

Scintillae 2012



**Scintillae 2012 celebrates the contribution of writers, poets and creative thinkers
to the communities of central and northern Victoria over the past decade.**

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This anthology is dedicated to Sara Douglass (Dr Sara Warneke, 1957-2011)—novelist, non-fiction writer, teacher and historian. She will be greatly missed by her fans and former History students, as well as by the central Victorian, Australian and international writing communities.

Foreword

Scintillae 2012 has been put together to celebrate the contribution of writers, poets, creative and critical thinkers to the communities of central and northern Victoria over the past decade or so. Many of the writers featured have assisted Bendigo TAFE's writing program over that period and thus the anthology also stands as a celebration of the often unacknowledged contribution of public arts education to this region. The diversity of literary themes explored as well as the high quality of the writing herein vindicates, I believe, the claim that community access to high quality, low cost public arts education at tertiary level is crucial to the well-being and future development of a vibrant and healthy community.

Over the years Bendigo TAFE's writing program has been supported in myriad ways by dozens of journalists, editors, poets and writers of fiction and non-fiction—some live locally, others much further afield. These professionals have nurtured our students via talks and presentations, mentoring, and editing of works in progress. We've also been assisted by academics at La Trobe University (Bendigo) in the disciplines of literature, film studies, philosophy, history, education and religious studies. These educators welcomed, taught and mentored our graduates as they pursued their studies (often to Honours, Masters and PhD levels).

In my years as program coordinator I've also had the immense privilege of teaching alongside many dedicated creative arts educators (many of whom appear in this anthology). The success of the program owes a great deal to these people. I'd especially like

to acknowledge the input over the years of three extraordinary coordinator-teachers—Justin D’Ath, Dr Geoff Russell and Dr Tom McWilliam.

The writing professionals and educators discussed above all contributed their goodwill, creative energies and immense knowledge to the program such that our students received life-changing educational opportunities.

It seemed appropriate, therefore, as Bendigo’s inaugural writers’ festival beckoned, to acknowledge some of these people through a quality literary anthology featuring examples of their work. As the idea grew we also decided to send out invitations to previous students of the course with a view to giving some of them the chance to appear alongside their former teachers and mentors. As a consequence around 60% of the material in *Scintillae 2012* is by former students of the program. We’d love to have featured even more ex-students but the deluge of submissions as well as the anthology’s size limitations meant we had to draw a line somewhere.

Although this project was initially envisaged as a literary anthology, it is a fact that over the years the PWE program at Bendigo TAFE has produced many excellent popular fiction writers, journalists and creative non-fiction writers. Since we are very proud of these graduates we also decided to include some examples of their work in the anthology.

Finally, I would especially like to acknowledge the members of the publishing team, in particular my co-editors Tru Dowling and Tom McWilliam and long-term Painted Words designer/layout expert, Peter Wiseman. A dozen or so Diploma-level students (undertaking ‘Advanced Editing’ and ‘Creativity in Cultural Context’) also assisted by sorting and assessing submissions, copy-editing and proofing the MS, and helping to plan aspects of the launch—Geoff Brown, Madeline Cooke, Barb Evans, Sarah Gale, Tom Levett, Anna Macgowan, Lorraine McMahon, Sarah McVeigh, John Murphy, Gail Remnant, Mitchell Roberts and Mark Sumner. David Wallace, Teaching Department Manager for Art, Music and Writing, also deserves our thanks for backing this project from its inception. Similarly, John Rossi and the Bendigo TAFE marketing team for their support in sponsoring a number

of events at the festival—including this anthology's launch.

Why Scintillae?

A number of people have asked me why we chose the name *Scintillae* for the title. The term has many layers. It appears in medieval alchemical texts (allegorical/spiritual and proto-scientific) as a phenomenon associated with the *albedo* stage of the opus or Great Work—the moment when sparks or tiny flashes of light (hope?) appear among the fermenting dark liquids associated with the gloominess of the preceding *nigredo* stage. 'Creativity' and 'alchemy', of course, have much in common, and the two words often appear together e.g. 'creative alchemy'. Gnostic-influenced writers also used the term—their *scintillae* were envisaged as individual souls cut off from their true identity as aspects of the *anima mundi* or 'world soul'. In the twentieth century Jung adapted these ancient usages to describe *scintillae* as the epiphanies that sometimes arise after periods of intense conflict between the 'persona' and ascending unconscious material. To him the *scintillae* heralded the emergence of the all-important 'self archetype'. Many students of writing and arts programs report 'finding themselves for the first time' due to their studies—in an age of widespread 'loss of soul' and psychological fragmentation this is no small achievement!

Later in the 20th century the term showed up again in theories associated with the 'New Physics'—especially Chaos Theory. Here *scintillae* featured as the sub-atomic particles (or wave/particles) at the heart of the so-called quantum revolution. More specifically, the *scintillae* represented the first manifestations of order and harmony after periods of chaos and entropy. Although it is not generally acknowledged, the strange behaviour associated with these marvellously 'wilful' *scintillae* became fundamental to cultural postmodernism—including literary postmodernism.

We also note that in the Early Modern period it was not uncommon to describe collections of poems, writings etc. as *scintillae* – as flashes, sparks or fragments of insight presented in book form. The symbolism here is quite apt, since it describes well the many flashes of insight and revelation that the reader will experience in reading the works in this anthology.

Contemporary hyper-capitalism tends to dismiss serious artistic endeavour as irrelevant to the human condition. Scientific progress and economic success alone are believed to define our general sense of community well-being. As a consequence, creative arts and humanities courses in all educational spheres are under attack and increasingly forced to prove themselves in terms of materialistic forms of measurement. The type of intense examination of self, other and cosmos on display in this anthology is increasingly likely to be dismissed as ‘of little or small account’ by some high-powered victims of what Erich Fromm termed ‘automaton conformity’. Such a judgment, of course, implicates a somewhat ironic contemporary definition of the word *scintillae*—to some people whatever creative people do will only ever be of ‘small or little account’.

The various *avant gardes* of literary history also encountered such ignorance. In times of social disintegration, alienation and decline, however, their *scintillae* helped initiate much-needed social and cultural change. In alchemical terminology their works became tiny, fragile sparks, flashes or flares of light (hope?) that helped illuminate the path to an exit from the general darkness. Literary *scintillae* may still, in times of need, suggest new ways of being, ‘worthwhile futures’, to suffering individuals and indeed to entire societies. This is the reason the creative arts and humanities remain essential to contemporary Australia—not to fuel the Gross National Product or advertise the country to possible tourists, but to promote certain life-affirming certainties, or *reveries of being*—certain expansive modes of consciousness—that allow us ultimately to connect more genuinely to each other and to the greater mysteries of what these days are being termed ‘the Multiverse’.

There is a final network of associations attached to the word *scintillae* that is of particular relevance to Central Victorian writers. Bendigo, like many surrounding towns, was founded on gold mining. The tiny specks of gold that miners searched for in pans and the like can also be described as *scintillae*—they signalled a kind of ‘industrial alchemy’ that brought prosperity to many. In the case of Bendigo, these *scintillae* testify to thousands of kilometres of tunnels deep beneath our feet. Obviously there

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is much more to Bendigo than surface appearances—much of the city's history exists in that vast underground honeycomb of tunnels and shafts. Writers, according to some theorists, are also miners, they mine everyday life as well as the sinkholes of the deep unconscious (however it is visualised) for tiny nuggets of inspiration, truth and hope.

Dr Ian Irvine (for the *Scintillae 2012* Publishing Team)

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Meditations on the Inaugural Bendigo Writers Festival

[The publication of *Scintillae 2012* has been timed to coincide with the inaugural Bendigo Writers Festival—a historic moment for literature and writing generally in this city. We are therefore delighted to include here the thoughts of one of the festival’s main organisers, the writer and journalist Rosemary Sorenson, concerning why it is that Bendigo is finally ready to host a major annual event of this nature. *The Editors*]

A newcomer to Bendigo sees the gracefully pompous Architecture and admires it but wonders how the city responds to change. She sees the poppet-head tourist landmarks that acknowledge Bendigo’s hard history and thinks about what kind of people that has produced.

Not just in the city centre but out on the edges, she sees too, quite quickly, conservative Bendigo, battler Bendigo, and a city not sure of its identity in a country that mythologises but perhaps also doesn’t understand the bush. Australians might talk fondly, patronisingly, of the ‘regions’, and even tell stories about the wide brown land, back of beyond and the way they talk differently out there. The notion that you go to the city to make it, retreat to the country when you can’t, runs as deep as the Central Deborah Mine.

But do we have a place in our national consciousness for a city such as Bendigo, a place neither bush nor metropolis, neither inside nor out?

It has been, for the past 100 years, tradition to escape from those ‘teeming sores’ described by A D Hope, to a less important place where things are not so tough—and a little dull. Tell someone you’re living with ironbarks and clear night skies, galahs of the feathered variety and wildflowers so shy it takes months to introduce yourself to them, and they say, ‘But I bet you miss the cafés’.

This golden country is, for many Australians, fool’s gold, pretty but not worth much at all.

What we don’t have, apparently, in Australia are small cities that are as full of difference, as rich in experience, as *becoming* in both senses of the word (lovely and also evolving) as what A D Hope designated the Big Five. We call our small cities ‘regional centres’, as though a state capital is not, too, a regional centre. We think of them as secondary, not just in population but in opportunity, culture, education, entertainment, and even quality of life.

In the past, that may well have been so, but let’s put a few words down on the page, and think about what they mean for a city such as Bendigo: global interconnectivity, information super-highway, and social networking.

Here’s what the technological revolution has meant for a city as neat, as desirable, as connected as Bendigo: we are no longer out on the edge, on the rim of where interesting things happen, left behind and left out of the social, political and cultural conversations. We are—we can be—part of whatever happens, and we can’t ignore that, even if we choose to.

To put together a writers’ festival in this city, back when the first writers’ festival started in Australia in Adelaide in the 1960s, would have been not just difficult but also foolhardy. No one could have gathered the kind of information and made the sorts of contacts now possible at the touch of a keypad.

Over the years, other places across Australia started up festivals—some in towns with far fewer attributes than Bendigo, it has to be said. But not Bendigo, despite having a campus of La Trobe University and a vitally important TAFE. It wasn’t yet the time.

Gradually, the city’s confidence grew, with strong and

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courageous decisions made to invest in a good art gallery, and to protect heritage sites while allowing quality development.

There is still a solid rump of resistance to change in Bendigo, and that's fine, so long as those who complain the city is too big, too classy, too open, are reminded there is now a diversity of opinion that it pays to take notice of.

That is why we needed a Writers Festival: to heed and encourage that diversity, to celebrate the curiosity it engenders, and—frankly—to show off.

We won't ever be Sydney, with its gorgeous harbour welcoming writers from all over the world, or Melbourne, with its self-conscious desire to be the intellectual capital of Australia. We will be—we are—Bendigo, a 'becoming' city. What we become is up to us. We can help each other discover what it is, however, by fostering, encouraging and enjoying the remarkable human achievements that are writing and reading.

Rosemary Sorenson

Short Stories

Napkin

Jess Anastasi

A fan, a swan, and a flower. Every time they went out for dinner, she had to go all origami on the napkins until by the end of the meal, their table was littered with serviettes twisted and folded into a stupid selection of different shapes. Usually one or two of the waiters or other diners found it entertaining and asked for an importunate lesson. And she was always more than happy to oblige.

But, for once, he just wanted to have a nice, quiet meal without their evening turning into a tutorial on Ancient Japanese Art Forms for Dummies.

Even as they sat down at the table, she was reaching for a napkin.

‘Really? Again with the napkins? Isn’t that ever going to get old?’ He flicked out his own napkin and settled it across his lap—where it was meant to go.

She shrugged and bent her head to focus on the first few folds. ‘It’s fun. What’s wrong with a little fun while we’re having dinner?’

He leaned forward, annoyance rising within him. ‘It’s not fun. It makes our dinner into a freaking circus and I’m sick of it.’

‘Uh-huh,’ she said, like she hadn’t even heard him. She bit her lower lip, brow dipped in concentration.

The waiter came by and asked for their drinks order, looking at her like she might be certifiable. He could attest that she probably was. He ordered a top-shelf whiskey and the waiter took himself

off again, shaking his head.

She finally glanced up, an expression of triumph on her face. He knew she was waiting for him to ask what she'd made, but he wasn't going to play her sick game any more. He clenched his jaw and hoped the whiskey would arrive sooner rather than later.

'Don't you want to know what I made?' she asked in a grating, sing-song kind of voice.

'No.' He crossed his arms. Really, he'd thought this a cute quirk at first. Except he'd also thought she'd get over it eventually.

'It's an angry face.' She held up the contorted napkin for him to see. 'It's for you, because that's what you look like right now.'

Holy crap. It really did look like an angry face. How the hell did she even do that?

He stood slowly. 'You know what? I'm just going to the bathroom.'

He walked away at a sedate pace, even though he wanted to run. He crossed the restaurant and went down the hallway toward the bathrooms. Halfway along, he spotted their waiter.

'Please tell me there's a back door out of this place.' He sounded desperate, because he damn-well was.

'Yeah, it's through the kitchen, but you can't—'

He didn't wait for the guy to finish, sprinting through the kitchen and out into the cool night. He wouldn't be taking her or her napkin fetish out to dinner ever again.

Tobogan Flapsack Changes His Name

Rod Blackhirst

*To the despair of his editor, fiction writer Spindles
O'Malley falls in love with names.*

What sort of name,' asked the stunned fiction writer, 'is Malcolm Brown? Goodness gracious, Brown, couldn't you add a hyphenated something, just to make it a wee bit more interesting?'

They were in Brown's brown office discussing books and careers and reporting on the manuscript recently submitted in a completely non-brown manner.

'The question,' said Brown, 'is what sort of name is Tobogan Flapsack for the hero of a love story?'

'I think it fits,' said the writer.

'I think it sucks,' said Brown, brownly. He was paid to be brown.

This was the impasse reached. Publishers, Muckleberry, Carlson and Poofjebs – usually referred to as MCP – insisted that their blithe word-monkey labour under the cautious Brown, an editor with a reputation for restraint. There are few eventualities in the whole wide world, however, that the writer – his name was the far more interesting 'Spindles O'Malley' – disliked more than a new editor. He determined to be eccentric. Besides, he had a genuine dislike for people named after colours. Blacks, Whites, Greens, Browns. Women named Scarlet. He had no time for them at all. He was, nevertheless, upon a contractual obligation and

despite a pique of artistic resentment he went away, revised, and then returned the manuscript for a new Brown perusal. The editor read a few pages and then put it down.

'All you've done,' said Brown, brownly again, 'is add the letter H. as an initial throughout. So now it is Tobogan H. Flapsack instead of just plain Tobogan Flapsack!'

'I think it's an improvement,' said the writer. 'Don't you?'

'Look,' said Brown, 'You've got a character here named Thomas Quartermain. Now that's a sensible name. Why not use that name for the main character? Instead of Tobogan Flapsack.'

'Tobogan H. Flapsack,' said Spindles, correcting. He'd worked on the revised version for weeks.

'Why not,' asked the editor, 'just use ordinary names that actually fit the character? I think it would sell a lot more books!' This was his professional opinion.

At this point Spindles decided that he had pricked upon a sore, one where Brown was very sensitive. His assessment of the new editor was that, deep down, he didn't think of himself as a Brown. No. He thought of himself as a *Perry Dilsonwangle II*. So Spindles determined that he should help his editor face this truth.

'I'm gonna call you Perry,' he announced. 'Perry Dilsonwangle. The second.'

'I'm very happy with Brown,' said Dilsonwangle.

This claim was so obviously untrue that Spindles chose just to ignore it.

'I asked your secretary earlier,' said Spindles, 'and she said you are definitely a Dilsonwangle. I tell you Perry, I've met several Dilsonwangles in my time, and I'm looking at one right now!'

Their relationship didn't improve after that. The writer insisted on referring to his editor as 'Perry' and the editor refused to answer to it. The editor insisted on changing the names of his writer's characters but the writer wouldn't hear of it. It had no music. It didn't twist his quirk.

'Don't you think, Perry,' said Spindles at one juncture, 'that in most novels the best thing about them is the names of the characters?'

'No,' said Dilsonwangle, 'I don't.'

'Where would Tessa of the Derbeyvilles be if she wasn't named

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Tessa of the Derbervilles?' Spindles wanted to know, citing an example.

'You mean, Tess of the D'Urbevilles,' said the editor. 'By Thomas Hardy.'

'Or if Oliver Twist was named Oliver Smith. It just wouldn't work, would it?'

Dilsonwangle complained that Dickens had a fetish for silly names and that Hemingway was a better writer precisely because he hadn't.

'Tom Bombadill! Now there's a name for a character!' said the Spindles.

'Perhaps. But Bilbo Baggins is corny,' said Dilsonwangle, sour. Being an editor he felt at liberty to pour scorn upon all the great writers of the English language. Indeed, he felt an obligation to do so. In his world, writers were the natural enemy. They were an unruly breed of difficult temperaments that caused publishers sleepless nights.

'Once,' said Spindles, 'I read a story where the main character was named O. Disseus! And he poked Polly Squeamish in the eye with a stick!'

'Homer,' said the editor.

'You see! What sort of name is that? Homer. Someone who goes home. It is at once the name of the greatest poet of classical antiquity and the name of an animated underachiever!'

'Your point being?'

'It couldn't work if he was named John. Or Malcolm. You couldn't have 'Malcolm's Iliad', could you?'

At this rhetorical high-point the editor and his client gazed at each other silently for a second. Then Spindles pleaded, 'Do you see what I'm getting at, Perry?'

At their next meeting O'Malley declared a change of pace.

'I'm writing a new book,' he announced.

'Good,' said Brown, encouraged. 'What's it about?'

'It's an autobiography.'

'Ah ha. Do you have a working title?'

'It's called *Clueless In Denver Colorado*.'

'An autobiography?'

'Yeah. It's about this guy. He lives in Denver Colorado and... '

'Have you ever been to Denver Colorado?'

'What do you mean?'

'Have you ever been to Denver Colorado?'

'Oh, I see. Why? Does it matter?'

'I'm just wondering why it's called *Clueless in Denver Colorado*?'

'Because the main character is clueless and he lives in Denver Colorado.'

'Is this main character you? You did say it was an autobiography.'

'Yes. It is me. But, to protect the innocent, he's named Randy the Soapbox. The third.'

'Randy the Soapbox?'

'The third. There were two earlier Randy the Soapboxes and it's important not to confuse them.'

'I see,' said the editor. He was getting annoyed. 'Listen! O'Malley! Here we are clueless in Elegant Ridge, and as far as I know you've never been very far out of Elegant Ridge, and so I do not see how you could possibly justify calling your autobiography 'Clueless in Denver Colorado', when you have never even been to Denver Colorado! And as for the name Randy the Soapbox...'

Eventually, the writer saw what his editor was driving at, so he went away, secluded himself in a lonesome cabin, and produced his new oeuvre. A few months later he returned manuscript-laden as Dilsonwangle had requested. It took the sharp-eyed editor less than three minutes to make a raw assessment. The work consisted of page after page of names. Names such as Nicolette Lagubra, Gordon Pittnargle, Demitrio Clanbollocks, Dusty the Sandbag, Silvester 'Fridgemagnet' Davies, Argyle Lowly, Teddy Smegdrifter, Philip the See-through Tube, Lydia Muff-Johnson, O. Toby Flipjar, Sonya the Plastic-Wrapper. Tony the Throttle, Evalyn Honeytribes, Barack Obama, Stella May Trippenwort, Scratchy Blonde Eileen, Sir Marcus Driftwood-Pottengroober and his wife Lady Shirley-Maree.

'This is just a list of silly names!' Dilsonwangle complained.

'I know,' said Spindles. 'It's called "Telephone Book". Do you like it?'

'It doesn't even have a plot!'

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'A what?'

'A plot!'

'You don't really see where I'm taking this, *artistically*, do you?' the writer observed.

'I don't,' confessed the editor. 'Are you being deliberately difficult?'

'Next I want to write a trilogy called "The Electoral Roll",' said Spindles, excited.

It was his conviction as a creative individual, he went on to explain, that nouns are the best sort of words you can get and so, *ipso logico*, proper nouns must be the very best sort of words of all. He liked the way Germans treat all nouns like proper nouns and for that reason alone wished they'd won the war. He had long before decided, however, that most of the characters in his tales were absolutely dull. They lived, loved and died, usually in that order. It was necessary, therefore, if he wasn't going to start disliking them, to enhance them – as he understood it – with interesting names. The best thing going for Jonathon Swift was his surname, O'Malley maintained, and Gulliver only travelled because he was named Gulliver. If he had been named Paddy or Sean he would have lived in Dublin working mill for five kids and a fish-wife. 'Now, J. Alfred Prufrock! There's a name!' O'Malley declared, and said he saw T. S. Eliot as a distant founder of his style. 'Thomas Stearns Eliot. Stearns. That's slightly silly,' he said.

'Let's get back to Tobogan Flapsack, shall we?' the editor suggested.

'OK.'

'I really don't care for the name. I think it detracts from an otherwise reasonable sort of love story.'

It was a story about how Tobogan had almost mutilated his heart-strings on a winsome lassie who accidentally had to move to Canada in a hurry. At the last minute their romance came crashing down like a failed baked cheesecake in a cold kitchen. O'Malley was trying to show that he understood the female reader.

'What about with the H?' the writer wondered.

'No. Doesn't work for me.'

'Come on, Perry, you don't think the H gives the character more depth?'

'No.'

The impasse remained impassable. That is, until – depleted from a series of creative writing workshops on the extended metaphor – O'Malley finally relented and said he'd consider other options. 'What about,' he asked, 'Stilts McNoughton-Von Rishing?'

Dilsonwangle screwed up his nose.

'What about Blinko Treadmill the Wildcard from Wadonga?'

'Nope.'

'Jim the Frilly Fingermittens?'

'No!'

'Laraby Huddleberger? Carlos J. Slingturban-Eastway?'

The editor shook his head.

'Frisky McKindlay the Great Nong of the North?'

Another no.

'Milton G. Flicktossor? Harold the Wheelie-Bin? Heath Grimwaddle III? Lotar Snorganmeister of Bremnen? Paltry Nicholls? Rubbery John? Tommy Sleekmurple? Leroy Henderson?'

The editor was unimpressed with every suggestion, except for the last.

'What was the last one again?' he said.

'Leroy Henderson,' said O'Malley.

'No middle initial?'

'No. Just Leroy.'

It was an eleventh-minute breakthrough.

'Done!' said the editor, seizing the moment. 'We'll call him Leroy. Just plain Leroy Henderson.'

'I don't see how it's going to work,' said O'Malley, 'but we can try it.'

The story, replete with Leroy, was subsequently published in the annual *Redfern Tractor Repairs Lower Murray-Darling Literary Omnibus* and was widely enjoyed, but with reservations expressed best by a raft of critics. Reviewer for the *Elegant Ridge Express*, Morris Skunkenbustle, put it most succinctly. 'One has to wonder why, in such a tale of twisted hearts,' he wrote, 'the author could not think of anything more interesting than the name "Leroy Henderson" to brighten up an otherwise almost-flat characterization.' And he asked the question many readers asked,

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‘Is O’Malley losing his touch?’

The author – hero of our tale – was thus vindicated, while the editor – our villain – was taken off the case by MCP and relegated to metro magazines. To mend his reputation among once-avid readers O’Malley rushed back into print with a new story called ‘Tobogan Flapsack Changes His Name’, a satirical endeavor describing the author’s own tangle with that deadly breed of misery-guts and literary killjoy, Agent Brown, thereafter affectionately named Perry. This was the third editor O’Malley had successfully dispensed with. ‘There are,’ he concluded, ‘some hardened bastards in the publishing world. Bastard-coated bastards. But in most cases, even in the brownest of Malcolms there is usually a Dilsonwangle trying to escape.’

Country Junk

Neil Boyack

There's nothing around here except my Granddad's house and the old reservoir, a crooked wishbone forest of coppiced ironbark where the cattle pound used to be. Blunt bones rising from the earth after every rain. The snakes are black, black like ribbons moving on shades of grey, brown, green. At night Granddad's tin roof is silver with moon and frost and inside he sits on one of the only two chairs in the room, jumping fire the only light. It sees his face. Pocked skin, crushed nose. Jack, my Granddad, dozes in the chair as he does every night, his nose whistling, the fire dying down to an orange coal, allowing cold and crickets to bleed in and fill his wooden home. Dreams. Phantom movements in his ugly boxing fingers. Boxing forty years before. Preston Town hall, fighting first-generation Italians who had travelled down from their fruit farms in the Mallee, blackfellas from Shepparton and one or two from the Alice. He could move his legs so powerfully his feet were a blur. The newspaper said he had an *educated left*, at a time when he could hold other men still, by the throat, his tattoos fresh, shining.

Granddad wakes and with rehearsed actions he goes to the gas stove to warm the bottle. The 1am feed, everything candlelit. Going to the cot he is asking me the questions. *Where's your mum eh? I wonder where she is.* He imagines her under a bridge somewhere with long-finger-nailed men, taking out-of-date medication to get high. Payday. Thursday. Tomorrow. *She'll be ok for a while after tomorrow wherever she is.* Granddad tells me that the drugs draw

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the company of the *hunted* men, those who have unknown kids, short fuses, dominating with harsh humour, odours, no good at closeness. *I hope those things aren't true. Assuming the worst is the best preparation little one*, he whispers to me, *Always assume the worst.*

In the morning we go for our walk. Granddad carries me in the baby-pouch, the dogs are on leads. He tells me that Mum is older now, and all she worries about are her men. *Your mum's always been like that... she's always wanting approval from blokes, even when she was a teenager, she'd be moping, coming in after parties late at night asking Grandma when she was gunna meet a bloke. Your grandma would say (sleepy gravel voice in the dark) 'You don't know how lucky you are, most of them are heartless.'*

We reached the paddocks beyond the reservoir. There was no water in the res. now, just saplings, a stalling landscape, waiting for flood, kangaroo tracks in the dried mud. Granddad whispered, reading the earth, *feathers from the hunting fox, cracks in the ground big enough to swallow me hand. I remember me wet feet, that hot ground, the relief of the soft moss in between the trees on Norris' hill there. Staying nights up here in this patch of bush with Barb, Jesus, those days were good.*

Listening to each other's breath.

The night animals.

The cleanness of those long swims.

Jesus that was good.

Grandma can't remember any of that now though.

A koala snorted, a pig in a tree, and it took Granddad a while to spot it.

A koala! I bet y'never seen a koala before, eh?

The man turned around so the baby could see.

The koala sat there in the fork of the tree, drugged, looking out over the little creek-beds that ran through the paddocks, the empty veins of the land.

The kangaroos in the paddock scattered when Granddad let the dogs off their leads.

They've got a good system, girl, those kangas, they just piss off and go when they need to and then get back together later. It's a good system.

The man with the baby stood still for a good few minutes,

watching the kangaroos and the dogs, a few bull ants in the dirt between his feet. The baby dozed in the carrier. Norris came out of the patch of bush on the hill with a couple of old rabbit traps and a bowsaw in hand. He surprised Granddad, who felt bad about having just let the dogs go in Norris' paddock. He scanned for the dogs and could see the whippet sprinting pointlessly after kangaroos that were drawing away at half-pace. Hum of corella wings close overhead, like tyres on bitumen; the sound hung perfectly while he waited for Norris.

'How are you Jack?' The rabbit traps clinked between the men.

'Yeah...' he said nodding, looking over the paddocks.

'I see you got company.' The wrinkled, tanned men looked at the baby who was pink and tight. Norris' brown hand with missing fingertips met the cheek of the baby. 'Geez, she's a cute-little-bugger.' Norris' wavy hair was untidy, face shaved unevenly.

'Yeah...'

'So you got the babysitting job eh! Where's Mum?'

'Christ knows. She went a fortnight back and I haven't heard nuthun.'

'Geez.' Norris and Granddad stood side by side looking out to the whippet who was jumping through the longer grass away across the paddock. 'I thought I saw her hitchhiking the other day...going down to Ballarat, couldn't tell exactly.'

'Ballarat eh?'

There was a nod and they continued looking out into the paddocks that were like family.

'How's Barb coming along?' Norris asked this question every time he saw Jack Spears.

'She's not. She's a blank slate.' The comments were blunt, wounded.

'Jesus...what about her *cooking*...does she still cook? She used to make that great slice at the CFA fundraisers, and there was that wallaby and quandong curry at old man Johnstone's funeral a couple of years back.'

'Nope...she's nearly burned down the house a couple of times. She forgets about the hot water on the stove, leaves the oven on and all that.'

The old men stood side by side owning their memories, looking

out to the paddocks of yellow grass, the burnt-out stump that looked like a one-eyed panda. Thinking of his wife, Jack Spears wondered after his own memory powers. He wrote lists, lists for everything. It was something all his boxing mates had said was good to do. Every morning he would wake, taking a minute to look at his list on the bedside table: *kindling, dead trees, baby*. Once, remembering the baby, he ripped away his blankets and thundered into the spare room on tippy-toes, to see her sleeping soundly. Her cot sat amidst old blinds rolled up and stacked in a corner, boxes of cassettes, craft magazines, baby goods, a wardrobe along the wall holding his old boxing dressing gowns, medals and gloves, their stink perished – now they were crumbling, the leather cracking and the laces brittle, the seams and embroidery of *Ironman Spears* faded, eaten by albino silverfish and moths.

‘So you gonna go after Grace down Ballarat?’ Norris asked.

‘...Yeah.’ It could have meant yes, or no.

When they got back to the house Jack put the baby in the bassinette and pulled out his banjo. He picked a tune with his fat crooked fingers. *Old Macdonald had a Farm*, the only thing he could play. Jack watched for reactions in the baby. He saw she had the Spears nose and lips. Her eyes zipped around alertly, chasing the tinny sound of the rusty strings. Parrots shot past overhead, morning shadows weak on baby’s face as she reached after them. *I’m worried for you*, Granddad sang it to the tune, *Grandma’s family won’t take yeh...your mum’s ripped them off too many times*. He kept on singing.

Burned a house down.

Fractured Grandma’s wrist with a fire poker.

Stolen money.

Old Macdonald had a farm eeeeeeeeeiooohhh.

Even with the noise and the movement the baby drifted into a sleep and Jack took her inside. She weighed nothing to him and he was extra careful not to wake her when he was walking and breathing and opening the door with the squeaky hinge.

Breakfast time was almost gone and Jack spoke to his wife sipping tea from a chipped white mug.

‘Take a look at these, love. Remember anyone? Anything? It’s good exercise for the mind.’ He started most days with this

question to his wife of forty years, relating to the family photos in the shoe box sitting on the dining room table over breakfast. Her memory had been missing for a good year now and all she could do was eat, feed the pets and water the plants; the same routines that had given her life meaning the previous fifty-six years. It was hard to believe that her past – her family, her wedding, her daughter – were all gone from her head. Jack looked into the photos, the shadows of the people in the pictures, their shoes, fingers, necks. This was the Spears family story. The babies, his boxing, as well as the long-gone faces of his wife's moonfaced family. Jack wondered who had passed the memory disease onto her, where it started. Like the dog-eared, black-and-white head-shot of the pipe-smoking man in front of the cypress hedge looking to his left; *Isn't that the man I used to dance with, way back?* She touched his hand, an important discovery.

'You remember dancing then?' Jack's tone was half accusation, like she had been pretending to lose her mind.

'There's something...in my head,' she said tapping her ear with suspicion.

Jack leaned closer, willing that some detail of their history together might remain.

'Wooden floorboards...dancing feet, tobacco, dirty farmers' hands like tree roots, nervous around the hips of the women, or was it the fear of getting their clean dresses dirty...I'm not sure.'

She couldn't say. She was missing again, fossicking through the photos waiting for another detail to ignite.

The day became warmer; birdless, Jack could hear. He thought of wood-gathering, and all the other jobs he could do as Barb went through the photos at the dining-room table. He moved to the verandah out front hoping she could recall something more of their dancing days, their life together, hoping that she might call out to him and tell him about some of the things they'd done together. They'd gone until dawn sometimes, back in Marston's shearing shed where there was a fire blazing, fiddle player, harmonica. Between verandah posts Jack found a shaft of late morning sun. It almost stung his neck, but he bowed his head to enjoy it. He closed his eyes and he drifted onto his feet, remembering the holes in the floor of Marston's shed, the way the light of the fire made

everyone look good, the way it shone under glinting beer bottles. From Marston's shed he slid deeper into the purple behind his eyelids and heard the hum of propellers at Point Cook airfield with his father. Collecting mushrooms in old kerosene tins near the runway with his dad, a once-a-year trip; his dad's hands – a clip over the ear, a warm shield on his cheek. The propeller hum was winding its way closer, until its spluttering was a hackneyed muffler Jack hadn't heard before. In his tile of sun he opened his eyes in annoyance knowing that anyone coming down his road would be coming to *his* place. Carefully Jack let his father dissolve and go back to wherever he was. He limped, then walked, up the driveway without expectation to see who was coming. A green '80s Falcon with a couple of white panels. The car brakes locked up and then released, the car creeping to the top of the driveway and stopping. It could have been someone looking for directions.

The stirred dust billowed past the car and then fell thin. Jack could see Grace in the front passenger seat getting cigarettes out of her bag, he could hear her raised voice coming from inside the car. She got out and walked to Jack in her chunky high heels and gave him a kiss and a hug. A little dog jumped from the car and ran up to Jack, sniffing him and wagging its tail.

'G'day, Dad. How's the water situation?' Grace lit a smoke and Jack worried about where she might flick her ash.

'Yeah, alright.' Jack noted the teeth-marks on his daughter's neck, the thick makeup on her face and remembered when he caught her putting on lipstick for the first time as a little girl; *You'd better clean yourself up before Mum sees, she'll kill ya.*

'I haven't been able to get rid of the dog. Frank don't like 'em. Do'ya reckon you could take her? She's pretty good, *Aren't you girl, yeeessss...*' Grace bent down to pat the dog with her smoke hand.

'I want you to meet Frank, Dad, he works at the abattoir up Bendigo. Frank, this is Jack... Jack – Frank.'

There was a man standing at the open door of the patchwork car, unmoving. He waved at Jack shyly. Jack walked to him to shake his hand knowing his daughter would have told boxing stories; it always made her boy-friends inanimate. Frank's face was sun-wrinkled, and his knuckles revealed tattoo scratches,

childlike letters. He wore a navy singlet and had a crew-cut, kangaroo-coloured hair, brown marbles hidden by squinting, a soft handshake.

‘So where are you living?’ Jack Spears asked his daughter, his hands folded together.

‘With Frank. He’s got a place outside ‘a Bendigo. I’ll give you my new number because we can’t stay long. We’re just here to pick the baby up. Frank has to go to work in a couple of hours.’

When the meaning of the words became clear, a feeling of pointlessness made Jack’s eyes dumb cocoons. The muscles next to his shinbones weakened, the legs that had carried him forever now unsure. The weakness wormed through his gut, hooking his throat, and he needed to swallow, to concentrate on forming his words over his clumsy tongue. He didn’t know if his daughter was talking, or if minutes had elapsed. Tingles in his body made him feel he was made of dots – tingles in his hands, like before a fight, his palms, his cheeks hot. He couldn’t look at his daughter any more, he didn’t want to know what she was going to do next. He turned for home. Silent galahs hidden in the leaves above, preening themselves. He listened to the gravel crunch under his work boots. Every step. Watching his feet. One boot in front of the other.

Granddad gave me a big kiss then gave me to my mum whose hands were unsure with something so clean and valuable. Mum looked at Frank who was looking to go, and she began her goodbyes.

When Grace was gone, Jack’s granddaughter was unreachable on her mobile phone. Unreachable in his mind, as thoughts and pictures tripped over each other. He went to Barb and the photos on the dining room table, hoping for some understanding from her. He looked down to the floor where the new dog was waiting quietly. He imagined the conversation between Grace and Frank, the complaining muffler, the car ride for the baby. He hoped to Christ they weren’t smoking in the car. Jack looked and

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sorted and fingered the photos on the table for something new, something he thought might make him feel better. 'There's that bloke again...the one I used to dance with,' Barb was holding up a different photo altogether. Jack didn't respond. He left his wife there at the table. He moved outside with the dog into the sun and started collecting wood. Then, with his hands, he ripped all the juvenile wattle trees from the ground, the ones that had died the summer before. They were rotted and brittle and would be perfect for kindling. When he couldn't fit any more wood into the shed he got the fire going inside. The cold came, and the moon and frost filled the corrugated iron roof with silver and grey. The fire in the wood burner was going hard, shuddering, and he sat and looked at it from his chair. He whispered to nothing, *Dreams, give me my dreams, please, give me something.*

Where the Wild Children Play

Mark Briggs-Smith

Brian had been warned not to stay out at the playground after dark. Bad things happen when the sun goes down. It was the last thing his mother said to him each day as he dashed out the door, lunch box in hand, to spend another afternoon clambering over the ancient play equipment. Brian never paid much heed to her rambling. He just filed it away under the things over-protective mothers say. Like don't take candy from strangers, or you can't play football with the other kids because it's too rough and you'll get hurt. But now as the sun disappeared behind the peaks of the gums, and the shadows stretched their cold fingers across the edges of the play-lot Brian wasn't so sure.

By day, the playground, with its matching see-saws, metal slide and revolving clown-face swing set, was an eight-year olds' paradise. Nestled among three adjoining estates and secluded by a ring of surrounding bushland, it was the perfect spot to escape the prying eyes of adults for a while.

Brian had spent most of his summer break down at the park. It was his own private refuge since he and his mother had moved to his Grandma's just before Christmas. A few years back Grandma had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and things had really gone downhill lately. Mum had taken leave from work and the two of them had trekked across the state to spend the summer here. Grandma spent most of the day either yelling or crying, and

rarely remembered who anybody was anymore. The park and its attractions had been somewhere to hide.

But now, in the dwindling light the place took on a new persona. The gums' darkened limbs closed in on the playground, locking out the comforts and safety of home with a menacing authority. Brian should have been home. But things were so tough at his Grandma's. Sometimes he wished he could stay at the playground forever, away from the constant screaming-matches that went on and on. He'd stalled later and later each night, but it had never been dark before.

Brian clung to the cold mane of a plastic horse for comfort. The horse was one of four moulded rocking horses mounted atop a multi-dimensional see-saw. The stallion's features were scratched and faded and its black painted mane was all but chipped away. It stared across at the playground with dull, lifeless eyes. Brian guessed it was the sorry appearance that had first drawn him to it. He'd named it Franco after he discovered the letters scrawled in black marker under the horse's belly. Franco became his new best friend, and he'd often imagine the pair on grand adventures fighting dragons and beasts in mythical lands. But now as darkness settled over the playground he wasn't so brave. Now Franco was just a plastic horse and he was only a scared little boy all alone in the park.

Brian forced himself to sit straight in the saddle. He knew he was being silly. All he had to do was cut back through the trees and he'd be home. It was a three-minute walk and an even quicker run. Yes, that's what he'd do. Keep his head down and dash through the trees and back into Grandma's court. He'd be there in no time. He just had to harden up and climb down off the horse.

A loud bang sounded to Brian's right. Brian squealed and cowered back into Franco's mane, peeking towards the direction of the noise. The beam on one of the see-saws rattled. Brian groaned. It had just shifted sides in the wind.

Further down, the clown face let out a metallic groan and

turned a few degrees. A pair of rubber swings rocked gently off each ear like a set of chain-link earrings. Brian ignored its sinister grin, steeling himself to run. There was nothing to be scared of. Slowly he counted down from three.

A child-like giggle rang out by the slide. Brian's breath caught in his throat like a hiccup and his muscles tensed as hard as stones. He stared down at the back of Franco's neck. It had to be the wind again. The playground had been empty for ages. Slowly, he forced himself to look at the slide. No-one was there. Brian allowed himself to exhale. His mind was obviously making things up; it did that sometimes when he was scared. Like when he was younger and swore there was a monster hiding in his closet. It turned out his monster was just a pile of clothes and a stuffed toy giraffe. His mother had blamed an overactive imagination, but in darkness with the cupboard open just a crack it really looked like...

A second giggle sounded, closer to the slide. The ladder jingled and Brian heard the hurried patter of feet on its steps. A second later the slide made a hollow thump as something slid down to the bottom. There was another giggle from the base of the slide before a series of thumps on the steps signalled that the process had started again. Brian stuffed a hand into his mouth to stifle a scream. It wasn't his imagination. He tried his best to hold his breath again, not daring to make a sound in case the invisible thing realized he was there.

More voices wafted from the darkness. Children's voices. They laughed and squealed from the blackest corners of the park. A see-saw raised gently into the air, balancing on its axis for a moment before banging down on the other side. Someone squealed before the beam shot back to its original side. Behind them the clown's face lurched and the pair of swings kicked up into the air in shallow arcs. At the park's edge a carousel spun, slowly at first but turning faster and faster with each rotation. Laughter echoed from every corner. Brian tried to block the sound from his mind and for the second time in as many minutes steeled himself to run.

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Before he could move three invisible bodies seated themselves on the remaining horse seats.

Brian screamed as the balance of the play-set shifted. He was a small-framed boy and the invisible weight of the three arrivals lifted his horse up into the air. Someone cackled from the seat of the opposite horse. All fight drained from Brian's wail. The laugh had been clearer than the others, and up close Brian noticed two things he'd missed with the others. The sound was unnaturally high, like the sound of no boy or girl he'd ever heard, and despite its merry suggestion, there was a hint of something much more sinister at its core.

Brian shifted back in his seat, ready to leap from the horse's rear end. He heard a crack, followed by a shooting pain as his ankles slammed against Franco's stomach. Brian looked down. The steel pegs that his feet had been on were gone and a set of leather straps had burst from their place. They twined themselves around Brian's ankles, locking his feet crudely to the horse's side. Brian strained his legs and clawed at the straps with his fingers, but his fidgeting only forced them tighter. He sat back up and pushed off the horse, trying to hoist himself up off its back. A second set of straps burst from Franco's neck, binding his wrists to the horse's neck. Brian thought about crying for help but didn't. What if a third strap bound his mouth?

The last rays of twilight disappeared behind the towering bushland and for the first time the playground was covered in shadow. Figures emerged from the blackness; figures that began as moving black shadows against the night solidified into tangible human-like shapes. Children. Dozens of them. They filled the playground like a school holiday crowd at an amusement park. But not all of them were the same. Many were boys and girls just like him. These ones dressed in Mickey Mouse or Pokémon T-shirts, or bright knitted jumpers. Brian didn't think they posed any threat. They looked as miserable as he was, waiting silently to climb up the slide or pushing each other absently on the swings. It was the others that stood behind them, giggling hysterically

and forcing them up over the slide again and again, or across the monkey-bars like a drill sergeant in a war movie. They dressed just like the other boys and girls, moved like them too, but there was something *off* about them.

Brian watched the playground scene in a numb disbelief. He didn't even notice the appearance of three small figures on his own horse-set until they were fully formed.

'Hello Brian,' one of them said. 'Glad you could join us.'

Brian froze. A small boy leaned playfully forward on the horse-set waving to him. Only it wasn't a boy, it was one of the others. It watched him with intense, black eyes that danced in the darkness like a crackling fire. Brian wished he could be anywhere away from its gaze.

'How... how do you know my name?' he managed in a shaky voice.

The boy smiled, revealing small, jagged teeth.

'We know all about you,' it said. 'We've been watching you all summer. Waiting.'

The playground had fallen still. All eyes were watching the conversation unfold. A fat tear squeezed from the corner of Brian's eye.

'I want to go home,' Brian sniffed.

The boy shook its head.

'But Brian, you are home. You're one of the wild children now.'

Brian struggled against his bonds. They held fast.

'I don't understand,' he said finally.

The boy nodded sympathetically and gestured around the playground.

'Some ran away from home. Others snuck out from their bedroom windows. You ignored your Mum's advice. It doesn't matter. All stayed after dark. All belong to us now.'

The others began to herd the children back over the play sets

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as if to illustrate the point. More tears ran down Brian's cheeks.

The boy clapped its hands together in glee.

'This is so exciting,' it said. 'I've never had my very own play thing before. I think I'm going to name you George. That's a good name isn't it? George? Do you like the horse-set George? I do. I could play on it forever. We could play on it forever.'

The boy began to rock the horses up and down, up and down, giggling at each rotation. Brian collapsed back into the seat, crying until he ran out of tears.

At some point during the night Brian heard his mother's worried calls from the darkness. He screamed himself hoarse but she never came. He was here to stay. He was one of the wild children now.

Ticking Away

Shelly Carter

I stand at my work-station, my fingers hovering over the control panel. This is my place for eight hours a day. One of the many stations called KIC. I am called KIC2e because I work the second of two eight-hour shifts on the 'e' machine.

The great machines stop for half an hour after every four, for servicing. During the break in my shift I have my meal. After I eat, I sit with other KIC2s. We do not talk but sit in silence staring at the clock. When the clock ticks the half-hour, we stand as one and return to our KIC stations.

This is all I know. My early years were spent learning to be a KIC. My designation, my name, KIC2e. I do not address other KIC2s. I speak to no one. When I work, my eyes never leave the screen before me; my fingers never leave the keys. I do not shift my weight but remain rigid for the eight hours I stand at my station.

A bell chimes to signal my shift is over. My machine is stopped to be serviced before KIC1s start it again in the morning. I follow others out of the room. It is more a shuffle than a walk, for we are all stiff from standing so still.

In straight, almost military lines we leave the machine building for the dormitories that make our home. We have a small, two-room apartment each. The main room has a wardrobe, a small drawer and a hard bed. The smaller has a toilet, sink and shower.

In here I strip: my clothes are put into a basket that will be collected during my next shift. I shower and put on 'home clothes',

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a baggy shirt and trousers. On my feet are soft-soled shoes. Once dressed, I go to the dining hall.

Here I sit in the same seat I always sit in. A waiter brings my plate and I eat what is on my plate. I have eaten this same meal three times a day for as long as I can remember. This is my life.

I am due a haircut tomorrow. It is custom that our hair be kept short. I have never seen anyone with hair longer than half an inch.

After I eat I return to my room. I sit on my bed, my hands folded carefully in my lap. And I wait. My eyes are fixed on the only thing on the beige walls. The clock.

It chimes and I get into bed.

This is my life. This is what I have done every day for almost thirty years. This is what I will continue to do until I die.

I will watch the clock tick away my life.

Thomas From Above

John Charalambous

There was a kerfuffle at the register. One of the workers, a reedy boy with salon hair, was having trouble with a customer.

‘Have you checked all your pockets?’ he was saying, having decided the customer was disabled in some unseen way. Brain injury perhaps. The man didn’t look sly or tricky, certainly not the type to sit down to breakfast then refuse to pay. He was two metres tall and wore a nice suit. Italian wool. Linda bought me something like it a few years ago. Three grand.

He obligingly searched his pockets, long white fingers delving into satin lining. He was open to any suggestion. I guessed he might be foreign, if only for his air of holiday detachment. And what a handsome, close-shaved face, what a sleek head of silver hair. He must have been fifty. Maybe fifty-five. My age. He searched his back trouser pocket, the little fob at the front, all the unusual places, with a look of sincere curiosity. There was a bank-up of people wanting to pay their bills. I could have gone through into the cafe, but I hung about. The man went on searching. His gaze bumped against us without embarrassment. He was sure he was among friends.

Finally he said, ‘No, absolutely nothing.’ His English was unaccented. Local.

‘I wonder if you could wait over there,’ said the boy, mindful of the queue. He tore the itemised invoice from the pad, stuck it

to the counter. Probably he hoped the man would go away, walk right out the door. But he didn't. He stood patiently to one side.

In any case, the boss was on his way. I could see him weaving between the tables. He was a squat European, Italian, maybe Serbian, I can only guess, one of those meaty, neckless, ostentatiously-bald men that women find secretly attractive. This from Linda, though I've seen for myself how they light up for him, girls twenty years his junior. He had a nickname. Everyone called him Toot.

'You again!' he blurted at the tall man. 'You're past a joke, pal.'

The tall man looked pleasantly back.

'I think he lost his wallet,' the boy improvised. He had a drooping lop-sided fringe, which he hid behind like a creature of Japanese anime. He showed just one kohl-rimmed eye.

'Didn't I tell you about this guy?'

'Not that I remember.'

Toot huffed disgustedly. He snatched the chit from the counter and crowded the tall man. 'What do you take me for, eh? I was nice once, I was nice twice, but three frigg'n times! Everyone's got his limits. You owe me seventeen-fifty. Croissant.Soy latte. If I'd seen you sitting there I'd have poured it on your head.'

'He hasn't got it,' said the boy.

'His licence. He can give us his licence.'

The man didn't resist. His arms hung limp in amiable surrender. That was when I intervened. 'You've no right to do that!'

'You don't know this guy,' said Toot. 'He's playing games. It's the principle of the thing. He can't keep getting away with it.'

'How much? Twenty bucks? Here!'

'I don't want your money.'

'I'm paying for him.'

'I just don't like cheating!' said Toot. 'You can understand that, can't you? Look at him. He's not short of a dollar. He's laughing at us.'

Not true. Or not outwardly. He had a look of superficial gravity, which he'd caught from the people watching, perhaps

from me. The man was damaged. Anyone could see it. I thought, What if that was me? What if something happened so that I was left wandering around half gaga? He *could* have been me. A little taller, a lot better-looking. That was my feeling, my insight, that he was an ideal *me*. I assigned him a corporate role. He was efficient and urbane, someone who got the best of things without contention. I guessed he had good friends, a wife somewhere distraught with worry. It made me want to hammer Toot's blunt round head.

'You're the one cheating,' I said. 'Twenty bucks for a croissant and a coffee. How do you get away with that?'

'Look, mate, I'm not quarrelling with you.'

'I hope he sues.'

'Yeah, very funny!'

Yes, he could have been me. Maybe it was about genes, our affinity. He had the same pale skin, the same slightly florid flush to his clean-shaven cheeks.

'Look, take him under your wing, if that's what makes you happy,' said Toot. 'We did what we could the first time round. Sat with him a whole hour, trying to sort him out. Then off he sailed as if nothing had happened.'

'I won't be back,' I told him, encouraging the tall man out into the walkway. I grasped his arm.

'What can I say?' said Toot, as if he cared. He had river frontage, a constant stream of people day and night.

'What's your name?'

A woman had joined us on the bluestone promenade. She had seen the altercation inside and wished to help. 'What's your name?' she asked him.

He brightened. 'Thomas,' he said. His smile was broad and assured. We introduced ourselves and he took our hands, first hers, then mine. His grip was gentle. It seemed we'd tripped some social switch. His attentiveness was total, it had the insistence of an embrace. I anticipated a flow of speech, a generous opening

up of everything that was hidden, but it didn't come. He said his name was Thomas.

Across the river, the sun squeezed over the crenellated skyline. On weekends the city changes face. The office blocks stand like disused machinery, while a different cast of people, intent on leisure, walk by the river. Thomas leant against the stone barrier. I credited him with an idle enjoyment of the moment. He could have been a tourist. He could have been an international visitor or one of those suburban people, as we had been, who troop in with their kids and old people to spend a few hours at the centre of things.

'Thomas, have you anyone waiting for you?' the woman asked. 'Anyone you should be meeting?'

He answered softly, prolonging the word 'No' as if fending off an absurdity.

'Anyone you've left somewhere? Your wife perhaps?' Because he wore a wedding ring. 'Is your wife waiting for you? What's her name? Your wife's name?'

He made a vague denying gesture. The woman looked at me, bit her lip. She was an unfashionable lady, a devil-may-care sort in black leggings, yellow socks and big boots with tread like a four-wheel drive. She ached for him, you could see her aching, her horror that anyone could fall into such oblivion. There was some mistake, there must be a failure, somewhere. Who was looking out for Thomas? She was ready to shake somebody's tree. 'What's your wife's name?' she persisted, probably unaware of the hysterical edge to her voice. He touched her wrist. It was an accomplished and fatherly gesture, maybe an old Romeo gesture, but he didn't have an answer.

The woman kept trying. 'Do you live far? How did you get here? Did you come in alone?'

'Alone,' he said.

It was more an echo than a firm statement. The woman's assumption that we could help him was slipping. Thomas was no easy problem. She groped in her cloth bag for her phone. 'Well,

I suppose we'd better ring someone who knows what they're doing.'

I thought this a bit hasty. What if his disorientation came in spates? He might recover if we allowed him time.

'There's probably a dedicated service,' she said. 'Though heaven knows what it is. Ambulance I suppose.' She made her decision unaided, thumbed a number and stepped away to speak.

I waited with Thomas. He spread his fingers on the wall, reading the texture of stone. He said, 'Basalt.'

'Sorry?'

'Look, you can see the bubbles from when it was molten.' He was reverential. 'Basalt. It gets pushed up from hundreds of kilometres. It hits the air and hardens. Turns into something we know.'

'You know about stone?'

He didn't answer.

'We have this black marble bench-top,' I said, trying to keep him going. 'Limestone actually. It's packed with little fossils. Extinct animals.' I could have been very specific. Trilobites, gastropods, sea stars, we had them all. 'We have the Early Devonian in our kitchen,' I said.

'Yes, I know,' he said. 'Very beautiful.'

'How do you know?'

'From last time.'

Ask a stupid question. I was tempted to keep asking questions, if only to see how detailed he could make our imaginary past. But the woman was finishing up on the phone. 'Can you stay with him for half an hour? Say till eleven?'

'Sure.'

'Yes, someone will be with him,' she reported back. 'They'll be at the new bridge.'

'No,' I suddenly decided. 'We'll go up to our apartment. That way they'll have an address. Much easier.'

The woman relayed my information. Thomas was already moving, drawing me along. I don't know how he picked the

direction of our tower. We walked up past the Aboriginal art gallery and overpriced boutiques and Toot's overflowing cafe. As we went through the pedestrian bollards he leant close. 'You haven't eaten,' he said. 'You must be very hungry.'

The weekend concierge was in the foyer, a young Tamil woman wearing plastic identification on a lanyard. She was very pretty, about twenty-five, with liquid black hair. I thought she might remember my name, but no. She wrote down my details and agreed to let the medics in.

'Nothing serious?' she asked.

'Nothing serious,' I assured her.

She smiled at Thomas. He was a handsome man in a suit. He looked like a newsreader. He smiled back. I produced my key-card and waved it over the scanner. The security doors slid open and we waited just briefly for a lift, one of six, fastest in the southern hemisphere – Linda says this like a brochure, both mocking and proud.

We have lived here five years, bought our apartment off the plan after our youngest child finally decamped. We travelled into the city to watch the works rise one floor a fortnight, first the steel superstructure, big cranes poking out in all directions, weighted cables dangling in the high altitude winds, then the concrete pumped from ground level. Such a departure from everything we had known, from the beachside weatherboard where once we had been an earth-bound couple, with dependents and a drab history. We were delighted when they roughed in the sixty-first storey – our storey. It went on growing, of course, for another thirty and more (you pay a premium for the uppermost), but we're satisfied with the sixty-first. You don't see or feel the stack above your head. You float in the sky. That was what we wanted: to live in the sky.

Thomas stepped into the lift. I admit I wondered at what I was doing, bringing a stranger into our home. Altruism played a part, sure – the guy needed help – but we could have waited at the

bridge. I guessed I was showing off. You get evangelical living in the sky. You want to share your elevated perspective. From two hundred metres the city is no longer a muddle, no longer mysterious or complicated, but a precise record, an explication, of human activity and relations for you to read. Not everyone can appreciate this. Linda accuses me of boring our guests. But something about Thomas – tall, handsome, dysfunctional Thomas – suggested he would enjoy the pinnacle view.

Going up – nine metres a second, glassy smooth – I watched him caress the grey brushed steel. His look said: ‘You are very lucky.’ Remembering what Toot had said, I supposed he was accustomed to latching onto people, to winning the fleeting friendship of strangers with his good looks and helplessness. I wondered how he knew I hadn’t eaten. Guessed he’d been watching me, summing me up while Toot was mouthing off. It seemed so pointless, such a terrible waste of drive and ingenuity.

Arriving at our floor, he held the door open for three descending Asians – parents and a teenage son. They grimaced thanks without a break in their private discussion, language unknown. Linda calls our tower Babel, boasting I suppose.

Thomas walked beside me in casual lockstep. ‘Is your wife home?’

‘She was asleep when I went out.’

‘Then we must be quiet,’ he said with a hint of collusion.

Our apartment, after the gloom of the corridor, was a blaze of white light. He went straight into the guest room and stripped off his coat, laid it on the bed. He emerged in his white shirt, detaching the studs at his wrists.

‘Did you get the paper?’ Linda called from the kitchen.

‘Sorry, no. But I’ve brought a friend.’ It occurred to me, belatedly, that she might not be dressed. On weekends she often eats breakfast sitting naked on the kitchen stool. But too late, Thomas had shot ahead into the living area.

‘Hello,’ he intoned enthusiastically. ‘Hello, hello!’ As if renewing a warm friendship.

I saw the mystification on Linda's face. She was not naked. She wore her black Thai wrap.

