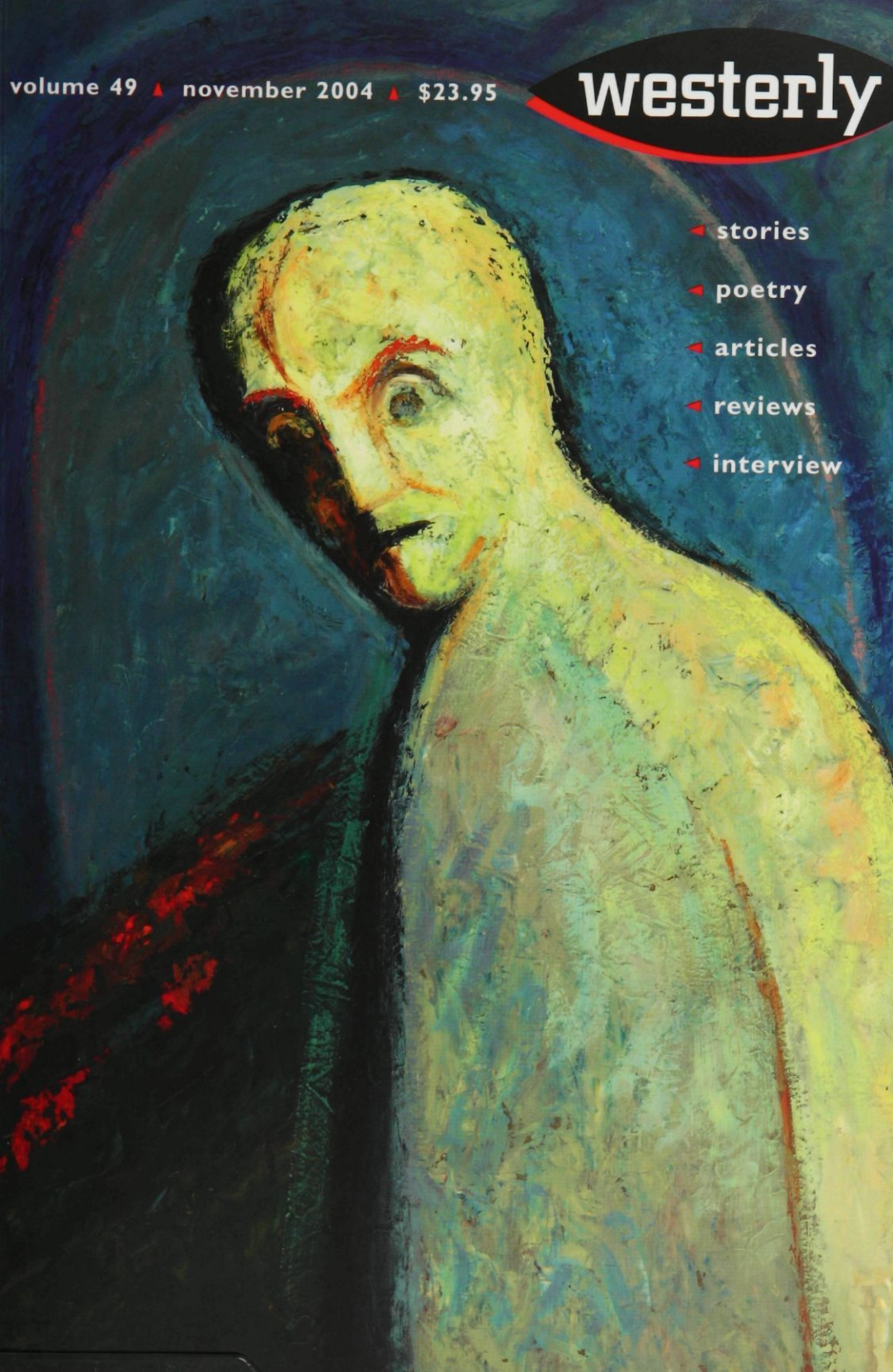


volume 49 ▲ november 2004 ▲ \$23.95

westerly

- ◀ stories
- ◀ poetry
- ◀ articles
- ◀ reviews
- ◀ interview



WESTERLY

Volume 49, November 2004

ed. Delys Bird & Dennis Haskell

Westerly Centre

(formerly Centre for Studies in Australian Literature)

University of Western Australia 6009

Australia

NOTICE OF INTENTION

Westerly is cooperating with AustLit: Australian Literature Gateway and the Scholarly Electronic Text and Image Service at the University of Sydney to convert the full backfile of *Westerly* (1956–) to electronic text, which will be made available to readers and researchers.

All creative works, articles and reviews converted to electronic format will be correctly attributed and will appear as published. Copyright will remain with the authors, and the material cannot be further republished without authorial permission. AustLit will honour any requests to withdraw material from electronic publication. If any author does not wish their work to appear in this format, please contact AustLit immediately and your material will be withdrawn.

Contact:

Info-austlit@austlit.edu.au



Supported by ArtsWA in association with the Lotteries Commission

Cover design by Robyn Mundy of Mundy Design using Dan Mazzotti's untitled painting, oil on hardboard, 75cm x 60cm. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist.

WESTERLY

an annual review ISBN 0-9750036-2-3

Editors

Delys Bird & Dennis Haskell

Editorial Advisors

Brenda Walker (prose) Mark Reid (poetry)

Editorial Consultants

Bruce Bennett (ADFA, Canberra), John Kinsella and Tracy Ryan (University of Cambridge), Susan Ballyn (University of Barcelona), Diana Brydon (University of Guelph), Douglas Kerr (University of Hong Kong), Brian Matthews (Victoria University), Vincent O'Sullivan (Wellington), Peter Porter (London), Andrew Taylor (Perth), Edwin Thumboo (National University of Singapore)

Administrator

Monica Anderson

All work published in *Westerly* is fully refereed.

Westerly is published annually at the Westerly Centre, The University of Western Australia with assistance from the State Government of W.A. by an investment in this project through ArtsWA. The opinions expressed in *Westerly* are those of individual contributors and not of the Editors or Editorial Advisors.

Notes for Subscribers and Contributors

Correspondence should be addressed to The Editors, *Westerly*, English, Communication and Cultural Studies, The University of Western Australia, Crawley, Western Australia 6009 (telephone (08) 6488 2101, fax (08) 64880 1030); email westerly@cyllene.uwa.edu.au; web address: <http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/westerly/>

Unsolicited manuscripts not accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope will not be returned. All manuscripts must show the name and address of the sender and should be typed (double-spaced) on one side of the paper only. While every care is taken of manuscripts, the editors can take no final responsibility for their return; contributors are consequently urged to retain copies of all work submitted. Minimum rates for contributors — poems \$40.00; stories/articles \$90.00. Contributors are advised that material under consideration for publication may be held until August 31 in each year.

Subscriptions: \$23.95 per annum (posted); \$42.00 for 2 years (posted). Special student subscription rate: \$17.95 per annum (posted). Single copies \$23.95 (plus \$2 postage). Email Subscriptions \$10.00 to westerly@cyllene.uwa.edu.au. Subscriptions should be made payable to *Westerly* sent to the Administrator, Westerly Centre at the above address. Overseas subscriptions: please see back page.

Work published in *Westerly* is cited in: *Abstracts of English Studies*, *Australian Literary Studies* Annual Bibliography, *Australian National Bibliography*, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* Annual Bibliography, *Arts and Humanities Citation Index*, *Current Contents/Arts & Humanities*, *The Genuine Article*, *Modern Language Association of America Bibliography*, *The Year's Work in English Studies*, and is indexed in APAIS: Australian Public Affairs Information Service (produced by the National Library of Australia) and AustLit, the Australian Literary On-Line Database.

CONTENTS

POEMS

Geoff Page	10
alicia sometimes	24
Megan McKinlay	26
Bruce Dawe	42
Mal McKimmie	39
Sarah French	61
Jose Wendell Capili	63
Dennis Greene	73
Roland Leach	91
Jeff Guess	93
J. P. Quinton	115
Graeme Hetherington	120
Christopher Kelen	121
Mark O'Flynn	140
Andrew Lansdown	142
Diane Fahey	160
MTC Cronin	161
Bev Braune	189
Kirpal Singh	186
Kim Young-Moo, translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé and Jongsook Lee	187

STORIES

Where Here Is	7
Graeme Kinross-Smith	
Surface Tension	12
Tracy Farr	
Fortunata	65
Sally-Ann Jones	
Commission	117
Morris Lurie	

you're memory
Wendy Waring
The Cutter-Off of Water
Alice Nelson
Peggy Walker
Anthony May
Perf
John Stubbley

ARTICLES

Kevin Brophy, "'Man-Moth' and the Flame of Influence:
a poet reading poetry"
Robert Dixon, "Cosmopolitan Australians and Colonial
Modernity: Alex Miller's *Conditions of Faith*, Gail Jones's
Black Mirror and A. L. Mc Cann's *The White Body of Evening*"
Don Randall, "Cross-Cultural Imagination
in David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*"

REVIEW ESSAYS

Adrian Caesar on new poetry, 2003–2004
Richard Rossiter on non-fiction, 2003–2004
Susan Lever on new work in fiction, 2003–2004

INTERVIEW

Richard Rossiter, "The Writer and the Community:
An Interview with Tim Winton"

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The editors have pleasure in announcing the winner of the Patricia Hackett Prize for the best contribution to *Westerly* in 2003:

Alf Taylor

for "God, the Devil and Me"

GRAEME KINROSS-SMITH

WHERE HERE IS

I haven't said all I want to say about time.

The blowflies die and remain in the tracks of the sliding window. I sit close by reading where there is good light. It is here. I read on in this room. People are always photographing each other, the book says. The photographs capture faces smiling. People don't know that each snapshot of a face may tell a lot about the future, as well as about now. There are smiles and smiles, is what the book is saying. Each photograph is here. It is now. Just for a fraction of a second – a 60th, or a 125th – and then immediately it is not here, it is not now.

I cannot say all I want to say about time.

Now it is what we call midday. It is still this place. This is where I am. I hear the roof crack in the heat. This is where here is, where I am. Will she come here? Will she find me? I am here. She is there. But she could be here. This is the place that time has reached.

Now it is what we call afternoon, the wind streaming the grass heads, the sun reaching in to the leaves and retreating as the branches move. Last night's thunder and sudden, brief rain scuds have gone. I can hear the door of the rough porch banging dumbly when the wind grabs it. Things are drying out again.

Here she is. Now she too is here. She sits studying her legs on the edge of the small dais. She fills my eyes. I love her contralto voice and her shoulders in the green top leaning down. Outside, the work gloves I used yesterday in the wet when I was splitting the wood are drying on the makeshift clothesline strung between tree branches. I can see the gloves from here, bobbing like unsure hands. Now it is another time. The sun has moved on through the leaves. It is roughly what we call evening, but with the time change that's not quite true – the sun's time is an hour earlier. The sun is still here. Its steady, streaming face masterminds everything I see, every ruck in the rug of the paddocks. I have the feeling that it is not

quite now, that it is some other time.

The men died there. They died up the road. It was not quite here, and I'm not sure exactly where the ute left the road and rolled. I'm not sure where their bodies lay, separated from each other in the grass. My neighbour Jack found them. First he saw the ute on its side and went to look. Then he found one man – he bent down gingerly: no breathing, no carotid artery. Then stumbling about and swearing with dread and surprise he found the other man up nearer the road. His clothes were peeled down his body, probably by the seat belt that had torn apart. Dead – probably trying to haul himself up towards the road. Both of them crushed. What is the difference between the slow-burning brazier and private ballet of life and the ash-cold stillness of death? There was a bottle of whisky in the ute, Jack said – and syringes. Who knows, he said. It was none of my business, if you know what I mean. None of it was here: it was there where the road bends near the top of the hill, near the entrance to the Potter farm. It was then. The time of the men reached a place and then it stopped.

I still haven't said everything I want to say about time or about death after life. But if I die without warning will I want it to be down in the sea's beautiful rooms of flowing tresses or would I like it to be on a hillside in grass with the spangled notes of larks far up against the blue? It would be then and it would be there. It's then, I realise, that I will stop remembering. But at the moment it comes it will be now and here. There will probably be no choice. Just like Jack my neighbour who found the two men, and then two months later was face down himself on the bank of the creek when they found him. Heart. He'd gone down there on the horse to bring up a couple of mavericks to the crush – rain and plenty mud. So when he doesn't come back to the fuggy kitchen and when Gwen his wife has been round the others to check the calves, their neighbour Paul on the other side is coming up the drive. Jack was going to meet me, he says. It was then. It isn't now. It was there, not here. So Paul goes to look – up the top first, near the windmill, and yes, there are three of the Herefords in the truck but nothing in the yard. It's still raining in heavy sheets across the face of the hill. He goes down to the creek. He comes back. Gwen asks him, her face lighting. You better not go down there, he says. She sways with sudden worry and turns to get her old oil coat. He stops her. She's quivering. Ring the Doc, he says. And the Doc comes, the smell of rain on his coat in the kitchen. Not long after him the ambulance comes up round the road's bends like a slow turtle from Benton.

Jack always said that when he went he wanted to go in the paddock.

I might never say all I want to say about time. What am I supposed to

do? There will be many other happenings that will come to sit near me. I will still breathe, watching each quivering movement until the happening is over. I will wait for the light to settle. There may be the dark clouds like enforcers behind the forest at the head of the valley, there may be the sheen of rain on the road. Afterwards, I will probably turn again to the axe – trimming, splitting – and time will step gently around me. The next burst of sun will reach its fingers into the lopped branches where they lie on the ground. It will draw out the sad wine smell of sap that the tree has spent all its life hoarding.

GEOFF PAGE

VERS LIBRE

Out on the skateboard
he is writing free verse,
floating up to

rails and benches,
sailing in the lower air.
And it's all just a matter of

muscles and tendons,
of "going on your nerve",
as Frank O'Hara, New York mystic,

memorably said.
The vocab's in the
knees and ankles,

"ollies", "kickflips", "carves" and "grinds",
the tricks that risk
the full cement,

the moves that sometimes
don't work out –
that bailing to a minor scuttle,

the rolling on a shoulder.
Friends, of course, are part of it
but they are not the point.

The deck, the kerb,
the wheels and he
are writing as the wind might blow
across the options of the concrete
an endless
evanescent poem.

TRACY FARR

SURFACE TENSION

Nick smells like a jumper you smoked hash in a month ago then threw to the back of the cupboard: sweet, must, fug and dust. He has always smelt like this, with or without drugs. The smell is the sweat in his hair, curling down towards the tip of her nose as she tiptoes to kiss him on the cheek. The memory of the smell is dredged up from the base of her brain: she remembers the smell with her whole body, head to heart to cunt to toenails, the smell of her youth.

“Helen,” he kisses against the top of her head, holding her in a tight hug as they stand, just out of the rain, framed by the front door of his house. Music is coming from inside the house, just audible under the high, animal wail of a tiny baby. “Come in and meet the family,” he says.

Helen follows Nick down a long wide hallway, past doors opening onto his life: steel grey office; sun-yellow lounge room; deep red bedroom; sour milk baby’s room. The hall ends in a big, open space. There’s an impression of light, even with the darkness outside, the rain clouds and early morning.

Though she’s never been there before the room is familiar to her, from the photograph of it in the newspaper clipping that her mother sent her last year. The paper had run a series of features over several weeks, *A New Architecture for Australia*, and of course they’d featured Nick, so lucky to have him back, internationally acclaimed, signature work in London and Hong Kong, settled back home with beautiful young wife. And so on. There was a photo, a fish-eye view of this room, Nick in the foreground distorted by the lens, with the thin, backlit figure of Young Wife in the background, sitting on the wide window ledge, her legs drawn up under her chin like a sulky teenager.

In the room now, Young Wife sits with a dark-headed baby at her breast. She looks up from the book she is reading, eyes beaming smiles from under curling dark hair.

“Eva, this is Helen. Helen, Eva. And our little Nina.”

The baby lifts her hand from her mother's breast, as if to wave hello to Helen. Nick stands watching them all, grinning.

"Hello Helen, I've heard so much about you. Good to finally meet you." Eva smiles at Helen, that beatific smile.

"You too," Helen says. "I can't believe we haven't managed it before now."

"Well, cuppa?" Nick asks.

"Thanks, I'd like that." Helen says quickly, welcoming the thought of something to do with her hands, something to hide behind.

"Water for me, darl," Eva tells him, "and can you bring me the macadamias? Sit down," she says to Helen, "make yourself at home. Every time I sit down to feed her a message goes straight to my brain. Ping! Macadamia nuts. It's costing us a fortune."

"I was the same with Liam. Roasted almonds. Here, I brought something for Nina," Helen says, foraging in her bag. She brings out a lumpy gift, leans across and places it on the table in front of Eva.

"Helen," she says warmly, "thank you."

Nick brings a glass of water and the bowl of neat round nuts, places them on the table by Eva. He picks up the gift, starts to unwrap it.

"Thanks Hel." He drops the paper and holds up the stocky wooden bee, spins the rounded red wings with his finger. "It's great."

"It's a Buzzy Bee," Helen tells them. "It's a New Zealand thing, it's one of those classics that everyone had when they were a bub. They're mostly made in, I don't know, China or something now, but this is a true blue kiwi-made one."

"It's lovely Helen, thank you, she'll love it," Eva smiles that smile again, beaming it in Helen's direction.

Nick squats in front of Eva – squats easily, Helen notices, watching him in profile, none of the old-man-groans Tom's started making when he kneels or bends or folds himself into a small space – and waves the bee close to Nina's head. "Look Bubba, Kiwi Bee from Helen and Tom." He turns and shrugs, smiling, at Helen, "Thanks Hel. It's great," puts the bee down on the sofa next to them, and places his hand gently on the suckling baby's head.

"Isn't she beautiful," he says quietly. It isn't a question, and he means Eva as well, Helen thinks, not just the baby. She remembers, vaguely, years ago when her boys were new, Tom looking at them – at her – like that. Nick turns his head to look at Helen, a sideways look, and she's struck again by how little he's aged, how much he's still the young man she remembers from all those years ago, when he was hers.

Nick gets up – Helen listens especially hard for the creak, the crack, the under-his-breath oof, but doesn't hear them – to tend the whistling kettle, then brings mugs to the low table the sofas cluster around.

"It's chai. Decaff. With honey." He takes the piss as he tells her. "It's all we've got at the moment, Eva's made me empty the house of anything with caffeine."

"Fine, fine," Helen holds the mug to her face, inhales. It smells like a sweet, wet dog. She watches Eva and the baby over the steaming tea. Nina has dozed off, her mouth slipping away from the long nipple leaving a trail of saliva and milk joining mother and child.

"I'll take her," Nick whispers, and settles back into the sofa as Eva lifts the baby and places her in his arms.

"You forget how tiny they are," Helen says, "I know it's a cliché, but you do, you know. When they grow up."

"How old are your boys now?" Eva asks, reclining now against the arm of the sofa, her feet (her tiny, soft feet, Helen notices) against Nick's leg, rubbing gently.

"Liam's twelve, James'll be ten in August."

"God, are they really?" Nick whistles. "I remember when you called me, when Liam was born. I was in –"

"Hong Kong. And we were in Seattle."

"Was it that long ago?" the two of them say simultaneously, then "Snap." They all smile at that, smile over their drinks at each other. They're quiet for a while, the rain clattering on the roof, the tea keeping them occupied.

"They're lovely when they're like this, aren't they?" Helen says, nodding at Nina. "Is she sleeping at nights? Are you sleeping?" I'll bet you are, she thinks, you can't look like you both look and not be sleeping, not with all the new-baby-bliss-hormones in the world.

"She's amazing," Eva confirms, "we're so lucky, she's slept through every night, a good nine or ten hours."

Fuck, Helen thinks, remembering the endless, sleepless months when her own boys were little. "Mmmm," she tells them, "lucky you. Makes a difference. I remember being so knackered, just constantly knackered." But you have youth on your side – *bitch* she thinks, then mentally takes it back.

"Hey, we still going out for breakfast?" Helen asks. She feels the need to get out into the world, be on neutral ground, away from the perfect warmth of their house.

"Yeah, let's –"

“Darl, would you mind if I didn’t? Helen, I hope you won’t mind, I’d love to come, but I really should have a lie down while Nina’s sleeping. You two must have plenty to catch up on.”

“Oh, sure, I know how it is. You sleep,” Helen says, relieved and ashamed at feeling relief.

“I’ll take Nina with me, babe. I can take her in the frontpack, she’ll be fine. Give you a real break.”

Eva reaches up to Nick’s ear with her toe (with her *toe!*) and strokes it. “Thanks darling,” she coos. She unfolds her legs from the sofa, stands up, yawns and stretches, and reaches out to take Helen’s hand. Eva’s hand is cool and warm at the same time. Soft. Small. “So lovely to meet you. We’ll talk again before you go home, yes? You should come around for dinner. She’s in a fresh nappy, darl. Have a lovely breakfast,” and she turns and leaves the room, padding down the hallway. Helen hears her humming, hears doors opening and closing, a tap running. Then quiet. Nina snuffles, still asleep.

Nick looks across his daughter at Helen. “Shall we go then?”

“Yeah.”

“I’ll just grab a few things for Nina, won’t be a tick. Would you hold her?”

“Sure.”

Nick stands, hands the sleeping bundle to her, then busies himself filling a bag with nappies, spare clothes, a distracting toy: the simple paraphernalia of the tiny. Helen’s body remembers how to hold a tiny baby – how long has it been? – but she is still surprised by the lightness of her, and the heaviness, the density, at the same time. “Hello, Nina,” she whispers at her, “I used to be in love with your dad. I’m Helen.”

They drive towards the coast in Helen’s rental car. Nina is strapped into her capsule in the back, behind Helen, where Nick can turn around and see her easily, touch her, touch the plastic keeping her safe. There is a quilted fabric star hanging above Nina on the handle of the capsule. She is asleep, oblivious.

The roads have changed, the houses of Helen’s childhood gone, and she is always shocked when she visits to come this way, to see the great walls of roadway where the little dark houses used to be. She turns the car into North Street, pointing straight at the sea. They pass Lyons Street a few minutes later.

“Your old street,” Nick says, grinning at her.

“They sold it ten years ago,” she tells him, smiling, thinking *he*

remembers, he remembers about me.

“They happy where they are? Mandurah, right?”

“Yeah, yeah they seem to be. Dad’s got his boat, Mum’s got half the street organised into book clubs and coffee mornings and god knows what else. The house is all new and shiny, well, ten years new, but you know. Yeah, I think they’re happy. They don’t miss town.”

“God’s waiting room down there, isn’t it?”

“It’s not so bad, it’s nice for them. It’s their fiftieth wedding anniversary next week, that’s mainly why I came over. We’re having a big party, all the old cronies, people I haven’t seen for decades.”

“God, fifty years. I can’t even begin to imagine what that must be like.”

“Tom and I will’ve been married twenty years next August.”

“Shit, I guess so. Shit. It seems – recent. And forever ago.”

“You’d already gone. You were in Sydney,” she tells him, surprised at how well she remembers, at her lack of hesitation in remembering.

“So I was. Well.”

“Well.”

“Well, wish them all the best from me, eh. Your mum and dad. They probably don’t remember me.”

“Oh, they do. Mum adored you. She always asks me what you’re doing, as if I have some kind of radar connection to your diary.”

She turns the car into Marine Parade, and the ocean is there, dark blue for winter, the noise of it, the glory. The rain has stopped as they’ve driven, and the sun’s out, as if the rain was never there. Helen pulls the car over, swerves across the road and stops, skewed, looking at the water, out to sea.

“God it’s gorgeous,” Helen says under her breath.

“I know. It’s why I came back, you know? I fucking love this coast.”

Helen winds the window down, closes her eyes and listens to the surf, smells it.

“It’s so warm. For winter. Wellington’s freezing at the moment. Well, always.”

“Serves you right, living there, I never could understand why you went. Christ, New Zealand! Traitor.”

“Bugger off. Dag.”

They smile, sit a bit longer, Nick turned back towards his still-sleeping daughter, pulling the rug up towards her chin. He leaves his hand on the rug as he turns back to Helen.

“I check her about a thousand times a day, you know? Is the blanket too far up, can she breathe, is she warm enough, is she too hot, too many clothes on, not enough. I’ve never felt like this before. I’m taken over. She’s so beautiful. I don’t want anything to happen to her ever, nothing

bad, nothing imperfect. Such perfect feet, they've never trodden ground."

"It's true, I remember, when they're this little you can't imagine them being bigger than they are, being – violated isn't the word, I don't mean anything as strong as that. Changed. Affected by the world."

"Yeah."

"Then all of a sudden they've got big tough smelly feet, just like us. Scabs and cuts and dirty toenails, sticky hair and sour breath. At least, boys do."

"I'll put my Nina in silk slippers with sheepskin lining. Keep her perfect and soft and untouched," Nick grins at Helen, not meaning it, meaning it. "Put her in a convent. Only let her listen to k.d. lang." They both laugh. "Come on," he tells her, "I'm dying for a coffee. I'm sick of fucking chai."

The cafe is already crowded when Helen and Nick walk in. Nick cups Nina's sleeping head in his hand, her body strapped against his chest in a front pack.

A couple is leaving a table by the windows directly over the beach, and Helen and Nick replace them, polite smiles as they manoeuvre around each other in the too-small gaps between the tables. Seated, Helen leans against the window, looking out at the beach. There are swimmers, young and old, despite the temperature, despite the early hour. There are always swimmers at this beach, every day of the year, never mind the weather, Helen remembers that from when she lived here. She remembers thinking they were mad, the ones who swam in mid-winter like these ones – she was only ever a summer swimmer, would wait until the water was as warm as it would get. Now, living in Wellington, she hasn't swum in the sea for years. Not since the boys were little enough to need her to go in with them, and even then she could usually count on Tom to do it.

A girl drops menus on their table. "Coffee? OJ?" she asks, her smile as abbreviated as her language.

"Latte, please," Helen tells her, "and a croissant. With jam."

"Flat white, thanks, and a smoked salmon bagel."

"Right." The girl leaves them to it, scribbling on her pad as she focuses on the next table.

"I was swimming for a while," Nick offers, tilting his head to the side, towards the ocean and the tiny figures shivering behind the glass. "Every morning, rain or shine. It was good. Good start to the day."

"Why'd you stop?"

"Don't know. I was away last winter and I got out of the habit. Kept

meaning to take it up again, but I never got around to it. Then Eva got pregnant – I don't know, it was just one of those things that fall away, out of your life. I'll take it up again sometime. It was good, good for me."

"Something's been good for you, anyway," Helen says before she can stop herself, "you look great. Pact with the devil? Painting in the attic? What's your secret?" She looks at him then, really looks, and finally, this close, she can see the lines around his eyes, at the side, the depth of the lines running from his nose to the edges of his mouth. Laughter lines, etched deep. He's doing it now, utters a loud laugh.

"Clean living."

"Bollocks. Tried that, and look at me."

"No, you look great," he says quickly, too hearty so she knows she doesn't.

"Thanks Mister Magnanimous. Good for my age, you're supposed to say."

"You're only my age," Nick says.

"Don't remind me. I feel like your mother." Because she does. Helen knows that Nick will be noticing how like her mother, how like her father too, she's grown in the years since they last saw each other. That she's put on her mother's heft and wobble; that her face has set, like her father's, into its plain, Anglo-Saxon, meat and potatoes heritage. She has faded to the pallor of wall putty after years in the cool, unbeckoning sun of Wellington. Next to Nick's slim, dark face and body – melanzane and vino rosso, his Dad was the same, she thinks, skinny as a rake, young until he died – she feels a generation older. Come on, she tells herself, shake yourself out of it.

"Eva's lovely," Helen says, and young, and beautiful. Especially young.

Nick just smiles back at her, an almost embarrassed smile, acknowledging, thinks Helen, that he knows exactly how lovely Eva is, how lovely to wake up next to, and how slim and beautiful is her body to hold.

"How's old Tom? Say hello to him for me," Nick offers, to match her Eva-talk.

"Fine, he's fine, same as always. Busy, of course," because her dear Tom is always busy, and always fine, and always the same. Always has been. Her Tom is the same as he was when she met him: her pillar and post, her support, her brace. As he was all those years ago, when he picked her up and buoyed her up and cheered her up: when he put together the desperate pieces that Nick had left her in after he'd torn out her heart.

But her heart doesn't hurt any more, not from Nick. It's been too long,

the hurting stopped years ago. When she sees Nick now, it's as if he's a long lost, well-loved relative, someone she's delighted to remember is related to her. Except that he's not, not really related, except by shared memories of long ago passion, flared bright with youth. She looks across the table at him now, cradling his daughter, and loves him like a brother – but not a flesh and blood brother. Fluids, that's what they shared. He's a fluid brother, long ago shared spit and come and her own distant wetness bonding them surprisingly tightly still, like wet clothes sticking to hot skin. Or as a coaster holds tight to the bottom of a glass, lifting with the glass to the lips of the drinker. Surface tension binds them, with the molecular memory of the long ago action of fluids.

The girl brings their coffees and food, and they smile their thanks, drink, eat a little, comfortably silent.

Then, "I was going through boxes when we moved back," Nick tells her, "and I found that old poster for *The Merchant of Venice*."

"Oh god, you had it on your wall for so long! You used to stare down at us from that poster, remember, you had it over the bed. Your eyes used to follow me around the room, I swear." His hooded eyes, Helen remembers. "I've got the programme at home somewhere. Amongst all the other junk." She smiles as she thinks of them, so young. "We felt so old, remember, we were the oldest ones in the Drama Society, they were mostly First Years, we felt like their grandparents."

"Yeah, we were twenty-two."

"You were the only one for Shylock. Remember, everyone said you looked Jewish enough – "

"Yeah, Italian, Jewish, what's the diff?"

" – and of course you were so old – "

"And you were so pissed off that you didn't get a part."

"As always. They made me the dramaturg. I was always the fucking dramaturg, and no one outside the English Department had any idea what one even was. I don't know why I kept going back." Helen laughs at herself, at growing close to anger even from such a distance. "It got under my skin, you know? I wanted to be on stage, and all I got to do was bloody dramaturgy. God, I still don't even know how to say it properly."

"You were good at it," Nick tells her. "You used to boss us around. I'd never noticed you before that."

"I'd noticed you. You were the reason I kept going back. I wanted desperately to do the trial scene opposite you, I had this grand plan to subvert the text and sexualise it," she takes the piss as she speaks, but it

was true, it had been her plan. "You know, all that talk of flesh. 'This bond doth give you here no jot of blood: the words expressly are a pound of flesh.' I had it all worked out. You were powerless."

He is looking at her, fraternal, all notion of sex gone, a mild smile across his face, as if amused to remember that he and Helen, that the two of them, that he and the middle-aged woman, that they ever were. The sexual tension is gone, as it should be, she reminds herself. Nothing like the smell and electric loin-stirring of the Merchant nights, the rehearsals flowing into notes, flowing down to the pub and eventually into his bed – but not until after the last night. A full house, the crowd loud and loving it, the great surge of whatever it was that lifted and bound them all backstage, in the dressing room after the last performance was over. Bubbly, then too much beer, then someone had a bottle of rum, and then just the two of them and a calming joint, sitting on the grass across from the pub, by the river. The talking had stopped, stilled by the smoke, and she'd placed her hand on his back and found that it belonged there, and he'd turned to her and smiled that bewildered smile and that was it, their mouths had fallen together and the kiss had lasted an hour, longer, and he was glorious and she smelt him and her hands travelled the country of his body as they lay on the cool grass, under the dark night sky and she rolled him over and he was hers, his flesh was in her, slick, and the night time smell of the river was all around them, wet – like them – and as glorious.

Helen looks at Nick across the table, again, chewing her lip. Her heart doesn't hurt any more. It doesn't. There is Tom, there are the boys: the heart-stopping beauty of their boys. And things are good, her life flows along with equanimity. There is little rush any more – not from sex much, not from anything really. She assumes this is the business of age, that this is the shape of a human life. And it is gentle and calm, and she cherishes this. Yes, she must cherish this, that's the way, celebrate the calm.

"It's all so long ago, that's what I find hard to –"

Nick breaks off from speaking, looking up as a deep voice shouts – maybe a word, maybe "God," or perhaps something less formed, a guttural grunt – at the counter of the cafe. "Christ," the woman at the table behind them says under her breath, then "Oh sweet fuck" from across the cafe, then there's shouting from the beach, wafting to them through the windows. Helen and Nick look up from their coffees, look at each other, then down onto the beach like the others in the cafe, but it takes them some time – only seconds, but everything is starting to happen more slowly, time becomes strange at this point – to focus on what is happening. There is splashing in the water – but it's a beach, there is always splashing.

There is shouting from the beach – but there is often shouting. It's the tenor of the shouting that helps them make a sense of it. The shouting is shrieking, and the shrieks are of terror.

There is a bigger splash then, a flash of dark, a bullet, an intensity, that most feared thing. There is a shark, breaching the surface. And, as quickly, the shark is gone. Or has become unseen. And Helen realises that there is a swimmer in the water who is not moving, that there is something strange about the swimmer's shape and lack of movement. And that there are two other swimmers in the water, heading to the still swimmer. Two strong swimmers, two men, stroke matching stroke as they pound towards the still one. Everyone else is getting out of the water, they are standing, shivering, lined up staring at the sea, watching the strong swimmers as they reach the still swimmer. One of them grabs the still swimmer in rescue hold, around the neck; they swim as quickly the long fifty metres back to shore, to the shallows, and collapse on the sand in only intermittent reach of the fingers of foaming water.

There is no blood, not even a drop to pinken the water. No jot of blood. She had expected blood. But there's the flesh: there is the torso in the shallows where the other swimmers have dragged it, legless, one arm missing, like a shop-front dummy waiting to be dressed. The strong swimmers lie, exhausted, either side of the torso. Three other men lift the body from the froth of the surf, lift it from the shallows and stagger up the beach, place it gently on the sand, above the reach of the water, then one of them kneels at the head, places his hands at what's left of the neck. Other watchers reach for the two men, the rescuers, help them up, drape them with towels, with jackets, warm them. As she stares, unable to move her eyes, someone covers it – the body, him, she tells herself – with a cartooned beach towel. The shape of his body fills the shape of the cartoon cat, raises it lifelike above the sand. A second person covers the cartoon towel with a plainer one, appropriate, coloured blue-green like the ocean.

Helen hasn't heard a sound for the last several minutes. It is as if the noise of the people in the cafe has stopped, the cars have stopped, even the waves have been making no sound. But she realises, as the noise slowly starts to filter back into her mind, that her brain must have blocked out the noise, that her poor senses had more than enough to take in without the crash of the waves, the frightened shouting from the beach, the sharply inhaled relief – *it wasn't me* – of the people in the cafe. As her hearing returns, Helen hears the thumping whirr of helicopters, that sound of war zones and traffic reports, vulturing in for a stickybeak.

Helen tears her eyes away, looks shyly at Nick across the table. Nick,

still staring through the window, covers Nina's sleeping eyes with his hand, as if to shield her from the horror.

"Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck oh fuckofuckofuckofuck," he whispers, on and on and on into the salt, sweet, chill air carrying death in through the barely-open window.

They drive to Nick's in a silence broken only by the quiet whimperings and snufflings of the restless baby in the back seat. Helen stops the car on the verge outside his house. Nick lets himself out, then comes round to Helen's side to unbuckle Nina. He reaches his hand in through the open driver's window and lays it over Helen's, clenched around the steering wheel. His hand on hers is cold and sweaty. Shock, Helen thinks.

"Hel," he says quietly.

"Yeah," she says to the steering wheel, "look, tell Eva I had to go, I can't —"

"Yeah," he says. "It's OK."

She looks past him and down at the staring, black-eyed, perfect baby.

"Hey Nina," Helen says to her quietly, and the baby stares back at her in an understanding way. "Look after yourself."

When she gets back to her sister's house there is no one home, but Ruth has left her soup for lunch, and a note telling her to help herself, that she and Tony have gone to meet friends for lunch, they weren't sure when she'd be back, *XXX, see you, R.*

Helen can't take her eyes from the sheet of paper in front of her. The lightness, the lack of shark and flesh and horror in her sister's note hurts her, makes her heart ache for the sister, the wife, the daughter, the mother, the lover of the dead man on the beach. For his flesh, ripped and cut and torn: forfeit. To bait fish withal.

She reaches across the bench for the phone, presses the numbers that will take her home. Five rings and the machine clicks on, and it's James' voice, her baby, "You've reached the Flannery household. We've all been abducted by aliens, so we can't take your call right now. Please leave a message after the beep and we'll get b-aaaaaaaggh, the aliiiiiiiiiiiiiiiens—" The message dissolves into a gurgle of alien noises, she can hear Liam's voice as well as James', then laughter, muffled. She hears the beep and breathes in deeply.

"Tell those aliens you're entitled to one phone call. I'm at Auntie Ruth's all day. Call me. Love you all."

She turns to the stove, lights the gas under the soup. She takes an open

wine bottle from the fridge and pours herself a large glass. She raises her wineglass to the window of her sister's warm house, out through the window to the trees. It has started to rain again, and the garden is dark and glistening. Water coats the outside surface of the pane; drops join to form rivulets then part again, becoming singular, individual.

ALICIA SOMETIMES

STEALING INFLUENCES: THE SUBURBAN SUBTERFUGE

For my dad

the first: Astral Weeks

Lester Bangs got it right: *twirling melodic arc*
How come you never told me this was your Psalm?

I'd seen you in those photographs: scrubby, mod shoes,
fluffed hair, sewn bravado, scuffling drumsticks, 1967.

It was as if hope was on your T shirt, the back read: hip.
I'd lock myself in my bedroom & play musical dress-ups.

Me, with a comb, mimicking heartbreak & loss
& you sliding in & saying *dinner's ready sweet thing*.

the second: Blonde on Blonde

Dylan: the firm glue. Watching you with guitar
& harmonica, softly layering your vocals with mine

(ghost of 'lectricity) we'd wink *(howls)* discussing what
the next line means, flinging definitions & sources.

Double vinyl like wheels driving me further into
the dreamy tongue of new landscapes & there

in the sun, I'd know I was your daughter, it's marked:
deeply depressed in the bones of your face.

the third: White Light/White Heat

I'd crouch in the living room, headphones & squalling,
craning my neck to see if you'd move to catch me

orbit-happy, decibel-excess, the wheezing of sound.
This thrill of circular, impatient thrust, rambling
the coffee table. Picturing stark night-clubs eight
years too early. Winding words aloud, then I'd
run through the kitchen in my socks, skidding,
scrambling just to tell you: *this* is my favourite bit.

the fourth: Chelsea Girl

On first listen, my diary writes of orange heroin,
the girl with the cheekbone blue-green eyes.

This was only on during late Sundays, never
when guests were around fawning over your LPs.

I savoured this one, kept the taste for quiet recipe.
Fizz would play the record years later in our flat,
openly, as if it could heal the mournful, the searching.
I hope it saved her; Nico with her arms around my friend.

the fifth: Greetings From LA

Provocative hallucinations cushioning my teen years
I would get ready; doloroso dolling up; Buckley
wailing in funky groove. Rebellion, at least has rhythm.
All my moods were in time: energetic & experimental.
LA: Australia contains those two letters but we were
worlds away. Sometimes you and I would go weeks ...
but then, the amp in the background or the snare &
we'd be all rock group again, on stage, together
in the lounge-room
belting out our history in song.

MEGAN MCKINLAY

ANCESTOR GAMES

In Hong Kong,
they give you 7 years – no more,
to shake loose that heavy flesh
and settle your bones into the earth,
Then they crumble you into brass,
to spend the rest of your death
squatting on mantels,
blind witness to the living.

In Japan, you find a corner
of the house, sometimes a seat
at the table, compact and sweet:
mandarins are the flavour of death.
And they pause, now and then,
in the midst of their breathing,
to open and close shutters
on the quiet business of the dead.

Here, our lavish bones crosshatch
the suburbs, push skyward
in columns of vehement stone.
Unruly skeletons lay
stubborn claim to acres; we picket
our dead yards, drunk, still,
on horizons, this luxury of air.

(Here, in this comforting vastness,
we spread our deaths
across all tomorrows,
as if the end of us were also
the end of the world)

ENCROACHING

In the garden,
my sister and I empty our shoes
without being asked.
Some things are learned early:
can't have that sand in the house.

As we watch,
impossible piles form
around the grevillea –
mountain ranges thrown up
from size 4 sneakers.
Even our mother
no longer blames the ants.

