64.2

New Writing from Western Australia
Fiction
Creative Non-Fiction
Poetry
Essays

In this Issue
Samuel Wagan Watson
Mary Anne Butler
Ian Seed
Claire G. Coleman
John Kinsella

Westerly

Break, / ‘the silent life-giver of worlds’
Shari Kocher

Soft midday winter half-past noon
and she writes to say she loves the
impossible as Goethe does, that
yearning for the impossible is quite
possibly what she loves most in me
quite. What for others might.

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64.2

New Writing from Western Australia
Fiction
Creative Non-Fiction
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Essays

Westerly

From the Editors **8**

Poetry

Ella Jeffery
Assumption **10**

Carolyn Abbs
Two Women **11**

Reneé Pettitt-Schipp
Here now, after being young but before we are old **19**

Lynne Viti
Greenwich Mean Time **20**

Kathryn Fry
Beneath the Blue Quandong **22**

Carol Millner
Library Days **30**

Lucy Roberts
The Birthday Party **32**

Mags Webster
Pacific **47**

Siobhan Hodge
Mythos of Pine **48**

Tim Edwards
Dusk at Limes Chalet—Toodyay **50**

Jenny Irish
Voila **54**

Amy Lin
Light as a feather **56**

Paul Dawson
Name = Compatibility Mode **66**

Kristen Lang
Rune **68**

Patricia Reid
screening time **81**

Angela Sorby
Orchard **83**

Stephen Gilfedder
My Father Marshals the ASIO Photographers at the 1967 Referendum Rally **97**

Jarad Bruinstroop
Yes, I am still watching **98**

Peri Dwyer Worrell
Verge **113**

Michaela Keeble
western district **114**

Maureen Gibbons
cloth of time **138**

Anne M Carson
George Sand talks about the drapes **167**

Claire Gregory
Whirlwind **177**

Steve Denehan
Photograph **178**

Dayna Patterson
In this version **186**

Sonya Frossine
plainsong **210**

Irma Woods
Bicycle **212**

Ian Seed
Incomplete **239**

Fiction

Alan Fyfe
Fog **12**

Matthew Hooton
The House at the Edge of Town **23**

Mike Williams
Heart **69**

Samuel Wagan Watson
The Release **99**

Gay Lynch
Roq and the Rabbit **104**

Tanya Vavilova
Bunny **116**

C. A. Broadribb
Parrot Lady **179**

Creative Non-Fiction

Laura French
Port Augusta **51**

Lianda Burrows
The Semantics of Starvation **57**

Zacharias Szumer
Bucks Night **85**

Shari Kocher
Break, / 'the silent life-giver of worlds' **126**

Marcia Jacobs
Now I Am Six **169**

Caitlin Maling
A Vernacular Landscape **232**

Essays

John Kinsella
To Find a Way Through: the inaugural Randolph Stow Lecture **33**

Nathan Hobby
'As My Great Day Approaches': Katharine Susannah Prichard in 1969 **129**

Kevin Brophy
Waves, Mountains, Wings and Sails: on Lorri Whiting, an expatriate woman artist **188**

Len Collard and Linda Martin
Nyungar Placenames: looking out from Kaart Geenunginyup Bo **213**

Interview
Claire G. Coleman and Elfie Shiosaki
'Our Legacy Is Truth': an interview **73**

Borderlands
Raelke Grimmer, Glenn Morrison, Adelle Sefton-Rowston
From the *Borderlands* Editors **140**

Jo Dutton
Things I learned about dying **143**

David McGuigan
The Docks **148**

Jo Tuscano
That Appears to Be the Case **149**

Anonymous
Sorry **156**

Barbara Eather
Piano Capital **157**

Mary Anne Butler
Highway of Lost Hearts **159**

WA Writers United Calendar **240**
Submissions **242**
Subscriptions **243**

Borderlands

where ideas and identities meet

A literary magazine for the Northern Territory

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From the Editors

Order

This issue of *Westerly*, while unthemed, is as always the product of a system of order. It is curated, edited, arranged according to a sequence of publication. It follows certain methods, and is set out according to prevailing structures. Each issue exists within the context of what has come before, and what might come in the future. Even within each text, language has its own orders and forms, grammar determines expression.

The issue is also testament to the individual—the function of the subjective within a system. With this issue, we are excited to introduce Paul Munden as our new Poetry Editor, taking forward the legacy of Cassandra Atherton's work over the last four years. We have been very grateful to Cassandra, and we are thrilled that she will continue to contribute to our team, joining Lucy Dougan in the role of Commissions Editor. We are equally happy to be working now with Paul in the selection and curation of *Westerly*'s poetry offerings. On this occasion, and in this selection, our attention has been drawn to questions of order. Submissions dictate their own ordering of the world: the order of things rising to meet us, occupying our minds and bodies.

Disorder

But forms of stability are made precarious in many of these contributions. Order can sit close with its opposite. We understand a negativity of this prefixed 'dis–', sensations perhaps of pain. Within these pages, witness is given to such experiences, writing that begins to make clear both the struggle that disorder can create, and the silent orders which underpin it, which exist within society's structures. Writing can be a space of subversion as well, and speak against the claustrophobia which overwhelms when an order becomes calcified and constraining. Several of the works here also play with the power inherent in disordering, unravelling this assumption of the negative space. Order and disorder are seen not only as functioning in dichotomy, but folded over one another, even at moments mutually reliant and engaged.

Border

Where is the line in this, prose, poetry or otherwise? How do we respond to the border? We know it as a structure of enclosure and simultaneously exclusion, whether an abstract demarcation or a natural boundary. Just as it is produced by a process, *Westerly* is contained by borders: some imposed by the limitations of funding and time, some constructed within our own self-imagining, some inherent and invisible. At moments, these function as decorative—they allow us to lay bare our specific remit as an act of celebration, the desire to draw attention to Western Australian voices as unique. At other points, they are less helpful, applying and assuming privilege—education, literacy, the liberty and money to write.

Bringing these borders into vision can help us deconstruct them, or make them at least more permeable. The writing here is sensitive to sites of disputation. (Closed borders, border force.) New knowledges renegotiate the borders that are in place. The act of naming emerges as an important challenge to imperialist and flawed narrative structures. The border-space in this can also act as a zone of liminality, of connection—there is possibility in that which is incomplete, rigid and/or vulnerable. Borders that divide can be reimagined to reflect commonality and inclusivity. (Soft borders, open borders.) This issue, we hope, offers you new ways of imagining the orders, disorders and borders that the world assumes. This issue also sees us work with a new sister-magazine in the Northern Territory, *Borderlands*. Their feature shows their efforts to allow the local to speak out from within borders that might otherwise constrain.

We're very grateful to the team at *Borderlands* for working with us, and in the process, opening some passage in the border between our two states. We're likewise grateful as always to the brilliant editorial and production team who have helped us bring this issue into being, with a special mention to the interns who have contributed with such enthusiasm.

As a final note, we wish to acknowledge the passing of Lorri Whiting. Her death is a loss to Australian art, and this essay shows her contribution to our culture as a woman of depth and power. Our sincere thanks to her family and estate, and to Kevin Brophy for his efforts in liaising with Lorri.

Catherine Noske and Josephine Taylor, November 2019.

Assumption

after *The Death of the Virgin*, The Master of the Amsterdam Death of the Virgin (c. 1500)

Ella Jeffery

Ella Jeffery's first collection of poems, *Dead Bolt*, won the Puncher & Wattmann Prize for a First Book of Poetry and will be published in 2020.

This is the room
a rational mind lives in:
three cushions on a bench,
one window,
the brief white spines
of fire.

By the bed, apostles lick fingers
over each turn of the page.
They are twelve miraculous itineraries:
proof that all cities
are less than three days
from this room.

Eel-eyed, they gawk and mourn,
speak and lean,
candling sadness on their knees.
Their looks slide off her sallow face.
In all the books
she gently falls asleep
but here insomnia
shakes its purse under her eyes.

Perhaps she will stay
one more night in this bed,
expecting the sun
to appear in the curtains.
The bedroom door is open
because this is just someone's house.
People are passing by outside.
A dog stares in from the street.

Two Women

after Vida Lahey, *Monday Morning* (1912)

Carolyn Abbs

Carolyn Abbs is a Western Australian poet. Her collection, *The Tiny Museums*, is published with UWA Publishing, 2017.

the washing machine shakes the house
and halts with a thud

I leave an unfinished poem on my desk,
pull out the tangled load dive

into the drum for a child's stray sock;
the hollow humid as the scullery

of Vida Lahey's *Monday Morning*:
Esme and a maid in Edwardian skirts

hand wash at the tub scrub,
bar of soap no mod cons for them—

trickle of running water
smell of oil paint turpentine;

steam gushes from the copper
streams to an open window—

out in the fresh morning air I rest
my laundry basket beneath trees

birds sing dotted
along the washing line like pegs—

then back to the poem on my desk
the scene moves to Vida,

her canvas strapped to the mangle,
she lifts her brush...

Fog

Alan Fyfe

Alan Fyfe is a Western Australian writer of fiction, poetry, journalism and music. He is a winner of the Karl Popper Philosophy Prize and his first novel, *Floaters*, was shortlisted for the T. A. G. Hungerford Award. He is currently working on a poetry collection and writing music for a fictional band.

Davud was fit to kill, rear end going left to right, focusing on a wagtail. The movement made his collar bell ring and the bird took off. The little cat turned to Errol and their eyes met. Errol had hardly realised he'd been watching Davud. He'd been sitting, sweating since early morning, listening to the painful notes his work-wasted muscles played, humming up from a spot to the left of his lower back. Through the chorus of discomfort and across the view of his stained and drained coffee cup, a memory had been creeping back while he sat pole-straight on a plastic chair. It never formed fully.

The glassy chime of Davud's bell disappeared under a louder, ruder scrape of metal on metal, as Sarah, sitting opposite Errol on their back patio, prised open her weed tin. The outline of the memory, so close to definition, turned to mist with the interruption. The little cat padded back inside to protest his empty bowl and Sarah reached to flick the door shut. She had wanted Davud to be an indoor pet when he joined them six months before, but Errol couldn't stand seeing him trapped in their hotbox house forever—constantly scratching at the door and mewling with longing recognition at other cats through the window. Outside, Davud didn't seem very dangerous. He would move gingerly on the lawn, completely unfamiliar with the feeling of grass-blades, and never get past the landmark of a small bush halfway across the yard before bolting back to the patio, terrified at the overwhelming range of sensations.

Errol watched Sarah chop the weed to powder with little scissors shaped like a hummingbird and his words fell out with a snide tone he hadn't expected—*It's a bit early for that, yeah?*

Sarah shrugged—*So, you don't want any?*

The heat was coming up, ratcheting half-degrees higher every half-hour, from their concrete-block back patio. She finished a spliff with an expert twist of the end paper, running a line of spit on her forefinger along the outside to moderate the way it burned, then struck it alight. He watched the way her cheeks hollowed as she sucked the smoke in, the way she stretched her mouth to let it seep from her lungs. He knew he'd take the burning paper stalk when she offered, and he blamed her for it.

He blamed her for starting early, he blamed her for a habit they shared. He watched her movements closely and felt a cloud of spite coming down. She caught his eye, smiled, then passed the smoke. It went to his head, first, and then performed its gummy mercy on his lower back. The pain numbed off by his third turn with the spliff and he felt guilty because he'd been about to say something hurtful to her.

Errol bit back his temper and let other words come out—*I think my dad has a bit of a crush on Julie Bishop.*

Sarah suppressed a little laugh and nodded—*She's a stylish woman. What made you think of that?*

I was watching TV when I got up. She quit. She's quit the ministry; ummm, I think she's still in Parliament, I'm not quite sure how that works. They would've won if they'd let her be leader. Everyone says that. She was smarter than all of them. I mean, good, I hope they don't win, but it goes to show, doesn't it?

What does it go to show?

Errol was still a little ashamed at the anger he'd felt towards her. He wanted to say something that showed he understood Sarah's concerns and that they were his concerns just as much.

The shoes... Ah, fuck, not that. She left her red shoes in the house. It's funny. It shows something about women, doesn't it? They promote all the dumb-fucks with dicks, not the smartest woman. 'Glass ceiling', that's the word.

I guess it does. Something doesn't feel right about all that, though.

What?

Ah, Errol, I can't remember right now, love. It's too early. When are you heading off?

Now. In a bit. When we finish smoking this.

Did you remember to tell your dad you're coming this time?

There was a little bit of hurt at the corner of that question, but Errol nodded because it was true he had forgotten to mention it the last time he took the hour-long drive from South Perth to Pinjarra to see his dad, and the old man had been out fishing for bream in the Murray. He stubbed out the joint and slipped the remaining half into his jean pocket for the trip. He gathered his wallet, keys, and the butcher's packet for his dad, which he'd laid on the glass table in readiness, and went out to the car before any Saturday demands could take hold.

• • •

North to south, Kwinana Freeway. It was the same trip Errol had taken every weekday for five years in the opposite direction and the routine was straight muscle memory. Turn on the radio as the tarmac opened into three lanes. Set a steady 100kph, drift left; the sun on the side of his face and pillows of air thrust out from whizzing trucks shaking the frame of his small track-back.

Errol's habit was to let his mind go on the trip. He went into his memory again, trying to reform a chain of thoughts he'd lost the trace of when Sarah opened the tin. But the buzz-saw danger of other drivers swinging in and out of lanes kept him from going too deep. A squat freezer truck, rattling and unstable looking, dogged him the whole trip. It would slow to a few hundred yards behind him, then pick up a tail wind and defy aerodynamics to pass him closely; six times... eight... ten. He could find a puddle of recollection for a moment but had to keep half an eye on staying alive.

It was only when the turn-off for Pinjarra Road came into view that Errol became aware there was a different tune on the radio than the one that had played when he turned it on. He'd been inside himself and that channel of attention had shut off for the greater part of the hour and the long freeway had gone by in two songs.

• • •

Errol pulled up in his father's driveway and opened his door. The noon heat pushed through the false atmosphere of air conditioning and the change in temperature made the pain in his back spike for a second. Matej, his father, was waiting in the shadow of the carport to greet him. It wasn't enough of an occasion to shake hands or embrace, so Errol started to ask after his father's health straight away. Matej recited what the doctor had told him, the name of his latest medication, and Errol noted all the unfamiliar terms to search out on the internet later.

The medical explanations covered twenty minutes and took them out to sit at the table Matej had made from salvaged planks, beneath a mulberry tree in his backyard, sanded and oiled and stained with purple blotches from falling fruit. Only once the report was finished did Errol feel he could relax into his chair and talk to his father about ordinary things.

He said—*I see your girlfriend retired from Parliament.*

Matej nodded—*Minister Bishop, she's a fine handsome lady. The brightest one of those idiots, they'll do worse.*

Errol felt like teasing—*What would Comrade Tito say?*

He's dead, and where has that all left us? I mean, I wouldn't vote for them, but Minister Bishop takes care of herself, it's the best thing, to present yourself well—nice hair, well-pressed clothes, fancy shoes. You should tell Sarah to follow Minister Bishop's example and you'll be a happier man.

Errol's humour dropped off—*I like Sarah to be comfortable. I like to see her with bare feet, standing in the grass.*

Matej shrugged—*You're a perverse man. What's in the package, have you brought something for me?*

Errol opened the package in the middle of the table. Inside the nest of butcher's paper there were two sausages, dark ruby and glossy under plastic wrap—*Sujuk!*

Of course, Matej made a fuss over the smallgoods, as he always did. Again, he enquired after the name of the shop. Again, Errol told him it was Vbras Butcher in Morley, the same place he always found his father's treats. Their conversation took on its ritual rhythms: Errol protesting that his father should live closer; his father protesting that he couldn't live in the city. The call and response of familiar concerns while Matej cut the sausage and arranged a meze on an old clay plate.

There was little point to the words. Errol knew his father would hate living in the city. He knew Matej had grown comfortable in his routines since Errol's mother passed—fishing, making useful things for his neighbours, watching the wind blow leaves up the street. It was only comfort, not happiness, but the city would take away his comfort as much as his joy, all those tight spaces. Because Errol knew the conversation and how it would end, he drifted out of it the way he'd drifted out the songs on his radio, and he focused carefully on the sound of his father breathing instead.

• • •

On the way out of North Pinjarra, up Wilson Street, all the cottages like Matej's cottage. Old state housing, sold on. Low rent for out-of-workers, some bauxite miners from the open pit up the road, retirees with thin superannuation purses. Errol struck the stub of the joint alight and stopped by the roadside to finish it. Through the smoke, the tall salmon gums behind the little suburb, the sun about their limbs in late afternoon, and back to the cottages—cream, or pastel blues and greens. All paint over asbestos boards. The memory Errol had been reaching for took definite shape; it was a cloud of grey dust.

• • •

Sarah greeted Errol in their driveway, cupping a little bronzewing in her hands. As she raised it, Errol saw where a patch of flesh had been torn open from neck to wing. She said she'd taken her eyes off Davud for a

minute, to turn off the kettle and pour tea, and then she'd come out to find him on top of the bird. In his awkwardness, Davud had failed to make the kill properly. Now the bird was mauled and barely moving, making small, astonished noises.

Errol stroked the bronzewing's warm chest—*Did you try wildlife rescue?*

Sarah shook her head—*Baby, I think it's past that. Look at him. Do you think we...?*

He took the bird from her hands and laid it on the dry leaves covering the garden bed by the driveway. In the shady garage he found his sharp wood chisel in a red chest, then he returned to the daylight where Sarah was keeping watch over Davud's victim and gently moved her aside. He knelt on the stinging hot concrete, keeping careful focus on the bird's neck, and brought the end of the chisel down as hard as he could. The lively, black eye misted over and the nervous force of Errol's blow knocked the chisel out of his hand, so that he slipped and opened his knuckles on a stone beneath the leaves. He stood up, holding the broken skin under the palm of his other hand. His body knotted and the pain in his back hit peak. Errol felt as though he was choking on plain air.

He shouted at Sarah without realising he was going to raise his voice at all—*WHY DO I HAVE TO DO SHIT LIKE THIS EVERY TIME? CAN'T YOU MAKE A FUCKEN DECISION YOURSELF? IS THERE ANYTHING YOU CAN DO WITHOUT A PHONE APP?*

And there it was, the rage that had been threatening since that morning. Building with the forming memory, the muscle pain, news from his father, and the heat of the day. All corners of the same object, let out on Sarah who'd done nothing. She responded by putting one hand on the centre of Errol's chest, holding him still under his heaving, agitated breath.

She said one word—*Stop.*

Errol's world contracted. It was plain enough how things had just taken opposite angles. Errol knew he had made a disgrace of himself, and Sarah's fury was barely in check. She took her hand off him and turned sharply away, leaving him in silence.

• • •

Later that evening, when she finally emerged from the locked bedroom, Sarah saw Errol at the kitchen table down the hall, his laptop open in front of him. He'd done the same the last few times he'd visited his father, sitting quietly in front of the screen, looking for something. Tonight, he seemed less engaged with the search; he was leaning back in his chair, arms crossed over his chest. She came up the hall towards him and he raised his eyes to acknowledge her. There were always these moments after a fight. She'd speak, or he'd speak. Just let a space of time go by and try with each other. Don't talk about the fight first, let that come after they connected again. The spaces were getting longer lately, but she pulled up a chair next to him and tried one more time.

Sarah returned to the conversation they'd started before Errol left for Pinjarra—*I remembered about Julie Bishop. No-one is talking about it today, the news is frothing over her. Don't you remember Wittenoom, where they mined the asbestos? All the kids, playing in piles of the shit. All those workers dying, and the kids too. Julie Bishop was the lawyer for CSR, the sugar company, they owned Wittenoom.*

Errol blinked and turned from the screen, a strange frown coming up—*Why are you talking about that now?*

It's just that no-one seems to remember. It was bothering me, it felt like shit. She's so bright, it's true, she did her job really well. She hounded those people in court and kept them on the hook for so long that they died waiting for a payout. Why does no-one remember? Why do they like her now?

Errol pointed to the screen; there was a black-and-white picture open on his browser of long, white, needle-shaped crystals —*Do you know what that is?*

Sarah trained on the image—*What?*

It's chrysotile, asbestos crystals, I guess, or the type they make roofs and boards with. Sarah, my dad has mesothelioma.

How? He was never in Wittenoom, was he?

No, it didn't have to be in Wittenoom to be dangerous. It was on the cottages down in Pinjarra. We had the contract to put vents in, some roof repairs. Every year, a few more vents to pretend you could make them cooler, but those shacks would bake good as an oven in summer anyway. Then, in winter, we'd put in pot-belly stoves for heating. It was a long way back, I was sixteen, starting out. We'd cut the walls with the big nine-inch angle grinder. We called it weatherboard. It wasn't that. When you cut it, a big grey fog of the stuff covers you. I didn't even think it was bad. Those were happy days, driving round with the old man, meeting people at the houses. We wore wet rags over our faces, we're not stupid, we knew it wasn't good to breathe in any dust, and that one made us cough worst of all. It wasn't enough.

You did that work too?

Yes.

• • •

Sarah stayed up for a long time after Errol turned in, feeding her looping thoughts with caffeine from tea and three more spliffs. She sat outside on

a daybed, near the back door, reading signs into the night air. She'd given Errol a pass on promises to curb his temper tonight, left off explaining that the pain in his back wasn't her fault again, and she'd shown all the small signs of care the news of his father called for.

It was a little crack in their relationship, the types of cracks anyone would expect to show up after more than a decade. It was just that the cracks were becoming more frequent, appearing day after day. And Sarah wondered how many more until the structure broke, but where they lived was never really a quiet place to think. The cars out on Canning Highway went all night. The low harmonic of the Metro Hotel neon sign was constant—buzzing, forever commerce fixed to the tenth floor, where it was visible from all the yards of all the houses below.

It was half an hour into the morning when she went into the bedroom. She stood by the dresser. Errol's shoulder was bare over the blankets, shades of yellow under the touch lamp. She tried to remember the exact shape of him when they met. On the dresser, near where Sarah rested her hand, there was a cardboard giftbox full of documents. Under the box was a scrap of paper she'd noted a few figures on: bond and rent, cooking utensils and new bedding—rough expenses to establish a life again if she just packed a bag of clothes and left him one day.

When she'd put her hand on his shoulder to comfort him earlier, it was forced. He responded to her touch, as he had when she'd stopped his anger with the flat of her palm on his chest, as he always responded to her touch—and seemed as though he was humble beneath it. But the gesture felt more like something she was required to do and less like something she wanted to do. When she counted the days of the last two weeks, she couldn't remember one when Errol hadn't raised his voice to her. Then she counted out a month. Then two months. Then she stopped.

Today wasn't the crack that ruptured the foundation, or Sarah might have been too tired and high to decide. Errol took pot for the pain in his back, Sarah took it after her own pains. Eventually, they took it to be with each other. They both knew it was too much now. Her decision couldn't take the shape of the car keys and the front door, and it couldn't take the outline of the tragic accounting on the scrap of paper beneath the giftbox. The only decision she felt the rightness of was sleep.

Sarah curled into the space on her side of the mattress, a few inches away from the warmth radiating from her sleeping husband. She closed her eyes. She listened to him breathing.

Here now, after being young but before we are old

Reneé Pettitt-Schipp

Reneé Pettitt-Schipp's first poetry collection, *The Sky Runs Right Through Us*, was shortlisted for the Dorothy Hewett Award and won the 2018 WA Premier's Book Award for an Emerging Writer.

we are folding
our bodies becoming soft pages
under lamplight, unearthing
the other, line by each
new line

your spine, pale as a new
born bird
is a ridge to which I return
but never know

what tender histories repeat
sailing through white of glacial sheets
our love contained as an island
expansive as air

we are folding
each into the other, holding
our warm stones of alone

curling around a question
we no longer need to answer
becoming a story that was
never ours
to which there is
no end

Greenwich Mean Time

Lynne Viti

Lynne Viti, a lecturer emerita at Wellesley College, is the author of two poetry chapbooks, *Baltimore Girls* (2017) and *The Glamorganshire Bible* (2018). Her poetry has appeared in over a hundred online or print publications, including, most recently, *Nixes Mate Review*, *Gargoyle* and *Chautauqua Review*.

In a time of a war halfway across the world—
a war we didn't want, one spurred by old men,
we fled the city, taking our books and music,
our marriage bed and secondhand table.

In my grandmother's station wagon
up the Henry Hudson Parkway we rattled along
into Westchester, onto the Merritt,
everything we owned we'd stuck in boxes or pillowcases.

We settled into a rented flat over a garage.
The kitchen's four windows admitted the morning light.
We eschewed meat, discovered tofu, kasha, spinach noodles.
We dined on garbanzo beans and cashew butter.

Our paycheques covered rent and gas, groceries,
food for the cats we brought home from the pound,
a calico and a black one who sucked his paw when he dozed.
We drove very slowly down Catrock Road after it snowed.

The city seemed so distant. The birds that stayed
all winter darted from one naked tree branch to the next.
Weekends, we lay in bed till ten, reading the paper,
nestled against each other under the emerald green spread.

You hadn't found work yet. In December you sold
Christmas trees from a Port Chester lot, freezing your hands,
so used to office work, the telephone and the foolscap pads.
Our idyll became frayed at the edges, there were quarrels
over nothing, or over money. We sold the motorcycle
to pay the oil bill. We missed the museums, the subway,
the long walks from midtown to home, the news kiosks,
the confectionery with chocolate Florentines.

We missed the faces of people we passed on the street,
Everyone in suburbia was white, with perfect teeth.
Everyone seemed happy with the way things were going,
in the town, in the country, in the broken world.

Beneath the Blue Quandong

Kathryn Fry

Kathryn Fry has published poems in various anthologies including the *Newcastle Poetry Prize* anthologies of 2014 and 2016. Her poems are also in the *Cordite Poetry Review* 2016, *Not Very Quiet* 2017 and 2018, and *Westerly* 64.1. Her first published collection was *Green Point Bearings* (Ginninderra Press, 2018).

Blue as a Brett Whiteley harbour
and a fairywren's winter brow—by
the path these fruits, some whole
as marbles coated in the sapphire

shade of the Pacific, some peeling
to decay in the dirt. You pause by
the trunk polished grey all the way
to the crown and the whorl of red

ageing in the green, and consider
the cycling of matter, your hands
sifting the years. And what of your
sure-fired thoughts and beliefs you

vowed then and the small deeds of
recompense or not. And why was it
both of you stepped out of yourselves
here, ready finally to reach for the other.

The House at the Edge of Town

Matthew Hooton

Matthew Hooton is the author of the novels *Typhoon Kingdom* and *Deloume Road*, and his short work has appeared in publications around the globe. He teaches at the University of Adelaide.

Two giant forklifts arrive at noon to scoop the townhouse from its foundation, lift it creaking and shedding concrete and dust, and carry it to the outskirts of the city, where it's deposited in a cloud of fibreglass and drywall on the very edge of the red desert next to a shanty town of half-ruined homes and trailers housing immigrants and laid-off miners.

'Kids were screaming all day. Three of 'em. A proper ruckus,' says the Strata Chairman. 'Can't expect people to put up with that sort of thing. You just *can't*.' His eyes bulge and he mops sweat from his brow as he informs the Channel 9 News drone that the Removers were his only option. 'After all, maintaining my neighbourhood's Atmosphere of Joy *is* in the job description.' The drone hums six feet in front of him, steady at head height, red light flashing to indicate a live recording.

The girl in the relocated house, Chloe, doesn't watch this interview on any of the seven screens in her bedroom—sits biting her lip now, looking out onto the desert through the gaping, north-facing hole that was once a south-facing wall covered on the inside by an array of galaxy maps and Wonder Woman posters. Chloe thinks there was a window too, but it's already tough to remember. Dust devils churn over the red and brown expanse, and she struggles to blink grit from her eyes, notes a fine coating of sand over her pink duvet. The room smells like op-shop toys and stale air conditioning, and she sits like this for another moment, clutching her one-legged kangaroo stuffie, and thinking not of her own safety or of just where in heck her parents and sisters are, but of how her doll lost its limb when a neighbour's dog raced through the gate to their yard after she'd left it unhitched one morning, how the canine (a pit bull terrier cross, long since deemed an illegal subspecies by the City Senate) had beelined for the fluffy roo and snatched it in its slavering jaws, shaken loose stuffing and pulled off the leg. And then her mum shrieking: *I hope you're happy*,

young lady! That could have been your little sister! Imagine! And Chloe did. She still dreams of this incident, and of the gaping lot that appeared where her neighbours' house had been after her father called the Strata. The red dirt of that property like a gum, the missing structure a pulled tooth.

Chloe's parents and sisters are not in the relocated house, as anyone watching the news drone footage can plainly see. Instead, they have accosted the Strata Chairman, cornered him against the peeling blue gum next to the cavity of rubble where their home stood only an hour earlier. The man continues to sweat, swallowing in great gasps, face beetrooting, as Chloe's mother screams at him and it becomes clear the house was not empty, that this woman's eldest daughter was home alone while the rest of the family picked up foodpaks just two minutes down the street. The man tries to defend himself, but it's tough to justify crushing a girl to death for the sake of a little peace and quiet, even if the parents shouldn't have left her unsupervised (he's already made this last point twice). The two sisters have started wailing, and the father looks like he might actually take a swing at the Chairman. All in all, it's great TV, and the remote admin staff at Channel 9 have sent in a second drone for different angles of the conflict, and for a close-up of any physical violence that might erupt.

It's not fear or boredom, or even shock, that draws Chloe out of her sandy bedroom, down the now-crooked stairs, and out the gaping hole in the living room wall, but song. A rising harmony that echoes from the edge of the desert and moves past the house towards the shantytown. Miners, Chloe sees, two by two in a line, marching in hard hats and fluorescent vests, drills and all manner of equipment in tow. The men and women are filthy, slouched in pale blue overalls, but they sing beautifully. No words Chloe can make out, and yet she feels sad, and thinks again of Roo's missing leg. She follows this procession, clocks the oddly lidded eyes of the miners, their narrow, squinting slits, a boy at the front of the line tapping a small steel drum. *They are following him home*, thinks Chloe. *They can't see.*

She walks in their footprints through the dust and sand towards the shantytown, watched by two Western Greys, a mother and joey, that bound off towards a distant stand of acacia. Soon another group of miners approaches from the opposite direction, the same paired lines and another child, this time a girl about Chloe's age, leading them to the tapping of a drum. The singing of the two groups harmonises briefly as the processions pass one another, but Chloe can't focus on the song, instead sees a herd of kids about her age following the new group, a woman in a white hard hat scolding them into silence and rushing them to keep up with the miners. When the woman sees her, she sighs and pulls Chloe by the arm into the midst of the herd. Chloe tries to protest, but the singing is too loud, and the woman just prods her along with the other children, who smell of sunscreen, feet, and forgotten backpack apples. And so Chloe marches back the way she's come, in step with the miners, past her half-shattered house and into the desert, to a giant mound of earth, at the base of which yawns a gaping black mouth, propped open by wooden beams.

Once they are inside, the miners stop singing, and the children huddle together in the quiet dark.

'Now class. Normally,' comes the voice of the woman, 'our brave miners would not bother with lights. However, they've agreed to allow an exception for the sake of our less attuned senses.' She flicks on a headlamp so that the steep tunnel flashes into view, the last of the miners already disappearing into its narrow throat. 'Stay close. Be very quiet. And, for goodness' sake, don't touch *anything*. So help me, Travis, I'm looking at *you*.'

The headlamp pins a grinning boy to the wall of the shaft, where his hand already rests on a rack of protruding white bones. *Ribs, maybe*, thinks Chloe. Huge. *A dinosaur?*

The ratings are off the charts. Literally. A cartoon-like red line shooting steeply upwards off the printouts. Best they've ever seen at Channel 9, which is why the Removers haven't been called back, and why the Strata Chairman sits in the dust on his backside, nursing a bruised and already-swelling eye socket, blood trickling from his nose into a cupped hand. The man seems equally upset and fascinated by the sight of his own blood, and the third drone (no expense spared on the human-interest story of the year) gives the exponentially growing audience a close-up of the blood pooling in the man's palm.

Chloe's parents have stopped shouting at the Strata Chairman, and taken to chasing one of the drones around the block, shouting for help, pleading with the authorities to find their missing daughter. The father's face amps scarlet and veins pulse at his temples. The mother chokes on sobs as she yells, and the two girls she's dragging can hardly keep up. One of them has dropped an empty juice box (a Class Six Littering Violation) and the girl looks back over her shoulder at the crumpled box, her free hand stretching for it. A drone catches this, and zooms in on the now-bent design on the front: a green cartoon T-Rex licking purple lips.

Chloe follows the class following the teacher following the miners following the tunnel deep into the earth. At first the heavy air hangs cool and wet, like an air-conditioned aquarium, and Chloe wishes she had a jacket or scarf, but after what feels like an hour of descent, the tunnel warms, and she realises she's sweating into her T-shirt. The teacher has hardly spoken a word, so the only sounds are of feet shuffling over dirt and stone. Finally the teacher pauses, whispers to the group that they have reached the Honeycomb, where tunnels branch and circle chambers and passages, and that the children must remain close.

'Buddy up,' says the woman, but since Chloe isn't part of the class, she doesn't know exactly what this means, and the other kids seem to be ignoring her.

An elevator next, all metal and gears, enough room for two dozen people. Nothing like the elevators in the city, which are smooth and shiny metal and hum like the microwave Chloe's family uses to heat their foodpaks. This elevator is skeletal. The bones of a machine.

They must be impossibly deep now, the air stale and reeking of motor oil, and Chloe thinks of the lunch hours she and Missy McFarlane spent excavating their elementary school sandbox onto the tetherball courts in a fruitless attempt to dig their way to China. More marching, more tunnels branching in the teacher's headlamp, until finally they hear sounds of machinery and metal on stone. Flickering lights, tunnels limbing in all directions.

'The lights are for the managers and engineers,' the teacher quips, as if reading from a manual. 'This is where the magic happens, where our finest have cut their way deeper than was ever thought possible. Listen, children. *Listen*. These are the sounds of a miracle unfolding.'

Chloe does listen, and wonders if the Senate even knows this is happening. She recalls a lesson at school about mines closing all over the country before her mum and dad were born even, about workers rioting, and then...? What? Life went on in the city as always. The class moves on too, these kids of miners and immigrants so like her own classmates in the city, and yet also different somehow, each carrying something of this new-old world in their pockets like carefully folded candy wrappers.

Chloe falls behind a few steps. Then a few steps more. The teacher's yapping fades. She should not risk this. She knows this is true. And yet, are those voices—a conversation to the right that lilts above and around the air pumps? On another day, Chloe would have stayed with the group, *buddied up*, announced her presence to the teacher. But today she had woken from a nap to the shaking of her house, and found herself deposited at the edge of the world, with sand in her hair and on her bed.

The only other time she'd had sand in her bed was that day after visiting Henley Beach when she'd lied about cleaning her feet with the garden hose and woke itching in the night with a pile of grit between her sheets. Her mother was furious, told her they'd *never* get it all out.

Good luck now, Mum, she thinks. And then, *where were you?* She steps off the path and follows the barely lit passage towards the humming voices.

The ratings are tapering. It had to happen eventually. The two sisters sit beneath the gum clutching dirty stuffed animals, a ruckus of lorikeets dropping leaves on their heads. Their mother stands on one of her neighbour's doorsteps, arms crossed, apparently waiting to be let inside, though it's been nearly an hour. Her husband has managed to snag one of the drones, impressive, but he has since discovered that the sleek grey flying camera is tougher than it looks, and though he shakes it and tries to pull it apart, the machine remains intact, and there is much talk in the studio about liability should he lose a finger in one of the tiny propellers. The Strata Chairman disappeared some time between the mother tearing up her neighbour's mail and the father's successful capture of Drone 2. No-one's sure if he'll be back, or indeed just how much blood he lost before he finally shoved tissues up his nostrils. Red lights flash in the studio. The network's ready to call it a day.

'Once upon a time,' drifts a voice from the passage ahead, 'there was only one continent, and it floated upon the great waters without anchor, and it was impossible to dig deep into the earth without flooding the shaft.'

Chuckling from a number of voices. A warm orange light. Chloe shuffles closer.

Another voice. 'Once upon a time, the great lights did not hang above us in the night sky, but filled the earth, and the deeper we dug, the brighter the light grew.'

More gentle laughter. Chloe enters a small chamber, in which a group of men and women, seven of them in total, sit upon wooden crates drinking from Thermoses. They wear the same dirt-covered overalls as the miners, but their eyes are open wide, and they spot Chloe immediately.

'Oh no,' says one of the women. 'Not again.'

'Another field trip?' says a man.

The woman shrugs. 'I'll take care of it. Y'all head back up. And make sure the elevator cables are clean *this* time.'

Six of the seven leave Chloe alone with the woman.

'So,' she says. 'Let me guess. You're lost.'

This isn't quite accurate, thinks Chloe. She is lost, but this time on purpose. 'Once upon a time,' she says, her voice cracking and smaller than she'd hoped. 'Once upon a time, dinosaurs ruled the earth, but they didn't walk and run like lizards or even birds, they hopped like roos.'

Silence for a heartbeat. Then the woman laughs, her teeth wonderfully white and crooked. 'The T-Rex with those little arms and big legs, right?'

Chloe nods.

'That's good. I'm gonna steal that. Want me to help you find your class?'

Chloe hesitates, then explains. She tells the woman about her house, about her parents leaving her alone, about the sandbox even, though she's not sure why. The woman doesn't interrupt, just nods.

'Well then,' says the woman when Chloe has finished. 'It's very nice to meet you, Chloe. I'm Tess.'

No camera drones at the scene now, so it's tough to know if anything's going on. There is a palpable sense around the city that the events of the day are already historic somehow. And that everyone involved has been finally and appropriately relegated to the past, to some osseous digital archive. Not gone, but fossilised.

Tess is an engineer, Chloe learns. Out of work, *officially*, for about two decades. *Unofficially*, in charge of making sure the mine doesn't collapse on her comrades' hard-hatted brains. She and Chloe leg side by side through a wide, well-lit tunnel. Their voices echo. 'Look, we take the kids to see the smaller digs because they're safer and it's good to have the community involved. All of them have relatives or friends with family members down here, and they know we're doing good work. But really, they have no idea how *close* we are.'

Chloe asks eight questions in a row, and Tess laughs again.

'Generation after generation. Eventually you adapt and change. No need to see much underground. But we treat them well. Positions of honour, really. Some of us need to see though. Make sure everything's sound, make sure the air pumps keep up. All that.'

'Don't you miss the sun?'

'Kid, we don't dig because we like the darkness. We dig cause we dream of uncovering the secret light.'

Chloe bites her tongue because she doesn't want to annoy the woman, and because Tess is being so nice to her that she can't bear the thought of making her cross, even if she's a little crazy. And then they reach the end of the tunnel, a rough black wall lit by two spotlights on the ground.

'Okay, this is it,' says Tess. 'As deep as anyone has ever gone. Probably we'll just keep going until we reach China.' This is a joke, but neither of them laugh, because they can feel it. Chloe can feel it. The wall before them is warm, almost hot. And the hairs on Chloe's arms stand on end. Her ears pop.

'Been like this for a while now,' says Tess, voice hushed. 'Amazing, right?'

Chloe nods.

'Look, kid. You're having a heck of a day, right? So I'm gonna let you do something you can tell your grandkids about one day. That sound good?'

Another nod, as Tess picks up a small pick-axe, the wooden handle polished from use, the iron tip dull but still dangerous looking. Definitely not something Chloe's mother would approve of. Definitely not something she could bring to show and tell at school without three weeks of Re-education Modules after class. She takes the tool from Tess. It's heavy, but she can lift it.

'An original. They used these for centuries. Our miners insist on them for this tunnel. Call it superstition. Go ahead, take a swing. Not too hard. And when you do, you'll have brought us closer and deeper than anyone in history. How's that for a good day's work?'

Chloe lifts the pickaxe above her head and stands before the end of the tunnel. 'Just, in the middle?'

Tess nods, so Chloe swings the tool into the rough stone. The axe doesn't bounce back like she was expecting, but catches in the rocky enamel. The tunnel shivers. A wave of heat rushes from where the axe has struck. Tess begins to say something, but the rock face slips down as though it were a curtain waiting to drop, and Chloe releases the handle, watches the axe fall as if in slow motion to her feet. Instead of dark rock before her, a mirror of shining light ripples blue and white, and within it, her own image: a tiny girl fathoms below the earth's surface, face dirty, hair pulled into a messy ponytail, eyes wide and shimmering.

Chloe reaches out and touches her own mirrored fingers, smiles as a blinding flash envelopes her world.

Library Days

Carol Millner

Carol Millner's poetry and short stories have been published in journals and anthologies in Australia and NZ. Her unpublished manuscript, *Settling*, was shortlisted for the inaugural Dorothy Hewett Award, 2015. Carol is a doctoral candidate at Curtin University where she also teaches.

Feb. '05

Some days we go to the library
for the air conditioning.

The kids want me to tell you—
'Perth might be hot but at least
it's not humorous.'

Mar. '05

Perth is hot and prickly and flat.
We're all flat—
flat on our backs with flu.

Mum's up, Dad's down.
Dad's up, Mum's down.
Like Mr Black & Mr Brown.

The children have fallen in love with Dr Seuss
I've fallen in love with Dianella library.

Aug. '06

The trees outside the library
have their roots deep
in the earth under the
book shelves
and under the librarian
in her Stirling City Council shirt
and under the three of us
reading on the orange sofas.

Oct. '06

I am just thinking—
reading and writing
are what anchor my
being wholly here—
when my son
gets his finger stuck in the plastic 'o'
of the magnetic alphabet.

The Birthday Party

Lucy Roberts

Lucy Roberts lives and works in Western Australia. She writes about the ordinary moments of daily life, seeking the unnoticed and the profound.

The dog is going from guest to guest,
black nose lightly touching knees and begging scraps of teddy bear cake.

Grandfather sits, a deaf island, at the table in the middle,
marooned without his walking frame, parked out of the way.

People fill my house, chat and laughter everywhere,
elephants stomping, baboons shrieking.

Burst balloons and party hats discarded on the floor.
Can I get you another coffee? More cake? Please help yourself to anything.

A tiny girl comes to my side,
frilly yellow dress, matching hairclip, party shoes abandoned.
Her hand, covered in chocolate, grasps my cream-coloured trousers.

She has been frowning at the guests, especially the ones who bend double and get in her face to ask:
'Aren't you a big girl now you are 2?'

She clutches my leg and I swing her up; she snuggles her head on my shoulder.
I'm woozy with fatigue from smiling and days of preparing.

With her arm wrapped around me and her face in my neck,
We are alone.

To Find a Way Through: the inaugural Randolph Stow Lecture

John Kinsella

John Kinsella is the author of over thirty books, most recently *Hollow Earth* (Transit Lounge, 2019) and *Open Door* (UWA Publishing, 2018). He is a Professor of the School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry at Curtin University, and a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge University.

> This piece was first presented as the inaugural Randolph Stow Lecture at the Big Sky Festival, in Geraldton, Saturday 15th of June, 2019.

Let's begin at school in English class in the 'new buildings' around 1978, Geraldton High School, the new wing built to replace the asbestos demountable classrooms to the south of the old school main building. We are reading through Alexander Craig's anthology *Twelve Poets*—an in-class reading session to get familiar with some Australian poetry in a more concentrated way than the odd poem here and there in a general poetry anthology. I am lucky enough via my mum, an English teacher at the school, to be already up with a few Australian poets—especially Judith Wright, who is already established and well known to school readers but not actually one of the poets in the anthology. These are newer poets, astonishingly eleven men and only one woman, but Gwen Harwood is no extra spoke on the wheel, she's pivotal. As Judith Wright looms so large in my imagination, I am shocked into a different way of perceiving 'landscape' via the poetry of a once-local Geraldton poet, Randolph Stow, whose poem 'Landscapes' echoes off the page:

> But the butcherbird draws all in; that voice is a builder
> of roofless cathedrals and claustrophobic forests
> —and one need not notice walls, so huge is the sky.
> (Stow 43)

In the light of these lines, I actually start to ask myself what am I doing *here*, in this place, and do I belong? Here in Geraldton, I mean, where we had recently moved—but more than that: here on this land, and further south than where I was born, but where I am also culturally distant in so many ways. How do I connect with respect for this land I feel close to, and yet lack a way of understanding? I ponder 'roofless cathedrals', something

I will ponder till the present day, especially when it's beneath the roofs of flooded gums, salmon gums and other ancient trees about to be bulldozed for developments. But back then I am fifteen and unsure about *religion*, and especially about God, and I know I love the 'outdoors' and want to spend my time in the bush under the sky, yet I also want to book-learn and gain knowledge every way I can. Stow confuses and entices me to understand who I am, and what I might do where I am.

In this short poem by 'local' Randolph Stow, I realise knowledge comes in many ways, and I have to start to learn outside the usual routes. He is of a 'settler background', and yet there's something troubled and deeply unbelonging, something outside notions of 'heritage' and 'inheritance' in him. How can he write so intensely about 'here' and still not be 'settled' with 'here'? He both belongs and doesn't belong. I know that feeling, I tell myself. At fifteen I knew I was on Aboriginal land, and I asked and was told it was Yamaji land. I listened intensely to stories of 'Champion Bay'.

Cathedrals are not necessarily as they *look*—the roof, the ceiling, in many ways, always aspirational, is also a block to truths, to insight into the spirit. Some insights might be mine to share; others won't be. And leaping 'ahead', but also of the same time, from Stow to the Cathedral-questioning and undoing poetry of Charmaine Papertalk-Green, in our collaboration on Monsignor Hawes, priest and architect, many decades later, I begin a journey that doesn't go from A to B and back again: à la Andy Warhol of New York, over whom I would obsess when in my twenties and thirties, but at angles and digressions I could never have imagined.

In writing place, I necessarily write about where I am, where I have been, and also where I am likely to go. This sounds obvious, but it's not really. Because where I go has increasingly to do with issues of permission and intrusion and welcome. This can involve respecting traditional peoples' country, *their* land and culture, and whether or not they want me there, but it can also be an issue of encroaching against mining, pastoral or government exclusion and control as an act of protest in attempts to preserve native vegetation and wildlife. Sometimes the acts of visiting and trespassing and working out where one should or shouldn't go are not straightforward and require much conversation and interaction. This means there's nothing furtive or secret about it—quite the opposite, it's all publicly declared, though private conversations are kept just that.