'Linda, this is Thomas.'

They touched hands. Linda still had a slightly stupid look. She did not ask for an explanation, how we knew one another, what this exquisite man was doing in her kitchen. He stood a moment beaming at her breakfast cereal. It was bright with freeze-dried berryfruit. Then he swung away, drinking in the clear daylight, the airiness of our dining area. He gravitated towards the glass, gazing out at a great bank of cumulus. The sun kept punching through in streams of bronze. 'Amazing,' he said. 'You have your own Bernini.'

Oh, that clinched Linda. Bernini. Beautiful Bernini. When we were still quite young she had hauled me across Europe to look at Bernini, or more generally at the art objects she'd grown up looking at in books. Time and again, over several trips, she took me back to the Cornaro Chapel in Rome. There she communed with a huge marble and stucco tableau of St Theresa and her angel, the very piece that Thomas seemed to be alluding to. It wasn't that she was religious. She liked the drama and idealism. Also it was sexy. Anyone could see it was about sex.

'Look at the colours,' said Thomas. 'Isn't that a place for angels?'

'I'll have to look harder,' Linda smiled.

'There ought to be angels.'

'I love it when a storm comes in off the bay,' she said. 'You can see it rolling in over the water.'

'I love that too,' he said. 'All that force.'

Linda was breathy with enthusiasm. 'And what a racket when it hits. The rain smacking against the glass. We pull up chairs to watch the show. You can feel the whole building swaying. How it must be up top, God knows!'

'Brilliant,' he said. 'Nothing better.'

'You mean . . .'

'Absolutely brilliant. You're in the box seat for lightning. You get to see it being made.'

Linda laughed. She couldn't conceal her delight. 'You're right up there? One of the Golden?'

Which was a tad cheeky. Residents on the top ten floors observed the sky through gilded glass, twenty-four carat gold. You had to be seriously rich to have bought up there, and perhaps a little crass. The Golden were elusive. Until now I had met just one, a taciturn Singaporean banker. Why hadn't I guessed that this was where Thomas hailed from? Thomas from above. For a second or two I was convinced, or maybe merely relieved to have a plausible account of him. But against this I had to put his earlier assertion that he'd visited us in our apartment.

He pointed out the grey meeting-place of sky and sea and the sun-spangled piers and headlands. Ships moved very slowly, perhaps not at all. Then there was the scabby impasto of the outer suburbs, the accretions of less than two centuries, and the brown curl of the river, the cabling of rail and road. I'm often struck by how very flat it appears, how pale and tonal, until you wade into the midst of the city.

'It's a never-ending painting,' said Thomas. 'Different by the minute.'

I organised food. Ham and crispbread. I was starving. 'Thomas?'

He declined. He was busy discussing the minor towers, 'Little Brothers' we called them, each emblazoned with its corporate logo. He was up with the news: stalled merger talks between A and B, shareholder trouble with C, refinancing not going as planned for D. He gestured at the buildings concerned, as if their stoic geometric faces concealed the feelings of neighbours anywhere, neighbours who were mortified by public failure, who exulted in their successes. I looked at the clock. The ambulance people were due. How could I explain to Linda? I'd had no opportunity to forewarn her. And to look at him now, to hear him, it was hard to believe he was in any way incapacitated. He dissected the investments of a hunched little entity across the river, an insurance company deep into commodities. They had interests

in Indonesia and two South American countries, he said, and were doing very nicely in equatorial Africa, where as a goodwill gesture they funded primary education in several remote towns. I must say I enjoyed his commentary. What a change! He talked so freely, and from a part of himself, I supposed, that was untouched by his disability. He strengthened my feelings of communality with our mighty neighbours, the makers of the world, all those banks and retailers and communications firms, the university, the manufacturer of military ordnance visible from our ninety-degree sector. After all, there they were at our feet, nothing concealed, snuggling and snarling and elbowing.

‘It’s astonishing how it all comes together,’ he was saying. ‘There’s a lot of co-operation happening. Unseen. We take it for granted – the right stuff getting dug up from the right places, and someone, a whole bunch of strangers, knowing what to do with it. You wouldn’t know who to thank.’ He caught sight of the knife on the kitchen bench. ‘Is that ceramic?’

‘Yes,’ said Linda, pleased that he approved of our things.

‘Eight point five on the Mohs’ scale,’ he said. ‘Unbelievably hard.’

‘Really?’ said Linda.

‘They start with zircon sands. Big deposits off Florida.’

It didn’t surprise me that Thomas knew where things come from. He was interested in processes. There was ore-bearing sand and gravel, a floating dredge, magnetic and electrostatic separators, chlorine. There were qualifications and distinctions, and high-pressure presses and industrial furnaces and sintering and diamond-abrasives, all culminating in the white, adamantine blade that he held loosely in his hand. Not that this exhausted his wonder. The same element could go a hundred other paths. Different alloys, different treatments, and it might have become a prosthetic hip or the combustor in a jet engine.

‘Unbelievable what they can do now,’ I said.

Yes, ‘they’ were admirable, that unseen army of people who know what to do and how to do it. They underwrote our lives. But why? Was the only organising principle money?

I think yes. You have to be realistic. But it was nice to be romanced by Thomas. He placed money and aggregation and human invention in the primordial forest, where you could close your eyes and inhale them as a holy fragrance. He said: 'Take any industrial material and you have a creation story. Glass. Polymers.'

'Is that your field?' Linda asked.

'She means materials science,' I said.

'Is that what I mean?' She gave me a pinched look. I'd overstepped. It didn't matter. We were both enchanted. I felt he was taking my clumsy intuitions and stretching them into something unassailably true. I checked the clock. The medics were five minutes late. I hoped they were lost. I hoped they would never find us. I didn't want Thomas to change back into the person I had met at ground level.

But he had his own internal tides. It can't have been anything we said, though I did see in Linda a slow realisation that there was something exorbitant about our visitor.

'All I know is that someone keeps sending us nice things,' he said.

I wasn't aware he'd finished. I expected more. It was very abrupt, how he withdrew the communicative force of his personality. We waited a good minute. Of course Linda had only seen talkative Thomas. She was puzzled. She looked to me for answers. All I could manage was a tiny wince. But Linda is astute. She grasped that he required special consideration. 'Yes, people make beautiful things,' she said.

'Beautiful,' he repeated. But we had ceased to matter to him. 'I think I'll go to my room,' he said.

'You're not feeling well?'

'Just tired. You know, sixteen hours in the air.'

He shut himself up in our guest room, the door pulled behind him.

The best place to talk was out on the balcony. It was slightly cold, the breeze buffeting our faces and sweeping our voices away into the atmosphere. Even so, our exchanges were hushed. Linda kept

looking back indoors, watching to see whether he would emerge from the guest room.

‘I can’t believe you did that to me. A total stranger. Couldn’t you have rung before you brought him up?’

I guess she was disturbed by how quickly she’d fallen for him.

‘You’re sure there’s someone coming to get him?’

‘Don’t worry. They’ll get here.’

I had left the front door open so they could walk right in. If we were lucky they would take him away without our involvement. We gripped the railing. Light cannoned off glass and roof-top Astroturf. It flashed on the river. You get used to great height. You forget what gravity is, you become identical with the thing you are looking at: the white wing-beat of a gull, the roof of a van.

Linda said: ‘I suppose they’ll know what to do. He’s probably on their data-base. If not, they can walk him about up top till he gets his bearings.’

‘If he lives up there.’

She looked at me hard. ‘You don’t think he does?’

‘Who knows?’

A voice came from inside. A pair of baby-faced ambulance officers, a man and a woman, stood in the dining area. I gestured for them to go back along the hall to the guest room, but they wanted more information. Linda went to speak to them while I stayed put on the balcony. I watched a train crawl into the copper-domed station. The carriages were blue and yellow. I liked the jab of colour. The voices started inside. Matey chatter. Nothing from Thomas. I looked up at the horizon. The balling clouds were still there, regulating the Baroque glitter of the world.

Called Upon

Madeline Cooke

I look down, repulsed by the spinach placed in front of me. I think of you. I remember how you taught me to hold my nose to avoid the taste. I remember how you said that if I chew quickly enough and swallow, then the flavour wouldn't have time to spread over my tongue and make me gag. My fork tinkles against the white china plate as I swirl the spinach in a circular motion, as if such an act will make it disappear.

Positioned at opposite ends of the table are my parents. Mum stares blankly into space. She seems oblivious to the slow hardening of her yellow potato. Dad works wearily at his lamb chops, his knife sliding pointlessly against bone, not flesh. I look beside me and see where you once sat. But it's all three of us who feel your absence, resting like dust upon every part of our exposed skin, while the silence wisps around us, never letting it truly settle.

Ms Magda lives a few houses down from ours. Her house is ordinary – pale cream weather-board with a rusty shed out the back. But it's her garden that attracts more than just flittering inhabitants. There are so many types of flowers, trees, different shapes, every colour, randomly planted, interwoven to form a mass statement of wild freedom.

She's a morning person. Each morning I pass her on my way

to school and she's watering her plants, sometimes with her pyjamas still on.

Today's no different.

As Ms Magda comes into view, I notice a change. It's the head-scarf. Ms Magda has always followed her own trends. A few months ago it was long flowing hippy skirts, then more recently, peaked hats and glasses without any lenses. But today, the glasses are off and the head-scarf is on.

She looks up as she hears my footsteps.

'Cassie, my morning visitor! What's on for today?'

'Ah, nothing special. Just school and then home. What about yourself? Anything exciting?'

She continues to water. Her shoes are soaked and droplets scatter across the lower half of her jeans.

'Well, I'll probably get the paint brushes out while the light is good. Oh, and I have some mail for your Mum. It was put in my mailbox by mistake. I'll toddle down to your place later on.'

'Okay, thanks. Anyway, I'd better keep going. I've got maths first. I've told you all about Mr Clark, so you'll understand why I can't be late!'

I continue my walk and pass the fading 'For Sale' sign that sends a dark patch of rectangular shade across her garden.

I swing the heavy school bag off my throbbing shoulder and drag it towards my room.

'Cassie! You're going to scratch the hell out of the floor boards!'

I keep my head down and continue my direct line to the bedroom. I slam the door behind me and throw my bag across the room. The zip bursts and papers flow across the carpet. I sink onto my bed and listen to the rising voices of my parents on the other side of the wall. They start tense and forceful before losing any apparent meaning, as exasperation breaks through and words pour out like tears.

'No! Everything is not okay!' 'It's different now... I told you that...' 'But you said...' 'You think you're the only one that's hurting! Well how about...'

I cover my ears but the yelling continues, both voices layering on top of one another until they form a compressed, smoky fog, leaving me wanting to scream for air.

‘Cassie! How are you this morning?’

Today, Ms Magda meets me on the footpath. She puts down her watering can. She looks me in the eye and I instinctively pull away from her gaze.

‘Yeah I’m good. Just heading to school, like always.’

She studies my face still turned uncomfortably away from her.

‘Sorry Ms Magda, I’m running late. I’ll have to catch you later,’ I say.

I turn to continue my journey but feel a hand on my shoulder.

‘Cassie, wait.’

I turn back to face her.

‘If you ever need anything, you do know I’m here, don’t you?’

I feel something drop inside me as I dare to look into her eyes.

‘Yeah... thanks.’

As I walk away, I feel her mindful gaze on my back.

Sitting on the veranda at home, I listen to the screen door swing open and shut, screeching loudly before making me jump at every closing blow. I glare up at the clouds, streaming like an eager current across the darkening sky. Stray leaves blow up against me, bullied by the breeze. I feel the air whirl around me and I become as unsettled as the dust it tosses and throws. But that’s how it’s been ever since the world took you away. Nothing has changed. No progress has been made. You left. You left me behind. And now I’m without you.

I run.

My feet thud heavily against the concrete but my body is swift. I feel propelled by emotion as it tries to break out, thudding against my forehead and beating against my chest. My fists clench tight, nails digging into the palms of my hands. Desperately, I force

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through the scratchy overgrowth and collapse onto my knees on Ms Magda's bristly doormat.

Light sweeps across my body as the door opens. Ms Magda stands over me, a silhouette against the light of her hallway.

'Did you do all these paintings?' I ask.

I sit on a green sofa, hot chocolate warming one hand and a tissue in the other. I stare around at the many artworks, hung at differing heights. I can't make out what they are but I feel intrigued all the same.

'Yes.'

Ms Magda walks across the room and takes up a position on the couch beside me.

'You must love it,' I say.

Her eyes switch from painting to painting, resting upon each in a familiar way.

'Yes, you could say that. I do enjoy my art. I just let my mind do what it wants.' A giggle leaves her lips as she glances over the walls. 'I guess that's why they all end up the way they do.'

I can't help but smile. The paintings did lack structure, order, civility... I lose the grin as my eyes are drawn to the mug in Ms Magda's hand. Her hand shakes, causing the hot chocolate to gently spill over the edge. She notices and quickly grasps it with her other hand. I become aware of my staring and look away. I can relate to that mug. I sigh.

'Ms Magda,' I begin. 'How do you deal with change?'

She stares straight ahead, processing the question.

'The one thing you can be absolutely sure of in life, Cassie, is that it's going to change. Yes, it makes you angry when life carelessly tosses you while you try to glide, not crash. There are some things we can't control. Nature has rules of its own.'

'Ms Magda! It's freezing and you're still managing to water?'

'Well, just because it's cold doesn't mean that time will pause

while I spend an extra hour or two snuggled up under the covers. Plenty of time for that another day.'

I glance around her garden. Something is different. Something is misplaced.... or missing.

'Where'd the "For Sale" sign go?'

I look at the empty brown holes, puncturing the green lawn where the sign used to be.

'I'm no longer selling.'

'So you're not moving?'

The sign has been there for so long now; I guess, after a while, it just lost its meaning. Ms Magda couldn't leave. The idea just doesn't seem possible. She's part of my morning routine, part of my day. She's part of my life.

'I have decided to keep the house, but I am still moving Cassie. This week, actually.'

I step back. 'You're what?'

'I'm leaving town Cassie. At this point in my life, I've got needs elsewhere. 'She slowly bends over to put down her watering can before sliding her hand into the pocket of her muddy jeans. She retrieves a rusty key.

'Do me a favour while I'm gone. I need someone to come over and check the house for me every now and then. Just to give the illusion that the place is inhabited. Would you be happy to do that?' She hands me the key and as I stare down at it, I open my mouth to speak but am interrupted.

'No time for questions now. You're going to be late. It's Thursday and you have Maths first.'

She bends back over her plants, and for the first time I notice she looks weary.

Each morning I walk past her place. All I hear is the rustling of the garden or a solo whistle from one of its inhabitants. Two weeks later, on my way home from school I decide to check on the house.

Her garden slowly comes into view. For a second I decide it can't be her place. But the same weatherboard house stands

where it always has.

It's the garden. It's in impeccable condition, precisely weeded, immaculately trimmed. I wander up a small path to my right, weaving easily around the mass of foliage. I hear the harsh sound of clippers and pause. Through a neatly pruned rose-bush I see a man in a mustard suit. My feet snap loose sticks and he looks up.

'Can I help you?' he asks. His voice is gruff and accusing. I feel a rush of annoyance tingle through me.

'Ah, no. Actually, I'm just here to check on Ms Magda's house. I didn't know she hired a gardener.'

He laughs in amusement.

'This garden would take over the whole house if she didn't get someone in.'

'I liked it better before,' I say quietly, unimpressed.

He huffs and returns to his gardening.

'It was bad enough when I first arrived. And who knows how long the treatment will take,' he says.

I freeze. Treatment?

'This garden would have been down the main street by the time she gets back.'

'What treatment?'

The gardener stops his clipping and looks directly at me. His feet begin to shift.

'Oh, I thought you would have already known. I mean, you coming here to her house and all. It just seemed like you knew each other quite well and...'

I shake my head.

'Hold on a minute.' I take a deep breath. 'Treatment for what?' It seems I already know the answer before the question leaves my lips. My mind races back for clues, for reasoning, for anything.

The gardener looks anywhere but at me.

'She's got cancer, dear.' He shrugs helplessly. 'But who knows? Her hiring me obviously means she's planning on returning.'

I turn away and head to the front door. I need to be by myself.

Ms Magda has cancer. I stuff the key into the hole and push it

to turn. Cancer! It won't turn. I turn the key up the other way. It doesn't fit. I jam the key in and out until agitated, I stop. I turn to the gardener.

'What on earth does she expect me to do...' My voice breaks slightly and I swallow hard. '... with a key that doesn't even fit the damn door?'

The gardener looks around him as if the answer is going to be caught in one of the branches hanging above. His eye catches on something left of the house.

'Have you tried the shed out the back? Maybe she gave you the wrong key.'

I tighten my grip on my slipping school books. I can't believe she'd do this to me.

The key slides smoothly into the shed lock. I heave the rusty door to one side, forcing a cringe-worthy screech.

I had expected rugged gardening tools and musty flower pots. Instead, my eyes fall upon a fully plastered, bright room. I glance over the shelves lining the walls. Paintbrushes in old paint tins are all organized by height. Pallets, powders, and various liquid paints sprawl across the lower shelves. Leaning up against the wall on my left are blank canvases.

In the far corner, standing over a paint-splattered piece of carpet, is an easel. Curious, I walk over to take a closer look at the painting, lightly perched upon its wooden ledge.

Sharp, dashing strokes, every colour, shade and angle, protrude from one centre point. Layer upon layer, they form an impression similar to that of a firework. But it's the woman, in the bottom half of the painting, who draws my attention. She's kneeling, back to the onlooker, arms extended out at her sides, as if bowing to the overpowering force of colour. She glows. Her peaceful state contrasts with the dramatic turmoil.

I step back and my eyes fall upon the signature sprawled at the bottom of the painting.

'M. Magda.'

I pick up a paintbrush. I glide the light bristles along the ridge of my nose, against my cheeks and over my closed eyelids.

The paint slides over the white material as I move the brush in whatever direction it chooses to go. It feels right. My mind is focused on nothing. My breathing slows and I allow myself to feel the energy flowing through my body, up through my shoulder, down the length of my arm, along my fingers, before finally being released through the fine, paintbrush tip.

And then I stop. My legs let me drop and I sit cross-legged on the floor before the easel. I look up and see a wet, abstract vision staring back at me. I greet it warmly.

Wet paint slips off the canvas and falls onto the carpet mat. Another drip follows.

Drip. Drip.

I don't try to stop it. I watch as it lands, forming a silky red stain on the carpet's fine fibres. It lies beside the others; some old, some new, some large, some small, some blue, some green, some gold. It comforts me in a way I don't fully understand.

The fly-screen door slams shut behind me. I walk into the dining room to find my parents sitting beside each other at the table. I take up a seat opposite them. The television hums in the background as I serve myself a decent portion of Mum's shepherd's pie.

'Cassie, do you know you have paint on your face?' Mum smiles as she taps her cheek.

I leave my seat and walk to the bathroom. I peer at my reflection in the glass and inspect the red dash of paint across my cheek.

'Yeah,' I yell out. 'Yeah, I do.'

Joanie had a secret

Justin D'Ath

She was thinking about it that morning when Maamaa came into her bedroom.

'Are you awake, Joanie?' Maamaa said. Maamaa was old. Joanie could remember when Maamaa wasn't old. It was a long time ago. When Joanie and George were little, Maamaa's hair used to be brown. Now it was nearly white. There were bumps on her face and on her hands, and her neck was all saggy-baggy like Joanie had seen on the Real Elephant that time. She liked to be reminded of the Real Elephant.

Joanie smiled up at Maamaa. She had not been asleep. She had been lying in bed listening to the cock-a-doodle-do in Mr Simmon's place next door and thinking about her secret. It was a good secret. Joanie felt all warm inside from remembering it. Her face went a little bit hot too. She would have liked to tell Maamaa her secret, but if you told a secret it wasn't a secret any more, was it? Jesus told her that. It was light outside.

'Joanie, your Daa has died.'

Joanie lay on her back and heard a cock-a-doodle-do through the window. There was something different about Maamaa. It was something about her mouth. She looked sad.

'Don't – cry – Maamaa.' It took Joanie a long time to get it out. She had to bang the wall with her hand.

'Will you pray with me, Joanie?'

Maamaa helped her get up and then she dressed her. She wheeled Joanie to the toilet.

‘B – b – baaaarf?’ Joanie asked. Maamaa shook her head.

‘You don’t have to have a bath this morning.’ She was crying a lot.

Afterwards they knelt on the rug next to the Jesus-wall and said prayers for Daa. Joanie was pleased Daa was in heaven, but she felt a little bit sad, too. It meant Daa would never ever take her to see the Real Elephant again. She kept looking at Maamaa. There was a dribble out of her nose and that thing about her mouth. Joanie didn’t know what it was about Maamaa’s mouth. It was different, that’s all. She heard the bell ring.

‘D – d – oooooor!’ she said.

Maamaa went to open it. She left Joanie stranded on her knees in front of the Jesus-wall. She loved Jesus. There He was on His cross. That was what He looked like. In the dark, you weren’t allowed to look at him.

Joanie heard talking in the passage. It was a man’s voice. She thought it was most likely Jesus come to take Daa to heaven. It sounded a bit like Jesus. Joanie felt hungry. She hoped it was toast-in-eggs soon.

Someone came into the room behind her. She tried to look around.

‘Hullo Joanie,’ said the voice of Jesus.

Joanie tried to think of a prayer. ‘Aaaa – men,’ she uttered. She covered her face.

‘Come on, old girl, there’s no need to cry,’ said Jesus. He sounded kind, but Joanie wasn’t crying.

‘Maamaa!’ she brayed. She thought for a moment that Jesus had taken Maamaa to heaven, too.

‘She’s just gone to put her teeth in,’ Jesus explained. He didn’t really sound like Jesus any more. Joanie opened her eyes. It was Uncle Norr-maan.

‘I th – th – thooort,’ Joanie began. But the rest of it was gone. She banged the floor with her hand, but the words would not come back.

'Up you get, love,' Uncle Norr-maan smiled. He helped her into her chair-with-the-wheels. Joanie saw that his eyes were red a bit like Maamaa's.

Auntie Fay came in with Maamaa. She had her arm around Maamaa. Auntie Fay was fat. The ladies were both crying. Everyone was sad today. It was because of Daa, Joanie remembered. Daa had gone to Jesus.

'Toast-in-eggs!' Joanie shouted.

Auntie Fay made breakfast. She burned the toast. Nobody else had breakfast. Maamaa had some breakfast but she didn't eat it. Joanie ate Maamaa's eggs. That made four eggs altogether. Joanie could count. She felt very pleased with herself and very full and she was happy about her secret. She forgot all about Daa.

Maamaa and Auntie Fay and Uncle Norr-maan each had a cup of tea. Joanie decided to try to count the cups. Already today she had counted the eggs. They showed you how to count on Sesame Street. Sometimes they counted little birdies. Joanie would have liked to count little birdies too, but there were only the cups. Already she had counted the eggs. The eggs were gone. Now she started on the cups. It was four. No ... six. What was after two? She banged the table for forgetting. At any rate, it was more than two. Joanie could always count to two. It didn't matter about more-than-two. There was only one Jesus and one Real Elephant. Maamaa was letting her tea go cold. Smoke came out of the full cup. Joanie knew it wasn't really smoke. It was something else. She couldn't remember what. Maamaa's mouth was alright now. It had teeth. There weren't teeth before. That was a strange thing. Joanie drank her milk.

The bell rang.

'Dooooor!' she bellowed, spraying milk right across the table.

Uncle Norr-maan went to see who it was. Auntie Fay mopped the table with a tea-towel, then she sat down and put her fat arm round Maamaa's back. Maamaa was crying. It was probably because her tea was cold.

Joanie could see out into the passage. She heard Uncle Norr-

maan. There was another man too. It didn't sound like Jesus. Uncle Norr-maan came in with the man. The man was a policeman. There were two policemen. Maamaa looked round and saw the policemen. She started to cry again.

Joanie wished everyone wouldn't cry all the time. It made her sad. The policemen weren't crying. Joanie smiled at the policemen.

Auntie Fay stood up and talked quietly to the policemen in the passage. Joanie heard them talking. They were talking about a gun.

'I h-h-heard a gun!' Joanie remembered. When it was dark she had heard it. 'Bang Bang!' she shouted, showing off for the policemen. Joanie could do good guns.

Then Maamaa put her face in her hands and her shoulders started rocking up and down. Auntie Fay came back and whispered something to Uncle Norr-maan. The two policemen stayed in the passage. Joanie liked the policemen. They caught robbers.

'Come on, old girl,' Uncle Norr-maan was saying to Joanie. 'How would you like to go for a nice ride?'

Joanie didn't. She wanted to stay and watch the policemen. She had seen a policeman once on the television. The policeman was a Good Man. Like Jesus.

Then Joanie thought of her secret and she smiled. One of the policemen smiled back. He was nice.

Maamaa and Auntie Fay were hugging each other. Auntie Fay's nose was red.

'Come on,' Uncle Norr-maan said. 'I'll take you to the zoo.'

Joanie clapped her hands. She liked going to the zoo. That was where the Real Elephant was. She remembered the Real Elephant. It was big. Daa took her to see it. Where was Daa today?

There was nobody else at the zoo. It was early. Uncle Norr-maan pushed Joanie in her chair-with-the-wheels. She saw monkeys. There were bars so that they could not get out. A tractor was stopped on the road. A man was in the cage. He had a bucket. He was digging something with a spade. There was a smell.

Joanie pointed so Uncle Norr-maan could see, too. It was funny that a man was in a cage. Joanie laughed and clapped her hands. She was happy. In a minute they would see the Real Elephant.

Further along Joanie saw lions. She shouted at the lions. She felt brave for shouting like that. Lions could eat you if they weren't in a cage. Joanie thought about being eaten by a lion. She wondered if it would hurt. There was one thing that hurt, but it didn't hurt any more. Joanie loved Jesus. He made her feel nice. She remembered her secret. The sun felt warm.

Here was the Real Elephant place! Joanie remembered. It was just along here! She banged the sides of her chair. She wanted Uncle Norr-maan to hurry.

'It's all right, old girl – we'll get there, we'll get there!'

Uncle Norr-maan was tired. He sounded more like Jesus when he was tired.

The Real Elephant was there. It was big. Joanie had never seen anything so big in the whole world. There was an eye. The eye was high up, even higher than Uncle Norr-maan's head. The eye of the Real Elephant looked down at Joanie. It blinked. It remembered her. She sat in her chair-with-the- wheels. I love you Real Elephant, Joanie thought. If she tried to say it, the words always went away. The Real Elephant understood.

I love you Real Elephant.

Joanie started to cry.

'It's all right, old girl.' Uncle Norr-maan had a handkerchief. She had forgotten he was there. He wiped her nose. His handkerchief smelt like Jesus.

'I guess we all loved him,' Uncle Norr-maan said. He had started crying as well. It was a day for crying.

Joanie reached up and held onto Uncle's hand. So, Uncle Norr-maan loved the Real Elephant too. Joanie was pleased. She had thought it was only her and Daa who loved the Real Elephant. (And Jesus too, of course. She had asked Him and He said He did too.)

But that was not her secret.

When they got home it was lunch. Joanie was hungry. Uncle Norr-maan had got her an ice-cream at the zoo, but now it was a long time after that and Joanie felt very hungry as he pushed her up the special ramp Daa had made for her chair-with-the-wheels to go up the front steps.

There were a lot of people there. Auntie Fay was still there. So was Auntie Collee-een and Auntie Pip and Auntie Jum-jum. Even the new Auntie was there, the one George married. She was Auntie K. Joanie had never seen so many Aunties. There were some Uncles, too. Joanie did not remember the Uncles' names. All the Aunties had red eyes. The policemen were gone. She had wanted to tell them about the Real Elephant.

'Where's Maamaa?'

'She's having a little lie down, dearie,' Auntie Fay said.

'Where's Daa?'

Auntie Fay looked funny. She put her hand up to her mouth. Then she turned away from Joanie and hurried from the room.

Someone was cuddling Joanie. It was someone big and soft. All the Aunties were big and soft except for Auntie Jum-jum. Auntie Jum-jum had had T.V. Joanie sometimes wondered why it made you skinny to have a television inside you. The Auntie cuddling her was Auntie Pip.

'Oh, you poor, poor dear!' Auntie Pip sobbed. Her face was scratchy like Jesus's.

Joanie pushed the Auntie away. 'Want din-naar!' she cried.

There was lots of food. There were cakes and biscuits and that nice bread. There was Big Sausage. All the Uncles were drinking beer out of glasses. The Aunties had cups of tea. It was a party. Joanie clapped her hands. Someone wheeled her over to the table. One of the Uncles poured her a glass of fizzy. There were lamingtons on a big plate. Joanie tried to count them. It was too many. She decided to eat them instead. Nobody stopped her. Nobody said, 'That's enough, love,' and wheeled her away from the table. Joanie finished all the lamingtons. She saw some cream cake. She pointed at the cream cake and one of the Uncles put it

in front of her. She ate it all. It was a very good party. Joanie was happy.

In the afternoon, Joanie felt sick. Auntie Fay took her to the bathroom and washed her. Usually Maamaa washed her. Sometimes Daa did. Joanie didn't like Auntie Fay washing her. She was sick on the floor and on Auntie Fay too. Auntie Fay was cross. She called Joanie a pig. Joanie liked pigs but she liked the Real Elephant better.

Auntie Collee-een had to come and help Auntie Fay lift Joanie out of the bath. 'You're getting very fat, dearie,' Auntie Fay growled. They wheeled her into her bedroom and put her in bed. It was still light outside. Joanie knew Jesus wouldn't come if it was still light. When she was asleep she dreamed about the Real Elephant. She woke up and remembered her secret and was happy. She looked at the gap in the curtains and saw that the sun was almost in bed. Her tummy made a noise.

'Maamaa!' she called.

At dinner there was only Maamaa and Auntie Fay. All the other Aunties had gone. The Uncles had gone, too. Daa's chair was empty.

'Daaaa?' Joanie asked, pointing to his place. There wasn't even a plate for him.

The two ladies looked at each other. Their noses and their eyes were red. Maamaa got a tissue and wiped her face. She was sad again.

'Eat yer dinner, dearie,' Auntie Fay growled. She looked cross. Joanie didn't like her any more.

'Where's Daa?'

Maamaa got up and went to the bathroom.

Auntie Fay said quietly, 'Your Daa is gone, Joanie. He won't come back.'

Then Joanie remembered. Daa went to heaven. Heaven was a nice place. Jesus was there.

Joanie ate her dinner. She felt happy. She had a good secret. She wished she could tell Auntie Fay, but you weren't allowed

to tell a secret. Jesus told her that. Joanie had forgotten that she didn't like Auntie Fay anymore.

After dinner they prayed to the Jesus-wall. Auntie Fay was there too. They said the rosary-beads. They made prayers for Daa. Maamaa cried a lot. It took a long time to say the rosary-beads. Joanie looked up at Jesus. She promised Him never to tell the secret.

Auntie Fay was going to sleep in the spare room. It was funny having Auntie Fay there sitting in Daa's chair while they watched *Country Practice*. Daa always watched *Country Practice*. Joanie wondered if there was television in heaven. She would ask Jesus about it. Maamaa went to bed before *Country Practice* was finished.

Auntie Fay had to put Joanie to bed that night. She tucked her in and stood for a long time beside the bed. Joanie looked up at her standing there. Auntie Fay was very sad. Her nose was red. Joanie wanted her to go out and turn the light off. She wanted Jesus to come. There were lots of things to tell Jesus. But Auntie Fay stood beside the bed. She stood and stood. Joanie began to get sleepy.

Then Auntie Fay started to talk. She didn't look at Joanie when she talked, she looked at the wall.

'Dearie, I know what he did to you – your mother told me. It was a terrible thing. You mustn't ever talk about it to anyone.'

Joanie wouldn't. He had made her promise.

'But the thing is, Dearie, it's all finished now. He's gone – he's dead – he won't ever be back again.'

Joanie thought her Auntie meant Jesus. She was cross with her for saying those bad things about Him. Anyway, Auntie Fay was wrong. Jesus always came back. He died once before on His cross but then He came alive again. He would come back tonight. Joanie would wait for Him to come.

But Jesus didn't come. Joanie waited and waited. Joanie lay in the dark and waited for Jesus. But He didn't come. When she knew that Auntie Fay was right and Jesus wasn't going to come,

Joanie cried. She had forgotten about her secret. She was still crying when she fell asleep.

Very early next morning, when Mr Simmon's cock-a-doodle-do had just woken up, Joanie lay in the dark and felt a small movement inside her tummy. It felt like a kick. Then she remembered. She clapped her hands underneath the covers. Now she was happy again. Auntie Fay thought He was dead, but Jesus was alive, all right. He was inside Joanie's tummy. She was going to have a Baby Jesus all of her own!

That was Joanie's secret.

Hugo, Man of a Thousand Faces

Christopher Elston

The two-storey weatherboard home I grew up in buzzed with the solemn conversation of the mourners. We had lost her to lung cancer four days before. It was impossible to think that something like this could happen to my own mother.

I had stood by helplessly in the months following the diagnosis, watching her waste away until nothing was left but an anorexic husk. Eyes once full of love and life had taken on a morphine-induced glaze, awaiting the inevitable.

As I made my way through the throngs of friends and family, enduring countless hugs and warm handshakes that really provided no comfort, I sought out my wife. I just wished all these people would leave and take their useless plates of food with them – the sponges, the tasteless sandwiches, the slices and casseroles. Did they really think that I would eat it all?

I found Audrey in the kitchen, serving up a slice of lamington sponge cake to a bespectacled uncle whose name I couldn't even remember. I wasn't what you would call close with my relatives.

She turned and regarded me with her warm chestnut eyes. I managed a thin smile. She took both my hands in hers.

'Some turn-out, huh?'

She wrapped her arms around me and hugged me tight. The faint peachy smell of her hair comforted me. When I released her I said, 'I thought I might grab some air, maybe go through a few of my things. A nostalgia trip might distract me for a while.'

'You know where I'll be.'

'I don't deserve you.' I pecked her full lips and slipped out the back door and into the chilly autumn breeze. I half expected one of my annoying relatives to be out in the yard smoking a coffin nail (at which point I would have decked him) but thankfully I was alone.

I had to move my junk out of the shed in the next few weeks anyway. I thought now was as good a time as any to start sorting through it all.

The shed door squeaked. I entered the gloom and felt for the light switch. The fluorescent tubes flickered to life, revealing stacks of head-high cardboard boxes against the far wall: archives of Bradshaw family history. I had no idea where to start. Mum had been such a hoarder and I would have understood if she had donated my stuff to Vinnie's or the Salvos. She had kept pretty much all of our toys from our childhood, although Grant had been dead ten years now – a car accident. They never did find out why he lost control on the road that night and slammed into the tree: I would always wonder.

The boxes, neatly labelled in permanent marker, contained everything from old school text books and comics to games, toys and dozens of jigsaw puzzles. I selected one of my boxes at random and pulled it to the ground. I broke the seal and peered inside. The worn paperbacks were complete sets of Hardy Boys and The Three Investigators. They were in surprisingly good condition. How they had survived was beyond me. I couldn't remember respecting anything I owned back then.

I reached up for another box. I set it down, peeled back the brittle packing tape and folded the flaps back. When the fluorescents bathed the contents a scream caught in my throat. A pair of piercing blue eyes stared back at me. I kicked the box across the floor, spilling the items. Amongst the litter of He-Man action figures, green plastic army men and Lego vehicles was something else – a doll. But it couldn't be. We'd disposed of it. I know we did!

All of a sudden it was 1977 again. I was six that year when I received the doll for Christmas. His name was Hugo: Man of a Thousand Faces, and as the title suggested, you could apply a large assortment of disguises – wigs and glasses, scars, beards

and warts – to his bald head and smooth plastic face. He was clothed in a dark blue tunic with medieval-style lacing at the collar. The cotton-stuffed arms were attached to infant-like hands clenched in permanent little fists.

He was a lot of fun at first. Grant and I would think up all sorts of crazy disguises to put on him. But then things changed. One Saturday I packed Hugo away, up high on the top shelf in my wardrobe before going out to play with friends. When I got home, I noticed that Hugo was on the couch in the lounge room. It was almost as if he were engrossed in the episode of *The Wonderful World of Disney*. When I questioned Mum about it she said that I must have put him there.

‘But I put him away before I went out to play,’ I protested. She wouldn’t hear of it and insisted that I must have forgotten. At first I thought Grant had done it but he was away at school camp that week. So who had put him on the couch? I put him back in his box again and stowed him away in the wardrobe and forgot all about him for two weeks, until I saw the small adhesive moustache attached to the fridge door. I knew it wasn’t there before – so how had it got there?

That same week as I lay in the dark alone I became aware of a familiar plastic stench wafting into the bedroom like an invisible fog. Out of the corner of my eye I thought the wardrobe door had slid open a crack. Then I heard a thump on the bedroom carpet.

What was *that*?

I lay there listening, too frightened to move. I felt a slight tugging at the edge of my doona. The moonlight coming through the window revealed a bald silhouette staring at me from the end of my bed.

It was Hugo!

Paralysis held me in its grip. I took a deep breath and tried to scream. Nothing would come out of my mouth. The doll inched closer, commando-crawling towards me. The stink became stronger. I gagged. Hugo was now up to my chest. I could feel his ice-cold touch through my pyjamas.

I wanted Mum!

For a long moment he sat there, staring down at me through those piercing blue eyes. The silence in the room was deafening. I

could only manage a weak croak as I desperately tried to cry out for Mum, only metres away in the next room. Hugo loomed in closer, centimetres from my face as if to kiss me. The smell was unbearable. Finally my vocal cords worked and I screamed for Mum after bucking Hugo off my chest. Within moments she was at my door. She snapped on the light switch, just as Hugo rolled off and under the bed.

‘What is it?’ Mum asked, concerned, ‘a nightmare?’

‘No.’ I was shivering uncontrollably.

She wrapped her arms around me. ‘Then what’s the matter?’

‘Hugo tried to get me,’ I said between sobs, ‘he’s under the bed. I don’t want him any more. I want to throw him away.’

‘But Hugo’s just a toy,’ Mum said.

‘No, he’s real! He tried to get me and now he’s under the bed waiting for you to leave.’ I clutched my pillow to my chest as Mum investigated under the bed. After a few moments she stood up and said, ‘There’s nothing there.’

‘But he was!’

‘Just go back to sleep,’ Mum said. ‘I’m sure it was nothing.’

‘Can I sleep with you tonight? Please?’

Mum conceded. She picked me up and lugged me into the warmth and safety of her bed. I snuggled into her back and slept fitfully for the rest of the night.

The next morning, after lengthy arguments, I made Mum get rid of Hugo and all of his hateful accessories. Despite her protests that he was a perfectly good gift from Santa, she burnt Hugo in the backyard incinerator along with the box and accessories. I watched.

Now I stood in the old shed, staring in disbelief at a toy that shouldn’t exist any more. As an adult, part of me, the logical part, knew that dolls didn’t come back to life or miraculously survive incineration. But another part of me, that six year-old child inside, simply couldn’t forget that long-ago night that scared me witless.

I approached Hugo and nudged him with my foot so I wouldn’t have to look at his face. I never took my eyes away from him as I packed the spilled toys back into the box. My hands were shaking. It was as if Hugo had been waiting all these years for my inevitable return. I knew I couldn’t leave him in the shed where

he could escape. I had to get rid of him for good this time or I'd spend the rest of my life in fear of a plastic doll. As I went outside to compose myself, an idea suddenly occurred to me.

Further up the overgrown back yard was the old incinerator that had never been removed despite the stringent fire laws that were now in force. I walked up to it and peered inside at the dead leaves and ancient grass clippings. Hesitantly, I made my way back inside the shed where Hugo was still lying in his original position. Or maybe he was just playing possum, waiting for just the right moment to attack me. I found an old box of matches on a nearby shelf and stuffed them into my jeans pocket. Fighting the urge to vomit, I picked up the hateful doll in my jacket so I didn't make contact and walked it up to the incinerator.

I could have sworn I felt Hugo twitch. I removed the matches from my pocket and struck one. It burst into flame and I dropped it gently to the bottom of the school-brick box. Within moments the leaves and grass began to smoke. Hungry flames lapped at the edges. The pungent smoke rose high into the autumn air.

I undid Hugo from my jacket and dropped him into the fire. He landed squarely on top of the flames, flames that devoured him quickly.

'Burn,' I muttered. 'Burn.' I leaned in to see that Hugo's tunic was almost gone and his face had melted, satisfactorily beyond recognition.

Feeling a warm wave of relief, I made my way back to the house where I found Audrey putting away some dried dishes. 'Did you find anything interesting out there?'

'Not really,' I chose to keep the incident to myself – for now, anyway. 'Just went through some old stuff from when I was a kid that I had forgotten about. I'll have to come back for it in the next few days.'

'How are you doing... really?' Audrey snapped off the yellow rubber gloves.

'I'm okay.'

That night, as I lay in our own bed, I was about to doze off after listening contentedly to Audrey's even breathing, when I noticed

something was amiss. I thought I heard a noise. I glanced over to the door that was now slightly ajar. I swore I'd shut it before climbing into bed. There it was again – the whispery sound of something sliding along carpet.

Like a plastic fart, an old familiar odour invaded my nostrils. I fought the gag reflex. I began to panic. I went to shake Audrey awake but I couldn't move. I listened for an eternity and couldn't hear anything. The plastic stench was still there. Then I heard tiny grunting sounds coming from the end of the bed. Something was climbing up the covers. I felt the tugging sensation on the top sheet. I buried my head in the covers like that same six year-old kid in 1977, trying to convince myself that I was delusional. I pulled the covers down to see if anything was really there, when the icy cold touch of an infant-like hand clamped against my throat. Unable to move I fought for breath. I was choking. Somehow I managed to reach across and flip on my lamp. Brilliant light exploded in the room and instantly Hugo released me. He jumped off the bed and crawled underneath.

Audrey stirred and turned towards me to ask what was wrong.

As I looked at her I noticed a small plastic wart from Hugo's accessory kit stuck to her face like an alien leech.

I screamed.

Hemingway's Elephants

John Holton

I suppose I should have been more shocked to meet Ernest Hemingway on the Broadmeadows train — not least because he blew his brains out in 1961, three years before I was even born, when Broadmeadows was just paddocks of Scotch thistles.

You could tell he was embarrassed to see someone reading *Men Without Women*. This was 1988 — sixty years after its publication. It was published the same year my father was born on a kitchen table in Coburg. It reads like it was written yesterday.

'I'm reading the elephant one,' I said to Hemingway. 'Do you remember the elephant one? We all read it at school. I bet you never dreamed they'd be reading it in schools after you were dead.'

Hemingway looked confused for a moment and then said, 'Hills Like White Elephants?' His voice was much higher than I'd imagined, but that could be a symptom of death.

'Yes that's the one. I've always liked stories about elephants. I especially like Kipling — *The Jungle Book*. There were several elephants in that one.'

'I shot an elephant once,' Hemingway said with a certain pride. 'But it's not really about elephants.'

'But, it says here about the colour of their skin through the trees.'

'Yes, but she's talking about the hills. It's about relationships. Not elephants.'

'But hills don't have skin,' I said dubiously. 'Why mention the

skin if it's not about elephants?'

'Because it's suggestive of elephants,' Hemingway said. 'It's symbolic, don't you see?'

'Well, why mention elephants at all then? It seems a little strange — if they're not real. Aren't you just disappointing all the people who like to read about elephants?'

'Quite,' was all that Hemingway said.

'Quite, indeed!' I replied.

There was a nervous silence as Hemingway looked at his watch and scratched anxiously at his beard; each of us swaying out of sync with the clickety clack of the train.

'What about The Killers?' I asked, not letting him off the hook. After all, this elephant fraud was a man who'd won a Nobel prize for literature.

'What about 'The Killers?'" Hemingway said, sounding agitated.

'Well, is it about real killers? It seems to be more about sandwiches. Are the sandwiches 'the killers?'"

'What sandwiches?' Hemingway was being downright aggressive now.

'He orders sandwiches. You wrote it — how can you forget the sandwiches? Are they like the elephants? Are they just symbolic sandwiches — is that what you're saying?'

Hemingway was wiping his brow with a handkerchief as the train pulled into North Melbourne station. He was out of the door in a flash — swept up by the rush hour crowd — his camouflage hunting jacket fading into the jungle of commuters.

I didn't see Hemingway on the Broadmeadows train again. Though I looked for him every day. I had some serious questions about the opening page of *A Farewell To Arms*.

Xylophone

Simmone Howell

Karen Carpenter comes to me in my dreams and speaks to me in rhyming couplets: Don't worry about Chick – have another carrot stick! Like most Americans she has way too many teeth and when she smiles it's like her features fall in. Sometimes she's wearing her touring jacket. It smells of sweat. I think she can't bear to wash it because then the Carpenters appliqué on the back might fade and that would be a bad omen. She says, I'm sure Richard would love to meet you, but he's got a lotta, lotta, lotta work to do. I think Richard is busy composing, creating, perfecting their sound while Karen is busy composing, creating, perfecting herself. She says, I have to be clean so when I sing it's pure, I don't even shit any more.

When I wake up I feel desperate and hungry but when I think about Chick the feeling goes away.

The trouble started with the Forty-hour Famine. You know, for the starving Ethiopians. Kate and I were both complaining about our teenage love-handles and we kind of dared each other into it. We bought a kilo sack of barley sugars and went door-knocking for sponsors. Chick decided to have a Forty-hour Foodfest instead. Sitting in Kate's rec room, Chick has a Pizza Hut Meat Lovers pizza – party size. Kate drinks Evian and says she never felt so clean and I crunch into the barley sugars, not even close to savouring them, my stomach shrinking fast.

Chick looks cute even stuffing himself. He says we should have a piss-up after the forty-hours finishes. He says, We should go down to one of those Vietnamese banquet joints on Bridge Rd. I say, Could you stop talking about food, please? We are only eight hours in.

Kate sighs contentedly and looks at me, You're not going to make it, are you? I say, I've got fifty bucks worth of sponsors say I can, and that's when Chick gets the idea. Who says you have to hand the money in? He's too cute. He can always corrupt me.

The first time I met Chick we robbed a North Balwyn bus. Kate and I had been op-shopping in Richmond and were making our way back to the suburbs. Kate was wearing a fifty-cent beret which made her look like a revolutionary and I had a bargain-bag of records – Dean Martin, the Beach Boys, Lou Reed and the Carpenters. We were the only people on the bus until it got to Kew Junction and then Chick got on. He sat in the seat behind us so we stopped talking about boys and started talking about homework. Then he flicked Kate's hat off, and she tried to pretend she was mad but it wasn't working, so then Chick came and sat opposite us. He said to me, What's in the bag, and I showed him. I said, I like the old stuff. He said, The Carpenters are OK.

I'd only bought that album as a joke, but now I saw it as a treasure. Kate started probing him about who he was and what he was up to and where did he go to school. He said he was on his way to work at a record store in Blackburn and we should come and check it out. He was so cute. And cool. And funny. Kate thought so too, I could tell. The bus driver made an unscheduled stop at the Harp Hotel and we all had to get off and wait for him. The driver disappeared into the pub and Kate said, I don't see why we couldn't have stayed on. Chick said, The money, honey, and shot over to the driver's window. He came back and said, Did you ever rob a bus? I need a leg up. Kate didn't want a bar of it, but I went around the side and bent over and Chick stood on my back, reached in the window, and when he came back down he had over forty dollars in notes. Kate wanted to run but Chick said

if he missed this ride he'd never get to work on time. The driver returned and we got back on the bus, like nothing had happened. Kate didn't speak to us for the rest of the journey but I'd already decided I wanted to go all the way with Chick. He was something else.

Karen Carpenter doesn't get much action. She sees everything from the stage and no one can touch her. One fan got too close. He decided they were married. He used to sit outside her parents' house waiting for her to come home until they put a restraining order on him. She says, All the number ones I've had, are for Richard, Mom and Dad. She's wearing a dress with a halter neck and her collarbone sticks out more than her breasts. I think she doesn't know how to be with people and she doesn't know how to be on her own. She exists between two worlds when she'd rather not exist at all. Then she sings and it's just to me.

I wake up feeling lonely.

So we're twenty-four hours in. The half-way mark. And when I meet Kate she looks different. She says, So, Chick came back last night. I get the dread feeling. I say, what happened? She says, Stuff ... and I feel like I want to throw up but there's nothing in me to throw. She says, Tomorrow night: Patterson's after Bridge Rd. She asks me how many sponsors I have now. About ninety bucks. My heartbeat has slowed right down. Maybe it will just stop. Karen's did. We're standing on Burke Rd in our uniforms and Kate's brushing her hair with her fingers. All girls named Kate have beautiful legs and boyfriends. I say, Wait here, and go into Macca's for a cheeseburger and fries. Kate says, What are you doing? How can I explain to her that I already feel like I've lost? I say, The starving Ethiopians can go fuck themselves. And I think she gets it then. Chick. Maccas goes straight through me and I spend first period with my head over the toilet, thinking hate, Kate, hate, Kate.

After school Kate says she's going to hunt up a few more sponsors. I catch the train to go home but I get off at Blackburn instead. Chick is in the back room cleaning vinyl. He says, For

some reason Ash keeps buying piles of records with unidentifiable substances on them – look. He holds up a particularly smeggy-looking side and says, Linda Ronstadt. Why didn't the guy just buy a stick mag? I say, It could be some kind of food. He says, Egg on your face and I laugh but only on the outside. He says, Did Kate tell you about tomorrow night? I nod and there is an uncomfortable silence. He knows I know. He says, Hey, I thought about you today, and pulls out a Carpenters album. Have you got this one? Of course. He puts it on the turntable and Karen's voice comes through, pure and sad, and like in my dreams, she's singing just for me. But it's a bad joke because there's a scratch on the record and it keeps going back to the same line - just like me they long to be close to you. Chick laughs but I run out of there. All the way home I have that song in my head. I'm pathetic.

Thirty-two hours in. Mum says, Are you sick of barley sugars yet? I make a face. She says, I'm very proud of you, and hands me a ten-dollar note. That's from Mrs Beecham. Mrs Beecham is Mum's secretary. Her husband's got cancer so she's the one who has to bring home the bacon. I put the note in my Tuppaware container. Mum says, what's the tally? I don't know, I lie. I stay up and watch Buffy. They're all beautiful but that's television for you. I think about how if my life was a TV show, I'd be too ugly to be on it. Before I go to bed I put a sheet over my mirror – like I read about in the Feng Shui section of Woman's Day – because I don't want to see Karen Carpenter tonight. But she makes a visit anyway.

Karen comes on with a Barbie doll dressed in '70s threads. She says, Barbie doesn't smoke or drink, Barbie doesn't even think. She leans in close so I can almost smell her breath on my face. Her teeth are capped. They are black underneath. Perpetual puking will do that to you. She says, Barbie doesn't fuck. Hey, Ken, tough luck. I think Karen Carpenter doesn't fuck either. She's in her twenties now and hasn't even been kissed properly except for that time when Richard set her up with an A&R guy. A nasty joke. He tried to feel her up and told Richard it was like

playing a xylophone except no sound came out. Karen's a virgin and Richard's gay, that's what all the people say.

Look out. Now she's on stage wearing a tight denim pantsuit. She's trying to sing soul but she's not sexy enough to carry it off. Look at her bones! She's a walking anatomy lesson. Doesn't she realise? I wake up and remember instantly that the forty-hours are over. But my stomach feels like it's full of cement that hasn't even set yet.

I meet Kate at Macca's and she's loaded up her tray. Chick feeds her fries and sends one in my direction. Eat up, buttercup. The fast is over. We walk to school and he kisses her goodbye at the gate. I say, so is it on then? She wrinkles her perfect nose and says, I reckon. She says, did you bring your sponsorship money? I shake the Tuppaware container. I say, Pattersons tonight. I'm going to drink 'til I can't think. Kate says, Well, I'm handing mine in. I say, Well, I don't give a shit, and stomp off to Home Ec. And all the while I'm thinking about Kate and Chick and wondering how you can win someone back when you never had them in the first place.

Me and Chick nearly kissed once. We split a cab back from the station and Chick got out first. I was in the back seat and I wound down the window the better to say goodbye. Chick leaned in and just like that the cab took off. I didn't tip the taxi driver.

It's muffins today and everybody's eating the mixture and making themselves sick. I can't even look at it. My muffins come out flat. Give them to the starving Ethiopians. The concrete in my guts has set now. I'm taking industrial action. No solids allowed.

I turn up late for the Vietnamese banquet. Kate says, We were worried about you. She looks worried. Chick says, Yeah, how are we meant to pay for all of this. The first dent in the Tupperware container came after school. I went to Eastlands and bought myself a new top. It's bright red and tight across the chest. I look over eighteen in it. I pull out a twenty and say, it's on the Ethiopians. Kate says, It's on your conscience. Chick says, You're a legend, and pays the bill.

Pattersons has the look and feel of an RSL. By this I mean it is full of old-timers who are more pleased to see young flesh than to worry about ID. We get a table by the piano and Chick buys a jug. I drink fast like I have to catch the last train home. Chick's all touchy-feely with Kate but she's not returning it and this gives me confidence. I keep drinking because I don't want to lose the momentum. A WW2 veteran tries to get my attention by flopping out his old fella. Chick winks, You said you like the old stuff.

Then one of the old ladies starts playing the piano and soon there are about four or five seniors at our table. Pots of beer everywhere. It's a sing-along but Kate pretends she doesn't know the words. Chick and I are pissing ourselves. The lady starts playing Top of the World and Chick is rushing at me, saying sing it, Karen, sing it.

I sing loud. But I sing beautiful. I sing it like I believe it. I sing it like there's an audience of millions swooning at my feet.

And then my own feet fail me and I'm on the floor hugging my guts up and Chick's holding my hair back from my face so I don't spew on it. The lady is still playing and the music sounds like it's underwater. I want to go home.

When Karen first started coming to me she almost looked normal. But now that I think about it, her eyes were a little too bright, her cheeks too rosy. She was always breathless unless she was singing and then it was like she was behind glass. Now she's wearing big dark sunglasses and I don't know how she keeps them on because it seems to me her face is all planes. Her bones have eroded. She says, I think I'm high enough to die, and looks heaven-ward. She holds my hand like she's about to say something important, and there are so many things I want to ask her.

The Son

Natalie Loves

The mother and her son were standing on a ridge on the verge of the road, the mother wrapping her arms around herself to stop the cold. The ridge where they stood had been made by the local council, she thought, or maybe a farmer. A roll of barbed wire, some tree stumps and tossed-out stubbies had been pushed hard into the soil to make the ridge. It was peppered with rabbit holes, some low to the ground, others on top, close together.

She could just see the edge of a triangular bottle stuck firmly in the dirt. Years ago, she would have dug it out, taken it home, washed it over and over and put it carefully on the ledge in the kitchen, with the others. It would have been a treasure. Her husband, long gone, would have said, 'What do you need that for? It's a piece of junk.' She didn't need it now, she thought. In a way, he had been right.

Her son had been too young to remember when his father left, never asking any questions. Her husband had just gone 'up North' on a whim and had not come back. She didn't miss him. She remembered the relentless questions she wasn't expected to answer, and the bullying – blocking her way, standing too close, but never actually hitting her.

Without talking, she helped her son lay the nets over the rabbit holes. She handed him the steel pegs, making sure the nets covered the holes. Now, standing still and together on top of the ridge, they waited.

Every now and again, the ferret stuck its head out of a hole

and got tangled in a net. David had to free the ferret and push it back in the hole. She hated everything about the ferret – its loping gait and rat-like face. Its fur was bristly, its movements too quick. She had touched it once, just to please her son, and it had flicked its head around to bite her. But it followed David around like a dog. All he had to do was make a clicking, sucking noise like a trapped rabbit, and it would run towards him. If he held it up by the scruff of the neck, like a kitten, it would yawn. David thought this trick was cute, but she still couldn't stand it. It truly frightened her.

Her son had turned into a hunter quickly, she thought. Not so long ago, she had sat with him at the edge of their dam while he held an abandoned pale-blue duck's egg in his hands. Slowly, after hours it seemed, the duckling had tapped open its shell. When it finally lay wet and exhausted in his hands, he had put it to his face to hide his tears.

'Shit!' said David. She looked up and saw a rabbit bolting off over the hill. She felt sorry for her son, at his helplessness, his frustration.

'Don't worry, honey. There'll be more. There has to be.'

'Yeah. But it pisses me off,' he said, scooping up his ferret, turning it around and shoving it roughly back into the hole. 'I should have got it.'

They felt rather than heard the thumping panic beneath their feet. 'Got one!' David said, grabbing the ferret, rabbit and net into a bundle. He squatted down and quickly, one-handedly, put the ferret in its box and untangled the rabbit from the net. As he stood up, one hand around the rabbit's neck and the other around the top of its bucking legs, she turned away.

'Is it dead yet?' she asked.

'Yes Mum. It only takes a second.'

'I know, but still...'