Down at South Beach,
we pick out letters on rust-eaten signs.
Do not walk on the dunes:
revegetating, restabilising –
all under control here.
Our mother squeezes
our hands, keeps us
to the path.

And at night, she closes doors
on the relentless advance –
inland and inland,
through pockets and crevices,
fissures and follicles.

Seashell to our ears,
there is only our mother's voice:
Don't go too close to the edge.
But already, we know:
the edges insist on their own approach;
even in the dry centre, there is no path
that leads elsewhere.
As broom and vacuum sweep
the coastline from our door,

my sister and I wirebrush
our feet on the footpath,
knowing there will always be
inroads.

Despite months of cloistered, air-conditioned days,
the lingering taste of sea-salt on skin fails
to surprise us.

Bottomless pockets, shoes barely bought,
bleed sand as if tapping a vein;

And as we close
those late-night shutters
we catch ourselves in imagining:
a false-backed wardrobe – there!
how easily we step into
this vastness of dunes,
that expanse of sky.

RICHARD ROSSITER

THE WRITER AND THE COMMUNITY: AN INTERVIEW WITH TIM WINTON

RR Tim, you were a student at Curtin University from 1978 to '81, when Elizabeth Jolley was one of the teaching staff. Did she have much of an influence on you?

TW More in practical terms than anything. It was early in her publishing career and behind the quirky façade she seemed to have a real determination about finding an audience. She had a great sense of craft and an infectious love of literature, but she was also quite worldly, shall we say; she wasn't shy about the kind of professionalism required in order to be published. She encouraged me to send stories to magazines, showed me how to be systematic about it. She made herself available to book clubs, drove all over the state, and I think that fostered a loyal readership. She didn't limit herself to the academy and I was interested by that.

RR She seemed to get a lot out of teaching.

TW Yes, she liked all that. I was amazed that she stayed so long, particularly once she found such a big readership. She was generous to a fault.

RR There was someone else there ...

TW Michael Henderson. He was probably the most influential, for me, in terms of what ended up on the page, you know, prose style and sensibility. He was a Kiwi, a graduate of the program at Iowa, and his novel, *The Log of a Superfluous Son* was highly praised by Anthony Burgess and Malcolm Cowley, I think. Really austere prose style, very stripped back, like Hemingway through the lens of Beckett. He introduced me to a lot of writing I hadn't encountered before, Marquez, Juan Rulfo, Borges. There was a kind of idealism in him, in what he was striving for. I was very young, but to me he seemed authentic. He was a writer first and foremost rather than an academic who dabbled in a bit of writing. I gather he didn't play

the departmental game very well and when he was moved on I was pretty disillusioned. Died a few years ago of cancer. He was a lovely man.

RR Do you think that apart from some sort of companionship, I suppose, you learnt anything at university? Would you be the writer you are now without attending Curtin?

TW Well, yes, I learnt plenty. But I think I still would have been doing what I'm doing. I imagine Curtin saved me some time, though. I was living in a fairly remote city, a deeply provincial place as you know, and I was from the working class, so I didn't have any connections. To writers, I mean. But also socially. Perth's pretty tight that way. I didn't have the entrée that someone like Robert Drewe had. I really only saw it in *The Shark Net*, the ease with which he could penetrate that world. Circe Circle, business, sports figures, the social life of the yacht clubs, and then as a journo at the *West Australian*. I was this kid from the suburbs, from a pretty narrow world. Doing the creative writing course saved me years of diddling around trying to find things out for myself. I mean, how else was I going to meet a writer? I think I learnt a lot from individual teachers. Graeme Turner was teaching there at the time and he helped me through a draft or two of *Shallows*. Before that, Michael Henderson worked with me on *An Open Swimmer*. The only short story that survives from that undergraduate period is "The Woman at the Well" (*Scission*) which I submitted as a class piece to Elizabeth. The best help I got was from teachers who saw that I was serious, where we trusted each other, and they mostly let me get on with it.

RR In 1987 you left Australia for the first time. How did you find being jumped out of Perth and going to Paris?

TW I'd never been abroad before, but I won the Marten Bequest in 1987 which was \$5000 to travel. I never had any ambitions to travel – I was just focused on trying to make a living. I'd published half a dozen books for about a thousand bucks a pop, and I was married with a kid and trying to wean myself off grants ... but I thought, what the hell, maybe I'll never get another chance. It was a terrific opportunity. Weird, but a great time. I did the bulk of *Cloudstreet* while I was gone. After Paris we lived in Ireland, in the gate lodge of Leap Castle in County Offaly. Another lucky break. Deborah Roberston, a friend from my Curtin days, knew the owner, a lovely guy called Peter Bartlett, who offered us the use of the place over the winter of 1988. The castle was infamous as a haunted place, and the Sitwells and others had written about it. There was some talk that a Yeats' poem had been influenced by the tower and its legends.

RR I remember visiting Yeats' tower. It was a powerful experience. I felt very much at home in Ireland; it seemed quite familiar.

TW I liked the people and was moved by the landscape, but I wouldn't say it felt familiar. It was actually quite strange to me. Rural Ireland was still very poor and a lot of people seemed to have one foot in an almost medieval mindset. This is out in the country, in the midlands. I knew plenty of country people. My family was only one generation off the farm. But I suppose it was my first encounter with something close to a peasant outlook, which I learnt more about in Greece. In retrospect I see that being abroad while I was writing *Cloudstreet* was useful in more than one way, the obvious one being the ability to see and feel things with the benefit of distance. I think it helped me find a way toward the more instinctive, magical part of the book. All those storied buildings, all those people I met whose imaginations hadn't been totally fractured by modernism, (you know, this is real but *that* can't be real), their sense of wonder was intact. It emboldened me, I suppose.

RR You returned to Western Australia, to Perth, in December 1988?

TW Yeah, bought a shack a couple of hours up the coast. It was all we could afford but it suited us perfectly. Raised three kids there. It was a bolthole, I guess. Haven't lived there fulltime for ten years now, but I still live there in my head. Emotionally it's really important to me, that house, the place, the reef, the beaches. When you've spent a long time feeling vulnerable, living hand-to-mouth, never qualifying for credit or a loan, for instance, it's hard to underestimate the feeling of security you get from finally having a place the landlord can't kick you out of. Even if it is just an asbestos shack.

RR Do you write up there?

TW Not anymore. Just reading and fishing and surfing. Fun only.

RR Did you know you were going to be doing *The Riders* when you were in Ireland?

TW No, it never crossed my mind. I was happy to keep writing about WA, which felt like my patch. I've always liked regional writers, provincial writers, and I'd come to see what I did in those terms. So, it was a surprise. I felt pestered by images and memories in the years afterwards and didn't know what to do with them. Also I ended up spending a lot of time in planes and airports and foreign cities in the years after I returned to Australia. Funny thing, feeling deeply connected to your own landscape,

really needing it, and having to travel so much. Became a pretty well-travelled provincial ... but that's a fairly common Australian experience isn't it.

RR In terms of writing a children's book while you're still working on an adult novel, do you like working that way or does one distract you from the other?

TW Haven't done it for a while, but I've never found it a problem. In fact I used it deliberately as a means of avoiding being stuck. Writer's block was more than an artistic inconvenience – it was potential financial disaster. So I used to literally move between three desks. I guess I see it as all the same work; it's all story. In fact characters from adult novels drift in and out of the kids' stuff because the settings are often the same. To me it's all the one fictional world; it took me a long time to be conscious and comfortable about that, but I kind of enjoy it. Faulkner and Sherwood Anderson have done it all before, of course, and William Kennedy, Richard Russo and so on. The stories overlap and somehow you're slowly adding to them without any design.

RR The fact that the characters recur; is there a sense in which they are built around real life people?

TW Oh sure, there's an element of autobiography in everything. But the characters who recur don't seem to be showing up because of that. Sometimes it's got more to do with the recurrence of place, me going back to a certain milieu over and over. Characters, plot, subject matter, themes, if you will, all follow from that, it's just how I work. People from my first novel show up in my seventh. It can be fun. For me, at least.

RR With the exception of *Blueback* which is a bit of a crossover book, I suppose you're very conscious that you're writing something called a kids' book nevertheless?

TW Hard to say in simple terms. I'm usually expending energy imagining my way into the story first and foremost, then figuring a way, by trial and error, of telling it the best way I can and then keeping a kind of organic consistency while I'm doing that. Keeping the voice, I suppose. The question isn't really whether kids or adults will like it. More an issue of whether I'm still interested myself. I'm easily bored. Sometimes the book's almost finished before I have a sense of who it's best suited to.

RR Is *That Eye, the Sky* the strongest example of that?

TW No, funnily enough. Early on in that book I was aware that the subject matter was a real stretch, culturally. For Australians, adults as much as anyone else. Trying to write about faith and a primitive mysticism in a post-religious age, particularly at a time of great hostility to Christian symbolism ... I didn't think people would get it, assumed they'd hate it. But I was really enjoying myself during the writing so I just pressed on and I got a real surprise when it came out here and overseas. It was very well received. It was the first novel to be translated, I think. And filmed. But I never thought of it as a kids' book, no. Fun pressing the boy's voice up against all our safe modernist prejudices, though. I was half frightened of what I was doing, but enjoying the discomfort, if you know what I mean. It was the turning point for my work, I think. Gave me confidence. Without it there'd have been no *Cloudstreet*.

RR For me, what I respond to so strongly in your work is the establishment of place, the environment, the ocean and all that. That seems to provide a connection, to give a substance to the thin history that we have, especially in this part of the world.

TW I got that same feeling from Stow, still do. An almost sacramental view of the physical world. When I read Rob Drewe's *The Savage Crows* I got that wonderful sense of validation you get, the recognition of somewhere you know finally showing up in a book. But in Stow there was something bigger, deeper, for me, a sense of recognition that was about mystery within landscape and place. He's still my favourite Australian writer by a country mile.

RR You've become a really key figure in the environmental movement. Anyone who knows your work knows that this is not a recent interest. Do you see the roles of writer and "public environmentalist" as seamless?

TW No. I see them as pretty distinct things. And I think my public role has been over-estimated. And I can't pretend to be comfortable about any of it, to tell you the truth. I like being a fiction writer, it's the only thing I ever wanted to do and I've done it for twenty-five years with as much personal privacy as I can manage. I find public stuff really hard, very draining, a real problem, so I avoid it wherever possible. Some years are better than others in this regard. Anyway, for quite a time I was able to be a donor or otherwise quiet supporter, sometimes able to discreetly bring people together, sit on committees, usually marine-related issues, because that's what I know most about. Having been a spearfisher and angler and

surfer all my life, having lived in a whaling town, you know, seen stuff happen and come to see how fragile things are, I suppose it made some sense. The renewed proposal to build a marina and resort on the Ningaloo Reef kind of forced my hand, really. It was a nightmare on the horizon. All the major green groups formed an alliance to fight it. We had no money, no real lever. We couldn't come up with anything better than me, the public idea of me anyway, to get the issue some attention, put pressure on government, engage the public through the media. And once you start that crap you've gotta see it through.

RR I guess time spent on these issues is time not spent writing.

TW Well, they are unrelated anyway. Why should a novelist's opinion be given any more weight than a social worker's? Novelists shouldn't sign up for propaganda wars. The only thing I can say in my defence is that even if my participation was reluctant my position was genuine. I did it as a citizen who knew a thing or two about marine stuff not as a novelist – and I didn't tell any lies. We gave the public enough information to come to a judgement about what was being proposed and when they saw what we stood to lose they got active. It was an amazing thing to be a part of ... you know, a moment when people came together across all kinds of boundaries. It gave me a special kind of political and cultural education, I suppose, and I'm still amazed that we won. But I just never expected to spend two years on it. And, yeah, I didn't write much more than speeches and essays in that time. I begged people for money, wrote a lot of wheedling letters and helped plan stunts to arouse the media. Not my idea of a good time.

RR I suppose the other thing is that you demonstrated you were so good at it, however reluctant you are.

TW It takes a lot of Greeks to wheel out a wooden horse. I was just the horse, really, just the visible part of a bigger enterprise. It was hard having to write or speak on behalf of what in the end was hundreds of thousands of people when you're accustomed to representing only yourself. And scary to realize that you're making powerful enemies on the Terrace and in parliament as a result. You're in the public in a very different way to the novelist. While you seem harmless as a public advocate, the media indulges you, but once it's obvious that you mean business then the dogs are off the leash and they can do things to you that you're not sure you can recover from psychologically, legally, financially. It was gruesome.

RR From here, can you think of major formative influences on your work? That relates to the next query, do you see Tim Winton, husband, father, Dockers supporter and so forth, as a different figure from Tim Winton, novelist, or are they just unpackable?

TW Influences ... yeah, living in WA, an isolated city. And living a suburban life when the suburb itself was a work in progress. When I was a kid in Karrinyup there was bush on one side of the fence and civilization on the other and it was just all happening before our eyes, the pushing back of the bush, the domestication of the landscape ... in retrospect that seems to have had an impact. Having one foot in each world, a love of the outdoors, a sense of loss from early on. But also the fact that all of us were making the place up as we went along. There's also the strange cultural isolation of Perth. Even since the Web and the ubiquitous writers' festival and whatever, you still see writers struggling with this gap between us and the rest of the country. The danger is that Perth is a city that rewards mediocrity to some extent. I worry about the sheltered workshop mentality that still prevails. People aiming low for safety, local presses and agencies feeling the need to nurture and protect and compensate for all this isolation and indifference from the east, so that not only is it a small pond to swim in, but also a pretty warm one. Sometimes there's a lack of vigour as a result, a settling for less in every sense.

RR And yet you still choose to live here.

TW Sure, it's where I'm from, although I'm mobile in a privileged sort of way. I get to spend time in the country as well as the city, and I can travel. But I'm happiest at home.

RR Do you think there are particular challenges in being located here at this point in history?

TW No, not really. I'm lucky to have come along at a time where it was possible to stay. A generation or two earlier it would have been harder, no question. But there's this weird monolithic thing, maybe it's a Perth thing, about being perceived as a success. In the public imagination it's as though there's only room for one sports star and one captain of industry and one writer and so on, a kind of laziness that maybe comes from the sleepy media outlets we have. When I was young Elizabeth Jolley was the writer and Alan Bond was the businessman and so on ... and now, it's me. It's silly and embarrassing and it's not useful to the culture or the individual. It's self-limiting.

RR In spite of the fact that you've been widely published overseas and have a huge readership?

TW Sure, I understand. In purely industrial terms it's no disadvantage at all – I mean, what's the commercial downside to being Rupert Murdoch? – but I'm talking psychologically. There's something morally corrosive about that monolithic status, is what I'm trying to say. And you worry that it's no help to those around you, you know, making a big shadow that obscures other work, other people. It's uncomfortable, but I don't know what to do about it except to leave ... and I don't want to leave.

RR I suppose with your work so strongly located here, you are more likely to get the Western Australian Writer tag.

TW I understand that. And I've been fortunate that my work has been, well, accessible.

RR Do you think the writing can go in directions of issues like the environment, refugees, all those pressing political social problems of the moment – do you feel you can engage with those matters as a writer as opposed to a citizen, or is this not how it works for you?

TW No, it's not really. I write domestically, I guess. I mean I've written a lot of fiction that touches on issues of environment for instance, but it's rooted in a pretty ordinary, domestic world. And fiction needs complication and doubt, a kind of muddiness that's the opposite of tract-writing. It's easy to have a thesis about sexual politics or refugees or labour relations or whatever, but it's not easy to make that argument survive the bends and bumps of a novel. And God knows there's some novels ruined by the effort. The novel you just *know* came with a 15,000 word essay explaining its purposes to some MA supervisor. Man, they're boring.

RR So, writer and citizen ...

TW I don't buy the idea that the artist is above society, that romantic notion that spilled over into modernism ... or the artist as high priest or seer. The writer has no special insight and no special responsibility either, but they have the same rights and obligations as everyone else. If I want to have an impact on politics that I feel I can't achieve legitimately within the weird constraints of my own craft, then there's nothing stopping me trying it on as a citizen. Being well known is no disadvantage, I suppose, but it doesn't give the right to talk out of your arse, either.

RR In your new collection of stories, *The Turning*, which is due out

later this year, there is a return to communities that are present in your earlier fiction – especially *Angelus* and *White Point*. The Lang family bear an obvious resemblance to the Leonards of the *Lockie* books, set in Albany – but typically these new stories are darker, the characters more embattled, even though the time periods they refer to are the same – the 1970s and 1980s. I am wondering about the reasons for this shift, if you agree there is one. Do you personally have a different perspective on this period now that you are further removed from it? Or is it a consequence of a sense that communities *today* are less cohesive, institutions (like the Police Force) and individuals are less trustworthy than they were?

TW No, there's no deliberate shift of outlook. Despite the cosmetic similarities these are different characters. I guess I just imagined myself into a different place with them. The Langs are in a more malevolent situation than the Leonards and their problems take them down a different path. In a way it's the slow implosion of a family under pressure ... and the regrets and hurts that linger. The Leapers, the two brothers in the *White Point* stories, have been around in my head since my student days. That and the dunes of *White Point*. They could have had a walk on in *Dirt Music*, those boys.

RR Many of the characters are facing difficult times: they're just getting by, or failing to. With one notable exception, they don't seem to have anyone much to turn to or talk to. Even though you make the point that your work is not issue-driven, it is commonly observed that a sense of isolation and loneliness is a familiar experience for many people today. In this limited sense do you think the stories reflect current lifestyles and attitudes?

TW Oh, loneliness is hardly unique to our times. Funny, though ... most of these stories are either about adolescents or people in middle age, periods when people typically find themselves struggling to connect. And here there are these characters in midlife considering their own trajectories, if you like, contemplating their loneliness which actually seems to have its origins in their teen years. Do the stories reflect current attitudes? To some degree that's inevitable but to be honest I'm not sure that I care very much.

RR A number of the stories are focussed on the past and then in the conclusion arrive, rapidly, at the present. Does this amount to some deliberate, conscious statement about the impact of the past – its unavoidability, its continuity with the present moment?

TW It's probably more to do with the demands of storytelling. That's often the way people tell you their story, isn't it? The way they suddenly leave off, and drag you back with them into the present. I suppose I settled on a kind of plain conversational tone for a lot of them, people wistfully recounting things. But, sure, the presence of the past is unavoidable, it's there in all my work. The past has its consolations but often it's just a knife twisting in an old wound. Either way, as Faulkner said, it's never over.

RR As a reader, the collection works in fascinating ways – particularly with the recurring characters in the two families, the Langs and the Leapers. It's a layered reading experience, each story becoming more complex, because of its relationship with what precedes it, and what follows. To some degree this is true of all collections, but here it is almost like reading a novel. Is this a change of mode for you? Are we likely to see more collections like this?

TW Yeah, that was a happy accident, gradually realizing that the stories related to each other. Could be nothing more than the result of twenty years of novelising – you know, the habit of hauling everything into the net, making connections. The short story writer is happy with a well-made tent; the novelist wants a shanty town at least. There was no pre-conceived chronology, so I did give myself a few logistical headaches. But, yeah, it's odd ... the stories relate and refer obliquely, but they don't require each other as chapters do. Yet they seem to help each other as you say. Somehow they become more than the sum of their parts, the way they resonate. It was interesting, finding my way with those characters. Change of direction? Well, they're just stories. I mean, I love the form, and I liked returning to it, but why ask *me* where I'm going? I can't even decide where I've been.

MAL MCKIMMIE

I, INCITATUS

*And it came to pass that Caligula's horse
Was proclaimed senator.*

Rudolf Marku

I, Incitatus,
broken and bridled
equine senator,
steed to a self-deified
emperor, strode the equator
at the hand of my master,
left the whole world
gasping for breath.

In the unofficial version
of the divine birth legend
Caligula, the Once-born, rises
hydrocephalic and insane
from the morning vomit
of his father, Bacchus.

Death is foretold in his eyes:
he already knows
he will inherit an empire.
Darkness riots in his veins
like wine long-turned to vinegar:
the future is an ecstasy turned sour.

When Caligula's family descended
like the Furies upon him,
wielding the death he could not outride,
nothing changed.

I, Incitatus,
coupling with new masters,
still, daily, circle the globe,
villages, cities, whole histories
devoured by fires sparked by my hooves
and fanned by the wind of my passing.
Between times,
in the cool night,
sleeping standing in my ivory manger,
I dream my name being called
by a real God, twice-born:

First from the thigh of Zeus
on a mountain of light,
then from Persephone's womb
in the darkness of Hades;
an ecstatic god of women,
children and animals,
calling me to freedom.

For nothing changes.
I am a Horse.
I still remember Dionysus.

THE SLEEPING

(After reading Theodore Roethke's "The Waking")

I sleep to wake and take my waking fast.
Mine is my fate and so I have no fear.
What can I learn by dwelling on the past?

We feel to think. The mind is all that lasts.
I hear my mobile ringing in my ear.
I wake from sleep and take my waking fast.

You lie beside me: this was all I asked.
I'll miss the body I leave dreaming there.
But who can learn by dwelling on the past?

Night fills the day, like dark wine fills a glass:
My heart gives way upon my office stair.
From sleep a waking takes me far and fast.

Fell Nature has a different kind of task
For you to do; go breathe the living air,
And, lover, dwell but briefly on the past.

From weeping you rise ready to outlast:
I fall away from always. But am near!
I watch you as you take your waking fast.
I watch you never dwelling on the past.

A TOUCH OF THE TESTIMONIALS

“When my husband Tom died
we were so glad we’d chosen Personality Funerals.
They make it all feel so personal, really ...
Like including with the coffin, for no extra charge,
that rusty old lathe from the garage where Tom
spent most of his time at home
until he became too ill.
Seeing that rusty old lathe sitting there on top of the coffin
on the way to the cemetery,
that was a nice touch, we all thought ...

And then when Grandad passed away
it was a pleasure to see they’d put
(right there in the chapel) the engine block
from that old FJ Holden he used to work on
whenever he got tired of watching the sports channels
– that was a particularly nice touch, we all thought ...
As was their including a piece of the lounge carpet
we never could get the oil-stains out of
– that was a nice touch, too ...

And when Uncle Sid eventually went
we were especially moved to see how the funeral people
had thoughtfully provided a large cardboard carton
just to hold all of Uncle Sid’s racing guides
(even though young Reggie said they wouldn’t
last very long in the crematorium furnace
– ‘the hottest tip he’ll ever get,’ Reggie said).
So, when your time comes, too
just remember that you can’t do better
than choose Personality Funerals
– I mean, they know what dignity means at a time of mourning.

And they’re dirt cheap, too.”

NEW POETRY 2003–2004

How to review twelve months of poetry published in Australia in 5,000 words? And what is the point? Historically, reviews have been a way to guide the reader towards what is worth reading or buying. Are readers really going to rush out and read/buy what I recommend? I doubt it. And my doubts are exacerbated by the impossibility of doing justice to any of these books in a few hundred words.

That I have been asked to undertake this Mission Impossible says something about the state of poetry and publishing in Australia today. Once thriving literary magazines have had their funding cut; poetry is, for the most part, published by small independent presses with limited marketing opportunities; most book-stores do not carry a significant range of contemporary work; many people write poetry, few read it; reviews of poetry in major newspapers are as rare as rain at Broken Hill; critical reviews of poetry are even more sparse. These plights of poetry will be familiar to the few who read this article. The question is, how to respond to the malaise with particular reference to the forty-nine books now carefully disposed in piles on my workroom floor.

Faced with this daunting task, the easy way out would be to choose the ten “best” volumes, (five men, five women) say something nice about each, and then make some anodyne remarks about the health of poetry despite its marginal status in Australian culture. Indeed, one could persuade oneself, given the weight of material under review, and given the beleaguered state of the art, that it would be pusillanimous to do anything but praise. This approach, however, would not only be boring but also would entail the avoidance of criticism. And the lack of a vigorous criticism of “literature” in general and poetry in particular contributes, I think, to the problematic position of poetry outlined above. So I am going to pursue another and more eccentric method. I will devote the second half of this essay to a brief notice of the best books as above. But before this happy

conclusion, I want to make an attempt to understand why I enjoyed comparatively little of what I read in many of the volumes and to suggest some reasons why others of goodwill towards poetry might also find such reading experiences unrewarding. I want to approach a few titles in a critical spirit, which seeks to identify trends that militate against the work gaining much of an audience.

Let me say at the outset that reading such a mass of work makes one ever more aware of how very, very difficult it is to write a really good poem. What do I mean by “good”? I mean a poem in which no disjunction is felt between form and meaning; a poem, then, in which the resources of the form – rhythm, rhyme, syntax, imagery, language—are married to subject matter in an indissoluble way; a poem, in which one feels every word as an inevitability, and to change a word would seem a desecration. I mean a poem which in this way produces “memorable speech” – memorable because it is profound, or funny, or satirical, or hauntingly musical. It *is* a big ask. But surely this is what published poets should be striving for?

The first obstacle to producing “memorable speech” that hampers many of the volumes under discussion seems to me a false or distorted notion of “the literary”. In a session entitled “Diseased English: Can it be Cured?” at the recent Sydney Writers’ Festival, Amanda Lohrey cogently touched upon this issue. Lohrey spoke of “mangled, pretentious, waffly pseudo-poetical writing which if it has five really bad similes and one strangulated metaphor in it, is considered to be literary”. Expanding upon this, Lohrey noted the misconception underlying such writing: the belief that “the literary ... can’t be plain English”. Though Lohrey is speaking here about judging writing competitions for school children, she is well aware that the problem extends to the “plane of high culture”. The idea that the “literary writer” has “a verbal facility ... they’re like ... a set of fireworks that can just toss adjectives or esoteric words into the air at random and link them up in some fascinating and preferably obscure way – which suggests that the writer is ineffably more clever and sensitive and deep ... than the reader” has, Lohrey asserts, “taken hold in several critical circles”. This leads to the kind of “fakery” in which “we collude in the Emperor’s New Clothes and accept anything that we don’t understand – and that’s full of figurative language – as being necessarily high art. And I think it’s about time we stopped”. Here! Here!

Let’s look at some examples, and examples taken not from the first effusions of the inexperienced, but from poets who already have, or at least seem to have, considerable reputations. In the prefatory pages to Judy

Johnson's *Nomadic*, we not only have the usual list of acknowledged periodical publications, but also a list of some ten or eleven prizes her poems have won. The collection has also had the assistance of the Australia Council. Johnson is unlikely, therefore, to be unduly worried by my carping. But almost every poem in this volume seems to me to fit Lohrey's description of fireworks above. As an added extra, there is a kind of specious exoticism at work in many of the poems, which locates their imagery in the Middle East or New Guinea or India or the West Australian outback, anywhere, it seems, other than the Newcastle, where Johnson lives. The opening poem of the book is also the opening poem of the *Nomadic* sequence; it is entitled "Shape" and begins like this:

This afternoon while looking for my watch
I found a love letter from your mistress.
In 1947 while searching for his lost goat
A Bedouin boy found the Dead Sea Scrolls.

There is no connection between the two events.

This is plain enough, but plainly unhelpful – an anti-metaphor pointed out by a banal and bathetic line. Here's how the poem proceeds:

I exist continents away from the Qumran monastery.
And words on paper predicting a future

cannot compare with copper scrolls
etched with clues to a biblical past.

Yet I encounter coincidence. As a snail shell
may only reveal the extent of its secrets when the snail

is crushed, so each ancient carapace crumbled as it unrolled.
And I am broken also, unravelling this script from eye

to tongue. It is not so much the shell that cannot take
the pressure. It is the space beneath the shell,
that once upheld its shape.

The poet is right, of course: one *cannot* compare the discovery of a love letter with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. So why are we bothering?

Because of a “coincidence”. What this coincidence might be is not vouchsafed us – the date, perhaps? Maybe the letter is her father’s. Yet the next poem in the sequence seems to be about the poet’s marriage. Who knows? What is certain is that the poet is not going to help us out, because that would make it all too easy.

Returning to the “coincidence”, we also return to the tortured syntax of the next sentence and the even more tortured simile and metaphor it introduces. Leaving aside for the moment the “secrets” of the “snail shell”, let’s consider the way the simile unhinges following the word “so”. The first term of the simile is about the relationship between shell and snail; the second concerns the shell only: we are asked to consider the unlikely possibility of an “unrolling carapace”. What are the referents of this metaphor? If the scrolls or the letter or the poet are like the snail *shell*, where or what or whom is the crushed snail?

The rest of the poem does not help. The poet (like the snail and the shell) is also broken – so much is clear. But then a third term is introduced to the metaphor i.e. the “space beneath the shell”. That would appear, appropriately enough, to be air – hot perhaps? The metaphor doesn’t work. And the point of a comparison (which isn’t a comparison) between the love letter and the Dead Sea scrolls remains obscure.

I cannot leave this book without also mentioning a poem called “Towards the Edge” which describes a man “drunk and naked on the cliff top”, who is “spinning on his body’s axis”. The middle stanza describes an “aerodynamic principle/ that has his penis flare outwards like a/helicopter blade”. One would have thought that a drunk behaving in this manner on a cliff top had enough problems without this serious anatomical worry, which beggars exegesis.

Just in case I might be thought to have it in for “écriture feminine”, let me turn to other examples of the “literary”, this time taken from the work of two blokes. Peter Boyle’s previous collections we are told “have received many honours”. Like Johnson, then, he won’t be troubled by my critical interventions. His fourth volume, *museum of SPACE* (sic.) is very mixed. It is separated into three sections: “The Museum of Space – Etudes, Part I”; “Jottings and other Poems”; “Philosophers and Other World Leaders- Etudes, Part II”. Etudes, indeed. (Pretentious, moi?).

The title poem opens the volume. It is in prose. (I have preserved the line-endings as they appear in the published version but have been unable to reproduce the justified right-hand margin.)

In the museum of space you open the lost codes. They glide around you – emblems and word fragments, pierced shells that become once more perfect spheres. You remember watching a man counting the beads. Though small enough to vanish into his hand, they tumbled through infinite circles. As you looked out one window, the cliff directly in front loomed up like a future you would never scale. Why are water and sand always used to measure time passing? They must then be the one substance – what never gets dry, what never gets wet, the absolute embrace that says, Wade into *me*.

There are a further two paragraphs of this, both of which are equally obscure because there is no apparent connection between the various scenes and images that we are introduced to, or the very abstract concepts (infinite circles?) that are broached. This is just the kind of stuff designed to make the reader feel stupid. Happily, I don't. I just don't want to read any more, because it seems so utterly pointless to me.

It is not only the prose "poems" that worry me in this book. Elsewhere, Boyle shows his penchant for imprecise metaphors that defy interpretation. "The Philosopher of Leopards" begins, "Why is a child's ear like a car horn?/Why are toes always too heavy for the journey?" Presumably these are supposed to be enticing rather than fatuous questions. But I'm afraid my immediate response is to say that a child's ear is nothing like a car horn and my toes aren't heavy. Perhaps this is the point. It's a joke. But then the rest of the poem does not yield many laughs and certainly doesn't answer the opening questions. It closes like this:

The leopard is the landscape without holes,
the hand blurred by the foot's arrival
the spots that are the snow
that was the sky.
Disappearance is all.

Commentary seems superfluous. I leave readers to judge for themselves.

It is a pity that so many poems in this book are marred in this way. When Boyle has the courage of his conviction and writes more straightforwardly, he can be very good indeed. There is a marvellous poem towards the end of the book, "Of Poetry", which begins with the recognition, "Great poems are often extraordinarily simple". I don't

understand why this precept doesn't inform more of Boyle's practice.

Another much vaunted poet is Luke Davies. His *Totem* comes with high praise from writers whom I admire and respect. In this instance, I cannot agree with them. The title poem is 36 pages long and is written in five-line unrhymed stanzas. It is very difficult to say what it is about. Love, mythology, physics, life, art, the universe etc. But as to any coherent argument or thesis, I couldn't find one. There is a verbal energy and exuberance here, transferred epithets and synaesthesia are utilised in a self-delighting, romantic pot-pourri. But I can't see many people making head or tail of this curious mixture of the high falutin' and the banal:

The real issue, of course, was this: atomically, energetically,
everything was wave function. And a wave continues forever into space,
the wavelength never alters, only the intensity lessens, so
in the worst cosmic way everything is connected by vibrations.
And this, as even a dog would know, is no consolation.

Ah but the dogs will save us all in the end & even the planet.
Not the superdogs but the household friendlies, always
eager to please, hysterically fond, incessant, carrying in the very
wagging of their tails an unbounded love not even
therapists could imagine; their forgiveness unhinges us.

It's a case of Dog save us. The forty love poems, each written in three quatrains, that constitute the second part of *Totem* are a great deal less obscure, but hardly more satisfactory. Often the poems are tripped up by clumsy rhythmical betrayals or clanking rhymes. This, together with the air of pastiche – one hears echoes of the great Elizabethan and Jacobean love poets – tends to make these poems read like clever-clever exercises gone wrong. Placing the titles in brackets doesn't help:

(Sweep)

Come stay the afternoon at least
And sunset will be none the wiser,
Come suckle like the bees awash
In that hallucinated pleasure
Of stamen deep in the bowl
That petals make. Come stay an hour.
Come lie with me and be my love

My Sugar Lee. I will whisper in your ear
All the dreams you forget
As you sweep away night each dawn.
Come love me till evening.
It is almost noon.

This, I think, demonstrates admirably that plain English is also no guarantee of poetic success.

Several volumes not mired by obscurity and having subject matter that I found engaging, nevertheless failed to convince as *poetry*. I think particularly here of Cathy Young's *The Yugoslav Women and their Pickled Herrings* and *drums and bonnets* by Miriel Lenore. These books are autobiographical in different ways and have a documentary ambience. Young's book is about and for "working women"; it is self-consciously articulating working-class experience in a gritty, hard-edged language. I found many of the poems made me want to know more or to ask questions. All this is good. But, the form of the poems and the lack of tonal variation between them left me feeling bludgeoned. Young's method is to juxtapose a string of clauses and phrases often eliding conventional syntax to produce a hammering staccato:

on the floor
they work all day
English classes after
lunch room full then a
shopping bag rush through tram doorways
to home to cook the family's tea do the wash and clean
kids at school now they work to supplement their husband's wage
parents just arrived
brother's family to come soon
it will be crowded
3 bedrooms are never the right size to store worry

It can, of course, be argued that the breathless pressure of the lines is entirely appropriate to convey the pressure of the migrant lives described here. I only suggest that too much breathless pressure ceases to have an impact, and leaves the reader numbed after a time. I also wonder if this method in its insistence on economy does not diminish the texture of the experiences and the lives that are being described?

Miriell Lenore's poems are engaged in a geographical, political and spiritual search for her ancestors. The first half of the book is situated in Northern Ireland, the second in the goldfields of Ballarat. The subject matter is powerful, but often I wondered if the artful documentary method was allowing the writer to score points a little too easily as here, in the poem entitled, "Drumcree 2000":

The posters are everywhere
In shop windows on postboxes and lightpoles
Drumcree 2000
Protestant Solidarity
Unite in our struggle against injustice.
'Unconquerable except by death.'

Bernadette Devlin says
if you answer Saint Anything
to the question *what school?*
you will never get the job

I read of a little boy wanting
to work in the Belfast shipyard
whose mother said *first*
you must change your name Patrick

Though I am sympathetic to the political direction of this, I'm worried by the way Lenore's method steers very close to the brutal propaganda of the murals she describes.

In the second half of the book, where the material is more insistently historical, I found the poems too bluntly prosaic:

how to educate their children?
Lizzie and John signed petitions for a school
set in a small clearing in the forest
the tiny shack no bigger than a living room
Whim Holes Common School 1863
was for all denominations
unusual in those sectarian days

Somehow the verse form seems unnecessary to the utterance here; the lack of formal punctuation seems a gesture that fails to disguise the conventional and prosaic syntax.

I am well aware of those theories from both right and left of the political spectrum, which see the conventionally punctuated sentence in English as an instrument of oppression. I don't agree with such theories.

Joanne Burns, some of whose earlier work I have enjoyed, seems to subscribe to the idea that disjunction is a radical gesture. The blurb on the back cover of her latest book reads like this: "Burns' ironic/satiric scrutinising of contemporary society continues in the poems and prose fragments of *footnotes of a hammock* – but often in a more oblique, disjunctive, absurdist way. Moments of self-angst, accidie are parodically trophed" (sic.). As a piece of self-reviewing, this seems to me to be better than anything I could attempt, including the neologism with which the last sentence concludes. Here's the beginning of mardi gras:

good heavens not ronald
again sniffing around
the moulding brocades at
the palanquin wrecker's yard
looking for signs of revival,
history's largesse ahoy – he snaps
his fingers as if a retinue
of factotums will fidget
into action at the whiff
of attar from the roses on
his chain store viscose
shirt – snubbed by those
D rate djinns he raises
his love handles like
a real godwallah
hissing for a free lunch ...

This kind of thing can be fun in small doses, but over the long-haul the ironic, self-parodic, clever-clever, knowing tone becomes wearisome. There are, however, some poems in this collection, which have a more elegiac and intimate tone, wherein emotion is allowed expression in a more unqualified way, and in these Burns's undoubted linguistic flair and energy seem to me to find a more satisfying outcome.

In Adrienne Eberhard's impressive first book, *Agamemnon's Poppies*, it is a relief to find that irony need not be ubiquitous in twenty-first century poetry, and that the conventionally punctuated sentence still has a role to

play in articulating subtle perceptions and fine shades of feeling. Refreshingly, Eberhard is willing to try her hand at the sonnet and rhymed quatrains, and though these do not seem to me to be amongst the best of the poems in the book, I applaud the ambition to make these formal structures her own.

As the title implies, there is something in this book of the exoticism I noticed in Judy Johnson's work, but here the rhetoric usually convinces of something deeply felt or imagined; there is a rhythmic and linguistic certainty in the development of the poems that convinces one that the writer is passionately engaged with her subject matter, rather than being passionately engaged with artifice. Eberhard is concerned with landscapes of the body, mind and heart; she has a talent for precise sensuality. Her poems about pregnancy and birth are admirable as is the ambitious sequence "Lines from the Black Sea". Here, Eberhard imagines Ovid exiled from Rome by Augustus. She is not intimidated or inhibited by Malouf's treatment of the same situation in his great book, *An Imaginary Life*. In the following poem, Eberhard fuses Ovid's longing for home with his longing for love:

If I had a boat
and the strength to sail it
I could make my way home.

Return to the lithe, summer air,
to the cool breath of early evening,
to amber wine on my tongue.

I would navigate the narrow channels,
the inland waters, as if they were
the warm, secret places of my lover's body.

I would suffer the storms of open seas
as if they were the wild gasps,
the frenzy of our couplings.

I would breast the coast of my country,
hugging every inch and crook
as if breathing love into the pores of her body,
cajoling with the lips and tongue
until, at last, we arrive at Rome.

The poem is simultaneously lucid and complex as it not only articulates the misery of exile and loneliness with its attendant sexual frustration, but also forces us to ponder the politics (and sexual politics) of an impassioned patriotism of place.

Another poet whose precision and clarity I have always admired is Nicolette Stasko. Her fourth book, *The Weight of Irises*, does not disappoint. The wonderful art of Stasko's poetry is to produce a voice that seems artless. As I read, I seemed to hear the poet as if she were speaking directly to me. In this way, the reader is invited to share intimacies. Though Stasko has always eschewed conventional punctuation, her lines form rhythmical and grammatical sentences, which sometimes seem to slide into each other by sharing a phrase. It is a way of making the reader pay attention to the tensions between the syntax and the lines, and a method of jolting the reader into awareness at key moments.

Stasko has a painterly eye, and her interest in fine art is evident in several poems here. And yet there is never a sense that we are leaving the world of lived experience to indulge in some abstract or superior realm. On the contrary, Stasko engages with paintings as she engages with life, searching for the radiant moments of illumination in the full knowledge of the darkness. Here is a poem from her sequence "Dwelling in the shape of things: Meditations on Cezanne":

Is it possible to represent
our feelings so exactly?
the twisted trunks of trees mimic
furiously writhing couples *volupte*
whose embrace offers nothing
but violence
not even in the pale violet blue of the sky
the vulnerable green of the leaves and grass is
there peace or tenderness
only desire
a leaping dog with bared teeth
the screams of a woman being raped
or giving birth
are the same
we would rather believe
these figures might be dancing
and that the one who bends to wake
the sleeper
does so gently

Stasko is equally capable of telling a story, offering a dramatic vignette or pursuing a meditation. She is various, subtle and clever. I cannot do the book justice in this small space, better that you should read it for yourselves.

