find one.

It was not to be my first time reading William Stafford. Like everyone who has ever studied American poetry, I was familiar with his poem about a man coming across a pregnant deer hit roadside. His 'only swerving' 'to think hard for us all' before he pushes the deer over the edge (Stafford, *The Way It Is* 77). Twisting through mountains where the rules of Australian roads—point straight and keep going no matter what—have no reality. I said those words to myself like a contract. In WA, I'd never driven on a road where it was possible to push anything off, just to nudge it in the heat from blistering tarmac onto yellow sand.

It was after waking in the late morning light of my first Oregon dawn and wrestling the artist's irascible coffee maker into submission that I made my way up the wet hill to the main campus library. It did not include much of interest but there was a complete collection of Stafford's work donated by his daughter who had spent much time in residence, Stafford being an Oregonian for the second half of his life. This being his place, I took the collection back and placed it on the mantle. In the light I could see out the windows to where a sliver of river wound its way in between the capes.

It was like how once I'd returned to Australia I would read deeply about Stafford, like it was a way of returning to that place and time. Judith Kitchen writes that '[t]he willingness to be part of the world and, at the same time, the recognition that the world is a cold, indifferent place to be forces Stafford to find a world of his own' (20). When I travel and miss the place I am, I think I am missing this world of my own. Poetry is a strange way of world building. Like mapping roads for cities never built.

It was not an easy choice to be leaving Texas. I liked its ugly freeways and loved its oil-rigged plains backing up against the Rio Grande and Mexico, the sense as you travelled across it that you were negotiating contested borders. Here was one history and there another lay on top. At the Alamo, men still cry, hats off heads, in the small and dank sandstone building where Santa Anna had come and Texas briefly had fallen. In 2017, in response to an elected despot, the President of Mexico will say they will pay for a wall across the border if the part of Texas seized in 1845 is returned. I would still love Texas if it were Mexico, when it was Mexico, when it was Spain, when eventually the hurricane hits the gulf again and Galveston is given back to the ocean.

It was the second afternoon of my time in Oregon; I picked up the chair and moved it to where it faced the window. I bought the Stafford down from the mantle and read

Sometimes in the evening a translator walks out  
and listens by the streams that wander back and forth  
across borders (*The Way It Is* 7).

I wrote it down, the first of many notes and inscriptions from Stafford that would become tangled in among my own poems. I read about how Stafford wrote, each morning when it was still dark. From then on I faced ocean in the early morning and waited for it to show. 'I reminded myself to be alert, to be aware of the now-ness of things—the feel of the day, the temperature, the kind of room, the people what they said.' (Stafford, *Writing the Australian Crawl* 47) Pacing myself through Stafford's poems, I would read in the dark and when it was light I would write what I could see, what I could feel.

It was like beginning each morning as though it was a new morning and a continuation of the one before and the one after. It was like how 'one doesn't learn how to do art, but one learns that it is possible by a certain adjustment of consciousness to participate in art' (Stafford, *Writing the Australian Crawl* 48).

It was opening the book and opening the Pacific Northwest. Poems that travelled even as they stayed still. Me in my room. Stafford back in his. My life in Texas. My husband in Texas. My family in Western Australia. The borders of my body thickened at these places. My fingers opening pages and slowly unbinding words. I was alone but less lonely. I worked each day towards being a person who knew how 'to stand utterly alone and let the heart of the world shudder through' (Lieberman 32).

It was in how Stafford said, insisted, the word *dark* poem after poem and it meant both the night and what was beyond it. And *rain, wind, water, hill* and *earth* (Heldrich 7). I started to count down his words on my fingers among my own salt country ones, listening to the creatures in the chimney, the branches on the roof at night.

It was a week in which I started driving in the afternoons. Taking my car up and down the same coastal freeway. The other artists in residence seemed to care more about preserving things. They collected sounds, mushrooms, images, made their own tinctures. One day they took me to a beach in almost sub-zero temperatures to dig deep into the sand for pippies. I left early in my car for fries. It wasn't that they weren't friendly. Another night the property manager took me bowling with her meet-up group. It's hard to make friends in small places like this, she said. I tried to sit 'quiet and feel out what relation is possible between us and the frightening land buried under all that asphalt, and how such a peculiar people as ourselves can live together with something like dignity' (Burns 26). They were all earnestly seeking. I listened.

It was Oregon that Stafford found himself in at the end of his life. He was from Kansas but the home of his poems is in travel. 'We see the image of the road, the path, the line—it is the lot of the true poet to be homeless; his "home" is on the road, on which he travels toward his destiny and the world's' (Stitt 187). In Texas and in Oregon and on the I-10 in Florida, the Blue Ridge Pathway and the Natchez Trace and in the books I read: the true American Dream is to move and keep moving. In the manuscript, the poems, I was creating while sitting still—in Oregon it was this movement I chased.

It was *scop* in 'Widsmith' the oldest poem in English, or in Old English 'his weird [fate] is to be a wanderer:/ the poets of mankind go through many countries,/ speak their needs, say their thanks' (Howard 105).

It was Thanksgiving (or, to some, National Day of Mourning) and the eco-community the residency was located within filled slightly. I bought two pies and took them down to the community boat club. We went round and introduced ourselves. We said what we were thankful for. I was thankful for the words slowly travelling back, for Stafford's poems teaching me to be still even as my mind wandered out.

It was a lie, the poem 'February in Oregon' which ended up in my book.

It was like this. I took my notebook to the printmaker's studio I had been allocated one afternoon. The windows faced the main lawn where deer and elk would come at dawn and dusk, even in hunting season when the threat of death was more than a car in dark and fog. I typed up the pieces of Stafford, pieces of my daily poems. I cut them up. Mixed them on the floor. Highlighted the pieces that *shimmered*, cut them out. Took screen printing paper and spread it, one meter by two meters on the floor. I laid out the poem pieces by sound. My words by Stafford's words. I took a photo. Typed up the new thing. When it came to shaping it, I visited the ceramicist's studio. She told me how sometimes to make something appear whole you have to exaggerate proportions, give enough guidance so the unnatural becomes a piece of driftwood you found walking the beach.

It was what people didn't know about Stafford. That with his ordinary language he was smuggling what wasn't. That when you sat with the words, they travelled.

It was the first diary I ever made. Twenty-eight pieces of poem like a calendar of days of the Oregon coast. Some mine and some Stafford's. I called it February but really it was November and December. It was the end of my time in America. The sections of the poem mapped time in the future. Stafford's poems bought the past with them. I sat on the floor of my studio in the middle of both.

It was like '[a]ll of my writings are one long production. I break off pieces, smaller or larger, and send them out. Sometime I will get around to welding the pieces together. It's as if I am distracted in building a big house; I hurry over to prop up a wall with one piece of writing, then have to drop everything to save a joist somewhere else. This is just a feeling I have, not a claim. I'd like to connect big pieces together and have epics' (Young np).

It was summer in the Blue Mountains. I was bringing together the manuscript that would become *Border Crossing*. The pages of 'February in Oregon' lying atop the torn pieces of Texas, pieces of my body, roads like veins running poem to poem. In the summer Australian light of eucalypt oil and bushfire haze, I took down my Stafford again and read of the *dark*.

(It was not an accident that this essay is in twenty-eight sections like the poem, or like the month of February).

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**Ascension**  
Paul Hetherington

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1.  
Evening sits on the landscape like a serious word as we approach Washington DC. So many acres of privilege lie beneath divided wings and on a highway cars chase yellow headlights. We've not come here to find history, yet since the body scanner's bleep in Los Angeles the flight has delivered loss's wide cartography—overrun tribal lands given to potatoes, wheat and corn. We don't belong in the air and below the land's a residue of palimpsests, none of which we read. On the edge of my seat the remains of another flight's spilt coffee posit a bitter idea of the past.

2.  
Aeroplanes congregate like oversized gulls as a storm subsides; as hundreds of schedules are hastily revamped. Wind scuffs the tarmac; we're rumbly gathered into an ascension of air. Your last email rests in my imagination like an embrace, but I don't understand its import. It's about what we saw and did, once, when our feelings were as expansive as a crossing of time zones; when our bodies might have been winged. You told me you travelled to me in dreams, like a theme from an old Chinese poem. I thought of wild calligraphies of distance—twisted grasslands, floodplains, tundra, snowfields. Desire that lifts like flight.

**watermelons**  
Rose Hunter

Rose Hunter is the author of three poetry books and one chapbook in the United States. Her next book of poetry will be published by Five Islands Press this year.

previously oblongs i thought, although maybe i did see round ones like these like the florist i walk past every day but until you stop i do not notice it; here's the thing, you do not buy the flower and give me the flower, you buy the flower and say nothing all the way to the bridge. how does this even fit with the rest of you? watermelon gobbler, insomnia you said, to eat too much too late (the watermelon excuse) but here you are doing it again, pound for pound i have never seen a person dispatch with so much crimson capillary red velvet cake red carpeted mouth you, watermelon crunch and slunch, you are shoveling spoonfuls of watermelon bubble blowing hula-hoop ellipses... in front of you half a bowling ball or set up to a pratfall to stumble into club footed, humpf. what watermelon, where? (see it doesn't work.) out of all the supermarket sections i am not surprised garcía lorca was found here. you can ignore the elephant but not the watermelon; how you are neck deep in watermelon and you have long since ceased to pause to *spit out the teeth*

\* italicised words in the final line taken from Charles Simic, 'Watermelons'.

**From João**  
John Mateer

John Mateer has published several books in Australia and elsewhere. His most recent book, *Unbelievers, or 'The Moor'*, was published by Giramondo, and appeared in Portuguese translation in 2015. It is forthcoming in German translation in Vienna later this year.

(Warrnambool)

João keeps seeing in his mind that monochrome picture of kindly Suzanne, his then girlfriend, inside a dark caravel, a real, timber caravel. She was unamused, he could tell even then, by the surrealism of a furniture-maker in Victoria reclaiming lumber from coastal windbreaks to spend a decade of weekends building his ghost ship, dreaming of sailing first to New Zealand, taking things easy, then to on Timor, and later, of course, to Lisbon. In contemplating Suzanne's face, she seems awkward, unhappy, though João's remembering the comic pleasure of that weekend, Warrnambool totally Portuguese for the festival, Lusitania's secret celebration of discovering Australia; on the windward side of a knoll overlooking the town their small *padrão*. Maybe, in her clear, calm eyes, she had already lost her João.

(Yogyakarta)

The postcard showed a becak driver asleep wearing a Superman T-shirt. João could tell his old becak driver saw the joke truly, and well understood. Beyond his own poor bahasa, from deep in his heart João meant this: *Pak, you may be 72 with legs like pistons and a wrinkled, mountainous face, still, midst all kinds of humble professionals, you are a bodhissatva to those who can see them in places like this Yogya of exhaust fumes and fast desolation...*

João understood the old man's superhuman simplicity, something the Indonesian could teach him. But, in a confusion, João had watched this old becak driver, his near complicity, not being shocked, on witnessing an accident, one man knocked down in the street; how he'd just peddled past, deadpan.

(London)

Capital: a severed head, a skull. He was in the Anglophone one, in Swedenborg House, listening to a Mexican poet, the hall crowded and dim as the Thames city always is. Gone from João's mind was the gloom of Blake's giants, of epics he had read while living there pining for his lost Galician love. The Mexican was invoking angels, those seldom seen emissaries. João suddenly wished Buddhism had expression without Emptiness: an unadulterated enthusiasm for flesh, beings precise as sunlight wriggling on a roof's edge, visitations unrecognized. One of the Mexican's angels was a tattoo on his daughter's shoulder. Whereas, vaster than imagined, João's guardian was that silent, refreshing wind sweeping through the twilight's dull city, entrancing commuters with the warm scent of incense, an intimation of more than another world.

## Sister Madly Deeply Emily Paull

Emily Paull is a writer, a blogger, a bookseller and an editor. Her short fiction has appeared in *[Re]Sisters: Stories of Rebel Girls, Revolution, Empowerment and Escape*, as well as *Shibboleth and Other Stories*, the 2016 Margaret River Press anthology.

Even as I bring the clippers down towards the soft dome of my head, all I can think about is how badly I do not want to do this.

I think of Josephine and how tiny she looked, swaddled in mounds of heavy, starched white sheets on her hospital bed. It is the only thing that keeps me from putting the clippers down. Josephine, who as a child, I felt I loved so fiercely that I wanted to squeeze her until her head popped clean off; who was like a life-sized doll to me and a pain in the bum all at once. Josephine, who I once dreamed had died in a fiery race-car crash, which woke me up screaming, only to remember that neither of us could drive. My tiny, perfect sister, lying bald and infant-like in a bed that was far too big for her, pinned to the spot with the pain of movement like one of Nabokov's butterflies in a frame.

It is the done-thing, to shave your head out of solidarity. It's what they do on TV, it's what celebrities do, it's the foundation of an entire charity. To help my sister through the trauma of the betrayal currently being unleashed upon her by her body I would do anything at all and yet the thought of losing my hair, of being bald, of not recognising myself when I wake up in the morning—it feels like my heart will break. The sheer selfishness of this feeling astounds me. I did not know I was capable of such base vanity. I am not usually so concerned by my looks. I own exactly three pairs of shoes—one flat pair for work, one heeled pair for going out and a pair of thongs for walking to the letter box and out to the pool. But after thirty years of hating who I saw when I looked in the mirror, I have finally reached a place where I like the woman I see, and tomorrow, that woman will have been replaced by a skin-dome with eyes.

My hand is shaking badly. I expect it to hurt. I expect to feel each lock of honey blonde hair being snipped away. Instead, I feel only the mildest tickle, followed by the sensation of lightness as my tresses flutter to the

floor like long, curly snowflakes. They begin to carpet the white tiles of my bathroom. I choke back a sob and focus on watching my hand's reflection and its death grip on the electric razor, which I bought for just this purpose. It is a good thing that I live alone, I think. I would hate for some roommate—or worse, a boyfriend—to walk in and find me shaving my head and sobbing. They would think I was having a full scale Britney Spears meltdown. And then I would have to tell them about Josie, and about her cancer.

I don't talk about my personal life much. I talk about my family even less. If I had a boyfriend, or a partner, perhaps I'd talk to them, but I don't. Who has the time, really?

The last curl drifts away from my head and I turn off the clippers at the wall. The bathroom is suddenly completely silent. I can hear my own measured breathing. It is as if I am simultaneously reminding myself to keep doing it. I have to force myself to look my own reflection in the eye.

The next morning, I visit the hospital. Nurses greet me by name as I enter the ward, stopping at the designated points to put sanitiser on my hands from little red pumps. There is a smell in hospitals, and it isn't the disinfectant smell that I'd always imagined, but something more pungent, like iodine. I always picture this smell as a rust red cream swiped around the incision point of a fresh wound, the colour of old blood and healing. I have not covered my newly naked skull with a hat, though it's less than ten degrees outside and the chill has seeped all the way through to my toes. To wear a hat would be to hide what I have done, as if it is somehow shameful. The only shame is in how ugly I feel. *I am Charlotte's husband in Sex and the City*, I think unkindly as I turn the corner into Josephine's room.

She is awake but only just, in that dreamy childlike phase where she is fighting the urge to drift off. Her eyelids have always had a natural purple hue to them, like an eyeshadow she was born with, but today it is exacerbated by the tired grey pallor of her skin. She smiles when she sees me, but is too exhausted to speak. The morphine is pulling her under. Her own bald skull is starting to grow tufts of white blonde hair, like the tips of cotton plants. I head for the visitor's chair under the window and pull a paperback book from my bag. When she sees I have settled, Josephine's shoulders relax and I see the moment when she allows herself to fall asleep. It's like a great weight has been lifted off of her. She sighs in her sleep. I swallow around the lump in my throat and try to concentrate on the page before me.

Mum's bag is in the corner of the room, so she's been here overnight most likely. One of us is here almost constantly now, though it's harder for me to get away from work than it is for Mum. The first few months were the toughest to cope with. It was impossible to block out the activity in the hallways, the people being pushed past open doors on gurneys, the sounds of shuffling feet and squeaking wheels, and the cheerful chatter of well-practised nurses on a cancer ward. There was a toughness to their happiness, a tone that said they'd seen and endured almost everything. I used to wonder if Mum and I would one day sound like that as well.

During the worst part of that first month, Josephine was so spaced out from all the chemicals in her system that she began to see spiders crawling all over her walls, and she began to scream and thrash in her bed, too weak to get up and run but too frightened to close her eyes. Mum climbed into her bed with her and held her and hushed her like she was a little baby. It was like it didn't scare her at all. When Josie was a child, she'd been prone to night terrors and had often woken up screaming—Mum said it was just like that—but I knew that it wasn't. It was a grown woman screaming in sheer terror, staring goggle eyed at walls she thought would attack her. That night, I went home and stood under the scalding hot water in my shower, and I cried until my eyes felt like they might detach from my skull. How could this terrified half-human person be the same as my baby sister, as the girl I'd fought with all through my teenaged years over stupid things like who owned what lipsticks and who was talking too much at the dinner table?