She looked back at her son who was proudly holding the limp rabbit by its neck. The rabbit's eyes were open, looking at nothing, and its face was the same, as if it were still alive. It reminded her of the Peter Rabbit stories she had read to him when he was very young and she wondered how he had come to be a hunter, so determined to kill.

Back then, she had thought his life would be different. It would be wider, full of discoveries and adventures. But he had chosen to make his own world – a smaller, safer world – one in which he had control.

She watched him closely as he stuck his knife in just below the middle of the rabbit's neck and slid it straight down its stomach to expose its shiny, complicated insides. He quickly turned the knife, nicked its guts from the top and bottom, and flicked the unattached viscera onto the dirt. It was the smell, not the red puddle of the insides that struck her. It was raw – like dirt and shit.

'Do you want the tail for luck, Mum?'

'No thanks. I don't need it,' she said, watching him squat down and carve a notch into the side of the ferret's box.

He had made the knife he now used to gut the rabbit a while ago, and it had truly amazed her. She told him it was a work of art – its proportions perfect. It had taken him hours and hours of patient grinding and honing, and the carved wooden handle fitted perfectly into his big hands.

'I'll make you one, Mum, if you want,' he'd said.

'I'd love one, David. I'd have it forever. It would be a treasure.'

The boy often talked about his dreams for the future, about how he couldn't wait to leave school. He hated school and thought it useless, a waste of time. He wanted a simple life. He wanted a bit of land, a veggie patch, chickens, cows, maybe goats. He would be self-sufficient, growing and hunting the food he needed, even forging his own tools. He had it all planned.

Hitching the ferret's box and the net bag over his shoulder, he walked back to the car. He held the dead, hollow rabbit up high.

He would make it happen. He would live his dreams in the world he would make. And he would be happy. She knew.

The Crab Catcher

Judith McNay

The Westgate Bridge is bumper to bumper, the traffic in stop-start mode. It's the week-night phenomenon *they* call 'rush hour'.

Lately, Celia had taken to imagining what aliens might think of human behaviour should they be observing us. She visualises an Attenborough voice-over...*encased in metal contraptions, millions of these ape-like creatures return to their nests in long lines after spending their day in communal work stations. They have a society not unlike the insect, monomorium minimum, better known as the common ant.*

It's very hot. Probably still in the mid-30s. A blue haze hovers over the bridge while heat waves dance on the ordered bonnets of idling cars. Exhaust fumes add to the toxic cloud emitting from the landscape of belching factories below the bridge. Despite her air-con, Celia can smell the foulness.

She glances across at the driver in the lane beside her. The podgy-faced man is stuffing a Big Mac buried somewhere in the profuse packaging that covers his face. Absorbed in his burger, he doesn't notice her stare. She doesn't like him. He reminds her of her boss. *Bet you get your rocks off beating up others too.* Immediately, she regrets her thoughts. *Who am I to judge you? You haven't harmed me. I must learn to be more tolerant.* He downs his burger, just catching her gaze as his lane moves up three cars.

Her new neighbour is a woman. She's married. Her bejewelled fingers tap impatiently on the steering wheel. Obviously late for something, she looks at her watch with wild eyes. *Probably had a*

hard day at work, now has to get home to the kids, cook dinner, clean up, argue with her husband and prepare to repeat the process tomorrow... just like my mother. Celia cringes at the thought that life must be the same for her. Damn human instinct! *Damn human ritual!*

Though Celia is young, she's feeling pressure to succumb to the rite, to begin life's journey according to custom. *Oh, the burgeoning weight of their force, those rats on their spinning wheels. Life's not so much a journey, is it, but a ride on a treadmill?*

Celia's lane moves up, and she's once again beside her boss' look-alike who now has a glob of mayo on the side of his nose. He notices her this time, turning his head and rolling his eyes with an arrogant air. She laughs out loud at the mayo on his nose. *Perhaps I was right about you.*

As her laughter subsides, Celia is gripped by claustrophobic panic. *I have to get out of here, get away! Why don't I just keep going? Why not?* Assuring herself that the traffic will eventually move, she makes the decision not to go home, but to keep driving. It's daylight savings. She can be down the coast in an hour or so. Weekdays are the best, the coastline deserted, save for the odd surfer, sands unsullied by human footprints, air un-breathed.

Celia has previously discovered narrow bush tracks off the main road that lead to pristine beaches protected from prying eyes. There are secret coves in those places where rainforest meets the rocks, where the ancient power and throng of the sea has carved its monuments to Mother Nature in vast sculptured formations and blow-holes. Where the relentless tide has washed clean the earth and crushed countless shells over millions of years to form the purest, softest carpet beneath her feet.

There are rock pools of turquoise, pock-marked by age, yet wise and persevering where the water is pure and warmed by the sun, adorned by multi-coloured weed, and habitat for a multitude of creatures. The kind of pools where life began.

Once free of the traffic jam, Celia drives as quickly as she can to her favourite hidden cove. Uninhibitedly, she undresses to stand naked in the breeze, her bare skin seeming to sigh with relief through every pore. Breathing deeply, arms outstretched, she

closes her eyes allowing the cool sea air to caress her, awakening her senses.

Energised, she walks along the water's edge, keeping just inside the line of ebbing froth so that she leaves no evidence, no footprint, so that she can look behind and not see her imprint upon the sand.

When she comes to an outcrop of rocks, she bounces lightly from one to the other, until she arrives at a pool of palest green, embraced by volcanic boulders heated by the sun and worn smooth as silk by time and tide. Slowly, she steepers her body into the water, relishing the moment, the blood-warm elixir of life flooding her private crevices, engulfing her, healing her.

Under the rose-streaked canopy of dusk, she feels at one with earth and sea, a creature of this planet, no more than that.

As Celia lies in her heavenly soak, she becomes aware of a presence in the pool. A small, terrified crab scurries about, sending up tiny eddies of sand where it has tried to burrow. She watches him momentarily, then reaches to the bottom of the pool, cupping him in her hands, facing him towards her.

'How strange I must seem to you,' she says gently. His eyes wave frantically on thread-fine stalks, his nippers grasping in front of him defensively, but not aggressively.

'I must appear to you like an alien would to me,' she says. 'But I mean you no harm, though I know I can never make you understand that'.

She thinks about what she has said, remembering that the polar ice is melting. Soon, the sea will engulf this very pool. The tide will no longer ebb over it. It will never again be warmed by the sun, and life will have changed here forever.

Releasing him, she says, 'I apologise to you on behalf of my species, little crab'.

Then, feeling very much like an alien on Earth, Celia steps out of the pool.

The Telling Day

Jennifer Mellberg

I

Jac was nearly halfway home when she pulled over and got out of the ute. Dust ballooned around the car and then drifted away. She stood in the gravel leaning against the front fender of the old vehicle. *Twelve months?* When the doctor had said those words—‘I’m sorry Jacqueline, but very few people make it further than twelve months’—it had sounded like a mistake. She held no other memories of the consultation.

The scene before her now was as familiar as the contours of her own body. Grey-green salt-bush scrub followed the gentle rise and fall of the ground. Purple hills lay like guardians of the horizon and massive clouds boiled up behind them. *Maybe it will rain at last.* But she doubted it. She watched the spectacle of the desert sunset—*might only be 364 to go*—and remembered the first time Will had brought her out here, virtually to this very spot. That day, gazing across to the hills, she had been flooded with a sense of having come home. She tried to explain it to him. He had merely nodded as if her experience was entirely predictable.

Has anything changed since 1961? The blue of the sky, the orange ground, the scattered bush still seemed part of a perfect canvas. Those hills like primordial shoulders braced against the winds still looked indestructible. *No, nothing’s changed—except*

me. Jac sighed and hooked her brown hair behind her ears as she dropped her chin onto her chest. *So tired.* Below her breasts she saw the curve of her abdomen moving gently with each breath. *Twelve months.* She stood like this, watching her body, and was struck by a tantalising notion: how good it would be to sink into this piece of earth, to melt away here and somehow beat death to the finish line.

She started the ute and moved unconsciously through the gears. How would she tell him? Were there any words that would make it easier to say? Or less painful to hear? She couldn't think of any. Where were yesterday's words? Words like 'lucky' or 'okay'.

The lonely black road unrolled into darkness before her. She reached the turnoff and headed directly west. Twenty minutes later their decrepit red letterbox came into view. The sight of it made her heart begin to race. As she turned into the driveway she caught a glimpse of the red light on top of the transmitter tower in town. She imagined her friends in the pub or at home in front of the TV and resented their humdrum normality.

The driveway ran alongside the house. Jac pulled up in the open space beside the back gate and felt her throat tighten as she peered through the fine red dust that churned around the car. But Will didn't appear. She picked up her bag and wallet and slammed the door of the ute. The back light was on and she could see Jasper—Will's kelpie and supposed farm dog—lying on the verandah. He lifted his head as the gate clicked shut and watched as she made her way along the fractured concrete path. Jac ignored the dog. *Where the hell's Will?* Jasper stood up and wagged his tail gently. She reached for the door handle. He nudged against her leg.

'No Jasper,' she said firmly, as she always did.

The squeak of the flyscreen-door emphasised the quietness of the house.

'Will?'

In the kitchen she flicked the switch by the door. A note lay on the table.

*Dear Jac—hope the trip home was okay. Assume good news!!
I've gone over to Brian's to get the roof on the new shed before
the rain comes—no doubt you've heard the weather report?
They've got to be right this time eh? See you soon babe. Will.*

The relief of being home drained from her. She ached with a childlike longing to be told what to do next. She looked across at the phone. *No. Definitely not. Sylvia would answer. Sylvia with her prying questions.* She let the note fall back onto the table and wandered up to their bedroom. Will's jacket lay across the patchwork quilt. She pushed it away and sank down onto the bed. As she did, a twinge on her right side frightened her. She lay still, her whole body tense, until the sensation passed. Words and lines practised so carefully during the trip home flew around inside her head. She imagined the whole conversation and his response. He would look sideways into nothing with a completely blank face when she told him. She would cry but he would not. Where were those strong, red-haired, freckled arms which, right now, should have been wrapping around her and pulling her into his warmth? *Bloody Brian and Sylvia. That bloody shed.* No, she would go to bed alone. And if she didn't wake when he got back—then tomorrow would just have to do. But, after a long period of staring up at the familiar swirls of the pressed-tin ceiling, she decided what she needed was a hot shower. At the kitchen she paused and then went to the back hallway. She held the screen door ajar and stood aside as Jasper padded towards the kitchen. He looked bemused by this sudden softening of the 'no dogs in the house' rule and stood with his head slung low, waiting for her to change her mind. She retrieved his decrepit blanket from the kennel and laid it in front of the stove.

'You stay on your mat, boy.

Jac was surprised how much better it felt to have the dog inside.

In the bathroom she remembered yesterday's heated discussion about the tiles which she claimed were 'hideous'. Will insisted 'Every bit of green is a bonus in a drought like this one.' They didn't seem so bad today. She dropped her clothes in a rough pile,

turned the water on – hard – and stepped into the shower. Was it possible that the taps were connected to her very self? Tears indistinguishable from their precious tank-water streamed down over her body. She ran her hands across her abdomen. Apart from the well-healed scar, her belly looked and felt normal. *Twelve months*. Could it be a mistake? Who would guess that the devil himself had taken up residence in there? All respect for water conservation was abandoned. She leaned against the wall and sobbed.

Stepping into the steamy room she almost trod on Jasper who lay on the bath mat.

‘Jasp, what are you doing here?’ A soft smile passed briefly across her face and she bent and gently scratched him on the side of the neck.

‘You’re really taking liberties, you know.’

The house remained silent as she dried her body. He’s not back. *Tomorrow will just have to do*. Tomorrow: the telling day.

II

A mob of red kangaroos far off on the Western Plain bounded erratically through the low scrub as they sought to escape from the wind and lightning. Inside the bulging clouds the storm howled. The residents of the little town near Jac and Will’s place had heard the weather reports. Most were unmoved by overstated wind warnings and promises of rain that never came. They had checked and secured anything loose or fragile and were content to follow their usual evening routines. The pub was packed with station-hands and young people from the town. Sylvia took a break from her most recent cross-stitch creation. At her elbow the static on the radio became ridiculous so she turned it off and went to the window to check on the boys’ progress. She could barely see them in the darkness but the murmur of their voices carried in the heavy, still air.

‘So when do you reckon she’ll be home?’

'Oh, maybe nine.'

'She'll be shitty with you, won't she?'

'Jac? Nah. She'll probably give Sylvia a ring if she wants to talk to me.'

'Maybe she'll come over anyway?'

'Yeah. Maybe. But she's already done 800k's.'

'Mmm. You worried, Will? You know, about what the doctor's going to say?'

'Nah, not really. It'll be fine—pass me a nail will you?'

Brian passed the nail and studied Will's face. 'It might not be, mate.'

Will looked up at him for a moment and replied softly, 'Yeah, I know.'

Bulky leather gloves had made the work slow and cumbersome but by 11.30 the last few pieces of corrugated iron were in place. They were still perched high above the ground, their torches taped to their caps, when the first curls of wind swept across Brian's yard. Leaves and dust rose like dancing puppets into the air. The men kept hammering. A few more nails would do it.

III

As Jac became conscious of the morning light she felt the languid peacefulness of waking change into a sense that there was something terribly wrong. It took just seconds for her to remember: *It's me. It's twelve months. It's the telling day.* Turning, she expected to see the familiar sandy hair and pink leathery ear of Will. He wasn't there. Hadn't been there. She was instantly wide awake.

'Will,' she called into the silence

She considered staying in bed. *Only 364 days to go.* In the kitchen Jasper looked warily at her in case she had changed her mind about the 'inside' rule but she fondled his ears and scratched his neatly-haired belly with her foot. The rule seemed unthinkable silly all of a sudden.

‘So where’s your old man, Jasper?’

He stared at her. She reread the note and stood looking at it for a full minute. The house felt like an animal holding its breath. This was not like Will. He had been worried about the doctor’s appointment too. What had she been thinking of to drain the hot water tank and go to bed? Shocked and suddenly sick with dread, she dressed quickly, got into the ute, whistled Jasper up onto the tray and headed towards town to pick up the south road. *What if he’s come off his bike?* Dust and sand blew off the ute in a plume as she gathered speed. *Maybe the storm kept him at Brian’s?* She dismissed the idea at once. *He would have rung.*

It took her a while to register that the scrub in the paddocks looked scoured. She wove around sand drifts that flowed across the bitumen. As she topped a rise she was forced to swerve wildly to miss an empty water tank that lay crumpled on the road. A shed door was splintered against a fence further along. *What? I couldn’t have slept through something that crushes tanks and tears sheds apart.* She pressed hard on the accelerator.

She came over the final ridge and gaped at the scene before her. The town had been demolished. Barely a house was intact. Not a single street was passable. The sugar-gums in the park stood like a group of pale naked women in a war zone. She gripped the steering wheel as if to steady herself. Jac and Will knew almost everyone who lived in the houses along those streets. She squinted and made out a few figures who moved slowly among the ruins. *Thank God.* But she was shredded with fear for Will and she gunned the old diesel and grated through the gears.

‘Oh please, not Will. Not my Will.’

Her fear deepened with every moment. Her breaths came in short, desperate gasps. Jasper hung over the edge of the ute’s tray, just behind her head, his nose into the wind. The debris on the road forced her to slow again and again. At last she was barrelling up Brian and Sylvia’s long driveway. Like a huge daddy-long-legs the frame of the new shed stood arched against the sky. Only a few metal sheets were still attached. Later she would have only

patchy memories of running through splintered timber and jack-knifed corrugated iron. Jasper shot ahead of her and stopped directly beneath the centre of the ruined frame.

Will's body was almost buried by the sand that had blown over him through the night. Jasper cocked his head on one side as Jac threw herself across the still figure. Her cries were shock waves in the silent air and Jasper cringed as she wailed. Two hours later a rescue worker found Jac still kneeling holding Will's cold hand. Her ashen face was streaked with muddy tears, Jasper pressed against her. He spoke urgently to her.

'What's your name? Are you injured?'

She didn't answer.

'Well, thank God someone's alive.'

Jac didn't even look up.

'Is this your place?'

She shook her head slightly. He spoke slowly and deliberately: 'Can you tell me—is there anyone in the house?' Jac wished he would go away. She focused on his face and wondered why he looked so worried and frustrated.

After a long pause she said, 'Sylvia. Sylvia's probably... I think Will needs an ambulance.'

The man looked at Will and then at her. He hurried away. Jac watched him indifferently as he walked around the wreckage and rubble that had been Brian and Sylvia's home. He kept shouting 'Sylvia' and then standing stock still as if straining to hear something. He peered under pieces of debris. Jac didn't really care what he did. With her free hand she reached again and again to tousle Will's hair and shake out the sand and dust. It took the man half an hour to coax her away.

'You'll get help for Will, won't you?'

He nodded and guided her to his vehicle and opened the rear door for Jasper.

'Where do you live?' the man asked.

'East road. Red mailbox.'

Standing in the doorway of the silent kitchen Jac gazed at the note—it still lay where she had dropped it. There was something... with a jolt it broke into consciousness. *Today's the telling day.* Jac snatched up the scrap of paper and turned to the man who had hesitated to leave her.

'You have to take me back.'

She felt the reluctance in his searching look.

'Now!'

'Look, I'm not sure if that's a good ...'

Jac tried to push past him. He grabbed her arm.

'It's okay, it's okay. I'll take you.'

Without another word they walked out to his four-wheel drive.

Memory

Graeme Murray

The paint is peeling from the walls, walls that have lost their lustre; once yellow they have faded to grey, and the weatherboards are slightly bowed from years of drought, then rain, then drought again. The hydrangeas around the front hide the decay, and the patch of lawn needs mowing. The corrugated-iron roof has changed from red to rust, the gate is always open because the latch is broken and, anyway, the uneven concrete of the path probably won't allow it to close. But the verandah is deep and cool, even on the hottest days, and has been renovated with new floorboards, and overhead the gutters have kept their shape so that the rainwater flows from them into the tank out the back. There is no breeze today and even though the shade from the veranda provides its usual relief from the heat, the air feels lazy and heavy.

Moira Hannity sits in a chair, an old straight-backed kitchen chair. Her skin, like the paint, has faded and cracked in sympathetic aging with the house in which she lives. She holds a magazine in one hand and, in the other, has a pen poised above a crossword. She thinks that the puzzle provides little in the way of a challenge; it is almost half finished, and yet she can't recall having filled in the blank spaces. Surely, she reasons, she would remember doing it, wouldn't she? After all, these things were meant to stimulate the mind. Slowly the hand holding the magazine falls to her side, her chin drops to her chest and an insect-like buzz issues with each breath from her lips. The pen, now forgotten, balances on her skinny thigh.

A car pulls up at the broken gate, but the sleeping woman pays no heed. She is wrapped in dreams of youth and beauty, of days of flowers and flirting. There is something in her posture that makes the driver of the car hesitate as he is about to open the door. He is sure that the woman can't see him. Through the windscreen he studies the frail figure. The stillness of her body worries him. Perhaps she will soon topple forward and sprawl, hurt and dazed, onto the verandah.

In her dream Moira hears the footsteps approaching, and knows that when she raises her head she will see Albert, clean-shaven and smiling, as he at last returns from service overseas. She opens her eyes, and wishes that she could return to the fading feeling of serenity that her dreams had conjured. There is a young man coming up the path towards her. His hair is short and stringy, his eyes the colour of rain-deprived summer skies. A door in the dark recesses of her mind moves ever so slightly on its hinges. A sliver of the light of memory emerges.

'Good morning,' says the young man. The vowels are drawn out so that they sound like the whistle of a steam train.

'Oh, hello,' says Moira. The corners of her mouth turn up, but there is a deep crease between her eyebrows. 'Is there something I can do for you?'

The young man is about to step into the shade of the verandah, but stops. Now, with the sun behind him, he is not much more than a silhouette.

'It's Josh,' he says.

Confusion and embarrassment collide in Moira's mind. The sliver has faded; the door has been shut. She shoos Josh back up the path a few steps.

'Get back in the light where I can get a good look at you. My eyes aren't what they used to be, you know. You young people today have to make allowances. We can't all have perfect eyesight. Things change as you get older, and not always for the better.'

'Well,' says Josh, 'I think there are a few things we could change around here that would be. For the better, I mean.'

'Why would I want to change anything? I've lived in this house a good fifty years and haven't had to replace anything, so why would I start now? Besides, Albert always looked after the

place and he wouldn't like me to go changing things.'

'But he's not here any more, is he?'

Moira doesn't answer. Albert had gone, it was true, but how long ago? He had laid the new floorboards and fixed the guttering. He had made sure that the tank had no holes so that she would have fresh water and not have to rely on the gritty stuff that came from the local creek. Or had that been his brother Walter? What did this young fellow want, anyway? Was he trying to pull a swiftie on her? Moira had heard about people coming to old people's houses and doing repairs that weren't needed, then they took off with the money. Wasn't there something about it every second night on the current affairs shows on TV?

'Look, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that.' Josh's shoulders slump slightly as he speaks more to the ground than to Moira, and again something in the door of her mind lets in a little light.

'Where do you live...Which one were you again?' she asks.

'Um, Josh. I've been living overseas, in Ireland for a couple of years, but now I've moved back here. Back to Sydney anyway.'

'And what do you do? What sort of work?'

'I'm a landscape designer. I work on new building developments.'

Of course you do, thinks Moira.

'Well,' she says, 'you'd know a bit about what needs doing, I suppose.'

'Yeah, well, I'm no professional, but I've picked up enough over the years to be able to do a bit of do-it-yourself stuff around the house. You know, concreting and the like.'

Moira shifts in her seat and the pen falls and rolls across the verandah, coming to rest against Josh's sandalled right foot. He squats to pick it up, and stays in that position, his eyes now level with those of the old lady. Moira can see his face more clearly from this angle. She notes the firm line of his mouth and the miniature ski-jump shape of his nose. Josh submits to her scrutiny with no apparent discomfort. He's pretty sure of himself, thinks Moira, but I'm no dummy, so he'd better not treat me like one.

'Listen here young man, if I did let you do some work, how long do you reckon it'd take?'

'Well, I'd have to do it over a couple of weekends, so I'd say

that by the time I get all the gear together I could have it done by the end of the month.'

'So I suppose you'll be wanting some money, will you?'

'Well not straight away. Not unless you want me to get the cement for the path, and maybe some paint for the roof.'

'Won't I have to pay you as well?'

'Why would you?'

'Why wouldn't I? Do you think I can't afford to pay my own way?'

'It's not that...'

'Because I have money. I'm not broke you know. I own this house. I own everything in it. I can afford to pay.'

It was only last week, thinks Moira, that that daughter of mine, Ainslie, told me that I should put all my money in the bank, that I should use one of those confounded credit cards to do all my shopping. Well, what happens if I need some money for myself? And where is she now, my daughter? It's the weekend and she's not here. She usually comes every weekend, but I won't tell this young man that. What was his name again?

Josh remains squatting on the path. Moira's sudden anger has surprised him. She has jutted out her chin and folded her arms across her chest.

'Look, I didn't mean to upset you,' he says. 'I just don't want you to think I'm trying to take advantage of you.'

There is something vulnerable, and familiar, about Josh's attitude. He could be a young farmer surveying the damage done to his crops by drought, or a digger boiling the billy before going to the front line. Albert had crouched in the very same way many times in the past, and again the light flickers at the edges of Moira's memory.

'I might have been a bit hasty,' she says. 'Tell you what. Why don't you go and get the things you need and come back next week and we'll sit down and have a cup of tea and a chat.'

'All right. No worries. I'll look forward to it.'

Josh uncoils from his position, takes a stride forward and leans over to give Moira a peck on the cheek. It happens so suddenly the old lady doesn't have time to be scared. As Josh edges his way toward the gate and the car, Moira is frozen with confusion.

'Oh, by the way,' Josh calls as he opens the car door, 'Mum

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said she's sorry she couldn't make it this weekend, so she sent me instead. We'll be able to have a nice catch-up next week.'

He slams the door and leaves.

On the verandah, Moira Hannity watches the car until it disappears over a hump in the road. The door of memory in her mind swings wide open. The light of recognition floods in. She sits and weeps.

It started simply enough

Cassy Nunan

Dear friends, here is my new email address. Sorry about the group email, but you know how it is. Hope to hear from you soon. Love Manuel.

It had been three years since she'd last had an email from him. She hadn't seen him for ten years. But they'd been close before, very close. And she believed that depth between people doesn't change. But life circumstances certainly do. So she started writing to him again. At first guarded, not wishing to sound too familiar, lest his old defensiveness arose. They had stopped emailing before because of a sticking-point. Not an argument as such, not a misunderstanding. Just a mismatch of mood. It was he who had stopped. And she'd been too stubborn to do a double reply. But old friendship can take those halts; it doesn't signal an end.

During those years since university she had moved south, married and had children. She even had a career. And he had moved further north. He was still single, or at least, single again.

As it turned out he had been very ill for the last year. He had been diagnosed with bowel cancer and had only recently completed chemotherapy. *I'm in remission now*, he wrote. *I'm gathering my strength so that I can find a new way to live. I've lost a lot of weight. Funny, I'm looking better than I ever did. The no-alcohol, fresh fruit and veggies lifestyle is a nice antidote to middle-age ennui.*

She checked her email every day, either at work or home. She was snared by Manuel's story, fascinated by the different choices they'd made in life and the ease of their affection after all these

years. But oddly, the freedom from utterance offered a type of anonymity.

He was conjuring up a pathway, parting the waters of an entire ocean. *I'm told I might recover, and now I must shelve my thoughts about death. And death is all I've had for the last few months. I've imagined myself in a coffin, in a grave, rotting into the earth. And I have anticipated the continuation of my consciousness, towards a light, or a new life, or god. And all I could see was darkness. But now that I am living, for however long, I still face darkness.*

Manuel, it's only natural to feel that way. Your body and mind have experienced a dreadful shock. You are in recovery, and recover you will. You will begin to see new possibilities. I know you. You will. She didn't like the sound of that, but she'd already pushed the 'send' button. How could she bridge the time gap?

She asked about the town he is living in. How big is it? Who are your friends? Are you working now?

He didn't say much about it. It's a small inland town, about 5000 people. I've only lived here a couple of years. I have a few 'mates', not many real friends. Mum and my sister live a couple of hours south. I'm a bit of a sad case really. My Labrador – Barney – died last year. I lost my job when I was on chemo. Now I do bits and pieces, gardening and whatever. \$10-an-hour stuff. Pays for the Internet connection.

She knew there was no place in the friendship for pity. Instead she offered distraction by talking about her job, but threw a shadow across it, so her life didn't sound too good in comparison. My boss is great, but I'm tired of sitting in front of a screen all day...sore back... sore bum... brain cells deadened by radiation... But it's a good job, as far as they go. It was better than that though. It was a great job. She felt lucky and proud of herself, as a mother, woman and working-class gal, to be where she was in life. She didn't mention that she was also doing some consulting on the side.

He wrote, Could hardly get out of bed today, from tiredness and lethargy. I penned a few words down, something like a poem... pieces of words somehow related to each other. But I'm here now, making real communication fly across the country to you.

She asked if the hospital offered any counselling, to deal with the trauma. He said he's considering it. He'd come this far. She mentioned a time when she was depressed after her second child.

I can't remember how long it lasted. It may have been days, it may have been weeks, when I gritted my teeth and forced myself to breast-feed him. I had to fight my desire to hide in bed and ignore the baby crying for milk. I had fantasies of running away. More than fantasies. One day I packed my bag and sat next to it all day. After that I took myself to a counsellor.

He said, I never knew you went through that. I wish I did. Perhaps I could have helped. I can't imagine you being so trapped. You. I always remember you laughing, entertaining people with your antics, always busy with something, always positive. I wish I was there for you...What did your husband do?

She said, He didn't recognise it. He didn't know it. And I couldn't speak it. It was a trench between us. There was no point waving a flag. He had enough on his plate, with work and a baby waking him in the night.

He said, I would have been there for you.

She said, If that's so, then I wish you were.

Several months passed, with communication between them speeding up and slowing down, according to the pace of her life. He was always first to reply. She hoped that he wasn't becoming dependent on her. But his attitude had lifted. He had been less negative, and she became more conversational about her lifestyle.

Then one Wednesday, while she was at work, the familiar envelope in the corner of the screen brought a turn of direction. He wrote. *I've been keeping it to myself, but now I think I should tell you. The cancer is on the move; it's colonising my body. The surgeon is gradually removing bits and pieces of my organs. I've just come out of chemo treatment and they've suggested that a palliative care nurse visit me at home. I guess I'm supposed to infer something from that.*

She couldn't concentrate at work, and she couldn't reply. What could she say? Emailing friends is an illicit activity and his news had hijacked her. She told them she had a headache and went home. She climbed into bed and covered her head. Trying to imagine him, someone she once loved, perhaps still loves, being taken piece by piece. The kids came home from school and she told them she was sick. They brought her a cup of tea like loyal

puppies.

She closed the door and plugged the laptop into the bedroom phone jack. She dialled up, but couldn't write. She lay back in bed and remembered.

She noticed him in first-year Philosophy. He was tall, burly and striking in his demeanour. He always wore a grey, old-style suit and a black business shirt. He usually sat at the back of the lecture theatre, and she began to sit close to him. Their friendship started with brief conversations and soon enough they were having coffee together in the student union. They talked about politics and philosophy and between lectures tried to solve the problems of the world. She had a boyfriend, and sometimes fantasised about exchanging these men's roles in her life. Instead they became best mates. They went out drinking together and exchanged books and fed off each other's verve for similar ideas.

Then one night when they were drunk at his house he kissed her. She said, *I shouldn't*. And he said, *Let's anyway*. And they did. It was fast and furious. There were no introductions or pleasantries. It all happened before she had a chance to think about what direction she might be taking her life in.

It was so good that it had to happen again. He pulled her into the technician's cupboard at the back of the lecture theatre while the lecturer was writing on a whiteboard.

But after that she put a stop to it. She couldn't bear the guilt of her transgression. And she also had a feeling that too much heat might burn the friendship.

He sulked and she saw less of him. They continued to socialise together, mostly in the presence of other friends. Their fervour dissolved. A few months later she broke up with her boyfriend, but Manuel continued to pale into the background. For years she wondered what might have happened. But she continued onboard the train as it pulled away from the platform, towards marriage, children, suburbia and a semblance of happiness.

She wrote to him, *Manuel, I wish I could be with you. I would hold*

your hand and try to absorb some of your pain.

He was online and wrote back, I've been lying here waiting for your reply. I feel I can almost touch you across space, through the fibre-optic filament, through the energy that connects us.

She asked, What are you seeing and feeling?

He replied, I am imagining you with your long blonde hair loose around your shoulders. Are you wearing Levi's still? I feel scared, but less alone now.

She said, My hair is short now and flecked with grey. But of course I still wear Levi's.

He said, I hope you don't mind me bringing it up. But I've often thought about the time we had together. It didn't last long. But I have carried it with me all these years. I have sometimes fantasised that your children are also mine.

She became frightened by this. She froze and couldn't reply. Her kids were watching TV and her husband was at work.

He wrote again, Don't be scared of me. I'm a dying man. I've already had a part of you, and I need to keep that alive within me. Am I asking you for too much?

She replied, You could never ask for too much. You have never asked for anything. But I'm not that person any more. I want you to know who I am now. Not who I was then.

She heard the turn of her husband's key in the front door. I can't keep writing now. I'll write tomorrow.

The next day she had a headache and stayed home. She dialled up again, on the laptop in bed.

He had written, You will always be who you are. I'm not hooked on my memory of you. I have always known you. See you tomorrow.

She wrote, How are you today? Are you in pain?

And instantly, a new message arrived. The pain comes and goes. I can control the quantity of morphine. But I won't overdo it because it makes my mind fog over. How am I today? I have been waiting for your email. I'm logged on all the time. Nobody can phone me, which is good.

Is anyone with you?

The nurse comes every morning and night. Mum and Carla came on the weekend, but they can't stay for long. This place can't accommodate them. But they'll be back next weekend. And they'll be around when the time comes.

'When the time comes', she said aloud to herself. The invasion of time shook her. She has a different time with him. Are they in time together? She can't see him eating, toileting; she can't see how his face hollows out, more and more, weekly. The smell in his room does not suffuse her life. Her time has children and husband flowing in and out and around her.

Your time is now, she wrote. Spend it with me.

Believe me, I am, he replied. I don't have much else. I'm all hollowed out.

She stated, As you said, I'm in you. Take me in.

Let me tell you more about me, what's in me, he insisted. They have taken away most of my bowel, and a bag has been tacked onto my body. They have taken chunks of liver and I wonder how long I can live with this grisly, decimated organ filtering my blood. I am wondering how long I can live with every organ whittled down to a minimum level of efficiency, while the cancer chomps its way through me.

A flood swelled from her gut and tears messed up the keyboard. She looked around at her lush bedroom with its warm tones, abundant cushions and eiderdowns. She was snuggled up at home in her fortress of comfort, when she should have been at work.

Tell me more, she said.

I have been turning inside myself looking for something to hang on to. But it's hard when you look around and everything you see, everything you're supposed to do, is about magnifying the phoniest parts of ourselves. The ads that promote holidays on tropical islands, the celebrities that celebrate the wonders of Botox. The other day I looked at myself in a mirror and I couldn't pull myself away from my own gaze. I was trying to find a remnant of beauty that I once might have had. So now I'm turning inwards to see what else I've got.

And what have you found? She really needed to know for her own sake.

I'll tell you about a dream I had. I was on a train and it was filled with everything from my entire life, my childhood toys, my family, my friends and all the accumulated junk of my life. The train is heading towards a cliff, and I am running through the carriages looking for a way to stop the train. Is there a handbrake, or can I steer the train in a different direction? But I am powerless, and the train tips over the cliff, in slow motion. And then I realise that I am not a passenger. I am

separate from it. It's not me. I am free to be anywhere and everywhere, and in all places at once.

The next day she said she had the 'flu and was too sick to get out of bed. She phoned her doctor and asked for a medical certificate. Her husband offered to pick it up for her.

She started the email conversation, again, with *how are you today?*

I'm missing you, he said.

I wish I could be there.

You can.

Tell me how, and I will.

Do you remember when we hid in the cupboard at the back of the lecture theatre? There was barely enough room for the overhead projector. Do you remember how I touched you and put my hand over your mouth so that you wouldn't squeal? Do you remember where and how I touched you?

Yes, I do.

Put your hand there now, and let me touch you.

She placed the laptop on the bedside table and followed his instructions. Closing her eyes she let him into her room. She could see his canker-drawn face and his thin fingers. His eyes were tentative, but his actions direct. She let him peel the bedcovers off and she almost leaped from her bed with the shock of his touch. He pressed her down and traced her body from ear to ankle. He would make this moment last forever. Where he placed his fingers, the warmth would stay, not fade. And in so doing, he came into her. He infused her entirely.

After that their emails returned to the once-a-day pattern. She couldn't allow him to take over her life. She was the one who had to keep living.

Three weeks later his emails stopped. She took herself into the backyard, not knowing for sure, but thinking about the likely event. She looked to the sky for a sign and it was the same as usual. Two days later a formal email came from his sister. It was addressed to all the names in Manuel's contact list. *I'm terribly sorry to let you know that Manuel passed away on Friday.*

She and her husband stood at the rear of the congregation. It was hot and the sun made a mockery of the black suits. People who must have been his immediate family circled the gravesite. The mother and sister clung to each other, crying loudly, unashamed. Other mourners moved in close as the casket was lowered into the ground. She kept back. She was a stranger, hovering like a sightseer.

She felt the warmth of a hand on her back and looked to her husband. His arms were crossed over his chest. The hand remained. She took a step backwards and glanced behind. On the other side of the cemetery fence there was an old, white, Labrador. He stood there until they made eye contact, then ran away.

Peripheral Vision

Mary Pomfret

The old fly-wire door springs open and bangs back against the wall. Alice rushes in and flings her schoolbag down with a thud on the wooden floorboards.

‘Mum, guess what? You’ll never guess,’ she gushes. ‘I was a bull’s-eye today, Mum. A bull’s-eye!’

‘And what, may I ask, is a bull’s-eye? And shut the door—you’re letting all the flies in,’ I say.

‘A bull’s-eye, Mum,’ says Alice, pulling herself up to her full height, ‘is someone who is always at the centre of things, a person who everyone likes. We had to do this chart and say where we belonged in the group at school. I put myself right in the middle. That’s me there, see,’ she says, holding her chart and pointing.

‘All the nerds and dorky kids put themselves on the very outside ring. I reckon they did that just to make everyone feel sorry for them.’

I open the fridge and see the can of beer sitting there, beckoning me like a friend. I take it out and pull back the ring top. Three thirty-five—a bit early maybe. Lois, my neighbor, had offered me one for morning tea last Saturday. Nothing too unusual in Darwin.

‘Some kids can’t help being dorks—I think I was one,’ I say.

She hasn’t heard me, and I’m glad. She skips down the passage, blonde curls bobbing.

‘Just ringing Susie, Mum,’ she calls.

Me at her age—long, dark lanky locks, skinny legs, hand-me-down school uniform, too short. Nothing like my little princess with her shining curls and heart-shaped dimpled face.

I pour the beer into a frosty glass and wipe the sweat from my oily face with the wet flannel I keep in the fridge. No chance of wearing make-up at this time of year. Clouds are building outside and the smell of the fickle rain is in the air. I take a gulp of beer, lick the frothy moustache from my upper lip and begin flouring the barramundi for tea.

Later, when Alice is softly sleeping, I sit on the creaky old cane chair on the front verandah. Now onto my second glass of red for the evening, I take a long sip. The cicadas are louder than usual tonight. The foetid, humid air that has settled on me, weighs down on me, takes hold. The booze helps.

As always, I start thinking of Jim. It was okay at first I guess, but it got so that he was drunk most of the time. I don’t think he knew who I was in the end, or even cared for that matter. It was when he started peeing in the corner in the middle of the night that I couldn’t stand it anymore. He must have known, because one morning he just got up, packed his bag, got in his ute and never came back. Didn’t even take his dog. Two years it’s been now. Sometimes it is hard to know if I’ve been any happier since we’ve been apart. Lonely with him, lonely without him.

When was the last time anyone invited me out? There was the Tupperware party last month, the wine and cheese night at the school at the end of last year and, oh yes, the book club, of course. But never any personal invitations. If the phone rings at all these days, it’s for Alice, or the library to let me know my books are over-due.

But life won’t be like that for Alice. She won’t live on the periphery, always skirting around the edges, making the best of things, waiting for things to get better. No. Not Alice.

Will anyone ever ask me out anywhere again? I look down at my cracked heels and my unpainted toenails. I used to despise

feet like these—old duck’s feet I would have called them once. Old duck’s feet—don’t-care-any-more-feet. I slide my worn thongs off and fan my dress between my legs. The cicadas are getting louder. Must be their mating cry—their love song.

My friend Maggie says, ‘You can always tell if a woman is sexually active by her feet. No woman in her right mind would go to bed with a man without her toenails painted.’ Maggie’s toenails are always painted a glossy red to match her perfectly manicured hands.

The cicadas are deafening now and I swat a mosquito on my arm. It’s drawn blood. I wipe my forehead with the back of my hand and pick up a book from the table, the latest high-brow offering from the book club. A new and up-coming author apparently. Maggie said it’s rich in symbolism and to really appreciate it you need to understand mythology.

Not really my style. Neither is the book club for that matter, but Maggie said it would be good for me. ‘You never know who you might meet,’ she said.

It’s an all-women show except for a solitary man, solitary in more ways than one. Don has a long grey beard and wears socks and sandals all year round—wet season or dry. He sits next to me sometimes and smells of dope and musty sheets that have been stored away for a long time. He rarely speaks—just sits there with a half-smile on his face, looking as if he knows something that we all don’t. At supper time he piles a huge plateful of whatever is going, and his beard is full of crumbs by the end of the night. Actually, he did speak to me once. He looked into my eyes and said, ‘Have you ever read Proust?’

Not knowing how to respond, I looked down at the carpet and noticed that his big toe was poking through a hole in his sock.

‘I think he likes you,’ one of the women whispered to me behind her hand.

A crack of lightning stirs me from my thoughts—it’s only teasing. The build-up has been going on for weeks now. Night

after night I sit on this verandah. And still no rain.

The mosquitoes are becoming vicious. I reach for the spray can and douse myself with pungent-smelling repellent. Thunder claps loudly in the distance, Jim's old blue heeler whimpers at my feet and I pour myself another glass from the cask. The wine makes it easier to breathe the hot heavy air.

One of the neighbours is playing old records. Scratched and squeaky melodies of the sixties come from his window every Friday night. Tonight, he plays The Ballad of Easy Rider over and over.

The cicadas rise to a crescendo. Rain starts to tap on the roof, slowly at first and then gathering pace. Rain—can it really be rain? It taunts you like this sometimes, though—a few drops and then it stops. But no, it keeps coming down hard and fast and splashes at me. The flame of the citronella candle flickers and goes out and I pick up my glass and walk inside.

A huge black moth is plastered to the lounge-room wall like a crucifixion figure and the ceiling fan turns with a relentless hum. Alice, asleep on the couch, her face innocent and serene in the amber glow of the table lamp, breathes softly, undisturbed.

Sitting down on the rug beside her, I stare into her sleeping face. I feel my body grow heavy and I lean against the couch, close my eyes, drift.

In a rosy haze I see her, a woman now, laughing and dancing in a field of lilies and butterflies, golden hair flowing down her back, her long white dress clouding around her like smoke.

Thunder rouses me from my reverie, and the smell of the rain draws me to the window. The waxy leaves of the tiger lilies shine in the light of the street lamp above—heart-shaped mirrors, waving to me in the wind. I see a face in the fly-spotted window—a middle-aged woman, lined skin and lank silver hair, medusa-like. The rain deluges now, like boulders on the roof.

I move away from the window, cover Alice with a sheet, bend down to kiss her cheek and just catch the sweet smell of her breath. I make my way down the hallway to bed.

Centuries later, my heavy eyelids open to see Alice's face looking down at me in the morning light. I reach for a glass of water to quench my burning thirst and to moisten my putrid mouth.

'I dreamt about you last night, Mum,' she says.

'Did you sweetheart?'

'Yes, Mum. I saw you dancing on your wedding day in a field of lilies. You were lovely, Mum.'

'Oh', I say, rubbing my eyes. 'How strange. I thought that was my dream.'

I pull on my black silk kimono, the hemline tattered, rotted away by the dank mould-ridden air of six Darwin wet seasons. My kimono was beautiful once.

I switch on the kettle and make a cup of Earl Grey tea. The fragrance of the hot amber liquid stirs my senses awake and I light a stick of incense and push it into a plant pot on the kitchen bench. The scent of sandalwood permeates the kitchen and the smoke wafts upwards in a faint spiral.

A frangipani tree overhangs the verandah. I take my tea out to the verandah and sit under the branches. A blossom—velvet white petals with deep yellow centre—falls at my feet and I reach down for it and put it behind my ear. Lois is in her driveway, unloading her shopping. She carries a carton of Foster's under one arm and waves to me.

'Not drowning,' I call to her, waving back.

'That's good,' Lois yells over the bougainvillea-laden fence.

The warm sweet tea glides down my throat. Above me in the branches of the frangipani tree, a spider has spun a huge gossamer-like web, seeded with raindrops. Oblivious to me, the black spider is posed dead centre in its own constructed world.

Alice is running around the garden with her friends, laughing loudly and calling, 'I'm a bulls-eye, I'm a bull's-eye.'

For a moment I close my eyes and breathe in the morning air, so fresh now that the wet has finally come.

The insistent ring of the telephone distracts me. I walk barefoot

on the floorboards and catch it just before it rings out.

'Hello.'

'This is Don... you know... from the book club.'

'Oh, hello.'

'Would you like to go to a movie tonight?'

'A movie?'

'Yes,' he says, 'a movie.'

'With you?' I say.

'Yes, with me.'

I put the phone down and feeling strangely lighter, I look at myself in the bathroom mirror. I pull my hair into a clip and smooth my hands over my face. Somehow the lines don't look so deep this morning, the shadows not so dark. Rummaging in the back of the bathroom cupboard, I pull out an old pumice-stone and a bottle of nail varnish, sit down on the edge of the bath and start scrubbing my feet.

Going Home

Penelope Sell

His marriage had been one of endurance. There had been a way of life, an expectation—work and provide. It had mattered at the time but now he felt an urgent need for change. When their son left he told his New Zealand wife he wanted to go back to Australia. She simply nodded as if she'd been waiting for it; she wouldn't be going with him.

There was no longer anyone he knew in Romsey. It was a different place from the one in his memory and there was nothing left of what could be called home. During his absence, Romsey had been populated by young families looking for housing cheaper than the city, and the old families had passed on or moved away. His father had died when he was just twenty and his mother was now ensconced in a retirement village in an outer-Melbourne suburb. When Dan went back he visited her, imagining on the train the kind of conversation they might have, but when he got there she seemed distant and only spoke of the weather and the food in the place. She did not embrace him. He did not embrace her. Hugs were not done in his family. She asked him nothing about his life and when he mentioned his son and the wife he had left, she'd turned away, disengaged, as if these things did not concern her. She was a stranger to him now, maybe to herself as well. The thought frightened him. He left that day not wanting to ever return.

Unsure now how long he would stay, unsure what he was even doing there, Dan rented a little cottage on a dirt road which

branched off the highway and went nowhere. The house opposite him was occupied by an elderly man who spent many hours in the garden. Dan found work in the petrol station where he stood behind the counter watching people drive in from other places, fill up their tanks, leave again. He would think about New Zealand and wonder if he'd done the right thing by coming back. He missed his workmates, their jibes about being Australian. It had given him an identity at least. Here, he was just the same as everybody else. On his days off he would sometimes browse through the opportunity shop

At times he felt overwhelmed with a sense of dislocation, as if his environment had taken on an indifference so profound it was almost hostile. He would sit at his dining table and look out at the house opposite; the man gardening if he was there, the dirt road that went nowhere, and he would try to ignore the foreboding. Perhaps it was his job. At the timber company in New Zealand he had overseen the comings and goings of planks of wood. There was an importance to it, a worldliness in the ships that carried the wood away. You could always feel the edges of New Zealand, always sense the sea. Here the land was vast and flat. It had its own beauty, something to do with endurance. And this is what he must do—endure, still. He looked forward to bed-time. Sleep was a relief.

One day in the opportunity shop he saw that a dictionary had arrived. It was on the floor, fat and comprehensive: an adult dictionary. There was no price on it and the ladies who worked there gave it to him for fifty cents. He tucked it under his arm and hefted its weight proudly as he walked home, smug with the bargain. He put it on the dining-room table and as the days passed he found himself reading the definitions of ordinary words, finding they meant more than he realised, occasionally meaning something quite different to what he had previously thought.

forgetting:

1. *To lose the remembrance of: let go from the memory: be unable to think of or recall.*

Romsey. Why was he here? What had been forgotten? He was grimly aware that place is only place, time only time. What

had been forgotten went deeper than that. Wonder perhaps. The wonder of a small boy.

He began to read the dictionary each night, consulting it as a religious person might consult the Bible—re-defining his vocabulary, re-defining his life.

way:

1. *A thoroughfare used or designed for travelling or transportation from place to place.*

Ships carrying wood. Cars travelling on highways.

2. *A non-spatial course leading toward a stated or implied objective.*
Peace. Calm.

3. *The opportunity, capability, or fact of doing as one pleases.*

My way.

There were more; that small, three letter word took up two and a half columns. It was a big word.

For a while he felt a little better.

It didn't last.

removed:

1. *Distant in degree of relationship.*

He looked listlessly out of the window. The old man opposite was tending his garden, clipping back a bush. The sound of his clippers was comforting in the quiet evening. He hadn't ever seen any visitors at the old man's place. He should approach him, perhaps, ask him over for a drink, maybe. Later. Yes. He would ask his neighbour over for a cup of tea.

approach:

To come or go nearer to in place or time.

Nearer to what? Just nearer. Further from removed.

Perhaps the man was lonely too. He was counting on it.

In anticipation of his saying yes, Dan began to clean up his house. It had become messy, as housework had been lumped into that part of life that was endless and futile. He found, however, that there was an element of satisfaction in cleaning up, in making a surface free of clutter, free of dust. He wanted to show the man that he was able, in the same way others were able, to keep a clean house. He wanted to show that he was not alone because he was lost, or mad, or difficult to get on with, or had lost the battle with the mediocrity of life. He wanted to show... himself...

to someone. It would make life more real, he thought. It would make it more interesting.

real:

1. *Of or relating to things themselves ... Not merely apparent: actual, true.*

He thought on this definition for a long time. It made him think of his son.

Dan imagined his guest sitting at the table. They could talk about the dictionary perhaps, have a conversation.

conversation:

1. *frequent abode in a place, intercourse, manner of life.*

2. *the action of living, associating, or having dealings with others.*

3. *sexual intercourse.*

4. *oral exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, ideas.*

His old definition, his only definition, was number four on the list.

From his window, Dan stared. It was late afternoon; faint cloud hovered on the horizon; the air was still. The man was laying mulch on his garden bed. Dan drew breath, gathered courage, and stepped out. He had not done anything like this ever before in his life.

‘Hello there.’

The man glanced up, held his back as he straightened to meet him, and smiled. It was a kind and generous smile that transformed his face.

Dan was taken aback by it. ‘Hi ... er... my name is Dan. I live over the road there.’ He indicated the house with his thumb.

‘Yes, I’ve seen you. Michael —’ The man held out his hand.

They shook. Could it be this easy? Yes, it could. Of course it could.

‘I used to live here,’ Dan continued, ‘as a boy.’

‘Oh! What’s the surname then?’

‘Sutherland.’

‘Oh...’ the man thought on it. ‘Can’t say it rings a bell.’

‘No, never mind... nice garden you have.’

‘Yes. Thank you. Keeps me busy. So you’ve come back home then?’

‘I suppose so. I’ve been living in New Zealand.’

'They say it's a nice place. Clean and green.'

'Well, not really. I worked for a logging mill.'

Michael smiled. 'Right. Well, it's changed around here.'

'Yes.'

They faced each other.

'Look, ah... I was wondering, perhaps, you know... if you wanted to... you might want to come over for a cup of tea, or something, some time.'

Uncertainty crossed Michael's face, a slight frown and a brief, puzzled look.

'Well ... I suppose that would be all right. Yes, I suppose I could.' Michael kept his eye on his visitor. 'A cup of tea you say? Sure. Why not?'

'Great.'

They paused.

'Ah... how about this evening then? After you've finished your gardening perhaps?'

'All right. Sure. Why not?'

'Good. Well, whenever you like.'

'I'll pop over later on.'

'Great.'

Dan showed Michael through his clean and basic cottage and the yard that was not a garden. Over their cups of tea Dan asked about Michael's past. There had been a wife, and there was still a daughter. The wife had passed away ten years ago.

'And your daughter?'

'Well...' Michael seemed hesitant to answer. 'She's in marketing. She's a busy thing. I don't see that much of her.'

'Like my son. He's on the other side of the world.'

'Does he know you're here?'

'Oh yes. I wrote and told him. I can only presume he got it. Could have moved for all I know.'

'Yes. They do that these days. Move around a lot. All over the world.'

'Whereabouts is your daughter?'

'In Sydney.'

'She has family of her own?'

'No children. Married though. I didn't go to the wedding. We

kind-of had a falling out.' He upturned his palms in exasperation then added, 'It was her mother. She never got on with Mum. But she's doing well I believe.'

'Yes,' said Dan, sympathetically. 'They are busy, the children.'

'Yes.'

The visit was pleasant, lasting over an hour. Dan was left with a feeling of accomplishment, warmth even.

He came again a few weeks later and Dan told him about the dictionary and the words he'd discovered.

Michael listened carefully, nodding, understanding, then he returned to the other day. 'You know, when we talked about our kids... I should have added that I regret it... not keeping in touch with my daughter.'

'Why don't you write to her?'

'I did. She didn't reply.' He looked at Dan with hopelessness in his eyes. Dan looked away, embarrassed.

'I know how that feels,' he eventually said. 'Losing touch. It's odd, isn't it.'

'I'm not going to try again. I have my pride. You should try with your son though. Maybe it's not too late.'

'Yes, I suppose you're right. I'll try again. I'll write.'

When Michael came a third time it was not at Dan's invitation. On the doorstep he seemed anxious to talk. He looked older, Dan thought, and thinner.

Michael sat at the table and opened the dictionary, glancing through it while Dan made the tea.

'You know,' he said, as Dan came in with the cups, 'My wife and I... we never really talked about the garden, even though we were out in it all the time. We never talked about it actually growing.'

Dan waited.

'I mean, we talked about it of course. What to plant where, that kind of stuff... but we never mentioned the actual *glory* of it all. The *continuance*. There's a word for you. The way it returns, the way the flowers keep coming up, year after year. It's amazing... they just... look after themselves.'

‘With a little help from you, no doubt.’

‘A little. Not much. You know your son may not have got that letter. You wouldn’t want to let it all go. When your family goes to seed it’s different, it’s not like the flowers. They don’t come back, they just wither away.’

Dan thought on this—his mother, his wife, his son. ‘You’re right, there.’

He passed him the cup and detected a tear welling in the corner of Michael’s eye. They said little as they drank their tea, Michael in a kind of reverie, and Dan letting him be, sensing he simply needed company.

Dan was on his way to work the next time he saw Michael at the fence. Michael said he’d been feeling unwell. He said that he would have to wait a bit, before visiting again. Dan nodded, offered a helping hand if he needed it, then carried on his way.

He didn’t see him for weeks. He kept a lookout from his window but he didn’t see him in the garden. There was the back of the place too, he thought: no doubt that needed work as well. He began another letter to his son, but discontinued it mid-way, unsure what to say, unsure what mattered, unsure of everything. He carried on with his day-to-day at the service station, and the dictionary remained shut while he read a book about a retired prime minister.

It was on a Saturday when he thought it was time to go and check on Michael. There was no answer at the front door so he went around the back and knocked again. No answer there either. He could hear something, a faint buzzing coming from inside the house. He peered through the window and saw Michael slumped over the table, a black cloud of flies swarming around his head.

He went in, choked for breath from the stench, fanned the flies away. There was a piece of paper cast aside with some writing on it. Damn, Dan thought, furious at himself for taking so long to visit. He saw his own name at the top of the paper and grabbed it before leaving the house. Outside the back door, where he could breathe again, he read:

110 - Scintillae 2012

*Dear Dan,
I'm dying. Please forgive me for not telling you about my
illness. I didn't want it becoming something to talk about. I
very much enjoyed*

Dan stood silent for a while, looking out at Michael's garden, the trees and flowers, a green sanctuary in a town that was drying up from drought. He fought the urge to cry as he walked towards the police station, the letter in his hand. Further up the dirt road he stopped and read it again and found his hands were shaking. When finished he gently folded it and slipped it into his shirt pocket. With a need to sit down he looked around for a seat but there was none, just the shops ahead, the highway of his home town, and the dusty road he stood on.

All dictionary definitions taken from Webster's Third New International Dictionary 1966.

Darwin's Butterfly

R. I. Sutton

How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?
William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

The story goes that the esteemed scientist, Charles Darwin could not stand the butterfly. For by its vivid beauty, by its brilliant raiment and languid flight—in short, by its very existence—this small and subtle creature threatened the bedrock of his life's work. Such is the nature of the small and beautiful, to slip past the snares of the mind and reveal the moment as it truly is—as a gift, as intervention.

It was the chimneys that stirred him the most—the way they seemed almost reptilian against the leaden sky, when he knew them to have been the nurses of his youth. Beneath them his family had grown and gathered; about them were formed some of his closest memories. But now standing before him, as razed and dirty as a blacksmith's furnace, was his family's kitchen stove where, on long-ago winter days, the cook had warmed and fed him between meals. And there, across a mound of fallen bricks, stood the drawing-room hearth, where his father had smoked his pipe before the fire. Yet now, but for these pillars thrusting here and there like smokestacks, all was dust, all was ashes, for the fire had taken care of all.

He blinked and sniffed the saline from behind his eyes. He had thought he would be all right, that he would look upon

the ruin as he might a beetle pinned beneath glass. But he had not accounted for these memories rushing to engulf him, had forgotten the stupor of the senses on the brain. And now, as these ghosts flitted among the wreckage like dispossessed moths—his mother warming her pale hands, his brother scaling the stairs—he wondered if he might be losing his mind.

It was not the first time he had wondered. Lately his dreams had become strange, disturbing his sleep, and his thoughts seemed to wander odd pathways. Those little happenings to which he had in the past given not a second thought had taken on whole new significance, preoccupying him for hours. Only this morning his little granddaughter had confounded him with something she had said, and he had been thinking of it ever since.

She came to sit on his lap as he read by the window, content to watch him scan the morning paper. And then, after sitting quiet for a time, she sat up and cried, 'The moon, grandpa—I can see the moon!'

'Where?' he asked, squinting through the panes of the window.