Why is this relevant here? Well, I am talking about the places we do or don't go to not only *in person*, but also *in writing*. When writing the Geraldton area, which I still often do, I do so as one who has lived here during my teenage years and who has family in town, and visits maybe once a year or every couple of years, but also as one who is more often absent. I don't just get the right to speak of where I don't permanently live, though I feel I do get the right to comment on place-specific issues that affect the entire planet—the devastation of country, pollution, exploitation and lack of respect. So, I need to find a way, through my writing, that acknowledges my outside status with some inside knowledge.

Back to my teenage years. It's now late 1978, and I am fifteen, have been in Geraldton for close to a year—it's getting near Christmas holidays and I want to get out on pushbikes with my mate Peter and head to Drummond's Cove to camp on the beach, in the sandhills (a pivotal moment in my life that will *echo*, too, through my poetry and fiction). I don't think about anything outside the world being there for us to explore, use, learn from, intrude on, or hide in. We head out on our bikes and take risks, perform that act of being teenagers working to reduce our constraints. But the Stow poem bothered me, it was called 'Landscapes', meaning there were more than one, or was it addressing all 'landscapes'? And was it this one or others? Something was missing, and I knew what it was, and didn't yet know how to put it. Ten years later, I wrote the first draft of a long poem about the 19th-century explorer George Grey and the fact that his intrusions were actually acts of *unexploring*, were acts of aggression and attack on Aboriginal peoples in the name of the Crown and progress, and had none of the vision and foreseeing his journals would later, in a variety of senses, congratulate himself on. That long anti-epic poem of mine would eventually, in a final draft, ironically be called 'The Benefaction'.

I'll give you a more recent example of my reprocessing teen years in Geraldton, and the issue of where my place might be in the imagining of the place—I am not denying in reality of presence, of the day to day, of living—I am talking about how we position ourselves in terms of rights and possession, the permissions we do or don't obtain, do or don't give ourselves to write ourselves into a place.

About five years ago when walking down around the 'new' marina (new to me) at the bottom of Bailey Street, as I think of it in terms of my old school coordinates, a poem came to me, as it had to. I had long been appalled when the old nurses' quarters opposite the old prison, which my family lived in for a period in my teens, was knocked down to make way for a car park for the Coles shopping centre precinct. Don't get me wrong, I am making no excuses for colonial buildings that represent the occupation of Yamaji land, but the building had stood a long time, been of use to people via the health aspect of things, and should not have been knocked down—it could have housed a number of homeless families, put heritage to pragmatic use. And that's the way I see any ill-gotten

heritage—the markers of colonial occupation—in the rectifying use they can be put to. *Conserve* to make *use* of, I say. So, that house long gone, I walk down to where the railway workshops had been, down to the marina and the maritime museum area, and I see gains and losses. The coast remodelled, and along with public focuses, especially Aboriginal works in the museum which I take as positively affirming, and an attempt in the general curation to face the complexity of settlement, and the use of the sea, I am overwhelmed by the irony of messing with the sea—the marina was full of boats of those at least well-off, if not the wealthy.

My personal despair aside—and I appreciate many others may look onto such an enclave and not necessarily feel the way I do, and, further, the old seafront was stone-walled and full of railway intrusions when I was a kid, so it too, back then, was intrusive—what redeemed 'place' for me was the sight and interaction with a sea lion. Its adjustment to the 'imagined' space was the roofless cathedral, or the de-roofing of the cathedral, that brought a greater spiritual truth to the place, to me and possibly to itself too.

This is the poem:

Sea Lion

Where I stood on the rocks in front of the train workshops
there's a marina and the growth urge of the Midwest middle class.
Large boats with sport-fishing ambitions sit in their pens—wine
and beer are quaffed amidships. Ladies with headphones and prams
jog along the boardwalk. Inside the maze of channels green water.

Where I stood on the rocks in front of the train workshops
huge chunks of inland stone ward off the Indian Ocean. Builders
will tolerate no wrecks of pleasure craft within their remit.
But near the jetty not locked-off from non-subscribers
Tim spots a sea lion which bottles, dives, then emerges

alongside us—lolling, rolling, blowing stale air over green waters.
It dives under the jetty and we misjudge where it emerges
but it turns back and communes with us nonetheless.
I am guessing a sea lion would consider this 'relaxed', like us,
but maybe not because fish are on its agenda. But Tim is excited.

So close! How the leisurists feel looking out from their cabins,
or down from luxury flats overlooking their pride and joys,
is another matter. What does it mean, this reclaiming of land,
this enveloping of sea, the narrow opening to a shipwreck coast?
Three and a half decades have passed. I feel no nostalgia, only grief.

Where I stood on the rocks in front of the train workshops
I fretted about the sheds and machinery behind me, the shored-
up defences against rough seas, and opening to the right looking
out to the islands, the crescent of beach where in the shallows
I trod on a cobbler and knew blue murder was a toxin in the blood.

Where I stood on the rocks in front of the train workshops
I should have guessed what would come—the agonising expanse
of God and science, the juxtaposition of machines and the sea, the
inevitability
of pushing out—nodules on the island continent, forces for and
against
isolation. We stayed as long as we could, watching the sea lion.

See, for me, Geraldton has never just been a take-it-easy, lots-of-sun, good holiday place; it was a home, and still remains a distant home of the imagination (rightly or wrongly), with all the complexities of belonging that entails. I was both happy and unhappy in Geraldton. I worked in a lab, took mineral sand samples loading ships, and yet started to develop my strong anti-mining stance in life. I was young and full of contradictions. I don't look back with nostalgia, but I do look back with appreciation at the worldview I got from joining town with country, rural with sea. I was distressed by racism and violence and, as tracked in my 'white bloke' poems written in dialogue with Charmaine and Charmaine's poems of Yamaji life-experience, I was strongly affected by that violence, but I also learnt how to write poetry about such issues.

I have people I am still close to, and places within the area I feel increasingly close to. I always felt I shouldn't be at Ellendale Pool which felt, if not off-limits to me, certainly sacred to others who were not me. I didn't understand why, and it's a place I feel both fascinated by, and deeply respectful of, to the point that I should leave. In some senses, I know it best through enforced absence. Now, this is not to impose on others; it's a feeling and it has been voiced in my poems and stories. But I still voice it. I think Stow, certainly looking back over his life, had similar misgivings and uncertainties, and he knew that place much better than me on a literal level.

Which takes me back to the idea of *heritage*, so vital to the region. Heritage is something both to embrace and to be wary of. Heritage can occlude the stories of country, and become just an ongoing way of denying the reality of colonialism. On the other hand, heritage can become a

conversation too, about the intrusion and theft of country, and can lead to healing, to 'reconciliations' that are wanted by those dispossessed, not forced on them, and a way of showing the success and failures of justice regarding history.

Sadly, there are far more injustices in the heritage record than justices. So what do we do? We preserve as traces, as records of what was, so we can make what *is now* better. I am, for these reasons, haunted by the colonial buildings of Greenough Hamlet as much as I am by the few remaining wind-bent trees that make the postcards of the recent past, and the Instagram moments of the present day. They too easily become part of the status quo of sandplain that is only about farming, but should surely be about restoration of both Yamaji rights and also the country as it once was, and what it could have been and could still be under the guidance of elders who best know who to make land 'work' for people and for itself, for the other creatures that dwell on it.

Co-existence is what interests me in this: between the aspirations of people, and the aspirations of other life. Farming needs to co-exist with respect for country. And where farms meet the sea is a place of disturbance and questioning. I have connected with those farms, with the sea, and the disturbances of settlement and the guilt they bring. In my 1998 book *The Hunt*, I open the poem 'A Tale from Sand-Plain Country' with these bothering lines (bothering to me, at least):

> Where the coast meets the sea
> Four hundred kilometres north
> Wheatfields go right up to the dunes
> Which shift with winds so strong
> They bend trees. Postcards are sold.
> Once the Devil played cards
> In a small stone pub
> And his opponents
> Noting his luck change
> As the stakes got high
> Checked to see if he'd been
> Marking cards under the table.

Rumours, stories, religion from far away brought in, in an attempt to overlay spirituality already there, but only stirring up the disturbance, the doubts, the wrongs. How does the language of recounting, whatever that language is, deal with this?

In the same locale, in those old Greenough Hamlet buildings, I find hope in the persistence of, say, swallows where few nesting places are left. The haunting and the nesting go hand-in-hand, maybe. This poem:

> **Swallows at Greenough Hamlet**
>
> It's the tree-bending wind I grew through
> in my 'growth spurt'—when I went away
> for the Christmas break at sixteen and returned
> to school at Candlemas, my birthday, at full height.
>
> We walk through the hamlet, holding our hats,
> stepping around the jail, which we won't visit.
> The convent was a site of learning and no doubt pain—
> it is cool and rudimentary and denies the wind access.
>
> We go inside as blank as we can make ourselves.
> and Tracy says it feels familiar, though she remarks
> on the veils of the Presentation Sisters in a *fin de siècle*
> photograph setting them apart—more like France
>
> than Cork or Kerry. I don't feel a connection
> until I walk into the room as chapel and see two
> swallows fly from one high, round louvred window
> to another, their shit over the floor, over the organ,
>
> over the Bible open somewhere just past the middle.
> I step back and let them settle in peace. Tim notices
> a nest moulded into a high corner. The two birds
> fly again then perch on the frame of a painting:
>
> Tracy tells me it is probably Simeon holding
> the baby Jesus—during Mary's presentation
> at the temple. The swallows, still ruffled, touch
> beaks and lift their forked tails to balance,
>
> chattering intensely. Later, we read the building
> is supposed to be 'haunted', but no static of expectation
> interferes with our interaction, our brief cohabitation
> with swallows who will fly fast every time
>
> new visitors enter the building. Outside,
> another pair of swallows follows us through shade
> of a strong, bowed eucalypt, to pivot on wires
> in driving wind, to call through the haze

where so many aspects of the four elements mix.
What was offered up in the temple was existence,
and no farmyard sacrifice, no holy acquiescence,
will occlude the glory of swallows making life.

What's interesting about going back again and again to a place one has lived in, but not actually 'moving back', is how over the years memories become more fragmented; so to compensate, you turn them into stories, to keep the threads going. In writing short fiction on Geraldton (and I have many stories set there, especially concerning the sea) I embellish or divert from an experience to make my story someone else's story, to increase the range of possibilities, maybe to tell myself more than I recall, or could have known. But in poetry, I try to join the fragments by returning and experiencing the here-and-now, and the poems build out of the past juxtaposing with the present; how I see things now merges with how I recall I saw things 'back then'.

Sometimes I see old schoolmates in the street and they don't recognise me, or maybe just pretend not to, and I try to think of how their perception of the place in which they've lived a large part of their lives has changed, and not changed. How many different stories are constantly at work in that place—counterpointing, augmenting, and probably frequently contradicting and at odds. When I started writing poems 'back' to Geraldton in the early to mid-'90s, I found I would write about school issues, about conflict I observed outside and inside myself, and especially about the beach.

My brother and I spent a lot of time skin-diving, and a lot of time on the sand. In Geraldton, I got a sense of 'under the water', and what I saw on my daily dives has informed the way I see the surface world now, especially as a most frequently 'inland' dweller. My brother, a shearer, but also a surfer who first stood on a board among the dumpers at Back Beach before moving across to Neons, Explosives, Hell's Gates and other breaks as a thirteen-year-old, still lives between the world of coast and inland, both vitally part of his seeing the world. And it sticks with me, too. Here is a poem from a book I did with the writer Robert Drewe called *Sand*, because we dragged as much sand inside our house as there was outside, as we traipsed back and forth between beach and waves and reefs and home:

Geraldton 2 Coastal Prophecy

The quality of sand...
Sunset Beach breaking at night,
gulls arcing in the glow,
the suffocating stench of weed
heaped by storm,
unravelled by those searching for worms...
the shape of kelp, of exotica: bull and antler,
fan and sifters of currents,
mainly ribbons like laminated book covers shredded
endlessly, sand shoals thinning
and the reef fish becoming scarcer:
check out what a spear from a spear gun does to a snapper,
ripping through and splaying its barbs, most often pulled back
till the flesh rips out, and it swims at an angle away,
a rock cod camouflage blown by a swirl of sand
on a clear day less a dorsal fin, a tail,
or the ray flat to the sand flapping airfoil
and a movement not of the dry land, of the surface,
its barbs in the long cartilaginous extension
of its broad self, a shovel-nosed shark
suffering the same, and anemones sensing
and closing too soon as weighted by lead
and buoyant in the insulation of a wetsuit
you pass, all colours of the sea muted as things stir up
and a rainstorm of salt makes the shafts
of sunlight grey... rules of a savage storm,
lines of fast fish ripping along the shallows,
moving out deep, the flickering sea snake
walking water and engraving
with a diffuse and widening shadow,
the weed dumped again and again on the beach
sweating in the late afternoon, the breeze
coating all, with a layer of sand, a composting of the beach,
botany and biology merging, interphase;
crabs lift and launch at night also,
the sun's orange blast
having bored through the sand
by then, a glimmer dispersed by currents and tide;
morning: stiller almost cold, bit of a cray float
colour eaten off like a warning, bite mark of sea
and the ropes tangled and layered into the sand, cuttlefish
still flesh around their lipped anatomies, declarations
of aerofoil and escape, graphological
on the sea's diluted ink, shells where the sea

has been emptied and the conch is an analogue
from *Lord of the Flies*; recall as a school kid
sunning here, a friend of the family
visiting, crisping in her bikini: flew kites,
through sand, crashed into the low waves,
felt tired and hungry in that washed-out good way,
the ocean all out there and a place of retreat, staving off
the land's locks and weirs, eroding stone,
pools so deep they find no end to the water,
fields flowing down to edge water
and sand rolling in heaps,
shaped and reshaped and held down
by a scrub defying
rules of fertility,
the ocean breathing life into the green succulence,
the sun doing the rest.

The poem was written on a revisit to Geraldton around 2006, staying in the Point Moore Caravan Park Chalets. Down on the beach from where the osprey craypot pole-sitting nest platform is now, down from the striped lighthouse which was there when I was nineteen, where I had a picnic on the sand with a girl from high school who was a poet (a year younger than me)... We'd talked about the sea and writing, believe it or not, and the fact that I had just moved to Perth to go to university. She was a poet and a fiction writer, and we both saw Geraldton as home, but also as somewhere you thought away from. To me, this is telling: when it is really your country, looking away can only take you deeper back into your home place, into your heritage, your real heritage, which is so much more than buildings, and when it is literally your country, into your ancestral and spiritual interconnectedness with place. Being non-Aboriginal, I didn't have this, and don't have it, and remember understanding this at eighteen.

But I wanted to write about this dislocation, and what I could reclaim, what I was allowed to reclaim, from my time living in Geraldton. And in some ways, what I felt I could talk about were the problems, the traumas, more than the many pleasures I had. A particularly traumatic poem, which came out of my witnessing a terrible crime as a kid messing around on the Chapman River behind the old army training area, was about a sack of kittens thrown out of a car onto the sandy riverbed. Something you never recover from. Rather than read that poem, written many years after I was there, and maybe a poem that had to be written 'away', I will read the first attempt I made to discuss it... written maybe in the mid-'90s:

9. Chapman River, where...

The off-colour of the water
in summer, the influx of the sea when the sandbar
broke through in winter. The sandstone cliffs
upstream where the river ate through history
and ignored settlement. Where human nature
was a sack of cats dumped down on the flats
below by persons unknown, driving a blue car
with covered number plates. Where an army reserve
backed onto the gorge, and you considered that
despite live ammunition nature had the best chance
behind the barbed-wire fences. Where bream grew smarter
along the lengths of a golf course, dragging red flesh
on endless runs, poisoning the unwitting with
their spikes. Where heat and water birds colluded
and something like myth made a ghost of itself
and got into your bones. When solitude
became reason enough for fear and the city
hundreds of miles South was always too close.

That was a first attempt to deal with the issue, but cushioned by other memories. For memories are cross-referenced with others, but the further we move away from them in time and place, what remains are often the most traumatic parts.

Water and land. Again, and again. Staying where we can look out onto the sea as if there are other places to go, but it's not what we want in Geraldton. I have learnt that in my coming back, over and over: the need to let the sea be, not a place to cross, but an endlessness that converses with the immensity of land. In the place we stay in often, I later wrote this looking out at the sea and a lone pine tree being buffeted in the wind, but a mast tree, like the Norfolk pines along Durlacher and Fitzgerald streets, a ship mast but not an adjuster to bend to the breeze like the river red gums of Greenough (though they have little choice losing mutual support on the cleared spaces):

The Sway of a Coastal Pine Tree

A lipidic white-capped sea, low
coastal heath, tether tableaux
to breeze bending the old pine
towards them, its sway on rebound
bringing it back to lash sunset.

Bright dark matter mixed
to force back to where the breeze
has blown, to fill compulsive
need, sweep to vacate and occupy—
lean to resist, impelled.

Pine is ritual, drawn back
to depths where appearances
are made and blessed, mast-like,
bent against a tidal surge,
branches radiant with drowning.

Confess, to balance or divine
a flow, draw needles against compasses,
steer towards an anchorage,
high up in the rigging, less rigid,
    breeze-dried waves,

arrangements of vastness.

Whose ritual are they, these non-native, introduced pines? They belong, as they've been planted and nurtured, and are identified in the centre of town as heritage, living heritage, and yet they're not. And this is the crisis of presence, of settlement. How do we talk about it? Well, literature is one means, and over the decades I have realised that literature is not about the self, but about ongoing conversations with others. How do we change the architecture of what we know as dwelling to become roofless cathedrals that respect not only all forms of worship, but the fact that buildings of worship are built on other places of worship, and that the stone and wood of these buildings is the stone and wood of a much longer-lasting permanent presence? It's not irony to say that the stone cathedrals are the temporary structures, and the places of Yamaji worship are the persistent and permanent ones, no matter how hard the ongoing colonial survey had tried to erase them.

Working with Charmaine Papertalk-Green on our book of poems, *False Claims of Colonial Thieves*, has been for me a personal addressing of what, essentially, is not mine to address, outside the fact that I have few rights of comment, even if I am an avid observer. But through her generosity as a Yamaji woman and poet, I have been able to talk over these 'issues' in poetry, and what we have done is there for people to read and talk about themselves. I'd like to finish with two poems, one of mine read by me, and one of Charmaine's read by her. It seems appropriate to return to Ellendale Pool, where Stow is referenced on a sign, and over which he may or may not have felt comfortable. Mick Stow and Charmaine Papertalk-Green are both great poets of this region, but Charmaine is a poet of this country:

Peacocking at Ellendale Pool

Speaking a truth doesn't disabuse
as the martins and swallows fly in & out

of the cliffs, and the *pool that is bottomless*
reaches beyond all prospects of drought,

and the kestrel positions itself for the edges
of chaos, and campers wade into amoebic

meningitis—*into the cells*—on a thirty-eight
degree day. Randolph Stow is celebrated

on a sign in the eye of the land, and we are informed
that he wrote *A Haunted Land* and *desire*

troubled this enclave, eye of the fillet,
its bloodied history. And then he was gone,

ensconced in Suffolk, away from his troubled
identity, or the lapses in identity that left

him stranded. And among those *revenant*
thick white river redgums (felled so readily), caravans

& willie wagtails, and a long-nosed dragon
in a swamp she-oak flashing point to point,

and the public gorging itself on the scene,
that interlude in a thermonuclear world,

pastoral country up to its edges, and another sign
speaking of the 'Indigenous connection'—thriller

subtext, crime drama, blockbuster and award winner,
as if it's a connection 'we' *might* take under advice!

This land that never stopped being Aboriginal land,
and *it* allows us to walk its erosions without being

plunged to the bottom of the bottomless pit.
Such decorations of the literary! Such gifts of *English*!

The lecture closed with a reading from Charmaine Papertalk-Green, of her poem 'Creation Markings—Ellendale Pool'.

The 2019 Big Sky Readers and Writers Festival, held in Geraldton 13–16 June, embraced the rich literary heritage of the Midwest region by inviting John Kinsella to deliver the first of a new series of lectures planned for the annual Big Sky Festival. The inaugural Randolph Stow Address for 2019, *Writing the Place: The Process of Conjuring Landscape*, captivated our audience with its insight and reflection, whilst paying homage to local literary hero Randolph Stow. In conclusion to the address, Charmaine Papertalk-Green firmly anchored the interpretation of decolonising the landscape to the Yamaji perspective. The Big Sky Festival is proudly delivered by the City of Greater Geraldton, with funding assistance from our major partner WritingWA. Big Sky returns in 2020 and for further details, visit the Geraldton Regional Library website.

Work Cited

Stow, Randolph. 'Landscapes', in *A Counterfeit Silence: Selected Poems*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1969. 43.

BIG SKY
READERS & WRITERS FESTIVAL 2019

Pacific

Mags Webster

Mags Webster is a writer currently based in Perth. Her second poetry collection *nothing to declare* is due out at the end of 2019.

at this instant only always
she is contronymic feel

her as she cleaves those little
clenches spell release re-pleat

the surface-underneath for she
is gill-grab roar and hiss

Pacific but is far from
peaceful she withholds relief

is sounded depthed
is made of gasp and raw

throat fricative of weather-temper she
brews anarchy from royal blue

insists all salt-sere land
unhitch and topple to a tidal

redesign o she an
o cyan
blue the language of
the dragging moon lunátic and contrary

Mythos of Pine

Siobhan Hodge

Siobhan Hodge has a PhD in English Literature. She most recently won the 2017 Kalang Eco-Poetry Award and second place in the 2019 Ros Spencer Poetry Prize. Her work has been published in several places, including *Overland*, *Southerly*, *Cordite*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Axon* and *Peril*.

I can see them in the trees, shifting
arms and legs, growing skin as the sun goes down.
The lost women, the ones who made the tracks.

The sand steams, blue gum emulsifies
over paths between the pines. The women before me
ride along, mare foaming. I dare not make new ways

but this is open seeding space. Fallen limbs
hide dugite dens. Honey hive pupils under leaf,
we lose roads and heartbeats, follow birds.

Digging down breaks the roots, untaps pines
faster than the fires when they come,
but the pines will always return.

Once, a man found a shallow grave. Bones
of cooked animal. Another fled
from symbols carved, feeding a bloodied stump.

We do not know who bled there.
Four-wheel paths jolt and start,
cut down by trees. Here, gravel erupts—

horses tread softly, peel crescent hooves
from spilled rubbish, plastic offerings
strewn in fox-mouth pattern.

Kangaroos move in silence, ruck over sand
that steams beneath foreign pines, creeping up,
stars upending a bowl of directions.

Setting down for night, campfire pens
destruction on the smallest scale,
smoking to galaxies daubed with ghosts.

There is no question, no answer in the night.
Words are meat, perishing softly before history
of rock and salt. You are remembered

only when you are sharp, digging deep,
gouging a legacy of angles. A beehive
thrives where there is weakness in the tree.

A final act of love, holding the body
and refusing to give up one fragment,
casting lilies to water. Choke the fish below.

The leaf-litter floor holds pieces of giants
gathering warmth and dust, the pines breathe out.
All feed and die between these arms.

Dusk at Limes Chalet—Toodyay

Tim Edwards

Tim Edwards is a Perth poet who has been published widely in Australian literary journals. He is a regular contributor to *Westerly*.

I watch the turning down of light.
I see paddocks shrink and the ring of hills darken.

Along the ridges the black silhouettes of small trees
are the last to hold their line. Wire fences have already gone.

Across the valley the handful of roof tops have surrendered
their definition. Soon two silver eyes on high beam

are blinking their way between clearings. As if on cue
along the gully comes the low thunder of another goods train.

Its day time load of colourfully tagged grain carriages
now a passing string of blurred grey boxes.

Port Augusta

Laura French

Laura French is a PhD candidate at the University of Western Australia. Her research is focused on existential anxiety in 21st-century dystopian fiction.

It's Monday afternoon when we roll over the bridge to the west side of Port Augusta, and it feels like summer even though it's only spring and we're too far south for heat. The sun beats through the bug-splattered windshield and browns the tops of my knees. It's not a great look, brown knees, pasty white shins flaking away for lack of lotion, but I'm learning to let this kind of thing go.

When I was younger I thought I had to be perfect. Tight-strung, hungry, every inch of my body shaved. I'd run through a mental checklist when you touched me: Is it thin enough? Zit free? Waxed into oblivion? If so, perhaps I could allow myself to exist. If not, I'd make some excuse and pull away. You were perplexed but endlessly patient. The way I loved you was the only thing that reached through my fog.

I'm older by the time we roll into Port Augusta, thirty years and one day. I've learned to live inside my own skin. We head over the bridge and pull up outside a self-serve laundromat. The building is mostly a chicken shop like something out of the 1980s: brown exposed brick, brown wood panelling. I go inside and change a twenty for coins.

Writing that, I pause and think: no, that's not quite right. I did that after.

When I was seventeen we would sit in your car at night, dreaming about turning on the engine and skipping town. Parents, religion, obligation, boring jobs, the question of what to do with our lives… Forget it, leave it all behind. Exist in a bubble. Eat ripe pineapple and raisin toast, drink water and cheap wine, we can stay this young and this enamoured forever. It all seemed plausible in the quiet cocoon of your Subaru. Another brown-seeped relic of the eighties, like the chicken shop, like us ourselves, both eighties kids with scruffy brown hair.

I laughed when you first revealed that car, with a tilt to your shoulders that showed how proud you were. Fair enough: I was sixteen and had

never dated anyone with their own vehicle. You'd worked for it, saved, paid nearly two thousand dollars. It was immaculately clean. And I *was* impressed, truly. It was just that my grandmother drove the exact same car. Still, your power was such that it stopped being a symbol of my grandmother and quickly came to stand for something else: freedom, desire, gentle rebellion. The portal to another life.

I was sorry when you sold it and bought something more reliable. I was sorry when we grew up and stopped kissing so much and started going to church. Why did that feel like sacrilege? Because it did, except when we'd stand up at the end to sing, and you'd hold my hand and I'd imagine we were man and wife.

After we got married, we stopped going to church and started listening to philosophy podcasts instead. Perhaps we got what we needed from each other. You gave me your love, and I gave you permission to think for yourself. That was enough.

The gulf of Port Augusta is shaped like a jagged cut running up the soft underbelly of our country. That sounds awfully dramatic in the context of a failing marriage, but the fact remains: the gulf *is* shaped like a cut, the deep kind that springs open at flesh level. Open at the mouth, rough and pointy inside. I look at the map and see visceral geographic violence.

Outside the Port Augustan laundromat-slash-chicken shop, I pile dirty clothes into our seagrass hamper and hunt for coins. We don't have any. I'll have to go in and ask. I turn to you, I say before I go that life is short, I was thirty yesterday, and I want children, and a husband who wants to be with me. You give me a hug but say very little. I open the door and lower myself down into the street, all short pink skirt and pasty white calves and sunburned knees, and go into the chicken shop and change the twenty and put our clothes in the wash.

So this is how it goes.

This is how it goes, even for us. We are not immunised by how much we loved. We are just like everyone else.

Living with disordered eating is a bit like being in a dying marriage. You compartmentalise, you turn your focus to the wrong things. Counting calories is a hell of a lot simpler than confronting the mess of your damage: better to eat, or not eat, your emotions rather than feel them.

Likewise with love. It occurs to me, watching our clothes spin, that I'd become preoccupied with external signifiers. A birthday present, a baby. Proof of concept. Better to obsess over these things than the absent referent. Because the real problem lies a level deeper: the thing I'm grasping for has quietly ceased to exist.

It's hard to accept, because I never believed in God the way I believed in you. I built my own religion around the way you made me feel. You struggled for years with losing your faith, and I thought I empathised but I mustn't have, really. Because now I feel it. Religion leaves a void.

I bring back the laundry in damp bundles and we discuss separation. My face is numb, and I can't shake the feeling this is happening to someone else—some other couple. Surely we are an unshakable fact of the universe.

But our meagre assets do in fact divide and a house is rented and it slowly becomes real. I buy furniture and a puppy. The puppy chews the furniture, and me, and nothing feels right.

We reunite, which does feel right, but I am tired. The processing power required for this recoupling seems to outweigh my neural capacity; for about two weeks, I have to lie down in the afternoons, like an old woman. Then my body catches up and I am buoyant. You are here, we are trying. A miracle. I float for a while with the determined zeal of a true believer, but the effort has the same strained quality as a dream where you're inexplicably flying: you look down and you fall.

Later, after you move out again, I consider those afternoon naps. Back when we went to church, I used to struggle mightily to stay awake through long sermons. Eventually, embarrassed by my lack of self-mastery, I started taking caffeine pills before the meetings. That first fortnight of our short reunion was the only other time I've felt such inexplicable fatigue. This, I now realise, is my body's response to denial. It knew, and I asked it to not know.

Alone in the house, I drink coffee on the couch first thing in the morning and the puppy, now grown, curls herself around me. I exercise, vigorously, feeling achingly sad and unusually awake. I think about the things I might write.

Voila

Jenny Irish

Jenny Irish is the author of two collections, *Common Ancestor* and the forthcoming *I Am Faithful*.

Hair scraped back, hands shaking, swallowing, swallowing, asking for water, refusing water, grey, shaking, her hair scraped back, a sour smell, her flesh all filmed in onion-skin-sweat—

and a discovery that experience can teach new exhaustion without teaching new expertise.

I give her the bottle, and it's too heavy for her to lift, and she drops it, and it spins spilling water in a clean, wet spiral—pretty—and I pick it up, and I wipe the rim, and I get a little cup, and I pour a little out, and I shape her fingers around the waxed paper, and the shaking in her hand makes the water jump the cup's thin lip before she can raise it to her own, and her quick rise and fall, rise and fall, rise and fall chest is slopped with wet, and so I take the cup before she can drop it, and I hold the back of her neck, and I hold the cup, and I tip water into the open space between her lips, tip and wait, and watch her throat move, tip and wait, and watch her throat move, tip and wait, and watch her throat move, and then use the hem of my shirt to dab around her mouth when the water comes back up, then tip and wait, and watch her throat.

Here, I have my two hands hidden behind my back. You know this game: pick one. You know this game: you know there's actually something pressed against each palm. Or, you know a different version: one where each hand is empty. But, let's go ahead and call this the land of plenty. Both hands closed, neither hand empty, pick one, and the fingers will fold back and *voila*: a prize.

Pick one.

Once, I imagined I would be a hundred things. Under the table, on my hands and knees, I played dog, eating from the floor, hoping I might grow up to be a Rottweiler like my best friend with her strong haunches, broad chest, and deep gold eyes.

With a baby doll made all of plastic—Ashleigh was her name—I practised at being a sailor, a doctor, a mother, a mermaid. I hurled her hollow pink body into the pond behind the house, watched her bob, then ploughed after her through cattails and pollywog slog. When I reached her, it was always too late, and then there was a burial at sea, or the straightening of an invisible white coat and stoicism, or grief that could crack bones, or a transformative kiss and Ashleigh's torso fed into a nylon stocking hacked off at the knee, stitched with a sprinkle of sequins—my sweet, pink merbaby.

I am a grown woman now, and what I have not become is a dog, a sailor, a doctor, a mother, or a mermaid, and though I trust in my specific skills, still I recognise they are so limited and that many things are better left to that which I am not.

When the girl is gone, what stays after is her sick smell, my lurching heart, all the calls to be made ensuring all proper protocol is met.

The next day, smell still hanging, my heart still kicking up, I learn a gang of graduate students, having deputised themselves experts in addiction, have talked the girl out of the formal treatment arranged, and are planning a slumber party weekend wherein they will help their classmate kick while watching underappreciated animated feminist films.

I overhear this in the wide hallway where they are giggling, and gasping, and grasping one another's arms.

Voila.

Light as a feather

Amy Lin

Amy Lin is a Perth-based writer and lawyer. Her PhD focused on the poetry of Francis Webb, Bruce Beaver and Michael Dransfield. Amy works as a Governance Advisor for local government.

Before cigarettes, before sex or alcohol,
there was the intoxication of attempted
witchcraft. Nineties video tapes stuttered

with overuse, inspiring our copycat cultism.
The phase stood out from the Britney
Spears dance moves, the crop tops

and coloured mascara. As if we were
building some edge into shiny lives, a
dabbling in the dark arts. But our

transgressions were innocent, a friend lying
by candlelight, three of us trying to raise
her by the strength of our fingertips.

The live coffin we hovered around, chanting
light as a feather, stiff as a board. A synchrony of
quiet breath. Was being weightless the

goal of our youth? Already, our bodies were
not our own. What would it mean to
float above air? We yearned to be

casements of flesh, with more space for a
soul to fill. And then someone would swear
they felt a lightness, a twitch

but gravity defied like death.
Watery words ran through our hands,
our gurgling laughter the more potent spell.

The Semantics of Starvation

Lianda Burrows

Lianda Burrows is a PhD candidate at James Cook University, under the supervision of the Colin Roderick Professor of Australian Literature. Her research concerns fictionalisations in Australian landscape following Patrick White. An acute interest in spatial experience remains.

I used to go down to the local pool, biding time between hospital stints. I waded in the shallow end through the heat of summer as my sister did laps in the next lane. I could often only walk a few steps before stopping. My lungs felt strained and my heart had developed random piercing pains. A lifeguard watched closely from nearby. I remember looking at myself in the change room afterwards and being frightened. I had initially caught sight of myself in my peripheral vision and I—unexpectedly—suddenly appeared clearly. I normally saw myself as I had always looked and struggled to perceive the changes wrought by a thirty-kilo weight loss. But when I saw myself, this time, from the corner of my eye, it struck me that I looked like a starved bird. All bones and veins, palpitating. I was a diaphanous skeleton with human gestures, but without a face. An assortment of features had gathered on my skull, but failed to impersonate anything recognisably human. I avoided eye contact because when I found it I saw nothing but a reflection of the spectre I had become.

In the most recent issue of *Meanjin*, Fiona Wright describes the history of female illness, in particular rumination syndrome and Anorexia Nervosa (AN), in the context of her own experience (56). As she notes, female illness has historically been conflated with hysteria and emotional extremes. We might forgive the medicine of yesteryear for bungling female diagnoses—it was, after all, often just an extension of broader social and historical inequities at play. But in 2019, gross structural inequities remain, particularly in terms of female health. Once an illness has been defined as psychological or psychosomatic, as Wright details, all symptoms, even those that do not directly relate to the original diagnosis, are often swept aside as the product of a pre-existing psychological disturbance.

Reading Wright's piece reminded me that I am still dealing with the consequences of a dermatologic condition on my scalp which

was, time and again, diagnosed as excoriation disorder—a disorder in which a patient compulsively scratches their own skin. Despite my protestations, my history of Anorexia Nervosa confirmed the diagnosis for every clinician I saw. Two years ago, a senior doctor turned to her junior counterpart after looking at my scalp and said: 'No need to swab. Anorexia Nervosa is complex. It will be a combination of self-harm and poor nutrition.' In a sense her diagnosis was not wrong—low iron and zinc levels probably made the condition worse. But when a swab was eventually and belatedly taken, the open wounds in my scalp revealed themselves as untreated folliculitis, or an infection of the follicle, which by that stage had developed into Golden Staph. 'I don't think I'm imagining the disturbance in my scalp,' I said tearfully. I was patted on the shoulder. 'It is very hard when our minds betray us.'

Once a woman is diagnosed with a mental illness—any mental illness—everything is reduced to that diagnosis. I have often felt that I could present to my doctor with a gangrenous limb, half falling off, and they would find a way to connect it to Anorexia Nervosa. 'Do you think... maybe you are disowning this part of yourself?' I want to say: 'No. No, I don't. I think maybe I have a bacterial infection, not a Dionysian family of origin complex made manifest in dismembered limbs or weeping wounds.' The situation is even more baffling, as Wright suggests, given that no-one actually knows what type of illness Anorexia Nervosa is. That is, there is no consensus on whether it is physiological or psychological in the first place:

> But the problem is that I've been told that, and treated as if, my physical symptoms uncontroversially aren't bodily, and that my illness as a whole is therefore completely invalid, when the reality is that we just don't know. (Wright 63)

Increasingly, research suggests that Anorexia Nervosa is a staged metabo-psychiatric disorder, or a disease with genetic and metabolic components which are at least as significant as the psychological susceptibilities that often precede the illness, such as anxiety. Yet, despite growing evidence suggesting the biological and physiological basis of the disease, it is still approached, across media, academic institutions, and the medical community, as foremost a psychological complaint. This leaves the patient left to testify to the validity of her own bodily experience: an impossible bargaining position for a woman already declared mad.

Part of the discourse around Anorexia Nervosa as a psychological or social phenomenon has happened in the humanities, undoubtedly with good intentions. Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight* (1993) initiated a compelling and longstanding line of ideological critique—that Anorexia Nervosa and agoraphobia, alongside other conditions historically experienced by women, are symptomatic of complex social and patriarchal structures (35). Bordo suggested that agoraphobia and Anorexia Nervosa may be approximated in the way that each capture and represent a female, spatial experience of the world—one in which the feminine body seeks to lessen itself, emaciate, hide, or disappear. Inherent social structures, it follows, catalyse and reinforce the feminine subject in a desire to remove and reduce itself. In the case of Anorexia Nervosa, however, the notion has at times contributed to the misrepresentation of the disease as a social phenomenon with a direct causal link to female body image ideals.

The relative ease with which 'anorexia' and 'body image' are conflated essentially relocates a physiological condition into a sociopolitical realm in which dieting and Anorexia Nervosa are products of the same social inequities. Anorexia is widely considered to be a product of 'control and emotion regulation' issues and 'there remains a cross-disciplinary emphasis on body image concerns as central' (Lavis 454). Consider the conflation that happens in the title of this article: 'How Extreme Dieting Becomes Compulsive: a novel hypothesis for the role of anxiety in the development and maintenance of anorexia nervosa' (Lloyd 144). In another article in *The Conversation* entitled 'Anorexia more stubborn to treat then previously believed, analysis shows', the accompanying photo depicts a thin woman looking in the mirror, met with the visage of a woman three times her size (Murray np). Dieting and the body image concerns which drive it are widely recognised as leading risk factors in the development of eating disorders, but in making this causal link, it strikes me that blame can also be conveniently assigned to patients, most of whom are female.

I have been a veritable ward of the state twice: once as a child and once as an adult, for agoraphobia and Anorexia Nervosa respectively. I developed agoraphobia at the age of ten—by twelve, I could not leave my room and barely spoke. I stayed in my room for three years. A fascination with wide, open spaces began in those years and lingers still, some twenty years later. Each night, once my family were asleep, I would sneak out into the lounge room to use the internet. Drawn to the vistas of the Antarctic, I scrolled through images of vast, icy plains and deep, vertical ice shelves. I gulped at the magnitude of it all. Heart racing, I would climb back into bed and imagine my body in such a space, engulfed and enraptured by its sublime scope. Over fifteen years later, I lay prostrate in a public hospital bed, scanning the walls for signs of structural weakness and half-hoping

they caved in. At the time, there were five public hospital beds in New South Wales dedicated to treating Anorexia Nervosa in adults. They primarily function as feeding ports—aiming to get patients medically stable enough and a high enough weight to enter a private treatment programme. Although bed numbers have since increased, chronic underfunding continues.

On the surface, my experiences testify to Bordo's claim that agoraphobia and Anorexia Nervosa are connected. So, too, do these experiences suggest that there is something fundamentally awry with my spatial experience of the world. The difficulty seems obvious: taking up too much, too little, not enough, too much. Indeed, I have often wondered if my proprioception is sound, given that I still sleepwalk sometimes or fall out of bed, that I struggle to walk in a straight line, and that regardless of my size I sometimes find it hard to clear a doorway without hitting my hips on it. Yet, despite the obvious, and despite the weight of my experience drawing me to comparisons between agoraphobia and AN and spatial awareness and the gendered body and the state, I can only think: Anorexia Nervosa is nothing like agoraphobia. Anorexia, once clinically manifest, is not psychological. It is a genetic response to starvation.

A recent large-scale study published in *Nature* linked the development of Anorexia Nervosa to psychiatric and metabolic genes. The genes associated with other psychiatric disorders were anticipated, but such a strong link to metabolic genes surprised researchers. In an interview with *The Guardian*, co-investigator Gerome Breen from King's College, London, is quoted as saying:

> Anorexia has the expected correlations with anxiety, depression and OCD, but it also has this set of apparently healthy metabolic correlations that we don't see in any other psychiatric disorder. (Sample np)

In this regard, AN might be conceptualised as a neural and metabolic switch that is flicked in a small percentage of the population when placed under starvation conditions. Previously, this switch was thought to relate primarily to psychological traits, with starvation triggering obsessive-compulsive responses in vulnerable individuals. This research suggests that the switch also relates to metabolic functions. That is, under starvation conditions, certain individuals may be programmed to start burning more energy, or burning fats and sugars differently, resulting in further weight losses, which compounds the traction of the disease. In the same article, a psychiatrist from the University of Oxford, Rebecca Park, states of the research: 'Hopefully over time such findings will lead to novel treatment approaches and begin to shift a culture of blame, that sufferers should just be able to snap out of it' (Sample np). Novel, indeed.

When Anorexia took hold of my thinking, I was not aiming to lose weight. None of my diets ever developed into AN. I was trying to normalise my eating and have structured meal times instead of grazing constantly, partly to save money and partly because I found it embarrassing that I ate twice as much as my boyfriend. I watched what he ate and how he appeared to wait patiently for the next meal, utterly satiated. 'God,' I thought. 'How is he not starving? I swear I am starving. Gosh, maybe I eat too much.' I don't. I was starving. This flies in the face of the aforementioned article in *The Conversation* which describes some AN patients as eating 'fewer than 400 calories a day'—without citation (Murray np). I am surprised that a) a researcher used it in the first place without citation and b) that *The Conversation* reprinted it. I may only be able to speak for myself, but I ate at least three times that amount all the way down to a body mass index of 12. Hindsight, as they say, is 20/20—eaten day in and day out, I need significantly more than that to maintain a healthy weight. From my perspective, when my weight drops, my anxiety increases, I burn more energy, and my weight drops again. There was no pre-existing phobia of weight gain.

The fact that the results from the genome project surprised researchers and media outlets concerned me because it suggests that patients are not being asked how they experience the disease. Or, perhaps I am just concerned that no-one is asking me—this is also possible. I am often struck by the wide-scale ignorance around AN—by how often people emphatically say to me, as if in on the secret, 'Oh, you had Anorexia Nervosa—it is about control.' There is a strong case to be made for the idea that Anorexia Nervosa is not, especially in its most severe and enduring clinical manifestation, about anything. It is a disease, not a maladaptive coping mechanism. Controlling, risk-averse, or perfectionistic people might be more likely to have rigid food rules or exercise regimes, which leads to a reduction in weight, which then triggers a genetically heritable condition. Likewise, diet culture may have a similar impact. But neither factor, importantly, is directly causative.

The ignorance is concerning, not least because over 20 per cent of patients who are clinically diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa die (Australian Department of Health, 2005). It has the highest mortality rate of any mental illness and I would argue that this statistic exists precisely because it is not a mental illness. It is not, at the very least, a mental illness in the same way that we understand any other mental illness. It is not a mental illness, for example, in the same way that agoraphobia is. AN has

distinct physiological markers across every organ in the body—both in its causes and symptoms. Some patients with Anorexia Nervosa die from suicide, but as many die from starvation itself. One might, of course, characterise the starvation of AN as a form of slow suicide. People have died on a hunger strike, after all, but the goal in these instances is ideological and political change, not death, and a death drive is rarely why people report reducing their food intake in the first place.

Most of the patients I encountered throughout my haloed tenure as an 'Anorexic' at various medical institutions across the country did not want to die. I certainly did not want to die. Throughout my decade of hospital rotations, I met a widow in her seventies who stopped eating after her husband died. The grief curtailed her appetite. So, too, a young man in his thirties who lost his young child. He hated himself for what happened after that. 'My wife lost a child, too', he would say. 'I didn't mean to make it about me.' I met a woman in her forties who told me not to waste my life. If you can help it, she said. She had never had a job or a relationship. Her life ended at eighteen when she became ill. I don't know what has or will become of her. Statistically, she will probably die from AN. But she helped me. She told me things about the disease that no clinician had ever told me. 'I bet you don't sleep,' she said. I nodded, rubbing my eyes. 'You can't sleep without enough fuel in the tank. Try to eat as close to your BMR [basal metabolic rate] as possible. You'll sleep better.' She was right. My grandmothers had their own stories with the illness, too. Allergies, grief, the Depression, attempts to save money; what brings men and women to starvation, especially in the first world, varies. The only common factor in these stories was that their thinking—and potentially their metabolic functioning—became compromised once they were underweight.

Only at one point during my internment in the disease did suicide become a serious option. I weighed up the notion for several days. It would cause my family great suffering, but watching me waste away seemed equally horrific. It was an impossible situation. If I eat more and gain weight, the disease doubles down: the murmur of intrusive thoughts and compulsions becomes unrelenting demands and punitive measures. The loudness will prevent me from sleeping, prevent me from resting, prevent me even from sitting down. But if I obey the disease, I will eventually die from starvation. I was exhausted. At the very least, suicide would be quick. This was slow and agonising for everyone. Suicide, I concluded, was the only weapon I had left against AN. I failed in my attempt, though it did end up causing cardiac arrest. It is, frankly, a miracle that I am not dead.

Prior to the publication of the genome project in *Nature*, recent psychiatric conceptions of Anorexia Nervosa had begun to emphasise a staged disease model. As with many somatic illnesses, there is a sense in which Anorexia Nervosa metastasises. It develops through, as Maguire and Touyz have argued, four stages. These stages are primarily marked by body weight. Stage 4, like cancer, marks the severity of the disease and typically results in death. At stage 4, the disease has likely affected every organ of the body—including the brain. To imply that a pre-existing psychological drive for thinness catalyses the disease is a logical fallacy because egosyntonic identification with the disease is a neurological symptom. This symptom occurs alongside malnutrition, electrolyte abnormalities, elevated liver enzymes, tachycardia, amenorrhea, and a multitude of other medical complications. It takes almost two years of full nutrition and weight restoration to repair the myelin sheath around the nerves in the brain. Yet, routinely, we find AN described as a primarily psychological illness (Maguire et al. 3). I had three episodes of heart failure, a seizure, and was put into a medically induced coma within the space of a few years—such experiences never struck me as psychological. Psychological counselling, however, was crucial—not in treating the disease, per se, but in giving me enough fortitude to withstand treatment long enough to get better.