It is also impossible to do justice to the quality "Selecteds" and "Collecteds" from the blokes this year. John Tranter's *Studio Moon* contains work published over the last fifteen years and includes some poems not previously published in book form. There is a new and ample "Selected" from Les Murray, entitled, *Learning Human*. John Kinsella's *Peripheral Light* is a "New and Selected", the selection made by Harold Bloom. Ouyang Yu has a *New and Selected Poems* and there is a monumental 690-page *Collected Poems* from Andrew Taylor. Happily, most readers will be familiar with the work of these poets and therefore I feel justified in limiting myself to a few remarks about Kinsella, Ouyang Yu, and Taylor before moving on to discuss a few books by less celebrated writers that seem to me of interest.

Peripheral Light shows John Kinsella in his best light. He gains from the process of selection. His extraordinarily prolific output inevitably means that the quality of work within individual volumes is mixed. Here, Bloom selects the best and the best is very impressive. It is also significant to note that the best excludes the kind of ranting poem that Kinsella is liable to shout at an audience with his manic, machine-gun delivery at poetry readings. Rather, we have here the wheat-belt gothic, the warped pastoral written in high energy lines with muscular cadence and sinuous syntax. The poems are a pleasure to read and made me understand Kinsella's growing reputation. Bloom's essay is interesting as well, not least for the way it concludes. Bloom writes that at the "midpoint" of Kinsella's career, "We are poised before the onset of what I prophesy will be a major art". It will be interesting to see if this prophecy comes to be fulfilled.

Ouyang Yu is a poet whose work I have enjoyed in literary magazines over the last ten years. His work probes the wounds of living between two cultures in neither of which he is at home. These are political poems in the broadest sense of that word, often fuelled by anger, but there is humour here as well and a formidable intelligence. If I have a criticism of the work, it is that it lacks tonal variation, and sometimes the words seem to have been flung onto the page with a view to creating a kind of anti-art. I understand the impulse to move away from empty aesthetics and the urgency that compels the poet to do so, yet if the utterance comes to seem too easy, too throw-away there is the potential for the reader to treat it too lightly as well.

Andrew Taylor is a poet who perhaps does not quite have the public profile of Murray or Tranter, yet he has been working away consistently over thirty-five years to produce an enormously impressive body of work. This *Collected* brings together poems from twelve individual volumes and includes some recent, previously unpublished material. It is a book that will live with me for months and years to come. Every time I open it to read, I find new pleasures. Taylor is a quiet poet, fastidious and precise, but this does not preclude a very wide tonal range and the deployment of a keen intelligence and wit in poetry that dazzles with its formal variety. The breadth of subject-matter is astonishing. Taylor is as at home writing about a cockroach as he is writing about a European cathedral. Here is another strength. Taylor is a distinctively Australian poet, yet he effortlessly encompasses the wider world. He is at home in Europe and America, and is a sensitive explorer of those cultures in relation to Australia.

Taylor also writes love poems, landscape poems, political poems, poems about the mundane struggle of day-to-day family living, and in all there is insight and learning worn lightly. One never feels that Taylor is showing off or self-advertising. His voice is welcoming; here is a poet who wants to communicate clearly:

Sometime

For Beate

Sometime in the night you must have visited me
sometime in the poor hours between last cars
and the double thump of newspapers on a drive
when the spirit sinks like water in a bore
during drought sinks and trembles and waits
in a double darkness of fear and sleep
which is not sleep but a kind of hunger

sometime then you must have visited me
with a gesture I don't remember with a word
I cannot recall with a touch an embrace
a lovemaking gone without trace
when I woke except a winter sun
gilded the edges of our garden with the clear
knowledge that you had come to me again

It is, of course, impossible to illustrate the richness of this book via one poem. Suffice it to say that here is a massive contribution to the cultural hoard.

Among individual volumes of particular interest I found John Stokes's *A River in the Dark*, Alex Skovron's *The Man and the Map*, and Paul Hetherington's *Blood and Old Belief*.

Although he is not a young man, *A River in the Dark* is Stokes's first book. This is significant because the poems strike one as hard-won. They deal with difficult material – illness, death and grief – in a chiselled language that is searching and sometimes experimental. Through a variety of line-lengths, tonal variation and sometimes startling juxtaposition of imagery, Stokes attempts to articulate those states of mind and feeling on the borders of consciousness that are most resistant to language. Occasionally this leads to a knotty obliquity, but there is never the sense that this is gratuitous. On the contrary, Stokes's voice convinces because the poems convey the sense of struggle he has with intractable material. There are memorable phrases here and occasionally a wonderful lucidity is achieved in poems such as "AIDS Blanket" and "Making the Funeral". Stokes is an ambitious writer and it will be interesting to monitor his development.

Both Skovron and Hetherington may be said to be in mid-career. *The Man and the Map* is Skovron's fourth volume, *Blood and Old Belief* Hetherington's sixth. The shadows of a European past are never far from Skovron's work, but this does not mean his poems are uniformly dark. One of the pleasures of his voice is that he can appear relaxed and conversational while still adhering to a precise formality. I enjoy the way Skovron's poems address the big themes of time and memory, of love and political brutality, of music and silence but do so with a lightness of touch, which never descends to mere whimsicality. One is always aware of a keen intelligence driving the poems.

Skovron is not frightened of being discursive, which makes it difficult to demonstrate the force of his writing via a short quotation. But perhaps something of the flavour of his work may be gained from these lines from his wonderful poem, "Mr Wilkinson". As in many of his poems, here Skovron is worrying away at the collision of cultures when migrants from Eastern Europe arrived in Australia after World War II. The poem describes an encounter between a young refugee, Klara, and an Australian geography teacher who is conducting a class on the capitals of Europe. Klara stands to show him her "town", "*Varshava*". The teacher, condescending, says that they are 'doing/capitals only, Klara – you will

have to *show* us/the exact location of your little town in Poland”. Klara, points to “Warszawa” and it dawns upon the teacher that this is Warsaw. Skovron describes his impression of the teacher’s reaction:

Just then the bell went, the usual rustle erupted,
we shuffled outside for Playtime and fresh milk;
but what I had glimpsed imprinted in that moment
on Mr Wilkinson’s face has haunted me
for forty years. His smile was chalky, superior,
but the *eyes* – suddenly blank,
with an emptiness between mockery and loathing;
and what frightened me in that instant of exposure
was the eerie absence of light behind those eyes -
a colour that glinted, yes, but opaquely.
I recalled, absurd, those impossible horror stories
Klara told me, of men in black tunics
who grinned to machine gun a column of ghost children,
then fondled tenderly a dog’s silken ear ...

This is not the end of the story, which goes on to uncover further complexities in the poet’s response, and leave the reader with disquieting questions about authority and prejudice, learning and brutality. It is one of several brilliant poems that illuminate this impressive book.

Paul Hetherington’s previous collections have shown him to be a meticulous craftsman of Romantic lyric poetry. In *Blood and Old Belief* this craftsmanship is put in the service of a verse novel. I have to confess immediately that this is a form that I am not enthusiastic about. It is very hard to write a good novel in prose. It is even harder in poetry. Harder still in lyric verse. And this, for me, is the problem with Hetherington’s book. Rather than a dramatic narrative in which characters interact through dialogue to create drama, we have a series of lyrics in which a narrator and three characters muse about their lives and relationships. What little action there is comes to us second hand, as it were. Everything is told, nothing shown. Oddly, this goes for emotions as well. These seem to be reported rather than embodied or evoked. And the denouement, which like the rest of the action, happens off stage, seems out of proportion to the circumstances as they have been expressed in the earlier poems. There are moments of lyrical grace here. Hetherington is particularly adept at evoking mood and, as ever, his iambic pentameters, quadrameters and trimeters display a technical gift of a high order. It will be interesting

to see in what service he deploys those gifts in the future.

I cannot conclude without mentioning and applauding UQP's initiative in producing *The Best Australian Poetry, 2003: a selection of the best poems from Australia's literary journals*. This deserves to become an institution. It is a generous selection that includes an introduction and notes on the contributors. The idea is that there will be a different guest editor each year – this, too, is a good idea. Here is an anthology that deserves to reach a wide audience. Whether it will or not remains difficult to assess. I suspect that many intelligent, general readers are so tired of reading slight or incomprehensible poems in newspapers and journals that they have given up on contemporary verse. They shouldn't. There is good stuff out there and this is a collection that demonstrates as much.

Poetry Received 2003–2004

Those marked with an asterisk have been mentioned in the above review

Adelaide 9 – *The Poetry of the City*. CD: SA Writers' Centre, PO Box 43, Rundle Mall, SA 5000.

Bliss, MML. *Rævo*. Launceston, Tas.: Cornford Press, 2003.

Botha, Christoff, et al. *Suasion*. The Fifth Collection of Fiction, Poetry and Scripts by Creative Writing Students from The University of Western Australia, 2003.

*Boyle, Peter. *Museum of Space*. St Lucia: UQP Press, 2004.

Brown, Alexander & Brian Geytenbeek, eds. *Ngarla Songs*. Fremantle: FACP, 2003.

*Burns, Joanne. *Footnotes of a Hammock*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2004.

Carey, John. *Sorting Through Wardrobes*. Charnwood, ACT: Ginninderra Press, 2004.

*Davies, Luke. *Totem*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004.

Dawe, Bruce. *The Headlong Traffic*. Melbourne: Pearson Education Australia, 2003.

Deller-Evans, Kate and Steve Evans, eds. *Another Universe*. Friendly Street Poets 28. Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 2004.

*Duwell, Martin, ed. *The Best Australian Poetry 2003: a selection of the best poems from Australia's literary journals*. St Lucia: UQP, 2003.

*Eberhard, Adrienne. *Agamemnon's Poppies*. North Fitzroy, Vic: Black Pepper, 2003.

Emery, Brook. *Misplaced Heart*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2003.

Evans, Steve. *Taking Shape*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2004.

Friendly Street. *New Poets Nine*. Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 2004.

- Guess, Jeff. *Winter Grace*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2004.
- Hardacre, Paul. *The Year Nothing*. Wellington: HeadworX, 2003.
- , Paul and B.R. Dionysius, eds. *Papertiger new world poetry #03*. CD. 2003.
- Hardy, Andrew. *High in the Pawpaw Tree*. Revised Edition. Launceston, Tas.: Cornford Press, 2003.
- *Hetherington, Paul. *Blood and Old Belief: A Verse Novel*. Canberra: Pandanus Poetry, 2003.
- , Paul. *A Tasmanian Paradise Lost*. North Hobart, Tas.: Walleah Press, 2004.
- Irvine, Patricia. *Leaving the Mickey*. Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 2004.
- Jenkins, John. *Dark River*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2003.
- *Johnson, Judy. *Nomadic*. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 2004.
- *Kinsella, John, *Peripheral Light*. Selected and Introduced by Harold Bloom. Fremantle: FACP, 2003.
- Kroll, Jeri. *The Mother Workshops*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2004.
- *Lenore, Miriel. *Drums and Bonnets*. Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 2003.
- Macauley, Wayne. *BluePrints for a Barbed-Wire Canoe*. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 2004.
- Markova, Ilinda. *Knockturnal Animal*. Charnwood, ACT: Ginninderra Press, 2003.
- McBryde, Ian. *Domain*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 204.
- McDermot, Dennis. *Dorothy's Skin*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2003.
- *Murray, Les. *Learning Human*. Sydney: Duffy & Snellgrove, 2003.
- *Ouyang Yu. *New and Selected Poems*. Applecross, WA: Salt Publishing, 2004.
- Page, Tony. *Gateway to the Sphinx*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2004.
- Peek, Andrew. *The Calabar Transcript*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2003.
- Richards, Kel. *ABC Classic FM's Word of the Day*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2004.
- Roach, Michael James. *A Rare Dance Won With Eight Guineas*. Sydney: Roach Industries Pty. Ltd, 2004.
- Rowland, Robyn. *Shadows at the Gate*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2004.
- Salt-lick Quarterly*. Spring 2003. Coburg East, Vic., 2003.
- Salt-lick. New Poetry*. Volume 4. Coburg East, Vic., 2004.
- Shenfield, June, ed and translator. *Tristesse*. Paris: Linventaire, 2004.
- *Skovron, Alex. *The Man and the Map*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2003.
- *Stasko, Nicolette. *The Weight of Irises*. North Fitzroy, Vic., Black Pepper, 2003.
- Steele, Rory. *Obverse and Parallel Lines*. Charnwood, ACT: Ginninderra Press, 2004.

- *Stokes, John. *A River in the Dark*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2003.
- *Taylor, Andrew. *Collected Poems*. Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2004.
- *Tranter, John. *Studio Moon*. Camberwell, Vic.: Penguin Books Australia, 2004.
- Turcotte, Gerry. *Hauntings, the 'Varuna' Poems*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2003.
- Watson, John. *A First Reader*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2003.
- Wattison, Meredith. *The Nihilist Line. The Fishwife's Other Tail*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2003.
- Wearne, Alan. *The Lovemakers: Book Two: Money and Nothing*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2004.
- Wicks, Les. *Stories of the Feet*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 2004.
- Wright, Judith. *Birds*. Introduction by Meredith McKinney. Canberra, ACT: National Library of Australia, 2003. Book and CD
- Young, Cathy, ed. "*beyond the shimmering*". A Gawler Literary Fund Anthology of Poetry. Gawler, SA: Gawler Literary Fund, 2003.
- *-, Cathy. *The Yugoslav Women and their Pickled Herrings*. Launceston, Tas.: 6 Salisbury Press, 2004.

SARAH FRENCH

BOY

For my Father

He was here yesterday
standing in front of the backdrop of an old army blanket
dressed as the princess in Aladdin
the sticky pink of his dress
had to be colourised in the photograph
his face a pale blank

he had to sing a duet with Aladdin
a dream in duck egg blue satin
face as perfect a circle
as a compass ever drew, smile –
strung like a hammock from ear to ear

they had to sing
If you were the only girl in the world
& *I was the only boy*

at the Royal Albert Orphanage
the boy who kept himself a secret
guarded by silence all his life
had to open his throat & hope

that he could follow his voice
like an Indian rope trick – up into the rafters
& tickle those thick ribs of wood, that
given enough force
his falsetto could shatter
the small square window that let in the moon.

EMPIRE

simmering in its silver helmet
the earl grey named after some past
fastidiousness, when the sun never set
on the british empire, now all the china
laid out in bone, waiting
for time to reverse – the handles of tea cups
cocked like royal ears – listening.

SOUP

Candles flicker as I strike my head
three times against the wall.
A cold wind sweeps over the table.
I pour wine in the cups, imagining
how you will lay chopsticks
on the meat and vegetables curling up
with fumes from the incense burner.
I pound rice with wooden hammers.
I knead it, like dough, before cutting
the image into steamed, coin-like pieces.
The paste pieces are mixed with meat,
pinenuts, chestnuts and water.
A sudden memory of turnips and cabbages
you piled up, mountains high, drowns like bean
pottage we sprinkled on the kitchen walls.
Like gills, I recompose this crackle of leaves
breathing your absence in a dumpling soup.



Photograph by Frances Andrijich

SALLY-ANN JONES

FORTUNATA

Often in the early mornings, when Astrid goes to the back lawn to hang the washing on the Hills hoist, she sees Fortunata picking tomatoes in her yard and the two women drop their tasks and meet at the fence to chat. Usually their talk is of mundane things. Astrid might want Fortunata to take down all her bedroom curtains and wash them, or clean the oven, or defrost the fridge. Fortunata might want Astrid's advice about her husband, Enrico's, permanently aching lower back or the warts on Giulio's knees. Sometimes Fortunata is making lasagne and wonders if Astrid and her family would like her to make double for them. Astrid always says yes to this but only if Fortunata will accept a special gift, such as a big leg of pork or a case of peaches. Sometimes Astrid is homesick and knows Fortunata will understand how much she misses the cold air crinkling with frost and the glistening, shining green of the grass and the big red double-decker buses. Sometimes Fortunata is homesick, especially if one of her many nephews and nieces in Italy is making his or her first holy communion. She knows every detail of the dress the girl will wear, of her veil, her shoes, the way her thick black hair will be coiffed. She knows how the boy has been groomed to march in the procession around the village, slowly, lifting his knees and for longer so his steps are dignified and slow.

There is one story Astrid never tires of hearing. It is the story of Fortunata's first meeting with Enrico, the man to whom she had been betrothed since she was a baby.

"I was at home, in my village, when the letter came," Fortunata begins.

"How old were you? What were you doing? Were you frightened? What did your mother say?" prompts Astrid. She knows the story is old and worn out for her neighbour, but for her it is a new, exciting thing. Another woman's life. Another woman's love. She wants to hear it all in great detail.

"Have you got all day?" Fortunata laughs.

Like Astrid, she is pushing forty, but she is not beautiful like the Englishwoman. She is short and composed of three balls, all balancing on

each other precariously. The top, smallest one, is her head, whose roundness is accentuated because she is losing her short, dandruff-coated black hair in patches. Even her eyes are round. They are the same velvety brown as Maltesers and always seem to be laughing, even when she is being very angry with Giulio for tearing his shirt or letting two of the white rabbits escape from their hutch. The next ball is her upper body, with its big, soft, swaying breasts that look like a cushion stuffed into the bodice of her apron. The third ball is her buttocks, which Enrico loves to grab as he walks past the table where he plays cards on the back veranda with his cronies. He takes big handfuls of flesh and pulls her down into his lap. Astrid has seen her smile when she wriggles against him and the other men, who never seem to have women, look across at them enviously. Sometimes, especially if he is losing, Enrico pushes back the chair on which he is sitting with his wife in his lap and excuses himself gravely and politely for "*un momento*", carrying Fortunata inside the house. He is so strong he doesn't notice that she is heavy, although she must be. They disappear for a few minutes, a door is slammed, there is silence. Then they come out again, both smiling shyly, Fortunata walking so lightly she could have air in the soles of her open boots.

Enrico is incredibly ugly, Astrid thinks. His whole face seems pushed forward into a nose. There is no forehead, no chin, no lips, no eyes, only a big nose with black hairs sprouting from the huge nostrils.

"So what were you doing when the postman came?"

"I was outside, down near the stone bridge over the river, where the bread oven was." Fortunata speaks slowly, as if thinking in Italian then translating into English.

"The oven wasn't inside your parents' house?"

Fortunata shakes her head. "No. Outside. At the end of the *orto*, the vegetable garden. I had made the bread for the day. We used yellow maize flour and the loaves were big as the hills here. It was time to take the bread out and there I was, about to open the oven door when *il postino* came up the white sandy road on his black bicycle, holding in his hand a letter for me, with a stamp that said Australia."

"Were you scared?"

Fortunata snorts. "Scared? I had waited my whole life for that letter. Everyone in the village expected it one day. I was seventeen. I wanted so badly to go to Australia, to join Enrico there. I had never met him, but I knew all about him from his mother, who spoke to him at Christmas time on the phone. And my father and his father had been best friends, until Enrico's papa was trampled by a horse. Everyone knew I would marry him.

Everyone told me he was the best man a girl could hope for.

"I ran to the bridge to grab the letter without even remembering to thank the man who had ridden all that way with it and then ran into the house, where my mother was making a *torta* from nettles. Yes," she said, "nettles. They are delicious. Really.

"And that was when my mother sank down in her chair beside the door and began to cry. I am her only daughter and I was going to leave her."

"But you hadn't even opened the letter," Astrid said. "It might have been from someone who knew Enrico, to tell you he was sick or something. It might have been from Enrico, to tell you he was going to marry another girl."

"No," laughed Fortunata. "I knew it would be him, asking for me. And it was. My mother and I couldn't read, but we knew it was. We had to walk to the church in the village and ask the priest to read it. Meanwhile, the bread was burned and had to be thrown to the pigs.

"And then my mother took out all the things she had been sewing for me since the day I was born. Sheets, pillowcases, embroidered towels, tablecloths, napkins, babies' dresses – a whole trunk of pretty things, some already a bit moth-eaten and yellow with age.

"And we went into Siena on the train and she bought me one good outfit, for meeting Enrico in Fremantle on the very first day, when the ship finally got there.

"All I had to recognise Enrico by was a photograph he'd sent a year or more before. It was raggedy around the edges, a bit creased and a bit crackly, but the man's face was still easy to see. The face had little close-together eyes that looked kind and teary, as if he'd just been crying when the photographer snapped him. He had black hair that looked as if it might be wavy and a big, hooked nose like a pirate's nose. And there was a tiny little moustache. A thin line of a moustache over his thin top lip.

"I'd kept that photo in my handbag during the whole long voyage and had taken it out to look at every night before going to sleep in my tight little bunk bed. I was with three other Italian girls, girls who were coming to meet fathers or brothers. I was the only one who was going to get married and they envied me. I told them about the things my mother had sent with me in the trunk and told them as much as I knew about Enrico, which wasn't much at all, really.

"When the big ship steamed into Fremantle harbour, we could see the thousands of people lined up along the wharf to watch us come in. They were waving and singing and there was a brass band playing. We four elbowed and shoved our way right up to the railings on the side that was

drawing into the quay and scanned the faces in the crowd. We were almost pushed overboard by all the excited passengers behind us. Everyone seemed to be crying and laughing and shouting at once. The air was filled with all those voices like thunder.

"I wriggled my way free to have arm-space enough to bring my handbag up to my chest and pull out the photo. I looked at it in the hot sunshine and the face seemed less familiar. Suddenly, it looked a bit menacing, although it never had before. I looked at the picture and then at all the brown-suited men in the crowd below and couldn't see anybody who looked like the man I had come all this way to marry.

"I was very frightened, for the very first time in my life. What if he had married someone else and hadn't bothered to tell us? What if he was sick, or even dead? What if he'd got cold feet and changed his mind? Perhaps he didn't want a wife after all. He'd been a bachelor all his thirty-nine years. Maybe he liked it that way. He was about to lose his freedom. He was about to have to share his house and half his wage. He was going to have children. What a disruption all that would be!

"I leaned right over the railing and was sick. I'd never been seasick, not once, but I made up for it that afternoon. My three friends were disgusted with me. The Fremantle Doctor had blown the vomit all over the top of my frock. My best frock. It was pure white, to remind Enrico that I was a virgin. I was someone he would have to be gentle with, to take care of. I wasn't a woman like the ones he was perhaps used to meeting whenever he felt the urge.

"One of the girls took me back down to our cabin and pulled the dress off me. She wiped my mouth with a corner of a ship's towel which she dampened with the water in the jug on the little cabinet between the bunks and made me drink some more and swish it around in my mouth to clean my teeth and freshen my breath. All our things were packed so she left me there and ran off to find a steward or somebody to help us. I had nothing to wear and I was about to meet my future husband for the first time.

"In all the commotion, I had dropped the photograph of him, so now I wouldn't know who he was. My mother had sent him a photograph of me, taken in Siena on my sixteenth birthday, but would it have reached him? Did he still have it?

"I leant over and was sick again – on the floor this time, because there was nowhere else. I was sick on the crumpled white dress.

"Then the cabin-mate came with one of the stewards. He had brought something for me to wear, a dress from a store of fancy clothes the crew

wore to celebrate crossing the equator. It was a silly, tight thing like a long blue glove and had a tail which dragged along the floor. It was supposed to make the woman who wore it look like a mermaid.

"It was covered in greeny sequins and real silvery shells. The steward cut the tail off with a pair of scissors, not bothering to check it was even, and pulled it over my head, over the slip I was wearing. It was so tight around my knees I could barely put one leg before the other, but it fitted perfectly and it made me look much better than I had in the white dress.

"The steward and my friend got me up on the deck again. By now some of the passengers, the first class ones, were beginning to file down the gangways and were being met by people on the quay. There was a lot of screaming and crying going on. I was watching some of these rich people carrying on and wishing I was one of them. If I had some money, I could choose whether to stay in Australia or whether to go home again to my mother and the *orto* and the oven where we made the yellow bread every day. I was already missing all of that. Very much.

"Then I felt that I was being stared at. You know that feeling you get sometimes when you know you are being watched? I let my eyes sweep over the rest of the crowd down there on the dock, not just the ones whose relatives had been in first class, and I saw two men looking up at me as if they had seen the Virgin in the flesh. Their eyes were burning and their mouths were wide open. They saw that I had seen them and they both called out my name.

"But there were two of them. One was quite tall and good-looking, the other one short and round like a mozzarella. Which one was the man who would be my husband?"

Astrid sees her neighbour up on the deck of the big ship with its eager passengers and massive chains holding to earth before it escapes to the sea. She can see her with shoulder-length, bouncy dark hair and bright eyes, a plump, supple body like a seal's encased in a blue sheath so tight it could be skin. She sees the sunshine shimmer off her, making her light up like a beacon, drawing the attention of not only the two men but of everyone who was there that day. Astrid sees her walk carefully down the gangway towards the men, putting one foot in front of the other as delicately as a geisha with bound feet might.

"I am Enrico!" and "I am Enrico!" the enchanted men tell her, because they share a Christian name. They rush towards her, scarcely able to believe the fairy-like creature who has come into their lives. Close up, the short one could be described as ugly, Fortunata thinks, while the taller has a face to rival that of the beautiful saint who kneels holding a red candle

behind the Pope on the Virgin's right side in the big painting which once hung over the high altar of the *Duomo* in Siena.

Fortunata has often gone to see him on her shopping expeditions into the walled city. From the wall of the *Museo* he is too busy looking adoringly at the Madonna and her child to take any notice of the young woman who comes to admire him. She had first been taken to see him on a class excursion and something about his young, strong, earnest face had brought her back again and again.

One of the Enricos could be him. The other has a look of a beady-eyed, beaked and cranky farmyard rooster with too much competition. Fortunata tells Astrid she was too confused and shy to ask the surnames of the two men who had driven all the way from the wheatbelt town to Fremantle to meet the ship. And too embarrassed to admit she'd lost the photograph and that, anyway, neither of the real men who were possessively clutching an arm each, and guiding her towards the customs officials from their side of the barriers in any way resembled the man in the picture. Neither even had a moustache!

The Enricos seemed to believe no introductions were necessary. After the contents of her one suitcase had been briefly examined by a bored customs inspector who seemed to see nothing remarkable in all the beautiful linens she had brought with her, the men walked her out into the sunshine and across a flat carpark. The short one tossed her case into the back of a utility and the tall one opened the passenger door for her to slide into the middle of the bench seat. It was so difficult for her to step up into the cabin of the vehicle in her tight mermaid dress that he had to lift her up and push her along.

Then they drove and drove and drove for hours, hardly speaking. Fortunata watched the swaying crucifix on the wooden rosary beads hanging from the rear view mirror. She watched the white lines in the middle of the road, hoping to see kangaroos. She watched the flat, brown fields with their grey sheep. She was glad it wasn't any hotter for already there were pools of sweat between her breasts, in the dip of her belly button and behind her knees. She hoped the tall man, who wasn't driving, was the man she was to marry. Slyly she watched his profile as he stuck his head through the open window to catch what little breeze there was. He was just like the beautiful saint in the painting called *Maesta*. She knew it had been painted by Duccio in 1311. It was something drummed into her from school days.

The other man, the parrot, never took his eyes from the road. He drove fast and well, overtaking lorries and cars. She was too shy to make

conversation, they had no idea what to say to a young Italian girl fresh from the arms of her mother.

“When the Enricos brought me to this house there was no pasta machine. I had to write and ask Mamma to send me one. It took months to get here. I don’t know how I lived through those months, with no fresh spaghetti.”

“When did you find out which Enrico was the one you had to marry?”

“Well, the parrot Enrico drove and drove,” she says, smiling as she recalls that hot day. Hotter than this. Or is she used to it now after nearly twenty years? “And I watched the other one, hoping it would be him. After an hour or so he began feeling sleepy and he pulled his head in from the window and lay it back on the back of the seat.

“Then he drifted off and soon his head began to loll sideways until it rested on my shoulder. He was cool from the open window and so trusting, like a baby. He was so beautiful I would have lain with him if he’d asked me. I would have pulled my mermaid dress off by the side of the road and lain with him. Yet I didn’t know if he was to be my husband. As he slept I let my eyes slide down to the zip of his trousers. I wanted to see if I could guess ...”

“Fortunata!” Astrid laughed. “You naughty girl!” Still red, she asks in a whisper, “And could you guess?”

Fortunata grinned. She held her hands out the way Giulio did when he caught a fish. A big one.

“What about the parrot Enrico?” Astrid was fascinated. “Did you look?”

“No,” laughed Fortunata.

“So what happened?”

“Finally we got here and I had to shake the sleeping angel awake. He had to pull me out of the ute because I had stuck to the seat, I was so sweaty. We got here to this house and the parrot one came around the car and picked me up and carried me over the doorstep.

“I nearly cried. So, after all, I wasn’t going to marry the handsome one who looked like the saint in the painting. And then, still holding me in his arms, the wrong one kissed me. He kissed me properly, like in the films, with his tongue, you know. And he tasted fantastic. He knew how to kiss, that’s for sure. He was confident, so right, he completely won me over. I knew he was a real man, a man who could give me pleasure and love and sons. He was strong enough to hold me for all that time without having once to shift my weight. He carried me into the bedroom because I couldn’t stop kissing him. I never wanted to stop. And he threw me on the bed and didn’t bother about taking his clothes off, or mine. He opened his

zip and pushed my knickers to one side. And that was the day I became his.

“The other Enrico was his best friend and the best man at our wedding. Afterwards, he went back to Italy because his grandfather had died and left him a vineyard. Sometimes he writes to us. He has a wife and seven children. I never think about him now.”

THESE MY WORDS

I

These my words:
the taste of loaves,

of fishes,
seven there were

and five
that grew,

ate up the
land, consumed
the sea;

and all the wheatfields
on it

and all the fishes
in it.

II

See how I share
the endless harvest

how I shift the load
from me to you

watch how I sweep
the residue,

the bits that fell
from other lips,

into these other
baskets.

III

These my words:
the taste of loaves

and fishes.

A field of wheat
and all the fishes in it.

“MAN-MOTH” AND THE FLAME OF INFLUENCE: A POET READING POETRY

My purpose in this essay is to tease out some of the distinctive ways a writer reads – or experiences reading – by detailing and reflecting on my own reading of Elizabeth Bishop’s “The Man-Moth”. It should be a given that in order to be a writer one must be a reader. In the introduction to Donald Barthelme’s book of essays and interviews, titled *Not-Knowing*, John Barth recalls a class of Johns Hopkins university students asking Barthelme, “How can we become better writers than we are?” After being told that they should read through the whole history of philosophy, the students objected that they had already been told to read through all of literature. “That too,” Donald affirmed. “You’re probably wasting time on things like eating and sleeping. Cease that, and read all of philosophy and all of literature. Also art. Plus politics and a few other things. The history of everything”.¹ The advice could not be more emphatic. It is also evident, however, that not all readers become writers, or read because they are writers. Are there then particular ways reading is important to writing? I propose that a poet tends to read in distinctive ways, shaded differently to the ways of critics, other readers or students. In general, I argue that the poet-reader takes in a poem as an act performed over time rather than as a text encountered upon a page. This is not, of course, a matter of absolute distinction but of relative weighting. Small differences though can make a significant difference.

In more detail, I want to consider a poet’s reading of a poem under the force of a series of questions put to a poem, questions that lead eventually, through the essential but sometimes difficult process of influence, to the poet’s own poem. The first two questions are focused on the text itself, the following two are to do with personal involvement in the reading experience, and the third incorporates both these elements while providing an impetus and validation for the production of new poems. The first, practical question is, “How does this poem work?” a question that

highlights analysis, poetics and prosody. Linked with this is, "What does this poem teach me about writing?" and here there is the matter of extracting from a text what it has effected as a performance. Both these questions are closely related. Following this there are two even more subjective questions, "What does it move in me?" and "Can I hear (contact, see, sense) the presence of a living person in this writing?" The former question can be instructional, but can also be inspirational for the reader who wishes to be moved by a poem to take up a pen or go to the keyboard. The latter question, I think, can be a distraction, particularly when the life (or stance) of a writer overshadows the writing. It is a useful question, though, if it brings the reader to experience a text as enacted by another writer making certain choices and exposing to view the risks and nuances of a performance – a performance that comes into existence as a collaboration between writer and reader. The final question I wish to highlight is, "What evidence of reading is there in this poem?" This addresses directly issues of influence and tradition, and opens the way to this poem influencing a poet-reader's next poem.

These are not all the questions a writer might put to a text, and they are not exclusive to writers reading, for they are also the kinds of questions that can be put by critics, teachers, reviewers, and many other readers. But their obsessive contact with the effects of influence and their movement towards the reading-writer's own writing give them a distinctive slant.

To explore this distinctive slant further, I characterise the kind of reading I will detail below as more self-instructive than, say, a critical or ideological one. This approach has much in common with the close reading strategies of those who broke away from New Criticism in the 1950s and early '60s, creating a space for the later rhetorical close-readings conducted by Derrida on Kafka and Shelley, de Man on Proust, Cixous on Joyce, Deleuze on Kafka, Kristeva on Mallarmé, Coetzee on Kafka, and others in the 1970s and '80s to the present. My commitment to close reading, however, has its basis in my concern as a poet for learning from the ways matters of poetics and prosody have been negotiated by another writer. The choices or decisions enacted in a poem are the clues for me to what gives it life or kills its life.

This kind of reading is also offered as a corrective or alternative to the sometimes overpowering, freewheeling, exteriorised, digressive or scientific critical writing of some post-modern theorists of literature, characterised often by a reliance on intellectualisation. The mid-twentieth century French phenomenological critic Georges Poulet (1902–1991) depicted the act of reading as a peculiar interaction with what he called an

“interior object”. He wrote, “Reading, then, is the act in which the subjective principle which I call *I*, is modified in such a way that I no longer have the right, strictly speaking, to consider it as my *I*. I am on loan to another, and this other thinks, feels, suffers and acts within me ... This provokes a certain feeling of surprise in me. I am a consciousness astonished by an existence which is not mine, but which I experience as though it were mine. This astonished consciousness is in fact the consciousness of the critic.”² Poulet goes on to describe his view of the two extremes of critical reading. On the one hand is the “mimetic critic” who enters into a sympathetic identification with a work, so much so that the critic’s own language mimics or calls up the most sensual aspects of the work under appreciative discussion. Such criticism allows the critic to express and convey the subtleties of the experience of reading a certain work, but inevitably it becomes “too congealed and opaque” to lend itself to intellectual analysis. Rousseau was of this type. On the other hand there is hyper-criticism, whereby a critic manages to reduce every line, sentence, metaphor, every word to “the near nothingness of abstraction”.³ This process of rigorous intellectualisation not only reduces all literary forms to the same level of insignificance, but makes the objects of literature “appear to be infinitely far away”. Poulet suggested, both unfairly and insightfully, that Maurice Blanchot is such a critic.

In the first case, criticism achieves a complicity with the work under discussion, but loses lucidity. In the second case criticism achieves a maximum lucidity but at the expense of any real connection with the work. The best criticism, Poulet suggested, oscillates between these possibilities. My aim as a writer in approaching Bishop’s poem, is to avoid extreme closeness and extreme detachment without losing entirely the privileges and insights each of these possibilities offers.

Poulet, however, is an incomplete guide to the kind of reading I wish to develop. In his detailed appreciation and critique of Poulet, J. Hillis Miller has pointed to Poulet’s over-confidence in the capacity of any text to reproduce the consciousness of an author. Miller has observed that Poulet’s criticism is associated, finally, with a tendency to take language for granted in literature:

For the most part he does not put the language of his authors in question, hold it at arm’s length and analyze it, interrogate it suspiciously for distinction between what it apparently says and what it really says. He does not scrutinize the language of his texts for the covert assumptions of its

metaphors, its tense structures, its silences. Part of Poulet's generosity toward his authors is a taking for granted not only of the authenticity of their experiences, but also of the authenticity of the words in which they have expressed their experiences.⁴

The inadequacy of the purity or naivety of Poulet's insistence on a philosophy of presence does not, however, have to mean that a philosophy of the abyss is the only reasonable or possible remedy. If language is not a transparent medium for the expression of an author's consciousness, it is equally not the case that language writes the texts we read. I would want to perceive in texts the strange to-ing and fro-ing, the oscillation, of a living person and their equally alive language. This movement gives a solidity to literature, and because it happens in time it constitutes an experience.

The American critic, Helen Vendler has written eloquently of her determination to follow a certain kind of close reading as an antidote to what she perceives as dominant forms of contemporary critical writing:

It is distressing, to anyone who cares for and respects the concentrated intellectual and imaginative work that goes into a successful poem, to see how rarely that intense (if instinctive) labor is perceived, remarked on, and appreciated. It is even more distressing – given the human perceptual, aesthetic, and moral signals conveyed (as I hope to show) by such elements as prosody, grammar, and lineation – that most contemporary interpretations of poetry never mention such things, or, if they do, it is to register them factually rather than to deduce their human import.⁵

Vendler clearly wishes to restore, as she sees it, a sense of complicity and intimacy with writers to her writing about literary works (she is, as it were, on – and at – the writer's side). She does, though, still bring analytical attention to textual characteristics. They are perceived as choices made by a writer at work with a text and once her discussion of a text is underway she takes up opportunities to conduct formal intellectual analyses, in fact oscillating between intimacy and detachment, or we might say, between text and writer.

There are then two kinds of movement to be considered in reading a text. The first is that movement between sympathy and analysis on the part of the reader-critic, and in addition the traces of a movement between a writer and a language as the text was produced.

On the matter of reading a poem as a performance, I approach a poem as an act in the sense that Kenneth Burke suggested when he wrote that a reading must be dramatic, that is it must take account of the way a poem unfolds or enacts itself before us.⁶ But more than this, I conceive of the poem as an act in the sense that J. L. Austin meant when wrote that speech can be in special cases performative. Austin coined this term in a 1956 essay, and immediately reflected that it was an ugly word but did the job of denoting those moments of speech when it is not possible to speak of whether what is said is false or true, but rather one recognises whether it makes something happen in the world, such as a marriage (“I do”), a baptism (“I baptise you in the name of ...”), or the flow of traffic (“Left Lane”).⁷ This classification of a use of language became an important influence on discussions of literature in the early work of Derrida, and later Judith Butler. A poem, we could say, is also a case of an utterance that cannot ever be true or false. Or rather, it is beside the point whether a poem is true or false. It must, in Austin’s term, be felicitous. Felicity has its root in the Latin *felix*, usually translated as happy. An act of felicity has achieved a happy grace, a striking appropriateness, an aptness. Performative speech is made of conventions, usually within a strict verbal formula, though with poetry it is this very formulaic nature of the performative speech act that is put under pressure. The poem must achieve its existence as a *particular* experience rather than a meaning (it must be doing something, not just saying something), but must do this within conventional strictures that allow it to act as poetry. This does not mean that poetry and all instances of performative speech have nothing to do with what is true or false, right or wrong, but rather that their relationship to these matters is slanted, characterised more by implication than direct reference or direct claim. Importantly, for my delineation of reading in this essay, the poem as performative speech happens over time, as any performance must. Timing becomes important, development too. Beginnings and endings become significant. A poem unfolds word by word, line by line, image by image, sound by sound, stanza by stanza as we witness it. This order I assume is important to the poet and to the effect of the poem. I know that as readers we can range haphazardly across the written word, particularly when it comes in the short eye-grabs of verse lines or can be scrolled at electronic speed on a computer screen, and these are legitimate ways of encountering a poem. I want to leave this kind of ranging, however, to some later reading and later reflection.

The poem – the performance – is Elizabeth Bishop’s “The Man-Moth”:⁸

The Man-Moth*

Here, above,
cracks in the buildings are filled with battered moonlight.
The whole shadow of Man is only as big as his hat.
It lies at his feet like a circle for a doll to stand on,
and he makes an inverted pin, the point magnetized to the moon.
He does not see the moon; he observes only her vast properties,
feeling the queer light on his hands, neither warm nor cold,
of a temperature impossible to record in thermometers.

But when the Man-Moth
pays his rare, although occasional, visits to the surface,
the moon looks rather different to him. He emerges
from an opening under the edge of one of the sidewalks
and nervously begins to scale the faces of the buildings.
He thinks the moon is a small hole at the top of the sky,
proving the sky quite useless for protection.
He trembles, but must investigate as high as he can climb.

Up the facades,
his shadow dragging like a photographer's cloth behind him,
he climbs fearfully, thinking that this time he will manage
to push his small head through that round clean opening
and be forced through, as from a tube, in black scrolls on the light.
(Man, standing below him, has no such illusions.)
But what the Man-Moth fears most he must do, although
he fails, of course, and falls back scared but quite unhurt.