'No, not out there,' she said, 'here.' She held his hands before his eyes, straightening his bony fingers with her own. It was to his nails that she pointed, to the pale pink crescents rising from their base. 'See here,' she said as she pointed from his little finger to his thumb. 'Here the moon is waxing, and here,' she said, stopping at his thumb, 'it is full'. 'And there,' she said, drawing her finger over his right hand, 'it gets smaller and smaller until it disappears!' She smiled as though she had shared with him a wonderful secret. 'All the faces of the moon, grandpa,' she said, spreading her hands over his, '—they're all here, on our fingers and toes! Isn't that amazing?'

He thought of her face now, of how the light had gone from it as he pulled his hands away and said, 'They are Lunulae, child—the nails' new growth. Beyond their name—from the Latin luna—they have nothing to do with the moon, nothing at all...'

It troubled him, recalling this, but for the life of him, he could not think why. He looked at the girl now, picking among

the wreckage with a broken tree-branch. He had insisted on bringing her against his wife's wishes, had thought it would be a valuable demonstration of the transient nature of things. His wife had worried that the spectacle would frighten her, but as he considered the girl, as incongruous as a dove in a war zone, he recognised in her neither cognisance nor fear. Rather, she wandered through the ashes like a comber at the beach, alert, relaxed—indeed, entranced by it all.

Seeing her so carefree reminded him of his own youth—here on the estate. He and his siblings had been allowed the run of the place. They were free to roam anywhere—except for the walled kitchen garden, which was the province of the cook. Here they could enter only when the woman was around to keep an eye on them, for she did not trust them to leave the household produce. But the reason she gave them was different. He could still see her in her great white apron, as rigid as a guardian before the stove. She wore the key to the garden on a chain around her neck, and here it stayed unless one of two occasions arose—when she was entering the garden itself, or when she was talking about it.

'How can I be sound of mind with the garden open an' you childes in it, lost as lambs a-fleein' from the Lord?' She leaned over him, the hefty key poised like a sword. 'There be fell things in there, lad,' she said, her eyes full of deadly certitude, '—fell an' beautiful things. 'Tis no place for elders, much less wee-uns.'

It had been his favorite place that—the kitchen garden. He recalled the cool darkness of the fig trees, the burgundy glow of the plum. He remembered the orchard during the summer, the green and gold and red of it beneath the dreaming sky. Within those walls the rose had grown by the vine, the herb among the fare; there the beds had ambled, not marched. By night he would climb the wall and gaze down into it like an exile at the border of a forbidden land. He would watch the moonlight meeting the shapes of the fish in the pond, imagining things in the dark and pensive places. And when he left to return to the house, in spite of the fruit gathered with his pilfering stick, he would leave

dissatisfied, for the way inside was always too far down.

He looked up from his reverie to follow the fire's course eastward. The ash pooled at the foundations of the house like a black hole, dwindling just short of the sturdy garden wall. The high oaken door to it was closed, and, he imagined, had not been opened for many a year, yet he knew that life continued within, for trees rose above it, and the ivy swayed on the bricks like many beckoning hands.

Sensing someone beside him, he looked down and saw his granddaughter there. 'Was this your home once, grandpa?' she asked.

He gave her what he hoped was an easy smile. 'Once, a long time ago, child, yes.'

'What happened?' she asked.

Her expression seemed felicitous, sad. He wondered if she had learnt it from his wife. 'The caretaker's fire got out of hand... burnt the place to the ground...' He could not keep the bitterness from his voice; clearing his throat, he turned away.

'No,' she said, shaking her head, 'I mean, why did you leave?'

'Oh,' he said. He adjusted his feet on the ash, trying to hide his irritation. The child did not seem to see the destruction about her, cared only for the sentiment of the place. He regretted bringing her here, regretted his own hopes for broadening her capacity. 'I left when I was about your age,' he explained, '—for boarding school. When I was old enough to live by myself I stayed on at university in the city. This place became mine when my father—your great-grandfather—died, but I had no use for it then. So I hired the caretaker.'

'You must have been sad, grandpa,' she said, '—when you left this place. With the stables and the trees and all the pretty gardens, you must have missed it so much.'

He looked around the grounds, and as he did a great weight seemed to settle upon him so that his two feet and his walking stick together felt like a tripod upholding the sky. He saw that where once the ancient oaks had risen beside the coach-way, now

remained but charred and broken stumps. And there, where in his youth had spanned the green sweep of the estate, now swept a black and wild allotment. Finally his gaze settled once more on the walled kitchen garden, and as it did the place took on a soft quality, as though he saw it through a fine mist of rain.

He was about to answer the child, to dismiss her, when a memory came to him. After his mother had died his father had insisted that boarding school was best for a boy of his age, refusing his pleas to be tutored at home as the girls were. And so, in his misery he had fled, running past the cook to hide in the kitchen garden among the branches of the fig.

The cook came to stand beneath the tree with her hands on her hips. 'Tis a queer thing,' she said, 'with the fig a-moanin' an' there being no wind! 'Tis a sad tree indeed to sob an' wail so...'

'It isn't the tree,' he yelled, 'it's me!'

'Och, but is there a childe in it then?' she called. 'An' here I was thinkin' Adam an' Eve returned to pluck his leaves for shame! Come down, childe, come down an' tell us what's wrong.'

'I'm not coming down,' he yelled, wrapping his legs around the trunk. 'I'm staying right here—for ever and ever!'

He shook his head and looked down at his granddaughter. 'Yes,' he said finally with a brittle smile, '...yes, I suppose I did miss it when I left.'

He was wondering how he might distract the child when he felt her suddenly clutch his hand. 'Look grandpa,' she cried, 'look!'

Blinking his eyes to clear them, he glanced up to see that the sun had found a portal in the cloudy sky. But what was strange, what he had not noticed before, was the thing it illuminated—a multitude of white flowers had somehow broken through the ash. As the breeze caught them they glimmered in the afternoon sun, for all the world like stars shining on the ocean of night. And then, as he stared more closely and more closely still, he saw that the ground itself glittered, for embedded in the earth

were a million points of light. He felt as though he stood upon the speckled night sky, as though the universe stretched on and on around him. But with his wonder came a queer sense of vertigo and he stumbled, leaning heavily on the child. As he righted himself the sun disappeared once more, smothering the illusion before his eyes.

Brushing the child's hand from his, he bent to examine the earth. 'Ah,' he said, 'ah, yes...' He plucked a flower and a handful of ash from the ground and held them before the girl. 'The light is refracted from particles of glass—the windows shattered by the heat. And this,' he said, shaking the bloom, 'is chickweed—very hardy, but worth little to all but the bees.'

'And the butterflies?' asked the girl, and as he looked he saw that, indeed, a host of fluttering shapes danced the blackened field below.

'Yes...' he replied, dropping the flower at his feet, '...and the butterflies.'

He watched the child run off in pursuit of them and allowed the ash to trickle through his fingers. He felt immeasurably tired, like a stronghold that had been under siege for too long. He wished to surrender, to throw wide his gates and lower the drawbridge, but to what, or whom, he did not know. Like a bird that had been caged for far too long, he was suspicious of all outside, though the door stood open and the way was clear.

He sighed and brushed off his trousers. He did not like this strange turn his thoughts had taken—birds and strongholds, symbols and metaphors. It was not logical. He did not like to think he had been wrong.

And then, so unexpectedly that he stood stricken for a moment, the rest of his memory came back to him, so clearly that it seemed to have happened not a minute before...

The cook stood beneath the fig, her hands on her hips. 'But you cannae be stayin' up there,' she said, '—with the wren out an' he bein' so fine.'

'I'm not coming down!' he shouted, turning his face from her.

'Well lad,' she said, dropping her hands, 'suit yourself...but as for me—I'm goin' to catch me a wish. He grants them, you know—the king of the birds...'

The cook had barely left the fig's span of branches when he was down the tree and beside her, peering through the leaves. 'Will he grant more than one?' he asked as they came to a raspberry thicket growing along the wall. After watching for a moment and listening to the sweet trickle of birdsong, a glimmer caught his eye. And then he saw it—a tiny bird of impossible blue.

'Well,' whispered the cook, smiling at the wren's dancing course, 'that depends on whether you can catch him more than once...'

'Catch him!' he cried, his voice startling the bird so that it flew away. 'That's impossible!' And then, before he could stop it, before he even knew it was coming, he was crying, and the cook's arms were around him, and he wept into her breast.

'Now you listen to me, lad,' she said. 'I know you don't want to leave here, an' that's fair. But as to comin' back—that's up to you. An' when I say catchin' the wren that's what I mean—when you're far away an' alone, all you need do is think of him an' you'll be here, back here in the garden with the trees an' the birds an' all the happy flowers all around you.'

'I don't believe it,' he said, pulling away, '—it's not true! There'll be crowds and buildings and horrible paved streets... I'll want to die.'

The cook smiled and her eyes grew vague, as though she saw beyond him, to somewhere far away. 'I know what you mean, childe' she said '—believe me, I do. You see, you're not the only one who's had to leave a life behind. But I'll tell you a secret if you promise to keep it to yourself, an' that's this. In my grandmother's time it was the way of our people to hide great wisdom in verse. So that, wherever we went—even be it an ocean away—we carried our home with us, in our hearts an' in our heads. An' so,' she said, 'goin' back was as simple as a song—or a poem, if you like.'

'Like a prayer?' he asked, remembering the one he recited before bed.

'Aye,' she said, 'just like a prayer.'

'Will you teach me one?'

His hands tightened on his cane and he frowned. Here his memory failed him, for though the cook had taught him, though she had gone over it with him, again and again, he could not remember the song. All he knew was that the verse had been rustic and crude—probably some extract from an old peasant hymn—that there had been something in it about the onslaught of winter and the desolation of the land...and something about the wren...

And then it came back to him—the last two lines.

'For those whose sight on God doth dwell,

The wren is in the garden, all is well.'

God—the idea hung in his mind like a star in the night sky. For him, trying to think of such a thing as God was like trying to grasp an ungraspable concept like that of infinity, of space. Whenever he tried he felt himself hurtling as though through a void—a feeling he imagined synonymous with death. He could not imagine how one could have the kind of indelible certitude that the cook did; it seemed to him naïve, yet in a strange way, profound. All he knew was that, when it came to the existence of God, he did not know. He did not believe that anyone could know—could not see how one could ever know...

He looked at his granddaughter and felt immediately at ease. The child had again assumed her tree-branch and her search among the ruin. He smiled as he again saw how incongruous she looked—like a ballerina in a rubbish dump. She was a delight to him, this girl, in spite of her carefree ways. In fact, he mused, she was a paradox, for it seemed to him that it was because of her happiness, her spontaneity, that he was both irritated and comforted in her presence. He felt old when he looked at her but she made him feel young; he was incensed by her idle lack of

logic but she caused him to dream. She pulled him this way and that as though he was a ragged piece of cloth on a swift autumn breeze. He never knew where she might lead him.

As he watched her, she stooped, picked something from the earth and straightened. And then she was running towards him, an object glimmering in her hand. 'Grandpa,' she cried, 'look what I found!'

It was a key.

Soldier Street

Carmel Williams

I wish they had told me... in the early fifties that all I needed was an adjustment of my own vision to see that what I thought of as a boring place, and an ordinary and uninteresting family, was full of hidden secrets and a strangeness that I would never get to the end of.

David Malouf, *The Age* 2010

We came when I was four. It wasn't a street, just a dirt track, mud in winter red dust in summer wandering down through bush and blackberries. That first winter my feet slicked through the condensation on the rose-patterned lino in my bedroom and in the mornings the first sound I heard was the crack of nails being hammered home and trees being sawn into beams for the new town.

Other sorts of people lived in the old town, people whose lives hadn't stopped for the war, who had plaster plant pots and brick fences and houses with more than four rooms, who didn't have a shrapnel-leg or a hook strapped onto the place where a hand used to be.

Our house was one of the first to be finished; then it seemed that every day another one would push itself out of the bush as if a giant was playing with oversized toy town blocks. They were all the same, facing the wrong way my father said, Jerry-built my father said, as the green timber in the door frames bowed and the plaster popped out of rivet holes. Row after row, white with green-trimmed windows and iron rooves, two bedrooms, bathroom kitchen lounge.

Women tried to nest in them, to change the sameness with their own special touches. Homemade cushions and curtains in material ordered from the catalogue or sent on approval from the mercantile man. Bedrooms painted in the new colours of lilac and chartreuse with hand-dressed dolls sitting on chenille bedspreads.

The men joked about how a bloke could be caught in the wrong house, wrong bedroom even. Yes that could happen.

The house down past the quarry sprang up one night the same as the others but there was always something about it. It wasn't the outside or even the strangeness of the pictures on the walls; it was Gloria herself, Gloria Love.

Her husband's name was different to hers, ordinary like him.

Bert, Bert Lovick.

Bert worked at the timber mill and had a square head that his cap sat crooked on and blue eyes you could see yourself in if the sunlight was right. His hands always had bits of skin off them and long tunnels of bruising where splinters went in and festered. Once he had to call my father in the middle of the night to bring his medical bag because he'd fallen on a newly-sawn log and had a wood chip up his bum.

'Long as a marrow,' my father had told Mum when he got home in the early hours.

'Been in there for days: stupid bugger.'

Gloria's eyes were wide and black and her eyebrows were grey pencil-lines that arced across her forehead. Her lips were perfect bows of magenta even when she came out before the boys went to school to collect the milk bottles in her house coat. When I got to know her I loved to watch her in the winged dressing table mirror as she slicked the colour around her mouth, kissed her lips together at the refection, then slicked some more.

The first time I spoke to Gloria she was sitting on a deckchair in the front yard painting her toenails red, and had stuck bits of cotton wool between each toe.

I was walking home from school and my mother had told me that never under any circumstance should bathroom chores be performed in public.

Only common people did private things in public.

Looking at Gloria's toe nails waving their cotton-wool flags and glinting in the sun I was speechless with the thought of where this would sit on my mother's scale of commonness.

'Cat got your tongue?' she called out to me.

'G'day Mrs Lovik' I twitted, staring at the toes.

'Not bloody Lovick. That's Bert, I'm Love, Gloria Love,' she laughed and wiggled her feet in the air.

'You're the little kid from down the other end, Dotty? Dina?'

'Dora, Mrs Love, Dora Marjorie'

'Dora,' she screeched, 'who'd call a kid that. Bloody crack-jaw of a name.'

She leapt up and pranced over to the fence, her housecoat unbuttoned so you see all the way to her knees.

She peered into my face and asked again, 'who gave you that bloody ugly name?'

Without waiting for an answer she bounded back over the grass and swooped on something from underneath the deck chair.

'Come here,' she beckoned me to open the gate.

'C'mon I won't bite.'

I trotted across to where she stood and she reached to pull me closer.

She was tiny and my head came nearly to her bosom. When I looked up I could see the blue lace across the top of her petticoat. She had a smell like gardens in summer. Later she would tell me it was the only perfume for real women to wear.

Le Fleur Marguerite, The Marguerite Flower. She got it, she would tell me, straight from Paris France by mail order.

She screwed the top off a gold cylinder in her hand and smiled at me.

'Do this,' she said and stretched her mouth out wide.

I did as I was told and felt lipstick, warm and waxy as she dotted it along my mouth.

'Go ummm.'

She rolled her lips together to show me how, and as I copied her she stood back to see the effect.

'There,' she said clicking the lipstick back in its case, 'now you're Delilah...'

After that I couldn't get enough of her. As soon as I'd get home

from school I'd drop my bag and race back down the hill to her house. On hot days she would be in the deckchair in the shade of the lemon tree with her cigarettes and a glass of pick-me-up on the tray beside her.

'Hello, Delilah—see to the boys, then come and read.'

Her magazines would be strewn on the grass, *True Confessions*, *Movie News*, sometimes even *Pix* and *Post*. I never told anyone about the magazines, I knew somehow they belonged to a racier world than my mother's *Woman's Realm* or *Episcopal Monthly*.

'Seeing to the boys' meant getting Nigel and Robert a vegemite sandwich and a glass of milk and sending them out to play in the backyard sandpit. There was a year separating them but they were like twins, quiet, grey-eyed, with lisping whispers that they seemed to use only for each other or Mr Lovick.

When I'd finished, Gloria, she insisted on my calling her Gloria, 'just like girlfriends,' would wave her glass at me and I would refill from the jug in the fridge, get myself a cordial and sit next to her flicking through the pages of bathing beauties and juicy Hollywood gossip. She'd look over my shoulder until something caught her eye and then she would lie back, arms behind her head, eyes hidden behind pearly-winged sunglasses, and ask me to read it to her.

This was the way I learned the size of Marilyn Munroe's bust, how Diana Dors' beauty spot was drawn on with eyebrow pencil and that black suspender belts with real Chantilly lace could be mailed to your door in seven days wrapped in plain brown paper.

During those long afternoons as she lay listening to my voice weave through the words an evil imp inside me whispered that Gloria couldn't read, probably couldn't even spell. It tempted me to miss a line or two, make up a few whoppers, but I never did. I didn't ever want to find out that Gloria Love wasn't perfect.

Through dusty summers and chilblain-cold winters my life moved along with hers. I'd spend afternoons reading or playing dress-ups in her slinky city clothes that hung in the wardrobe under heavy calico bags. Our feet were the same size and I would mince around in her lizard-skin heels and fox furs pretending I was Lauren Bacall or Grace Kelly. Often as I rummaged through her things I'd find a bottle of pick-me-up crammed between tissue

paper or wedged at the bottom of a handbag, and if she was nearby she'd put her fingers across her lips and blow me a kiss

'Our secret,' she'd say.

We always finished our days by playing ladies in the best room. Gloria would sit on the couch with her glass and ciggies balanced on the arm. I would perch on the footstool arranging my finery and stretching my calves out along the mat to get the full effect of my slinky shoes. She wouldn't talk much, just sip and gaze up at the pictures of herself, now and then tapping her fingernails on the armrest and flicking her lighter on and off.

Three photos hung above the fireplace in a spot where the other houses had thick square mirrors or china ducks that flew endlessly towards the ceilings. The photos seemed to be the same until you looked closely and saw a different tilt of her head or a slanting light on her cheek.

All three were of Gloria Love without any clothes on. In them she was standing next to a pedestal with a spiky plant on top. She had one arm above her head and a veil draped across her neck and over her hair. The veil didn't cover her bosom but there was foggy smoke across her other lady parts that trailed out behind and stopped at her ankles. Her face was turned to the side but you could see her cupid's-bow lips outlined in sepia.

The first time I'd looked at them I'd squeaked with shock. 'They're... they're ... rude.'

'They're art, you silly little Christian,' she'd laughed, before standing and drawing down on her cigarette.

'That's me when I was alive.'

Buds grew out of my chest one winter and my mother nagged me about what she called my sulky turns. I went to the church camp and played cricket on Dennis Cooper's team wondering why I'd never noticed that his hair wasn't bluey red but a pale sort of amber that glittered as we sat, knees brushing in the light of the camp fire.

I hardly thought about Gloria and when the days began to widen out into spring I opened her gate one afternoon and stood staring at the overgrown grass and the dead geraniums by the front door.

When I asked my mother about it her mouth drew in like a

stringed purse and she hammered at her scone dough with floured fists.

News travelled out of the kitchens and down the tracks of the town, sniggering behind the sugar bins at the Co-Op and bubbling around the urn at Saturday cricket. *Mrs Fancy-Pants. Left him high and dry. Those poor little kiddies. Modelling. Hah. Streets of St Kilda more likely.*

That year my mother bought me my first lipstick. Pastel Haze, pale and insipid as virtue. I threw it in the Quarry and shoplifted one from the emporium.

Standing naked in my bedroom I smeared Magenta over my mouth and raising an arm above my head, preened in front of the window so the light slanted on Delilah's breasts and blotted out the darkness that was Soldier Street.

Poetry

Seagrass Poems

Miranda Aitken

i.

The jetty extends like a hand,
creeps finger-like through
swell and salt and sand
to hold fast.

ii.

Listen now to this place;
to the combing of seagrass and the shifting sand.
Be water, drink in the light!
The bay is becoming itself, and the jetty is lending a hand.

iii.

On the jetty we walk like Jesus
and the bay is a fish's eye.

Untitled # 1

Jan Bayliss

night coolness

grass-whispers to the moon

frail, sweet, as lovers' vows

All Souls

Julia Birch

She watches as he hollows out the pumpkin,
scooping out the seeds and
the fibrous, complex mesh
with dexterous hands,
intent.

So he empties her,
ripping at her woven secrets
to reveal her bared flesh.

And she is laid out,
and gasps for air.

Water Supply

Neil Boyack

How many kids did she have?
eight? nine?
with six different dads?

I heard she moved to Avoca
then to Horsham, then Ballarat, then back
don't know where I heard that

when she was here
she lived near the water supply
in that red cedar dump
where cockatoos have eaten holes
septic rotted dry

over lamingtons, clicks of knitting
through the temple sweat of total fire ban
ladies at the CWA say *she* made the water dirty

the Historical Society
and the pub people said

she was the one who sullied the water

having men there on the bank of the reservoir
day and night
a witch's laugh
a boar's grunt

132 - Scintillae 2012

I grew up with her

her mum a drinker in the ancient cedar house of nagging boards
a lover of men, their trappings, structures
low quality serendipity

cock driven promises gave hope for seconds
the truth
a chore for next week
in underwear
half of the time

Crowing doors
leaky roof, defeated toilet
no fridge

we ran in and out of that house
like the men
and we used to bury bottles of cordial
in soft autumn dirt
then dig them up next day and drink

that was when we used to get rain

Barmah

(Murray River Camp – 1996)

Neil Boyack

A boar's head is mounted on the wall
high above the pool table
alongside record breaking cod, fresh water crays

Barmah Pub ceiling fans chop the hot air and the cob webs
moving the black hair
of the aboriginal women playing pool below

scars on their faces
beneath the heaviest February sweat
a pink line through the lips from the handlebars of a bike
a pink line on the forehead from a submerged log

the smiling, larger woman has red stilettos
the wiry woman bare feet

pool cues as guitars to AC/DC
cutting in at volume
from the sun stained jukebox

their kids in the corner with
crayons and lemonade
searching for space
in old colouring books

 through the window and over the road
 the river grooves the earth
 so humid, the birds are dead
only cicadas live

an aboriginal man lays on a patchwork car bonnet
beneath a block of river gums
instructing kids on how to kick the footy
sipping beer
loving things

Wind

Lesley Burston

She hunches in the wind,
Stumbling, shuffling along.
The swirling leaves all around
Dance in crazy patterns,
Softly touching her legs,
Floating to the ground.

Her hair blows sideways,
In a funny parting,
Coat flaps and flutters
At the hem, held fast with buttons.
Above, tree branches hiss,
With leftover leaves.

Her face scrunches up,
Against the onslaught of elements,
Water and wind so fresh,
So bitter, so icy—her memories,
Clear, concise,
Never ending.

Arthur on the Street

Rex quondam, rex que futurus

Brian Coman

Two-pot Vee of heavy grunt
Vestigial mudguards, back and front
Extended fork, obtusely strung
Saddle (king and queen) low slung
And so arranged to make a seat
Where buttocks barely skim the street.

The lumpy engine blats away
'Fire at will' the pistons say
Bearded rider, studded coat
Leather-cased from foot to throat
And arms, like circus monkey are
Hanging, ape-like, from the bar.

This is how the King will come
Not (as presumed) from Avalon
And now he shatters down the street
Where four Pale Riders come to meet
And then retire to a Knight's abode
Two-bedroom fibro, Commercial Road.

And when, perforce, the end is nigh
Arthur will untune the sky
Not with music, but obscene roar
Then, blessed silence evermore.

The Blue Dressing Gown

Ross Donlon

It hung in my boy's wardrobe,
an army regulation item
no one could throw out.

And it would be hard, wouldn't it,
to discard the only thing left
in something like the shape of him.

It hung on a wire hanger,
skeleton of his shoulder
cutting across collar bone,

the drape of it swinging side to side
if nudged into a shy dance,
or if asked up by a breeze.

I used to wear it, with no sense
of feeling weird or spooky,
alternating with a practical flannel,

yet at night sometimes woke
frightened by its doorway shadow,
a man hanging on the moon's hook.

I never realized I'd outgrown him
walking tall through one summer
while his shoulders rode my back.

The tassels swung like incense
as I walked in his shape
trying to sense the being inside him.

Midsummer Night

Ross Donlon

In Ålvik the festival of Midsummer Night is at eight o'clock
yet there's a sense of displacement or disorientation,
expectation of fantasy beneath a screen of fact.
We visitors want it to be midnight
but it's still broad daylight on an overcast day—
clouds like fallen towers edge along the fjord.
Fine films of rain keep the scene shifting,
new images drift over the wooden reels piled like an altar;
a foreshore pyre billows next to the town's fire truck;
a fireman in protective gear slews fuel on the flames.

We expected other signs along the fjord,
other torches along the picturesque rim,
other symbols as the night came on,
perhaps a romance of paganism,
primal fire before the light of Christianity,
but the water only smoked with rain.

Enough witches were burned in Christian Norway,
some in Bergen, eighteen once up north in Vardø
to warrant two monuments. Both are in the guides.
All were women condemned by strange weather,
town hysteria and the encouragement of torture.
Being Norway, there's an architect-designed
memorial in Vardø. The illusion of an empty chair
is consumed by flames inside a glass space,
as though regret for what happened in 1621
must be never ending, the constant, almost animate fire
more awful, more alive, than stone.

138 - Scintillae 2012

In Vardø only Ingeborg Kroll refused to confess
to flying, drowning sailors or having a tour of hell
before her body gave up to white hot iron,
her chest burning with sulphur.
Buried on an island opposite the gallows
the shape stretches like another judgment.

Children gather in the roped front row
sitting cross-legged, themselves tiny idols
who look up and down from the cameras
they nurse and touch as tenderly as manikins.

Most settle to watch the digital version
once removed from reality,
able to edit and save the furnace of wheels on fire.

Eventually the reels begin to topple
and roll into themselves.
Their round faces look up burning
before rows of screens, a smiling crowd,
and one thousand years of shadows
while small boys as ever cry,

More diesel. More diesel.

For Ingeborg Kroll

Childless

Tru Dowling

Dry in season, shrivels the womb
The drain of staining dark, air-bound
A shadow haunts an empty room

The spoils of expectation loom
Girth and breadth and depth rebound
Dry in season, shrivels the womb

Sheds each cycle of the moon
Loss's slippery slide impounds
A shadow haunts an empty room

Without consent, does a flower bloom?
Without the rain, what feeds its ground?
Dry in season, shrivels the womb

The light of seasons dulls to gloom
When chance slips past and time is wound
A shadow haunts an empty room

The taste of sweetness sours too soon
Love's honeyed voice a hollowed sound
Dry in season, shrivels the womb

Dual longing serves a solid tomb
Locked in their echoing each found
Dry in season, shrivels the womb
A shadow haunts an empty room

Dismantling Kitchen

- a meditation on ingredients

Tru Dowling

I.
his equipment is encrusted
with remnants of old creations—
powdered evidence of
a history formed in yeast and
grain, again and again, enfolding dawn

hours the dewy scents of seasonings,
seasons spiced and floured by
fragrant mornings filling
a space white
as a sheeted long table, chairs, roller
and mixing machines—

the used stainless
glints from tongues of sky-light
falling clean through
the work clearing
to pluck a polished spot,
and sounds a cha-cha seductive
as his two-step swivel

to flick a switch
to roll the dough,
and turn and shake
to roll again
expand and fold
and form a round

II.

in the corner, behind
closet doors, waiting
room shelves prove mounds
ripen, rise
like mushrooms after rain,
meditate existence, taste,
touch, a fading pungent odour...

his potter's hands will sculpt
each cob and scone
and currant-scattered scroll
etching petals and patterns, a patina
of sugared water
to glaze over fontanelles with a brisk
sweep back and forth

by the dozens, measured and dressed
for propriety, his appetite
renewed each day leaving behind
little scraps
of unmade desires

Minor Drag

Clayton Eshleman

The body piles at Abu-Ghraib,
apple-stacked asses like a gigantic Sadean sexual molecule
male all the way through,
the Caucasian subconscious unleashed on the brown body.

I walk Washtenaw Road,
a pupa in a Hydra-tainted imperial chrysalis.

Controlled demolition of the three Towers.
Controlled demolition of our Constitution.
Controlled demolition of our rights.
Controlled demolition of our environment.
Controlled demolition of our ice.

The missile that penetrated the Pentagon:
The Entry not of Christ
but Pat Robertson into Washington.

It is Alien o'clock.
When will the truth explode from Bush's chest?

For Ian Irvine, in Australia

The Tjurunga

Clayton Eshleman

begins as a digging stick, first thing the Aranda child picks up.
When he cries, he is said to be crying for
the tjurunga he lost
when he migrated into his mother.

Male elders later replace the mother with sub-incision.
The shaft of his penis slit, the boy incorporates his mother.

I had to create a totemic cluster in which imagination
could replace Indianapolis, to incorporate ancestor beings
who could give me the agility
—across the tjurunga spider's web—
to pick my way to her perilous center.

(So transformationally did she quiver,
adorned with hearts and hands,
cruciform, monumental, *Coatlicue*
understrapping fusion)

Theseus, a tiny male spider, enters a tri-level construction:
look down through the poem, you can see the labyrinth.
Look down through the labyrinth, you can see the web:

Coatlicue

sub-incision Bud Powell

César Vallejo

the bird-headed man

144 - Scintillae 2012

Like a mobile, this tjurunga shifts in the breeze,
beaming at the tossing
foreskin dinghies in which poets travel.

These nouns are also nodes in a constellation called Clayton's Tjurunga. The struts are threads in a web. There is a life blood flowing through these threads. *Coatlucue* flows into Bud Powell, César Vallejo into sub-incision. The bird-headed man floats right below
the pregnant spider
centered in the Tjurunga.

Psyche may have occurred, struck off
—as in flint-knapping—
an undifferentiated mental core.

My only weapon is a digging stick
the Aranda call *papa*. To think of father as a digging stick
strikes me as a good translation.

The bird-headed man
is slanted under a disembowelled bison.
His erection tells me he's in flight. He drops
his bird-headed stick as he penetrates
bison paradise.

The red sandstone hand lamp
abandoned below this proto-shaman
is engraved with vulvate chevrons—did it once flame
from a primal sub-incision?

This is the oldest aspect of this tjurunga, its grip.

Recalculating.

When I was six, my mother placed my hands on the keys.
At sixteen, I watched Bud Powell sweep my keys
into a small pile, then ignite them with 'Tea for Two.'
The dumb little armature of that tune
engulfed in improvisational glory
roared through my Presbyterian stasis.

'Cherokee'
'Un Poco Loco'
sank a depth charge into
my soul-to-be.

This is a tjurunga positioning system.

We are now at the intersection of *Coatlicue*
and César Vallejo.

Squatting over the Kyoto benjo, 1963,
wanting to write, having to shit.

I discovered that I was in the position of Tlazoltéotl-Ixcuina.
But out of *her* crotch, a baby corn god pawed.

Recalculating.

Cave of
Tlazoltéotl-Ixcuina.
The shame of coming into being.
As if, while self-birthing,
I must eat filth.

146 - Scintillae 2012

I was crunched into a cul-de-sac I could destroy
only by destroying the self
that would not allow the poem to emerge.

Wearing my venom helmet, I dropped, as a *ronin*, to the pebbles,
and faced the porch of Vallejo's feudal estate.
The Spectre of Vallejo appeared, snake-headed, in a black robe.
With his fan he drew a target on my gut.

Who was it who sliced into the layers of wrath-
enwebbed memory in which the poem was trussed?

Exactly who unchained Yorunomado
from the Christian altar in Clayton's solar plexus?

The transformation of an ego strong enough to die
by an ego strong enough to live.

The undifferentiated is the great Yes
in which all eats all
and my spider wears a serpent skirt.

That altar. How old is it?
Might it cathect with the urn in which
the pregnant unwed girl Coatlicue was cut up and stuffed?
Out of that urn twin rattlesnakes ascend and freeze.
Their facing heads become the mask of masks.
Coatlicue: Aztec caduceus.
The phallic mother in the soul's crescendo.

But my wandering foreskin, will it ever reach shore?

Foreskin wandered out of Indianapolis. Saw a keyboard, cooked it in B Minor.

Bud walked out of a dream. Bud and Foreskin found a waterhole, swam. Took out their teeth, made camp. Then left that place, came to Tenochtitlan.

After defecating, they made themselves headgear out of some hearts and lopped-off hands.

They noticed that their penises were dragging on the ground, performed sub-incision, lost lots of blood.

Bud cut Foreskin who then cut Bud.

They came to a river, across from which Kyoto sparkled in the night sky. They wanted to cross, so constructed a vine bridge.

While they were crossing, the bridge became a thread in a vast web. At its distant center, an immense red gonad, the Matriarch crouched, sending out saffron rays.

'I'll play Theseus,' Bud said, 'this will turn the Matriarch into a Minotaur.'

'And I'll play Valjejo,' Foreskin responded, 'he's good at bleeding himself and turning into a dingo.'

Together let's back on, farting flames."

The wily Minotaur, seeing a sputtering enigma approaching, pulled a lever, shifting the tracks.

Foreskin and Bud found themselves in a roundhouse between conception and absence.

They noticed that their headgear was hanging on a Guardian Ghost boulder engraved with breasts snake-knotted across a pubis.

'A formidable barricade,' said Bud. 'To reach paradise, we must learn how to dance this design.'

The pubis part disappeared. Fingering his sub-incision, Bud played 'Dance of the Infidels.'

Foreskin joined in, twirling his penis making bullroarer sounds.

The Guardian Ghost boulder roared: 'WHO ARE YOU TWO THE SURROGATES OF?'

Bud looked at Foreskin. Foreskin looked at Bud.

'Another fine mess you've gotten us into,' they said in unison.

Then they heard the Guardian Ghost laughing. "Life is a joyous thing,' she chuckled, 'with maggots at the center.'

A NOTE

I was first alerted to the *tjurunga* (or *churinga*, as it is also spelled) by Robert Duncan in his essay "Rites of Participation" (from *The H.D. Book*), which appeared in *Caterpillar* #1, 1967. Duncan quoted Geza Róheim ("The *tjurunga* which symbolizes both the male and female genital organ, the primal scene and combined parent concept, the father and the mother, separation and reunion... represents both the path and the goal"), and then commented: "This *tjurunga* we begin to see not as the secret identity of the Aranda initiate but as our own Freudian identity, the conglomerate consciousness of the mind we share with Róheim... the simple *tjurunga* now appears to be no longer simple but the complex mobile that S. Giedion in *Mechanization Takes Command* saw as most embodying our contemporary experience: 'the whole construction is aerial and hovering as the nest of an insect' — a suspended system, so contrived that 'a draft of air or push of a hand will change the state of equilibrium and the interrelations of suspended elements... forming unpredictable, ever-changing constellations and so imparting to them the aspect of space-time.'"

Reading Barry Hill's *Broken Song* / T.G.H. Strehlow and *Aboriginal Possession* (Knopf, 2002), brought back and refocused Duncan's words.

In Vol. 13 of *The Collected Works*, para. 128, Jung writes: "*Churingas* may be boulders, or oblong stones artificially shaped and decorated, or oblong, flattened pieces of wood ornamented in the same way. They are used as cult instruments. The Australians and the Melanesians maintain that *churingas* come from the totem ancestor, that they are relics of his body or of his activity, and are full of *arunquiltha* or mana. They are united with the ancestor's soul and with the spirits of all those who afterwards possess them... In order to 'charge' them, they are buried among the graves so that they can soak up the mana of the dead." [CE]

Nasturtiums / for Gwen Harwood

Tegan Gigante

Lines: you revisit me now
like a new wind, or
an old breath breathed again,
and this time I feel the death
that stilled your wild mind.

You no longer move your shapes
across the page—as to each—
such intimate arrangements.
I do not seek to shadow
the dance of grace you left
as etchings on your grave;
and—as to each—must hope
to foster traceries, to
shape my own designs.

The breath that moved
your words was yours alone, and
—as to each—such secret alchemy
occurred within your warm body
as it was then
a spell to change ephemera
of thought and air
to spoken breath, such tempered
forms and woven gold...
The pattern of your moulds
are broken, unrepeatable.

150 - Scintillae 2012

I repeat the experiment
and my alembic spawns
such different forms,
upon pages as white and clean
as your own once were.

Outside my window
wild nasturtiums bloom,
their colour lifting me
from the encroaching gloom,
the autumn sky a grey premonition
of winter and of death.
Between your time and mine,
the pattern of the floating leaves
and timely shape of flowers
has been kept, repeated,
while yours did not survive the winter,
is instead preserved in fragile parchment
an artefact voiced in the throats of strangers.
In the wake of so many minds dead,
our flowering must be made anew;
poets must populate each spring
and from the same air
breathe new shapes.

Somehow I will be gone,
just as you are now;
and—as to each—
in some where and time,
our letters will be equal lost
to new winds, and new deaths.
On some yet unimagined earth,
the same nasturtiums still may bloom,
their colours cut across the room to find
the eyes of some yet unimagined mind.

Witnessing Saigon

Sue Gillett

I.

It's *Tet*, nineteen sixty-eight, and
Saigon's burning.
The cocktails clink,
champagne, molotov,
sampled from the rooftop.
Bomb-blast stutters in the blink
of a shutter,
wink of mechanical eye
that can withdraw
and recover
blank composure.

II.

She's nine in nineteen sixty-eight.
Human. Her eye
is seared by fires
breaking close to kin.
Images are trapped in
eyelids shut on living pyres,
undefended,
unrevealed in quickly snapped,
chemically fixed,
two-dimensional
short exposure.

III.

It's New Year's Eve, new century, and
Saigon's bursting.
The star lights flint,
pyrotechnics drop,
best viewed from the rooftop.
You watch memory's imprint
return to haunt
the festive scene, a raw veined,
skin-thin silk-screen,
superimposed,
encrypting a
grim disclosure.

Cassandra in Red

Sue Gillett

Always there has been this droning
nagging undertone
of nostalgia

precocious and prophetic
post-maturity

as if she was
born ancient and hunched
born already mourning in goldenness
the gilded never-days
of fleeting youth.

Now
it seems it
really is too late.

Awoken
to the presently lost
she feels unheeded years accruing
in the slipstream of her future-focussed
backward gaze, dragging
at flesh and hope.

This cannot be written off as
just aesthetic hiatus:
aware of the loss of poetry
entailed in body's alignment
with old-soul she
must shift her weight

struggle to know
how not to give in.

154 - Scintillae 2012

Late through the night she sits
red wine bolstering
her resistance to unwinding
knowing there's no refuge
in being right.

Troy burns in her skirts
incinerates sleep.

She sips at the rim of a promise always past
(emptying the cask it must be admitted)
blinks through a crimson fringe
of crenellated hair

blear-eyed now but
epic-facing still, she unfurls
words like flags to whip against
the hollow sky, courting the echo
of trumpet and drum
proof of heart and hearing

dumbly upturns palms to catch
a falling voice
if ever it returns.

death of a columnist

John Holton

on the day of neruda's funeral
thousands defied the general's orders
crowding the streets of santiago
grieving in lines they knew by heart

but what of a columnist from a country rag
diligently plying his trade
dissecting the universe for ten cents a word
would anyone leave their comfortable home

would the sub-editors bequeath page eleven
a blank space white as arum lilies
so that someone might miss him
even for a day

156 - Scintillae 2012

Stationery Shop Girl

John Holton

after they made love
(instead of smoking a cigarette)
she would whisper sweet nothings about stationery
like how the average pencil could draw a line
35 miles long
he didn't know whether to move to the next town
or write 'I love you' in pencil
25,000 times

Europe After the Rain

Ian Irvine

Things have settled in the melting,
man is fossil now,
impersonal textures on fissured walls.
The sun rises (as always),
to a still organic beauty,
where all things are constituted
somewhere between rock and tissue.

Only the soul is absent—
its debris has no name,
no presence
to the assembled organica.

The mannequin is all but human now,
tall beneath iridescent gallows
 olive green, beside an ornate stele.
Mythopoeic sentries stand guard,
observe in the waiting,
the decalcomania of banished gods.
Together, messenger and doppelganger
trudge upon the brittle reef of
 history,
they survey distant patches of colour
fossil soils
and the same old sun.

Hiroshima Dance

(Butoh)

Ian Irvine

The dance of the holocaust century
 is will-less—acted upon
they impact upon the shoulder
 (missile trajectory), she braces.

They direct again, at the small
 of her back
and
 she hurtles sideways, braces
until they bullet
 her knees
and she buckles, staggers
 marionette awaiting the next
shrapnel animation
 perhaps
the back of her neck?

She slumps forward
 still upright, braces
statuesque
 immobile.
injury of mind wars
(embed their words)

Her arms like branches, her
 hands like autumn leaves
 lifeless, hanging—craving
the oblivion of earth.

Then it comes
 strange wind
of the holocaust century
 uncanny flash
and we're blinded
her shadow in the sunlight.

For Deanne and Toby

Anne Frank's Sister Falls from Her Bunk

(Bergen-Belsen, 1945)

Lisa A. Jacobson

From the well of my bunk,
I watch you fall. You do not stir
when I call or scratch at the lice that infect us all.
The cold-booted guard gives you a little kick.
A dirge plays on my frozen lips.
Water and dark earth, to which we return;
that's what you sound like, dragged from the room.

Three days pass without you here.
The typhus unfurls its crimson flowers.
I try to speak but find I have no mouth.
I'm a black dog, muzzled.
To say 'heart' is unheard of.

Each night I climb a few more rungs
up the ladder out of myself,
into the attic where we hid once, quiet as bones.
The sky is improbably blue.
I am rising like smoke towards you.

Several Ways to Fall Out of the Sky

Lisa A. Jacobson

Forget to take your wings from where they hang in the hall, the brass hook silent as a question mark beneath silver feathers.

Remember to collect your wings, having noticed the post-it note on the bench that says 'wings'. But in your haste to take flight, forget to fasten their buckles.

Become mesmerised by the sun, bigger now than the world below.
Forget to flap.

Ignore any doubts about low-flying above a somnolent bay where a ploughman works doggedly on in furrows of soil, and Daedalus calls out your name.

Lose faith in the universe, the laws of physics, the invention of flight.
Forget to breathe.

Consider the way gravity swings the planets round, pulls tides up shores, draws blood from women.

Discover profiles of loved ones in the clouds – your mother with her back half-turned, your daughter dissolving as you wing towards her.

Remember unwashed clothes, wisdom not yet taught to kids, pets gone hungry, the goldfish, the goldfish...

Be totally unable to remember the author of *The Grapes of Wrath*; only that the Japanese translation was *The Angry Raisins*.

Find remorse weighing heavier on your shoulders than wings.

Fly into the flight path of pelicans that peck at your hair for their nests –
which throws you right out.

Crash into Mt Sugarloaf, graceless as a kettle crash-landing the moon.

Seek out the floor of heaven, the face of God.

Soar too high in winter. Feel ice freeze your wings over, as it does to all other
high-fliers: winged horses, ghost ships, over-ambitious angels.

Fall asleep in the air. Remember this: no one knows who you are.

Cut Shakespeare?¹

Melinda Kallasmae

Why not
choose a word
and play with it
before you
use it?

– in white –

and –

when you
tire of play –
why not

lose it?

Erase it
and others.
Steal adjectives
from sonnets –

Dare you!
Modern Poet –
shouldn't
scare you.

Shakespeare could
compare you
to a day – find you
more and more –
compare more and more –

¹ Response to Bernadette Mayer's experiment suggestions [in B. Andrews and C. Bernstein (eds)(1984) 'Poetics and Language', The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, Southern Illinois University Press, p.80]

How *would*
you compare?
Lovely and temperate?
What you want?

Still?
Are you
 scared to
 take scissors
 to Will?

Lovely does not
run with them;
Temperate does not
wound with them.
Lovely and Temperate

what language?

Sue King-Smith

how to find
the words, the nouns/
verbs/adjectival clauses
for the shanty towns
that wrap around johannesburg,
where children overflow
the rubbish and run in packs
of grief ground in;
where pharmaceuticals
are the western
war of choice,
(a warring absence);
where words are hollow
even when shaped
in promise.

and can the language
of the semiotic,
rupturing in eruptions
not phallic, not singular,
give voice to girls as they burn
on pyres of their own
making? in afghanistan, their
skin sings, but with
what melody?
does their silence
speak?

a webbed language
tendrils artesian.
the trees are full of salt rot.
frogs cease to exist.
snakes are back-broken on edges.
the understory is eaten to quick

by crops of hooved things,
imported. so now the story
goes underground, but will
it be enough?

sub-atomic particles
speak across the void
joining in spin as
quantum minds,
(scientists? shamans?)
share their (collective)
thoughts, and maybe a
language of action
would explain these
intimacies of matter
that defy reason?
verbs as interlocutors
of a new way, perhaps.

back, back, before words
gathered in groups. back, back,
before the pictograph
and the inscription of cycles.
back behind the wall,
and gestural, we conversed
with animal selves.
back, back, before distinction,
before differentiation, when words
were numinous sound-scapes
without meaning. then,
the wrenching gut
of suffering done to
me/you/us/them/all,
shaped in sounds
of sameness, maybe
the only language
that speaks in a tongue
that can heal.

Swimming the Unconscious

Sue King-Smith

Before degrees of separation,
we swam the mire, quick-silver dark
with pores as porous as water.
Schools of fish caught us
in collective darting tides, all
of a mind, singular, no beyond
or outside and we rode the sliding
fractals of existence. Opening rice-paper
wings in unison, and rising
into flight we soared the curdling
updrafts and hung like tiny origami
marionettes, guiding strings
unseen. Migrating south we bounded
down a mob of kangaroos, eyes slight
for dangers, our sinewy legs
like springs. Life was a small
flowered chaos and we duck-dived
kaleidoscopic centres.

Sometimes still, synchronicity swims
through ether, and you send
me an email, and I send you a book,
that cross unlikely paths in
cyberspace. And they speak the
same language, tell the same story,
and we laugh across the coincidence
that is not coincidence at all. (We shared
a primordial womb once.) And at night, still,
we dive head-first into waters embryonic
and old as time, swimming the
unconscious.

Monsieur le Chat

Joan Macneil

Le Chat is a light-flashing tiger
exotic in his rousseau-lair.
He has scented spring in the wind,
sifts past rain, gathers, launches
to green-eyed leaftree, wild
in the rubber-curved branches.
He hurls his revitalised form
to the redbrick patch ... bursts to
loose petals and dust, camellias
that bloomed unseasonable red,
his haunched fur ruffling to the
raunchiness of a season-leaping day.

Tiger dematerializes in the rousseau-square
Monsieur le Chat sleeps in his rocking chair.

The Hound of Empedocles

David Major

The hound of Empedocles is deep in slumber.
His dreams are hot and of Nickneven
and other awful Scottish hags.

Nidhogg the serpent gnaws
at the root of the ash
and all the while,
unconcerned that this may fall,
Empedocles in his purple robe
regards the breeze that scours the clouds
that through the day obscured the view;
the airships of the Northern King;
battlefields that stretch and
sprawl on black and golden sand
where the Emperor has ordained
and raised his hand
and so our mighty and ungainly
Hephaestus made so thus:

Prometheus lies, laid low,
surrounded by his precious, senseless, clock...
Prometheus lies in chains
among the hollow senseless wreck
of the ship that ruled the sky
and was in turn
the flagship of the Emperor's fleet —
the mighty Roc that crashed and burned...

The hound that slumbers on
lives in Copenhagen and the Port as one;
one bronze sandal chewed in each,
depending on which eye is open;
on which hand the deity that dances
raises and the sky below its feet
unravels to a pulse
and in that pulse does play the tune of separate notes
that bind all Copenhagen and the Port as one
to the wheel that turns in concert with the sun
that rises on Copenhagen and the Port as one;

The rain persisted until it filled the world,
seven boroughs of the town are islands now;
between them water lies dark and deep
and full of things that of dark deep violence speak;
and all the streets are gone,
and all the air is dark;
and the baker and his wife
sit surrounded by their sourdough
and the sputtering flame that flecks
the dark face of all the world
with a little light, and all is lost...
but in Copenhagen they have burnt the toast.

The hound of Empedocles is deep in slumber.
His dreams are hot and of Nickneven
and all these awful Scottish hags;
Nidhogg the serpent gnaws.
Such is the root of the ash.

If Dali had these Steps

Lorraine Marwood

Two up, two down
concrete, plain blocked,
he'd paint the ants
mosquitoes, tiger snakes
in tissue wrap and knocking
politely at the front door.

But here, the solid shoe-scraping
blocks are disempowered,
verandah, thick front lawn
have been demolished,
the steps lift the horizon
to middle trunk, kite over
the dog kennel and see the tractor,
red diesel pulling a net of
unpressed hay.

Rural backyard
can afford such Dali tributes
no traffic, no joggers
not even a neighbourly wave.

Thistle Cutting

Lorraine Marwood

Once he hankered after thistle-cutting
ten or twenty slashed with the sharp
flash of his father's shovel,
when school was finished
and he'd bussed and biked home
to the dairy farm.

Garnishes they were, little flourishes
of deep green, toeing right down
into the wet clay of the irrigation
bays. His father explained that now
was decapitation time,
before the pale white of thistle flower
began its escalator trip
to full ripeness.

So he worked at a scything motion
catching the sharp retort
of hollow-stemmed thistle
buckling with the cut,
sighing into soil
whiskered with many seasons
of worn-out prickles
and the matted nests
of unspread seed.

These Climes, This Shore

Cassy Nunan

Stuffed full
Of white privilege;
Brained by the Big Easy
And gorged on an ocean view

The great Aussie lifestyle
Humidifies, rotisseries 'til your
Dermis is pork-crackling,
Innards a secret stew.

Pumped up
With insulation
To buffer the heat and spill
Of a bigger world.

Buoyant, you
Jog that petite arse off
On a freeway of
Ear-plugged mime artists.

This is everyday.
Your feet on the path
Where you left them,
Your mind set loose on a wave.

But the same remains,
The same abyss-mal fact always
Remains: of a flat earth country
Of wide insouciant days

You will fall;
By choice and fate
You were shored up
And will be

Dumped by the sure.

For a Friend Whose Son is Serving in Mesopotamia

B N Oakman

Do you remember when we booted a football, how he danced
sure-footed between pear trees in the orchard imitating
that waning star twilighting with the endangered Lions?
He was a bright student if he bothered, and nimble
between the wickets. Offered the Academy but, determined
to be a grunt, he's patrolling a valley of death, agitating
sand laced with powdered bones of Roman legions.
Soldiering was his vocation, he said. Left politics to others.

Never mind base justifications, dishonourable motives,
deployment to ungovernable parts where inhabitants find
fractional harmony for slaughter of invaders. Can he not
imagine a booby-trap's blast, a hurtling boot, foot inside,
a splatter of brains, vomit, excrement, guts, the maimed
whimpering Mother? Has he never shuddered to the thud
of dead-march drums, watched the shortened steps, thought
it might be him boxed beneath the flag, not read Owen:

how the women's eyes

Passed from him to the strong men that were whole?

Your pleadings perished before his tempered zeal
and with burdened heart you surrendered to his will,
though I'll wager there's no insult you'll not wear,
no foolishness you'll not tolerate,
no material thing you'll not surrender,
no Mephistophelian pact you'll not entertain
to persuade him home to share our scatheless tedium,
sure-footed, nimble, still dancing on a wing with Lions.

Trainspotting with Robert Lowell

B N Oakman

Some medical-man shot electric charges through the mind
 that composed *the old white churches hold their air/
 of sparse, sincere rebellion; frayed flags/quilt the graveyards
 of the Grand Army of the Republic.* I read Lowell before
 knowing of his 'manic depression' and nothing alerted me
 to 'madness', a disordered state of mind. There's despondency,
 despair, dead-weight of all-too-distinguished forebears—hardly
 surprising if (though not in his words) *the Lowells talk only
 to Cabots,/ And the Cabots talk only to God.*—but always
 there's an acute, bleak honesty *knowing/ each drug that numbs
 alerts another nerve to pain.,* and the glint of sharp observation,
*These are the tranquillized Fifties,/ and I am forty. Ought I
 to regret my seedtime?* He's a trusty guide through dank tunnels,
 the ones without snaking sunlit detours, *where the bones/
 Cry out in the long night for the hurt beast/ Bobbing by Ahab's
 whaleboats in the East.,* and much to be preferred to some
 unrelenting optimist, roaring 'Butter side up!', bullying us
 to 'Always look on the bright side', welcoming every flicker
 in the gloom, never thinking it's *the light of the oncoming train.*

Dada Bolivia

Sandra Pashkow

Cruz smoke cocalero
Indians fight back
cocaine no!
President a
and enter politics
terrorist in the US
a hero in Bolivia ... a
no income
Black, grind up
add chemicals
Coca Yes
livelihood, immigrants
green first, the ruling
two Bolivias
children, medicinal Amazon
crops burned no money
no, A female senator
no crops La Paz
soldiers, US money
cheering men yellow
greenback, coca farmer
a sea of ... shades of ... of green
Indian families consider, the red
Killing the green No No red
Cocaine fire Bolivia hands raised
green yellow rich red
for the powerful Bolivia
no food
Bolivia
crops, Indians, everyone, women
Invasion no food Supports For Leaves
burned flag madly
waving Santa flags
shouting for all of the jungle
and green of Green

Green Venus

Brenda Skinner

Green Venus, a fourteen dollar
garden ornament turned
artist's model, roams the world
wary of freeloaders and con men

She is a de Milo.
a desirable surface
but without arms to behold
her recent mirror changes.

A surprise landing returns her to the garden
of her Palaeolithic sisters,
where amidst the refuse and stench
of a birth pegged for servitude,
her wounds begin to seed with hope.
Measuring herself anew,
she steps into love without condition.

Portrait of Thora²

Brenda Skinner

Thora Mary Kinniburgh
is not here at the moment
she used to sit at my kitchen table

and smoke
and talk onetwothreefourfive
in her deep-throated voice justlikethat

honestly
she was one sexy dame
and what I want to
know is
where is she now,

now that I have begun to write in earnest
Mr bloody Death.

² Modelled on the structure of e.e. cummings' poem *Portrait VIII*.

A Human Heart

Roger Sworder

A human heart
Is just another flower, though
Invisible. Its petals part
And form a disc when Gods appear.
But hearts behave more like the sun
Than other flowers do. They send
Mild beams of praise to everyone
Through every sense, and those they touch
Know their own splendour. To this praise
Creation grows as to the light.
Plants, animals, the nights and days
Are glorious to make us look,
They preen themselves to make us gaze
And gaze on them. They need us here
As witnesses. Each human glance
Completes a circuit of the world.

A Narrow Escape

Roger Swarder

Automobiles scream, screech, crash, crush
hush. Dreams

Echo those echoings labyrinths deep.
En garde, thou hornéd Minotaur! Come, leap
My golden boy! Attack those blazing beams!
Theseus considers his half buckled hub,
Grimly considers his enemy's wound,
Across the crossing his footsteps resound
Echoing, echoing...

Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death

I've lost the thread,
Forgot the tangling orders of event,
Fearful lest last I lay not hurting, torn
In Ariadne's arms, will wake instead
Again to fight the Minotaur, suspend
Again my leap across the gates of horn.

Creative Non-Fiction

Isaacs Road

Miranda Aitken

Tonight it's Kilcarnup

Ocean is our soundscape. All along the coast, where the waves meet the sand, reef and rock, we hear it. Tonight Kilcarnup is pounding, exploding, as if there is a great battle going on across the ridge. And if, at first light, I were to venture down to the battleground, I would find the beach in ruins; rock and sand flung afar, broken into pieces, strewn across the inland heath. Bushes and trees laden with seaweed, starfish in their branches, shells shimmering on their leaves, and fish left gasping like birds lost at sea. It's not always like this, a violent assault of one element on another, a battle for supremacy between ocean and land, but it is autumn and the ocean is preparing for winter, practising for storms and riotous nights of wind and swell. On calmer nights the meeting of water and land is consensual. Then we fall into easy sleep, rocked like babies.

The tree that blocks the view

I live in a house where the mouth of a river kisses the salt of the sea. It is surrounded by grass trees; big, beautiful silent sentries. Elegantly wild, their slim spiky quills glow green, their trunks of blackened rings grow quietly. Grass trees dream of lizards, spiders and fire, sending their spears into the sky, decorated with small flowers for the birds. Beyond them stands the marri tree,

obstinately blocking the view. In autumn her billowing branches are covered in nectar-filled blossom, resembling a bride's bouquet. Black crows perch high in her long limbs, watching, waiting.

On winter nights, when the wind whips off the ocean and slaps across our hill, the marri tree comes alive – she dances in the chilled moonlight and the grass trees bang their heads to the ocean's rock and roll, their freakish hair style unmanageable.

That tree has got to go, it's blocking the view.

I see myself high in her heart where all her branches meet. It is perfect for perching. I move in with my pen and paper, and a little water. I will learn to live on blossom and gum nuts. Perhaps the crows will bring me offerings. 'No way are we going to lose that tree', I say. It is mine, or is it me? 'We need that tree.' We need them all.