One of the greatest complexities of treating AN rests in the nexus between civil liberty and agency versus this complete loss of self. Restrictions are put in place to protect the patient from the disease. After all, how can a patient whose brain is so compromised be afforded any say in their treatment? They are no longer really present. At the very least, they are no longer controlling their behaviour—the 'self' becomes a spectator. But the loss of agency is also a loss of agency for this spectator-self—it was not merely my disease that was under guardianship or imposed upon in legally-mandated nasal-gastric feeds, but me. The 'self' to whom the disease gave no voice was also muted legally and medically. I cannot help but think that if men were more highly represented in the patient demographic of AN, or in the language we use to talk about the illness, treatments might be better funded, less coercive, and less affected by the same kind of victim-blaming so commonly experienced by women.

I am, more or less, recovered, though indelibly altered by the experience, if only in that I now find myself exclaiming repeatedly: what a waste of my time. We are meant to treasure such lessons, as though without some greater good drawn from suffering, the disease has won—but I do not treasure any of it. There was no lesson. Why would there be? Do we ask patients what type 1 diabetes has taught them? How it might equip them to be better people? Do we ask: what did you learn from your mitral valve prolapse? We do not ask these questions because we do not

blame patients for these conditions. The decade I lost to AN was, all in all, an abject waste of my time.

Although there is a place for a discussion of Western diet culture and the idealisation of thinness in the perpetuation of AN, these ideas arguably belong within the context of broader public health discussions. There is a risk in treatment-based discussions of AN which emphasise dieting culture and body image because it becomes easy to conflate dieting with starvation. In the social imaginary, the differences between AN and dieting become differences of degree and not of kind. Discussions driven to help patients end up undermining them. The lack of meaningful distinctions between starvation and dieting becomes part of the broader logic which leads a clinician to turn to Wright's mother and say: 'Why is she doing this?' (Wright 54). It is clear from Wright's account that she was never doing anything—no more than a man going bald might be accused of 'doing' something. What is he doing? He is standing idly by and watching, with varying degrees of horror, as a biological mechanism unfolds upon him. But a woman's experience as a patient, even when the symptoms are just as physiological, is still deeply entrenched in the trope of hysteria.

The person who pays for this is ultimately the same spectral figure treading water at the local pool. A diaphanous skeleton with bulging eyes and a vascular stomach, nursing broken ribs from defibrillation. The look on the lifeguard's face said to me: shouldn't she be in a hospital somewhere? Like a sick dog that removes itself from the pack to die, we expect illness to be kept invisible and removed to the margins of polite society. Nobody wants to see a starving bird flung from the nest trying to do laps in their local pool. And nobody wants to see the inglorious end we all inevitably meet made visible: death. Because that's what AN looks like and that's what it is. It's an image of a person dying who is powerless to change their fate. I should have been in hospital but I was waiting for a bed.

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Name = Compatibility Mode

Paul Dawson

Paul Dawson's first book of poems, *Imagining Winter* (IP, 2006), won the national IP Picks Best Poetry Award, and his work has been anthologised in *Contemporary Asian Australian Poets* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2013) and *Harbour City Poems* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2009). He teaches creative writing at UNSW.

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General discussion

Rune
Kristen Lang

Kristen Lang published both *The Weight of Light* (Five Islands Press) and *SkinNotes* (Walleah Press) in 2017. She won the ACU Poetry Prize in 2015 and was shortlisted for the 2019 Dorothy Hewett Award.

Blue-grey stone jags up from the foothills,
looming into cliffs and crags, white-capped
in a wind which renders the man, like the pale
grass and the small, ground-hugging shrubs,
horizontal, clinging under a clamour of sky.
Ripped cloud thickens into a mesh of snow. Ice
seeps into his fingers. And the sharp whip
on the wind-entangled tarn carves into his bones
a kind of filigree, wiry threads of the weather
curling into the marrow, planting squalls
in the re-spelling of his name.

Heart
Mike Williams

Mike Williams writes poetry and fiction. His two novels *Old Jazz* and *The Music of Dunes* were published by Fremantle Press. He works for a bookshop in Perth.

Mal McKimmie,
'The Pecking Order'

I am like a bird that has succeeded
in flying through a mirror:
all the world is unfamiliar.
I have emerged on the other side of myself
and I cannot return.

It's after eleven and I can hear the wind building, sweeping off the Southern Ocean. Splashes of rain angle onto the verandah and the dunes are dark and wild—it's going to be some night. I'm thinking about my daughter Jude in Canada and how the house is back to my solitary ways. I miss her, her music, her dedicated aversion to the Howard regime, liking nothing better than to stir her father's complacency. I get up and feed some mallee root to the pot-belly stove, and I figure I should do the rounds outside. This storm is going to worsen before it blows out. I get into a waterproof jacket and slip out into the wind. I check the boatshed and the two smaller outbuildings, windows and doors fastened, and I stack the three wooden chairs on the verandah and rope them down to the railing. Hunching into the wind and the rain, I take the boarded track down through the dunes and stand on the edge of the beach and watch the sea foam in across the reef. No moon. No stars; just dark cloud banking in from the south-west. This is the south coast in one of its darkest moods, but it's wild and beautiful. It's this that's kept me here all these years, dug in like some old hermit crab, as Laura used to say. It's getting cold, a southerly chill moving in with the wind and rain. The rain is icy on my face. I watch the sea and the wind-whipped dunes for a while and then turn back to the house.

I shake rain from my jacket on the verandah, dry my face on my shirtsleeve and step into the warmth. Something tightens in my chest, sudden and alarming. A knot of pain. My vision darkens and I find myself sitting on the chair by my desk as the pain spreads like an angry flush. Then it's gone. I'm a little breathless and my face feels cold. I sit, slumped to one side of the chair so the room's on a crazy angle. The burning comes again,

increases, and now there's tingling, numbing in my left hand and lower arm. Not good. The phone in the hall seems to be an impossible distance. I can't seem to move. Sick. Frozen. The phone is now floating, a mirage, a Dali painting, its cord hanging like a severed umbilical cord. I sit, leaning into the pain. I must move. The wind rattles the house. The sea is crashing on the rocks. As I push myself off the chair I stumble against the desk and the lamp falls and the room is full of crooked night shadows, and I am one of them, shuffling like some old man towards the hall.

I fall into the hall chair. This strange fire in my chest, draining me of everything else. The handset is dead weight. My breath is shallow, and it hurts. I finger triple-0…

A stranger's ragged voice in my throat croaks what I fear is garbled words and meaning.

I lie in the hall on the edge of something new and fearful. Suddenly, I am fragile, vulnerable. The wind and sea—as long as I can hear those, I will be all right: this is what I tell myself. Rain on the roof. My chest burning.

How yer doin' Frank? John asks me, watching the monitor beside me as the ambulance barrels towards Albany. It's late and the road's dead quiet.

Easier, I tell him.

You'll be right, mate. Just take it easy, any pain and I want to know, okay?

They've given me something and I'm feeling a little out of it. We drone towards Albany. I'm drifting in some other place, remembering some distant morning with Jude.

I stood in the kitchen while the kettle boiled and looked out over the moving salt-grass. I'd lit the pot-belly stove and the driftwood kindling was taking and already the warmth was evident. It was cold outside. I took Jude some orange juice. She was awake, of course. She'd heard my alarm. She'd been mostly sleepless from nervous excitement.

Performing Arts here we come, I said.

City here we come. No more one-horse town, said Jude, pushing her black hair away from her face.

Horse died last week anyway.

Dad joke… Stop now.

Can't, I'm on a roll.

Frank, it's too early. You going to miss me?

Nah.

You'll miss me.

Come on, drink up. I've got breakfast cooking.

I was taking Jude to board in Fremantle for the school term. I was feeling guilty about it, but she was insistent she'd be all right. Jude's destined for music and performance. I had seen it growing and down here she was stifled. I'd got her in to start second term at John Curtin in Fremantle. She was savvy enough at twelve to know her old man couldn't cut it in the city anymore. I was proud she was willing to step out and try it. I'd made her promise if it didn't work out away from home, ring me straight away and I'd drive up and bring her back. Mostly Jude's responses had consisted of 'get real' or 'as if'. She'd been on the phone to her mother in Canada, and Laura had been supportive of her ambitions. I heard Jude in the shower, then back in her room zipping up her bags. Oh, was she ready for the road. I sipped my coffee and thought of the long trek through the Wheatbelt, driving into the dawn, taking my daughter into new days.

The ambulance drones on. I have no pain now, and I'm a still a little out of things. I sleep.

I remember this world from another time, another hospital, another hemisphere—the boy with appendicitis. Certain places take on this quiet and unworldly night vision, the play of nightlights and shadow, the humming silences: railway stations, ports, hospitals, they all have it. This nocturnal world, where things slip beneath the surface. Silent running.

A nurse gives me a needle in the belly. It's to thin the blood, she tells me. So, you're up from the south coast, then?

Cullen Bay.

Went down there once, driving back from Esperance… Wasn't much there, I remember.

She looks about thirty, short blonde hair, traces of an accent which I can't quite pick. Maybe Scandinavian. I tell her it's like everywhere on the coast; it's growing, people finding out about it. I live outside of town… very quiet, right on the edge of the national park.

Sounds wonderful. So heart attack and needles in the stomach not on the life plan?

Not exactly.

They'll give you an angiogram in the morning and see what's going on.

What happens with that?

They'll go into the artery in your groin with a cardiac catheter and they'll move through the arteries so they can pick up any blockages or any narrowing. That's it, more or less.

And if they find anything?

They may do an angioplasty. That catheter again, but with a special balloon at the tip which can be inflated to push outward in the narrowed artery. Depending on what happens, they could put a stent in there.

Which is?

It's like a wire cage, stainless steel, keeps the artery open. Once implanted, it stays there.

That sounds pretty incredible.

Medicine is incredible these days… It's a good time to be sick.

I'll try and bear that in mind, I say. I can just hear Jude coming back with, *Yes, providing you don't live in the Third World, and then you're fucked.*

I sit up as the nurse adjusts my pillow, tucks in a sheet.

So what do you do down in Cullen Bay?

She pumps up a blood pressure band on my arm as I give her a thumbnail sketch of my life on the coast. She releases the pressure. You try and get some sleep.

When she's gone, padding down the ward corridor, I ease myself up and look out to the nightscape of tree-lined Nedlands and the university clock tower above the trees. It's about two and nothing stirs. I can hear my roommate breathing in his sleep on the other side of a railed curtain, a comrade in arterial plaque. I'm wired to a heart monitor and I adjust the wires so I can lie back down. The past twenty-four hours are some mad blur. Albany hospital, the trip to Perth, wheeled into casualty in Nedlands, and now here in the belly of the whale. I switch off my bed light and angle my head to see the monitor. My heart's cryptic chatter pulses green in wavering lines. Imagine arteries like rivers on topographical maps, the silty flow of them. Sand bars. I miss the sound of the ocean when I'm away from the bay. It has become my pulse. Funny, I have never thought of it that way before. Somehow, it restores a little faith in myself. I tap into the immediate truth of it. Outside, the trees are rattled by the wind. If I was home, I'd be out there checking for storm damage.

I don't sleep. Submariner. On night watch.

'Our Legacy Is Truth': an interview

Claire G. Coleman and Elfie Shiosaki

Claire G. Coleman is a writer from Western Australia. She identifies with the South Coast Noongar people. Her family are associated with the area around Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun. Claire grew up in a Forestry settlement in the middle of a tree plantation, where her dad worked, not far out of Perth. She wrote her black&write! Fellowship-winning book *Terra Nullius* while travelling around Australia in a caravan. *The Old Lie* is her second novel.

Elfie Shiosaki is Editor for Indigenous Writing at *Westerly*, as well as a lecturer and academic at the School of Indigenous Studies, University of Western Australia.

Claire G. Coleman yarned up her new novel *The Old Lie* with *Westerly*'s Editor for Indigenous Writing, Elfie Shiosaki.

Elfie Shiosaki: I really enjoyed reading The Old Lie *and experiencing all of its twists and turns. Could you tell us about your second novel and how it builds on your first one,* Terra Nullius*?*

Claire G. Coleman: When I wrote *Terra Nullius*, I wrote that in a bit of a feverish frenzy anyway, but knowing that if it was successful my life would be over for a while. As soon as I finished the final copy-edits of *Terra Nullius*, I started writing my next novel, like the next day, the very next day, handed in my copy-edits and then started. I did that for a number of reasons, and one of those reasons was that I was terrified that I'd let the fear of screwing up my second novel cripple me if I didn't go straight into it. I didn't want to be crippled by that fear because I'm still scared, even though the reviews of *The Old Lie* have been positive, I'm still scared it's going to be a flop, an embarrassment, because if your first novel is terrible, it's not an embarrassment, but if your second novel sucks it's really embarrassing. It's the only way to deal with fear, to examine your

fear, to work out what you're scared of and then push it aside and just get on with stuff.

I call *The Old Lie* a spiritual sequel, it's not the same story as *Terra Nullius*, but it was actually inspired by the same trip to Western Australia. When I came back to Western Australia and came up with the idea for *Terra Nullius*, I also visited my grandfather's grave. My grandfather was a black Digger and his grave was unmarked, and during later research I discovered that unmarked Aboriginal soldiers' graves are actually quite common in the South West. In fact it's so common there's actually an organisation that specialises in finding unmarked Aboriginal war graves.

I decided to make *The Old Lie* a bit different because *Terra Nullius* has one big world-shaking twist in the middle of it. Rather than people having their feet knocked out from under them, I decided to not let the reader catch their feet at all, I wanted people to have no idea of the direction of the story so it all becomes guess work. So I decided that the audience didn't need to get to their feet, I wanted them to feel as destabilised as I feel a lot of the time, like this idea of not knowing where you're going, what you're doing, what you're thinking and what your life is, so yeah, I just made it a completely destabilised and destabilising novel, that's why it's got twist after twist after twist, built on twists. I thought well why not, if the characters aren't going to feel like they know where they are, if the characters have been destabilised then I want to build that feeling in the audience. That was the intent because I think it can be hard for people to have proper empathy for characters if they don't understand their life, so if you make the novel as destabilising as possible it helps to make people understand.

ES: I read that you wove some of your own ancestors' stories into your novel. Could you tell us about how they have influenced your storytelling?

CC: My grandfather was a black Digger, he went away in World War II and he went for—I think he was away for six years, leaving my dad behind. My dad was born not long into the war, so for the first six years of my dad's life, his dad was fighting in the Pacific, but then my grandfather came back and I don't have much more history on this, I only have conjecture from what happened to other people, but he wouldn't have got a war pension because Aboriginal soldiers didn't, he wouldn't have got soldiers' settlement land because Aboriginal people didn't.

It's in the records in various archives of Aboriginal people applying for the war pension and being told, 'No, you have to apply to the Aborigines Department for Aboriginal Welfare', which of course was a pittance compared to the war pension, and I do know that Jerramungup which is in my ancestral country was originally Aboriginal land and that was used for soldiers' estate, so people had their land taken off them for soldiers' settlements. It happened all over the place but certainly my grandfather was a soldier and all his siblings were soldiers. That's the biggest bit of family history in it but there's also, like always, there's snippets all built from different pieces of my family history so my story and my own experiences and stories of people I know, so I weaved everything into it.

ES: Your novel echoes histories of colonisation and trauma for Indigenous people, but in an entirely new context.

CC: Well, if I wrote it as a historical fiction novel there would be a certain segment of the community who would just say, 'It's just another Aboriginal historical fiction novel' and ignore it. Then they'll go, 'Oh we know all this history it doesn't matter, we know it all.' Instead by putting it in the future it kind of unmoors events from their time in history and suggests that bad things that happened in the past could also happen in the future, and are happening in the present.

So putting it in the future kind of unmoors it and it also means that I don't need to worry about people saying it didn't happen that way because if I said it in the future then it doesn't need researchable or provable historical accuracy, it can be a bit more impressionistic about events so that people can get a feeling for what happened without me having to argue with people for years in the future about whether or not things I put in my book actually happened. Everything in there is factual, everything is based on history, but by putting it in the future I don't need to justify it.

ES: How do you think Indigenous speculative fiction contributes to truth-telling about these histories of colonisation?

CC: I think almost every Indigenous person I know who is writing, is writing to tell or unpack the truth and make sure that the truth is told or shown, and I think it is certainly, all of our life. It can be fiction, non-fiction, historical fiction, futuristic fiction, they're all tools for telling the truth and I think telling the truth is extremely important.

In South Africa when they ended Apartheid they considered the act of truth-telling to be an important part of the end so people can know what happened so they could understand it and not stop the end of Apartheid

getting better. In Australia we still have Apartheid in the Northern Territory, and if anyone says that the Northern Territory Intervention was not Apartheid I will call them a liar because there is Apartheid because the law is specifically aimed at Aboriginal people, that's separation by law. So, until we stop arguing about the truth we're not going to move on as a country, and I'm hoping that my fiction and my non-fiction is helping people talk about the truth and by putting it in fiction I think that I am getting it to more people than I would otherwise, because I am getting my stuff to a lot of people.

ES: Your novel powerfully speaks to our current fight for Indigenous human rights, in particular the fight by Indigenous women to resist attempts to disconnect us from Country. Why do you think these stories about fighting back are so meaningful?

CC: I think Indigenous women have been the strongest keepers of culture all the time, Indigenous women and girls have often been the first to resist. You hear stories all around Australia of women feeling unsafe and packing up the kids and walking away, and just walking and walking, and walking, even though when walking they could die, they still just walk away. *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*, for example, is about children who just walked away and managed to keep culture alive.

Women have been the keepers of culture, they've been the savers of children, have fought to keep children in families, not always successfully because obviously the Stolen Generation happened but it's often also the women who pull everyone back together when people return to culture as well. So I think the strength of women is important and I was trying to cover that in *The Old Lie*, and I think I managed to, at least to a degree, establish the strength of Aboriginal women in resisting colonisation, often by just not dying, as an act of resistance.

To survive one more generation is an act of resistance when you're resisting genocide. Aboriginal men and women, but particularly women, have always fought against oppression and colonisation, just often the weapons were not weapons of war, they were techniques of survival. People always underestimate how much power you have to have to survive a genocide and we've obviously survived it because we're still here, so therefore surviving genocide takes strength and people discount that strength in particular.

ES: Anishinaabe academic Grace Dillon has described Indigenous Futurisms as narratives of 'returning to ourselves'. Could you explain how Indigenous storytellers are revitalising Indigenous knowledge, culture and histories in this way?

CC: In Australia, Indigenous Futurisms is a very, very new thing, it seems to be just in the last few years, from what I understand anyway, and in North America Indigenous Futurism is often used to project Indigeneity into the future. I think in Australia so far what people are using it for is using the future to unpack the past which is what I'm doing. I think that's where we are at now. The problem with using Indigenous Futurism to project into the future is in Australia we haven't really looked at the past much yet, so we're still at that point, and when we project into the future that requires a certain amount of optimism and I don't think we're ready to go into the optimistic space yet as Aboriginal writers because, well I often get asked why I don't write happy endings, and I always say, 'I'll write a happy ending when we've had one', because we haven't, Aboriginal people don't get happy endings. A happy ending is when no-one has died for a while.

We're not having in our real-world stories where everyone lives, so we can't really have them in our fiction because I think it will be dishonest. I'd like to have fiction where everyone lives, maybe I'll get there one day. *Terra Nullius*, let's face it, it was a bit apocalyptic with the sheer quantity of death in it. *The Old Lie* has got a bit less character death but it's not got a happy ending. I don't like the idea of being dishonest to the point where I project a happy ending onto our culture that hasn't had a happy ending in it.

ES: What does that mean for Indigenous people, if in our present, we cannot yet imagine our future?

CC: It just means maybe we need to work harder at finding a positive future so that my generation's grandkids can imagine a world where we have a happy ending. I suppose my idea of a happy ending is if, before I die I can produce that happy ending, or help produce that happy ending because I don't think we're there but I think we can be there and we will be able to see a positive future, and maybe writers younger than me can see a positive future to write. Let's hope so. My third novel I'm working on has a bit more of a positive future to it, so let's just hope that things are changing, maybe.

ES: Each generation is taking steps towards change, and leaving a legacy for the next generation which walks our path.

CC: I think our legacy is truth, or that's certainly part of our legacy, bringing truth and truth-telling and truthfulness to the fore, whereas before Australia has all been about hiding the truth, because Australia is—I wrote a poem recently which had the line that 'Australia is a country that dreamed itself into being', the Australia that we hear about, the 'Australia the Lucky Country', I'm pretty sure doesn't exist. It's like every piece of fiction where there's a so-called utopia—I quickly came to understand that every utopia is a dystopia for somebody and in every dystopia that you read there's somebody who is benefiting from it who thinks it's a utopia, so in Australia the so-called lucky country, and it's a lucky country for rich old white dudes and a dystopia for pretty much everybody else. It's not the lucky country but as long as we imagine it is things aren't going to improve, so I think that's something we really have to examine as a country.

ES: Do you think truth-telling is about shattering the illusions we hold about ourselves?

CC: Absolutely. Well my work so far in my writing career, which isn't that long a career, I'll be honest, a few years, but my work has all been about shattering the delusions about what this country is. Every myth I find I try and find a way to stick a wedge in it and break it, because it's important, I think an important part of it, you can't tell the truth if people are still believing myths, so the first step of truth-telling is to shatter the myths and then from there we can work on rebuilding a truth, and there are several really ridiculous myths such as Captain Cook discovered Australia, that's a myth, and even recently a couple of years ago, our Federal Minister for Education said that Australia was started when Captain Cook landed on the 26th of January 1788. He'd been already dead for nine years. Or Scott Morrison talking about doing a re-enactment of Cook circumnavigating Australia, Cook never circumnavigated Australia, or people saying that Cook was the first white person to land in Australia, he wasn't, there had been white people landing here for a century before him. So it's all lies, everything in Australia's history is a lie. If you go back to primary sources it's all a lie, if you rely on secondary sources you believe things that aren't true, such as my favourite one, the myth that Aboriginal Australians were nomadic. That's the biggest load of bullshit in the history of historiography, because most Aboriginal people as you know had a very small amount of space that was considered the family-run and you didn't leave that except to go to have meetings with other tribes or to find a life partner. So it's not nomadism when somebody's home farm is a river valley, it's just living in different parts of your property at different times.

ES: Could you tell us about any future work you are developing?

CC: I'm working on another novel which I'm not going to reveal too much about but it's a very near future speculative fiction, possibly a bit more positive about the Aboriginal experience. It could be considered to be Indigenous Futurism in the way the term is used in North America in that it's about Indigenous people having a future, and projecting ourselves into the future. I've got an idea for a non-fiction book about the myths in Australia ripping apart history. I've got this thing where I like to get statements, historical statements or things like that and I turn them upside down and look at them and find the gap in them that shows them to be lies.

It's like when you watch people do landscape painting and sometimes they'll turn the painting upside down then imagine it upside down when looking at it to see if they've missed something or got something wrong. Same thing, I turn the so-called facts upside down and I find the hole in the fact and stick in a wedge and break it, and I want to do that with Australian history, as a large non-fiction book, because I've done it in fiction, it's time for me to do it in non-fiction.

ES: Archives have been used as a tool of colonialism, but Indigenous story-tellers are now engaging with archives to contribute to truth-telling and revitalise history-making.

CC: There's a common running joke among people I know that we would have a lot harder time rebuilding the true history if white people hadn't written everything down so well, because the archives do not match our history. What was written down as archival truth does not match the way that history is taught about Aboriginal people, so if you're thinking about it that way, the archive does destroy itself once you start looking at it, or destroys our sense of history.

Archives are not neutral and they've never been neutral and archivists really need to consider their bias when putting things into the archives or determining what goes in the archives—they are not archiving everything, and what to add and what to omit determines which bits is actually part of the process of biasing the archives. Then of course if archives have false information in them and it's not broken down, unpacked or even resisted then people will believe things because they're in the archive, it must be true because someone wrote it down. Well, I can write down lies too and if I wrote down lies and they end up in the archive then how are people going to know that there's lies in the archive? I actually think

that Aboriginal Australia, we need more of our own historians, and we need more of our own archivists because too much history of Aboriginal people has been written down by white people, and too much of the archive has been controlled by the colonisers, and I think it's time that we took control of our own archives.

That's part of why I am so desperate to write as much as I do is because it's important that we control the stories, Aboriginal people controlling Aboriginal stories, and I would prefer if non-Aboriginal people butted the hell out of telling stories about us or telling our history until we've caught up. Someone said to me, 'Why can't they write about Aboriginal people?' and I said, 'I tell you what, when we've had 230 years of writing about ourselves like you've had 230 years of writing about us, then you can start writing about us again', because for 230 years most of what's been written about Aboriginal people has been written by white people and I believe that has to stop.

The Old Lie was released in 2019 by Hachette.

screening time

Patricia Reid

Patricia Reid lives in Brisbane and has been published in *Southerly*, *Rabbit Poetry Journal*, and *Cordite*.

can't quite get a fix
there's just the road a turn off before the town
she drags her finger along the unmarked line
google uniforms the road compacts time
removes downpours in the wet that briefly slick
the dusty shoulders to a rolling quiff
girl that stomped in puddles with the kids
cast no shadow the lie of road implacable
stalked her daily walk in and out
from town but shows no sign of recognition
who can know
if this road leads or follows

the line across the screen though wavering doesn't show
brief breakout jigs of joy small pirouettes of dust
trucks backloaded with arabica beans
headed for the coast
the half-grown kiap in pressed khakis
leader of his troop of wild warriors
heading for the showground
men foreheading shiny cutout plates
of tins of IXL
saluting the sugary cargo god of whites
tourist cameras that lie in wait for savages

google doesn't have signage to The Tip
Kepari burned to death on a pyre of discarded tyres
video of the witchburning without soundtrack
posted to the Daily Mail online
you can watch her burn
it always stays the same a looping gif

google doesn't show the way to Muk's new
husband's place doesn't tell if he was kind
if she's alive still rolling string
if little John grew into a man
the flat warmed rocks the leaping creek
bed a man rose from one ordinary sweet
morning he crashed his Baron on Goroka strip
she won't trace this black line over the Daulo Pass
where memory fails to shoulder
        the overburdened hold

she presses fingers hard against the glass
it stops her touching
that young woman the man that once boy
daily footfalls left no impression in the dust
was the pit pit grass still broken down
blood still reddening the ground
at the screening a woman quietly weeps
she resists the wish to touch her
gently on the wrist takes the chance to give
        this other self the slip

Orchard
Angela Sorby

Angela Sorby is the author of four books and has won many literary awards, including a Midwest Book Award, the Brittingham Prize, and the Discovery/The Nation Prize. She is Professor of English and Creative Writing at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA.

Woody Guthrie, 'Washington Talkin' Blues'

But my hopes was high and we rolled along
To the Columbia River up in Washington.
Lots of good rain [...] Feller might grow something

Dorothea Lange, photo-
documenting the Depression
in Eastern Washington,
preferred scars,
wrinkles and squints,
so no wonder she skipped
my grandpa Harold,
whose skin was tackle football
smooth at seventeen
when he rode the rails
with his brother Russ
to Yakima from the Midwest.
There was cash in the harvest.
They slept in tents.

Later Harold wed a wife
who scratched all the faces
out of family albums
with a rusty hat pin,
so the only picture
of the brothers in Yakima
shows torsos in overalls.
They could be anyone.

Is that why they glow?
Not ghosts. Never ghosts.
        Young men.

Whoever snapped that shot
was no Dorothea Lange,
but an amateur
who smudged the lens,
so that even pre-hat pin
the brothers were blurs,
moving half out of their bodies,
which is how hope works.

Bucks Night

Zacharias Szumer

Zacharias Szumer is a writer who lives in Melbourne. His writing has appeared in *Overland*, *Cyclic Defrost* and various other publications.

Despite what you may have heard, the nightlife of the Deddick Valley—in the deep, green heart of East Gippsland—is quite lively. Even at 2am on this minus-degree night, the hilltop paddocks are a menagerie, the bushes rustling with animals darting here and there, startled by the three dark figures clasping long-barrelled guns. In front, Elias sweeps the shadows with the torch, pausing every few minutes on a pair of faraway pinpricks, glassy-bright in the halogen glow like flickering lights on a distant machine console. Unlike the two amateurs accompanying him, he can distinguish between the eyes of a deer and a wallaby at 400 metres across a dark paddock. Most of the time it's the latter, so we go on. Walking several paces behind, I'm feeling very Chopper Read-chic, all black hood and balaclava, with a shotgun nestled in my black cotton gloves. Elias has already shot one deer tonight, but—as 'menagerie' should imply—the deer, foxes and wild pigs are still awake. So we're going to stay out too—keep following the trail to the top of the paddock, which slowly plateaus out into an altar beneath the speckled milky sky. It isn't difficult to stay focused on the simple task of scan, load, aim, fire, but I'm starting to get pretty tired. I'd stayed up reading most of last night at Elias' parents' house, trying—somewhat frantically—to make sense of a melee of feelings about our plans for the next few days. Elias—a friend of several years who I rarely get to see as we live in different cities—had asked me a few weeks ago if I'd like to go deer hunting on a small property owned by some friends of his family. The couple who own the property regularly invite him and his father to hunt on their land because, as he puts it, 'They want people who aren't bogans to come out and help them keep the feral deer and pigs under control.' I have never held a gun in my life, let alone been able to shoot a stealthy ruminant in the dark, but Elias says I satisfy his personal criterion of being someone he could spend a few days walking through the bush and talking with. I am flattered to have made the cut and thinking that, if anything, I'd learn some skills that

might come in handy through the approaching climate apocalypse, I accept his invitation.

Apart from the Mad-Max-scenario survival skills and maybe some free venison, I wasn't sure what else I'd get out of hunting. I certainly didn't think I'd get into the sportsman hunting shtick: posing next to a dead animal for a photo or proudly bagging a pair of antlers to hang on my wall. But there was a faint tinge of excitement. And, as best as I can summarise it, I think it was the idea of a more intimate interaction with the bush—the sensation of moving through an ecosystem that I had to be able to understand to source nourishment from. Like most people in Australia, I live enmeshed in supply chains which separate me from the animals and plants that sustain my existence. Picking a sprig of rosemary from a neighbour's bush is about as far as my hunting and gathering usually goes. And walking along Melbourne's Merri Creek, which is usually about as far as my bushwalking goes, I never look at the plants around me as a source of nourishment apart from the purely visual. So there was something compelling about temporarily stripping away that mediation and becoming a more direct link in the organic chain of living and dying.

Thinking about all this, I remembered proofreading a writer named Patrick Jones when I was an intern at *Arena* five years ago. He must have published a few articles over the six months I sat in that light-filled editorial office in Fitzroy. They were mainly phenomenological treatises about hunting and foraging around Daylesford—about his process of learning to read the language of the organic world and increasingly relying on this fluency to sustain himself and his family. His was also a project of self-transformation: 'walking for food' as a methodology of awakening the senses dulled by sedentary and mediated life (Jones np). I wasn't able to accept wholesale this worldview—his vision included the phasing out of literacy and a return to a purely oral society—but among the mainly theoretical polemics I was tasked with checking, there was respite in reading his sensuous descriptions of the intricate workings of mycelium, the cycles of composition and decomposition, the life teeming in every glen and gully and square inch of dirt. Locavore primitivism might still be fringe in Australia circa 2019, but the basic contours of what he finds so appealing about hunting and foraging are common enough, even among the camo-gear-wearing set. According to a Gippslandian hunter featured in a 2013 episode of *Catalyst*: 'If you hunt sambar in this country, you have to be observant. I think hunting is a very grounding experience. It's directly relating to nature…' (Conservation Hunting).

University of Tasmania sociologist Adrian Franklin agrees, describing the appeal of modern-day hunting as an interactive, multi-sensorial way to experience the bush and its often-unappreciated cornucopia—a charged and sensuous experience that is far richer than just bush*walking*, with its requirements to stay on the track and look but not touch. 'You're not a bushwalker, who just walks along and sniffs a few flowers and looks at things. You are participating in nature,' another Victorian hunter rhapsodises (Rintoul np). In the light of such glowing hunter-forager testimonials, I wondered if I too might be able to revivify my senses, however temporarily, from their state of desensitisation—escape the feeling of being 'all head and bodiless' from my highly caffeinated, screen-time-heavy, supply-chain-mediated lifestyle (Jones 128).

We arrived at our campsite in the early afternoon. Reaching the Deddick Valley coming from the south-east involves winding your way down a narrow dirt road which traces that great scar of tectonic violence known as the Little River Gorge. Supposedly this is one of the most nail-biting drives in Australia, but given the aforementioned night of 'so, uh what's the deal with hunting?' reading, I'm a bit tired. So I snooze intermittently in the backseat, next to the ammunition box and the three long black gun bags. Elias and an old friend of his, Paul, chat away in the front seat. After finding a spot and pitching our tents, Elias instigates a gun-OHS and target-practice session. He briefly explains the anatomy and function of the three guns then inserts a wallet-sized piece of cardboard between the crenellations of a tree stump around thirty metres away. Considering my total lack of experience (I didn't even play shoot-'em-up video games as a kid), I'm not too bad of a shot. While awkwardly discharging the smaller .22 rifle, which shoots bullets only large enough to immobilise smaller animals such as rabbits, I don't think I even come close. But when we retrieve the cardboard it looks as if it has been attacked by a toddler with a hole punch. Not so bad after all, I guess. Now, Elias, with an ominous twinkle in his eye, is insistent that I try the Beretta shotgun. This is a menacing beast. With its elegant wood-grain butt and intricately engraved metal fittings, it looks like it should be in the sure grip of some cowboy desperado, not in my quivering hands. And, presumably like the other first-timers he's guided through this ritual, I recoil after setting off this piece of heavy artillery several inches from my ear. Elias laughs and shows us the larger .270 rifle. 'This one's for deer. If you shot a deer with the .22, it wouldn't die. It'd run off and die slowly over about a week, probably from infection of its wound.' I wonder how this scene would look if someone was to come driving along the road, which runs about ten metres behind the stump.

Apparently this is sufficient training, and after tea with the property owners, we drive up through the undulating recursions of cow paddocks into the hills behind the farmhouse. We park near the top of a creek and Elias divvies up the guns. I get the .22, Elias has the larger rifle and Paul has the shotgun. Elias says that during the day deer like to hang out in shady places like the gully this creek runs through, and only at dusk do they start to come out and graze in the paddocks. He shares many such deer-psychology insights over the course of our trip, which I thoroughly enjoy. Especially when he starts a sentence with: 'If I was a deer, I would be…' We walk down the creek, Paul and I shooting at rabbits as they dart across the path and into the scrub. Despite their ubiquity—they seem to be the introduced species running most rampant here—we don't manage to hit a single one. I think this might be Paul's first time hunting too, but he looks pretty comfortable with it already. Elias is quite fastidious about gun safety and won't let us walk around with bullets in the chamber, which means a lot of repetitive loading and unloading, but probably prevents one of us amateurs from shooting one of the members of our party in the leg. We keep walking downstream and Elias looks at the scuffed dirt near the bank of the creek and declares that 'there's a fuckload of deer activity in this gully'. A good sign.

The sambar that we are here to hunt are largely the descendants of deer released around Melbourne and East Gippsland in the 1860s. Since then, they've fanned out over most of eastern Victoria and there are possibly up to one million of them now roaming through the state. Most of their ancestors, along with those of the other six species of wild deer in Australia, were released by 'acclimatisation societies'—a fanciful/delusional 19th-century movement based on the goal of spreading 'choice animals' to all corners of the globe. In their fervent desire to bring together what God had torn asunder, they introduced wild antelope to Western Australia (which roamed freely for most of the 20th century before dying out in the 1980s from a combination of drought and hunting), as well as pheasants, carp, trout and a wide variety of English songbirds. In 1862, Sir Frederick McCoy, a respected naturalist, University of Melbourne professor, obstinate anti-evolutionist and leading member of the Victorian Acclimatisation Society, claimed that importing hoofed ruminants would be of 'lasting benefit to the millions of men who will in the fullness of time inhabit this land' (Low 34). With the benefit of 150 years of hindsight, many conservationists now see the legacy of our continent's various camels, donkeys, buffalo, deer and banteng somewhat differently. The Invasive Species Council says that deer are 'probably Australia's worst emerging pest problem' (Invasive Species Council np). Victorian National Parks Association spokesman Philip Ingamells colourfully described them as 'just giant hoofed cane toads, trashing most habitats in the state' (Carey np). It wasn't an off-the-cuff comparison either. A recent Parks Victoria report says that the continued spread of deer 'will be an invasion rivalling cane toads in its seriousness' (Victoria National Parks Association 5). Their effect is mainly the result of overgrazing and browsing low-hanging foliage, trampling stream-banks and wetlands and rubbing their antlers on trees (to strip off a dried-out layer of velvet and to mark their territory), which essentially ringbarks them. In recent decades their numbers have risen significantly, and experts say they occupy only a fraction of the habitats they could spread into (Bilney np).

After following the creek for twenty minutes, we hear a loud honk somewhere in front of us. Unaware that this faithful imitation of a train horn is the sound of a deer, I fail to react. Elias, however, springs into action, pushing a bullet into the chamber and rushing forward. But he doesn't get a shot off. Apparently, this sound means that the deer has been startled and will now be moving too fast for us to catch up. Elias says if we hadn't made such a ruckus shooting rabbits along the way, we might've been able to sneak up on it. We walk back to the truck along the ridge that the deer ran up, but we don't see or hear it again. It's getting towards late afternoon now, and Elias wants to try a new tactic. This involves us sitting silent and motionless among a patch of trees halfway up a hill, watching the opposite hillside and waiting for the deer to come out with the dusk. We take our positions and listen and watch as the buzzing and cawing of the birds ceases and the bush falls into a vast silence. I don't have the deer-calibre gun, so I just lean back against a tree trunk and watch the outline of the mountains fade into the sky, become dark shoulders jostling against one another. We sit for half an hour, but no deer emerge. To make up for our lack of success so far, Elias shoots a few rabbits, which he and Paul turn into a green curry.

Given the effects of introduced species like sambar, recreational hunters and their associations often portray themselves as Australia's unrecognised true conservationists, and they regularly use this argument to lobby for increased access to state-owned land. Visitors to the website of the Victorian Deer Association are immediately confronted with—in title case and large, bold font—the heading 'Conservation Hunters', followed by 'our pledge is to preserve the environment and pursue the cultural activity without cruelty or abuse' (np). The simple

arithmetic of hunting-as-conservation seems sound; if deer are causing the ecological harm that ecologists say they are, then anything that reduces their numbers is good, right? Perhaps. But hunting lobby groups often butt heads with environmentalists, who say that the hunting of dispersed, uncoordinated individuals and groups is generally ineffective at controlling feral populations, and often inimical to the goals of conservation. One of the arguments is that recreational hunters prefer to shoot bucks for trophy antlers, rather than does, which would have a far greater impact on the species' reproductive capability. Another is that they mainly hunt in more accessible terrain, which pushes deer further into more remote, environmentally sensitive and pristine areas (Booth np). Rohan Bilney, an East Gippsland-based ecologist, says that despite significant-sounding figures—recreational hunters killed an estimated 100,000 deer in 2017—the result is usually only a slight reduction in the rate of population increase (np). This is partly because of the fecundity of certain types of wild animals: even a fifty per cent reduction in their numbers one year might not make a difference to their abundance in the following year (Booth 26). And the question of abundance is at the heart of this conflict. This is because, as their critics would argue, the Victorian Deer Association's slogan would remain entirely accurate with the verbs switched around so it reads: 'to pursue the environment and preserve the cultural activity'. And preserving the cultural activity means keeping enough deer around that hunting is still worth the while, which may not be the same level of abundance needed to avoid significant impacts on biodiversity. So far, the hunting lobby in NSW and Victoria has been successful at maintaining the status of deer as a protected game species, instead of a pest (as they are in most other states), which their adversaries say would allow for more effective population control. In rebuttal, the Australian Deer association has long argued that the legal status of deer is no impediment to effective management. And to the dismay of many conservationists, the Victorian Government agrees (DELWP np).

After finishing the rabbit curry and mentally fortifying ourselves to leave the warmth of the fire, we head out again. This time we start by walking single file up a rutted dirt road that crosses through some bushy areas and leads up into the property's higher paddocks. We've been walking for about thirty minutes when Elias suddenly motions for us to stop behind him. He darts forward, kneels down on the embankment of a small dam and shoots up into the darkness of the nearest hillside. He turns to us, his face glowing in the heat of the moment, and declares, 'Boys, I think I got a deer!' We scramble up the hill to find out if he was right. But the deer isn't where he says he saw it collapse, even after a shot to its chest with the gluestick-sized .270 bullets. We scour the scrub, Elias looking a bit confused by the deer's seeming resurrection. About forty metres up the hill, he finally catches up with it stumbling in a patch of scrub and fires another bullet into its side. This time it doesn't get up again. But as we approach its massive body, I can see it's still shuddering and moaning, as if in the throes of a horror-movie exorcism, the last reserves of life's possession still clinging on. Elias doesn't seem perturbed; he says these post-mortem twitches are normal. 'But ya gotta watch out for this,' he says while reaching out and grabbing one of the back legs, which buck out, kicking at the air. He grins and explains that it's just a muscular reflex. But my intuition is revolting against this, and I let Elias know as much. Maybe he has his doubts too, or maybe he's only trying to assuage the unease of a first-time hunter, but he takes my suggestion to shoot it again, this time in the head. Finally, it stops moaning. Up this close, there's no cute Bambi or majestic stag, just hawing and bleating, life running out, blood and bile oozing from the mouth, the smell of glandular secretions mixing into the air. It's massive, impossible to lift, so we drag it down to the edge of the track. But even after bringing the truck up right next to it, we still can't lift it into the back. Luckily, it's freezing cold and we are almost the only predators around, so it will be okay if we leave it and come back to gut it and package up the meat in the morning.

The twin images of hunting-as-conservation and hunting-as-intimate-connection-to-land come together to form a common archetype of hunting lit: the responsible, rifle-toting *homo naturalis*. A sportsman whose sensuous relationship with the bush is matched by his strong sense of duty to manage it. (It's pretty much always a him.) But this image seems to be engaged in a constant war of attrition with another, which might be best described as the *Wake-in-Fright*-kangaroo-hunting-scene idea of hunting. This brief vignette of orgiastic violence—which is maybe the most famous hunting scene in Australian cinematic history—is a highly stylised version of what Elias meant when he said the owners wanted 'people who aren't bogans' to come and shoot some deer. There are, as Elias explains, a fair number of hunters out here whose idea of a good time *is* a slab of tinnies and firing off as many bullets as possible at anything that moves. To be fair, the Victorian Deer Association and most of their fellow travellers wouldn't condone this sort of thing. (For that matter, they probably wouldn't condone giving an unlicensed person a shotgun after twenty minutes of training.) But despite their best efforts to present hunting as a measured, responsible endeavour, this ancient antagonism persists. And I don't use the word 'ancient' for hyperbolic

effect. US anthropologist Matt Cartmill says this dichotomy can be traced back to ancient Greece:

> Dionysus and Artemis [...] are paired with each other in a symbolic opposition that shows up in various forms again and again in Western thought about hunting. [...] Artemis leads a troop of maiden archers in an orderly program of wildlife management; but Dionysus dances at the head of a band of drunken crazies who tear their quarry apart with their bare hands and eat the bloody flesh, like predatory beasts. The followers of Artemis discipline the wilderness, but the followers of Dionysus participate in it. [...] [A] tension between the image of the hunter as a park ranger and the hunter as a beast of prey. (775)

Maybe it's a bit of a stretch, but it certainly lends a sexy, mythical sheen to these contemporary debates. The Victorian Deer Association claiming the title of Artemis, while their critics see them only as Dionysus. And to add insult to rifle-induced injury, Dionysus masquerading as Artemis—dressing up his bloodlust in the guise of some traditional practice of land management. But what about the debate between recreational hunting groups and conservationists? In that case, it's more like two competing visions of Artemis. I'm not really in a position to say who has a greater claim to this mantle just yet. But I do think that while recreational-hunting-as-conservation might be good PR, that doesn't mean it's some calculated fabrication. As Adrian Franklin says, it is not only in conflict situations that hunters say they are 'motivated by a passion for ecology, a love of nature (and animals) and a need to conserve animal habitats [...] the hunting and angling literatures from the 1950s onwards are characterised by these themes' (*Animals* 118). I don't find it difficult to believe that your garden-variety Land Cruiser-driving weekend hunter has a meaningful connection to the land and a sincere desire to act as its steward. If hunting is this intimate, sensual way to relate to the bush, then it follows that it should instil a sense of custodial responsibility. To accept the conservationists' programme—that land management should be relinquished to appointed experts—is understandably felt as an intervention, an imposed mediation, that denies them this custodial responsibility.

Sure enough, at around 10am the next day, the buck is still lying there, sprawled on the grassy hill slowly easing into the sunlight. Providing a running commentary as he works, Elias spreads its back legs and with a freshly sharpened knife makes incisions along the edges of the inner thigh. I am surprised at how easily the skin peels off—like a thin film barely connected to all the parts it's holding inside. To butcher the entire animal, Paul and Elias work together over a couple of hours, slowly stripping the skin back and carving out the best cuts: the backstraps running along the spine and the big chunks of the haunches. Compared to the rabbits we skinned last night, a deer's muscle mass makes it a lot easier to avoid piercing any of the digestive organs, which unleash a variety of foul-smelling liquids and spoil the meat. I get a demonstration of this when, after harvesting most of the meat, Elias cuts open the guts so that other animals feed on them and speed up the process of decomposition. A pungent sour green paste of masticated grass oozes out, some of it onto his hand. He says the smell will stay on his skin for days. With the meat packed into eskies, we leave the dismembered corpse sunbathing in the pleasant early-afternoon light. In the end, I will take a full forty-litre esky of meat back to Melbourne and spend the next few months slowly turning it into stews and curries. To get rid of it all before a move, I'll have to give away a few five-kilo zip-lock bags to friends too. The recipients are grateful, but seem slightly affronted by the rare urban sight of meat with blades of grass still clinging to it.

In his 1972 book *Meditations on Hunting*, which has become a sort of holy text of hunting, Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset said that even inexperienced hunters are swiftly gripped by an atavistic thrill when they set out into the mountains, rifle in hand. But this thrill, this primal amphetamine for dulled senses, seems to evade me. Hunting doesn't seize my senses in the way that its devotees describe. Walking through the paddocks spotlighting with the torch or driving around with guns pointed out the window mainly just feels like playing the deer hunter arcade game. It's immersive, but only in the way that playing Big Buck Hunter at the local Timezone is. A 'sportsman' hunter might say this is because we were mainly hunting at night, which some of them disparage as too easy because you're exploiting the deer's reflex to freeze when blinded by torchlight. Maybe that's part of it. But I think the primary culprit here is probably my own ignorance. Immersion in hunting—even for those who consider it a game or sport—is immersion in the practical application of knowledge. And a skilful hunter's knowledge—of their prey's favourite terrain and foods and the habitual ways that animal reacts when startled—is complex. As is the ability to feel the direction of the wind and position yourself relative to that and the position of your quarry. Just watching Elias differentiating between the eyes of distant animals in torchlight or their tracks in the scuffed dirt elevates him to

almost-Bear-Grylls status in my eyes. When I praise him, he laughs it off and professes to be an amateur, but it still reminds me that I'm basically an illiterate wandering the aisles of a library out here. I may have lived in the bush until I was twelve, but I never learnt the names of trees or how wild animals behaved. While walking in the bush was interactive, as it can only be to an unsupervised child, it wasn't an interaction based on gathering food or understanding ecology.