Then he returns
to the pale subways of cement he calls his home. He flits,
he flutters, and cannot get aboard the silent trains
fast enough to suit him. The doors close swiftly.
The Man-Moth always seats himself facing the wrong way
and the train starts at once at its full, terrible speed,
without a shift in gears or a gradation of any sort.
He cannot tell the rate at which he travels backwards.

Each night he must
be carried through artificial tunnels and dream recurrent dreams.
Just as the ties recur beneath his train, these underlie

his rushing brain. He does not dare look out the window,
for the third rail, the unbroken draught of poison,
runs there beside him. He regards it as a disease
he has inherited the susceptibility to. He has to keep
his hands in his pockets, as others must wear mufflers.

If you catch him,
hold up a flashlight to his eye. It's all dark pupil,
an entire night itself, whose haired horizon tightens
as he stares back, and closes up the eye. Then from the lids
one tear, his only possession, like the bee's sting, slips.
Slyly he palms it, and if you're not paying attention
he'll swallow it. However, if you watch, he'll hand it over,
cool as from underground springs and pure enough to drink.

* *Newspaper misprint for "mammoth"*

What in this moves me?

What draws me to this poem? Its beauty and strangeness at first. Then the odd effect of such straightforward speech leading to such elusive meanings. For me the poem's strange landscape seems to share something with the nearly empty late afternoon and evening scapes of the surrealist painters De Chirico and later Delvaux. It is evocative, but I am not sure what it evokes. A poem that interests me is one that takes me to a thought or a place of feeling, sometimes a dream location that I recognise but do not know. I am drawn to it too because it is an accidental poem. Elizabeth Bishop recalled the writing of this poem in a notebook entry:

This poem was written in 1935 when I first lived in New York City. I've forgotten what it was that was supposed to be "mammoth". But the misprint seemed meant for me. An oracle spoke from the page of the *New York Times*, kindly explaining New York City to me, at least for a moment.⁹

Prompted by this misprint, the poem reads as both a whimsy and an opportunity taken for a deeply serious exploration or construction of self.

How does it work?

"The Man-Moth" begins with the point of view of the moon or moonlight above a man who stands for Man (very much a masculine figure

in his hat). The opening, indented with the stressed single syllable word, “Here”, is dramatic and unfussy. There is both a sense of the theatrical and an intellectual directness indicated in this beginning. The first four lines take us through a series of scale reductions which are also equivalences: from the moon above to an awareness of the bulk of buildings below, then down further to Man (both a figure and a concept) and even further down to the scale of the hat within which his whole shadow lies, then to a doll and yet further down in size to the figure of a pin balanced on its head. These reductions recall one typical method of handling images in the haiku form, though more literally they recall the way a movie camera might zoom in on details of a scene from above. They are also a demonstration of the way poetry moves through details and images to a sense of general significance, as Aristotle observed in the *Poetics*. These lines then end with a return to the presence of the moon’s “vast properties”, most notably its queer light: light of a temperature impossible to record *in* thermometers. That word “in” is strange here. “With” would be a more likely and less noticed choice. It is as if temperatures are taken into thermometers where they are then not just measured but kept. The suggestion is both that this light cannot be measured adequately by recording instruments and that it cannot be contained or captured – that is, understood by Man. The further suggestion is that abstract qualities can be perceived and treated as objects in this world.

This reflection on moonlight brings us seemingly naturally to the Man-Moth of the title. He begins his place in the poem as more moth than man, though there is a rational part of him treating his progress towards the light as an investigation. The vivid image of his shadow dragging like a photographer’s cloth behind him is another element of strangeness in the poem. The insubstantial shadow is given physical presence in the image of the black cloth, just as earlier the abstract notion of temperature was given a physical presence by that preposition “in”. Both shadow and light act as objects in the poem. This observation of shadow has a later echo in a sentence from Bishop’s story, “In the Village” (first published in 1953), where she records a childhood impression from visiting the blacksmith around the corner: “In the blacksmith’s shop things hang up in the shadows and shadows hang up in the things”.¹⁰ The image drawn from photography adds to other elements of intense visual desire (voyeurism?) in the poem: from the moth’s attraction for light to the final address to us or to herself, “if you watch”. The Man-Moth is compelled to move towards what he fears, and we know it is death: the short life of the moth, the death that comes to moths that dive into flames, into the heat of any light,

or exhaust themselves in seeking the source of moonlight – the death that each of us is moving towards within our own fascination. But tied in with this there are images of birth: the circle for a doll, the small hole proving the sky useless for protection, and the tube through which he imagines being forced like a scroll of parchment. This doubled image of birth and death helps give the poem potency as a symbolic work. Victoria Harrison calls the Man-Moth “a culmination of recognizable opposites, man/nature (moth), man/woman (mother)”.¹¹ She observes that though his grammatical signifiers are male, the boundaries of his world are female in form: the doll, the feminine light of the moon, its presence as a hole, and the domestic pin. Harrison goes on to describe the Man-Moth as a creature of cross-species with a cross-gendered consciousness.¹²

When in the poem he returns unhurt he has become more man than moth as he commutes on the subway train with other passengers. It is as if the moth in him is one of his recurrent dreams. The poem takes up a slightly more elevated and lyrical mode as rhymes and near-rhymes accumulate rapidly: “dreams” with “dreams”, “tunnels” with “recurrent”, “ties” with “underlie” and “train” with “brain” in just two and a bit lines. This rhyming, together with an emerging iambic beat and the forced monosyllabic regularity of the false spondees of “he does not dare look out” all work to reinforce the sentence of inevitability and repetition imposed on the Man-Moth’s psyche. Rhymes and rhythms can bang along like a train does. The following lines though fall back to a more prosaic and even awkward form of writing (“the susceptibility to”). At this point there is a psychological conflation of sight and thirst. The Man-Moth dares not look out the window at the “draught of poison”. The light is a vision but also a liquid that would kill him. The next step in the logic here is an interesting one, since this desire for liquid poison light is regarded as a disease. He must keep his hands in his pockets, again as though the light is an object he might take up with his hand – as we might take up a drink.

In the final stanza we are invited to watch this man in order to see the moth within him, though it is not his moth-ness we will find but again a double symbol, a double sign. It is the most human of signs, a tear, but it is also creaturely for it is said to be like the bee’s sting. His tear, we are told, “slips”. This word is triply emphasised: by the comma before it, the full stop after it and by its place at the end of a line. It is so startling that it cannot help but echo “flits” in the fourth stanza, also singled out by punctuation and by placement. For all its presence as evidence of humanity in the Man-Moth the tear holds in itself a sign of his strangeness, his doubleness and through the image of the bee’s sting his

mortality. The poem ends by extending the image of the tear to its deep (unconscious and inhuman) purity which becomes also an image of thirst and an invitation to drink this antidote, perhaps, to the draught of shining poison the moth in him cannot resist.

I read the poem in this manner as a developing performance, each part taking on significance as a step further along a line of thought, feeling and imagination. One of the movements I detect here, is the intense building of images of the moth and then a retreat from it, but always, through the doubleness of the poem's imagery, a sense that the splitting of the self into human and inhuman could begin again at any moment. Each human element carries in it the potential for manifesting the inhuman, and equally each moment of moth-consciousness recalls our own human existence. New York's sheer buildings and its underground rail frame the extremes of this world of transformations, reversals, deaths. This is what the poem performs in me.

What can this teach me about writing?

There is much here for a poet to learn from and marvel at. The first test of the success of a poem is whether the reader goes back and re-reads it immediately, and the next test is whether the reader returns to it in the future. This seems to me one of those poems that can hold its reader's attention in new ways each time it is revisited. Some, though might find such poetry too "finical, awkward, /in a state of controlled panic" – as Bishop described the Sandpiper in her poem of that title.¹³ In fact, it might be that such poetry draws its critic in to too minute an examination of its grains at the expense of perceiving the wider beach and ocean of its world. Poems choose their critics (and readers) as much as critics choose their poems. Perhaps the most difficult task before this poem is to lift one's head from its details.

It is never a simple matter to take instruction from a poem, but as a writer I trust (instruct) myself to take not only the lessons of the specific and complex strategies analysed above, but to take that vague impression of risk, dream-like logic, visual association and intense, rhythmic scrutiny over to my own writing.

Who wrote this? Do I know her now?

Before going further with the poem I wish to reflect on Eliot's stricture that poems must be impersonal and poets must find a way of removing themselves from their poems. "The Man-Moth" is clearly an intense poem, worked not just carefully but obsessively and somehow making

deeply imaginative, difficult and significant connections throughout. Elizabeth Bishop lived a relatively reclusive and uneventful life. She did not write openly confessional or autobiographical poems and she did not explain her poems by reference to her life. Nevertheless, the main events of her life have become irresistible keys to understanding some of the subjects of her poems and the ways images work in them. Her father died when she was eight months old and her mother soon after had a breakdown. When she was five years old her mother was institutionalised as incurably insane. These events are recounted in her short story, "In the Village" (first published in 1953 in the *New Yorker*).¹⁴ The child Elizabeth was raised by her grandparents. She missed a great deal of schooling through severe eczema, asthma and bronchitis. She lived in Brazil from 1951 to 1967 with her lover, a woman who later committed suicide. On her return to the United States in 1974 she taught at Harvard where she took classes in Advanced Verse Writing for those she called "the usual nuts and freaks".¹⁵ She published only four volumes of poetry. For most of her adult life she struggled with the debilitating effects of alcoholism.

Given these traumatic and sometimes vivid details it can be irresistible to read the pattern of her life into this poem written when she was twenty-four years old, barely a year after her insane and estranged mother died. What do we make of her attraction to a double-creature? Is it that she felt herself to live a sexually subterranean life beneath her public one? And does the conflation of light with poison draughts and thirst refer us to her disease of drinking? Is the poem a young woman's attempt to bring New York and the whole juggernaut of modernism down to a manageable strangeness as she feels overwhelmed by that great and stunningly contemporary city? There are many avenues, cracks, or silver rails in this poem that might lead back to personal elements in Bishop's experiences and in her psyche, all of them fascinating for those who find a poet's life as interesting as the poetry. In Bishop's case, the facts of her life came to public notice when two biographies and a collection of her letters were published in 1994, fifteen years after her death, making it suddenly possible to read the drama of her life back into her poems which until then had seemed intensely *impersonal*, stitched together with a formidable sense of craft and wry humour antithetical to that looser, confessional poetry of her peers such as Robert Lowell, Randal Jarrell and John Berryman. I find this biographical reading a compelling exercise too, though one that has limited appeal and threatens such complicity or identification with what lies within a literary work that intellectual analysis is soon replaced with intuitions, suggestive connections and

guesses. Biographical (and by extension psychoanalytic) interpretations of poetry can help though to uncover the achievement of impersonality in a poet's work. We can always ask once such inquiries are undertaken, how crucial is the biography to the sense of a poem or the value of a poem. If in the end, as perhaps is the case with a figure like Lord Byron, it is the life and not the poetry that creates the greater interest, we know at least where we stand in relation to a body of work. It does help with this poem to know that it was written in response to a newspaper misprint and as a young woman's response to living in New York for the first time in the 1930s. Beyond this I suggest the life need not take precedence over the poem's poetry, for then we are in danger of treating the poetry more as a case study than a work of art (an act of art).

Is there evidence of reading, of influence?

Another avenue of inquiry would seek to uncover the literary and cultural influences at work in this poem. In Eliot's terms, laid out in his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", we would seek that "conformity" which has recreated tradition and established a new poem. In Bloom's terms we might seek the ways in which the poetry misreads deliberately its precursors, as he argued throughout *The Anxiety of Influence*. Taking a lead from Aristotle we can look for how imaginatively and significantly the poet has imitated not just life but poetry itself.

We know from biographies, memoirs, Bishop's published letters and from the evidence of her collected poems that the poet Marianne Moore (1887–1972) was a mentor and a significant influence on her poetry. Both published biogico-poetic studies detailing the characteristics of wild creatures. Both wrote poems called "The Fish". Bishop's, written twenty-five years after Moore's, adopts the same detailed attention to a natural creature with highly imaginative metaphorical connections at work throughout. Bishop, like Moore, was committed to a prosaically anti-poetic line that gives each poet's poetry its modern feel as it progresses through highly associative image-based leaps. Both poets revel in the embedding of rhyme, near rhyme and sound-echoes in their poems, even to the eccentric extent of splitting a single word in order to achieve a rhyme (for example, Moore's "ac/cident" in "the Fish" and Bishop's "a/n" in "Pink Dog"). Both Moore and Bishop were practised amateurs in the visual arts and adopted highly visual modes in their poetry. In "The Man-Moth" Bishop indents and shortens the first line of each stanza, recalling the manner of Moore's shifting left-hand margin in her poetry. The Man-Moth poem itself adopts the mode of a quasi-scientific report on this creature, seeming to parody

Moore's use of this form in her many poems based on natural history. It is, possibly, a poem that manages to pay respect to her mentor while distinctly disengaging from that influence. In Bloom's terms, she manages in this instance to misread and update her necessary influence. The poem was written in 1935, shortly before Marianne Moore and her mother enthusiastically took up the task of editing Bishop's work. It was published in 1936 in *Life and Letters Today*,¹⁶ and in 1946 it was included in her first collection, *North & South*. By 1940 the overseeing of her poems had soured over Moore and her mother drastically rewriting and restructuring Bishop's poem, "Roosters".¹⁷ Elizabeth Bishop's *Man-Moth* is perhaps an imaginary toad in a real garden (New York), in response to Moore's definition of poetry as real toads in imaginary gardens.

The mufflers other commuters *must* wear reminds me of the poster Gregor Samsa kept on his bedroom wall. It was an image of a woman in fur-lined muffs. As a beetle late in the story Gregor scales the wall of his room and covers the poster, protecting it. This reference to mufflers might not be a deliberate allusion to Kafka's "Metamorphosis", but there is no doubt that the poem's premise shares some of the same horror and fascination at animal-human transformation, or more abstractly a fascination with the status of the monstrous outsider.

To take up another possible influence evident in the poem at one of its arresting moments we could ask, why is the moonlight "battered"? Is it battered like silver worked by a silversmith? Is it battered by the sharpness of the New York buildings it strikes as it falls upon the earth? Or, as another poet suggested to me, battered as in a flour batter used to fill the cracks in buildings? Or is there an echo here of Donne's Holy Sonnet XIV beginning, "Batter my heart, three person'd God", for Donne's poem is itself a series of paradoxes and oxymorons taking up images of freedom and imprisonment, violence and love, faith and doubt, chastity and ravishment. Donne's poem swoons with longing just as Bishop's *Man-Moth* does. Donne's speaker is overthrown by his shining God, reason cannot serve him (just as it is misguided in the *Man-Moth*). The desire for imprisonment at the end of Donne's sonnet seems to be taken up in Bishop's "If you catch him", and in the *Man-Moth*'s own rush to enclose himself in a train carriage. It is a small wonder that a single word can link two poems written centuries apart; that a poet can signal an influence through such a single adoption. If Donne's sonnet is connected with Bishop's "*Man-Moth*" then it is through a process of transformational imitation, a wholly active and highly individual use of literature's opportunities for intertextuality.

From poem to poem

After reading Leonard Shengold's suggestion that "moth" has a psychological connection to "mother",¹⁸ and being reminded of my fourteen-year-old daughter's fear of moths, I produced a poem under the influence of thinking about, rereading, and writing about Bishop's poem. I had set myself the task of coaxing Bishop's poem to influence my writing. The anxiety in this process for a writer is the fear of being merely derivative or being overwhelmed, while the opportunity is to be taken out of the usual narrow rails of the self with its too-predictable repetitions. My poem focused on the presence of moths in my daughter's fears and the presence of birds in our family's back yard.

There is no predicting how an influence will be shaped by the choices poets make (or are drawn to). Influence, I am convinced, is far more fruitful for producing poetry than falling back on expressing personal feelings or recording personal experiences. Attention to other writing takes one's own writing out of itself, closer to an uncanny collaboration with readers and other writers, where it carries the astonished consciousness of an *I* partly borrowed from what has been read and partly on loan to an unknown reader. This is evolution at work – a series of variations on a pattern, unpredictable mutations on a template, innovation provoked by precedent, and under the energising stress of working in unfamiliar ways a method for writing beyond the merely personal.

The Dream of Moths

The black bird's orange beak is high.
Its fat black morning coat startles us.
My daughter frightened by moths each night
asks why the bird advances on us.
Its head twists up to greet me eye to eye.

It dropped into the yard with daylight
as moths were lifting from her dream
as if it could tell us now what all this means.
The cat will turn its back and creep inside.
The bird will knock its food bowl over
then snap each biscuit like an insect.
The black bird's orange beak is wide.

At night the moths return in silence,
soft as mothers, strange as blindness,

blankets of them, coloured only brown
or black or grey. We wriggle down
into the cave of night inside us
until falling light or sudden bird call
brings us crawling back to kitchen,
twisted lemon tree and cat bowl on the bricks
where the black bird shows its dreamless eye to us.
The black bird's orange beak is quick.

I dress in helmet, jacket, gloves and scarf
to ride my bike into the morning frost.
I am soft and round and dark as moths.
I fear the day and every day will be too short.
I shrug, *The black bird comes to us
because we bring it daylight with this bowl.*
The black bird's orange beak opens, shuts.

Note: This essay was assisted and inspired by a workshop conducted at the Victorian Writers Centre in October and November 2003. About a dozen poets met weekly for a month and expressly took up a number of poems as influences. Each week we would take one poem, which we read then re-read each day, analysed, wrote about, sometimes learned by heart, all the while writing our own poetry under the influence, in imitation of, in resistance to, in reply to, despite, or in gratitude to that week's poem. This exercise required us not only to re-examine our own habitual poetics as we composed new poems, but it made us newly aware of how we were reading poetry. My thanks to those poets who participated in the workshops.

Notes

- 1 John Barth, "Introduction", *Not-Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme*. Donald Barthelme, ed. Kim Herzinger (New York: Random House, 1997).
- 2 Georges Poulet, "Phenomenology of Reading", *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, eds V. B. Leitch et al. (1969, New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 2001): 1323, 1325.
- 3 Poulet, 1327.

- 4 J. Hillis Miller, *Theory Now and Then* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991): 50.
- 5 Helen Vendler, *The Breaking of Style* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995): 6.
- 6 Kenneth Burke, "Symbolic Action in a Poem by Keats", *Close Reading: The Reader*, eds Frank Lentricchia and Andrew DuBois (1969, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 72–87.
- 7 J. L. Austin, "Performative Utterances", *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, eds V. B. Leitch et al. (1969, New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 2001): 1432.
- 8 Elizabeth Bishop, "The Man-Moth", *The Complete Poems 1927–1979* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1994): 14–15.
- 9 Quoted in Victoria Harrison, *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 58.
- 10 Elizabeth Bishop, *The Collected Prose* (London: Chatto & Windus): 253.
- 11 Harrison, 58–9.
- 12 Harrison, 59.
- 13 Bishop, *The Complete Poems 1927–1979*, 131.
- 14 Elizabeth Bishop, "In the Village": see acknowledgements, *Collected Prose*.
- 15 Ian Hamilton, *Against Oblivion: Some Lives of the Twentieth-Century Poets* (London: Viking, 2002): 185.
- 16 Harrison, 220.
- 17 David Kalstone, *Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989): 79–85, 93–5, 265–9; James Fenton, *The Strength of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 127–44.
- 18 Leonard Shengold, *Soul Murder Revisited: Thoughts about Therapy, Hate, Love and Memory* (London: Yale University Press, 1999): 207.

ROLAND LEACH

WILDERNESS

1

The word *panic*
once meant to feel the fear
of wilderness

imagining the god, Pan,
with his untamed tastes
appearing from the smiling

dark of forest
before you could
scream.

So all the fairytales
where children wander
into forests:
a place of witches & wolves –
creatures who don't obey

2

straight lines or need light
to know who they are.

So the trees were cut
and canopies collapsed
allowing light to dissolve the dark
to create settlements
which is another word

*to feel at ease, to stay in one place,
not to venture out*

to know that things
will not/can not
appear suddenly at your door

with the wet smell
of undergrowth in its pores

3
or the long scrape
of claw at the wooden door.

And so it was from the beginning –
or at least the time
when we thought we should be in control –
that the wilderness
was a sentence
a punishment for transgressors

and the word “wilderness”
from *will* – to be *wilful, uncontrolled* –

was a place where they were sent
beyond the borders:
the exile of sinners
wild men who found frontiers

though it was only those
who got lost in the forest
who learnt who they were
learnt that the wilderness
was not separate.

HIS LAST WORDS

“Put that bloody cigarette out”
after Saki (Hector Hugh Munro) 1870–1916

After an ultimate respite
in a shallow shelled crater –
the German sniper’s rifle shot
that put a bullet through his head
left a last neat exclamation mark
upon his forehead
with only the faintest wisp of blood.
Having practised
this kind of exactness in his prose
he would have applauded its execution
along with its economy.
But not his dispatch –
unlike his stories’ best resolutions
this was never going to be for him the high point.
A last simple black comedy of blunder
sunk in the horror of the Western Front.
At the end of all of his collected plots
a kind of final practical joke gone awfully wrong
but with what he might finish each tale –
here with the most improbable outcome.
After four decades of demented maiden-aunts,
the house parties and high teas,
he had stepped through the French windows
in the closing hour
of an almost perfect summer afternoon;

at the end of an age
into a wholly different realm
with a sense of duty *in extremis*
and something after any of his characters who
might have said that he had finally got
what was coming to him.

POETRY COLLECTION

These poems do not belong to me
although I wrote them
all of one interminable winter
when I was desolate for the ocean
and had to be content with the wind
each night scratching in high tension

wires worrying at my sleep.
And in the morning mimicking the scrape
of my pen pushing always at the verb
to do something with a terrible landscape
of castor-oil plants and wild olive:
I did not know then in that bleak earth

that I was mining much.
I bought it back on Tuesday from
a book trolley in the market for fifty cents
and it was warmly buffed with use.
Firstly *Pier Lane Library* on the flyleaf
and then a name in copperplate ~~Filly~~

and another in pencil *O. Beattie*
bearing it to a trinity of successive shelves.
The title poem wears the imprimatur
of red circles of burgundy probably raised
and put down at a dinner party
slipped as a coaster between all of their

conversations.

Page 45 has a turned down corner
that bookmarks the worst of hours
and found perchance an echo in another.
The inside cover has a copied line
from *Berryman* – “*up for good at five*”

as I hold it gently as a frail thing
that has come back to my side
in relative shape after slipping for years
between extremes
turning up from a previous life
something after a stranger.

THE NEED TO BELONG: NON-FICTION PUBLISHING IN AUSTRALIA, 2003–2004

The creation of place, imaginatively and materially, where one feels a degree of comfort (if not relaxation) is a dynamic work-in-progress if this year's selection of Australian non-fiction publishing is anything to go on. Aboriginal Australians, European Australians, Asian Australians, even "Australian" Australians are all having their say about what constitutes an Australian identity, and the nature of the spaces – rural, urban and suburban – we inhabit. Women and men, old and not-so-old (but rarely young), the writers engage with the present, occasionally anticipate the future, but overwhelmingly probe the past. There are books on philosophy, economics, literature, law, language, and science. Lives are looked at up-close in memoirs and biographies, seen at a distance in histories, contextualised politically and ideologically in sociologies, and represented narratively in an abundance of "true stories".

Issues and interests are as dispersed as the genres in which the works are written. Nevertheless, central to a number of writers, and at the margins of others, is a view of the past, which is often ambivalent and at times contentious. Noel Henriksen, in his book on Christopher Koch, *Island and Otherland*, points to two dimensions of a past as it functions in contemporary Australia. He quotes James McAuley's poem "Warning", which includes the lines:

Beware the past
Within it lie
Dark haunted pools
That lure the eye
To drown in grief or madness.

The past McAuley has in mind is one where people grope “For comfort there”. It is the nostalgic past of an ideal world, one which is lost – if it ever existed. Desire for this world is accompanied by a disengagement with, or anger towards, the present; in its extreme forms it insists that it is a past that can be recuperated. Linked to this desire is an overarching view of the “Other”. The “Otherland” for Koch is multifaceted: it is constituted by dreams, the world of the imagination of the writer, mainland Australia for Tasmanian islanders, the exotic of Asia, the Celtic land of faery. It is also the past. Koch wrote, “The past is like a trunk in the attic here [Hobart], very close at hand; ancestors are not far away”. The challenge for Koch, and many of the writers represented in this survey, is to engage with the past, in all its manifestations, in ways that are productive for the present, rather than perform a perverse form of denial.

Life stories, whether in the form of letters, diaries, biographies or autobiographies, are by definition to do with what has gone before. The best of these works, such as Volume 2 of *The Diaries of Donald Friend*, edited by Paul Hetherington, enable a degree of illumination of our own lives. Embattled sexually (“To be celibate is to suffer torture, and become warped. To be promiscuous ends in debasement”) and artistically (“this extrovertish shallowness ... evident in my work”), the Donald Friend who emerges from these pages is a figure whose anxieties and contradictions point to a common human fragility, which is not limited by time, place or gender. *The Diaries* cover the period from June 1944 until March 1949, when Friend was thirty-four years old. There are first-hand accounts of events that impinged on the literary and artistic life of the nation: the Ern Malley affair (Friend considered Max Harris a “very bogus Melbourne intellectual”) and the controversy surrounding the Archibald Prize won by Dobell for his painting of Joshua Smith. Was it art or caricature? Friend’s uncertainties about himself as an artist – in a period when abstraction was beginning to dominate – were compounded by the comparisons he made between his own work and that of his close friend Tas (Russel) Drysdale. Sex and art collude and collide in his infatuation with the young Colin Brown. Friend wrote: “It seems, unhappily, I can only coincide with Colin on the canvas in which I express him. In flesh, never ... Colin is the whole desire of my life. I hate, fear and love him”. Rather despairingly, he wrote in 1946: “Love is tabu if it is queer”. Hetherington comments: “The diaries reveal a man who retained his love for the sensual and beautiful, but who craved deeper satisfactions – through intimate relationships and his art. By his mid thirties ... he was puzzled about how – and even whether – such satisfaction would be possible, except perhaps fleetingly”.

The Diaries of Miles Franklin, astutely edited by Paul Brunton, also provide a picture of a deep divide between a public and private persona. As Brunton notes, "The companionable, intelligent, witty person whom men and women sought out was in private deeply unsettled". Like Friend, Franklin wrote her diaries with an eye to publication. While she was frequently beset with a sense of futility and lack of accomplishment in her life, she appears confident that her diaries were worthy of publication – and not infrequently warned her friends that they might appear in them. The diaries cover the period from Franklin's return to Australia in 1932 at the age of fifty-three (she had been overseas for much of the time since 1906) until her death in 1954. Back in Australia, Franklin became very involved with local writers, strongly promoting the view that Australian writing must be distinctive. In a 1945 letter to Prime Minister Chifley, she wrote: "Without a literature of our own, we are dumb. In the disturbed world of today, more than ever we need that interpretation of ourselves". Sixty years later, those words are still being echoed in the face of constant challenges to Australian content in the media, especially television. The diaries tell us of a troubled relationship with her ailing mother, record her acerbic comments on those she deemed literary pretenders, praise Eleanor Dark's modernist novel *Prelude to Christopher*, and reiterate her sense of loneliness and doubts about her own ability. In 1950 she wrote, "I've struggled so long for nothing – long enough to prove over and over again that I have no talent for writing ... There's not a soul alive to whom I'm of any consequence". Another writer who spent most of her life outside Australia was Henry Handel Richardson. From the age of eighteen (in 1888) she lived in Germany and England, apart from a brief return to Australia in 1912 to gather material for *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. Michael Ackland's excellent *Henry Handel Richardson: A Life* provides a detailed and intriguing account of a writer who stated, "It has never been my way to say much about my private life. Rightly or wrongly, I believed this only concerned myself". In spite of this obstacle, Ackland examines closely Richardson's interests in music, her involvement with the suffragettes, her relationships with women (especially Olga Roncoroni), her attraction to spiritualism – and above all the production of her fiction.

Like Christopher Koch, Colin Thiele's sense of identity is linked to his German ancestors. Born in 1920, twelve years before Koch, he is the subject of Stephany Evans Steggall's lovingly detailed biography, *Can I Call You Colin?* German settlers, and their life in the Barossa Valley, formed the basis of Thiele's writing about characters who, in his words, had to "tear their roots from the homely soil of their ancestors, and to transplant

themselves into an unknown earth so foreign and so far away that it defied imagination ...". In a further parallel to Koch, Thiele, early in his writing career, was linked to the Jindyworobaks, and edited the 1952 anthology. Rex Ingamells was a significant influence on his work, along with Flexmore Hudson, Max Harris and Geoffrey Dutton. He went on to become one of Australia's best known writers for younger readers, publishing over sixty titles, including *Storm Boy* and *Sun on the Stubble*.

Peter Skrzynecki's *The Sparrow Garden* and Niqi Thomas' *Minerva's Owl: Excerpts from Exile* both engage with more immediate experiences of displacement. Thomas describes a return to Prague with her father after the Velvet Revolution of 1989. She unearths the history of her grandfather's resistance against a totalitarian regime – and begins to establish her identity as a European Australian, with stories to tell. Simply and powerfully written, Skrzynecki's memoir is a paean to his parents, both recently dead, and his European roots. Emotional, without being sentimental, it speaks of the simple patterns of lives in suburban Sydney, of people for whom, "Emigration had changed their lives externally, yet essentially they remained the same". As Displaced Persons, their existence is accompanied by a sense of loss and sorrow, the untranslatable *zal*. And yet these "reffos" and "bloody Balts" live lives of courage and humour which provide the next generation with an enabling sense of self. Robert Adamson, born in 1943, two years before Skrzynecki, tells a very different story in his *Inside: An Autobiography*, although both men were brought up in a working-class environment, and creativity became central to their lives. Adamson beguiles the reader with his unadorned statement of an early life of almost casual crime – stealing a rare bird from the zoo, a Gestetner from school, running away with a girl whom he later discovers is only fifteen – and finally ending up incarcerated in Long Bay gaol where, amongst other humiliations, he is raped. Interspersed with this is an account of a diligent and skilled pastry cook working very long hours. At no point does Adamson seem bitter or twisted by his traumatic experiences, and when he finally meets poetry in the form of the Bible, Hopkins and Rimbaud, it as if this were always his destination. The story of how the dyslexic becomes the poet is told with elegance and simplicity. Simply told, too, but lacking the elegance and insight, is Bud Tingwell's autobiography, *Bud: A Life*. It is as much an account of the development of Australian film and television from the 1970s onwards as it is a life story – one remarkably free of any deep sense of conflict.

Aboriginal life-stories are again strongly represented; significantly it is the women who are recording their stories and, more generally, Aboriginal

history. Ruth Hegarty's *Bittersweet Journey*, a sequel to the award-winning *Is That You Ruthie?*, tells of a life of courage and determination against what are by now familiar odds: an oppressive – if well-intentioned – white regime of the 1940s and 50s, poor housing, poverty, drunkenness, violence, and numerous children. Her story, told with grace and clarity, is an inspirational one. The ambition driving Ruth Hegarty is to establish control over her life. As a young mother, she did not win a battle about where to build a hut in the bush, but she did go on to become a decisive and dominant figure in Aboriginal community organisations in Brisbane, including as chairperson of the Black Community Housing Service. Capturing very different life experiences is *Two Sisters: Ngarta and Jukuna*, a work produced by Ngarta Jinny Bent and Jukuna Mona Chuguna in collaboration with Pat Lowe and Eirlys Richards. Ngarta and Jukuna were members of Aboriginal groups who moved out of the Great Sandy Desert in the 1960s. Theirs is an extraordinary story. As the Introduction notes, they were to learn that they were “not only Walmajarri, but also Australians”. Both went on to become successful artists. Jukuna's story is translated from the Walmajarri; however the book also includes the original text. Another story of a divided and transformed life is Hilda Jarman Muir's *Very Big Journey*, unpretentiously subtitled “My Life as I remember it”. She was one of the “Stolen Generation” and summarises her time in the Kahlin Home for “half-caste” children in the following words: “I'd been taken from the bush, running around eating bush tucker and locked up for six years in a government institution and then sent out to work”. The children were educated to grade four level and then forced out into a world that they were in no way prepared for. The system itself ensured that these children would, as a consequence, have a problem fitting into either culture; the wonder is that so many did. As Muir states: “They gave us half an education and treated us as if we were half human, not white, not black: half an education for half-castes”.

Stephen Kinnane is also concerned with the impact on individuals and families – for many generations – of the forced removal of Aboriginal children. *Shadow Lines* is a compelling account of a search for belonging, as the author traces the histories of his Aboriginal grandmother and English grandfather. Kinnane describes the process by which he gradually uncovers the stories of Gypsy/Jessie, removed from her family in the north-west in 1905 and sent south to the Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission; and of Edward Smith from London. Kinnane's narrative is a personal one, well-informed by research and an awareness of the wider social, political and historical contexts. The “Empire” that reduced the world to “wet or

dry, black or white” collapses into the complex spaces and patterns of “shadow lines”. In his article “Land rights and progressive wrongs” in one of the themed editions of the classy *Griffith Review* (“Dreams of Land”) Noel Pearson writes of the hard issues confronting contemporary Aboriginal groups and individuals: passive welfare, addiction and violence. The importance of a sense of belonging is clear. Pearson says: “Let me once again state that our miserable condition is a product of our dispossession”. A wider view on an issue raised in a number of these works is evident in Dawn Bessarab’s “A Socio-Political Perspective Of Sexual Violence and its Impact on Aboriginal Women’s Health”, in *Future Imaginings: Sexualities and Gender in the New Millennium* edited by Delys Bird, Wendy Were and Terri-Ann White. This is a useful collection of essays, variously conceived, but not overburdened with dense theorising.

Individual stories of resistance and the development of a new sense of identity are placed in a larger historical context by Bain Attwood’s *Rights for Aborigines*, which tracks the changes in Aboriginal relations with white Australia from the mid-nineteenth-century until the 1970s. The narrative is divided into five deceptively simple chapters: Blacks, Whites, Citizenship, Land, Power. It is the last two issues that provide the focus throughout the book. Attwood analyses the politics and key players – both black and white – surrounding particular pleas and contestations over land and citizenship, predominantly in south-eastern and northern Australia. The imbalance of power in regard to land rights is encapsulated in the direct language of Ted Egan’s ballad, “The Gurindji Blues”, which in the final verse poses the question of what would be a proper price at which the “poor bugger blackfellers” might buy back Aboriginal land – what they were originally paid for it, flour, sugar and tea? Attwood concludes his valuable study with the observation that the moral legitimacy of the nation depends on acknowledging the disastrous legacy of the “past-in-the-present”.

Reflecting critically on Aboriginal writing is Anita M. Heiss’s *Dhuuluu-Yala: To Talk Straight*. The study begins by raising the difficult question of authenticity, and who has the right to speak about Aboriginal issues and experience. The roles and identities of Colin Johnson/Mudrooroo and Roberta Sykes are the cases in point for this analysis. Is Aboriginal identity a matter of “blood” or experience? Heiss concludes that Johnson, as she chooses to call him, must engage first of all with himself: “... Johnson must learn to live the life of who he really is: genetically (non-Aboriginal), spiritually (a Buddhist) and practically (an academic in a white educational system)”. The discussion that follows suggests that none of

these categories is straightforward. Who Johnson “really” is, and what constitutes Aboriginal writing, is part of a complex and ongoing debate. The book also addresses Intellectual Property Rights and contains valuable chapters on Canadian (“First Nations”) and Maori literature. The list of references is impressive. “Mudrooroo and the Curse of Authenticity” is the title of Adam Shoemaker’s essay in *Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo*, edited by Annalisa Oboe. This collection contains a wide range of essays engaged with contemporary theoretical practice. Oboe’s introduction points out that the contributing authors are not interested in whether Aboriginal “blood” provides legitimacy for Johnson to speak for and about Aboriginal people. She argues that essentialist concepts of identity are not helpful. Oboe attributes Mudrooroo’s constant change, his abilities as a “first-class shape-shifter” to a capacity to avoid easy categorisation by readers and critics, noting that “Aboriginality has always been, discursively speaking, in several places at once”.

One attempt to “fix” Aboriginal identity and history was Keith Windschuttle’s *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, in which he claimed that the number of Aboriginal deaths in Tasmania had been vastly overstated. He also questioned the motives, intelligence, belief systems, and attachments to land of Aboriginal groups. His particular targets were Henry Reynolds, Lloyd Robson and Lyndall Ryan. *Whitewash*, edited by Robert Manne, provides detailed counter arguments to Windschuttle by eighteen contributors – who, in turn, question *his* facts, figures, methodology and motives. Manne claims that *Fabrication* “contributes to Australian history what Helen Demidenko’s *The Hand That Signed the Paper* contributed to Australian fiction – counterfeit coin”. He adds that what was so dispiriting about both episodes is the lack of critical judgement exemplified by the intelligentsia; there was a ready acceptance of falsity. The battle between Windschuttle and others is one of a number of conflicts examined in Stuart Macintyre’s *The History Wars*. He acknowledges that Windschuttle does reveal some sloppy referencing on the part of his opponents (particularly Ryan), but concludes that overall *Fabrication* “is a shocking book, shocking in its allegation of fabrication and also in its refusal of the interpretive framework that earlier historians employed”. Macintyre analyses how the past is politically mobilised in the present to support concepts of “us” – Keating’s Big Picture on the one hand, Howard’s relaxed and comfortable, ordinary Australians on the other. Both versions involve inclusions and exclusions; this is the contested territory of figures like Manning Clark and Geoffrey Blainey. Macintyre

suggests that it is all too convenient to dismiss the implications of a troubling and troublesome past with the epithets “the black armband view of history”, the “guilt industry”, or “endless and agonised navel-gazing”, among others.

A white perspective on rural identity is provided by Jo Jackson King’s *The Station at Austin Downs: One family’s adventure on the land*. As with the Aboriginal life-stories, there is much detailing here of everyday events, especially of family interactions. Here too, there is a close identification with a rural landscape and an examination of how change is dealt with – as the extended family move from the familiar world of a farm in the south-west of Western Australia to the station country of Austin Downs. Here they become pioneers in the growing of fruit for the Perth market. King reflects on the challenges facing a young family in an isolated environment, and comments on the sense of belonging and identity that Aboriginal workers possess in this arid landscape: “Their fathers worked here and, I think, their grandfathers before that. I wondered if the connection they felt to this land was anything like the one I felt to the farm: out of my hands, but still part of me”. King’s is a confident, if sympathetic voice. Unlike their Aboriginal counterparts, the white owners, or leaseholders, can to a significant extent choose their moment of leaving or staying in their chosen location. Adventures on the sea, rather than the land, are the focus of John Little’s *Down to the Sea*, “The true saga of an Australian fishing dynasty”. For five generations the Warrens have been fishing out of Eden on the south coast of New South Wales. Early in the century Henry Lawson and E. J. Brady celebrated the seafaring adventures of patriarch Ike Warren, who started the fish-trading business at Mallacoota on Victoria’s Gippsland coast.

The narrative of the outback is still a potent one for a nation of city dwellers. Kieran Kelly, a Sydney-based investment banker, is drawn to the challenge of crossing the Tanami desert, located in the Northern Territory and Western Australia – a landscape that defeated the explorers John McDouall Stuart and Augustus Gregory. *Tanami* provides an account of Kelly’s journey by camel, accompanied by the knowledgeable Andrew Harper. Another “story” set away from the metropolis is Stephanie Bennett’s *The Gatton Murders: A true story of lust, vengeance and vile retribution*. The writing is not as sensational as the title; nevertheless revenge, lust, a complex network of relationships in a country town, and Irish-Catholic values are all part of the mix. Three members of the Murphy family – Michael, Ellen and Nora – were sexually abused and murdered on Boxing Day, 1898. Bennett uses an array of reports, documents and files in her

“whodunit?” investigation of the case, which was never solved. One hundred years later, there are contemporary resonances: although there is no suggestion of police corruption in Bennett’s account, bungling and incompetence are clearly evident. A childhood spent in rural NSW may be the motivation behind Bill “Swampy” Marsh’s desire to put together his collection *Great Australian Droving Stories*. It is a series of anecdotes and tall stories about droving around Australia from the 1920s to the 1960s – many of them of more interest to their originators than to a contemporary audience.