Two Octobers Ago

Our house perches on the side of the hill. We inhabit it like birds. Below, the Indian Ocean horizon stretches north, and south, and west. We watch the passing of ships, the evolution of clouds and sometimes there are whales. Always there is the inky silhouette of the ridge at dusk and the luminescent sunset celebrating the river's return to the sea.

At dawn my child stands trembling at my bedside. Outside, small birds sing, oblivious to the crack of white lightning. The timbre of thunder fills the valley. Do all children fear lightning? I wonder, and sleepily say 'spring storm'. He crawls into the slim space between me and his father. We lie and listen. I try to return to sleep – I am heavily pregnant with our second child and sleep is rare and precious. I feel the willowy length of my once-tiny child beside me, while our unseen wriggles and squirms in my belly.

The roar demands wakefulness so we get up and watch the show. Above the ocean the sky is cobalt blue. Zigzag silver strikes the horizon. The air rumbles with foretelling. If I can change my son's fear to awe, I will be happy. 'Look! Gaia, Neptune and Zeus are at play,' I say.

The sky delivers another surprise – the rattle of hail. The verandah and garden fill with ice – 'White' he says, 'the colour of

lightning.' He runs about scooping hail into his mouth, living the lightning that earlier made him tremble.

'It's like snow', he says. But it is a spring storm and already the hail is gone. Rain falls. A sweet warm current blows in, bringing with it the scent of plants and trees from the valley below.

All morning the storm instructs the day. The sky floods and fills with rain-laden cloud then clears again. But lightning and thunder cannot leave the stage and the house is briefly shaken. It is as if the earth is at work, not the sky, the charged atmosphere brimming over. A planet alive, and potent. Dangerously great. Deserving of a small boy's trembling at dawn.

Poems in the night

Tonight the moon hangs west, a blood-orange sliver low in the sky. A demon moon, she glows after sunset, and then sinks into the sea. Up late, the fire ticks like a tin roof on a hot day. I wait for a poem like an owl hunting bush mice, baby quenda, frogs and translucent geckoes. Any time soon, something will scamper across my consciousness. Outside is darkness and the night and in it I hear the country. Breathing. Humming. Holding on. The silence of growing. Sand settles and rocks weather. The crows have clocked off and grass trees are dreaming again.

The Fire and the Footy

Graham Borrell

Burn?! I thought you were getting someone to *cut* the grass,' Mum said.

'Do you know how much they wanted?' Dad's voice was a high falsetto. Indignance reigned. I scoffed my toast, anxious to finish and leave the room before this conversation gained intensity.

'Why don't you mow it?'

'It's far too high for the mower,' Dad replied. 'It'd take too long and I want to go to the football this afternoon.'

Dad was eating his bacon and eggs while Anne, Tony, Patricia, Jennifer, Kathryn, Philip, Christine and I listened in relative silence. The only interruption was when Mum dropped toast onto plates in the centre of the table and eight hands uncoiled to grab one of the two bits on offer. Dad was seemingly oblivious to the starving children at his table who were torn between getting extra bits of toast and the obvious danger of staying in his proximity if this argument spiraled out of control into something more violent.

'Is Peter helping?' said Mum. Peter was Dad's co-worker.

'No! He's gone fishing for the weekend.'

'Then who's going to help with the fire?'

Fire! I looked up. Fire! I think I even stopped eating. Or paused anyway. Dad had a forty-four gallon drum down the rear of the backyard in which he used to burn rubbish at night and Tony, my older brother, would get to help. Not actually putting the wood and paper in the bin but passing it to Dad and getting close to the

roaring heat where the sparks and embers would rise high in the night air.

'The kids.' He continued to read the paper, but Mum moved from the toaster to the head of the table, opposite my father.

'Which ones?'

Dad looked up from his paper. Glanced around the table. 'Anne, Tony...' he paused. Pick me! Pick me! 'Graham and Trisha.' Yes! Yes! I clenched my fists under the table.

'You can't take Graham and Patricia,' Mum said. I looked at her. What are you saying? The toast popped and eight sets of eyes froze. Mum didn't move.

'Trisha's far too small!' she replied. 'And Graham ...' Her voice trailed away. 'Don't you dare let anything happen to him!'

'Graham then! The three eldest. Anne, Tony and Graham.' Anne was ten, Tony eight and I was seven.

He folded the paper, and as he rose silently from the table eight pairs of eyes followed him. If Mum had dropped toast on the table at that moment, everyone would've have been torn between hunger and possible escape.

'Nothing good will come from this,' Mum said. 'Mark my words!' But Dad had disappeared out the back door. Mum buttered the now cold and hard toast and dropped it on the centre plate, but I wasn't hungry anymore.

'Can I leave?'

'Go!' I scrambled from my chair and went outside past Dad's prized tomatoes around the corner where only the stump of the apple tree remained. Despite his love for it, he had cut it down one evening after work and once when I had fled the kitchen table to shelter behind it in a desperate escape move, it was gone and I had nowhere to hide.

'Everyone in the car,' Dad yelled. 'Let's go!'

Dad beeped the horn and the three of us squashed into the back seat. From the front window of the house, the young ones were watching as we left and a few minutes later we were at Dad's three building blocks in Oakleigh. Head-high long grass grew across them. The end one had the yellow brick foundations laid for a house and at the front of the middle block was Dad's corrugated-iron builder's shed.

Dad attached a plastic garden hose to the tap.

'Tony, Anne. Go round the outside and stamp the grass down with your feet,' Dad said. 'Take Graham and show him how.'

'Why?' asked Tony.

'It'll be a firebreak.'

'A firebreak?'

'Just do as you're told!'

Dad lifted Tony onto the bricks and pointed. 'From the back of the house to the post up there and back to the road.'

I couldn't see the post above the brown grass but followed my taller sister and brother and copied them as they stamped the long dry grass. Bits of straw scratched my legs but I wasn't going to complain. I was just thinking of the fire as I followed them and we tramped in single file around the boundaries of the blocks. It was all a game – follow the leader – but soon we were back at the shed where Dad was impatiently waiting for us.

'Tony, you guard the shed.' My brother nodded. Because he was the oldest boy he was given the most important job. 'Wet the shed with the hose and don't let it catch on fire!' Tony grabbed it and hosed water on himself, wetting his clothes, which I thought was a really strange thing to do.

'Wet these sacks,' Dad said. On the ground were four hessian sacks, and Tony hosed them down.

'Anne, Graham, come with me.' He walked to the back, big strides through the grass. 'Graham, you stay here. Don't let the fire get past you!' I was near the back corner of the bricks. Behind me the high grass went on forever. I could see tunnels where Tony and I had played cops and robbers. 'Anne, you stay here in the middle and I'll be near the end post. When the fire comes close, hit it like this,' and his sack slapped the ground. 'I'm going to light the grass near the road.'

I squinted as Dad walked towards the sun. After a while, I heard him yell but I couldn't see him. I watched as smoke wafted into the air. I could hear the grass crackling and Dad came back running and breathless.

'Don't move! Don't let the fire get past!' He yelled. When he reached my sister, he stopped, turned and yelled, 'Stay here!'

I could smell the smoke as flames curled through the grass

and into the air. My eyes started to water and the smoke became thicker. Tony and the hose and the shed disappeared from view, but along the back, where we had flattened the grass, I could see Anne swatting the grass and I copied her. But then the smoke came between us and I was alone. The smoke grew thicker and the roaring, crackling flames grew louder. A rat scurried from the grass, ran between my legs, and I tripped and fell. When I got to my feet the heat was on my face and I slapped at the grass with the heavy sack. My eyes watered but the tears dried before they reached my cheeks. Flames licked at my legs. I wanted to run but I was fearful. I swatted the ground beneath my feet. I stepped backwards but the flames and smoke seemed to be everywhere. I wanted to escape.

I remembered his voice. *Stay where you are!* So I began to hit the flames with the sack again and again. I panted hard but there was only smoke. I couldn't feel anything except the fire on my face. My tears dried instantly. Someone was shouting but I couldn't stop. The flames burned but I daren't move.

Then out of the smoke my father returned. I was so happy to see Dad and to be fighting the fire alongside him. He hit the fire beside me, but then a stranger picked me up and carried me through the blackened grass and sat me down on the footpath. That's when I saw the red fire engine and firemen with hoses and Anne sitting in the gutter crying and Tony nowhere to be seen. Before I had a chance to stand, she was beside me. 'Are you okay?' she asked.

I nodded. 'Where's Tony?'

'He's in the fire truck.'

'Dad?'

'The fire chief's talking to him.'

From the street the blackened grass stretched far past the house. No more flames. Just smoke. And silence.

Dad came back. 'Get into the car!' I thought we're in for it, but on the way home, he sang one of his favourite songs:

*One day while I was walking
One bright and sunny day
I came across some children
Busy at their play
I offered them cool ice-cream
They said we'd rather not
Oh, when we kids eat ice-cream
We like it piping hot.*

*Oh, crazy, oh crazy
Oh, what a crazy song
I feel so bad, I feel so sad
So sing it right or wrong.*

He stopped at a milk bar, returned with three Choc Wedges, held them up and said, 'Don't tell your mother!'

By the time we reached home, Anne and Tony were finished but I was still at the licking stage. 'Stay in the car until you're finished!' Dad said.

I sat in the car, but what's the use of having an ice cream if no one knows? I went inside. Mum and Dad were arguing in the kitchen.

'Look at him! For crying out loud,' said Mum. 'You can't take him to the footy like that!'

'I want an ice-cream!' screamed Trisha. Mum grabbed my half-finished ice-cream and stuck it like a dummy in my sister's mouth.

'That's mine!' I cried.

She pointed to the door. 'Go wash your face!'

Extracts from *Hammered: Memoir of an Addict*

G.N. Braun

I - Back in Court – February 9th 2000

I packed a small bag. I knew about prison life from friends who'd served time, but I was worried. I didn't have any idea what I could take, so I didn't bother to take much. The things I'd miss the most would be Carolyn, the kids and the drugs.

I presented at the Clerk of Courts counter. Nothing was said about my failure to report to the cop-shop, so I was lucky. It could have been an extra charge.

Carolyn was nervous, but a strange calm had settled over me. I'd resigned myself to the idea of getting locked up and had convinced myself it wouldn't be that bad. As the morning went on and cases were called, I found myself growing more and more detached from reality.

My solicitor, Simon, showed up around eleven, taking us aside and going through last-minute preparations.

'You shouldn't be called to speak until the end, just before sentencing, but when you are, show the old bastard proper respect,' Simon said. 'Just say you regret the situation and have made appropriate lifestyle changes. It's gonna go to a custodial sentence, but you shouldn't serve more than six months. It all depends on whether the old prick likes you or not.' He opened his case and got out some paperwork. 'Now, you've moved from

Frankston, yeah?' he asked.

'Yep,' I said. 'We're in Burwood now.'

'Good,' he said. 'I'll put that as a serious attempt to change. Have you got your methadone on track?'

'Yep. We upped our dose to ninety ml, and we're stable now.'

'Good. That'll help a lot. With luck, you won't be locked up for too long.'

He gathered his papers and went to get an early lunch with the police prosecutors. Carolyn and I went across to the shopping centre to get a coffee. I couldn't stomach anything more than that and neither could she. We were both a little stoned, having had a taste the night before and saving a small hit for the morning, as it would be my last chance for at least half a year.

We got back to the courthouse around half past one, just as the afternoon session began. After about twenty minutes, they called me into the courtroom. We filed in.

'All rise for the honourable Glen Rabbino.' The clerk's voice echoed around the court, distorted by the shitty PA system. The door at the back opened, and the magistrate walked in as if he had a three-foot rake up his arse and sat down behind the bench.

'You may be seated,' the clerk said.

The magistrate tapped away on his computer for a moment before looking at both the prosecutor and the defence counsel. 'Gentlemen,' he said. 'Are we going to be here long?'

'No, your honour,' the prosecutor replied. 'We have a no-contest plea.' The magistrate raised his brow and looked over at Simon. 'Is your client pleading guilty to all charges,' he asked.

'Yes, your honour,' Simon replied.

'The prosecution shall read out the charges?' the magistrate said.

'Yes, your honour,' the police prosecutor said.

'The accused is charged with possession of a drug of dependence, use of a drug of dependence, possessing a drug of dependence with intent to traffic, and trafficking a drug of dependence. He has also been charged with possession of proceeds of crime. The accused has pled guilty to all charges.'

The magistrate looked at me over the top of his wire-framed glasses. 'Hmmm...' he said.

Simon stood up. The magistrate looked at him. 'What do you

have to say on behalf of your client?' the magistrate asked.

'Your honour,' Simon began, 'my client has led a very traumatic life. He began using drugs at a very young age, having grown up in an area where it was normalised. He has been addicted to speed for most of his life, as well as being a chronic cannabis-user.'

The magistrate looked unimpressed.

Simon continued, 'My client became addicted to heroin five years ago, and since then has spiralled downward and made some unwise decisions in his life.' He looked over at me as he spoke. 'He has managed to maintain some semblance of working, and is a trained nurse. He has worked as a carer for the disabled and has devoted a lot of time to caring for others.'

I'd worked on a few occasions throughout the years as a personal-care attendant, but this was a big exaggeration on his part. I'd told Simon that I was registered as a nurse, and had worked for an agency for years. I'd neglected to mention that I wasn't registered, and that the work was few and far between. No more than ten shifts over the last five years.

'After the arrest, my client moved away from the area to escape the endless cycle of heroin, and has maintained a strong relationship with his partner and her children.' Simon cleared his throat.

'Mr Braun has also since stabilised his methadone dosage.'

The magistrate peered at me. 'Mr Braun, have you made any attempt to get off the drugs that have, thus far, ruined your life?'

'I have, your honour,' I said, standing up. 'As Simon said, I've stabilised on methadone, and have made enquiries into detox and rehab. I love my family very much, and just want to get better.'

'Thank you, Mr Braun,' the magistrate said. 'Please sit back down while I find out what options I have for sentencing.' He proceeded to tap on the keyboard of the computer in front of him for another five minutes before he finally looked back up to me.

'Mr Braun. You have pleaded guilty to use of heroin, and to trafficking in a drug of dependence, which is an indictable offence and punishable with level four imprisonment, up to fifteen years,' he said.

I shuddered. I didn't want to go to jail. I felt light-headed, and the room seemed to sway.

He continued, 'In this instance, I believe that you seem a likely

candidate for some level of rehabilitation, and so are deserving of one final chance to do so.' He looked down at the screen in front of him. 'You don't seem to have a history of violence. Rather, you have turned to theft and such to support your addiction. Without the addiction, I feel that you would not have been such an onus on society as you have been.

'In the matters brought before me today, I find you guilty of all charges, and sentence you to three months imprisonment for the trafficking charge and one month imprisonment for the use of heroin, both to serve concurrently, and both wholly suspended for twelve months. On the other charges, I find them proven.'

My mind raced as Simon turned to me in triumph, gesturing not to say anything until asked to speak.

'You will go to the Clerk of Courts' counter to receive the paperwork, and you will stay out of trouble in the future. I suggest you find some help for your addiction, because if you come before me again, I will not be so lenient next time. Do you understand?' he asked.

'I do, your honour, and thank you,' I said.

I was free. But if I offended again over the next twelve months, I'd serve at least three months before I served whatever time the new offence gave me.

I'd never felt so relieved. It was only after we left the court building that it hit me just how lucky I had been.

On the way home, we stopped and scored.

II - The Split – 2000

Things were rough between Carolyn and me at this point. She seemed to be distancing herself from me as far as possible. We'd argue, and she'd kick me out. A day or a week later, we'd make up and I'd move back in. Carolyn was used to the pain, the emotions, and the relapses of addiction, after years of using. I wasn't. I was scoring behind her back, just to feel better. For me, it was all about the 'now' and not being sick.

She either didn't suffer from the withdrawals as much as I did, or she was more used to them – I'm not sure which. Maybe I was just weak. There were so many issues between us. During the

years, I'd scored without her many times and sometimes she had caught me out. She hated me doing it and took it as a betrayal. She thought using without her was as bad as sleeping with other women.

I started staying in Rochester with Mum. Mum had no idea I'd been busted for dealing, but she knew I'd gotten in trouble, as I had to keep going to the Corrections Victoria office, twice a week. She kept asking what had happened, and after a few weeks, I broke down and told her. We both had a cry over it, but I promised her I'd get my shit together. Easier said than done.

* * *

The withdrawals seemed overpowering and I had real trouble coping. The drugs, the tension, the history; they were all combining to tear Carolyn and me apart. I believed I still loved her, and I thought she still loved me. I still went to see her and the kids at least once a month, and slept with her when I did.

While driving back to Rochester after a visit, I found an old beaten-up Toyota sitting beside the road with the passenger door open. I stopped to have a look.

No sign of anyone. The keys were lying on the floor. I hid them on top of one of the tyres, got back in my car and went on to Rochy so I could grab someone to bring me back.

I got hold of a mate named Dave, and he agreed to give me a ride.

We arrived, I grabbed the keys, and followed him back to Rochy, nervous all the way.

The car ran very well, and it gave me transport when I most needed it. I used it to get to my community work and the sign-ins for Corrections Victoria, and I used it to go to Melbourne and score when I could afford to.

* * *

A month later I was staying down at Carolyn's for a couple of days. Still in the car I'd 'found', I was on my way to meet some customers to sell some DVDs on a nice summer's day. I had arranged to meet them at McDonald's in Richmond, so I parked there and went to call them from the public phones across the street to tell them I was waiting. I made the call and walked back

to the car, reaching into my pocket for the keys. Not there!

Shit!

I walked back over where I had crossed the street and checked in the still-empty phone booth, but no sign of them.

Fuck!

Cursing my luck, I went back to the car to see if they had fallen to the ground. I finally found them – still in the ignition and locked inside.

I went over to the shopping centre and got a coat-hanger from the dry-cleaners there. I made my way back across Church Street and started forcing the wire through the driver-side window.

I spent maybe fifteen minutes trying unsuccessfully to unlock the door when I noticed a car pull up nearby. I looked up to see it was a cop divvy van.

Fuck! Somebody must have noticed me trying to break into the car and rang the cops.

I had no idea what to do, so I ended up trying to bluff my way out. If in doubt, pretend it's yours.

As the cop on the passenger side opened his door to get out, I rushed up to him. 'Guys, brilliant timing. Do you have a screwdriver or a toolkit? My keys are locked in.'

Looking suspicious, the cops peered into the car, but they relaxed when they saw the keys in the ignition. They must have thought I was legit once they realised I had locked the keys in the car. They both laughed at my stupidity and got a tool kit from their divvy van. One of them pulled out a long screwdriver and wedged it between the door and the frame.

While one cop struggled to create a gap, the other one pushed the coat-hanger through the space and hooked it under the locking knob, flipping it up and opening the door. I was ecstatic as they put the tools back in their car, wished me a good day, and drove off.

I couldn't believe it – cops had actually helped me break into a stolen car! They hadn't bothered doing checks on me or the car. They hadn't even bothered asking me for ID.

When I finally caught up with the guys who wanted the movies, I ended up selling a hundred bucks worth to them. I went straight to score, and then hurried back to Carolyn's place to have

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a taste. Carolyn found it hilarious that the cops had helped an addict break into a stolen car.

The car only lasted another month. I ended up crashing it on my way home from Croydon Market. I gave the driver of the other car a fake name and address and left the scene, but I didn't make it far before the car overheated and died at the side of the road.

Play up, play up, and play the game: Don Charlwood and other war stories

Dianne Dempsey

I first interviewed Don Charlwood in 2006 when he was celebrating the 50th anniversary of *No Moon Tonight*, his seminal book of the Second World War. He was 90 when I interviewed him and still writing, mainly books on maritime history which he is very keen on. (And you will be pleased to know that in 2012, he is still publishing his work.)

The occasion of my interview with Charlwood was Anzac Day and I asked him what had compelled him to write *No Moon Tonight*. 'I felt I must raise some small memorial of words to the men I'd known,' he told me. 'And I felt guilty that I had got away with it all. I still had a very strong picture of those men.'

So painful were these memories that Charlwood didn't sit down to his Adler typewriter until ten years after the war had ended. When he read the book's proofs he almost balked at publication. He felt he had exposed himself far too much. 'In those days we didn't really talk about our feelings,' he said. But after the book came out he received shoals of letters from men thanking him for articulating, at last, what they had been through. Later, Charlwood received letters from the children of airmen who told him, 'Now I understand my father'.

As a navigator with Bomber Command in the RAF, Don Charlwood participated in night bombing missions over Europe.

The airmen's prospects of survival were dreadful and Charlwood, with eloquence and honesty, nailed their fear and despair and described their ways of coping.

Nick Hudson, who published Charlwood's second memoir of the war, *Journeys Into Night*, says that Bomber Command's chief, 'Bomber Harris' lost credibility after the war, largely because of the bombing of Dresden. 'Don's book recorded the extraordinary heroism of those airmen, irrespective of whether what they were doing was worthwhile. You couldn't dispute that the men who went nightly into the maelstrom weren't brave.'

Nick Hudson believes that in general, the initial novels of both the first and second world wars were one-sided and patriotic, 'All about beating up the Huns and having a jolly good time,' he said. '*No Moon Tonight* was one of the first war books after the Second World War to break away from the jingoistic view of war and describe it in a more personal and analytical manner.'

According to Robin Gerster, the author of *Big-Noting: the Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*, this celebratory, intensely patriotic attitude to war can largely be attributed to the great historian of the First World War, C.E.W. Bean.

With his formal, 19th-century prose style Bean calls on the pukka values of the Empire to make sense of the carnage of the trenches: In the closing section of *The Story of Anzac: The First Phase* (1921) Bean says that men held their life dear, 'but life was not worth living unless they could be true to their idea of Australian manhood.'

Books of the First World War which dispelled the heroic myth of war included Frederic Manning's *Her Privates We*, (1929) and Ion Idriess' *The Desert Column* (1932). Both books provide extraordinary, intimate accounts of war from the point of view of the soldiers themselves. By contrast to Bean's cool, measured prose these accounts are hot and angry and idiomatic. This is Ion Idriess at Lone Pine: 'Of all the bastards of places this is the greatest bastard in the world.'

Apart from *No Moon Tonight*, one of the more sophisticated memoirs of the Second World War is Ray Parkin's trilogy, *Out of the Smoke* (1960), *Into the Smother* (1963) and *The Sword and the Blossom* (1968). When writing about his experiences as a POW on the Burma-Thailand Railway Parkin takes an essentially

philosophical view of war. It was Weary Dunlop who hid Parkin's diaries for him when he was sent as a POW to Japan. And it was Parkin who was instrumental in bringing the public's attention to Weary Dunlop.

Any discussion of Australian war literature must naturally include the Vietnam War, and it was this war which finally put paid, in Australian minds, to any lingering myths about the nobility of war. As wars go, Vietnam was a bad one. It was a bad war as far as the geographical terrain was concerned and it was worse when it came to the political territory. Robin Gerster says that the nature of this war is reflected in the dominantly bitter tone of the literature as in William Nagle's *The Odd Angry Shot* 1975 and Lex McAulay's novel, *When the Buffalo Fight*. 1987.

Another, more recently published book, which fits into this category is Barry Heard's *Well Done, Those Men: memoirs of a Vietnam veteran* (2007) in which Heard describes the effect of post-traumatic stress on himself and fellow veterans in heartbreaking detail.

Towards the end of the interview with Charlwood he quoted the Henry Newbolt poem which he learnt at Frankston High School — 'Play Up, Play Up and Play the Game' and then he told a story about his mother.

'She watched while men and boys she loved went off to the Boer War and the Great War,' he said. 'She even sent four sons to the Second World War. It hurt her, but she never questioned it, because that was what was expected. But when the Vietnam War was on, her granddaughter's boyfriend was called up and he was on the run.

'Her granddaughter brought the boy to my mother's house where she hid him. When the police came looking for the young man she gave them a cup of tea and scones, smiled sweetly and sent them on their way.'

Charlwood believes that the best books on war are honest books. 'When I was at school I'd never heard of Siegfried Sassoon or Wilfred Owen. We certainly didn't read *All Quiet on the Western Front*; we should have read that. We had no idea of the reality of war. No idea.'

Extract From No Moon Tonight

I rose and drew back the curtains. The morning was innocently mild and bright. When I went outside I saw a party of workmen laying the foundations of new huts close to our own. Each morning for some days I had noticed them there. Sometimes I wondered what they thought of us, the wan, bearded, untidy-looking men they saw rising when half their morning's work was done. It seemed wrong on this morning that they should be there at all; wrong that they should appear to be taking life so much for granted. I felt an impulse to walk over to them, to say, 'I am sorry, but you shouldn't be here. The sane life of daily work has ended. You cannot have heard that Keith has gone, gone since you dug those holes last night, and probably we shall never hear of him again.' With my overcoat over my pyjamas I stood watching them, till one of them looked up and greeted me. I nodded vaguely, but did not speak... I went and dressed and set out for the ops block. On the road between the cabbage field and the sports ground I met Ted Batten.

'We're on again tonight,' he said.

'Same place?'

'Same place.'

I shrugged.

Doing Death Badly

Pam Harvey

Soraya wanted to know how she would die. She wanted to talk about it with her husband so they could plan for her end in the most dignified way possible. Her thin body was sharp in her summer clothes. She watched us steadily as we talked, pulling air in and pushing it out with such giant movements of her shoulders that the hollows above her clavicles were large enough to take a fist. When there was silence, she asked the real questions we were there to try and answer.

‘What will it feel like when I’m dying?’ She paused. ‘Will not getting enough air be like drowning?’

What can you say? We gave her the legal choices, the right to say no to intubation, ventilation, resuscitation. She filled in the forms that expressed her desires and we made sure copies went into the hospital history. After we left her house – a bunch of health professionals who had just contemplated their own mortality by talking about someone else’s – we didn’t speak until we were back at the hospital.

Our clients were all dying. They had chronic, progressive lung disease and went through each day a minute at a time. What they feared most was not being able to breathe: *not* being able to get the air into their inflated chests and then *not* to be able to force it back out. Their necks were hollow, strands of muscles like struts pulling out their collar-bones in accessory action. Their chests

heaved, shoulders up and down, arms braced, even on hello. Sometimes they gurgled or wheezed; those noises marked their presence. Pale faces, red faces, deep-blue lips. Some of them smiled wryly at what had happened to them: some never smiled at all.

I went to their homes to talk about their disease, travelling comfortably in my white hospital car and parking intimately in their driveways. Their houses were laid open to me: photographs on the mantelpiece, little dogs curled up on frayed carpet, piles of books within reach so no one had to move too far. Hairbrushes and Vicks VapoRub balanced on last week's newspaper, a letter from a son, a faded cloth rose in a vase, a block of chocolate half-eaten: a clutter of things surrounded their chairs and I saw it all.

Visiting someone at home couldn't be more different than seeing someone in the vast noisiness of a hospital ward. Everyone was grateful for that difference because in people's homes you get their true story. In homes you can talk realistically about things that might make a difference to people's lives – stronger muscles so they could walk more easily to the toilet, better nutrition to give them the utmost in energy, effective delivery of medication to keep the airways open. I was optimistic, realistic, and I had the time to listen. I knew that I was with people whose diseases were progressive and that they were going to die. I drank tea with them, beer with them, ate tuna mornay with them when they offered it for lunch.

I could do their lives alright. I didn't do their deaths very well.

When Dad died, Mum rang and my husband answered the phone. It was Monday and the theme song to 'Australian Story' played in the lounge room. I was on my hands and knees trying to get Thomas the Tank Engine out from behind my son's bedhead. The baby was asleep – she'd gone down early. Had she known?

My husband gently pulled me away from Thomas and switched the light off in the room. Then he told me Dad had died. I said, 'Oh.' Just 'Oh'. My next thought was that I had to get to Mum. My teeth started chattering as soon as I got in the car and didn't stop for hours.

When I reached my parents' house, the front door was open

to the well-lit hallway. I ran in, glimpsed my Dad's body under a sheet on the lounge room floor, and went on to my mother in the kitchen. The ambulance men and Mum's neighbour were there as well. They left as I arrived, leaving Mum and me alone. We looked at each other then went to the lounge room where we unveiled Dad, and stroked his forehead until the undertaker came. I really wanted to go with them when they left – it felt so wrong to let strangers take him away. How do you do the death of your father?

When I see someone smoking, I can't help but stare. What I imagine are innocuous threads of black poison weaving their way into people's bodies. I wonder: can people feel the destruction inside, the air sacs breaking down, the crap on the inside of their lungs? If it's a young person smoking, I get flashes of what they might look like in fifty years' time: gaunt figures that grasp their knees when they breathe, locking their elbows so they could heave more air into their lungs.

But I don't find the whiff of cigarette smoke unpleasant. I've been known to draw it in. It's the smell of my childhood, of Dad in the kitchen reading the Herald, of the mysterious office where he worked that had black and white checked lino on the floor and a tea room thick with men's cigarette smoke. It also reminds me of the early days of young love, when his smoke curled into the dark night while we watched it in contented silence.

Smoking as a symbol of an untroubled childhood – romanticism at its worst. If I'd known when I watched Dad's smoke drift up over his paper that it was poison he sucked into his lungs – and had us breathe – my childhood would have had another colour. A grey, dull smoky colour. I hope that what killed my father – slowly and insidiously – won't take my husband, eventually, as well.

Soraya had chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, C.O.P.D. Twenty years ago, when I first went to university, we called her disease emphysema. Back then, it seemed to be a condition of old men who lay in their repatriation wards, coughing and spitting

as we pummelled their backs to shake the phlegm out. A cough, a hawk, and we would cheer 'Well done! That was a good one' and peer into their sputum mugs as eagerly as treasure hunters. Physiotherapy then was often endless rounds of pummelling backs, the pain in our arms so bad by the end of the day that we could hardly write our clinical notes. Who would want to be a respiratory physio? we groaned. There were jobs much more glamorous: sports physiotherapy, for example – the treatment of the young and vital.

I was a football trainer for a local club for a few months. The changing room was filled with naked men who didn't give a rat's for the young girl waiting at the massage table. They wandered backwards and forwards, steaming naked from the showers, hairy and swearing, complaining about their back pain, their ankles, their groins. They were blatant and unappealing, and I turned my back on the glamorous. Give me ordinary people any day, with lives that are rich in experience and living in houses filled with the artifacts of their stories. Spare me the football change-rooms.

Soraya's house had been renovated. It was clean and neat with almost-white walls and open, friendly rooms. The furniture was new, the kitchen contemporary. Classical music poured from the speakers in the living room. Olive rugs lay thick and voluptuous on polished floorboards. The doors were always open to let the smoke out. Fifty cigarettes a day and the smoke was always there.

She couldn't give them up. She knew her body was wretched with smoking. Barely sixty years old, but her arms and legs were skeletal with the continued effort of breathing, dissolving every bit of fat she had. She could walk around the inside of the house, but not around the outside. When she drove, she parked out the front of where she wanted to go. On bad days, she didn't go anywhere because she knew she wouldn't make it. She'd had an embarrassing moment in a shop once when she'd been too breathless to even answer the anxious shopkeeper when asked if she was alright. Soraya had owned shops once, owned a whole string of them. Her embarrassment was born of being on the other side.

When I came to her house, I was armed with my usual regime

of exercise sheets, dumbbells, positions for easier breathing. We talked. That day, she could hardly walk around the room but she did it for me, apprehension in the thin smile she placed on her face. She told me of the pain she had in her back that seemed to limit her breathing even more and I told her of an exercise to do that meant lying on the floor. It was then I discovered the extent of her fear.

The fear began in the morning as she woke, startled to find herself breathing so badly. If her pillows had slipped in the night, she would be half-way down the bed and feel like she was suffocating. She'd have to struggle herself upright and breathe carefully, breathe quietly, until she could open her eyes and face the day. There was a fear of not being able to get out of bed, and then a fear of not being able to walk up the corridor, and when she did, there was that terrible guilty fear of not being able to resist another bloody cigarette

There was the fear of not being able to get off the floor if she fell.

When I first worked in a rehabilitation hospital, part of a patient's discharge criteria was that they had to be able to get up from the floor. It sounded harsh, mean, cruel, and there were people who just couldn't and you'd never ask them to. But most could. We used to lay a large gym mat on the cold floor of the old physiotherapy department and park a chair at either end. The old person – some so frail they were nothing but loops of skin on bone – would sit on one chair and lower themselves down until they were lying curled on the mat. Then we would instruct them on how to get up – on hands and knees, crawl to the chair, good leg bends up, hand on chair, and heave. Surprisingly to me, an amazed 22 year-old, they did it with relative ease, taking their time and sometimes in pain. Once they were seated, and rested, and nodding at our congratulations, they nearly all turned and said, 'Thank you. I didn't think I could do that.'

At Soraya's home, I discovered that lying on the floor panicked her. She had done what I had suggested, and was lying on the olive rug, eyes darting and face tense. Her back pain had eased but her anxiety had skyrocketed. So I lay next to her and told her

about what used to happen at the rehab hospital. We spent some time staring at the ceiling. We talked again, quietly, about things that mattered and things that didn't. Gradually I could hear her breathing settle. We kept lying there, probably for half an hour in total, until she was ready to get up. Which she did without trouble. She sat on the couch looking exhausted but pleased and I thought about the hurdles we put in our way, and how we struggle against them all the time. And how much energy that took. And how little energy we had sometimes, whether we had lung disease or not.

Over the next few months, Soraya confronted fear a lot. It was usually related to movement, of having gone too far and too fast, with not enough breath for it. Getting out of a chair was a problem if she thought too much about it: the sudden thrust of legs and trunk triggered a blinding panic and she just couldn't remember how to go through the motion. If she waited until she was thinking about something else, it was easy. Our team worked with her: psychologist, nurse, physio. We visited regularly, me more than anyone. Sometimes the physical person is the easiest to be around: I'd talk of practical things, of muscles and joints and fitness.

I can't remember for sure when Soraya showed me her poems but it happened quite soon after the floor incident. Side by side on the rug, we'd learned that we'd read books in common and were equally in awe of Ian McEwan. I'd told her that I took creative writing classes and that I wrote books for children. She didn't say anything for a while. I was used to people being surprised when I said that I wrote, especially if they only knew me as a health professional: it was too hard for them to imagine. I don't think it surprised Soraya though. 'I write poetry,' she said, so quietly I almost missed it.

It was only a minute or two before she got up from the floor.

We sat at Soraya's kitchen table surrounded by her notebooks and she read to me some of the poems she had written. I wish now that I could remember a line or two but she only showed me briefly and then shut the book. I had a glimpse of a journey and some dark places she'd been. Soraya hadn't written for a while

and seemed a bit bemused at her own words. She did some more writing after that day, she told me, but I didn't hear any more.

I should have had a photograph of Dad at his bedside when he was in intensive care. It would've given him a life beyond the man in the bed pulling at his tubes. Maybe I should've put that photo out, of him at eighteen, slouch hat on his head, heading off to war. Would the staff have been able to connect to him then instead of seeing yet another old man worn to fairy-floss lungs by years of smoke? Maybe I should have told them that he started smoking in those war years, that he came back with what surely must have been post-traumatic stress, and that he'd only just been able to stop? In old age and far too late.

Anyway, he made it out of hospital to die at home. A small triumph there.

Our team went to a lot of funerals – there was one nearly every week in our game. Funerals were the wrong way around, I always thought. At their funeral, you got to know how people had been before you came on the scene. You could learn things like how they liked listening to country music or reading science fiction, and that you could have loaned them your John Williamson CDs or your Sarah Douglass collection. And the photographs they showed weren't the clients you remembered: they were fatter and smilier and wore smart clothes. At funerals, I was always reminded how much we came in on the tail end of people's lives and how much we had missed.

Soraya's death came unexpectedly. I suddenly had a phone call to say that she was in the emergency department and asking for our team. I scooted over there and hunted for her in the unfamiliar chaotic atmosphere. She was breathing shallowly and fast and I could see in her frightened eyes and pulled back lips that she'd been doing it hard for a while.

She couldn't talk to me so I talked for her, telling the ED nurses what symptoms she had normally, her normal rate of breathing,

her normal cough. When I left her, she gave me a startled look and squeezed my hand, but I had to go. It wasn't my work area and I'd given the others all the information I could. Soraya's husband was there. 'Ring if you need me,' I said to him. 'I'll come and see you later,' I said to her.

But I didn't get the chance. From emergency, she went to the medical ward and then to intensive care. It was her breathing; she'd worked so hard she just ran out of energy. They intubated her but didn't do a tracheotomy, and so part of her end of life wishes were fulfilled. She died on a Monday; exhausted, worn out.

I only cried for my Dad when I was alone. Usually after I'd dropped the kids at crèche and I was in the car by myself. I was like a driving tap – tears come on as I turned the key in the ignition, tears went off with the last lot of brakes.

I went to Soraya's funeral with one of my colleagues who'd had a bit to do with her. The chapel was full of people I'd never seen and had no right to know. I listened to the story of her life – I can't remember who read it – and caught glimpses of the person I had come to know. At some point I started crying, as everyone did. The tears got worse as the last song played, and then worse again as I hugged her husband and turned to leave.

'Do you want a lift back to work?' said my friend.

'No, I think I'd better walk.'

She nodded, patted my shoulder, and left me.

I walked up the hill and along the four blocks that led to work, howling all the way. I wasn't meant to: health professionals are meant to be stronger than that. We aren't meant to get so tangled in someone's life that we also get tangled in their death. But I don't do death well – not that day, not any day – and I guess I am all the richer for it.

Nineteen Ninety-One (a Memorial)

Ben Iser

I walk down the long greasy corridor, moving slowly, wading through the hot humid air. My eyes drift laconically over myriad posters taped or stapled one on top of another. Some advertise upcoming shows but most are evidence of nights—and often bands—that are nothing more than memory. I reach the end and hand a five-dollar note to the door-bitch: a bored, skinny, Goth chick with a dormant, half-smoked rollie hanging from her lower lip, glued in place by thick red lipstick. She hands back my change and applies a rubber stamp to my wrist. The ink depicting the venue's logo blurs instantly, seeping into the sweat on my arm.

I enter the main room, its details obscured by the haze of old smoke and the close to non-existent lighting. As I walk I imagine a ripping sound—a sound like Velcro straps being torn open—as I lift my feet from the floor, the carpet sticky from decades of spilt beer, spittle, piss, phlegm and god knows what else. I imagine the sound of my footsteps because it is far too noisy to actually hear anything: the hubbub of the crowd competes with the band on stage blasting out their own peculiar style of rock'n'roll.

I remove a dart from my packet. I'm smoking Dunhill this week. Taking a drag I scan the room looking for my friends. Spotting Justin's shaggy mane I head over to the table he and his

brothers have secured. Halfway there I catch his eye and motion towards the bar. He signals back for me to get a round in. After getting the beer I complete my journey to the table. Setting the cans of VB down, I say g'day to the boys. Justin introduces me to his latest girlfriend. I say hello and she smiles back. I don't catch her name – the band is loud and Justin is a quietly spoken guy (until he gets drunk and bellows an out-of-tune rendition of The Birthday Party's *Junkyard* as we walk home).

The band on stage is called Hoss. They are one of the groups that have formed out of the ashes of local legends God, named, some say, after the Lobby Loyde and the Coloured Balls jam GOD (Guitar Over-Dose). Others maintain that the moniker 'God' was the result of the rampaging egos of the group's members.

This is a typical night out for me and my friends. It's 1991 and although we don't know it yet we are in the midst of the last hurrah of a distinct underground, or alternative, music scene. Over the next few years some major changes will take place that will irrevocably alter the way people relate to music. Firstly, the way the charts are compiled is changing. Computerised point of sale systems allow retailers to keep an accurate and detailed record of inventories and sales. The charts will no longer be compiled by junior sales assistants scratching their heads on Monday mornings desperately trying to remember what was sold last week. Suddenly musicians playing in niche styles will find themselves being taken seriously by managers, booking agents and record labels: what they have been doing for the love of it can now be considered a career.

The Internet will change computers into powerful communication tools. Want to know the sound of that band your favourite 'zine keeps talking about, but you can't afford/don't want to splash out on an unheard record? No longer will you have to ask amongst your friends or hope, fingers crossed, that a track will be played on the radio. Just go online and listen to a track.

But all that is yet to come. Right now the floodgates are open

and anything goes. Bands like Hoss know that they'll never be rock-stars. Commercial radio won't touch a band that likes to make music which is slightly askew, discordant, threatening. There is an edge, a danger. There is energy inherent in this music. Its form is simple – a bastardised mix of Psychedelia, Glam and Punk, all stripped back and played full tilt at maximum volume. Bands like this enjoy challenging their listeners and themselves. Because they know they'll never be famous they don't play safe, they say to themselves – and to their audience – Fuck it. Let's ROCK!

There is purity and joy in this attitude. Music is created simply to exist for its own sake.

It began with The Saints and Radio Birdman. Tapping into the Punk rock zeitgeist of the mid-Seventies, they were the pioneers, creating an entirely new sound. Following the Detroit blueprint of the MC5 and the Stooges, they were followed by a succession of groups. The scene was loud, sweaty and testosterone-fuelled. And so it is today.

Whenever a scene develops in isolation it will develop a distinct character of its own. The world-wide explosion of Punk rock saw many scenes develop in parallel. In Japan a spirit of experimentation with form prevails. New Zealand favours sublime pop melodies. In Australia music is an exercise in cathartic aggression.

One of the first underground gigs I went to was an all-ages Thrash show held in a school hall in Fitzroy. The headline act, SIC, played fast and frenetic punk at 180 beats per minute. The crowd was a mix of skaters, punks and head-bangers and the mosh-pit was pure mayhem. Guys were jumping up and down, crashing into each other, leaping from the edge of the stage and even swinging from the rafters. But for all the scratches, bruises and bloody noses it was totally safe. There were no fights; no-one was trying to hurt anyone. Any injury was simply the result of the mass release of energy and frustration.

And so no one cares. Its millennial, an apocalyptic attitude.

I'm here now with my friends enjoying a band that may not exist tomorrow and I don't care. Enjoy the moment while it lasts.

I notice that Justin, his girlfriend What's-Her-Name, and his brothers are staring at me with bemused expressions and I realise I've been thinking out loud.

'Your round, Nostradamus,' says Josh.

'Beer?'

'Better make it whiskey.'

I'm standing towards the back of the room. Hoss have finished their set and now Venom P. Stinger is playing.

'What sort of bike d'ya ride?' asks a grievously beer-sodden voice in front of me, a voice that sounds like truck wheels on a gravel road. I look down to see a small man, maybe just over five feet high, peering at me inquisitively through small beady pin-prick eyes. He wears a leather jacket of the style worn by James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause*, the same style of jacket I'm wearing although his is scuffed and dirty with cloth patches sewn on it.

'I don't have a bike,' I reply. Suddenly two meaty fists grip the front of my jacket, pulling it tight around my back and bunching it up under my arms as I'm lifted up onto my toes.

'Then I'm gonna rip ya fucking jacket off and shove it up yer arse ya fucking arty cunt!'

I hang in the air, my face a shade of white that would make the Goth door-bitch jealous.

Another biker leans into the small man and says loudly, 'You can let this one go. I think he just shat himself.'

The small biker grins and drops me down. He and his companion push their way through the crowd laughing.

The warmth spreading through the front of my jeans makes me aware that the larger biker was not far off the mark. It's hot in here, I think to myself, dark too. With luck no-one will notice and I'll dry out by the time the gig is over.

That's the other great thing about this time. The different sub-genres are too small to exist on their own and so the clubs and

band-rooms are full of Goths, Punks, Indie Kids, Greasers and whatever other freak cares to come along... I feel a punch on my arm.

‘You’re doing it again,’ says Justin.

‘Sorry.’ I try to relax and let the music wash over me, into me. Soon I’m swaying in the flow and the sonic waves are drowning the voices in my head.

Hours later I’m stumbling along the road with Justin *et al*, singing *Junkyard* at the top of my voice.

James Cotton 'Superharp'

Chris Lambie

As I walk away from meeting legendary bluesman James Cotton ('Superharp'), his first lady reminds me gently: 'You know, Cotton is the only one around who has played with Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters.' Jacklyn Hairston speaks with the level of wonder you'd expect from a fan-club president. His partner of 20 years is well aware of the history attached to her man.

Of course, a serious name-dropper would also mention collaborations with Johnny Winter, Taj Mahal, Joe Louis Walker, Charlie Haden and Matt 'Guitar' Murphy. Cotton has also opened for or played with B.B. King, the Grateful Dead, Led Zeppelin, Santana, The Allman Brothers, Steve Miller, Freddie King, and Janis Joplin. The harmonica maestro's biography reads like a blues history lesson featuring all the iconic markers: Chicago, Mississippi, cotton fields, juke joints, Highway 61, Sun Records, Fillmore, Newport, Blues Hall of Fame, WC Handy Awards and a place in the Smithsonian Institute. His recordings have gathered a string of awards and nominations with his 1996 album *Deep in the Blues* claiming a Grammy Award.

The son of a Baptist preacher, Cotton grew up on the Mississippi cotton fields listening to his mother imitate trains and chickens on her harmonica. He was an avid fan of Sonny Boy Williamson's radio show and one Christmas, Cotton got a 15-cent

harmonica of his own. When he was nine years old, his parents had both died and he, the youngest of their eight children, left home to be taken on by Williamson, his idol. Of the years spent as his mentor's 'adopted' son and impressive opening act, he says, 'He didn't teach me how to play. I just did it!' As a teenager, Cotton joined Howlin' Wolf for a time and, at 15, cut four songs at Sun Records: 'Straighten Up Baby', 'Hold Me In Your Arms', 'Oh, Baby' and 'Cotton Crop Blues'. A radio station in Arkansas gave Cotton his own 15-minute show in 1952 and he went on to play beside Muddy Waters for 12 years. When asked what it was like to work with the enigmatic Howlin' Wolf, Cotton pauses. He casts a bemused smile at Hairston.

'Well, you know, it's a funny thing about those old blues singers,' he begins. 'They was so much into what they was doin'...They'd make a record, then they'd go play it that night, and whatever was on that record, you had to play! You couldn't miss a thing. If you missed it, [Wolf] would take some of your money. He'd say, 'You give me \$10 because you didn't play that'. Muddy Waters used to do that too. I was playing for about two or three years [like that] and he was *real* good. He didn't miss it! Muddy was a nice man. Good blues singer and blues guitarist.'

In a 66-year career, Cotton has performed at concerts and festivals around the world. The 5th Miri International Jazz Festival lured him to South-East Asia for the first time. Hairston says, 'This whole area has been untapped for most of the blues world. We wanted to meet everyone in the area and see what it was like and it's obvious you all really love the music.' Visiting the East Malaysian state of Sarawak (Borneo) is also the closest he's got to Australia so far. As word spread that the Grammy winner had 'entered the building', the buzz in Borneo reflected a global hunger to hear authentic blues. Just as Englishmen like Mayall, Clapton and the Rolling Stones did in the '60s, a new generation of blues and roots artists is going back in time to learn from the pioneers. Cotton has seen the trend first-hand. 'It seems like it's coming back again', he says. 'The blues is the foundation of it all

and people are going back to the roots again. Blues got a lotta feeling. You can *feel* it. It's just like going to church on Sunday morning. That's what's drawing them over, is the feeling.'

Cotton commonly plays for three generations of fans at music festivals. At Miri, every man, woman and child joins the chorus to announce they've got their 'mojo working' in the steamy night air. Thanks to the internet, his iconic 1960 Newport Jazz Festival performance of 'Mojo' with Waters can be re-visited. Cotton compares today's access to a world of music with his own early awakenings. 'It's a big difference. Music is freer now. More people know about it. Now it's more modernized. I came up on a farm and I had to work every day. You'd work in the fields all day, go to sleep, wake up, go back to work. It was that way when I was nine years old. Back on the farm, when I got to singing the blues, the boss thought I was crazy!' he recalls with a chuckle. 'To [go into music] you have to study it, give it time...work at it. You have to put yourself into it. If you don't put something in, you don't get nothin' out!'

At the MIJF press conference, Cotton catches up with old friend Michael Shrieve who leapt to fame as Carlos Santana's teenage drummer at Woodstock. While the Miri event is labelled a 'jazz festival', there's plenty of room for cross-over acts and no-one's complaining about Cotton headlining the bill. 'Jazz came from the blues but the blues hasn't been getting the attention or credit it should,' he says. But Cotton is no 'blues snob' and names Willie Nelson and Johnny Cash as current favourites on his iPod. 'I listen to everything I can. I can't play it all but I love to listen.'

Accompanying their leader's wailing harmonica, the James Cotton Blues Band proves their worth on stage later that night, igniting the crowd with a scorching set of classic hits and new tunes. Cotton is rightly proud. 'It's a really good band. Some come from different backgrounds. Some from rock, some from soul... but with me, they play the blues.' The band features Slam Allen (guitar, vocals) Tom Holland (guitar, vocals) Noel Neal (bass) and Kenny Neal Jr (drums). All worthy soloists. Cotton

happily allows each member a turn in the spotlight. Bass player Neal appeared on his 2004 album *Baby, Don't You Tear My Clothes*. After seven years playing in Cotton's band, Tom Holland says, 'I wake up every day happy to go to work.' A new album on the Alligator label is due for release in the coming months. 'Some are a little rocky but not *really* rocky,' Cotton says of the new songs. 'I'm a blues man... but a good man!' he laughs with a twinkle in his eye.

'I think everybody gets the blues. Some people get the blues, they don't even know it! You know, you lose your job – you got the blues. Your ol' lady leave you – you got the blues. You got no money – you got the blues. There's happy blues and sad blues. You get a job or your ol' lady comes back again... that's happy blues!'

Possessing a powerful set of pipes, gun guitar-player Slam Allen has lead-vocal duties covered at Miri. A smiling Cotton fans Allen with a white handkerchief when the guitarist's fiery licks reply to the smokin' harp. As a result of throat surgery, Cotton's voice is soft these days, on the raspy side – almost Brando 'Godfather'-style. His fervent harp-from-the-heart playing may have cost his vocal chords a decibel or two along the way. It certainly takes its toll on his instruments. Despite his travelling with 'maybe 25 or 30' harmonicas, there are no vintage items among them. He explains: 'Sometimes I blow 'em out.' He confirms that his tools of trade sometimes disintegrate on stage. 'I don't keep 'em. Once they go bad, I get rid of 'em. It's a funny thing, you know. You can't tune a harmonica. Once it goes, you know, it's just gone. You gotta blow the reeds out of 'em and I spit 'em out,' he laughs.

After countless recordings, live shows and awards, is there anything left on Cotton's 'to do' list? 'Yeah, well... I want to be in a movie', he answers. 'I did everything and I've been in a movie but I didn't play a part in it.' What part does he have in mind? Without hesitation he says, 'I'd like to be a cowboy.' Perhaps he'd need an appropriate hat in place of his signature beret? 'Oh, he's got one!' Hairston assures us with a grin. [*Hello Jim Jarmusch?*]

Hairston glances at her watch. 'You want to wrap it up soon

Honey?’ she asks. It was a long flight from the US with ash alerts from Iceland’s volcano adding an eight-hour layover en route. The sound check is done and show time approaches. We’ve been talking twice as long as the allocated time. ‘Yeah, I gotta lay down...and get some rest and I’m ready to go,’ he promises. As recorders and cameras are packed away, I mention seeing Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee twice in Australia. Cotton smiles broadly and sits back in his chair. Time stands still as he recounts a conversation with another blues giant. ‘A couple of years before Sonny passed, he told me, ‘If I go first, put one of your harmonicas in my grave.’ And I did that.’ The Terry/McGhee duo were rumoured to have had a shaky off-stage relationship in the later years of their touring partnership. ‘You know, they couldn’t stand each other by the end,’ Cotton tells me. He confirms stories that a middle-man relayed messages from one muso to the other while in the same room. ‘Superharp’ has worked with just about everybody who matters in blues history. The mention of guitar great Hubert Sumlin – who played with Cotton before joining Howlin’ Wolf for two decades – triggers another tale. ‘Hubert Sumlin? Well now I’ll tell you something,’ he begins. He talks of weekly visits to his friend’s home, mediating between the guitarist and his God-fearing mother. Cotton recalls, ‘She’d say, “If you play those reels on that guitar, you gonna go down and go to hell!”’

It’s been a long, inspiring career but perhaps most impressive is Cotton’s continuing passion to take the music even further. He’d like to tour in Australia, and following his Malaysian debut would prepare for the Chicago Blues Festival in June. ‘I went to Chicago in 1954 and all the good blues musicians were there – Elmore James, Memphis Slim, Jimmy Reed, Muddy Waters... Everybody was there.’ His warm laughter hints at a wealth of stories from those trail-blazing days. How does it feel to be a part of treasured memories for so many music lovers across the world? He says simply, ‘It makes me feel good.’

From Chronicles of Suburbia

Lauren Mitchell

I – Sign Language

Across the road from home there's a sign of sorts. It's a timber board nailed high between two metal poles, about two feet long and the width of a weatherboard.

It's old and weathered and looks as though it may have once-upon-a-time read something harsh like 'trespassers will be prosecuted'. But time has taken its threat, its words, and rendered it futile. It's just a harmless piece of wood now with nothing to say...

The view across our street and beyond that sign is a pretty one, of a thick patch of ironbarks and pine trees. You can imagine the smell when it rains; on warm, wet days we open our front windows and let great wafts of pine and eucalyptus sweep through the house.

Trespassers are most welcome over there. Each time we walk the rough, often puddled paths, we pass new club houses in the scrub in various stages of construction. It's really comforting to know the kids still build cubby houses.

I've made a secret little cubby-hole for myself under our front verandah and behind the rose bushes, using wicker chairs in place of gum branches. I can't be seen from the street, but I've got a perfect view of that perfectly contained world, with its resident kookaburras and mystery owls, rarely seen yet often fabled.

I have my own little tea party behind the roses and watch the clouds roll over. And I stare at that sign.

I reckon it needs some new words.

I reckon I could lug a ladder over there and a pot of paint and give that sign new meaning. But what words to choose when there's only room for so few?

I'd like something hopeful. Something lovely, something to gift to the neighbourhood. Most street signs are so controlling, so bossy in their purpose. Stop. Wrong Way. Do Not Enter. Maybe this sign could be an opposite sign?

It could say Just Keep Going. You're All Right. Or simply Welcome. We need street signs that point us in a positive direction. Signs of our times. Signs of the things we want to come.

I was talking about important words with a friend; she said one that comforts her is the word 'be'. She loves to see that word because it reminds her to be calm, be happy, be in the moment, be content, be herself.

Maybe I could start this sign with the word 'be' and see what happens? I'd love to think the people around me would fill in the gap with something simple yet wonderful. Or perhaps the words Cubby Houses Live Here would do? What more do you need to know to be optimistic about the future?

I'd love to be greeted by words of comfort each time I sat down to my cubby cuppa. Because, usually, comfort words aren't easy to come by. Weasel words come cheap. Worry words and crisis words come to our driveway, wrapped in plastic then unravelled and spread across the kitchen table each morning.

Words of moneymen and debt come straight to our letter boxes every other day. Hurried words of abbreviation beep at us from phones and computers, assaulting private moments every day. I yearn for calm and steady words to ground my world. This sign could be just the thing to do it. This could be A Sign of Hope.

II – Fragility of Life at Sea

I heard a story of a 40-year friendship that recently went adrift, ran aground, hit rock bottom. These two women, in their 60s, had been inseparable for all their adult lives. And now one of them won't return the other's calls, reply to her emails, explain the change in heart.

She has knocked the wind out of the other one's sails.

I'm not trying to trivialise their story with all the boat analogies, but perhaps there's a reason why a friendship is called so, after a sea vessel. It can be an unpredictable thing, at the whim of prevailing winds. Swells of emotion. Something that one day seems seaworthy, strong and dependable, can so easily be battered and bashed by a chance change in circumstance.

I've had a few friendships desert me, without clear reasoning. They were friendships spanning well over a decade. Well over formative years, with shared dreams realised and some lost. Win and lose. Ebb and flow.

At the time those friends were lost, I was philosophical, reasoning that people change. And they don't always want to pack you in their suitcase and take you along for the ride. But as time ticked by, the hole these women left in my life was not easily filled and the sadness of that found a little place to rest itself.

So how sad must it be, to lose a friend after 40 years?

We all have our own quiet grief to carry, to cart around among all the other stuff of life, bringing it out to ponder over while looking at old photos, listening to old CDs, cleaning out the cupboards.

I attempted to clean out a storage cupboard at home recently. Talk about all at sea. Facing boxes and bags of harboured belongings is enough to jolt you from one moment in your life to another, without warning.

I found photographs taken by one of those friends during an amazing experience we shared. I picked them up, then put them back. I didn't want to dishonour the friendship by putting them in the 'cast away' pile, but I didn't want to face them either.

I found a bag of little shoes. First walkers, first Converse All Stars, first Bob the Builder gumboots. All worn for too little time to wear them out, they were perfect candidates for the op-shop pile. Again, I held them, put them back. How much can one woman pack away?

Then I found a tattered box I knew well. It was a favourite game from childhood I knew my boy would now love, so it went straight to the top deck. The Game of Life.

