THE ANGELUS BOY

I'm walking through the city and I hear the bells of the Cathedral pealing. Whenever I hear a bell toll, I think about the Angelus boy. I wonder if there was something I could have done to change his fate. Or was it already too late by the summer of 1981? Even then I had the curious feeling that a current was dragging him down-river, with nothing to grasp onto.

I wonder if the bells in the Cathedral are mechanised or if they have a boy, like we did, to climb the tower and ring the bell in the old way. I expect it's all automated now.

It was back in my school days. On a hill in the middle of sheep country, I attended the convent school. A century-old building with sagging rafters and wrought-iron lacework, it had two classrooms upstairs, two down. Poplar trees, bending in the wind, lined the path to the tuckshop. A grey stone church blocked our sun. At the end of the football field was the fence to the public school. Sometimes you could hear them on the other side, singing taunting chants about us as they skipped rope. Sister Anthony told us they were going straight to Hell.

Every day at noon the church bell was rung in the pattern of the Angelus: each chime connoted a segment of a Catholic prayer.

On my first day the bell rang and everyone else knew what to do. You had to drop your pen and bow your head in silence until it ended. Nobody told me. They didn't have it at my old school. There were only two of us who hadn't been there since kindergarten. They didn't let on what they thought of me but I heard what they said about her.

It was the specially assigned job of one boy in the class to climb the church tower at midday and pull the long rope in the sequence of the prayer. He went through a door at the back of the church that no one else was allowed to enter. Past the statue of the Virgin Mary holding the broken body of Jesus, post-crucifixion. The paint was chipped and Mary was missing a little finger.
The boy could hardly spell “cat” but he timed the rings carefully.

A stream of volunteer mothers took the Angelus boy for individual reading but no one seemed to know how to help. Sometimes when he was being urged on to read but simply couldn’t, his frustration would well to the surface and he’d throw his book and cry out like a wounded animal.

You could tell from looking at him that he was motherless. He wore trousers that may have been his father’s once. The coarse fabric signified a previous decade. His hand-knitted grey jumper was worn on the elbows and had lost its shape. Perhaps the nuns gave him clothes from their charity cupboard. They gave me a tunic from there, this one time, when Robbie Tully vomited on my leg in art class. He’d eaten a packet of Cheezels at lunch and the vomit was orange.

The Angelus boy’s clothes, and the way he struggled with his schoolwork singled him out from the other boys. I’m not sure if he matured faster than us, or if he was a few years older, but his voice deepened and his shoulders broadened before the other boys. You’d think this would have given him an advantage in school sports but no one wanted him on their team.

I like to think the priest who asked him to ring the Angelus did so to make him feel special. Looking back now and remembering Father O’Reilly’s creepy darting eyes, I’m not entirely sure.

A humourless white-haired aunt, with drawn-on eyebrows that always made her look surprised, looked in on the boy. She arranged the altar flowers and performed secret errands for the priest. The boy’s dad was on a war pension and drove around town, slowly, in a big old dented station wagon.

The station wagon lurched down the back lanes. Old Mr Pearce is leering out the wound-down window, thick glasses and hair that won’t be tamed.

Kids are playing in the street, interrupted only once or twice an afternoon by cars. They kick footies, lean on their bikes, skite and go to the corner shop for lollies. They skip rope until the sun sinks and long shadows jump and hop beside them.

When his car approaches, the play halts. One child is laughing still and it echoes against the now quiet street until he turns his head and catches on in panic.

They run inside, balls left bouncing, ice cream melting from upturned cones on the road. They jump fences, dive through hydrangeas, and lie behind wood heaps, with their hearts in their mouths until the car finally moves on. The sound of children’s games is replaced by the low hum of Mr Pearce’s engine.
It's probably just a myth, what they say about him. That he killed and skinned a man in the war. That he caught a possum in his roof and ate it. That he chased a girl and held her down.

It's probably just rumour, but the peculiar hum of his engine is enough to incite terror in a generation of town kids.

I used to think about the Angelus boy. I'd think how it was funny the way life turns out. Our brother died and left a hole (the size of a boy) in our family. We'd sit around the dinner table at night, sometimes glancing at his empty chair but never saying anything. Meanwhile the Angelus boy had no one to love him. It just didn't seem right.

I used to look across the classroom and wonder if the boy would have turned out different if he was ours. I looked at his hair, all greasy and unkempt and thought how if he had my mother it'd be all clean and brushed. My mother would have smoothed it down with her hands before he left for school in the morning. I thought maybe no one ever touches his hair.

I wondered if anyone ever read to him. If he were ours, my mother would have read to him and with him, every day from birth.

One morning I packed him an apple. I cut it in half through the core, so the seeds would make the shape of a star. I figured if he had no mother, and only scary Mr Pearce and the aunt with the surprised eyebrows, then maybe no one had ever told him about the star in the middle of an apple.

I got the apple out of my bag at lunchtime but it had turned brown and it spoilt the star. I didn't know if he would want it after all so I was going to put it in the bin. All my class started walking down to the oval and the boy was skulking around, waiting to fall in behind them. I guessed that's what you'd do if you didn't have anyone to talk to. That made me feel sad so I held out the apple. He looked around at first to make sure I was looking at him.

"It's an apple," I said. "I cut it through the core so it has a star in the middle."

I opened it up and showed him. He tilted his head and considered it but didn't say anything.

"You probably don't want it, 'cause it's started to turn brown, but I thought I'd show you."

He sort of snatched the apple from my hand. He looked at the star. He nodded at me then put it in his bag. I nodded too and walked towards the oval.

At the end of the day we were packing our books into our bags and Sister Anthony was watching us like a hawk. She walked up and down, then she saw the apple.
"What might I ask is this?"

The boy said nothing.

"How many times do I have to tell you that it's a sin to waste food?"

She said to think about all the starving children in Africa. I felt sad for the little African kids with the bloated stomachs but I didn't see how one brown apple would make a difference. It wasn't like you could actually send it to Africa was it? And the boy wasn't the one who wasted it. I wanted to say this to Sister Anthony but I thought about how mean she could be so I stood still.

She grabbed the boy by the collar and took him to her desk. She hit the boy with the cane. He bore it quietly, his mouth a straight line, the class watching.

My apple only hurt him more. I didn't know how to help. I tried to talk to him one more time but he just looked straight ahead and said nothing. I gave up. I guess everyone did. He kept to the classroom's shadows and left school as soon as it was legal.

Amanda O'Callaghan told me in gym class that the boy's mother left him at the church when he was a baby. It was Christmas and there was a nativity scene near the altar. When no one was around, she took the Baby Jesus and left the boy in the manger. She shot through to the city. Well that's what Amanda reckoned anyway.

I thought about his mother when she held the baby in her arms and named him after a saint. Did she wish for him a devout life? What horror made her run? Did she think the Church would save him?

I moved away to the city but a few years after school I caught up with Amanda.

She said, "Did you hear the Angelus boy turned bad?"
She inhaled on a Winfield Blue.

"It's pretty terrible. Are you sure you want to hear about it?"

I said, "Sure." I thought it couldn't be anything too serious, maybe shoplifting or he got in a fight.

She said "No. It's really bad."

"Spit it out then," I said.

"He tied his aunt to a chair," she said. She put out her cigarette and leaned in close. "He cut off her dress and did things to her ... Sick things."

I thought she was kidding.

I thought about the aunt's surprised eyebrows and wanted to cry.

Later I pondered if it could be true. I thought about the boy and wondered what you could become if you grew up with no mother, charity
clothes and no one to talk to. I thought about the anger that would slowly gather inside of you.

I heard he went to gaol.

I wondered if he was always sick. I remembered that sometimes he took a while to return to class after ringing the Angelus. I wondered what acts he might have performed in the church tower while we continued on with our arithmetic. Perhaps even the priest watched, lurking in the marble shadows, eyes darting, hands in his voluminous robes.

It’s possible though, I think, that he just savoured those minutes of quiet sanctuary in the old tower. There was no one there to make him feel shabby or stupid, only the stairs and the walls and the fading vibrations of the bell.
STUPID QUESTION: A BROKEBACK SONNET

for Matthew Shepard

struck dumb: that we're still so retro-sexual
a kiss is just a meeting of mouths &
a fuck is just a beast of burden & release
_oh love_, of all the locations we leave off
the lonely planet of desire
with all the bombs dropped & deaths tolled
in a six o'clock time slot
aren't there any other crevices to police?

to all the children who've joined the ranks
of a broken constellation, their memories still
trembling bright like stars, I want to shout:
come out, come out, who ever you are! but first
they want to ask you was it worth dying for?
as if you were the ones who had a choice.
SHINTARO

Here he comes, the rubbing alcohol of mountain air
like the aftermath of a smack across the face,
enhancing his complexion.
When he speaks, the dubbing is so out of whack
that a single word, spoken emphatically
with a nod of his ponytail, goes on and on,
his mouth still working long after
yes or no have been put to the sword.
He wears two blades:
    the handle of one like black vertebrae
        emerging from behind his shoulder,
the handle and scabbard of the other
angled through his waistband
and palmed, when standing, in a gesture
of reassurance, then one of position and balance,
when running.
    Legend has it he could wing
        a low-flying swallow, keep it as a pocket
of shadow in the folds of his robe, and instruct it
to watch and listen for what he himself
might not see and hear: smoke unsheathing a dagger,
or woodgrains with eyes in the rafters.
After years of watching him in grain-led
black and white, after listening to a soundtrack
scratchy and bleak, it was a revelation
to see him in person at the Horden Pavilion,
where he gave an exhibition
of swordsmanship to a crowd of cheering boys.
Dressed in crimson, blue and green, he danced,
weaving past the dark bindings of Puppet,
Koga, and Phantom ninja, leaving them for dead.
When it was over, he bowed deeply, his hands together,
then signed our bubblegum cards.
Years later, seeing him again on a re-run,
he was wearing a straw hat like a section
lifted from some pagoda
with a woven visor concealing his face.
When he removed it, when the camera came close,
he said to himself, or to Tombei the Mist,
his closet friend, *Death is living understood*,
and his lips kept moving until the kanji appeared
like a scattering of star-knives, signalling the end.
THE WELL WEATHERED PIANO: A STUDY IN RUIN

for Eric Harrison and Vivienne Robertson

A piano is said to be Ruined (rather than Neglected or Devastated) when it has been abandoned to all weathers and has become a decaying box of unpredictable dongs, clicks and dedoomps, with not a single note (perhaps excepting D) sounding like one from an even-tempered upright piano. Sometimes you push down one key, and five or six others companionably go down with it, making for a surprise cluster and swathes of harmonics singing forever. The notes that don't work - clicks, doks and tonks - are at least as interesting as those that do.

Each Ruined Piano is utterly unique with respect to action and tuning (if we can talk of tuning at all). An F# one and a half octaves above middle C on a West Australian Ruined Piano in a semi-desert environment differs radically from the same note on a flooded piano in a studio four floors below pavement level in Prague.

A Ruined Piano has its frame and cabinet more or less intact (even though the soundboard is cracked wide open, with the blue sky shining through) so that it can be played in the ordinary way. By contrast, a Devastated Piano is usually played in a crouched or lying position.

All this raises the question, "What is a piano?"

I discovered my first Ruined Piano in June 1987 when I went on holiday with my wife and children to Nallan Sheep Station, just north of Cue, some 700 kilometres north east of Perth, Western Australia. On our arrival, the owners of the sheep station told me that they had a piano in one of the sheds. I wasn't interested, though. This was meant to be time with family. And I was tired of pianos.

However, on the third day I succumbed, and found a piano that was totally done for. During the eighties I had been preparing pianos - altering the sound of them by inserting objects between their strings. This one, however, without the familiar festoon of guitar jacks, rubbers, coins and pegs,
was “prepared” beyond any piano I had ever played or heard. Prepared by weather and neglect – prepared by the radiant earth, and the cold stars:

I respectfully approached the Ruined Piano in the shed and took hold of the fall to lift it. It was so rotten that it came away in my hands. I shoved batteries into my Marantz recorder and slung microphones over the dusty rafters. As I played, ants appeared journeying in concentric circles on the front panel of the Jefferson (Chicago ‘26). The golden-haired eight-year-old daughter of the sheep station owners came in out of the majestic heat and stood on the cool floor of the shed watching me. I knelt to pull back the bass strings and then released them as if I was firing off huge arrows. The piano roared and groaned. After some minutes the girl’s mother came over and muffled her daughter’s ringleted head in her huge flowered dress, as though shielding her from an atrocity. I knew that the mother wanted to speak, was about to speak. I pointed frantically up to the Nanyo and the Sanyo microphones with my right hand, while trying to finish the performance with my left. Finally, she broke in – “Have you finished?” And I had.

I played with birds singing, roosters crowing, generators starting up, and the owners complaining about the drought; in short, everyone and everything having its say. The recording turned out to be a lusty union of the environment and the ancient roaring song of that decaying hulk.

Before its life in the shed, the Ruined Piano had spent a year on the sheep station tennis court where it had been exposed to searing heat and a flash flood. When I examined the inside of it, I found a mud map left by the rising waters.

Forty years before the flood, it had been the bar piano in the goldmining town of Big Bell, east of Cue. Although gold mining has resumed in Big Bell, there is nothing left of the town except its 1930s art deco hotel, which is now derelict – a ruin in the middle of nowhere – fireplaces half way up walls, the floors collapsed, the Ladies’ Lounge opened up to the harsh blue sky.

The only unchanging law is the law of change. Ruins are what remain – still passing away to be sure, but lingering. When they linger as Ruined Pianos, they sing their song of transience – of failure and loss. They sing of all that we loved that will never come again – the loss of home, the fading away of prestige and glory. Death comes eventually to every piano. And dead, they sing a different kind of song.

A piano judiciously left in the open and exposed to all weathers will ruin. All that fine nineteenth-century European craftsmanship, all the damp and unrequited loves of Schumann, Brahms and Chopin dry out, and degrade to
a heap of rotten wood and rusting wire. The piano returns to aboriginality, goes back to the earth where the chirrup of its loose wires blown about by the desert Easterly is almost indistinguishable from the cicadas' long electric blur.

The piano, that arch symbol of European musical culture (and cultural imperialism) in its present condition as the Ruined Piano, functions as a dead end sign for Northern Hemisphere traditions and styles that we have so gratefully and eagerly adopted in Australia.

WARPS – the World Association for Ruined Piano Studies – was formed in 1991 by Stephen Scott (of Bowed Piano celebrity, and Professor of Music at Colorado College) and myself. Steve suggested the catchy acronym. The organization has worldwide membership, has never held an AGM, and tends to move into action only from whim or from a rush of blood. WARPS has devoted energy to giving old pianos a good home, which can certainly mean adequate sunshine and rain – or in the case of Stephen Scott and myself, plenty of snow. In *When the Anzac Body Blossoms and Blooms* (25 April, 1991, Colorado College) I played three ruined pianos that had been prepared by rain and snow. That performance was made possible by Stephen’s students drying out the pianos with twenty-three hair dryers over three long nights. Otherwise, the pianos would have been disarticulate.

*The WARPS Taxonomy of Ruin*

neglected (including veranda pianos)

abandoned (including shed pianos)

weathered

decayed

ruined

devastated

decomposed

annihilated – as after having been blown up by a landmine planted in it by the Germans' retreating northwards through Italy in 1945.

A cultural history of Ruined Pianos in Australia

In 1888 a French juror named Oscar Comettant estimated that there were 700,000 pianos already imported into Australia. Now the French are more into philosophy than mathematics, but even allowing for a margin of error that’s an awful lot of Johannahs for a country with a then population of perhaps 3 million folks.

Perhaps all over this terrifying country there are Dead Pianos – left on beaches – abandoned on tracks – pushed over cliffs – rotting in ruined
huts & cabins – making peculiar Homes for birds & mice & spiders playing witches’ music among the strings & fretwork, & the silk all gone to rags.

Pianos on the Beach is a defining image of the early days of white settlement in Western Australia. It anticipates by some 160 years the piano-on-the-beach in Jane Campion’s film The Piano, where, presumably to protect Nyman’s asinine score, the beached piano is almost in tune after its immersion – hard to believe, considering the sea change it must have undergone. The tuning and structural outcomes for beached pianos in Western Australia in the 1830s would surely have been more disastrous, and a good deal more engrossing.

The piano was the bearer of European musical culture and the status that went with that. It was also an agent of social cohesion (evenings of Schubert songs, and selections from Don Giovanni mixed with popular sentimental songs of the day). No wonder immigrants to New Holland clung to their pianos:

One story we heard at dinner concerned a ship in trouble at sea whose Captain ordered the thirteen pianos on board with much of the cargo to be thrown into the sea – & there was almost a Riot on the ship as the owners tried to prevent him & were shouted down by the other passengers, fearing for their lives.

It isn’t difficult to imagine that the first people to play these thirteen pianos could have been Aboriginal people, and that these strange offerings from the surf would also have been a source of convivial music making. Importantly too, these would have been some of the first ruined piano performances in New Holland:

As the invasion began
aboriginal kids hammered on salt pianos
pushed from ships in desperate straits
Morning rolled them in the foam
thumped them up on to the beach

Great gift of the morning surf –
sweet ringer dead ringer tumult cave

She sings high while her sister on the wooden cliff
swings her heels down on to the cold wet keys
clink clink an ank …
Some 170 years later I encountered a Schwechten Piano at Hermannsburg Cultural Precinct, out of Alice Springs, in the Northern Territory. It had spent fifteen years in the dressing room behind a stage where theatricals were mounted. While old codgers, their heavy guts bursting out of their pink tutus and rights, danced for the delight of the missionaries, their charges, the Aboriginal kids, would invade the dressing room and jump from the top of the piano onto the keys, creating unheard of clusters. Each one opened cracks and widened crevices in the pantomime up front. Subsequently, this piano was sent down for a season or two in the cattle yards.

Back in 1989, when I was working late at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, I decided on a midnight coffee in Northbridge. I came back to find I'd left the door open and in the dark auditorium an old Aboriginal man, wearing a Salvation Army great coat was coaxing a shivery plangy tune from the ruined piano at the lonely center of the auditorium. Security and the police (in competition as to who got there first) burst in through the open door.

"Do you wish to prefer charges sir?"

"No – best piano improv I've heard this year."

The old guy gave me a grin and shuffled out – a Schwepps bottle sticking out of his left-hand overcoat pocket.

An invitation to the Ruined Piano

It's good to approach each Ruined Piano as a new occasion for learning – letting go of last year's Sonata for the chaos, frustration and joyous confusion that's there at your finger-tips. It's good to start afresh with the Ruined Piano each time that you wish to perform on it. What was a sweet-swelling long ringer on Tuesday can be the merest plink by Thursday. Knowing in part is best. Over-learning can shut the performer off from the intoxication of improvisation, from being truly guided by what lies so richly to hand. Not knowing allows for surprises, and opens up the alluring possibilities of bewilderment and failure. The ruined piano becomes increasingly derelict as you play it. Even if you are reluctant to commit to improvisation, you may well be driven to it, because the mechanism is failing away under your fingers.

Ways to play Ruined Piano(s)

This will vary from piano to piano, and is dictated to an extent by the condition of the piano. A Ruined Piano can be played in the conventional way, but may also be played seated on the ground. This gives easy access to the strings, as well as to the keys. This is also a convenient position for playing multiple ruined pianos. The strings of the various pianos can then be played simultaneously, creating intoxicating effects, especially when the sustaining
pedals of several pianos are jammed down with erasers.

**Piano Labyrinth**

In early 2005 Tos Mahoney artistic director of **Tura New Music**, suggested that I gather ruined pianos from throughout the state to create an installation for the Ruined Piano Convergence at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts. I travelled through the wheat belt and the Perth Metropolitan area gathering pianos, recording some of them, and talking with their owners to find out about the history of their piano. The photographer Vivienne Robertson travelled with me, photographing the pianos.

I ended by creating a curving labyrinth of some seventeen pianos in the main hall at Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts. People could walk through the labyrinth, playing the pianos as they went, and starting and finishing anywhere they liked. This hands-on experience catered for people’s curiosity about the highly accessible sounds of the piano keyboard, and the slightly less accessible sounds of the strings. The installation could be played by any number of people at the same time.

As far as possible, each piano had its own story printed and placed on it, so that people could also read their way through the installation.

**Absent pianos**

Sometimes the condition of the piano was such that it couldn’t be moved without it breaking apart. In *Piano Labyrinth* these pianos were acknowledged by a photo of the piano with its accompanying story, positioned in the curve of pianos.

One such piano was owned by Ian Clarke, a farmer who has a property just out of Goomalling, about two hours east of Perth. His piano lives on top of a hill in one of his paddocks. You can see it as you drive into his property – strange and lonely against the clouding and unclouding skies. Ian told me this story:

We had inherited a piano that sat around for years, without anyone playing it. Finally my wife said, “Could you take it out of here, so we can put a dresser in.” So I put it on the front-end loader and drove it slowly up the hill. When I looked back toward the house I could see my wife watching, astonished, from the kitchen window. I drove on to the top of the hill, where I placed the piano. Now we call it Piano Hill. The piano’s been there four years now — returning to the earth from which it came. Now there are lupins growing up around it. When there were sheep in this paddock they used to congregate around it. Maybe it was a talking point for them.
Late afternoon: the piano is casting long shadows. It darkens in the rain, then dries back to light grey. It is shedding its casing. Its pedals are below ground level, and there are caterpillars, spiders, woodlice and ants living in it. As the wind blows through the sea of lupins, the piano emits its own song, but you have to lean in close to hear it. The keys – heaped up on each other – are like the scree of breakaways.

I found pianos in garages and on verandas, as well as in the open. People were happy to see their piano go, but wanted it to have a good home. Understanding that their piano would be part of Piano Labyrinth was seen as contributing to that – “It’s good that you can find a use for it. Better than it ending up at the dump.”

The Ruined Piano Sanctuary

On Friday October 21, 2005, pianos from the Piano Labyrinth at PICA were taken to Kim Hack’s and Penny Mossop’s Olive Farm near York, 80kms east of Perth, West Australia. Kim, driving a crane with seven pianos suspended off it, placed them under trees, on rocks, in the bends of streams, on a shed roof, in a dam – where they are degrading at their own rate, and in their own way.

To play the pianos you have to find them spread out over the 160 acres of the olive farm. At the launch of the Sanctuary on November 18, 2006, Kim Hack
and I conducted a guided tour for a hundred or so people, enabling them to encounter a number of the ruined pianos, and leaving them to discover and explore the remainder for themselves. Kim is the curator of ruined pianos in the Sanctuary. His curatorial tasks involve a delicate balance between allowing the pianos to degrade unchecked, and intervening to do such repairs as are necessary to avoid the more precipitous forms of ruin.

A recent cursory inspection of the Sanctuary revealed: a nineteen-century British Challen piano engulfed by white ants that have transformed its insides into a gothic cathedral of ingested wood; a Blakely and Thomas (also British) occupied by rats who’ve built their nest in the top, and are no doubt enjoying the resulting high-rise living afforded by this unique location, and a German Lindal piano which resides in a dam, and has been occupied by frogs. If you listen at night, you can hear them jumping about on the strings creating weirdly subtle accompaniments to their croaking.

**A note on the Ruined Piano**

A note on the Ruined Piano is open at the edges. It happily admits the barking dog, the truck starting up, the sheep station owner complaining about the drought ... like this it differs from a note played on a conventional piano, where the song of the bird in the rafters can seem to bounce off its hard glassy surfaces.

When I examine my ruined piano I find that what we would conventionally regard as middle C is a *long ringer* – a note that sings on uncontrollably after you’ve left it.

A, a sixth above middle C, is a *dead ringer* – a note that rings brightly and then abruptly stops.
E, two octaves and a sixth below middle C, is splendidly rich in sub harmonics – a *yum*.

Similarly for G, B, F that have become respectively – an *after shudderer*, a *sweet ringer* and a *ghost tone*...

Plucking the bass strings on an ancient weathered piano whose sound board is cracked wide open can produce astonishing pitch bends, then cataclysmic shuddering. On any Ruined Piano, there are a number of *non-workers*. This isn’t a cause for dismay. In the first place, those notes don’t work in significantly different ways. Some are boomps, others doomps, some click, some buzz … Others don’t go down at all, and when you hit against their resistance they emit a resonant *doonk*. *Non-workers* in their infinite variety and manifest laziness create the “negative space” in which the more pushy and industrious tones can shine.