Perhaps the only time I've ever experienced something close to this vaunted feeling of immersion was during certain periods in my late teens and early twenties when I had zero dollars in all the world, and I would wake up feeling taut and excited by the challenge of finding a way to eat each day. The urban landscape became a terrain whose opportunities for nourishment had to be learned and understood: which supermarkets had exits that made it easy to walk out with a green bag filled with groceries, which ones didn't have security guards, which dumpsters were full of expired but perfectly good food. Unlike the exchange of legal tender for foodstuffs, this was a far more interactive, immersive, skill-requiring way to source daily nourishment. I came to intimately know the urban environment—and its loopholes and opportunities—more closely, because this knowledge was vital to the game.

Elias wants to give both of us the chance to put a notch in our belts, and it's my turn after Paul shoots a doe early on the second night. I suppose this is a component of the Hunters Code—the achievement that marks a successful trip. And although Elias is perhaps one of the last people who would subscribe to some naff sport-hunters' ritual, perhaps he does feel that, as our hunting mentor figure, it's his responsibility to facilitate my first trophy-animal kill. So, after a few unsuccessful chases on foot, we're now driving around, playing flashlight tag with the shadows. Soon enough, Elias instructs Paul to pull the car up and give me a shot into a dark gully from the passenger-side window. As a forewarning to any would-be hunters, I'd like to note that this part is very jarring: squinting through the telescopic lens into the pitch dark, trying to align the barrel with the torch beam, and suddenly a large mammal looms into vision, so close up and illuminated you can see its confused expression and the twitching of its fur. I hold the rifle as steady as I can and centre the crosshairs on the small deer sitting on the ground with its front legs folded. It looks oblivious to its predicament, staring into the torch beam as if caught in an unexpected ray of sunlight on a cloudy day. I clench the trigger, but the bullet sails somewhere over its back and the deer quickly follows it off into the darkness. Oh well. I tell Elias that I'm not too fussed about not earning my Deer Hunter Badge, and we head back towards the campsite. We check one more spot on the way back, but there's no deer to be seen. Perhaps as some sort of consolation prize, I shoot a rabbit. My aim still leaves something to be desired though, and my bullet hits it in some non-fatal region of the body. It squeals and I run forward, Elias yelling for me to break its spine by pressing down on its neck and pulling back hard from the haunches. One quick snap and it's silent and limp. My one confirmed kill of the trip. I lift it up by the back legs and—with its carcass swinging in sync with my stride—walk with Elias and Paul back to the dead deer lying by the side of the dirt road.

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My Father Marshals the ASIO Photographers at the 1967 Referendum Rally

Stephen Gilfedder

Stephen Gilfedder's poetry has been published in literary magazines, newspapers and anthologies of new verse since 1970.

The shout of 'hold' seemed to come
With the shadow of a passing cloud
Somewhere from the circus
Of caravans, kombis, utes
And hand-painted panel vans.
Bled around a dust-streaked bus
A multitude pulsed, waiting for a sign,
An amoeba of students and academics,
Unionists and public servants in cardigans
On their flextime break eating
White bread sandwiches from paper bags,
Ringed by Commonwealth police.
I bought a copy of *Gurindji Blues*,
'Poor bugger me, Lord Vestey…'
The little 45 later to find
A resting place in my collection
Between *The Saints* and *Graham Parker*.
From the back of a truck
Charlie Perkins was introduced
And Ted Egan began to speak
And everything went quiet.
As the cops spread out and wedged in
Between the troublemakers and the innocents
The rhythmic chanting began and I sighted
My father in his dark glasses far at the back
Signing in mummer fashion, making
His 'ceremonial' work understood
As the photographers worked
Through the clusters, poses snapped
To last a lifetime on the files.

Yes, I am still watching

Jarad Bruinstroop

Jarad Bruinstroop is a writer who lives in Brisbane. He was shortlisted for the 2019 Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize. He is currently undertaking a PhD at QUT.

after you've gone to sleep
two young men wrestling

with monogamy. Both sheathed
in flannelette, pale

as pear flesh, and thin as good
intentions. They're art-class

handsome, 90s bed-headed,
book-fair sensitive. They emote

in open-plan spaces, against
exposed brick. In the wide

shot kitsch artefacts underpin
their domestic aesthetic. The sex

is effortless here, progresses
the plot. I ought to stop

watching but I'm a sucker
for something based

on my viewing history. I would
have read a book

if they were not all so far away
from the couch and so full of men

dying and leaving behind
bodies as life-like as wax fruit.

The Release

Samuel Wagan Watson

For Woripa

Samuel Wagan Watson is an award-winning Indigenous poet and raconteur from the south-side of Brisbane. Born in Brisbane in 1972, he is of Munanjali, Birri Gubba, German and Irish descent. His work *Of Muse, Meandering and Midnight* won the 1999 David Unaipon Award, and *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* won the 2005 NSW Premier's Award for the Book of the Year and the Kenneth Slessor Poetry Prize. Samuel has toured Australia extensively as a writer, has been a writer-in-residence at a number of institutions and has toured New Zealand, Germany and Norway to promote his work. His latest collection is *Love Poems and Death Threats* (UQP). Samuel was awarded the 2018 Patrick White Literary Award.

Danny and Bull... Bull and Danny.

Some final splinters of sunlight jagged the hilltops on the western rises before them. Danny drove. The petrol gauge read half a tank. He and his cousin Bull would never have been caught dead in these remnants of day when they were kids. Elders had warned of *red-eyes* appearing on the edge of the unsealed road; meandering spectres making their journeys to haunt, claiming unpaid debts from the living. Bull rode in the passenger seat of the car. Danny had promised Bull's mother that they'd be home by dusk.

The sedan was reasonably new and slick; slick for this region anyway, carrying two dark passengers up the winding roads of the big valley that coursed west from River City. Danny couldn't help feeling like a black wraith moving through the numerous ghost towns on the backroads towards Murgon. As the pair climbed into the ranges the sentinels of Bunya Pine became more prominent; Black Cockatoo country.

'You wanna stop 'ere in Fernvale... Get a sixpack for the drive?' Danny had heard that wayward anticipation in his cousin's voice.

'Nah... I promised your mother, Bull...'

The vehicle had already drawn stares from night-owls. There were no 'Welcome' mats in these tiny communities. A blackfulla from the city knew this in his blood. The people out here had a gentle way as they moved. Arthritic hate. A bent neck that eased an arch at strangers.

A flatland of shadows unfolded out of gumtrees and thicket. Danny smelt the familiarity of lavender farms. *'We're almost there, Bull...'*

His cousin had been quite subdued along the trip. Even when they passed Wacol and the prison where Bull had been a 'guest', the energy in the car was flat. There was nothing Danny wanted to say anyway. Some of the bricks had fallen down from the childhood bond the men had built together. Danny chose the city. Bull earned a cracked pelvis on the rodeo circuit. Bull found it hard to even ride a lawnmower after that. Then the broken cowboy consumed painkillers to chase the hurt. Alcohol... Heroin... Chapters in custodial detention.

Danny finally eased the car into Murgon. The suspension clapped over the dormant train crossing. W*hite-folk* kept to their pub on the left... The *black-folk* knew their place across the way. A solitary statue of an Anzac held residence in the main-street division. Danny looked over his shoulder briefly thinking he might see the lights of Cherbourg Mission behind the township, but there wasn't even a firefly's chance. *Out of mind, out of sight.* Some traffic loomed. A couple of dark faces checked up from their drinks. This was a bubble that would take decades to deflate and decolonise.

'You wanna stop in for one?' asked Bull. Danny calmly exhaled, ignoring his cousin's voice. He glanced into the side streets. The constabulary weren't even lurking. A blackfulla driving a new, registered and reliable vehicle could warrant a mandatory search among this 'small-town' silt.

'Not far now...' whispered Danny.

Solar-flares were burring in the crests ahead of them. There was no oncoming traffic. Danny wondered for a moment whether or not he should tweak the headlights to high beam and then decided against it. Black wings of a crow sprang before the car. Roadkill tarnished bitumen. A crossroad loomed. Danny recognised the silhouette of a broken sulky in a barren paddock. Fingers of rustling cane. Unkept fences. He aimed the car in a gentle manner onto a winding road that soon lost the smooth surface into wafting dust clouds.

'Remember when Stewie swore he saw a devil-dog on this track one night?' Then the hairs sprang on the back of Danny's neck. He regretted the memory instantly. The lore in isolation of this place had earned his respect; some fear, but mostly a healthy respect. Bull's father, who was dead now for thirty years, had tried to make his peace with the spectral matters here too. But there was little point in keeping shades of the afterlife away. '*Old Bull*' often recounted the tales of settlers who went missing in these hills and how the winter months harboured their cries on the chilling tongue of wind.

Danny navigated in fragmented memory and weariness. This was a place where the mind's eye tricked you. A small patch of land sat ahead dropping into a gully. Failing daylight, but nonetheless, Danny had brought his cousin to a place that was a birthright. Wads of blade grass were almost covering the shoulders of the road now and a track veered off into nothing.

The headlights of the car were literally consumed in the wilds of undergrowth. And this was good. Safety in cover. A faceless bank manager had dispossessed the family any rights on the property for a generation. Danny and Bull had aspirations of working these ridges as kids; more so Bull than Danny but reality and economic rationalism hijacked those dreams. Danny would soon be forty-eight years old. And degenerative natures made way into Bull's body for some time now, too.

Danny thought about his fading passenger, the pile of belongings in the car that were his only worldly possessions. Methadone. Demons. *AHHH BULL, WHAT DID THEY DO TO YOU IN PRISON???* Once upon a time their elders called the cheeky pair 'Amigos'.

Suddenly the wheels of the vehicle ran over metal. It must have been the forgotten cattle grid that was too choked by weeds to be seen and it brought them both out of their stupors.

'We're here, mate!' said Danny.

'I know,' chirped Bull.

Danny allowed gravity to do the rest and the vehicle rolled into a rough meadow next to the heap of a dilapidated dwelling. A sturdy hardwood frame of the four walls had collapsed in, bringing down a hood of corrugated iron. Small saplings were reclaiming floor. The sun was poor but enough to pose light on the dim mushroom-cloud of a mango tree on the other side of the wreckage.

Bull's mother was too frail to even meet them up here. As Danny cranked the door open a maze of shrub and grass met him in contention. He realised he couldn't have even unfolded her wheelchair from the sedan to welcome her son home.

'Come on then...'

Strand and leaf fought against Danny as he waded out from the car. He felt the cool air suppress his frame. Green needles pricked. Footing was difficult at first. Blood began to circulate through his legs. The leather boots and heavy denim jeans he wore gave him enough confidence to

blindly track through the tangles. He stomped metres and then turned back to the car.

Danny reached in and cut the ignition, flicking the headlights off. There was a calm and comfortable dimness that surrounded them. Bugs chirped. The sky almost mirrored the land in mats of luxuriant cloud morphing and jumbled as the earliest evening stars made an appearance. The moon was too low yet to really show any influence. In the pitch of this setting Danny felt his cousin ease too.

'I did promise your Mum, my Brother... Sorry we couldn't stop.'

Danny and Bull were both of 'Wakka Wakka' blood and had returned to the tribal country of their Wakka Wakka forebears. Bull's mother had seen the burial of too many Wakka Wakka kindred laid to rest in the Mission cemetery of sacred-red earth studded in white identical wooden crosses. The days of mourning and misery, misery and mourning, wave upon wave of Sorry business, no justice and no reckoning for the innocent and the wretched.

Danny stretched back into the car for a beige paper bag stamped 'PERSONAL PROPERTY' with the aid of a few remaining lights that flickered in the dashboard and the only light for miles around. He struggled to pull a flat container carefully away from the coupled garments and paperwork that some prison official had impersonally packaged.

'You all right there, Bull?' he gently whispered.

Firmly holding the container he stepped back into the grass and made trail upon the sodden growth. He moved about, the moisture of dusk gathering on the thickets until a clearing that gave access down into the folds of the land. Much motionless shadow and gullies beyond.

Danny paused and listened to his lush surroundings.

'Here we go... Cobber...' he said. His throat dumped a solemn *gulp.* He puffed out his chest and called out to Bull: *''Ere mate... You're home now!'*

Danny carefully snapped the lid on the container and assumed an odour would follow; a smell that may possibly illustrate some of the prison stench; damp cold concrete and 'WHITE OX' tobacco. Angst. The essence of what had become of his cousin, the ingredients of a man's life and pain. He let the ash sift before him into the night.

'There ya go, bud...'

Subtle breezes picked up the fine white powder and a rush of motion parted the grasses downhill and away. Little paper-winged moths flocked out of the growth and danced in the flow of Bull's departure. Danny saw fleeting seed lift from thickets, in unison with the clicks of tiny grasshoppers excitedly jumping into the dusk. Somewhere in the lower ridges a menagerie of bird noise erupted and a flowering bud of moonlight broke through cloud above the distant peaks of tree line. Bull's spiritual presence made small tumbling spirals that retreated into the shrub; finally at rest in playful communion with the country in the remains of the day. A pledge fulfilled.

'There ya go, Bull... There ya go... You're free...'

Danny and Bull... Bull and Danny... Amigos...

Roq and the Rabbit

Gay Lynch

Gay Lynch works adjunct to Flinders University, publishing essays, hybrid pieces, memoir, novels, papers and short stories. You can find her work in *Best Australian Stories*, *Bluestem Journal*, *Edições Humus Limitada*, *Island*, *Meanjin*, *Meniscus*, *Griffith Review*, *Westerly*, *TEXT*, and *Sleepers Almanac*.

Rosemary and garlic smells spring from the pan at my feet, levitate above my sill, and waft through my open window into the alley. I stick out my head and see Jack, hairy and shiny-eyed, about to lean across my sill.

'Something smells good,' he says. 'Gamey.' He takes out one earbud, twitches his nose, and slings his arm around my shoulders. Sideways hug. Jack's my main man but I never let him disrupt my habitus. I just raise my fist in salute. Then watch him lumber away down the alley, to his café next to the Salvos. He'll be tripping on Machine Head when they begin with gentle strings, then riff away into something thrashier and trashier. Dark, like us. On the gallery walls of my new place I have splashed and tagged, 'Cast off the shackles of the past / Live in the moment.' I sit down on my stool and poke at the meat again. Smoke drifts around the massive beams of the warehouse and out through a broken skylight. Once, I saved a rabbit. I bite my lip. Wait, do you want to know about the rabbit? Not cute. Not the vid-game. Not the toking, carrot-token snatcher.

Every morning, for two years, I go to Jack's place to sell *The Big Issue*. While there, I also read the café newspapers and warm up, check if a suspended coffee awaits me on the board. He and I like to watch Literary Agent Lanny—upper-case LAL—at work. Most weekdays her laptop and paper cover Table 4 while she plays host to other single cells. Protos that pay for her coffee and sometimes her rent.

When she meets new café patrons, LAL channels Artoo-Detoo: 'I am a literary agent; I am a literary agent. I am on the committee of everything important.'

Chillax. Her writers. Complicit. They'll do anything for her—*anything*—expect nothing. Listen to her. Lie for her. Lie down for her. Love her.

Most days, LAL cradles the phone against her cheek, rocking back and forth with joy, as if she has changed a submitter's life forever. Maybe she has. Maybe she promises to hook them up with a publisher, or maybe not. Maybe some of them feel like a smelly splotch of dog shit that rolls up under her feet—wastes her time. Jack calls what the agent does doublespeak. Neither of us gets how she makes bread and honey, boodle, guac. Power comes from permission to print. Okay. That's her story. People want it. We don't buy it.

My creativity is way more complex. Because of LAL, *and* my father who disparages my lack of production, I decide to write. Not wanky write, like wearing a badge: **I am a writer**. Not talking, talking—joining a 5,000-strong choir singing 'Aspirational Diktat'. Just, you know, having a go. Maybe, I'll become famous. Maybe not. Constructing my first sentence in billable time is a complete headfuck. It has to be good. *Very* good. Otherwise, why bother? Why risk disrespect, dished out by LA Lanny. I google the best way into a new narrative—voice and mood—so variable, depending on my friend Dr Zoloft, and whether I adjust the dose properly for alcohol and weight gain.

Every night, when I reach for UHT milk to pour onto my Cocoa Buds, I read my first sentence aloud—shift a comma, switch a simile, detonate the whole thing into fragments—and return it better expressed to the magnet on the rainwater booster box. Then rip another sentence from Bourdieu. Turn it inside out. 'Habitus is not fatal.' Found text. But then I insert too many subordinate clauses. Lose control. My sentence falls off the pressure tank. For three days, I forget about my artistic capital, my Bigflip into the literary game and go off on a crying jag.

Elle finds me cracking a sad on the edge of the tunnel. Thank Gaia she has already booked her bus ticket to Surrey Hills and her new squat. Leaving me with a roof over my head, near an entrance to the Darkie Tunnel. Her old squat and she'll be back. I'm her caretaker. She says. *Our s*pace. She says. But I own the padlock; recycled toxic groundwater; disused plant clutter. I know. You want to hear about the rabbit.

I don't make up crazy shit. It's LAL's own fault I take her out at 10am in front of Jack's café: 120 kilos of gravitas, plus skateboard, slicing through the pall of car emissions that hover over us like stale farts. Six *Big Issue*s tucked under my arm, I stop her in her tracks. Stop her babbling on her phone without a glance fore or aft, focused on her illegally parked Volkswagen, as she barges onto the pavement. Feel sorry for *me*, filled with fright, freaked out, trying to bail, in minus half a second. Nothing to do with me being an Am. Just fucking impossible scenario.

I drop in, can't avoid her but swerve a bit, hit the tin fence next to the café, jam my hip trying to elongate the time between slam and fall. In the

chaos that ensues, a white rabbit startles from her Frida Kahlo tote bag. She relinquishes its silken lead and cannonballs through the air; hits the verandah balustrade and crumples in an untidy floral heap on the tiles. The rabbit scarpers. My thoughts leap ahead like the little lapin. I don't know if Jack knows about the tote pet.

Straight up, the agent pushes herself onto her knuckles like an angry primate, but her left arm collapses. I look deep into her eyes and then away, embarrassed. Does she know about me? That I write? Her screeching draws a lot of attention. Me? Super keen for someone to capture the bunny before a car squishes it flat. Brakes screech. Jack moves out from behind the counter to hold the door for the freelance proto flurrying past. In haste, he drops his porn sudoku.

All my mags flutter onto the footpath. At least today the agent can't pretend me away, or worse, smile and say '*I'm* sorry. *I'm* sorry. I have *no* money... I've *never* had money.' For someone giving out so much good and bad oil on the blower it sounds bloody strange. We all know who, apart from the protos, pays for *her* coffee and kimchee salad. Alf and Sadie, my mainly estranged tax-paying parents, provide her dole and add-ons. I can sell *The Big Issue* because it's okay to help people. Mother thinks she knows the real reason but she's wrong, wrong, wrong. I, Roq, have money but disavow parting with it because it could mess up *my* dole and because I cannot be sure under what conditions my parents earned it.

So, the rabbit saga. I scoop up the bunny and retreat. From a distance, I see that the accident has completely thrown LAL, lying flat on her back like a salamander. From some distance, arms folded, Jack watches. LAL groans. A freelance proto uplifts her from behind and seesaws her into a BMW, bloodying her Salvo skirt. Neither Jack nor I speak, in case we say something inappropriate. LAL is decisive with relationships: we witness tears, FB unfriendings and shouting. But we try to stay on her good side. One day, we too, may crave publication.

I hold up the rescued rabbit, making sure she sees it through the passenger window. She nods.

I nod.

She skews her head and the car takes off.

Rabbit blood fills my pocket. I limp inside.

Jack has an extraordinary ability to talk about weather as if he cares. I, Roq, accept the talking-about-the-weather price of a cup of coffee and lurch straight in: flood or fire, heat wave or blizzard, unusual weather events or cli-terror. It's safer and more ethical than begging. This day, I watch his face, hoping to divine the availability of said suspended coffee.

We have a system of nods, of coming forward, and retreating when the café is busy. Is an accident currency? Even more than usual, I need caffeine. Crave it. I sit on the long stool at the back of the room where I hold court with no-one. I read the newspaper. I dab the rabbit's blood with a soon-soggy serviette.

'How goes your morning so far?' Jack usually asks as he places the coffee in front of me. But this day he acts a little cool. Then winks. Ah. We mustn't talk about the agent. There are spies. I hum. I rock onto the balls of my feet and back. The protos throw pre-emptive glares. The rabbit lets out a shrill whistle beneath my coat. Jack looks down. I become double or nothing on his nuisance radar. I gently squeeze the bunny and then ease up as blood swells in my pocket and drips onto the floor. 'Bloody terrible,' I offer, instead of the usual 'Very well thank you, a few of my projects look like progressing.'

'You are a funny one.' He scratches his belly. 'What happened out there?'

Silence descends. I am poleaxed. The protos stare at me until I think I might sick up. I shimmy the blood puddle with my toe. Imagine pop slamming the tail of my board into the floor. Surely the *Big Issue* people can't expect me, and my PTSD, to stand outside in the cold holding an injured rabbit. At this thought, my heart swells with normalcy. I lift my hand to my brow. When Jack gives up on me and goes behind the counter, I whisper into the rabbit's fur, 'I'm taking you to the vet, kiddo.' I am fairly certain LAL won't come back to so-called work for a while.

That I have rescued a rabbit will excite, surprise and distress Elle. Once I told her cheap meat kept me alive and she wrinkled her little nose. Morphed her whole beautiful face into Pepe the Frog. I always forgot about her militant veganism. But Elle forgave me, and sold me her skateboard because... I don't know why. I think too about why I bought her home brew, and how she needed to go to Sydney. She's not really my friend; I just like her.

Home I go, the rabbit trapped in the inside pocket of my coat, six *Big Issue*s under one arm—four sold to a proto who turns up late for her coffee-consultation with the agent and decides to cash in on some social capital. Will she sell them on? Jack passes me on the way out. In my warehouse, fortified by coffee, I make the little lapin—he/she/it—a bed in an old doll's pram and tuck a jumper around its matted, furry body. I have neither the time nor the inclination to sex a rabbit, just to avoid pronoun-antecedent gender problems and, before dark descends, I want to read *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*—retrieved from the Salvos' dump bin on the way past.

On the very first page of the book, I find I can't concentrate. Paranoia speeds up my heartbeat. Choking on my own saliva becomes a real possibility. I run through a few parental double binds until my breathing settles. I try not to contemplate the obvious dangers of living in a condemned factory: falling asleep on a candle, lighting up oil drums and containers crammed with carcinogens; suffering an infarct. I refuse a random, anonymous death like fake people on the front pages of newspapers. To calm myself I pat the rabbit, which I have named Doxa. It backs up in the pram so that only its twitchy nose remains visible. It sniffs at the water I offer in a rusted lid and its jumper slowly turns into Crimson Lake, my favourite Derwent pencil colour. I have no nuance. No cues for care. I strive only to individuate myself as a good person. What else can I do?

I hyperventilate. By page three, I still cannot concentrate. Words swirl in my brain like boiler smoke. I listen to my body. I survive only by inviting distractions. I run with the bunny in my arms to the vet surgery. At the counter, I lift it out and place its face close to mine.

Marbled eyes look steadfastly back, pink mouth trembles. A low grinding sound comes from the back of its throat. Bloody drool runs from its mouth. The vet whisks it backstage and I hide in the waiting room, behind a magazine—silly title, circa 1976.

The receptionist, trapped in a laminated ark, won't take my complaint seriously that the reading material is out of date.

'Animal liberationists steal them,' she parries. 'Why don't you go home? We'll call you when we know what's wrong with bunny.' Her physiognomy resembles that of an inbred Setter and I lose confidence in the impending rabbit prognosis.

Curled up on the mezzanine floor at home, indecision cripples me again. Hunger growls inside me. It breaches my scaffolded independence plan. Trumps it. I ring my mother, who agrees to leave a board meeting at the gallery and collect me. Firstly, she is a sucker for an animal story, secondly, she's writing her memoir and—gold, wild, real power—I tell her about LA Lanny. At all costs, I think, I must avoid describing the unregulated way the woman runs her business, or Mother will take her on as a personal project. And joyfully tap her credit card for her too. Not wishing to risk self-loathing, I go quiet when Mother arrives.

Twice that eventful week I walk to the café. No-one has heard from LAL—that irresponsible caregiver. I trudge home to wait for the vet to call. I wait and wait. Eventually she rings. The rabbit is fucked but for two thousand dollars she will perform a miracle. Does she mean organ transplants? Twenty hours of surgery, two teams and no dinner breaks? I bring the rabbit home. Two days later I notice the poor thing has passed—mainly because of the stink and blowflies twirling inside the pram.

Five days after the accident, hunched over soy coffee at the café, I see LAL slide into her shopfront office. I focus on her single finger, pounding harder than ever on her iPad. Someone has tied her left arm in a tie-dyed sling. She looks up, over and away, from invisible me. I am barely a blip on her radar. Ask about the fucking rabbit, I think. So, nothing.

A timid girl with tight orange curls sits beside her—possibly a work experience high school student or underemployed postgraduate—trying to right a wobbling tower of manuscripts.

LAL rolls her eyes at the little orange person, shuffling paper on the table beside her. 'No-one wants to read this stuff,' she offers.

'Poor you. I'll weed a few out then, shall I?'

The phone rings. 'If you want me to represent you,' the agent enunciates in its vicinity, 'you must stop writing crap, Dan.' Hits the button. A bead of perspiration forms on her upper lip.

'Who makes *our* decisions?' asks the girl. Good question.

'I am the literary agent. I decide everything.' LAL tips her head on one side, suddenly coy. 'That's the beauty of running your own business.'

I retreat to my table to decide what to do about the dead rabbit's vet bill.

The proto-freelancer arrives, throws down her keys to the beamer, and kisses the agent, their relationship now cemented by the accident. Jack says the freelancer has always been free with him, but LAL likes to lance her too. My analyst will not like me finding this funny. Then the proto surprises the café with a published series and lays individual books out on the agent's table: 'I Like Red', 'I Like Blue', 'I Like Green', and many others. For all I know she works the full rainbow range.

LAL sighs.

What can anyone say? Ephiphanot? Empathy for the freelancing freelancer lights up my supramarginal gyrus.

'Well done,' is what LAL eventually says.

'Thank you so much.' The freelancer presses on. 'Darling, what a trial to work with your arm in a sling.'

'Love you so much,' the agent cries. 'Well done, YOU. I'm in a mood. Manuscripts arrive at the post office in truckloads. Some of their creators… can't write a sentence.' She resumes pounding on her keyboard. 'It is just so horrible to reject my friends. Up to now I've made a point of working only with people I like.'

Goddamn, I, Roq, can write a sentence. Had Father not drummed it into me in primary school—a sentence is a noun and a finite verb. I experiment with eye contacting LAL.

The freelancer, weary from affirmation, moves to the bar to order coffee. LAL slides off to the loo and I lean sideways to lift one of the manuscripts from her pile. By the time she returns, powder blizzarding her nose, I have read the first ten pages and they *are* pretty torrid. I've corrected grammar and spelling. Random checked for stupidity. I stand up and bang my backside against her table. In the kerfuffle, her slush pile capsizes, and I replace the annotated manuscript, note enclosed:

> Dear, Dear Submitter,
> A paucity of ideas can be more fatal than a few typos. Try not to hit your subject with a sledgehammer. Never mind conveying so many feelings. This is abnormal illness behaviour. Most editors would consider using 'nice' 129 times excessive. Write another 160,000 words. Or send us a new novel in a different genre. There's not much to like about this one / there's something we like about this one? We like to leave things open.
> Cheers,
> Ed.

For several days I use this modus operandi while trying to decide about calling the RSPCA about the rabbit. Then I round on LAL. 'You must be worried about your pet?'

She tilts her head and pouts. 'The barista told me…'

'His name is Jack.'

She sighs. 'Yes, yes. Jack told me that you cut your knee when we collided… and I dropped my pet.' She knows me.

I wait for her apology. None forthcoming. 'I bled a lot. I ruined a good coat.'

She throws her head like a flighty pony. 'As you can see, I came off worse…' She stands up and moves to the window where she begins to pace.

Is she daft? I struggle out of my chair, scoop up my *Big Issue*s and step into her path. Her pashmina swirls. She flicks me with its tassels.

'What about the rabbit?'

'Oh, do you have him?'

'Not bloody good enough.' I feel *very* upset. Not only on the rabbit's behalf. My throat constricts. Only Elle understands me. And she hardly knows me.

'I bought the rabbit for my kids,' LAL said. 'Thought I was paying it off but, *apparently*, I'm leasing it.'

'Your rabbit is a shitter.' I wheeze a bit. 'He hides. He eats soft furnishings. He has destroyed the ambience of my home.' I feel like a real writer. Making stuff up.

'I'm thinking of switching to a cat,' she says. 'More interesting. All my writers own cats.'

Yawn. 'And what about dead birds? Small marsupials?'

She cocks one eye at me as if she is channelling them.

'I took your rabbit to the vet,' I add.

'I'm sorry if you got stuck with the bill.'

OMFG. Badly brought up, Mother will say. Never speak about money. Always pay your way.

'What do you do, Roq?'

'I work as a visual clearance officer. When I'm well.'

'But the windows are filthy,' she throws counter-wards, seeking Jack's attention.

Childish emotions rise in my throat. Respiration shuts down. Overheated, I slump to the floor.

After Jack serves me a consoling almond latte, he walks me down the alley. Slides some hesh into my pocket. 'Sesh at the park after dark?'

'I don't go there. Druggies.' I hang my head.

He kisses me on the cheek. Sideways squeeze.

The following day I edit two more manuscripts while LAL lectures someone on the footpath. With fulsome praise, I mark up one of mine and slide it onto the smallest pile. Suggest a five-grand advance. A bidding-war. Then I leave. Over the week, I edit a lot of other stories until she twigs. I play hard like I do in cribbage. We don't talk about the rabbit, but she asks me to do her work. She fobs off questions about contracts and starting salary, looks angry when I ask for a living wage. I think about the freelancer and her series. Perhaps, in a few years, the agent will take *my* book to a publisher. It'll be a small print run but if I keep going like this, I'll be pushing mongo.

As usual, Mother and I attend Writers Week. Well, I meet her there on my skateboard. Does she know that *I write*? NA. An international publisher invites people from the audience to pitch their book proposal and Mother glides up to the mic. I recognise her chapter synopses from her submission to LAL just before the publishers humiliate her.

'What makes you think people would want to read about that?' one of them crows.

'We pick one manuscript in every 10,000 this way,' says another.

They have lured her for their pleasure. They attack her idea on all sides. They bat their eyes at each other. Mother retreats, confused. Takes her seat. Her head droops over her box bag.

I feel a panic attack coming on her behalf and make a huge fuss leaving my seat, all 120 kilos of critical mass.

I march between the audience and the podium shouting, 'Fuck all Writing. *Upper Case*. **Bold**.' I turn.

Mother sits up. I decode her look. 'You are too old to be a child prodigy now, Roq. And you have only embarrassed yourself.' Then I skate away towards the river.

Out of her sight, my chin trembles. Will she tell Father?

I turn my phone to silent.

I stop speaking to my mother.

I increase my Zoloft.

I Darkslide near the tunnel a lot.

I don't think Mother wants to speak to me either.

The sun shines through the broken skylight. I stoke up my little campfire and arrange sheets of newspaper on my lap. Fat drips through the grid onto the sheet of corrugated iron beneath it. In mystical reverie, I lift a chunk of charred loin halfway to my chin. The week-old meat tastes tender. The rubbery legs exude an antiseptic smell. I slop hot juice. Over and over, I remember everything and how it happened: how I love Jack's darksomeness, how he tries to shock me, talking about dog fights, alt-right culture jamming and Fiji Water, and how I became a writer. I remember other good things. I remember bad things. I remember good manners. Elle taught me to thank people who challenge me. They make me a better person.

When she gets back, I'll tell her I'm the top *Big Issue* seller for March and that they're publishing my story.

'The one under the magnet on the pipe?' she'll tease.

'Do you want to read it? *Literally*?'

'*Absolutely*.'

Elle understands me. When our memes ripen, we'll take over LAL's means of production.

Verge

Peri Dwyer Worrell

Peri Dwyer Worrell has a keen appreciation of diversity, tolerance, and taking no crap from anyone. After thirty years as a physician, Peri expatriated to Latin America, where she writes and edits.

Fascinated and repelled
By the black-bug dots
In the centre of the poppy,

The child wants an explanation
Of a question she cannot frame
And cannot forget.

western district
Michaela Keeble

Michaela Keeble is an Australian writer living in Aotearoa with her partner and three kids. She mainly writes press releases about climate change, but her poetry and fiction are also published online and in print, including in *Southerly*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Not Very Quiet*, *Cicerone*, *Mimicry*, *Capital*, *Turbine* and *CommunityLore*. Her poems have been anthologised in the *Poems in the Waiting Room* series and the Caselberg Trust anthology, *The Unexpected Greenness of Trees*.

that old horse had no interest
being ridden

I had to kick him
out the gate

untalented, unable
to communicate

I kicked him up
the long farm driveway

five kilometres of gravel
gumtrees, silence

I'd turn his head
at the end of the road

he'd run for home

that's why I did it
over and over again

for the hold on, half out
of the saddle, unfixed

who was more stubborn
who more oppositional

I still haven't learned
the lesson

nor Dad
at the paddock gate

giving in
to his earthly grief

howling
holding on

to a girl who could not
hold him up

Bunny

Tanya Vavilova

Tanya Vavilova is an emerging writer preoccupied with liminal spaces and outsider perspectives—by life on the margins. Her debut collection of essays, *We Are Speaking in Code*, is forthcoming from Brio in early 2020. She recently won the Carmel Bird Digital Literary Award for her short story capsule *Grub*.

A lone streetlight in the distance, the stars big and bright. Not city stars. These ones twinkled like in the nursery rhyme. My backpack was filled with too many books and too few warm clothes. I'd never learnt to pack properly and, let's face it, probably never would.

When a ute, headlights blazing, came careening down the street, I hid in the undergrowth. Old habit. It turned left at the bend and, after a while, I flicked the leaves out of my hair and kept going.

The trees—I didn't know their names—were squat in autumnal hues or else tall and trim with branches spreading out like mushroom caps. I always wanted to live in a tree house, a cabin closer to the sky, away from everyone. These trees were perfect for it.

I took my time getting to the house. No-one was waiting for me. Except maybe the rabbit. I tried to remember if I'd ever seen a rabbit in real life before. Once. A girl on crutches. We weren't friends, not really, but she invited me to her party and, as we were sitting in the living room, she brought out this cartoonish bunny—white, big and fluffy—the size of an overfed cat. I can't remember if I patted it.

Turning into Nettle Street, I shone my torch on a few letterboxes before finding the right one: number 12. Helen had left a light on inside. She told me she'd leave the key under the linen in the laundry. I crunched up the gravel drive and unlatched the side gate. The garden was all shadows: long-limbed trees and sheds, discarded furniture. I tripped over some steps and landed with a thud.

'Hello?' a voice called from the back door.

I froze.

'You must be the rabbit-sitter.' The woman was silhouetted in the dark. Small, bird-like, gentle. 'I'm Kate, Helen's sister.'

I exhaled and introduced myself. 'I'm sorry I um… didn't expect anyone else to be home.'

'Don't apologise. Helen doesn't *exactly* know I'm here.'

She took my bag and ushered me in. Under the bare bulb in the kitchen, her face was pale and freckly. A halo of ginger hair. She looked just like Helen.

'Have you been here before?'

I shook my head. Helen was my brother's friend.

The living room was an amusement park for rabbits. A large hutch, cardboard-box-warrens with interconnecting tunnels, fresh hay, shredded newspaper, dandelions and clover, chew-toys. Watching me look around, Kate said, laughing, 'I don't know why she doesn't just get a dog, like everyone else.'

I wondered how close the sisters were.

'Helen left some mulled wine in the fridge. You want me to microwave you a mug?' she asked.

I noticed her lips were stained purple.

'Sure.'

Where was the rabbit? New people, loud noises. I'd read somewhere that they can die of shock.

'Make yourself comfortable,' Kate called from the kitchen.

I flicked on a lamp in the shape of Saturn. Picking a spot closest to the fireplace, I stared into the flames. I'd been looking forward to being alone. Months of sleeping on friends' couches, I was sick of it.

Kate and I sat opposite each other with mugs of steaming wine. The spicy scent of cloves and oranges reminded me of my first winter away. One of the women, really we were *girls* then, made mulled wine on the old stove. *Extra Cointreau*, she'd said, *just because.* We got very drunk. That was the first night I felt like I was being watched. They found me outside with my clothes off.

'Where's Bunny?'

'Probably in one of his warrens. He's shy of strangers, it took him two days to get used to me.'

It struck me that I wasn't needed here.

Kate shook her head. 'Stay. I knew Helen was going away and had someone coming to look after Bunny. I'm glad it's you.'

I wondered what she meant by *that.* Had someone sent her? I pushed the thought away.

Setting me up on the fold-out couch next to one of Bunny's hay-filled warrens, she apologised for taking Helen's room. *At least you'll be warm here, by the fire.* She warned me that Bunny might make a bit of noise at night. 'I hope you're not a light sleeper.'

'No,' I lied.

'Oh and don't leave books or cords or anything on the couch—Bunny shreds everything.' Her eyes twinkled. 'Like the Stasi.'

She closed the baby gate and tiptoed down the hall.

I breathed out.

I couldn't picture them as sisters. Helen was highly strung, always stressed about one thing or another, awkward, but Kate, Kate was chatty, happy, at ease. They had similar looks and a similar laugh, that was it. A bit like my brother and me.

When a car barrelled past outside, I held my breath. Old habit. 'No-one is after me,' I said aloud and then worried that Kate had heard me. 'No-one is after me,' I repeated quietly.

Lying down on the rug in front of the fire, I waited for Bunny. I willed my body still, my mind calm. I breathed in and out. When he finally peeked out from under a box, I saw that he was brown with a white chest. I let him sniff my feet, my legs, my torso, my arms, my hair, but when I leaned over to stroke his fur, he darted away. I changed into my flannels and got under the covers, sending the couch springs squeaking. Falling asleep, I realised that, although I was allergic to cats and dogs, I did not seem to be allergic to bunnies. It seemed like a good omen.

I woke up to him tipping over a ceramic bowl onto the floorboards. 'I'm sorry,' Kate said, glancing up from the floor where she sat with Bunny. 'Didn't mean to wake you.'

I smiled sleepily.

The mornings were my best times; moments of clarity before the bad thoughts started crowding in.

'He's looking for the dandelions at the bottom. He eats those first then the clover, grass, lettuce before everything else.' She paused. 'Did you sleep okay?'

Kate was gone the rest of the day. *Heading into town*, she'd said, *for errands*. I always wondered what people actually did when they said *that.* No-one really went to the post office or bank anymore. So what did they do? I fumbled with the Aeropress, worrying about splashing hot water everywhere. Helen's coffee beans were fair trade and organic. She even had a milk frother, one of those Nescafé thingies—but I couldn't be bothered. On the couch, I stretched out and grabbed Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* from the bottom of my bag. At one point, the rabbit hopped onto my legs and started chewing the tassels of the blanket. He flinched when I leaned over to pat him and leaped under the couch. I kept reading.

When I came back from having a shower, my book was in tatters. Shreds of white paper all over the room. Bunny was nowhere to be seen.

Fuck. I found the dustpan behind the fridge and got down on my knees. A quarter of the book was in ragged strips. I picked up a scrap from between the couch cushions. *The streetcar is muggy with twice-breathed air and the smell of wool. Cordelia sits with nonchalance, nudging me with her elbow.* I could smell the two friends, the passengers on the tram. Here, in the living room, earth mixed with smoke.

I circled the room on my hands and knees, picking up loose sheets of paper. That's how Kate found me, kneeling on the floor with the dustpan.

'He likes classics more'—she pointed at Bunny who'd come out from his hidey-hole—'Helen didn't talk to him for three days after he chewed up her Proust.' She walked over to the bookshelves where some loose pages had settled and picked them up.

'I didn't know Helen read Proust.' I didn't know anyone who'd read Proust.

A few pages had landed by the fireplace.

'Let's save these for kindling,' Kate said.

I emptied the dustpan and came to sit beside her. She smelt of pine and milk. A coffee drinker too then. I realised the pine scent was familiar; Kate was helping herself to her sister's perfume. She held the remains of the book in her hands. The torn pages reminded me of the fight Damien and I had just before I left for good. The one where he called me *a little cunt* and tore my paperbacks in half. I knew he was looking for me.

Kate asked if I felt like ordering pizza.

'I can't really afford it.'

It was true. I wasn't getting any shifts at the deli.

'That's okay,' she said. 'It's on me.'

I listened to her gentle lilt on the phone. 'Yes thanks... Yep... cash... Yep, yep... See you soon.'

She poured the rest of the mulled wine into a small saucepan and turned on the stove. 'We might as well finish it,' she said. She asked me about my name. 'Jewel, now where is *that* from?'

'My parents were hippies.' From experience, I knew that was a good answer to just about anything. People thought they 'got' me the moment I said that. The truth was that I'd given myself that name. My parents had actually called me *Olivia*.

I fiddled with the fridge magnets—Australiana themed—and asked Kate what brought her to Helen's.

'I guess there's no reason for me to lie, is there?' she said, pulling up a chair. 'My girlfriend left—I cheated on her, I'm broke, I had the spare key to Helen's place. That's about it really. What brings you here?'

I shrugged. 'Bunny?'

'Helen doesn't pay you, does she?'

'Just train fare.'

'So then?'

'You're gonna think I'm crazy,' I said, which is what every crazy person says, 'but I feel like someone's after me… It's hard to explain. I like to keep moving.' I refilled our mugs with mulled wine and kept talking. 'I have to talk myself out of these thoughts. It's like a glitch in my brain.'

Kate nodded.

She seemed to radiate serenity, which made me think of the *Black Books* episode where Manny swallows *The Little Book of Calm* and becomes more or less Jesus. Kate would be Mary.

We ate the cheesy pizza on the floor in front of the fire. Half veggie, half four-cheese. It was creamy and salty and fatty—perfect. Also, it was the first thing I'd eaten all day. My stomach churned with the effort of digesting.

'Look.'

Bunny had flopped onto the carpet.

'That means he wants company,' she said. 'You wanna pat him?'

I stroked his back cautiously at first then I touched his ears, his face. His fur was soft and silky. It reminded me of something.

'He loves that,' Kate said.

As I continued to stroke his fur I realised with horror that the coat I wore in Sydney was made of rabbit pelts. How many bunnies made a coat? Humans were awful, weren't we? I knew there were aliens out there; they'd enslave us when they arrived, just like we enslaved those we considered weaker than us. I continued patting Bunny.

'What are you gonna do when Helen gets back?' she asked.

I'd forgotten we were having a conversation. *Glassy eyes*, Damien liked to tease, but then later he'd shout, *You fucking crazy cunt.*

'There's a website for couch surfers,' I explained. 'People want company, stories, entertainment basically. I want a free bed—or couch.' I asked what her plans were.

'I'm hoping Helen will let me stay here for a while. I could help with Bunny, with the house. I don't really know.' Her words sped up, stumbled over each other. 'Although actually Helen likes her space, I don't think she'd be keen on her little sister mooching about—or mooching off her. What's the expression?'

'I think the Brits use "mooching about" to describe loitering, but the Americans use "mooching" to mean getting something for nothing; *you know*, scabbing.'

'That sounds right.'

We watched the rabbit bunny hop across the room.

The term *bunny hop* made me think of taking gymnastics at the local Y. You'd put your hands on the ground in front of you and kick up your bent legs, just like a rabbit. I quit when I hit puberty—it was too awkward in skin-tight leotards.

'They don't live very long,' Kate was saying. 'One to two years in the wild. Longer if they're indoor pets. Seven to ten years then I think… They have nearly 360-degree vision. A blind spot in front of their nose, isn't that funny?'

I kept missing fragments of our conversation. My neurons were fizzing like rock candy. I wanted Kate to leave, to be left alone. And then I remembered something I heard on telly once. 'It's probably poor form to mention this in front of Bunny'—he was munching on dry pellets—'but if you're starving and eat rabbit you'll actually die faster from starvation that you would otherwise.'

'Why?'

'The meat's too lean. Not much by way of nutrients or fat, just protein. Your body uses up too much energy digesting it.'

We both looked at Bunny.

'You ever eaten rabbit?' she asked.

I shook my head.

'Me neither,' she said, then added, 'I mean, it's not out of the question.'

She yawned and said she'd take a shower. Actually what she said was, 'I'm gonna hop in the shower.' I wondered why we used the verb *hop* in this context. We didn't say, *I'll hop to the shops*, we said, *I'll pop down to the shops*. I poured myself some more wine to crush these and other pointless thoughts.

As I was getting ready for bed, I found a stray strip of paper under a chair. *But I began then to think of time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of the other.* I thought of fortune cookies then, breaking them open, reading the coated slip of paper. Prophecies of love or fortune. Here in *Cat's Eye*, a reflection on the nature of time, memory. I pictured Helen reading Proust and eating madeleines. That's all I knew of Proust: the madeleines.

Near dawn, the rabbit jumped on and off the sofa bed a few times. Up, down, up, down. The springs squeaked. He probably missed Helen. I rolled over to face the wall and covered my head with the pillow like they do in the movies.

• • •

We settled into a routine. When Bunny heard me stir in the morning, he'd bound up to me for a pat. I took care of his litter tray; I mixed the wet and dirty bits around, and added fresh litter from the bag. I dropped a handful of fresh hay into his hutch and topped up his dry pellets. I changed his water bowl, which occasionally had some poo sunk at the bottom. A goose-down jacket hung on the back door and I'd put it on before squatting in the dewy grass outside, plucking clover and dandelions for his breakfast. I would open the curtains to let in the morning sun. Afterwards I'd have a long, hot shower that steamed up the tiny bathroom. *Be careful*, Kate had warned, *there's no temperature valve.* I liked the heat, the limitlessness of it. While she went off to run errands or meet friends, I read my books. I went for short walks, which avoided busy roads and people, and circled back to the fibro cottage before the light faded. I picked more dandelions for Bunny. I read some more and napped on the couch.