I don't read a word of the book, and I can't remember what I read yesterday, but having it in front of me helps. It doesn't feel like I am waiting for something bad to happen. I am a woman reading a book while nearby her younger sister sleeps. The even, shallow breathing from the bed beside me is soothing, like the ticking of a clock in a silent room. I feel myself drifting into a waking sleep, though the book stays upright in my hands.

What feels like minutes later, I wake to find my mother sitting next to me in the wheelchair she uses to take Josephine out for walks in the hospital garden. There's a lake with a small rock waterfall and ducks swimming about in it, and Mum and Josie like to sit out there and chat. On her good days, Josephine can stay out there for an hour or more. On her not so good days she gets cold in minutes, or falls asleep in the lift. The time outside does Mum as much good as it does Josephine.

'Do you remember when she used to choreograph dances and then bring us all into the family room to watch her perform?' Mum whispers to me now.

'Remember? I was the backup dancer a lot of the time.'

'What was that song she always used? The slow one, the Savage Garden one?'

I smile. 'Truly Madly Deeply. The girls next door helped her with that one, the two older ones. They were pretty good.'

Mum laughs into her Styrofoam cup of coffee. From where I'm sitting it smells like a warm, strangely heavenly mix of real coffee and bleach. I excuse myself and duck down the hall to get my own.

He is there again. He is always in the visitor's lounge when I go to get coffee, always coming off the night shift. Today his hair is messed up on the left-hand side from where he has been leaning his head in his hands. I watch as he puts three sugar sachets into this cup. There was a time when I would have flirted with him, and said 'that stuff will give you cancer', but that joke doesn't seem funny to me anymore. Jason, his name is, or as Mum and I call him, Nurse Jason because that's who he is. He's an oncology nurse from Josephine's ward, and even if I had the energy to flirt with him, I would not, because he's been assigned to Josephine and that would just be strange. Nurse Jason sees me and he smiles like he has been waiting for me all morning. He does not look twice at my bald head.

'Hey, Candace. Josie had a good night last night, did your Mum tell you?'

I shake my head and reach for a styrofoam cup. 'I haven't seen her properly yet, she's just got back to the room and I need caffeine.'

He keeps smiling at me, waiting as the coffee machine gurgles water into my cup. I think *we could be a couple, making breakfast together, if only we were anywhere else*. It is a stray, unwelcome thought and it makes me blush.

'So how are you?' he asks, his voice soft.

'As fine as can be expected.'

'Do you have to go back to work soon?'

I shrug. 'I can't really imagine it happening. I might just resign—find something part time until—' I cannot finish my sentence. Tears flood my eyes and I put the coffee cup down. My tears are controlled, measured, but all the same I am crying, and Nurse Jason scrunches up a handful of tissues and passes them to me. He puts his hand on my shoulder. That iodine smell is all over his skin.

'Candace, do you want to get a coffee with me sometime, some place that isn't a hospital lounge?'

I have been hoping he would ask this for so long, but I've also dreaded it. I have two lives. I have my normal life with my work and my friends, where I used to sleep with guys (just casually, never anything serious) and go out and laugh. In that life, no one knows about Josephine. It is none

of their business. I don't want anyone feeling sorry for me. Then, I have my hospital life, where Josie is the only important thing. Nurse Jason is part of my hospital life. If I allow myself to go on a date with him, I will be mixing my worlds, which is something I said I would never do.

'No,' I say, finally. 'I don't think that would be a good idea. No thanks.' I excuse myself before he can try to change my mind; before I can start crying all over again.

Josie is sitting up in her bed when I get back. 'Mum had to go,' she says. 'She needed to get some things. She'll be back.'

I slide back into the visitors' seat and lean back. 'God,' I exhale. 'Why does everything have to be so fucking complicated?'

Josie is flicking through a magazine that someone has left for her. It's old. Brad and Angelina are on the cover, clearly still together. She raises her eyebrows at me without looking up. 'Did Jason finally ask you out?'

'Yup.'

'And you said no because you're martyring yourself because I have cancer?'

'Shut up.'

She closes the magazine and puts it on her tray table next to the remains of a breakfast she's barely touched. Her eyes are bright today, something that seems more obvious now that her hair is gone and her skin is the palest it's ever been. Today, she looks like she's glowing. 'He's nice. He's been really kind to Mum and me, what's wrong with having a cup of coffee with him?'

I wrinkle my nose. 'He's not the kind of guy I usually date.'

'Because he's not a total loser? I agree.'

I try not to laugh, but she's right. There's a reason I never go on more than three dates with anyone—it's because the kinds of guys I usually meet don't have enough substance to them. By date number three, we've usually run out of things to talk about.

Josephine folds her hands in her lap. Her hands are shaking, but I know better than to ask her if she's in pain. 'Don't you want to find someone more permanent, Candace? Jason's not a three date max kind of guy. He's a spend your whole life together type.'

'Says the girl who dated the same guy she went to the Year 12 Ball with for six years.'

It's a throwaway comment, the kind of thing I might have said to her before, but I know I've gone too far when I look up and she's turned her face away from me. I have brought up Anthony, the one topic that is now off-limits.

'Oh, Jose, I'm sorry, I—'

She holds her hand up to shush me. There are tubes and wires running out of the back of her hand and a heart monitor plugged to her finger. 'It's fine. I broke up with *him*.'

'Seriously?' This is news to me. Josephine and Anthony had broken up right after she got diagnosed. She'd never spoken about it, never told me why. My only involvement was in helping her move from his place back to Mum and Dad's. Mum had stopped short of phoning him and giving him a piece of her mind for breaking up with a woman who'd just found out she had cancer, but we'd unplugged the phone and hidden it and her iPhone from her until she calmed down.

'Come on, Candace, he wanted to get married some day and have kids and all I could offer him was a chance to watch me die. It was easier this way. Kinder.'

'I disagree! He *loves* you. So he has to know you're sick but he doesn't get to see you at all?'

'No. No, he doesn't know.'

I can't sit down any longer. I get up and stalk to the window, throw the curtains open. I look out over the tops of the houses surrounding us, thrusting my knuckle between my teeth to keep from yelling at her.

'So, what, he just thinks you don't love him anymore?'

'Pretty much.'

'Are you just never going to speak to him again?'

Josephine sniffs deeply and when I look back there are tear tracks lining the sides of her nose. 'Never again isn't really a lot of time for me now, I think I can manage it. Shit, I dunno, maybe he'll find out I was sick when he reads my obituary or something. You can invite him to my funeral, I don't care. I just didn't want him wasting time with me when he could have been finding someone else, someone who *could* spend the rest of their life with him.' A wracking sob shakes her whole body and she struggles to regain her breath. I'm at her side in a few steps, and I sit on the side of her bed with my arms around her, rocking her back and forth and kissing the soft dandelion fluff on her scalp. She cries noisily into my chest. 'Oh god, I miss him. But how could I put him through this? He's only twenty-five.'

'You're only twenty-five.' I'm crying too. It seems like I am always crying. None of this is fair.

'I just want to ruin as few lives as possible. So will you just have a stupid cup of coffee with Jason?'

I say nothing. I just rock her as she cries.

I do not have coffee with Nurse Jason. For two months, I do pretty much nothing but visit the hospital and go to work. I quit my full-time job and take casual work cleaning houses.

Josephine gets worse and worse, and I start bringing a thermos of tea with me to the hospital so that I don't have to go to the visitor's lounge.

Soon it's summer and Christmas music starts playing in the hallways. Nurses' stations are festooned with tinsel, and there are jars of candy canes on every counter. Most of my clients go on holiday as soon as the school term is over, and so I sit by Josephine's bed while Mum is at work. I don't bring a book anymore. Most days I just sit and hold her hand.

As I'm leaving to go home and change my clothes one night, I run into Jason in the hall. His hands grip my shoulders to stop me from falling backwards. It's completely my fault—I had been too immersed in checking my phone to pay attention to where I was going. My skin is on fire under his hands. My treacherous brain pictures him kissing me and my whole body shivers.

'Hey,' he says, his face breaking into a smile. 'How are you?'

It's a wonder he still asks me this. I spend most of my days visiting a sister who is dying—how does he think I am?

'The same.'

'I haven't seen you for a while. Your hair has started to grow back! It's cute.'

'I've been here.' Blushing, I run my hand along the soft bristles that have started to cover my head.

'I know. Josie tells me. Oh, hey, who was that guy who visited her earlier?'

I glance back at the door of Josie's room. 'What guy?'

'Young guy, about her age. He brought flowers.'

My heart starts pounding. 'What did he look like?'

Nurse Jason lets go of my shoulders and steps back so we're no longer standing so close. He moves next to me so that a patient can be wheeled past in a wheelchair. 'I dunno, just a regular guy. Sort of dark blonde hair? Wearing a polo shirt?'

I'm already sprinting back to her room. 'I have to go,' I call over my shoulder. 'Thank you!'

I only left her a few moments before, but Josephine is already asleep, the briefest hint of a smile on her lips. On her dresser I see the flowers, and I'm not entirely sure how I missed them before because they are the biggest bunch of purple orchids I have ever seen. They seem to be reaching out into every corner of the room. My hand shakes as I reach for the card. 'Always, Ant.' A lump begins to grow in my throat.

'I called him,' Josephine says, without opening her eyes. 'I decided it was up to him whether he wanted to visit me or not.'

My eyes are so damp I can hardly see where I'm going, but I make my way over to the bed and climb in beside her. She snuggles her head onto my chest.

I think that I may never be able to let her go.

**Pleistocene Soup**  
Charlotte Guest

Charlotte Guest is a Western Australian writer and Publishing Officer at UWA Publishing. Her writing has appeared in *Griffith Review*, *Australian Book Review*, *Overland*, *Westerly*, *Voiceworks*, *Writ Poetry Review* and elsewhere.

In the kitchen  
I prepare  
Pleistocene soup

and watch a program  
on big old things  
before concrete.

I imagine megabeasts  
where we sit, grazing  
on a much younger earth,

and the first  
modern humans  
sharing hot food.

In the news,  
a footprint as big  
as your trunk

undressed itself  
before a sad woman walking  
along the shore.

A sad woman walking  
the shore—  
observing the primal rhythms

of the sea, that crept  
in its solid way  
over mammals' backs

and now  
licks her toes  
like a terrier—

bends, as I bend to pick up  
clothes, wipes, as I wipe  
benchtops and mouths,

and touches  
millions.

## Beneath Parliament Hill

Claire Potter

Claire Potter is from Perth, Western Australia. She has published a full-length collection *Swallow* (Five Islands Press, 2010), and two chapbooks *N'ombre* (Vagabond Press, 2007) and *In Front of a Comma* (Poets Union, 2006). Her writing has appeared in *Poetry* (Chicago) and *Best Australian Poems* (Black Inc Books). She lives in London.

Alone, drawn as dark as a stick  
pulled from the green-lit ponds  
I walk the dog silently across the hill  
My thoughts harden into a frieze—  
a sword then a doily, an egg then a dart  
a branch then a lichen  
pinning itself here  
and there

The dog unsettles a gull  
from a basin of water  
I whistle her from the granite fringe  
draw her into my march with the lure of stick  
—the two of us furrow deeper  
into the rudder of hill  
until a crow cuts through the under-  
growth and careers into a giant willow where more  
velvety crows hang in the wind

As a whole, the crows  
band the tree with an immense  
crown, they nestle and shine  
like petrol flames  
in shawls of milk-white catkin  
Separately, they remind me of tyrants  
perched around a willow tablecloth—  
crimson minds, cold temples, black feather bow-ties  
their hunger burns long into taproots  
their camels wince through eyes of needle

I am tyrant then innocent, crow then tree  
I like to split burdock into seed  
My feet oblige slowly  
through chalk and clay  
My hands to the wrists are unclean—  
I walk the dog around the hill  
Her stick travels up, up  
into a rupture, into everything I wish  
to call the breeze.

**Thursday Morning**  
Adam Ford

Adam Ford is the author of the poetry collections *Not Quite the Man for the Job* and *The Third Fruit is a Bird*. His poetry has appeared in the *Age*, *Cordite*, *Overland*, *Best Australian Poems* and *Australian Poetry Journal*. His website is [www.theotheradamford.wordpress.com](http://www.theotheradamford.wordpress.com)

On one side of the window there's me.  
Jacket and tie,  
pen in hand  
behind my desk,  
deleting commas and inserting brackets.

On the other side of the window there's her.  
Faded denim overalls,  
squeegee in hand  
abseiling from the roof,  
scraping soap suds from the window.

It only lasts for a minute.  
A flick of the wrist  
and she slides out of sight,  
leaving a few fingerprints on my side  
and an otherwise uninterrupted view  
of the crystal-blue sky.

**Reading *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*—Aboriginal Child Removal in 2017**  
Hannah McGlade

Dr Hannah McGlade is the Senior Indigenous Research Fellow at Curtin University, School of Humanities. She was the recipient of the 2011 Stanner award for her book *Our Greatest Challenge: Aboriginal children and human rights*. A human rights lawyer, Dr McGlade has advocated for Aboriginal women and children's human rights nationally and internationally. In 2016, she was appointed the Senior Indigenous Fellow at the UN office of the High Commission for Human Right.

*Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996) is the story of three young Aboriginal girls, sisters Molly and Daisy and their cousin Gracie, taken from their parents by government authorities in 1931, to live far from their home at the harsh Moore River Native Settlement. Written originally by Doris Pilkington Garimara, it was adapted as a film under the title *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, directed by Philip Noyce (2002). The children were part of what is now known as 'The Stolen Generations' and their story remains profoundly relevant to the lives of a great many Aboriginal children and families. While there has been significant critical response to the text both in itself and in the context of its adaptation, specifically in the realm of Australian cultural studies, it is pertinent and necessary to consider also the social context of the story. This is coming from the perspective of Aboriginal human rights and social justice.

The era of Australian history that saw the children cruelly taken from their Aboriginal *Mardu* families and lands is not one that we are now proud of, although some people have sought to deny or minimise the extent of the past practices of Aboriginal child removal. In 1997, the national human rights body, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), tabled in federal parliament the report of its national inquiry 'Bringing Them Home', which found that the past widespread removal of Aboriginal children constituted a form of systemic race discrimination amounting to a 'gross violation of human rights' ('Bringing Them Home' 233).

The HREOC inquiry involved consultations with Aboriginal people across Australia, including people who themselves had been taken from their families and placed into missions or homes with non-Aboriginal families. It involved a study of the laws, policies and practices that allowed for Aboriginal children to be removed from their families. Aboriginal child removal took place as part of a national policy to assimilate Aboriginal people and was based on the notion that Aboriginal people 'for their own good' should cease to exist as a race of people. The colonial governments did not value Aboriginal people or cultures and the removal of thousands of children from their families and land was a mechanism used to break down the Aboriginal culture and identity.

These policies, whilst shocking by today's standards, were then completely acceptable to non-Aboriginal Australians, including government officials and policy makers. They were underlined by then predominant 'scientific' theories of Darwinism, which promoted the European race of people as biologically superior to other races, denigrating Indigenous people as 'inferior' or 'savages' (Haebich 70). It was this ideology that also saw Aboriginal people dispossessed of their lands without a treaty and rendered marginalised by the dominant society.

The practice of Aboriginal child removal was widespread and entrenched through laws such as the *Native Welfare Act of 1905*, which deemed the Native Protector, AO Neville, the legal guardian of 'every Aboriginal and half caste child' under 16 years of age. In Western Australia, Aboriginal children like Molly, Daisy and Gracie, were removed from their parents and placed in missions where they were denied the love and affection of their families, deprived of their Aboriginal culture, and forced to endure appalling living conditions.

These removals were justified as being in the best interests of the children, although they clearly were not<sup>1</sup>. In *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, the girls experience conditions at Moore River that are akin to incarceration: 'It's like a gaol. They lock you up and come and open the door in the morning.' (66). They were shocked to learn they could not speak their *Mardu* language anymore, the dormitories were bare and overcrowded and the food inedible. The 'inmates' of Moore River could also be punished by way of solitary confinement for many days in a small concrete room with little light and ventilation. This was no place for anyone, let alone children: 'It looked more like a concentration camp than a residential school for Aboriginal children.' (Pilkington Garimara 72).

Fortunately my Noongar family was not torn apart by the past practices in the way that so many families had. My *Kurin Noongar*

great-grandmother (Ethel Woyung) and *wadgella* Irish-Australian great-grandfather (James McGlade) lived and worked in the bush avoiding attention of the Native Welfare department. Their marriage was prohibited (as were all intermarriages) but this did not worry them too much as they loved each other and their children. My mother grew up in the bush with her father and grandparents and also managed to escape detection by the authorities. Many of my relatives, however, were not so fortunate and they suffered the pain of having their families torn apart under these policies. I remember one aunty telling me how they cried out in the night for help but none was forthcoming. She was speaking of the abuse of children that took place in these missions.