**Some techniques for playing the Ruined Piano**

The metal flap under the keyboards of some ancient pianos can be plucked to create the sound of a goat in heat.

“Smudging the stars (Van Gogh)” – a technique whereby the thumb is slid basswards (leftwards) down the lower strings, without the use of the sustaining pedal. This is normally an intensifying move in an improvisation.

Generally when plucking the strings, *wait and listen*. The best sounds – pitch bending, and a vibrant shuddering come at the end of a low plucked bass note. Rather like when you wait for someone to finish a sentence, and you find that their subtler feeling has become apparent. Rushing to make your next point can obscure those inflections of feeling.

Short pianos – “boudoir pianos” – can be turned on their sides and the castors removed. Placed next to each other, they can be played vertically like a double piano accordion.

When playing ruined pianolas the mechanism can be manipulated to create the effect of air being puffed through bellows, another way to turn the piano into an asthmatic accordion. The broken pianola mechanism can also provide a variety of metallic percussive effects.

When keys don’t work, the hammers can be made to contact the strings with the fingers. Also, the hands can be turned upside down as for juggling, with fingers on the mechanism to activate the hammers.

The unoiied pedals on a Ruined Piano give an array of squeaks, squawks and grinding sounds.

Partly depressing some keys gives you access to a range of squeaks and rustling sounds. To reliably elicit these sounds, you need to touch the keys delicately.

A ruined stool can give a penetrating shriek when you turn from ruined
keyboard to keyboard. All such sounds, which would be suppressed in conventional performance, can be given full rein when performing on the Ruined Piano.

The principle of limitation – there is no need to introduce extraneous percussion like drum sticks, mallets or brushes into your performance. Simply use parts of the piano that have broken off, to strike or stroke the strings.

Writing for Ruined Piano
For Left Hand of the Universe I wrote a fugue, march, waltz so that Slovak and Moravian Musicians in playing the notes – they didn’t – would enable me to know, for instance, what middle C sounded like on a Slovak Ruined Piano. In this way, the score, rather than being made on the presumption that the pianos were similar (conventionally well-maintained as to pitch and mechanism) – was created so that I could elicit and expose the differences between pianos. In that way I could find out what F sharp an octave and a half above middle C sounded like on a Slovak Ruined Piano in Bratislava, as distinct from the ‘same note’ on a West Australian Ruined Piano in my kitchen.

Each Ruined Piano has no choice but to be startlingly unique.

Care and maintenance
I decided to bring my ruined pianos out of storage warehouse, and place them in the warmth and nourishment of my kitchen. This made eating-in difficult, but given that in Perth it’s possible to eat out of doors most of the year, I began to eat on my front and back verandas – or, because I’ve never established any cooking routines, at my local café. The four or so Ruined Pianos have thrived in my kitchen. House rules: no food or drink on the pianos.

I fix my ruined piano with string and fishing line. I also glue back parts that have broken off. Once, I asked my piano tuner of thirty years to do some primitive repairs to keep the piano going during its terminal decline. He did that only on condition of strict confidentiality.

The Quest
The best ruined pianos that I’ve encountered have been in outback West Australia and in the Red Centre. The extremes of drought and flooding rains produce great roaring hulks. Here, as elsewhere, pedigree is important. The brand names of those pampered aristocrats of the piano world – Ronisch, Steinway, Lipp appear regularly on the best Ruined Pianos.

At the Old Telegraph Station in Alice Springs I discovered the Camel Piano – reputedly the first piano in Centralia. It was a Ralph Allison Piano
(Royal London model) made by Wardour and Sons, Soho, London in the mid nineteenth century. The story goes that it was brought from the railhead at Oolnadatta to Alice Springs on the back of a camel. It occupied one side of the hump, while a drum of water occupied the other. This was shortly after the telegraph line went through from Adelaide to Alice Springs. Although it’s only a short upright piano, this was certainly an arduous, even heroic journey for the camel.

Innocent in appearance – a so-called boudoir piano with a sulky expression – it has a chintzy orange cloth under fine elaborate fretwork on the front panel. The top register sounds Chinese though it’s utterly beyond tuning. The bass sounds like someone ripping up kerosene tins with secateurs – heart stopping.

During the drought that never ended at Nallan Sheep Station I confess to recording on the Ruined Piano at night. I’d hide in the freezing iron shed, waiting for Dave, the sheep station owner, to go to bed. Straight after he’d stumbled back up the homestead steps I would drag up an oil drum, feel the broken teeth of the Jefferson piano under my fingers, then play _con braccio con passione_ for the applause of millions of cicadas through the shivery shuddering graveyard shift.

When the week was up I paid my friend Nathan’s and my accommodation. Dave, having shot two hundred sheep that morning, with hundreds more dying out at remote windmills, was so drunk I could see through to the inside back of his skull. “That mad bastard you brought with you. The other night I was going to bed. I heard thunder, rushed out onto the verandah. The sky was clear full of fucking stars. You should shoot that maniac piano chumping bastard.”

**NOTES**


3. For members of WARPS and their bios, see my ruined piano website: www.warpsmusic.com.


JEFF GUESS

MELBOURNE CUP

There's an unmade sand track
Off the only sealed section of the Dalkeith Road

where an untidy corner of rolled rusty wire
and moulded fence posts
borders this long slow agistment

and an old frail horse droops
beneath the ancient dark of afternoon
and pepper tree shade

with the nosebag nuisance of flies
around its face

its tail the only movement
a fugue of repetition
in the seventh heat soaked day of summer

somewhere in an adjacent lean-to shed
a man in a sweat-stained and purple singlet

is tinkering with the mysterious minutiae
of a carburettor

and at this farthest distance from Flemington
a distorted crackling radio
marks this timeless moment
with the staccato of a racetrack reveille
the horse raises its slow head
  to the sleepy summons
  of something it has almost forgotten

the man puts down the impedimenta
in his fingers
wipes his hands on an oily rag
and a nation stops

for a start.
THE ESCORIAL
(For Philip II)

The strict sharp lines and bare facades
Preserve the story of the man
No longer father but the king
To his rebellious, vicious son,

A nocturne sounding deep within
And fading on the outer wall.
Perhaps he watched across the plains
And saw the light-drowned beech trees turn

Into smooth-masted, green-sailed ships,
Imagining the treasure fleet
From half way round the world had sunk
Again in waters close to home,

Mindful of how the sun could tease
By resting on the bordering hill-
Tops as a tribute all in gold,
Then setting on the other side.
I was crying when I opened the door. Even with the glimpse I got through the peephole I could never have guessed what a sweetie she was. I couldn’t help myself, I was crying like a baby, and she was looking all doe-eyed and gracious, holding a bunch of magazines and wearing a skirt. I knew the moment I saw her she’d come to talk about God, knew it even when I heard the knock. But what did I care? The mere sight of her knees was enough to wind me right up. It doesn’t take a lot at my age.

“I’m sorry, sir,” she said – sir! such respect – “I’ve come at a bad time.”

“No, no,” I assured her, before she could back away, “the timing couldn’t be better.” I sniffled and smeared the tears across my cheeks. “I’m sorry, it’s just that everything’s been a bit much lately. I’m right down in the dumps. Perhaps you can help me, yes, yes, come in.”

“I don’t want to upset you.”

“Oh, please, please,” I said – how could such a lovely creature upset anyone? – “I’m already upset, it’s just ... Everything.”

I was hunching and breathing in sniffls, huffing up a good old sorrow. I was misery personified, the very mask of Greek tragedy.

“I was hoping to talk to you about Jesus,” she said, finding refuge in her mission.

“I know, I know,” I said, pathetically. “I know.”

“But if it’s not a good ...”

“Go on,” I said, weeping like a willow, “sit down, make yourself at home.”

I walked through into the lounge room, waving her on. She trailed behind with that peering round the corner look people sport when they aren’t too sure of things.

“Are you sure this is a good time? I could come back another day.”

“Oh no,” I said, “this is perfect timing. I could use a good talk right now. Especially about Jesus. Something to cheer me up.” I pulled out my handkerchief and blew my nose loudly, trying to avoid too much burbling. I was crying out tears as quick as I could wipe them away.
“Please, please,” I said, “I’ll put the kettle on.”

We were in the lounge with the kitchen adjoining. My round, old, wrinkled belly was tight with the drama. I bowed and scraped and showed her to the couch. She stood looking at it for a moment, clutching her colourful brochures, then sat down, knees tight together with her back as straight as a rod. There won’t be any flies on her!

“Tea?” I asked.

“Err, yes please. Thank you.”

I shuffled into the kitchen, still having a good old blubber. It really was a first rate bawl fest I had going on; top notch stuff. Safe in the kitchen I cracked a hidden smile and washed my face under the tap. I dried myself vigorously with a tea towel. For a little treat like this I didn’t want to look too bleary. I’d already unfurled the black flag of pity.

I stuck my head around the corner. “Milk, sugar?” My eyes were dry now, with just a faint sheen and a sting of red veins.

“Umm, white, one sugar,” she said. “Look, are you sure ...”

“Of course, of course. I want to hear all about Jesus. This is a godsend, I’m sure of it.”

She stayed put and the kettle clicked home. Having just had a cuppa, there wasn’t much of a wait. I’d prefer to be pouring half a bottle of scotch down her throat, but it just wasn’t going to happen. I made the tea in a flash, wanting to hurry through before she did too much thinking. If everyone turns them away, then don’t they wonder about the people who let them in? I shuddered to think what she thought of me; if I was anything like the others.

I poured the tea and brought the steaming cups on through, eyes kept low and mouth in an arch; hung with the fishhooks of gloom. I sat down next to her, close but not too close. There was still plenty of time while the tea was hot.

“Well, here we are,” I said, throwing in a gratuitous extra sniffle.

“Okay, thank you.”

She really was a darling; lovely long dark hair, tall and slightly awkward, small, pert breasts – what a lucky old bloke that Jehovah was! There were quite a few things I wouldn’t have minded witnessing, let me tell you.

“Everything alright?” I asked.

“Yes. Are you alright?”

I took my time, just to keep her thrown. I could see she’d normally be damn confident, smiling and charming, telling it how it was, turning the pages of the magazine, letting me in on the good news, until someone broke all the rhythms. It might have been she who came knocking, but it was me who was calling the shots.
“Are you alright?” she asked again, all sincerity. It was a long while since such a beauty took so genuine an interest.

“Yes, and no.” I said. “I’ve been up and down like the lid on a boiling kettle. Maybe you can help!” I said, too excitedly, banking on her putting my exaggerated sincerity down to being hysterically sad.

“But you were crying so much,” she said. “Have you had some bad news?”


She straightened up even further, stomach flat as a tack, small but haughty breasts, nice firm tittie handfuls.

“We have this free magazine,” she said. “It’s called The Watchtower. It’s about living a better life.”

“A better life!” I said. “That’s exactly what I’ve been looking for.”

I shifted across another inch as she held the magazine tight in her taut little lap. On the cover was a lovely, peaceful scene; a huge, lush garden, with people of all different races and colours, neatly dressed just like her, lolling about on the grass with a whole zoo full of animals; tigers, deer, squirrels, hippos, dogs, monkeys. There were fruit trees in bloom and flowers sprouting all about. It was a vision of paradise, and the sun was belting down; I don’t suppose it ever gets nippy in paradise.

“My name’s Jennifer,” she said, ready to get on with things. “I’m from the Jehovah’s Witnesses. We believe the Bible is the word of God and we look to live according to His words.”

“As it is written,” I said with theatrical awe.

“Yes, that’s right.” She shuffled the magazine in her hand. “Exactly as it is written. Not as other people have said it is written, but as it is actually written.”

“I see,” I said, shifting towards her another inch.

“The important thing is to ask whether or not things stand up to the test of scripture.”

She was back on track and down to business. I liked that immensely, right back on target she was.

“Things like?”

“Well, anything really. Especially about how to live according to God’s will, in harmony with the laws of the Hebrew and Greek testaments.”

“Like the ten commandments?”

“Yes, that’s one example.”

I leaned over for a closer at The Watchtower. I took a sip of my tea and wiped my eyes again, pinching them into my nose.

“The Watchtower tells you most of what you need to know about what we do.”
“I’ll bet it does,” I said, remembering to throw in a sniffle. “And so what
do you have to do to be a Jehovah’s Witness?” I inched closer still.

She reached forward carefully and picked up her cup of tea. She was
looking straight ahead. Not looking at me. She took a sip and put the cup
down again.

“We talk about the meaning of the scripture and how it governs our lives.
How we believe we ought to live by it.”

“Well that all sounds pretty useful to me.”

There was a time when I didn’t have to put on a big old act just to get a
young lady on the lounge. Back in the good old days they were queuing up for
yours truly, and even once past my prime my form held good. This was one
of the longest shots of my long career, but you never can be sure with these
godly types. They’re either ripe and ready for a bit of exploitation, or they’re
right as a rusted wingnut. Truth is, it’s just plain tough when you’re over sixty.
You have to hope they really love their daddies.

“I find it very useful in helping me to live a good life,” she said.

I rested my arm across the back of the couch, just behind her shoulders.
I could almost feel the bone beneath her young flesh.

“I wish I knew how to live,” I replied.

“Perhaps,” she began, but she got no further, for I was tired off all the
dithering. Bursting into a new and more outrageous wail of sorrow, I plunged
my head down straight into her lap and wrapped my arm around her shoulder.
At last I could feel the scents I smelled; the fabric softener, the conditioner,
the hint of an iron’s metallic steam. She gasped and writhed, stiffened and
shifted. I could feel her bones and softness jumping about beneath my
weeping face. I pressed myself right into her crotch. I couldn’t get my nose
through the fabric, but being there was enough, right in the crucible of the
world.

“Get off me!” she cried. “Get off!”

She tried to leap up, but the sheer weight of me made it impossible. The
Watchtower slid off the couch and spilled across the floor. I reached up and
managed to get my hands on her breasts. It was more than I could hope for;
they were there right enough, and none of those wooden bras you sometimes
run into; I could feel the nipples in the palms of my hands like stigmata.

“Get off me!” she cried, forcing herself upright with all her strength. “Get
off!”

Ah yes, this was a champion score! Even better than the time I faked a
heart attack in the fruit shop and fell down right under the skirts of two
young twins. I saw everything that time, let me tell you, absolutely everything
you can hope for without paying. Then there was the time I fainted on that
towering beauty at the opera house. I just don't get near women like that most days, but there in the foyer, failing in a falsified fit, as my hands ran along her perfect thighs it was like gliding down a curtain of sex; sliding down from heaven on a silken fire pole.

"Get off me!" cried my little Jehovah's Witness, lunging into the air. "Help me, someone help!" I could see she was going to cause trouble if I didn't let her fly, so I took in one last great whiff, treated myself to a final squeeze of her titties, then slackened my grip and rolled off.

I fell into the gap between the table and the couch, arms and legs flailing in the air like a beetle. I'd come a right cropper and she was on the move, making straight for the door. I had no intention of pursuing her, except maybe to give her magazines back. I'd had my fun and gotten as good as I was ever going to get.

I started to laugh aloud, great big belly laughs that rocked me back and forth as she skidded through the hallway and clattered down the steps.

I laughed and laughed until I could stand it no more. Then a wind sprang up and the door slammed shut. I looked to the crumpled Watchtower beside me with a reading surge of pity. My heart heaved a sigh, my throat locked up and this time I really started crying.
CRACK AND VANISH

Eventually, it resembles a tomato plant
stopped growing after a promising start,
offering up hard green balls that crack and vanish;
we continue to water
though not as frequently or hopefully.
The grip has loosened,
to get through is to hang on.
By now we are defined
not by what we reject
but by what rejects us,
what we can no longer lure.
The benefit
is that we pull comfort from the unknowable,
achieve a functionality smooth but never smug –
our pact with pragmatism.
And we continue to grip,
a level of corruption permitted
if it spares the small bit
enclosed within our clenched fist
that defines us, which
during tremors of the night
that lay us bare, we clutch.
NO SWEAT!

When yesteryear's truisms are always
tomorrow's anomalies and the bile
of circumstance here and now in this toy
TV video-manic town is spewing
sweat-stained singlet clichés ... love you baby ...
at sweet and sour white weddings and so, so
sad predictable funerals – what else
to say, save forget-me-knots on the grave?
Tomorrow was always too late to make
amends, to read the obituary
and suppress (of all things, chuming
in your gurs) Macbeth's ultimate statement.
Crows' cries copulate in the brass-hot sky;
out here, amid the breathless stubbled rye.
WAITING FOR A SIGN FROM HOME: FAY ZWICKY AND GERHARD MARCKS’ DER RUFER

The 1967 sculpture Der Rufer (The Caller) by Gerhard Marcks (1889–1981) has taken on new meanings in each place in which a cast has been installed. A cast was installed in front of the Brandenburg Gate shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall, while the Art Gallery of Western Australia installed its cast in the early 1980s. West Australian poet Fay Zwicky (1933–) wrote a poem responding to the Western Australian statue in the mid-1990s, published in The Gatekeeper’s Wife.¹ This kind of poem prompts the question: can the visual work of art and the ekphrastic poem work together to influence the viewer/reader to produce new meanings, and if so, how?

Fay Zwicky is one of Australia’s best-known poets. Although born into a Jewish family, her parents and both grandmothers were born in Australia, and she attended a Church of England school during the 1930s and 1940s in “the cranky moral earnestness” of Melbourne.² She grew up “in a family without religious dogma, and the haziest connections with Jewish origins,” which led to a “sense of being a stranger both to one’s own and to one’s adopted culture.”³ Zwicky describes the Australia in which she grew up as “a country of transient allegiances, a country where you can re-invent yourself over and over again, where you can invent your community, your own mythology.”⁴

According to Zwicky, she knew very little of the sculpture’s background, but simply responded to seeing it regularly in the forecourt to the Art Gallery of Western Australia, where the figure resembled, as she said in characteristic Australian vernacular, a “lonely old bugger.”⁵ The figure leans backwards from the waist, as one does when taking a deep breath, with hands cupped beside the face, poised as if to shout at the top of its lungs. It is much larger than life size, and commands attention, although when I saw it in the early morning, city commuters hurried past on their way to work without giving it a second glance.

Graeme Turner and Brian Copping have commented on the austere
setting in which the sculpture was installed in the forecourt. They remark further on “the reliance on European art and traditions in our galleries and in our wider view of art,” arguing that this reflects the “Australian sense of cultural inferiority,” the belief that Australia lacks a local culture and must seek culture from a European source. Werner Senn, however, in his survey of Australian poetry responding to works of art, argued that this “has little to do with the cultural cringe” and that Australian poets use European art to “question or even undermine the cultural assumptions which inform it.”

Mareks was a sculptor and teacher, initially at the Bauhaus school in Weimar, but his art was judged unacceptable to the Nazi government in the 1930s who dismissed him from his teaching position and confiscated a number of his sculptures. Much of his life’s work was destroyed when his Berlin studio was bombed during the war. However, after the war he returned to teaching and freelance sculpture, receiving many awards.

Zwicky’s note accompanying her poem refers to Mareks’ expressionist period, when he taught and worked at the Bauhaus; subsequently, he appears to have returned to figuration:

A trip to Greece, undertaken at the right time, made me return from uninhibited expressionism (1928). Since then, I have tried to approach the matter in the one way I am convinced to be the right one for me, avoiding lack of form and meaningless abstractions ... Plastic work is a matter of weight and proportion, forms which you wrest from the chaos of life. There is nothing “new.”

_The Caller_ was made in 1967, originally for Radio Bremen, the motif apparently derived from the Stentor in the _Iliad_, whose voice was as loud as fifty men, in whom Mareks saw the embodiment of the right to freedom of speech. At its inauguration in November 1967, Mareks made the following remarks:

I was asked to say what I was thinking with *The Caller*. I do not think, I look. It was like this: once I stood on the bank of a river, the ferry was on the far side, beside me a man put his hands to his mouth and called into the wind, "come over." The mouth is the first and last means of communication – the cry for help, giving orders, murmurs of love and the body's last breath. The hands form the shape of a bell. We are reminded that in the human body all types of equipment can be imagined.\(^{14}\)

*The Caller* took on additional meaning when the cast was set up before the Brandenburg Gate in May 1989.\(^{15}\) In November of that year the Berlin wall started coming down and at about the same time the quote from Petrarch, "I go through the world and call peace, peace, peace," was added to the installation.\(^{16}\) *The Caller* thus became a symbol of freedom "for all oppressed around the world" and "a reminder to the Germans and all nations that the price of oppression, suffering caused to one's own people and others ... should never be forgotten."\(^{17}\) I suggest that this knowledge has become part of the mythology of the work, and whether known to the poet or not, may influence the reader who, as I did, researches the sculpture seeking to know its origin and what it looks like (there is no reproduction of it in Zwicky's book).

Mareks, *The Caller*,
forecourt of the Art Gallery of Western Australia.
A contemporary definition of *ekphrasis* holds that it is the verbal representation of visual representation. I have argued elsewhere that the process of representation is unstable, and that visual and verbal representation introduces changes, or "differences." I propose that *ekphrasis* contributes to the field of difference in which the viewer/reader encounters the art work, and that these "differences" influence the production of meaning from the art work informed by the poem. To conceive how this may happen, I propose that the poet and viewer/reader in *ekphrasis* share something with Martin Heidegger’s concept of the *preserver* who restrains usual knowing and looking to allow meaning to emerge from the work of art. Heidegger does not elaborate on his concept of "restraint," but one may theorise "switching," and its role in "restraint," as occurring, for example, when the viewer/reader considers possible meanings occurring within and outside signification and between the different modes of signification indicated by C. S. Peirce’s concepts of symbol, icon and index. The resemblance between the sculpted figure and the human body is one to which the viewer can relate despite the stylised facial features. The viewer assumes that these features have been crafted by the artist’s hands, and may be taken as an index of the artist’s activity. One can also see many layers of symbolism arising from the location and circumstances in which casts of the sculpture have been installed in Germany, and in Western Australia.

A consideration of the "differences" Zwicky’s poem generates from the work of visual art encourages ideas about how these may influence the viewer/reader to produce new meanings.

**The Caller**

(Gerhard Marx, c. 1920)

Bronze brother, wild face lifted skull-like
in a howl, gaunt elbows stretching taut
a monkish robe, hands cupping anguish’d cheek-bones,
wasted frame past prayer. *Ora pro me* ²⁵

Your name forgotten on the sandstone wastes,
back turned to towers of chrome and glass
far from the lost homeland. Instruct me in
your wordless patience, stilled ferocity.

Your homeless stance prophetic yet your words
remain unspoken mouthing pain of a God unsighted
sightless in this land of garish failure;
where is childhood’s strict and wrathful judge?

Brought up hard against a stony tribe, nothing
I'd been taught or told prepared my way among these people, brother: their stunted lingo, shit and blood, their hardness. They make a go of it, some tough core keeps them at it. Do you give in, conform, do things their way? Or wait to let the music take its time to surface howling, stifle in your throat? Prompt me brother. What is required of me, long failed, who once craved silence stillness timelessness? Obedient and rebellious to what end?

Facing fading light, as scared as any time-bound creature of the coming dark, the whispering grasses close to the river’s source, the half-heard music staved against the promise of love’s burden. Something has to die behind the eyes for music’s reclamation from the mutilated spirit, for poetry’s release from silent rock, from watchful sandstone, crumbling in the air, wind’s sweep over grass. It can’t be forced but, like the sparrow’s fall, will come.

And you will stand against the night, stretched above stone, sightless sockets staring at the void, at Him the Absent, body clenched against His wind still waiting for a sign from home, the weary echo of your cry closing inward like the hurling desert boomerang that circles ever circling in subtle silent rushes.

O hear O Ora

The statue is literally an immigrant and, although Zwicky is not (except from the Eastern States), the voice in the poem is of an immigrant. According to Zwicky, she is very different from the voice in the poem — “I have to be grateful for the freedom to think that my parents and my education gave me, enabling me to cross borders without fear and to relish difference.” The voice in Zwicky’s poem responds to the Caller as a brother and reads wildness, anguish and ferocity in the figure, yet acknowledges the patience and stillness of a frozen figure (line 8). The voice comments on Australian culture by noting that the figure’s name has been “forgotten on the sandstone wastes” of the Gallery forecourt (line 5) and that God is unsighted in this “land of garish failure” (lines 10–11). The sculpture is situated against
the backdrop of the Perth central business district – the “towers of chrome and glass” referred to in line 6. This image of “garish failure” recalls Australia’s economic history of boom and bust over the last forty years, which would be well known in resource rich Western Australia.