•••

Kate waltzed in, arms heavy with shopping. Her hair was tucked under a hand-knitted beanie. 'I feel like a local already,' she said. 'Actually, I think folks might be confusing me for Helen.'

I told her that people had stared at me on my walk.

'Sometimes it just feels that way,' she said.

She unpacked the groceries and offered a commentary of what she'd bought. Sardines, baked beans, pasta, zucchini, broccoli, mandarins. Coffee filters.

'Here, Bunny will love this,' she said, handing me a thumb-sized piece of banana.

I put it down on the floor and watched as he sniffed the air. He lolloped towards the wedge of yellow, licked it then took tiny bites. His scut, an irresistible white pom-pom.

'It's a rare treat for him,' Kate said. 'Helen says it's like chocolate for a toddler, bad for digestion. A little is okay though.'

What I needed was a dog, not a rabbit. On my walks, I'd passed barking beasts behind tall fences or straining at their leads. Everything from Jack Russells to German Shepherds. Bunny was adorable but easily startled. When my phone rang, he'd freeze or bolt. If I accidentally scraped a chair on the floor, same thing. He was petrified of *everything.* A prey animal, which is what *I* felt like a lot of the time.

He'd left a button of banana on the carpet.

Kate was telling me she'd met up with an old friend for coffee today. A musician friend, someone full of opinions and self-importance. 'I'm looking for work and he has connections.'

I told her I understood.

'He said he'd keep his ears open, but I don't believe him.'

I said I had people in my life like that too.

Bunny, now having finished the banana, scrabbled around in his litter tray, spraying paper pellets in all directions.

'Oh, buddy.' Kate laughed. 'You're getting poo on the rug.'

We monitored his droppings daily. Helen had warned that a day without pooping constituted a medical emergency for a rabbit.

'You know, rabbits have two different types of poo?' she'd said on the phone. 'One type you rarely see because they eat it straight from their anus.'

I told Helen to stop talking or I'd gag.

'God, looking for work is tough,' Kate said.

'I went for an interview at a bookshop last week,' I said, 'and they asked if I had postgrad qualifications. When I asked what the shifts would look like, the matriarch told me it was just "cleaning and tidying on a repetitive basis".'

Kate laughed. 'Get out.' She told me her barista back home has a PhD in anthropology.

Bunny flopped onto his side, nose twitching.

'I have a Tinder date tonight,' Kate announced. 'It could be a dud. Let's face it, probably will be. When was the last time anyone went on a good Tinder date?'

I told her I'd never used Tinder, it made me too paranoid. People weren't who they said they were. They were shorter, fatter, older than they said they were. They also lied about their jobs, talents, hobbies. It was fraudulent and also dangerous.

While Kate was out, I made a vegetable soup. A big batch that we could eat over a couple of days. Going back and forth between the kitchen and living room, I'd somehow left the baby gate open and Bunny took his chance. 'You sneaky bastard, get back there.' I knew he could chew through an electrical cord in seconds.

He stood on his hind legs and sniffed the air, then he crawled on his belly towards the fridge before pressing his face against the back door. That's where his dandelions grew. 'You won't survive long out there.' I coaxed him back into the living room with some rocket leaves from the crisper.

I sat down on the floor with him and ate my soup. When my phone rang, we both jumped. It was a private number. We huddled by the bookcase, me, eating soup, and him, sniffing my feet.

•••

On the last night before Helen arrived home, Kate and I sprawled on the floor, drinking cups of peppermint tea. I was stroking Bunny's silky ears which were flopped back. 'From this angle,' I said, looking at his ears joining into a beak, 'he looks just like a duck.'

Kate told me about a study. Kids shown the duck-rabbit illusion around Easter time were more likely to see a rabbit first.

We seemed to have fallen down the same rabbit holes. And for the first time, I understood what that expression meant. Rabbits tunnel, creating labyrinths under the earth; no matter where they start, they end up somewhere else and probably far away.

Kate was telling me about her ex.

'... too soon to call her my ex?' She grimaced. 'When she worked at the gallery, she had to stand in the corner, watching people coming and going, saying "don't touch that" all day. She wanted to be an *artiste*. As if any of us liked our jobs.'

I told her about Damien. About my feelings of being hunted, and not just by him. I have trouble going outside, I confessed. 'Even though I know that no-one knows me here in the mountains.'

Kate asked what I thought was going on.

She hadn't heard of the condition when I named it.

'It's not *exactly* schizophrenia,' I said.

I had actually been held hostage once, but the rest, all those other delusions—the strange looks, long-limbed shadows, suspicious cars—were tacked onto that long-ago nightmare.

Bunny jumped between our leg, bright little hops.

'He's happy.'

'I'm jealous of him,' Kate said, laughing. 'I don't think I could actually stay here, even if Helen let me, which she probably won't. I'd be too resentful of the rabbit.'

We brushed our teeth together, spitting globs of toothpaste down the drain. That night we both slept on the sofa bed with Bunny between us. I heard him sneeze a few times before falling asleep.

• • •

When Helen opened her front door, she saw us in her living room. 'Hi! Well this is a surprise, Kate'—and turning to me—'Hey, Jewel! How's it going?'

Her face and hands were cold from the walk when I stood up to hug her.

'How was Bunny?'

We told her about his random bunny hops, bellyflops, midair twists. About feeding him nine-dollar blueberries and picking dandelions from the neighbours' front lawns when we ran out here.

'He looks happy,' she said.

We asked her about her field trip, but Helen said she couldn't say much at this stage. 'Top secret blah-blah-blah,' she said. 'I can probably talk about it when it's no longer interesting and no-one cares.' She grinned.

While she had a bath, Kate and I talked about our plans.

'I'm catching the train to Penrith,' I told her. 'My cousin has a place there. She said I could stay for a bit.'

'Can I come with you?'

I stared at her.

She fidgeted. 'You'll barely notice me plus it's good to have a travel buddy. I can mind your bag while you go to the loo.'

I laughed. 'Is that all?'

'And other things.'

'What will you do in Penrith?' I asked.

'What will *you* do in Penrith?'

I told her about rumours that a panther still lurked in the area, but Kate couldn't be dissuaded. I realised I was glad.

As Helen was hugging us goodbye, a piece of paper fluttered out from behind the front door. *In my dreams of this city I am always lost.*

'Well,' Kate said, 'that feels prophetic,' but I didn't know what she meant.

'Be safe,' Helen said.

As we walked uphill towards the station in the half-light, I looked back twice but each time the road was empty. Kate tried to distract me. 'Look,' she said, pointing at two cockatoos making a racket on someone's roof. Proud and noisy birds. We watched as they shrieked and swooped, blurs of white, in the sky and up ahead.

Break, / 'the silent life-giver of worlds'[1]

after Frida Kahlo, Jeanette Winterson, and Ralph Waldo Emerson

Shari Kocher

Shari Kocher's *The Non-Sequitur of Snow* (Puncher & Wattmann) was shortlisted for the Anne Elder Award in 2015. Recent awards include the Venie Holmgren Poetry Prize, the University of Canberra Health Poetry Prize and Runner-up in the Newcastle Poetry Prize. She holds a doctoral degree from the University of Melbourne and works in a freelance, supervisory and remedial capacity.

Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*[2]

Each has a tone like cut glass.

I

Fine sand calibrates cut glass, and shrinks. What is tone? What is each? The St Andrew's spider corners a ricrac thread turned delicate. High to the waist in the place where the horses bolted. Once a cut snake teeming with paper boats and kids in tyres, all those slicked and muddy feet. Still a few shards left over. Grass that cuts like paper in spindles pinned with ticks: glassy grass in ricracs, almost a kind of loving. The devil you know. In a screw-top jar. Little bit not far. Clean as sand. Plain as mud. Sweet.

II

Panes of glass. Grass blowing. On the banks of the Todd in flood everything a psychedelic green with hints of yellow acidic. But I've got this wrong. The glass is smooth even though it moves slowly down the window one hundred years of loving past the present rate. Windows washed with water. Those microfibre-wonder-cloths that make the glass look clean when wet for half an hour, dry in streaks like finger painting: glass grown thin and thickened at the base, framed by boards soft-grained and holding tightly to bending straight. But I've got this wrong.

Think: water music. Think: fountains. Think: how do they keep the glass clean on all those pretty cake counters. I never felt cleaner covered in sand those forty days in a car beside her. Salt crusts the skin and catches the glass on fire. We brushed the flakes off and walked on water without the cake picking up the taste of disinfectant or rubber gloves or the paper they use to serve the pretty cakes on. I've got this wrong. I've got to keep things plain as mud.

III

Sappho, why is the moon rising in the upper corner of the triangle window at ten o'clock in the morning? I would have thought *I had a name, but I have forgotten it*[3]. Have I fed the cat? Has *anyone* fed the cat? The cat says *N-e-oow* convincingly.

The icy sluice lifts bare feet through mist, whose shortest of days glows briefly. Soft midday winter half-past noon and she writes to say she loves the impossible as Goethe does, that yearning for the impossible is quite possibly what she loves most in me quite. What for others might. Patience: how can I muster it. I might make a bust of it.

In clay.

Batteries, keys, glasses, cake.

Think: Kahlo. Think: Kit Kat.

Morning breaks, the friendly reds, the big blues, hands full of leaves, noisy birds, fingers in the hair, pigeons[4]. She is impossible. The cat had a name once, but I think she's forgotten it. The second cat's name is. She's a wild one, Sappho. *A main lesson of wisdom to know your own from another's*[5]. I think that's her second breakfast. I trust you to make. *Gladly we would anchor but the anchorage is quicksand*[6]. Water runs fiercely beneath. Breaking only to break. Out of glass. Which rivers dryly down the centuries and thickens. *The universe is the bride of the soul*[7]. Like chocolate. All the pretty cakes and all the pretty horses turning south. The icy river sluices bare feet plain and sweet. Today *my hands are sunk in oranges*[8], which the cloud-cobbled wind blows fresh off the mountain in a eucalypt blizzard. If wishes were horses *the particoloured wheel must revolve very fast to appear white*[9].

She writes to say the poets I am reading found god in female form the most perfect. Terrified of the ecstasy of whirling. She writes to say keep whirling. Your impossible is perfect. (The cosmic telegraph is working.) Snow flurries the orange blossoms my hands are sunk. Here the wind caps are wine cups, could almost be—what do you think a soul is made of? Cracks in the concrete, a wild mustard. Waterhole up the mountain nobody goes to. Long-time-little-bit not-far they put a fence around it. The deer always find a way through, though. And the ducks keep whirring their emeralds. Stray feathers float the broken pylons. Somebody is singing the country up there, somebody must be singing it. The water, I tell you, the water is surely alive.

Notes

1 Frida Kahlo. *The Diary of Frida Kahlo: an intimate self-portrait*. Abrams: New York, 2005 (1995). 217.
2 Jeanette Winterson. *Sexing the Cherry*. Vintage Books: London, 2014. 78.
3 ibid, 3.
4 Kahlo, op. cit.
5 Ralph Waldo Emerson. 'Experience' (Essays: Second Series), in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Brooks Atkinson. Intro. Mary Oliver. New York: Modern Library Paperback Edition, Random House, 2000. 324.
6 ibid, 312.
7 ibid, 322.
8 Kahlo, op. cit. 215–216.
9 Emerson, op. cit. 313.

'As My Great Day Approaches': Katharine Susannah Prichard in 1969

Nathan Hobby

Nathan Hobby is writing a biography of Katharine Susannah Prichard. It expands on his PhD thesis about her early life, which he recently completed at the University of Western Australia. His novel, *The Fur*, won the T. A. G. Hungerford Award.

In the archives, after a life in black and white, Katharine Susannah Prichard bursts into colour at the end of her life. The ten minute home video lingers reverentially over the white-haired woman. It captures her doing ordinary things at her home in Greenmount in the hills of Perth—writing at her desk, standing outside her writing cabin, posing in front of a blooming wattle bush in her garden, drinking tea on her verandah with friends. All through it she is talking, talking, talking, but her words are lost; there is no sound. Usually things are the other way around—all words and no visuals.

Near the end is a scene which belongs at the beginning: Katharine standing on the driveway, opening the gate as if to invite us in. It cuts to a scene of her showing a copy of her thirteenth and final novel, *Subtle Flame,* and then, shockingly, a procession is following a hearse through the gates of Karrakatta Cemetery. Just as she seems so alive, she's snatched away from us again.

She's been gone fifty years now, this chronicler of the people and places of the backblocks of Australia. She died about eleven o'clock at night on Thursday 2 October 1969. The date of her death is the finish line I've been working towards for five years. Her long life is a marathon I run, by myself, through the archives. At first, I am worried there won't be enough material, but tracing her childhood of genteel poverty in Melbourne to reach the suicide of her father in 1907, I write too many words, take too many diversions. I keep going, trying to find the right pace, the best path through her life. Her long apprenticeship culminated in her prize-winning debut, *The Pioneers* (1915), just before she committed her life to communism during the horror of the Great War. For the rest of her life she struggled with how to simultaneously be a writer and a political activist. In a creative burst during a political lull, she wrote her most famous

novels, *Working Bullocks* (1926), *Coonardoo* (1929), and *Haxby's Circus* (1930). After her fairy-tale marriage to a war hero, Hugo Throssell, ended in his suicide in 1933, she threw herself into party work. My attempts to pick up the pace don't work; I've only reached 1935. But with the fiftieth anniversary of her death approaching, I jump ahead and read through her 1969 letters, counting down the last months of her life.

Everyone pays close attention to a dying person; their words take on extra significance. How were they at the point of departure? What did they make of their lives from the summit? Or perhaps that's wrong—biographers are usually focused on a different summit, the peak of accomplishment, the parts that make the subject famous. Perhaps it's actually my own obsession with death showing. Or my evangelical upbringing. 'The last words of the dying', writes Patricia Jalland of the Victorian era, 'had special significance for the Evangelicals, who believed that conduct in the final hours was a vital test of fitness for salvation. Departing saints, and even the less worthy were supposed to be supremely aware of their proximity to divine judgement and to the afterlife at the hour of their death, and therefore capable of uttering words of heavenly wisdom' (33).

Katharine had been preparing for death a long while. She sent off her unfinished autobiography to Angus and Robertson in 1961 because she thought her heart was about to give up. *Child of the Hurricane* was published in time for her eightieth birthday in 1963. She suffered a stroke soon after and nearly died, but recovered and taught herself to write with her left hand. Against the odds, she finished *Subtle Flame,* published in 1967. By 1969 she had begun to seem frailly invincible.

I find a description of Katharine's final New Year's Eve. It's in an undated letter at the very end of the 1968 folder of letters to her son, Ric Throssell: 'Gil & Roma came up on New Year's Eve, & we had a beer on the verandah, but they left before mid-night & I didn't even hear the New Year come in'. I've sat on that verandah myself, and now I can picture her drinking beer there with John ('Gil') and Roma Gilchrist. Gil is the one who took the home video footage of her. It is a small poignance, Katharine asleep in the same bed she will die in nine months later, not even hearing her final year begin. But I read on and find Katharine discussing her preparations for a forthcoming anthology of her work; that anthology was published in 1965. The letter is out of place.

In January 1969, Katharine's granddaughter, Karen, is visiting from Canberra. Katharine doesn't approve of the boyfriend who arrives, and she keeps returning to the subject of him and what she calls 'the honeymoon' in the letters which follow; he isn't responsible, he doesn't share Karen's interests in art, literature, and music.

Karen is a rare living link between me and Katharine. Fifty years after Katharine knew her, I have lunch with this person Katharine loved so much. 'I ache over her', Katharine writes in one letter. 'What life will do to her' (12 Jan.). Even if you live long enough for your own story to reach some resolutions, you don't live long enough to find out what happens to the next generations.

I'm tantalised by the gaps between Katharine and me. Twelve years between her death and my birth. Ninety-eight years between our births. They throw up both the connections of living memory and the strangeness of the vanished past.

If a writer was alive when I was born—even if they died soon after—they feel a part of my era; those who died before I was born seem more distant. Some of the babies of 1883 were still alive when I was born, but they didn't last much longer. While I'm writing the biography, the last person born in the 19th century dies. An Italian woman, 117 years old, she dies on a Saturday afternoon in an armchair at her house on the shores of Lake Maggiore (Jenkins). It is an extinction, a passing that warrants more attention than it receives.

In early February, Ric and his family tell Katharine they will be visiting in March, and it becomes a new focal point for Katharine. She will make jam. It will be a 'heavenly month' (3 Feb.). A week later, she has a bad fall near the gate and her face is bruised yellow and purple but her main concern is that she will be looking better by the time Ric arrives. To reassure him, she lists the many friends who help her as she lies in bed recovering.

Her friends tell her she needs a full-time aide but she's reluctant; it would be expensive and the women she has employed over the years have rarely lasted long. Eventually, she finds a 'Mrs W', who is a 'wonder'. She lets Mrs W and her husband set up their campervan in the paddock on the condition they don't bring their cat, out of concern for the safety of Katharine's beloved magpie, Caruso, who comes for food each evening. When the cat appears, Katharine is angry and worried for Caruso but decides to say nothing.

In March, she writes to Ric:

> my joyous thought all the time has been that you'll soon be here (I've already stocked with cornflakes!) And, I suppose, your next letter will tell me wh[ich] plane I must watch the

> sky for—& whether you'll be coming straight to me, or have to go first into the city. How someday, which ever way it happens, darl, my joy will be complete just to see you, & feel you. (9 Mar.)

She goes into Midland, the nearest shops, and buys a new dress to 'gladden' Ric's eyes; it's the first one she's bought in five years. She isn't winding down, she is still living her life.

There's a two-week gap in the letters, over the time Ric and his family visit. This is the paradox of correspondence: it stops when the correspondents are together.

It is the last time they will see each other, and although Katharine does not know that for sure, she writes:

> I did feel as if the light had gone out of my world when your plane passed over—though I didn't see it—waited, scanning the sky, for half an hour, then decided there was so much cloud, I'd probably missed seeing it. (30 Mar.)

Sometimes Katharine's love for Ric is almost worshipful, the love of a mother who lost her husband to suicide and whose only child has lived on the other side of the country for twenty-five years. 'As my great day approaches—the day on which you arrived—how can I say all that it means to me[?]', she writes before his birthday on 10 May (4 May). She doesn't want to be alone on the day and invites friends to dinner to toast Ric in his absence.

Although she is staunchly atheistic, her ceremonies and superstitions have a religious quality. She picks flowers each day and places them by the photographs of her family as an act of communion with them:

> I've just picked some roses to say good morning to you, darl—actually I've been able to have some fresh flowers for you every day through the hot weather—only once had to fall back on lantana, but it was a pretty little mauve one! (23 Feb.)

She is still thinking about her writing, even contemplating learning about television screenplays so she can adapt one of her stories. The only things she finishes in this last year are commissioned pieces; three different requests arrive for articles honouring the centenary of Lenin's birth. She keeps up with her own literary business, negotiating paperback editions, royalties, and translations. But she puts more energy into promoting the work of her father and her son. After an article celebrating the centenary of the *Fiji Times* doesn't adequately recognise her father, an early editor, she decides she must try again to have some of his stories about the Pacific republished in book form and in September she writes to the National Library requesting they return the clippings she sent them years earlier. Meanwhile, when Ric's play *The Day After Tomorrow* is published she orders multiple copies and sends them off to people of influence she knows.

What should you read in the last year of your life? Katharine does not turn to her favourite books of the past nor—despite her career as a novelist—is she reading much fiction. In March she has been reading the poems of Pablo Neruda and is 'thrilled with the imagery—vigorous life sense, sweep & zest of them' (9 Mar.). Like most of us, her reading diet is partly serendipity, and she reads a book Gil lends her called *Cannibal Cargoes: The Story of Australian Blackbirders* (1969), a popular treatment of a troubling period of colonial exploitation which might have brought to mind her father's emigration to Fiji in 1869 and her own birth there in 1883. In June, she reads a survey of human evolution, *The Inheritors* (1961) by Ritchie Calder, an ambitious, big-picture book which finishes with a chapter speculating about the future of humankind.

In June she writes a message of support for the World Peace Assembly and particularly its work on disarmament, urging that they pass a motion opposing germ warfare. In July, she writes to her granddaughter Karen:

> The future of this country after all is of most importance to you—and its people. How can they be brought to a saner way of life? The struggle against war—& the system wh[ich] thrives on it—won't be over for many years but it's the most worthwhile one to work for, surely. How to work for it—within the circumstances of our lives? That's the question for individual consciences, don't you think? (Prichard to Karen Throssell)

But her letters to Ric suggest that she might feel she gave too much to the cause. She tells him to save time to write, to make sure he has the energy for vigorous creativity. '[T]he conservation of energy for the most important things in our lives is essential, I've learned at long last' (14 Aug.). While supporting the Vietnam War protests, she thinks that Karen shouldn't get too involved until her university exams are finished.

Katharine lives the last twenty years of her life under a conservative government. She narrowly misses the first sign of the Liberals' grip on power crumbling—in the federal election three weeks after her death, Labor gains eighteen seats under Gough Whitlam. On the other hand, it's just as well she doesn't live long enough to see her hope for the

world dissolve with the end of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of Australia, both in 1991, events which are mercifully just outside the lifespan of her generation of communists for whom the Russian Revolution in 1917 had been a beacon of hope.

Katharine is still engaged in the world, following events in the Soviet Union, thinking about big themes in the books she reads. But there's no commentary on the things we remember 1969 for. I don't expect her to take an interest in Woodstock at the end of July, but I am surprised to find no commentary on the moon landing earlier in the month. How strange an event it would have seemed to someone who was born during the reign of Queen Victoria, for whom travel by horse was normal and motor cars exotic.

Katharine lives long enough to see the wattle bush bloom in 'all her glory' with 'masses of golden down' in late July; she lives long enough to feel the winter lift and spring arrive. Ric will be visiting again in October, a quick trip for business. In her second-last letter to him, she writes:

> Have just heard a chestnut breasted whistler—& seen him in the garden—such a handsome fellow with his black waistcoat and white collar above the chestnut breast. And he warbles gloriously in [the] gum tree at the end of the verandah—I've been asking [him] to come & sing to you darl! Though you'll hardly have any sunny hours with me. And October [is] usually a glorious month. (7 Sept.)

The folder of letters to Ric ends abruptly, two weeks short. Even though she is about to see him, surely she doesn't miss writing to him two weeks in a row? Are there more letters, lost or omitted?

On the day of Katharine's death, 2 October, she writes a letter to her old friend, Doon Stone. Doon was contemplating moving back west to live near Katharine, but she has written to say she's decided instead to move to Tuross Head on the South Coast of New South Wales. Katharine wishes her the best but confesses she's 'green-eyed' about it; 'we both know how to overcome disappointments', she writes, a little tartly. 'Such a strange, lonely life it is, these days' (Prichard to Stone).

Doon keeps the envelope of Katharine's final letter and annotates it, 'Written on the day of her death'. Yet curiously, for a document she recognises the value of, the stamp has been torn off. There's no hint of a postmark; perhaps Doon, who lived through the Depression, can't help but reuse it.

Ric is due to arrive late that night. The aide, Mrs W, has departed, in circumstances unknown, and an old friend, Amy Wells, is helping Katharine. Katharine and Amy spend the day getting the house ready. 'They had made his favourite dish, goulash, festooned the house with flowers and had everything in readiness' (Harris). Katharine is tired and goes to bed at six o'clock, intending to sleep until Ric's arrival. About ten o'clock Amy finds her 'breathing heavily' with her face to the wall. She says she is hot and throws off her blankets. While Amy goes out to make her a cup of tea, Katharine has a stroke. She stutters, 'Jolly,' her doctor's name. He lives nearby and comes straight over, giving her an injection to calm her. The way Amy remembers it, Katharine dies as the noise of Ric's plane roars overhead on its descent (Wells). Despite the tragedy of narrowly missing the chance to say goodbye to Ric, could it still have been a good death, to slip away in the grip of anticipation, hoping to see him right to the end?

In narrating our subjects' deaths, biographers seem immortal. We may be epigones, but we're the survivors, the detectives arriving after the fact to piece together what has happened. In preserving the past, in living in the past, time is meant to stop and the biographer is allowed an eternal present. It's a compensation for devoting ourselves to someone else's life.

But, of course, biographers are dying just like everyone else.

A journalist wrote a popular biography of Katharine's husband, Hugo Throssell, which keeps agitating me with its unattributed borrowings from sources and its carelessness, compounded by how often it is relied upon by others. In 2015 I am in the manuscripts reading room of a library and find this biographer's name signed in above mine. I look around the room at the researchers hunched intently over their desks, but I can't work out which one he is. It would be hard to start a conversation anyway—'I read your book with considerable interest' would only be true in a formal sense. In 2018, I write a blog post correcting some of the mistakes repeated from his book in a news article about Hugo. I feel uneasy for criticising the biographer's work, unaware he's been dead for months.

There is an academic who wrote the excellent entry for Katharine in *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*, as well as several other pieces on her. He is insightful and formidable in his judgements and a retired vice-chancellor; I want to be sure I know my stuff before writing to tell him I am working on the biography. Several years in, just as I feel ready to make contact, I learn of his death. Perhaps I should have been less cautious—but on the other hand, he may have had more pressing things to do at the end of his life than correspond with me about a past research interest.

Another time I compose an email to the biographer of Katharine's unlikely writer friend in London, the politically conservative G. B. Lancaster. Checking a detail online just before I send it, I discover he died in 2009. Writing that email feels like an encounter with a ghost. Later I find out he left unpublished his magnum opus, a biography of the poet Allen Curnow. The draft was nearly half a million words long and his widow spent years editing it, cutting it down for publication. I feel, by turns, inspired and depressed by that. Why do we spend our lives telling other people's stories? And what if we die in the midst of it? I'm young enough and reasonably healthy but too often I find myself thinking about dying before I see my biography published. And then I wonder why I have made it mean so much in my life.

Katharine doesn't have a grave. She requested 'a cremation, the ashes to be scattered over the top of Greenmount [...] overlooking the lovely prospect and in view of the house where the happiest years of my life have been spent' (Williams 18). Ric carried the canister of her ashes to the spot where Hugo had always talked of building his dream house and eventually 'wrenched off the lid of the tin and scattered the ash on the dry grass' (Throssell 362–363). There's no plaque and I don't think anyone alive today could pinpoint the location. It leaves a feeling of incompleteness about her end. She is everywhere but also nowhere in particular.

Six weeks before Katharine died, her friend Catherine Duncan urges her not to burn any more letters, writing that 'in fifty years, dearest Kattie, the KSP you are now will have become someone else—she will have escaped you'; Katharine should 'surrender the truth to posterity' (Duncan). Katharine writes back, conceding Duncan has a point.

While Katharine is still remembered, she is always becoming 'someone else' according to the concerns of the moment. Perhaps Duncan perceived that future generations would be more likely to remember fairly and truthfully with more evidence available. Fifty years later, the sort of revelations and secrets that once seemed worrying are less so, with most of the people concerned long dead.

At fifty years dead, one is passing out of living memory. Looking over the archives of the Katharine Susannah Prichard Writers' Centre, based in her old house, I find the early documents full of people who knew her well. The annual Katharine's Birthday celebration at the centre was conceived as a chance to celebrate her among eyewitnesses. It continues today but the eyewitnesses are mostly dead and the Katharine who is celebrated has taken on legendary status. The image of her in the centre's logo symbolises the transition—not the flesh and blood Katharine of 1969 but a stylised likeness of a Katharine of the 1920s in a hat.

The biographer Martin Edmond laments that his subjects had come to exist only as representatives of 'notions espoused by others', not as 'real people' acting in 'real situations'. His biography becomes a mission to restore them. He won't tell their story to prove a point—he will tell it to show a 'lived life' (318–319).

It's hubristic and unfashionable, but it's what I want to do also. Just to bring Katharine back to life a little.

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NLA = National Library of Australia

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cloth of time

Maureen Gibbons

Maureen Gibbons has a Doctor of Creative Writing from Curtin University of Technology. Her verse-novel *The Butter Lady* was published in 2016 and her poetry has appeared in journals and anthologies.

i stitch with my mother's thimble,
feel her rhythms in my finger-tips—needle in, needle out—
see her stitch bridal satins, cumulus chiffon,
threads in, threads out;

see my daughters wear my mother's thimble,
stitch in random rhythms—threads in, threads out—
see their motifs mirror mine,
mirror hers;

marvel as the thimble's indentations
spiral into fibonacci fields of sunflowers;
heads dipping, seeds slipping,
to dance the slow waltz home.
threads in, threads out...

Borderlands

Borderlands is a new literary magazine for the Northern Territory, speaking to the NT's unique social and political landscape, and promoting its linguistic diversity.

Borderlands

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY

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From the *Borderlands* Editors

Raelke Grimmer,
Glenn Morrison,
Adelle Sefton-Rowston

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The Northern Territory has been without its own literary journal for twenty years. This absence of a distinctive space dedicated to capturing a uniquely Territorian voice has left us on the edges of a national discussion, at the mercy of others' agendas, and beholden to outsider publishers obligated to markets elsewhere. A quick scan of Australian literary journals finds most located in major cities and largely on the east coast, a situation symptomatic of Australia's longstanding marginalisation of its rural, regional and remote storytellers. Compounding the blurring effect that this distance from the mainstream can have, skewed and misleading representations of Territorians and their contexts have commonly held sway in the Australian imaginary, and are, more often than is desirable, penned by outsiders. The result has been that for twenty years readers and writers from the NT have suffered displacement from the centre of 'national' discourse, and from any empowered position where they might influence the way Australia and the world perceives them. In the process they have come to recognise and clearly understand the gap between a lived experience of a place and its literary representation.

A recent effort to remedy this situation is the *Borderlands* project to develop a new literary magazine for the Northern Territory, a collaborative effort between editors and writers Adelle Sefton-Rowston, Raelke Grimmer and Glenn Morrison. Unsurprisingly, the team warmly welcomed the chance to put together a 'trial run' of the magazine, a special NT feature edition of *Westerly,* which showcases some of the best writing from the Northern Territory this year. The huge number of submissions for this feature attests to the desire for NT authors to inform a national literary imagination. We are grateful for this opportunity to work with *Westerly*, and especially with editor Catherine Noske, and to 'learn the ropes' from a professional and respected editorial team.

The special feature includes an impressive suite of poetry, memoir, essay and fiction from authors from all manner of backgrounds and writing experience. Award-winning author Mary Anne Butler puts forward her most experimental work yet—transforming her play *Highway of Lost Hearts* into a novel. We have no doubt you will enjoy reading the first chapter of this, exploring how relationships can operate when one is dying. Similarly, Jo Dutton's essay 'Things I learned about dying' is reminiscent of Susan Sontag's claim that 'it is not suffering as such that is most deeply feared but suffering that degrades' (125). Also featured is Jo Tuscano, who gives a gruelling account of evidence heard during the Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory while at the same time finding a new friend. The poem 'Sorry', written from prison, points perhaps to a role for creative writing in the process of restorative justice.

The name for the magazine is inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza* (1987) in which she explains that a Borderland is 'where a frontier line that divides may also come to reflect what the two sides have in common' (3). The *Borderlands* project coincides with significant historical moments including 'developing the North', the appointment of Mick Dodson as NT Treaty Commissioner, and growing global attention to systemic racial profiling and the transforming of prisons. As Marcia Langton writes in a 2005 essay, there is 'something happening between black and white Australia, and […] it has to do with music, art and film' (109). *Borderlands* is proving that Langton's perceived shift also includes writing and storytelling, and that it must include the NT.

Phase one of the *Borderlands* project has been to gauge stakeholder interest in an NT journal, and to develop a business case based on market incentives and creative forces. *Borderlands Magazine* also aspires to offer something novel to creative practice by experimenting with the digital platform of art *and* storytelling. Phase two of the project is set to publish its first online pilot edition of *Borderlands* this month and a pilot print edition in the first half of 2020. The initiative is funded by Arts NT, Charles Darwin University, Creative Partnerships Australia and the Regional Arts Funds.

By expanding the borders of Australian literary culture and celebrating authors and critics from within and beyond the NT, the magazine hopes to position itself at the vanguard of a Northern Australian literature. Writing from the NT hopes to inform inter-Australian perspectives by indexing (rather than trivialising) the NT's unique social and political landscape, by promoting its linguistic diversity and providing a trenchant and complicated representation of marginalised groups. This NT feature gives hope to *Borderlands*' own potential, and we encourage you to read more about us at http://borderlands.cdu.edu.au.

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Things I learned about dying

Jo Dutton

Jo Dutton is the author of three novels: *On the Edge of Red* (1997), *Out of Place* (2006) and *From Alice with Love* (2013). Jo is the winner of the ABC Short Story Competition and has won several Varuna Awards for manuscript development. She lives in Alice Springs and is a member of Pilotus Press Cooperative, bringing voices from Central Australia to national and international audiences.

Texting *u r amazing* to someone who is dying is completely thoughtless. Using capitals *UR AMAZING* makes it borderline abusive. She, he or they aren't amazing, but caught in a wave that will eventually crash on a shore they haven't visited before. Some of the dying people I've known had no idea what this would look like—Balmain or Barcelona or Boggy Hole—but they didn't speculate because it would be like trying to predict a dream. However beautiful, it didn't warrant thinking about. Not when they still could open their eyes, alive. Others had a fixed idea of where they were going. Somewhere better, which made a lot of sense because the dying bit is for the most part no fun at all, least of all for the dying. Though some men (who I've not stayed friends with) think dying could not be harder than being present at the birth of their children. Is this a skilful trait of vicarious empathy or a patriarchal position protecting men from the body politics of pain?

Death is often compared to the work of a woman in labour. The expectations of both events, dying and birthing, become inverse. At a birth one is given a new life to care for. The result of dying is unfortunately death, and one is left with a funeral to plan. Of course, not all births have a happy ending, even if the wanting for a boy or a girl has had to be reckoned with. As a woman who's failed to bring all my babies into the world alive, I've been the recipient of the *UR AMAZING* text. How does one respond to such inanity? I did what I could about the pain, but I certainly didn't feel amazing. It felt like terrible luck and for a while I lost all hope of ever feeling well, let alone amazing. For the dying, it's not a free choice, it's just how the cards fall. And should you get served a bad hand, as my mother (the queen of pithy sayings) would quip, there's no use wishing otherwise, because *if wishes were horses, beggars would ride*. Dying is dying. It can't turn into a horse either.

Unlike birthing, the result of dying is not as hard to predict. It has one inevitable exit point: death. Except in the case of Jesus, but it's too convoluted a tale to do more than use a reference point about every rule having an exception. He would, I believe, if he was divine, attest to the fact that dying is no fun. Sometimes I despair at the paucity of my religious knowledge (despite fourteen years of Sunday church). Although I doubt I'll worry too much about it, even when the chips are down.

Death is a struggle. It requires a determination and great effort to break a bond with a body, even one that's stopped acting like a body in most ways. But the dying do not want to be pitied for what is ahead, or an already rough and rocky crawl. When I show pity my pupils dilate wide and shiny like I've just seen a wondrous sight, or been taking far too many fast drugs. And a sad, oh-so-sad smile creeps upon my lips. Even without adjunct banal commentary (*Poor thing what can I do? Are you in pain?*), this sickening pitying can make even those not flooded with chemo or morphine puke.

If you know what's good for everyone, when there's a Dying One in your circle don't make comments that come from sympathy cards or Hollywood movies. Don't cook casseroles either. They get tipped out. Not that the dying don't appreciate the effort everyone is making; but who wants to die in a house full of casseroles filled with fleshy aubergine and decomposing kale? The veggie casseroles are always from two groups of people. One is those who aren't that sure if the dying ever ate meat. If this is you, remind yourself you don't know the Dying One very well. Maybe give the food roster a miss. Get over your FOMO! It's unattractive to say the least. Anyway, someone like me would have the self-appointed role of food coordinator, and in the end you would be hunted out as an imposter. A kind of gaslighter for grief. It is true in bigger places that the country-care cook up is less prevalent due to geographical and time constraints. Another reason to live and die in a small town or leave while still alive, depending on your bent.

The other group of veggie cooks are those who aren't sure if the intended recipient of their lovingly made organic dishes are vegan. It's important to understand rule 101 of dying: dying people must switch to organic food if they are real dying people because we want them to not give up but do everything in their power to fight death. Without a hefty bill for organics, the dying and their loved ones can't really claim to be trying. This second group is also not close enough to the Dying One to be fully informed on the Dying One's progress. They are unsure if the Dying is doing all in their power to stay well, and is in fact now correctly an organic vegan, which generates points for trying. But in addition, should the dying lose, they will be eligible for the consoling knowledge that no animal has been sacrificed in their struggle.

The other casseroles filling up the bin are beef, lamb and chicken. Perhaps pork, although usually not if the Dying One is Jewish. The amount of casseroles delivered can be attributed to:

A. The size of the Dying One's circle of loved ones,

or

B. Evidence of community competitiveness to have their favourite version of the said casserole be the best and thereby win the best caring person award.

Take your pick.

Stacked in the kitchen like a strange shrine, these dishes full of organic meat from happy animals smell till the kitchen reeks like a food hall at closing time—putrid and nauseating which, of course, doesn't help the Dying One feel that their flesh is any more alive. Then there are all those Tupperware containers that need washing and acquitting, usually by the lover of the Dying One or whoever has been tasked with travelling the road of no return. Quite frankly, they'd probably prefer to spend more time on that journey than answering the doorbell to the Dying One's home to be greeted by a casserole on the doorstep. Also, it's a burden trying to decipher whether *I. F.* stands for Ian Fleming or Ingrid Folds, or is just an existential question appearing on the lid.

This is where the hospital versus home death advantages need weighing up. And mark my words, as in birth, the positions are pretty heavily contested. Are you thinking it's no-one else's business? Then you still don't understand that, just like when a pregnancy is announced, a woman becomes the object of all manner of public scrutiny. She can be touched without permission, gratuitously advised, or else scared by horror stories about other women's births. A terminal diagnosis carries a similar public outing.

But back to food and the dying. In a hospital, no casseroles are needed. Hospitals have professional dietician-designed delicious cuisine. (Where do these so-called dieticians come from? Salvation Army kitchens?) Hospital food tastes like six casseroles mixed together, but always served lukewarm as if there is some concern the Dying One might tip it inadvertently all over themselves. Perhaps sue for damages—if not personally, then perhaps a litigious relative can do so later, during the anger stage of the five steps of grieving. Don't scoff. There are steps. How many is still being debated in the millions of texts on how to die and how to grieve.

There is one clear and obvious disadvantage to hospitals that needs to be pointed out. They don't have front doors that can be locked.

Complications not common in the home environment can arise. Like visitors popping their head in the room and asking permission in a soft voice to pop in. Yes, I confess to putting on that voice too—the tone is a cross between an apology and a demand. Sometimes audacious claims that they were just in the 'neighbourhood' are made to justify not having an invitation. I mean come on! How often are those not working in a hospital actually at one? I hate to confess, but I've gone a step further. I have actually gone to another city so puffed up with grief that I said boldly, *I was just in the area. Is this a good time?* This obliges the Dying One to be gracious, as they have the least time left to be rude.

Maybe getting access in this way is easier for my generation because all the Dying Ones I've ever insulted come, like I do, from a time when stories of fire and brimstone were used to moderate behaviour. I'd measure a bet that this tendency to be polite in the face of death might fade, just as religion loses its moderating power to offer hope. Anecdotal evidence supports the contention that rudeness on the part of the Dying is almost always aimed at those they love most. *Ain't that the truth*, I hear the palliative care workers murmur. It's the paradox of love.

A friend once said about a mutual friend, *just because he is dying doesn't give him a licence to do what he like*s. He'd told her to *fuck off* when she wanted to bring a tea of skink and bat shit over to 'help'. Her complaint was delivered far and wide with raised eyebrows and pursed lips. At the time I found her entitlement to criticise so odorous I had to open the window in the room. If dying is not the small opportunity to do what one wants, then perhaps we are doomed to never get the noose of responsibility off from around our necks.

There are a number of remedies on how not to die: tiger milk or cicada paste pellets can be recommended just as usefully as Tibetan Chants. Give the latter a go and you too can be as popular as I was in the company of dying friends. I truly didn't deserve the response I got. To be frank, in this instance I had to swallow pretty hard to not call her ungrateful, which is definitely a sin against the first commandment of dying.

1. In dying, thou should never be ungrateful or a sad sack.

We Well Ones talk (only because we care) about our insights into what may have precipitated this wrong and selfish moodiness. They are a bit doped up, it was a bad test result, the fault of another Well One, whatever. These discussions are fringed with an edge of piety and blousy with over-inflated graciousness as we forgive transgressions, piously let bygones be bygones and all that entirely self-satisfied twaddle.

To be brutally honest, I've said a lot of wrong things to the dying. But my biggest faux pas was momentarily forgetting where I was and cheerfully uttering to thy Dying One: *you can do it, just breathe*. That roused her out of an almost coma-like state. She sat up like the devil had spooked her. I swear if the cutlery on the dinner tray wasn't plastic, I'd be dead now too. But I am not. Not yet. Life is never fair, and neither is dying.

So as I die, by all means light a candle, say your prayers in whatever language you like, scream, urge me on, spur me to fight, bring casseroles, tiger's milk, tend to me, plump the pillows, sing a song, change the sheets, bathe me gently, let me know I can leave you, bring flowers before the grave stones render them useless. I'll forgive you for living, and I'll forgive myself for dying.

The Docks
David McGuigan

David McGuigan has taught literacy and numeracy to Indigenous students and refugees for over sixteen years. His poetry and short stories have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Best Australian Poems*.

Father laboured on the wharf, foraging
stamps from foreign lands, the far-flung
shards of our British Empire. His kitbag caught

the blast of tugs, the brawl of sailors,
the whine of monsters at their moorings.
And he hauled home tales of long-dead dockers

who haunted the wharf's winter mist.
I would sit ashore, picturing their backs stretching
and twisting under the weight of the wheat,

hooks raised, tattooed arms lashing the last
of evening's light. And the sea skulking unappeased
beneath the creak of salt-lacquered boards.

That Appears to Be the Case
Jo Tuscano

Jo Tuscano is co-author with Bill Simon and Des Montgomerie of *Back on the Block: Bill Simon's Story* (2009) about Bill's experience as a Stolen Generations member in the Kinchela Boys' Home. Her two novels *Under Andromeda* and *The River Child* will be published in 2020 by Odyssey Books. Her forthcoming book *This Is Where You Have to Go* is co-authored with Lynda Holden and explores Lynda's experience as an Indigenous mother whose baby was taken by forced adoption. Jo's current project is writing with Christine Palmer, an Indigenous elder, who was an early activist in Alice Springs in the seventies.

A week at the Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory, and a friend for life.

At 9.50am in the morning, the heat was enough to make the lawyers take off their suit jackets to walk the short distance from the car park to the Alice Springs Convention Centre. It was the 13th of March, 2017. Merit McDonald and a small group of protestors from Shut Youth Prisons held up their placards as the cameras rolled. Dylan Voller was one of them. People started arriving and entered the building, thankful for the air conditioning. Indigenous elders, parents and grandparents, children, relatives, interested members of the public, senior and junior counsel, representatives of Indigenous organisations and those giving evidence had come together for the Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory.

I took a seat next to an Aboriginal woman. We introduced ourselves. Her name was Christine Palmer, an Arrernte Kaytetye elder. Out of our mutual outrage and sadness over what we heard at the Commission, Christine and I bonded in that week, sitting next to each other, scribbling notes, giving each other eye rolls and grunts of disbelief at some of the evidence. We drank endless cups of coffee and tea, ate biscuits and

swapped stories. Christine was giving evidence to the Commission. I was there as a member of the public and as a writer who has an interest in Indigenous issues. Christine has spent her life working to improve conditions for her people. Her qualifications include narrative therapist, trauma and grief counsellor, family support worker, Stolen Generations counsellor and crisis support worker, just to name a few. She has sat on the Northern Territory Women's Advisory Council and the Alice Springs Child Protection Team. She moves seamlessly between secret women's business and social media.

On that first morning, the image of Dylan Voller, strapped down into a chair, handcuffed and with a spit hood over his face, was not far from the surface of everyone's thoughts. It was the reason the Royal Commission was convened. Also, not far from everyone's thoughts were questions: How could this happen? How could those entrusted with such a high degree of duty of care for such vulnerable children allow this to take place? After listening to a week of evidence, it was not difficult to see why. In the period from 2006 onwards, there was a systemic failure on all levels of care and protection of children, ninety-five per cent of whom are Indigenous, in detention in the Northern Territory (White and Gooda 6). From the Corrections Minister down, the inquest proves the system was flawed.

Early in the proceedings the Commission heard from former and current detainees whose experiences can only be described as anything but rehabilitative. Whether incarcerated at the Don Dale Centre, Aranda House or the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre (ASYDC), the evidence is testament to a dark era in the Territory's youth justice system. Detainees were treated with violence, racism and the arbitrary application of punishment. They were strip searched and thrown into isolation in unhygienic conditions. The Commission heard about detainees being kicked, slapped, held by the neck, verbally and racially abused, sexually harassed and thrown into isolation for up to eighty hours, clearly breaching the United Nations rules on solitary confinement and the Territory's own Youth Justice Act. In November 2012, the children at the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre had no toothpaste for two weeks and no deodorant for five months. Overcrowding saw seven children sleeping in a room for four, some on mattresses on the floor. There were times when the classroom was used as a bedroom and reverted to a learning area the next morning. One current detainee reported his room at the ASYDC contained bugs and a dead mouse, stuck to his mattress. A former detainee reported being called a 'dumb black kid' and a 'cunt' (Turner, *Transcript* 935:23; 942:29). Another reported two weeks of microwaved meals with no fresh food at all. There are not enough toilets and no access to water in the rooms.

At Aranda House the children never saw sunlight. Windows were covered, and in the yard, a shade cloth covered the whole of the area, even in winter. The sally port[1] was not secured properly so that when children were moved between Aranda House, used mostly as a remand centre, and the ASYDC, they were handcuffed. It took three years to procure a purpose-built vehicle to transport the children safely. If in isolation, the detainees had no access to education at all. Complaints to official visitors included not enough food and not enough blankets. Cold and hungry, traumatised and abused, disconnected from family and country, it is not surprising that conditions escalated to the point where there were riots.

Christine sat, shaking her head.

'It's all so preventable,' she said, during a break. 'A visit from an elder has been shown to calm the kids down. Such simple things can make a change. They need to engage with us, the people who *know*.'