My Noongar family also has our own connection to the infamously harsh Moore River Native settlement. Moses Woibung, my great-grandfather and *Noongar* elder from the *Kurin* people had as an elderly man been transferred from the Carrolup mission to Moore River settlement where he likely passed away. I imagine that great-grandfather Moses also experienced the hardship of life at the mission, where Aboriginal people were treated so cruelly.

While the history of Aboriginal child removal as experienced by the young protagonists Molly, Daisy and Gracie was finally recognised in 1997 through the HREOC national inquiry, the extent of what had happened in the past was not accepted by the government of the day. The then Prime Minister John Howard disagreed with the report findings that Aboriginal children had been wrongly removed for reasons of race alone, or that one generation could apologise for the past. He did not accept the recommendation that all Australian parliaments acknowledge responsibility for the practices of past child removal and negotiate an official apology with Aboriginal people and other appropriate reparations or remedies for the past wrongdoing ('Bringing Them Home' 250).

It was a turning point in Australian history when a subsequent federal government agreed there should be a national apology for what had happened.

In 2008, Australia bore witness to an official apology of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made on behalf of the parliament and the nation:

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.  
(Rudd 'Apology' np)

Many Aboriginal people present in the Great Hall of parliament, myself included, wept and cried openly in hearing these words. There had been too much pain and the true story of our history had been suppressed for too long. The apology was so powerful that many Aboriginal people believed that healing and reconciliation was truly now possible, even within our reach.

Sadly, nearly a decade later, it seems that the apology has not been able to bring real change into the lives of Aboriginal children and families. While the Native Welfare department no longer exists, having been superseded by the Child Welfare Protection Department, the Chief Executive Officer of this body today is now the legal guardian through the state of thousands of Aboriginal children who have been removed from their families. Increasingly, the Aboriginal children removed are placed with non-Aboriginal families far outside their traditional home and country<sup>2</sup>. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) at 30 June 2016, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders was almost ten times that for non-Indigenous children. Legislation for child removal is state-based, there is no federal authority as such. In every state and territory, the rate of Indigenous children on orders was higher than the rate for non-Indigenous children. The highest recorded rate of overrepresentation was 16.8 in Western Australia. (AIHW 43) While the rates of non-Aboriginal

children being taken into care has declined, the removal of Aboriginal children has increased, and in 2016 there were in Western Australia 2,617 Aboriginal children in care (as compared to 2,326 non-Aboriginal children in care). (AIHW 43) The AIHW data indicates that, as of 30 June 2016, one Aboriginal child in every seventeen had been removed from families.

Child removal is no less distressing today than it was in the past. Two years ago, here in Western Australia, I witnessed inadvertently the immediate aftermath of Aboriginal child removal and the pain of a young child in great distress. No Aboriginal people were even present to comfort him as he tried to make his way free and back to his family. It was cruel and unfathomable that our children could still be treated in this way.

Very often Aboriginal children in out-of-home care are moved from home to home, with multiple foster care placements a common experience. This in turn is known to increase the likelihood of poor outcomes in life and in relation to education, employment, social, behavioral and emotional problems. (See: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 'Children in Care') Sometimes the foster carer cannot cope with the children's traumatised and difficult behavior, and little support is typically offered to Aboriginal carers (Thomson, McArthur, Watt 33–38). The children may not always be treated well and valued in their foster homes and some foster carers' motivations may not be in the children's best interests. ('Speaking Out About Raising Concerns in Care' 26–31) Unfortunately, children placed in out-of-home care can also experience abuse in their new homes. Many children have reported abuse, including sexual abuse, and not feeling safe in their care home. (Robertson np) They may not know their Aboriginal family, or have any understanding of why they were removed. Aboriginal children frequently experience dual forms of racism or discrimination as Aboriginal children and as a 'government kid'.

The underlying reasons for child removal today relate back to the original dispossession of Aboriginal people in colonial history. This includes the continued impacts of the history of the Stolen Generations, which resulted in intergenerational trauma, high levels of mental illness and distress, poverty and racial discrimination. In *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, we learn of the immediate impact of Noongar dispossession, a description which remains incisive: 'The Nyungar people who once walked tall and proud, now hung their heads in sorrow. They had become dispossessed; these teachers and keepers of the traditional Law were prevented from practicing it ... Their pain and suffering remained hidden and repressed, silent and deep.' (Pilkington Garimara 16)

There are many interlocking factors causing the removal today of too many Aboriginal children. Family violence is a main cause of

contemporary Aboriginal child removal. The violence of colonisation, directed at Aboriginal people and including sexual violence against Aboriginal women and girls, even those as young as Molly, Gracie and Daisy, has turned inwards amongst Aboriginal communities as women and girls suffer exceedingly high rates of interpersonal violence. Aboriginal people also experience disproportionate rates of poverty and many Aboriginal children are removed following an assessment of 'neglect' that is often closely linked to poverty. In addition, Aboriginal child rearing practices have not been recognised by non-Aboriginal people and authorities and have been misinterpreted as neglectful of children. As *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* also shows us, Aboriginal children and families have always been under surveillance. 'No matter where the three girls went, there was always someone watching them very closely' (Pilkington 41). The continued surveillance of Aboriginal children and families today plays a role in high levels of contemporary child removal.

In considering child removal, we must look at the outcomes for children removed. Astoundingly there is little evidence that removal is improving the lives of the children removed. To the contrary, children in out-of-home care generally have poor outcomes. They are more likely to experience poorer health, depression, violence and suicide over their lives, be imprisoned, abuse drugs and alcohol, less likely to have healthy relationships and less likely to have access to education and economic opportunities. ('The Family Matters Roadmap' 3) Removal of Aboriginal children from their families should only be a matter of last resort, and if they are not given a better life in care, then they should be returned to their families who often grieve for them long after their removal.

In 2017, on the anniversary of the 'Bringing Them Home' report, former Prime Minister Rudd warned Australia 'we do not want to see the emergence of a second Stolen Generation, not by design, not by default.' (Cited in Murphy np)

Rudd was echoing the concern held by many Aboriginal people that while the past discriminatory practices of child removal have been denounced, our shameful history is ongoing and current child removal practices are reflective of and embedded in our past.

Child removal is so prevalent now that no Aboriginal family is immune to it. According to the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), when the 'Bringing Them Home' report was released in 1997, Australia was shocked to learn that 20% of all children in care were Aboriginal. Now, some 20 years later, Aboriginal children represent over

35% of all children in care. ('The Family Matters Roadmap' 5) Once again, the over-representation is highest in Western Australia, where Aboriginal children now make up over 54% of the children in care. (*Child Protection Australia* 52)

SNAICC believe the numbers of children in care will continue to rise. They estimate that if nothing is done to intervene, the current level of Aboriginal children in care will triple by 2035. ('The Family Matters Report' 23) Contemporary Aboriginal child removal has also been criticised by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, who visited Australia in 2017 to report on the situation of the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Special Rapporteur found that the practices of child removal today are not separated and distinct from the past, but rather that:

The prolonged impacts of intergenerational trauma from the Stolen Generation, dispossession and entrenched poverty continue to inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' experiences of child protection interventions ... (Tauli-Corpuz 12)

The Special Rapporteur said that there should be greater engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and community in decision-making and increased support for community-led early intervention programs investing in families to prevent child removal. The Australian government should appoint Aboriginal Children's Commissioners in each State and Territory and develop a national strategy in order to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.

The findings of the Special Rapporteur represent a significant response of the UN to very serious issues of human rights confronting Aboriginal children and families and Australia as a nation. The Australian governments, both state and federal, should respond to the issues highlighted in the report, by implementing the important recommendations. As the Special Rapporteur noted, Australia has made a bid for a seat on the Human Rights Council and it is critical Australia also evidences a commitment to human rights at home.

In 2012, I took part in the National Child Rights Taskforce that travelled to Geneva to address the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child who were then considering Australian government's report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. After hearing considerable evidence put before it, the Committee expressed concern that racial discrimination against Aboriginal children remains a problem.

They noted that there was ‘serious and widespread discrimination faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’ (‘Committee on the Rights of the Child’ 7) in relation to the provision of and access to basic services and significant over-representation in the justice system and out-of-home care. The Committee was also concerned about the large numbers of Aboriginal children being separated from their homes and communities and placed into care that does not adequately facilitate their cultural and linguistic identity.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child found that there was inadequate consultation and participation of Aboriginal people in policy design, decision-making and program implementation. It recommended to the Australian government that it review its progress and implementation of the recommendations of the ‘Bringing Them Home’ Inquiry, to ensure the full respect for the rights of Aboriginal children to their identity, name, culture and family relationship. It also recommended that Aboriginal Children Commissioners be appointed at the state and federal level to ensure advocacy and increased respect for Aboriginal children’s human rights within government agencies.

Unfortunately, there has been little progress made towards the implementation of the 2012 report recommendations. No review of the ‘Bringing Them Home’ recommendations has commenced. Aboriginal participation in out-of-home care responses remains inadequate. Governments are also implementing a policy of permanent child removal in the face of widespread Aboriginal opposition.

One of the most significant recommendations made in the ‘Bringing Them Home’ report was that the responsibility for Aboriginal child protection be transferred to Aboriginal people (‘Bringing Them Home’ 524). This recommendation is supported by Indigenous peoples fundamental right to self-determination as set out under the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Article 3:

*Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.*

While Aboriginal peoples right to self-determination has been included in various state legislations governing child welfare and protection, it has usually not been afforded any real recognition in practice. The gesture of recognition has become tokenistic and will remain so without reforms that allow and support for the right to be implemented in the practices of child protection. In some jurisdictions, notably Victoria, there are

reforms underway that promote Aboriginal peoples’ participation in decisions and process concerning children. This includes Aboriginal family-led decision-making processes that are guided by Aboriginal cultural tradition and supporting families and community to engage in the process and make decisions about the wellbeing of their children.

According to the SNAICC, the situation of Aboriginal child removals today is unlikely to change without a radical rethink and overhaul of child protection concerning Aboriginal children. SNAICC has established a national campaign ‘Family Matters’ to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care. It has issued a ‘Roadmap for Reform’ presenting evidence-based vision and strategy for change to policies and practices. The ‘Family Matters’ campaign is grounded in strengths-based Aboriginal-led solutions. It encompasses an early intervention and preventative focus, supports trauma-informed healing and cultural safety in policies and practices. Child removal should only be a matter of last resort, there should be supports to ensure the safe return of children to families and the right of children to family and culture should be safeguarded.

We learn from *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* that the removal of Aboriginal children did not end with Molly, Gracie and Daisy. Just as Molly’s own daughter Annabelle was removed from her and sent to the Sister Kate’s Children’s Home in Perth, the practice of removing of Aboriginal children from their families has never stopped. It has continued and been experienced by successive generations of Aboriginal people. The suffering that always accompanies Aboriginal child removal has continued and the painful consequences of our past have not ended.

*Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* powerfully reminds us that there are stories that we must always tell of our history, of Aboriginal dispossession and racial oppression, of the strength and resistance of Aboriginal children and families. Perhaps even more importantly, this is a story of hope, commitment and resolve. As Molly once told her younger sisters, ‘I know it’s a long way to go but it’s easy. We’ll find the rabbit-proof fence and follow that all the way back home.’ (Pilkington Garimara 78) *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* offers us the opportunity to understand what happened in the past, why it is relevant today and what we must do to address the painful and wrongful legacy of Aboriginal child removal. This inspirational true story signals our past and our future, of another journey we have to make, one that we must make together.

## Notes:

1. Christine Choo's chapter 'The health of Aboriginal children in Western Australia 1829-1960', in *Aboriginal Children, History and Health* (ed. John Boulton, 2016), talks about the deaths of children at Moore River settlement between 1916 and 1962, based on the burial registry for the settlement (102-116). The largest number of those buried at the settlement were children under five. They died from a multitude of serious health conditions and diseases (113), largely preventable and related to the environment in which they lived.
2. Chris Serra's article in *The Guardian* 'Too many Indigenous children are taken from their families—it doesn't have to happen' (23/5/17) demonstrates the growing public awareness and concern over this situation.

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## What I Know Eileen Chong

Eileen Chong is a Sydney poet. Her books are *Burning Rice* (2012), *Peony* (2014) and *Painting Red Orchids* (2016). She has shortlisted for the Anne Elder Award 2012, the Prime Minister's Literary Award 2013, the Peter Porter Poetry Prize 2015, the Newcastle Poetry Prize 2016 and the Victorian Premier's Literary Award 2017. *Another Language* (2017) will be published by George Braziller in New York City. [www.eileenchong.com.au](http://www.eileenchong.com.au)

Tonight at a party someone asks what love is. What I know is nothing. Champagne and fine hotels; tears over ten courses.

Dark windows facing the city. Light bleeds around the glass. A woman writes the first act of a play. No poetry in a life

lived and discarded. A child speaks of the planets. I am tiny, floating in space. I do not know how I breathe, where our sun is,

or how I will find my way home. Time moves, divides and frays.

## Fault Eileen Chong

'Matins', Louise Glück

I see it is with you as with the birches:  
I am not to speak to you  
in the personal way.

In the moonlight the trees that stand  
along the bay glimmer. Silver as the band  
I removed the morning after. I showed you:

yellowed, shrivelled leaves. Careless,  
shallow watering and the roots rise up  
to the surface, chasing absent moisture.

The orchids have outgrown their pots.  
See how they push. There's rot in the mix.  
White mould spores. Don't breathe.

Above us, the birds are darting across  
the single square of blue. A swallow  
seeks its mate. One lifetime laps another.

## A New Norcia Subset John Kinsella

John Kinsella's most recent books of poetry include *Firebreaks* (WW Norton, 2016) and *Graphology Poems 1995–2015* (Five Islands Press, 2016). A recent book of short stories is *Old Growth* (Transit Lounge, 2017). He is Professor of Literature and Sustainability at Curtin University, and a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge University. He lives and works at Jam Tree Gully in the Western Australian wheatbelt.

The Benedictine community at New Norcia inflicted sexual abuse on school students on an almost unprecedented scale in Australia during the twentieth century. Further, given New Norcia's control, displacement and exploitation of Aboriginal children and people, everything we write about the place has to be viewed in this context. The poem itself cannot exist alone, cannot exist outside this context. This is no longer the grubby secret of the Catholic Church, but public knowledge. No poem can be a celebration.

### 1. False Starts

Where the great flooded-gum fell or was felled close to the East Moore River a count of growth-rings shows almost four-hundred years with guesswork filling the hollow with logic. And those false starts where the chainsaw bit and didn't talk, rejected by a harder layer of time where firebark annealed against the sawteeth, the vicious chatter, and retreated then went deeper again to find another rebarbative layer of history decades ago where something surfaced in its locale in its heartland, the very essence of its tree-being its witness of prayers circumferencing as exoskeleton the language of country reaching out of its skin to resist and say, We are still omnipresent! these bites just up from the full cut the absolute severing from its massive fallen body in segments alongside a deadend road. This is where we start and finish, near the blossom-zone of curving grey honeyeater beaks spiking late-winter nectar making the seasons name in their system every time they spark and then chase each other toward progeny, their sanctifications, their decisive moves towards a start that will have no end.

## 2. Cactus Islands in Moore River

Beyond the *forbidden sign* (*heavy machinery*)  
where the bridge overs a rapid of a bloated Moore River,  
an island either side of the melaleuca-sucking flow—  
scum and froth and purity all at once, the grassed  
channels conduits for herbicide-orange and malfeasance  
of riparian agriculture clotting at the islands' sharp  
points and the giant cactuses metastasising the arterial,  
the fleshy land. Can we support this image of damage  
without it collapsing into metaphor of xenophobia  
or can we go back to the dispossessed and claim  
on their behalf or are both pictures in a dialogue  
through which we might make some sense? Or words  
fail when the river flows and when it dries and pools  
fester with lunulae of algae and choked microfauna?  
I would wonder this and write it differently,  
but the mess of thought is pinned to the picture  
of where I was, what I take away with me,  
what I will return to again: terrorzone to rearrange  
in this daguerreotype brain of mine. I am saying  
that the spread of cactus is a risk to native flora and that we  
might extrapolate to make images and analogies  
but it doesn't work in this overburdened tableaux  
of land and machinery, of newcomers and the less recently  
arrived and the people with the oldest claims. They are  
all people and as such are celebrated in my ethics,  
but I know the science and I know analogies fail  
and the literary cannot always be extricated from science  
and vice versa and sometimes people wherever  
they walk from walk outside the constructs of language,  
the semiotics of waking and sleeping and being intact  
where you are. The eucalypts are in blossom  
and form a fragrant pomander in the box of my head,  
extracted by my nostrils. A messy and unpleasant  
image, no doubt, but explaining much that adjoins  
without annexing my river moment, split between  
two Cactus Islands, but cactus islands of glorious  
melaleucas and towering, imposing cactuses,  
disturbing the balance in a disturbed realm.