Possibly the reference (line 12) to the absence of “childhood’s strict and wrathful judge” could be a reference to the poet’s own Australian upbringing in “cranky moral earnestness,” and the next verse could equally refer to the poet’s migration to an adult world in which life isn’t fair as to a migrant’s experience of coming to Australia. The voice in the poem (line 20) ponders conformity, and the tension between letting one’s inner music “surface howling” or “stifle in your throat.” This echoes the sculpture’s tension between the “howl” (line 2) and the “wordless patience” (line 8). This tension is a result of the medium of the work of art, and shows both a recognition that the sculpture is not to be mistaken for its referent, for which, like a mythical figure, there is none, and that in the poem the voice can “howl” if it wishes.

The colloquial rendering (line 29), “Something has to die behind the eyes” suggests a loss of spirit to allow music to be reclaimed from the “mutilated spirit” (line 30), but may more simply suggest a letting go of passionate intent, or de-familiarisation, for “poetry’s / release from silent rock” (line 31). The latter seems more positive, echoing a favourite story from Zwicky’s childhood – “Aaron’s rod causing water to spring from the rock in the desert.”

“And you will stand against the night” (line 34) echoes “Facing fading light, as scared as any time-bound / creature of the coming dark” (lines 25-26) and possibly alludes to Dylan Thomas’s “Do not go gentle into that good night.” The reference (line 37) to the figure “still waiting for a sign from home,” following a reference to “Him the Absent,” presumably God, suggests that “home” may have changed from the lost homeland (line 7) to the “void” (line 35). Finally, there is the “weary echo of your cry closing inward” with the reference to “circles / ever circling” possibly a colloquial reference to aimlessness.

The sculpture works with the motif of calling from one human being to another for recognition and help in this world. Marcks saw the mouth as the first and last means of communication between human beings and The Caller has become a symbol in Germany for freedom of speech and freedom from oppression. Marcks has captured what others have called the “vocabulary of movement” of the human body. Zwicky’s poem makes changes to the “caller” motif in which the voice in the poem first relates to the figure as an immigrant in a foreign land, undecided whether to stifle their own voice or to conform, then admires the endurance of the bronze figure for whom the fading of human life, the absence of God or any sign “from home” does not
matter, then appears to acknowledge the futility of internalising the cry for help that is prayer. In so doing, I suggest that Zwicky has responded to the vocabulary of movement, and the figure’s robe, so that our viewing of the work of art, re-informed by the poem, reveals our need to be heard, to receive a sign in return from other human beings.

Could this poem have been written by a poet gazing upon the same statue set up in front of the Brandenburg Gate? I don’t think so. Having researched the sculpture on the Internet, I knew when I saw it in Perth in the course of writing this article that the Brandenburg Gate was built around the time the First Fleet arrived in Australia, and that the cast in Berlin was installed in the centre strip of the “Road of 17 June,” named to commemorate the rebellion by East Berliners in 1953. Against the City of Perth backdrop of “towers of chrome and glass,” the feeling of recent arrival that apparently influenced Zwicky is hard to shake off, and encourages the change to the “Caller” motif, to one waiting for a sign from home.

Note

The poem “The Caller” is © Fay Zwicky 1997, reproduced by kind permission of Fay Zwicky. Images of the sculpture Der Rufer by Gerhard Marcks are reproduced by kind permission of the Gerhard-Marcks-Stiftung, Bremen. I would like to acknowledge helpful comments from Fay Zwicky and Arie Hartog on early drafts of this article. Photograph © Fiona Raitt 2005, reproduced with permission.

Notes

5 Zwicky, personal communication, 13 April 2005.
7 Turner and Copping, 4–5.
10 Luther College (2004).


Arie Hartog, Gerhard Marcks Institute, personal communication, 1 March 2005. Author’s rough translation.


Beamcorp, 1–2; *Berlin Encyclopaedia* (2002).

Beamcorp, 1, 19.


See further Raitt (2005) and (2006) where I argue that Heidegger’s concept of earth is also implicated in “differences” and “switching.”

*Der Rufer*, bronze, by Gerhard Marcks (1889–1981), stands in the forecourt of the State Art Gallery of Western Australia. Marcks has been called the “last of the original German expressionist sculptors.”

The Latin expression “ora pro me” appears in Christian hymns and observances and means “pray for me.” Despite the figure’s “monkish robe” noted by Zwicky (line 3), and her association with the Christian invocation “ora pro me,” the motif of the Caller does not appear to have religious symbolism in Germany (Arie Hartog, personal communication, 1 March 2005).


Zwicky, “Border Crossings”, 236.

I take this expression from John Russell Taylor, *Impressionist Dreams: The artists and the world they painted* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1990): 157, who was there considering the pre-occupation of the Impressionists with ballet dancers and women bathing and grooming.

ALF TAYLOR

"HEAR THIS, YOU ELDERS"

Listen all who own this land
Has anything like this
Ever happened in your days

(Multitude of natives shouts in unison) – Never

Or in the days of your
Forefathers

(Multitude of natives shouts in unison) – Never

And in the future
Tell it to your children

(Multitude of natives shouts in unison) – Yes, yes

I beg of you to
Let your children
Tell their children
And their children
To the next generation

(Multitude of natives shouts in unison) – Yes, yes

That another country
Is coming to invade your land
And to claim your country

(Multitude of natives shouts in unison) – Talk to the invaders
No more the trees will grow
To the blueness, to the sky

(Multitude of natives shouts in unison) – Death, death

Mother earth will have
Her bowels ripped open
In search of her golden rocks

(Multitude of natives shouts in unison) – Death, death

And you native people
Will have no say
On your sacred land
You will be thrown aside
On unwanted land called reserves

(Multitude of natives shouts in unison) – We are one

While these people
From another country
Will claim your land
In the name of Jesus Christ

(Multitude of natives shouts in unison) – But we are many
COLEBROOK HOME AND THE DISAPPEARED PAST

“The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

Milan Kundera

There is a particular site in the foothills of Adelaide, at Eden Hills, where there was once a Home for children who would become known as the Stolen Generations. The Home (one of several) was called Colebrook Home, after Thomas Edward Colebrook, who became Australian President of the United Aborigines’ Mission in 1902. Nancy Barnes and Doris Kartinyeri, two Stolen Generations women, grew up in Colebrook Home at Eden Hills and have written about it in their autobiographies: A Spirited Brumby and Kick the Tin, respectively. The life stories of Nancy Barnes and Doris Kartinyeri have been in the public domain since the year 2000, although interestingly, Nancy Barnes’ autobiography was self-published, because commercial publishers did not think that her representation of herself as “saved,” educated and quietly content was marketable. I have written about that elsewhere.¹

What interests me here is the demolition of the building that was once a Home, long or short-term, for 123² Aboriginal children, and the conversion of that site to a Reconciliation Park. Memories of the demolished Colebrook Home at Eden Hills have continued to haunt numbers of non-Indigenous residents who lived and/or currently live in that particular part of South Australia. Why this is so may be a specific and local question. Nevertheless, thinking about that specific question in the context of discourses of bereavement might contribute something more general to the way we think about reconciliation.

The site of Colebrook Home at Eden Hills is adjacent to an Apex Memorial Park, which commemorates the casualties of war. Australians, Americans and Europeans are familiar with such spaces: parks and avenues of
honour with plaques and statues to remind us that (mostly) white (mostly) men died in wars. But how do we read the space where the bricks and mortar of Colebrook Home once stood? Ken Inglis, in *Sacred Places*, reminds us of the significance of the very few colonial “memorials” to Indigenous individuals, who are represented as faithful Jacky Jackies, black servants supporting white masters, or as the last of their tribe (25). Inglis recounts the story of one radical politician who proposed prior to the celebrations for the centenary of British settlement in 1888 that “we ought to do something for the aborigines.” To this suggestion Sir Henry Parkes retorted: “And remind them that we have robbed them” (26).

Indigenous people do not need to be reminded of what they have lost. My concern here is with what the site at Eden Hills might represent for non-Indigenous visitors and people living in the district. Perhaps, for non-Indigenous people, the demolition of Colebrook Home enabled forgetting, rather than remembering and dealing with the discomfort of those memories.

In his introduction to *Stranded Objects*, a study of mourning, memory and film in postwar Germany, Eric Santner develops a framework first suggested by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich in their study *The Inability to Mourn*, published as long ago as 1967. The Mitscherlichs were curious about, to use Santner’s words, “the apparent absence of any sustained emotional confrontation with the Nazi past in postwar German society” and incredulous that the German people had apparently “avoided what might – and in a certain sense should – have been the psychological reaction to the defeat in 1945, the direct confrontation with the facts of the Holocaust and, above all, the loss of Hitler as Führer, namely a massive fall into depression and melancholy” (1). Santner of course recognises the reference to Freud’s “distinction between two different patterns of bereavement: mourning and melancholy” (2) and endorses mourning as a more “healthy” form of grieving. “Melancholy,” he says, “is the rehearsal of the shattering or fragmentation of one’s primitive narcissism, an event that predates the capacity to feel any real mourning for a lost object, since for the narcissist other objects do not yet really exist” (3).

It is outside the scope of this essay to make pronouncements on whether or not the policies that were designed to deal with “the Aboriginal problem” in Australia resulted in a genocide that can be equated with the Holocaust, and whether or not apologies for past cruelties can have any lasting significance. This is a long and on-going debate, most passionately addressed in recent issues of the *Quarterly Essay*, particularly by Inga Clendinnen and John Hirst. But what I can do here is draw upon the framework suggested by the Mitscherlichs, and extended by Santner, in order to come to some
conclusions about kinds of social, moral and political behaviour, prior to and after the demolition of Colebrook Home. This may be helpful in addressing the question of whether the memorialisation of a particular site, on which bad things happened, necessarily and universally represents a process of healing and reconciliation. The concern is that, for non-Indigenous people, such a site may be used for “rehearsals,” circumventing any genuine mourning for people whose identities and lives have been actually or metaphorically lost.

The site of Colebrook Home is positively important to some, but by no means all, of the Aboriginal children who grew up there. The generosity of the few Colebrook kids, or tjil tji tjuta, as they call themselves – including Lowitja O’Donoghue, Doris Kartinyeri and Nancy Barnes, whose words have been published and who have worked and/or continue to work with the Blackwood Reconciliation group to develop the park—is quite overwhelming. But in the Reconciliation group the ratio of Indigenous members to non-Indigenous members is very small. How self-congratulatory can the non-Indigenous members of the group be (I say we because I joined the group)? Have attitudes been changed? What does the park “say” to non-Indigenous visitors and, increasingly, tourists? How might they “read” it?

So-called “bush” or “camp natives” were believed to be dying out by the end of the nineteenth century. We know that the “problem” for the government was what to do with children who were the product of trans-racial liaisons or “erotics,” to use Mary Louis Pratt’s descriptive term. In South Australia, in 1908, Senior Constable W. G. South was appointed as a (sub-)Protector of Aborigines. “From the following year the general child welfare law, the State Children’s Act 1895, was used to remove Indigenous children [from their mothers] on the grounds of ‘desititution’ or ‘neglect’. A child could be deemed ‘neglected’ if he or she ‘sleeps in the open air, and does not satisfy the Justices that he or she has a home or a settled place of abode’” (Bringing Them Home 120).

At the beginning of the twentieth century it was generally believed that if the then designated “half-caste” children could be removed from Aboriginal camps and raised as white children, they would assimilate, find a place somewhere (unobtrusive) in the social order, marry whites and, in effect, “disappear.” An article appearing in the Adelaide Advertiser in 1936 asserted:

Much as we sympathise with the mother-love of the lubras, we say that the half-caste children should be segregated from the natives before the age of five, and given equal opportunities of education and training with white children. Public money thus spent would be well employed ...
As is evident in retrospect, South Australia was not prepared to spend large sums of money providing equal opportunities for the education and training of Aboriginal children of mixed parentage. This becomes very clear if we examine the level of support for Colebrook Home at Eden Hills.

In South Australia, from a government point of view, it was fortuitous that the United Aborigines Mission, following their own agenda to Christianise the natives, stepped into the breach. What this meant was that government policy could be implemented at low cost, very low cost, and the carers of the children could assert in comfortable ignorance that they had never forcibly removed children from their parents. E. J. Telfer, in *Forty Years of Missionary Work*, insisted that:

These unwanted little ones were so much ‘drifting wreckage’ throughout the great northern country ... Many of these waifs are sent to the Home by the police, under instruction from the Government. In some cases their white fathers or the aboriginal mothers bring them to be cared for. The Mission never forcibly takes a child from its native mother, and every inmate has been rescued from the possibility of demoralisation or premature death ... What is the Mission doing for them? They are warmed and fed, and provided with clean clothing, cozy beds, and healthy surroundings. All the influences of the Home are pure and elevating, and the children soon lose the ‘pinched and hunted look,’ and become happy and contented. (171–2)

The other side of the story has been recorded again and again in *Bringing Them Home: The Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (1997). One of the “Colebrook kids” gave the following evidence:

we had to learn to eat new food, have our heads shaved ... Then we had to learn to sleep in a house. We’d only ever slept in our wedjas and always had the stars there and the embers of the fire and the closeness of the family. And all of a sudden we had high beds and that was very frightening. You just thought you were going to fall out and to be separated. There was a corridor and our cousins were in another room. We’d never been separated before. And the awful part was we had to get into that train later on with one little grey blanket and go down to Colebrook ... a matter of weeks after. From that time until 1968 I didn’t see [my mother]. Thirty-two years it was.

The idea for the first Colebrook Home emerged in 1924, when Annie Lock,
a member of the United Aborigines’ Mission, found what was described in *Forty Years of Missionary Work* as “a needy native child,” named Rita, in Marree, in the north of South Australia. The first temporary home was established in Oodnadatta, then two lady missionaries, Sisters Hyde and Rutter, moved their “saved” children south to a small cottage in Quorn, and then to larger concrete quarters on the outskirts of Quorn.

In 1944, following serious water shortages in Quorn, Colebrook Home and its children relocated to Eden Hills, in the foothills above Adelaide. The building they occupied, formerly known as “Karinya,” had been erected between 1910–11, on government land reserved for a State Institution for the reception, control, and treatment of inebriates. Between 1930 and 1945 the building was occupied for short periods by women with no means of support, by Chinese refugees, and Aboriginal children on summer holidays. This is a space, then, that has only ever accommodated “others”: people perceived as strays and waifs, outcasts, misfits and unwanted persons.

Children from Colebrook Home at Eden Hills attended the local schools at Eden Hills and Blackwood in the 1950s through to 1981. I attended Blackwood Primary School in the fifties with children from the Home. At the time I believed, as did my classmates, that Colebrook Home at Eden Hills was an orphanage.

In the 1950s, renewal of the lease of the Home to the Mission was under threat. The Mission had been unable to provide the necessary care and maintenance of the building and conditions were reported as “appalling.” In December 1956 photographs appeared in the Adelaide papers under headlines such as “Squalor at Colebrook Home.” The *Advertiser* quoted a local Council report stating that sanitation at the Home was “totally inadequate,” that lavatory accommodation was “hopeless” and that “raw sewerage was being discharged over the ground surface, forming a putrid cesspool at the rear of the premises.” There were broken walls in the shower recesses, the kitchen was “unsuitable” for the preparation of food, there were mice everywhere, the cellar was dirty and the stairs dangerous (December 4, 1956). The then Superintendent, Howard Hill, wrote several times about his concerns regarding seepage in the cellar. In his November/December report in 1954 he complained:

> The cellar is a worrying problem of the Home, and the children find pleasure in throwing tops, shoes, or anything in the water which is over 12” deep. In fact the water smells. I have been putting kerosene in the water to kill mosquitoes, but find it has killed some frogs, and they have had to be collected and disposed of.
Superintendent Hill's monthly reports in the fifties make it quite clear that the Home was falling into disrepair. Some help was forthcoming, from local volunteers and voluntary organizations and tradespeople. But the State government and local authorities clearly did not ultimately accept responsibility for the health and safety of the children. Indeed, the Board of Health saw the problem of the cesspools first and foremost as a threat to the local residents, as if the Aboriginal children did not count as residents at all.

Superintendent Hill's reports during 1954 and 1955 indicate how difficult it was to keep up with the day-to-day work of caring for the children, let alone raising funds or finding volunteers to attend to the plumbing. In the middle of 1954 he writes “I have not been well for some time, and feel I cannot continue much longer without a holiday, as I am having giddy turns and suffering acutely from boils.” In the same report, he inadvertently reveals the low level of tolerance of Aboriginal children in schools. This is a common story, by no means exclusive to Colebrook. “It is in keeping the Home clean that means so much extra work and time. The children must be kept clean now otherwise their position at school would be very difficult. We are doing our best to convince the Schools and all others who come in contact with the children that they are sent to school spotlessly clean and free of any odour” (2 May). Without sufficient clothing, that was not easy. In his Monthly Report for July 1955 Hill writes:

The problem of the boys’ underwear, such as underpants, is a big one ... I have always told people who enquire about clothing that we are always glad to get as many pairs of underpants as possible ... the boys so often sleep in them day after day that they get them worn out much quicker as they escape the laundry, then boys say they can’t find them. I know they will burn them if they get them very dirty, so as they won’t get rowled at. Sometimes they have been used for cloths to wash their floors. I think it would be a good idea if they all could have two new pairs each as they have been fast disappearing. Being short-staffed helps this sort of thing to get out of hand.

Mr and Mrs Hill eventually resigned, ill and exhausted. After a rapid succession of staff in charge, Superintendent Finek and his wife took over in 1957. Colebrook Home was by then very run down. Finek’s first written impressions of the Home are decidedly Gothic. He describes the Home at Eden Hills as a:

sprawling house, half hidden by a wilderness of trees and shrubs, [that] did not look at all inviting. The roof was rusty and under the long
verandah the somewhat grimy cream wall abruptly met the dark blue painted bricks which continued down to the red floor of the verandah itself.5

He notices the peeling paint, the inner gloom, the windows painted so that no one can look in. He notices the padlocks on the servery, the fridge door and the pantry. He recoils from the smell. “The whole place had a musty unpleasant even unhealthy odour and looking at the dingy dark coloured walls we felt a shiver go down our spines.” Finck concludes that his visit had “not been an exhilarating experience” (4). Although Finck was initially inclined to say no to the Superintendentship of Colebrook Home, he changed his mind. “We knew absolutely nothing about caring for children” he wrote (5).

Superintendent Finck ran Colebrook Home as a Faith Mission, relying on voluntary assistance and donations of food, money and services. He imposed a “fanatical” religious regime that was impossible for the children to adjust to, and that some, including Doris Kartinyeri in her autobiography _Kick The Tin_, insist covered sinister goings on, including sexual abuse. Punishments imposed by the Superintendent included depriving children of meals. Children who wet their beds were deprived of breakfast. At the two local schools attended by Colebrook Kids, lunches occasionally disappeared. At least two of the teachers at Blackwood Primary School (Ian Auhl and Ken Darwin) were sympathetic and interviewed Colebrook children about conditions at the Home.6 Darwin and Auhl concluded and reported that punishments at Colebrook, particularly deprivation of food, were out of proportion to any childish misbehaviour at the Home. Nevertheless, parents complained. This was the reason given by the headmaster at Blackwood for his decision to expel Aboriginal children from school. I had to recover this information from State Archives; although I was there at the school I knew nothing about it at the time. How could that be?

Whoever was in charge at the Home (staff changeovers were frequent), what becomes evident, from variously authored government documents and media reports focussing on the inadequacy of the building at the Eden Hills site, is a tendency, among those reporting on Colebrook Home, to conflate the deteriorating Home with its Aboriginal inmates: hazardous to health, out of control, sub-standard. Western domestic ideology evolving in the nineteenth century did this to women, defining them as the space of the home. An uncared for home signified a deficient wife and mother, who could not be socially condoned. But at Colebrook there were no mothers; children had to assume mothering roles themselves. Social condemnation was
deflected from those who, at a number of levels, were really responsible for
the state of the Home and settled too easily on the children in care, children
who were too often and too thoughtlessly described as filthy, smelly and
deficient.

There is a belief among some of the “Colebrook kids” and a few of the
local residents that the Home at Eden Hills could, and should, have been
saved by the State Government. This was also the view of Constance Cooke,
of the Aborigines Protection Board, after a rare visit to the Home in 1954. In
her report she recommended that the property, although leased to the
Mission, should have been the responsibility of the state Architect-in-Chief.
Furthermore, she declared that Colebrook might not have deteriorated so
much if the Aborigines Protection Board had met more often and visited
Aboriginal Institutions more frequently (5 April).

For some of the children, Colebrook became what they had instead of
country. Doris Kartinyeri, in Kick the Tin, describes Colebrook Home at Eden
Hills as “a huge and beautiful looking building with a verandah surrounding
the sides and front, supported by rows of great posts. It stood on acres of land
with beautiful gardens and tall gum trees” (13–14). It is true that Colebrook
was also a place where horrible things happened. Domestic ideology has
always been contradictory. Homes are supposed to be safe places, but from
the outside, who is to say whether walls make a fortress or a prison? How
much more open to contradictory definitions of home are the spaces of a
Home with a capital “H,” when the parents are gone, where carers come and
go and where the children have been stolen or removed from parents
conceptualised as racially other?

The establishment of the various Colebrook Home sites (there were
four) was the result of assimilationist policies, but children who grew up
together in those homes often came to think of themselves as family or
community. They created identities to replace what was lost. Doris
Kartinyeri writes of Colebrook at Eden Hills: “This was our home and we
respected it. We were happy in our own way, laughing, crying, and just being
an extended family with a lot of love” (Kick the Tin 14). Reproduced in Kick the
Tin is an emblem of the Colebrook Tree, designed by Faith Thomas. The
roots represent the various tribes from which the children came and the
trunk the strong family unit that they became, most particularly under the
care of the first Matrons, the maiden Sisters Hyde and Rutter. I would
suggest, therefore, that the demolition of Colebrook Home (not the closing
of the Home in acknowledgment of the wrongness of assimilationist policies,
but the actual removal of bricks and mortar that made what some Aboriginal
children called home) was much more problematic in terms of reconciliation
than has previously been allowed.
The space of Colebrook Reconciliation Park empowers, to some extent, a particular group of Colebrook kids, who remember their time in the Home, for various reasons, more positively than others - most particularly children under the later regimes of Superintendents. But what messages does it convey to non-Indigenous visitors?

The abolition of assimilationist policies was acknowledged in the demolition of the evidence of those policies. At the time (1974), people in the district thought that was a good thing. In hindsight, and drawing upon the work of the Mitscherlichs and Santner, it begins to seem that the demolition of Colebrook Home was a “remarkably efficient” defence against melancholy, the most primitive form of grieving. Assimilationist policies were designed to wipe out human beings who were not “like us”: that is to say, in a colonial context, not “white.” Had we been able to understand, at the time, that the racism that determined those policies was in fact part of our makeup, part of our heritage, we would have had to face the “traumatic shattering of the specular relations” (Santner 3) we had maintained with that anonymous entity we might have called “the Government.” We would have had to face what John Hirst first described in *Sense & Nonsense in Australian History* and has since reiterated, as “cold-blooded cruelty planned by a distant Bureau in pursuit of the ideal of racial purity” (63). We would have had to rethink who we were, acknowledging that we have always believed ourselves superior to those coloured others who, like refugees, drunkards, unwed mothers and the perceived dregs of our own society have been relegated to a space for the unwanted. We would have had to enter “a potentially debilitating melancholy” (Santner 4), in order to overcome our ingrained belief that others were simply an inferior part of ourselves, and that we could be improved by eliminating them.

In *The Inability to Mourn* the Mitscherlichs point out that in post-war Germany, melancholy, as the pre-requisite for healthy mourning, was avoided by the efficient burning of “affective bridges to the immediate past” (in Santner 4). This involved “rejection of an inner involvement in one’s own behaviour … prevent[ing] a loss of self-esteem” (in Santner 4). Breaks with the past have to be maintained, otherwise the gap will begin to fill with debris from the past. The Mitscherlichs argue that in post-war Germany this gap was maintained through the “manic” activity of clearing away.