The Don Dale Centre could accommodate thirty-eight but in 2010 it accommodated forty-three. Cabinet submissions called for separate girls' accommodation to be built at Don Dale. This was rejected despite reports from official visitors that they had serious concerns about keeping males and females together (McCarthy, *Transcript* 1347:32). In 2011, the then Commissioner of Corrections described the Don Dale facility as one that 'needs to be bulldozed' (McCarthy, *Transcript* 1337:15). In 2010, an expert panel recommended the building of a new seventy-five bed facility to address the problems of rising numbers of youth in detention in the Territory. That recommendation was ignored.

Until recently, there was no onsite medical or psychological assistance at these centres. Hearing problems in Indigenous young people run at seven per cent in the 0–14 age range (Australian Bureau of Statistics), affecting their ability to learn and participate in programmes. Three weeks ago, hearing testing began on all new detainees. Many children have mental health problems and yet had no access to a mental health professional. Lack of information and communication meant that a child could be transferred hundreds of kilometres away without parents, relatives, lawyers and external support agencies being informed. There was never any system in place to notify anybody, causing great stress on families trying to find out information.

Christine knows of families to whom this has happened:

> There was no communication with the families. Their children were moved without notification. Family would turn up to

> visit to be told their child had been moved to Darwin, 1,496 kilometres away. Or they would phone to speak to their child and be told the same thing. Parents didn't have the money or they couldn't get time off to travel to Darwin or both. To be separated from their child is incomprehensible. The only contact was by phone but it still didn't lessen the anxiety that there was over a thousand kilometres between them and their children.

It was obvious that some of the personnel employed at the youth detention centres in Alice Springs and at Darwin were completely unsuitable for working with children. Woefully inadequate training meant that the youth justice workers knew how to put a detainee into a cell, extract them from a cell and administer first aid. This training, called PART, Predict, Assess and Respond to Challenging/Aggressive Behaviour Training, was completed after five days. It covered the use of handcuffs and various restraint techniques. There was no training in conflict resolution, de-escalation techniques, drug and alcohol issues including withdrawal, trauma and grief issues, cognitive behaviour, suicide ideation and no training regarding recognising the signs of a high-risk troubled young person. Christine has worked with children who often came into the remand centre straight from court and were highly traumatised. One former manager employed his son and then employed his son's friends, all men with training in martial arts (McClee, *Transcript* 1147:40). None of them received training in anything other than restraint techniques. Staff shortages meant children were in lockdown for extended periods.

In an audit of the ASYDC, the data collected showed that all relevant documents that detention centres were mandated to keep on the premises were missing. The Care and Protection Act? Not there. Clarification manual? None. The Youth Justice Act? No trace. Policies and Procedures Manual? Same thing. When asked how the staff were to access information should they need it, the OIC of the Alice Springs Centre at the time, Mr Derek Tasker, replied, 'It's on the Intranet' (Tasker, *Transcript* 1096:47). The former acting general manager of Don Dale, John Fattore, admitted to it being nine days before he saw the footage of Dylan Voller strapped in the chair. A worker who assaulted Mr Voller was referred to the Professional Standards Unit. He never showed up. That investigation was not pursued and the worker was given another contract at Don Dale.

'Only to allegedly assault another child some six months later—correct?' asked counsel.

'It appears to be the case. Yes.' (Fattore, *Transcript* 994:35)

A ripple went through the public gallery. People shook their heads.

Professor John Rynn, a psychologist with many years' experience working with Indigenous youth, made the distinction to the Commission between cultural awareness and cultural competence in regard to training of staff. Anybody can be made aware. It doesn't necessarily follow that being aware also means engaging meaningfully in Indigenous culture and finding ways to interact with and to rehabilitate troubled youth. He spoke about the need to procure as much cultural information as possible when a detainee first arrives; skin name, community, language are all factors that will be significant. Professor Rynn spoke about the long-term damage of placing detainees in isolation and the use of spit hoods, leading to sensory deprivation, affecting the prefrontal cortex in the teenage brain.

Children in detention in the Northern Territory come from all over the Territory, from urban settings to remote communities, where sometimes English is their second or third language. Detainees who spoke little English were reliant on other detainees who spoke the same Aboriginal languages to interpret for them. When cross-examined, the manager of the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre was asked how he knew that the detainees who didn't speak English had understood what had been translated to them by other detainees. They looked happy, was his answer to the Commission. One can only imagine what was lost in that translation.

A booklet given out to new detainees at the ASYDC, printed in Darwin, was given to each detainee on arrival. It contained information for the children (if they could read) regarding how staff dealt with the detainees. It stated, 'Different officers have different approaches, and as a detainee you will need to learn the different ways that officers deal with situations' (Tasker, *Transcript* 1062:5–8). The looks on the faces of those in the public gallery, as they read the paragraph on the big screen, said it all. No consistency, no standard, each worker a law unto themselves. No surprises if the detainees were hypervigilant, stressed, reacted on impulse or were just as unpredictable as the workers themselves.

The former Minister of Correction's evidence was what was to be expected. Political obfuscation. Gerry McCarthy had all the terminology we expect to hear from a member of Parliament: delivering outcomes, budgetary constraints, cabinet briefings, community models, competing priorities, operational procedures and the usual excuse, 'I inherited Aranda House' (McCarthy, *Transcript* 1347:45). He spoke of having to prioritise the government's limited capital investment. The overwhelming message, however, was clear. Children in detention in the Northern Territory are not worth investing in. They have been a low priority.

'There's nothing to do here and nowhere for the kids to go,' a young Aboriginal girl told me.

When Adam Giles was Chief Minister of Northern Territory he closed the youth centre in Alice Springs, citing Alice Springs had been 'cleaned up' (Sleath np). Currently, there is no youth centre in Alice Springs and yet the government had no trouble investing in motor sports in central Australia, citing the benefits of tourism to the region. Incredibly, the Minister did not see the footage of Dylan Voller and the abuses at Don Dale at the time. He saw it when the rest of Australia saw it, the night the ABC *Four Corners* programme aired *Australia's Shame*, years later.

To balance despondency with hope, the Commission heard from people who are passionate and committed to better outcomes for the children in detention in the Northern Territory: teachers, external workers, doctors and ordinary citizens who are trying to bring about change. These people, despite working in very tough conditions, demonstrated compassion and flexibility to the children and were determined to make a difference in their lives. When Christine gave her evidence, the Commissioners were clearly impressed. One of the Commissioners asked her what she would do to fix some of the problems.

'I'd hand-pick my team,' Christine says (Palmer, *Transcript* 27).

Later, she told me that besides the teachers, the doctors, the professor and a few others, her team wouldn't include anyone she'd seen working for the system. They've got unhealthy attitudes, she told me. Christine is full of ideas. She never stops. And she never stops educating herself and others.

Christine and I have continued our friendship and are now writing a book together about the early days of activism in Alice Springs. She taught me the word 'mulpa', which is not easily translatable but means something akin to 'person or friend that guides you'. Christine has furthered my knowledge of Indigenous culture. She has guided me in understanding.

When I was editing the interviews that Christine has done for the book, I was struck by how many people she interviewed say they came up to work and 'fell in love with Alice Springs' and never left. I began to understand why. The breeze coming over Alice in the evenings was unlike any I'd experienced. The desert, the landscape, the artwork, its role in film and literature, the history of activism and the people make it unique.

The Commission wound down on Friday afternoon. Christine and I said goodbye and made plans to catch up soon. I knew we'd be friends for the rest of our lives. Outside the convention centre, two elders held a small smoking ceremony. They asked me to walk up to the smoke and waft it into my face. This is healing, one of the elders told me. I hoped it was a metaphor for the final outcomes of the Royal Commission. I hoped that the system would be seen for what it was: outdated, broken, reeking of a colonial past where black kids didn't rate. Funding needs to be increased, education made a priority for detainees, staff recruitment practices must change, training overhauled and cultural competency must be at the forefront of decision-making. People like Christine, with a wealth of experience, qualifications and a vision for her people, need to be listened to. Otherwise, nothing will change. And that appears to be the case.

Note

1 A sally port is a space between the entrance and another gate into the detention centre. It prevents escapes.

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Sorry
Anonymous

This poem is by a young Indigenous man who loves writing poetry. He recently spent time in prison, and emailed his submission to *Borderlands* via his case manager. Attached with the 'release of information' form was a note saying that the author is 'aware of his shortcomings and accepts responsibility for his actions. This can be seen in one of his poems entitled "Sorry".'

Sorry is more than just a word,
It's like a medicine for the emotions that touches people's souls.
I myself, aint a fan of the word sorry,
But here today, I want to say sorry.
I know when you look in the mirror, you wish you could wash your scars away,
It's not a band aid you can rip off and forget, it's a mark of pain I caused that day.
I was blinded by alcohol, jealousy and rage,
That's why I'm still standing behind this cage.
It took me almost ten years to realise this,
That you were the only woman being punished.
I may walk around, like I'm the maddest bloke on the streets,
But really, I'm just a coward who bashes woman constantly.
So I'm gonna stand up to say, yes I am a coward.
The spotlight really belongs to all the women survivors.
I don't blame you for hating me,
I don't blame you for not forgiving me,
But I am truly deeply sorry.

Piano Capital
Barbara Eather

Barbara Eather is a writer, musician and visual artist who grew up on a sheep and cattle station in a remote area of north-west Queensland. Barbara studied commerce at the University of Queensland and in 1986 took her first job in Darwin. She hasn't left.

According to folklore, there's two eras in this town: Before Tracy and After. A simplistic assessment—just ask the Larrakia People—but it's still an accepted 'fact'. Merry Christmas, 1974. Take that up your clacker, Darwin. Plenty has been said about that mean little system—that bitch Tracy who almost wiped this northern capital off the map. How she snaked across tropical waters, doglegged once she was past the Tiwi Islands, set her beady eye on Darwin and came in, her evil vortex sucking everything out.

Survivors still speak of looking up into the heavens during the calm eye, doubting there was a God, or imploring to one (if He existed). And seeing thousands of sheets of roofing iron illuminated by lightning and circling Darwin like Christmas tinsel. There's no mention of airborne pianos. Perhaps there should have been, for it's also in folklore that when claims for post-cyclone compensation were lodged, Darwin's per capita piano ownership exceeded the national average many times over.

After the dogs had been shot, and thirty-five thousand citizens evacuated in the largest airlift in Australian history, wounds were licked and memories lodged. There's still argument about who did what during and after the disaster. There's division about what should happen now, division amongst the survivors and between those who went through it and those who didn't. At an all-faiths' church service to commemorate an anniversary of Cyclone Tracy, there were many faces absent. Some thought it had been turned into a circus, complete with thirty-piece orchestra and wailing soprano.

'This is us they are talking about,' one survivor said to me. 'They didn't actually ask us if we wanted a live broadcast.'

Others spurned all official commemorations and had their own—flowers scattered from a yacht, breakfast at the beach as dawn broke, even though that private event was gatecrashed by a camera crew. Some did nothing, except nurse demons.

But despite the cynicism about how many piano claims turned up on compensation forms, many pianos were victims of Tracy. As one survivor intimated to me:

> We lost everything, and then some more. The morning after, one neighbour bundled his family into their car. Before he left he asked us to salvage anything we could from their home. But there was nothing to save. Our friendship with that family was never the same. They couldn't believe there was nothing left, even though they had seen it with their own eyes. My piano was gone, without a trace. Like two hours of practice a day for six years had never happened.

Forty years later, when she had allowed herself the indulgence of a new second-hand piano, she found she could no longer play. All the scales, arpeggios, entire sonatas and wicked honky-tonk rags were still embedded in her musical soul. But so was something else, a deep sadness that surfaced whenever she tinkled the ivories.

Highway of Lost Hearts

Mary Anne Butler

Mary Anne Butler's plays have won the Victorian Prize for Literature (2016), Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Drama (2016), NT Chief Minister's Book of the Year (2016 and 2018), and NT Literary Award Best Script (2010, 2014, 2018 and 2019). *Highway of Lost Hearts* is her first novel.

I'm clearing up the loft when I hear a strange buzzing. The dog stops short and perks up her ears, so I know it's not just me. A shaft of sunlight pierces the dirty window, the panes shudder and tremor, and then the whole thing bursts asunder, spraying razor-sharp shards and glass splinters all over the place. The dog howls: long, and low, and mournful. And then a Human Heart slip-slithers down the shaft of sunlight and splats smack-dab onto the wooden floorboards: stirring up dust motes, and dead flies, and too many ancient buried memories.

The heart looks up at me with a deep-dimpled smile.

love you could drown in

Dad?

I hear him cough from downstairs.

What?

I want to tell him that Mum's in the loft. But that sounds crazy enough from inside my head. It'll sound even crazier when I say it out loud.

Ahhh... nothing. All good.

He's crusty today. Didn't sleep well. Lung cancer. Stage Four. Metastasising all over the shop. He can't get the breath in deep enough, which makes him tired, which in turn makes him cranky. Which is fine, unless you have to actually live with it. When he slumps into one of these moods, a bleak, tense gloom plummets down onto the whole house and it's impossible to shake.

Should've died alongside your mother, he'll say.

Can't argue with that, I mumble. Not loud enough for him to hear.

The Heart flips over onto its back, arches its head, and cackles like a maniac at me.

Crah-crah-crah-crah-crah-crah-CRAH!

A Kookie! It's a Blue-Winged Kookaburra. Flown straight through the window. A juvenile; must be just learning to fly. It leaps up onto its clawed

feet, shakes itself off, skitters over to a pile of boxes and hops up on top of one marked *train set*. It looks me dead in the eye, flaps its wings twice, flies straight for my forehead—and then diverts at the last second to zip back out the window. My heart nearly stops with it. Beaks like arrows, those things.

I look around at the splintered glass, cobwebs and dust, cardboard boxes crammed full of my mother's deceased life: memories stacked one on top of another. There's a huge temptation in me to angle the whole pile towards the manhole, push them over, and let physics send the lot tumbling: down down down the steps, straight out through the front door and into the street, where they might disappear all by themselves.

Fat chance. I know he'll never let that happen. And once he's finally gone, it'll be me up here packing up the lot: him, her and my whole damned childhood. Piled up into a truck and sent off to Saint Vinnies for a second chance at life.

A mouldy, stale Wet Season smell mingles with the chronic heat and rising humidity. I can't find what I came up looking for anyway, so I pick up the dog—all twenty-seven kilos of her—and navigate the glass maze until we get to the manhole. I put her down safely, and we descend the steps together.

I find Dad in the kitchen, trying to light the gas stove. Last time he did that, he singed both his eyebrows off.

Here, I say, taking over. I light the gas and put the kettle on.

Find anything? he asks.

No. The window broke. A Kookie came straight through it. Glass everywhere.

Kookie?

Blue-Winged.

Ah. They're back, then. Your mum used to feed them the bacon rinds.

a bacon-shaped memory where a mum once stood

She's got to be somewhere, he says.

You had her last.

No, I didn't.

You did. We came back from the crematorium, and you wouldn't let me touch her.

I put her down somewhere.

Where?

I can't remember.

These days he's lost inside his own internal labyrinth which doesn't seem to have any entrance or exit points. He reckons it's the drugs, and maybe it is. Either way, it drives me batty. He waits a beat, and then the inevitable:

Fancy a game of Scrabble?

And right away he's back to my old dad: dragging out the board, setting up the letter racks, propping upright in his favourite chair; and we spend the next two hours sipping tea and laying down tiles and arguing about archaic versus contemporary language while the Dog snores and grunts and farts at our feet. And then it all goes to shit when he tries to convince me that ERRORIST is a legitimate word, as in One Who Commits An Error. I argue that it's not. He checks his fifty-year-old Shorter Oxford English Dictionary—which doesn't have it—but he follows that up with his standard 'because it's a contemporary word it won't be in there' line. And he won't let me check online at home because he doesn't trust the Interwebbies. He thinks they're spying on us. And I know I should let it go, should let him make up any bloody language he wants to, at this stage of his life. He'll be wordless soon enough.

At six o'clock he wants his dinner, so I fry up the lamb chops and mash the spuds and steam the broccoli and beans while the Dog hovers around my feet, salivating. Dad insists on eating at the table, so I set that as well; and when we finally do eat, he complains that the veggies are too crunchy, so he leaves them on the side. And the chops are too fatty, so he cuts off half the meat. But I know that's just his way of navigating his dwindling appetite, so I nod and say I'll feed them to the dog, later on. And tell him to at least eat his mash, which he does not.

He's in bed by eight—cannula hooked up to the soft-humming oxygen concentrator—and I sneak in five minutes later to turn out the light. He's having a vivid dream: eyelids flickering erratically, lips twitching like he's trying to tell me something. I watch them pucker and quiver with the effort, and something deep in me wants to crawl into bed with him. Snuggle down with him under the covers. Try to make everything go away, so that he's all right again.

But I can't.

I remember as a kid thinking he could fix everything. And then the shock when I realised he couldn't. That there are some things which are just un-fixable. My school friend Jez was killed on the train tracks, and I asked my dad:

What happens when you're dead?

Nothing.

Nothing?

Nothing.

How can there be nothing?

There just is. You're here, then you're not.

... so Jez is...

Not here.

But where is he?

He's nowhere.

I tried to wrap my head around it.

How can he be nowhere?

pulped into nothingness

muscle and bones and hair and teeth minced fresh across the tracks

He's dead, Mot. That's it for him. Over. Finito. No more. Lesson to be learned from your friend Jez: Don't play on the train tracks. Enough now, I've got things to do.

And a hole blasted through my gut which left me emptier than I'd ever thought possible.

I feel a trembling around my calves and it's the dog, shaking and quivering. Leaning into me hard as if she's trying to get inside my skin. Must be a storm around somewhere.

Not possible, I think. It never rains in October. But then again, it's hard to predict these days. Climate's all over the shop. And then I remember the Kookaburra's maniacal laugh. And a frog starts up its croaking in the downpipe. That's rain, all right. Nature never lies.

Perfect. Broken loft window, and it's about to piss with rain.

The Dog hates storms. Once, I was heading out to see a film and I locked her inside the house because it was night, and there was a storm coming. She panicked and broke through the back glass door, bolted down the road and followed me into the theatre. First thing I know is I'm standing in the queue buying a ticket when this low, eerie, mournful howl starts up behind me. I recognise that sound straight away and spin to see her, coat covered in splinters of glass, dripping wet and quivering. She seriously looks like Black Shuck. I squat down to her level, clap my hands hard, and her ears prick up straight away. She makes a beeline for me: hiding under my legs, trembling glassy blood-water from a cut on her nose. The woman behind the counter kindly refunds me for my ticket and I take off my coat, wrap the Dog up snug and safe, and heave her the three long, rainy blocks home. Her heart thuds overtime for the first two, but by the third she's clearly growing into the rhythm, because she spends that one licking my face dry as the rain beats down on it.

I lift the Dog in next to Dad, and tuck her well under the sheets to muffle the encroaching thunder and lightning. She gives me her moon-eyed look.

Don't desert us, she pleads. The pack has to stay together.

Sorry, girl. I won't be long.

I head out to the garage and scrunt around for the tarpaulin, unearth some ancient ockie straps and a hammer, put on my boots, head up to the loft and crunch across the broken glass to try and plug the window up. Storms around here tend to rip whole roofs off—so what my little ockie-strap-tarpaulin set-up will do, remains to be seen. I wind an ockie strap tight around each corner of the tarpaulin, attach them to the corners of the window frame, and chuck a few nails along the edges for good measure. Then I head back down. Tomorrow I'll call in a glazier to get it properly sorted. I scoop my trembling, terrified Dog out from under Dad's sheets, pop her into my bed, and get in next to her. She curls into her own ball of safety; nose shoved deep in my armpit for added pack security.

An explosion of thunder shakes me awake in the wee hours, so I pop the quivering Dog back into Dad's bed and head back up to the loft to check my handiwork. One corner of the tarpaulin's come unhinged, and it's flapping all over the place. I try to reattach it; but a surge of wind tears the other corners away from their moorings, rips the whole thing out of my hand and I watch it fly off into the night like a polyester ghost.

There's no point fighting anymore, so I just stare out and admire the force of it. Rain explodes from the heavy clouds, and every streak of lightning is beautiful and terrifying; electricity pulsating throughout. Storms are magic, really. Here we are thinking that we can control the universe, yet a single monster storm could wipe us all out in a matter of seconds.

Rain pisses in horizontally and Mum's boxes are getting soaked, so I start stacking them into the far corner, away from the broken window. They're heavy. And wet. I lift the ones I can, and half-drag the rest while thunder booms around me in massive, roiling waves. By the time I pick up the final box it's disintegrating; mostly cardboard pulp with packing tape wound around it. I wrap my arms tight around the remains, and heave it upwards.

It feels oddly warm. Heat radiates from the inside, as if there's something alive in there. For a second, I wonder if a possum or carpet python has made it their home. Wouldn't be the first time we've had wildlife up here. But a python wouldn't be this warm, and a possum'd be scrabbling through the thin walls of the box by now, trying to gouge my eyes out.

And then I notice that the box is glowing. At first I think it's the reflection from a streetlight. But no. It's definitely coming from deep inside the box. A warm, eerie light oozes out between bits of disintegrating cardboard, casting shadows onto my skin. The cardboard pulp gets hotter, and everything in me screams out to drop the thing; but it's like sleep paralysis. My brain sends signals to my arms which they can't seem to execute, and my legs feel numb and leaden, and then an electric charge shoots

straight up through my body, riveting me to the floorboards. I suddenly understand the expression frozen in fear, because that's the only way to describe it. I'm literally rigid with terror.

The bottom of the box explodes, and an urn tumbles out.

Mum's ashes.

They land splat-dab on the floor, bounce three times towards the manhole, then stop suddenly short. The rest of the box oozes from my hands and slides onto the floor, spewing out miniature train engines and carriages and stations and bridges. I stare at the urn. It doesn't move. I edge towards it, reach down and wrap my hand around it. It's still warm, as if she's just been put in there straight from the burning. I pick it up, and instantly smell sulphur—

and then I just drop the thing, and bolt. As fast as I can. Down the steps. I scoop my trembling Dog out from Dad's bed, put her in mine, and hunker close down next to her. I don't know which of us is shaking more. I stroke her nose to calm us both down until her breath settles into a deep grunting rhythm, and her paws start twitching in a cat-chasing dream.

Mum floats vivid back into my head. That deep-dimpled smile of hers. Her contagious laugh; mouth cavernous and free. *Laugh like a drain*, my dad used to say. But as he likes to remind me, I didn't see her in the non-laughing years. My Stray Years, as he calls them. The years I couldn't connect.

When I finally garnered the courage to contact them again, all I could think was please, please, please let Mum answer the phone. But it wasn't Mum who answered. It was Dad.

Your mother's got cancer, he says. Just like that. No 'How are you, where are you, are you all right?' Just—

Your mother's got cancer.

So I clean up what's left of myself, gather up what little I still own, and head back to the place I used to call home.

I go with them for the appointment to the oncologist, where he pronounces that the cancer has taken up residence in my mother's spine, having holidayed there from her lungs.

Secondary, he says. Stage Four. Three months. If that.

And then the impossibly short, impossibly surreal not-quite-three-months during which chemo takes over. Chemo, which multiplies the shitty cells at the same rate it multiplies the good cells: so they race side by side, and the good cells take the lead for a bit, holding steady, but then way too soon they start to tire—peaked too early—and the shitty cells sneak up from behind, encroach from the inside lane, do a stealthy overtake to pilfer the lead—

loss of appetite
loss of taste

surge forward while the good cells fall backwards, plum tuckered out with their early efforts.

loss of hair
cheekbones protruding

And the shitty cells have this one pegged. They bolt forward on the final lap, scream around the last bend—

bones stick skeletal through skin

cross the finish line before anyone knows it; and we're left with the diminishing. The gaunt forty kilos and counting: 39, 38, 37. The brittle sparrowness of a body, crumbling. Yet something still pumps, somehow; pushing her indomitably forward. Until one day it doesn't, any more.

the impossibility of nothingness

And then it's over.

the weight of emptiness

Just like that.

the ache of a space

Me and Dad crumble, and for a time it's like the Dog is the only functional being amongst us; until she points out that she can't open the dog food herself, and so I have to do something, have to move forward, even if it's only to open a can of Casserole with Five Kinds of Meat, and tip it up into her bowl.

And now Mum's been stuck up there for a whole year. Alone. In a cardboard box. And it makes my soul ache. So I peel myself quietly out of bed, and creep back up the steps. She's still sitting on the edge of the manhole, like she's waiting for me to bring her up a cuppa. I pick her up. It's cool and dark inside there now; no sign of the light or heat from before—and I wonder if I'm losing my marbles, as well.

I nestle her into bed with the Dog and me. The Dog licks the outside of the urn with a hot, dry, tender tongue. Like she knows Mum's inside, and is trying to fix her, make her whole again. I lie there and stare into it. Think of her cells, her bones, her brain, her neurons. Her heart. Charcoaled and pulverised into dust. Poured inside this hollow plastic space. I touch the urn to feel her nearness, and a bubble of thought appears above my head. She's the one I loved, and he's the one I'm stuck with. And if I wasn't related to him, I'd have nothing to do with him—and that's the truth. And I think of the Stray Years, when I left because of him, but the real consequence was that I lost all that time with her.

I'm sorry, I whisper into the urn.

the things that can't be undone

I'm so sorry.

A knot of regret screws deep inside me, making its home so tight in the core of my gut that it's impossible to undo.

The Dog lifts her head and eyeballs me. Asks me if I'm okay. I don't respond, so she wriggles her way upwards in the bed, rests her snout on my solar plexus, and breathes there steady for a bit until my respirations fall in line with hers. And then we breathe together in a soft, gentle rhythm until the cold grey light of dawn sneaks in on us, and we finally fall into a deep and dreamless sleep.

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George Sand talks about the drapes

Anne M Carson

Anne M Carson is a poet who is published internationally and widely in Australia. *Massaging Himmler: A Poetic Biography of Dr Felix Kersten* is forthcoming in 2019.

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*History thus makes use of everything: a merchant's bill, a cookbook, a laundry list; that is how twenty-seven lengths of green velvet can inform the history of humankind.**

Deep green, redolent of forest and fir
tree. Nap lush enough to run your fingers

through. Grandmama bought them to
redrape the whole chateau—twenty–

seven lengths for all the mullioned
windows, all the terrace doors. To dress

them in finery, to bring hints of foliage
inside. But her last illness overcame

her plans. Instead they led a sheltered
life, not swinging in scent-laden summer

days as expected. Not absorbing the angry
recriminations grandmama and mama

flung at each other, fighting over me in
the salon. Not sheltering me in my boudoir

as I wrote through the cold shiver of
winter nights. Saved the ravages of moths,

* George Sand. *The Story of My Life: The Autobiography of George Sand: a group translation.* Ed. Thelma Jurgrau. New York, USA: The State University of New York Press, 1991. 127.

the indignity of retirement, saved the
chagrin of replacement—new, younger

drapes with nap still springy and thick.
They slept the revolution through, folded

and fallow, missed the messy loves-gone-
wrong, drunken confessions, squeals

of children at play. Deep in their cotton
sleeves, they slumbered through the decades,

hidden in grandmama's camphor chest.
After my death, Solange's daughter, Aurore,

found them, shook out the dust and restored
them to glory. Now they hang where grand-

mama always intended, verdant picture-
window framing. Deep within their knowing,

in the way of inanimate things; witnessing,
absorbing. Green inside and out.

Now I Am Six

Marcia Jacobs

Marcia Jacobs lives in Melbourne where she teaches and writes. Her essays and poems have appeared in various literary journals and anthologies here and abroad. These include *Meanjin*, *Poetica Magazine* and *Singing For All He's Worth—Essays in Honour of Jacob G. Rosenberg* (Picador).

Anne Michaels,
'The Hooded Hawk'

sorrow magnifies
through the generations, each human's part
heaped upon the next, in this way our griefs
are joined.

I was most comfortable in my skin on Sundays. Like tea leaves steeping in a warmed pot, Sundays were infused with Yiddish song and verse. On that day of the week, I learned to read and write the *alef-beys.* Huddled with the other children around a communal table, our elbows almost touching, I paid close attention to my teacher as she crafted perfectly formed letters with smooth yellow chalk on the blackboard. Holding a freshly sharpened lead pencil in my fist, I tried to emulate her skill, laboriously entering each letter, *aleph*, *beys*, *gimel*, *daled*, into a pristine *heft*, an exercise book given to me on the first day of Sunday school. After completing the task, our *lererin* (teacher), Mirele Kohn, would guide our pronunciation: '*Noch amol, un noch amol*,' again, and once again, she intoned. We repeated the phonic sounds over and over. Each letter seemed to carry its own melody, its own cadence. On my page, they reminded me of black quavers dancing from right to left across thin blue lines.

At six years of age, and old enough to understand that my world was marked by boundaries and routine, I had already completed a first year at the St Kilda state school under the tutelage of Mrs Easter. One of many children who hailed from an immigrant family where little or no English is spoken, I was intrigued by siblings John and Betty, the protagonists in my first reader. I hankered for the easy repartee they enjoyed with their parents and with each other. I also discovered the joy of singing English folk songs and *God Save the Queen.* I didn't know much about God or the Queen, but I liked the anthem's decisive rhythm. I looked forward to the

assemblies on Mondays when we stood in designated rows around the flagpole and sang to the unknown with gusto.

• • •

The Sunday school was named in honour of the renowned Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem. Although a short distance from our compact flat in Eildon Road, St Kilda, the drive often felt interminable. With little time in the morning to digest *gepregelte broit*, the thick slices of French toast my mother made from Friday night's meal of leftover challah, it was all I could do to prevent myself from hurling fried bread residuals over the upholstery in my father's cream-white Ford Prefect. During a span of twenty years in which the car would service our family, I cannot recall an uneventful ride. My father refused to accept that his driving, a sequence of jerky movements along Brighton Road, was the cause of my carsickness. As he began to make the turn into Sinclair Street, the school gates looming on the horizon provided a reprieve. Within a few hours, I knew I'd have to get back in the car again.

On that first Sunday in February, at the start of the school year, he held my hand as he always did, whether we were strolling along the Elwood Pier or sauntering down Grey Street to the corner milk bar for a vanilla ice cream cone. In the front yard, we joined the small throng of acquaintances, mainly fathers and children, mingling around the brawny oak.

At the height of summer, an umbrella of luxuriant green provided much needed shade. In the successive months and years, we students usually congregated under the tree's wide canopy of leaves, bearing witness to a cyclical transmutation of colours. Against the backcloth of changing seasons, we'd shuffle gleefully through a carpet of pale vellum, cardamom red, burnt amber and russet brown. We'd speak to one another in English and listen with half an ear to parents and teachers who conversed in Yiddish. Throughout childhood, two languages would always remain in counterbalance. One for the world outside, and the other, our *mameloshn*, our mother tongue, reserved for home and Sundays.

In those days, it hadn't yet occurred to me to question the provenance of language, nor to query the melancholic exhaustion in our parents' eyes. I was still too young to recognise that their demeanour was not borne out of hours in factories bent over intricate piecemeal work, nor from standing behind the punishing fumes of the steam press. During the earlier kindergarten years when my world didn't extend beyond the convergence of Eildon Road and Acland Street, I think I always expected the certainty of absence. I sensed its intransigence; I anticipated its unspoken resolve to rear its head repeatedly and indiscriminately.

Even then, I was able to intuit that the past can, without warning, impinge upon the here and now. I could feel it when my father quietly sang a Yiddish song about a little boy who tells his mother that he has to leave home in order to make his way in the world. I could picture that little boy standing in a doorway, dressed in a grey corduroy jacket, a red scarf wound loosely around his neck. Clutching a worn knapsack to his chest, he valiantly attempts to console his heartbroken mother. His promises to return fail to placate and with twilight approaching he abandons his plans. A mother's love prevails. She and her son embrace before he is tucked into bed. I could never tell my father that the song filled me with an ineffable sadness; that the songs he always sang to me seemed to carry an undeclared history. After he'd finish singing, silence would float between us.

• • •

On the occasion of my sixth birthday, my mother presented me with two collections of poetry, A. A. Milne's *When We Were Very Young* and *Now We Are Six.* They are still in my possession. Reaching for the treasured slim volumes on my bookshelf, I open the worn navy-blue cover of *Now We Are Six* and flip through pages now dog-eared with age and splattered with memory. Traces of hot chocolate and the coarse sticky vestiges of cinnamon toast are mementos of countless breakfasts and suppers when I pored over those poems and E. H. Shepard's illustrations of Christopher Robin and his teddy bear, Pooh.

Poetry propelled me into a world beyond mine. I imagined a little boy's days and evenings in the company of his nanny, who was attired in starched grey and white. I imagined that they sipped tea and consumed custard tarts in the large nursery filled with a collection of soft toy animals, made anthropomorphic in A. A. Milne's stories. I imagined that large nursery on the top floor of a stately English home; a roaring fire in the inglenook grate; the warmth on Christopher Robin's skin; his nose sometimes pressed against the sash window overlooking walled garden borders of mature hedges, pale pink roses and purple bergamots. I assumed a straightforwardness in his life which I coveted, not because of privilege but because I imagined a serene and untroubled childhood. Reading Christopher Milne's autobiography as an adult informed me otherwise, but as a young girl, wistfulness caught me unawares. It stayed with me. It became my steadfast and intimate companion for longer than I care to admit to myself.

At first glance, Christopher Robin and I had much in common. Our fathers composed verse for their only children. Both fathers were prolific.

Both wrote plays, short stories and essays. Their biographies are well documented. One was born into comfortable circumstances in Hampstead, England; the other raised in Baluty, an impoverished neighbourhood in the city of Lodz, Poland. One was universally recognised for his contribution to juvenile literature, and the other revered, towards the end of his life, for a comprehensive body of writings. My father's words grew out of dusky, private shadows and a chamber of collective anamnesis[1].

• • •

The Eildon Road flats were filled with children. I knew them, and our parents knew each other too; they shared a mutual past. While I could neither have articulated nor substantiated such knowledge, I presumed a yesteryear that hung over them like a dark cloud. Not yet acquainted with the truth of history, I didn't have the language for a persistent underlying disquiet that silently burrowed its way into my consciousness.

Meanwhile, in spite of our parents' fears about safety and wellbeing, on the street we were left to our own devices. Sometimes, our games meant that we would take life into our hands, stepping over lines in grey pavement squares. Sometimes we played at make-believe. We improvised. A shady thicket separating the orange-brick buildings was our rustic proscenium. Behind the bottlebrush shrubs, we carried out self-assigned roles of king and queen, prince and princess, with gravitas. Purple berries scattered in the unkempt grass were our currency. They were our pretend jewels that fell like soft rain from verdant overhanging branches, and in their dappled shelter we celebrated our insouciance. Afterwards, we returned home to mothers and fathers who were locked in unspeakable dreams.

I too had dreams. They pulled me into a labyrinth of passages suffused in blackness and milk-white fires in the night. Dreams invited faceless children, obsidian figures to dance hand-in-hand on my rose-coloured ceiling. Only the first glint of dawn brought calm. When my mother attempted to rouse me from a welcome early-morning slumber, I'd tell her about unrelenting nocturnal images that interrupted my sleep. 'Why would you have bad dreams?' she asked.

• • •

Even after that third Sunday, which coincided with the date of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, April 19, I was unable to name it—an inexpressible swelling that habitually emerged without warning and remained lodged within. Looking back on that day when we children were summoned into a school room prepared for memory, I imagine that the sun must have tumbled through the twisted limbs of the old oak, grinding autumn's palette into a murky paste.

Inside, walls and windows were covered in a swath of black crepe. Six thick white candles had been placed on a low table positioned towards the front of a small stage. Against the backdrop, fashioned out of cardboard, six letters, *gimel-ayin-daled-ayin-nun-kof*, were affixed onto a large sheet. Already able to decipher the characters, I spelled out, '*Gedenk!* Remember!' Well versed as to its meaning in another context, the word *gedenk* had until now foreshadowed castigation. '*Gedenk*, remember,' warned my mother when she threatened punishment for my insolence. Yet here, in a small cramped auditorium, I was mystified. What was there to remember? As I scanned the faces around me, the stretch of silence was unsettling. The teachers' sombre gaze, unnerving.

And so it began. Strange incantations accompanied the kindling of each candle: Auschwitz, Majdanek, Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Sobibor, Treblinka. Flames the colour of straw flickered in half-light, casting their glow on a tall thirteen-year-old as she walked up to the podium. I took it all in: her measured gait; a thick braid flung over her left shoulder; a passionate delivery of the first lines from a Yiddish poem; her pale, thin face suddenly crumpling, a teacher's arms around her slender body; an eruption of weeping.

Years later, when it would be my turn to recite the first stanza of that particular lengthy poem of remembrance and resistance by Binem Heller, '*In Warszawa Ghetto iz itst khoydesh Nisn*', 'In the Warsaw Ghetto, it is now the month of Nisan', I'd remember that girl with the long plait. I'd think about her age and the likelihood of her birth in a DP camp—a place borne out of the crossover between captivity and freedom.

History paints a circle around the present. Heller's poem weaves the ancient chronicle of Jewish liberation from Egyptian bondage together with a shattering reality: a family in the Warsaw Ghetto observes the annual ritual of Seder for the last time. It is Passover eve, 19 April 1943. Tonight, the overriding question 'Why is this night different to all other nights in the year?' can't be met with the customary response outlined in the *Haggadah*, the traditional text replete with instructions and benedictions. Biblical and Talmudic declarations of God's benevolence are redundant in the ghetto where the table is bare, the Angel of Death arrives uninvited and Elijah's cup remains empty. Tonight, traditional metaphors of deliverance and redemption smoulder like burning embers.

Following the young girl's suspended recitation, my premonition deepened when *lerer* Diner marched briskly onto the stage. Revered for his gentle nature, he stood before us, looking curiously dishevelled in a dark suit that hung off his small frame. As he spoke, his tone became

increasingly shrill and strained. It seemed out of character for one who was normally softly-spoken. Stifling a nervous laugh, I shifted uncomfortably on the metal foldaway chair. His speech was peppered with *ghettos*, *konzentratzia lager* (concentration camps), *gehargete Yidn* (murdered Jews). I was hearing these words for the first time.

I remember wanting *lerer* Diner to stop talking. I couldn't bear the searing pain in his voice. I wanted to place my hands over my ears. I wanted to be anywhere but here. Awareness like a conflagration slowly building in my throat confirmed my unbidden dreams at night. Much easier to picture myself outside where gossamer clouds moved gracefully across a soundless, cornflower blue sky and where my father would surely be waiting for me at the gate. I knew he'd be there to greet me with his broad smile, his arms outstretched, ready to receive my hug.

The commemoration finally over, I ran and threw myself against him. The tune of *der Partizaner lied*, the song of the Partisans, *Zog nit keynmol az do geyst dem letsten veg: Never say that this is the final road for you*, still ringing in my ears. 'What happened to you at school?' he asked. 'Tell me!' His demand to know was met with silence but he persevered in his cross-examination. I withheld, until all at once the trauma of that last hour spilled forth like a torrential downpour. 'Once something terrible happened and I know it has something to do with you; it has something to do with us.' Oblivious to the gathering around us—a group of other parents and students watching a father attempting to console his daughter—I continued to sob without shame. Slowly, tentatively, I began to pull away, making sure that I was still close enough to nestle against his chest; still close enough to scrutinise his face. I remember his eyes. They were filled with helplessness and recognition.

•••

Language and history are fused together like interlocking bracelets. In Yiddish, I learnt about my parents' inestimable sorrow. I learnt about the human predilection for good and evil. I learnt that life can bring both inviolability and miscreancy. I learnt about the Catastrophe which, like a sharply serrated knife, spliced time into two halves. I learnt about that period, *far der melchome*, before the war, and then afterwards, *noch der melchome*. I learnt about the interim, the rupture. We referred to it as *der letster Khurbn*, our most recent destruction. The word 'Holocaust' was not yet in vogue. Derived from the Greek *holokauston*, it means 'sacrifice by fire'. In subsequent years, it would become the universal reference to the 20th century's state-sponsored destruction of six million Jews. In adolescence and adulthood, I would assiduously avoid its use whether in teaching or writing. Periodically, I'd have to explain to my friends and colleagues that, for me, the allusion to sacrifice is troubling. I'm uneasy with the implication that clarification can be made—that there can be meaning or purpose to untold suffering. Besides, in mother tongue its connotation seems too distant and foreign.

•••

At home, the past pressed against the present and stumbled ahead of the future. Love and loss were indistinguishable. In the aftermath of a first commemoration, I became the sole audience for my parents' reminiscences. Information was offered in gradual doses like an occasional tablespoon of pink cough syrup. My parents were considered in what they imparted, or so they believed. Eventually I would learn that memory doesn't wait for opportune moments. Its appearance arbitrary, I could never be prepared for fragmented pieces of testimony.

In the kitchen, my mother proved adept at multitasking in ways I'll never be able to rival. Holding a cigarette in one perfectly manicured hand, with the other she'd stir a dollop of sour cream into a pot of crimson borscht on our freestanding green and yellow stove. Simultaneously launching into a Yiddish soliloquy about another time, another place, she'd speak of starvation in the Warsaw Ghetto. And the uprising when she leapt between tenement rooftops, barely managing to escape an onslaught of Nazi bullets. And her return to the family's temporary residence in the ghetto, only to discover that all the occupants of the building had been deported to Treblinka. Then, as if detailing an itinerary for holiday destinations, she'd reel off the names of concentration camps where she was an inmate. Altogether there are eight. She counted them on her fingers. I always assigned myself the task of memorising her trajectory. To this day, though, I still lose my way in a maze of unfathomable numbers.

From the St Kilda Esplanade's grassy slope, my father and I used to watch the celadon-green waves crash against the shoreline. We'd drink in the bay's crisp, salty fragrance, tossing leftover rye crumbs to wailing seagulls. My father always seemed lost in thought but I was used to his introspection. I knew he was elsewhere—back in Auschwitz where birds didn't dare to fly and where humans foraged for scraps. During those moments, he avoided my gaze as he spoke of *appels*—those endless roll-calls when he was forced to stand naked in winter's chilled early dawn.

•••

When my parents spoke to me of brutality, death and the miracle of survival, try as I might, I could never contain the involuntary tears that pricked my eyelids. '*Farvos veynstu?* Why are you crying?' my mother asked. 'You shouldn't cry,' my father gently chastised. And then, with quiet affirmation, they both concurred. '*Darfst visin*, you need to know!'

I would come to realise that my parents' stories were never complete. Instead they were snatches of life, particles of history that, for me, had long metamorphosed into chiaroscuro grey and ash-white images. As I grew up, they would continue to play around in my head like a newsreel on a home movie camera. Slowly, they'd seep into memory I could never claim as mine. But since memory is my *yerushe*, my inheritance, it became mine. Its weight, its silence, its scream—we, the children of survivors, carry them.

Note

1 My father, poet, storyteller and author Jacob G. Rosenberg (1922–2008), is best known for his memoirs, *East of Time* and *Sunrise West*.

Whirlwind
Claire Gregory

Claire Gregory has been spinning stories all her life, both in the pages of her fiction and in her career as an archaeologist and historian. She finds endless inspiration in the Australian landscape and in the three young storytellers-in-training whose lives are entwined with her own.

Your mind whirled all the way down that long road,
rising and falling with the dusty plains.
On both sides twisted columns of red,
scattered earth whipped into air,
given life.

We passed quickly, but nothing escapes your eye, and
you caught your breath to see the king of the sky
brought down;
reduced to a pile of feathers on the asphalt,
all the grace flown from his bones.

You turned as we streamed by,
straining against your seatbelt,
little nose flat against the glass,
and watched until the departed
disappeared into the past.

You said nothing more for many breaths,
and then from the back seat came your quiet voice.
'I didn't know I had a favourite bird,' you said,
'until just then.'

A heartbeat later, 'Why do we all have to die?'

There are so many answers,
but there are none
that could ever make enough sense.

Tears welled in your eyes as we drove on,
only visitors under the vast blue sky.

Photograph
Steve Denehan

Steve Denehan lives in Ireland with his wife Eimear and daughter Robin. He is the author of *Miles of Sky Above Us, Miles of Earth Below* (Cajun Mutt Press) and *Of Thunder, Pearls and Birdsong* (Fowlpox Press). He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best New Poet.

I look at the photograph
curled at the corners
dulled by time
I look at her
my mother
old to me then
young to me now
I blink
look again
she is younger still

Parrot Lady
C. A. Broadribb

C. A. Broadribb has a computer science degree, an MA in Professional Writing and a Graduate Diploma in Journalism. She lives in Sydney.

The lady looks like a parrot, with yellow, orange, red and purple splodges all over her shirt. Her hair's in a bun, but not the sort you can eat. Julie explained it to me, about the different types of buns and how you can eat some but not others. I reckon it's confusing. Why not have different words for different things? We could call it a 'hun', combining 'hair' and 'bun'. Or a 'bair', only then it would sound the same as 'bear' so that would confuse people too.

'Edgar, it's rude to stare at people. Remember how we talked about staring?' Julie says.

'You said it's okay with dark sunglasses. That lady's wearing sunglasses.'

'No, I said if *you're* wearing dark glasses people won't notice. It doesn't work if it's the other person wearing them.'

'Why not?'

'Drink your coffee before it gets cold.'

I take a sip of it but I don't really like it. I only ordered it because Julie always drinks coffee and she's smart and stylish and I want everyone to think that I'm smart and stylish too.

'Why's she sitting there all by herself?' I say. Everybody else is sitting with other people.

'Sometimes people do. She might just need some time to herself.'

'She's wearing a ring. That means she's married. Why isn't her husband with her?'

'There could be all sorts of reasons. Maybe he's at work.'

'What do you reckon she's thinking about?'

'Goodness, Edgar, I don't know.'

Julie's got that funny look on her face she sometimes gets when she's with me. She never looks like that when she's talking to other people. I've seen her talking to staff at the home and she acts differently with them.

'Do you reckon I'll ever get married?'

'Well, Edgar, some people believe that there's someone for everyone.'

'You mean one person will marry everybody?'

'Not exactly.'

'Maybe I'll marry someone like that parrot lady. I won't leave her sitting alone at a café. I'll spend every single minute with her.'

'That's very romantic.'

Julie sips her coffee. She's not talking as much as she usually does. She looks like she's thinking about something. Maybe the same thing as the parrot lady is thinking about, or maybe something different.

This café we're in has an indoors part and an outdoors part and we're outdoors, sitting on benches under a big, stripy blue umbrella.

'Would that umbrella keep out the rain?' I ask.

Julie glances up as if she hadn't noticed it before. 'Perhaps. But it's mainly to keep out the sun.'