## 3. Reading in St Gertrude's Chapel

In the bivalve half, inner cup  
of sound of our own voices where  
we are watched over by painted visions.  
Outside, visitors search for relationship  
to anomaly and for contemplative answers.  
This decommissioned girl's school embraces  
the terror of secrets, of communion  
with cool but sometimes deadly stone—  
bricks and mortar, the tendrils of creed  
reaching through from the other side of the earth,  
passing through the core and igniting futures  
outside the enclave. And now, a dozen monks  
walk the grounds reciting Dante for next  
weekend's performance of the *Inferno*,  
from which they'd hope to be safe,  
but never gloating as the piano  
will play tunes of Gershwin  
in variation. But that's a few hours  
in the future and due to take place in another room,  
at right angles to this room of prayer, with more  
external light and a raised stage  
where notes might parse without a cross,  
without our Lady reading the score  
over a shoulder. Listen, between words,  
hear her troubled breathing.

**Treasury**  
Graham Kershaw

Graham Kershaw is the author of novels, poems, stories and articles. He lives in Denmark WA, where he practises as an architect and occasional publisher.

Even in the dark, Peter knew he lay in the infirmary. No other room in the school was half so quiet. He could feel that familiar band of stiff, white linen, tight across his chest. All the boys had been there at some time or other in the past, at least for few minutes—one long procession of bleeding knees, elbows and toes over summer, stepping up to be daubed with blood red mercurochrome. Peter hated the angry look of the stuff, more than the sting or the smell—there was a kind of violence in the colour. The boys all looked like branded sheep, coming out into the sun, blinking, lost lambs looking for their mothers.

‘Mother’: he whispered it. A small word. A big, hollow sound. They had one, inside the main gates—a white woman with a child in her arms. Harold played the hose over her occasionally during summer, to take the dust off. Peter touched her perfect feet once, when no-one was looking. They were cold, in the sun. Yet the Slow Learners couldn’t walk past her without welling up, staring up open-mouthed at a white woman with arms of stone.

Peter shivered in his bed, under tight sheets. Harold wouldn’t visit now. He wouldn’t dare. They wouldn’t let him, if he tried. Would they? If anyone came in the dark now, it would be a ghost, some dead woman tiptoeing in on slippers, down shadowy corridors in a dirty floral nightie. And no-one else would see her, no-one would hear. She’d kiss all the motherless boys, leaving lippy on their brows and tutti in the air, but none of them would even wake. No-one except Peter.

Better the door stayed locked. He could pee in the pan. Better this sickness than the visitations of pale women with all the blood drained from their hearts. Peter pulled out the old book from under the mattress: ‘PALGRAVE’S GOLDEN TREASURY’ it said, on a red cloth cover inlaid with gilt half worn away. A gift from Aunt Whatsit, the woman who’d taken him home over Christmas, because his mother ‘wasn’t well enough’. She called

herself ‘Aunty’ and swaddled him cruelly in treats and smiles and pecks upon the cheek for four humiliating days.

He opened the book at random and read the first line: ‘*Absence, hear thou my protestation.*’ He closed the book again and stared at the faded cover. She’d had all the trimmings, that woman—the blue aeroplane curtains, the big soft bed, the pyjamas, even a sweaty little dressing gown and slippers he wore out of politeness, in the middle of Summer. She had it all planned, from the moment they drove out past the big iron gates and Our Lady: a week of ice creams and bus rides and Chrissy decorations. *The Love Bug*, at the Grand, even. But when this woman’s stage-set folded—when the treats ran out and Christmas ended—Peter found himself back inside the school gates again, as if he’d never left.

‘Merry Christmas, Peter.’ Before getting in the car, she handed him a red package, wiping her eyes. ‘Something to treasure.’ Peter had to wait until the car disappeared through the gates, belching smoke. Then he unwrapped the useless book. The gates cried for oil as Harold swung them closed for the day. Crows answered from the tallest trees. Harold waved to him stupidly. Peter moved on, thinking to hide the book under the old corrugated tin behind the laundry, before anyone saw it. But Harold followed, of course, in his lumbering gait—that mad half-sideways lope he resorted to when he needed speed. ‘I’ve got unctons in me junctions,’ he’d always say and the boys would laugh, but behind his back they called him Quasimodo, because they’d seen the old black and white film in the hall.

Harold caught up and growled ‘Merry Christmas, Petey!’ Then he asked about the present and Peter had to explain. ‘The Bothers’ll have this,’ the old man muttered. He always called the Brothers that. He was scrumpling the red paper with his fat, sausage-like fingers. Peter snatched at the package, but Harold just held it as if not noticing. His arms were thick and strong, and they’d been burnt sometime—they had a glossy pink lobster’s shell of dead skin. ‘Hang on,’ he said, ‘shall we hide it at my place? You can have a read there, whenever you like.’

Had Peter ever agreed? Hadn’t he just drifted after the old guy, following him down the track by the veggie plots? Hadn’t he just floated like a dead twig in the old man’s wake? He remembered hesitating outside that old grain store near the river, staring at Harold’s open door, afraid to follow. ‘*GROUNDMAN’S LODGE*’ was burnt into the jarrah sign above the door. The threshold was dark, as if there were no windows inside, no other door.

He had to get out of the infirmary, to get away for good. He pulled back the sheets and tiptoed to the outer doors. Sure enough, they weren’t

even locked. Anyone could get in. Or out. Rain was shifting dust along the edge of the veranda, turning the concrete glossy crimson. Some kid had painted that concrete once, down on his crimson knees, under orders.

Half in, half out of the doorway, Peter clutched the small book under his pyjama top, willing himself to run. A cold wind poured in through the open doorway, hollow noises from the classrooms, echoing voices and collisions, whisperings and shufflings, that deep admonitory tone hovering like thunder. Brave the rain, Peter told himself; brave the windows. Take the chance. Better that than let some bastard catch you here alone.

Steps rapped out nearby, down the dark corridor: disembodied steps tapping closer. Brother Patrick called out, 'Gegan!' Peter stepped out onto the veranda, his back to the cold wall, and gently closed the door. Overhead, rain drilled away at heavy clay tiles. There were only lace curtains at the Staff Room windows—Peter couldn't see in, but they could see out. He'd be spotted soon. He had to go.

He edged away along the wall, as if along a narrow cliff ledge. Tall trees ringed the oval like dark watchtowers. Black birds wheeled, way above the swaying crowns of the river gums, crying out in alarm. Yet the river slipped away easily, under those trees, to the world he'd once known—the real world of trannies, dragsters and flares, homes and delis.

This was his chance, while the downpour threw a veil over everything, yet the longer he wavered, the heavier and weaker he felt. Sunday was dying—he could see it in the sky. The day was shrivelling up into something hard and dead in his guts, at the thought of Monday morning. They'd be dragging out the old projector in the hall soon, for Bogart or Karloff.

Peter pushed off into the face of the rain, tripping on twigs and branches brought down by the storm. He splashed out over grass toward the nearest trees, imagining he heard someone calling, but when he glanced back all he saw was rain, turning the whole school vague and grey. He put his back to the rough trunk and looked up, panting. Fat drops torpedoed down, pregnant with light. Sinuous limbs burrowed up into the white sky, tapering to a capillaried crown. Higher still, birds circled, dim and blurred like fish in deep clear water. Peter closed his eyes to the glare and felt the tight, heavy grip of sodden flannelette against his skin. It could never rain again; the sky was emptying itself once and for all. The land, the air was swollen with it.

Between trees below the oval, something immense was moving, riven white by rain. Angry water. He began to skirt the high edge of the oval. When he reached the paperbarks he felt well hidden. The ground

was trampled flat down there, almost dry. Ash and bark like paper. The smoking spot. The wanking spot too, if you believed Jim Ahern.

Further in, the ground sank away to reeds. Peter crouched down and saw how the water had risen. It was a real river now, flowing straight and fast through Church property, and it smelt of other places.

Peter noticed movement on the oval—Harold in his long raincoat, tossing pellets over the grass. That man. The way he always approached, looking about like a murderer in one of those crappy old films, whispering under his breath: 'How's it hangin'?' That Peter Lorre smile at the corner of his mouth, that nervous flicker of tongue.

Peter heard crows in his head; saw their torn black sails over the school and the river. He was back in the old man's Lodge again, reading Pear's Cyclopaedia and feeling the heat of the bar heater on his feet and face. Harold was outside somewhere, making himself scarce, knowing this was what Peter came for—this makeshift privacy, this doll's house of solitude: the tilting shelves of Harold's little library, the smoking fireplace, the sagging armchair stained with a comfort so deep, Peter would find himself crying there sometimes.

'Make yourself at home,' Harold would always say—part of the spell cast by his voice, the long, low breath of the last word, wafting into that dim room, promising sanctuary, and promising knowledge too, knowledge of a world Peter had never seen. Those shelves sagged under the weight of Matisse, Picasso, Chagall and Redon: naked women in Kasbahs, bison-headed men, swirls of black pubic ink, lovers flying in pink, dreamy women with all the mystery of sweet lives swimming in their eyes; one long delirious promise of kindness, freedom and beauty.

'Make yourself at home.' Harold kept himself busy outside, while Peter settled within the broad crater of the armchair—that pungent nest of newspapers, loose tobacco and greasy antimacassars. Sooner or later, Harold's shadow would fill the doorway again. Fussing over the corner cupboard, he'd mutter, 'Now, let's be having a look at you.' Then that xylophone rattle of pencils against the table, a rusty squeak as Harold lowered himself onto a small stool in the shadows. 'Your father must have been a handsome fella,' he'd say, sure as rain, scratching away at paper. 'He would have turned the ladies' heads, I dare say. You'll be turning heads too, son, before too long. Just you wait. Now...' And then he'd fall silent, and draw.

Reading was harder, with the hollows of Harold's darkened face hovering there. Peter's legs started to itch, and his back to ache. The lace of the seat cover needled his bare back, and the newspaper under his thighs grew damp. He'd want to get up and run out, but he wouldn't,

couldn't. He'd sit very still instead—more still than ever—and turn the heavy pages of his book, feeling his skin tickling from the nape of his neck to his toes, as if the tip of Harold's pencil ran there, slowly; as if feeling was coming back to him painfully, inch by inch, after a long paralysis.

The last day he was there, it was hot. Peter threw his shirt on the floor, something he'd never dare do in the dorms. Harold put half a glass of beer on the little spindly-legged table by Peter's chair, then retreated to his own favourite gloomy corner. Blowflies rapped against the window, hard as gravel, then span off and hit the glass again, though the door was wide open. Peter smelt the sour beer warming.

'Little bugger!' Harold came over and held out his glass for Peter to see. Hair sprouted from the old man's armpits, black against his white singlet. 'Will you look at that?' A fat fly wheeled around the little brown lake at the bottom of Harold's glass, propelled by one wet wing. Harold picked him out by the other wing, licking his lips, widening his eyes. Then he snapped the wet black thing into his mouth. Or seemed to. He made a great show of chewing and swallowing.

Peter giggled. 'You didn't, really,' he said.

The old man slid out a broad, red tongue. No fly.

Peter smelt something rotting, and recoiled. 'Gross!'

The old man just rubbed his tummy and burped, and they both laughed. 'Get it down ya, lad.' He winked, raising his glass. 'Mum's the word,' he said, 'Scout's honour.'

Peter drank the warm, bitter liquid in one go, the way he'd seen Harold do. Then he wiped his mouth and tried to burp, but couldn't. Harold giggled. The room span a bit. It got dimmer. He must have slept, because it was quiet all of a sudden—the flies and the birds were gone—and Harold was less distinct in the corner. He wasn't drawing anymore; he was just sitting there staring. Peter had to look away, because there was something he couldn't understand. He heard an almighty sigh, as if that great ball of belly had punctured.

He'd been there too long this time. He'd be missed by now, cross-country run or not. But the room darkened even more, and he couldn't see the floor. Peter scrambled out of the chair on numb legs and leant against the back wall for balance.

Harold's dark, shining eyes stared, following Peter in the gloom.

Peter froze. It was coming back to him, in pins and needles—the familiar sting, walking away from the strap, walking away from their everlasting leather; walking away from every dark threshold he'd ever crossed in search of love or comfort. The sting of survival.

Harold's eyes floated in the darkness of his silhouette. They looked like the eyes of a hungry, frightened child. It sent a shiver down Peter's spine, and made him step aside, grabbing his shirt where he found it under his hand, and circling those eyes, toward the spotlight of the open door.

Harold stood, rising out of shadow like the living dead. 'All right, son?' he said, and his voice was too deep, as if his mouth were full.

Peter went very still, staring at the bright door. Only his chest rose and fell. Then Harold's shadow blocked the light.

He'd stayed too long.

Out on the oval, pelted with rain, Harold coughed and spat, hunched over in his hooded coat like Quasimodo. When he lumbered closer to the trees, Peter gripped the book tight and stepped back hurriedly against a wet crush of reeds. Cold water gripped his legs, pulled him down. Reeds rose over eye level, swallowing Harold.

Sharpness swam against Peter's legs now, as he strove for balance. Water reached for his waist. He had to hold the book clear. Then his feet suddenly slid away—he felt his shoes loosen and hang heavy from his ankles. He was treading water, kicking reeds and branches. Over the rippling dirt-brown water, he held the book in his disembodied hand, a nest in a flooded tree.

A sudden surge grabbed and span him out into open water. He watched the school; the jetty and embankment began to slide away. He swapped hands, still holding the book clear, he wasn't sure why. Maybe the gold. The idea of treasure. Trees either side squeezed the water into a narrow, angry channel. Branches swept past faster, trembling, the air shook with thunder. Peter felt something building, something huge and unstoppable. The book vibrated in his hand. He was turning.

Peter dipped his head below the surface, his left hand still raised, though he knew the book was wet. Cold clamped over his head, and for a long moment, silver spheres swam in emerald mist, in silence. Everything stopped, the way he always wished it would, every Sunday. But the pain in his chest grew.

He fought for the surface, where rain trashed him harder than ever. His arms ached. He was stiff and cold. The rain was loud. He imagined the green silence; how easily he might slip into it. He felt the useless dead weight of the book in his hand and struggled to remember why it had seemed to matter. Branches swept by, closer now, loose paperbark hanging off them in tattered, dripping sheets.

An island was passing, mid-channel on his left. He grabbed at the nearest branch. Submerged branches kicked out at his legs. He got a good

grip and his legs swung up under him, up against tree roots on the bank, but the sand was loose, and gave way. Falling back, he tossed the book onto the bank and heard it thump out of sight.

*'Absence, hear thou my protestation.'*

He loosened his grip on the tree, and let the water take him down.

Even in the dark, Peter knew he was in the infirmary. Again, that deathly quiet. Metal tapped metal, lightly: the click of a bolt delicately withdrawn on the far side of the room. Then the door to the corridor swung open. Peter felt the air contract. A shiver travelled the length of his spine, against the metal bed. Padding—bare feet on polished boards. Sour yeast in the air. Someone breathing.

He fumbled in the sheets to hide the book, but couldn't find it. Then he remembered. As quick as a slap of water, a cold clammy hand clapped itself tight over his mouth, bruising his lips against his teeth, burying his head into his pillow. The metal bed cried out. Peter buckled at the waist as a crushing weight pinned him down, so hard he felt the wires of the bed through the mattress.

'Quiet. Be quiet,' a voice hissed, close to his ear. Peter went limp, recognising the voice. The hand let go. Peter lay still and silent. This was the worst of all. The moment had come to shout, but Peter just lay still, listening to the man talk down to him, listening to the moment pass, listening to his own long silence begin.

## Repartee Rachael Petridis

**Rachael Petridis is a founding member of the Fremantle writing group OOTA. Her work is widely published in a range of journals and anthologies. Her first collection, *Sundecked* (Australian Poetry Centre, 2010) was commended in the Anne Elder Award.**

*One of us has to die first*    you once said  
your words flippant repartee

I begin to imagine a lone path    our walks  
the scent of wildflowers    the blue perfumed Spring

our large bed    tumblings of warmth beneath a sunlit quilt  
and I turn again    mutter utterances in sleep  
my arm flung across your shoulders    a habit

born of day's comforting and night's consolation

how a phrase of frivolous words    knife-sharp    cuts  
a pit in the weave of our covering sheet

and when darkness draws down its carapace

we curve our bodies    foetal    each into the other  
inched tight    holding on

softening towards sleep

## The Silver Bracelet Carolyn Abbs

Carolyn Abbs was Highly Commended in the Dorothy Hewett Unpublished Manuscript Award (2016). Her first poetry collection is forthcoming with UWAP.