The very grimness with which the job of clearing away the ruins was immediately begun – which, in oversimplification, was taken as a sign of German efficiency – itself betrayed a manic element. Perhaps this manic defence also explains why news of the greatest crimes in Germany's
history was received with so few indications of outward emotion. *(Inability to Mourn 28)*

At Eden Hills, in the eyes of local residents, Colebrook Home seemed to disappear overnight. State Records reveal, inadvertently, that the gradual falling into decay was the result of neglect or generalised apathy at a number of levels. Arguably, the decision to remove the home from sight was a strategic one. The State Government did provide some support for Colebrook Home, and with some voluntary help, the Home was sufficiently repaired to enable a ten-year renewal of the lease in 1959. But by 1969 concern about the inadequacy of the building, including complaints from local residents about the lack of sanitation, was such that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Sir Robin Millhouse, was not prepared to recommend further extension of the lease. He informed the United Aborigines Mission that the children and their caretakers could continue to occupy the property until a decision was made regarding its future use. Overall, despite the good will and hard work of the few who cared, there was not enough support for Colebrook Home or the wellbeing of its children to maintain it as a building with the potential for restoration.

Colebrook Home at Eden Hills was demolished in 1974. Advertisements appeared in the local paper inviting residents of the district to salvage bricks and mortar. There are fragments of Colebrook Home all through the surrounding districts, mostly buried. I helped load a trailer myself, to fill a dangerous pit in my father's garage. Those bricks are still buried in that garage, beneath tonnes of clay. Other bricks have been recovered from elsewhere around the district and returned to the site of the former Home, where they are regarded by some members of the Reconciliation Group as precious objects. Certainly their significance as metaphors is profound.

When Colebrook Home at Eden Hills disappeared from sight, those who wanted the Aboriginal presence removed were relieved. But even those who condemned assimilationist policies tended to read the demolition as evidence that the embarrassment of the past was over. However, now that Colebrook autobiographies have been written, it is clear that the emotional responses of Colebrook kids to their former home (or Home) are complex, contradictory, and as varied as would be expected from any group of individuals who lose the place of their childhood and/or adolescence, whatever memories may be attached to that place. It seems obvious now, as perhaps it was not obvious then, that memories of past cruelties cannot be demolished overnight, and that wounds cannot be healed without pain.

What is interesting about Santner's "Reflections on the Discourses of
Mourning" is the parallel it suggests between the slowness, some would say failures, of Australian Reconciliation movements, or conciliatory gestures, and the "circumvention" of "complex layering of mourning tasks" (6). Drawing upon Jean-François Lyotard and Peter Schneider, Santner discusses post-war Germany in terms of an "inability to tolerate the ... habits and habitation of postmodern selves, and an inability ... to mourn the losses left in the wake of the Holocaust" (8). Mourning involves letting go of dreams, including, as Schneider points out, "the dream of colonial domination" (164). In a postmodern world, past dreams would include "dreams of redemption ... even if they are cast in the rhetoric of liberation" (164). Clearly letting go of such dreams of domination or redemption is not something simply achieved by non-Indigenous Australians through a visit to a Reconciliation Park.

Colebrook Reconciliation Park is now a beautiful (beautified) space, with raised, dry paths, such as the Colebrook children never knew when they lived there. The foundations of the Home have been covered over. There is a central fountain with clean water, representing the weeping parents from whom the Colebrook kids were taken. There is a sculpture of a grieving Aboriginal mother, head bent over empty arms. Her arms are sometimes filled with flowers, placed there by both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous visitors. It is natural to want to put something in the mother's arms. But how much such gestures by non-Indigenous visitors represent acknowledgement of the past is a troubling question. There is a great deal of "recreational grieving" going on. School children, for example, have been encouraged to kneel at the base of the Fountain of Tears to bathe their faces in the tears of weeping representations of Aboriginal parents. But what does this have to do with facing the past?

One of the strategies discussed by Santner for avoiding painful mourning is that of identification with the victim. The Mitscherlichs describe this as a substitute for mourning and "above all a logical defense against guilt" (in Santner 6). As Santner says:

The capacity to feel grief for others and guilt for the suffering one has directly or indirectly caused, depends on the capacity to experience empathy for the other as other. This capacity in turn depends on the successful working through of those primitive experiences of mourning which first consolidate the boundaries between self and other, thereby opening up a space for empathy. (7)

Indigenous people are only too aware of the lack of empathy - most would describe this lack as racism - in their day-to-day lives. Lowitja O'Donoghue has insisted that:
Aboriginal people have had a different and alien culture imposed upon them. But, significantly as well, they have been excluded or marginalised from that prevailing culture. It is not hard to understand that if you are regarded and treated as an outsider in your own land – not only as different but also as sub-human – there will be profound social and emotional consequences.

I have thought a lot about the memorialising aspects of Colebrook Reconciliation Park and their implications since visiting Hamburg, Leipzig and Berlin in 2004. Lyotard, in “Ticket to a New Décor,” described the “forty-year silence about the ‘Nazi interlude,’” imposed by his generation, as an “interdiction against anamnesis” and a “symbol for the entire Western world” (14–15). It is clear that in Germany the current generation of younger people has been thoughtfully engaged in memorialising the past; the range of interpretations of how best to acknowledge past cruelties is astonishing. Examples include new memorials built from the bricks, stones and glass of ruined churches, standing alongside what remains of the original churches: the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church is one such an example. There are also numbers of stabilised ruins, preserving and representing acts of destruction. The New Jewish Museum in Berlin can only be entered by way of the Baroque building that was once the Superior Court. The new museum has been designed to disorientate its visitors so that they can experience the confusion of people whose countrymen rejected them. The Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe, near the Brandenburg Gate, has proved to be very controversial, with critics arguing that the concept of 2,711 identical stone slabs is too abstract to function as a memorial. But the memorial I have thought about most, in relation to Colebrook Home, is one I did not see: the Harburg Anti-Fascist Memorial Pillar, just outside Hamburg. This memorial was unveiled on 10 October, 1986. A lead covered pillar, 12 metres high, was erected on a brick platform near the entrance to an underground commuter station. Visitors and passers-by were invited to inscribe their names and/or comments into the lead, using attached styluses. As available space was used up, the pillar was progressively lowered into the brick platform. By 10 November, 1993, it had disappeared from the skyline. It still exists, locked away in the brick platform, but is generally regarded as having served its function.

The anti-fascist memorial in Hamburg was the conception of Jochen Gerz (b. 1940) and Esther Shalve-Gerz (b. 1948). Their concern was to bring to the surface suppressed memories of the Holocaust and to provoke reaction and discussion over a limited period of time. As a Memorial it was “intended
... to remain in people's memories, rather than becoming a mere token of guilt which through habituation becomes forgotten or ignored" (1). Now out of sight, it can nevertheless still be glimpsed through glass in a locked door in the platform (5). Over eight years, 60,000 reactions, both positive and negative, were recorded on the Gerz memorial: signatures, quotations, racist remarks, swastikas, swastikas overwritten with "Nazis Raus," spray tags, scratches and scrapes. A hole was violently gouged into the surface of the lead and there is at least one bullet hole.

Perhaps at Colebrook Reconciliation Park it is too easily assumed by non-Indigenous visitors that, like the foundations of an old building, the past can be buried. What about the messy stuff between demolition site and tidy Reconciliation Park? Have we really dealt with that? What about the objections from some local residents to the suggestion that the site should be left as a wild garden? What about the fears that undesirables would camp in that space, that always was a space for the unwanted? Where are these objections recorded and who answered back? The closest we have to such records are the graffiti on the new architecturally designed toilets, and these are regularly scrubbed away.

The gap that appeared in the landscape along Shepherds Hill Road, when Colebrook Home was so suddenly demolished, was troubling. Perhaps it should have been left as it was, an obvious wound in the landscape, until such time as those of us who only knew the Home by its external appearance could face the enormity of what had happened to others who had no choice but to live there.

Considerable interest has been expressed in reproduction of the Grieving Mother sculpture, created on commission by Silvio Aponyi, specifically for the Colebrook Reconciliation Park. So far the insistence that she should become a reconciliation commodity has been resisted. Nevertheless, the desire for tokens is still something visitors bring with them.

For the Stolen Generations and their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, the injustices are far from over. Indigenous people know this. The Reconciliation Park at Eden Hills provides valuable opportunities for interactions, dependent upon the goodwill of the few who are willing and able to share their experiences of growing up at Colebrook. But the site does not have the same significance for everyone. The past cannot be assuaged by fountains and sculptures, tidy landscaping, or souvenirs. And the performance of grief is not the same as grieving. For the non-Indigenous, there is more work to be done; there are facts to face and that involves the discomforts of mourning, including an acknowledgement that what we must renounce is the colonial dream of domination.
The powerful, as Robert Manne writes, insists, have “treated the people whose mode of life ... has [been] destroyed with patronising condescension at best.”¹⁰ The demolition of Colebrook Home was yet another betrayal: the culmination of on-going neglect and failure to acknowledge “grave injustices” that extended far beyond sub-standard accommodation. How to remember that, without repeating yet again our propensity to dispossess the already homeless, requires continuing commitment to “historical understanding and imagination”. That, inevitably, will be much more painful than a walk in the park.

Notes


2 Loviija O’Donoghue, addressing the Blackwood Reconciliation Group on 17 January 2007, corrected the figure of 360 that appears on a plaque at the Eden Hills site. There were four homes that accommodated “Colebrook” children: at Oodnadatta, Quorn, Eden Hills and Blackwood.

3 I am indebted to Gail Jones for drawing my attention to this Introduction.


6 In July 1957, Ken Darwin’s father, Harold Darwin, who was relieving Head at Eden Hills Primary 1955–56, wrote to the Premier, Thomas Playford, about his concern for Colebrook children who were attending Blackwood Primary. He wrote that during his time as a headmaster he had “learned much about Colebrook that made [him] very uneasy”.


BLACKBIRDING

Before dawn, little girls play with knives;
walk over the grass still grey with damp
before a sun swells the ground and all

the living in it. Two girls out with paring knives,
at dawn – you'd think a play duel was afoot!
Every Saturday before breakfast: two girls out

with an undertaking: to collect the dead,
or those close to it. After Dad sprayed
the night before. “Off me vines yer little bastards!”

He’d long-lobbied to kill them en masse.
“Bloody pests!” as he swivels his bald-mad eyes,
a persistent “pink pink pink ...,” a thin “peeeeeee”

and a low “tuc tuc tuc” sends him running
down the grape rows with his rifle
shooting black rocks or any spot on his eye

that puts a blackbird in his mind. So most are dead
by dawn if the spray has got to their hearts.
The girls are civil mystics and farewell

the last star to blip off the sky.
Before dawn it’s as still as a seed;
everything sharp clicks the air. Like the snakes,
who have been out all night, slimming along
the trellis channels under the vines, the girls
have exacted their process. They pick off
any beetles around wounds and openings,
Lift off the wing bars; the upper-tail covers
and unclip the wishbone from their shoulders.

See the way the tendon lifts like a string
from the underside; the way their thumbs fit
neat in the cupola bone behind the eyes.

In winter, they hear the blackbirds
quietly “singing to themselves.”
This is their sub-song. They marvel

at tinybird architecture and how such quiet things
once made sky circles. The blackbird plays
a boxwood flute. When they find the air sac

it’s better than a boring chicken’s wishbone –
you can push the sac and see
if there’s any song left in it. The stitchbird’s
glomera bone brings luck in fives. They peel back
the duffled barbs, remove the pinions and fold
the wing back under the body; tie it with string

and clean their hands on the dewy watergrass.
They’re planning a whole day for the blacks
nested in the upland mangrove nooks
to listen for tacit caws in cavities and howed stumps.
They imagine dismantling the head of an owl
and locating the hoots in its standing frame.

Or to the sea! – the steep cliff sucks the grey sea
up against its chest, the young nested against the cliffs,
out of reach from the rats. For today, they are done,
they fondle the oddments deep in their pockets
and follow the horse-path home. At night they lie
on the blue grass. Around their ankles

are amulets made from birdfeet tied end to end,
scratching their skin “tué tué tué.” If they hold
the tiny birdskulls up to any-shaped moon, look

through the eye sockets and there’s always
a round moon. The great distance between stars
contains the eye. They will grow up to farm the stars,

not in clean rows but thrown up like random seeds.
You can sharpen a tailbone to its quill-end
to draw a whitebird on the night, or hold

longer wingbones up to the stars like a scaffolding
to the spotted flue; join them horizontal
as if collecting the universe in armature.
ANTHEM TO THE GREEN TREE FROG

Tonight you woke me
from my half-sleep state

a croak to wake the dead
right next to the screen

door of the bedroom
daily I wonder at the

painted gleam of your
colour, green so green

it would make the Irish
envious - I find you sitting

in camouflage on the
edge of a leaf or, as

tonight, belly-flat against
the glass door waiting for

insects - I've found you
visible as daylight and still

as the soughing night air atop
the iron railings - you play

tricks on tourists hiding
inside the flange of the toilet
bowl so forever after they'll see those tiny flat-ended

hands grasping – it's humour and the joy of colour – and of

course the midnight croak presaging the wet season.
Westerly Non-Fiction Review 2006–2007

When David Carter embarked on the *Westerly* 2006 essay that reviewed non-fiction of the previous calendar year, he concentrated on “the condition of publishing and getting published in Australia,” and called his reflections “Public Culture Publishing: 2005–2006.” In the spirit of one of those doleful litanies of absence so important and troubling for colonial cultures, Carter drolly lamented that he had “no cookbooks, or textbooks, no celebrity biographies, no *feng shui* or financial management titles, no Lonely Planets or CSIRO diets.” He also remarked, this time with unfeigned regret, “how absolutely rare it is to see book-length literary criticism published in the Australian market.” Notably in that regard, the twenty-eight non-fiction titles submitted to *Westerly* in 2006–2007 bear a different complexion.

Only one of them comes from a large commercial publisher. This is *The Forgotten Children* by David Hill from Random House. It is an indictment—based on his own experiences, archival research and many harrowing testaments—of “Fairbridge Farm School and the Betrayal of Australia’s Child Migrants.” Their story had not been forgotten. Alan Gill’s *Orphans of the Empire* was published ten years ago, although—as Hill points out—very few of the 100,000 children whom Britain “exported” to its former colonies were orphans. Hill’s book is imbued with a palpable passion, but this does not make for fluency, in one to whom writing evidently does not come easily. Yet he has added another important piece to one of the crucial cultural mosaics of Australia—the story of those of its children who have been lost in so many ways.

No less than half of the books considered here come from scholarly presses. One of them is the now defunct Pandanus Books from the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the ANU. This is *My Dearest Brown Eyes*, a selection of the World War II letters, from battlefields and home front respectively, by Sir Donald Cland and Dame Rachel Cland, edited with impressive attention to detail by Nancy Lutton. These frank, intelligent,
adult exchanges expand the social range beyond the “other ranks” who have more often furnished the grist for the vast mill of recollections of Australians at war.

While Carter regretted the paucity of literary critical titles last year, here there are five, or perhaps six. Two of them come from overseas publishers. In a series called “Text and Studies in Western Esotericism” (presumably not intended for the general reader), Katherine Barnes’s learned account of The Higher Self in Christopher Brennan’s Poems, comes from Brill, of Leiden and Boston. It will set purchasers back 129 Euros, or SUS168; libraries some large fraction of that. Don Randall’s well-executed monograph, David Malouf, is from the Contemporary World Writers series of Manchester University Press. Here Malouf keeps company with the likes of Carey, Ishiguro, Mo, Munro and Murray. The approaches to their subjects by the two authors are instructively different.

Barnes is understandably defensive. Who reads Brennan’s poetry now? How can it be rehabilitated? A touch resentfully, she contends that “we might even find that we have been neglecting and disapproving of a poet who could hold his own on the world stage, who was tackling some of the big ideas of the Romantic-Symbolist era while all the approval was going to his compatriots Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson for their ballads and stories of bush life.” There are multiple problems with all this. “All the approval” hardly went in the direction that Barnes suggests. What were those “big ideas”? Were they as vague as what she takes to be the key exploration in Brennan’s Poems: “the notion of a higher or transcendent self constituted by the union of human soul and nature”? The crucial question of what attracted Brennan to the ratbagery of alchemy, Rosicrucianism and the Kabbalah is begged. Despite the fond wishes of A D Hope, Brennan’s ornate and windy diction stands in the way of a comeback. For all that Mallarmé saw him as a kindred spirit, Brennan’s favourite local poet was Victor Daley, whose empty image “the sunset rose of passion” he particularly cherished.

Randall has the less daunting task, for Malouf’s renown is surely more secure than ever (at least for now) with the recent publication of another volume of short stories, Every Move You Make, and of his first verse collection in decades, Typewriter Music. Both appeared too late for Randall’s book, which is well-constructed, and thoughtful, a fine example of the endangered species of the literary critical monograph. He believes that what most distinguishes Malouf’s work is “its strong inclination to find in otherness (or alterity) the stimulus and orientation for a creative unsettling of identity.” Randall is an Associate Professor at the University of Bilkent, Ankara. We are reminded once more of how keenly Australian literature is prized in numerous countries.
abroad. Another of these critical studies reinforces the point.

This is Mind the Country: Tim Winton's Fiction, by Salhia Ben-Messaheb, an academic based at the University of Lille, who is the daughter of illiterate Algerian parents. Published by the University of Western Australia Press, this is the first book-length study of the author. Evidently Winton generously assisted Ben-Messaheb in her is the research. Perhaps as a consequence, the work is more expository than critical. There are awkward formulations: “the land as a Wintonian text is essentially Western Australian,” or “the varying nature of Australian space revolves around a duality of the land and reality.” Nonetheless one is inclined to agree with her judgment of Winton’s stories as “picturesque, curious and strange.”

Roger Bourke’s Prisoners of the Japanese, from UQP, is subtitled “literary imagination and the prisoner-of-war experience.” Its focus is not on POW memories – artistically the richest literary issue of the Second World War, at least in Australia – but on fiction produced by writers of various nationalities. Here is the peculiar story of Pierre Boulle’s The Bridge on the River Kwai, here too are Empire of the Sun by J G Ballard and James Clavell’s King Rat. While among Australian novels, Nevil Shute’s A Town Like Alice is rightly prominent, three other books are welcome brough back to notice: Hugh Clarke’s The Tub, Donald Stuart’s I Think I’ll Live, and No Time To Look Back, by the eccentric, multiply talented and too-long-neglected author and archaeologist, Leslie Green.

The oddly titled Flashing Eyes and Floating Hair, by Cassandra L. Atherton, from Australian Scholarly Publishing, is not about Coleridge, but an intricate and intriguing “Reading of Gwen Harwood’s Pseudonymous Poetry.” Developing John Rowan’s theory of “sub-personalities,” Atherton interrogates the poetry that Harwood wrote as Walter Lehmann, Francis Geyer, Míriam Stone and Timothy F. Kline. She sees these figures as ways for Harwood to contain the anger (which Atherton believes she feels against the world and her treatment within it, especially as woman and wife), but also as elements in her career-long, obsessive effort to control the interpretation of her poetry. It was Lehmann who gave us the much-debated poem “In the Park,” besides the notorious acrostic sonnets from Abelard to Eloise and back that were published in the Bulletin in 1961. From Geyer came the key figure of Krote. Atherton is capable of both intense and persuasive close reading and lightness of touch. Try these sub-headings: “Beating the schnitzel and other romantic euhemisms for sex,” “Shotgun weddings and the beast within.” But would Gwen Harwood (Clive James’s Australian poet of the twentieth century) have been disarmed?

Peter Kirkpatrick’s The Sea Coast of Bohemia: Literary Life in Sydney’s Roaring...
Twenties, is concerned with a loose group of artists, authors and their attendants in this “partial record of one Australian Bohemia in the Jazz Age.” Reprinted with a new introduction after its first appearance in 1992, this remains a spry, dexterous, engaging work. A new publisher, Network, which come with a swag of connections: the Australia Research Institute at the Curtin University of Technology. The ambition of the press and its confidence in its authors are not in question. Kirkpatrick’s book is placed within a series called Australian Scholarly Classics. For *Homing In: Essays on Australian Literature and Selfhood*, Bruce Bennett has the same publisher, but finds himself in a different series, of Australian Essays. Both he and Kirkpatrick have their photographs on the cover, Bennett as a ghostly mask, sinistely smiling at us before he ranges elegantly across authors who include Ee Tiang Hong and Edwin Thumboo, Paul Hasluck, Clive James, Lewis Becke and Peter Porter (subject of an important earlier monograph by Bennett).

Four of the titles presented to Westerly come from ABC Books, and a mixed bag they are, although maybe indicative of why this is such a profitable arm of the corporation. Last year David Carter missed out on a cookbook. This time he could have sampled one that is truly crass: *Celebrity Homecooked: Favourite recipes and memories from Australian celebrities*, edited by two publicists, Dylan Brookes and Chloe Waterlow. Here are Jessica Rowe’s “Atlantic Salmon Fillets” (boned, assuredly) and from her husband Peter Overton, “Butterflied Marinated Leg of Lamb.” “Pumpkin Soup” from Molly Meldrum, “Scrambled Eggs” from Rolf Harris (these in the “Going Veggo” category) are succeeded – under “Sweetie darling” – by Johnny Young’s “Aussie Pavlova” and, more astringently, “Lemon Delicious” from Margaret Olley.

After this tawdry, luridly-coloured shocker, it was a visual relief to turn to Liam Campbell’s handsomely produced *Darby*, the life story of Darby Ross Jampijinpa, who survived the Coniston massacre in Western Australia as a child, and who died the day after his one hundredth birthday. A stockman, drover, prospector, story-teller in Walpiri and in English, Darby is depicted vividly during his “one hundred years of life in a changing culture.” Impressive too (even for one who thought it the sport of toffs and dilettantes, of men who preferred to be without women) is Les Hawkins’s edited collection of *Great Australian Fly-Fishing Stories*. There are 37 chapters (none by women) and contributors famous in other fields include Sir Hudson Fyshe and the poets and friends Douglas Stewart and David Campbell. Many pieces are absorbing to the outsider as well as to the addict. The latter will be delighted at such sentences as “he snipped off the Royal Wulff and tied on a smaller Grey Wulff.” All of us should, perhaps, reflect on the sage aside of Mrs
Cadwallader in *Middlernarch*: “it is a very good thing in a man to own a trout stream.”

Last of the ABC Books is another collection by numerous hands, Julianne Schulz’s *A Revealed Life: Australian Writers and Their Journeys in Memoir*. The writers (40 of them) are both “established and promising” and have been “selected from the hundreds published in the *Griffith Review*.” This then, is one of those “best of” collections with which little magazines mark their survival. Here are Gideon Haigh, Helen Elliott, Eva Sallis, Michael Wilding, and Donald Horne pondering his death. Donna McDonald, in “I Hear With My eyes,” reflects on her deafness; Anna Maria Dell’Oso on having an autistic child. Let Sallis have the last word, on those “angry messages” – anti-Muslim – which “remind me that there are many different beloved Australias, increasingly unreconciled.”

At the posh, non-populist end of the market are two books from The Miegunyah Press. Each treats of a famous and controversial Roman Catholic figure. In the only biography proper in this assortment, Philip Ayres has written a very good book, of interest to those without the faith as well as within it. This is *Prince of the Church: Patrick Francis Moran 1830–1911*. When Moran left Ireland to be schooled at the Irish College in Rome as a twelve-year-old orphan, the country was “at its most populous,” but the disaster of the famine and of subsequent wholesale migration was only a few years away. Ayres shows us a man studious, inflexible, a nationalist for the land of his birth and for Australia, a key supporter of Federation (but not elected to its council) and of the fledgling Australian Labor Party. At times Ayres becomes exasperated with Moran’s tireless quarrelling with his foes, but this is an eloquent work in which the man blends into and tries to reshape the religious and political world that replaced a personal life for him. Ayres has not been as well served as he ought to have been by proof-readers. Two samples from the first few pages: Kilkullen or Kilkullen? And was John Henry Newman really at Propaganda College from “late 1846 to early 1947”?

The other Miegunyah title is edited by Patrick Morgan: *B A Santamaria: Your Most Obedient Servant: Selected Letters: 1938–1996*. The material is drawn from a family donation to the State Library of Victoria, where Morgan is a Library Fellow. The cull of letters was severe, since Santamaria typically wrote ten a day, while the rest of his time was “taken up with devising and carrying out political strategies.” The familiar terrain of Santamaria’s adamantine public life is traversed through his private communications: support for Franco, Catholic Action, the Rural Movement and “The Movement” itself, TV appearances on “Point of View.” Correspondents range alphabetically from Adams, Philip to Young, Guildford, the latter a long-time
Bishop of Tasmania. Ayres is here too, Santamaria complaining to him in 1993 that there was no party to take over from “the two bankrupt organizations who monopolise the political stage in Australia today.” They have, however, outlasted this trenchant combative, implacable warrior as indeed has the West, whose destruction by communism he so persistently and wrongly foretold.