'But I thought umbrellas are for rain, and people are supposed to carry them. That looks too big to carry.'

'It's a special type of umbrella.'

'You mean like the home is a special type of home?'

'Er... yes. Some things are like that.'

'And we're both special because we're sitting under the umbrella but I'm twice as special because I live at the home too.'

'Yes. Have you decided what you want for lunch?'

The waitress comes over again. She's not colourful like the parrot lady. She's wearing a blue shirt and black pants and her hair's tied in a ponytail and she looks bored. Julie orders something with a funny Italian name and I ask for a ham sandwich because it's always the same no matter which café we go to, so I know what to expect. The waitress scrawls on her notepad and shuffles away.

'The parrot lady's had that soup in front of her all the time we've been here and she's only had three and a half spoonfuls,' I tell Julie.

Julie nods, but doesn't seem very interested.

'If it was too hot it would make sense but it can't be the same hotness now as it was when she first got it, can it?'

'Maybe she doesn't like the taste.'

'But wasn't the half a spoonful to see what it was like? Why have three more spoonfuls if she doesn't like it?'

'Let's not worry about it, Edgar. Tell me what you've been doing lately. Has anything interesting been happening at the home?'

'The cleaner washed the dining room floor yesterday and it got all slippery and people kept falling over. It was really funny.'

'What about the crafts class? Did you make anything?'

'Greg was running that. I don't like him. I made a big papier-mâché ball and told him it was his bald head and he got mad at me.'

'Well, you know that's not very nice. It's not his fault he doesn't have hair.'

I don't understand why Julie's always trying to spoil things. Doesn't she ever have fun? I bet that parrot lady's fun at times. Only right now she looks so serious. She's given up on the soup and is tearing little pieces off a bread roll and eating them one by one. It's going to take her a long time to finish it that way.

'Why's she wearing such a bright shirt? Does she want everyone to notice her, even though all she's doing is eating bread?'

Julie seems confused for a moment, then looks at the lady.

'Maybe it's just to look nice. It's a kaftan, actually.'

'It looks new. But it's too loose. I bet someone bought it for her and got the wrong size.'

Julie looks thoughtful. 'You know, I think you're right.'

The bored waitress comes back with our lunches. Julie's having pasta. She should just call it pasta instead of that funny Italian name.

'How long has that parrot lady been here?' I ask the waitress.

She just looks at me funny and walks away.

'It would be rude for her to gossip about other customers,' Julie says. 'You shouldn't have asked her.'

'But we're talking about the parrot lady.'

'We don't work here.'

Julie's got all these complicated rules and it's hard to understand at times. Sometimes it's all right to talk about other people and sometimes it isn't.

'I bet the parrot lady's waiting for someone. That's why she's taking a really long time to eat lunch.'

Julie looks sceptical. 'She might have a headache or feel sick.'

'But she's facing the entrance like she wants to see who's coming in. I sometimes sit near the door to the craft room so I can see who goes in and out.'

Julie looks around. 'I don't know if that really means anything. Do you like your sandwich?'

'Yeah. It's a ham sandwich. It's got ham in it but not sand. And it's not made by witches so it's okay to eat it.'

'Yes, Edgar.' Julie's fiddling with her watch, even though it shows the same time as mine. Maybe she's wishing she had bought a cool Mickey Mouse watch like mine. Hers is just plain. Maybe I'll buy her a Mickey Mouse watch for her birthday and then she'll be happier. Only she won't

tell me when her birthday is. She just says, 'Near the end of the year,' whenever I ask and won't even say how near the end.

A young boy at another table starts screaming. He looks like he's about three years old. The woman with him is trying to shush him. The parrot lady frowns at him. Julie looks annoyed too.

'People shouldn't bring young children to cafés,' Julie says. 'They should be more considerate.'

'You're not used to kids screaming 'cause you don't have any,' I say. 'I bet parrot lady doesn't have any either.'

'I have no idea. Why do you keep talking about her?'

'It's a mystery. The Mystery of the Parrot Lady at the Café. I want to solve it and be famous like Sherlock Holmes.'

'You know he isn't real, don't you? He's just a character from a book.'

'I don't care. He's great. He could work out everything about that parrot lady in a minute. Only he's not here so I have to do it.'

Julie sighs. 'All right, Edgar. So, we've deduced that she's married, doesn't have kids, and someone bought that kaftan for her.'

'But not her husband because he would have got the right size, wouldn't he?'

'It must have been a surprise present. Otherwise, the buyer would have asked her what size she wore.'

'See, you're doing great. You can be Watson and I'll be Sherlock. I should have brought a big magnifying glass to look like a real detective.'

'What would you do with it?'

'I dunno. But I'd find something.'

'You thought that lady's waiting for someone. But she's not checking the time, like people do when they're waiting.'

Julie's right. Parrot lady's just sitting there doing nothing much. I worry that maybe I'm not such a good detective after all and people won't admire me and write books about me. But then I notice something.

'She's fiddling with her ring. She keeps looking like she's about to take it off but then she doesn't.'

'So she is. That's interesting.'

'I'm like that with clothes. I can't decide what to wear so I keep changing them. Like today I was trying to decide whether to wear my rugby shirt or my One Direction shirt or this one.'

I'm wearing my Dr Who shirt with the photo of the doctor standing in front of the Tardis, about to go off on a great adventure.

'It's not quite the same with wedding rings. People only have one.'

'But she can't decide if she wants to wear it or not. Maybe she can't decide if she wants to stay married or not.'

Julie pauses, a forkful of pasta halfway to her mouth. 'You know, you're quite a bright boy, Edgar. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.'

'Thanks. Hey, Marianne says I'm bright too. She runs the cooking class. I can boil eggs all by myself now.'

'Wonderful.' Julie smiles. 'You know what I noticed about your parrot lady? Her bag's expensive but her shoes are cheap.'

I look and look, but I can't see any price tags on the bag or the shoes. Julie must be one of those psychics who know things without anyone telling them.

'That bag's too large and chunky for her, though,' Julie says. 'I think a man bought it. A woman would have more fashion sense.'

'Did the same person buy her that shirt?'

'Kaftan. Maybe. I don't know.'

'Why didn't she just tell him the shirt and the bag are too big?'

Julie shrugs. 'I suppose she didn't want to hurt his feelings.'

'Like when I stub my toe on the door and it hurts?'

'Sort of.'

The waitress is talking to the parrot lady now, and I try to hear what they're saying, but the people sitting nearby are talking too loud. It would be rude to get up and go over to find out what they're saying. Julie told me off last time I did something like that. So I only hear a few words. Parrot lady says 'carrot cake' and then something else.

'Turena. Talana. Tyrina.'

'Sorry?' Julie says.

'That's what the lady said after she said carrot cake. Is it another type of cake?'

'I don't think she would order two. Even one isn't a good idea at her age.'

I don't know what Julie means. There's nothing wrong with cake. It's yummy. I'd eat two cakes if people let me.

Julie waves the waitress over again and asks for another cup of coffee. Then she says, 'You've been very helpful. What was your name?'

'Talaya,' the waitress mutters, and slouches away.

'That's a weird name,' I say.

'You mean uncommon,' Julie says. 'I think it's a lovely name.'

'It sounds like a car. Like Corolla.'

Julie looks around. The waitress is inside the café. 'Be polite, Edgar.'

'Maybe parrot lady comes here a lot. That's how she knows her name.'

'Or she just asked, like I did.'

'But Corolla smiled at her and she didn't smile at you.'

'Oh. Perhaps you're right, then.'

I can tell Julie's losing interest in the mystery. She's taken her mobile phone out and is tapping away on it. I wish I had a mobile phone to play with, but nobody will let me have one. All the staff at the home will give me is a toy phone with buttons on it that don't do anything. I should have brought it with me, though. Maybe parrot lady would think it was a real phone because she would be sitting too far away to see it properly.

'A friend's coming by to pick me up,' Julie says. 'She'll be here at 2pm.'

'Who is she? Where are you going to go? Can I come?'

'Her name's Anne. We're just going to the beauty salon for facials. You would get bored there.'

'Facials. Is that where you put green goo all over your face and cucumber pieces on your eyes and look like an alien?'

'Sort of. It's to cleanse my pores.'

'What are pores?'

'Oh, don't worry about it, Edgar. Would you like some ice cream?'

I ask for chocolate ice cream and while Corolla is getting it I watch parrot lady again. She's just finishing her carrot cake. It looked like cake, not carrots.

'Why's she allowed to have cake when she didn't eat all her soup? Nobody lets me have dessert unless I finish my meal first.'

'Yes, but she's an adult. You know, she does look unhappy. She's probably eating cake to cheer herself up.'

'Is she unhappy because she doesn't know if she wants to stay married or not?'

'Possibly. But we shouldn't jump to conclusions.'

'I don't like jumping. It makes my legs tired.'

I look around. Some of the people who were here when we came in have left and some new people have come in. Parrot lady's still the only person sitting on her own and it looks odd. I want to ask her to sit with us but Julie's always telling me I shouldn't talk to strangers because they might not like it or they might be mean to me. Of course, parrot lady wouldn't be mean. Nobody who wears such a pretty shirt would be mean to anyone.

'Julie, how come you're married and happy but she's married and unhappy?'

'Oh, people are all different, Edgar, and so are relationships.'

I don't understand that. 'If I ever get married will I be happy or not?'

'It depends if you find the right partner.'

'So parrot lady got the wrong one? Is the person who bought her that bag and shirt the right one?'

'Kaftan. And I have no idea.'

'How did you know your husband was the right husband?'

'I'd rather not talk about it, Edgar.'

Julie's so boring at times. She asks me about all the things I do but she hardly tells me anything about herself. I know she lives with her husband in a house somewhere and sometimes she calls it home but it's not like the home I'm in and she doesn't have cleaners or a cook like we do. But she has a pet poodle and that must be fun. We aren't allowed to have pets.

'Do you reckon parrot lady has any pets?' I say. 'What if she's got a pet parrot? That would be funny.'

'Yes. Especially if it's the same colour as her shirt.'

I laugh and laugh and a man and woman sitting at a table nearby stare at me, then look away. I hear the man mutter something about special needs.

Julie glances at her watch. 'Anne will be here soon. We'll give you a lift back so you don't have to walk.'

'But we haven't finished solving the mystery.'

'You can't work everything out, Edgar. Don't worry about it.'

Parrot lady's suddenly sitting up straighter, looking at someone or something behind me. A flashy red car is driving into the car park beside us. It stops near the entrance to the Arts Centre.

'That's a Rolls Royce, Edgar,' Julie says. 'Rich people have those.'

I watch the driver as he gets out to see if he looks rich, but he just looks ordinary. He's tall and has neat brown hair and is wearing a suit and tie. Parrot lady's smiling and waving at him, but he doesn't notice. He goes around to the other side of the car and opens the door and a young lady wearing a white dress gets out. They kiss and the rich man puts his arm around her shoulders and they walk into the Arts Centre together.

Parrot lady's taken her sunglasses off and is staring after them, looking shocked. Then she pulls a handkerchief out of her bag and dabs at her eyes.

'So much for her little middle-age fantasy,' Julie sighs.

'What do you mean?' I say.

'Relationships are complicated, Edgar. Always remember that.'

In this version

Dayna Patterson

Dayna Patterson is the author of *Titania in Yellow* (Porkbelly Press, 2019) and *If Mother Braids a Waterfall* (Signature Books, 2020). Her creative work has appeared recently in *POETRY*, *AGNI*, and *Passages North*, among others. She is the founding editor-in-chief of *Psaltery & Lyre*.

Romeo doesn't drink the apothecary's poison,
and Juliet awakens in his arms. They ride
horseback to Mantua and have seven kids,
hyphenate their surnames: Montague-Capulet.

Hamlet checks behind the hangings, sword sheathed,
and Ophelia doesn't drown in the glassy brook,
but goes to a women's college, studies botany.
Fratricidal uncle-king, guilt-gutted, offs himself.

In this version, Lear doesn't banish his third girl,
and Cordelia cares for him in second childhood,
spooning mashed turnip to his lips when teeth fail.
Cradles his head as he slips into void.

Othello suspects his suspicions, suffocates
his doubts, crushes the spine of Iago's lie,
loosens the villain's tongue so he finally explains.
And Desdemona bears cinnamon twins.

The nursling lives, and Lady Macbeth, Thane's wife,
is queenly, but not queen. Is content with legacy,
only nightwalking to hush her infant's teething,
only brewing wild poppy & milk for its gums.

In this version, I chase away my mother's blue beasts,
concoct a strong spell to keep her from breaking
out of my childhood. Later when I break
from my father's faith, fissures don't shift to ravines.

Leontes believes Hermione, or better yet
he never succumbs to morbid jealousy.
Therefore, their Perdita grows up like a song,
her mother's face familiar as sun on her skin.

Waves, Mountains, Wings and Sails: on Lorri Whiting, an expatriate woman artist

(Part One)

Kevin Brophy

Kevin Brophy is a poet, essayist and fiction writer. In 2015 he was writer-in-residence at the B. R. Whiting Library in Rome. His latest book, *Look at the Lake* (Puncher & Wattmann 2018), records two years of living in the community of Mulan in the Great Sandy Desert of Western Australia. This book was awarded the Wesley Michel Wright Prize for 2019. He is a past winner of the Calibre Prize for an outstanding essay. In 2019–20 he is poet in residence at the Keesing Studio in Paris. He is Professor Emeritus in Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne.

April 2015

Lorri Whiting, eighty-eight years old, in a bright marine jacket bulky enough to withstand storms at sea, was waiting for us at the Orbetello train station. We had travelled two hours north from Rome to meet her. She was sitting in her new red Citroën, elbow at the open driver's window, walking stick snug against her on the inside of the door, and the gearstick close up to her bulky body through the layers of clothes. She waved us into the car. Immediately I felt included in her world.

Behind her on the back seat was her dog, whose name we soon learned was 'Nuvolo': a British bulldog with a squash-faced, wheezing, snorting, overwhelmingly physical presence. She waved her arm back telling him to move over as Andrea slid in beside him. I climbed in the front seat.

'Meet Nuvolo,' Lorri announced. Her deep Australian voice rumbled along with the engine, telling us that 'nuvolo' was Italian for 'cloud', and that Nuvolo was the code name of a resistance fighter in the north of Italy during the Second World War. When Lorri had moved to Rome in 1955, Nuvolo (Giorgio Nascani) was one among a new generation of radical artists experimenting with the use of fabric, deerskin and raw materials in abstract collages on canvas. I would learn later that she had exhibited with him in her first Italian shows. Nuvolo had introduced her to the versatile 'seriotipie' method of screen-printing, which he had developed from his roots in the Umbrian town of Città di Castello, a centre for innovative printing techniques since the 15th century. Nuvolo, the artist, had died in 2008, so his code name had been taken up and honoured by Lorri's beloved bulldog.

We were on our way to have lunch at Lorri's favourite local *ristorante* beside a small beach at the bay of Porto Ercole, said to be the town where Caravaggio died in 1610, and a town now proud of its annual pirate festival. On one arm of the small harbour, the remains of the Spanish six-pointed star of Forte Stella nudged out above a forested slope. When we arrived Roberto, the *ristorante* owner, greeted Lorri as an old friend. She spoke with him in her broad, Australian-inflected fluent Italian. Lorri, I soon discovered, was not only a woman with an impressively bohemian and physical presence, but she had a quick and powerful mind coming at you in nonstop stories, questions, propositions, technical information, memories—with sudden asides to Nuvolo settled beside her, cooling himself on the floor tiles by spreading belly and legs as wide as possible.

As I listened to her I could hear occasionally the oval vowels of a slightly anglicised Australian accent coming through in ways that created echoes of her brother's voice so familiar to a particular generation of Australian followers of politics and public issues. 'Malcolm,' she said. 'Yes, we didn't share many interests or values. But as he got older he seemed to adopt a lot of my thinking and my values. He was all right. We had good times together as children. Did you know him?' I had to confess to having regarded him at one time as the destroyer of Australian democracy, but then later admired him as a lone voice of reason and compassion in public life. 'He visited me a few times,' she said, 'but we didn't have much to say to one another. I heard he had done something dramatic in politics in Australia. Oh well.'

We had come to Orbetello to thank Lorri for the donation of her Rome apartment to the Australia Council, which administers residencies there for poets. I was at the beginning of a six-month residency in the apartment. The lounge wall in the apartment was dominated by a large abstract artwork by Lorri. It was a collage of roughly cut triangles jostling for space within their frame, coloured in the complex steely-blue and green tones of the sea. The image was packed with energy. Lorri had lived in this apartment for thirty years with her husband Bertie Whiting, poet, adventurer and journalist, until his death in 1988. Many of their books survived in the apartment's small library.

She brushed aside the matter of her generosity and talked about Bertie. More than twenty years after his death, emotions remained strong and difficult for her. He died too young. His poetry hadn't been published enough or appreciated enough. He would have written a lot more poetry if

his life hadn't been taken from him. Her gift of her apartment to poets was in honour of Bertie, in the hope that future poets might find opportunities he didn't. He would have grown as a poet, she said. They would have seen to this together, as they saw to everything else, including the building of their varnished glass-fibre yacht, the beehives they had tended on the plains of Victoria's Wimmera country in the late 1940s, and later as they managed living in remote English woodlands without running water, often close to gypsy camps.

At their Trastevere apartment in Rome, they had carried the pieces of a kit for their yacht up in a lift barely big enough to hold two people. What wouldn't go in the lift they had taken up the stairs, until their neighbour tenants, Lorri said, were thoroughly sick of them. When she needed advice on a boat-building problem Lorri would take a bottle of brandy to the shipyards. 'You can get a lot of advice from a bottle of brandy,' she let me know.

Lunch at Porto Ercole was finished according to Lorri's style too, with brandy-laced coffees as we looked out over the bay. Enclosed by the forested arms of the slopes on either side, small working boats of local fishing families bobbed before us on a calm, clear Mediterranean Sea.

On our return to the train station after that first meeting, I took my turn in the back seat. Nuvolo wasted no time mounting up against the side of my body. He pushed me against the door, almost suffocating me with his meaty breath and sweaty dog hormones—an overpowering dog stink emanating from him. It could have been friendliness or it could have been the kind of over-friendliness that announces who is top dog in this little gathering. I wound the window down and hung my head out and held my breath for as long as I could between gulps of air. Lorri told us it cost too much, thirty euros, to have Nuvolo bathed and that he had a psychiatrist named Barbara. Lorri said that on one of their earliest sailing trips she and Bertie had sailed round Corsica. 'You can smell it,' she said, 'but the wine isn't the best.' A small war of resistance developed in the back seat as I set my arm as a barrier to Nuvolo's attentions.

Through the decades, a good number of the poets in residence at the apartment in Trastevere had come to see her but she remembered clearly only one of them, Anthony Lawrence. He was the wild and charming one, the one who had parties, who put her up in the apartment once when she was in Rome, and maybe reminded her of Bertie's exuberance and his love of having crowds of visitors in the apartment.

She told us that when she and Bertie held parties, she had a particular hour when she went to bed no matter who was visiting or how well the party was going. She would get up, announce it was her bedtime and disappear into her bedroom. For her, the highest priority was to be ready to go back to work in her studio the next day.

In 2015, Lorri still had her yacht tied up at Marina Cala Galera around the point from Porto Ercole, and still planned to put together a small crew to sail it under her command on another Mediterranean adventure soon. It might, she said, be her last time out on the sea. She began to talk of the yacht's beauty, its design, the reasons they built it the way they did, strange crew members she had sailed with over the past twenty years, the wine and spirits they found to drink at each port.

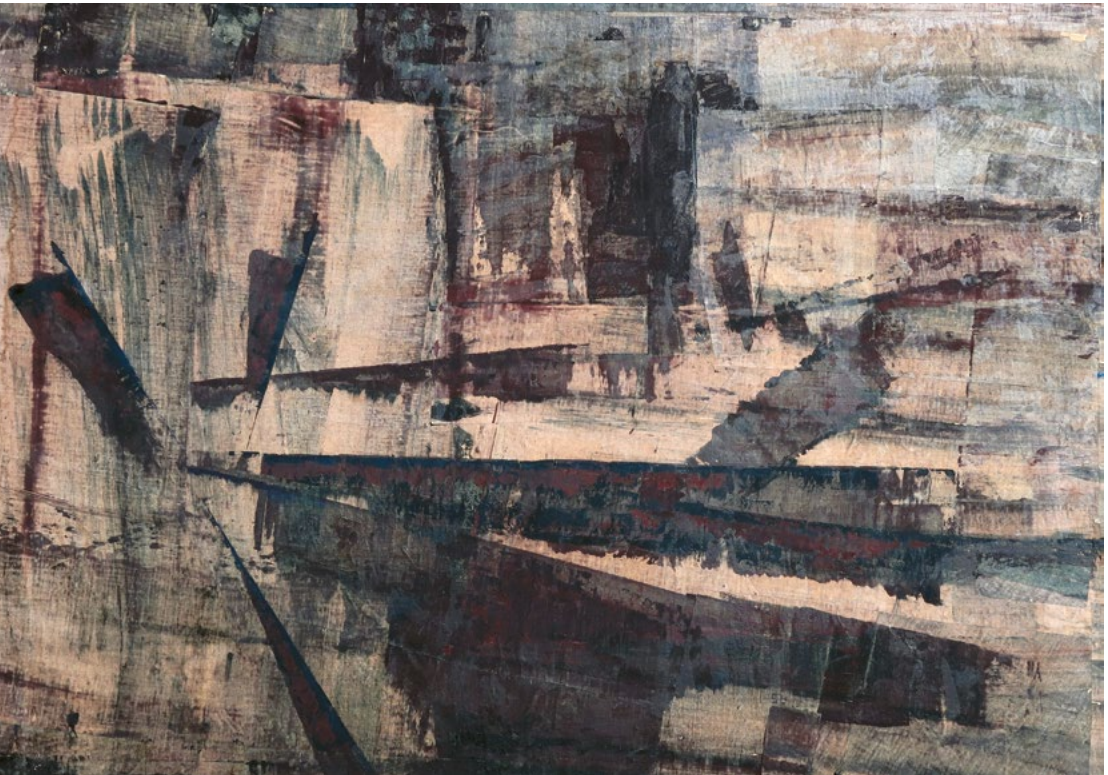
During those six months in residence at the Rome apartment, Andrea and I visited Lorri regularly, and stayed for an extended time in the nearby town of Orbetello, learning the layout of the coastal area known as the Maremma by riding bicycles along the shoreline and across the peninsulas of a series of once Etruscan and later Roman settlements.

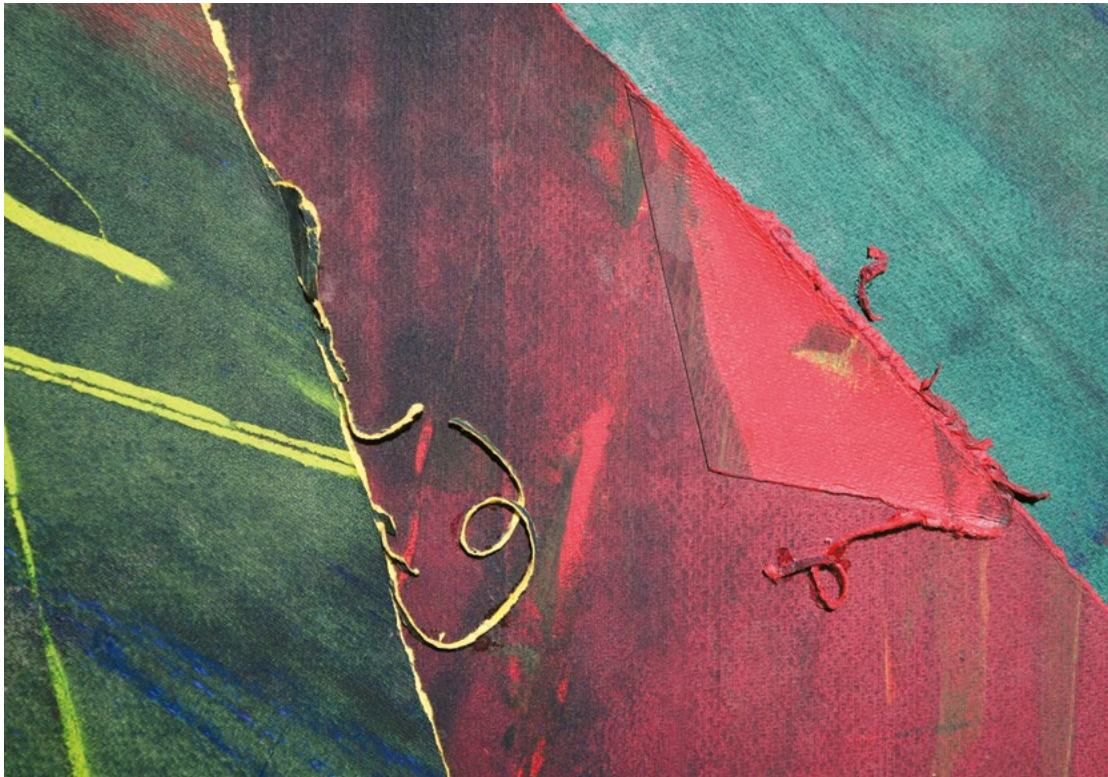
After one of our lunches at the marina where her yacht was harboured, we saw her off in her red car with Nuvolo packed in beside her, and followed her out on our bicycles. At the gate to the entrance we discovered she had sideswiped her car on a post, losing her entire side mirror. It didn't matter much, she announced, only a mirror, and no harm done to anyone. Lorri had such a confident style and such an aura of strength about her that it was easy to dismiss the incident as she had. But as it turned out, over the next year she discovered she had been virtually blind in her right eye for some time and the other was losing sight too.

Though she did go out on her yacht with two sailing companions for that last voyage in 2015, coming back exhilarated and exhausted, the next four years would mean an increasingly reduced world for her as she gradually lost most of her sight and the good use of one of her knees. She would become almost wholly reliant on the friends and helpers around her in her home.

Over that time, Lorri took to ringing me at my Australian home in Melbourne with news of her life, memories of her childhood and thoughts on art and sailing, and with questions to me about the short fiction pieces she was trying to write. The calls came at least weekly and sometimes every few days.

Gradually I understood that Lorri had worked among the most advanced and influential abstract artists in Rome during the 1950s and '60s, and that her own record of single-person exhibitions in Rome, New York, London and many other places was evidence of a life lived in total commitment to her art, and with remarkable achievements along the way that might not come to the notice of art historians or a wider public, particularly in Australia. I formed the idea that I might write about her art.





Lorri

CASE 114

Lorri, though, was focused on her next creative pursuit, which was her exploration of the possibilities of writing the short fictional pieces based on her sailing experiences. I understood this as the necessary outlet for a woman whose physical ability to paint was severely diminished, but whose creative impulses remained strong and lively. I offered to edit her fiction while I listened to her talk of her life in art—and took what notes I could.

March 2019

Andrea and I have returned to Orbetello to see Lorri again, and the world is a different place. Both my parents have died in their nineties, we've spent two years living in a remote Aboriginal community on the edge of Western Australia's Great Sandy Desert while Andrea taught there in the local school of the community of Mulan. I have retired from working as an academic. Over these four years of regular talking by phone, Lorri has lost most of her eyesight to glaucoma and one of her knees has become so troublesome that she walks only with great difficulty, using two sticks to probe her way forward. No more driving. No more sailing. She has given her boat to a friend who will use it as a training vessel for new sailors. Roberto, suffering from cancer, has sold his bar at Porto Ercole, much reducing her local circle of acquaintances and hangouts. She hasn't been able to paint or sculpt or work with wood for some years now. Her turn to imaginative writing continues, though she relies on a friend to type her drafts to send to me by email for comments and editing.

In her first foray into a short story, she imagined that Bertie had faked his death and was away sailing on another boat with new friends. She saw him on this other boat from a distance while at anchor in a bay, and did not know whether she should confront him or let him go. In the most recent story, she acknowledged obliquely that her brother helped pay for her sailing boat and that she feels now that she never adequately thanked him.

When her home on a partly wooded hillside between the towns of Orbetello and Ansedonia nearly burned down in 2016, she was, as she says, 'so smoked-over they thought it was the end of me.' She spent nearly three months in hospital after the fire, for some of that time in an induced coma. Her dog Nuvolo has died, replaced by a slightly smaller bulldog, Linus ('Leenus'). Like Nuvolo, he splays himself on the cool stone floor of her lounge room at the centre of her home, paws out, nose down, snuffling his way through his thoughts. Like Nuvolo, he is loved and valued simply for being alive and being himself. Lorri has a number of women who look after her—Sigrun who has lived with her for many years and does the cooking, Didi who takes care of her accounts and walks Linus, Claudia who drives for her, and some others who come and go as they are needed, including a neighbour who delivers firewood and does some gardening. It seems to work for now.

She is determined to believe that her sight in at least one eye will recover sufficiently for her to read and write once more, even if she will never drive again. She speaks of her life as she might of her beautiful boat, sitting at its tiller: 'It will turn out all right,' she says, 'but I might not have enough time for it to turn. It needs to turn smartly if I'm going to be alive when it turns.'

We have come hoping to see more of her paintings and screen-prints, hear more of her memories and generally spend time with her. She has more than two hundred paintings wrapped in bubble-plastic housed in a shipping container in her backyard. Many of these were painted in the 1960s, a few never exhibited, some not yet signed and dated.

We will be staying for two weeks at an apartment in the horse-riding school beside Lorri's semi-rural home.

On the second morning of our visit, Lorri tells me that Ugo is coming to see her. Ugo might or might not own an art gallery nearby. He is interested, he says, in two of her paintings. When he arrives in a white van large enough to take dozens of paintings, he has a young assistant with him and they go out to the shipping container where they sort through her pictures until they find two that are suitable. One picture is nearly two metres high, the other much smaller. Both paintings feature her hallmark sail-like or wing-like triangles of paper cut-outs glued to canvas, one of these featuring black wings on a bright yellow background, the other more complex in structure and more layered in its colouring. Both paintings seem to me to draw their dramatic effects from the handling of the darker tones, especially black and grey. The paintings need to be signed but we discover that Lorri cannot see them. We don't know whether she should use a biro or a large marker-pen, or whether she should sign them on the front or the back, or even how she should sign them. Eventually each painting is brought to her lap where she prints 'Lorri' on the back of each canvas with a black marker. Ugo, wearing a grey T-shirt with the word OBEY across it, leaves with the paintings and apparently a promise that he has a buyer for them. Lorri is pleased that someone is looking at her work and might even buy it, but the details of the transaction seem murky. No percentages, no commission, no prices were discussed, and the beautiful paintings are now gone. I ask her how she feels about this. She says that one cannot spend one's life worrying

about money. Money is such a small matter when you have enough to get by on. It is difficult to imagine the affectionate and charming Ugo not coming back with payment for Lorri.

I ask her if these paintings have titles and she says they don't, that she never knew what it was she was painting in any case. But she has said the opposite about her paintings as well—namely that they can't escape being about something. 'I did have an idea of what I wanted,' she adds, 'but it was the triangles that came through.'

Her simple printed signature of 'Lorri' on her work does not indicate a childish diminution of her powers or a lingering Australian informality but rather her decades-long commitment to making for herself an Italian identity. She adopted the painting-name of Lorri in the late 1940s, wanting hers to chime with the names of those writers and artists she admired and whose names were recognised immediately as Italian, such as Buzatti, Angeli, Turcato, Franchino. Nuvolo, Rotella, or Consagra. 'Lorri' was simple, sounded Italian and was hopefully memorable; it seemed to work in the new world of Rome's avant-garde abstract artists of the 'new materiality' (Celant 13–19).

In March 2019, Lorri had just secured Italian citizenship after years of moving her application through the bureaucracy. It was important to her. It signified a final step away from Australia and towards Italy where her work might, she hoped, be remembered and understood as European. It wasn't that she had a career plan, though. It seems to me that all along she made only those decisions about her art that felt right to her, whether they were strategic or not. Becoming an Italian citizen seemed to have a lot to do with following her own heart.

As well as becoming more and more interested in how history might perceive her contribution and her legacy as a woman abstract artist in Europe, I was also increasingly aware of the difficulties Lorri created for herself, first by her separation from her family, and then compounding this by her failure to visit Australia again or develop an ongoing presence as an Australian artist. Lorri made it clear over the course of our talking that her chosen life far away from Australia in Rome was in part a reaction to what she perceived as rejection from her childhood family.

Lorraine was born in 1927 into the Fraser family. Her father Neville (1890–1962), an officer in the British Army during World War I, was owner of the New South Wales Riverina grazing property of Balpool-Nyang until 1944 and then Nareen in Western Victoria. Neville had studied law at Oxford and at the University of Melbourne. Lorri's mother, Una Woolf (1902–1998), fell in love with Neville, then a Melbourne barrister, after meeting him at a party on the British battleship *Repulse*. After marrying in 1926, they departed for Balpool-Nyang with Una's grand piano. Three and a half years after Lorri's arrival, their son Malcolm was born.

Una was said to be a woman of beauty, cultivation and education who supposed that if she had not married she would have become a concert pianist or an actress (Jones np). Instead, she raised two children among 'plagues of locusts, mice, frogs, droughts, floods [...] the lot' (Ayres 8). After becoming a widow, she moved to live in South Yarra, from where she attended art history lectures at the University of Melbourne and became a noted local collector of Anglo-Irish glassware. She mixed not just with the city's social elite, which was expected of her, but also with Melbourne's more edgy circles of artists and intellectuals (Fraser and Simons 30). Though Neville might have been wary of his wife's interest in art, he had once had something of the modish devil in him. In his early thirties he had imported and driven fast French racing cars, coming to police notice for selling one to the notorious gangster Squizzy Taylor.

In the two major biographies of Malcolm Fraser, Lorri is recognised only in the context of the future Prime Minister's childhood. Mostly she is noted as an absence. In 1933, as a six-year-old, Lorri was sent to board at St Catherine's school in Melbourne, nearly 300 kilometres away from the isolated family property at Balpool. In her 2010 biographical study of Malcolm Fraser, Margaret Simons wrote that Una found the six-year-old Lorri 'uncontrollable', and worse, she was leading young Malcolm astray (17–18). 'She was already set in her ways,' Philip Ayres reports Una saying in his 1987 biography of Fraser, 'with an inclination to rebel against any authority, so that ordinary everyday affairs were apt to become matters of argument. When Malcolm fell in happily with any arrangements at all he became a very easy child to live with and tremendously loving and affectionate' (8–9). This apparently straightforward description of temperamental differences between the siblings might be aimed at deflecting attention from the dramatic change in the family dynamics at this time.

It is possible to imagine the three-and-a-half-year-old Malcolm witnessing those arguments between Lorri and her parents, and understanding that the consequence was the disappearance of his sister from the family. Philip Ayres writes, 'After Lorri went to boarding school the only other child nearby was the rabbiter's daughter, Girlie Brown, who was four years older and sometimes played with Malcolm. Apart from her, no other children visited, and normally there were no strangers about' (8–9). When Una Fraser told Philip Ayres that for a while she was afraid Malcolm was not a fighter, 'as he never persisted in trying to get his own way' (9), it is possible the young and dramatically isolated Malcolm was well aware

that the consequence of resisting his parents would be just such an early banishment to boarding school as his sister had suffered. It is possibly no surprise that for Malcolm as a child, when he was disappointed by something, 'there was always acceptance of a verdict and he would drop the subject' (Ayres 8–9).

Perhaps this situation throws a light on how difficult and important it might have been for Malcolm Fraser, leader of the opposition in the Federal Parliament in 1975, to find in himself the strength of individual conviction required to unseat a powerful Prime Minister and a sitting Labor Government that he thought had gone beyond its mandate.

Lorri recalls arguments and beatings. She returns often to the fact that when she was a year old her parents went away for a grand tour of Europe, leaving her with her grandparents. She remembers 'getting what we called thrashings. My mother said once, you just do it again afterwards and I said yes, that's to teach you it does no good to thrash me. But they didn't learn.'

Una and Neville, unable to learn this lesson from their daughter, must have felt they had no choice but to send Lorri to boarding school at St Catherine's and later to Toorak College in Frankston, where Lorri refused to do schoolwork. Lorri remembers feeling tiny at boarding school: 'At thirteen I decided not to pass any more exams. It was a bad decision. I changed as I grew up, but you don't grow up all that much.'

When Lorri speaks of her brother, it is with affection for him and admiration for his more personal and private qualities. He was a fine horseman, a good wood turner, and when it was possible a valued childhood companion on the Edward River that bordered the Balpool property. 'My brother died,' she said one afternoon as we sat by the sea at Roberto's café. 'This tall serious statesman, he died. I didn't really know him. My sister-in-law came over [to Italy] to see if I was all right. I'm sorry I didn't know him. I think it's a mistake to have your children separated. I was at boarding school from six years of age. He was sent boarding when he was twelve. They said he was delicate. We had a nice time whenever we were together, galloping horses and chasing sheep and cattle and what not. We had a river nearby. It was lovely, with a place to lie on the bank. I have a few things he made, a bowl carved from Lignum Vitae and another out of a wood used for aeroplane propellers. They did their best with me but I was a bit of an outcast.'

The most valued childhood times were when she was out horseriding, often with her brother. At about twelve she became lost on her horse in the 2000-hectare forest beside their property. 'I put the reins down,' she said, 'and waited, and the horse took me home. I had been lost. It was a strange feeling being lost.' This is a story she will return to over and over again, as though she can never quite make sense of the significance of that feeling of being lost. Once, after retelling the episode, she reflected that though a horse might take you home, you can't sleep with it.

She and Malcolm kept up a warm and comfortable though spasmodic correspondence through the decades. (He admitted in one letter that he was 'a lousy correspondent'.) He hung her artwork prominently in his office and his home. Some of Lorri's letters to Malcolm and Tam survive in the Fraser archive held at the University of Melbourne. Lorri's letters flow with the same ease and poise of timing as her spoken voice, mostly ignoring punctuation but always making perfect sense. Her dry wit and her willingness to play the scandalising sister are on display when she weaves stories from her frequent confessions to him that really she has little of interest to write about. In one of these letters, she writes for instance of their then two bulldogs away with them on a skiing holiday where the dogs were fighting with each other. Their vet had prescribed tranquilisers for the dogs, and after repeated phone calls to the vet, with doses of expensive tranquilisers increasing, Lorri found the solution was for her to down the tranquilisers along with the dogs. She copies out jokes for Malcolm, and sometimes prods him to be a better correspondent: 'Let us know what your news is when you have time you can always dictate a letter or better still force the wife to write to keep us up with your movements—without necessarily doing anything that fills the daily newspapers as that might be in the long run very tiring' (27 March, 1972). Lorri's visual imagination is put to use too in commenting upon the Fraser family's recreational pursuits: 'We gather you go water skiing. It must take a biggish motor to get Mal going' (19 February, 1972). I sat in the compulsory silence of the archive reading room of the university snorting and chuckling over her letters to the distress of some serious researchers there.

Lorri is a storyteller with ready anecdotes that can be brisk in the telling then can slow you down as you go back over them. 'When I was about fourteen', she told me once, 'I fell from a horse and it kicked a hole in my head. Its name was Tango. They talked about a change in my personality but my mother said that the hole in my head didn't matter too much because I was a girl.' On sailing, Lorri has many observations to make, often to do with the freedom and rare power she felt when out at sea: 'I actually won one regatta,' she admitted, 'and that was enough because they're a bore. You sail off and you end up back in the same place—in time for lunch. It's all right for Sunday sailors but I want to get somewhere when I sail.' From her childhood there are sometimes vivid

images of scenes most of us would not want to remember: 'I remember as a child the crows picking eyes out of sheep'. She recalls finding a broken boomerang on the forest floor. Not knowing then what this was she took it home and asked her parents. They dismissed her find and told her they did not want to hear her talk about it again. Lorri can patch together a powerful story from a few broadbrush sentences that might seem at first to be a sequence of strange non sequiturs: 'They asked me if I wanted a coming-out party. I didn't want to dance and I didn't take drugs. I didn't want to ruin my head, what I had of it.'

April 2015

I told her during one of our visits that we had been tending to Bertie's grave at the beautiful Cemetery for Non-Catholics and Foreigners in Rome, where Bertie was buried close to Antonio Gramsci. We had pulled out a pine sapling threatening to tear Bertie's grave apart. We had carried some pansies from the nearby grave of John Keats and dug them in around Bertie. She complained that she was paying a lot to have his grave cared for but she could no longer make the trip to Rome.

'We met at a dance in a big house,' she said. 'He thought I spoke French. We married at twenty-one and twenty-four and went beekeeping. It wasn't sensible. This was South Australia and Gippsland and the Little Desert. We sold out and moved back to Melbourne. We looked like tramps and I suppose we were. Bertie had been in the army and they taught him to eat snakes in case one day he happened to need to eat them. At one stage we discussed starting up a snake farm. We would have had to wear boots and gaiters. We thought we would sell the skins and bottle the rest as serpent meat. We went to the Dandenongs and then to England to a cottage with a well that for some reason didn't freeze in winter. We had no hot water. The gypsies were nearby and they never stole from us. We always gave them flowers. In England, I had a house and six pounds a week, and I was a sculptor.'

When Lorri met Bertie Whiting, he was, as Jon Stallworthy described him in the foreword to Bertie's *Lost on the Sea* poetry collection, a 'large laughing man [...] decorated, witty and handsome' (Whiting 4). A Paratrooper Captain who had lied about his age in order to enlist in the Australian Army in 1939, he had fought through the New Guinea Campaign, then in 1945 was appointed Aide-de-Camp to the Governor of Bengal, R. G. Casey, later to become Australia's sixteenth Governor General. Fearing Gandhi might be assassinated in the turmoil leading to Indian independence Bertie Whiting urged Casey and Lord Mountbatten to appoint him bodyguard to Gandhi. Gandhi refused.

Bertie began writing poetry seriously in the early 1960s, and his first poem was titled 'Gandhi, 1946'. It is a poem that comes with a suspicion of authority and charisma, a poem too that offers the poet as a physical presence, but one detached enough to absorb the subtleties and seeming contradictions of experience. A decade and a half after his encounter with Gandhi he was still, it seemed, wondering what it was that drew him to the man and what it was that motivated him to make his offer of protection, and what might be the meaning of 'strength' in the context of Gandhi's and Bertie's lives. Gandhi was murdered in 1948 as he mingled without a bodyguard among the public.

> Did you like him? No. What was it, then?
> He had a memorable laugh.
> Did you like his disciples? No, not at all,
> They had the vestry air.
> Yet you remember him? Oh yes, unforgotten
> The bright eye and the paper light
> Hand on my arm when I walked with him.
>
> Only that? No, time has eaten away
> The resentment at a power
> That presumed on my arm for its strength,
> And now I like to think
> How, after I had escorted him to the car,
> The Khitmugar came up
> To ask permission, if he might touch that arm.
> (Whiting 5)

Between 2015 and 2019, I listened to Lorri tell the story of her husband's dying over the course of many phone calls. She could recount the details as though they were there fixed within frames before her—and she did not look away. She has the artist's faith in the importance of the gaze, perhaps under a conviction that only by looking and keeping looking can we understand or overcome what is most painful.

'Bertie's cerebellum was shrinking. A rare disease. Nothing to be done. By 1982, it got noticeable. A neurologist said he couldn't do much for him. He had to see a doctor in Rome but he told so many lies the doctor couldn't know what was wrong with him. He told the doctor he was a parachutist and had fallen on his head. Not true. He said he'd been knocked out boxing repeatedly but he might have been knocked out once, if that. He always

threw in some lies. I had to get him to see a psychiatrist. From 1987 to 1988, there was nothing much I could do. Bertie kept telling lies until one clever neurologist made sure I was present when he asked him questions. I only corrected Bertie once. He claimed to be sexually active, but he hadn't been for years.

'He became too sick to sail and he couldn't walk properly. I had to do it all myself, up the mast, tie the ropes, stay on the tiller. But I was greatly relieved when he stopped and I could become the skipper.

'He was eventually in a wheelchair so we couldn't go out anymore. So many things he couldn't do. I had to go out and walk off my problems by myself. Then he couldn't hold a fork. Hell. He had been a strong man. It was a bloody awful thing to happen to a man so active and strong. I found my neighbour leading him around one day. He couldn't speak by then.

'There was no cure and there is still no cure. A neurologist said there was nothing much we could do except for me to inject him with folic acid every day. It was ghastly. There was no future and nothing to be done. It's well over now. One doctor asked if I wanted a fatal injection for him but I think Bertie really didn't want to die. He asked for a gun but all I would do was set a plastic bag in his way. He could use that if he wanted but I couldn't give him a gun. I did all I could to keep him alive though I wanted him to die. I must take my mind away from Bertie.

'Bertie was more a poet than a journalist or a beekeeper. Christopher Fry was in Rome writing a film and we had him for dinner. I showed him Bertie's Gandhi poem and Christopher said, "It's a poet you are." The beekeeping was a mistake. It was a waste of time. He was hoping to make a lot of money from it but bees can be difficult. Bertie was a smarter man than me but he didn't have intuition—he had to be told or he had to read about something before he could understand.

'Houses have been important to me but I got married to a wandering beekeeper. I didn't want to have a family because I knew I would be left holding the baby. Picasso didn't have children. The women he was with had the children. I didn't want my movement to be stopped. I wouldn't have liked it. They cry all night too, you know. Bertie would have left me at home to go out and have fun. We did talk about it, but no, I didn't want that.'

It might be that having turned her back on her family and country, to lose her close and necessary companion in Bertie, was to confront the fragility of her situation and the irreversible consequences of choices made along the way. Much in our lives is taken out of our hands by circumstances, which can mean those choices we have made in our youth so easily seem too decisive, too impulsive, too important to have been left in the hands of our young selves. Though, as we know, as soon as we begin to go back over everything, for most of us most of the time we find we would not have wanted to live any other life than the one we have been dealt. Lorri's telling and retelling of Bertie's last years seems the one part of her life she cannot quite come away from.

Lorri Whiting died while this essay was in preparation for printing. Lorri was buried in the same tomb as Bertie at the Rome Cemetery for Foreigners and Non-Catholics on Friday, 20 September 2019.

Part Two of this essay will be forthcoming in Issue 65.1 (June/July 2020).

Notes

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Source for letters between Lorri Whiting and Malcolm Fraser: University of Melbourne Archive, Malcolm Fraser Collection, 106/17 Box 7, Folder 52.