Simon Armitage

‘Poetry attempts a dialogue with the departed’

My mother hid the bracelet  
between folds of silk in her underwear drawer:  
each oval disk the size of a fingertip, petal smooth  
beneath, embossed on top with black Indian elephants;  
disks linked with fine chain, the way elephants trail  
trunk to tail      the clasp broken,  
missing

and all those years, I sensed the sadness  
the sorrow, perhaps death, who knows.  
Something *to do with the war* ...  
Her voice lingers in my poem, leaving  
the same question  
that as a child, I knew    not to ask.

## The Australian Flatback Sea Turtle Daniel Jukes

Daniel Jukes is a creative writer and PhD Candidate. He is studying at Curtin University, and his writing has been published in the *Australian Book Review* and *Westerly: New Creative*.

It took a long time to get to 80 Mile Beach. We drove in three-car convoy, stopping off when we needed to and wanted to. We saw stromatolites at Hamelin Pool, and spent New Year at a motel in Exmouth. At the beach—which used to be called 90 Mile, until somebody decided to measure it—the sand swirled thick through waves which rolled and rolled and rolled, turning quickly into foam, dragging us along the shoreline. In a photograph of that day my smile is forced and the vast expanse behind me is empty. Clouds rise like rocks, like distant mountains, and shells speckle the sand. There is no one else, so my friends must be behind the camera, but that is a little how it is on that beach: impossible not to feel alone, even with friends swimming, sitting, watching, listening, talking. Something like the tracks of a car lead off into distance, tyre impressions only just visible.

We came back to the beach that night with torches. Before we saw the water we could hear it, and then the moon turned a smiling face at the ocean—which was all kinds of darkened silver—and our small electrics were redundant. The waves tip and tip and tip, a felt sound, throbbing and trembling. At night horizons may be closer, but the beach felt just as monstrous. I thought of *The Waves*, which

broke and spread their waters swiftly over the shore. One after another they massed themselves and fell; the spray tossed itself back with the energy of their fall. The waves were steeped deep-blue save for a pattern of diamond-pointed light on their backs which rippled as the back of great horses rippled with muscles as they move. The waves fell; withdrew and fell again, like the thud of a great beast stamping. (Woolf 128)

All my memories of that night are silver-tinged; moon-touched. It still feels not-quite-real.

I wanted to be by myself and wandering, but was scared to; I felt the beach deserved silence from us—I wanted to hear its noises: birds, waves, wind. But we whispered to each other as loud as we could, spraying our tiny torchlights across the sand, catching things with brief flashes of light. It was still warm, balmy even. The moon was layered on the water.

We tracked back and forth, leaving our own marks, spreading ourselves as wide as we could, running sometimes, turning, shouting, wild with it. There was nothing so simple as time, that night. It did not matter when we were, just where.

Giddy on night, we went looking for turtles, laughing at the thought of them, jumping at the birds which swooped through silver bands of light. I knew we were not meant to be there: there are birds which come to this beach from wild Siberia; they fly past and move on, have done for thousands of years. We had drifted in off a black-tarmacked road to stay a day or two in obscene little chalets.

Clumps of seaweed and pools of water caught that light and set us running, words wind-caught, at shadows. Except one of those shadows was still, did not move like the rest of the beach, like those wisps of sand which were dancing. It was the size of my palm—just the palm, not the fingers with it—and each of its limbs was perfectly moulded. Its new shell caught a lick of silver; it was pointed the wrong way, back up the beach, to the dunes instead of at the water. And it was dead. But that was part of it all: it had lived a brief kind of lottery, which it won—perhaps—by weight of numbers, but lost a thousand times more. This tiny one could not read the lights on the horizon, or it did not have the energy to reach the waterline, or it had been unable to crest of one of those dips in the undulating beach, where waves had bitten at the sand to make bands and shadows, grooves, divots, ripples.

Time was complex: it gulped past, shot off like the dim, hopeless torches we brought and did not need to use. I do not know how far we walked or how long we lasted: it could have been hours or seconds. But that strange, odd glee kept infecting us, and we hopped from shadow to shadow.

And then, from nowhere, caught in the corner of the eye at the edge of silver light, fled this thing along the sand. It half-swam, skimming across the wobbles through small pools, pulling itself with tiny flippers. We ran with it, around it, willed it on, all of us as best we could, wanting to protect it, to keep the birds away, to stop them from stopping it reaching the water. It knew where to go, arrowed at the waves, wanted them. Its flippers were finger-sized. We followed it to the water and watched it work into the ocean. Waves flopped and dropped and it paddled out into darkened,

silver-edged sea, only resting occasionally, just too long for comfort, until the strange crawl of a turtle on land disappeared into mile-long shallows. A little black dot, a missile in moving water, enacting a cretaceous rite.

The Cretaceous Period ended around 65 million years ago, with that asteroid which sent the dinosaurs back into their skeletons, making their feathers grow, and slowly spreading their wings. Dinosaurs now chirp and crawl, but the Australian Flatback Sea Turtle, *Natator depressus*, still crawls its ancient way up the sand: it 'is the most primitive genus among the extant Cheloniiidae and is among the most primitive form in the entire family' (Zangerl, Hendrickson, and Hendrickson vii). The eyes it has stare back through all those years. Its body, when (and if) it grows into a great thing that will heave itself up onto the beach, is thick with time.

*N. depressus* lives across the tropical top-half of Australia. Well, it nests there. It lives in the ocean and swims most of its life in dark water. In their 'redescription' of the Australian Flatback Sea Turtle, Zangerl, Hendrickson, and Hendrickson detail specimens of it held in collections. They focus on the few kept remnants of juvenile *depressus*—the time called, in the literature, the turtle's lost years. Zangerl and the Hendricksons list the lost things that we know of, which all perished in the time between their post-natal run to the water and the first rumoured, strenuous, pulls back up the beach to lay. 'As for most species of sea turtles,' they say, 'there is a dearth of museum specimens ... in the 'lost year' size-class' (51). Indeed, there are only eight known specimens of juvenile Flatback Sea Turtles. Without precise locational data for these found, caught, and kept eight, it is very difficult to be precise about where *N. depressus* spends its days and nights as it grows, biding time before returning to the beach. And because of how and where the turtles were taken, that data is lacking. McCulloch's 1908 specimen comes from 'Port Darwin'; Fry's from 'Cape York'. Their labels are handwritten. 'Northern Territory Museum specimens R2939 and R2940 were found washed ashore on a beach on the outskirts of Darwin town following a storm' (52). These last, R2939 and R2940, are the only two specimens of the 8 to be preserved in alcohol. Their shells, called carapaces, are 14 and 22 centimetres in length. Two more specimens from the Northern Territory come from the Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria. They 'consist of dried, partially eaten remains found under the nest of a White-bellied Sea Eagle'. Zangerl, et. al. 'think of the White-bellied Sea Eagle as a "collector"' (52), but do not say anything about the people who keep these pickled or picked-at shells inside museums.

The final specimen on record 'is a 27-cm-long, dried flatback carapace that we found hanging as an ornament on the wall of the restaurant-bar

at the Victoria River Wayside Inn' (52). It is up to you to decide or imagine how the turtle—a juvenile, remember—crawled its way onto the wall of that restaurant-bar, so that Zangerl, Hendrickson, and Hendrickson could (one day) step in, measure it, and note it down. All the evidence, they say, points towards the turtles staying close to shore until it is time for them to crawl back up the sand, when the females retrace their very first journey.

According to Zangerl and the Hendricksons, 'The staff on duty [at the Wayside Inn] said that the animal had been collected by Mr. Don Hoar near the junction of Timber Creek with the Victoria River' (52). The water is salty there, and the locals say that they see Australian Flatback Sea Turtles regularly; that junction is 300 km from the ocean. Zangerl, Hendrickson, and Hendrickson are sceptical, but still use this information to infer detail on the way *N. depressus* lives: 'Given any semblance of accuracy in the alleged collection locality, it implies a saline mangrove habitat far removed from the exposed seashore' (52). I imagine the thing I saw on the beach that night—it growing, from the size of my palm, into a dense and grunting cretacean, scared, perhaps, to swim out into the deeper parts of the ocean, sticking tight to the coast in a war of attrition with waves, birds, and people: 'basking specimens are often conspicuous at a considerable distance and may generally be easily approached within close harpooning distance' (52). Mangroves *would* be safer, but there are none at 80 Mile Beach.

I do not know how Mr. Don Hoar managed to capture the turtle nailed to the wall of the Victoria River Wayside Inn. Z and H and H use it, and the others, to argue that *N. depressus* does not have 'lost years', like other Sea Turtles—that they always stay close to the shore; the females waiting for a night when their eyes shine wide at the stars and their flippers brush madly, inefficiently, at the sand. I like the idea of lost years though; I like the mystery.

The scientists seem enamoured but also detached from the animal they describe:

The literature on *N. depressus* reveals a continuing controversy on whether the flatback is primarily carnivorous or primarily herbivorous, with no clear observations of actual feeding in nature and almost no firm data on stomach contents (see Williams et al. 1967: 6; Worrell 1970: 10). Most of the arguments for carnivory are inferred from the reputed unpleasant taste of the flesh (Bustard 1972: 85; Limpus et al. 1983a: 178), but Worrell (1970) says he finds the flesh quite palatable, and we (L.P.H./J.R.H.) can confirm this from a single experience in Western Australia. (54)

It is easy to imagine Worrell snaffling the flesh of a new-caught turtle, a juvenile, and noting down that, in fact, the taste was pleasant. He is by himself in the middle of nowhere, no et al., sampling the turtle he is dissecting for study. I do not know how H and H managed to taste their turtle, if they cooked it, or why they might have wanted to. Nothing is made of the absence of Zangerl.

Where we would have to walk back into camp, through a gap in the dunes, was a boatshed. On the south side of the shed there were marks in the sand stretching back to the water. It was a path, dug into the beach that night, and it went in a straight line from the sea to the edge of the dunes. It was wider than my shoulders, obvious, and when I turned around to look across the rest of the beach I saw more paths dug in to the sand, which was netted by them, crosshatched in all these paths carved by something come from the depths of the ocean. It would have been a long journey for a body not made to feel its own weight. But there she was, parked in the moon-shadow of the boatshed. She made strange kinds of groans and shuffs, and worked at the sand underneath her with a kind of wriggle and push, a time-honed, awkward, effortful action. We were silent then. And we watched her, and the stars and the waves and the darkness in-between. She was enormous, prehistoric, and the marks left by her flippers were bigger than handprints. She was all hard and thick, muscled and deep-shelled; her eyes were shining and she knew we were there, but I and we could not help but stay to see the way she worked and struggled. She snorted, hawked, seemed to grimace, doing the same thing she had always done, and the same thing that has always (yes, not quite always, but a good-sized chunk of it) been done on the beach. This was ritual and custom, and this archaic thing we got to see and feel (when she pushed off sand and it flicked into the folds of our clothes) was a privilege.

Zangerl, Hendrickson, and Hendrickson point out—they are at pains to show—that their monograph does not represent the first time the Australian Flatback Sea Turtle has come up for consideration by anatomists. Their work is a *redescription* of the animal, and they plot the route to their conclusions: *N. depressus* was first described by S. Garman in 1880, who used a stuffed specimen (holotype MCZ 4473) from the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University. He called it *Chelonia depressa*. To make his classifications, Garman used a juvenile specimen (MCZ 1413) which, in 1914, T. Barbour realised was not *depressus*, but *mydas*. It was McCulloch, in 1908, who proposed that the *depressus* warranted—no, deserved—its own genus, and so gifted

the Australian Flatback Sea Turtle its *Natator* moniker, using the same specimen that Fry (no doubt to the chagrin of McCulloch) re-re-described later as *Chelonia*. This process removed and then replaced *N. depressus* among its cheloniid cousins. It was the lack of specimens which made it difficult for the turtles to be described, to lock them into separate species.

Then came Bustard & Limpus's 1969 breakthrough: they showed that the 'lateral peripherals' of the *C. mydas* were not all upturned! In the same year, the great work of Cogger & Lindner, with their publication of a photograph of an adult female 'covering its nest on a beach in the Northern Territory' (1), brought about a re-examination of the genus of the Flatback. And then, in 1984, Pritchard & Trebbau finally suggested the reapplying of McCulloch's '*Natator*'.

Both Hendricksons were in the north and north-west of Australia from January to March 1981. That was when they collected their 6 'mature' specimens of (then) *C. depressa* 'from widely separated beaches' (1). Four of the specimens were females taken after nesting, and two were partial remains (also—probably—female). Four turtles taken after nesting are preserved as skeletons at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu; unfortunately I do not think I will ever have the chance to see them, as I have no plans to travel to Hawai'i (but then, neither did what those bones once were). 'Study of these skeletons', say Zangerl, Hendrickson, and Hendrickson, 'leaves no doubt that *depressa* does not belong in any of the presently established genera of extant cheloniids. It is at least as distinct morphologically from each as they are from one another ... Beyond question, *depressa* is the type species of a 5th Recent genus of cheloniid turtles' (2). And, of course, I cannot know exactly what that means. So I will have to trust them.

Zangerl, Hendrickson, and Hendrickson are without doubt enigmatic. I imagine Zangerl as puppet master, sending his scientists into the world and then ticking, crossing, and checking their work from his post as Curator Emeritus at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Hendrickson and Hendrickson were married. They worked in Tucson, at the University of Arizona (where my brother studied for a semester, and where he met his girlfriend). Lupe P. Hendrickson worked in the Cooperative National Park Resources Studies Unit, and John R. was Professor Emeritus of Biology. They are dead now. John R.'s 2002 obituary (written by David Owens and published in the *Marine Turtle Newsletter*) begins: 'JRH was brilliant, he was confident and he was not very tall.' A brutal microcosm of a man which just about sums up biography: how we are meant to squash life from the few details we have. 'He grew up

in Tipton, Iowa (pop. 2, 998), in the middle of the American great plains. [And] these brief facts', continues Owen, 'may help us understand why he loved the desert, the ocean, the tropics and Senorita Lupe Perez so passionately.' Perhaps they might. But I get no sense of the love Lupe and John had for each other from those words alone; I get some from the three months they spent looking for turtles together on vast and distant beaches spattered across the top of Australia, tasting the flesh of the thing they thought was different from everything else, that they were trying to trap between pages and *redescribe*—an animal which had brought them from the deserts of Arizona to edges of the Indian Ocean and the Timor Sea.

Lupe was (as Owen goes on to say) John's former student. This fills in another gap, and creates a thousand false impressions. To build a life from what's condensed onto the old website of an archived newsletter themed solely around marine turtles is difficult. But—it can be hard to resist. And even if it is difficult to understand the motivations of those who pursue arcane, specific facts, it is impossible to stop trying to. What is odd is that people persist in trying to track down the past (which is possible to represent but impossible to present). It is perhaps possible to *redescribe* the past, but we must be careful to compare that redescription with the stuffed and stabbed-at specimens of the Flatback Turtle, which tell us next to nothing about what it does, what it thinks, where it goes: we do not know the way it feels, or if the sea is lonely, because we only have preserved shells and recovered bits of stomach-churned algae to work with.

There is something continuous about the turtle, about the ritual of the beach, the way it crawls precisely and deliberately towards the top of the sand (the way it crawled the day I saw it). It is a prehistoric thing which has seen the world move, has seen the shifting of tectonic plates and the crumbling of rocks into dust and sand. It has survived the process which turned the biggest dinosaurs into the smallest birds, all the while laying eggs which are the size of thimbles. It is as though its world stopped, was made perfect there across the topside of Australia: the sand at 80 Mile Beach is fine and white flecked, and the beach is long enough to curve away with the shape of the planet. The water is warm and the air is thick and turgid. It must be how the turtles like it, because they have stayed a long time. But that continuity is a lie: its world has not stopped. It merely changes more slowly than we—I—can sense.

The morning after the night on the beach we went to look at the marks she left. There was no sign of what we saw in the darkness, but underneath the sand were the eggs she laid. And, one day, out from beside the boatshed,

will come a tiny thing set on-course for the water, programmed to run the gauntlet, to reach for the waves. That journey is ingrained inside these creatures, coded there by stars, by the feel of sand, by the slow rhythm of the waves and the temperature and tannin of the water.

We drove on then, left the beach, like the flicker-hearted things we are.