From the plush of Miegunyah to the plod of self-publishing: three of the *Westerly* books appear to fit into this category. They are Michael Denholm’s *The Winnowing of the Grain: Art and Craft Magazines in Australia, 1963–1996* (Carlton Street Press); Ouyang Yu’s *Bias: Offensively Chinese/Australian* (Otherland Publishing) and Edwin Wilson’s *The Melancholy Dane: A Portrait of the Poet as a Young Man* (Woodbine Press). Denholm has surveyed 109 magazines and broadsheets in a scrupulous manner that ensures that his book will be a valuable research tool; he has quarried many forgotten places. Moreover, this is intended to be “Part one of a ninefold series of books.” Denholm is that rare bird – the independent scholar – sustained by principle, perseverance, but not by the public purse. As he caustically records “the Visual Arts Board, and the Visual Arts/Crafts Board of the Australia Council, did not support the writing or publication of this history, nor have they supported in any other way other histories or other monographs I have been writing since 1991 concerning the visual arts in Australia.”

By contrast, the poet and autobiographer Edwin Wilson has a stipend from his work at the Sydney Botanical Gardens. His literary ambition is indicated by title and subtitle, in the immodest allusions to Shakespeare and Joyce. This second volume of his memoirs plots a hectic and sometimes ungalant course through study, work, marriage. It is a long book, but editing is not a task that Wilson seems to relish. Altogether terser, and much more aggrieved, is Ouyang Yu’s “Collection of Essays on China and Australia,” where the title alludes to an Australian native in Joseph Furphy’s *Bias: Offensively Chinese/Australian* is an unusual miscellany of reviews, lectures, essays by Ouyang, an interview with him and even “Selected Reviews of Ouyang Yu and His Works.” That inclusion illuminates one of the two main concerns of the book: the alleged indifference to Australian writers of Asian background (not least the author) and the knotty problems of translation – from place to place, language to language, which focuses the author’s sharp intelligence.

Some of the material Ouyang calls “my literary ranting,” notably against those – such as Les Murray and Peter Rose – of whose animus he is convinced. The latter’s editorship is angrily taken to task: “where Pauline Hanson left off, the *Australian Book Review* stepped in, keeping a white
Australian culture from being ‘swamped’ by Asians” – that is, by not reviewing or regarding their work. Ouyang therefore set up his own journal, _Otherland_, in defiance. He is more interesting, as he surely knows, when talking of his movements between two languages, not least as translator of his own poetry. Mirroring this is the experience of having lived in Australia since 1991. At first “I felt as if I were dead ... somehow a dead person who could still observe the happenings in the outside world, a world that was totally irrelevant to me.” He also comments acutely on this aspect of language learning: the Chinese “in mastering the English language ... make the language their own master.”

Such vital issues – about which Ouyang rightly generalises while at the same time understanding how intimate and individual they are – occupy the excellent essay collection edited by the daughter and mother duo of Mary Besemeres and Anna Wierzbicka, _Translating Lives: Living With Two Languages and Cultures_. In the Introduction they write, ruefully, of how “Bilingual experience is a resource that until now has hardly been tapped in Australia.” They quote Eva Sallis (who reappears in this collection) on Australia as a “language-locked” country. Had they known, James McAuley could also have been enlisted, denouncing Australia as “a nation of brutal monoglots.” For the editors, more temperately, monolingualism “brings about an unconscious absolutisation of the perspective on the world suggested by one’s native language.” Their contributors attest to a different way, having been asked to “describe how they came to live with more than one language.”

There are striking essays. Kim Scott, who learned Noongar only as an adult, has come to be ambivalent about his use of English, “repelled by ... my own fluency.” Brij Lal describes the heritage of an Indian Fijian as “complex, chaotic, contradictory.” He is also exercised, as are other writers here, by the problems for an outsider of accommodating to speaking English in Australia. For instance, Korean-born Kyung-Juo Yoon remarks that “one cannot necessarily find the same category of pain in different languages.” Others speak – as did Ouyang Yu – of their awkwardness with their first language when they return to the countries of their birth. Zhungdao (Veronica) Ye’s dialect was Shanghainese. Back in China she is led to feel that “a fish that has never returned to water will never know the impact of water on it.”

One of the finest of these books also comes from a bilingual author. Jacob G. Rosenberg has published poetry and prose in Yiddish and in English. His second volume of autobiography – _Sunrise West_ (which follows _East of Time_) – “navigates between two worlds: my wartime and post-war experience in Europe, and my subsequent new life in Australia.” A survivor of death and work camps, unlike most of his family, Rosenberg’s
episodic narrative is punctuated with vignettes that take on the quality of parable, the messages of which are variously hope or resignation, but not despair. To this he does not succumb even when his mother “speaks” to him from the gas chamber at Auschwitz, confiding to her son how “that torment of losing one’s mind was the sweetest horror of our dying.” Eventually resettled with his wife in Melbourne (although resettlement is “a term that had left an invidious echo in any survivor’s psyche”), Rosenberg finds that a Jewish cultural life already exists there; observes the intramural feuds over whether to speak Yiddish or English; extends his network of acquaintances to his Australian neighbours as well as to other Jews. This short and often startling book ends simply, with the reappearance of Rosenberg’s mother: “She sat down on the edge of the bed and, folding her hands, spoke.”

The other work by a Jewish author to be found in this bundle is not an autobiography, but a memoir of the writer’s father, Howard Goldenberg’s _My Father’s Compass_ from Hybrid Publishing. Written as an act of filial piety in a style at times jerky and self-conscious, the book concerns the exemplary life, the precepts and practice of Myer Goldenberg, a much-loved doctor at Leeton in the Riverina, and then in Melbourne, where he moved so that his sons could be schooled there. He is remembered as a ferocious driver, a skilled sailor, in jest as a lover, and ultimately as a physician whose life was shaped, as he led it to shape his children’s, by his Jewish faith. Goldenberg is no paragon, but we are gradually and rewardingly enfolded in the son’s tribute to his father.

Altogether more rough-hewn is the last of these titles to describe itself as a memoir, Barry Heard’s _Well Done, Those Men: Memoirs of a Vietnam Veteran_, from Scribe. The narrative trajectory of this story is a time-worn one, the tale of a rite of passage from an unsuspecting innocence (rural rather than urban in this case) to National Service in the first intake — instruction, training, meeting mates — travel abroad and the disturbing experience of first things: foreign country, death of enemies, death of comrades. For Heard the most intense and damaging memory is of Operation Ballarat on 6 August 1967 when several of his friends were killed. Now, writing this memoir, he attempts “to finally purge any demons,” but in the painfully acquired knowledge that “war is often only a small part of the battle that determines the rest of a soldier’s life.” Especially so for the veterans of Vietnam, it seems, the only loquacious cohort to return from battle overseas in the military history of Australia.

At this point in the survey we have arrived at titles not readily grouped together. One of these is Laurel Nannup’s _A Story to Tell_, published by the University of Western Australia Press for the Charles and Joy Staples South-
West Region Publications Fund. “Trying to catch hold of my memories,” Nanuup tells affectingly of her life as a child and teenager in Western Australian missions, and illustrates this attractive small book with photographs, and with her own etchings and woodcuts. On an altogether grander scale in respect of its subject matter is the only University of New South Wales Press book here, in itself something of a surprise given the extent and quality of its non-fiction publishing in the last decade. The book is Paul Gillen and Devleena Ghosh’s Colonialism and Modernity. This is an estimable and unusual kind of production now, a broad historical coverage from “The Rise of Europe” (beginning in 1450) to the present. Following this first section is the discussion of various themes – for instance the ethics of colonialism – and a number of “hot topics.” Presumably market research has shown that there is an undergraduate, even a text book demand for such a generalist work.

The Australian Academy of the Humanities also features once, as the publisher of its 2003 Symposium, Creating Value: The Humanities and Their Publics, edited by Elspeth Probyn, Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker. In a context “politically fraught,” arguments were sought – intrinsic, instrumental and institutional in John Holden’s triad – to justify funding the humanities. Two of the most persuasive cases were put by very senior academics. While observing that all universities “now fly flags of vocationalism,” and that “the golden days of the humanities are in fact a trailing myth,” Deryck Schreuder nevertheless affirms his faith that “the humanities and the arts alone can evoke wonder, revelation and magic in the human consciousness.” Gavin Brown, trained as a pure mathematician, seconds him, extolling not “job readiness,” but “excitement and emancipation through humane study.”

In the series Scribe Short Books is Clinton Fernandes’s first-rate, compact analysis of Reluctant Indonesians: Australia, Indonesia and the future of West Papua. He pillories the “faith-based edifice that is the Australian-Indonesian relationship”; identifies the scare phrases deployed to diffuse disgust with the activities of the Indonesian military – “arc of instability,” “opening the floodgates,” “220 million Indonesians.” It may be, Fernandes surmises, that “the various ethnic and religious communities of the Indonesian archipelago ... decide to make alternative arrangements for living in the region.” There might be a future for West Papua, “so shamelessly and brutally exploited by the looting of its resources and the policy of transmigration,” so nearly invisible to Australian eyes.

Last of the twenty-eight in this reckoning are two books from the independent publisher Black Inc. The most recent in a series, Australian
Essays 2006 is edited by Drusilla Modjeska. She regrets the absence of architects, lawyers, physicists, for “very few of our professions have a tradition of writing out from their specialties.” She objects to the “florid narcissism” of essays relating “my travels, my love affairs, my childhood, my books ....” And she adds that while “the essay may be a loose sally of the mind ... it’s notoriously hard to do well.” Notwithstanding, she has assembled – in the expansive, 417 pages of this book – a number of authors writing very well. Among them, to single out only a few, are Christina Thompson, Alan Frost, Mark McKenna, Peter Conrad, the versatile Gideon Haigh once more, with Raimond Gaita having the solemn last words on “Justice and Hope.”

The other Black Inc. book, and one of the picks of this array, is Nicolas Rothwell’s Another Country. Northern correspondent of the Australian – a capacious brief – he won a Walkley Award for his coverage of Indigenous Affairs. Like several other authors discussed here, Rothwell is engrossed by the bilingual life, here as lived by many Aborigines. Yet the extinction of Aboriginal languages spells doom for the world view that they could express. The essays and essays in Another Country reveal much of the splendours and miseries of the Aboriginal people of northern Australia, and of Arnhem Land in particular. Their plight, he believes, is “as grave an ethical crisis as Australia has ever faced.” No one has written more acutely or angrily than Rothwell of the racketeering in the market for Indigenous art. After the “abrupt, impressive release of visual energy when painting begins in a remote Aboriginal community,” the work is sullied and exploited. Bitterly, Rothwell summarises: “the rotten, morally decayed state of the Indigenous art trade is the best known of the secret scandals among market insiders.” This is a grieving, indignant, pessimistic book. For Australian Aborigines, “the long, quiet days before Western time began,” have passed forever. (If, indeed, quiet they were.) And that’s it, except to say that neither their present condition, nor their possible future will be ignored – any more than so many other vital issues of political, social, linguistic, recreational life in Australia will be – on the evidence of what was sent to Westerly in this last year.

**NON-FICTION RECEIVED 2006–2007**

*Those marked with an asterisk have been mentioned in the review.*


RONGOTAI

The salt storm killed everything in my mother's garden. I heard it late at night against the windowpanes, crash
just like rain in the fist of the wind, Rain with the secret of salt.

The plane to Sydney would roar and lift above us at 7 am — and silence would fall again like fuel
the veil of fuel that smelt of kerosene
that felt like the slow lick of a lazy fire
that fell within its own laws of falling when I was standing out in my mother's garden.

Another plane and another and another landing, across the road where the hill
used to be. As the hill and the houses slid into a chasm of waiting to be something else

I found a stone fish, I imagined it to be a goldfish left behind to starve and stiffen. I held it in my palm
the puzzling fish, and left it where I found it. From the sloping garden I could see my roof.

The houses went like snails on the backs of trucks then the hill, inch by truckload. Dug down to the bone.
My brother came home with the skull of an original. Which, by a miracle of intervention I never saw until

I was taken to the museum on the hill. Another hill. And we went on living, under the battering wing.

Dad would rage and shake his fist and shout that he would mount a machine gun nest

on the roof, next to the chimney. As I flew out I looked down and saw him, sparing my plane.
THE THOUGHT OF AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEM TROUBLES & ELUDES ME

So I've been leaning against
the names of things
not just walls but the very air
the rug, the pen
the silver garbage bin.

But all words are
autobiographies
used to tell
half sentences
a quarter turning moon.

Today is a sound.
I hear words that mean
landing jet or rustled plastic
a book that depends on mercy.
And the gas, breathing.
RHIZOMATIC KINSHIP IN KIM SCOTT’S BENANG

The tree by my window where the children climb, once again casts its cool shade and lets the wind whisper in its leaves. It is a tall and pale gum. [...] It towers over the house, and Grandad believed its roots threatened the foundations. He was right in that, they have cracked one wall.

Grandad wrote: Cut down the tree. Burn it, dig out its roots. He might also have written: Displace, disperse, dismiss ... My friends, you recognise the language.

Kim Scott, Benang

Harley Scat, the narrator of Kim Scott’s 1999 novel, Benang is engaged, quite literally, in a quest for roots. Following a horrific car accident in which his father is killed and Harley himself is brought back from the dead, he awakens to find himself weightless; he floats away on the slightest breeze. Discovering that he can be anchored only by storytelling Harley embarks on a quest to unearth the history of five generations of his Nyoongar family – a history effaced at every turn by the insistent attempt of his grandfather, Ernest Scat (Ern), to strip his grandson of his Aboriginal kinship networks and cultural heritage. In doing so, Ern had aimed to engender “the first white man born” (10). Yet for all of the defiance of Harley’s assertion that “[t]he tree still lived; it would grow again” (108), the novel that takes shape out of Harley’s journey does not, in fact, reconstitute an easily identifiable “family tree.” Rather, Benang is a novel which posits a “rhizomatic” model of Indigenous kinship over and against the rigidly arboreal structures of the European notion of genealogy.

In describing both the novel and the kinship networks it depicts as rhizomatic I emphasise the intimate relation between the aesthetics and politics of this novel in that its breaks, twists, and repetitions mimic the difficulties confronted by Indigenous people affected by the eugenicist
theories and practices which dominated Western Australian government policy in the first half of the twentieth century. My definition of rhizomatic writing draws from two texts by Deleuze and Guattari: 1975’s *Kafka: Toward a Minority Literature* and 1980’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. Scott’s novel, I argue, models the “determinational” discourse described by Deleuze and Guattari whereby authors writing from within a dominant, state-sanctioned language and culture “reterritorialise” and transform that language into one that mounts a challenge to the original. The rhizome in this context does not simply designate a subterranean root system, but refers to the way in which language oscillates between standard and non-standard forms, and the way that the temporalities of history are reversed and disordered.

In the case of *Bunyanga* the rhizomatic aesthetics of the novel are evident in its oceanic rhythms, its contiguous placement of historical and fictional stories, and its refusal of an identifiable teleology: but just as significantly, the proliferating narratives of this novel reveal what I have called a rhizomatic model of kinship. Such a model both contests the extreme deracination experienced by the Nyoongar characters populating Scott’s novel and provides a paradigm for imagining a post-Stolen Generations politics of collectivity.

Harley’s bizarre talent for flight poignantly satirises the success of Era’s attempt to “elevate” the status of indigenous people by “breeding out the colour” and wiping out their history. That this kind of “breeding up” is not what Era had in mind is clear from his “terror – and later, indignation” at Harley’s “propensity to drift” (162; original emphasis). Era is modelled explicitly on eugenicist and “Protector” of Aborigines, A. O. Neville. Described by Scott as a “continual – albeit perverse – source of inspiration” for his own work (497), the excerpts from Era’s accounts of his project that Harley includes in his narrative are in fact drawn directly from Neville’s own letters and his 1948 eugenicist tome, *Australia’s Coloured Minority*. Just as the historical Neville believed that Indigenous peoples might be literally bred into civilization, Era’s project amounts to a single-handed mission to “whiten” the population of South-Western Australia not only by forcing himself on a series of Nyoongar women employed as domestics in his home, but by carefully selecting one son, Tommy, on whom to bestow the title of first white man born.

In defining Era’s project via the use of this telling phrase, Scott transforms the character into a kind of everyman. In his Alfred Deakin Lecture in 2001, Scott ironised European settlers’ continuing desire to locate or inhabit the position of “first white man born.” He noted: “In the archives I was also jostled by local historians elbowing one another to claim an ancestor as the ‘first white man born in such and such an area.’ To be descended from
the first white man born. I thought their rivalry provided a curious parallel to Neville’s photograph and plans. To claim the first white man born is to make a fresh start. To begin. To be noble pioneers creating a society.” Scott’s citation of these numerous, nameless local historians prevents us from dismissing Neville (and Ern, as his fictional counterpart) as idiosyncratic cranks. Rather, we are shown that shades of terra nullius continue to pervade our imagined connections to the land well after the overturning of the doctrine. Indeed, Scott’s indictment of amateur historians via the parallel he draws between their projects and Neville’s suggests that it is precisely at this most local level that the desire to make whiteness indigenous – to claim land as birthright – manifests itself.

Unfortunately for Ern, his scheme fails when Tommy reveals what Ern regards as signs of atavism. Tommy threatens to rewind the project by fathering a son with Ellen – a woman of mixed descent who was to be part of Ern’s own personal crusade. The honorific therefore passes in turn to their child, Harley. But to plot Harley’s parentage in this way is already to elide a number of significant doubts as to exactly what his origins may be. Even as the story throws paternity into doubt (directly in that Ern rapes his son’s girlfriend, indirectly in that numerous, nameless offspring of white fathers are by turns abandoned and taken up as part of extended kinship networks) the status of maternity becomes just as questionable as women named Ellen multiply across the text: at Sister Kate’s home for quarter-castes, so many boys are named Tommy, so many girls Ellen (385, 395). Harley’s position in this novel as “mama’s maybe, papa’s maybe” (to tweak Hortense Spillers’ famous phrase) seems to suggest that it is the very vocabulary of the nuclear family that the narrative seeks to disable.

Maternity and paternity are not puzzles to be solved by the identification of single names; Harley’s quest to situate himself within his family is an occasion for the proliferation of attachments which link up or back, to a name that is also a concept – “Benang.” It is Fanny Benang who gives her Nyoongar name to the novel: “Pinyan or Benang ... there is a Nyoongar word, sometimes spelt, benang, which means tomorrow. Benang is tomorrow” (464). Benang thus simultaneously signifies both Harley’s past and his future. The name does not simply mark a now-known point of origin the way a family name might, but in denoting the past and the future in equal measure Benang disrupts the temporal and spatial structure of the family tree. For all that Harley traces his roots back to Fanny Benang and Sandy One Mason, the details about their pasts he discovers while doing so simply open up more questions about their kinship identities. His Nyoongar heritage does not begin with Fanny Benang, but reaches further back to the birth of Sandy
One, “our first white man” who is no white man at all (484). Sandy One, it transpires, is the son of an unidentified “half-caste” woman, herself a child of rape who was violently removed from her Nyoongar mother and given into the care of the former convict who would father her son. The identification of these ancestors thus becomes the catalyst for more speculation — yet another occasion for what Harley sees as the triumph of “imagination” over “notes, references, and immaculate indexes” of his grandfather’s genealogical diagrams (36). The network Harley’s storytelling creates has neither beginning nor end and no clear distinctions between generations, or even between siblings and cousins. Against the way in which we might typically imagine a search for origins, Harley’s quest does not, therefore, attach him to a single point or person but produces an account of history which is rhizomatic, contingent, and multiple rather than linear, determined, and singular.

For Deleuze and Guattari rhizomatic writing is intimately connected to what they call “minor,” or “revolutionary” literature. Such literature is recognised by its remarkable capacity for the “deteritorialisation” of language. This notion of deteritorialization refers to the ways in which minor literature is not defined as literature written in minor or obscure languages, but is the language that a minority group constructs within a major language: in Deleuze and Guattari’s examples, this might be the German spoken and written in Kafka’s Czechoslovakia — a fluid language mixed with Czech and Yiddish — or the non-standard English, now sometimes termed Ebonics, created by African-Americans. Using metaphors revolving around immigration and “nomadology” they ask: how do you become a gypsy in relation to a language that is at once your own and not your own? Significantly, Deleuze and Guattari note that Kafka saw Yiddish as a language which can be understood only by “feeling it in the heart”; he used it, they argue, to “rework German language from within [such] that one cannot translate it into German without destroying it.” The uncanny echo of Scott’s subtitle — From the Heart — in Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Kafka suggests that Benang, too, is a text which cannot be readily “translated.”

Initially, this problem of translation is Harley’s. On several occasions he rails against the difficulty of deteritorialising English: he is held prisoner in a language not his own, his reliance on English is, as his grandfather taunts him, a “fence” that keeps him from accessing the familial history he so desires to know (36). As Harley writes he finds that the work he produces “was still [Ern’s] story, his language, his notes and rough drafts, his clear diagrams and slippery fractions which had uplifted and diminished me” (36–37). Trapped within Ern’s archive, shaped and marked by his words, Harley turns his rage
and despair against his now-paralysed grandfather: “I soon turned to my grandfather’s flesh. I wanted to mark him, to show my resentment at how his words had shaped me” (37). These attempts at writing are black marks on white skin, reciprocation for a history of white (re)marks on black skin:

full of frustration and anger at my place in Grandad’s story, I wrote END, CRASH, FINISH into his skin. I poured black ink and ash into the wounds and tended them carefully so that the skin would heal and seal the letters stark and proud (445).

But in reproducing his grandfather’s violence Harley finds himself drawn into a story of loss, absence, of “worlds ending” (445). His “lines of ink,” are described as mere “dirty tributaries joining” the great river,” powerless against the momentum of history-as-progress (445). The subsumption of his words by a genocidal narrative seeking to “destroy [the] memory of a culture, destroy evidence of a people, bury memory deep in shame” mirrors the “dilution” and absorption of despised “strains” of Nyoongar blood attempted by Ern’s breeding project (446, 27).

It takes the intervention of his uncles, Will and Jack, to turn Harley’s sense of an ending into a belief in a new beginning (446). With the help of his uncles, who guide him through Nyoongar lands and their associated history, Harley will learn to “deteritorialise” language not through writing, but by literally finding a voice: “it is far far easier for me to sing than write,” he realises. “This language troubles me” (8). Through the medium of song Harley finds a way to give sound “to the rhythm of many feet pounding the earth, and the strong pulse of countless hearts beating” (7). Instead of words, Harley’s song articulates “the creak and rustle of various plants in various winds, the countless beatings of different wings, the many strange and musical calls of animals who have come from this place, right here” (7–8). “Almost weeping, I let the song come, and my hovering body articulated something like a didgeridoo itself, except that the notes were so high and varied” (87). Harley’s singing deteritorialises language in its estrangement from sense which is simultaneously a performance full of meaning for his listeners.

But if Harley can become a nomad in language by rising above sense altogether, Scott as author must traffic in words. His writing achieves deteritorialisation less by the fluid intermixing of Nyoongar and English words and speech-patterns (though native words do pepper the text, and since there is no attached glossary, they disrupt and disorient the white reader’s understanding) than by the challenges it levels both to what
Deleuze and Guattari would call sedentary, State-sanctified history and to novelistic form. As I noted above, historical documents are cited contiguously with the fictional narrative of *Benang* to produce a kind of counter-history, which, as Lisa Slater has argued, “appropriates and annexes colonial records into [a new] textual topography [in order to] expose their genocidal and racist agenda.” Yet this misegenation of genres alone cannot produce a deterritorialisation of language. Harley remarks:

When I write like this – of railways and fences, and of extensive pages of notes – I give a nod to my grandfather; to his lines and his discipline, to his schemes and his rigour. And I further acknowledge, and nod to, the demands of Historical Fiction. And I nod with the resentment which those which I call my people felt, still feel. Nod nod nod. I hope you are not falling asleep (323).

History is genealogical, it relies on trees and roots which fix people and points in space and time. The rhizome, in contrast, “may be broken or shattered at any given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines … Any part of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be.” Like a burrow, a rhizomatic text can be tunnelled into at any point – it has multiple points of exit and entry. *Benang* fits this bill in both form and content. The narrative ebbs and flows, history bleeds into fiction, first person perspective slides into free indirect discourse. In an intricate narrative origami individual characters’ stories unfold and then are folded back into the stories of others as complex webs of relation are revealed by Harley’s nonlinear, parallax narration.