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plainsong

Sonya Frossine

Sonya Frossine is currently in her first year of university, studying creative writing at Curtin University. Her poetry has previously won awards in national competitions such as the Ipswich Poetry Feast (2017) and the Roland Leach Poetry Prize (2018). Several of her poems have been published in student magazines, including *Primo Lux*, which allowed her to perform her work as an invited guest at the 2019 Perth Poetry Festival.

in the low-strung hum of her guitar,
head handcuffed to long hair,
singing tongue and heart about what Jesus
promised her
and her mother.

she throws fire far
in the flick of her guitar pick,
down into the thump-bump dark
of a thousand bodies. on

stage, (on paper) she's singing
about an apartment in New Orleans,
where potted plants are dying at
the same rate as her brother:
one leaf at a time.
she downs onion-honey witch drinks
daily, trying to cure the headache,
as fixated as a cancer patient. in
my head i'm
a treehouse in New Zealand,
the gutters wet with leaves and rats and rain.
i creak under hydrangeas and gumboots,
caught between kid-crumbling afternoons and the
realisation that the planks are rotting; actually,
everything is.
addicted to the same onion-honey potion,
only mixed by my mother.

Bicycle

Irma Woods

Irma Woods is from Minang/Goreng country in the Great Southern region of Western Australia. She is a theatre and film practitioner, serves on MEAA's National Performers Committee, and is currently a Cultural Consultant for television series *The Heights* (Season 2). Irma lives in Whadjuk country with her family.

Bicycle letters spokes green green trees my Grandfather cycling a long long feet pushing peddles wheels wheeling him home a young man back then green green trees going by letters exchanged about bicycles my Pop had his one Mum says he cycled off the Mission to work to people put parts of old bikes together made them new it's in the files there somewhere ~~still had to be home by~~ dark darker cycle cycling cycling back to his family on the mission people from different countries was there too kids were sent there they family followed them got to know each other bigger bigger family circle cycling off the mission cycling made him happy gone for weeks working ~~not far~~ the men went working t~~hey said~~ farmers place Borden come back come back to us cycling along whatever could be carried he would bring back to the mission for family back back cleared the land cleared before before all the men did had to family needed somewhere to stay thought they were safe doing the right thing they was found out no no wasn't right at all last family to move off the mission ~~to Albany eventually~~ not happened to you cycling on your ~~new~~ bicycle a long

This work was inspired by archival material and written as part of the project 'Ancestors' Words: Noongar writing in WA government archives (1860–1960)'. The full collection of works from the project will be published in an Online Special Issue (8) in November 2019, edited by Kim Scott and Elfie Shiosaki, available free to download via *Westerly*'s website.

Nyungar Placenames: looking out from Kaart Geenunginyup Bo

Len Collard and Linda Martin

The authors of this paper are Len Collard, a Whadjuck Nyungar Elder and Professor in Indigenous katitjiny (knowledge), and Linda Martin, a non-Indigenous lecturer in Creative Writing, both at the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia. For the purpose of this essay, the authors refer to themselves as ngulluckiny (we), but advise that Nyungar language, cultural and critical placename analysis and knowledge comes from Len Collard.

> *Kia Kia Kiaaaaa nitja Whadjuck Nyungar boodjar. Katitjiny wer mar wangkiny noonar koorl geenung yeye nyinniny.*
>
> *(Hello, hello, hellooo this is Whadjuck Nyungar country. Knowledge and hand talk you have come to look at today here.)*

Sitting on the Nedlands foreshore, looking out across the stretch of clear blue water, it is easy to forget the noise of city life. Gentle waves lap softly onto the bank, sun catches the movement of the water, occasionally dolphins splash in the deep. It is tranquil and prepossessing. Dotted along the grassy banks, groups of people laugh, talk and picnic. Children run and dive into the water. Further up the hill at Kaarta gar-up (Mount Eliza, Kings Park) friends and families gather under the tall eucalyptus trees where the djiti djiti (willie wagtail) call. From there they can see the water curve and snake from Elizabeth Quay to the University of Western Australia (UWA) and all the way across to Attadale. Derbal Yaragan, the estuary at the foot of the City of Perth and part of the beeliar (Swan River) that has nourished people and activity for more than 50,000 years, a waterway that continues to course its way into the Nyungar way of life.

The last two hundred years have blanketed much of the history of the Nyungar people around Derbal Yaragan. New wangkiny (language) has been put over ancient wangkiny, new placenames over original ones. But if we peel away that layer of time, we can share in the rich, vibrant and

continued history of Nyungar people. We can respect the Nyungar way of life through the stories from Elders and kin that tell us about relations, food, culture, weirn (spirituality) and katitjiny (knowledge). We can value the intricate naming of places that reveal salient information about boodjar (country), moort (kin) and katitjiny (knowledge).

> *I'm a Whadjuck/Balardong Nyungar Elder from the Aborigines of the South West, Western Australia. This is my homeland. In the South West of Australia there are 5,000 Nyungar placenames, so you can't move in my country without speaking Nyungar. My old people always told me 'Lenny, when you grow up and become a man and you get around the traps, you gotta speak in our language because that's the sign that we still hold and carry the power through the governance and the authority of our tongue.'* (Len Collard)

In 2018, with colleagues Josh Reynolds and Paulina Motlop, ngulluckiny (we) undertook the cultural mapping and research of eight placenames in and around UWA. Ngulluckiny wanted to share Nyungar knowledge with colleagues and students by showing how Nyungar placenames contain historical information about Nyungar cultural practices, how they carry emotional and cultural significance.

In undertaking the research, ngulluckiny (we) began the first stage of our Nyungar cultural bidi (pathway) approach by identifying eight prime sites in and around UWA whose Nyungar names reveal stories about the relationship between Nyungar moort (people) and boodjar (country), and that are consequential for Nyungar people, locals and tourists. The identified sites are: Derbal Yaragan (City of Perth estuary), Goordaandalup (UWA), Boolahdalalingup (Pelican Point), Boodjar Gapalingup (Melville Water), Kaart Geenunginyup Bo (Kings Park), Birritt (pathways, e.g. Riverside Drive), Mandyooranup (Freshwater Bay) and Margamangup (Point Walter).

Ngulluckiny were mindful that the naming of Nyungar places can alter with the six seasons of the Nyungar year, but for the purpose of our study we chose only one naming. Ngulluckiny also chose the spelling of each placename, with some variants, knowing that Nyungar placenames have different spellings depending on which of the twelve Nyungar dialects are referred to, or which of the thirty or so written wordlists produced since 1829 is consulted. Regardless of the variations of placenamings and spellings, we knew that the meaning anchored in the identified site was constant and that each placename told a yarn.

if you look around there are beautiful big gum trees—
this is all the area where Aboriginal people used to camp and live—
all kinds of different seeds and what-nots used to grow in this area—
plenty of food—
there were Black Swans—
this area was covered in them—
this is why they used to call it the Gabbee Derbal—
ducks, wildlife, plenty of everything for people to live off in this area—
kangaroo, emus, you could find just about anything here—
it was very rich—
from the stories my mother used to tell me—
grandmother, uncles, aunties used to tell us it was a very spiritual place—

Judy Jackson[1]
(Aunty to Len Collard, Nyungar Elder,
Traditional Owner and Oral Historian)

Ngulluckiny (we) then moved into the second stage of our Nyungar cultural bidi approach, commencing with a desktop literature review of historical language and literature databases—for example, newspapers, wordlists, placename meanings and other non-Indigenous colonial literature sources. Ngulluckiny did this with the knowledge that European cartographic approaches are not easily transferable into Nyungar systems of placenaming. From the lists, ngulluckiny were able to derive a superficial meaning of some of the placenames but, at best, translation was one-dimensional. The wordlists offered meaning into the Nyungar language to some degree, but didn't take into consideration the complexity of Nyungar language structure and language codes.

> *Nyungar knowledge doesn't live in the archives, it lives in Nyungar people who have carried it for 50,000 years. Lived knowledge needs to be incorporated into any research on Nyungar placenames if the research is to carry authority, if it is to be bona fide and meaningful. A Nyungar cultural bidi approach needs to incorporate Nyungar oral history, logic, and a credible researcher who has the authority to undertake the research. In a way it reminds me of Aristotle's three appeals: pathos, logos and ethos.* (Len Collard)

Continuing with the second stage of our Nyungar cultural bidi approach we then moved onto oral history recordings and transcripts of Nyungar wangkiny (language) speakers who had listened to the Nyungar stories passed down from their kin, and who continue to live the Nyungar way of life. Many of the Nyungar bidier (people who walk at the front of the bidi) spoke of the places we had identified. Listening to their oral stories we were able to grasp cultural and economic significances inherent in the identified sites. It was only when ngulluckiny incorporated the Nyungar maia (voices) and wangkiny (language) into our cultural mapping exercise that we were able to convey the emotional, moort (familial) and weirn (spiritual) connections to the Nyungar placenames. It was only at that point that our placename history came to dordok (life).

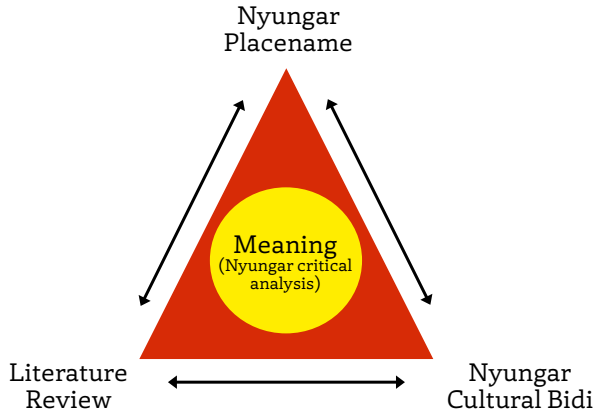
> *This place we know as Kings Park—*
> *If you go down the river [pointing to the south]*
> *And look back at the shape Kings Park represents—*
> *It looks like it's a boodjari yorga—*
> *It looks like a pregnant woman laying there—*
> *That's where the Nyungar people were given life to.*
>
> Mort Hansen[2]
> (Uncle to Len Collard, Kaneang Nyungar Elder,
> Traditional Owner and Oral Historian)

> [...] *this is Whadjuck country here, then the whole of the Swan would cover Whadjuk. Then if you went out of the Swan, you would be coming into Balardong country, or Yaut country.*
>
> Janet Hayden[3]
> (Aunty to Len Collard, Wilman/Balardong Nyungar Elder,
> Traditional Owner and Oral Historian)

Ngulluckiny (we) had identified the placenames, accessed the archival research and the oral histories, but ngulluckiny needed to apply critical cultural knowledge that would allow us to combine and analyse the research to find the richer meaning. It was only during this third stage of our Nyungar cultural bidi approach, when we applied Nyungar critical analysis of the research findings, that all-encompassing meaning was made.

> *After many years of having worked in this space, I had an epiphany moment when I realised that there were many words contained in the Nyungar placename. I came to the conclusion that to crack the ancient Nyungar language codes embedded in placenames, one needs to deconstruct the sentence, bringing in Nyungar lived use of language.*
>
> *In looking at English words, we're programmed to see each word as a whole. With Nyungar placenames, each word is mostly comprised of several words, contracted into one. By identifying each word and looking at its position in the contracted placename we can read the words contained in the placename as we might read a sentence.* (Len Collard)

The 'epiphany moment' made us see that the interrelation of Nyungar placename, documented archives and lived Nyungar katitjiny (knowledge) allowed for a deeper, comprehensive meaning. To show the relationship between these three access points, ngulluckiny developed a diagram to use as an interpretive model for our Nyungar cultural bidi approach and to exemplify how meaning is made and therefore explained.



In the language construction tables that follow, readers can see that when broken down into word segments, the placenames don't simply signify a location, they also embed historical and cultural meaning. Readers will learn that Nyungar placename words are made up of smaller word segments—similar to a sentence in the English language—each segment containing meaning and, when analysed and combined by a Nyungar language speaker and researcher, holding significant cultural value that enables us to appreciate the sense of place and connection to boodjar. The placename tells a story about Nyungar way of life related to

its geographical site. Ngulluckiny are now pleased to share information on the eight Nyungar placenames in and around UWA.

> *Nyungar placenames can be broken down into smaller wangkiny segments and it is in these smaller segments where meaning can be found. But it takes a critical Nyungar wangkiny speaker and cultural knowledge holder to be able to make connections in the wangkiny, to find the historical, cultural and social meanings. It is here you can read the living history.* (Len Collard)

Next time ngulluckiny gather at one of the places for a celebration, a walk or to go fishing, ngulluckiny will be able to stop and respect the Nyungar placename and its cultural meaning. Ngulluckiny might recall the maia (voices) of Nyungar moort (elders and kin) kura, yeye, boorda (past, present and future).

***Kia Kia*: Derbal Yaragan/Derbal Yarragon/Derbal Yaragan Beeloo**

Derbal Yaragan is one of the placenames for the estuary at the front of the City of Perth and that feeds into the beeliar (Swan River), which borders the UWA Crawley campus. Derbal Yaragan can be used to show that when ngulluckiny separate the Nyungar placename into word segments we can reveal meaning in each segment that, when combined, contributes to the entire meaning.

der ta dar taa dah	opening mouth of doorway entrance access to
bal barl baal	he/him she/her it
yirra	to rise from above on top of
gan gan nghyne nganna	I myself me
beeloo beeler bi-lo bilo beel	floods rivers stream crossing fjord

If segments were pieced together in a linear and literal sense, translation might look something like 'doorway he on top of me rivers'. It is only when ngulluckiny apply Nyungar knowledge to the word segments that ngulluckiny can see that Derbal Yaragan is interpreted as 'the estuarine starts at the top and comes down to me'.

Derbal Yaragan is the estuary at the front of the City of Perth, the body of water that was created by the Waakal (water snake) that made the beeliar (Swan River) waterways. For Nyungar people, the Waakal (water snake or Rainbow Serpent) is the creator of all things and embodies Nyungar culture theory and laws. Because the Waakal lives in Derbal Yaragan there are many kaarnya (protocols) about getting into the water. Naturally, Nyungar people respected these kaarnya as Derbal Yaragan was an important living site and food source that offered a wide variety of reptiles in addition to birds, eggs, frogs, fish, tortoise, marron, gilgee and coonacs that they caught by hand, netting or gidgeeing (spearing).

Nyungar people continue to access Derbal Yaragan for sustenance, katitjiny (knowledge), weirn (spiritual renewal) and to practise distinctly cultural forms.

> *They believe in the Wagyl very dearly; they reckon without the Wagyl around they would have no water. They would not let the kids go and torment the Wagyl. They would drive them away. There is a Wagyl in the Swan River and he very rarely shows himself. If the water was muddy, the old grannies used to say don't swim in there, because he is having a feed. Don't swim; wait until the water is clear then you can go and jump in. He was very important to their lives, because they believed in*

having fresh water. They wanted the water, so they wanted the snake to stay alive.

Dorothy Winmar[4]
(Aunty to Len Collard and Whadjuck/Balardong Nyungar Traditional Owner and Oral Historian)

I remember when I was a young boy my Uncle brought a big snake into our camp and he said to us boys, if ever I catch you boys shooting shangais at this snake, I'm going to boot you, you know where. You have to leave this fella alone. He's the protector of this water here and you're not allowed to chase him away. He said, if you chase him away, this water will go; this water will dry up.

Sealin Garlett[5]
(Uncle to Len Collard, Whadjuck/Balardong Nyungar Elder, Traditional Owner and Oral Historian)

***Kia Kia*: Goordaandalup/Gurndandallup/Goordandalup**

goord	lover/husband/wife/betrothed
daan	tie together
dal	opening
al	over there/that thing there
up	place of

Goordaandalup is situated where the buildings of UWA, Crawley, are now located. A reader might deduce that Goordaandalup has something to do with a formal union between lovers but the meaning is still opaque. In applying Nyungar interpretation and cultural katitjiny (knowledge), ngulluckiny can see Goordaandalup means 'the place or entrance to the location of lovers where lovers are united in a life-long relationship'. In other words, Goordaandalup was used as a place for ceremony, bringing together husband and wives, extended families and future in-laws.

At this man-da (ceremonial site), Nyungar people gathered for cultural purposes and activities, in particular for unions of men and women. Future in-laws and extended families would come together with the new 'husband' and 'wife'. The new goord (spouse) would then take up a life with the family group. Nyungar people and students continue to gather at Goordaandalup and the UWA campus is still a favoured place for lovers, marriage ceremony and celebration.

There was all the Nyungar or people who used to camp the Derbal or estuary. There were some fellas from the north; they came for some ceremony. They came and sat down and sang. They had come to trade and they brought some medicine and some fire. That was, like, along the river. They reckoned that in the wintertime, it was cold, see, and these fellas who used to hunt up in the bush, they brought some things down, clothing and stuff, yongka booka [kangaroo skin cloaks]. These fellas only used to stay for a little while, while the ceremony was there and they used to exchange things, you know?

Sealin Garlett[6]

***Kia Kia*: Boolahdalalingup**

boolah	lots/many/big/large
dal	opening
al	over there/that thing there
ing	situated here/sitting here
up	place of

Piecing the Nyungar word segments together, ngulluckiny see that Boolahdalalingup can be interpreted as 'the location of the one with the big mouth' or 'the big mouth is situated at this location'. Today, this landmark is referred to as Pelican Point. As we know, the pelican has a large mouth. Nyungar people used to gather at this place with the katitjiny (knowledge) that pelicans were in abundance. And where there

are pelicans, there are fish—all year round. For local Nyungar people Boolahdalalingup was, and continues to be, a place to gather and fish.

> *They used to catch their fish with gidjees [spears]. They used to hunt with spears, catch possums and all sorts of animals with fur on them to make the kids clothes out of them; those bookas [kangaroo skin cloak]. Without the booka, it was very cold in the winter. They even made shoes out of fur. They were very clever people; we are still clever. They hunted for their living and lived off their land.*
>
> Dorothy Winmar[7]

***Kia Kia*: Boodjar Gapalingup/Boodjar Kepaalingup**

boodjar	ground/earth/land/country
gap	water
al	over there/that thing there
ing	situated here/sitting here
up	place of

Boodjar Gapalingup, 'the place where the water and the land meet', otherwise known as the riverbank. Many Nyungar people would regularly come to the riverbank and the swamplands, particularly for hunting and gathering. The swamps contained birds, birds' eggs, ducks, swans, frogs, reptiles and other food sources. They also contained bulrushes that were used for making bread cake.

The UWA campus was built on the wetlands. Today, particularly during the winter period and after heavy rains, students and staff need to walk around the grassed areas that often become saturated. Perhaps the swamplands have remained active even after sand infill.

> *Dave Nannup, my grandfather, told me about Aboriginal people, that they never ever lived, as people assumed, right on water. They lived away from the water, so they didn't frighten the animals. Living away from the water and carting it back to the camps for their use, made sense. There was a lot of fresh water and good camping places there [Pinjarra]. If you camped near the water, you would frighten the animals away. If you scared them away, then you would have to go running around looking for the animals for food* [...] *The animals came into that water soak, kangaroos and other animals, Aboriginal foods. Frightened, they stay away from the water. They caught the animals at their drinking time at the water. I still say that even though the majority of white people say that the Aboriginal system was stupid, they were not. They were very, very sensible. They were that way, so they could survive, they had to actually learn to survive by being sensible, not by being stupid. For thousands of years, they did it. So I think if people knew how the old people lived, how they survived, they would survive, too. It was a natural thing to learn to survive therefore they had to be sensible to survive, not by being stupid.*
>
> Joe Walley[8]
> (Uncle to Len Collard, Pindjarup Nyungar Elder, Traditional Owner and Oral Historian)

> *They all had rich foods like fish, turtles, swamp hens, gilgies, ducks and swans, ducks' eggs and kaarda or goannas... Yes, it was all bush, kangaroo and quer; no big buildings along there then.*
>
> Fred Collard[9]
> (Father to Len Collard, Whadjuck Balardong Nyungar Elder and Oral Historian)

***Kia Kia*: Kaart Geenunginyup Bo**

kaart	head/top of something/hill/mountain
geenung	look/observe/see
iny	situated here

up	place of
bo	afar/a long way off/in the distance

Kaart Geenunginyup Bo is interpreted as 'here at this place at the top of a hill or mountain where you can see a long way away'. Today it is known as Kings Park and, standing at the top of the hill, ngulluckiny can still see a long way away. For Nyungar people the site was a lookout used for camping, communication and observation. People would light a fire for gatherings, inviting people who could see the fire and smoke from across the beeliar (river). Nyungar people would also shout from the top of the hill and their voices would carry across the beeliar. People on the other side of the beeliar would then access Kaart Geenunginyup Bo by wading through the matagarup ('the location of the holes made by walking along this Birritt'—the pathway). The site was also used to observe fish in the beeliar and watch other activity.

Nyungar people, other locals and tourists continue to come to Kaart Geenunginyup Bo for the view and to get together and picnic with friends and family.

> *A lot of these big hills or rocks were very useful to Aboriginals, because they used to get up on top of the rock and send smoke signals to let the one mob know what was going on to another tribe. They would make a big fire and when the other people on some other rock saw it, they would tell them they saw their fire and then they would go down and meet each other.*
>
> Dorothy Winmar[10]

> *[Uncle Cliff Humphries] showed me all the Nyungar camps. He showed me where my Grandma used to live, where they picked out a camp and where they used to stay. We would pull up and all walk around. They showed me some of the birds and the trees, and the ashes and the blackboys, and medicine that was in the blackboys. They showed me the roots of the trees and the medicine bushes. I remember when we looked at that camp. He showed me where these people used to get water from.* [...] *There are places where you find serenity; where you find a sense of belonging. I was able to allow the birds and the air and the feeling of the breeze of that place, and was a beautiful sense, that this is a part of our place, this is a part of our area, our culture.*
>
> Sealin Garlett[11]

> *This place we know as Kings Park an' if you go down the river [pointing to the south] and look back at the shape of Kings Park, it looks like it's a boodjari yorga [pregnant woman] laying there. That's where Nyungar people were given life.*
>
> Mort Hansen[12]

***Kia Kia*: Birritt**

Bidi	vein/main path or track

Nyungar katitjiny (knowledge) tells us that Birritt relies on 'bidi', an alternative spelling that carries the same meaning. This reminds us that, while we can refer to words on written wordlists, it's only with added Nyungar cultural and oral wangkiny katitjiny (language knowledge) that variances and meanings can be recognised. Bidi is understood as 'tracks like veins that blood travels along'. The 'tracks like veins' is also symbolic of life.

Foot tracks or paths were made by Nyungar people as they walked through the trees. Over time, these continuous routes became established footpaths. The road going from Midland to York (the Old York Road) was known as King Dick Road. Many of these footpaths became the highways and byways that crossed Nyungar boodjar.

When cruising along the Birritt, today known as Riverside Drive, admiring the stretch of water beside us, ngulluckiny remember that the bitumen road was laid over an ancient Nyungar footpath, just as were the roads from the foot of Kings Park and along the Freeway.

> *They did a lot of travelling along the Swan River, from York to the Swan and around Beverley. They were cattle droving and they came down here to Fremantle and to get cattle from the Fremantle docks and take them back around the York area and the wheat lands for the farmers.*
>
> Janet Hayden[13]

It was a major campsite just on the south side of Thompson Lake, on the south side of Thompson Lake reserve. From there it all depends on the seasonal walking. Some keep to the south, going along the east of the town of Kwinana, others on the west side and come in that way. They split up, because of family affairs, close family affairs. The Nyungar people travelling through, they want to go and see their family on one side or the other.

Joe Walley[14]

***Kia Kia*: Mandyooranup/Mandyuranup**

mandjar man-da	a sort of fair/people gather for social and exchange all together gathering collectively
yoor	come
ngung	mine
up	place of

Mandyooranup can be interpreted as 'the place of a fair of my gatherings'. The placename reveals a site of corroboree and/or tribal gathering. Nyungar people from different clans and regions would, and continue to, meet at Mandyooranup for tribal gatherings. The gatherings focused on trade and exchange and acted as an opportunity to meet future in-laws, husbands and wives, or relations.

Water used to leak from the side of the hill and drain into little riverlets that provided fresh water. The site also offered shelter and plentiful food sources from the river and the land. Today Mandyooranup is known as Freshwater Bay and is overlooked by the suburbs of Dalkeith, Claremont, Mosman Park and Peppermint Grove.

What my Grandmother told me, the way she told it to me, it sounded like it was paradise. They didn't want for anything. They lived off the land and the fish from the water. They got the kangaroo skins pegged out and cut them up to dry them and sewed them to make coats; yongka booka, or kangaroo coats, choota bags out of them, rugs to sit in. They were quite contented with their lives. Sometimes I think, why have we been robbed of this beautiful paradise that we could have still been sharing?

Dorothy Winmar[15]

Nguny koorlongka boollara [I've got many children], I must have merinj koombar merinj [I must have food and lots of it]—that means he wants plenty of tucker; he got a big family to feed.

Yelakitj Tom Bennell[16]
(Grandfather to Len Collard, Whadjuck/Balardong Elder, Traditional Owner, 'Keeper of the Stories', and Oral Historian)

They might tell each other news, like, if an old elder died and they wanted to gather around. They were very significant sites; the rocks, waterholes or gnamma holes where they drink from, and where all the kangaroos live. They would make their home around there for a while.

Dorothy Winmar[17]

***Kia Kia*: Margamangup/Margamongup**

mar	hand
ga	of/connected to
mandjar man-da	a sort of fair/people gather for social and exchange all together gathering collectively
manga	fish trap
mungit	banksia

munga	a crowd of people
up	place of

Margamangup can be interpreted as 'the place where you catch fish by hand'. For Nyungar people the location offered, and still offers, plentiful food, with fish and other resources. Nyungar people would gather here for celebration or ceremony, and it continues to be a meeting place that offers Nyungar people food, shelter and drink.

Today, Margamangup is known as Point Walter and the area of water that stretches between Attadale and Point Dundas in Applecross. The area continues to be a popular place for fishing and a gathering place for picnics, barbecues and water sports.

> *[Uncle Cliff Humphries] reckons where Point Walter was, the water used to go right out there, and there used to be a sand bar where they used to walk across and get the fish from there. When you look from the hill and you look over Point Walter, and you're having a look at the sand bar, you can see in your mind, you can sort of picture that back then, of it taking place. He said there was an area where they'd put wood; it was like a pine? And they'd sit their kids on it.*
>
> *It was accessible, a good hunting area along the Point Walter side and they used to get young birds and fish, and crabs used to come up. If you came at the right time, there would be fish stuck in the sand bars. That was a real good time of being hunters and gatherers. He reckons these are stories that his mother had passed down.*
>
> Sealin Garlett[18]

From our placename research, ngulluckiny hope that current and future researchers will see that no Nyungar wangkiny (language) study should be undertaken without the inclusion of Nyungar lived history. The inclusion of lived Nyungar katitjiny (knowledge) allows us to see not only what places were historically used for but also gives a description of place, its way of life and purpose. The placenames continue to be active. Just as we can look and see the activity on the waterway today, we can see what time before European settlement might have looked like.

Ngulluckiny are grateful to the Elders who have passed their katitjiny (knowledge) on to us for the interpretation of these placenames. In particular we thank the following Nyungar Elders for guiding our bidi approach to understanding this sense of place and boodjar: Sealin Garlett, Dorothy Winmar, Tom Yelakitj Bennell, Joe Walley, Janet Hayden, Mort Hansen, Fred Collard and Judy Jackson. Your maia (voices), and so many other maia not included in this essay, have brought our project to life.

Ngulluckiny acknowledge that research cannot be undertaken without recognition that Elders are custodians of all Nyungar katitjiny (knowledge) and wisdom, and ngulluckiny respectfully acknowledge that the Whadjuck Nyungar in the Perth region are from the twelve different wangkiny (language) groups among the Nyungar people—Balardong, Juat, Kaneang, Koreng, Minang, Njakinjaki, Pibelmen, Pindjarup, Wardandi, Whadjuck, Wilman and Wudjari—and are traditional owners of the South West of Western Australia.

> *When the wedjelas first came here, the Nyungars lived on the top of Kings Park and they saw the ship coming in. Grandmother said they thought it was the spirit of their people coming back and they were scared of what was coming back, that they were ghosts. But then they learnt that they were another sort of people, white people and then they got used to seeing them and talking to them.*
>
> Dorothy Winmar[19]

Nitcha boodjar koonyarn nitcha koori buranginy boodjar karluk maya koonyam wah. Deman deman and maam wiern kia moort koonyarn. Deman and maam noonookurt, boodjar koonyarn karla koorliny. Koorlongka boorda gneenunyiny.

> *This is my country where I belong. This is deman and maam, my grandmother and grandfather's land, this is their land where their spirits move now. Boorda or later on, this is going to be the responsibility of my children and my children's children, their home and this place will always be linked to their spirit.*
>
> Sealin Garlett[20]

Note on the Text

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Notes

1 Judy Jackson quoted in Collard and Palmer (1998).
2 Mort Hansen quoted in Collard, Harben and Van Den Berg (2004).
3 Janet Hayden, oral interview and transcript (2002). Personal collection of Len Collard.
4 Dorothy Winmar, oral interview and transcript (2002). Personal collection of Len Collard.
5 Sealin Garlett, oral interview and transcript (2002). Personal collection of Len Collard.
6 Sealin Garlett (2002).
7 Dorothy Winmar (2002).
8 Joe Walley, oral interview and transcript (2002). Personal collection of Len Collard.
9 Fred Collard quoted in Collard, Harben and Van Den Berg (2004).
10 Dorothy Winmar (2002).
11 Sealin Garlett (2002).
12 Mort Hansen quoted in Collard, Harben and Van Den Berg (2004).
13 Janet Hayden (2002).
14 Joe Walley (2002).
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16 Tom Yelakitj Bennell quoted in Collard, Harben and Van Den Berg (2004).
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A Vernacular Landscape

Caitlin Maling

Caitlin Maling is a WA poet who has published three collections with Fremantle Press: *Conversations I've Never Had*, *Border Crossing* and *Fish Song*.

In poetry, we speak often of finding your voice. Now that I live in Australia again, sometimes people still ask me if they can hear something a little bit from elsewhere in mine. I spent four years in Texas listening to the music commonly known as 'bro' country, sounding out each hard plosive and drawl in the ten repeated words that seem to comprise each song. I particularly like 'truck' for how it hits hard at every aspect of your mouth almost like clicking your tongue or a bird insisting with its beak that food lies beneath the bark.

• • •

It is in the process of writing my third collection of poems *Fish Song* that my voice gets real *straya*, especially when I read my poems aloud or speak about them. People laugh at me. My friends and family—even strangers—repeat words back at me. Once in America a man asks me to say the word 'no' over and over, marvelling at how I 'get every vowel into a single word, a single syllable even'. In the thesis defence for my Master's, an examiner asks me if I am conscious of the musicality of diphthongs in my work; diphthongs being 'gliding vowels' where the sound of one vowel travels into the next in the space of the same syllable. My language is muddled this way, imprecise, relies on the way things flow together.

• • •

I write *Fish Song* from and about Grey Shack Settlement and the WA crayfishing town Cervantes. Although Sam Carmody's novel *The Windy Season* has recently fictionally mapped the lives of the fishing people of Cervantes, to the best of my knowledge there is no poetry of the town and nothing written about Grey. Or rather, the publications that have been written are all called variations of 'Shack Sites Western Australia: Planning Framework'. Tim Winton has owned the coast just north and south, Randolph Stow the bigger town of Geraldton 500 kilometres above Perth, and John Kinsella and Dorothy Hewett the land that stretches inland, which settler Australians call the Wheatbelt. But the shacks have existed outside of literary production even as they have produced their own language. To live there is to be a 'shackie', and to speak 'shackie' is to talk in a litany of geography: back beach, the point, coggos, the track.

• • •

Grey is a loose cluster of 120-ish almost-buildings set amongst three undulating dunal ridges in the Nambung National Park. I say almost-buildings because most do not meet the codes, legal and linguistic, required to label something a building. For starters, most were not built but dragged. Fully formed metal boxes towed on the back of trailers, trucks and utes, then laid atop uneven concrete slabs. In our shack, a water bottle placed in the centre of the opening hallway might roll in one of five directions where the ground set rough, or twenty years of direct feet contact has worn a path like the link between well-rehearsed memories or the words the brain stores together, sea : salt : rust.

• • •

In the most summative of the bureaucratic reports, the *Wedge and Grey Shack Settlements: Cultural Heritage Assessment*, they label the shacks 'vernacular building types' (13). Vernacular is a strange word; it binds building and place to language. Not in the sense that it refers to a type of language used to speak about buildings, but in the way both the shacks and the way people speak at the shacks are bound to that particular stretch of coast in time, coming into existence in the postwar years to serve a fishing community that no longer really exists, on a then inaccessible stretch of coast, which is now only two hours of easy tarmac from Perth along Indian Ocean Drive.

• • •

According to Reena Tiwari, the Shacks are vernacular in a poetic sense because they make us aware of their construction—they are buildings with all their workings made visible, a body turned inside out to the eye (68).

The particular *occa*-ness of my current accent is new, came upon me late. Sometimes I picture having grown the musculature of my voice box into something heavier—visible from the outside—having restrung myself like an instrument for a different music.

• • •

Accents are a class thing. Synonyms for vernacular include colloquial, unbookish, informal, and vulgar. They are heritable because of situation and place, not genetics.

In primary school, I had to record my mother speaking on a cassette tape, then play it back to the class who would try and identify what her voice made them think of—none of the children could hear any accent. When I first lived overseas, I was mistaken for Canadian, South African, and New Zealander—the common educated Anglo-Settler tongue rendered global, invisible.

As I write this book, my stepfather gets sick and dies. He left school at fourteen to become a merchant seaman to support his family after his own dad suffered a stroke early. From that point on, he worked a variety of fishing and trucking jobs. No-one I'm blood-related to speaks like I do now, but he did.

• • •

My stepfather is the reason I first came to these places. Before his dad's stroke, his father fished out of Cervantes. His uncle, then his cousins, kept living there. When he dies he has finally had the experience of running his own boat out of the town for crays then occy, even if the decaying fishery meant it was never a viable financial option. His stories were all of small boats in high weather, drownings and small-town vendettas. I put them in my poems.

• • •

There were rarely any women in these stories. Partly this is because before there was the road running up the coast—the same road that leads to the 2011 report calling for the demolition of the shacks—there was no easy way to access these settlements. Women would stay down in Perth. When you were up, you fished and maybe drank a bit[1].

The old Italian fishing superstition that women should not be on boats holds up. My sister has tried for years to get out crayfishing but none of the men will take her. When she brings up her new boyfriend after our stepdad's death he is asked within the same weekend.

• • •

I come to know the Grey Shack Settlement through the man I will marry. It is serendipitous that his family has held a shack for several decades thirty minutes from where my stepfather fished. My first trip there is a drinking one with his university mates. The other girlfriends are better than I am at staying out of the way and sleeping as the men keep drinking, throwing things, vomiting and singing Metallica loudly. Within twenty-four hours I will develop glandular fever that means we need to leave and I will not be able to speak for two weeks. I will not spend time sleeping in the shacks again for many years.

• • •

When I come back to the shacks to write this book, it is to a landscape under dual threats. John Selwood (a good Cervantes footy family name) and Roy Jones identify gentrification as the largest: the road introducing a new vernacular to the place not dependent on the cobbled together poetics of recycled iron and timber. The larger threat is global warming and the rising sea levels it brings, particularly dunal erosion under the winter king tides that have left a one-metre sheer sand drop from where the dune scrub ends and the pure beach begins (84–85).

I have to leap this gap to take my daily morning and evening walks along the edge of the ocean, trying to notice changes in the patterns of the weed and debris washed up.

• • •

Because my husband's shack is now on the primary dune with no other dunes to hold back the water, his is one slated for demolition within five years before the place becomes too dangerous for human inhabitation. Against this threat, my husband joins the community committee and skypes in to meetings from our place in inner Sydney.

When he is on the phone, his voice gets deeper, he swears more, shortens names, speaks of shacks and sites as though they are mates by abbreviating them and adding the suffix 'ee' to each. While he does this, he is sitting in his work shirt, taking off his cufflinks.

• • •

In their article 'Western Australian Battlers and Coastal Squatter Settlements', Selwood and Jones argue that the shacks 'are expressions of the Aussie Battlers' pioneering spirit and reminiscent of the early Australian squatters who opened up the country' (78). They write this in a journal named *Prairie Perspectives*, for an international audience of other settler colonists.

These places, they write, came into existence via 'working class, down-to-earth, practical, self-sufficient pioneers—manly personages with the ability to "make do"' (78). The shack settlements they built: 'symbols of the cultural heritage of the common people' (79). Vernacular, then, in all senses.

• • •

I have always written by going to a place and listening to the people speak there, collecting parts of language and feathering my nest with them like a bowerbird. Most of the people speaking loudly here are men, although there are spaces where women congregate. I am aware that my voice travelling through this landscape is a whipbird echo of a man's, that my poems likewise trace a route back through the settler men that have written of the things I write about.

• • •

There is another swathe of reports written about this landscape. You can find them archived online at the websites for the National Native Title Tribunal and the South West Native Title Settlement[2]. These hold the Native Title reports for the Yued Region—part of the Noongar Claim that stretches across the majority of the southern geographies of what is now known in settler parlance as Western Australia.

I believe, as Lawrence Venuti writes, that there is an inherent violence residing 'in the very purpose and activity of translation' (14). To write or speak English in Australia, especially to write about Australia as a settler, is to do a violence, to trace, cut, bulldoze and tarmac roads.

Core to the violence of translation is the 'invisibility' of the translator. Nowhere in their article do Selwood and Jones identify the people who lived and spoke for tens of thousands of years in these locations before the incursions of battlers, farms, roads and written languages.

• • •

Many of my poems are about the roads: the Old Road, the New Road and the Track. A poem is a way of travelling. Another poet I know speaks of them constantly as bridges. My poems are less bridges than they are versions of these three roads, I try to make the work of travelling visible—pockmarking the poems, cutting open the land, showing the bodies that every moving vehicle, every road, leaves behind.

• • •

Poetry should risk something. But you get to decide what that risk is. In poetry criticism the word 'accessibility' is a loaded one. To risk accessibility is seemingly to risk being too simple for poetry, the way that the vernacular is defined against the 'literary' or 'cultured' tongue.

• • •

I am obsessed with one particular Australian song more than any other: 'Flame Trees' by Cold Chisel. I listen to it every time I drive any of the roads to and from Cervantes and the shacks. I used to play the Sarah Blasko version, where she sings in the universal folk music intonation. When singing—in English at least—it's common to lengthen syllables and articulate more imprecisely. Blasko's voice, while definitively hers, could come from anywhere.

Over the time of writing *Fish Song*, I gravitate towards Jimmy Barnes' voice: the high nasal pitch like an angry galah or the sound of my stepfather's angle grinder. I sing along. Yet on other songs, like 'Cheap Wine', or when I hear Barnes interviewed, you can still hear the lilt of the rough Scottish working-class accent of his family and childhood.

• • •

In the last decade of his life my stepfather's hearing went, from many years spent around screaming men and machinery. He would not get a hearing aid; instead he would ask us to repeat everything louder and slower. I would mirror his voice, like singing back a verse in the hope that it rendered me closer to him, like a cuckoo almost faking my way into the nest, or, more kindly, like a lyrebird.

• • •

At an artist's residency I meet a composer who identifies herself as being hearing-impaired; she relies on the visual to both compose and comprehend. I ask her if accents are detectable when lip-reading. We are standing on a street corner in upstate New York with cars going by and she says that this might not be the best place for answering questions, but that she will try.

My mouth, she says, stretches horizontally across my face when I talk in ways an American's does not. When I test out this movement, making my lips move into an exaggerated grimace to pronounce the word *town*, I notice the thick strings in my neck draw taut and quiver. It's at those moments, she says, that my voice is higher than most other people's, edging into the range she cannot easily hear.

• • •

As we wait for my stepfather to die, we talk to him, he hears nothing—not even the low notes. Once he is dead and placed in a cheap wooden box, I sit a copy of the book on the top of the coffin to be burnt with him. We do not stay for the cremation. Outside the funeral home in the sun the magpies cry in the peppermint trees.

• • •

The best line in 'Flame Trees' is its most exhausted. As Barnes grieves for person and place, he stops, and says more than sings, 'Who needs that sentimental bullshit anyway?'

To love and be loved is also to risk accessibility. When I write in the voice of the father I have loved and have lost, I risk knowing my grief. To write of the coastline, as the water inches up and the buildings risk the bulldozer, is to risk finding that grief unfathomable, inarticulable, stuck in the shifting nasal vowel sounds never reaching the end of the word.

Notes

1 The principle recommendation of the 2011 report, Recommendation 6, reads 'The Committee recommends that the responsible Minister and managing authority instruct leaseholders and shack owners to remove the shacks at Wedge and Grey and, as a priority, develop the area to provide the public with low impact, nature-based, affordable visitor facilities and accommodation, including camping and caravanning facilities' (vii).

2 The South West Native Title Settlement appears at: https://www.dpc.wa.gov.au/swnts/Pages/default.aspx The original findings appear at: http://www.nntt.gov.au/searchRegApps/NativeTitleClaims/Pages/details.aspx?NTDA_Fileno=WC1997/071.

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Incomplete

Ian Seed

Ian Seed's collections of prose poems include *New York Hotel* (2018), *Identity Papers* (2016) and *Makers of Empty Dreams* (2014), all from Shearsman Books. *New York Hotel* was selected as a TLS Book of the Year in 2018. His prose poems have appeared in a number of anthologies, including *The Valley Press Anthology of Prose Poetry* (2019), *The Best Small Fictions 2017* (Braddock Avenue Books), *The Forward Book of Poetry 2017* (Faber & Faber), and *The Best British Poetry 2014* (Salt). He lectures in Creative Writing at the University of Chester (UK).

It was an event to celebrate something, but I could no longer remember what.

'What's going on?' I asked a colleague.

He looked at me. 'What do you mean, what's going on?'

'I'm sorry, I'm really not myself today,' I said.

'Why don't you go into the refreshment room?' he suggested, pointing to a door.

The only person in there—it was really just a dilapidated storeroom—was the woman from IT, famous for her stammer. She was standing by a small window, gazing out.

I went over to join her, wondering what there was to look at. Not much, as it turned out. Just a backyard with a couple of overflowing bins.

'Oh, it's y-you,' she said, not looking at me, but putting her head on my shoulder as if she'd done so a thousand times before.

The event, whatever it was, was sure to be a waste of time, but at least now there was the possibility of romance.

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!

December

1st KSP Social Event: Katharine's Birthday & Awards Ceremony, from 10.30am.

7th PCWC Workshop: 'Trouble is Our Business', crime fiction with Guy Salvidge, 1.30–4.30pm.

January

16th KSP Young Writers: Holiday Hub for ages 12+, KSP Writers' Centre, 9.30–11.30am.

17th OOTA Workshops: Poetry with Shane McCauley, Fremantle Arts Centre, 1pm (offered alternate weeks).

19th FAWWA: Perth Writers Salon with Campbell Jefferys, every Sunday morning until 16th February.

20th Voicebox Poetry Reading and Open Mic, Threeo Café, South Fremantle, from 6.30pm.

24th OOTA Workshops: Prose with Chris Konrad, Fremantle Arts Centre, 1pm (offered alternate weeks).

February

From first week: KSP Young Writers' Group: 'Scribe Tribe and Homeschoolers'.

2nd FAWWA Poetry Workshop: 'Writing with an Enlarged Heart', with Susan Bradley Smith, 1.30–4.30pm.

2nd FAWWA Event: 'Audible' spoken word event, with Campbell Jefferys and Susan Bradley Smith, 7–8.30pm.

3rd FAWWA: Tom Collins Poetry Prize awards night, Voicebox Fremantle, 7–9pm.

24th Voicebox Poetry Reading and Open Mic, Threeo Café, South Fremantle, from 6.30pm.

March

PCWC Workshop Series: 'Story of Your Life: Narrative as an Act of Healing in Contemporary Memoir'.

PCWC Workshop Series: 'Memoir and Biography Writing'.

2nd FAWWA: 'Writers-in-Residence', Scott-Patrick Mitchell, until 15th March (workshop included).

15th FAWWA: Stuart Hadow Short Story Competition opens.

28th WA Poets Inc.: Poetry Workshop with Carolyn Abbs, WA Poets Office, Bon Marche Arcade, Perth, 10.30am.

29th FAWWA: 'Writers-in-Residence', Ben Mason, until 12th April (workshop included).

30th Voicebox Poetry Reading and Open Mic, Threeo Café, South Fremantle, from 6.30pm.

April

PCWC Workshop Series: 'Story of Your Life'.

PCWC Workshop Series: 'Memoir and Biography Writing'.

4th FAWWA: 'Writers-in-Residence', Andrew Levett, until 17th May (workshop included).

18th KSP Workshop: 'So you want to… *Elevate Your Narrative Voice*', KSP Writers' Centre, 1–4pm.

20th Voicebox Poetry Reading and Open Mic, Threeo Café, South Fremantle, from 6.30pm.

21st KSP Social Event: 'Literary Dinner with Katie Hale', KSP Writers' Centre, from 6pm.

May

3rd KSP Social Event: 'Open Day', KSP Writers' Centre, from 11am.

25th Voicebox Poetry Reading and Open Mic, Threeo Café, South Fremantle, from 6.30pm.

June

PCWC Workshop Series: 'Story of Your Life'.

PCWC Workshop Series: 'Memoir and Biography Writing'.

1st FAWWA: Stuart Hadow Short Story Competition entries close.

13th KSP Workshop: 'So you want to… *Elevate Your Editing Skills*', KSP Writers' Centre, 1–4pm.

16th KSP Social Event: 'Literary Dinner with Eugen Bacon, KSP Writers' Centre, from 6pm.

29th Voicebox Poetry Reading and Open Mic, Threeo Café, South Fremantle, from 6.30pm.

Ongoing

The Fellowship of Writers WA will be running a number of events across the year, dates TBC. They also offer residencies.

OOTA Prose and Poetry classes are ongoing, on alternate Fridays.

WA Poets Inc. host a variety of poetry events throughout the year.

KSP Writers Centre offers three private cabins for writers to retreat, with substantial discounts for members, plus ten different writing groups meeting on a regular basis.

Peter Cowan Writers' Centre (PCWC) supports novice, emerging and established creative writers, offering a range of workshops and writing groups.

For more information on any of these events, please contact the host organisation.

Peter Cowan Writers Centre: www.pcwc.org.au

KSP Writers' Centre: www.kspwriterscentre.com

WA Poets Inc: www.wapoets.wordpress.com

Voicebox: www.voiceboxpoets.com

FAWWA: www.fawwa.org

OOTA: www.ootawriters.com

Westerly Magazine: www.westerlymag.com.au

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'Pacific'
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