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## Art, Beauty, and the Problem of Consciousness in Tim Winton's *Breath*

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In Tim Winton's novel *Breath* (2009), recently adapted into a 2017 film by Simon Baker, the everyday world is presented to the reader in aesthetic terms. Surfing is thus transformed by Winton from a sport or pastime into something creative and artistic. The world the surfers occupy is described in similar terms, from the breathtakingly beautiful to the downright ugly. Such a strategy is not new in Winton's fiction, which most often seeks beauty within the grotesque, from the gruesome practices of the whaling industry described in his early novel *Shallows* (1984), to the atmospheric terror of *In the Winter Dark* (1988), to the emotionally tortured characters who appear in the stories of *The Turning* (2004). His most famous novel, *Cloudstreet* (1991), is set in an ugly, brooding Gothic house that, in Faulknerian style, heaves, moans, and even speaks to its inhabitants. Sometimes this grotesquery is shockingly visceral: Luther Fox's bleeding feet as he makes his way across the sharp rocks of remote northern Australia in *Dirt Music* (2001), or the casual severance of Sam Pickles' fingers in a work-related accident in *Cloudstreet*, are just two memorable moments that made my own fingers and toes ache in sympathy. In the midst of this pain and ugliness, however, Winton frequently discovers a beauty that redeems and purifies his characters and the worlds they inhabit. While these stylistic elements are part of the natural texture of Winton's writing, in *Breath* they are self-consciously highlighted in order to explore the relationship between human existence (represented by the novel's central metaphor of breathing) and the creative, artistic process.

Much of the criticism focused on this novel, as such, attempts to locate its exploration of this theme within the dominant philosophical discourses about art and beauty. Brigid Rooney, for example, in her essay 'From the Sublime to the Uncanny in Tim Winton's *Breath*' (2014), notes that in 'a distant echo of Edmund Burke's famous treatise on the sublime, surfing in *Breath* [...] is not just about the experience of sublimity, it is

also about beauty' (244). Rooney further characterises Winton's novel, especially its depictions of nature, as influenced by the tradition of philosophical aestheticism—'The natural sublime—as theorised by Western philosophers from Longinus to Burke and Kant—is defined in the encounter of the spectating subject who stands at an implied distance and gazes upon' (245)—an idea that Winton simultaneously exploits and challenges in this novel. In his essay on *Breath*, Nicholas Birns observes similarly that 'surfing for both boys is the acme of their creativity, and their immersion in it is a form not just of recreation but, as the novel's repeated motif of "something beautiful. Something pointless and elegant" demonstrates aesthesis' (266). These critics follow the conventional tendency of seeing beauty from an aesthetic point of view, a perspective on beauty that implicitly privileges the spectator, the viewer who judges and appreciates a work's qualities from outside the artistic process.

Such a perspective has become the dominant mode for approaching art and literature ever since Immanuel Kant's influential treatise on aesthetics, *Critique of Judgement* (1790). The notion of taste, of a rational appreciation for beauty that Kant develops in this book, assumes that the value of a work of art or literature is determined primarily by the individual spectator or reader. The notion of 'disinterestedness' is key to this Kantian perspective—since the spectator views the work from outside the creative process, he or she should be able to apply rational principles of judgement to its aesthetic reception in a way that the artist cannot. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), however, Friedrich Nietzsche encourages his readers to consider the matter from a different angle, from the perspective of the artist:

Kant, like all philosophers, instead of envisaging the aesthetic problem from the point of view of the artist (the creator), considered art and the beautiful purely from that of the 'spectator,' and unconsciously introduced the 'spectator' into the concept 'beautiful.' [...] 'That is beautiful,' said Kant, 'which gives us pleasure *without interest*.' Without interest! Compare with this definition one framed by a genuine 'spectator' and artist—Stendhal, who once called the beautiful *une promesse de bonheur*. At any rate he rejected and repudiated the one point about the aesthetic condition which Kant had stressed: *le désintéressement*. Who is right, Kant or Stendhal? (104, original italics)

In *The Man Without Content* (1970), a book which opens by citing this same passage from Nietzsche, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben

considers how the modern aesthetic perspective that emerges with Kant has profound implications not just for the world of art, but for humanity's deeper sense of itself. He contrasts the ancient Greek experience of art as something powerful and terrifying, epitomised by Socrates's proposed exile of the poets from his ideal Republic, to the detached, ironic, even somewhat bored figure of the modern aesthete. How is it possible, Agamben ponders, that humanity's reception of art has been so utterly transformed? Moreover, he wonders, why has this reversal had such an unnerving effect on the modern artist, whose creativity often sees them teeter on the brink of madness—Hölderlin, Van Gogh, Nietzsche, Artaud, and many more?

Similar questions are embedded in the fabric of Winton's novel, most obviously through the central metaphor of breathing. Early in the story the book's protagonist, Bruce Pike, contemplates 'the enigma of respiration,' noting in particular a sharp duality in how humans regard this fundamental process (Winton, *Breath* 42). On the one hand, Pike reflects, breathing is something that humans generally do in an unconscious, habitual manner. How strange, he thinks, that something so essential for life is, for the most part, taken entirely for granted:

It's funny, but you never really think much about breathing. Until it's all you ever think about. [...] In a whole lifetime you might rarely give it another thought. Until you have your first asthma attack or come upon some stranger trying to drag air into himself with such effort that the stuff could be as thick and heavy as honey. (42)

Pike thus reframes the dangerous adventures of his youth—breath-holding challenges, surfing, sex involving strangulation, even his first taste of coffee—as 'a rebellion against the monotony of drawing breath' (43), an attempt to face off defiantly against life rather than succumb meekly to its dumb rhythms.

[A]s a youth you do sense that life renders you powerless by dragging you back to it, breath upon breath upon breath in an endless capitulation to biological routine, and that the human will to control is as much about asserting power over your own body as exercising it on others. (43)

As such, the novel uses the metaphor of breath to judge and divide the people that Pike encounters, labelling them either as 'ordinary' or 'extraordinary,' a division that correlates to their creative capacity, as though life itself were a work of art.

These intertwined but opposing states make up the aesthetic structure of Bruce Pike's world. The ugliness and banality of his hometown of Sawyer, which extends to the regional hub of Angelus, is repeatedly placed in contrast to the natural beauty of both the sea and the forest, which Pike's parents, in particular, regard as a kind of threat. These two worlds are not merely separate from each other: the commercial world of the town is seen as an active exploiter of its natural counterpart, spreading ugliness by waging war against the splendour of nature. Pike's youthful appreciation for the beauty of surfing emerges out of this dichotomy, which he imagines as a reunification of the human and natural spheres, a world in which humans—and most unexpectedly, men, who are normally the chief agents of civilization's ugliness—can rediscover the beauty of nature:

How strange it was to see men do something beautiful. Something pointless and elegant, as though nobody saw or cared. In Sawyer [...] men did solid, practical things, [...] [but] there wasn't much room for beauty in the lives of our men. [...] Loonie and I surfed together, [...] [but] we never spoke about the business of beauty. [...] [F]rom day one I was stoned from just watching. (25–6)

Not yet having learned to surf at this point in the story, Pike is necessarily an observer, but he uses this experience, in accordance with the Kantian model, to set up an aesthetic judgement. This judgement is not merely aesthetic, for Pike's panegyric to natural beauty and his condemnation of industrial ugliness reflects, in turn, an ethical judgement.

This perspective changes when Pike learns how to surf, particularly under Sando's direction. It is not so much that Pike changes his mind about the nature/society split, as that he shifts from being a spectator of surfing to being a practitioner, an artist himself. As Nietzsche understood, seeing art from the inside of the creative process is a very different experience from that of the outside spectator. The spectator may be able to appreciate beauty from a distance, but remaining inherently outside the creative process means that he or she cannot take on any of the risk involved in the act of creation. Although surfing can be a physically dangerous activity, the risk in question, as in any creative action, does not come from its physical aspect—rather, it is existential risk, in which each wave is a kind of *agon*, a test of one's value that deploys physical strength and skill in the same way that a poet deploys words. Sando presents a challenge to the Kantian aesthetic perspective when, following

the boys' first trip to Barney's, he flatly denies the value of the spectator in determining the value of surfing:

Geez, I wish we had a camera, he [Loonie] said afterwards as we chugged back through the forest. It was too good. Shoulda got a photo.

Nah, said Sando. You don't need any photo.

But just to show, to prove it, sorta thing.

You don't have to prove it, said Sando. You were there.

Well, least you blokes saw it.

My oath, I said.

But it's not even about us, said Sando. It's about you. You and the sea, you and the planet. [...] Eventually there's just you and it. You're too busy stayin alive to give a damn about who's watchin. [...] That's what you deal with in the end[.] (76–7)

Sando's removal of the spectator collapses the possibility of judgement and, with it, the whole purpose and value of aesthetics. For the aesthetic judgement is grounded in the assumption that an artist (surfer, poet, or any other kind) performs their creativity primarily for the spectator, an other whose function is to imbue the creative product with value through the act of judgement. But if the true artist requires no audience, as Sando contends, if the triangular aesthetic assumption collapses into a headlong encounter, a struggle only between artist and the creative action, then we suddenly gain an insight into Agamben's question about why so many artists live on the edge of sanity. For the modern artist does not, unlike in the time of the ancient Greeks, experience art as a communal practice, a dangerous but shared task, but instead takes all the risk of creativity onto themselves. If they are truly willing to push the limits of the extraordinary in their art, they end up risking their own self, the very meaning of their existence as expressed in their art. Little wonder then that in this radical isolation so many artists and poets have gone mad. The aesthetic spectator, far from being the height of civilised sophistication, is in many ways a freeloader who, while enjoying the benefits of artistic culture, does not have to bear the risks of creation.

How did we come to this point, in which the perspective of the spectator becomes the main measure of artistic value—epitomised, in this novel, by Loonie's inexorable need for some kind of testimony to his surfing feats? Agamben argues that the late seventeenth century witnesses a dramatic shift in the attitude toward art that reflects, in turn, a monumental change in how human beings understand the

world. Agamben points to the European practice of keeping a ‘cabinet of wonder,’ a collection of curiosities that the privileged classes gathered as a reminder, in accordance with medieval religious ideas, of the divine unity of the world. In such collections, works of art existed alongside such curiosities as animal parts, unusual rocks, shells, dried plants, and so on, without any differentiation. By the seventeenth century, however, in a world fragmented by Enlightenment ideas, Agamben detects an important shift, exemplified by Marco Boschini’s book on painting, in which an imaginary ‘scission’ (Agamben 36) takes place that transforms the indiscriminate ‘cabinet of wonder’ into the modern museum of art, a sanctified location in which art can be seen and admired.

[T]he work of art is no longer, at this point, the essential measure of man’s dwelling on earth, which, precisely because it builds and makes possible the act of dwelling, has neither an autonomous sphere nor a particular identity, but is a compendium and reflection of the entire human world. On the contrary, art has now built its own world for itself. Consigned to the atemporal aesthetic dimension of the *Museum Theatrum*, it begins its second and interminable life[.] (33)

It is ‘our aesthetic experience of art,’ argues Agamben, that ‘makes us build museums and makes it appear normal to us that the painting should go immediately from the hands of the artist to a hall in the museum of contemporary art’ (32–3). Since art existed long before the advent of museums, Agamben’s point is that modernity ought to be viewed as a historical aberration, transforming art by placing it into a sphere that is separate from everyday practice, whereas its traditional function was precisely to illuminate and reveal the value of ordinary life. As such, the art object, as can be seen in the ‘cabinet of wonder,’ was not viewed as exceptional precisely because *everything* in the world was seen as an immanent expression of ‘the divine world of creation’ (34). With this separation, Agamben writes, the ‘original unity of the work of art has broken, leaving on one side the aesthetic judgement and on the other artistic subjectivity without content, the pure creative principle,’ both of which refer back to the museum as a place of spectacle in which the contested line between art and non-art plays out in a ‘constant movement beyond itself’ (37).

The effect of the ‘cabinet of wonder’ finds its parallel in *Breath* when Pike and Loonie discover the surfing magazines, which reveal to them that Sando, despite his philosophy of surfing for its own sake, is actually a celebrity. The two boys flick through the glossy American magazines,

looking with their own kind of wonder at the photos of Sando surfing on famous beaches, trying ‘to piece together a story from all these disparate captions and photos’ but ‘all we could really glean was the fact that Sando—for a time, and in places that were legendary to the likes of us—had briefly *been somebody*’ (Winton, *Breath* 64–5). The discovery of the surfing magazines is depicted as a kind of ‘fall’, a taste of forbidden knowledge, the effects of which Sando recognises immediately in the expressions of the two boys. ‘Before he’d even seen the mags he’d sensed something different in the way we looked at him,’ recalls Pike. ‘Our admiration for him had enlarged; it had metastasised. I remembered how we leapt out of his way as he lunged for the box. He stood back with it under his arm like a man holding something dangerous and unstable and I had the queerest feeling of having transgressed’ (66–7). The discovery of the surfing magazines is thus a turning point in the novel, for while Sando’s skills had previously made him seem godlike, it was a divinity embedded in the natural context of his surroundings. The magazines shatter this immanence, elevating Sando to a higher status in the boys’ minds that, in its idolatry, removes him from their world: suddenly he is rendered unfamiliar, other, transcendent. The museumification of art and the surfing magazines operate on the same principle, whereby the elevation of creativity also means alienating it, removing it from the immanent power it once exercised over its natural context. Little wonder, then, that the status of creativity has changed so dramatically in the modern world. The dangerous influence that Socrates, for instance, associated with art stemmed from the ability of the artist to influence the social context from which their immanent power flowed. Placing art in a museum bestows on it a certain transcendence, but in the process strips it of its context, making it less dangerous by disconnecting it from direct contact with life. That is not to say that modern art cannot challenge and confront its viewers, but its power is diminished by its sequestration—a viewer can walk away from a work of art, refuse to view it, even remain entirely ignorant of its existence. Such a separation is not possible in a society where the power of art is an immanent part of the context through which one moves and, as the book’s central metaphor reminds us, breathes.

As a result, the reader witnesses Pike struggling throughout his life to reconcile this modern division between the immanent and the transcendent. The post-Enlightenment world, accustomed to equating identifying a problem with the first step toward its solution, finds its own logic turned inside-out. If becoming conscious is the first step, as Pike realises about the act of breathing, its advent is also a signal that

something has gone wrong. Now that humanity has been aroused to consciousness, attempting to return to the previous state of unconscious immanence turns out to be impossible, a truth Pike discovers when he attempts to overcome his addiction to adrenaline. The perverse (and ultimately untenable) solution he learns from Eva is to push consciousness to its limits until, through an excess of stimulus (auto-erotic asphyxiation, electric shock), a lapse into unconsciousness is induced. Winton highlights the uncanny resemblance between the life-denying suicide and the differently motivated but equally self-destructive behaviour of the thrill-seeker—despite their outwardly opposite motives, both paths converge with the same nihilistic result, and it is a measure of Pike's experience that he, unlike his younger colleague Jodie, is able to tell the difference when they encounter the body of the dead boy in the novel's beginning.

Across his writings, Winton deploys a number of discourses to try and counter modernity and its obsession with consciousness, from his religious beliefs, to his admiration for indigenous culture, to his love of the natural world. In his recent memoir *Island Home* (2015), for instance, he makes some poignant remarks about the intersection of these discourses when considering the value and purpose of art and beauty:

[T]he genius of indigenous culture is unquestionable, but even this is overshadowed by the scale and insistence of the land that inspired it. Geography trumps all. Its logic underpins everything. And after centuries of European settlement it persists, for no post-invasion achievement, no city nor soaring monument can compete with the grandeur of the land. [...] Think of the brooding mass and ever-changing face of Uluru. Will architects ever make stone live like this? [...] Humans are unlikely to ever manufacture anything as beautiful and intricate. (*Island* 13–4)

Winton's comments are a startling assessment of what constitutes artistic achievement, for in this passage he overturns the conventional idea that art is an activity intimately related to human creativity by suggesting that natural formations like Uluru eclipse even the greatest achievements of human culture. For Winton, the beauty of these formations stands independently of human consciousness, a curious contradiction given that beauty is a quality that has no obvious meaning outside the human sphere—the arrangements of the natural world are surely as devoid of aesthetic intention as they of ethical sense. Despite his insistence otherwise, Winton's view of nature is thus inherently

romantic and anthropomorphic, making his attempts to re-establish a harmony between humanity and nature somewhat problematic. Like the problem of breathing, like the problem of art, it is humanity's modern consciousness of itself as both a part of nature and yet, because of this self-consciousness, somehow separate from it, that is precisely the foundation of our alienation from the natural world.