By his own admission Harley “confuses things,” he fails “to follow an appropriate sequence” (97), and resists Ern’s “nonsensical” insistence on reading documents from left to right: “I fairly made [Grandad’s research files] rustle about my ankles as I hovered in that room, kicking my legs amongst them to disrupt their neat order” (323). He “slides away” from certain traumatic events, seeking to come at them “from some other way” or direction, “gliding across” lines of print (367, my emphasis). His propensity for uplift quite literally allows him to traverse spatial and temporal zones to bear witness to, and relay the details of these “mothers’ fathers’ brothers’ sisters’ lovers” (408) lives not simply as histories, but as they actually happened. Initially, the result of these forays into the past is as confusing for him as it is for us. The nature of his kinship to the people he encounters becomes even less exact the more information he unearths about his ancestry. Harley’s grandfather may in fact be his father after he rapes his son’s girlfriend; Harley’s grandmother is possibly Ern’s legal wife’s much younger
aunt, or may be no biological relation to the family of Fanny Benang whatsoever. Names are changed, and are just as frequently repeated—witness Sandy One and Sandy Two Mason, or the tantalising, haunting women named Ellen. The effect produced by reading this novel is one of profound genealogical bewilderment. The reader’s position mimics Harley’s in that neither party can pinpoint exactly where he fits into his family tree. As he himself describes it, he is “stuck out in the sky like [a branch] from which the rest of the tree has been cut and carted away” (145).

Yet it is from precisely the unruliness of his genealogy that Harley comes to draw strength. Rejecting the “sharply ruled diagrams” by which his grandfather plotted out the generations of his eugenist project (27), Harley’s narrative creates a model of kinship that is more rhizomatic than rigidly arboreal. It ceases to matter that relationships are not strictly defined along white, nuclear lines. Rather, what matters to Harley is that all the descendants of Fanny Benang are brought into relation with one another for the first time. Indeed, slippages in family position that are intolerable to Ern and his project of breeding out the colour are incorporated into Harley’s narrative as evidence of the endurance of the Benang “blood-and-land-line” (49). Inter-relatedness ceases to be an object of guilt, ridicule and denigration (“she’d be related to you wouldn’t she?” Tommy Scat’s white co-worker remarks of the Nyoongar woman he has just raped [406]), and becomes a source of sexual and emotional fulfilment as Harley enters into a relationship with a Nyoongar girl and her adopted sister, either or both of whom may be a cousin, an aunt or a half-sister.

Harley’s rhizomatic model is rooted, in part, in Indigenous traditions of designating all maternal aunts “mother” (and all cousins thus “sister”) which have no place in Ern’s rigidly perpendicular system.” Ern openly scoffs at Kathleen’s appellation of her Aunty Harriette as “mother” after her own mother, Dinah, disappears. But more than this, even generational distinctions collapse such as when Dinah, “accepted what her mother had bequeathed her” and took on the name, Benang (103). Dinah’s action cannot be countenanced by the white authorities. In their thinking, since she bears the same name, she must be Fanny Benang. For Harley, this is entirely possible, although not in the way the authorities insist:

it may have been ... that the two of them had simply come together so close to their home to make yet another effort to keep the spirit they represented alive in the face of continuing betrayal. (103)

In this passage the name, “Benang, Pinyin” is the means by which Fanny’s
spirit is passed on to her children and children’s children. “It is the same people. We are of the same people” (103). As generations collapse into one another and muddle Err’s calculations and claims to objective, scientific success, time similarly telescopes. In opposition to the three generations within which Err was so sure he could produce “the first white man born” we are presented with a family network comprised of five generations whose stories barely penetrate the depth of history associated with the Nyoongar people and their region. To hark back to Sandy One and Fanny is “to go back no time at all, not really” (172), they are simply part of “a much older story, one of a perpetual billowing from the sea, with its rhythm of return, return, and remain” (495).

A kinship which is relational and continuous without being strictly biological or genealogical has consequences for a politics of collectivity. We might say that this version of kinship ensures that the political is emphatically not personal in the sense of “individual.” Thus, at the beginning of the novel Harley’s stated aim is to reverse history not simply for himself, “but also for [his] ancestors, and for their children in turn” (19). In response to policies and practices which deliberately shattered traditional kinship structures and shamed indigenous people into refusing their mothers and fathers and denying their names, Scott’s text offers a version of relatedness which is enacted through storytelling. “I have written this story wanting to embrace all of you,” Harley concludes, “and it is the best I can do in this language we share” (495). His story specifically targets those who have no knowledge of their Nyoongar heritage, the children of his Uncle Will, of his unnamed aunts, all those “I embarrass, who turn away from the shame of seeing me … you hear something like a million million many-seized hearts beating, and the whispering of waves, leaves, grasses. We are still here, Benang” (495). Grass, waves, the wind through leaves – these are rhizomatic networks which testify to the endurance of connections whose multiplicity exceeds specifiable origins or teleologies and excludes the singularity of the family tree.

NOTES


Deluze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 9, 8.

See Larissa Behrendt’s note on the subject in *Home* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004): 43. This tradition is also central to Nugi Garimara’s (Doris Pilkington) telling of her mother’s story in that, Molly, Daisy and Gracie, the three sisters who make their daring escape are, in Western terms, cousins. *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996). I discuss the significance of such horizontal kinship relations in “Lost Mothers and ‘Stolen Generations’: Representations of Family in Contemporary Aboriginal Writing,” in Dawn Memee Lavell-Harvard & Jeanette Corbiere Lavell (eds), *Until Our Hearts are on the Ground. Aboriginal Mothering: Oppression, Resistance, Rebirth* (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2006): 224–238.
A DESCENDANT

I fancy I'm descended from the Picts
But we don't appear to know much about those painterly people,
Least of all what lingo they might have been speaking,
Rattling on in the cold, all those poor savages
With, I like to imagine, a St Andrews accent, better still an Aberdonian
Because they now employ the best English of all,
Unless the Barbadians do. Which is another matter,
And somehow related to cannonball fast bowling.

Our patrilineal family came from the crumbled heart
Of traditional Pictish country, close enough
To their curious dark stones marooned in a Christian churchyard,
Not that they'd have known a Pict from a Skraeling,
Most of them.

In fact, much as those tattooed tribesmen of yore
(I like to pop in a phrase like "of yore," don't you?)
Cobbled up their disgraceful invasion scheme with the Saxons,
Black Geordie, my grandpa, hurried off south of the border,
Failing to reinvent the past – until he sailed out here.

A bit of a pity there are parish records
Otherwise we could knit any brand of past at all:
Once here, for example, he became a kilted highlander
At the drop of a hat, or discreet swirl of a plaid.

We'd be utterly ignorant about those mythical Picts
If it weren't for my favourite Latin author,
Whose quite astonishing sleight of voice was to give us
The persuasive speaking voice of a Pictish chieftain,
Who may well be quoted more
Than any other soul from bonnie Scotland,
At least for the next eighteen-hundred years.

After all, there's always Robbie Burns.

I don't know how far I'm going to get
With all those blessed Picts, bar the fact that we
All are hungry about distant origins, micropoetically located
In the fog between Brothers Grimm and DNA,
But having anything Scotch at all about you
Can be swanky, or else a continuing pain in the kilt.

But there you are, then, all of us need a mythology;
So, for the general sake of my vitamins
I fancy that I'm descended from the Picts.
DANTE IN EXILE

The heart, like a resting steed, is quiet
for a moment. Blue smoke of morning begins
to raise up its cloud of obligations, the pen
taught like a student how to write again.
As if no man anywhere had ever hated, killed
another, the sun in its robes shines down.
Brass, copper, silver, bronze, all take on lustre,
becoming a pretence of gold. Whatever his party,
creed, a man is not made good nor bad by his own
summations. What is written is not made to
last. It is not a soul, not a spirit made to
yield or praise hereafter. Love cannot be taken
away, nor insult, hot word in wine of midnight,
nor a glance like a green lake in summer.
Honour belongs not to a city, a state,
a vacuum with lordly raiment, a vanity
preceded by fine horsemen, archers, a clenched
fist of iron. Beatrice, Guido, dead, but lifted
a little into glory by song, made more than
human by their grace, this memory, this
self-inquisition before another sunrise,
mooring bells tolling, goose warning of everything
and nothing, the soul still like a sleeper
in its blankets. Not yet frozen into death
a face can smile its way from storm, mind
lose its panic in the peaceful nave, prayer
reserved like a last coin in weathered pouch.
Many times under sentence of death, who
is not? Insects are chanting bright rosaries.
In a dusty mirror, a young man looks over
An old shoulder, and sees only
the rose-ripe horizon beckoning back.
In her last novel *Drylands*, Thea Astley predicted not only the imminent death of the novel, but of the book itself, suggesting it would be replaced by videos and newspapers. This was perhaps unduly pessimistic, but reports of the death of the literary novel are certainly current, with writers complaining that it is increasingly difficult to have literary novels published. On the other hand, those of us with longish memories can recall when there were not many novels, literary or otherwise, published in Australia. In 1972, for example, only 19 novels were published; in 1985 there were, remarkably, 200; in 1998 there were 350, and in 2006 they were back to 240. During this recent decline, however, the proportion of literary to other fiction has not varied a great deal, as Peter Kirkpatrick pointed out in a recent *Australian Author*, which suggests a tactical withdrawal by publishers to a more sustainable level, rather than the demise of the literary novel.

Publishers respond to the buying habits of their customers, and their publication of fewer literary novels reflects a shrinking readership. It is, however, not just the shorter attention spans of readers and their preference for visual narratives that are to blame for this decline. There was a larger audience for literary fiction in the 1970s and 80s, due in part to the dramatically increased numbers of university-educated readers who had benefited from free tertiary education from the early 1970s. The reduction in government support for universities, the emphasis on vocational degrees, and the consequent de-funding of Arts disciplines in particular since 1996, has resulted in fewer literature academics, and fewer students, both mature-age and school leavers, for them to teach. Theoretical assaults on a canon of literary works “good” enough to merit intensive study have also undermined the credibility and sapped the confidence of teachers and students alike. The flight of many literary academics to theoretical and cultural studies has further reduced the number and status of literature offerings, and branded those that remained ideologically suspect.
Like the reported death of the literary novel, the reported death of Australian literature in the universities is also a topic of current debate, as is the putative connection between them. In a recent “Book Show” on ABC Radio National a panel of experts was asked to discuss the decline of Australian literature studies. They agreed that fewer university students were opting to read literature, including Australian literature. Sydney University, which used to have the largest suite of Australian literature offerings, has experienced reduced enrolments in recent years, and is offering fewer subjects. The panel suggested a number of explanations for this decline: the higher cost of university study and the consequent loss of mature-age students; the dispersal of Australian literary texts into subjects not labelled “Australian Literature”; and the escalating pressure on students to choose vocational subjects. Interestingly, however, they did not discuss changes in the product offered, which a business with a declining customer base might be expected to review. No one pointed out that the introduction of theoretical and cultural studies alongside literary studies in the 1990s reduced enrolments in the latter. Dedicated readers wanting to enlarge their experience and enhance their appreciation of literature still find themselves directed instead to the banality of popular culture tricked out in the pseudo-sophistication of Gallic theory. Not surprisingly, they vote with their feet and enrol in other subjects. When they leave university, the range of their literary reading has not been extended and its quality has not been enriched. Unless they are passionate about their reading, they are less likely to buy and read demanding literary fiction.

Outside the universities, where writers, readers and publishers are largely unconcerned with academic fads and fashions, literary business proceeds, albeit with a smaller audience for its more sophisticated products. Those literary novels that are published continue to be read in private, and discussed in reading groups and at literary festivals, and continue to compete for the increasing number of literary awards and prizes. Serious readers do, however, have difficulty finding classic Australian novels in print, and the schools and universities that no longer offer them to students willing to read long and complex works are partly to blame. Bruce Beresford recently complained that when he tried to interest investors in a film version of The Fortunes of Richard Mahony no one knew what he was talking about. It should be said, however, that there are encouraging initiatives by the Copyright Agency Limited and the University of Technology Sydney/ABC Radio National to make such texts available in print or electronic form.

Some years ago, Helen Garner opined that Australian fiction, literary and otherwise, had lost contemporary relevance, and suggested that non-fiction
had become the engaged writer’s vehicle of choice. She believed Australian novelists were avoiding the issues of the day and retreating to the “safety” of historical fiction. Whatever the truth of this analysis at the time, it is not true of this year’s novels. Richard Flanagan’s _The Unknown Terrorist_, Andrew McGahan’s _Underground_, and Janette Turner Hospital’s _Orpheus Lost_, to name but three, are very contemporary political satires exploring the ugly transformations of Australian and American society after the 9/11 attacks and the Bali bombings.

_The Unknown Terrorist_ is a generic hybrid: part political satire; part thriller; and part a _noir_ account of contemporary Australia, “that dirty, dead decade they were all condemned to live through . . . in a place which had once been a community, in a country that had once been a society.” The generic mix unsettles the reader, as it may well have been intended to do: how do you describe a society prepared to devour its own innocents in order to placate those disturbed by draconian political responses to the threat of terrorism?

The book opens with a cryptic reflection on “the idea that love is not enough” in relation to Jesus, who “could never have enough of human love”, and Nietzsche, who was declared mad for trying to stop a horse being beaten. I am not sure that the connection between this Dostoevskian meditation and the story of a stripper entrapped in the terrorism hysteria that follows is ever clearly established. The “Doll” is a pole dancer in “The Chairman’s Lounge” in Sydney’s Kings Cross, and the book tells the story of the last days of her life. As her name implies, the Doll is deliberately dehumanised at the start, which makes her hard to relate to: she is pitiable rather than psychologically interesting. By constantly repeating this objectifying name (we only learn her actual name near the end of the book), Flanagan emphasises the point that the rotten society he is satirising objectifies and depersonalises such people so that it can cease to care about them or empathise with them; but his constant use of the misnomer renders the reader at least partly complicit in this unconcern. Late in the book we learn of the Doll’s personal traumas — incest as a child and a stillborn baby as a teenager — and while these explain her state of emotional shutdown, and increase the reader’s interest and sympathy, they do not entirely compensate for the earlier lack of engagement with her.

The Doll is a Westie trying to escape her ugly and deprived origins and make her way in the sleazy inner city. A chance meeting followed by a one-night stand entangles her in a phoney terrorist scare. This is concocted by a television journalist desperate to resurrect his waning career and a crooked ASIO spook wanting to ingratiate himself with a government looking to justify its repressive anti-terrorist laws. Their baseless sequence of news
stories enmeshes the innocent, apolitical Doll ever deeper in the nonexistent terrorist plot until she is driven to violent action, a revenge that will ensure her long-term imprisonment.

If the Doll is the victim of a sick society, that same society is the ultimate target of Flanagan’s richly eloquent and meticulously detailed satire. Striking a balance between the two, the urgent personal narrative of the Doll’s desperate attempts to survive, and the extended political satire on the society whose servants are persecuting her, was never going to be easy. *The Unknown Terrorist* is a fiercely confronting book, which offers its readers few comfortable pleasures. Its pace is sometimes uneven, but like earlier Flanagan novels it comes together very strongly towards the end. Its heart is clearly in the right place and, particularly given recent events, we would do well to heed its warnings.

Andrew McGahan’s *Underground* is another disturbing depiction of the damage that the politically manipulated fear of terrorism is wreaking on Australian society. Set in an imagined future, two “Liberal” Prime Ministers after John Howard, it follows the misfortunes of Leo James, the estranged twin brother of the Prime Minister. It begins with Leo being abducted in the hurly-burly of a Queensland cyclone, and the pace of the narrative continues at breakneck speed. This first abduction is followed almost immediately by another, in which James is rescued from his abductors, a group of would-be Moslem terrorists, by the Australian Federal Police. But the Federal Police are no longer the good guys, and Leo is then rescued from them by Oz Underground, a resistance group opposed to his brother’s government. Headed by a collection of former judges and Labour politicians, Oz Underground opposes the increasingly draconian anti-terrorist laws that have given the Prime Minister virtually unlimited power.

The trio of Leo, Harry from Oz Underground, and Aisha from the Great Southern Jihad, then career down outback roads to Melbourne, with much murder and mayhem on the way. Shortly after they arrive at the headquarters of Oz Underground in a state-created Muslim ghetto in Melbourne, it is destroyed in a military raid from which they narrowly escape. They then follow obscure roads to Canberra, which was supposedly nuked some years before by terrorists. In the culmination of their story they discover that the destruction of the capital has been faked for the news cameras, and that it has instead been transformed into the secret centre of world administration visited by all the powerful, including Osama Bin Laden, the US President, politicians of all countries and the CEOs of multinational companies.

*Underground* is thus part thriller, part cautionary tale and part futuristic Orwellian nightmare. Its chilling message that the cynically cultivated fear of
terrorism could all too easily turn a democracy like Australia into a totalitarian
police state is, however, embedded in a less than entirely convincing story.
That Canberra could become the centre of world rule without anyone in the
country outside conspiring politicians knowing about it stretches belief. And
Leo James is an unlikely and unlovely narrator of the story. Portrayed as a
polar opposite to his conservative, control-freak twin, the hedonistic and self-
indulgent Leo exploits his alleged closeness to his brother to further his
dodgy development businesses. Documenting the corruption of the political
system through his eyes is presumably a strategy to reinforce the message
that the situation is so bad that it appals even such a cynical self-seeker.

Leo’s final imprisonment in the House of Representatives chamber,
where he realises fully the extent of the corruption his brother has presided
over, seems clumsily symbolic and highly improbable, as is his brother putting
him before a firing squad. Such episodes, which verge on the comic, seem at
odds with the seriousness of the message. In contrast, Flanagan’s vision is
bleak and grim throughout, and what happens to the Doll has an awful
inevitability. The futuristic nightmares of Margaret Atwood’s Oryx and Craik
and Cormac McCarthy’s The Road are similarly unrelieved in their bleakness.
McGahan, on the other hand, includes exaggerated, half comic details that
would be at home in a political cartoon, but that reduce the emotional impact
of the profoundly serious warning that Underground is elsewhere sounding. It
is easy to sympathise with that warning, but as in Flanagan’s novel, that does
not necessarily translate into an entirely even toned and fully engaging story.

Janette Turner Hospital’s Orpheus Lost also depicts the ugly consequences
of Western over-reactions to the threat of terrorism. Unlike Underground and
The Unknown Terrorist, however, it does not draw on popular genres to make its
message accessible to a wider audience, and does not forego psychological
complexity. While the style is racier than in earlier Turner Hospital novels,
and the action faster, Orpheus Lost remains a literary fiction, resonant, rich and
strange. It includes much that will be familiar to readers of Turner Hospital,
including the ever shifting relationship of truth and illusion, holocaust
survivors and their traumas of memory, the search for a lost father, and visits
to Dante-esque undergrounds. What is new is its mythological dimension,
which combines with the magic realism of The Last Magician to give it a
resonance beyond contemporary realism without reducing the starkness of its
political insights.

As the title suggests, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is evoked and
reworked in a contemporary setting. “Che faro senza Eurydice”, Orpheus’s
lament for the lost Eurydice in Glück’s opera Orfeo ed Eurydice, runs as a
leitmotif through the story of two musical lovers. The haunting aria is the
signature tune of the novel's Orpheus figure, Michael Bartok/Abukir, a Jewish Australian musician who plays the violin and the Persian oud, a pairing reflecting his double heritage: an Hungarian-Jewish mother and absent Arab father. The Eurydice figure is Leela-May Magnolia Moore from the town of Promised Land in South Carolina. A postdoctoral student of the mathematics of music at Harvard, Leela is seduced by Michael's playing of "Che faro senza Eurydice" in the Boston subway and in turn seduces him.

Their intense relationship is interrupted by Michael's search for his absent father, which entangles him with Arab terrorists bombing American subways, and takes him to Beirut and to the truth about his terrorist father. From Beirut he is "rendered" to an horrific underground prison in Baghdad by private agents of the American government. In what is ultimately a positive denouement, one that reverses both the tragic ending and the gender roles of the myth, Leela helps to save Michael from his Baghdad hell.

The writing in Orpheus Lost is intensely evocative, and the narrative, though chronologically fragmented, compelling. The most enthralling chapter describes Michael's childhood in the bizarrely haunting Chateau Daintree, another dazzling fictional variation on Turner Hospital's own isolated childhood. A major new work from one of Australia's finest writers, Orpheus Lost is one of the books of the year, and not to be missed.

Manfred Jurgensen's The American Brother also explores the consequences of extreme anti-terrorism legislation. Like Planagan, Jurgensen has metaphysical ambitions. His central character and narrator is Harry Greene, recently made redundant from his Chair in the Arts Faculty of a Brisbane university. His resulting trauma runs through the rest of the book as he tries to establish whether or not his life is still "real." Harry is also torn between the sexually voracious Sarah, a former student now working for a shadowy anti-terrorist organisation who follows him to New York, and his idealistic wife Janice, who is put under house arrest for supporting the family of one of her students, an Iraqi refugee who has allegedly joined Osama bin Laden. The enigmatic ending of this increasingly complex plot is explosive, while at the same time rather weakly letting Harry off the hook.

The American Brother is something of a baggy monster. Its ability to hold the reader varies, and it would have benefited from firmer editing. Harry's metaphysical speculation, while credible enough, is not exactly riveting. On the other hand there is some real narrative mystery and suspense, and there are perceptive insights into the ills of contemporary life in Australia and America.

Carol LeFèvre's debut novel Nights in the Asylum derives its political message from the controversy about Australia's treatment of asylum seekers.
Escaping from a betrayed marriage and the death of her only daughter in Sydney, the central character Miri seeks the asylum of her childhood home in a remote country town. On the way she picks up the Afghan Aziz, who sought asylum in Australia, was imprisoned instead, and has escaped from a detention centre. When Miri reaches her home she finds Suzette Moran and her baby daughter there, seeking asylum from her abusive policeman husband, the one character whose bizarre sexual predilections should see him in a real asylum. The sexual relationship that develops between Miri and Aziz, who is more a sex object than a refugee with a troubled past, is lingeringly described in visual and sensuous detail. Photography figures largely in the book – almost everyone constantly takes, develops and poses for photos – and the unlikely ending of the narrative is a set of verbally described snapshots in which all of the good guys escape into happy future lives.

The Asylum in Rodney Hall’s Love Without Hope is, in contrast, brutally punitive and not at all a place of escape. Set in 1982 when the New South Wales Department of Lunacy was still in operation, the story opens with Lorna Shoddy screaming in the Calm Down room of a Mental Institution, which is presided over by the then-titled “Master of Lunacy.” The depressed Lorna had been found living alone and in squalor after a bushfire has killed her beloved horses. On the advice of the district nurse, who has ulterior motives, she has been committed. Imprisoned in the Asylum, Lorna eventually learns to calm down and to work the system, eventually escaping during a storm. Her return home is, however, bitter sweet, compromised by events beyond her control.

This astutely observed tragi-comic story is illuminated by Hall’s singular combination of shrewd insight and generous humanity. It has a richly diverse and wholly credible cast of small town characters, ranging from the truly generous to the smugly self-satisfied and the nastily selfish. The sufferings of the elderly are clearly and compassionately portrayed. The depiction of rural communities is unillusioned, and at times engagingly satirical, but it is lit up by the generosity of the few, who may be without much hope, but who love on nonetheless. I am surprised that this splendid novel from a much-awarded author has so far escaped the attention of award judges.

Kate Legge’s The Unexpected Elements of Love is another warmly perceptive account of the indignities of old age. Legge’s characters are better educated and better resourced than the isolated and rural-poor Lorna Shoddy, and they are not victims of a mean and self-serving society, as she is; but their plight remains heart-wrenchingly sad, and they are genuinely losing their grip on life. Hall’s Love Without Hope has more bitter moments, and its view of society is generally bleaker, but both books are significantly redeemed by acts of
generosity and love.