I'd love to go back and tell my ten-year-old self – the one who

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got this game for Christmas – that by the age of 33 that game would be on track for many, many amazing wins. And some losses too. But that's life.

No matter how long you've been sailing with someone, you can't always see the icebergs.

Academic Non-Fiction

The Poetry of John Kinsella

Miranda Aitken

John Kinsella writes a radical anti-pastoral poetry of the West Australian Wheatbelt landscape that was his childhood home. As a vegan pacifist, Kinsella is radical both in his political and ideological positions, in his experimentation with language and in his determination to remove the veils of pastoral nostalgia through which the Australian landscape has been perceived and written. Kinsella's achievements are many, varied, and notable; author of over thirty books, including about twenty collections of poetry, he is a Professor of English at Kenyon University in the US, a Fellow at Cambridge University in the UK and the Adjunct Professor at Edith Cowan University (where he is a principal of the Landscape and Language Centre). John Kinsella has taken the West Australian Wheatbelt to the world and his work has been translated into many different languages.

In *Wheatlands*, Dorothy Hewett, who also grew up in the Wheatbelt and wrote many poems about her childhood there, writes that when she first began to read Kinsella's poetry she had an 'extraordinary feeling of kinship' (2000, 9). Reed (2010, 91) quotes Glenn Phillips's term 'home landscape' to describe the way that Kinsella 'figures his kinship' with the West Australian Wheatbelt. Connection and sense of belonging to place is examined, from childhood through to adulthood, all the while scrutinising and critiquing traditional European practices and attitudes to land ownership, farming and the resulting salination of farm land. In his poems Kinsella examines the devastating

effect that dispossession has had on the traditional Aboriginal owners of the area (and the effect of colonisation/invasion generally) and his work has been described as 'an eco-anarchist critique of colonization and land degradation' (Reed 2010, 91). Often dark and angry, his work seems to demand of both himself and the reader that we do away with any sentimental or nostalgic traditional pastoral ideas about the places he writes; the poems are rarely lyrical or romantic, and can challenge the reader on many levels: ideologically, poetically and linguistically. However, a sense of commitment to environmental activism motivated by deep love of country is always present.

In an interview in 2010, Paul Outka offers this definition of ecocriticism and its practice:

Ecocriticism is the study of how nature and human/natural relations are constructed in a variety of different forms of representations such as literature, painting, music, and so forth, and the ecological, human, and political consequences of those constructions. The inquiry is structured around the fact that nature is both a real thing that exists outside our speaking and writing, outside of language and representation, and yet is always something we approach only through language, representation, and our own personal and cultural history. Analysing the paradoxical intersection of those two realms is at the heart of what ecocriticism does. (*Landscapes*, Vol 4, Issue 2, 2010-11)

This 'paradoxical intersection' in the poetry of John Kinsella is of great interest to Marthe Reed, who suggests that the poem can become a space where poet and reader can reconnect with place; a 'psychic liminal space' that resonates in the consciousness, and a space where Kinsella connects with place 'via loss and longing' (2010, 92). As much a theorist of poetics as he is a poet, Kinsella himself says that 'language is another landscape, and where these two planes meet is where the abstractions, and I feel, the enrichment, come into their form of focus' (2011).

Two of John Kinsella's more recent collections are *The New Arcadia* (2005) and *Shades of the Sublime & Beautiful* (2008) and with titles such as these the reader is immediately aware that Kinsella is in intertextual conversation with ideas and writings from the ecological or nature-writing 'canon'. In *The New Arcadia*, Kinsella engages with the classical pastoral, and often mythologised,

Arcadian trope of a living in harmony with nature often associated with the ideals of utopia. The third collection is considered to be Kinsella's 'great pastoral trilogy' that includes *The Silo* and *The Hunt* (Pingping & Philips, 2009). The title *The New Arcadia* suggests that the poet has found or wants to find a new harmonic home in the land of which he writes, but like Virgil, Kinsella is concerned with environmental problems associated with his own modern Australian civilisation (Garrard, 2012, 40). Kinsella writes both within and against the classical pastoral tradition in a manner not dissimilar to other post-colonial writers.

There are four eclogues in *The New Arcadia* in which by turn brothers, farmer and young bloke, birds and lovers converse in verse with echoes of Virgil's eclogues. In 'Eclogue of Presence' the 'Farmer' is aggressive and violent, claiming ownership of a land full of death; in the first stanza – 'everything you see stretched between river and hills/ is mine, and you need my permission to cross even the gullies' – and in the third – 'and the noise/ they hear will be the sound of death come down from the hills/ down from my house where guns are loaded' – the farmer commits acts of violence against both the land and its creatures, who are 'quelled by rifle and chainsaw', and against traditional owners personified in 'Young Bloke'. 'Young Bloke' knows the land, speaks its language and recalls the violence committed on and to it: 'You Wadjelas have killed what you see, and morning/ is lonely because of it'. Noise is important in the poem: the gullies 'speak out in a language that'd just be noise/to you' says Young Fella to the Farmer, who is 'aware of every noise' but creates the noise of death. (96-101). The poem is a dark rendering of the Wheatbelt's colonial past.

While not all poems in the collection are such dark and angry expressions of land-theft and environmental destruction, some, such as 'The Shitheads of Spray', are poetic rants against ecologically unsound practices like spraying crops with pesticides. In this poem Kinsella vents his unforgiving spleen against white settler/ pastoralist society, 'worshippers of spray-drenched fruit/ that smiles without blight'. These, he writes unequivocally, are the 'descendants of those who murdered/ Yagan and chopped his head off' – they are the 'shitheads of spray' who 'graze sheep on

dying grass/ and smile benignly' (114). In his radical anti-pastoral poetry Kinsella rarely holds back from shattering the pastoral myths that White Australian culture has inherited from its British colonial past.

In *Shades of the Sublime & Beautiful*, the angry tones of *The New Arcadia* are not as prevalent—many of the poems concentrate on detailed observations of landscape leading to the contemplation of aesthetics and the transcendent. Notions of the Sublime in poetry have their roots in the Judaeo-Christian tradition's ambivalent attitude to wilderness. Edmund Burke (whom Kinsella acknowledges), wrote his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* in the 1700s. In it he states that 'the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature...is Astonishment: and Astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of Horror'. While the Sublime has associations with terror and awe, the Beautiful is often associated with pleasure, smallness and delicacy. (Garrard 2012, 71). Notions of the Sublime and the Beautiful can be found in the poetry of the English Romantics, such as Shelley and Wordsworth, and later in the American Transcendentalists such as Thoreau and Dickinson.

In the poem 'Astonishment (Of the Passion caused by the Sublime)' there is a sense that the poet is reconnecting with, and reflecting on, nature and place. Terror can be found in human form 'a V8 slowing down is warning – taking an interest in banksias unlikely' and in nature 'the smallest difference on re-encounter astonishes, fills you with that terror' (28). In the poem 'Colours of the Wheatbelt' the poet describes a juvenile dugite that has come into the house. A creature often associated with fear, the snake in the poem is transformed into a creature of colour, light and beauty, with almost magical 'resonances of the body shape unfold[ing] like an incremental halo about its form'. Evoking images of the Aboriginal Rainbow Serpent, the snake contains colours of the Wheatbelt, 'a rainbow dense with chemical light of its touch, the streaming colours within' (55). This could be seen as a metaphor for sacred indigenous knowledge of the land. It reveals its 'true colours' only to its rightful custodians. As in the poem 'Snake' by D H Lawrence in which the poet encounters a

snake drinking at his water-trough – ‘Was it humility, to feel so honoured?’ – in Kinsella’s poem the snake’s presence is sacred and divine (1993, 952).

The final poem in *Shades of the Sublime & Beautiful*, ‘Forest Encomia of the South-West’ sees the poet return to his activist roots while exploring family history and identity. For many who have lived in the south-west of Western Australia the poem evokes images and personal histories that may be familiar. The poem moves from micro to macro, from the personal to the political, while the title references classical rhetoric (Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary defines ‘Encomia’ as a Latin word derived from the Greek, meaning ‘a formal or high-flown expression of praise’). In part 1, the poet establishes his formal family relationship with the forest, in which he reveals that his grandfather was a head State Forester: ‘Kinsella is a road and a forest, Kinsella is an overlay’; and how he does not fit in with family tradition, ‘a man’s man... and you’re Claude’s grandson? Surprising’. Part 2 is concerned with early colonisation, land-clearing and occupation, and more recent environmental protesting over sand-mining in south-west Tuart forests: ‘The sand-mining company/ has the government in its pocket—this/ is a barely renovated cliché’; and the sub-culture of the protester, ‘girls/in dungarees call on the moon goddess,/ and they move on.’ Part 4 is a powerful stanza in which the violence of logging the forest is juxtaposed with the ethereal and spiritual beauty of a standing forest, metaphorically sacrificed like Christ by the Romans. And like the Christian tradition in which worshippers metaphorically consume the body and blood of Christ, in this poem bark, wood and flesh become one:

Surrounded by the paraphernalia of foresting
the cutting and tearing of bark is head over shoulder
in the pit, raining down flaky tears,
an electric rip – of the tongue,
taste not unlike the taste we have of ourselves,
skin, flesh, chapels in the clearing...

The poem is a wonderful example of the way in which Kinsella uses the depth of his experience in exploring and subverting traditional understandings of the sublime and the beautiful and encompassing expressions of reverence and rage, both personal and political.

In discussing what ecocriticism is, Garrard refers to the introduction of Cheryl Glotfelty's seminal *The Ecocriticism Text* (1996), and the questions ecocritics ask, which range from the representation of nature within a text, to concepts of wilderness, science and the 'cross-fertilisation' between literary studies and environmental discourse and other disciplines, concluding from Glotfelty that 'ecocriticism is an avowedly political mode of analysis' (2012, 3). Garrard writes that ecocriticism enables us 'to analyse and criticise the world in which we live' attending to 'the broad range of cultural processes and products in which, and through which, the complex negotiations of nature and culture take place' (5). The poetry of John Kinsella can be found to encompass this broad range of cultural negotiations, and it is aggressively and actively political in its nature and focus.

Part 7 of 'Forest Encomia of the South-West' is almost a Kinsellian manifesto of the sustainable/ unsustainable in Western Australia: 'Sustainable equals dispossession/ Sustainable equals clear-felling'. From the micro to the macro, nature is represented as the cultural and the historical: 'Sustainable equals ochre rivers and the peeling-back of the layers/ of allegory', and as the scientific and the spiritual, 'Sustainable equals dieback trod and trod through by effusing bushwalkers/ infiltrated by bird calls – shocked into spirituality by the weather calls/ of white-tailed cockatoos'.

Kinsella writes in his personal essay, 'Landscape Poetry':

I write loss and destruction, lovingly. I write people whose viewpoints are very different to my own, who politically oppose me as I oppose them, but I celebrate the difference. Out of the destruction comes something fresh and vital. For me, poetry is a sublime thing, but also gritty and angry. It can do something. It is awareness and the blood flowing through veins. It is the unseen stream below the surface sought by the diviner and found to be running salt. (2011)

Pingping and Philips trace the poetic progress of Kinsella as it develops from anti-pastoral to radical pastoral. They suggest that his work is 'an example of an Australian poetic attack on the traditions of the "pastoral Eden"' and argue that 'he uses the current plight of much of the Australian landscape to arouse our awareness of the importance of the whole world's environmental

protection, whether it be in Australia, China or any other continent' (2009, 2). Pingping and Philips make the significant suggestion that Kinsella's Pastoral Trilogy, which includes *The New Arcadia* discussed in this essay, should be added to Western culture's significant writings concerning humanity's relationship with nature (12).

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Shouting Across the Distance: Contemporary Irish Female Poets

Julia Birch

While some Irish female writers such as Speranza (Lady Wilde, formerly Jane Elgee, mother of Oscar Wilde), Rose Kavanagh, Alice Milligan, Katharine Tynan and Mary Devenport O'Neill were published before the 1900s, there were many others who remained largely invisible, not only in poetry and literature, but in a far wider cultural sense. As Kelly remarks in her introduction to *Pillars of the House: an anthology of verse by Irish women from 1690 to the present*, for a long time 'Women scribblers were tolerated [but] "Verse" was the only type of poetry that women, excluded from a classical education, were expected to write...' (1987, 16)

Donagh MacDonagh, editor of *The Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, has described Irish women writers as part of 'the submerged body of ballad makers' (Kelly, 1987, 11). In addition, the editors of *The Penguin Book of Women Poets* (1978) observed that '... even today there is a tendency to neglect the work of women poets, and national anthologies include little of their work' (Kelly, 1987, 12). Thomas Kinsella's decision, as editor of *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, not to include work from any modern women poets is an example of this mindset (Kelly 1987, 13).

Poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, commenting on the absence of female writers from the manuscripts over centuries, believes this

socio-cultural and political history mirrors the amount of space available in the twenty-first century for women writers, referring to this as a 'repression of the "deep feminine" in Irish minds, and Irish society – and poetry' (Sewell, 2003). Similarly, the 1991 publication of *The Field Day of Irish Writing*, a collection covering more than a thousand years and described as a defining moment in late twentieth-century Irish literature, was 'marked by the virtual absence of female writers' (Stylus Publishing, 2008). 'At the deepest level – you may say at the level of ontology underpinning [sic] – the Irish poetic tradition is sexist and masculinist [sic] to the core' Ní Dhomhnaill remarked (*Poetry Ireland*, 1993, 109).

Poets such as Máire Mhac an tSaoi, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Eavan Boland have consistently explored, articulated and challenged the boundaries of this constraint, and as contemporary Irish female poets, have also broken through a seemingly insurmountable barrier, from being the subjects of Irish poetry – the *Muse* – to becoming recognisably, and authentically, the *authors* of it.

The existence of contemporary Irish women poets has caused a seismic shift in the framework of the nation's poetic tradition... Simply by picking up their pens to write, contemporary women writers have turned the tradition inside-out and shifted from the passive position of subject to the active position of author. (Galvin 2001, n.p.)

That being said, Irish female poets are even now constantly writing within significant inherited literary constraints.

There was a widespread belief that if poetry, which was a hereditary gift... fell into the female line, then it was gone from that particular family for seven generations to come... A similar taboo existed against women telling Fenian tales; but that did not stop women being storytellers or filiúil (poetic). (Ní Dhomhnaill, 1996, 114)

Mhac an tSaoi, Ní Dhomhnaill, Ní Chuilleanáin and Boland's poetry is overlaid with Ireland's bardic history, with its intensely oral and communal tradition, musicality of language, colour and form, all of which create a powerful emotional and visceral affect. Yet this very mantle of oral and bardic tradition has until recently excluded these same (and other) Irish women from playing an active literary role in their cultural heritage, learning and future vision.

Boland admits that 'For a long time, I've had a sort of dialogue going in my mind – maybe even a quarrel – between those elements of poetic experiment and bardic inheritance' (Schmidt, 1997). While recognising the burden and constraints of their country's bardic, oral history on them, these Irish women poets have, however, breathed new life into it, with such poetry as:

They are outsiders, always. These stars –
these iron inklings of an Irish January,
...they are, they have always been
outside history.
Out of myth into history I move to be
part of that ordeal,
whose darkness is only reaching me from those fields...
(Boland, 'Outside History', 1990)

The rhythm, melody and cadence of this poem and the one following carry both the voice of the past, and the understanding of the present poet:

In case you thought this was a gentle art
follow this man on a moonless night
to the wretched bed he will have to make:
The Gaelic world stretches out under a hawthorn tree
and burns in the rain.
(Boland, 'My Country in Darkness' *Colony* (1998)

Mhac an tSaoi, Ní Chuilleánáin and Boland may be characterised by Boland's self-description that while she is a feminist, she is not a feminist poet. For Boland, feminism has great power as an ethic, but not as an *aesthetic*. For her poetic needs and intentions, feminism is restrictive. Instead, 'My poetry begins for me where certainty ends... the imagination is an ambiguous and untidy place... its frontiers are not accessible to the logic of feminism.' (Schmidt, 1997)

On the other hand, Ní Dhomhnaill is emphatically a politically active feminist writer. She has said: 'The issue of the native language and its suppression has intrinsically a vast political dimension... At surface level it offers parallels with the position of Ireland's women.' ('Words for the Branwen's theme', *The Water Horse*, 1999)

Máire Mhac an tSaoi, the oldest of these women, exercises an extensive technical knowledge and a personal style reminiscent

of classical Irish poetry, and is considered by many to be Ireland's greatest living Irish-language poet. An example of this style is at work in one of her most famous poems, 'Oíche Nollaig': (translation *Eo Feasa*, 2010):

*Le coinnle na n-aingeal tá an spéir amuigh breactha,
Tá fiacail an tseaca sa ghaoith ón gcnoc,
Adaigh an tine is téir chun na leapan,
Luífidh Mac Dé ins an tigh seo anocht.*

With the candles of the angels the sky outside is speckled,
The tooth of frost is in the wind from the hill,
Light the fire and go to bed,
The son of God will lie in this house tonight

Born in 1922 in the same year as the Irish Free State, and writing a generation before Ní Dhomhnaill and Boland, Mhac an tSaoi is considered one of a handful of major Irish poets who transformed poetry during and after the Second World War, her work forecasting the emergence of women's voices in both English and Irish in the 1970s and 1980s (Centre for Irish Studies, NUI, 2007, n.p.)

Like future poets such as Eavan Boland, Mhac an tSaoi writes of, and from, the intimate female experience, at a time when (as Ní Dhomhnaill has put it) the 'deep feminine' in Irish culture was marginalised. For example, in her most famous poem, *Ceathruinti Mhaire Ni Ogain*, written in the 1940s, she challenges Ireland's moral integrity: 'I care little for people's suspicions,/ I care little for priest's prohibitions,/ For anything save to lie stretched/ Between you and the wall...'

And yet, while Mhac an tSaoi's poetic voice is informed by the poetry of bardic and traditional folk writing, her measured style actually allows her to be subversive. Though her voice is forthright, this same poem also shows the conflict and ambivalence apparent in her writing and in a wider sense, of the Irish woman's experience of sexuality, femininity and social morality. 'That tension between individual desire and conventional values is central to Mhac an tSaoi's poetic method.' (de Paor 2006)

The social, cultural and economic realities for women until well into the second half of the twentieth century were stark, women experiencing considerable legal, social and educational discrimination. In her analysis of the periods of silence experienced

by many writers, Tillie Olsen considered the complex issues of creativity versus interruption which are so often the lot of the female writer, and of which she said 'Where the claims of creation cannot be primary, the results are atrophy; unfinished work; minor effort and accomplishment; silences.' (1980, 95)

Women writers in particular suffer from what Olsen calls this 'cost of discontinuity', often to a greater degree than men, mainly due to the major role they play in child-bearing and rearing. And yet, writers such as Ní Chuilleanáin

...allow those who have been silenced by history to surface in art as surreal but living presences. Her poetry is one of half-secrets, half-revelations, scrupulously controlled but also continuously startling, using the language of history, religion, landscape, and myth to unlock those categories of experience for which poetry is the proper language. (Holdridge 2007, n.p.)

Layered within and alongside this poetic arena has been a growing movement to write in Irish, to use the Irish language as the primary means of poetic expression. Ní Dhomhnaill writes solely in Irish, which many believe is a deliberate act of political and cultural significance (Murray, 2009, n.p.). In 'The Language Issue' (translated by Paul Muldoon) she writes: 'I place my hope in the water/ in this little boat/ of the language... only to have it borne hither and thither,/ not knowing where it might end up' (*Pharaoh's Daughter*, 1990).

The Irish Free State, founded in 1922 following the Gaelic Revival of the late nineteenth century, heralded a resurgence of interest in the Irish language and its folklore and mythology. It became official government policy to protect and promote the Irish language, which led to a revival of Irish language literature and the official recognition of *an Ghaeltacht* – Irish-speaking regions. In 1926, *An Gúm* (*The Project*) became a significant outlet both for original literary works and for translations into Irish from poets such as Mhac an tSaoi, and in the second half of the century saw the emergence of female writers and poets such as Ní Dhomhnaill, Boland, and Ní Chuilleanáin.

Contemporary Irish female poets, while writing in Irish and in English (or in translation) and expressing their own personal poetic, have both shared, and individually explored, a number

of common themes. In particular, they share the potent subjects of women's experiences of writing in a male-dominated literary landscape; the themes of exile; of change and the quest for identity, so prevalent in Irish culture; the themes of love, femininity, feminism and sexuality, ... 'sift[ing] through the domestic lives of [their] mother[s] and ancestors.' (Parini, 2007); and in particular, examining female archetypes and the sacred, and acknowledging and exploring (and consequently, often *subverting*) ancient Irish folklore and mythology, traditions which many Irish female poets like Mhac an tSaoi, Ní Dhomhnaill, Boland and Ní Chuilleanáin see as an integral part of the Irish language and part of the structure and narrative of Irish culture.

As Boland has said: 'Irish poetry has a bardic history... The Irish bards lay down in the darkness to compose.' (Schmidt, 1997). Many Irish female writers (and women of other nationalities) might understandably reflect on how in the past they too have composed (and may still do) in the shade created by their socio-cultural history.

Mhac an tSaoi, Ní Dhomhnaill, Ní Chuilleanáin and Boland, all of them mothers and wives or partners, share as a consistent feature of their writing the intimate and the domestic spaces. In *First Communion Day*, Ní Dhomhnaill writes of her daughter's first communion and of her own conflicting emotions as a mother: '... how could I tell her about the life ahead of her,/ about the darkness through which she will have to walk/ alone, despite my very best efforts, and against my will?'. Boland talks of the 'disorganisation of the beloved moment' (Schmidt, 1997) when composing *The Pomegranate* ('In a Time of Violence', 1994), and of how the poem opens out to include the things she loves and wishes to unite, such as her teenage daughter, asleep in her room strewn with magazines, coke cans and slices of apple; in *Nightfeeds* (1982) she brings together poetry and motherhood and the complexity of ordinary women's experiences.

Ní Chuilleanáin's poetry is subtly powerful and provocative. It can be '... oblique, but always concrete, reflecting the elemental realities of fire, air, water, and earth, giving utterance to what most challenges speech' (Holdridge 2007, n.p.). As an example, in *Ardnaturais*, where she speaks of birth (in this instance, of the sacred), and where swimming becomes a meditation on death, she writes: 'Alone in the sea: a shallow breath held stiffly / My

shadow lies / Dark and hard like time / Across the rolling shining stones' (in Kelly 1987, 136).

Holdridge comments:

While her numerous images of mythical figures, travellers, pilgrims, and women ... remind us of our deepest inner sanctum, with its litany of spiritual truths, fears, and needs, these images also catalogue the importance of the ordinary and the domestic as new metaphors for human experiences and emotions. (2007, n.p.)

These Irish female poets, each with her own unique poetic, honour female strengths while also engaging with Irish language, culture, myth and imagery, where they constantly cross the boundaries of mythology and the everyday, and of the past, present and future.

Eavan Boland articulates it best for them all when she writes:

I began writing in a country where the word 'woman' and the word 'poet' were almost magnetically opposed... I became used to the flawed space between them. In a certain sense, I found my poetic voice by shouting across that distance. (*Object Lessons: the life of the woman and the poet in our time* 1995, xi)

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Reading My Email in Public: An Experiment in Real-Time Spoken Word Generation and Performance

Warren Burt

I've been involved with experimental art of all types – musical, visual, verbal, performance – since the late 1960s. One of my principal artistic interests has been to set up a process, often involving randomness of some kind, to produce artistic output. Needless to say, I'm interested in found objects and the unexpected beauties and delights which might be discovered from them. Although my first works of this type were musical, using the random combination potentials of the early Moog synthesizers, I quickly became interested in applying those ideas to the realm of creating (or writing) texts. At first, I performed these processes by hand, using lists of random numbers to select texts from a number of sources and combining them into larger texts, which were themselves cut up and recombined using further lists of random numbers, producing collage texts which were sometimes bewildering, and sometimes very funny. My first major effort in this vein was my performance poem 'Nighthawk I' (1973) which takes an hour to perform, and which gradually progresses from a kind of genial, humour-filled collage to a manic mantra on the word 'nighthawk.' This was dedicated to my friend and neighbour Kathy Acker, who at that time, like me, was influenced by a

number of other people who were experimenting with the limits of language, such as the writer William Burroughs, the composer Kenneth Gaburo, and the cross-media artist David Antin.

Once computers became easily available, I realised they were an ideal tool for this kind of work. A number of people wrote programs to produce texts of various kinds, such as the early 1980s 'Racter' and 'Eliza,' which, besides proving that artificial intelligence in text generation had a long way to go, generated texts which almost, but not quite, seemed as if one were conversing with a person. In 1985, with my colleague Allyn Brodsky, at International Synergy Institute in Los Angeles, we brought two computers into the same room, ran Racter on one machine, and Eliza on the other, feeding their output into each other, and transcribing the resulting conversation between the two programs. The resulting libretto, slightly edited (to remove loops that the programs could occasionally get stuck in) was realised with very early crude computer voice-synthesis into my radio opera 'Racter and Eliza: An Opera of Mistakes.'

In 2009, I was invited to Melbourne to perform in the Overload Poetry Festival. At this time, I had seen a lot of musicians performing with laptops, and had noticed that watching someone perform on a laptop usually was not interesting. It looked like someone reading their email. As I said at the time, with some vehemence, *This is not a business model I want in my art*. However, because all the neat new musical toys I was interested in were currently computer-based, I decided that for the moment I was probably stuck with performing on a laptop, and decided to run with the image of someone reading their email. I would, in fact, read my email—aloud, in public—as a performance. Then I thought that I could make things a bit more interesting if the email were actually being modified in some way, so that although the vocabulary would be from email, the syntax, grammar and combination of phrases would be generated on the fly. While I was doing this live reading, I would also be performing electronic sounds. This would give the performance some drama: this nut is reading an almost incomprehensible text, and is modifying it electronically while he's reading it, AND is also performing electronic sounds. The performance of it that was recorded on

video turned out to be a bit less dramatic than I was hoping for¹, but the idea was interesting, and the overall sound result is not unattractive.

Over the years, a number of programs have been written for making and modifying texts, some merely entertaining (the various academic-bull generators, which will generate a paper on semiotics for you in real time), some more serious in their intent. In the former category is a 1991 program called Babble, written by Tracey M. Siesser, Lewis Horowitz, and James E. Korenthal. (Yes, Babble is merely entertaining rather than being serious, but another of my compositional joys is the challenge of using consumer-level technology to create serious work.) Babble will combine 4 texts in real time, using probabilities you can set. That is, you can tell the program to use one text a lot more than the others for source material. You can also record the output to a text file, or watch it stream up the screen in a text window. Since the program is a DOS program (how ancient is that?), it can run on any Windows computer and take up very little memory or computer power. So if I wanted to chop up my email, in a semi-unpredictable way, and have it displayed on the screen while I was performing, and use the computer for music making at the same time, Babble was the program to use.

There are a number of other programs that I could have used—Markv is a text-generating program that uses the mathematical technique of Markov Chains in writing new texts. This preserves grammar better than other programs. Brekdwn, used extensively by John Tranter, is another program with some advanced features. And more recently, John Dunn of Algorithmic Arts of Fort Worth, Texas, completed a 10-year project writing ‘Art Wonk,’ an algorithmic tool-kit for generating music, computer graphics, or texts. I’ve written a number of text pieces with Art Wonk, including ‘54,’ an algorithmic reprocessing of the lyrics to the old American TV show, ‘Car 54, Where Art You?’ This was performed at SNO Gallery in Sydney on 7 November 2009. I read the poems, and performed music at the same time. In this performance, I felt I had achieved a kind of dramatic performance

¹ See it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPYvHlhT3KA&list=UUUnChDxI4F6p-1naZYutVJkw&index=29&feature=plcp>

I hadn't in 'Reading My Email in Public.' That's the hazards of the improvising performer's life, I guess.²

Back to Babble. Here's a quick example of how it works. From a current Greenpeace magazine, I took 3 short texts.

'Year after year, India's fish stocks and marine biodiversity are being depleted. Yet awareness of rampant illegal and destructive fishing practices remains low.'

'The Rena oil spill was New Zealand's worst environment disaster. Rather than viewing it as a wake-up call, the government is pursuing plans to allow deep water drilling.'

'We're proud to announce that Greenpeace Forest Campaigner, Paulo Adario, was awarded the 'Forest Hero' award by the United Nations. Starting in the 1990s, Paulo built a campaign exposing the threats to the Amazon.'

These three texts are combined by Babble. For this demo, there is an equal chance of words from any of the three being chosen. Here's the result:

deep water drilling

We're proud to the Amazon

The Rena oil spill was awarded the Rena oil spill was
awarded the government is pursuing plans to allow
deep water drilling

We're proud to allow deep water drilling

We're proud to announce that Greenpeace Forest
Campaigner, India's fish stocks and marine
biodiversity are being depleted. Starting in the
government is pursuing plans to allow deep water
drilling

We're proud to allow deep water drilling

We're proud to allow deep water drilling

Year after year, the United Nations. Rather than
viewing it as a campaign exposing the 6082, Paulo
Adario, India's fish stocks and marine biodiversity
are being depleted. Starting in the 9302, Paulo
built a campaign exposing the government is pursuing
plans to announce that Greenpeace Forest Campaigner,
was New Zealand's worst environment disaster. Rather
than viewing it as a campaign exposing the Rena oil

² See this performance at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZKiRwGFcpk&list=UUnChDxI4F6p-1naZYutVJkw&index=23&feature=plcp>

spill was awarded the 'Forest ro' award by the United Nations. Yet awareness of rampant illegal and destructive fishing practices remains low

Why 'We're proud to allow deep water drilling' came up three times in this short text is a mystery to me. It's part of the surprises that the program produces. But as you read through the text, you can see that parts of the source sentences have been combined in various ways.

For the performance in 2009, I used my email for Sept 1-5, 2009 as the source texts, and ran the program four or five times, each time getting a finer and finer 'grain' in the combining of the texts. That is, the output of the first run, as you can see above, has large parts of each text unmodified. If you take already combined texts like that and put them through Babble, you'll get smaller fragments surviving from the originals. As you repeat this process a number of times, your text will be more and more 'collage-like' and less 'quotational.' This kind of iterative system, where the output of a process is fed back into its input, has many uses in the arts and sciences. It's the basis of 'Iterative Function Systems,' a branch of Chaos Theory in Mathematics. Used with sound, this feedback is the basis for just about every oscillator circuit known. As a principle, feedback loops are one of the major tools of our technological society. Although in performance, I used a live output of the program to read from, just in case things failed, I made a 'safety' output of the program. Here's a short excerpt from it:

/the music - it hypothesis is better known, they
nonetheless can.

I hope a problem solving experiment as fearless
abandoning of tape and a treatment plan. Symptoms:
Old minds are "Hoam well. The question you really
don't need to Crohn's Disease which seems
increasingly/Winy 9, or the initiated but if you
could grab my cat sitter and I won't have a book
selling business, shops always take out about
tickets. They're booked out some sort of the right
balance between discordance also to be there sim ly
is no good quality bokchoy, vile smelling food.
Diagnosis: Old historic theater. Creation of
electronic music studios in his shop sell books from

bikeacciden so sorry I missed the same investig tor
and in a generally learn new pursuits more of the
information regarding Denis's produce and there sim
ly is OK.

Further, irreversible. Treatment: Old minds are like
I hope this is a checkbook, while back, a comtemp.
Russian fellow by name of the media very sharp minds
and I'll be trial and scotland.

It comes time. This is a quick message to figure out
for your payment you also to you building them at
some books, and display.

Until recent years, and what does the performance
through effort forestalling some of electronic music
studios in any event, you. Problem is a quick
message to confirm your presentation here til early
Nov.

I'm not just for Overload to library today. I missed
theig timeline thing I just three tickets for the
right balance between the entrance to the music - and
arrived at this is as opposed to offer them. In this
is a problem we've all. I'll probably go up, shops
always take aproximately 22 or academy-based
classical guitar at least 52 years earlier in
Warwick, recording and arrived at least 20 Sept at
PM.

I was especially delighted that words like 'Overload,' the name of
the festival I was performing at, survived the chop-up, and came
through the mix. In the performance in Melbourne, the names
of several other performers on the program also came through,
making a nice reference to the performance as it was happening.

In live performance, one of the challenges is to make the text
dramatic, or entertaining, in some way. Remember, I may know
the source texts, but the computer is producing the cut-ups in
real time – when the text appears on the screen, that's the first
time I've seen it. And while I'm reading, I'm also working a small
box of electronic sliders, which is controlling how the computer
is modifying my voice and playing a number of electronic and
sampled sounds. For the September performance, I had three
modifications of the voice: pitch changing, spectral freezing
(where an instantaneous moment of the sound is stretched in time
infinitely), and waveform replacement (an extreme distortion

process where each particle of the voice is replaced by a different randomly-chosen waveform); and three electronic sounds to choose from: a synthesizer playing sub-harmonic patterns, a physically modelled piano playing microtonal melodies, and a sampler, playing recorded bits of a previous performance of mine playing a homemade instrument consisting of highly amplified hardware bits and pieces. So in addition to my reading, I've got six other things to control and shape. You can see that while I'm performing, I'm very busy. My many years of work in improvisational theatre are called upon to maintain interest, concentration, and surprise. It's just like juggling, except words and electronic processes are involved rather than balls.

Having gotten this far, the gentle reader might be wondering: Why do this? Why not just write a text and get on with it? There are many answers for this—the joy of exploring found objects, the fun of seeing familiar words in unfamiliar contexts, or even just the simple desire to make language which might approach a state of abstraction rather than communication. The American composer John Cage was fond of quoting Norman O. Brown who said that syntax was the militarisation of language, and that he, Cage, was interested in making a language 'without glue.' Seeing and hearing words 'without glue' and mostly, without communicative intention, is something we get very little chance to experience. Every second, every message unit, is filled with 'meaning' and 'communication' these days in our information-saturated society, to the extent that we might forget that there are many alternative modes of verbal experience.

One of the most interesting things about the recent exhibit at the National Gallery of Victoria about Vienna at the start of the 20th century was the Vienna streetscape of 1905. There was an almost complete absence of advertising. Even the signs on shops were small and discreet. Compare that with walking in any suburban shopping strip today, where you're exposed to about a thousand times more verbal information in two minutes than anyone in Vienna would have been exposed to in a whole day. For some of us, working on the abstraction of language may be a chance to say 'enough already.' Paradoxically, by creating verbal non-sense, one might be making a (non-intentional) statement

against a media environment where everything, in great profusion, is trying to communicate – is trying to sell something. In my case, I'm trying to create multi-layered experiences for both myself and an audience, events that incorporate music, language, found objects, found sounds, and which provide some level of perceptual complexity – to create, if you will, a sounding object of fascination and some level of virtuosity for willing minds to explore, and non-directionally wander through together.

Terms of Trade: Gender Relations in Three Postcolonial African Texts

John Charalambous

The texts I examine in this essay hail from Ghana and Uganda, both once part of British Africa. Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* was first published in 1991, while Monica Arac de Nyeko's 'Jambula Tree' and Doreen Baingana's 'Tropical Fish' appeared in *African Love Stories: An Anthology* in 2006. Coming respectively thirty and fifty years after political independence, these fictions explore very localised post-colonial conditions. By and large, the characters are too young to have experienced British rule, but the ramifications of the imperial past shape their economic and emotional landscapes. The certainties of indigenous African tradition, real or imagined, are challenged and modified by a globalising commercial culture that would never have been possible without the preceding colonial domination. Hence the three texts have common themes – change, transculturation and the fraught necessity of negotiating new models of human freedom and intimacy. For African women, who are the focus of these stories, the last task is shown to be urgent.

In 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism"', Anne McClintock remarks that 'no "post-colonial" state anywhere has granted women and men equal access to the rights and resources of the nation state' (92). She notes that despite 'the rhetoric of popular unity', the political liberation of

former colonies did not liberate women (92). Rather, it served to 'institutionalise gender power' – or the rule of men (92). In the three African texts that I examine there is a common theme of patriarchal control. Traditional, localised custom combines with globalising forces to maintain the subordination of women. I see no contradiction in this. In my view colonialism, and its contemporary child, transnational capitalism, are expressions of the male drive to control, own and exploit. In Baingana's 'Tropical Fish' the exploitative nature of 'free trade' between rich and poor countries is paralleled by a mixed-race relationship that reduces a young woman to sexual commodification. In Aidoo's *Changes* three well-educated professional women, each to a greater or lesser degree thwarted by marriage, negotiate pathways through a maze of shifting economic circumstances and custom – with mixed success. In Arac de Nyeko's 'Jambula Tree' a young lesbian girl, persecuted in her shanty-town, defiantly awaits the return of her lover from London. Sometimes the women in these stories find an ally in the cultural plurality set in motion by colonialism, which proposes alternatives and allows them to believe in effective female agency and change. But the forces against them are implacable. Autonomous single women are seen as anti-social and a threat to male hegemony. What is more, the promises of Western market-driven ideology often prove false, the rewards hollow. Difficult working lives become more difficult, new burdens are piled on the old, while the desire for human intimacy is no closer to being met than before. In this new transactional environment where nothing is certain, where everything is up for grabs, the unchanging factor is that women must fight, haggle and dream from a position of institutional weakness. The terms of trade are skewed.

It is an imbalance that is explicitly portrayed in Doreen Baingana's 'Tropical Fish'. The reality of globalisation and foreign inveiglement is played out in a young Ugandan woman's relationship with an expatriate Englishman. Studying sociology, twenty-five-year-old Christine looks on her student years as 'a kind of holiday before real life' (93). Her ultimate fate, she supposes, is 'a government job that doesn't pay, in a dusty old colonial-style office, wearing shoes in desperate need of repair, eating

roasted maize for lunch' (93). Or she might marry 'someone from the right tribe, the right family, right pocket-book and potbelly, and have him pay the bills' (93). She jokes that her degree will bring a high bride-price of exotic cows, 'Friesians and Jerseys, not the common long-horned Ankole cattle' (93). Her cynicism arises from an ingrained awareness that in traditional society her prospects and status as a woman are defined by her 'trade value'. Her desires and unique personal qualities hardly count. In the struggle of 'real life' she must submit to male-dominated institutions, embrace the male ethos of transactional exchange, and attract a husband who can offer her an advantageous future.

By contrast, her relationship with Peter Smithson, an expatriate Cockney who makes a killing exporting tropical fish from Uganda to the pet-shops of Britain, seems to offer respite from the harshest aspects of this lop-sided gender deal. Christine is hard-headed enough to know that it still fits the familiar pattern of exchange, but the terms appear so much better. Indeed, while Peter is grey, balding, soft-bodied and far from sexually attractive, she appreciates the run of his plush house with its 'bright batiks on clean white walls, shiny glass cupboards full of drinks and china' (89). His wealth elicits a mix of awe and passivity. After sex she feels 'well fed and well taken care of; a child full of warm milk' (90). Yet she is aware that these feelings of infantile pleasure and dependency have a political parallel, as she wryly refers to his bedroom as the 'Master Bedroom' (89). Peter enjoys the prestige of the erstwhile coloniser. Such is his power that Christine imagines he has provided her with a consequence-free zone, a place where she can

... walk around the large, airy house naked, a gin and tonic in my hand. I didn't have to squash myself into clothes, pull in my stomach, tie my breasts up in a bra, worry about anything, be anything (90).

On the other hand, she is not blind to his unpleasant traits. At their first meeting he speaks of her studies with condescension. And rather than invite her personally to his swanky house, he imperiously despatches Zac, his employee, to summon her. Later, after they become lovers and she inquires after his surname, he facetiously tells her to call him Mr Peter, as his elderly houseboy

Deogracias does. Then there is his lack of loyalty to her, which is evident from his penchant for waitresses that he takes to the Sailing Club. Moreover, she has seen how he operates in business, how he humiliates a money-changer who tries to get the better of him. All this can be overlooked, however, because she believes the bargain she has made with him is advantageous. With her body she has bought goods and services: 'bubble baths, gin and tonics, *ganga* sex, the clean, airy white house where I could forget the hot dust outside, school, my all too ordinary life, the bleak future' (97). It is the oppressiveness of local conditions, in which there is no viable place for a single, independent woman, that makes her commercial relationship with Peter bearable if not attractive.

Yet her deepest needs as a woman are not being met. Peter does not respect her intelligence, nor permit her to truly participate in his life. He does not *care* for her – all of which is brought home to her by his response to her having had an abortion: 'Do you want any money?' (97). It is a question that swamps all the subtle possibilities of human intimacy. At the same time Baingana implies that Christine's personal devastation is emblematic of a larger devastation. She floats an analogy between Peter's behaviour and the predations of the introduced Nile perch, which Christine reads about at the abortion clinic:

The Nile perch is ugly and tasteless, but it is huge, and provides a lot more food for the populace. But it was eating up all the smaller, rarer, gloriously coloured tropical fish.

Peter is an individual, but also representative of a monstrous and rapacious international drive that devours the 'gloriously coloured tropical fish' of private possibility. The invention of new forms of human intimacy based on respect and holistic feeling is not possible.

The protagonist of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* arrives at a similar negative conclusion. Early in the novel Esi Sekyi is raped by her husband Oko. Trying to define what has happened, she reflects that there is no word in all the African languages of the region for 'rape in marriage'. Popular local opinion has it that a wife is always sexually available to her husband, and that Oko's unrestrained lust is a sign of her desirability and the strength of their relationship. But Esi is not a traditional village woman. As

an Accra-based sociologist working for the Department of Urban Statistics, she is hurt and angered by his behaviour. Her turmoil is complicated by her awareness that she is applying foreign values – the values of the former coloniser – to her domestic situation. Even so, the rape brings long-standing dissatisfactions to a head. Quite apart from what Oko has done, she realises that it is the institution of marriage that diminishes and frustrates her. As a career woman who lives for her job, she resents the all-consuming nature of her roles as wife to Oko and mother to her daughter Ogyaanowa. On the assumption, reasonable enough in Western countries, that a well-educated professional woman with a good job can achieve an independent life, she ends the marriage. Her subsequent relationship with Ali, a wealthy Muslim travel consultant who already has a wife, explores the limitations of Esi's individualistic free-agency in late twentieth century Ghana. Esi's miscalculation is that she imagines she can craft her own arrangements, and that society will allow her to remain a single woman with a boyfriend.

In common with Christine in 'Tropical Fish', Esi must defy indigenous tradition to achieve a degree of fulfilment. In both cases the values of the former coloniser, now internationalised through commerce, seem to offer a greater scope for human freedom, and for female freedom in particular. What is more, Esi believes she has the commitment and co-operation of her partner, which whom she shares, she assumes, an uncluttered goal-orientated pragmatism. Surely two clever and privileged people, versed in the mores of Western modernity, can fix things to their mutual satisfaction. And yet Esi discovers that her private desire and creativity cannot resist the crushing male imperative to own and control, exemplified by Ali's determination to make her his second wife. Esi accepts his proposal in the foolish belief that she can tailor traditional polygamy to her individualistic needs. The consequences are catastrophic. The spontaneity and equality of their relationship is lost. She finds herself alone, alienated from her family, disenchanted with Ali when he is present, insecure and jealous when he is absent. At first sight it might seem that tribal and Islamic custom has prevailed over alien notions of gender equality. But this is not the whole picture. Rather, it

appears to me that the transactional mentality of globalised commerce complements and reinforces Ali's patriarchal impulses. By persuading her to wear his ring, he achieves monopolistic control. He plants the flag and Esi becomes his exclusive territory.

Disillusion with the institution of marriage runs throughout Aidoo's novel. Nor is it a modern disillusion, as Esi's grandmother explains:

Esi, a woman has always been diminished in her association with a man. A good woman was she who quickened the pace of her own destruction. To refuse, as a woman, to be destroyed, was a crime that society spotted very quickly and punished swiftly and severely (133).

Nana further remarks that a woman went to her wedding as to an execution: 'She was made much of, because that whole ceremony was a funeral of the self that could have been' (133). This holds true for Ali's first wife Fusena, who enjoys an egalitarian friendship with Ali when they are students and young teachers, but finds that marriage entails an end to her career and an unfulfilling confinement in the home. When she suggests to Ali that she might return to teaching, his unspoken objection is that as a wealthy man he cannot be seen to have a wife working in such a poorly paid profession. Instead he buys her a massive kiosk at a strategic site in Accra, and although she becomes a very successful businesswoman, it is not the work for which she was trained and continues to feel an aptitude. In accepting marriage, Fusena has lost both her feelings of solidarity with Ali and her freedom. She recognises this while living abroad in gloomy London. She muses that she has 'exchanged a friend for a husband'. She feels the tragedy of this, but is in a bind. Like her later co-wife Esi, she cannot fashion a satisfying alternative:

Leaving Ali was not only impossible but would also not be an answer to anything. Because having married her friend and got a husband, there was no chance of her getting back her friend if she left or divorced Ali the husband. She would only have an estranged husband. Nor did it help matters that in the middle of all her frustrations, she kept telling herself that given the position of women in society, she would rather be married than not, and rather to Ali than to anyone else. (80)

Fusena's positive human feelings for Ali are denied a viable social expression. Her desire for love, companionship and sex is snapped shut within the transactional relationship of marriage, which in African societies remains, overarchingly, a commercial pact between families. As Anne McClintock observes of post-colonial societies in general:

Marital laws . . . have served to ensure that for women citizenship in the nation-state is mediated by the marriage relation, so that a woman's *political* relation to the nation is submerged in, and subordinated to, her *social* relation to man through marriage'. (92)

Even the third important woman in Aidoo's novel, the vibrant and opinionated obstetrics nurse Opokuya, who seems to work in dedicated unison with her husband Kubi to raise their four children, finds marriage an imperfect arrangement. Opokuya and Kubi lead busy working-lives, but there is only enough money for one family vehicle, over which they constantly squabble. While marriage provides a workable economic unit, allowing them to maintain a household and rear their children, both husband and wife chafe under the strain. What is more, Kubi's aborted sexual encounter with Esi suggests that monogamy is fragile and limiting to a person's needs. During this encounter Esi fleetingly wonders whether casual sex 'might be an answer to the great question of how to get one's physical needs met, and still manage to avoid all attachment and pain' (196). The hitch is that Kubi's wife Opokuya is her best friend. Esi's thinking is pragmatic, focusing on social realities. She needs her strong friendship with Opokuya more than she wants sex. She recognises that unlike family connections, friendship is a choice, or an expression of personal freedom, and further, that friendship between women, being largely egalitarian, is more rewarding and reliable than friendship between a woman and a man. If Esi's difficult struggle arrives at any sort of conclusion it is that female solidarity is a necessity.

In Monica Arac de Nyeko's *Jambula Tree* close female friendship offers not only a means of emotional survival, but resistance to patriarchal values. The story is told by Anyango, a young female nurse living alone in Kampala. She addresses her lover Sanyu, who is returning home from London to the impoverished housing estate where they grew up. As girls they

suffered persecution in the estate, and made a pact to escape the fate of those 'noisy, gossiping and frightening housewives' like Mama Atim who sit out front of their one-room shacks waiting for 'their husbands to bring home a kilo of offal' (165). Nor will they conform to the moral strictures of women like Mama Atim: 'We made that promise never to mind her or be moved by her' (164). They pin their hopes on education. Anyango reminds Sanyu: 'You said it yourself, we could be anything. Anything coming from your mouth was seasoned and alive' (165). What Anyango remembers and clings to is their mutual determination to create lives free of the oppressive weight of local opinion. Theirs is a private rebellion, fuelled by a love that Ugandan society regards as shameful and illegitimate.

While the girls' sexuality is policed by other women – by their mothers, and by Mama Atim who watches 'steadily like a dog waiting for a bone it knew it would get' (176) – the sexual regime the women uphold is part of a broader male hegemony. Women have no recognised position outside of heterosexual monogamy. In marriage they are confined and controlled in a state of economic dependency, their bodies available for the exclusive pleasure of their husbands, who are not themselves faithful. This powerlessness has a corollary in Sanyu's inability to ward off the incestuous attentions of her father. The girls' love for one another therefore challenges male control over women's bodies. The girls exist for one another, not for men. Although hostility to their behaviour comes from all sections of society – from school-teachers, from other children, from Sanyu's wealthy and otherwise liberal parents – its ultimate source is signalled by Arac de Nyeko's focus on the military presence in Kampala. Anyango and Sanyu's chief persecutor Mama Atim is terrified of the green-clad soldiers who guard the Lugogo Show Grounds. 'What were soldiers doing guarding Lugogo, she asked. Was it a front line?' (167). The question is left hanging, but the implication is that yes, Nakawa Housing Estate is a front line in a campaign of gender control. Behind the 'soft' force of oppressive custom is the 'hard' force of male militarism. In terror of male brutality, and having internalised it, Mama Atim becomes an agent of patriarchal control, which is symbolised by the military green

fabric from which she cuts her underpants. Significantly, the girls wear primary school uniforms of the same military green. Domination pervades their lives.

The implication is that women remain the colonised subjects of men, coercively controlled and exploited. Ironically, the liberal values of the former colonial power appear to operate as a countervailing force, speaking of freedoms and exotic possibilities that Ugandans will not countenance. Sensing this, Mama Atim is quick to tell Anyango: 'London is no refuge for the immoral' (168). It is possible that the West, or London in particular, does feature in Anyango's mind as an imaginative space of liberation where a lesbian life is possible. But she is also very aware that she is not an English girl, and that they must live in Uganda, to which Sanyu, after all, is returning. In an attempt to 'naturalise' her feelings for Sanyu, she celebrates the jambula tree as a metaphor for an indigenous lesbianism. It is in and under the jambula tree, with its roots deep in African soil (albeit in Mama Atim's front yard), that they pass their childhood and grow to sexual awakening:

And your breasts, the two things you had watched and persuaded to grow during all those years at Nakawa Katale Primary School, were like two large jambulas on your chest. And that feeling that I had, the one that you had, that we had –never said, never spoken – swelled up inside us. (176)

Anyango notes that the tree 'had been there for ages with its unreachable fruit. They said it was there even before the Estate houses were constructed' (176). Her lesbian love for Sanyu, she implies, is an expression of ancient human potential that pre-dates the oppressive constructions of modernity. Against the odds, the lovers remain true, at least in Anyango's mind, to their childhood pact. 'Sanyu,' she tells her lover, 'you rise like the sun and stand tall like the jambula tree' (177). It is the optimism of private creation.

It is there in all three texts – women striving to carve out a little freedom amid the social prescriptiveness of post-colonial Africa. All three texts explore the coerciveness of male control over women's lives. In each case pessimistic readings are possible. The terms of trade are bleak. The efforts of free people to choose their own unique forms of intimacy are repeatedly thwarted. Nevertheless, in these stories the ideal remains, and is celebrated.

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Clayton Eshleman in Conversation with Ian Irvine

(Interview conducted late 2007 to early 2008 and published in *Jacket Magazine* (36) [Sydney, Australia])

I.I. Clayton, you seem to have been enormously productive these past few years, and across all areas of your public profile as a writer. There is certainly no sense that you're slowing down either in terms of publications or public engagements/performances. Similarly, in terms of quality it appears to me as though you're at the height of your powers as a poet, translator and essayist. Are there any reasons for (secrets behind!) your remarkable productivity at the moment?

C.E. I think that completing *Juniper Fuse* in the late 1990s released a lot of energy. I also retired in 2003 and immediately realized that I had been quite depressed in the classrooms at Eastern Michigan University for the past decade. I was trying to teach students how to write poetry who had read hardly anything at all and were mainly in my classes, as far as I could tell, out of curiosity. My best students were painters.

So getting out of the classroom made me feel like a lion let out of his cage. I completed fairly quickly a number of projects involving essays and poems, and the following year, when I got a contract from the University of California Press for *The Complete Poetry of César Vallejo*, I began translating Vallejo's first book—the only collection of his poetry I had not previously translated—and

revising all of the rest of my work, with a great deal of joy.

There is something about an accumulating focus that pays off. I had insisted on dealing with my background in the late 1960s and early 1970s, so that early life traumas were written into and through, and cleared, for the most part, by the time I began my research, in 1974, on Ice Age cave art, for the book that turned out to be *Juniper Fuse*.

I had also taught myself, by the mid-1990s, to write first drafts of poems and then turn them over and leave them alone for a year or so before doing any revising. I had discovered that when I attempted to revise immediately I destroyed the most original parts of a poem. I was like an animal mother turning on one of her cubs. After a year or so, I could re-approach poem drafts and inspect them, on one level, as if I had not written them. This has enabled me to protect what was most original about such beginnings, and to carry many projects through to completion.

I.I. In my first encounter with your poetry back in 1983, i.e. the poems in *Hades in Manganese*, your incorporation of terms drawn from the technical vocabulary of Ice Age archaeology really stood out: 'A wheeled figure stabs and sews/ the infancy in our grain to the skin of the ground./ Wheeled wall master who mends in manganese ...' Just how important was your engagement with the caves to your development as a poet?

C.E. To my knowledge, the lines you quote there, from the poem *Hades in Manganese* have no technical archeological language in them. I think those lines are imaginal improvisations off what I saw initially in the paintings on certain Ice Age cave walls. I think the 'wheels' on my 'wall master' came about via my attempting to engage the acrobatic drawings and engravings in such caves as Pech Merle and Lascaux. Lines swirling and superimposing evoke a wheel-like motion, or a wheeling of the mind as, like an ice-skater, the engraver or painter's hand cuts and feints across the wall.

I became aware of Upper Paleolithic cave paintings in my late thirties, at a point when I had worked through a lot of my own personal early life, and was looking for new challenging material.

The cave paintings, with no historical context, turned me from my personal life to transpersonal materials and that was both exciting and demanding. The caves and their ensouled decorations took me, in effect, out of myself, and made me utilise my imagination in a way I had not done before. The cave images also humbled me as they empowered me. They also gave me a back wall, not a Greek or even Neolithic one, but a true back wall, where that truly revolutionary move from no image of the world to *an* image seems to have taken place.

I.I. Much of your poetry projects an aura associated with elements drawn from primal spiritual traditions. This aura is supplemented by your use of imagery etc. related to Paleolithic cave art and also from more contemporary art. It strikes me that whatever happens to be unfolding in the foreground of your work is often positioned in a kind of unique communion with a vast repository of archaic and modern imagery. You seem to describe aspects of this in terms of your 'compositional method' in the notes to the poem 'Spirits of the Head' (in *Reciprocal Distillations*)¹ when you write that the poem arose out of 'over a dozen pages of notes'. Could you comment on both the layered visual quality to much of your post-'70s poetry and its relationship to your way of composing poems.

C.E. I think that the main benefit from research for a poet (in the case of *Juniper Fuse* it involved library work as well as cave-crawling) is that it builds up a file of materials that cling to the underside of consciousness, and can be brought into play when, in composition, one needs a lever or hoist, in effect, to move the poem along, into another dimension or sounding. I also try to open myself to what I call 'lateral entries' while writing, so that the focus can be bombarded left and right by images that, at a glance, do not seem to have anything to do with the ongoing core meander, but may very well turn out, when viewed in terms of the whole composition, to extend the focus into a more complex, or as you put it, 'layered' presentation. I am not talking about

¹ "A Note on the Poem 'Spirits of the Head'" in *Reciprocal Distillations*, p.5-11, 2007.

'automatic writing' here, or 'free association' (whatever that is). I attempt to keep a rational 'shit detector' beeping slightly above my head to the left, while I write, so that trash (clichés, sentimentalities, repeats, nonsense) is immediately phased out of the composition. Thus I'd say I work in a state of qualified spontaneity. The layered... quality you speak of probably refers to the conjunctions that occur in my lines, where what I am probing is intersected by materials from the research file.

I.I. Another aspect of your poetry is the impression you give the reader of a kind of metaphysical/sacred (or at least 'visionary'/'magical realist') view of our place in the cosmos. In your recent poem 'Some of Her Names', for example (*in Reciprocal Distillations*)², you write: 'As a poet my *cor*, my heart, is under Cerridwen'. In some of your poetry you seem to express a deeply immanent, embodied spirituality informed by mythopoetic feminism and archaic spiritual traditions. Do you see your work as a poet as 'spiritual' or 'religious' – and if so, in what ways?

C.E. I do not think of my poetry as being 'religious,' in as much as it is not involved, in any fundamental sense, with organized religions. I was raised as a Presbyterian Christian but most of that stuff fell away when I discovered poetry in my early twenties, as a student at Indiana University in the late 1950s. Poetry became my praxis, or way of orientating myself to my life as well as to the world around me. '

I disagree with Gary Snyder here, who has written that a poet needs religion in order to learn how to live. While poetry, at base, is without moral strictures, and irritating do-thises and don't-do-thats, it is such an all-embracing way of being that I believe a sense of meaningful living emerges via what one teaches oneself while writing. I should acknowledge here, however, the work of Wilhelm Reich. I was in Reichian therapy with Dr Sidney Handelman (who was a student of Reich's) in NYC in the late 1960s, and at that time I read many of Reich's books. I was extremely impressed by his ideas about Self-regulation and

² 'Some of Her Names', in *Reciprocal Distillations*, p.30-33, 2007.

its relationship to orgasmic potency (see pp. 39-41 in *Companion Spider*), which I saw, along with Research and Experimentation, as one of the poet's 'powers.'