More varied and entertaining is Paul B. Kidd’s *Great Australian Fishing Stories*. And staying with the obsession with nation-defining titles is Jim Haynes’ *Great Australian Drinking Stories*. It is a serious collection about intemperate practices, if such an oxymoron is possible. Haynes provides a brief historical introduction on drinking in Australia, noting the traditional link between the “Australian character” and alcohol. He queries whether its centrality in much of Australian life is to do with the inheritance of a “drinking culture” from Irish and Cockney migrants, or whether circumstances such as rum being the accepted currency in NSW until 1814, were of greater influence. The book is divided into four sections: “The Roaring Days”, “The Dark Ages”, “The Enlightenment”, and “The Reformation”, with notable alcoholics like Henry Lawson and Lenny Lower well represented. In his “Letter to the *Bulletin* re Drinking” Lawson puts the case for drinking in minimalist terms: “A friend says that we don’t drink to feel happier, but to feel less miserable”. Other writers are more celebratory, such as Anon. in this traditional toast:

There are many good reasons for drinking—
And one has just entered my head:
If a man doesn’t drink when he’s living
How the hell can he drink when he’s dead!

These may well have been the sentiments of the subjects of Bruce Simpson and Ian Tinney’s sepulchral collection, *Where the Dead Men Lie: Tales of graves, pioneers and old bush pubs*. The title is taken from Barcroft Boake’s eponymous dirge, which announces that the final, troubled resting place is “Out on the wastes of the Never Never”. There is in fact little in the way of tales in this book; it is more a survey of pioneer graves accompanied by photographs.

One reason for the predominance of “bush myths” in the Australian search for an identity that seems a more-or-less comfortable fit, can be

seen in the histories of our cities – and none more clearly so than Perth. Jenny Gregory's handsomely produced and illustrated *City of Light: A History of Perth since the 1950s* provides an account of how planners, architects, councillors and politicians – and occasionally the public – have fought over the contested space of “the city”. Regardless of local governance, the city is not exempt from larger order movements – technological, modernist, postmodernist – that impact on the built environment. The title, appropriate in so many ways, fortunate and unfortunate, comes from John Glenn's observation from space in 1962, after Perth left on its lights for the passing spacecraft, *Friendship VII*. The *Daily News* called it “a West Australian handshake to America”. Arguably, Perth has been shaking hands ever since, so that now there is not much to distinguish it from numerous other cities of similar size across America or the world. There is little sense of its origins; it is a city without a past, without memory. It demands that its citizens live in the moment. It is, however, adjacent to Kings Park and the Swan River, both in surprisingly good condition. And there is Fremantle. An earlier view of the colony and the city is contained in Pamela Statham-Drew's engaging *James Stirling: Admiral and Founding Governor of Western Australia*. Environmentalists have made much of the fact that the very first act symbolising the birth of the city was the felling of a tree, recorded in George Pitt Morison's painting “The Foundation of Perth”. From the beginning, too, there were questions being raised about allegiance and identity. William Leake complained of Stirling's “imprudence” in naming the city Perth. Had the name been chosen, he asked, because “Sir George Murray was born at this insignificant place, known only to reading men or Geographers as an obscure place in Scotland?”

White Australia's historical attitudes to Aborigines are the starting point for J. V. D'Cruz's and William Steele's polemical and provocative revised edition of *Australia's ambivalence towards Asia*. Central to their argument is the claim noted by Ashis Nandy in his Foreword that “Australia's ambivalence towards itself underwrites its ambivalence towards its own indigenous people and Asians”. The original ambivalence derives from an uncertainty about its status as a colonised and colonising country, combined with a conflicted sense of self, because it is caught in the “geographical trap” called Asia. The authors cross disciplinary boundaries in drawing on the comments of journalists, writers, philosophers, academics and politicians to establish that cultural and historical blindness is responsible for a deep-seated racism manifest in Australia's structural, discursive and political frameworks. The

conventional focus for the interrogation of race and power relations between Australia and Asia is reversed in Alison Bronowski's *About Face: Asian Accounts of Australia* – a book dismissed by D'Cruz and Steele because they argue that it demonstrates a fear of any non-Anglo criticism of Australia's relationship with its near neighbours. Bronowski looks at the perceptions of Australia from the point of view of ten Asian countries: China, Japan, Korea, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines and concludes that their views are, typically, dominated by unflattering stereotypes. The mismatch between Australia's self-image and how it is perceived from the outside is partly due to a dismissive arrogance on the part of Australia, signalled by its lack of support for Radio Australia and the sale of the Cox Peninsula transmitter to a fundamentalist Christian organization for broadcast into Indonesia. Like D'Cruz and Steele (who provide an overwrought analysis of racism in Blanche D'Alpuget's *Turtle Beach*), Bronowski also turns to fiction and its writers to elaborate her argument. Here she finds a largely negative representation of Australian culture; it has a second-rate status behind Britain, Canada, and the United States. But there is also frequent criticism of the country of origin, especially by second-generation “hybrid” characters who are trying to establish an identity by straddling two worlds. Bronowski identifies “Occidentalism” as a useful strategy whereby Orientalism is reversed and helps to provide cultural scapegoats, very often for political ends. The drift of Bronowski's argument is that racism and ignorance is evident on both “sides”; perhaps this is a useful reminder for some, but it is not a productive position in which to remain.

Jan Ryan's sociological study *Chinese Women and the Global Village* demonstrates just how difficult and dangerous it is to generalise about any racial or national group. Fifty women were interviewed for this wide-ranging commentary, which among other matters, looks at family structures, attitudes to work and marriage, education, and, of course, notions of identity. Age, education, country of origin (China, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Australia) are all important factors in how these women have accommodated the demands of a white-Anglo world. The interviews also reveal that no one can be reduced to a deterministic set of socio-political-cultural factors – although there is, according to Ryan, consensus over one issue: an overwhelming preference for friendships with other Chinese because here they found “common values, similar humour and familiar lifestyles”. Not surprisingly, all subjects found themselves in varying degrees caught between two worlds. One of the more optimistic, a Malaysian Chinese, “Anna”, stated: “I have left the old world and have

come to a brave new world where I can feel free to be myself, say what I think without doing damage to the family or anything like that. I can be as strong willed as I want, say what I like ... on every issue from politics to sex and the arts". A personal and engaging account of Australia-Asia connections is John Mateer's *Semar's Cave: An Indonesian Journal*. It is a work which, as the blurb states, is "Neither travel writing nor reportage, neither exotica nor history". Mateer, born in South Africa chooses, with a poet's sensibilities, moments that illuminate the complexities and ambiguities of insider-outsider relationships.

In the feeding frenzy of "reality television" the demand for "true stories" seems to have outstripped the desire for fiction in Australian publishing. Gail Bell's remarkable *Shot: A Personal Response to Guns and Trauma* describes the moment of a bullet entering the body, her own and others, and its lasting impact, physical and emotional. The experience of shooting, and being shot, is examined through a number of stories, which include those of RSPCA officers, Vietnam veterans and murder victims. Of a very different order, but also concerned with living or dying, is Robin Haines' *Life and Death in the Age of Sail: The passage to Australia*. Through references to diaries, letters, journals, and public records she examines the vicissitudes of travelling to Australia by ship from the 1820s onwards. Her emphasis is on working-class emigrants, most of whom, she observes, greeted the new world with a sense of optimism and determination. Kirsten McKenzie explores the lives of some of these settlers from the 1830s to the 1850s in Sydney and Cape Town in *Scandal in the Colonies*. Oscar Wilde observed that "scandal is gossip made tedious by morality"; McKenzie establishes that the morality governing what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour was as fluid as the new identities being carved out in the colonies. Policies of inclusion and exclusion establish the trajectory of the development of these societies. For many, a capacity for masquerade is a necessity as colonists strive to re-invent themselves according to dominant British cultural models. Scandalous indeed was the life of Mary Broad, convicted highway robber and mother, who escaped from Botany Bay to the Dutch East Indies in 1791. Broad's escapade is the subject of Carolly Erickson's novelistic *The Girl from Botany Bay: The True Story of the Convict Mary Broad and Her Extraordinary Escape*.

In considering the broadly political spectrum of non-fiction publishing in the last twelve months, readers may well feel a need to be armed with a copy of James Franklin's *Corrupting the Youth: A History of Philosophy in Australia*, which promises to address such questions as, "Why are the established truths of my tribe better than the primitive superstitions of

your tribe?" Admirably lucid, it provides an account of the various debates and strands – and the key players – in the teaching and practice of philosophy in this country from the 1920s to the present. It is at its best in looking at the past; Franklin is confounded by contemporary theory, although justified in questioning the opaque language of some of its practitioners. More helpful references for providing guidance on contentious issues are Bryan Horrigan's *Adventures in Law and Justice: Exploring Big Legal Questions in Everyday Life* and Hugh Mackay's *Right and Wrong: How to decide for yourself*. The latter includes chapters on "Does the end ever justify the means?" and "Should we ever go to war?" Both questions are pertinent to *Dark Victory* written by David Marr and Marian Wilkinson. Under the direction of John Howard, Australia violated international conventions on sea rescue in an attempt to prevent 438 asylum seekers from reaching Christmas Island on board the *Tampa*. The book does one thing Howard and others were desperate to prevent: those on board seeking refuge become personalised – people with names, histories, desires. *Dark Victory* is a powerful and depressing account of cynical manipulation and dishonesty in a desperate, and ultimately successful, bid for re-election by the Coalition government. It was a winner in the 2003 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards. Another writer to put a "human face" to the disowned and disenfranchised is Winton Higgins in *Journey into Darkness*. He employs his own travel diary, based on experiences in Poland and Israel, to address concerns about Australia's lapse into moral indifference over Aboriginal reconciliation, asylum seekers, and treaties guaranteeing a wide range of human rights. He makes a case for examining Germany's "journey into darkness" – the Holocaust – as a means of illuminating what is now happening in Australia. In both instances the authorities had to ensure there was a "*reliable public indifference* towards their abuses". Higgins considers what characterises a national identity that is called upon, or constructed, to garner this support.

Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation edited by Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker and Jan Gothard gathers together papers from a symposium on the centenary of the *Immigration Restriction Act* (1901). The editors note that, "Any examination of the logic and history of White Australia is inevitably drawn to the question of whether Australia sees itself as a part of the world or apart from the world "in one form or another is addressed by all the contributors – with the *Tampa* episode regarded by many as a pivotal issue in establishing and reflecting contemporary attitudes. Ien Ang in her chapter "From White Australia to Fortress Australia" analyses the ways in which *racial* anxiety – by no means limited

to Australians – is here inflected by *spatial* anxiety: “at the heart of modern Australia’s sense of self lies a fundamental tension between its white, European identity and its Asian, non-European location”. The logic of an antagonistic relationship between history and geography is played out in border protection policies (asylum seekers must *not* set foot on the Australian mainland) and anxieties about competition for urban space and for places in schools and universities. At base there is a fear of diversity, a fear that it will fragment an imaginary “national unity”.

Hugh Mackay quotes Lyndon B. Johnson’s view: in “modern warfare there are no victors; there are only survivors”. Alison Bronowski in *Howards’s War* concludes, “Whoever won or lost, or in the long run wins or loses, we are all damaged – invaders and invaded alike”. In this polemical text Howard and his government are again in the firing line with what, by now, are well-rehearsed criticisms of Australia’s involvement in Iraq. Bronowski, like Mackay, raises the question of whether the end justifies the means. Neither writer seems too sure. Mackay at one point concludes it is best to assume the end *never* justifies the means, but then proceeds immediately to qualify this position. He notes the slippery political manoeuvrings over this issue: “When no weapons of mass destruction turned up, a different ‘end’ had to be found to justify the invasion – hence the talk of ‘liberation’”. The theme of a just war is taken up by a number of contributors to Raymond Gaita’s thoughtful collection, *Why the War was Wrong*. In his introduction he notes that, “All of us are glad that Saddam’s criminal government has fallen ... None of us believes that the war was a just means [to that end]”. The essays are in fact far more circumspect than the title would suggest. Robert Manne expresses the dilemma of many when he states that the war “originated in ideological fantasy and imperial hubris [and] was justified on the basis of an astonishing falsehood”. And yet, without it, “the disgusting regime of Saddam Hussein would still be in power in Iraq”. He concludes, “From this simple unpleasant truth there is, I am afraid, no escape”. Mark McKenna, in his chapter “Howard’s Warriors” – which closes the book – outlines the ways in which Howard has fully exploited every opportunity to welcome home troops from aboard, often taking over the role conventionally that of the Governor-General. In these performances he has consistently drawn links between today’s troops and what he calls the “Anzac tradition”. McKenna argues that the danger of these “theatrical displays” on the streets and in the media is that the more war becomes accepted, peace becomes the exception. The motivations of Bush and Blair and Howard are of concern to many of the writers. Manne cites an article claiming that Bush believes “he was chosen

by God to eradicate terrorism from the world". John Howard is another who believes in destiny. In *The Howard Years*, edited by Manne, the section title for Manne's chapter is a quote from Howard: "The times will suit me". The contributions are wide-ranging and consider Howard's engagement with indigenous issues, asylum seekers, war in Iraq, economic and environmental policy, and Australia's relationship with Asia. It is broadly critical of Howard's performance.

Owen Harries' 2003 Boyer Lectures, titled *Benign or Imperial: Reflections on American Hegemony*, lucidly examine many of the issues raised by the preceding writers. He points out that the world changed profoundly with the implosion of Russia, and the arrival of the "unipolar" system where America is the only significant player. Economic, cultural and military hegemony is the result. He speculates on how the balance of power might shift again with the arrival of China and a united Europe as serious contenders for the "superpower" tag. Harries questions the conventional wisdom that globalisation will break down divisions between cultures; he claims that the opposite result is just as likely. He examines the implications of America's post-September 11 unilateral position that it "will, if necessary, act pre-emptively", and considers the dangers of Australia's "cheap hawk" position of "punching above one's weight".

Many of the subjects that writers have pondered and analysed in the books mentioned thus far are reflected and refracted in Peter Craven's *The Best Australian Essays 2003*. Politics, literature, memoir, war, race – Paul Kelly, Delia Falconer, Paul McGeough, Robert Gray, Robert Manne – are some of the topics and voices included. The flexibility of the genre is evident throughout the collection. The rational Nicolas Rothwell describes his experience with an Aboriginal medicine man; David Malouf analyses the phenomenon of Anzac Day; Danielle Wood considers the significance of the thylacine for contemporary Tasmanians confronting yet another extinction – that of the Tasmanian devil; Inga Glendinnen brings together Aztec civilisation, Freudian analysis and a liver transplant. Glendinnen, when very ill with "inflamed brain sickness" writes, "I clung to my lifeline of words to catch even these experiences, and so had an illusion of remaining in control". And, fittingly, language is the subject matter of the final book of this survey, Don Watson's *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language*. Watson is concerned with the ways in which the debased and empty language of marketing and managerialism has affected the wider society, and is seeping into the domain of the personal. This does not augur well for our public and private relationships. We become blind to implications social and political, and lack self-knowledge. Such

language, he says, “could no more carry a complex argument than it could describe the sound of a nightingale”. Australia lacks a rhetorical tradition, which carries with it the suggestion of an inferiority in our relationships with other, more articulate nations. “Here we make do with language, as we make do with low rainfall and thin soil and bits of wire”. As Wittgenstein stated: “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world”. Watson regrets that his education did not attend sufficiently to language and that now, if he could write the curriculum, children would study for twelve years “the beautiful arrangement of words”. He cites two lines from Czeslaw Milosz that encapsulate the relationship between self and language and the need to belong:

To find my home in one sentence, concise
as if hammered in metal.

Non-Fiction Received 2003–2004

Those marked with an asterisk have been mentioned in the above review

- *Ackland, Michael. *Henry Handel Richardson: A Life*. Melbourne: CUP, 2004.
- *Adamson, Robert. *Inside Out: An Autobiography*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2004.
- *Attwood, Bain. *Rights for Aborigines*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003.
- *Bell, Gail. *Shot: A Personal Response to Guns and Trauma*. Sydney: Picador, 2003.
- *Bennett, Stephanie. *The Gatton Murders: A true story of lust, vengeance and vile retribution*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004.
- *Bent, Jgarta Jinny, Jukuna Mona Chuguna, Pat Lowe & Eirlys Richards. *Two Sisters Ngarta & Jukuna*. Fremantle: FACP, 2003.
- *Bird, Delys, Wendy Were & Terri-Ann White, eds., *Future Imaginings: Sexualities and Genders in the New Millennium*. Perth: UWA Press for the Westerly Centre, 2003.
- *Broinowski, Alison. *Howard's War*. Melbourne: Scribe, 2003.
- *-. *About Face: Asian Accounts of Australia*. Melbourne: Scribe Publishing, 2003.
- *Brunton, Paul, ed. *The Diaries of Miles Franklin*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004.
- *Craven, Peter, ed. *The Best Australian Essays 2003*. Melbourne: Black Inc, 2003.
- Creswell, Toby. *Love is in the Air*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2003.

Davies, Geoff. *Economia: New economic systems to empower people and support the living world*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2004.

*D'Cruz, J. V. and William Steele. *Australia's ambivalence towards Asia*. Clayton, Vic.: Monash Asia Institute, 2003.

*Erickson, Carolly. *The Girl from Botany Bay: The true story of the convict Mary Broad and her extraordinary escape*. Sydney: Macmillan Australia, 2004.

*Franklin, James. *Corrupting the Youth: A History of Philosophy in Australia*. Sydney: Macleay Press, 2003.

*Gaita, Raimond, ed. *Why the War Was Wrong*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2003.

*Gregory, Jenny. *City of Light: A History of Perth since the 1950s*. Perth: City of Perth, 2003.

Griffith Review: Insecurity in the New World Order. Sydney: ABC Books, 2003.

**Griffith Review: Dreams of Land*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2003–4.

Griffith Review: Webs of Power. Sydney: ABC Books, 2004.

Griffith Review: Making Perfect Bodies. Sydney: ABC Books, 2004.

*Haines, Robin. *Life and Death in the Age of Sail: The passage to Australia*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003.

*Harries, Owen. *The Boyer Lectures 2003: Benign or Imperial? Reflections on American Hegemony*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2004.

*Haynes, Jim. *Great Australian Drinking Stories*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2003.

*Hegarty, Ruth. *Is That You Ruthie*. St Lucia: UQP, 2003 (1999).

*-. *Bittersweet Journey*. St Lucia: UQP, 2003.

*Heiss, Anita M. *Dhuulhu-Yala To Talk Straight: Publishing Indigenous Literature*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2003.

*Henricksen, Noel. *Island and Otherland: Christopher Koch and his Books*. Melbourne: Educare, 2003.

*Hetherington, Paul, ed. *The Diaries of Donald Friend*. Vol. 2. Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2003.

*Higgins, Winton. *Journey into Darkness*. Blackheath, NSW: Brandl & Schlesinger, 2003.

*Horrigan, Bryan. *Adventures in Law & Justice: Exploring big legal questions in everyday life*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003.

Huggan, Isabel. *Belonging*. Sydney: Bantam Books, 2003.

*Jayasuriya, Laksiri, David Walker and Jan Gothard, eds. *Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation*. Perth: UWA Press, 2003.

Kandelaars, Debra, ed. *Moments in Time: True Life Stories of Australian Men and Women*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2004

- *Kelly, Kieran. *Tanami: On Foot Across Australia's Desert Heart*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2003.
- *Kinnane, Stephen. *Shadow Lines*. Fremantle: FACP, 2003.
- *Kidd, Paul B. *Great Australian Fishing Stories*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2003.
- *King, Jo Jackson. *The Station at Austin Downs*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2004.
- *Little, John. *Down to the Sea*. Sydney: Macmillan Australia, 2004.
- Lynch, Anthony and David McCoocy, eds. *Space. New Writing No. 1*. Geelong, Vic.: Whitmore Press, 2004.
- *Macintyre, Stuart and Anna Clark. *The History Wars*. Melbourne: MUP, 2003.
- *MacKay, Hugh. *Right and Wrong: How to Decide for Yourself*. Sydney: Hodder Headline Australia, 2004.
- Macquarie A-Z People and Places*. Revised Third Edition. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004.
- *Manne, Robert, ed. *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*. Melbourne: Black Inc, 2003.
- *-, ed. *The Howard Years*. Melbourne: Black Inc, 2004.
- *Marr, David & Marian Wilkinson, eds. *Dark Victory*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003.
- *Marsh, Bill (Swampy). *Great Australian Droving Stories*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2003.
- *Mateer, John *Semar's Cave: An Indonesian Journal*. Fremantle: FACP, 2004.
- *McKenzie, Kirsten. *Scandal in the Colonies*. Melbourne: MUP, 2004.
- McNamara, Ian. *On the Road with Macca*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2003.
- *Muir, Hilda Jarman. *Very Big Journey: My Life As I Remember It*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004.
- Niall, Brenda. *The Boyds*. Melbourne: MUP, 2002.
- *Oboe, Annalisa, ed. *Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo*. Cross/Cultures 64. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003.
- Orr, Mary. *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.
- Priest, Bill. *And, Behold, A Burning Bush*. NSW: Seaview Press, 2003.
- *Ryan, Jan. *Chinese Women and the Global Village*. UQP Australian Studies Series. St Lucia: UQP, 2003.
- *Simpson, Bruce and Ian Tinney. *Where the Dead Men Lie: Tales of Graves, Pioneers and Old Bush Pubs*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2003.
- *Skrzynecki, Peter. *The Sparrow Garden*. St Lucia: UQP, 2004.
- *Statham-Drew, Pamela. *James Stirling: Admiral and Founding Governor of Western Australia*. Perth: UWA Press, 2003.

*Steggall, Stephany Evans. *Can I Call You Colin? The Authorised Biography of Colin Thiele*. Sydney: New Holland, 2004.

*Thomas, Niqi. *Minerva's Owl: Excerpts from Exile*. Briar Hill, Vic: Indra Publishing, 2003.

*Tingwell, Charles "Bud", with Peter Wilmoth. *Bud: A Life*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004.

*Watson, Don. *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language*. Sydney: Knopf, Random House, 2003.

Williams, Robyn. *Asimov's Elephant*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2003.

Wilson, A. N. *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her*. Milsons Point, NSW: Random House Australia, 2003.

Wishaw, Ken. *Helicopter Rescue*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004.

THERE IS NO ONE TO COMPLAIN

I walk down to the river.
I'm searching.
I'm searching for a jar of leeches.
In the distance I see something
flashing so I head toward it.

As I come closer I see
it's a mirror dangling
from a tree. Underneath
a table with six sealed jars.

I open a jar
stick my finger inside
pull it out –
blood slides down my arm.

I feel the sharp clutch
of a hand on my shoulder.
I turn and see a woman's
face covered in mud.
She points across the water
and says if I want my
own leeches I have to swim
to the opposite bank.

I strip my body of clothes
– pause for a moment –
enter the water and swim.

I stop, put my head up.
I'm half-way.
The water is colder at my feet.
I can sense the muddy floor beneath.
My arms ache and my head is numb.
I look back and see the mirror flicker.
There is no one to complain.
I see my face on the surface
and wonder why I'm here.

MORRIS LURIE

COMMISSION

To Ashkenazy, a writer of probity, in consequent ever deepening obscurity and neglect, came out of the blue a commission.

Write me a novel, a rich man required of him.

Although rich here a poor word for proper description.

Language has its limitations, even Ashkenazy to acknowledge, after all.

Two million dollars, he proposed, this man, to Ashkenazy his fee.

Cash.

Any currency.

Whichever country.

Whatever and wherever required.

A first half on handshake up front, he detailed, this man, to Ashkenazy the terms of transaction, its mirror million upon submission fulfilled and completed.

Ashkenazy pondered, of course, the usual practical parameters.

Of what length?

As you require.

Some preference of subject? Setting?

None.

Serious? Satirical?

Your choice.

Could be, let's say, experimental? Must be, on the other hand, of established type or style?

Entirely your own business, told him the rich man. I'll never even read it.

Two million dollars.

In crisp clean cash money.

The first million in a minute immediately up front.

Ashkenazy circled a date in his diary.

One proviso, said the rich man.

The ink already drying.

That there must be one copy and one copy only. All drafts or notes or outlines or whatever you make by way of assisting manufacture to be destroyed, your every alongside self suggestion, every least scrap or sketch or scribbled even tentative written down thought, nothing nowhere otherwise to survive. What you give me is all that will exist of your book in the world.

Ashkenazy acknowledged without hesitation.

Five months, he said.

Slamming his diary shut with a satisfying bang.

Ashkenazy bought paper, two reams, his usual setting-out amount.

Stripped and rewaxed and buffed to a sheen the pine plateau of his worktable, sweat and a soft rag, hive of industry, honey to the eye.

Sharpened his pencils, two dozen ready spears, upright in a jar of once upon a time best Scottish marmalade.

Made clean the typeface on his typewriter, the Swiss, the manual, his professional lifetime's trusty tool.

Washed out and refilled with new ink his gold-banded black fountain pen.

Ready?

Now?

To begin?

The million minus so far not a single dollar in neat stack on his kitchen table any chance visitor to be suitably impressed or amazed.

The price of probity?

Ashkenazy ate his evening meal at the other uncrowded end.

The rich man was a phone number, twenty-four hours, no one will answer, I'll know it's you.

The diary said today.

Ashkenazy shaved, showered, made himself nice.

Ate his usual breakfast, in now accustomed ease at his kitchen table's unoccupied other end.

Drank his tea.

Started a pipe.

To rise in answer, without rush, nor falsely laggard neither, staged affectation, never mind no witness, not Ashkenazy's way, when it sounded, the exactly on time arranged and expected single sound of knuckle on his front door.

Ashkenazy opened.

The man and his money on Ashkenazy's doorstep.

They exchanged.

The cash in a sack that might have held groceries, sturdy brown paper, perfunctorily folded, of casual closure, a take-away meal.

Ashkenazy's five month's work in a plastic case, transparent, hinged, closed with a clip on the other side.

Commission

A novel by

A. Ashkenazy

Two reams thick.

Held and encircled by a thick rubber band.

Did they speak?

Should they speak?

Was there indeed any word further to say?

As even a handshake of concluding civility?

Oh, and this, said Ashkenazy.

Producing from behind his back a supplementary envelope.

His posture in offering hinting at a bow.

You might even imagine a smile.

Although there wasn't.

He didn't.

As he closed carefully his door.

That his patron might or might not enquire of its content, a simple docket of laboratory origin, receipt, invoice, what purchased and when, or enquire then further, deeper, its property of instant incineration exposed to naked air, was, I assure you, in all probity, Ashkenazy's least concern.

GRAEME HETHERINGTON

VOYAGE

(After C. P. Kavafy)

The ticket's condition is clear:
No turning back on the voyage
You didn't even choose to take,
And which, though short, is longest, since

It shadows and incorporates
All. Fearful, you can change wives, work,
Your house, country, real ships, and go
Anywhere whenever you like,

In actuality or dream,
Believe you are dodging your fate,
And still you're chained to time that needs
No relieving shift at the helm,

So constantly intent is it
On getting you there as programmed.
You can have one of heart – a change,
That is – becoming Death's best friend

By loving black in every form,
Hoping to be spared when at last
You sail into port, options gone,
As trapped as you were at the first.

CHRISTOPHER KELEN

HOTEL LISBOA

a bamboo scaffold
 for the neon sky
the gods of luck
 the evil eye

it's all too subtle in this place
the ploys are never untangled

see where a Chinaman
 lost his hat gambling

the view lost its centre,
 beach, sea gone

nothing rotates any more

the big come-on
 the Lisboa flashing
malignant thing among my wishes

see the man with the bent stick and cigar
prosperous of some other era
 lipstick or nicotine

see the slick pimp
 big teeth, sparse moustache

dream of
 The girls in the dungeon below

Macao, 2002

COSMOPOLITAN AUSTRALIANS AND COLONIAL MODERNITY ALEX MILLER'S *CONDITIONS OF FAITH*, GAIL JONES'S *BLACK MIRROR* AND A. L. MCCANN'S *THE WHITE BODY OF EVENING*

On 17 January 2004, the *Australian* newspaper named Nicole Kidman its "Australian of the Year". The editorial argued that Kidman's career is exemplary of how her country has changed: "Where once too many of us resented international success, Australians now understand we must compete on the world stage in all industries if we are to prosper".¹ For the *Australian's* film reviewer, Lynden Barber, Kidman's career represents "the best of modern Australia", and he notes with approval that "she has held the world spotlight while remaining unmistakably Australian". Struggling with these paradoxes, he describes Kidman – incorrectly – as an "expatriate" who embodies "the national character" while also living the "post-global superstar life".²

There is a perfectly familiar term for the paradoxical formations of modern identity that Barber is struggling with here: it is cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism can be defined as "the capacious inclusion of multiple forms of affiliation, disaffiliation, and reaffiliation, simultaneously insisting on the need for informing principles of self-reflexivity, critique, and common humanity". Like the nineteenth-century concept of "disinterestedness", to which it is closely related, cosmopolitanism, at least in its older sense, is "the expression of the need ... to enact or embody universalism, [and] to transform it into a characterological achievement".³

In this paper I want to test the proposition that there is a new generation of "cosmopolitan Australians". Whether this is a genuinely new phenomenon or not, it appears to constitute a marked change from the immediately preceding generation of "expatriates" who did not return to Australia, and who often struggled to balance the claims of British or American and Australian citizenship. As a "characterological achievement",

the new cosmopolitanism might be seen as a form of strategic self-fashioning that can be mobilised as a colonial response to the metropolitan, a way of overcoming the belatedness or supplementarity of provincial cultures, of making them identical with the metropolitan in space and time – in a word, of making them modern. This is close, I think, to what the *Australian* admires in the career and persona of Nicole Kidman.

Clearly, I could enumerate further examples of the new cosmopolitanism drawn from commercial popular culture, especially the production of celebrity in the cinema, fashion and popular music industries. In the present paper, however, I want to begin exploring these issues through readings of three recent Australian novels, where I believe versions of the new cosmopolitanism are also apparent: they are Alex Miller's *Conditions of Faith* (2000), Gail Jones's *Black Mirror* (2002), and A L McCann's *The White Body of Evening* (2002). This is partly to shift the discussion – deliberately – from the domain of popular culture to the literary, and partly to set up ways of thinking about how the new cosmopolitanism might be connected – whether by comparison or contrast – with an older formation that I will call colonial modernity. Significantly, the three novels I discuss here are set in the last decades of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth. This opens a potential continuity between the contemporary media's "new cosmopolitanism" and an earlier form of cultural capital that Sylvia Lawson, in her biography of J. F. Archibald, called the colonial paradox: "The Archibald paradox is simply the paradox of being colonial ... To know enough of the metropolitan world, colonials must, in limited ways at least, move and think internationally; to resist it strongly enough for the colonial to cease to be colonial and become its own place, they must become nationalists".⁴

A second reason for using these three novels is that they allow me to make a connection between the new cosmopolitanism and recent work on the vocation of literary intellectuals. In Matthew Arnold's mid-nineteenth-century sense, "disinterestedness" is the process of *bildung* or personal "cultivation" most closely connected with reading. Cosmopolitanism, then, is historically bound up with the literary and with the principled comportment of the literary intellectual. Since the early 1990s there has been a marked renewal of interest in the forms of intellectual mobility and ethical authority once offered by cosmopolitanism. This is an impulse – and here I allude to the titles of some recent books – to feel once more "at home in the world"; to "think and feel beyond the nation".⁵ If such formulations risk sliding back into totalising and dominative modes of thought, at stake is one of the founding

assumptions of modern literary studies: the very possibility of witnessing and interpreting others, of thinking and feeling beyond the limits of strictly local categories of identity such as gender, race and nation.

What distinguishes the new cosmopolitanism from the old is its residual suspicion of universals. At the same time, this new work recognises that post-structuralism's negative critique of Enlightenment robbed theoretical language of a certain ethical and political purchase. Gayatri Spivak's call for a "strategic essentialism" is an early example of this turn. Julia Kristeva, too, has recognised the ethical value of cosmopolitanism, which she defines as a principled "detachment from provincial identities", a "therapeutic exploration of strangeness within and outside the self".⁶ Without wanting to re-invoke universals, there is, then, a felt need for a set of middle-range terms, a form of "strategic" or "provisional universalism" that would allow us to speak about the work of literary intellectuals as both a situated ethical practice and a distanced critique. While some appear to invoke cosmopolitanism in its older, universal sense, others have turned to what Scott Malcomson calls "actually existing" cosmopolitanisms in recognition of the fact that intellectual work is always already located, historically specific and therefore, in some measure, compromised.⁷ In this sense of the term, cosmopolitanism has been scaled down, pluralised and particularised, making it, as Amanda Anderson observes, at once "more modest and more worldly".⁸

"Utopia in a minor key": Gail Jones's *Black Mirror*

These formulations are suggestive for thinking about the complex cultural locations occupied by Victoria Morrell, the protagonist in Gail Jones's novel, *Black Mirror*. Born in Melbourne in 1910, Victoria is brought up on the West Australian goldfields before going to art school in London in 1936. After discovering Surrealism she moves to Paris where she practises as a painter and mixes with the leaders of the movement, including Breton and Dalí.

A series of childhood events has led Victoria to disengage from the conjunction of identities bequeathed to her by her father and by settler colonialism in Australia. These include the failure of her parents' marriage, her father's exploitation of socially dependent women, and her brother's class-motivated violence against Victoria's working-class lover and his family. Her father, Herbert Morrell, is a "fabulously rich" industrialist who freely raids other cultures in expressing his own *nouveau riche* taste:

[he] had a passion for collecting ... and sought out objects on a criterion of radical unAustralianness. Contemptuous of the local, he chased with laborious effort and at foolish expense exotic knick-knacks, gewgaws, artworks and curiosities. *Foreign* was a word he loved to roll in his over-dentistried mouth.⁹

This capitalist self-fashioning is what Scott Malcomson would call an actually existing cosmopolitanism. Ironically, Morrell's imperial acquisitiveness is also a pernicious form of Surrealism, which Victoria later recognises as the organising principle of the British Museum's collections: a "peep-show" of "the world's everything" (37). Herbert Morrell also personifies the sexism and racism of his class. His treatment of Japanese prostitutes and of his Aboriginal housemaid, Lily White, again ironically anticipates the Surrealists' primitivism and cultivation of the exotic: "He was pleased by the anonymity of the [Japanese] women's faces ... Something in their interchangeability excited him" (178); "Contemptuous of [Lily White's] race, he nevertheless believed Aborigines the custodians of some secret and defining essence, some nocturnal mystery" (179).

By the late 1920s, Victoria has so completely disengaged from the identities bequeathed to her by her Australian family that she feels rootless, without local identity. It is now another, more positive version of the "worlds-in-collision" principle that allows her to begin the hard work of reaffiliation. Her cosmopolitanism requires a willed, performative reconfiguration of the self in relation to diverse, mobile, and often conflicting cultural contexts. It is at this critical moment that Victoria encounters Surrealism at the International Surrealist Exhibition, held at the New Burlington Galleries in London in June 1936. Surrealism is significant not only for its historical role as an international, cosmopolitan art movement, but for its aesthetic of incongruity and *bricolage*, which provides a theoretical model for the practice of self-fashioning and the performance of new, hybrid identities: Victoria came to see "the beauty of things in dislocation" (86); "The Paris [she] arrived in ... [was] a city of ... marvellous conjunctions" (87). Yet even as she builds her new identity, Victoria remains, at some level, an Australian. This is so at the very moment of her "alchemical ... transubstantiation" into her new, Surrealist self:

Monsieur Marcel Duchamp answered the door. He peeped, flung it open, then flew his hands to his face in the sweeping gesture of a magician who has that very instant puffed something strange into existence.

Ah, voila! L'Australienne!

Victoria felt herself suddenly endowed with symbolic accessories: bounding kangaroos, vistas of orange earth ... The mantle of Australianness descended upon her, as though an invisible parasol had collapsed. ... She stood there bedraggled, pre-empted by nationhood. (18) ✧

Even as she tries to check her nationality at the door, Victoria's Australianness is reconstituted by Surrealism's insatiable demand for and creation of the exotic: "Disbelieving in nations they still wanted an Australia" (22). As Victoria experiences it, becoming cosmopolitan does not mean moving decisively from one identity or culture to another, but the simultaneous occupation of different identities and cultures, each historically grounded, none truly universal. For this reason, Paris "was a city Victoria knew both as an Antipodean stranger ... and as a dedicated Surrealist" (140).

Surrealism, too, we begin to see, is just another actually existing – and therefore compromised – cosmopolitanism. For all their pretensions, the leading Surrealists fall well-short of their own ideals. This is evident in the role played by the "the negro" and "the primitive" in Surrealist aesthetics, which is bound up with French imperialism, and with European racism and sexism. Surrealism may at first seem to Victoria to have "the supernatural atmosphere of an entire counter-world" (70), but it turns out to be very much of its time and place. This is revealed to her by André Breton's prurient lecture on "the negro": "He speculated on primitivist urges and waxed racist on Black Venuses. ... Josephine Baker, [Breton declared], is a Surrealist *par excellence* in her pitch-black nakedness. ... Bullshit, Victoria thought" (145). Here, there can be no "pure" cosmopolitanism, for Surrealism's "marvellous conjunctions" are, like Herbert Morrell's *nouveau riche* salon or the collections in the British Museum, a production of imperialism, racism and sexism. Surrealism is a grounded, embodied, and therefore tainted universal. It allows Victoria to invent herself anew, though within certain limits: her Surrealist self remains grounded in the very Australian origins she has sought to leave behind, and the Surrealist movement, while offering her mobility beyond the local and provincial, falls short of its own cosmopolitan aspirations by being grounded in the limits of its own time and place.

This ambivalence comes close to James Clifford's account of the new cosmopolitanism, about which he admits to having "mixed feelings". Clifford certainly has a positive view of cosmopolitanism's ability "to sustain and rearticulate a sense of who one is by appropriating, cutting,

and mixing cultural forms” – notice again the implicitly Surrealist aesthetic that underlies the concept of *bricolage*. “People”, Clifford argues, “have for centuries constructed their sense of belonging, their notions of home, of spiritual and bodily power and freedom, along a continuum of sociospatial attachments”. But if cosmopolitan subjectivity is a matter of “inventiveness” and cultural performance, it always takes place within certain historically and culturally constrained possibilities. For Clifford, then, cosmopolitanism is “a pragmatic response, making the best of given (often bad) situations”. For this reason he is at pains to distinguish between his own “pragmatic” view of cosmopolitan re-invention and the more utopian attitude to hybridisation found in much post-colonial theory, where it is central to the political project of personal and cultural liberation. “If there is utopia here”, Clifford demurs, “it is utopia in a minor key”.¹⁰

Secular vocations: Alex Miller’s *Conditions of Faith*

In the character of Anna Griffin, the Australian scholar who has come to interview Victoria Morrell in London to write her biography, Gail Jones touches on the link that has long existed between cosmopolitanism and the work of intellectuals. This is a more fully developed theme in Alex Miller’s *Conditions of Faith*, whose protagonist, Emily Stanton, abandons her vocation as a student of classical history at the University of Melbourne only to find it revived by unconventional friendships formed in Paris and Tunisia, which cause her painfully to reassess the future direction of her life.

Like Victoria Morrell, Emily Stanton experiences as a young woman the urge to divest herself of a series of possible identities laid out for her in advance. Emily’s task is to re-invent “the conditions of faith” under which she can conduct a meaningful life after the absolutes of home, family, patriarchy, religious faith and national identity have been abandoned. This is, again, a characterological achievement. The events of Miller’s *bildungsroman* unfold across a single year, 1923, during which Emily Stanton not only marries, moves to Paris with her husband and gives birth to a daughter, but also gives birth to a new self, fashioned in response to new and exotic cultures.

The starting point of Emily’s reaffiliation is her relationship with her husband’s homosexual friend Antoine Carpeaux, who introduces her to modes of friendship beyond her inherited ideas of home and family, and to cultures and ways of life that carry her beyond her own nation and the Anglophone empire in which it remains embedded. She writes to her

father, "I could not imagine meeting such a man in Melbourne".¹¹ Antoine's father was a French landowner in Tunisia, and during Emily's difficult pregnancy, while her husband Georges is preoccupied with his work in Paris, he takes Emily to convalesce at Sidi bou-Said, his family home near the ancient Roman amphitheatre at Carthage. Here, Emily discovers an intellectual vocation in re-interpreting the life of the early Christian martyr, Perpetua. This project of cross-cultural research is gifted to her by her new friends, who invite her to enter into and interpret their worlds. The tokens of this invitation are Perpetua's medallion, given to her by Antoine, an edition of Perpetua's journal, given to her by the Arab archaeologist Hakim el-Ouedi, and the academic career given to her by her mentor, the American scholar Dr Olive Kallen.