*The Unexpected Elements of Love* is a sympathetic account of two inter-connected families facing different inter-generational crises. Beth Worboys struggles to come to terms with the onset of her husband Roy’s dementia as well as her own disabling arthritis. Roy is engaged on a major commissioned sculpture, the last of his distinguished career, but his mind is betraying him as he struggles to complete the work. His wife agonises over whether he wants her to assist his death when his mind is completely gone. In the parallel story a friend of Beth’s daughter is trying to deal with the competing demands of work, husband and children, including a lovable but hyperactive son she does not want to see drugged, as the “authorities” recommend. The exploration of the cruel decisions ageing imposes on marriage partners and their children, who also have to confront their own fears and demons, is searching and unsentimental, though the dramatic resolution resolves some of the dilemmas a little too easily. *The Unexpected Elements of Love* is peopled by intelligent, articulate and generous characters, who bring those admirable qualities to bear on the hard choices that confront them.

The sufferings of children is another recurring theme in this year’s novels, contributing significantly to *The Unknown Terrorist* and *Orpheus Lost*, and dominating Gail Jones’s *Sorry*, Tara June Winch’s *Swallow the Air*, Deborah Robertson’s *Careless* and Rhyll McMaster’s *Feather Man*.

A searing first novel from an established poet, *Feather Man* is a confronting account of a young girl’s struggle to escape from a poisoned childhood of parental indifference and sexual molestation. Its bleak take on the limited lives available to women growing up in the 1950s recalls Jessica Anderson’s *Tirra Lirra by the River* and the novels of Elizabeth Harrower. Like the Doll in *The Unknown Terrorist*, the first-person narrator of *Feather Man* in not given a name until the last pages. Sexually molested by her next-door neighbour Lionel at the age of six, later engaged to conventional medical student Peter, and later again married to Lionel’s entirely self-centred son Redmond, Lyce struggles to escape the menacing constrictions of the men who try to make her progressively their girl, fiancée, lover, wife and popsy.

Lyce is a disturbingly believable character, and her family is an all too convincing nightmare of dreary 1950s conformity. The men she battles are understandably less three-dimensional. Their effect on her is traumatic, and the revenge she finally takes on Redmond, while liberating for her, is particularly brutal. The conflict between her romantic compliance with her imprisonment in male constructions of women’s roles, and her rebellious insistence on her right to freedom, self-worth and personal creativity – she is a gifted and eventually successful painter – is deeply insightful and
powerfully conveyed. The narrative is skilfully managed, beginning with the traumatic moment of childhood violation from which everything develops, leading the reader gradually to an understanding of the profound conflicts of Lyce's life, and ending with a characteristically cruel, funny, back-to-the-beginning last line.

Tara June Winch's *Swallow the Air* is another remarkable first novel, another bleak and compelling *Bildungsroman*. In twenty spare and moving episodes it chronicles the rites of passage of May Gibson's young life. These begin with the early death of her Aboriginal mother, and the descent into alcoholism of the aunt who cares for May and her brother Billy. May hitches to Darwin in search of her absent white father, lives for a time in The Block in Redfern, and journeys into rural New South Wales in search of her country and her family. All of this questing ends in disappointment: there is no reunion with her father, there is no hope in The Block, and there is no Gibson mob to welcome her in what was once her tribal country. Even her return to what she finally recognises as her only home is undercut by the news that her aunt is being evicted.

There are, however, compensating moments of caring and generosity scattered through this bleak progress of self-discovery. There may be no homecoming for May, but she retains a positive spirit, a quietly determined refusal to succumb to the despair of so many of those around her. Winch's writing is richly poetic at times, bitterly spare at others. There is no retreat from the despair and dereliction of so much of indigenous life in Australia, but its spirit remains undimmed. This is a dazzling debut novel from a gifted young writer.

Like *Orpheus Lost*, Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* is unquestionably a literary novel, and a much awarded one. It is also, like *Orpheus Lost*, a musical novel, as Wright has pointed out: "One of my intentions was to write the novel as though it was a very long melody made of different forms of music, mixed somehow with the voices of the Gulf." The music of *Carpentaria* is, however, Aboriginal, not European, and the pace of the narrative reflects this. *Carpentaria* is a big, slow-moving book, suspended – in the manner of Gabriel García Márquez and Salman Rushdie – outside the usual realms of realistic fiction in a world of fantasy, myth and allegory. It is set in and around Desperance, an oxymoronic conflation of Despair and Esperance, which is both a town on the Gulf of Carpentaria and a metaphoric microcosm of Australia as a whole. The allegory is continued in the name of the central character Normal Phantom, in other characters like Hope, Will and Angel Day, and in the Gurfurrit Mine.

Like the novels of García Márquez and Rushdie, *Carpentaria* asks its
readers to forego some of the usual pleasures of fiction – spirited action and psychologically engaging characters – and lose themselves in its strangeness. In return, it offers a singular insight into Aboriginal ways of thinking, seeing and remembering, and of living in communion with a physical world alive with ancestral spirits and nourished by the accumulated wisdom of many generations. In this parallel universe, the Uptown whites, when they are not ridiculous and/or incomprehensible, are seen as rapacious and brutal racists. Their hold on power obliges black characters like Norm and Will Phantom to interact with them, and in Will’s case, to lead the fight against their Gurfurrr Mine; but they are most themselves when travelling and communicating alone with the spirits of sea and land. It requires patience and stamina for readers from outside to follow them into this world and to engage with them there, an entry that is not made easier by a narrating voice that is curiously disengaged from the sometimes appalling events it relates, not shrinking from their often violent details, but seemingly not provoked into comment or outrage.

It may be indicative of the current state of publishing that a challenging work of literary fiction like *Carpentaria* could not find a mainstream publisher, and was taken up by Giramondo, a small specialty Press. It can be argued, however, that such literary publishing is essentially a cottage industry, best conducted on a small scale by enthusiastic littérateurs, and not subject to the philistine bean counters of the multi-national publishers. The classic example of this is the most celebrated literary novel of the twentieth century, Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

Deborah Robertson’s *Careless* is an elegantly constructed and profoundly moving account of an unconnected group of unexceptional people whose lives are linked by the killing of a group of children. Beginning from this harrowing event, seen through the eyes of the only child to survive, the book expands into an extended meditation on death, loss and grieving. In addition to the central story of lost young lives, it retells a number of other stories about the abuse of children. Sonia Marstrand, who is herself grieving for the recent death of her husband, and the loss to Europe of her two adult sons, is the narrator of three of these cruel stories. Prompted by news of the death of the children, she recalls the story of the three Beaumont children, who vanished from a beach in Adelaide in 1969 and were never found. This in turn recalls the story she heard as a spell-bound child of the children of the Irish king *Lir*, who were imprisoned for nine hundred years in the bodies of swans, and died when they were finally released.

The third story is of the killing at architect Frank Lloyd Wright’s Wisconsin house *Taliesin* of three children and four adults, including his
partner and her two girls. Sonia tells this story to Pearl, the sole survivor of the killing in which her younger brother died. Pearl has been fascinated by a picture in her psychiatrist’s consulting room of Wright’s later, much celebrated house Fallingwater, and she has re-drawn that house beautifully. When Sonia sees these drawings, she musingly tells Pearl the cruel story of the earlier house. Pearl is also told the story of the movie Taxi Driver by her psychiatrist after she has overheard mention of its character Travis Bickle in relation to her own tragedy. The retelling of these related stories is in a sense therapeutic for Pearl and the other characters grieving for the dead children. They also resonate with the book’s own story of the death of children, and the multiple grieving that causes.

Pearl is a wonderfully convincing child character. The diverse group of parents, siblings and friends brought into relationship in the aftermath of the deaths is also powerfully realised, and their grieving is deeply understood and movingly portrayed. Never consciously “literary”, the writing is alternately rich and austere; it is also deft and unobtrusive, and it maintains a pitch of emotional intensity that is never over-stated. The reader is alternately carried forward by the impetus of the narrative, and slowed by a desire to linger over and to savour the narration. In the course of the book a memorial is planned to commemorate all lost children. The book itself might stand as that memorial, a symphony of grieving for lost young lives. Careless is one of the standout books of the year, and richly deserves its short listings and awards.

Despite the widespread pessimism about the future of literary writing, this year’s array of books demonstrates that at least some literary novels are still being published. The appearance of a number of collections of short stories is also hopeful, despite the fact that, like the literary novel and poetry, the short story is routinely described as a threatened species, struggling to find publication. The Best Australian Stories 2006, edited by Robert Drewe, continues the excellent standard of this annual collection, and Adriana Ellis’s Glass, Liz Gallois’s India Vik and Elizabeth Stead’s The Gospel of Gods and Crocodiles are engaging evidence that good stories can still find publishers. The times may be tough for aspiring writers, but all is not lost.

**Fiction Received 2006–2007**

*Those marked with an asterisk have been mentioned in the review.*


Thomas, Scarlett. The End of Mr Y. Melbourne: Text Publishing [uncorrected proof, 2007].


DIRTY TALK

You have to believe in what words can do
to do this. She does. I do. We do. There’s
something about how we’ve got it off
to get us off that stops me from asking

Did you go on like this before we met?
Have I always gone on like this with you?

I don’t think we started when we started.
I would have been first but not by much.

When we don’t, we don’t give it a thought;
when we do, we can’t think of anything else.
TWO GIRAFFES

fuelled by the perfume of wide savannahs moonlight on summergrass sunlight on waterholes
the dream rises in us some days even here in the smogged city
we blend where-ever don’t be deceived what makes height in us are leaves on the thorn tree African acacia’s spine
enclosed are we with our shadow where is the stroke of dappling?
we contain another continent our limbs remember the long lollipop
BLEEDING IN FREMANTLE: 
EMBODYING TRAUMA IN CRAIG SILVEY’S RHUBARB

When I moved to Perth from “the east”, I actively sought Perth fiction to read as an entrance into the local culture, as a way of imagining place, of making sense of Perth through the imagination of its writers. At the time, Craig Silvey’s novel, *Rhubarb* (2004), was gaining a high profile, especially for a first novel by a young writer. It was selected as Perth’s “One Book” for the 2005 Perth International Arts Festival, which meant it was widely advertised through the Festival, with the author touring regional centres and libraries running local book events and discussions. Published by the independent, local, and highly reputable Fremantle Arts Centre Press, *Rhubarb* is a story of “two very damaged and distant people finding their way to a tenuous connection” (1). It is firmly located in Fremantle as an historical but also an immediately compelling and contemporary place of social and cultural relations. As such, it reflects and also contributes to the quirky eccentricity that Fremantle holds dear. Graham Nowland has argued that the Fremantle port often operates in fiction as a threshold site through which characters undergo psychological transition. In Silvey’s novel, however, it is the people who populate the city of Fremantle that are figured as potent triggers and bearers of psychic trauma, and the effects are written on their bodies. This does not mean that Fremantle as a location is inconsequential; on the contrary, place and people are somewhat paralleled in their scarring. What I find interesting is the impact of gender on the way bodies bear signs of trauma in *Rhubarb*, and in their capacities as agents of healing. If fiction bears the marks of a culture’s social anxieties and histories, then *Rhubarb* reflects an apparent unsettling of gender norms and yet the lived experience of trauma is radically gendered through its corporeal manifestation.

A Fremantle Novel
*Rhubarb* leads us through an imaginary Fremantle largely due to the
extraordinary wanderings of its blind protagonist, Eleanor Rigby. She beatles around the streets at all hours of the day and night with her guide-dog Warren, sipping coffee on cappucino strip, avoiding the drunks, fishing from the wharf, interacting with the locals and acting as blind but knowing tour-guide for the uninitiated like myself. Her authority is established from the beginning when we are told that:

Though they are now gentrified and renovated, she knows these streets. At will, she can conjure a cerebral map of Fremantle, a network of space and place and roads. And always, inside it somewhere, there’s a Big Red Arrow pointing at a tiny figure, and three Big Red Words that say: You Are Here. (19)

There is some ambivalence about the trope of tourism inscribed in these mind-maps, but the commercial attraction is part of the city’s reputation as a funky tribal village housing the state’s cultural producers and outsiders, where artists, migrants, the disabled and dysfunctional, the homeless and dispossessed wander alongside wealthy consumers, entrepreneurs and visitors in postmodern glory. During the 2005 International Arts Festival, there were scheduled “Walks with Warren” (the guide-dog character) around the Fremantle streets of the novel, indicating that there is some authenticity to the fictional rendering of Fremantle which can be retraced, and wants to be retraced.

While the geography is compelling, it is the local characters who make the novel (and arguably the city) lively: Frank the retired wharfy who speaks about his dead wife as if she is still alive; always-the-immigrant-Bruno who owns the corner store and loudly greets Eleanor with a blind joke (because he assumes she is also deaf); his long-suffering wife Althea; the fire-twirlers and buskers; the man who reads Tolstoy in the café and rips out the page after he’s finished it, calling out its page number and then tossing it over his shoulder if nobody claims it. And then there’s Ewan: a tall twenty-three year old reclusive who is afraid to leave the limestone cottage he lives in alone making and playing cellos, or rather, making “one cello over and over and over again” (26).

Fremantle is also conjured by the senses: the novel begins seven days before Christmas so there is weather: stilling, oppressive heat; sweat; storm; seabreeze. There is food: coffee, kebab, mango and watermelon. There is the smell of patchouli and pot, bougainvillea and mint, barbecues in the park amongst the cricket and the cars and the sprinkler sprays (109). On a Sunday night there is “waffles and exhaust and garlic and deodorant” (169). The
quirkiness of place is paralleled in the form of writing which plays on words, stringing them together to invent new versions, which uses mid-sentence capitals, bold, italic, white space, stage and camera directions, popculture and intertextual reference, and a scattering of scatological tropes which include the excreta of everyday life: Warren farting, possums copulating, and Eleanor menstruating. Sperm, shit and piss frequent the pages, as do death and destruction. There is an abject underside to the eccentric.

The imaginary body of Fremantle then, is impressively composite: European, Nyoongar, Anglo, old, young, blind, gifted, ignorant, wealthy and poor, reduse and flancuse, male and female, determined and direction-less. Customary binary opposites appear to mix in a volatile but productive social space, which is mirrored in bringing together the two protagonists. While Ewan is a hermit and Eleanor an extrovert, they are both emotionally wounded by traumatic pasts that seem to manifest as silence and blindness. Their youth and their meeting suggest a kind of reconciliation and potential healing, and yet Eleanor's copious menstrual blood becomes a defining feature of her trauma in a way that Ewan's body cannot manifest. Throughout the heat for the entire seven days leading up to the last Christmas of the millennium, Eleanor is described managing or wiping up after her leaking mobile body. She grimaces over a “belligerent belly” (158), “her bloated belly cramping up like it’s viced” (102), “her period bites sharp” (109), “the empty belly roils and folds and cramps with tedious egg dispensing” (130). Indeed, the text is positively infused with cramps, bleeding and tampons whenever Eleanor is about, a device that seems all the more extraordinary in a text written by a young man (Silvey was twenty-one when the novel was published). Pain infuses her everyday existence and most insistently for the duration of the novel, but for what purpose? And what difference does it establish from the other forms of pain described? I'm interested in the kinds of bodies being written here: the damaged men frequenting Fremantle and what kinds of alternative masculinities they might represent, but mostly the bleeding woman and the way her body functions in this text as the site of blood and trauma. If, as Elizabeth Grosz argues, the body is “the disavowed condition of all knowledge”, what kinds of knowledge do these bodies register?

**Embodying trauma**

In this book, everyone is vulnerable: all humans suffer from their own personal psychoses and this is represented through physical and emotional pain which is often interchangeable. Death is rampant, so in many ways this novel revolves around grief and loss. This element is clear in the family
histories of the two protagonists who are virtual orphans, clearing a space for them to make their own life and yet burdening them with arduous histories. Ewan’s mother left their strict Adventist family when he was young. His father was inconveniently addicted to gambling, and used to leave Ewan in the car at the casino to recite the bible in order to assuage his illicit sinning. After a big win, Ewan’s father converted to Krishna on the steps of the casino and left for India, leaving the fifteen-year-old Ewan all his worldly possessions. This was soon after the death of Ewan’s cello teacher and friend Jim, aged twenty-three. Ewan’s response to death and loss is to lock himself inside, continually replicating the cello that Jim bequeathed him. In Eleanor’s family, her first elder sister was born dead, her second elder sister Jenny had anorexia and then literally disappeared from her life, on the same night that her mother’s womb fell out leaving her lifeless, stranded on the couch watching television. On this same night her father ran away, dying later the same year of cirrhosis of the liver. The disappearance of her mother, father and sister was on the same day, and Eleanor’s immediate response was to go blind. She tells Ewan it was due to acute glaucoma — “a fast, severe flood of eye fluid” (165) — but there is some suggestion that Eleanor may have had more agency than this in her embodied response.

Embedded in these histories is a more sinister and serious narrative around forms of abuse and trauma. The novel recounts four significant moments which begin with the words “Back here”, suggesting a reverse chronology in time but also a buried level of consciousness. The first moment describes Ewan’s relation to Jim his cello teacher until Jim’s untimely death. The second describes Ewan being locked in the car to read the bible while his father gambles at the casino. Instead of reading, though, Ewan memorises cello music, searing it into the muscle memory of his hands. Cello music thus becomes a kind of sacred text replacing the biblical text his father hypocritically observes and preparing Ewan’s intense relation with his cello. The third “Back here” moment is the blind Eleanor’s first menses, alone in the bathroom, feeling as though she is dying from her own bloodied wound with nobody to tell. This is the beginning of a life of menstrual pain which is suggestively linked to the fourth (and prior) moment: the night Eleanor and her elder sister witness their father kicking their mother in the genitals so hard that her womb detaches from her pelvis and prolapses. This is written from three perspectives: the third person, the mother’s and the daughter’s with increasing intensity. In many ways its horror forms the climax of the novel, not only because of its utter violence but also because of the formative place it is seen to occupy in Eleanor’s psyche. It is the reverse of the primal scene, in which the child sees the mother and father having sex: in this scene, the child sees the father castrating the mother.
While all of these events are formative in their characters’ lives, what is immediately evident is that female trauma has an additional physicality that is fundamentally linked to sex and sexuality in a way that Ewan’s trauma does not. This is replicated in the characterisation. Eleanor is always being physically described, even naked in the shower and the mirror which she cannot see, whereas all we know about Ewan is that he is tall. Even her compulsive walking renders her visible and physical, while Ewan is sedentary in darkness and silence, almost invisible. Eleanor’s mother’s wounds are fundamentally sexual, as she embodies the father’s misogyny which goes on for years. We find out that she regularly took sleeping pills to absent her self, but her body still took the punishment issued by a particularly insistent form of male sexuality.

National trauma
If this is a novel of grief, it is also a novel about its eternal return despite the ways we invent to suppress it. Eleanor’s blindness must be symbolically related to her being an unwilling witness. It might have been a way to stop seeing, but her bleeding throughout the novel is a continual reminder of the womb as a site of torture, as her mother experienced it. Blindness only stops witnessing during the light. It is at night, in recurring dreams, that the repressed returns in this novel, with always the same nightmare ending, when Eleanor literally wets herself. During the height of the trauma of the novel, a second person narrator distances itself from the trauma to speak to Eleanor, saying:

    you didn’t know that sleep would be Memory’s regress. The place where dreams are bred and shaped and played and replayed; where Everything buried would surface. (248)

This suggests that dreams actually function in this novel, that dreams do the work of bringing what is buried to the surface. One particularly dream, then, becomes emblematic. It is dreamt before Ewan and Eleanor meet, and signals the beginning of her period, so the wetness this time is blood. The dream begins:

    Alone on the jetty, the faceless girl sees a Big Violin coursing silently towards her. Almost submerged. Its strings are broken and spread like whiskers, too light to tear the waterskin, though these floppy oars see to row in stunted strokes. It parts a shimmering, furrowed V in its wake. It comes closer. She is not afraid.
She glances up and sees the defunct Roundhouse atop a granite knoll. And the circular convict prison spins like a merry-go-round, with bright flashing lights. Pulsing above it is a Big Red Arrow. And three Big Red Words: You Are Here.

The tide rises. Lapping and slapping and louder still.

She feels heat between her legs. She clamps them shut. It sealds. It’s blood, she knows, but she can’t see it. Smells its ferre scent. Feels it sticky and itching. She turns to run but her feet are stuck, stuck, stuck to this jetty. (72)

This dream can be read as recognition of trauma that extends from the personal to the political: to the body politic. It is haunted by the foundations of Fremantle: the passage of violin-boats across the sea from the perspective of those on the land, and the ensuing bloodshed. The Roundhouse is a Fremantle icon in the sense that it is an obvious feature that identifies Fremantle and is also required seeing for any visitor to the area, as suggested by reference to the tourist map in the dream. It was built in the 1830s as the first permanent building and was a prison modelled on Jeremy Bentham’s design. It sits on an Arthur Head, a significant Nyoongar site known for its capacity as a natural whale trap, and therefore plentiful food and feasting. Whale harvesting became a colonial industry, as the Roundhouse imprisoned mostly Aboriginal inmates in the 1830s, and then later held them before they were transported to Rottnest Island to serve sentence. White convicts arrived in 1850. In the Roundhouse today, a textboard tells visitors that the site is a “record of every major stage of Fremantle history” and “mirrors the major elements of this state’s development.” Recognised as a cultural icon, it can be read as functioning similarly in Eleanor’s dream in its reminder of the past. If Silvey’s novel writes bodies as repositories of grief, then it is Eleanor’s body that buckles and bends with this project. Women’s bodies are the site of bloodshed, leaky reminders of past trauma, and they have mapped onto them reminders of colonial intrusion, of sexual predators and violent bloodshed.

Visibility and Desire
Women are habitually associated with their bodies (as reproductive or not), but men’s bodies do not have a similar currency of embodiment. This is evident in the novel through the degree of visibility attributed to each protagonist. Eleanor is well-known on her walks, and her guide-dog often renders her more visible. At the Old Shanghai when she becomes disoriented in the crowd Eleanor becomes a spectacle thrashing and yelling on the ground for Ewan, who has deserted her. Because Eleanor does not see but is
seen, the visual economy of the novel replicates the traditional male gaze in which women are to-be-looked-at through the male gaze. The gaze is an important aspect of desire and pleasure – scopophilia is the pleasure of looking, and voyeurism refers to the pleasure of illicit looking. At the same time, Eleanor is denied these pleasures through her blindness.

As someone who has chosen to be reclusive, to hide from social interaction, Ewan is not readily visible in his community as he creeps out of the house to buy provisions before other people are awake. This is replicated in his characterisation: as readers we know more about the way Ewan thinks and feels rather than how he looks or, perhaps more importantly, the way he is seen by others. Kenneth MacKinnon argues that "the male body takes on a crucial role in masculinity," however Ewan's self-imposed silence and absence suggest a more spectral masculinity, reinforced by his insubstantiality in physical terms. Eleanor's menstruation continually establishes her as the body while Ewan stays inside, abstract and thoughtful and playing music, just as he did when locked inside his father's car. Can these be considered gendered responses? Or are the sources of trauma themselves gendered? If Eleanor is able to embody trauma partially through being a menstruating woman, then what does the novel have to say about emotional registration on male bodies?

Katherine Bode argues that men's bodies are often absent in fiction, even though male characters are present, and Sally Robinson suggests that "white male power has benefited enormously from keeping whiteness and masculinity in the dark" thereby escaping the sort of surveillance and regulation to which women's bodies have been subject. In her doctoral work, Bode identifies a group of contemporary Australian novels that depict physically and psychically damaged men, some of which include interactions with blind women. Bode suggests that the visual economy set up in these novels draws attention to the politics of visibility, of who is being-looked-at and who is looking. Drawing on Laura Mulvey's critical work on the male gaze and visual theory since then, Bode concludes that the visibility prompted by representing men as damaged, as victims of dominant masculinity, is potentially conservative if it does not reframe the traditional visual relations expected of women. These fictions, then, suggest a troubling of traditional masculinity, and yet women's lived experiences remain embodied and visible as bodies to be looked at. The increased incidence in literature about otherwise privileged, white, heterosexual men as emotionally or physically wounded, however, suggests other kinds of masculinities emerging, often through a trope of crisis, as David Buchbinder has also identified in public discourse.
Hegemonic masculinity\textsuperscript{11} barely appears in this novel and if it does it is punished. Eleanor's father perhaps represents a fairly brutal version, and he runs away and dies. Bruno the Romanian delicatessen owner is a stereotype of European uber-masculinity, and he is ridiculed by Eleanor's prank of placing a potato in the exhaust of his beloved Mercedes. This results in an obsession with personal safety and material security for Bruno, thereby unleashing his insecurities. Bruno has apparently been threatened with emasculation before – in fact with castration – when it was found he was to be a father with three different women at the same time, and so migrated to Australia (an interesting substitution itself!). Eleanor talks about the potato trick with relish as "a Big Man brought down", and offers to castrate other men whose masculinities are aggressive and dominating. On the way to the Old Shanghai she is taken aback by a doof-blaring car of hoon speeding too close to the corner. "You know, Ewan," she says:

I submit that we adopt India's stance on birth control, except we'll offer car stereos for vasectomies. And I can tell you, I will personally volunteer for the task of snipping vas deferens. And I'll come equipped with my own pair of rusted hedge shears. (146)

Eleanor may be denied visual pleasure, but she apparently enjoys imagining her potency in other ways. As well as offering to remove the physical manifestations of manhood, however, Eleanor also offers up her own ovaries for the taking, reinforcing her experience of sexual difference as an embodied source of pain. It's interesting to note that virtually the only instance of sexual desire in the novel is between possums.