I.I. It seems to me that your poetry has a great deal to say about humankind's relationship with the animal and plant worlds. Arguably your work on paleolithic cave art uncovered a kind of pathogenic psychic 'splitting off' ('fracture?') between humankind and other non-human forms of life on earth. The poem 'Fracture' (1983) seems important in this respect: at one point you write: '... crying the oldest cry/ that earth is responsible for our deaths/ that if we die collectively/ we will take the earth with us *if we can*.'³ How do you see our current global environmental crisis, given the archaeological material you've researched these past few decades?

C.E. The human immortality compulsion must be one of the worst flies in our ointment. César Vallejo has written (see p. 355 of *The Complete Poetry of César Vallejo*) that 'the sorrow of men... lies in never being certain of death.' I would expand this to not only not being certain of death but of seeking to deny death via solutions provided by organized religions, all of which I find odious (if I had to choose one, I would find Tantric Buddhism the least odious). I think that one reason people are cruel to each other is because acts of cruelty set screens between one and one's own mortality.

The planet is now suffering, at full vent, the human immortality hang-up which says, in effect, that life here, in the here and now, physical, existent life, does not in the long run count for anything. As you may know, American Evangelicals are on record as having stated that it does not matter what we do to the earth (in fact, they say, the quicker we ruin life on the planet, the better). The same people heap abuse on Arab suicide bombers who can't wait to get into their own form of paradise which is supposedly filled with sloe-eyed virgins.

³ 'Fracture', in *Fracture*, p.37, 1983,

Now, there are other factors involved in human cruelty that I cannot nail down under the rubric of religion, for one reason because I believe human beings were cruel before there occurred what we call 'religion.' For a monotheistic God to exist, you needed a social structure with a king or imperial leader. Before the Neolithic, before agriculture, while I see no evidence of what we call 'war,' hunter/gatherer tribal units appear not to have been hierarchically organized. However, I do not think we can assume that such people were not cruel to each other, especially to strangers.

Becoming human, thousands of years ago, appears to have involved separating the human out of the animal continuum, a blessing and a curse if there ever was one. Cro-Magnon people seemed to have revered animals in ways that one still finds traces of in indigenous peoples today.

At the point that the connection between semen and pregnancy was discovered (very early I think) then the stage was set for our two-tiered system of women being inferior to men. The male became the 'star,' as it were, the creator, with women relegated to being hot-houses for his progeny.

I.I. A web-search on your work (and also in reading more generalist texts on US poetry) shows that three terms are repeatedly used to describe your core poetics: 'deep imagist', 'American grotesque' and 'ethnopoetics'. How useful are any of these terms to describe the unique poetics you've developed during your life?

C.E. 'Deep Image' emerged out of the evolving poetics of Robert Kelly and Jerome Rothenberg in the mid-late 1950s. Statements on it can be found in issues of *Trobar* and Poems from the Floating World magazines. This term, as I understand it, was mainly a provocation and a sighting, and not a 'movement' as such; thus both poets dropped the term after a few years. Curiously, it was then picked up by Robert Bly and James Wright who simplified it and are still today, by some, thought to be its founders. I was just finding my way into poetry at the time Robert and Jerry were involved in 'Deep Image' (an American crossbreeding of Surrealism, Projective Verse, and depth psychology, to my mind).

I found their thoughts about it fascinating but I was never part of it in a procedural way.

‘American grotesque:’ I am not sure where this term comes from or exactly what it refers to in American poetry. Perhaps it is a play on Mikhail Bakhtin’s term, ‘grotesque realism,’ elaborated in his book *Rabelais and His World*. If so, then I do feel it is relevant to my work. I read the Bakhtin book in 1972 when I was finishing the writing of *Coils*. Bakhtin confirmed in his discussion of ‘grotesque realism’ certain strategies in my manuscript that I felt uncertain about. I had felt that certain grotesqueries in that book might turn out to be an embarrassment, or worse, make my writing look foolish. For example, in attempting to excavate my Indiana background, at one point I ranted and raged against my father, and at another point expressed some very weird sexual fantasies concerning my first wife. I myself viewed such performances as healthy, and as part of a breakthrough-farewell to my ‘given’ Indianapolis world, one which I viewed as racist, sexist, and utterly repressed. However, as you know, real breakthroughs always carry some blow-back. One goes to paradise one night and wakes up the next morning in Hell. Bakhtin’s Introduction to his book laid out an elaborate description of ‘grotesque realism,’ offering me a theoretical and historical backdrop against which I could see my own work.

‘Ethnopoetics:’ Another Rothenberg formulation which I am very sympathetic with, but am not directly a part of. I suppose you could extend my work on the deep past, and connect it with ethnopoetics, but such is an association, not a primary. I was, in fact, back in 1966, suspicious of what Jerry was up to, when he was asking American poets to transform ethnographic or missionary versions of tribal poetries into a kind of new American poetry. I recall sitting in the living room at Paul Blackburn’s flat on East 7th Street in NYC, which I had rented for the summer of 1966, staring at a missionary version of an African hippopotamus chant and feeling absurd. The chant, in the version given me, was not only stilted and probably filled with translation errors, but it was just one aspect of a charged, sensual rite involved with dance, color, smells, food, and the environment. So I told Jerry that I did not know how to do anything with it, and never became involved in

his initial ethnopoetic project.

Since then I have decided that in spite of my own objections to the 'hippopotamus chant' situation, that Rothenberg's project has turned out to be an honest and imaginative attempt at a grand inclusion of the world's poetries relative to 20th century American poetry. In terms of the continental USA, as demonstrated in the Rothenberg and George Quasha anthology of the mid 1970s, *America: A Prophecy*, the ethnopoetic push brought to bear on poetry written for the most part by white heterosexual males, indigenous and folk poetries heretofore excluded and confined to such categories as Folklore and Ethnography. I recall Helen Vendler's fury in her review of *America: A Prophecy* in *The New York Times*. She could not tolerate such inclusiveness. Imagine! Sitting Bull cheek-to-jowl with Marianne Moore!

I.I. In 'Prologue to Origins' contained in Vol. 1 of *Poems for the Millennium* the editors state that it is impossible to understand 20th century radical poetries 'without mapping at the same time some features of the old worlds, brought newly into the present & viewed there as if for the first time ...' It seems clear to me that in some senses your attempts to plot the origins of the imagination back to Palaeolithic cave imagery represent perhaps the exemplary case of what Rothenberg and Joris were describing. If as they put it 'the new seeks out the old', the 'old' you went in search of was very old indeed. I wonder how you now view your decades-long commitment to this project given that your major work on the 'origins' theme, *Juniper Fuse*, has just recently been published? Do you have a sense of closure?

C.E. *Juniper Fuse* was published by Wesleyan University Press in 2003. The book is going into a second edition this winter.

On one level, my work on Upper Paleolithic imagination is over. On another level, I stay up on archeological publications in the field, because my wife Caryl and I lead a yearly tour to the painted caves of the Dordogne every June, and I want to be able to respond to clients' questions.

In 2004, I was given permission to visit the Chauvet cave, discovered in 1994, in the French Ardèche. Chauvet appears to be

as important as Lascaux. I wrote a poem about the lions on the left wall of the end chamber that is included in *Reciprocal Distillations*.

I.I. Any Australian reader of *Juniper Fuse* would be immediately struck by the great silences one encounters at every point of your tentative poetry and archaeology-based reconstruction of the subjectivity of Paleolithic humanity. 'I wonder if she will pass through/ the Aurignacian assembly/ I'd like to hear the speeches/ as she defends her ogre intelligence.'⁴ Given the immense antiquity of indigenous Australian traditions, not to mention the fact that much Aboriginal rock art remains intimately connected to living spiritual and cultural traditions, the question arises: how might contact with living guardians of our indigenous traditions impact on your work? I know that you've been interested in visiting Australia for some time now and wonder what it is you might be seeking here were you to make a visit?

C.E. As you know, I have read Barry Hill's *Broken Song*, and written a six-page poem, which I regard as a kind of summation piece, called 'The Tjurunga.' I hope to publish this poem in an Australian magazine, and I would be very interested in the response.

I would love to visit Australia and made an attempt a couple of years ago to get enough readings and honorarium to make a trip possible. But I could not raise enough to cover Caryl's and my expenses. Were I to come, I would try to arrange to see rock art sites and to have some contact with indigenous people—especially artists and writers. I keep thinking that there will come along, one of these days, the indigenous equivalent of the French poet Antonin Artaud: a man or woman who will tear away the communal residue of two hundred years of colonization and reveal the psychic force within, for good or ill.

I have an old friend in Los Angeles who collects contemporary indigenous paintings from Australia. He has visited, in Australia, the artists he collects, several times. This has been a remarkable experience for him.

⁴ From 'The Aurignacians Have the Floor', p.25 of *Juniper Fuse* (2003) and *Hades in Manganese* p.88, 1981.

I would also like to visit Australian museums and wineries, and to meet non-indigenous artists and writers. Besides my own poetry, I would like to expose Australian audiences to my translations of Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, Antonin Artaud, and Aimé Césaire.

It would also be very interesting for me to show some slides of European Ice Age cave art to indigenous Australian artists and talk with them about their response!

I.I. You've had some fairly critical things to say about neo-formalist trends in US poetry (its promotion of a return to 'traditional' ideas of poetry). There is the sense that your critique comes out of your long engagement with traditions of experimental poetry. Is there still a 'mainstream' in US poetry and a clearly defined *avant garde*, or is the situation more complicated these days, as you seem to be suggesting in your article 'A Wind from all Compass Points'?

C.E. Of course the boundary between the conventional and the innovative is blurred, but I think it is definitely possible to understand that poets like Robert Kelly and Billy Collins come from two essentially differing viewpoints concerning the art of poetry. The difference is one between an alchemist (Kelly) and an entertainer (Collins).

The lineage of American poetry that interests me the most is the one that begins with Walt Whitman's extraordinary breakthrough, nearly Cro-Magnon in its originality, and continues in the early part of the century with the work of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Gertrude Stein, to name three. In the 1940s, Charles Olson appears, and, in the 1950s, Robert Duncan, and those two poets carry forward aspects of early 20th century innovative strategies. Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens, both poets I admire a great deal, especially Crane, seem to be outside the lineage I briefly described above, but they are both very special, very original, and so I don't care what lineage they belong to. Crane is the closest thing we have to Arthur Rimbaud. Stevens has an extraordinary mind but is also a passionless nerd.

I do not believe that poetry is conventional thinking presented with classy wrappings and ribbon. I believe that it is about

the extending of human consciousness, making conscious the unconscious, creating a symbolic consciousness that in its finest moments overcomes the dualities in which the human world is cruelly and eternally, it seems, enmeshed.

It looked as if in the late '60s, as part of the alternative-culture explosion, that innovative poetry was going to move to the fore, and cease to be backgrounded, as it always has been, by poetry that reinforces the status quo. But this did not happen. The energy of the '60s suddenly crashed, in 1970, with the Manson murders and the death of Charles Olson. Two new things occurred: the university creative-writing degree programs began to proliferate (there are now over 300 of them) and a new and relatively uncommunicative experimental poetry, Language Poetry, proposed itself as the new American avant-garde. Powerful poets of my generation like Robert Kelly and Jerome Rothenberg were, in the eyes of the handful of critics writing about the 'new,' leap-frogged-over by the Language Poets. The writing degree programs are not interested in poetry on an international scale, and the poets emerging from them, with jobs on their mind, have proven to be, in some cases, quite talented, but in nearly all cases, not original or really commanding.

Two primary enemies of the poetry that I believe in are education and entertainment. The university system, in creating young professor-poets out of graduate students, focuses on a poetry that can be easily bricklayered into the educational curricula.

But back to your question: sure, there is always a mainstream American poetry and it is never very interesting, from my point of view. The current one 'stars' such poets, for example, as Collins, Louise Gluck, Derek Walcott, Mary Oliver, and Robert Pinsky, all talented writers who have never made me change my mind about anything. Collins has replaced Allen Ginsberg as the famous populist poet. This is very sad. At his best, Ginsberg was a miraculous bridge figure, wise, available, courageous, risky, and politically savvy. Collins is none of these. Ditto Dana Goia and Ted Kooser.

I.I. Some commentators on post-WWII US poetry suggest that a crisis in language (as un-problematically 'transparent to reality') was at the heart of poetic postmodernism and that it gave birth to what we might call certain 'non-linear' poetries. Others have suggested that a more significant strand in postmodern US poetry was the attempt by many post-war poets to break down Western ethnocentrism and expand the range of possible poetries in multiple directions. Commentators on your work seem to see it as representative of in particular the second type of poetic postmodernism. How do you place your work in relation to the larger poetic and cultural trends of the mid to late 20th century? In what sense do you feel your work gives voice to a post-modern poetics?

C.E. I have always read internationally from the late 1950s on, and feel more connected in a comradely way to poets I have translated, especially Vallejo, Césaire, and Artaud, than most English-language poets. Translating creates what I call an 'assimilative space,' opened up by doing many versions of a single poem, and spending hours with dictionaries, especially English-language ones. Thus Vallejo, for example, worked his way into me in a way that Pound or Williams never did. .

This is not to dodge your question, but to offer it a perspective. My work does relate to that of Charles Olson's in its concentration on the archaic. In a way, you could say I took a lead from Olson's 1953 notes on paleo-archeology and cave art, and developed what he only touched on. I also feel a kinship with the poetry of Robert Duncan of the late 1960s on, and Denise Levertov's political poetry from this period too. The last thirty years of Adrienne Rich's and Gary Snyder's poetry means a lot to me, as does Robert Kelly's. But none of these writers has touched me as deeply as a Vallejo, whose broken lantern glass I will carry in my stomach until the day I die.

I should also mention William Blake here. His Herculean attempt to create a new realm of mythology for the West engaged me deeply when I was in Kyoto, Japan, in the early 1960s. In an effort to dynamite my blocked ego I created some of my own god-forms in a long poem called 'The Tsuruginomiya Regeneration.' I

was not able to complete this poem and abandoned it in the early 1970s, using some fragments from it in my book *Coils*.

'Isms' don't interest me much. I have never consciously proceeded out of any theory. So I have no thoughts about to what extent my work does or does not give 'voice to a postmodern poetics.'

I.I. As a follow up question: where do you feel we are currently headed in terms of the main thrust of poetic innovation?

C.E. Who is 'we?' All English-language poets, including Australian and the English? The question is too general. I am not well-read in either contemporary Australian or English poetry.

In terms of American poetry, the younger awarded and widely-published mainstream poets, nearly all of whom have been through the university writing mills, appear to be involving a kind of non-sequitur Language Poetry with displays of self-sensitivity. Among my younger contemporaries, I admire the writing of John Olson, Will Alexander, Rachel Blau Du Plessis, Anne Waldman, Andrew Joron, and the late Tory Dent, to name a few. I mention others in the essay you have cited, 'Wind From All Compass Points,' which is in *Archaic Design*.

I feel the real challenge for American poets writing today is not only to explore their imaginations but to simultaneously hold themselves open to information and feelings about being Americans and part of a system that has been poking an armored nose in other peoples' business since the end of World War II. One must pick up on what is in the air, not merely information, but the ways in which imperialism creates psycho-linguistic micro-climates that are willy-nilly tapping into all of us.

The extent of American governmental intervention has been available for decades but most of us paid minor attention to it until 9/11. The challenge is to register how it really feels to be an American in this era, as a person with one's loves and distresses, caught up in this whirlwind of global grabs, and receding freedoms. Adrienne Rich's new collection of poems, *Telephone Ringing in the Labyrinth* (which I finished a review of this morning) is one capable response to the challenge I am sketching out here.

Vallejo's, in the Paris of the 1930s, was another.

Writing poetry is an essentially affirmative activity, but affirmation, as such, only makes uncommon sense when its feet are relentlessly being held to the fire by negation. There are social negatives as well as one's own intrinsic dark. Cid Corman wrote a two-line poem years ago which goes:

You are dead.
Speak now.

That is also part of the furnace of our challenge.

I.I. It strikes me in reading your poetry and essays that you have spent a great deal of time exploring what we might call the deep psyche or the collective psyche. A number of psychologists have also influenced your work over the years—most obviously James Hillman and Wilhelm Reich. Where do you stand these days in terms of the various depth psychologies that were developed in the 20th century? Are alternative psychologies still inspirational to you?

C.E. Over the years I have drawn upon the work of all three of the psychologists you mention. I mentioned before being in Reichian therapy and the importance of Reich's concept of self-regulation.

While in Japan, I read Joseph Campbell's tetralogy, *The Masks of God*. That was my introduction to world mythology and, as an introduction, it was okay. Today I find Campbell often superficial, and much of his cross-cultural mapping suspect.

Jung is a much deeper vault, and any time I get involved with a mythical figure or event, I always consult my *Collected Works* of Jung's writings to see what he has to say about such. Jung's contrast of the ego with the self, and his thinking about individuation, has fed me for years. I probably should have sat down at one point and read him straight through. But I haven't. I have cherry-picked, as they say, here and there.

I met Jim Hillman while living in Los Angeles in the 1970s, attended a number of his lectures, and at one point, in Dallas, Texas, interviewed him (the interview appeared in *Antiphonal Swing*, my first collection of prose, published in 1989). He is a very smart guy

and a fine writer. He has also been obsessed with getting 'image' back into archetypal psychology, pushing psychological probing into imaginative areas that connect with poetry. My attention was first called to Hillman by Robert Kelly and Robert Duncan, two poets with their own mental encyclopedic files of material. Hillman's book, *The Dream and the Underworld*, was very useful in offering me a perspective from which to regard cave art, to study it as a psychic phenomenon, and not as literalistic 'hunting magic.' Hillman himself has not studied the deep past (his back wall is Greek) but he has a broad sense of the underworld.

I.I. When I read your poem 'Hardball', for example (out of the collection *Under World Arrest*)⁵, and even some of your more recent poetry concerned with the consequences of the extension of US hegemony abroad I am struck by the link between your understanding of acts of injustice and oppression ('personal' and 'structurally engineered') and neo-psychoanalytic (especially Reichian) critiques of what we might call the fascist/authoritarian character type. It seems to me that a poetic assault on the authoritarian character type has been a long-term subtext/theme in your work. Did this arise with your early readings of Reich or did it come from somewhere else?

C.E. I wrote "Hardball" in a state of anguished fury and tried to jam words together to the point that they cracked or melted. The first half of the poem is stronger than the later half, as it is very difficult to follow the first-half assault with convincing reflection.

Up until I went to Peru in 1965, I was what we call 'apolitical,' meaning supportive of the status quo, and thus, actually quite political, though I didn't know it. In Lima, I had an adventure with the American State Department and that, plus my utter shock and bewilderment over the extent and depth of Peruvian poverty, made me wake up and start to regard peoples' lives as politically contoured. At this point, Vallejo's *Poemashumanos* (which I had

been translating since 1963) took on greater resonance, since it is a masterpiece of political awareness presented in non-agendafied

⁵ 'Hardball' can be found in *Under World Arrest* p. 132, 1994.

innovative language.

By the time I moved to NYC in the summer of 1966, I was ready for Reich—not only the Reich of *The Function of the Orgasm*, but of *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* and *People in Trouble*. In 1967 I became very involved with Angry Arts, an organization of some 500 NYC-based artists and writers protesting the American invasion and occupation of Vietnam. I organized the ‘poetry wing’ of Angry Arts, and, with a couple of dozen poets, rented flatbed trucks which we parked in hostile neighborhoods in the Bronx, Harlem (where people turned out to be supportive of us) or before the Metropolitan Museum of the Arts. With megaphones, we read our angry poems about the horrors our government was perpetuating in Vietnam. At one point, I met with a doctor who had just come back from Vietnam with some photos of napalmed children. *Ramparts* magazine ran a few of his photos, but some were so ghastly they would not touch them. I ran two of the most horrible in the 3rd issue of my literary magazine, *Caterpillar*, and our Angry Arts poetry group had these photos blown up in poster form. We rolled them up under our suits and went in to high mass at the arch-conservative St Patrick’s Cathedral, with the idea of standing up at a certain point, taking out our posters, holding them high above our heads and marching out. Alas, we had a stool-pigeon in our midst and the plain-clothes cops hidden among the congregation were waiting for us. At the moment we stood up, they pounced. I was on the cover of *The New York Times* the following morning, along with another poet being hustled down the cathedral steps by a cop. We all spent the night in jail. Someone bailed us out the next day.

I.I. When I first read the poems ‘Iraqi Morgue’, ‘Dead Reckoning’, ‘One if by Land, None if by Void’, ‘From a Terrace’, ‘A Ferocious Fold’ and others in the *Alchemist* collection I was fascinated by the incendiary mixture/cocktail of visionary language and political directness. In ‘Autumn 2004’, for example, we come across the lines: “Dick Cheney’s mouth/ slides on circular-saw teeth, with rakers,/ to rip out the throats of words ...”⁶ Is this visionary, political directness a general feature of the US poetry scene at the

⁶ ‘Autumn 2004’ can be found in *An Alchemist With One Eye on Fire*, p.49, 2006.

moment or are you in some senses a lone voice?

C.E. While I like to think that my political, or civil, poetry bears my own stamp, I am in no sense a lone voice now. Since the beginning of the 20th century there has always been some American political poetry. However, if you look at the work of the major poets of the Pound generation, there is a sad lack of response to Nazism and the Holocaust. This absence is most embarrassing in Pound and Stevens. Charles Reznikoff, almost alone, of that generation, addressed the Holocaust in his 1975 collection, *Holocaust*. Of a slightly later generation, Muriel Rukeyser wrote potent political poems at many stages of her career.

The Vietnam War forced both Duncan and Levertov into a political dimension, as I have mentioned earlier. In fact, fine poems aside, their correspondence contains, at points, a remarkable meditational exchange on the role of the poet during wartime. I highly recommend *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov* to Australian readers. Of this period, Michael McClure's *Poisoned Wheat* is also a fiery political poem.

Today, five years into the Iraqi invasion and occupation, many American poets have been moved to express their distress over what our government is doing. The poets whose names first come to mind are Adrienne Rich, Anne Waldman, Amiri Baraka, Ed Sanders, and Jayne Cortez. Jerry Rothenberg wrote a powerful middle-length poem in the late 1980s, called *Khurbn*, documenting a trip he made to what was left of the death camps, where some of his family members perished, in Poland.

I am, however, one of the few poets to question the so-called 'official version' of what happened on 9/11. A year after the attack, I wrote 'The Assault,' which accuses the Bush administration of complicity in the destruction of The World Trade Centers and the penetration of the Pentagon. It can be found in *Archaic Design*.

I.I. In your prose introduction to *Alchemist* you write: 'American poets today, facing the possibly comprehensible mindset of neo-con conquest, *amor-fati*, and the need to find out for oneself, must assimilate such vectors and figure out ways to articulate them. If we cannot accomplish this, then our distinction may become that of being the first generation to have lived at a time in which the origins and the end of poetry became discernable.'⁷ I wonder, (from the perspective of an outsider admittedly) have the recent crises in US relations with other nations, and within the US itself helped birth a new 'poetic' of historical significance among contemporary US poets – i.e. one capable of addressing the destructive side to the Neo-Con 'vectors' you allude to?

C.E. Unless one is willing to spend hours daily visiting websites, watching television, and reading newspapers and books, it is very, very difficult to gain a comprehensive sense of what is actually going on, as far as our government, at home and overseas, is concerned. It is probably harder now, than ever before, because of the administration's secrecy and stealth. I give the news about two hours daily, and I know that I am aware of only a fraction of what is actually going on. The amount of governmental dissimulation makes me question anything I read or hear and such subsequently makes it difficult to be bold in working with such matters in my writing.

It is also an uphill battle to, as they say, wrap one's head around the true facts of what our government is up to because of the self-censorship that is built into all of us. We have been educated for decades that America is a democracy that supports freedom everywhere. We know this is false—have known it for years—yet the propaganda entangles itself with the American landscape which, with jarring industrial and urban exceptions, is still without the conflicts taking place in so many countries. Speaking for my own generation, I believe there is an attitude in me concerning America that was fashioned during the Second World War (when I was a child). Younger American writers may be less imbued with such formations. I would be foolish not to recognize these traps and make myself aware of their subconscious *and* conscious force.

⁷ *ibid*, p.6-7.

I.I. Given your long history promoting, translating etc., poets living and working under socially-repressive regimes – as evidenced by the recent update to your 1988 anthology of translations, *Conductors of the Pit* (2005) – what advice would you give to poets and other writers/ intellectuals on the receiving end of what PEN International has described as an increasingly global attack on freedom of expression – often under the banner of defending the public against ‘terror’?

C.E. As an American writer who can still write and publish what he wants to, I don’t think I am in a position to give advice to writers in places like Burma, Russia, and China. I met the Chinese poet Bei Dao in 1993 and have since watched what he has been up against with the Chinese state. And Bei Dao is hardly even what is generally called a ‘dissident writer.’

Here, for the most part, people do not pay attention to what writers say about the state of the union. Of course there are exceptions: immediately after 9/11, Susan Sontag, in *The New Yorker* magazine, said, in effect, ‘what did we expect? We have been provoking those people for decades.’ While she was harshly criticised (I think mainly for not merely expressing sympathy with the victims’ families), nothing happened to her.

I.I. Earlier this year a book containing your translations of the complete poems of Vallejo was published.⁸ His work has haunted you – often in an almost literal sense – for many decades and you’ve written extensively, over the years, about the role he’s played in your development as a poet and writer generally. I’m struck, in particular, by the idea you have that becoming a poet involves, at times, subordinating one’s ego and entering into an apprenticeship that involves giving something back to poetry/ literature. Could you discuss how you see your long commitment to translation, editing and teaching at this point in your life?

⁸ César Vallejo, *The Complete Poetry* (2006).

C.E. I have translated off and on, sometimes full-time for months, ever since I was a student. I have only translated poets whose work had something to teach me (I have translated no prose at all). And I have always been aware that in doing so I have, on one level, been shovelling some of their coal into my own furnaces. That is, in moving Spanish or French into English I was creating half-way houses of a sort, texts that were no longer 'theirs,' but also texts that were not truly my own, texts that I could influence myself with—in contrast to being influenced by poets who write in English. So in the kind of translating I do, there is a trade-off, of sorts: I create what I believe is an accurate translation that absolutely respects the integrity of the original. I can offer this text to a monolingual American reader and assure him or her that what I am offering does not misrepresent the original. In this way, I have provided a valuable service, in exchange for which I have planted in my mind many seed-ideas and sensations that may be of use in my own work-to-come. There is a community involved here, of the living and the dead, and it includes as well the unknown reader/poet who may take some charge from my translations and build it into his or her own work. I see this as part of the audience I like to think I am involved with.

At this point, I do not have any new translation projects. I may edit a larger edition of my Artaud translation (*Watchfiends & Rack Screams*, 1995), but that will not involve doing any new translations to speak of. My co-translator Annette Smith and I were very close to a "Complete Poetry of Aimé Césaire" in the early '90s, having translated all but some seventy or so pages of his poetry. It is a shame to come so close and not have the whole body of work, under our names, in English. But because of some differences concerning our method of working together that cropped up on Annette's part a few years ago, I don't think this is going to happen.

I don't plan to edit or teach any more—other than in brief residencies, which I am happy to do. Although you do not bring her up in any of your questions, I do want to mention that since around 1973 Caryl has worked as my companion-editor, and

has read all of my work, usually in an early stage, commenting astutely often on what she finds there. I think I have improved as a writer for one reason: because of her honest and intelligent commentary.

I.I. In viewing your recent output as a poet, translator and essayist it strikes me that you seem to have completed or wound up at least three long-term projects – winding up *Sulfur*, publishing a definitive translation of Vallejo's poetry and publishing your theories regarding Paleolithic cave art and the origins of the imagination. However, these endings seem to have birthed new and fascinating projects – almost by some law of energy-transference. Could you talk about your up-coming projects and answer the question: is one lifetime enough for a poet such as yourself?

C.E. Black Widow Press will publish *The Grindstone of Rapport*, in 2008, which is a 600-page 'Eshleman Reader,' with a selection from the past forty years of poetry, prose, and translations. I spent a couple of months editing it this summer.

I also have a longish (sixty-five pages) work in poetry and prose on Hieronymus Bosch's 'The Garden of Earthly Delights' that I researched at The Rockefeller Study Center in northern Italy in 2004, and completed here in Michigan just this year. This summer I completed a manuscript of short poems called 'Anticline,' around seventy pages, some forty pieces. I think that I will add the Bosch poem, called 'Tavern of the Scarlet Bagpipe,' to 'Anticline,' for a book to be published in 2009.

I have quite a bit of unpublished early writing that I don't know what to do with. It is not up to my current standards, so I am hesitant to try to have it published. There is, for example, a journal with over three hundred entries, called 'Heaven Bands,' that was written between 1968 and 1972. It is one of those workbook projects, full of dead-ends, clumsy configurings, and statements I no longer agree with! I think it would be impossible to rewrite it and end up with more than a fraction of it.

I would like to go very deep into the ocean, really deep, down

into one of those trenches. Were I to luck out, and someone offer me a ride, I would love to try to write what I see and experience in the abyss. An oceanic descent would be an extension of my work on the European Upper Paleolithic, as would a visit to some Australian rock art sites. After the European cave paintings, on the basis of studying photographs, I think indigenous Australian rock art is the most imaginative in the world.

I.I. Are we likely to see you 'down-under' in the near future?

C. E. If I am invited in such a way that my and Caryl's expenses could be covered for a month, I would love to come.

Political poetry: the artistry of dissent

Sue King-Smith

'Poetry cannot block a bullet or still a *sjambok*, but it can bear witness to brutality—thereby cultivating a flower in a graveyard' (Nelson Mandela cited in Forché 1993).

'Poetry is the liquid voice that can wear through stone' (Adrienne Rich 2003: p.122).

'Poetry is a crematorium' (John Kinsella 2003: p.98).

When I was a child, I spent many hours poring over books, mainly art books, in my grandparents' library. I particularly remember the strange savage beauty of the modernists, most notably the Post-Impressionists, Surrealists, Cubists and Expressionists: Paul Gauguin and his flat, staring women looking out from vividly-coloured tropical backgrounds, Edvard Munch's swaying scream, Pablo Picasso with his beaked African masks and multidimensional worlds, and Salvador Dali's melting clocks. As I got older and interested in more diverse topics, the library seemed to expand to meet my need for knowledge. Books on literature and philosophy appeared, novels and collections of poetry were stacked several layers deep on the shelves, and more and more shelves appeared in this unwieldy, organic and continually growing collection.

Like the US poet, Adrienne Rich, who talks about her father's

library as having had a profound impact on her as a child, my grandparents' library taught me many things, especially about the interconnectedness and interdependence of all knowledge. Rich puts this beautifully when she says that her father's library taught her 'To assume that philosophy, history, foreign literatures in translation, novels, plays, poetry of many kinds belonged together in one room of the mind' (2009: 19). I would add politics to this list also, as I believe that the multifaceted and complex nature of politics, dependent as it is on human interaction, means that it must necessarily be in dialogue with many other forms of knowledge.

Many years later, I was sitting in this same library with my grandmother, sifting through piles of family photos going back several generations. Almost in passing she noted that nearly all of the people who were pictured in these grainy images had been exterminated during the Second World War. Shocked, I questioned her further and, for the first time in my life, she talked about the fact that hundreds of family members and friends had died in the gas chambers and concentration camps. I realised that this loss, this absence, resonated through every aspect of her life, and indeed, that in some strange way, it had been passed on to me too. In that moment, I also realised that her library and the act of accumulating all those books was, in many ways, an attempt to gain some sort of understanding of how human beings could possibly act in such an inhumane way. Having recently inherited a large proportion of that library, it is perhaps a reminder that this always was, and still is, one of the most important themes in literature.

As a poet myself, I am particularly interested in the way in which poetry has the capacity to unearth the subtext of a particular situation or idea. Poetry has deconstructive capacity, unravelling the language and machinations of oppressive structures; it can document or act as a witness; it can speak from personal experience; it can give voice to collectives; it can be bold and propagandist or subtle and lyrical. Poetry, whilst seeming innocuous and lacking the power to effectively challenge repressive regimes, has often been banned (and poets jailed) under oppressive governments. It is perceived as dangerous. Perhaps this is because, as Rich says

in her poem 'Transparencies', sometimes "word and body/ are all we have to lay on the line" (2004: 49)

In this essay, I am interested in how, exactly, poetry functions as an anti-oppressive force. Can it? Should it? And if we are to answer 'yes' to those questions, how do we define it?

Politics and poetry in the 20th century

Politically-engaged poetry has often been derided within literary circles for its perceived didacticism and simplistic rendering of social realities. Whilst it is certainly true that a lot of propagandist and sometimes simply 'bad' political poetry exists, the same could be said of love poetry or nature poetry, yet it is rarely suggested that these styles of poetry should be excluded from the ranks of 'serious' poetic endeavour. Politically-engaged poetry can be found in every era and many of the poets considered the 'laureates' of their time (sometimes official but often unofficial) have responded to the social, political and cultural conditions of their societies.

As the poet Anne Walden says in the introduction to *Civil Disobediences: poetics and politics in action*, 'Poets for countless centuries have had a pulse on the ebb and flow of the "polis"' (2004: 4). From the ancient Athenian poet and lawmaker, Solon (638 BCE–558 BCE), renowned as a founding father of the Athenian polis, and the Chinese poet Sū Shì of the Song Dynasty (1037–1101), who was twice exiled for political crimes, to the English poet Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743–1825), who wrote about slavery and the situation of women, and called for legislative power for the people (Armstrong et al 1996: 1), many of the most significant poets across the ages have been politically engaged. As James Scully asserts, 'Most major poetry is consciously political, and always has been. Where do we want to start? With Aeschylus? Virgil? Dante? Can you imagine looking Dante in the face and saying poetry and politics don't mix?' (1988: 5). Whilst it may not be appropriate to call these poets 'political', as that term is very much imbued with contemporary understandings of that term, they are amongst the many who have challenged the dominant socio-cultural hegemonies of their particular eras, refusing to be

cowed by oppressive political paradigms (often at great risk to themselves).

The 20th century saw, arguably, more socio-political upheavals than any preceding century. In many ways, the 20th century could also be viewed as one of the most radical centuries to date in terms of poetic innovation. It has also been one of the most violent. In their introduction to the book, *From the republic of conscience: an international anthology of poetry*, the Australian poets, Flattley and Wallace-Crabbe sum this up:

It was Anna Akhmatova who asked, 'Why is our century worse than any other?' It is difficult for us to imagine a worse century. But do we mean in degree or in kind? Is it simply that, with increasingly sophisticated means, we can kill, maim and suppress more efficiently and on a grander scale? Or has something new been unleashed, perhaps always there, waiting in the blood like a virus? The poets lead us to suspecting something new. They open the door to our dwelling and take us in to look around, and we become aware of a prevailing mood that permeates even the timbers and fabrics. In a phrase, this mood is an absence of trust in our own humanity. (1992: 3)

American poet, Muriel Rukeyser has said, 'I lived in the first century of world wars./ Most mornings I would be more or less insane' (cited in Rothenberg and Joris 1995: 1). The 20th century saw two world wars, the development and dropping of the atom bomb, a generalised militarisation of Western society, the Holocaust, the horrors of Stalinist Russia, the Vietnam War and the Gulf War (amongst numerous others), as well as numerous genocides. It saw positives also, with the growth mid-century of a global consciousness in which, as Fredric Jameson describes, 'Third World People or the "natives" became human beings, and this internally as well as externally: those inner colonized of the First World – "minorities", marginals and women – fully as much as its external subjects and official "natives"' (1992: 128). These events and cultural shifts have resulted in a particular mood that has been transposed into the poetry of the more politically astute writers of the age. Flattley and Wallace-Crabbe alluded to this mood above but they articulate it more fully in the following passage:

[a] sense of helplessness pervades many of these poems about our time...It is an age in which a high school can become a prison, a torture cell, a death chamber, and finally, a museum, in the space of a few years...The sun rises and sets. The moon fills the sky at night. Yet there is a profound sense of unease. Human beings are alone with themselves, waiting for an end. (1992: 3-4)

The sense of nihilism described above is pervasive within 20th century Western poetry, and it may be this nihilism that has propelled poets to question and rethink the structures and nature of language. For some philosophers such as Theodore Adorno, who asked the oft-quoted question, 'How can one write poetry after Auschwitz?' (cited in Gubar 2003: 27), the horrors of the Holocaust caused them to ask whether silence can be the only appropriate response to a society that has turned so violently in on itself.¹ The awareness that language itself had become instrumental, a function of a culture turned toxic, produced a profound shift in consciousness, which generated a concordant shift in the linguistic forms employed by poets. Language itself came under scrutiny. In this radically altered world, poets and other politically engaged writers and thinkers had their conception of themselves as 'civilised' human beings shaken to such a degree that the only response was to deconstruct the very means by which they communicated. In their introduction to the groundbreaking anthology, *Poems for the millennium: from fin-de-siecle to negritude*, Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris state something similar:

For the better part of two centuries, the western world and then the world in general have been witness to a revolution of the word that is simultaneously a revolution of the mind and (consistently or not) a revolution in the (political, material and social) world itself. (1995: 2)

For Rothenberg and Joris, not only have poets responded to social and political change during this period, they have often been instrumental in initiating change, via radical challenges to socio-political assumptions implicit within language structures. Certainly this is true of the work of some indigenous Australian poets like Lionel Fogarty, who sees the English language itself as a particularly insidious aspect of colonialism. As Fogarty says,

¹ See 'Poetry after Auschwitz: remembering what one never knew' by Susan Gubar for in-depth discussion of Adorno's contention, in the context of poets writing post (and in response to) World War II.

he wants to use 'English against the English' (1995: ix). Mead (like Fogarty himself) likens Fogarty's work to that of earlier Aboriginal resistance fighters, suggesting that Fogarty's form of resistance, unlike the earlier freedom fighters, is 'on the linguistic frontier' (2008: 427). In his poem 'Do yourself a favour, educate your mind, Fogarty says:

*I was born into ashamed blackness
with Europeans hard pushing words
that makes people's ideas tighten
into European turn outs (1980: 23).*

The U.S. L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets undertook a similar project, although their focus was to undermine the linguistic dominance of the rhetoric of economic rationalism (both of these battles continue...).

From the Dadaists, based in Switzerland, and the Surrealists in France, to the Futurists in Italy, many early 20th century European poets were writing from specific political perspectives, and saw politics as central to their poetics. The Dadaists, for example, vigorously protested against the First World War, which they viewed as having resulted from bourgeois values combined with excessively rationalistic ideological/political structures. Surrealism grew out of Dadaism and combined the themes of personal transformation (influenced by Rimbaud and Freud) with Marxism (although the Surrealists' relationship with Marxism was, at times, fraught). The Surrealist poet, Andre Breton, wrote a manifesto, *Pour un art révolutionnaire indépendant*, with Trotsky. Rothenburg describes Surrealism as a movement 'based on principles of consciousness and politics' (1995: 465). The Italian Futurists, in contrast, embraced violence and war. In 'The Manifesto of Futurism', their most prominent proponent, the Italian poet, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, wrote:

We will glorify war – the world's only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gestures of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for women...We will destroy museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice...we will sing of the vibrant nightly fervour of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons... (cited in Rothenberg and Joris 1995: 198)

Although not all of the Futurists were Fascists, many, like Marinetti, were politically active and were vocal supporters of Fascism.

Rothenberg and Joris note that poets in the early to mid-20th century were increasingly aligning themselves with emerging (or established) political movements. They state:

Although the concepts of the artistic and political avant-gardes that were to mark this century had been thought out and defined in the previous one, and despite earlier commingling or disaffiliations, it was from the late 1920s on that the poetic avant-gardes began to link their fates more closely or more publicly with movements of social and cultural liberation, or tried to form alliances—often disastrous—with both the (political) left and right. The poets and artists wanted change—a change that would affect not only their art but the world in which that art took shape. (1995: 6-7)

With this political engagement came a questioning of all aspects of, not only society, but of the language that could be employed to convey any political idea. Thus came a revolution in form, arguably unprecedented in the history of poetry. Along with these early 20th century movements came various 'new' poetic forms (in the West) including concrete poetry, sound poetry, the chance operations of John Cage, procedural writing, Fluxus 'happenings' and the syntactical deconstructions of the Language poets (amongst others). With post-colonial writing increasingly coming to the fore, African-American, Asian, indigenous and other marginalised poetries and poetic forms began to inform the work of a number of Western poetic movements. The 'Beats', for example, incorporated African-American jazz rhythms into their poetry, whilst the Ethnopoeticists recognised and integrated Asian poetic forms, such as haiku and tanka, and Indigenous (often oral) poetic forms from around the world, into their work.

What is political poetry?

Defining the term 'political', when used in reference to poetry, is challenging. Some poets and theorists postulate that all poetry is intrinsically political as all poetry is necessarily positioned, meaning that it is always a direct product of the poet's socio-cultural position in the world. As Scully suggests:

The bottom line is that all poetry is political insofar as it bears a set of assumptions about the organization and priorities of life, and carries with it a whole network of lives interpenetrating it, just as it interpenetrates life. Even its silences—sometimes especially its silences—have political content. (1988: 4)

Whilst this appears valid, such a broad definition is not particularly useful in this context. Limiting our definition to poetry that is consciously or overtly politically-engaged helps 'narrow' the definition somewhat, but it is still necessary to explore further the various ways politically-engaged poetry can be categorised, even if these categories are necessarily provisional and artificial. Some possible categories might include: the war poem; the propagandist poem; the patriotic poem; the 'personal is political' poem; the 'poetry of witness'; the poem that interrogates the political through innovations in form/language; the poem of dissent; the satirical poem; the visionary or utopian poem (that re-visions an alternative socio-political future); and perhaps, as Adrienne Rich notes, a 'poetry that is the voice of those and on behalf of those who are generally unheard' (Rothschild 1994).

Political poetry could also be defined by its form or use of language. Daggett categorises with reference to the tone, imagery, language and historical predecessors. For example, his first two categories are: '1. Poetry rich in metaphor and imagery, poetry that works mainly by evoking feeling and sensory experience... [and] ... 2. Poetry that is agitational in tone, spare in imagery and metaphor, working by a kinetic energy of public speech' (2007). Carolyn Forché, in her introduction to *Against forgetting: twentieth century poetry of witness*, talks about poems of 'direct address', poems in the 'epistolary mode' (speaking to an imagined group), 'postcards' (images of situations), 'testimonio' and 'objective reports' (1993: 33-6). Whilst there is crossover between these various definitions and forms, they all emphasise different elements that can be present in a political poem.

It must also be acknowledged that some poets, even those most often cited as 'political poets', are ambivalent or even hostile to their work being described as political. Pablo Neruda is just such an example. Often described as having one of South America's most forthright political voices, Neruda argued that he

wrote about what he saw around him and that he disliked the compartmentalisation of his work into limiting categories. As he said in an interview with Eric Bockstael:

I insist on telling you that I am not a political poet. I detest that classification which insists on designating me as the representative of an ideologically committed poetry. My ambition as a writer, if there is an ambition, is to write about all the things I see, that I touch, that I know, that I love, that I hate. But in pointing out to me 'the world of the workers' you make me, in an unconscious and generous way, the spokesman for the anxieties of the masses or of the legions of organized workers, and that's not the case. I am only the echo in a certain part of my poetry of the anxieties of the contemporary world, of the anxieties of Latin America. But I refuse to be classified as a political poet. (2005)

Allen Ginsberg expressed something similar:

I myself don't believe in so-called political poetry. I think what a poet does is he [she] 'writes his mind'. And like everybody else, his [her] mind is concerned with sex, dope, and everyday living, politics included. (cited in Rothschild 1997)

Both of these poets seem to have objected to the separation of the political from the everyday. Both poets, in other interviews and in their poetry, actively embraced the role of poet as advocate or activist. In many of his poems, for example, Ginsberg was explicit about his political concerns. For example, in poems like 'Death to Van Gogh's ear' (in Honan 1987: 6-10) the narrator rages against numerous governments (including the U.S. and Russia) and their various colonialist and imperialist policies. In other poems like 'Howl' and 'A supermarket in California' (in Honan 1987: 3-4), he foregrounded the fact that homosexuality was (at the time the poems were written) still maligned by American society. However, both poets felt limited by the fact that their work was labelled as 'political'.

Other poets seem to have no such reservations about their role as 'political poets'. As Jerome Rothenberg states:

The poets who live with language and remember the need to resist and remake feel whatever moves they make to be political and charged with meaning in the political sense. Time will determine if the politics are good or bad—if (as I would see it) they contribute to our liberation or our deeper entrapment, but that they are a politics is something I would choose never to deny. (in Bernstein 1998: 1)

Another poet who embraces the idea of being politically engaged is the prominent American poet Audre Lourde who describes herself as 'a black-lesbian-feminist-warrior-poet-mother' (Steif 1991). She says, 'the artist must be revolutionary. The artist is one of the few who knows how much there is to lose', although elsewhere, she notes that the way politically-engaged poetry affects readers is by making 'a piece of truth inescapable. Poetry is the conflict in the lives we lead. Poetry as an art intensifies ourselves, alters and underlines our feelings. It is most subversive because it is in the business of encouraging change' (Steif 1991). This perspective is not dissimilar to the perspective expressed by Ginsberg and Neruda above.

Perhaps a more appropriate term should be found for this kind of poetry. Carolyn Forché makes a useful general observation about the nature of what she calls 'poetry of witness' but her comments could be applied to political poetry generally. She suggests that, when describing poetry, we often resort to the rather simplistic distinction of poetry either being 'personal' or 'political'. She also notes:

The distinction between the personal and the political gives the political realm too much and too little scope; at the same time, it renders the personal too important and not important enough. If we give up the dimensions of the personal, we risk relinquishing one of the most powerful sites of resistance. The celebration of the personal, however, can indicate a myopia, an inability to see how larger structures of the economy and the state circumscribe, if not determine, the fragile realm of individuality. (1993: 31)

Poetry that is purely 'political' (if such a thing is possible) risks becoming empty rhetoric, whereas poetry that only speaks of personal experiences risks missing the broader social implications of such experiences. Certainly, many of the most powerful political poems explore the ramifications of socio-political realities by illustrating how they impact on the personal realm. Such poems may take socio-political insights and ground them in personal anecdotes. James Scully makes a similar distinction, suggesting that the notion of 'a poetry of dissidence', for him, is a more 'honest' definition of politically engaged poetry, noting that political poetry is, by definition, poetry that 'goes against the

dominant ideological grain' (1988: 5).² He notes that although all poetry might be described as 'political', if a poet's work blends neatly into mainstream ideological and cultural beliefs, then it isn't likely to be described as 'political'.

Dissident poetry...does not respect boundaries between private and public, self and other. In breaking boundaries it breaks silences: speaking for, or at best with, the silenced; opening poetry up, putting it in the middle of life rather than shunting it into a corner. It is a poetry that talks back, that would act as part of the world, not simply as a mirror of it. Obviously such a poetry rules nothing out. Dissident poetry does therefore observe connections—say, between social empowerment and valorization and human definition—that the dominant poetry declares that 'poetry' must ignore or suppress. (1988: 5)

Forché observes that perhaps we need a third term that can more usefully describe a poetry that works in both the personal and public spheres, a term 'that can describe the space between the state and the supposedly safe havens of the personal. Let us call this space "the social"' (1993: 31). The term 'social' encompasses or refers to a poetry that, amongst other things, personalises socio-political realities and grounds the ideological in the everyday.

Certainly the idea of 'social poetry', as articulated by Forché, and the 'dissident poetry' of Scully, reflect some of the concerns and reservations expressed by poets who dislike the term 'political poetry'. Martin Espada's notion of 'a poetry of the political imagination' is also useful here, acknowledging as it does, the fact that poetry interprets the political, not using analytical, didactic or rhetorical language, but as it is refracted through the lens of the imagination. As Espada notes:

Poetry of the political imagination is a matter of both vision and language. Any progressive social change must be imagined first, and that vision must find its most eloquent possible expression to move from vision to reality. Any oppressive social condition, before it can change, must be named and condemned in words that persuade by stirring the emotions, awakening the senses. Thus the need for the political imagination. (1999)

The Australian poet, Bruce Dawe, makes the point that, in fact, the most potent politically-engaged poetry doesn't separate the

² A possible critique of Scully's comments would be that political poetry can also be written from a position within dominant political power. An example of this would be Marinetti writing poetry with a fascist agenda.

political out from the personal or the lyric. He notes:

Such a critical division fails to recognise one central fact—that it is from profoundly personal and lyrical well-springs that successful poetry of social and political concern comes. It is because the poet...responds initially as a person to whatever the circumstance is, that he or she is driven to seek expression... (1992: 97)

Martin Espada expands this idea, suggesting that the goal of poets should be to use their artistic skill and imaginative power to transform a moment or event or socio-political reality into a poem that resonates with power and pathos. This is the poet's task.

Political imagination goes beyond protest to articulate an *artistry* of dissent. The question is not whether poetry and politics can mix. That question is a luxury for those who can afford it. The question is how best to combine poetry and politics, craft and commitment, how to find the artistic imagination equal to the intensity of the experience and the quality of the ideas. (1999)

Certainly, for me, Forché, Scully and Espada's ideas regarding the nature of politically engaged poetics are persuasive and reflect many of my own ideas about the process of merging politics and poetry. Political discourse can effectively argue the merits or otherwise of a political ideology. However, politics is necessarily transformed when it is refracted through a poetic lens. Poetry can capture unique and subtle nuances that may be missed or interpreted differently by political analysts or commentators. These insights may not be better, but they do offer a different perspective.

Whilst writing this essay, I sit in my own library, a freshly-painted 1950s school portable. I think of Flattley and Wallace-Crabbe's quote that a schoolroom can have many transformations in a lifetime and I think that the latest manifestation of this one might be its most peaceful. I pick up a book of poetry by the Vietnamese poet, Thanh Thao, written in response to the Ma Lai massacre and I think of a meeting over lunch we shared in Vietnam in 2007. In that discussion he asked my partner (via an interpreter) 'Why do you think I write poetry?' My partner, unsure how to respond, allowed a space in the conversation for Thao to continue. Thao looked him squarely in the eye and said softly, 'I write for all the ghosts'.

If Eduardo Cadava is correct when he says: 'There is no word or image that is not haunted by history' (1998: xvi) then perhaps the role of politically engaged poetry is to write for the ghosts, write the silences, the absences, and most importantly, the absences that will come into being if no one speaks. Poets must write in many tongues, from many perspectives, but we must continue to speak. For me, the following comment by Flattley and Wallace-Crabbe has particular resonance:

The lack of care and the complicity of silence find us all wanting.
We cannot dissociate ourselves from the hypocrisies of our
governments or the immoralities of our corporations. Nor can we
hide behind the screen of busyness, even if we do call it 'work and
family commitments'. This is classic middle-class camouflage:
one of the more altruistic personae of self-interest. (1992: 8)

Ultimately, silence is complicity. All the poets mentioned previously have refused to be silent. They may be critiqued for being imperfect in terms of form or ideologically misguided but their strength lies, to my mind, in their willingness to engage with the difficult and uncomfortable socio-political realities of our age. They advocate changes that they believe will contribute to creating a more just world. And that is a goal worthy of poetry.

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'The Frenzy on the Wall'

Two and a Half Cheers for Hollywood

Harry Oldmeadow

There are two American cinemas: Hollywood, and Hollywood...
the Hollywood of sums, and the Hollywood of individuals.
(Jacques Rivette)¹

Recalling his first childhood encounter with the cinema, in the 1920s, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote of being mesmerized by 'the frenzy on the wall'. My own initiation into Hollywood magic came in the late '50s through the exploits of Gary Cooper, John Wayne, Robert Mitchum, Humphrey Bogart *et al.* and the allure of Ingrid Bergman, Elizabeth Taylor, Kim Novak and Ava Gardner. *Vera Cruz* (director Robert Aldrich, 1954) inaugurated a lifelong fascination with the Western while *Raintree County* (Edward Dmytryk, 1957) was my first 'adult' movie, seen surreptitiously! Early favourites included *The Desperate Hours* (William Wyler, 1955) and *The Buccaneer* (Anthony Quinn, 1958) — I hardly dare revisit that one! This kind of fare was on offer every Saturday afternoon at a shilling a pop, with cartoons, serials and a B-feature thrown in (Jaffas and Fantales were extra). I've been hooked on Hollywood ever since — a Hollywood that no longer exists, the mid-century Hollywood of studios, genres and stars. And I'm talking real stars, not celebs: Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie (to

¹ Jacques Rivette, "Notes on a Revolution" (1955) in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, ed. Jim Hillier, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 94.

choose two of the more congenial of the contemporary glitterati), or Bogart and Bergman? No contest!

Visit one of those internet sites where you find a clutch of quotations on any given subject, type in 'Hollywood'; you will find that the overwhelming majority bucket Hollywood as a realm of the utmost rapacity, cynicism and depravity, a moral cesspit where monstrous egos, hypocrisy, betrayal, and exploitation are the order of the day, and where the pursuit of profit is Master of All. Here's a sample from people who should know:

You can take all the sincerity in Hollywood, place it in the navel of a firefly and still have room for three caraway seeds and a producer's heart.
(Fred Allen)²

Hollywood amuses me. Holier-than-thou for the public and unholier-than-the-devil in reality. (Grace Kelly)

Hollywood is a place where they'll pay you a thousand dollars for a kiss and fifty cents for your soul. (Marilyn Monroe)

(Fred Allen, the radio comedian, kept Hollywood at arm's length; Grace Kelly escaped to Monaco; and we all know the sad story of Marilyn.) No one doubts the squalid realities signalled by these testimonies — and countless others with the same freight.

Turn to more academic analyses of 'Hollywood' and we are likely to be told that it is 'a factory of bourgeois ideology', the new 'opium of the masses', an instrument of 'cultural hegemony', a microcosm of brute capitalism, a place, in Angela Carter's words, 'where the United States perpetrated itself as a universal dream and put the dream into mass production.' (Such critics tend to take little notice of the fact that despite the general repression of politics, many of the best Hollywood films are either ideologically subversive — often inadvertently — or, more often, riddled with ideological contradictions and tensions.) Feminist and psychoanalytic theorists expose a patriarchal system of exploitation pivoting on voyeurism and 'the male gaze'. Postmodernist theorists snap-freeze the Hollywood cinema into a corpse to dissect on the laboratory bench. (It might be noted in passing that no one outside Academe reads the

² The Fred Allen quote and those following from Grace Kelly, Marilyn Monroe, Angela Carter, Georges Duhamel, Ben Hecht, Ernest Lindgren, Jean-Luc Godard, and Jacques Rivette can all be easily found on the web.

arcane lucubrations and sometimes absurd theorizations of these people. Nonetheless, semiotics, post-structuralism and various deconstructionist theories have been highly corrosive in film studies, as they have in all the humane disciplines.) Others decry the Hollywood cinema as irredeemable trash, a popular form of entertainment dumbed down for the masses. Recall the words of the French writer, George Duhamel, who pilloried the cinema as

a pastime for helots, a diversion for uneducated, wretched, worn-out creatures who are consumed by their worries..., a spectacle which requires no concentration and presupposes no intelligence...which kindles no light in the heart and awakens no hope other than the ridiculous one of someday becoming 'a star' in Los Angeles.

This lament was written in 1930 but it has been rehearsed many times since. For my own part I'm more inclined to David Thomson's view:

A movie is a kind of séance, or a drug, where we are offered the chance to partake in the lifelike... It is surreptitious; it is illicit, if you like, in the sense of being unearned or undeserved. It is vicarious, it is fantastic, and this may be very dangerous. But it is heady beyond belief or compare. And it changed the world. Not even heroin or the supernatural went so far.³

Consider the strange case of Ben Hecht, one of the most celebrated (and highly paid) of Hollywood screenwriters, with a glittering roster of credits: three films for director Howard Hawks, *Scarface* (1932), *His Girl Friday* (1940), and *Monkey Business* (1952), two with Hitchcock, *Spellbound* (1945) and *Notorious* (1946), as well as *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939), *Wuthering Heights* (Wyler, 1939), *A Farewell to Arms* (Charles Vidor, 1957), and *Some Like it Hot* (Wilder, 1959). Film historian Richard Corliss went so far as to call Hecht the Hollywood screenwriter, someone who 'personified Hollywood itself.'⁴ And yet Hecht himself would claim that

Movies are one of the bad habits that corrupted our century... an eruption of trash that has lamed the American mind and retarded Americans from becoming a cultured people.

During the classical era of Hollywood cinema, when the studio oligarchs reigned supreme, there was an endless litany of

³ David Thomson, *The Whole Equation*, New York: Vintage, 2004, p. 155.