Emily's meeting with Hakim amid the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre ironically recalls Adela Quested's encounter with Dr Aziz in the Marabar Caves. Far from wishing to harm her, Hakim is seeking to enlist Emily professionally in the cause of Tunisian decolonisation, hoping that she will initiate a scholarly challenge to the dominant reading of Perpetua's story by the French Catholic archaeologist Pere Delatrrre. Hakim is an example of Edward Said's Third World intellectual, who uses the tools of the metropolitan culture against it. Like the site of the amphitheatre, the legend of Perpetua, as Hakim describes it to her, is contested and multi-layered: "If you ask Delatrrre, he'll tell you she was a martyr of the Holy Roman Church. The Christians claimed her and made a saint of her. But I say she was a misunderstood Berber woman" (164).

Like Anna's biographical interest in Victoria Morrell, Emily's interest in Perpetua is cosmopolitan in the sense of being a compulsion to think and feel beyond the national or provincial, but it is also deeply personal and therefore compromised: she is an "interested" observer in the sense that Perpetua's struggle for self-representation parallels Emily's own struggle to accept her unwanted pregnancy which may be to a Catholic priest. Far from seeing this as a handicap, Hakim is alert to the importance of a scholar's personal motivation. He and his colleague, Ahmed, have approached her because they hope that she might open up a new and subversive interpretation of their history: "Give her the book, [Ahmed] told me. She's a young married woman and is to have a child soon'. ... Ahmed ... thought you might see something in [Perpetua's] situation that we don't see" (178). Although Hakim pays tribute to the British ideal of disinterested scholarship (207), the reality is that all involved in the struggle for interpretation of Perpetua's story are deeply situated and therefore compromised.

In taking up Hakim's challenge, Emily turns for collegial support to the American archaeologist, Dr Olive Kallen. Her Islamic scholarship, too, is deeply rooted in her own particular milieu. She possesses "an independent intellectual life that is well grounded in the robust and civilized complexities of New York and the American Museum of Natural History" (326). Dr Kallen is an "independent" scholar by virtue of her principled cosmopolitanism, her deliberate reaffiliation with a culture other than her own, but her independence is, paradoxically and at the same time, "grounded" in an enabling milieu that has its own specificity. Emily understands her new career in the same terms. She wishes to be "an independent scholar", yet this cannot be achieved without the generous and liberating gifts of her French, Tunisian and American friends. Emily's intellectual vocation is at once situated while aspiring to be universal; it is personally motivated but requires sympathy for other cultures; it strives for objectivity and scholarly rigour while being complicit with a number of incompatible interests – religious, ethnic, national and personal.

Emily's experience at Carthage can therefore be read as an allegory of the intellectual vocation, which involves a difficult though ineluctable negotiation with otherness. She has entered a maelstrom of interpretation that resonates with all-too familiar debates in the humanities around the politics of intellectual work. Yet she is also performing what might be seen as the fundamental work of humanities intellectuals: working within and against the limitations of purely local interests in an attempt to sympathetically witness and interpret the other. In proposing to interpret Perpetua's story, is Emily guilty of speaking for the subaltern? Is she following Jane Eyre's project, as Spivak reads it, of constituting her own modern selfhood and career at the expense of the third world? Should she accept Hakim's invitation or leave him to write Perpetua's history from the perspective of a male Arab nationalist and intellectual? Does Emily's own passionate engagement with Perpetua disqualify her from interpreting her story or is this a pre-condition of all intellectual work? And to what extent does Dr Kallen's gift of professionalism offer a way through these perplexing issues?

Miller's position on these questions of cross-cultural sympathy, professionalism and intellectual work is similar, I think, to that of the American literary scholar Bruce Robbins. In *Secular Vocations*, Robbins address two assumptions which he believes became the "common sense" of the American humanities academy in the 1980s and 1990s – the era of identity politics. First, that careers are bad – that "success in professional career making is at best an embarrassment to any scholar who ... makes a

career while and by maintaining a commitment to radical social change". And second, that "representation is bad", that "the professional western academic has neither the right nor the ability to represent others".¹²

Robbins rejects the view that intellectuals have "fallen" into the academy as myth-making after the fact, arguing instead that the institutional location is the very condition of the modern intellectual's coming into being – its untranscendable horizon. "Let's be clear", he argues, "There is ... no place where thought can be free of all material encumbrance and social entanglement, and it is time to stop trying to return there again and again. ... Not disembodied freedom, but diverse embodiednesses and incomplete servitudes have to become the common sense view of intellectual work".¹³ Robbins advocates a self-reflexive professionalism that is mindful of its own privilege and self-interest, but without conceding that this irrevocably taints its practices or fundamentally disarms its attempts to advocate progressive principles or to practise critique.

The new cosmopolitanism is central to this work and to the ethical comportment of the intellectual, not in Arnold's older, unobtainable sense of disinterestedness, but as a pragmatic acceptance of the doubleness of the intellectual's location. On the one hand, Robbins points out that "no one actually is or ever can be a cosmopolitan in the sense of belonging nowhere".¹⁴ On the other hand, he recognises the ethical value of what he calls "the negative relation to nationality ... an insistence that includes the possibility of presence in other places, ... a density of overlapping allegiances rather than the abstract emptiness of non-allegiance".¹⁵ In putting the case for this "more modest cosmopolitanism", Robbins also puts the case for a certain professionalism: "professionalism that, without presumption of ultimate totalizing certainty, believes in its own intellectual powers of generalisation, abstraction, synthesis and representation at a distance, and in the process of putting them to use. Which believes, one might say, in its own *work*".¹⁶

This is a plea to accept what Mark Sanders in his moving study of progressive South African intellectuals and apartheid calls the intellectual's "responsibility-in-complicity".¹⁷ For South African intellectuals there was never the luxury of pure opposition because they were always complicit to some degree in the circumstances they opposed. Sanders offers this not as the exception but the rule. The intellectual's work is always "contaminated". This is what Sanders means, both positively and negatively, by the concept of "responsibility-in-complicity". These formulations, I think, come close to describing the position in

which Emily Stanton finds herself when she is invited to professionally interpret the story of Perpetua, not only for her own reasons but also in the cause of Arab nationalism.

Colonial modernity: A. L. McCann's *The White Body of Evening*

The often unstable relation between cosmopolitanism and post-colonial nationalism is also an important theme in A. L. McCann's novel, *The White Body of Evening*. Its historical setting hinges around the moment of Federation in 1901 and the collision between an emergent Australian nationalism and both earlier and later forms of cosmopolitan identification. The novel begins with the marriage of Albert and Anna Walters in Melbourne in 1891. Anna is Australian-born but her parents are German. She has "never thought of herself as Australian" and is troubled by the exclusionary nationalism of the day.¹⁸ This is a time when "White Australians", as her trade unionist neighbour explains, "are standing up for their rights more than ever" (16). In cultural terms this is expressed through the institution of censorship, which pathologises European modernism. Hidden away in a bookshop in the inner city, Anna finds books with titles like *Syphilitic Madness and the Modern City*, while in a dark corner a man reads *Therese Raquin* (25).

By the first decade of the new century, Albert's son Paul has begun his career as an artist, writer and theatre producer. His rebellion against colonial nationalism is expressed through identification with European modernism and bohemianism. McCann depicts a local colonial art culture that is provincial and belated. At Melbourne's Gallery school, Paul Walters is taught a tepid form of tonal realism that he rejects as philistine. He and his friends pose as bohemians in Fasoli's, "a little restaurant on Lonsdale Street where, so it was said, one might be able to imagine oneself in Soho or Montmartre" (117). McCann develops a sharp opposition between Paul's cosmopolitan sympathies and the realist aesthetic of the new White Australia, which is associated with the *Bulletin*. Paul and his sister Ondine disparage the nationalist aesthetic: "Besides the Red Page all they publish these days are eulogies to the nation, satires or bush vignettes. ... perhaps that's why artists are fleeing Australia like rats from a sinking ship" (118). As a painter, Paul rejects realism for a crude form of expressionism, and looks to his German background: "Ondine and I, well, I'm not sure what we are. Not Australians, not Germans either. We're caught in the middle, which is nowhere" (118).

As Paul sails away from Melbourne for Vienna, his imagined artistic home, he experiences an intense vision of Melbourne's colonial belatedness:

in the grid-like uniformity of the city, in the emptiness of its streets and the crushing conservatism of its terracotta-tiled villas spreading out into a vast suburban wilderness, the imagination, if it wasn't beaten flat with national sentiment and the spirit of the land, could only turn in on itself and devour its host like a parasite. The future of Australia lay in either individual sickness or collective subservience to the blandest and most brutal invention of modern times: the nation. (182)

Cosmopolitanism is central to Paul's image of himself as an artist: he believes himself to be a citizen of the world whose imagination transcends the particularities of colonial Melbourne. But in Vienna, he meets the poet Klessman, an anorexic, epileptic and truly "rootless" (212) Jewish writer, who translates and re-writes Paul's father's journals to produce a slim volume of great modernist poems. Klessman defines the limits of Paul's aspirations as a colonial artist. He personifies the modernist notion of the artist detached from commodity culture to which Paul can only aspire by falsely claiming authorship of Klessman's poems after his death.

When he returns to Melbourne in the 1920s, Paul attempts to introduce a form of avant garde theatre inspired by the French Grand Guignol, the theatre of fear and terror, but he fails for two principal reasons: first, because his modernist ideal of the separation of art from the market is unsustainable; and second, because Melbourne's is an irrevocably belated culture. He believes himself as a playwright to be on higher moral ground than the society he writes about: he "talked about being part of the avant-garde. He took it all very seriously" (286). Yet when he debates these issues with his sister, Ondine can see that his plays use similar techniques to the commercial entertainments and tabloid journalism he despises. Paul blames Melbourne for his failure, invoking the concept of colonial belatedness and recommitting himself to an idea of art that he can only associate with Europe, or a colonial's idea of Europe: "He had been brought low a third time by the cursed colony and was now ready either to leave for good or to sink lower still" (333).

By and large, discussions of colonial modernity in Australian scholarship have followed two contrasting models of the temporal and spatial relations between metropolitan and provincial cultures. The first focuses on the burden of colonial belatedness, the second on the attainment of simultaneity. The concept of belatedness finds its exemplary expression in Homi K. Bhabha's reading of Fanon in the final chapter of *The Location of*

Culture.¹⁹ Here, modernity is an epistemological structure that offers simultaneity, agency and inclusive identity to individual subjects belonging to a shared culture in and of the present. But because of the uneven development of international capital, this opportunity is not evenly or simultaneously distributed in different global locations. In postcolonial contexts, the enunciative repetition of modernity is subject to both a spatial and temporal lag, and it is in this space, which both translates and deforms the project of modernity, that Bhabha locates the possibility of a postcolonial agency. It is this version of colonial modernity that we find in Andrew McCann's articles about Marcus Clarke's career as a colonial journalist²⁰ and in Paul Walters's fictional career as a colonial playwright.

A second way of understanding colonial modernity is to see the circulation of cultural capital as closing the gap between colony and metropolis. In Australian scholarship, this second model has emerged most strongly in work on commercial entertainment, such as Richard Waterhouse's research on international vaudeville and minstrel shows,²¹ and Veronica Kelly's on the nineteenth-century popular stage.²² In this model of colonial modernity, the idea of belatedness appears as something internal to high culture's own mythologised self-representation. In contrast to McCann, Kelly argues that in the domain of popular entertainment there is no evidence of either temporal or spatial distance, the so-called time-lag or cultural cringe: "Founded in the wake of the industrial revolution, Australia as a series of six British colonies was meshed into the global commercial popular entertainment industry, linked by continuous touring by artistes and companies via the international and intercolonial shipline, road, and later rail routes. Constructions of insularity speedily disperse in the face of the abundant evidence of the international and intercultural nature of colonial theatre".²³ The strong form of this reading, as in Catherine Brisbane's introduction to *Entertaining Australia*, is that the myth of colonial belatedness has actually obscured the "cosmopolitanism" of colonial culture, which it is the scholar's work to re-discover.²⁴

As Kelly's work suggests, it has perhaps been through international, urban, commercial popular culture rather than through high culture that colonial Australians have most strongly experienced that sense of simultaneity and mobility, that breaking down of the distinction between province and metropolis, that I want to invoke by the term colonial modernity. All of the novels I've discussed here, however, depict forms of

colonial belatedness that are increasingly felt in the period up to the 1930s. This suggests a need to distinguish between different registers of cultural practice. All three novels focus on forms of high culture – Victoria Morrell’s Surrealist art, Emily Stanton’s classical historical scholarship, and Paul Walters’s expressionist art and theatre. From the perspective of these practices, colonial culture appears to be belated and the protagonists’ cosmopolitanisms are forms of response to that felt condition of colonial supplementary. The protagonists either elect to remain in Europe or, in Paul Walters’s case, hold out the option of returning there. And all three novels end historically around the late 1920s, when the split between high and low culture might be said to have become institutionalised in Australia with the emergence of modernism.

The kinds of cosmopolitanism cited by historians of popular entertainment like Waterhouse, Brisbane and Kelly appear only in the margins of these three novels. In McCann’s, for example, there are passing references to the gramophone and the latest international recordings of popular classics available in Melbourne. In all three novels there are references to Australian tourism in Europe. In *Conditions of Faith*, Georges Stanton’s career as an engineer and his aspiration to take part in Bradfield’s Sydney Harbour Bridge project place Australia at the forefront of modernisation, if not of modernism. And, in *The White Body of Evening*, there are references not only to international vaudeville troops, but to early cinema: Paul Walters attends the Melbourne screening of Frank Hurley’s film of the Ross Smith flight from London to Sydney, which creates a sense of Australia’s participation in the expansion of modern transport. All these instances belie the theory of colonial belatedness.

It follows from this, I think, that we need to be cautious about seeing Australian cosmopolitanism as a generalised mode of response to colonial supplementarity without being sensitive to the different registers of cultural practice and to the history of that cosmopolitanism, which changes markedly in the period from 1890 to the present. We need, then, to distinguish at least two axes across which the history and forms of Australian cosmopolitanism might be mapped: the first is the relation between high and low culture and the different forms of cultural capital and mobility they respectively offer at any given time. The second axis is historical. It appears, for example, that the modes of popular cultural practice Veronica Kelly discusses take place before the modern split between high and low culture becomes institutionalised. McCann’s novel, in particular, spans a considerable period, from the 1880s to the 1930s, but does not register any change across this time – roughly the generational

gap between Albert and Paul Walters. Then, too, something happens after about the 1930s, when all three novels cut out historically – that is, the onset of modernism and the almost exactly contemporary phenomenon of expatriation for figures like Christina Stead and Patrick White, for whom Australian culture was indeed belated. These historically earlier forms of cosmopolitanism and expatriation did not necessarily provide the same kind of cultural mobility attributed by the *Australian* newspaper to contemporary actors like Nicole Kidman. This is partly because we cannot legitimately compare the present day flows of personnel, technology and capital in the cinema industry with the more constrained economy of imperial culture treated in these novels. What intervenes here is the gap between contemporary conditions of globalisation in the cinema and other popular culture industries, and their late-nineteenth-century equivalents or predecessors. Imperial patterns of cultural exchange *to some extent* foreshadow the contemporary entertainment industry, but there are also marked differences. It is precisely across this gap that Gail Jones's researcher, Anna Griffin, confronts Victoria Morrell, whose career is the product of an earlier set of cultural formations and earlier – and therefore different – forms of cosmopolitanism.

My claim for the evidential value of these historical novels must therefore be circumspect. What I think we can say is that they represent a marked contemporary interest in re-discovering forms of cultural mobility, cultural capital and ethical authority once offered by historically earlier forms of cosmopolitanism that foreshadow what I've called the new cosmopolitanism. But in remaining focussed on the high cultural practices of painting, poetry and avant-garde theatre, and by ending their historical coverage around the 1930s, these historical novels do not allow for any general assumption about continuities between these older and newer forms of cosmopolitanism, nor to understand the period of expatriatism that punctuates them – from roughly the 1920s to the 1990s, when the “new cosmopolitanism” began to be named.

For their advice in the preparation of this article I wish to thank David Carter, Veronica Kelly, Andrew McCann and Gillian Whitlock.

Notes

- 1 Editorial, “Honouring a great talent”, *Australian* 17–18 January 2004, 14.
- 2 Barber, Lynden, “Our Brightest Star Reaches for Home”, *Australian* 17–18 January 2004, 1, 4.

- 3 Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000): 30-1.
- 4 Sylvia Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox: A Strange Case of Authorship* (Ringwood. Vic.: Penguin/Allen Lane, 1983): ix.
- 5 Tim Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds, *Cosmopolitics: thinking and feeling beyond the nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
- 6 Quoted in Amanda Anderson, "Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, and the Divided Legacies of Modernity", in Cheah and Robbins, 284.
- 7 Scott L. Malcomson, "The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience", in Cheah and Robbins, 238.
- 8 Anderson, *Powers of Distance*, 3.
- 9 Gail Jones, *Black Mirror* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2002): 156-7. All subsequent references appear in the text.
- 10 James Clifford, "Mixed Feelings", in Cheah and Robbins, 366.
- 11 Alex Miller, *Conditions of Faith* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000): 58-9. All subsequent references appear in the text.
- 12 Bruce Robbins, *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1993): 152-3.
- 13 Robbins, *Secular Vocations*, 10.
- 14 Robbins, 26.
- 15 Robbins, 250.
- 16 Robbins, 188.
- 17 Mark Sanders, *Complicities: the intellectual and apartheid* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).
- 18 A. L. McCann, *The White Body of Evening* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2002): 7. All subsequent references appear in the text.
- 19 Homi K. Bhabha, "Race, time and the revision of modernity", in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994): 236-56.
- 20 For example, Andrew McCann, "Marcus Clarke, Gustave Dore and the Mystery of the Popular", in Alison Bartlett, Robert Dixon and Christopher Lee, eds, *Australian Literature and the Public Sphere* (Toowoomba: ASAL, 1998): 101-9.
- 21 Richard Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville: the Australian Popular Stage 1788-1914* (Kensington, NSW: UNSW Press, 1990).

- 22 Veronica Kelly, "The Cosmopolitan and the Provincial: the Sydney *Bulletin's* Theatre Criticism 1880–1900 and Constructions of Australian Modernity", *Australian Studies* (forthcoming); "Hybridity and Performance in Colonial Australian Theatre: The Currency Lass", in *(Post)Colonial Stages: Critical & Creative Views on Drama, Theatre & Performance*, Helen Gilbert, ed. (Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire: Dangaroo Press, 1999): 40–54; "Colonial 'Australian' Theatre Writers: Cultural Authorship and the Case of Marcus Clarke's 'First Play'", *Australian Literary Studies* 18.1 (1997): 31–42.
- 23 Veronica Kelly, "Colonial 'Australian' Theatre Writers", 31.
- 24 Katharine Brisbane, ed., *Entertaining Australia: The Performing Arts as Cultural History* (Sydney: Currency, 1991).

YOU'RE MEMORY

Look out, the grass is green! The earth pulls at your flesh. The pain in your chest insists. The lawnmower stutters. Summer. 1973? You sit in the backyard, stripping copper wire. The scavenged copper pays for Bett's anniversary present. Your twin brother Dick looks nothing like you. You leave behind the silver birches, leave behind the still lake; the shaft of a nickel mine swallows you up each day. How close the lawn is. The foreign beach is bullets and gore, is machines, and gobbets and limbs – and somehow you climb the cliff, you climb the cliff, and marry, and marry again, your first child is born, and when she sees that movie, she says, she knows it doesn't capture the time you never speak about. The green grass is closer. Shelley's hair flashes strawberry in the sun as you pull her into your arms – “Not lost, not lost” – the search party hangs back awkwardly; the tears run down your face. You build a house. You build another. Your initials are traced in the sidewalk. The hammer is balanced; you choose a nail punch to fit. A gravid woman who is not yet your wife stands beside you. You have two children. Your brother Dick looks just like you. The grass is too green. You go to England. You leave England. The ocean bears you out and home. The ocean bears you. Waves thirty metres high wash over the destroyer's deck, and wash away the chest of Bermudan cedar you have made for your bride. You make another. The grass is closer now. You work. You smoke too much. You stop too late. You start again. On long car trips, you sing a song about a man who left a lobster in a chamber pot, to the great delight of your daughters. The green grass is sweet. When you wreck the Hudson, Bett forgives you. Dick and you and your little brother Les

take the wagon down to the Grand and fish. From the plans for the house in Halifax, you build a scale model for your daughter. She chalks your name on its slate roof. Its slate roof makes a good chalkboard. You wake, put on your overalls, take the bus. The sun rises. You make a coffee and check the chemicals in the boiler. You wake, put on your overalls, take the bus. You play scrabble with your sister. Sometimes you win. You jounce Shelley on your knee. Shrapnel makes it ache. Outside Bett's hospital room, the doctors say she will die. You gather your young daughters. You wait. You are patient. And frightened. The grass is so green now. Your daughters become women. You do not approve or disapprove of their choice of mates. Bett struggles to walk again. Your daughters borrow your tools. You lend them your hands. Bear them up. Must this earth call so insistently? Must this grass be so green? You braze two pipes and solder the fitting. You tilt the baby bottle into your first child's mouth. She squirms in your cradle of sinew and brawn. The lawnmower stutters and almost dies. You've drunk too much rum, and argue a little. And sing. Around you, no one ever fights. Your eyes are serious brown. Here is the grass now, and now you are gone.

THEOLOGY OF LUCK

Try as he might God couldn't waste him.
Whittled him down, over the years, piece by piece.
A toenail a man can live without,
can boast with at parties as a war wound.
Two eyebrows missing in more than stunned
amazement takes some sweet talking
to explain the theology of luck.
And when your hair ignites (twice!)
for no other reason than standing in the wrong
place at the wrong time, well, a wise
man reads the signs.

For a human lightning rod Roy C. Sullivan
was in the wrong profession. Even in leisure
(fishing ever fraught with danger) he was a marked
man, distrusting the optimism of blue skies,
the cheery smiles of weather girls.
He sickened of showing the calligraphy
of scars: his seared left shoulder
the chest and stomach burns
the roasted ankle
the legs cooked to a turn.
His glowing core a wound.

Seven times struck by lightning
(don't count the near-misses),
as though God's magnifying glass had a yearning
just for him. Rejecting awe and pity
did he venture out in thunder storms
screeching for peace to the barren Heavens?

Did he offer cinders of himself to false idols?
Throw his own ash from the hill top to the wind,
extinguishing a private conflagration.
Mocking God with an epitaph:
died at his own hand, rejected in love.

MUMMY-LONG-LEGS

i

Too late daddy
learnt mummy-long-legs only
wanted his body.

ii

Long-legged mummy
simply cannot stop – she finds
daddy so yummy!

iii

Legs numbering eight–
all that's left of daddy since
mummy-long-legs ate.

iv

Merely a reflex
mummy-long-legs told daddy's legs
shortly after sex.

CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGINATION IN DAVID MALOUF'S *REMEMBERING BABYLON*

A critical controversy marks *Remembering Babylon*'s immediate reception in 1993, its publication year – also, pertinently, the International Year of Indigenous Peoples, and the year following *Mabo v. Queensland*. In early November, Germaine Greer publishes a review titled “Malouf’s Objectionable Whitewash”, challenging Malouf’s representation of indigeneity and denouncing the principal character Gemmy Fairley first as the enabling centrepiece of Malouf’s “supremacist fantasy” and then more simply as his “fake black”.¹ Peter Craven promptly rebuts Greer in “An Ad for Philistinism”, affirming that Greer’s hostility merely reflects her “own post-colonial condescension towards her former country”.² The gloves now off, further debate ensues. Peter Otto, in an article-length review, seems to align himself with the detractors when he asserts that the novel performs an “erasure of the political”. However, Otto engages thoughtfully with the figure of Gemmy – the character Greer treats so dismissively – and finds in Gemmy a revelatory “locus or catalyst for certain kinds of disorientation intrinsic to the colonial experience”.³ In the following year, 1994, Veronica Brady publishes in an American journal: *Remembering Babylon*, in her view, responds productively to the challenge of *Mabo* and aligns itself with *Mabo*’s demonstration that the argument of terra nullius “has no standing”.⁴ The debate within Australian publications seems to culminate, however, with the appearance of a full-length scholarly article by Suvendrini Perera, which remains the novel’s most fully elaborated adversarial critique. Perera’s argument in brief is that Malouf misappropriates “the indigenous body” and mobilises it within “the discourse of happy hybridism”. In so doing, Malouf produces a “transubstantiated” version of indigeneity, which then allows for the “evacuation” of the space of the indigenous and “the substitution of colonising for colonised bodies”. The overall outcome is “a Providentialist narrative of colonisation”.⁵

After 1994, the voices in favour of Malouf's novel seem to outnumber and overpower those that speak against it. *Remembering Babylon*, which had been short-listed for the Booker Prize (but without ultimate success), is honoured in 1996 with the inaugural International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Upon the announcement of this award, Gia Methereil publishes a strong statement in the novel's favour, recognising and validating its expressed will to reconciliation of Australian society's divided elements. *Remembering Babylon*, she observes, "presents the story of white colonialism as inextricable from the story of black Australians", and this acknowledgement of "a shared history" coincides with the position adopted by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.⁶ In the broader international context, some critics express reservations about the work, but these are more modestly presented and embedded in largely favourable appraisals. So Sheila Whittick, publishing in France, suggests that it is "difficult to identify" Malouf's final position with respect to the Eurocentrism of his principal settler characters.⁷ Other commentators extol the novel in terms that suggest awareness of the early denunciations, but without confronting them directly and explicitly. Thus Michael Mitchell credits Malouf with undertaking a "perilous but necessary transgression" of conventionally understood cultural boundaries; Carolyn Bliss asserts that the envisioning of Gemmy as a bridge-between must be understood as failed myth.⁸ However, the early arguments against the book are not countered so much as skirted; the challenges are left largely unanswered.

The adversarial criticism, from Greer through to Perera, unites in its will to defend cultural and racial borders. The contemporary world is understood as an assembly of cultural territories, all of them representing and defending their borders and constituencies with greater or lesser degrees of success. This critical perspective is acutely problematic with respect to Malouf, because his work so insistently involves the testing and questioning of borders, boundaries, and boundedness – already in *An Imaginary Life* and in the subsequent fictions, up to *Remembering Babylon* and beyond. Malouf's creative wager is that one can cross interpersonal and intercultural borders imaginatively; his ethical belief is that one should try to do so. In Malouf, boundedness exists to be surpassed. Self-overcoming, through responsiveness to the appeal of the other, is one of his principle themes. Indeed, a common motivation for Malouf characters, albeit often unconscious, is the quest to find the perspective of the other – to see the self from the other's perspective. Clearly, orientations such as Malouf's may open an author to the charge of cross-cultural transgression

– to the charge of venturing into realms of representation in which the author has no valid claim – but one should ask then if Malouf’s imaginings duly recognise and respect real-world issues of cultural difference.

Concerning the case of *Remembering Babylon*, the evaluation of Malouf’s cross-cultural vision must turn upon the figure of Gemmy Fairley, the novel’s “black white man”, or again, its “white black man” – Malouf uses both phrases.⁹ In preceding novels, Malouf had mainly explored the dynamic, mutually articulating relationship of self and other in relation to pairings of intimately bound but antithetical characters: Ovid and the Child, Jim Saddler and Ashley Crowther, Digger Keen and Vic Curran.¹⁰ In the 1993 novel, Gemmy stands as the principal instance of difference, of otherness, for all other major characters. And of all the characters, Gemmy is most clearly presented as a site for the reconfiguration of postcolonial subjectivity and identification. If such reconfiguration – or transfiguration – is a problem in Malouf’s text, the problem must centre on Gemmy.

Gemmy’s cultural performance, to begin with, needs to be recognised as productive rather than merely reproductive. Gemmy stages questions of cross-cultural perception, puts into performance an exploratory reading that aims to cross the bounds of difference. Such perception, such reading, which aims not at appropriation but at recognition, enables rather than impedes effective, productive cross-cultural negotiations. The question Gemmy poses within the text is not primarily – what is Aboriginal identity? His advent raises much more pressingly a series of differently focused questions: what is European settler identity; how (and to what degree) is this identity posited upon conceptions of Aboriginal difference; how does the case of Gemmy perturb and challenge these conceptions; how does Gemmy represent in himself, and stimulate in others, a work of re-evaluation and rereading?

Gemmy’s specific capacity to raise questions about cultural identity and cross-cultural interpretation is clearly signalled in Malouf’s canny handling of the first encounter – Gemmy’s first confrontation with a North Queensland settler community. As Paul Carter has affirmed, the cross-cultural interpreter should strive to recognise “the theatrical nature of cross-cultural relations”, especially in situations of encounter.¹¹ Thus, historical actors perform, and events are staged, in accord with pre-established (albeit often unconscious or unacknowledged) scriptings. One may note here too, Carter’s suggestion that historical writing often presumes to stage for the first time what it can only restage. However Malouf (an erstwhile collaborator of Carter’s) is alert to both the pitfalls and the possible advantages pertaining to the theatrical character of cross-

cultural encounter; he plays upon the pre-established elements of encounter scenarios, inscribing critical difference upon a familiar territory.

While portraying Gemmy's first attempts at self-representation, Malouf focuses attention on "the rag" with which the newcomer covers himself – or perhaps one should say, the rag with which he doesn't quite manage to cover himself. The rag's ineffectiveness as a covering adds a comic element to the text, but also carries the suggestion that the rag is not, most crucially, a covering. This rag is Gemmy's only piece of clothing when he first encounters the novel's Anglo-Celtic settler community. While being examined, sized-up, by the settlers, Gemmy removes the rag from his waist and presents it for examination. He then becomes anxious as he watches it passed from hand to hand and mutely communicates his will to have it back. The basic terms of this encounter scene are familiar enough: naked savagery confronts clothed civility. Yet Malouf, in his narrative detailing, works carefully to defamiliarise the episode; the easy, recognisable oppositions are not allowed to determine its development or resolution.

Crucially, the rag that Gemmy proffers then reclaims is not savage garb, is not Aboriginal clothing – though the settler community clearly misreads it as such until it is presented for closer examination. The rag, once examined, proves to be "the remains of a jacket," begrimed but originally "blue, perhaps royal blue" (12), a child's sea-jacket of European, and almost certainly British, origin. Gemmy evidently retains it not as covering but as sign; it intends to show much more than it hides. As this jacket-rag confirms, Gemmy presents himself to the settlers not as a reassuring transfiguration of the other but as a troubling transfiguration of the same. Malouf's reworking of the scene of colonial encounter does not, then, offer Gemmy as an assimilable stand-in for the absent and unassimilable Aborigine; it does not presume to render Aboriginal otherness as naked fact, nor to consolidate a fantasy-inspired misrecognition of the other. Gemmy's rag is unmistakably an uncanny object that synecdochically confirms Gemmy in his status as the familiar defamiliarised.

The presentation of the jacket-rag is Gemmy's first assertion of his peculiar claim to inclusion in the white settler community, but it is also the initiation of his production, within this community, as a "mixture of monstrous strangeness and unwelcome likeness" (43). This notion of "mixture" strongly suggests a hybrid status, but one that is, crucially, a matter of settler perception; the settlers begin, now, upon presentation of the rag, to think of Gemmy in terms of mixture or hybridity. Readers concerned with Malouf's treatment of cross-cultural negotiation may find

this outcome rather too easy, but one should note that Malouf's concern is with *perceived* hybridity, and that the author does not undertake to confirm the rightness of settler perception. Moreover, this perception of cultural mixing disturbs the settlers rather than reassuring them. It does not resolve for them the problem of cultural difference; mixture is, on the contrary, the most anxious and unsettling possibility that difference suggests to Anglo-Celtic settler minds.

But is it accurate to perceive Gemmy as a hybrid? Certainly he fails to manifest the quite pronounced degree of syncretism, the intermingling of two or more cultural formations, which one would typically associate with hybrid status. Gemmy is never able to integrate his personal history. His English childhood remains split off from his subsequent Aboriginal acculturation, asserting itself, always disruptively, in stammering English speech, in unwelcome memories, and in nightmares. It is precisely the violence – indeed, the deep personal violation – marking Gemmy's experience of English culture that makes his English identity unassimilable. And the violence he meets with in the settler community consolidates the constitutive breach in his personality rather than mending it; English and Anglo-Celtic forms of culture first provoke and subsequently maintain the splitting of Gemmy's mind. The character's only hope of happiness lies not in a successful syncretism but in the symbolic, almost ritualised dissolution of the script of his English colonial identity. This dissolution, under purging rain, into "bits all disconnected" (181), is the necessary precursor to Gemmy's final acceptance of the Aboriginal gift of "the land up there" (118) – his only possible place for validated being-in-the-world. Moreover, the identity-documenting script that Gemmy has reclaimed from the schoolmaster Abbot is mistakenly reclaimed; it is not of course Gemmy's own story. This error, however, is as perfect in its way as Gemmy's inaugural slip of the tongue – his substitution of "object" for "subject" in his first characterisation of himself. The script of English colonial identity is an imposition by an alien and alienating power, a consecration of dispossession. This misrepresenting script, and Gemmy's ineluctably mistaken relationship with it, together demonstrate that imperial culture bars Gemmy from the path of syncretic biculturality. Gemmy can never reclaim, own, and incorporate his legacy of "Englishness"; only symbolically can he play out his relationship with it.

One character in Malouf's novel, the minister Mr Frazer, does nonetheless put forward a thoughtful envisioning of Gemmy as a hybrid and, all told, as a successful one. In the writings that later become his

“report”, Fraser represents Gemmy as one who has felicitously “crossed the boundaries of his given nature”, and thus, as a “forerunner” and “exemplum” of the future development of Australian cultural identity (132). Such utopian optimism no doubt accounts for a certain tendency among critics to read Frazer as the representative, within the fiction, of Malouf’s own thinking: Perera names Frazer as *Remembering Babylon’s* “recording conscience”; Philip Neilsen asserts that Malouf “leaves us in no doubt” as to “the correctness” of Frazer’s “insight”.¹² Although it would be foolish to deny a significant utopian strain in Malouf’s work, the understanding of Frazer’s vision as Malouf’s very much needs to be questioned.

Malouf’s narrative *represents* the writing of Frazer’s utopian text; that is, one does not simply see what the character writes, one witnesses a very noteworthy portion of the character’s writing process. While penning his utopian vision, and more particularly, Gemmy’s place within it, Frazer falters and interrupts his composition. Just after Frazer writes of Gemmy as a hybrid exemplum, Malouf makes a shift into the immediacy of present tense, and writes, “[Frazer] breaks off, his hand pausing above the inkwell. He has come to a knotty place in his reflections, feeling a lapse of the high emotion that has carried him on” (132). Clearly, this breaking off has among its textual functions that of alerting readers to the need for some thoughtful circumspection. Frazer’s vision is not to be gobbled up or swallowed whole. His writing needs to be read and interpreted in accord with its process – with some thoughtful interruptions rather than a too free-flowing ease.

Frazer, one should recall, first plays an authoring role when composing the “Colonial fairytale” of Gemmy’s life (19). Subsequently, during his botanising excursions with Gemmy, which constitute his quite limited initiation to Aboriginal cultural knowledge, Frazer does not reveal himself as a particularly quick and able learner – indeed, his bumbling efforts in this regard yield some of the novel’s best comic moments. Generally speaking, the character is notably bound up in his own thoughts, his own private projects, and enjoys at best a sort of respected marginality in relation to his community. An utterly sincere but all too frequently inept sympathy characterises his relations with Gemmy. And when Frazer attempts, on Gemmy’s behalf, to communicate his vision to the powers – that is, to the colonial government – he fails utterly. To sum up the case, Frazer and the Romantic, Providentialist utopianism he represents have their place in Malouf’s novel, and it is a carefully circumscribed place.¹³

Gemmy is not easily subsumed by the term hybrid, nor certainly can

one discern in him the cleanly limned exemplum for modern Australian self-fashioning, which Frazer too optimistically, too idealistically portrays. One may yet ask, is Gemmy presented as a version of Aboriginality? Does Gemmy in moments manifest himself as a fake black man or a transubstantiated indigene? Certainly, his learning to live with an Aboriginal tribe has transformed him. Between transubstantiation and transformation, however, there is an appreciable conceptual distance. One should note, also, that if Gemmy were not transformed – deeply transformed – Malouf’s imagination would be paying little respect to the specificity and coherence of Aboriginal forms of culture. But in any case, the instances of transformation, or perceived transformation, are several, and they deserve some consideration. There is “the whole cast of [Gemmy’s] face” (40) – which is analysed, it should be noted, as an understandable effect of a particular non-European acculturation: “his teeth had been worn down ... from eating the native food”; “his jaw, over the years, had adapted itself” to produce “the new sounds” of Aboriginal languages (40). Gemmy’s movements are unsettlingly silent; in this too he signals Aboriginality for the settlers. More crucially, he has a deep and detailed knowledge of the land: he understands it in Aboriginal terms and interacts with it in accord with Aboriginal codes. All these details serve as readily understandable, modestly concrete manifestations of a sixteen-year process of cultural initiation.

Malouf ventures into more difficult and delicate areas of representation when he ascribes particular forms of intuitive knowledge to Gemmy. A brief and not very daring example of this occurs when Gemmy feels “the hair on the back of his neck stiffen” at the approach of unseen, unheard black visitors (93). A more extensive, more imaginatively venturesome instance of such intuitive knowledge occurs elsewhere, however, in relation to Gemmy’s botanising excursions with Frazer. The presence of Aborigines – always unnoticed by Frazer – receives this handling:

As for what the blacks would be seeing, Gemmy knew what that was. He himself would have a clear light around him like the line that contained Mr Frazer’s drawings. It came from the energy set off where his spirit touched the spirits he was moving through.

All they would see of Mr Frazer was what the land itself saw: a shape, thin, featureless, that interposed itself a moment, like a mist or cloud, before the land blazed out in its full strength again and the shadow was gone. (68)

In accounting for this passage, one must focus first upon the assertion "Gemmy knew". Malouf very typically locates knowledge in the consciousness of a specific character, and clearly this is the case in the present instance. Malouf is here registering the experience or feeling of knowing, something that is more akin to what is called conviction than to objective knowledge. Gemmy does not feel his thought as belief; he feels it as knowledge. He is in the midst of what one may call an acculturated sense of the known and the true. What Malouf has put forward then is not an assertion of his own true knowledge of Aboriginal experience but rather a credible portrayal of Gemmy's inner life and world-view. The writer shows what his character has learned to believe, and in so doing demonstrates that individual knowledge needs always to be evaluated in relation to cultural contexts.

Yet one should also note that Gemmy's mind immediately likens Aboriginal perception to something pertaining to his other world, his other life: in Aboriginal eyes he, Gemmy, will have a "clear light" around him, "like the line" he has seen in Frazer's drawings. Thus, Gemmy's consciousness, even in this quite adventurous moment of its imagining, does not ape or mimic or fake black consciousness. Again one has a sense of this mind's specificity: it is a mind divided between two distinct cultural worlds – and a mind ever hungry to make associations between them, because, as a general rule, the two don't fit together at all well. Thus one can see that Gemmy's imagination does incline toward the work of integration, of synthesis – the more active, agential pursuit of hybrid self-fashioning. This work ultimately fails, unfortunately. One finds in Gemmy a desire for hybridity, though not its well-resolved actualisation.¹⁴

But the most engaging and suggestive aspect of the passage in question is its delineation of the problem impeding effective cross-cultural encounter. Encounter between white and black, settler and Aboriginal, does not occur during the botanising excursions. It does not occur because of limited visibility, which Malouf understands, quite unusually, as a bilateral problem – not simply as a problem of the white colonist's vision. Frazer's ways of seeing do not discern the Aboriginal watchers; but the watchers cannot clearly see Frazer either.¹⁵ Gemmy's importance, as the witness of failed encounter, is not so much that he has access to black vision but that his particular position, both in-between and divided between, allows him a unique comprehension of the problem of cross-cultural gazing.