Winton tries to solve this problem of consciousness in *Breath* in two main ways. His first strategy, one that he deploys across his fiction, is to reinvest the natural world with a divine immanence. One might recall from *Cloudstreet*, for instance, Sam Pickles's notion of the 'hairy hand of God', a principle of celestial luck that he believes guides his every decision, or the prophetic visions of Fish Lamb, or the family pig that speaks in tongues, along with numerous other comparable examples. Similar religious notions appear throughout *Breath*, most notably the notion of grace. Grace, of course, is usually aligned with the notion of beauty, and Winton uses the word in this sense, for example, when describing Sando's expertise: 'There was a casual authority in the way he surfed, a grace that made all our moves look jerky and hesitant' (*Breath* 58). More often, however, he uses it in a quasi-theological context, of grace as a feeling of undeserved love and forgiveness. 'Even now, nearly forty years later, every time I see a kid pop to her feet, arms flailing, all milk-teeth and shining skin, I'm there; I know her, and some spark of early promise returns to me like a moment of grace' (26). Winton reiterates the idea in his choice of name for Pike's wife, Grace Andrews (from whom he is symbolically estranged), as well as his encounter, late in the novel, with a defrocked priest. This latter incident exemplifies the ambiguities of Winton's spiritual vision—the accidental nature of their meeting makes their connection seem spontaneous, unconscious, as though it were part of a greater design. Yet the two men spend their time 'laugh[ing] at every shimmering mirage in shared disbelief,' dismissing any kind of 'magical thinking' while at the same time seemingly spellbound by the power of their sceptical consciousness and its ability to see through the illusions thrown up by nature. The human separation from nature, for Winton, parallels its religious alienation—to be in tune with the natural world (as Pike experiences when he is surfing) is equivalent to receiving the blessings of divine grace.

The other, equally problematic way that Winton attempts to resolve this problem is by drawing on the resources of indigenous culture. In *Island Home*, in greater detail than ever before, he expresses his admiration for these cultures and how they have influenced his own thought. 'Largely spurned by settlers, ignored by consolidating colonial

successors, and either patronised, romanticised or politicised by every generation thereafter,' he writes, 'Aboriginal wisdom is the most under-utilised intellectual and emotional resource this country has' (*Island* 189). The key quality he identifies in this wisdom is the indigenous integration into the Australian landscape:

Those who became the Aboriginal peoples of this continent were almost always required to live nomadically. Their occupation of many regions was seasonal, even notional. Distant but precious country was held by skeins of song and webs of ritual, so even country that was not physically occupied was never empty. Places were intimately known and culturally vital but culture rarely imposed itself in concrete terms. Artifacts and constructions were largely ephemeral and icons required seasonal refreshment. [...] [C]ulture originated in and deferred to country. (12–3)

Winton perceives, correctly, that indigenous culture is rooted in an immanent experience of the natural world, a perspective from which its art and other practices proceed. Since Australia's colonization, this immanent mindset has lived in uneasy tension with the transcendent worldview of modernity, and therein lies the paradox of Winton's prescription. For if the wisdom of indigenous culture lies in its immanent relationship to nature, trying to embrace its practices and mindset in a *self-conscious* manner is a strategy that cannot help but eliminate the immanence it seeks. William Blake demonstrates this truth in *Songs of Innocence* (1789), in which he reveals innocence also to be an immanent state—from the moment one can grasp what innocence is, to name it and describe it, one can no longer be innocent. It is thus impossible to return deliberately to an immanent mindset, because the very consciousness that urges us to make this step simultaneously blocks us from doing so. It is at this impasse that the modern human being (and by extension, modern art) finds itself.

Winton's spiritual pantheism and his interest in indigenous culture are his response to this larger, unresolved issue of modern consciousness. The solution that Pike uses to cope with (but not resolve) this problem is symbolised in the novel by his playing of the didgeridoo. Despite this instrument's association with indigenous culture, it is striking that the young Pike instead learns how to play from Sando:

That summer he taught me how to play the didjeridu, to sustain the circular breathing necessary to keep up the low,

growling drone you could send down the valley from his front steps. [...] I liked the way it sucked energy from me and drew hard feelings up the way only a good tantrum could when I was little. I blew till I saw stars, till a puddle of drool appeared on the step below or until Sando took the thing off me. (*Breath* 125–6)

The circular breathing that Winton seemingly offers here as an example of indigenous wisdom is, in reality, re-appropriated into an entirely different, modern context. For whereas indigenous peoples originally employed the didgeridoo as a communal instrument, attuned to the rhythms of the natural world and the customs derived from it, Pike plays it as a modern individual with no other purpose than to fulfil his own emotional needs. Far from being a genuine return to indigenous traditions, Winton resituates the didgeridoo in this novel in the same startling manner as a work of art by Marcel Duchamp or Andy Warhol, transforming the object in question by stripping it of its original context (a bicycle wheel, a soup can) and thus recontextualising it.

In *Breath*, then, Winton attempts to grapple with the condition of humanity, through the experiences of Bruce Pike, by considering life from an aesthetic, creative point of view. What he discovers is the steep cost of modern consciousness, for while it provides a certain control over the natural world, it also alienates humanity from that context. Winton treads a familiar path to earlier artists and writers by attempting to overcome that alienation through his engagements with spirituality and pre-modern cultures, but ultimately Pike becomes the exemplar of the modern individual's irresolvable dilemma, yearning endlessly for an immanent world that is no longer accessible. His unsatisfactory solution to this impasse reflects the state of modern art, which is by necessity an art of practical compromise—having pushed the limits as far as he can, Pike learns to integrate his desire for the extreme into the everyday rhythms of his life: 'For a good while I feared excitement. But I found ways through that. I discovered something I was good at, something I could make my own. I am hell's own paramedic' (*Breath* 213). The endless flow of wave upon wave, the repeated pump and release of adrenaline, the eternal sequence of one breath after another: such is the condition of modern humanity, Winton reveals, a cycle in which we must either learn, like Pike and Sando, to enjoy riding for its own repetitive sake or, like Loonie and Eva, face the possibility of destroying ourselves in the search for a false transcendence that, in reality, is death and nihilism in disguise.

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## Small Things

Jill Jones

Jill Jones' most recent books include *Brink* (Five Islands Press, forthcoming), *The Leaves Are My Sisters* (Little Windows Press), and *Breaking the Days* (Whitmore Press).

Everything suggested has been removed  
apart from a few pharmaceuticals.

The smallest things give form to light  
beaten with wings, water thrashed sky.

Each day thinks through frail modernities,  
dangerous traffic, skin-filled impatience.

Hear the smoky breath of daily nostalgia  
dreamt in Australian ways.

In the name of television, the news is bad news  
each second gets a bit tricky.

Instead of a dove-grey rapture  
wake up and arrange your resistance.

## Gone In Terrain

Jill Jones

An eagle looks like time  
then flies above it  
flight movement and colour lost within ranges  
perpetual light perpetual fall  
weathered roadside shadows as the never-ending begins  
world of cloud and crosswinds.  
The bird flies out of sight  
and the myth  
is still everlasting that we will taste this air  
as day sweat or  
a later moon to cry under.  
And home lines end in becoming  
wood returns to land as cracks run through us  
years slant across patterns in walls.  
In silence is no silence or sounds our feet make  
in ruins where  
desperate ancient water tracks down walls  
disappears as a saint weeps into plaster  
the adept oxidation of ages sacrifice  
eccentric ultimate bones a lasting feathery pattern  
under hollow windows.  
Or as if some ghost  
exploded gaps in pug and pine  
an unlucky toss of galvo crashed on ground  
with old gear and paraphernalia  
among undone magic of brick and iron  
even doors have lost their shadows.

Ecstasies of heat touch us igniting morning  
a pattern of nests angle in a tree  
smoothness and dryness death in branches  
death just barely below this old firmament  
embrace of white stones and ochre.  
Sand runs like the water this once was  
as memory folds bodies back  
into their field of mulch  
as ground speaks in hum  
about how we've wrecked time.  
Did anyone ask the country  
did anyone ask anyone?  
Sun and water make colours  
what you craft out of the singing moment  
articulate hush pulsing in tracks and fences  
how clouds fill at this angle with a faint orange.  
Thought percolates into thought  
the air's material dust and sound  
changing direction passing wheels  
the last camber of the earth.  
Sky is inexorable becomes almost anything.  
Nothing is  
ever finished.

## Trainspotting

Anna Ryan-Punch

Anna Ryan-Punch is a Melbourne writer. Her previous publications include poetry in *Westerly*, *Antipodes*, *The Age*, *Quadrant*, *Island*, *Overland*, *Southerly*, and the anthology *Prayers of a Secular World*.

Heads swayed in three-quarter time,  
the Hurstbridge express  
clattered along to work.  
But hovering above  
a strictly high fence  
a pair of disembodied hands  
popped up  
with a cat.  
One hand buoyed  
a coiled bum and tail,  
the other palm; a fluffed-out chest.  
A cat suspended,  
triangle head turned  
to follow our train.  
My squawk twisted heads  
while I swivelled double-take.  
The window shot  
clicked out of frame.  
Anonymous hands must  
have often collected the  
fence-line trainspotter,  
raised him sphinx-like  
above the skim of eye-line.  
His almond gaze pivoted my  
limp toast morning around  
to an absurd puppet show,  
while he played his trick  
on the horizon,  
curled and cat and calm.

## Breaking the Cycle

Dorian

Dorian is a writer who has lived and worked in the United Kingdom, Hungary and Australia. She currently lives in Melbourne with her family.

The ringing phone pulled me from my sleep. I turned to check the clock—it was just before three in the morning and all I wanted was to get back to my dreams. Under the blankets my body was warm, but the air on my face was fresh and sharp: it was Budapest, it was the middle of winter, and outside there was snow on the ground.

The phone kept on ringing. The night silence of the flat made the noise seem louder than during the day, it echoed through the emptiness of the rooms. The apartment had been mine for less than a week, even my parents didn't have the number yet. There was only one person who could have been phoning.

There was a house in London that I had left behind. A two-storey, middle-of-terrace south of the river, one in a row of brick houses that all looked the same. A railway ran alongside, noisy with commuter trains to and from the City.

Perry and I had bought the house together, although we couldn't afford it. Perry was from Cardiff, but he had lived in London for so many years there was barely a trace of a Welsh accent, only a slight flattening of the vowels from time to time. He was eight years older than me, but his thick, curly hair was still a rich brown, not yet the coarse grey it would later become. He was a carpenter, and his hands bore the marks of his trade: blackened nails, squat fingers, thick skin pitted and flecked with splinters.

Yet he had a wonderful face, quite beautiful, with only this flaw: a narrow line of white scar tissue, three inches long, which ran from the corner of his mouth out towards his left ear. The result of a knife attack one night, when he was on his way home after an evening drinking with friends. The attacker got three years, but Perry was marked for life.

To meet the mortgage payments we filled the house with lodgers—up to six of them at a time. The cheap carpet was soon worn through with the

tread of so many feet, the white walls were soon grey from the touch of all our hands. There was always a queue for the bathroom, there were always unwashed dishes stacked in the sink.

The lodgers came and went, but some of them stayed long enough to become friends. Wilko, a Dutch chef, and his English girlfriend, Mo, lived with us for more than a year. They moved to Holland, and at the end of one April when Queen Beatrix was still on the throne, we visited them for *koninginnedag*, Queen's Day. Their flat was in Tilburg, south-east of Rotterdam. It was filled with blond wood, space and light. We sat talking through the afternoon, then around nine we got ready to go out. It was the tradition to dress up for the celebrations in orange, the national colour. Wilko put on an orange sweatshirt and trousers, Mo painted her face.

At the local bar, all the tables and chairs had been cleared away, leaving a large space that was already packed with drinkers. The boys had begun their drinking a few hours before. I checked Perry's eyes. They were sharp and focused—he was still in the first, pleasant, stage of his drinking, when the alcohol heightened his humour and he was fun to be around.

The music was too loud for speech. I joined Mo and her girlfriends, who were dancing in the centre of the floor. Everyone was in orange, and the dancing was wild and abandoned. The Dutch call it 'orange madness'. From time to time, I glanced across to where Perry was standing with Wilko up against the wall, plastic glasses of beer in their hands. The room grew more and more crowded, until it seemed the place couldn't hold us any more, that it would have to burst; and then slowly the bar started to empty out. I noticed Perry over in a corner, trying to put his hand up a strange girl's dress. Wilko pulled him away, and we headed back to the flat.

It was cold and dark, our breath frosted in the air. Perry was subdued at first. Then, out of nowhere, he began accusing me of flirting with one of Mo's girlfriends.

'What girl?' I asked.

'The dyke in the red skirt. You fancied her, didn't you? You wanted to go home with her!'

We had reached the external concrete stairs leading up to Mo and Wilko's flat. I could see Perry's breath fast and warm in the cool air.

'Don't be stupid,' I said.

I turned away from him and started up the stairs. I heard him come after me and began to move more quickly, but I had not yet reached the landing when he caught up. He gripped my hair and wound it around his hand, then used it to drag me backwards down the concrete steps. I pressed my hands to my head to lessen the pain, and scrambled desperately to keep

up with him. I was terrified of falling. We reached the street and I had managed to stay upright, but still he pulled me along. I was trying to run backwards but he was moving faster now, and finally I could no longer match his pace. I crashed onto the bitumen, grazing my arms and legs. Perry stopped and picked me off the road, holding me by the collar of my shirt. We were face to face. His eyes were glassy, and his scar twisted his mouth out of shape. He lifted me so that my feet left the ground and then he hurled me across a car parked nearby. I gasped as my body slammed into the bonnet. I was too shocked and winded even to scream.

Wilko ran over and pulled Perry away. He took him up the stairs, while Mo helped me off the car. At the entrance to the flat, Perry kicked a glass wall panel, shattering it into many pieces. It seemed that he would never stop. Yet as soon as he lay on the spare bed he fell straight into sleep, a frown on his face as though even his dreams troubled him.

In the morning, he remembered none of it. Over toast and Edam cheese, I described to him what had happened, not missing a single detail. I showed him the fragments of orange glass at the front of the flat; I rolled up my sleeves to display my grazes and bruising. He told me how sorry he was, how he would make it up to me, how he would never do such a thing again. I told him that my scalp was sore—I ran a hand through my hair to show him how it was still falling out.

He said: 'You're enjoying this, aren't you?'

Of course, no one wants to be a victim of abuse. But there was some truth in what he said. When he was sober, when I was no longer at risk, I wanted to find a way to hurt him back. It was a way for me to regain control.

The issue of dominance and control is at the heart of family violence. In Australia today, the statistics tell a frightening story. One in four Australian women has experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner (Cox 3). And while physical violence is often the image that comes to mind first, family violence encompasses much more than this. Since it is a pattern of coercion and control by one person over another, it can include emotional as well as physical abuse. It also includes financial abuse, where a perpetrator uses joint assets or joint debts to control another person. Financial abuse in particular can continue long after a relationship has ended, for example through withholding child support payments. This interferes with the survivor's recovery, making it difficult for them to build economic independence and security.

Although the majority of perpetrators of family violence are men, and the majority of their victims are women, abuse also occurs within

same sex relationships, and in non-intimate relationships such as carer relationships. Women with a disability are 40 per cent more likely to suffer domestic violence than women without a disability (Women With Disabilities Australia 1). Indigenous women are also at disproportionate risk. They are, for example, 34 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence-related assaults than non-Indigenous women (Commonwealth of Australia 93). This is partly why Western Australia has the second highest rate of reported violence against women in Australia, and why it is second only to the Northern Territory (Government of Western Australia 2). The causes of family violence are multiple and complex, with a key factor being gender inequality and attitudes towards women within the community. Sometimes, but not always, the roots of family violence can be traced back to childhood, where early influences and experiences can form a pattern of behaviour that will endlessly repeat itself over the years to come.

When I was a child in England, maybe eight or nine, I was bullied at school by a girl called Angela Piewell. Angela was thin and angular, sharp-boned. Her clothes hung from her small frame like oversized sacks. I think now that they were probably hand-me-downs. She came from a large family, and they lived on a run-down council housing estate. Neither of her parents worked, and her life was probably hard, although none of that concerned me then. At just eight years old, her face was already lined and worn, she was ancient before her time. She used to pull my hair, which I wore in a thick braid down my back. In needlework class, she liked to stick pins into my arms whenever the teacher's back was turned. I didn't understand why she had singled me out. I was a quiet, well-behaved child who was always a little too eager to please. I just wanted to get along with everyone.

One lunchtime in the playground, Angela offered me her hand. I gripped it tightly, thinking in my innocence that this was a peace offering, that at last she wanted to be friends. I felt a brief flood of happiness. Then, without warning, I was flying through the air. Angela had decided to try out a judo throw she'd learned. I landed hard on my back, all the breath knocked out of me. I lay on the ground with my ribcage aching, gasping for air, while Angela walked away laughing. Hot resentment raged through me, but I felt helpless, unable to vent my fury. Until I found a way to release all of the anger that boiled inside.

In our class there was a plump boy, a quiet and gentle child, who lived a long way from the school and hadn't made any friends. Because Angela was stronger than I was, because I was afraid of her, I turned on this boy

instead. I used the techniques I had learned from Angela to torture him: I pushed him, called him unkind names, I took his favourite pen and refused to give it back. I pretended to be friendly by offering him a turn with my Spirograph set, and when I had him hooked I froze him out, sharing the set with everyone in the class but him. I still remember the look of confused disappointment that wiped the grateful smile from his face.