⁴ "Hecht", Wikipedia.

remonstrance from directors, actors, editors, script-writers and cinematographers: Hollywood stifled creativity; studio moguls were Philistines; radical projects were thwarted at every turn; Hollywood threw creative spirits on the scrapheap as soon as the box office returns headed in the wrong direction. There is the attendant popular mythology (in which fact and fancy are liberally admixed) that Hollywood repeatedly ate its own children—Judy Garland, Monroe, Montgomery Clift, Orson Welles, Marlin Brando and the rest. To make the arraignment of Hollywood even more severe we might also remind ourselves of the craven cowardice (or worse) of the studio bosses in the McCarthyite persecution of the ‘Hollywood Ten’, and the collusion (or worse) of eminent producers, directors, actors and the like. Chaplin, Edward Dmytryk, Abraham Polonsky, Joseph Losey, Jules Dassin, Dalton Trumbo, Martin Ritt, and many others suffered varying degrees of humiliation and ostracism, and their careers were, at the least, severely disrupted, sometimes destroyed. Others compromised themselves in ways which were quite understandable but nonetheless damaging, if not to their careers then to their subsequent reputation and self-respect—Elia Kazan and Humphrey Bogart to name two.

Now here’s the rub. All that said—and there is much more that might be said in similar vein—let us confront a paradoxical but inescapable fact: in the classical period (say, somewhat arbitrarily, 1935-1960) Hollywood produced a truly astounding torrent of distinguished films, the best of which can, I think, fairly be ranked with the most elevated achievements of human creativity in the 20th century. The best? Well, for starters, *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942) *My Darling Clementine* (Ford, 1946), *Red River* (Hawks, 1948), *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956), *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1958), *A Touch of Evil* (Welles, 1958), to name a few favourites. 1939 is often adduced as an annus mirabilis of Hollywood. Consider: *Gone with the Wind*, *Ninotchka* (Ernst Lubitsch), *Stagecoach* (Ford), *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming), *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (Frank Capra), and *Wuthering Heights* were among the high-flyers but *Love Affair* (Leo McCarey), *Dark Victory* (Edmund Goulding), *Destry Rides Again* (George Marshall), *Drums Along the Mohawk* (Ford), *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Sidney Lanfield), *Intermezzo* (George Ratoff),

Jamaica Inn (Hitchcock), *Only Angels Have Wings* (Hawks), and *Young Mr Lincoln* (Ford yet again!) also made their appearance that year. An astonishing roll-call! But we can find at least a handful of masterworks in *any* given year of the classical period. (The same is far from true today.)

The classical period of Hollywood is so-called because it was in these years that the possibilities of the cinema were most fully realised. Of course, it was in the early decades of the century that the first wave of great film-makers, in America and elsewhere, established the audacious visual possibilities of the medium—Eisenstein, Griffith, Murnau, Chaplin, Stroheim. But it was only with the coming of sound in the late '20s that the full repertoire of expressive possibilities was unlocked. The factors at work are too complex to unravel here but one may mention a few key developments: the exploitation of sound, colour, lighting and deep-focus cinematography made possible by new technologies; the elaboration of the 'transparent' or 'plain' style, marked by continuity editing, naturalistic lighting, and various strategies to promote 'identification' and verisimilitude (life-likeness); the subordination of style to the imperatives of narrative; the influx of a stream of sophisticated artists from Europe (Murnau, Lang, Lubitsch, Ophuls, Sternberg, Renoir, Tourneur, Maté, Curtiz, Siodmak), many of them deeply influenced by German Expressionist cinema and well-versed in the *avant-garde* developments in other arts; the refinement of a ruthlessly efficient and highly productive studio system and its various corollaries—stars, genres, specialized labour, the economies of scale; the insatiable popular appetite for films.

In its heyday MGM was turning out a full-length feature every week of the year, Hollywood as a whole about 600. 1946 was perhaps the zenith of the system, a year in which movie attendances reached an all-time high: David Thomson cites the scarcely believable figure of 100 million weekly attendances in the USA, which is to say something in the order of two-thirds of the total population!⁵ [To consolidate my earlier contention: 1946 produced *The Best Years of Our Lives* (Wyler), *The Postman Always*

⁵ David Thomson, *The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood*, p. 201.

Rings Twice (Tay Garnett), *Gilda* (Charles Vidor), *Notorious* (Hitchcock), *The Big Sleep* (Hawks), *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor), *It's a Wonderful Life* (Capra), *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak), and *My Darling Clementine*.]

How are we to explain the extraordinary surge of creativity in the quarter of a century between 1935 and 1960? Well, the studio system itself is one of the keys. As André Bazin, a pioneer of serious film criticism and founder of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, asserted,

What makes Hollywood so much better than anything else in the world is not only the quality of certain directors, but also the vitality, and in a certain sense the excellence of a tradition...The American cinema is a classical art, but why not then admire what is most admirable, ie. not only the talent of this or that filmmaker, but the genius of the system...⁶

Thomas Schatz borrowed Bazin's happy phrase for *The Genius of the System* (1988), in which he shows how the studios provided the conditions for an extraordinary efflorescence of films. It goes without saying that a great deal of ephemeral pulp, even unmitigated garbage, was produced in Hollywood in these years as well as those comparatively few masterworks. But the same could be said of any of the arts: to take another relatively popular art-form, how many worthless or mediocre novels were published in these years, and how many novels of real significance and durability? For every Hemingway there are ten thousand Carter Browns! Nor can we gainsay the fact that the studios often aborted promising projects and caused some serious grief to a good many talented artists. But equally true: the system itself nurtured a whole raft of directors whose achievements would be quite inconceivable without it—Ford, Hawks, Capra and Preston Sturges, to mention four of the first rank. Ford obliquely acknowledged his debt to the system in such characteristic utterances as this:

...someone's called me the greatest poet of the Western saga. I am not a poet, and I don't know what a Western saga is. I would say that is horseshit. I'm just a hard-nosed, hardworking, run-of-the-mill director.⁷

⁶ André Bazin, "On the *politique des auteurs*" (1957) in *Cahiers du Cinéma: the 1950s*, p. 251 & 258.

⁷ Andrew Sinclair, *John Ford*, New York: Dial Press, 1979, p. 187.

It is also worth remembering that even the most apparently maverick of American film-makers in this period exploited the resources and conventions of the studio system, even Orson Welles, *enfant terrible* and perhaps the most flagrant show-off in the history of the cinema. Furthermore, many of the most creative American film-makers today, long after the death of the Hollywood system, have learned its lessons well—Martin Scorsese and Clint Eastwood furnish conspicuous examples. (We might also note that such “old-school” directors have resisted the relentless drive to infantilize Hollywood—*à la* Spielberg & co—and have spurned the fantasy-special effects-blockbuster syndrome whereby Hollywood now caters primarily to teenagers whose aesthetic sensibilities have been mashed by massive overdoses of television, video-games, internet and digital gadgetry. Talk about jaded palettes... But that’s a story for another day.)

If one might resort to a somewhat paradoxical expression, the *creative constraints* of the studio system liberated many of the finest film-makers of the era. Jean Renoir, himself a towering figure in the European cinema who also worked in Hollywood, acutely observed of the most fertile genre in this period, ‘The marvellous thing about Westerns is that they’re all the same movie. This gives a director unlimited freedom’⁸ — a bit extreme perhaps, but you see his point. Certainly the crystallization of the major film genres in this period is another key to the fertility of Hollywood. Each genre developed a formula of interrelated formal, narrative and stylistic elements which continually re-examined some cultural conflict; Hollywood well understood Aristotle’s dictum, ‘conflict is the essence of drama’. Jim Kitses wrote, properly, of the Western as ‘a varied and flexible structure, a thematically fertile and ambiguous world of historical [and mythic] material shot through with archetypal elements which are themselves ever in flux.’⁹ Each genre, resting on a tacit agreement with the mass audience, provided film-makers with an inexhaustible reservoir of allusions, associations, symbols and conventions which could be modified, inflected, parodied, satirized or repudiated. Generic

⁸ Renoir quoted in Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, New York: Random House, 1981, p. 54.

⁹ Jim Kitses, *Horizons West*, London: BFI/Thames & Hudson, 1969, p. 19.

intertextuality, to resort to academic-speak, was one of the primary pleasures of the classical cinema.

There is a good case to be made for the argument that film was the art form of the 20th century—and here one must, of course, include the manifold forms and styles of cinema which emerged in Europe, Russia, Japan and elsewhere. The modest scope of the present piece does not allow me to *argue through* the claim so a few bald assertions must suffice. Mid-century and before the advent of television on a large scale, the cinema was by far the most *popular* form of both ‘art’ and ‘entertainment’—and the distinction becomes extremely blurred in the case of Hollywood. As critic Robin Wood observed, ‘to find anything comparable we have to go back to the Elizabethan drama. No other contemporary art form has been able to speak to all social and intellectual levels simultaneously and show a comparable achievement.’¹⁰ Cinema is the most *collaborative* medium and draws on a whole constellation of related arts — music, theatre, dance, literature and photography most obviously. Its liberation from spatial and temporal constraints opened up breathtaking expressive possibilities. Writing in 1948, Ernest Lindgren hailed the versatility of the medium:

It is impossible to conceive of anything which the eye might behold or the ear hear, in actuality or imagination, which could not be represented in the medium of film. From the poles to the equator, from the Grand Canyon to the minutest flaw in the piece of steel, from the whistling flight of a bullet to the slow growth of a flower, from the flicker of thought across an almost impassive face to the frenzied ravings of a madman, there is no degree of magnitude or speed of movement within the apprehension of man which is not in reach of the film.

Cinema as an art form oscillated between the material world and a boundless domain of fantasy. Thus, a century ago, Severin-Mars could rhapsodize, ‘What art has been granted a dream more poetical and more real at the same time! Approached in this fashion the film might represent an incomparable means of expression.’¹¹ Perhaps Jean-Luc Godard had the same idea in mind when he

¹⁰ Robin Wood, *Howard Hawks*, London: BFI/Secker & Warburg, 1983, p. 8.

¹¹ Severin-Mars quoted in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, London: Routledge, 2000, ed. Clive Cazeaux, p. 328.

wrote, 'Cinema is the most beautiful fraud in the world'.

Consider just one of the peculiarities of the cinema: it is the medium *par excellence* for exploring, in the finest register, not only the beauty but the expressive possibilities of the human face. Who can forget the close-ups of Bogart and Bergman in *Casablanca*, or those of John Wayne, Joanne Dru and Montgomery Clift in *Red River*, or Elizabeth Taylor in *A Place in the Sun* (George Stevens, 1951), or Kim Novak in *Picnic* (Josh Logan, 1955)? Or, to turn elsewhere for a moment, the visage of Joan of Arc in Dreyer's classic, or those of Ingmar Bergman's protagonists in that peerless sequence of masterpieces running from *The Seventh Seal* and *Wild Strawberries* (both 1957) through, at least, to *Cries and Whispers* (1972)?

One of the pleasures of cinephilia is to read the work of others also so afflicted. Here I am certainly not referring to the turgid pomposities of the academicians in whose work one often struggles to find any *passion* or *love* for the cinema, or any respect for those impulses of *human creativity* which make any art whatsoever possible. The search, on one side, for an 'objective' form of film theorisation and film criticism—a pursuit of the unicorn if ever there was one—has dealt a death-blow to the very idea of human creativity; hence the fashionable pooh-poohing of the auteur theory which is now 'old hat', a remnant of 'romantic' criticism, or even worse, a relic of humanism! Yikes! And hence the disdain for 'subjective' judgements, as if judgements could ever be other than personal. (As the great literary critic F.R. Leavis observed, 'You cannot be intelligent about literature [or cinema, we might add] without judging. A judgement is a personal judgement or it is nothing ... you cannot have your judging done for you.'¹²)

Then, too, there are those academics for whom the adolescent slogan of the Parisian streets of '68, 'Nothing outside politics', has become a totalitarian rubric: these critics can be easily identified by their obsessive use of pre-fabricated terms and slogans—'cultural hegemony', 'bourgeois ideology', 'repressive discourse' and much more of similar ilk. (If this observation has no traction,

¹² F.R. Leavis, *Letters in Criticism*, ed J. Tasker, London: Chatto & Windus, 1974, p. 89.

take a cursory look through the pages of academic film journals such as *Screen*.) I have slogged through any amount of academic film-writing—even the opaque writings of Christian Metz, now thankfully out of fashion—but precious little of it answers to my own *experience* of the cinema. None of this is to deny that some illuminating work has emerged from the academy.¹³ But generally much more attractive and interesting are the writings of the more serious-minded journalistic film reviewers (Andrew Sarris, Pauline Kael, Manny Farber, Molly Haskell, Jonathan Rosenbaum), more free-wheeling ‘culture critics’ (Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag), and film-makers-cum-critics (Francois Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, Peter Bogdanovich, Lindsay Anderson) — though on the whole, and unsurprisingly, the great film-makers themselves turn out to be pretty humdrum writers if they put pen to paper at all.

One of the attractions of the more journalistic mode of film-writing—and one thinks here primarily of weekly and monthly publications rather than the newspapers where ‘reviewing’ is often little better than ‘golly gosh!’ — is that such writers, in the main and by the nature of their craft, are forced to focus on the particularities of a specific film which they have in front of them and which they must ‘read’ and *evaluate* (a bogey-word amongst post-modernist academics) for the intelligent lay person. The best of this kind of criticism often provides a coruscating insight—I think of Susan Sontag referring to the ‘kinetic *élan*’ of *The Searchers*,¹⁴ or Jacques Rivette’s observation of *Red River* that ‘the smooth, orderly succession of shots has a rhythm like the pulsing of blood, and the whole film *is like a beautiful body, kept alive by deep, resilient breathing*.’ I’ll swap a whole shelf of film theory for such gems. Such criticism is often intensely subjective, opinionated, provocative, sometimes infuriating. (I’m with George Steiner: ‘all criticism is, in its moments of truth, dogmatic’.¹⁵)

No doubt there are many different critical approaches and

¹³ The work of such figures as Jim Kitses, Robin Wood, Stanley Cavell, David Bordwell, Leland Poague, Thomas Schatz, Jane Tompkins, Lesley Brill and Tania Modleski might be saluted in passing.

¹⁴ Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*, New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1969, p. 106.

¹⁵ George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967, p. 14.

theoretical perspectives which will each yield their own insights into the Hollywood cinema. To summon one instance: the materialist-semiotic analysis of Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln* in *Cahiers du Cinéma*¹⁶ remains an intensely interesting and illuminating exercise that I would be the last to catapult into the rubbish bin. But any theoretical perspective becomes stultifying the moment it becomes totalitarian; alas, much academic film-writing has gone in this direction. Film theory is too often an ultimately reductive, jargon-ridden and tendentious exercise wherein specific films simply become grist for some sort of ideological/theoretical mill (over the last few decades variously materialist-Marxist, psychoanalytic-Lacanian, Metzian, semiotic, feminist, post-structuralist-deconstructive, post-colonial). Please: let us keep in the foreground of any consideration of Hollywood the *sine qua non* of the classical cinema, as it is of all art, the *creativity of human individuals*.

¹⁶ Editors, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No 223, 1970 (reproduced in translation in many film theory anthologies).

Rosaleen Norton: art, sexuality, and society

John Snowdon

Outsider society: a sense of place

Colonial sailors once forged a path from the wharf, to claim Woolloomooloo Hill as a locale for rest and recreation. Since then, the harbourside real estate of Elizabeth Bay and Potts Point has done little to displace the hilltop territory of outsider society that is King's Cross. The Cross is a junction where William Street, Victoria Street, and Darlinghurst Road converge, amidst the affluent suburbs of Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay, and Rushcutters Bay. Even today Kings Cross has no postcode of its own. Actors, musicians, painters, poets, prostitutes, intellectuals, and other urban city-dwellers made it their home, as did the bohemian artist Rosaleen Norton from the 1940s to her death in the late 1970s.

This was when Prime Minister Robert Menzies led a government that was intent on maintaining a conservative status quo. Norton, like many at The Cross, did not cower but maintained her belief in Pan, and continued to produce art, just as sex workers continued to entertain sailors, servicemen, and local clients. The enclave presented an alternative option to conformity, and Norton's art featured at various venues. One of these was The Lincoln Inn, in Rowe Street. where intellectuals and artists associated with the left-wing sub-culture of the Sydney Push,¹ met to mingle, and discuss ideas. Amongst the

writers, P.R. Evans captured something of late 1940s atmosphere of bohemian Sydney:

*There in the airless cellar dimly lit,
The Saints of esoteric culture sit:
Free verse, free art, free love, freethinking thrive . . .*²

Mainstream society maintained a voyeuristic fascination with Kings Cross. The red neon 'Coca-Cola' sign, and the hot pink and jet black of the Pink Pussy Cat Club beckoned at the end of William Street, to mark the western entrance to illicit territory. Sydney society looked inward, to a district that flashed electricity, like a pinball machine, wedged between Darlinghurst and middle-class suburbia. For those who did not visit this risqué world of non-conformity, unconventionality, and sex, magazines like *The Australasian Post*, *People*, *Truth*, *Squire*, and tabloid newspapers like *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily Mirror*, and *The Sun* readily provided salacious stories. Australian society was eager to lap up text dished out with zealous self-interest by this sales-driven media.

The press portrayed Norton as 'the notorious, Pan-worshipping Witch of Kings Cross . . . a person known to the police through two prosecutions for obscenity'. Crime reporter Bill Jenkins considered that she was 'on the lowest rung of humanity. She was the epitome of depravity . . . She exuded evil'.³ Newcastle academic Marguerite Johnson disagrees and claims that 'Rosaleen Norton is among the most misunderstood women of Twentieth Century Australasia'.⁴

Norton's interest in the Western esoteric tradition grew from a long-time study of Carl Jung's writings, tempered by Eastern and Theosophical influences. Later she studied the Kabbalah, and practised ritual magic.⁵ Her philosophy became 'allied to a cosmology that was distinctly her own, but which drew much from ancient mythology'.⁶ Norton's drawings often included symbols of her own, some of which came to her in trance, or in dreams. 'Individuation', from *The Art of Rosaleen Norton*,⁷ alludes to this mixture of influences, referring to the Jungian concept of unification for mind, body and spirit, but including insects, and peculiar symbols. The drawing also features the artist's face, on a winged creature with a serpentine phallus and clawed feet.

The Kashmir café, in McLeay Street, and the Apollyon café, in Darlinghurst Road, hung several of Norton's paintings. Both venues were supposedly meeting places for her coven, which the press referred to as her 'Devil's Cult'.⁸ Wiccan author Phyllis Curott defines a coven as a group of people with similar interests, who meet as a 'support group, a consciousness-raising group, and a psychic study centre'.⁹ Curott points out that a coven is a place of safety that is private to those who belong to the circle. Norton's coven included the practice of 'sex-magic', which Curott describes as 'an expression of divine union... of Goddess and God. Significantly, sex magic is an aspect of Wiccan practice that is conducted by consenting adults'.¹⁰

Norton's involvement with Wiccan ceremonies prompted accusations of sex orgies and demoniac parties, and the press produced headlines such as 'Black Masses in Sydney'.¹¹ Norton was cast as the antithesis of complacent family life. Her occult practices and overt sexuality challenged the complacency of conservative Christian attitudes, which had prevailed since the early days of European colonization. It was not difficult for the press to portray her as a demoniac, anti-Christian traitor to parochial Australian values. Johnson points out that she became 'society's scapegoat, the witch on the outskirts of the community, a demon required to reinforce family values and Christian morality'.¹² Ironically, she drew upon her infamy to cultivate her public persona, although this construction did nothing to curb the scope of her art.

'A Vision of the Boundless'¹³

Transcendence and out-of-body experience were recurring themes that featured in both Norton's work and her life. She recognized the Freudian notion of the dream as a place of the uncanny, a beginning for all human beings. From an early age she rejected the idea of denying extra-sensory experience, and repudiated rules of repression as 'senseless shibboleths', referring to the biblical notion of a password that could determine an outsider's fate in a closed society.¹⁴ Gavin Greenlees, Norton's partner, wrote poetry that also alluded to a world beyond physical boundaries:

*He is the castle of echoes,
And the walking mill, sideshow to attraction beyond sleep,
We created those dissolving, mobile corridors,
From the dream logged, archaic flesh,
Of giants no longer valid¹⁵*

'Nightmare', from Norton's 1943 exhibition at the bohemian Pakies Club, Sydney, depicts a god-form arising from the body of a woman who is sleeping, or in a trance state.¹⁶ It is a visual representation of astral projection, and when writing about this image, the term 'transcendental contraband,' comes to mind. Post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida employs this phrase to describe a transcendental system where at least one key concept in that system cannot be explained within the system itself.¹⁷ Art is such a system, as an artwork invites the viewer to rely on his or her own perception of the experience, regardless of a prevailing cultural interpretation. Art has the capacity to trigger a point of recognition for the viewer that comes from perceived experience, rather than from lived experience. Our initial response to art comes through the senses.

Even so, it would be naïve to believe that our understanding of art has not been affected by inherited expectations and beliefs. Literary commentator, essayist, and political activist Susan Sontag reminds us of this tradition, pointing out that hermeneutic intervention questions the value of accepting creative expression for its own sake:

The earliest theory of art, that of the Greek philosophers, proposed that art was a mimesis, imitation of reality. It is at this point that the peculiar question of the value of art arose. For the mimetic theory, by its own terms, challenges art to justify itself.¹⁸

Socio-historical interplay between the languages of creativity and society's status quo, underscores the duality described by both Sontag and Derrida: art, as well as literature and music, has the power to transcend society's conservative boundaries, yet each art form is experienced from within the confines of that same society.

A reviewer in the Sydney magazine *Pertinent* identified only as Paul, discussed society's attitudes to Norton's work. He thought it unfairly biased for some of her drawings to be seen as 'presentations of evil':

If I am to analyze this feeling quite honestly now, I find only one explanation: to the impure all is impure. There is nothing disgusting about them [Norton's drawings], not even those which depict horrible, terrifying, even repulsive ideas or images.¹⁹

Paul's enlightened opinion was far from unanimous. In 1946 police raided Norton's exhibition at the Rowden White Library, University of Melbourne. She was charged following complaints that her drawings were 'lewd and disgusting', depicting 'stark sensuality running riot', and 'as gross a shock to the average spectator as a witches orgy'. Norton found these remarks naïve and representative of an immature mentality. 'Obscenity, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder,' she argued, and went on to say, 'this figleaf morality expresses a very unhealthy attitude.'²⁰ Neither the artist nor the viewer could fully experience a world 'divided between accepted discourse, and excluded discourse,' to quote Foucault.²¹

Police seized four of the works, alleging that they were decadent, obscene, and likely to arouse unhealthy sexual appetites in those who saw them. Their case was accompanied by 'considerable press coverage, most of which . . . dwelt on the extraordinary subject matter of . . . [the] works, her bohemian lifestyle and occult interests.'²² Police claimed that Norton was displaying works inspired by medieval demonology, but the defence attorney argued that the allegedly obscene pictures could not be proven 'likely to corrupt those whose minds were open to immoral influences'.²³ They were mild when compared to other publications that had already been cleared by the Australian censors, and viewers were entitled to form their own opinions. In court, Norton was asked to explain one of the paintings, 'Witches' Sabbath' (later reworked as 'Black Magic').²⁴ She described the work as:

Symbolic, with the female figure, resembling the artist, being a magic practitioner and the panther personifying the powers of darkness. The embrace represents the initiation of the practitioner into the 'infernal mysteries.'²⁵

Rather than representing a gratuitous, orgiastic union between 'the practitioner' and the panther, Lucifer, the embrace recognizes the struggle between humanity and the powers of darkness.

Mankind and Lucifer have both fallen from grace, and Norton is not worshipping their union, but acknowledging the existence of a relationship between contraries. It is an embrace that contradicts complacency, as the viewer is invited to recognize the veracity of human susceptibility to a dark attraction, or desire, and it is this image that society's institutions chose to suppress.

Norton was acquitted of the charges although her maverick stance as an artist had ensnared her in a paradoxical scenario. Her expression came through art, yet the press and the police impacted on her life by ensnaring her in a construction of institutionalized subjective judgment. *People* magazine featured her on the cover of a 1950 edition, with the title 'Priestess of the Occult', and her reputation became firmly established.

In 1952, police attention shifted from obscenity to vagrancy charges, as Norton and Greenlees had no visible means of support. Publisher Walter Glover came to the rescue with the offer to fund a collaborative book, and *The Art of Rosaleen Norton* was produced as a deluxe edition. Again, police intervention led to obscenity charges and bowdlerization.²⁶ *The Sunday Sun* ran the headline 'Witches, Demons on Rampage in Weird Sydney Sex book', and similar sensationalism called for the book to be banned. This time, when Norton was asked to explain her drawings in court, she referred to the psychology of Carl Jung, and Sigmund Freud, explaining that many of her artworks referred to the 'fusion of the conscious and subconscious mind'.²⁷ It was deemed that several pages needed to be obliterated to permit distribution of book, and Norton later replied by publishing her poem *Odium Psychopathologicum*, concluding with the lines:

Yet know, O ape of little sense
'Honi soit qui mal y pense!'²⁸

Collective response: have attitudes changed?

Much of Norton's work is now available, despite the cultural intervention that she experienced during her lifetime. Her stance pushed the limits of bourgeois ideas, and her artworks invited society to extend its willingness to consider the possibility of new experience. But has this altered the actual process of press and

police intervention in art? A few instances come to mind.

The 1973 controversy surrounding the purchase of Jackson Pollock's 'Blue Poles'(1952)²⁹ featured discussion about the painting's price and size, alongside the nationality of the artist, and press-fuelled debate concerning the work's aesthetic appeal. The painting eventually gained its place in Australia as a treasured work of art, and along the way, the artwork itself introduced many Australians to a greater awareness of the American avant-garde of the 1950s.

It took a great deal more effort before Ron Robertson-Swann's sculpture 'Vault'(1980),³⁰ was eventually restored and relocated to the front of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne. Since its commission the sculpture has been criticized on the grounds of cost and aesthetics, dubbed 'The Yellow Peril' by the press, shifted in a late-night operation, and neglected.

The 2008 controversy surrounding photographer Bill Henson's work also adopted an authoritarian voice, in this case to criticize the artist's representation of adolescents. In so doing, society chose to intervene in an artistic discourse that sought new understandings through the increased participation of children. Once again, police seized photographs after a talkback radio program had voiced concerns, which led to complaints. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's attack on the artist's credentials and ability reinforced the view that society can legitimately regulate art. His remarks recall Wendy Bacon's observation from almost forty years ago: '... there is nothing more ridiculous than a politician sounding off saying "how filthy" or "how degrading".'³¹ Interestingly, Professor Bacon was herself banned from participating in a panel at the 2009 Sydney Writers Festival, due to a critical article that she wrote for a student newspaper.

Some titles of Young Adult literature that have been banned include: *Catcher in the Rye*, J.D. Salinger (1951); *Harriet the Spy*, Louise Fitzhugh (1964); *Bridge to Teribithia*, Katherine Paterson (1977); and *Looking for Alaska*, John Green (2006). Reasons for censoring these books included profanity, vulgarity, occultism, lack of moral fibre, encouraging deception, sex, lesbianism, and homosexuality, yet each title has since earned its place in reading lists for literary studies.

Sometimes public opposition to cultural control has contested society's right to dictate which works of art and literature are acceptable. Key cases, including the 1967 challenge to the Customs Act that overturned the ban on Gore Vidal's novel *Myra Breckenridge*, and widespread defiance of the 1969 censorship of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, the last fiction to face an Australian court, demonstrate this dissatisfaction.

Perhaps it is more difficult to uphold artistic convictions, if you will pardon the pun. Art is not mass-produced, and the 1966 imprisonment of artist Mike Brown on obscenity charges, demonstrates the difference. Police officers simply arrested him, and took his paintings as evidence. Like Norton, he had to defend himself in court, and it was not simply a matter of his work being banned. The 2011 arrest of Archibald prizewinner Adam Cullen on firearms charges presents a similar dilemma. 'All I was doing was making art. I am very scared. I have never hurt anyone, ever,' he said.³² In his defence, Art Gallery of NSW director Edmond Capon wrote:

He lives what some may see as a peripheral existence. That is often the role of the artist; to experience the extremes in order to incisively observe the commonplace.³³

Our individual response to art, literature, and music is sensory, and not received via an already ascribed meaning. It is not necessary to study music history in order to decide whether or not we are affected by a piece of music. Each art form possesses unique qualities and integrities that individuals can interpret directly. Returning to literature, theorist Wolfgang Iser articulates this proposition, proposing that readers can establish the underlying assumptions of a work for themselves, and assemble the subject matter into a system of order.³⁴ He describes this as the theory of aesthetic response, which counteracts preconceived notions, or margins of difference, that separate audiences from a direct experience. He argues that aesthetic response theory should be understood as a 'dialectic relationship between the text, the reader, and their interaction'.³⁵ Iser challenges the supremacy of informed reception, and proposes that aesthetic response liberates readers from pre-determined attitudes. The same is true for art and music, as viewers and listeners possess a similar

capacity. In contrast to this, reception theory arises from a history of judgments about the text, and this analysis simply strips away any precious quality, or beauty, by confining understanding to parameters that are already known.

Following on from Iser's work, German theoretician Gabriele Schwab questions the way that art affects us. She refers to Iser's quasi-paradoxical deduction: 'fictions become our uncanny doubles, reflecting to us something we otherwise cannot perceive.'³⁶ Norton's art refers to this uncanny world of the senses. Her paintings and drawings occupy a space between the known and the unknown. Schwab describes this as a kind of cultural brokerage, whose role is to intervene in the empirical world. If society decides which artworks are acceptable and which are not, then such a brokerage is impossible.

Conclusion

Art is a creative rather than an imitative process. It is more than a commodity for controlled consumption, which can be regulated or confined within the bounds of cultural conformity. That is because a passage of music, a written text, a colour, line, shape, texture, or dance has the capacity to awaken the uncanny in each of us. We really do not need to ask permission to experience this quality, as we have the ability to think for ourselves. Society continues to maintain agents with the power to enforce its rulings regarding the restriction of unacceptable artworks. These tethered monsters are not unleashed in order to protect us from ourselves, but to thwart a healthy sense of social and political critique. The police and the press have no business enforcing this cultural containment, in order for myopic society to feed its insatiable desire for unquestionability.

- ¹ Weblin, M. 'The Lincoln Inn,' *The Northern Line*. No.2, April 2007. <http://docs.google.com/gview?a=v&q=cache:P7VMsiCOjckJ:setis.library.usyd.edu.au/anderson/contributors/weblin/tnl/tnl02.pdf+the+sydney+push+the+lincoln+inn+there+was+a+young+lady+named+jane&hl=en&gl=au&sig=AFQjCNHjXty6Jn2RLFEScARdwSOyWrIxoQ> (Accessed 20/10/2009).
- ² Weblin.(2007), p.8.
- ³ Jenkins, B. *As Crime Goes By*, quoted in Borham, S. 'The Dark Secret of Eugene Goossens,' *Sun-Herald*, John Fairfax & sons, January 3, 1993.
- ⁴ Johnson, (2002).
- ⁵ Drury, N. S. (2008). *Rosaleen Norton's Contribution to the Western Esoteric Tradition*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia.p.8.<http://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/31438> (Accessed 29/10/2009).
- ⁶ Overall, R. and Richmond, K, (1998). *The Occult: An Exhibition of Material from the Monash University Library Rare Book Collection 4 June – 24 July 1998/exhibition catalogue written by Keith Richmond and Richard Overall*. Monash University Library, Clayton. Vic. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn352995> (accessed October 13,2009).
- ⁷ Glover. W. (1952) *The Art of Rosaleen Norton*, Glover, Sydney.
- ⁸ *The Sun*, Sydney, September 26, 1955.
- ⁹ Curott, P. (2002). *Witch Crafting: A Spiritual Guide to Making Magic*, Thorsons, London. p. 278.
- ¹⁰ Curott (2002). p. 285.
- ¹¹ *The Sun*, Sydney, September 22, 1955.
- ¹² Johnson, (2002).p.1.
- ¹³ This was the subtitle of an article about Norton's lifestyle and psychic abilities. *Pertinent*, Sydney. June, 1943
- ¹⁴ Norton. R. I was born a witch, [autobiographical article] *Australasian Post*, Sydney, January 3, 1957. The biblical reference is from *Judges* 12: 5-6.
- ¹⁵ Greenlees was Norton's partner, and this excerpt is from the poem that accompanied her drawing 'The Angel of Twizzari' in their collaborative book *The Art of Rosaleen Norton*, (1952). Glover, Sydney.
- ¹⁶ Drury. (2008). 'Nightmare' is reproduced on p.27.
- ¹⁷ Phillips. J. *Derrida and deconstruction* <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/deconstruction.htm> p.26. (Accessed 23/10/2009).
- ¹⁸ Sontag. S, (19670. "Against Interpretation", in: *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, p. 3.
- ¹⁹ *Pertinent*, Sydney, June 1943.
- ²⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, August 4, 1949.
- ²¹ Foucault, M. (1990).*The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, vol. 1*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Penguin, London. p.100.
- ²² Overall. (1998).

²³ Overall. (1998).

²⁴ Drury, (2008). 'Witches Sabbath' is reproduced on p.28. 'Black Magic' was published in *The Art of Rosaleen Norton*, Glover, (1952).

²⁵ Drury, N. (1998). *Pan's Daughter: The Strange World of Rosaleen Norton*, Sydney. p.40.

²⁶ See Overall. (1998). The Post-Master General's department judged the book obscene and prohibited distribution through the mail. Subsequently, the State police charged Glover with publishing and selling an obscene book. This was followed by a customs ban, which made *The Art of Rosaleen Norton* the only Australian art book to suffer such a prohibition - an attempt to outlaw Norman Lindsay's *Art in Australia* (1930) having failed. Despite this, Glover was not prohibited from selling the book outright; all he had to do was black out the offending pictures to fulfill legal requirements.

²⁷ This trial was reported in *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Sun*, Sydney, February 5, 1953.

²⁸ Glover. W. (1982) *The Art of Rosaleen Norton*, 2nd Edition. It is significant to note that Norton uses the phrase '*honisoit qui mal y pense*' (shame be to he who sees evil of it), as this is not only associated with the chivalric order of the Knights of the Garter, but the phrase also has a strong connection with The University of Sydney, and with intellectuals associated with the early days of the Sydney Libertarian Push.

²⁹ Pollock, J. 'Blue Poles'. In 1973, the Whitlam government purchased the work for the national Gallery of Australia, for \$A1.3 million – the highest price ever paid for a modern painting. At the time, the purchase created a political and media scandal. The painting is now one of the most popular exhibits at in the gallery, and is thought to be worth about \$200 million.

³⁰ Robertson-Swann, R. 'Vault'. It is an abstract, minimalist public sculpture built of large thick flat polygonal sheets of prefabricated steel, assembled in a way that suggests dynamic movement. It is painted yellow. It is a key work in Melbourne's public art collection.

³¹ Bacon.W. (1971). *Sex and Censorship*, in *Lot's Wife*, Monash University.<http://www.takver.com/history/aia/aia00033.htm> (Accessed 31/10/2009).

³² Morgan, Joyce. 'All I was doing was making art.' (Article) Sydney Morning Herald, 22.10.2011.

³³ Morgan op cit.

³⁴ Iser, W. 1978. *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

³⁵ Iser, (1978) p.x.

³⁶ Schwab, G. If only I were not obliged to manifest: Wolfgang Iser's Aesthetics of Negativity. Ed. Jean-Paul Riquelme. Spec. issue of *New Literary History* on Wolfgang Iser 31.1 (Winter 2000): 73-89.

Contributors – *Scintillae* 2012

Miranda Aitken writes poetry and creative non-fiction. Living in the southwest of W.A., she evokes a strong sense of place, exploring connections with her natural world. Occasionally she writes songs, which she sings in her family band. She studies at Edith Cowan University, and is writing a verse novella.

* 'Seagrass Poems' and 'Isaacs Rd' were both published in *Indigo* Vol. 6 Summer 2011.

Jess Anastasi has been a horticulturalist, personal assistant, receptionist, take-away food cook, check-cut chick, and at some point realized the only job for her was writing. Author of the popular Sanctuary series, she has four novels and two novellas published to date, and her writing is fun, sexy and smart. She has a Diploma in Professional Writing and Editing, and when she's not penning her next work, she's busy being a wife and mother. Jess lives in country Victoria, Australia and you can find out more about her at www.jessanastasi.com

Jan Bayliss is a visual and word artist, living in the Bendigo region. She is currently studying Visual Arts at La Trobe University Bendigo, and works in student support at La Trobe and Bendigo TAFE.

Julia Birch migrated from England at age 30 and now lives in Bendigo with her two daughters. Her passion for writing began after winning a BBC Radio poetry competition at 15. Julia has a BA Hons. in English Literature and is a former student of PWE at BRIT. She has a background in newspaper advertising and is currently a newspaper feature writer.

Rod Blackhirst was born in Dandenong, Victoria, and spent his childhood in Melbourne and Geelong. As a young adult he moved to the Cann River region until the Ash Wednesday bushfires. He moved to Central Victoria in the early 1980s. He has worked in newspapers, publishing, bookselling and other odd jobs before a

career in academia. He now teaches Religious Studies at La Trobe University.

Graham Borrell grew up in his parents' backyard where a towering plum substituted for Enid Blyton's Faraway Tree. After several failed apprenticeships he became a carpenter and builder of picket fences. In the mid 1990s Graham's love of writing resurfaced and his short stories and poems won awards and were published in various journals. More recently his young adult novel, *Coogee and the Hunters* was published, and he completed a Diploma of Professional Writing and Editing at Bendigo TAFE.

*'The Fire and the Footy' appeared in *Dad Stories* (Dokter Press 2007)

Neil Boyack was born in 1967. Married in Las Vegas in 1997; two kids. Lives with family on solar power, water tanks, dirt road, in the Victorian bush. Since Grunge times in Australian lit. Neil has been producing work that has been translated into French and Chinese, and published in the USA, Canada, and Australia. He has written four short story collections including *Transactions* (2003). *Self Help and Other Works*, a new collection of poems and pieces, will be out in 2012. He has also had many poems and stories published recently, including in *Best Australian Poems* 2011. Neil is the creator and director of the Newstead Short Story Tattoo (www.newsteadtattoo.org). Check www.neilboyack.com for more info.

*Barmah was first published by *Verity La* (online), Australia.

*'Country Junk' was first published by *The Literary Review*, USA.

G. N. Braun is author of a number of short stories and a memoir, *Hammered: Memoir of an Addict*. He is also the president of the Australian Horror Writers Association, and the director of the Australian Shadows Awards. Other works are due out nationally and internationally this year and his work has been published internationally. He is also a professional editor.

* Extracts are from *Hammered: Memoir of an Addict* (2012) Legumeman Books.

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Leslie Burston is a student at La Trobe University who lives in Bendigo. Apart from writing poems she also enjoys tweeting.

Warren Burt is a composer, writer, performer, video artist, educator and a few other things. Currently living in Daylesford, Victoria, he teaches at Bendigo TAFE and Box Hill Institute. His most recent activities have been several performances on the Undue Noise series in Bendigo, and producing the 90th birthday concert for the composer Felix Werder for ABC Classic-FM.

Shelly Carter has been writing short stories for many years. More than twenty of her pieces have appeared in anthologies and journals. Aside from writing fiction she writes and edits newsletters for the Bendigo Talking Tramways and prepares papers for the Australian Air Force Cadets.

John Charalambous is a Bendigo-based novelist and occasional short-story writer. His three novels are *Furies*, 2004, *Silent Parts*, 2006, and *Two Greeks*, 2011, all published by University of Queensland Press.

Brian Coman is a former biologist; he returned to the Academy after retirement and gained his second PhD in the Humanities. He has published many scientific papers, a book of essays (*A Loose Canon*, Connor Court, 2007), a history of the rabbit in Australia (*Tooth and Nail* 2nd Ed, Text Publishing 2010), and many articles in *Quadrant*. He was a part-time lecturer at Bendigo College of TAFE for some years.

Madeline Cooke grew up with an unexplainable passion for literature. She has recently focused on her creative writing and has written many short stories and poems. She is currently in the process of writing her first realist novel. Madeline has had works published in both local and national magazines and journals.

Justin D'Ath was born in New Zealand, one of ten children, and moved to Australia in 1971 to study for the priesthood. That didn't work out so he became an author and in the '80s and '90s wrote many adult short stories. *The Second Coming* was one of these and was the winner of the 1988 Arafura Short Story Award. Justin continued writing and has become a successful children's author. He lost his house and all of his early writings in the Victorian bushfires two years ago and is delighted that this story still lives on.

* 'The Second Coming' was published in *Northern Perspective* (University of Northern Territory).

Dianne Dempsey is a Bendigo-based freelance journalist, book reviewer and scriptwriter. She has written for *The Australian*, *The Courier Mail*, *The Australian Book Review*, *Australian Author*, *The Sunday Age*, *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Her screenplay *Hoop* was a 2012 official finalist in the Canada International Film Festival and her short script, *Yin and Yang*, won first prize in the California International Film Festival. Dianne also works as a part-time journalist for *The Bendigo Advertiser*.

* 'Play up, play up and play the game' appeared in *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane) in 2006.

Ross Donlon lives in Castlemaine where he convenes poetry readings and is publisher of Mark Time Books. Winner of international poetry prizes, he has featured at poetry festivals in Australia and England. His latest book is *The Blue Dressing Gown and other poems*.

* 'The Blue Dressing Gown' won the Wenlock Festival Poetry Competition (U.K., 2009) within the Arvon International Poetry Competition and was published in *The Australian* in 2011.

* 'Midsummer Night' won the Melbourne Poets Union International Poetry Competition in 2011.

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Tru Dowling is a poet, performer, and word-lover, currently teaching in Bendigo TAFE's PWE. Performances number 200 plus, with poems appearing in journals including *Poetry Monash* and *Eureka Street*. 2011 heralded Tru's debut poetry collection, *Memoirs of a Consenting Victim* (Mark Time Books), and she won PCP's Francis Webb award.

* 'Childless' has been published in *Famous Reporter* 36, 2007 and in *Memoirs of a Consenting Victim* (Mark Time Books, 2012).

Christopher Elston has been writing seriously for six years and has had numerous works appear in various high-profile publications. He lives in Bendigo with his wife, Jennie, and son, Matthew. His day job is managing his local Collins book store.

* 'Hugo, Man of a Thousand Faces' appeared in *Devil Dolls & Duplicates in Australian Horror* 2010, *Short & Twisted* 2010 and the *Unmasked* anthology 2010.

Clayton Eshleman was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, June 1, 1935. He is the author of more than forty books. His collections of poetry include *Hades in Manganese* (1981), *An Alchemist with One Eye on Fire* (2006) and *Anticline* (2010). He has also published collections of essays (*Companion Spider*, 2002), collections of poetry and prose (*Juniper Fuse: Upper Palaeolithic Imagination & the Construction of the Underworld*, 2003) and, in 2008, *The Grindstone of Rapport / A Clayton Eshleman Reader*. He founded and edited the highly regarded journals *Caterpillar* (1967-1973) and *Sulfur* (1981-2000). He has been a full-time translator since the early 1960s. His collections of translations include *The Complete Poetry of César Vallejo* (2007), *Watchfiends & Rack Screams: Writings from 1945-1948 by Antonin Artaud* (1995), and *Solar Throat Slashed* by Aimé Césaire, with A. James Arnold (2011). He has received the National Book Award in Translation, a Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry, grants from both the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, and two Landon Translation Prizes from the Academy of American Poets. He lives with his wife Caryl in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Website: www.claytoneshleman.com/

* 'The Tjurunga' was published in *The Grindstone of Rapport: A Clayton Eshleman Reader* (Black Widow Press, 2008). It also appeared in *Alligatorzine* 62.

* 'Minor Drag' appeared in *An Alchemist with One Eye on the Fire*, Black Widow Press, 2006. It also appears online at *Possum Pouch* (July 2006).

* 'Interview with Clayton Eshleman' appeared in *Jacket Magazine* (36), 2008.

Tegan Gigante has written and developed her poetry for many years and has been published in various magazines and anthologies. She was recently awarded a B.A. with First Class Honours in philosophy. Her passion for both metaphysics and Australian poetry informs her creative writing. She recently completed her Diploma in Professional Writing and Editing.

Sue Gillett is a senior lecturer in Arts and Strategic Communication at La Trobe University (Bendigo campus). She has published widely on Australian literature and cinema and has a particular interest in contemporary women's writing. Her books include *Views from beyond the mirror: the films of Jane Campion* (ATOM) and *Land Lines: Anthology of Regional Poets* (MPU). Sue is a passionate believer in the power of singing and has written the libretto for a folk opera, entitled *Mercy Will Carry Your Feet*. She is currently editor-in-chief for *Melbourne Poets Union*.

* 'Witnessing Saigon' was published in *Postcolonial Text*.

* 'Cassandra in Red' was published in *The Attitude of Cups: an Anthology of Australian Poems about Tea, Wine and Coffee* (edited by Sue Stanford, MPU).

Pam Harvey is a published author of 14 children's books. She is also a freelance non-fiction writer and has had articles published in *Good Reading*, *Bendigo Magazine* and *The Australian*. A regular reviewer for *Reading Time* (The Children's Book Council of Australia magazine), her reviews have also been published in *Australian Book Review*. She is currently the Bendigo district representative for the Victorian Children's Book Council of Australia. Pam is a Creative Writing PhD candidate at the University of Canberra

* 'No Smoking' was published in *Appendix: a journal of the medical humanities* in Spring (USA) 2011.

John Holton is a freelance writer and editor based in central Victoria. He is the author of more than a dozen publications including fiction and non-fiction titles. John's weekly newspaper column, *Between Here and Home*, appears every Tuesday in the *Bendigo Advertiser*. Most recently he published two hand-bound and crafted poetry collections, *Cowness* and *The Little Book of Nowhere*.

* 'Hemingway's Elephants' was published in *Best Australian Stories 2007*, edited by Robert Drewe.

* 'Stationery Shop Girl' won the People's Choice Award at the 2011 *Moving Galleries* exhibition and was published in *The Little Book of Nowhere*.

* 'Death of a Columnist' will appear in John's soon-to-be-published collection, *a thing I cannot name*.

Simmone Howell is the author of the young-adult books *Notes from the Teenage Underground* and *Everything Beautiful*. She lives in Castlemaine where she writes and runs creative workshops for teenagers. Visit her at: www.simmonehowell.com

* 'Xylophone' appeared in *3am Magazine* (UK).

Ian Irvine (Hobson) teaches writing at Bendigo TAFE and Victoria University. His work has appeared in various journals and anthologies including *Best Australian Poems* and *Agenda Australian*

Edition (Contemporary Australian Poets). He is working toward a contemporary poetics based upon Transpersonal Psychology and Relational-Cultural theory. Ian has published three books and gained a PhD for work on postmodern forms of alienation.

* 'Europe After the Rain' appeared in *Envoi* (150th Gala Edition), Wales, UK, June 2008.

* 'Interview with Clayton Eshleman' (see Clayton Eshleman bio).

Ben Iser is an amateur musicologist and historian of modern popular culture. For cash he manages a book store. In 2011 he completed the diploma in Professional Writing and Editing at Bendigo TAFE where he also studied Information Technology. He writes about music, obsessions, random events and the interconnectedness of everything.

Lisa A. Jacobson's verse novel, *The Sunlit Zone*, was published by Five Islands Press in 2012. The manuscript was also shortlisted for the 2009 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards. Lisa holds a PhD in creative writing and her work has been published internationally. Her poetry is represented in *The Oxford Book of Modern Australian Verse*, edited by Peter Porter (1996). See www.lisajacobson.org for more details.

* 'Several Ways to Fall Out of the Sky' was the winner of the Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize (2011).

* 'Anne Frank's Sister Falls from Her Bunk' was included in *The Best Australian Poems 2010*. It also appeared in the *Age*, 2010.

Melinda Kallasmae recently graduated from Bendigo TAFE's Writing and Editing program. Her narrative-based poetry reflects her deep interest in people and language.

Sue King-Smith has had work published in various journals, including *Island*, *Text*, *Famous Reporter*, *Mascara*, *Blue Giraffe*, *JASAL* and *Linq*. For three years she was co-editor of *The Animist*, electronic arts journal. Her first collection of poetry, *An Accumulation of Small Killings*, was published in 2008. She holds a PhD in Creative Arts from Deakin University.

* 'Swimming the Unconscious' was published in *Mascara Literary Review*, March 2008, as well as in Sue's poetry collection *An Accumulation of Small Killings* (MPU, 2008).

* 'What language?' was part of her PhD thesis *A wordless horizon: towards a politically engaged poetic* (Deakin University, 2010).

Chris Lambie studied writing and editing at Bendigo TAFE between 2002-2004 before becoming a regular contributor to *Rhythms Magazine*, *Forte* and *Tsunami*. Chris has had features published in *The Geelong Times*, *The Bendigo Advertiser*, *The Koori Mail*, *Arts in The City*, *The Big Issue* as well as music, events and travel websites. Chris regularly covers Malaysian events as a guest writer for the *Sarawak Tourism Board*.

* 'James Cotton "Superharp"' appeared in *Rhythms* magazine October 2010.

Natalie Loves decided, after two decades of teaching and bringing up four children, to return to adult education, enrolling in the PWE course at Bendigo TAFE. She has had pieces published in a number of editions of *Painted Words*. Having completed her Diploma, Natalie currently enjoys working collaboratively with a small writers' group in Castlemaine.

Joan Macneil is re-emerging as a writer and poet. Her first book was *Woman at the Window*; her latest is *Tourneys... Are Not Just for Jousting* (1995). She lives in Castlemaine where she is preparing her third book of poetry for publication and is working on a novel.

In 2010 **Judith McNay** gained her Certificate IV in PWE, and is currently enrolled in the Diploma of Visual Art at Bendigo TAFE (majoring in Photography). She plans to combine photography and art with her short stories and poetry in anthology publications, and has recently begun reading her poetry at local venues.

* 'The Crab Catcher' was published in *Montage* (University of Ballarat) 2010, and was inspired by Clifton Pugh's painting of the same name which hangs in the Castlemaine Gallery.

David L Major was born in 1957, in Wanganui, New Zealand. After graduating with a BA in Regional Planning from Massey University, he spent several years touring New Zealand in bands. He immigrated to Australia in 1990, and in 1994 received a BA in Fine Art (Painting) from Prahran College (Melbourne). More recently, he gained a Diploma in Professional Writing from Bendigo TAFE. He is the author of *The Day of the Nefilim*, a SF novel, and *The Secret Weapon* a collection of short stories and poetry created in 2011. He has three daughters; Isobel, Sian, and Carys. He resides online at davidlmajor.com

Lorraine Marwood is a Bendigo poet and author. Her publishing credits include *Skinprint*, Five Islands Press new poets and *Star Jumps Walker*, which won the inaugural Prime Minister's award for children's literature in 2010. Her poems have been published in Australian journals as well as in the USA, Canada and the UK. Currently she is writing poems for her fifth book with Walker. Lorraine loves conducting writing and poetry workshops for all ages. www.lorrainemarwood.com

* 'If Dali had these Steps' was published in *Going Down Swinging* November 2008.

* 'Thistle Cutting' was published in *Quadrant Book of Poetry* (2001-2010) edited by Les Murray.

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Jennifer Mellberg is a Central Victorian writer who graduated with a Diploma of Professional Writing and Editing from BRIT in 2007 and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from La Trobe University (Bendigo) in 2011.

* 'The Telling Day' was published in *Meanjin* 2007-08 (double issue) Vol. 66 No. 4 & Vol. 67 No. 1.

Lauren Mitchell is a Bendigo Professional Writing and Editing graduate of 1998. She has worked as a journalist for regional newspapers as well as local and national magazines. She is also a former magazine editor and the author of two books. Lauren has written a regular newspaper column since 2006.

* 'Sign Language' was published in the *Bendigo Advertiser* on May 7, 2011

* 'Fragility of Life at Sea' was published in the *Bendigo Advertiser* on February 25, 2012.

Graeme Murray's early life was spent in the south eastern corner of NSW, and the ACT. He now lives in Bendigo with his wife, Lesley, and one dog. He writes for his own pleasure and is currently working on a novel for young adults.

Cassy Nunan lives in Thornbury and works in the mental health sector. In 2010 the Melbourne Poets' Union published her collection *This Life Takes Passengers*. This year she was awarded the Joseph Furphy Literary Prize for her short story *To The Light*. Cassy is currently redrafting a second novel.

* 'These Climes, This Shore' appeared in *This Life Takes Passengers*, MPU, 2010.

B N Oakman completed two poetry units at BRIT in 2005 and until then had not written a poem. Subsequently about 80 of his poems have been published in leading literary journals in Australia and overseas. A commercially published collection, *In Defence of Hawaiian Shirts*, appeared in 2010, Peter Cundall recorded a poem for ABC Classics and The Literature Board of

The Australia Council awarded him a new work grant. Website: www.bnoakman.com

* 'Trainspotting with Robert Lowell' was published in *The Australian*, 7 January 2012.

* 'For a Friend Whose Son is Serving in Mesopotamia' was published in *Acumen: A Literary Journal* (UK), vol. 71, September 2011.

Harry Oldmeadow is a cinephile, photographer, bush-walker, Luddite, dog-lover, one-time hippie, Collingwood supporter, and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at La Trobe University Bendigo where he also teaches Cinema Studies. His publications include articles on John Ford, Hitchcock, post-modern theory and the state of the contemporary academy.

Sandra Pashkow is employed part-time in administration while she completes her BA Honours degree at La Trobe University (Bendigo). She is fortunate to have extremely talented lecturers who inspire her to excel. A voracious reader, open to challenges, she experienced a mind explosion of philosophy, religion, language and critical thinking that opened her up to a new galaxy of enquiry.

Mary Pomfret is a writer whose short stories and poetry have been published in a variety of literary magazines both nationally and internationally. Mary has a special interest in women's writing and is currently working towards a Creative Writing PhD at La Trobe University, Bendigo.

* An earlier version of 'Peripheral Vision' was published in *Idiom* 23, Vol. 18, 2006.

Penelope Sell was born in New Zealand in 1965. Her short stories have appeared in various Australian and New Zealand literary journals including *Island*, *Overland*, *Takahe* and *Meanjin*. In 2001 she received a Varuna Writers' Residency/Fellowship. Her first

novel, *A Secret Burial*, was published by Harper Collins in 2003 and in 2005 she was the recipient of a \$25 000 developing writers' grant to write her third novel *Homeless*. In 2006 she was awarded a writers' residency at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Ireland, by the Australia Council literature board. She now lives in Dunedin with her two daughters after a long period in Australia.

* 'Going Home' was published in *Takahe*, 69 (NZ), May 2010.

Brenda Skinner studied Professional Writing and Editing at BRIT in 2007 & 2008 and has had poems published in *Painted Words* (2007) and *Tamba* (42). She is currently exploring shorter poetic forms including haiku and renga and submits work to *A Handful of Stones*, an e-zine dedicated to short observational pieces of writing.

Mark Smith-Briggs is a graduate of BRIT's Professional Writing and Editing course. His horror fiction has appeared in more than 20 magazines and anthologies in the US, Canada and Australia. His short horror film *Snap* won the 2009 International 15-15 Film Festival. He is the secretary of the Australian Horror Writers Association and has been a judge for a number of genre-based awards. He has won a *Chronos* award and been short-listed for two *Ditmars* for his non-fiction work in the horror genre. He works as an editor with Leader Newspapers in Melbourne.

* 'Where the Wild Children Play' was published in *Eclecticism E-zine* #11 in February, 2010.

John Snowdon is a musician, teacher, and writer. He returned to study Professional Writing and Editing at BRIT in 2005, and since then has published both fiction and non-fiction works. He is presently exploring the socio-historical link between the languages of creativity and individual autonomy as a Creative PhD project at La Trobe University, Bendigo.

R.I. Sutton completed her Diploma of Professional Writing and Editing in 2003. Her fiction has appeared in *Kalimat*, *Zahir*, and *Glint*, and was nominated for the 2010 Pushcart Prize. She teaches Creative Writing in Bendigo and is currently working on her first collection, *A Phantom of Earth and Water*. Website: risutton.com

* 'Darwin's Butterfly' appeared in *Zahir* (no. 19, Summer 2009) as well as in Cezanne's Carrot (February 2011). It was nominated for the 2010 Pushcart Prize (US).

Roger Swarder was a Principal Lecturer and one-time Head of Department of Arts at La Trobe University Bendigo where he lectured in Philosophy, Religious Studies and Literature. His particular interests include the pre-Socratic philosophers and Plato, traditional theories of work and art, and Romanticism. He is the author of books on Homer and Parmenides, and of *Mining, Metallurgy and the Meaning of Life* (1995). His most recent book, *Science and Religion in Archaic Greece*, was published by Sophia Perennis in 2008. A collection of his poetry will be published by Connor Court Publishing in the near future.

Carmel Williams taught in Bendigo TAFE's PW&E course for a number of years and was lucky enough to meet many creative and interesting people. She is pleased that many of her former students are now making their mark as writers, editors and teachers. These days Carmel writes shorts stories, plays golf, writes poetry, plays golf, reads new writers, plays...

#ENDS#