Gemmy's textual role, then, is quite clearly to raise rather than resolve questions of identity and difference. Most acutely, this character

problematizes the understanding of hybridisation as an easy resolution of cultural difference and the antagonisms that may attend it. There remains, however, the possibility of electing another character, Janet McIvor, to fulfil the role of hybrid exemplum for a utopian Australia-in-the-making. Janet's experience of bee-swarming, her ravishment by bees, most strongly suggests this interpretative possibility. Indeed, the swarming incident is right at the core of Perera's denunciation of Malouf's supposedly facile and irresponsible deployment of hybridism. According to this reading, "hybridised European bees" claim Janet as a bride, and thus consecrate her privileged (and pointedly non-native) hybrid status.¹⁶ Thus, hybridised spirits of place – of a land already colonised and hybridised – elect and by the same gesture create a duly hybrid (but nonetheless white and European) preferred inhabitant for the land. The notion of the ravishing bees' hybridity is not, however, Malouf's. Janet, it is true, will become in later life a hybridiser of bees, a creator of new strains, but the swarming incident has to do with Mrs Hutchence's bees. Mrs Hutchence, as one learns, keeps "stingless native bees" and also "imported ones" (139). The bees that swarm upon Janet are "armed angels" (143); they carry the threat of the sting. So, the swarmers are "imported", it would seem, and likely as not Europeans, but their hybrid character is neither stated nor suggested. Whatever its relation to the theme of hybridity may be, Malouf's bee swarm clearly intends to manifest unassimilable otherness, an order of knowledge and being that is beyond the human, a superhuman ravishing force. (One recalls the transfigured Zeus's claiming of Leda – and others.) In this moment, the text strains toward realms of experience outside the human intersubjective realm – beyond society, culture, and ideology. One may not favour such a fictive move, and one may question its validity or its success, but Malouf's imagining nonetheless maintains, upon examination, its integrity; the writing's real details resist its reconstruction as a neocolonial allegory of cross-cultural encounter.

Determining the degree and character of Janet's hybrid status is a matter of quite substantial critical and interpretative consequence, because Janet is, indisputably, the ordering consciousness for the novel's resolution. This mature Janet, however, is a nun and a scholar-scientist. Both of these roles discourage the reading of Janet as somehow representative, as some broadly applicable model for modern Australian self-fashioning. Far from manifesting an empowered hybridity, Janet occupies a marginal place within her social world, willfully apart from this world though inescapably drawn into its on-going legacies of violence. Her

final role, as the narrative's orienting consciousness, is most pertinently to situate prayer at the novel's resolution, to establish prayer as its final defining gesture. Prayer, of course, manifests aspiration rather than achievement. Janet aspires to discover and inhabit a world in which borders, thresholds, are radiant – as with the sudden, briefly luminous, shoreline meeting of continent and ocean in the novel's final moments. Yet this blessed reconciliation is crucially a matter of "approach" (200). Within the world of experience the novel records, difference rubs roughly, or is roughly rubbed; the border, the margin or edge, is a site of contact and learning, but also of lesion, of wounding, even scarring – as is quite typically the case in Malouf.¹⁷

How then does *Remembering Babylon* take place in our contemporary world of cultural and racial borders? How does it participate in negotiations, often conflictual, of Australian cultural actuality? My preceding analysis strongly suggests that Malouf is a tester or questioner of borders and not an inattentive or irresponsible transgressor. His novel reveals an acute and thoughtful knowledge of where the borders stand, how they have been drawn and how sustained. It represents the difficulty of entering and effectively inhabiting new cultural territory, and despite its clear commitment to reconciliation, it maintains a measured circumspection with respect to the resolution of difference presented by hybridisation. The writing arises out of its confrontation with the nettled questions of how to represent difference and the encounter with difference, of how – in what ways and on what terms – one may represent the cultural other. Malouf's Frazer stumbles upon such questions, and so, one surmises, has Malouf. As Lee Spinks acknowledges, Malouf does not resolve "the intractable problem of representing but not speaking 'for' the 'other'", but he is clearly aware of the problem and self-consciously wrestling with it.¹⁸ He offers a "writing that is struggling, of necessity only partly successfully" to reshape the world in and by which it is shaped.¹⁹ Authenticity of voice cannot be ratified by bloodlines nor by the demonstration of appropriate ethnic indices – not least because no writer, whether pertaining to a relatively empowered or disenfranchised group, can lay claim to freedom from the power systems of the social world. The writer's responsibility, then, cannot be to resolve her or his relationship with power and violence – their history and their actuality. The writer must register conflict and contradiction, in the world and in the self, and must struggle. Gemmy Fairley – already established as a complex, multivalent figure – may also serve as a textual embodiment of this necessary struggle.

The provocatively titled collection *De-scribing Empire* was published in 1994, the year after *Remembering Babylon*'s appearance. In the concluding text of that collection, noteworthy titled "Reading Difference", editors Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson laud "the resilience and ingenuity of textuality in eluding forms of constraint and control".²⁰ This statement affirms implicitly the existence of a diversified body of contemporary texts, in which each text in its own way counters, eludes and thus counters, the representational limitations imposed by the power systems of its social world. It may be that by reading differently, by reading for difference differently, one could ascribe to *Remembering Babylon* a portion of the resilience and ingenuity Tiffin and Lawson so hearteningly evoke.

Notes

- 1 Germaine Greer, "Malouf's Objectionable Whitewash", *Age*, 3 November 1993.
- 2 Peter Craven, "An Ad for Philistinism", *Australian*, 10 November 1993.
- 3 Peter Otto, "Forgetting Colonialism (David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon*)", *Meanjin* 52.3 (1993): 546, 553.
4. Veronica Brady, "Redefining Frontiers: 'Race,' Colonizers and the Colonized", *Antipodes: A North American Journal of Australian Literature* 8.2 (1994): 94.
- 5 Suvendrini Perera, "Unspeakable Bodies: Representing the Aboriginal in Australian Critical Discourse", *Meridian: The La Trobe University English Review* 13.1 (1994): 17, 18, 22.
- 6 Gia Metherell, "Babylon not always remembered fondly", *Canberra Times*, 24 May 1996.
- 7 Sheila Whittick, "Excavating Historical Guilt and Moral Failure in *Remembering Babylon*: An Exploration of the Faultlines in White Australian Identity", *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 19.2 (1997): 99. See also Marc Delrez and Paulette Michel-Michot, "The Politics of Metamorphosis: Cultural Transformation in David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*", *The Contact and the Culmination*, ed. Marc Delrez and Benedicte Ledent-Benedicte (Liege, Belgium: L3-Liege Language and Literature, 1997): 155-70.
- 8 Michael Mitchell, "Armed Angels: Visible Darkness in Malouf and Golding", *World Literature Today* 74.4 (2000): 771; Carolyn Bliss, "Reimagining the Remembered: David Malouf and the Moral Implications of Myth", *World Literature Today* 74.4 (2000): 731-2.
- 9 David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon* (Toronto: Vintage, 1994): 10, 69. All subsequent references to this text are presented parenthetically.

- 10 The works presenting these character pairings are respectively: *An Imaginary Life* (1978), *Fly Away Peter* (1982), and *The Great World* (1990).
- 11 Paul Carter, *Living in a New Country* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992): 160.
- 12 Perera, 18; Philip Neilsen, *Imagined Lives: A Study of David Malouf* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996): 212–13.
- 13 Peter Pierce has presented a view similar to mine, finding in Frazer's utopianism "a well-intentioned if deluded desire" in "Problematic History, Problems of Form: David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*", *Provisional Maps: Critical Essays on David Malouf*, ed. Amanda Nettelbeck (Nedlands: The Centre for Studies in Australian Literature, UWA, 1994): 193.
- 14 Mitchell coincides with this view of Gemmy, arguing that the character is "a victim of the metropolis" and thus "not a representative of Aboriginal culture"; his hybridity is at best "a hybridity of victimhood" (*World Literature Today* 74.4 [2000]: 771).
- 15 A difference of degree is noteworthy registered: the Aborigines' capacity to see Frazer is limited, but Frazer sees "nothing at all", even when the Aboriginal watchers are "meant to be seen" (68).
- 16 Perera, 18.
- 17 "The world is all edges", and often woundingly edgy, in *12 Edmondstone Street* (New York: Penguin, 1986): 54. For an extended discussion of Malouf's edges, see Martin Leer, "At the Edge: Geography and the Imagination in the Work of David Malouf", *Australian Literary Studies* 12.1 (1985): 3–21.
- 18 Lee Spinks, "Allegory, Space, Colonialism: *Remembering Babylon* and the Production of Colonial History", *Australian Literary Studies* 17.2 (1995): 173.
- 19 Margery Fee, "Who Can Write as Other?", *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) : 244.
- 20 Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, *De-scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and Textuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994): 235.

THE CUTTER-OFF OF WATER

It's better here in the country, the heat. In the city the heat is filtered through the buildings, through the warm bitumen and it rises up off the pavement like steam. Night and day, it's there, even if you can't see it. It's there in the high, airless rooms, in the grey courtyards full of dead wisteria stubs, in the distant roar of the freeway. Here it hangs in the air like a curtain, shimmering, it's part of the landscape. Beyond every hill there's that great emptiness in the distance and the sky is different too. Bluer, you might say.

People say that it's the cities where you find the market in death. That it's there that old ladies get murdered and bodies are found in alleyways, a knife slipped in the space between the ribs. They think that a crime like a murder is unimaginable anywhere but in the cities, that it's there that you can cover up, protect, absorb crime.

Here you can sit for hours on the low steps, the grass like dry feathers around the feet. You can spend hours watching the light, hollower here, and brighter. And it's true that the birds are louder here, over the fields, over the creek.

There are geese down by the dam. Geese take to the air clumsily, they have to make a run, skimming over the water. They lift their wings heavily. I found a goose once, tangled in the sharp wire of the old boundary fence. It was half dead when I found it. I bathed its wounds and stuffed bits of bread and fish down its throat and made it a place to sleep on the verandah. In the morning it was very still and when I held it against me I felt a ribbon unfurling and something like a white arm brushing against my face. It was the long, sinous neck falling. I buried it under the peppermint trees.

At the back of the house one of the peppermint trees has been uprooted and it lies with its roots twisting darkly towards the sky. I don't know what happened, don't know if it was a storm or an axe, or a long ago shearer wanting a fire to warm his feet by. Fallen, it disgorges beetles,

spiders, small flickering lizards. Yesterday I saw a brown snake spring out of the rotting body like a sudden breath.

I am thinking about the word *house*.

A house: the space a woman must create around men and children to protect them, to restrict them, to prevent them from the waywardness that makes them want to leave the house, leave the woman.

The shearer's house is the kind of house that children love. Dim and narrow, it offers up long passages and dark nooks. There are spaces, shadow-bright and mysterious, and long cracks between the planks of the walls. In the afternoon the light falls like tiger stripes across the room.

The day unrolls into moments, the light shifts, you notice a small lizard on the wall above the fireplace. There is a stillness to the heat and a sense of things moving and shimmering in the haze filled afternoons. The gum trees lean over the roof of the house and the leaves shift against the tin.

Sometimes I sleep late into the morning. In the long space between waking and the first breath I see a pair of hands folded against the pillow. Pale, thin, they belong to another woman.

In the bedroom the shearer, or someone after him, has hung a print. Under the cracked glass is an open sky, clouding in the distance, and beneath it, three young and beautiful shepherds and a serene woman by a stone tomb. One of the shepherds is kneeling before a low plinth, reading the words that have been carved into the stone. *Et in Arcadia ego*. Another shepherd is relaying the reader's words to the serene woman who looks as if she has already heard them, looks as if she understands everything in the world.

So far away, Arcadia, where the light through the trees, and the trees themselves, and the shepherds and the serene woman are bathed in death. For it is death that has written those words.

There is no writing, no words upon a page. I sit for hours by the window, the tea cooling in the pot, and watch the gum leaves against the glass like small silver fish.

Within the story of this summer is another story. It lies, coiled like a small tight spring. It's a story I read three or four years ago and can't get out of my mind. It happened a long time ago, on another summer's day, in a village in the south of France, in the late afternoon. A man from the water board came to cut off the water of a woman who was slightly different, slightly strange. Retarded, the townspeople said. She lived by the train

line. The new high-speed train cut straight in front of the house. Every hour the house shuddered with the force and the roar of it. She had two children, this woman they called backward, a boy of three years and a baby. How did she survive, this backward woman? I suppose she made a living somehow. I suppose she did odd jobs in the village. And perhaps she had some help.

She couldn't pay the electricity bills, or the water bills, and one day in the summer a man from the water board came to cut the water off. It was a very hot summer, the grass dry, leaves dry, sky very high and clear. He knew how hot it was, the man from the water board, because the sweat pooled between his shoulder blades as he turned the water off and he had to use the bottom of his shirt to wipe his face.

He saw the woman there. He saw the woman and the children there in the dry garden, watching him as he worked. She didn't say anything to him, didn't ask him not to cut the water off, just watched him. She had strange eyes, he said later. Eyes that seemed to have no centre, no pupil, so that it seemed the whole eye was looking at you.

He knew, the Cutter-off of Water, how hot the days were and how long, and that she, the backward woman, would be left without any water to bathe the children, without any water to give them to drink. He knew this but he did his job, he did what he had been sent to do. He cut off the water and he left.

That evening the woman took the two children and went and lay down on the rails of the new high speed train. They all died together. Feel the sun-warm iron against the backbone, feel its firmness, its utter lack of give. Hold the children, one under each arm, whisper to them perhaps.

They say the driver didn't even see them there, dim shapes in the warm dusk.

Dusk. Across the fields the light of dusk. It's everywhere, the narrow rooms of the shearer's cottage, the twisting grass of the paddock, the far-off creek. Purple, a blue and purple light that's reflected back from the oily surface of the dam. If you look at the water you can see the peppermint trees and above them, the last shred of sun unfurling like a ragged flag against the sky.

For a long while I don't look at the light of evening, don't look at the fading sunset. They don't interest me. Times goes by around me, so

much of it must have already flowed by.

I'll go on with the story.

It was not, in fact, the first time the Cutter-Off of Water had seen the woman. Before he worked for the Water Board, he was a conductor on a ballast train. Few people know what a ballast train is. They haven't seen the south, haven't seen the violent gales that come down like a whip and leave a blue sky in their wake. In the winters the rain would wash away the train tracks if gravel wasn't poured between the railway sleepers. The ballast had to be hauled from the quarries and dumped coarsely onto flatcars and spread along the railways in the south. This was a long time ago. The tracks are swifter now, and sturdier and the quarries are only empty gashes.

After the day's work, The Cutter-off of Water would walk back along the railway line to the village. See him, this man with his thick fingers and his peaked cap, strolling through the French countryside on a summer evening.

See the French countryside: wavering tips of cypress trees, pathways, twisting and red, some blackbirds whirling in a field of corn, night skies simmering with stars.

But wait. What are these? Exclamations on wonders natural and touristical? It's not a painting behind glass, this place where the coil of the story springs open. Not a place where pale flowers reach towards placid skies and men stroll homeward to down dark beers in quiet cafes. No this is a place of shuddering trains and coal mines. A place where the earth gives up the burned bodies of miners, picks still frozen in their hands, lumps of coal glistening in their soot-black hair. A place where purple men freeze in baker's doorways and children sleep under burlap and newspaper.

It's in this country that the Cutter-off Of Water walks home past the house of the backward woman. She would be standing in the garden regarding the bare field and its crop of yellow boulders with her distracted stare. Alone, her hands a bit thick, the children playing in the dirt behind her.

He would nod to her and touch his hat in the way that men had then. She never spoke to him, never arranged the face into a smile of greeting, but once, trapped between her hands, she held out a beetle, dark and shiny, its shell the colour of a shotgun barrel. Inside she had a tin chest full of them, glistening darkly, glistening images of the Cutter-Off of Water and the woman they called backward.

Her dress slips easily off the shoulders. Unclothed, her skin is strangely soft to the touch. There is a low cot against the wall. She doesn't say anything, doesn't fight him and he is not rough. When he pushes against her he worries, for a moment, about the thinness of her bones. He can feel her small ribs, pressing like ridges into his flesh. On the window ledge he sees that she has put a green branch in a flower pot.

In the shearer's cottage there is another picture, a photograph. Not a coloured blow-up but an older photograph, finer and delicate like the daguerreotypes pressed between paper in the parlours of the city. It's a picture of a woman dressed in black, slender, with a faraway look. She could be the shearer's mother, could be anyone's mother.

There's nothing left of anyone's face or body after they die, no record of their smile. They say that photographs are for remembrance but it's not true. They are forgetting. The countenance of the dead, flat, fixed forever in light and shadow is only one image among the hundreds of images in the memory. We think that photographs enable us to see the dead again but they don't, they restore them to silence.

She's been abandoned to silence, the backward woman. No one will ever speak about her again. Her name, if she had one has been forgotten. She didn't argue, didn't ask the Cutter-off of Water, didn't ask anyone for help. The case is closed.

She gathered up her children and all three of them went and lay down on rails of the high-speed train line. She held a child under each arm and waited for the train. The Cutter-off of Water was drinking marc from a white cup in a café in the village.

DIANE FAHEY

BREATH

Summer loses itself in off-hand winds,
dishwater rain from low skies – so sparking
a thirst for extremes: to be beyond it all,
stand in a flooded plain of goose-pimpling green,
the steel sun driving a stake through noon, legs braced
against shunts and whorls as the tide pivots.

Submerged: a boundless room of dream colours
where doors of opal glass swing open, shut,
starburst fronds stream like squid. Nylon threads of
sunlight hook you upwards along spritzed trails
to emerge one breath, a lifetime, closer to things,
sight lent to the other senses, this moment
an elegy for all moments, a warrant of
desire edged in gilt haze, in salt fire.

FROM THE SERIES FLYING

for Shinkichi Takahashi, Peter Boyle & Marc Chagall

“Her White”

The white
woman lay down
naked beside the coloured
bowl of fruit.

The blue
tree blew next to the yellow
birds which remained encapsulated
in some space
of their own.

A red
scarf covered
the woman's feet.

The village in the background
was in the background.

Her own house crept closer
to her and the patchwork
rug she lay upon
gave only shallow meaning
to the enduring curve
of her hips
and breasts.

Both arms wrapped
around her head swept
back the dark
hair from her bland
face.

Her nudity was untranslatable
by my eye
into the nudity
I knew
and the sky in my blood
lifted me away
from any vision
while in the earth
a most visceral step
Her White
conceived as hunger.

Three Birds

Three birds face
in different directions
and they all see
sky.

Where is the god
we call on the way
through all the rooms
we pass.

The sky seems flat enough
to walk on, not an accident
of this round world
without purpose.

I need the god, I cry
as too much of myself
builds up
in solid objects.

The birds split
into six and the sky goes
over here
and over there.

Sacredly, the last
remaining direction
stops resisting
and enters the fray.

The earth shakes
as God enters a bird's breast
with my belief
that it can fly.

READING GROUPS AND CREATIVE WRITING COURSES: THE YEAR'S WORK IN FICTION

This year the finalists for the Miles Franklin prize were a rather international lot of novelists – Shirley Hazzard for *The Great Fire*, J. M. Coetzee for *Elizabeth Costello*, Peter Carey for *My Life as a Fake*, with some Australian domiciles – Peter Goldsworthy for *Three Dog Night*, Elliot Perlman for *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and Anna Maria Jagose for the historical novel, *Slow Water*. While this was acclaimed as an impressive field for the prize, the dominance of the “internationals” Carey, Coetzee and the ultimate winner, Hazzard, invites reflection on the performance of more “local” writers over the past few years. There were no contenders by Murray Bail, David Foster, Helen Garner, Kate Grenville, Rodney Hall, David Malouf, Frank Moorhouse or Tim Winton, and, sadly, Elizabeth Jolley has retired and Thea Astley, a regular Miles Franklin winner, died in August.

Brian Castro's *Shanghai Dancing* scooped several other prizes, including the New South Wales Premier's prizes for fiction and for Book of the Year. The history of this novel presents further matter for consideration: Castro's regular publishers, Allen and Unwin, rejected the manuscript and it was finally published by Giramondo, the small press run by Ivor Indyk from the University of Newcastle. At the dinner where his awards were announced, Castro expressed some satisfaction that his rejected novel had won such prestigious prizes, but the publishers appeared unrepentant. Apparently for them, this *tour de force* by a novelist with a string of original and brilliant works behind him was not a commercial proposition. Castro's novels are difficult to read; he demands a commitment from readers who will follow his dazzling and digressive wit, and can tolerate his shifts from one moment of historical time and perspective to another without clear direction signs. These readers exist in Australia, but they are a small elite. Australian publishers long for the Booker-prize kind of novel, intelligent and sophisticated, with a clear narrative and a strong commitment to

entertaining the educated readers who buy the winners each year. As Lisa Highton, the publishing director at Hodder Headline, told Jeremy Fisher (*ASA Newsletter*, July 2004) publishers are looking for “books that will appeal to reading groups”.

The judging panel for the 2003 Australian Literature Society Gold Medal (which I chaired) found *Shanghai Dancing* the most serious novel contender for the prize, but gave the award to Laurie Duggan’s collection of poetry, *Mangroves* (discussed at length in David McCooney’s review of poetry for *Westerly* last year). Castro’s novel offered a level of poetry in many respects equal to Duggan’s, and the readership for poetry and for Castro’s fiction may well be the same group of people. We all know about the tiny market for poetry.

The novel can appeal to a range of audiences and performs quite different services for different readers. For most readers, a novel is a time-filling entertainment providing a satisfying excursion of the imagination. Some readers enjoy the way that novels address aspects of experience beyond the range of the daily newspapers, or political discussion, or histories. Some want a book that will please everyone in their reading group. Some may share my desire for challenging ideas, thrilling language, transforming emotions, the whole excitement of living in a world that the novel has transformed into something mysterious, emotionally extreme, full of possibility. Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral* trilogy stands as my current model of this kind of novel, but Colm Toibin’s *The Master* about Henry James’s life at Rye is my most recent experience of it. This is too much to expect from every novel or even every hundredth novel, but one can live in hope.

From a writers’ point of view, the novel also presents a range of opportunities – to explore obsessions, to enjoy the possibilities of language, character and narrative, to analyse society, culture and politics, to argue about the current state of the world, to write history from an unusual viewpoint, and, increasingly, as a form of personal expression mediated by the creative writing course. The match between readers and writers is not often perfect, and it can be no surprise that none of the novels in this pile of books published in Australia through 2003 to July 2004 offers the engaging and transforming power of my ideal. But there is plenty for the reader who wants intelligent diversion.

Janette Turner Hospital’s *Due Preparations for the Plague* and Rodney Hall’s *The Last Love Story* demonstrate the skill of consummate prose writers. Both invoke the atmosphere of a post 9/11 world where terrorism and oppression threaten the freedoms of the West. Hospital’s central

characters are the children of those who died in an airline hijacking in 1987. As adults they find themselves obsessed with exposing the conspiracy that led to the hijacking, consequently endangering their own lives. The novel combines murder mystery, spy thriller and family drama, shifting between the USA, France and the Middle East. Hospital judges the pace and the dialogue finely, leaving us with a pertinent question for our times “What possible preparations can be made?” (390)

In a note at the end of his *The Last Love Story* Hall tells us that he got the idea from a conversation overheard in a Berlin restaurant where a group of Germans told GDR escape stories to some American visitors. Hall makes his story of a man deceiving one woman in order to free another into a more general vision of a totalitarian future, and subtitles it “A fairytale for the day after tomorrow”. In his novel the City is an archetypal city divided by a river that keeps the industrial workers from the wealthier sections of the city. The decadence of a globalised world has incited Christian fundamentalists in the industrial section so that:

A preacher with the clenched rage of the stillborn – the next best thing to a charismatic visionary – whose call for committed Christian principles, in a world of rampant drug-use and the rise of the Ayatollahs once Saddam Hussein had fallen, sparked so fanatical a response that armies immediately began massing on both sides of the river and, after a brief period on red alert, made their move. (7)

Though the novel is a warning against a possible future, its narrative follows a more personal story of divided allegiances, subterfuge and suffering. Hall does not try to understand the rationale behind those committed to oppressive regimes, or even to sympathise with the bourgeois mother who almost loses her simple daughter to the escape plan. These characters perform the stereotypical roles of the fairy tale that he declares himself to be writing. Anna Funder’s account of the GDR’s love stories and suffering in the non-fictional *Stasiland* provides a more complex and shocking version of real possibilities than Hall’s simpler imagining of a future. Nevertheless, Hall is so experienced and skilled a writer that *The Last Love Story* appears effortless, as if he has tossed it off as relief from his more ambitious work.

Those of us impressed by Andrew McGahan’s first novels watch with interest as he develops a career as a writer who can move beyond the limits of fictional autobiography. While *Last Drinks* (2000) operated in the thriller

genre, his latest novel *The White Earth* returns to the examination of the meaning of Australian history that underpinned *1988*. McGahan looks closely at a particular area of land – the point where the Darling Downs meets the ranges north of Toowoomba – and explores the history of white ownership. He creates two characters – William, a nine-year-old boy who has grown up on a wheat farm and his great uncle John, who has battled to own Kuran, one of the old grazing properties. The Aborigines have long disappeared from John's land but the signs of their occupation are everywhere in bora rings, rock cairns and tree-clearing. McGahan describes Kuran in detail, even providing a map of its major features, in order to ask serious questions about human intimacy with the land and the meaning of land ownership. The dramatic crisis comes when John's anti-native title league friends turn out to be Australian adherents to the Ku Klux Klan and William discovers clear evidence that Aborigines have been massacred at Kuran. This melancholy novel serves as an elegy for the land and the lost opportunities for black and white Australians to share their love for it. Nevertheless, McGahan's decision to tell part of the novel through the point of view of a child restricts the sophistication of his discussion of the issues, and it moves at a fairly slow and predictable pace. *The White Earth* will disappoint readers who loved the self-mocking wit and humour in McGahan's early novels, but it assures us that he remains a serious and committed novelist.

In this post-postmodernist era, new and playful versions of history remain a prominent mode for the novel. Nerida Newton's first novel, *The Lambing Flat*, splits her narrative between the story of a Chinese boy accompanying his father to the goldfields of New South Wales and the lives of a son of convicts and his immigrant bride setting out for the bush of Central Queensland. This allows her to combine the Lambing Flat riots – one of the most racist events in Australian history – and the struggles of women on the frontier in one novel. It is a stretch, both artistically and geographically, and we wait in anticipation of how she will bring her Chinese boy and Australian bush girl together. This is not history as an exploration of the cultures and attitudes of the past, but as a repository for stories about racism and sexual hardship to serve the enlightened contemporary sympathies of the novelist. Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* demonstrated that postmodern games with such history can imply the complexity of the past but *The Lambing Flat* simplifies matters.

Kristin Williamson's rollicking and enjoyable account of the lives of convict women, *Women on the Rocks: a tale of two convicts*, sticks much closer

to the historical record – she cites her historical sources in some detail at the end. The novel purports to be the journal of Mary Jones, a woman transported for forgery in 1820, and Williamson works from the records to invent Mary's journey from maidservant to successful seamstress in Sydney. While there is murder and mistreatment aplenty, the novel celebrates the vitality of convict life, clearly endorsing the comment from Mary's friend, Jane, that they have been "transported to a better world". At times Mary's narration may seem a little too prim for credibility, but *Women on the Rocks* achieves what it clearly sets out to do – entertain readers while educating them a little about Australian history.

Of the other enjoyable novels published over the year, Mardi McConnochie's *The Snow Queen* stands out for its lightness of touch. McConnochie creates a character called Edward Larwood, rather like Robert Helpmann, who returns to Adelaide to direct the ailing Ballet South. Her description of Teddy's response to Adelaide offers the ironic pleasure of recognition to any reader who knows about Helpmann – and Adelaide. The story of Teddy's return to his home city runs parallel with a memoir by his earlier mentor, Galina Koslova, a veteran of the Ballets Russes who has now retired to the life of an Adelaide socialite. This story allows McConnochie to reflect on the possibilities for the creation of serious art in the provinces, the obliteration of the contribution of women to the history of performing arts, and the nature of artistic commitment. Posy Foster, an unpretentious Adelaide girl, choreographs the beautiful ballet, "The Snow Queen", but lives the rest of her life as an unknown ballet teacher in Adelaide. McConnochie's novel is so skilful and unpretentious that it suggests Posy Foster's businesslike approach to art may be her own.

Malcolm Knox's *A Private Man* also examines familiar urban territory – this time, the middle class lives of a North Shore Sydney family. But the subject proves less comfortable than it might appear at first, as John Brand, the respectable doctor, is seduced further and further into the world of pornography and internet sex. Knox is curious about the underside of the respectable lives of men: John's three sons follow the divergent paths of doctor, cricketer and pornographer, each confronting masculine corruption from a different point of view. The second son, Chris, is in the Australian Test cricket team and the novel has some sharp criticisms to make of that team's racism and dishonesty. Chris belongs to the old school of cricketer, whose vices only extend to drunkenness and picking up admiring girls in bars after a game; his younger team-mates now prefer the more professional consolations of video sex and prostitutes. The eldest son,

Davis, offers a kind of moral centre for the novel, though he appears ineffectual (less masculine?) for much of its length, while Hammett pushes the family tastes into the open as a purveyor of sleaze. I'm not sure that Knox is saying that a propensity for pornography is genetic, or whether he sees it as part of the range of male sexuality. He does depict Hammett as a little boy with a precocious sexual curiosity who loved to run around naked – are these the signs of a potential pornographer or just an astute businessman? John's addiction is presented as sad, pathetic and humiliating, rather than immoral. Knox does make the interesting comment that internet sex may appeal more to elderly men who have never had access to pornography before than it does to the young.

A Private Man presents North Shore social aspiration and the masculine addiction to pornography and sport with more solemnity than it may deserve; I can't help feeling that this material calls for a sharp satire. There are times when this possibility comes close to the surface, as in the descriptions of Davis's modern marriage or the tawdry pornography exhibition with its ludicrous strip routines. Knox, however, resists any temptation to mock his subject.

Other novels that examine aspects of contemporary experience in interesting ways include John Clanchy's *Lessons from the Heart* about two adolescent girls experimenting with sex and love on a school excursion, and Terry McGee's first novel, *Misconceptions*, based on her experiences as a gynaecologist. McGee provides detailed and credible accounts of her central character's working life (you'll learn amazing things about the female body) as she negotiates a negligence claim and the difficulties of love. It's also that rare accomplishment – a well-written and energetic novel about contemporary working life. Wayne Grogan's first novel, *Junkie Pilgrim*, reports from the underworld of Sydney drug trafficking, prison and the Cross, a genre now familiar from Australian film and television. Grogan's protagonist is a North Shore Catholic boy gone wrong, and his experiences are recounted with a sharp observation of detail. Grogan worked on the waterfront in Sydney and Newcastle and, like McGee's novel, *Junkie Pilgrim* conveys a convincing sense of insider information.

In *Turtle Nest* Chandani Lokugé writes sensuous and restrained prose (reminiscent of Arundhati Roy) on a suitably exotic subject – the return of an Australian girl, called Aruni, to the Sri Lankan fishing village where she was born. But Aruni's search for a homecoming, her desire to belong to her mother's beach people, ends with her pack rape on the beach by the village boys. At this point the sensuous writing creates problems of interpretation: is the rape some sort of initiation that returns Aruni to her

lost family? Or is it a violation, a warning against too close an inquiry by the sophisticated Western woman into a more brutal culture? Lokugé calls it “rape” but describes the act in a relatively soft way, suggesting that Aruni has been seeking this all along, that she “asked for it”. The last paragraph describes the abject state of the beach cloth that Aruni was wearing, but there is a residue of longing for a more “earthy” and authentic world even here:

Later that morning, the women discovered the cloth washed ashore. It was too soiled to sell even to the poor local folk. Just fit for those beach dogs which dragged around anything even faintly smelling of blood.

Once feminists would have raised their voices over this (remember the arguments about Beverley Farmer’s rape story “Darling Odile?”), but Lokugé’s novel appears to be firmly encased by the kind of postcolonial theory that renders the Third World more authentic than the First. Surely such a sensationalist ending invites us to reflect on the freedoms of women living in Australia compared to those surviving on a beach in Sri Lanka.

Last year, Paul Genoni singled out Gail Jones’s novel *Black Mirror* as the first novel most likely to be read in ten years’ time. She has followed it with *Sixty Lights*, a beautiful, if rather self-conscious, contemplation of ways of seeing, which has just been listed as a contender for this year’s Booker Prize, together with the other Australian contender, Shirley Hazzard’s *The Great Fire*. Her protagonist, an Australian orphan called Lucy Strange, has the gift of seeing with an artist’s eye and develops an interest in photography. The book is divided into sixty short chapters – the “lights” of the title – each offering some carefully rendered visual image as Lucy’s life progresses.

Sixty Lights is also an historical novel – Lucy is born in Melbourne in 1852, and her awareness of the visual coincides with the invention and popularising of photography. Her mother’s death in childbirth and her father’s subsequent suicide puts Lucy and her brother Thomas into the care of their uncle, an Indian Civil Service officer who takes them to London. Both Lucy and Thomas are drawn to the possibilities of photography with Thomas finding work as a projectionist for a magic lantern show, and Lucy in an albumen factory. Lucy travels to India on the prospect of marrying her uncle’s wealthy friend, Isaac Newton (having

assigned these names, Jones has no shame in commenting on them as if they were genuine), but she becomes pregnant on the voyage and returns, with Newton's blessing and support, to London. There she establishes herself as a photographer before succumbing to consumption.

This slight narrative allows Jones to invest each turn of Lucy's life with her own poetic image-making – from the startling description on the opening page of the Indian servant pierced by the mirror he has been carrying, to Lucy's own death “a slight tilt of vision, as when one tilts a daguerreotype in its box, and the image slides suddenly away, into shiny nothingness” (246). The story is little more than a premise for the series of images that Jones wants to create. These are vivid, poetic and always interesting, but there is a studied carefulness about the writing that deflects engagement. From time to time, Jones's characters think in the terminology of the literary theorist: they notice “interiorised concentration”, feel “extenuated abjection” wonder at the “alien quality of autonomy” of objects.

The novel repeatedly refers to *Jane Eyre*, *Great Expectations* and the opera, *The Flying Dutchman*, as if these are touchstones for a Victorian sensibility. But her characters operate free from the Victorian restrictions of financial need, sexual custom or social sensitivity. So Lucy's unmarried pregnancy creates no real difficulties, and Isaac Newton provides the wherewithal for her future as a pioneer photographer/artist. In India, Lucy can enjoy herself among the bazaars and temples without fear or offence. No doubt this is deliberate postmodernist anachronism, and the novel recalls Peter Carey in his *Oscar and Lucinda* or *Illywhacker* mode. Nevertheless, this selective gleaning from history and Indian culture appears reductive, even exoticising. Jones began the novel during a writer's residency in India sponsored by Asialink, “an institution dedicated to cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and the generation of artworks inspired by the honouring and celebrating of cultural difference”. Cultural *difference* – between Victorian people and the present, between India, England and Australia – here emerges only in the service of the poetic image.

Philip Salom also uses the novel as a vehicle for poetic image-making. His *Toccata and Rain* tells the story of a man with two lives. In his late forties, Brian has driven out of his rather dull and idle life in Perth to turn up as Simon, an idiosyncratic artist, in Melbourne. A television documentary about the strange tower structures he is building in a Williamstown backyard alerts his estranged wife in Perth to his new life, and the novel begins a quest for Brian's/Simon's memory. Back in Perth,

Brian consults a psychiatrist who believes he has a case of “dissociative fugue” – occasional bouts of amnesia – and he can no longer recall life in Melbourne. Money is no problem as Brian’s parents have left him a block of apartments, so he can retrace his trip to Melbourne and try to discover his other self.

Immediately, he finds that Simon has a lively sexual life, with a beautiful blonde dragging him to bed and a plump brunette providing lodging, food and love. Even his Melbourne psychiatrist finds him sexually attractive. It’s a pity he has to worry so much about his mental state because Simon clearly has lived in clover. Though the council is not happy with the tower structures, most people of taste find them wonderful, and Simon is soon working on them again. Of course, the cause of his memory loss is eventually revealed – childhood trauma over his father’s death – and Brian/Simon lights out for still another life.

The prose of the novel slips into poetry as a way to convey Brian/Simon’s mental state, and to suggest his detachment from the lives of the women around him. It is difficult to sympathise with this male self-obsession, however, and, while the novel explores the relationship between art and memory it does not reveal anything profound. Brian regards the woodwork craft of his ex-wife as kitsch, presumably by comparison with the ceramic-studded towers he builds as Simon. This appears to be the traditional derision of women’s craft by the artist-man, but I missed any irony on the part of the novelist. Salom’s poetry can be sharp and witty; framed in this story of a male ego it appears another form of masculine self-regard.

Reading a lot of recent fiction in quick succession reveals some of the conventions of contemporary Australian writing. Most of the novels surveyed here are structured as split narratives, usually with the past and the present time sequences as separate narratives offered in alternating chapters, but often with the points of view of two different characters. The novels by McGahan, Knox, Newton, Clanchy, Lokugé and McConnochie all work in this way. This may seem an interesting and appropriate approach to some material, but for a reader it can be all too predictable and even formulaic. In most cases, this strategy withholds information from the reader so that a revelation can occur in the second last or last chapter – leaving the reader with an irritating sense of being manipulated. Often we are led to a melodramatic or sensational conclusion, the “terrible truth” that will be revealed in the course of the double-narrative novel if the reader will only stick it out. Many of the novels begin in the present tense, some only breaking into the past tense

under the pressure of length, making for a monotonous reading experience.

In some cases the decision to tell the story from the point of view of a child, foreign or mentally handicapped character – granted that Faulkner did it successfully – limits the language possibilities of the novel. The choice of the voice for a novel must be the most crucial element in its range; Jones and Salom may err on the side of self-indulgence but they announce from the beginning of their novels that a skilled writer is at work.

Let's rejoice then, that Brian Castro, the self-professed 'disorientalist' can produce such a rich and complex work as *Shanghai Dancing*. Castro takes the experiences of his own family as the loose basis for a narrative of dynasties that parodies any solemn notion of family history. The novel begins with a pose of autobiography as, after the death of his father, the middle-aged narrator decides to go back to his birthplace – the straits between Shanghai and Hong Kong – and seek out his family stories. Here, Portuguese adventurers, Chinese warriors, prim English missionaries, simple Chinese girls, gangsters and whores struggle their way through the twentieth century. Castro plays with the interchange between history and personal experience, fact and invention inserting a series of evocative photographs into the text and commenting on them. These include the wonderful cover photograph of Castro's father's Portuguese Latin American dance band in China. The novel is full of matter, historical, personal, reflective, with the urbane voice of Castro's narrator carrying us through it all.

What is there here for the reading groups? Certainly the novels by Hall, Hospital, McConnochie and Williamson provide thoughtful entertainment, and those by McGahan, Lokugé and Knox should start some arguments. While the "art" novels may disappoint this reader, the talent of their authors is not in doubt, and a range of skilled Australian writers is clearly waiting for the kind of urgent material that can engage their full talents – and their readers' commitment.

Fiction Received 2003–2004

Those marked with an asterisk have been mentioned in the above review

Blain, Georgia. *Names for Nothingness*. Sydney: Picador Australia, 2004.

Byrski, Liz. *Gang of Four*. Sydney: Macmillan Australia, 2004.

Byatt, A. S. *Little Black Book of Stories*. Milsons Point, NSW: Random House

- Australia, 2004. [first published Chatto & Windus: London, 2003].
- *Castro, Brian. *Shanghai Dancing*. Artarmon: Giramondo, 2003.
- *Clanchy, John. *Lessons From The Heart*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2003.
- Dettman, Joy. *Henry's Daughter*. Sydney: Pan Australia, 2003.
- Divola, Barry. *Searching for Kingly Critter*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2004.
- Falconer, Colin. *Anastasia*. Milsons Point, NSW: Random House Australia, 2003.
- Glover, Stuart, et al., eds. *I Won't Be Long. The Second dotlit Creative Writing Anthology*. St Lucia: QLD University of Technology, 2004.
- Goldsworthy, Peter. *Three Dog Night*. Camberwell, Vic: Viking/Penguin, 2003.
- *Graham, Gordon. *Top Bloke*. Milsons Point, NSW: Random House Australia, 2004.
- *Grogan, Wayne. *Junkie Pilgrim*. Blackheath, NSW: Brandl & Schlesinger, 2003.
- Haddon, Mark. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Sydney: Random House, 2004.
- *Hall, Rodney. *The Last Love Story*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004.
- Hamilton, Peter F. *Pandora's Star*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004.
- Harris, Robert. *Pompeii*. Sydney: Hutchinson, 2003.
- Harvey, Paul. *The Mighty Bunyips*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2004.
- Henderson, Graham. *Place of the Paintings & Other Stories*. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 2004.
- Hobby, Nathan. *The Fur*. Fremantle: FACP, 2004.
- *Hospital, Janette Turner. *Due Preparations for the Plague*. Fourth Estate, 2003.
- Hyland, M.J. *How the light gets in*. Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2003.
- Jackson, Graham. *Raymond's Medal*. Albury, NSW: Letao, 2003.
- Jarrar, Nada Awar. *Somewhere, Home*. Melbourne: Vintage, 2004.
- Jin, Ha. *The Crazed*. Sydney: Random House Australia, 2003.
- Johnson, Heather, Mel Kinsman, Stefan Laszczuk & Anna Solding, eds. *Cracker! A Christmas Collection*. Kent Town, SA: 2003.
- *Jones, Gail. *Sixty Lights*. Scoresby, Vic.: Random House, 2004.
- Jurgensen, Manfred. *The Trembling Bridge*. Briar Hill, Vic: Indra Publishing, 2004.
- Kevin, Charles. *Uphill and Downhill*. Caboolture, QLD: Anthos Publishing, 2003.
- *Knox, Malcolm. *A Private Man*. Milsons Point, NSW: Vintage, 2004.
- *Lokugé, Chandani. *Turtle Nest*. Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2003.