His mother came looking for me one day after school.

'So you're the nasty little girl who's been terrorising my son,' she said.

She told me I was pushing him to a nervous breakdown and asked me to stop. But I didn't recognise myself in her description of me, and the sense of control I gained from hurting her son was far too valuable for me to give up. Angela might have stripped away my power but I had found a way of getting it back. And so I carried on.

There is an old school photograph in my house now, I took it out the other day. It is a class of eleven-year-olds. I am sitting in the front row, smiling innocently into the sun. The boy I tormented isn't there. I don't remember what happened to him—perhaps his mother transferred him to another school; perhaps he had a nervous breakdown and had to leave. Perhaps it was my fault. Now, I don't even remember his name.

Until Budapest, I had never lived alone. I came from houses filled with people, from schoolyards and university corridors teeming with life. I had always chosen to live that way. And I have been shaped by the people I have lived with. Like a magpie, I picked up their habits and characteristics, and wore them as if they belonged to me.

From my mother, I acquired my negativity: for her, nothing was ever good enough, and nearly every remark was a veiled complaint. Now I have to struggle not to do the same. From my brother I learned the art of deception: how to build outwards from a foundation of truth, and how to look innocent while you lie.

One university landlord, a German man, used to play Wagner loudly above my room into the early hours of the morning. I thought I hated it, a distraction from my late night, coffee-fuelled bouts of essay writing. But when I moved out, I found I missed it after all. And from an American friend, a writer, I learned a passion for language, and a way to communicate with a clarity I had never achieved with speech.

From Angela, and from Perry, I learned about power: how to have it, how to lose it. How to wield it, how to abuse it. I have felt both its horror and its giddy pleasures. Like a drug, its harsh, sweet taste is burned into my nerves forever.

Bullying is a pattern of learned behaviour. Children can learn from other children. They can also learn from their parents, for example if they experience or witness family violence at home. If a child gains social approval or feels powerful by bullying, then they are likely to want to repeat that behaviour. Some children can carry these behaviours into their adult life to become bullies in the workplace, or perpetrators of family violence at home (Falb et al. 890). Conversely, victims of bullying can be more vulnerable to becoming victims of family violence later in life.

So how do we break the cycle? The good news is that there is a plan. As part of the Council of Australian Governments, Western Australia has endorsed the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. This recognises that there needs to be a coordinated, whole of government and community sector response. The bad news is that the response in Western Australia has so far been largely policing and justice based, and focused on perpetrators.

In its March 2016 report, Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence noted that existing policy responses simply aren't working: the prevalence and severity of violence is not reducing (Summary 5). In setting up the Royal Commission in 2015, after a number of family violence-related deaths in Victoria, the Victorian Premier acknowledged that 'more of the same policies will just mean more of the same tragedies' (Summary 1). The Victorian Government has committed to implementing all 227 of the Royal Commission's recommendations. Among these, one key finding was that there needs to be more emphasis on support for children and young people, if we are to prevent the effects of family violence carrying through to the next generation (Summary 22). The hope is that Western Australia, along with other states and territories, will eventually follow Victoria's lead.

Not all women manage to leave their abusers. Separation is the most dangerous time, and some women die trying (State of Victoria vol 1. 21).

I was lucky enough to be able to leave, although I had to run to another country to do it. At three in the morning in Budapest, the phone was ringing, and I knew it wouldn't stop. I flung the sheets back and got out of bed. My body shook with cold as I walked down the hallway. My bare feet shrank from the polished boards.

I had lived in cold flats before. One winter in northern England, I stayed in an unheated apartment with four college friends. It was over a butchers' shop. From a back window, you could see into the refrigerated shed where carcasses hung from hooks. The flat's toilet was broken, and

in the mornings you had to plunge your hand through a layer of ice in the cistern to make the flush work. I can remember each of those friends clearly—what characteristics did I take from them? Perhaps my sense of humour: subtle, dry and grim. And an understanding that in coldness there can be warmth.

My rented Budapest apartment was large, but there was almost no furniture. The telephone sat on the floor of the vast, dark living room. Close up, its ringing was deafening, insistent and impatient. There was, most likely, a half-empty bottle of Jack Daniels at the other end of the line.

I bent down and wrenched the cord from its socket. Silence fell. It was absolute—there was no hoot of an owl out beyond the dark windows, no hiss of tyres in snow. There was not even the breathing of wind through the trees. If we pick up the characteristics of those we live with, then what happens when we are alone? Perhaps in the silence you can discover the person you really are, perhaps it creates a space in which you can just be.

I walked back down the quiet hallway to bed. It was January, it was a new year, I was twenty-six years old. I felt free, on the verge of something. In another four years I would be in Australia, where I would make a home for myself. Still running in some ways, because the memories never disappear, but moving forwards, discovering who I am. Discovering who I would like to be, once all those past influences are stripped away, once the repeating pattern of control and fear is broken.

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**At Rest**  
Heather French

I am forever lost in my  
curiosities; it is a great place  
to be.

Every night my husband and I  
fall asleep holding hands;  
mine atop his.  
Flat on our backs,  
hands clasped together  
as if in the plot of our grave.  
The earth curled into blanket.

I take comfort in this act.  
Believing I get to stay with him  
that long. Knowing  
even his illness  
cannot separate us.  
Thinking our hands will  
always be touching—  
as they do now, as they have been,  
since before we even knew.

**Conversation as you died**  
in memory of Valerie Olsen  
Paul Knobel

Paul Knobel is the author of  
three books of poetry. He has  
been widely published in  
Australian literary magazines  
and newspapers. He is the  
author of *An Encyclopedia of  
Male Homosexual Poetry*.

you couldn't speak  
& we were talking

about love affairs  
in Morocco and Thailand

seduction in New York;  
about business in Sydney

about being an artist

The flowers on the table  
made a statement:

there was your photo  
& your art: the irises  
in the garden:

there you were alive  
& smiling;

outside the new green foliage  
of spring:

the leaves on the trees  
ironically commenting

## Review of *Border Crossing* Nandi Chinna

Nandi Chinna is a poet and research consultant. She was recently Writer-in-Residence at Kings Park and Botanic Garden Perth. She won the 2016 Fremantle History Prize.

Caitlin Maling. 2017. *Border Crossing*. Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Press. RRP \$24.99, 108pp.  
ISBN: 9781925164367.

Caitlin Maling's second poetry collection *Border Crossing* (2017) departs from the home terrain of childhood and growing up in Western Australia that Maling so searingly interrogated in her first book *Conversations I've Never Had* (Fremantle Press, 2015), shortlisted for the Western Australian Premiers Book Awards, Judith Wright Poetry Prize, and the Dame Mary Gilmore Prize. As the name suggests, *Border Crossing* moves away from Perth where the author grew up and turns its gaze toward the self in exile as the author negotiates the experience of living and travelling in the USA.

In one of the early poems in the book, 'Intimacy', Maling writes:

during the French film  
I spend my time wondering  
how I can put doors and windows into poems (30)

These lines beautifully open the work as a series of windows and doors into both America, and into a generation struggling with how to make meaning and live in a world where loss is the predominant narrative. Maling's generation have inherited a world where Walmart, Target, Loews, Sears are a repeating motif more familiar than the names of trees and birds. Maling's world is the world of the Anthropocene, of post-neoliberalism, where extinction of species is underway and irreversible. As Maling so poignantly writes in the poem 'Background Extinction', 'everyone says there is less now... the core will show that we were here for a second' (85-86).

In *Border Crossing*, Maling articulates an ideal of love, but what is more familiar is the inevitability of disappointment and the belief that we that we maybe genetically predisposed to loss. In 'Snow Day', she writes:

It's nice to love this way,  
nicer to believe ourselves loved.

But I love best that which can't  
love me back. (91)

Love as tragedy is a thread through this work, from the family at the rodeo cheering a child into the arena even as he is kicked in the face by the animal he is trying to lasso, to the moose laying down in the bloodstained snow after hunters have slain her calf.

Maling's encounter with America is mediated through a confrontation with violence (in love, through war, in architecture, carelessness and TV); a difficult place, littered with the scratch-marks of disenchantment; love found and lost, struggled over; televised bodies and seekers of an elusive mythology of perfection. Many of these poems are gritty with anger and express of the bleakness of a generation where death by cinematic glow is contrasted with death by urban indifference ('Sad Teen Cancer Movie'). Even unfamiliar words can be construed as violence: in 'Four./The Ozarks Sprawl', 'I thought growing up that verdant was a simile for violence' (56). In 'At the Excalibur', it's the night before the wedding and the protagonists (Maling and her partner?) are in a Casino. The devastating image of love we are left with is that of a horse staggering, moments before its death:

The dancer starts to move again,  
back and forth in front of us,  
like how I've heard a horse does.  
After you shoot her, before she knows she's dead. (33)

Maling wrestles with the questions of identity by contrasts and juxtapositions of foreign/familiar, America/Australia. Always, like a dark spot in the corner of the eye, is self-reflection, self-examination, taking the reader on a kind of existentialist road trip through her own becoming as America reveals itself. The borders we cross are geographical, physical, embodied and visceral.

Maling questions how women can take up the burden of subjectivity as a desiring being, while remaining true to one's own self. In the poem 'Greenville', Maling's protagonist refuses to make herself the object:

i'd never pretend my body  
was instrument  
that my guts stretched  
& dried on a rack  
might make a sound  
rotten & echoing as a cat  
longing at your door. (64)

The next piece sequentially, 'Aclima', is a poem of violent reckoning that seeks to meet the perpetrator of sexual violence sin for sin, eye for eye. Maling implies that to have the mark of a murderer may be better than to have no mark at all. Finishing with the ominous threat, 'Let's go out into the field, brother' (65), it is better for Maling's Aclima, the sister of Cain and Able, to pick up the pock-marked stone against her brother, than to be absent, than to not exist in history. This is a disturbing position that opens up ethical questions regarding feminine subjectivity and traditional feminist discourses of non-violence.

Several times during the reading of this collection I found myself turning to google to search concepts and words such as 'multiple trace theory', and 'stochastic', terms which are relative to statistics. (Look them up!) Perhaps Maling's training in criminology affords her a sharp eye for detail as well as a knowledge of statistics and mathematics. As a reader I appreciate this expansion of knowledge embedded in an artwork. Maling's writing style is observational and precise, often using unique juxtapositions to articulate abstract ideas. The cadence and lyrical quality of the work render these poems gratifying to read, notwithstanding their troubling subject matter. Maling's is a perspicacious female voice, one that courageously and skillfully articulates the geography of a young woman negotiating the borders of a world—which as Maling reminds, us can often be worse than its mythic origins.



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# WA Writers United

*Westerly* is part of WA Writers United, a collaboration of literary organisations in Perth. *Westerly* subscribers will benefit from member discounts on tickets for all the following events—just mention WA Writers United when you book!



## July

- 1st OOTA Workshop with Guy Salvage.
- 8th 'A World of Poetry: Making Your Own' with Sanna Peden, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 11th KSP Literary Dinner featuring Writer-in-Residence Lee Battersby, KSP Writers Centre, 6pm–9.30pm.
- 13th KSP Press Club, KSP Writers Centre, 9.30am–3pm.
- 15th Deadline for KSP Ghost Story Competition, 5pm AWST.
- 22nd 'Drafting and Editing for Publication' with Josephine Taylor, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 22nd KSP Writing Workshop with Lee Battersby, KSP Writers Centre, 1pm–4pm.
- 28th Deadline for KSP Emerging Writer-in-Residence positions for 2018, 5pm AWST.
- 30th KSP Sunday Session featuring Kevin Pamplung, Balcony Bar, 4pm–5.30pm.
- 31st Voicebox Poetry Reading, Fremantle Fibonacci Centre.

## August

- 5th 'Writing About The Past: Historical Fiction, Biography, Memoir, Family History and Other Genres', with Ian Reid, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 11th–20th Perth Poetry Festival, WA Poets Inc.
- 20th 'Editing and Revising Short Stories' with Brooke Dunnell, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 25th Deadline for KSP NextGen Writer-in-Residence positions in 2018, 5pm AWST.
- 26th KSP Spooky Stories Night Fundraiser, KSP Writers Centre, 6pm–9.30pm.
- 27th KSP Sunday Session featuring Douglas Sutherland-Bruce, Balcony Bar, 4pm–5.30pm.
- 28th Voicebox Poetry Reading, Fremantle Fibonacci Centre.

## September

- 1st Deadline for KSP Short Fiction Competition, 5pm AWST.
- 2nd 'Writing to Unravel: Your Authentic Path as a Creative Writer' with Nicola-Jane Le Breton, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 4th–10th Creative Connections Art & Poetry Exhibition, Victoria Park Centre for the Arts
- 15th Deadline for KSP Memoir Competition, 5pm AWST.
- 22nd Deadline for KSP Laurie Steed Story Retreat, 5pm AWST.
- 23rd 'Short Stories and The Bigger Picture' with Susan Midalia, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30–4.30pm.

- 24th KSP Sunday Session featuring Tineke Van der Eecken, Balcony Bar, 4pm–5.30pm.
- 28th KSP Press Club, KSP Writers Centre, 9.30am–3pm.
- 28th Voicebox Poetry Reading, Fremantle Fibonacci Centre.
- 29th Deadline for KSP Poetry Competition, 5pm AWST.

## October

- 8th 'Detail and Description in Short Stories' with Brooke Dunnell, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30–4.30pm
- 21st 'Writing Memoir: Autobiography and Biography' with Josephine Taylor, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 21st OOTA, AGM and 20-Year Celebration Party.
- 29th KSP Sunday Session featuring Scott-Patrick Mitchell, Balcony Bar, 4pm–5.30pm.
- 30th Voicebox Poetry Reading, Fremantle Fibonacci Centre.
- 31st KSP Literary Dinner featuring Writer-in-Residence Sarah Nicholson, KSP Writers Centre, 6pm–9.30pm.

## November

- 4th 'Introduction To Poetry: Poetry of the Senses' with Vivienne Gance, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 11th KSP Writers Workshop with Sarah Nicholson, KSP Writers Centre, 1pm–4pm.
- 17th KSP Big Quiz Fundraiser, Swan Districts Football Club, 6pm–10pm.
- 19th 'Figurative Language: Style and Point of View' with Marcella Polain, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 24th Deadline for KSP Fellowship positions for 2018, 5pm AWST.
- 26th KSP Sunday Session featuring Louise Allan, Balcony Bar, 4pm–5.30pm.

## December

- 3rd Katharine's Birthday, KSP Writers Centre, 11am–3pm.
- 8th OOTA Christmas Party!

## Ongoing

The Fellowship of Writers WA will be running a number of events across the year, see their website for details:  
<http://www.fawwa.org/events>  
OOTA Prose classes with Helen Hagemann and Poetry classes with Shane McCauley are ongoing, on alternate Fridays.  
Contact: [www.ootawriters.com](http://www.ootawriters.com)

**For more information on any of these events, please contact the host organisation.**

Peter Cowan Writers Centre: [www.pwc.org.au](http://www.pwc.org.au)  
KSP Writers' Centre: [www.kspwriterscentre.com](http://www.kspwriterscentre.com)  
WA Poets Inc: [www.wapoets.net.au](http://www.wapoets.net.au)  
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LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY



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## Westerly Submissions

Westerly publishes fiction and poetry as well as articles. We aim to generate interest in the literature and culture of Australia and its neighbouring regions. Westerly is published biannually in July and November. Previously unpublished submissions are invited from new and established writers living in Australia and overseas.

**Submission deadline for June edition:** 31 March

**Submission deadline for November edition:** 31 August

Submissions may be sent via post or submitted online. Unsolicited manuscripts not accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope will not be returned. All manuscripts must show the name and address of the sender and should be typed (double-spaced) on one side of the paper only. While every care is taken of manuscripts, the editors can take no final responsibility for their return; contributors are consequently urged to retain copies of all work submitted.

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**Front cover image**

Nina-Marie Thomas, *Ten*, 2017.

© Nina-Marie Thomas

**'Ambushed by  
Hope: Extracts from  
Fay Zwicky's  
Journal (Notebook  
XIII, August 2012)'**  
Fay Zwicky

(25131)

More and more I've come to realise that our 'realities' are shaped in our earliest years and have their own separate validity. Who is to say that one 'reality' is more real than another?

**With writing and ideas from**

Peter Rose, Jill Jones, Tony Birch, John Kinsella, Stephanie Bishop, Hannah McGlade, Eileen Chong, Susan Midalia, Graham Kershaw, Danielle Clode, Paul Hetherington, John Mateer, Caitlin Maling, Tricia Dearborn, Brendan Ryan, *Westerly's* Writers' Development Program and many more.

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