- Manfredi, Valerio Massimo. *The Talisman of Troy*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004 (1994, trans).
- *McConnochie, Mardi. *The Snow Queen*. Sydney: Flamingo/HarperCollins, 2003.
- McDuff, Phyllis. *A Story Dreamt Long Ago*. Milsons Point, NSW: Random House Australia, 2003.
- *McGahan, Andrew. *The White Earth*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004.
- *McGee, Terry. *Misconceptions*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2003.
- McMullen, Sean. *Voyage of the Shadowmoon*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004 [2002].
- *Newton, Nerida. *The Lambing Flat*. St Lucia: UQP, 2003.
- O'Connor, Peter. *When Tomorrow Comes*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004.
- *Salom, Philip. *Tocata & Rain*. Fremantle: FACP, 2004.
- Takagi, Akimitsu. *The Informer*. Caboolture Qld.: Anthos Publishing Company, 2002.
- Van Essen, Susanna. *A Trick of the Light*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004.
- *Williamson, Kristen. *Women on the Rocks. A Tale of Two Convicts*. St Lucia: QUP, 2003.
- Woolfe, Sue. *The Secret Cure*. Picador, 2003.
- Zolin, Mirian. *Tristessa & Lucido*. St Lucia: UQP, 2003.

ANTHONY MAY

PEGGY WALKER

David Duper was in the kitchen. He was deep into the rolling of sushi. He spread his nori on a thin bamboo mat, packed the rice and layered the vegetable and tuna in an overlapping line. As he rolled the mat and the nori he kept an even pressure stroking out from the middle. It was a trip. He loved to do this. Slow and patient, he knew that he had as long as it took Gail to get out of the shower to finish it. He couldn't concentrate after that.

He made six rolls and left the cutting for later. He put them in the fridge, washed his hands and thought about the casserole in the oven. It's cool. He picked up his rosé and made the final decision on dessert. Ice cream with a joint. He'd leave both for the table.

While he waited for the shower, he put on a pot of coffee and changed the CD. Warm up the mood.

Gail came into the kitchen wearing shorts with a halter top and poured herself a small glass of Hennessy. They were both moving to the music, not quite dancing.

"What do you call it when you wash the car, that thing how the water runs in little lines down the paint?" she asked.

"Beading," he said. He put his glass down, moved around behind her and put his hands on her hips.

"I'd like to be like that in the shower. Not the water to run down the curves of my body but to bead. I want water to bead on me," she said, sounding the word twice.

"Do you want to be a car?" he asked.

"I'd be a good car," she said.

"What car would you be, a sexy car?" he said.

"Sexy cars are trashy. I'd be sleek and powerful and classy. Expensive cars are boring and cheap cars are trashy and middle cars are too middle class. I'd be a Passat if it could be one income bracket higher. Midnight blue with leather upholstery," she said.

"Back it in here," he said, pulling her into him.

"I can reverse. I can go forward. I handle very well," she said. "I can take you to destinations."

"Don't go too fast, that's dangerous," he said.

"The road's not wet," she said.

"But you're drinking at the wheel, that's bad," he said.

"Are you going to give me a ticket?" she said.

"Just a warning," he said.

"It's not my first offence," she said.

He moved his right hand to her shoulder and his left around to hold her belly. He began to squeeze.

The phone rang.

Red light.

The guests arrived at seven-thirty. Billy and Janice and Errol and Patti. The weather was beginning to turn and David commented on the fine woollen lavender pashmina that Patti was wearing.

"You're wearing a new purple shirt," Patti said, "Was it a gift?"

"A pre-birthday present from Gail, just for this dinner," David said. He went back into the kitchen. Janice watched him go. Gail came to the door to walk them in.

"Something smells good," Errol said.

"David's made a Tuscan rabbit casserole. He's a sweet," Gail said.

"Come in, you two," Gail said to Billy and Janice. "Stop dragging your heels."

"Billy's pissed off with the taxi driver," Patti said.

"You all came together?" Gail said.

The conversation took them through to the lounge room. Billy sat at the coffee table and began to roll a joint.

"Get in a good mood," Gail said. She picked up a cigarette from his pack and mock-glared at him while she lit it. He smiled at her.

"Where's the birthday boy?" Janice said. She was holding a wrapped present in her bag.

"He's in the kitchen speaking Italian to his casserole," Gail said.

"Does he speak Italian?" Janice said.

"Janice," Patti said.

"House looks good," Janice said. Gail was pouring drinks.

"The ugly bitch next door passed on a cleaner and her husband. They're ex-Russian, sort of a dynamic duoski. They come once a week and put everything back in order," Gail said.

David walked in with a tray of sushi. Janice and Errol and Patti cheered. Billy was still rolling.

David knelt down and put the tray on the coffee table. Billy lit up and passed it to David, who took a hit and passed it to Gail who passed it straight on to Errol.

"There's a theme," Gail said. "We've decided that there's going to be a theme to the evening."

Behind her David stood on his toes and pointed down at her.

"We decided this," Gail said, stressing the pronoun, "and the theme is mistakes. If getting older is a mistake whose only benefit is birthday dinners with dear friends who are like family, then what are the other mistakes that we survive?"

"I don't think getting older is a mistake, it's a good thing," Billy said.

"It's not a debate, Bill. It's a game, a theme, get with it," Errol said. He leaned across the table and passed the number back to Billy.

Dinner went well. Everyone enjoyed the food. Everyone played the game. They talked about mistakes, errors of judgement, flaws of character. Like all modern dinners, they were talking about property by dessert.

"We have to talk about break-ups," Gail said. "What are the best and worst break-up stories that you know? Personal experience is worth extra points."

"This is not fair. I have no personal experience," Errol said. "I have never broken up, never been broken up with. Neither a breaker nor a breakee."

"Why?" Billy said. "I don't get it."

"Not a lot to get, really," Errol said, "Before I met Patti, I had never had a relationship that could be called solid enough to begin or end. I met Patti, fell in love, told her, that was that."

"You were a virgin before you met Patti? He was a virgin?" Billy asked Patti.

Patti shook her head, smiled.

"No. I was wildly and wonderfully sexually active. I had more sexual encounters than all of you and the rest of the people in the street put together. And that was before I started going to brothels. Then I really stepped it up. I was a love machine. I could have represented Australia in the Olympics of Sex. I was gold. Just never had a girlfriend," Errol said.

"Patti changed all that," Errol tagged on.

"He's sort of serious about relationships," Patti said. "He nearly broke up a relationship once though. I wouldn't let him."

Gail smiled because she knew the story.

“OK, this is my break-up story and its going to have to be Errol’s as well because the poor dear doesn’t have one of his own,” Patti said. She smiled at Gail.

“Gail knows the story. A few years ago before I knew you, David, or you two,” she said, “I was in a thing with a very wealthy guy. It was a very different life, believe me. He had squillions. He was a stockbroker, big flat in Hamilton looking out on the river and his boat and the view over the city and, like, everything. It sounds like I’m making this up but I’m not. It was real fairy tale stuff.

“I was working at the hospital and then I’d go to this flat and I could spend hours just looking out of the window. Or the paintings. I’d spend days just looking at the paintings that he had on his wall. It was very big luxury.

“He had this boat that he used to take up to the Whitsunday Passage and all over the place and have parties on and all that jazz. I have to say, it was quite a time.”

“Did you like that stuff? The big bucks life?” David asked.

“I never thought of it like I do now,” Patti said. “He was totally at home in it and I sort of just went along. I met him at a party and he asked me out and he was very nice. You’d think that he was stuck up or snobby but he wasn’t. He was a really nice guy. But he worked really hard and he played really hard. I know they all say that but anyway,” she said.

“It was a bit difficult with the work at the hospital. I was forever jumping in and out of taxis. He wanted me to move into the Hamilton place but it didn’t feel right. I had a bit of trouble with the changes. One minute you’re changing catheters on some poor bugger from Inala and then it’s in the cab back to the flat, get changed, on the boat and you’re drinking champagne in Moreton Bay. I’m not saying that I had too much trouble but nothing felt lasting or anything like that. There was a sense that nobody had all this money and that there was going to be a bill to pay someday. I don’t think that day has come for him yet.

“Anyway, one day Errol came into hospital. He had a polyp on his throat so he couldn’t speak. I was looking after him and thought he was sort of good looking, nice clothes, good body,” she smiled at him and he raised his eyebrows.

“He knows this bit so ignore him. He was in for a couple of days and he was on my ward. Then it was weekend and I was actually off for the whole weekend. So it was in the taxi, off to Hamilton, yadda yadda yadda. But we were running late so I grabbed some clothes and went straight to the boat. Big night on the bay. Lots of champagne, music, some businessmen from

Melbourne that were being entertained. Sort of blah, really but a lot of fun at the same time.

“By this time though, I’m starting to get tired of it all. These businessmen are very funny and some of them are really smart. I met one guy once. He ran some company that did something incredibly boring with plastics. Extruded plastic or something. Had a factory outside of Melbourne, thought he could bring it to Logan and have another factory up here or something. We went to dinner with them. It was a big deal. His major thing was if there was enough for his wife to do in Brisbane. She liked Melbourne and she had grown up there but was willing to move to Queensland as long as she didn’t feel like she was coming to the backblocks. That sort of stuff was very icky.

“But the guy himself was like this expert on the American Civil War. And he made it really interesting. He knew everything, he’d read everything, knew how it came about, like in detail, knew what happened afterwards. All that. Now meeting people like that was really good but it was getting harder and harder to ignore all the crappy pretty-girl-on-the-successful-money-man’s-arm stuff.

“So this morning I’m on the yacht, on the bay and I wake up and see my nurse’s uniform slung over the back of a chair and I went fold it up, put it in my bag. As I do, a note falls out of the pocket. From Errol. It said, “When I can speak again, I’m going to ask you to marry me.”

“Aw,” Janice said. She lowered her left shoulder, leaned her head to that side and smiled at Patti. Gail put two fingers down her throat and made a gagging sound.

“Yes, I know. Maximum cute. But he did. When he recovered his voice, he came back to the hospital, found me and asked me to marry him. I don’t why I believed him or why I thought it was a good thing. No paintings, no boat, no snazzy apartment on the hill with this one. But it seemed like a good idea at the time. So I went back to Hamilton, got everything I’d left at the flat and took it all home. When Justin came home I was waiting, we had a scene and that was that. No biggies really. I don’t think he was that bothered.”

“I thought you said that Errol had nearly broken up a relationship. It sounds to me like he did,” David said.

“Not really. He wanted to go and speak to the guy but I wouldn’t let him. I wanted to keep the two things separate.”

“I’m next,” Janice said. “But I want to give David a present first.”

“You guys gave me a present,” David said.

“I know but I saw this this morning at the markets and I couldn’t resist and then when I saw your shirt, I just knew it was the right thing,” Janice

said. She leaned back from the table and reached for her bag. From inside she pulled a wrapped gift and handed it across the table to David.

David smiled and smiled again at Gail. Gail smiled at David. David unwrapped the gift. It was a small purple leather case.

"It's for your iPod. I saw it at the market. This woman makes them and she has them in all different colours. That's the best. And it matches your shirt," Janice said.

"Thanks, it's beautiful," David said. "I'll go and change it over now."

"No, wait to hear Janice's story," Gail said.

"Well," Janice said, "my story begins before I met Billy. I was sharing a flat in Highgate Hill with a really nice girl from Casino, in N.S.W? She was so pretty, all legs and smile and boobs and hair and skin and manner. She was gorgeous. We didn't know each other very well but we worked in the same building in Mary Street? There was a sort of e-bulletin board for the Education Department and she put up a notice for a person to share and I went and we got on pretty well. She was a real country girl. Very beautiful but sort of naive. Too giving or something like that?"

"Well, after I've been there a few weeks, she starts to see this guy. She fell very hard, from the start. I'm not sure where they met but he didn't seem like much on paper. He didn't have a job."

"He did," Billy said. "He was a barber. He had an identical twin brother that was a dentist. They both had bad feet from standing behind chairs all day."

Errol rolled his eyes.

"Is that true?" Janice said. "I don't think that she, India, ever mentioned that. I don't know how much you want me to get into this. I mean it's part of the story and it's not."

"Just tell it, Janice," Gail said. She was smoking the joint that Billy had passed to her. It wasn't circulating very far.

"Well, the point is that India really loved this guy, whose name I cannot remember," Janice said.

"Willy. William Moore. I went to Dutton Park Primary School with him and Warwick, the brother," Billy said.

"OK, Willy, that was it. So she loved him but you got the sense that he didn't love her. You know the thing. She'd be telling stories about him and the things that they did together and he sounded, well, a little indifferent or callous or something. She couldn't see it because she was too close but it was there.

"But you never say anything because you never know whose toes you're going to be standing on. It was like one day she bought him a CD that

apparently he'd heard this thing on the radio and was going on and on about it. What was it, Billy?"

"Outkast," Billy said.

"Yeh, Outkast. So she bought him this Outkast CD that he was going on and on about and when she got home it was like, Did he like it? and she said, Oh, yes, but you could tell that she was really down in the mouth like he didn't care or something. It wasn't nice. She was always frustrated that she couldn't do enough for him or whatever. I never met him but I got a really bad vibe from the stories that she used to tell.

"Anyway, one day she comes home from work. We would sometimes finish at the same time and walk home together but I'd flexed a half day that day to go to do some shopping at Garden City. Well, I get back from the shops and she's got home from work and she's sitting there with this letter in her hand crying her eyes out. He's dumped her. It was so sad for the poor thing.

"I tried to comfort her, hot, sweet tea, lots of cuddles, lots of listening, all the good stuff and it wasn't really getting anywhere. Then I noticed the letter that she'd dropped on the floor and I noticed that it had a return address on the envelope that was in West End, just about three streets away.

"I thought, You lazy bastard, you don't have the decency to walk three streets to speak to her. You write her a cold, bloody letter.

"So I grab the letter and storm out of the door. I was furious. I'm going like a woman possessed down Vulture Street with this letter in my hand.

"Well I get to the door and I start banging and banging and eventually this guy comes to the door. I ripped into him about what a loser he was and how he'd hurt India's feelings and that he wasn't worth her tears and all this dramatic stuff. I was so angry. And all the time he's just standing there with this blank look and these red eyes like he'd been doing bongs all afternoon. I went ballistic. Get off your fat arse and go and apologise to her, I screamed. He scratched his head. We'd never met so he didn't know who I was. You're a low life piece of shit and I hope you rot in Hell, I screamed. Still no big reaction so I decked him. I went whack at the side of the head and he went down.

"Well I hear from the ground this, I'll be sure to tell him when I see him, which I recognise as a line from "Blood Simple" and I think, Oh shit. Yes, I've got the wrong guy. It was Billy."

"It was me," Billy said. He was eating Neapolitan ice cream. "She just whacked me and I went down. I was just up to realising what was going on when she king hit me. I was impressed. It turned out, when we got things

sorted, that we liked the same movies and that was that.”

Janice reached over and touched Billy’s hand. Gail smiled at Patti.

“I don’t have a funny story,” Billy said. “Mine’s just a sad one really.”

“Tell it. Sad is good,” Gail said.

“Who made you MC?” Patti said.

Gail shushed her.

“I’m going back some years now,” Billy said. “It was the time of the great slide to Sydney. Back in the days when we all thought that you had to go to Sydney to actually come alive.”

“Instead of go to Sydney and pretend not to be from Brisbane,” Patti said.

“Something like that. Right. No names because these people are still living and working in your town and I’m sure that they don’t want these memories thrashed around the dinner table.

“He and she were an item, a big item. They hooked up in student politics. He was going to be a poet, she was the politics major with a future. All quite nice, really. Until he got the grass is greener bug, which as we all know in the inner life of provincial cities means the outmigration to the metropolis. He couldn’t help thinking that he could do better in Sydney. And that wasn’t just in terms of being a poet. He couldn’t help thinking that maybe he could do better in the romance stakes. I don’t think that compatibility was an issue. These two were locked in. I think he just wanted someone prettier.

“So one day he just pulled up his stumps and went to play in the big league. There was a big scene but he tried for the clean break. He thought that she was handling it. She was very pissed off but handling it, so he thought. And he went.

“When he got down to Sydney he moved in with his sister who lived in Coogee. Not exactly the literary centre of the world but it was a start. At least it wasn’t western suburbs. His sister was an office worker, public servant, something like that. She lived in a little flat a few streets back from the beach. I remember him telling me that he thought he was set. He had the beach and one bus into town. No rent. He was going to do well.

“He didn’t know but the girl he left behind him hadn’t stayed behind him. She had followed him down to Sydney and was watching the flat in Coogee. She didn’t know that his sister was his sister and she thought he had moved in with another woman. She was sort of prepared for stalking him and then confronting him and getting him to realise his error and come home but then the other woman thing sort of threw the plans all out of whack.

“One morning they woke up to find her standing in the street outside of the flat screaming at the windows. What a bastard he is, how he had wrecked her life, how he was going to hell. All of it. Then, when they had opened the windows and looked out, in their pyjamas, she whipped out a kitchen knife and slashed her wrists. It was awful. They got her to hospital and they patched her up. They’re both back in Brisbane now. They’re with other people and they lead fairly quiet lives. That’s it. I don’t know if it’s a sad story or not now that I’ve told it.”

“It’s definitely sad in some way, Billy,” Errol said.

“Gail?” Billy said.

“No,” Gail said.

“My turn,” David said.

“This is a difficult one because it hasn’t happened yet,” David said. Janice looked at Gail but Gail didn’t look back.

“You are all very good at taking this piss out of the fact that I come from out west. Well this is an out west story. When I grew up in Boulia there weren’t many people around. There still aren’t many people around. You tend to form pretty strong bonds and that’s always a problem because you know that a lot of you, the kids, that is, have to leave. It’s not anything so dramatic as the farm won’t support you all or anything like that but if you want a life, you have to go. So you get really strange about things. On the one hand, you get close because you’re all in this together, Boulia against the world, and on the other hand you know in the back of your mind that you’re going out into the world and possibly not coming back. This is teenage life out west.

“I was coming back. I was always coming back. I didn’t even entertain the notion that I wasn’t coming back. So when I fell in love with Peggy Walker, it wasn’t a problem. I was coming back. My mum tried to warn me and my dad was pretty blunt. He said that I had to go to Brisbane to get a degree and I could leave all the emotional stuff until later. I didn’t listen. I fell in love with Peggy Walker and I promised myself to her. I told her that I wouldn’t even look at anyone else and that I wanted her to wait for me and I was coming back to marry her when I had a degree and a job and I could support a family. Sounds very fifties, I know, but, well, dramatic love.

“So I came down to Brisbane. I studied hard being a good country boy. I lived on campus until I met Gail. And I fell love with her. You know the rest except that I just feel this terrible obligation to Peggy Walker and I don’t know what to do about it. Gail tells me to ring her or go back and see her but I don’t know what to do. Things are different out there. I feel like

I've wasted her life and the longer I leave it, the worse it gets.

"So this is a break-up story about a break-up that hasn't happened yet. Crap story, eh?"

The table was quiet. Janice held back tears. Errol pushed back his chair and stood.

"It'll work out, mate," he said.

Slowly they got their things together. Patti rang a cab. The evening was over. Gail went to bed. David sat up and drank some wine, listened to some music.

In the morning, Gail went to work and David took the day off. He sat in the winter sun and read the paper. He tidied and cleaned the house. He went for a walk and bought some things to make Gail soup for dinner. The day went by.

In the early afternoon the mail came and he wandered out to collect it. In the letterbox was a phone bill, a real estate flyer, a hardware store discount brochure and a letter. The letter was from Peggy Walker of Boulia. It said, Dear David, I've been meaning to write to you for some time now. I want to let you know that I am getting married at the end of the year. I hope this doesn't come as a shock to you and I hope that you can be happy for me. Love struck out of the blue and I have to follow my heart. Love, Peg.

AT LAKE BALATON

It was here you saw the similarity
Tagore, Rubic, Gandhi, Lee Kuan Yew
The last came a little slowly
Pragmatism unbound can be dangerous
You said, reflecting ominously

As we travelled and engaged
You cautioned me against being frank
Ours, you said, was not a society
Tolerant of robust, opposing views
We prefer, you advised,
More public agreement, less public argument

And so I took the road less travelled
Even as your lickboys soiled victories
With your knowing gaze, unmoved.
What do all these matter in the end
You so often chuckled, grinned and guffawed
Chiding me for my little tokens of difference
Tokens which now lie heavy between us
Even as we still travel that lonely road
To each our own lake balatons
Where certain truths emerged and died.

KIM YOUNG-MOO

PERTH: RIVERSIDE WITH SWANS

Translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé and Jongsook Lee

I want to build a nest and spend some time here.
Becoming a water bird

I want to visit that forest of masts
across the river, moored with sails furled.

No matter how dazzlingly the lake waters
shine somewhere in the sky

today,
I want to go flying

low, low
over the blue rippling waves

feeling the wind blowing on my breast
like a bare winter tree

on some snow-covered slope.

ONE MORNING IN PERTH

In this southern land
a pigeon is sitting on her eggs
in a lemon tree in our back garden
with yellow fruits ripening.
Each day here is like the fifth day of creation
a day for spreading a daily layer of down

and sitting brooding, waiting for the world to hatch.
The down drifting beside the river –
what nest can it have come from?
Is it seagull's down?
Holy Spirit's down?
A scent of lemons drifting in the breeze ...

BLOOD FOX

a still creep sidles up inside me

purple berries hide the fig in moonlight

their golden bloody innards
marked with the fox's gash

the softest parts spread across his lips
slip satisfied, replete
of all remorse
that should find ripening
a place to hold secure
remembering blossoms' fleshy door

prefer the gory plunge
to find the core

PERF

i can look inside my window or inside my head or inside this never-ending writing and always make out a vision of a shifting shining perth city ... perth, western australia – *australie occidentale* – accidental australia (almost french) with this one faraway accidental place reaching out to bask in the reflected skyscraper sunshine of its own daydream citidom ... but because i can only see it through this here looking glass or the shattered makeup of my memory or the garbled lawlessness of these words, i still can't be sure that it actually does in fact exist ... and how can it? what an impossible dream of a place it is ... especially when i try to conjure up images of its workings, and especially its summers ... those long-line mirages of afternoon sweats and soggy footpath shirtfrontings, or the front-room head reclining that roll back through the memories of this place, this illusion, and join together with all the headbutting and struggling rehashed memories of everybody else lazy and liquid, rolling and dalloping their way around their melting houses, their suburbs, their city that floats from time to time out on a haze into the indian ocean past rotnnest island, and on other days back up and over the hills into the wheatbelt sea and past it into the raggedy bush of empty desert tossings which turn it inside out, turn it north or south or back in on itself until it wakes and the people wake with it back in the usual and nominal and relatively-conventional place in which we find it now ... or i think of it mid-year, especially in the swaying sighing trees that drip slippery and winterly with the dipping crippling winds and waters and waves that wash away the unsure shore and the land on which this whole place makes its stand ... or in autumn i remember school detention and the sweeping together of endless maple leaves that scrunch and scratch like sunburnt skin on the back of my old man's hands, blowing away in time ... or in spring the smell of mowed lawn that always makes me think of tennis courts and cricket pitches lined with cracks that open up longer and wider the more you play, the more you stamp your feet there, the longer the whole thing goes on ... i think i can remember

growing up in the hills never really a part of the city but never really a part of its opposite either, but lost always in some kind of observant middle-ground, surveying and watching its bits grow and shrink and pulse their way wider and deeper, uprooting the soil as it bulges like a giant thirsty redgum reaching towards its own painful realisations and a final and sorrowful ultimate definition that keeps disappearing like a forgotten name or mixed-up siesta dream just as you approach it once more ... i think about years of living on the coast that don't really amount to much now except the faint sound of night-time waves blowing and throwing themselves constantly ashore, lapping further until they reach the feet of the street and the pubs behind them and maybe even further until they come sliding past the bouncers and under the slit of the door to the front bar where they mix with the foam of spilt beer, picking up cigarette butts and coasters until my friends and i look around the bar and notice we're once-and-for-all finally drowning in it, and it's only then, in that realisation, in that need to breathe, that the water finally recedes and tumbles back out with the tide – or maybe it's just because the doors open and it's closing time again and we're thrown back out onto the streets and the night ... it's a city i see as both beginning and end of the line, depending on which way you turn it, which way you turn yourself and which way it picks and points and turns you ... while you're in perth it's always silently encouraging and hoping and wishing you leave to do whatever it needs to do and yourself the same, but when you're away it calls out across whatever morning dawn you're watching in whatever part of otherplace australia or world and pleads for your return, and there's always something in the sound of its voice or the desperation of its pleadings that reminds you of yourself ... again i say it's a conjured up magical place, a lonely and terribly beautiful place overcome with water, and not just ocean but the river that washes the city this way and that and all the other water that surrounds it in wheat and desert and minerals and more underground water that connects with all the rest of it, even the bits beneath your skin between your bones, and on the water the city again goes wandering, sometimes far from home, like all the people and friends who've ridden the wave away, like actors and musos and sportstars and artists and writers, businessmen, schoolteachers, journos, plumbers and students who wash up confused and alone on the sandy or concrete shores of another place and wonder if perth was actually real at all, spending the rest of their lives trying to find out, trying to find it, trying to even things out, even things up ... but i can sympathise ... and you can get bored with paradise and quietness, and in the end it's relativity that pulls at you and

directs your choice, but a choice it remains – that is, *to go ...* but to go from what, exactly? ... something non-existent and shining? something summer and always? what choices bark at the hearts of all, lurk in the hearts of men, lark and jerk and park in the hearts of heads? especially in this place that is no place but a silver-rimmed spectacled reflection of afternoon fremantle windowglass and american cup lustres that bounce off an eye and shoot it all the way back to cbd buildings erect and erected on the back of many a farmer and many a miner, including those still coughing their pillows red every morning with the memory of blue tailings and underground gloom and doom and witenoom ... and what of the original man? – the one who first called this illusion home, or maybe it wasn't an illusion then – the unseen, unknown, unrealised, unrecognised, unheard first man who lies in the shadows under trees in backblock city parks in the dry heat of flyswatting evening summer and does the same in howling tuesday night winter wilds – maybe he's just part of the illusion too, but the difference is he knows that it's nothing but a sad cruel joke, making him in fact more real than anyone and anything, this city included ... and funny to think that this place *can* be included in anything, because it seems so far alone and so far misplaced that there might actually exist nothing else to compare it to ... no sydney, no melbourne, no brisbane, new york, oldhome london, all of these imagined far-off places giving definition to perth by what it is not, but at this distance we can only imagine the other to exist and hold onto it as real because if it isn't then gawd-damn maybe this here place ain't real after all (and neither am i) and how could it be when so many things go into making a person, making a place, making a perth cit-eee ... yip-eee ... like all the western suburbs businessmen who wake in the soft white silk or cotton of monday morning bedsheets and pillow slips with wifey nestling and nudging by his side before slipping into shower and breakfast and brand new beaming beamer and off to the boardroom and boredroom boredom ... and all the women in northern suburbs red-tile look-alike madness houses rising in early-dawn pink robe stolen from balinese hotel to wake up kids for school before feeding them rice-bubbles and driving them to class and coming home to wash and clean and watch american midday talkshows and shopping channels ... all the labourers and tradesmen on building sites and other places laying and fixing and twisting and mixing until the job is clean enough for the next tradesman to come along and add their touch, like a stationary backwards production line that brings the workers to it ... all the kids in eastern suburbs taking buses and trains to school in green and blue uniforms, or whatever they want, lounging and swearing in great huge

bird-like mobs and full of weekend stories and messages of who likes who ... all the hospitality workers, public servants, retail staff, roadworkers, dole-earners, uni students, academics, artists, city bums ... all of everyone everywhere leaning and pushing toward the final swinging bell of friday afternoon when it's all released out onto the streets and it doesn't matter what time of year or what shrouded pocket of the city it is, everyone unfolds themselves excitedly and blows great huge imagined weekend bubbles that (in the moment of dreaming them) can last for minutes, four hours, for forever in that one and ultimate act of blowing that sees them finally able to chase whatever it is that really and absolutely burns at them, for them, because of them – or to let it all go, pouring out into the gutters of northbridge or the alleys of fremantle, the train station terminal end-of-the-line seats of midland, even the freshly repaved footpaths of st quentins avenue claremont that run parallel to stirling highway, following the river from its mouth into kings park mountsbayroad and on to the central-building city itself before shooting off towards greenmount hill and the clouds and all the rest of australia somewhere hopefully behind it ... but after all this it's still just a white-line conjured up nothing-place for everybody and nobody ... a figment of my imagination and of yours ... it's every city and no city and all the clichés – “the biggest country town in the world trying to be a city”, “the most isolated capital city in the world”, “closer to cities in asia than other cities in australia” ... it's a secret wish, a child's boast, an unforgettable, unmemorable place that makes and draws its own maps in solid buildings during the day and creeps out onto the streets at night to destroy the lines that it itself has drawn, especially the one that colours and cuts the constantly crumbling horizon ... i see it in my dreams sometimes as a beautiful and sad poetic drunkard soul, immeasurably old and immeasurably young, wandering forgotten and out of control across the lanes of some massive midnight superhighway that can only belong to a future we ourselves are creating ... it tumbles and lurches through occasional traffic not knowing exactly where it's headed, only hoping that eventually a driver might respond to its up-turned thumb and slow down long enough for it to hitch a ride ... maybe it's not just perth i see in this dream but australia and the world as well, with all its people and all its places lined up on the side of the freeway, desperate and desolate, trying to wave down cars with only the slightest and gentlest twist of the hand or nod of the head, unsure which future is coming but resigned to the fact that it'll ride whichever one comes first ... as i say it's an accidental place full of infinite and improbable parts empty of independent existence that through whatever crazy design of cause and

effect have managed to conspire together to fashion a city, a country, a world, a person that's crying out to be heard, to be itself, to be real and independent and fixed ... it's a place that i look at down the long end of many a blurred kaleidoscope that flips it, cracks it and distorts it in wildly hallucinatory cuts and colours that go spiraling around in mixed-up blurrings almost out of control if it wasn't for the rounded borders of the filter, of the memory, of the imagination that keep it together and make it all whole ...

CONTRIBUTORS 2004

Brother Anthony is Professor in the English Department of Sogang University, Seoul. He was born in England, has lived in Seoul since 1980, and is one of the leading translators of modern Korean literature.

Bev Braune's recent book is *Camouflage* (Bloodaxe Books/Dufour Editions). She holds a doctorate from the University of Wollongong for her creative and scholarly work *Skulvádhi Úlfr*. Her poetry and critical essays in aesthetics have appeared in journals in Australia, Canada, the USA, Caribbean and UK.

Dr Kevin Brophy coordinates the Creative Writing program in the School of Creative Arts at the University of Melbourne. His most recent books are *Explorations in Creative Writing* (MUP 2003) and *Portrait in Skin* (Five Islands 2002).

Adrian Caesar is a Canberra writer. Until recently, he was Associate Professor of English at UNSW at ADFA, where he remains an Honorary Visiting Fellow. His most recent book publications are *The White: Last Days in the Antarctic Journeys of Scott and Mawson 1911–1913* (Picador, 1999) and *The June Fireworks: New and Selected Poems* (Molonglo Press, 2001).

Jose Wendell Capili was educated at the Universities of the Philippines (UP), Tokyo and Cambridge. On study leave as Assistant Professor at UP, he is currently a PhD student at the Research School in Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.

MTC Cronin has published ten books of poetry, most recently a Spanish/English edition of her 2001 book, *Talking to Neruda's Questions*, translated by Juan Garrido Salgado (SAFO, Santiago, Chile, 2004) and *<More or Less Than> 1–100*, (Shearsman Press, UK, 2004, www.shearsman.com). Her next collection is forthcoming from Ravenna Press, USA.

Bruce Dawe is one of Australia's best-known poets. Amongst his most recent publications are *A Poet's People* (Longman) and *Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems* (5th rev. ed. Longman), and a recent study of his work is Dennis Haskell's *Attuned to Alien Moonlight* (UQP, 2002).

Robert Dixon is ARC Professorial Fellow in English, Media Studies & Art History at the University of Queensland. He is preparing a book on the

career of Frank Hurley and an edition of Hurley's diaries to be published by Melbourne University Press in 2006 and 2007.

Diane Fahey has published seven books of poetry dealing with autobiographical themes, nature writing, and Greek myths. Her most recent volume, *The Sixth Swan*, is based on Grimms' fairy stories.

Tracy Farr was born in Melbourne and grew up in Perth, studying at UWA through the 1980s. After spending five years in Canada, in 1996 she settled in Wellington, New Zealand, where she still lives. Her stories have appeared in books and literary magazines in New Zealand.

Sarah French's poetry has been published in *Blue Dog*, *Meanjin*, *Cordite* etc. In 1998 she co-edited the Young Writers' Issue of *Westerly*. In 2004 she won the WA Section of the Tom Collins Poetry Prize.

Dennis Greene lives in Perth, WA. Freed by early retirement to follow his bliss, he has become in recent years a fulltime writer and occasional editor.

Jeff Guess has a background of teaching English in high schools and now tutors at the University of South Australia and teaches poetry at the Adelaide Institute of TAFE. His eighth collection of poetry, *Winter Grace*, was launched during Writers' Week in Adelaide in March 2004.

Graeme Hetherington is a Tasmanian who divides his time between Australia and Europe and has published four books of poetry, the latest being *A Tasmanian Paradise Lost* (Walleah Press).

Sally-Ann Jones works as a freelance journalist and is completing a MA in Creative Writing at UWA. She has five children and, when she has time, indulges her interests in writing, reading, gardening and history.

Christopher Kelen teaches creative writing and cultural studies at the University of Macau in South China. His most recent volume of poetry, *New Territories*, was published in Hong Kong in 2003.

Graeme Kinross-Smith is a writer, photographer and long-standing teacher of writing in workshops who works in Melbourne, Geelong and Port Campbell. His most recent book of poetry, short fictions and photography is *If I Abscond*.

Andrew Lansdown is the author of twelve books, including six poetry collections and two fantasy novels. Five Islands Press plans to publish a new collection of his poetry, titled *Fontanelle*, in November 2004.

Roland Leach is the proprietor of Sunline Press and his last collection of poetry *Darwin's Pistols*, was published by Picaro Press.

Susan Lever is an Associate Professor of English at UNSW at ADEFA. She has published widely in Australian literary and cultural studies. Her most recent work is *Real Relations: Australian Fiction, Feminism and Form* (2000).

Jongsook Lee is Professor in the English Department of Seoul National University.

Morris Lurie's most recent publication is *The Secret Strength of Children*, stories, from Bruce Pascoe. A memoir, *The Particulars*, is in progress.

Anthony May teaches at Griffith University at Nathan, Queensland. *Peggy Walker* is one of a collection of stories that he is currently writing that draw on the Anglophone ballad tradition as their source.

Dan Mazzotti studied art at the Ravenna Academy of Fine Art in his home town in Italy. After coming to Western Australia in 1952 he worked at a variety of jobs and from 1963 completed a number of important commissions in different media. His work has been widely exhibited in Perth and Sydney and is represented in private collections in Australia, Europe, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore, the United Kingdom and Hong Kong.

Mal McKimmie was born in Perth, Western Australia. His poems have appeared in numerous Australian literary journals over the last fifteen years, and have been performed many times at guest readings. His first collection, entitled *Poetileptic*, will be published by Five Islands Press (Melbourne) in 2005.

Megan McKinlay lives in Fremantle and teaches in English, Communication, and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia.

Alice Nelson is a Perth-born writer who has been living and working in New York for the last few years. She has recently returned to Perth and is working on a novel.

Mark O'Flynn lives in the Blue Mountains where he writes poetry, fiction, and for the stage.

Geoff Page is a Canberra poet. His most recent books are *Darker and Lighter* (Five Islands Press), *Drumming on Water* (Brandl & Schlesinger) and, as editor, *The Indigo Book of Modern Australian Sonnets* (Indigo).

J. P. Quinton has recently completed honours in creative writing and has now started an architecture degree.

Don Randall is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Humanities at Bilkent University (Ankara, Turkey). His publications include *Kipling's Imperial Boy: Adolescence and Cultural Hybridity* (Palgrave, 2000) and articles on colonial and postcolonial literature and culture. His current project, of which his *Westerly* article is a part, is *David Malouf*, a comprehensive critical monograph which will be published by Manchester UP in late 2005.

Richard Rossiter teaches Australian literature and culture and supervises postgraduate writing students at Edith Cowan University.

Kirpal Singh teaches at the newly-established Singapore Management University where he co-ordinates the Creative Thinking Programme. Kirpal is currently completing the editing of *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Southeast Asian Verse*, and his own latest book, *Thinking Hats and Coloured Turbans: Creativity Across Cultures* (Prentice-Hall, 2004) is nearly sold-out. In June 2004, Kirpal became the first non-American to be appointed to the prestigious Board of the ACA – the American Creativity Association.

alicia sometimes is a poet/musician and co-editor of the Australian literary journal *Going Down Swinging* (www.goingdownswinging.org.au). She is also co-host of the spoken word radio show *Aural Text* on Melbourne's 3RRR. Her first poetry book, *kissing the curve* is out now through Five Islands Press.

John Stublely has a BA (English) degree in creative writing and journalism from Curtin University, and an Honours degree in creative writing from UWA. His work has appeared in (*LiNQ*), and on websites in America. He has held a writer's residency as part of the Jack Kerouac Project of Orlando, Florida, and currently lives in Perth, WA.

Wendy Waring is a translator and writer originally from Canada. She teaches creative writing at Macquarie University in Sydney and is currently finishing a novel, *Empire of the Pure*.

Tim Winton lives and works in Western Australia. One of Australia's most important writers, with a major international reputation, he has a new book, *The Turning*, coming out later this year.

Kim Young-Moo taught in the Department of English Language and Literature at Seoul National University. He published a number of translations from English, including poems by William Blake and several

works on religious themes, as well as a volume of personal essays in 1988, and a volume of literary criticism *The Language of Poetry and the Language of Life* in 1990 that received the prize for criticism in the 1991 Republic of Korea Literary Awards. He died of cancer in 2001 aged fifty-seven.



STORIES

Tracy Farr
Sally-Ann Jones
Graeme Kinross-Smith
Morris Lurie
Anthony May
Alice Nelson
John Stublely
Wendy Waring

POETRY

Bev Braune
Jose Wendell Capili
MTC Cronin
Bruce Dawe
Diane Fahey
Sarah French
Dennis Greene
Jeff Guess
Graeme Hetherington
Christopher Kelen
Andrew Lansdown
Roland Leach
Mal McKimmie
Megan McKinlay
Kim Young-Moo
Mark O' Flynn
Geoff Page
J. P. Quinton
Kirpal Singh
alicia sometimes

ARTICLES

Kevin Brophy on "Man-Moth"
and the Flame of Influence
Robert Dixon on
Cosmopolitan Australians
Don Randall on Cross-cultural
Imagination in David Malouf's
Remembering Babylon

INTERVIEW

Richard Rossiter,
interview with
Tim Winton

REVIEW ESSAYS

Adrian Caesar on new
Australian poetry, 2003–2004
Susan Lever on recent fiction
Richard Rossiter on the year's
work in non-fiction

ISBN 0-9750036-2-3



Single copies of *Westerly*
including postage:

Aust.	\$ 23.95
NZ	\$ 27
USA	\$ 16
UK	£ 10
Euro	E 14