If masculinity is troubled in this novel, then so is sexuality. Ewan and Eleanor barely broach anything sexual, thereby disappointing the usual plot trajectory of boy-meets-girl. The model provided by Eleanor's parents, however, renders heterosexuality lethal if not fatal. Ewan's sexuality is confined to autoeroticism, and impotence figures particularly in the character of Frank as a demoralising form of male sexuality. Eleanor describes herself as a twenty-one year old virgin (111) and her body as prepubescent despite menstruating: "no hips, no thighs, no breasts ... She is the same size she was at twelve" (18–19). Asexuality seems rife. If this novel does echo contemporary concerns around the impact of violence and grief, then it is pessimistic. If the daughter is left bleeding in Fremantle with her eyes smote seeing no future pleasure besides the anticipated castration of men, is desire also destroyed for the son?
Impromptu

Ewan’s grief, I suggest, is markedly different from Eleanor’s, and intensities of sexual pleasure survives through the cello. Music always forges links back to Jim, Ewan’s cello teacher in Sydney before his mother left and before he and his father moved to Perth. Interestingly, Jim is a male body who bleeds: Jim has haemophilia, a disease of the blood. He becomes one of the 261 Australians who contracted AIDS from infected blood transfusions, and dies after Ewan leaves Sydney. The blood-disease also acts to disassociate male sexuality from homosexuality (which might otherwise be associated with AIDS) even though Jim’s and Ewan’s relationship is warmly homosocial, if not homoerotic. When Jim dies Ewan receives his cello named Lillian, who seems to act as a surrogate for Jim’s bodily presence. Lillian is described as a female body and there are descriptions of both men holding Lillian that purposely draw on the language of sexuality. When Jim plays Lillian, who has “passed through many hands and generation” (61), he is “sliding, punching, rolling, tickling notes so they sing like nothing else ever has ... Lillian rises and falls and settles into Jim’s shallow frame” (58). When Ewan receives Lillian in a parcel, “He slid her between his knees. She fit. Like nothing else ever had. She whispered to him. Only he could hear” (126).

If Lillian is sexualised by Jim and Ewan, she also brings a special kind of relief and pleasure to both of them. Jim’s debilitating disease has brought with it early arthritis and a variety of other painful ailments, which are eased by playing music and yet the physicality of the cello is also painful:

The sound of her, the playing of her annealed him. Numbèd him blissfully for the duration. He needed that sound to fill his lungs and convince them to push back outwards. But she taxed him heftily. She pressed against his chest, she wore red sores into his knees and grated his joints. Right under his nose as he juiced the sound from her. She tore tendons and vessels and ligaments. Bleed by Bleed. Leached the use of his body while he sought reprieve in hers. (63–64)

The pleasures of Lillian, however, also induce pain in a characterisation that begins to sound like a vengeful castrator. Later when Ewan has a panic attack outside he seeks refuge in Lillian:

Diving falling into this room where she lies limbless on her side. Claiming her. She’s wrapped up, you give her limbs. Spooning. Locking her breast and shoulders and an open string growls. It’s a G string, you don’t giggle. Holding, not held. Hunching leaning rocking and you don’t know why.
You don’t know why. Shake, shudder, bite marks on your knuckles. (104)

Even to those who do not bleed, it seems that Lilian still bites. Ewan’s experience of listening to Lilian being played by Jim is visceral and eroticised. Watching Jim play at the beginning of each lesson, Ewan responds: “A shudder gusts from his spine. A cloak of tingles to start the lesson” (59). It’s difficult to separate the music from Lilian and Jim, but they are all implicated in Ewan’s pleasure which again is associated with visceral sexual responses as his:

toes curl and he is lost in it. A feisty rush fizzles up his back, imubes him with an unbearable energy. He wants to run around and dance badly. Do something with it. And it’s so easy to see that she is more than wood and strings, the way she sights stretches sins breathes life. And Jim is just warming up. (58)

There is much that is seductive about Lilian, and Eleanor recognises it too. Eleanor first hears Ewan playing as she walks by his house, and she seeks out the music again and again when she finds it helps her sleep soundly, bypassing the nightmares. Ewan and Eleanor are both insomniacs, and music is understood to soothe their night terrors. In this sense, given its eroticisation, this music has a connection to pleasure and seems to be figured metonymically – not as desire but as something more fulfilling.

Music Memory
If Ewan’s music can be said to stand in for pleasure, then it also has a complex relation to memory. Ewan “finds that nothing holds memory like music” (124) and yet also comments that “he plays for a counterfeit memory on a cello called Lilian” (70). The combination of music and memory reach a climax on Christmas day though, when Ewan plays Lilian for Eleanor. Despite her lived experience of monthly pain, Eleanor finds that the music opens up a particularly vulnerable memory space, displacing the numbness that protects her:

Memory ... The melody bends, dances, touches her skin and bursts. A tangible, sentient thing. Touching ... The room roars with the crescendo. It’s an edifice of air, and it threatens to fill her up. It gushes in spires. And if she’s not careful, Eleanor, she’s going to lose it. It’ll flense her, this sound, this music. Expose her, spilling, spilling, Because it’s working its way inside now. And nothing can get inside, for she shepherds out the
world. With a rough stubborn veneer. Brittle now. It's picking, pecking at her.

When she reaches her home, she vomits and her period stops “at that exact moment” and the novel elides Eleanor and her mother into “Estelle Eleanor. Who leaves silently now, and leaves silence” (241).

The death of Eleanor’s mother Estelle and the end of Eleanor’s bleeding indicate the nadir of Eleanor’s narrative, but a disturbing scene is being played out at Ewan’s house where he destroys Lilian. In the same way as Eleanor’s father sees her mother as dead flesh – “like bashing a hanging carcass. The slack, sluggish, mated, cadaver response of her flesh” (212), Ewan at this moment reduces Lillian to “just wood”: “just wood that he swung back and flung while he bellowed and watched it fly and watched it crack against the far wall. He saw the spine split” (320). This particular phrase mirrors the description of the mother’s “glass spine,” and “dead spine” in which “the clock hands split” (208, 212). His violence takes us by surprise, but Ewan at least is not obliterating a real woman’s body. During the manic destruction, however, Eleanor has returned to his house. She has just discovered her mother dead and putrefying on the couch, and intuitively runs to Ewan’s only to hear the sound of a spine splitting:

And everything stops for Eleanor Rigby as she recognises too well the sound inside this place. Too, too well. And it is not the sounds that brought her here, but she’s heard it before, she’s been there and seen it and is struck here because of it and it killed her mother and she can’t be here. She can’t be here ... She loses it. (318)

The destruction of Lilian is clearly linked with the destruction of Eleanor’s mother through this language. But it barely makes sense that these actions come at the hands of Ewan.

If there is any sense in destroying the cello, then it is something to do with the intensity of Ewan making the native fretless mandalute in his workshop for days and nights beforehand in an almost ecstatic trance. Ewan is a cello maker, but usually it is Lilian he replicates. In creating a new hybrid instrument from local wood, Ewan’s agency to create his own music is realised. If this comes at the price of destroying the old model, then perhaps it is a material way of externalising and reconciling his grief. The mandalute is an instrument of hope in the novel, a way forward materially manifested by Ewan, and yet there is little hope for Eleanor. Reminding us of the classic
formulation of sexual difference since the Enlightenment whereby men are producers of culture while women are reproducers, Ewan’s grief functions to produce a new cultural instrument while Eleanor remains stuck with her blind bleeding body, painfully registering her reproductive potential.

Rhubarb and Chocolate
While there are lots of joking and joviality in Rhubarb, it is a fairly pessimistic book as a reflection of social preoccupations around gender, power and bodies. Suggesting that hegemonic heterosexual masculinity is deadly to women and children and finding few alternative models of gender or sexuality, music might seem to offer a more amorphous and satisfying eroticism, and yet even it is withheld and destroyed.

It’s kind of ironic that Ewan offers Eleanor dark chocolate as a balm for her menstrual pain, given that the novel is a veritable compendium on uses of rhubarb: from cello oil to blood cleansing potions to rhubarb fool pie and abortant. A mix of healing and poison, just like any herbal, rhubarb is worked into the text as linament, laxative and expletive (rhubarbrhubarbrhubarb). Dark chocolate, though, is something Ewan’s mother used to binge on once a month, and would share with Ewan (161). It’s a connection back to the absent m/other. It’s offered as a remedy to Eleanor who is allergic to painkillers, who confronts the pain of the past every month.

As a novel that turns in to domestic violence, the bodies of women feature irrevocably as sites of blood trauma, forging connections between individual violence and local or national bloodshed, including its generational impact. When masculinities are also damaged in this process, they are more difficult to see and remain perhaps limited in their capacity to experience or at least articulate trauma. Finally, perhaps the Fremantle of the novel is a place in which the affects of trauma can be visibly exercised and lived, because there are already reminders in its landmarks.

Notes
1 All references in parenthesis refer to Craig Silvey, Rhubarb (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2004).
4 All information on the Roundhouse obtained from the Roundhouse visitors’ textboards, Fremantle.


Bully

The blood had dried and turned black by the time they got his body up into the sand dunes. It was matted into his hair, dark and sticky, and caked around his nose and mouth. His face was something grisly and theatrical – crooked nose, blue, swollen-over eyes and the horrible, clownish smile where they had kicked in his teeth.

The sun was coming up. They stood in a semi-circle, panting from the effort of dragging his body up the beach. Flies began to descend on the corpse.

“Fuck off!” One of the more nervous boys batted a fly away with his hand.

“Get the boot in, Boolly,” said a boy with broad shoulders and a red, freckled face. “Give him one last stomp for the road.”

“Fuck off, Chooka. Stomp the boot in yourself.”

“Maybe I will.” Chooka kicked the side of the corpse with a dull, sodden thud. The flies hovered for a moment.

“Urgh!” Some of the boys let out a half-laugh, half-groan. Chooka narrowed his eyes at the boy called Boolly.

“Give him a kiss, Boolls.”

“Fuck off.”

“Give him a big, wet kiss.” Chooka pouted his lips teasingly.

“Kiss him yourself, ya fucking pooflah. You’re fucking nuts.” Boolly looked at the others for recognition.

Chooka knelt ceremoniously by the body. With both hands he gingerly lifted the head.

“Boolly, I love you. Give me a kiss, Boolly.” The boys laughed.

“You’re fucking gross, Chooka. You’re fucking disgusting.” Boolly’s eyes darted back and forth as if he was trying to make up his mind whether or not to run.

Chooka got up dusting sand off his board shorts.

“What? Don’t you want to give him a kiss? That’s not very nice. You’ll hurt
my man here’s feelings. Where’s ya manners? I think we better make you be nice. Pin him down,” Chooka commanded.

The boys crowded around Boolly, pinning his arms back and shoving him towards the body.

“Don’t you fucking dare.” Boolly kicked wildly trying to get free.

“Make them kiss,” Chooka ordered.

They pushed Boolly on top of the corpse, holding him there with his arms pinned back. Boolly squealed.

“Oh, God, oh God.”

Eventually, they let go of his arms. He scrabbled on top of the corpse, unable to get his balance before finally getting up, tripping a few metres and then falling back down again to vomit.

The boys were quiet for a moment not knowing what to do. In the background they could hear the sound of the waves and Boolly retching in the sand.

“Now none of you pooftahs say a word about this to anyone,” Chooka stood with his hands on his hips looking at each boy in turn. “There’s no way anyone will fucking know it was us.”

“What if the police ask us where we were?”

“Why the fuck would the police ask us anything? We didn’t even know the guy. They’ve got no reason. Not unless one of you cunts says something,” Chooka glared. “We were out all night partying, right?”

The boys nodded uncertainly. Chooka looked down at the body with disgust.

“Nothing fuckin’ linking us to this poor Mohammed, right?” He gave the body one last kick for the road. “Come on, I’m fucking starving. Haven’t had anything to eat since yesterday” and he marched off down the sand dune. The other boys followed.

Boolly, seeing them leave, got up and chased after them.

“Hey guys, don’t fucking leave me here.”

Far off, the cafes along the beach strip were opening for breakfast. The sun rose higher in the sky, glinting off the water and warming the pavement.

***

We drive up the coast, all us girls. We stay in an apartment, one of the nicer ones, on the beachfront. There’s only one bedroom in the apartment, so Bree says whoever picks up first each night gets dibs on privacy. This means Bree, so the rest of us set up air mattresses on the lounge-room floor. By the third night, there are bowls of milk-logged Rice Bubbles everywhere, wet towels
on the floor and underwear strewn across furniture. By the third night Bree is sick of me.

"Wipe that stupid look off your face," she tells me. I'm used to this. In year three she used to tell me to stop acting superior. It wasn't till I visited Bree's house that I heard her mother use the same line on Bree. Bree's mother works at the supermarket. She's one of the ladies who hands out free samples of sausage meat on toothpicks. She has a sort of halo of fairy-floss blonde hair and pink, fluffy mules that clack when she walks across their linoleum kitchen floor. These days when I go round to Bree's house her mother likes to squeeze my arm conspiratorially and ask me if I'm on the pill.

Lisa and Bree are picking outfits for the night. I sit on the couch watching.

"I can't believe I got fucking thrush," Lisa says, trying on a silver, backless top. "It must have been from sitting in the spa with Damo all afternoon. When he fingered me it fucking hurt." She spins around to look at her back in the mirror. "Does this top show off my tatt?"

To celebrate her eighteenth birthday, Lisa got a tattoo of two dolphins at either end of a rainbow. Her lower-back is still red and infectious looking. Bree scowls.

"I don't think silver is your colour. What are you wearing?" She asks me. I shrug my shoulders in a non-committal way.

"I don't know, my blue top, I guess.

"Put it on."

I go into the bathroom and lock the door. Cosmetics are littered across the vanity - mascara, foundation, eye shadow and the adhesive Bree uses to glue on her fake nails. Bree's real nails are ragged and bloody. She hasn't been able to stop biting them since she was nine.

When I come out Lisa says,

"Oh, not fair. That looks hot." More a complaint than a compliment.

"Let me try it on." Bree holds out her hand. I turn to go back to the bathroom. "Oh God, you're such a wuss, we're all girls here. Can't you change in front of us?" Bree says, but I lock the bathroom door anyway. When I come back Bree yanks the top over her bra. It's too tight.

"You look like a blueberry," Lisa laughs.

"Shut up, Lisa. You've been a bitch to me all day." Bree gets red in the face pulling the top back over her head. She hands it to me. "I guess you're so thin because you never eat any real food."

And I'm used to this, too. I once overheard Bree's parents discussing my family. Bree's dad said my mother looked like the type of filly who didn't shave her pits.
“Rabbit food,” Bree’s mother muttered.

Later, we go down to the beach to meet the boys. We sit on the sand drinking rum and cokes and Lemon Rusks. The boys mess around tackling one another and playing stacks on. Damo and Dave get hold of Lisa and undo the strings that keep her top in place. She squeals, clutching the silver material to her chest.

“Do it up, Damo, you fucking dick.”

“Okay, okay. Keep your tits on.” The boys laugh. Damo ties the string in a bow. Then with one hand he rubs Lisa’s neck while the other hand goes below the waistband of her skirt.

“Done,” he smacks her bottom. “Your modesty remains intact.”

“Modesty?” Bree says, plopping down in Hassan’s lap. “I thought you lost that at twelve, Lisa.” Bree smiles up at Hassan.

This is an important night for Bree. She’s got designs on Hassan Kassis, A-grade footballer and probably the only guy from our school Bree hasn’t been with.

“He’s really sensitive,” Bree says later when the three of us have gone off to pee. The toilet block is closed but we squat behind it, hoping the boys won’t come and bust us. “People take it for snobbing but he’s just, like, really shy.” Bree pulls out a tampon and flings it into the bushes.

“Yeah, I know what you mean,” Lisa inquires. “Like Damo, he might seem like a prick but he’s actually really sweet. Like tonight, he told me my hair looked nice.” We yank down our skirts and lurch back to the beach, Lisa and Bree starting to sway unsteadily in their lucky heels.

By two, Damo’s got Lisa further down the beach and they’re rolling about in the sand. From where I sit I can just make out their black shadows. A crowd of boys are standing around Bree.

“Scrubber! Scrubber!”

Bree looks like she can’t decide whether to laugh or cry. I look over at Hassan sitting by himself smoking a cigarette.

“Hey,” I call out to him.

“Hey.”

“What are you doing next year?” I ask.

“Playing rugby.”

“Oh, right.”

“What are you doing?” He asks me. His face seems sad, almost poetic. When he first came to our school people used to call him Pretty, that amongst other things.

“Design,” I say.
“Do you smoke?” He holds a cigarette out to me.
“No.”
“Do you drink?”
“Obviously,” I laugh, holding up my can of rum and coke.
“I don’t,” he says and I realise he’s telling the truth.
Bree staggers over and crouches down beside me.
“What the fuck are you doing?” She whispers.
“Nothing,” I shrug my shoulders.
“Well, good.” Her breath smells sweet and stale at the same time. “You know Dave really likes you.”
“Does he?” I look over at Dave playing stacks on. I look at the way the back of his ears don’t meet his thin, reedy neck.
“You should ask him to come over,” Bree says.
“I don’t know.”
“Oh, for fuck’s sake, don’t be such a frigid bitch,” and she yells out to the boys. “Dave, Genevieve’s got the hots for you. You better come over here and sort her out!” She pats my shoulder and winks at me before walking off to talk to Hassan.
Later, when we’re kissing, and Dave’s hands are scrabbling around in my underpants, his nails scratching my skin, I look up and see Bree leading Hassan off by the hand. They walk towards the road not looking back.

***

The bus stopped at the train station. A group of boys got on. There were six of them and they pushed their way to the back of the bus quickly.
“Oi!” The driver yelled out to one of them. “Where’s your pass?”
One of the boys stood up, making a clicking noise with his tongue, and sauntered back down the front of the bus. He stood in front of the driver. His shoulders were broad for his height and he held his stiff, muscular arms bent in readiness for a fight. His face, though, was childish and freckled. A malevolent child. A mean-eyed Ginger Meggs.
“One child, puh-lease.” He shoved the money at the driver.
“You’re not a bloody child. Full fare” and the driver took the money and waved the boy away with his hands.

The bus drove through the town centre and up towards the beach. At the back of the bus the boys laughed loudly gesturing to people on the sidewalk.
“Eh, ya fucking poofthah!” They banged on the glass. “Yeah, you! Your pants are fucking gay.”
“I’d tap her,” said one of the boys pointing to a fat girl sitting on a bench
outside the chemist. “I’d tap her for fifty bucks.”

“Yeah, you would, Spewart. Hi, bush pig. Yup, we’re talking about you,” and they slammed on the glass, waving to the fat girl.

“Oi,” yelled the driver. “Shut up or get off.”

Around the boys, passengers turned away, afraid to make eye contact. As the bus approached the beach the boys began to bang on the glass again.

“Mohammed! Mohammed!” Outside the bus, the boy they were yelling at turned to look. “Yeah, ya wog. We’re looking at you.”

The boy raised two fingers at them, calmly and defiantly.

“Did you see that, Chooks? Cheeky, fucking sand nigger.”

The boy with the freckles looked down at the boy standing on the sidewalk. With one bold, inspired gesture the boy on the sidewalk pouted his lips and blew him a kiss. The bus rolled on. The boy with the freckles turned to others.

“If I see that shit-skin again, I’m going to fucking kill him.”

After the boys had exited the bus the other passengers seemed to expand with relief. A woman carrying shopping bags spoke to the neighbour on her left.

“Wasn’t that awful?”

“Yes, I know. Delinquents, the whole lot of them.”

“I never would have had the nerve to behave like that when I was a teenager. I would have gotten a slap off my father for one thing.”

“Maybe someone should give them a slap.”

“They should be locked up, that’s what. Teach them some manners.”

“Yes, but at least that lot was Australian.”

“Yes, I know what you mean. It makes me afraid to leave my house,” said the woman with the shopping bags and she shuddered to demonstrate her fear.

***

Afterwards, he can not stand to look at her. There is something about her stupid, bovine-like affection, the way she flings an arm across his chest and curves her body around him, which turns his stomach. He feels like telling her that her breath stinks. He lies with his arms folded across his chest, unresponsive. She chats animatedly about all the girls she hates, all the friends who have wronged her.

“Genevieve’s just a bitch. Everyone likes her because she’s nice to people but I’m sure she’s the one who told everyone I slept with Marcus Day on the
leadership-building camp. People said he went down on me with my period, which is so not true." She smiles up at him.

He wonders if she's trying to make him jealous.

"I don't even think she's that pretty. She thinks she's fantastic just because she's going to uni and because she went to the formal with Sev but I'm good friends with Sev and he says they never even did anything. He says she's a frigid bitch."

She strokes his chest, admiring the darkness of his skin compared to her own sun-burnt pinkness. It feels strange to her to think how they had made fun of him when he first arrived at their school, how they had called him shit-skin and Osama.

"You don't think she's pretty, do you?" She asks.

"Who?"

"Genevieve."

Hassan pictures the girl in the blue top with the long, dark hair.

"Do you think she's pretty?"

"I don't know."

This seems to satisfy Bree. She knows enough about boys' uncommunicative nature not to push for more.

"Besides, she's probably still a virgin. That's what we think. Lisa and me. She never even gets with anyone." Bree lies back on the bed, pleased with herself.

Hassan looks at her. She has rows of blackheads on her forehead and chin. They're all over her back and shoulders as well. Her sunburn has created a pattern on her chest, red with white triangles where her bikini has been. In the dark, the white of her breasts looks almost fluorescent. She rubs a foot against his leg. The nail on her big toe is black. He stares at it. She lets her foot travel higher up his leg towards his groin.

"You're pretty ugly."

"What?" She smiles at him blankly.

"I don't know about that Genevieve girl, but you're pretty ugly yourself," he says. She takes her foot off his crotch.

"Shut up!" She says it playfully but with a note of panic creeping into her voice.

"No, really, you've got zits all over your face and on your shoulders and shit. You should do something about it. It's disgusting."

She stares at him wordlessly, her mouth open.

"Don't be mean."

"No, I'm serious. I don't know how you can stand to look at yourself. You're a disgrace."
“Shut up.” This time she says it in a flat, quiet voice. She looks like she’s going to cry. He stares at her feeling a strange sense of defiance.

“What?” He raises his eyebrows.

Her face is red. She turns over on the mattress with her back to him. From this angle, her bottom looks childish, vulnerable. He can hear her muffled sobs, her unladylike snuffling.

“What’s your problem? I was just being honest,” he says to her back.

“Why are you being so mean to me?” She says it into the pillow, nasally, pathetically.

“I’m not. Come on, have a bit of backbone. I’m just telling it like it is.”

“No you’re not. You’re being mean.” She sits up. Her face is wet with red splotches of colour. “What did I do to you? I really like you.”

“Oh, come on.” He shrugs his shoulders. “I was just kidding.”

“I think you should leave.”

“Oh come on, Bree. I was just teasing you.”

“I’d like you to leave.” She leans across the side of a bed, picks up a t-shirt and pulls it on.

“Hey, come on. I really was joking. You can take a joke can’t you?” he sighs. Somehow, by acknowledging it, she has taken all the fun out of the game. He puts a hand on her shoulder. The t-shirt she is wearing has a picture of a koala on it.

“Look, you’re not ugly. I was just being a fucking idiot. Ignore me, seriously.”

“Why did you say it then?” She crosses her arms.

“I don’t know. I’m an idiot. I’m a prick.”

“Yeah, you are.” She pulls on her underpants and sits on the edge of the bed. “I don’t know why I bother with all you fucking guys. You’re all pricks.” There is silence.

“Yeah, we are,” Hassan says finally. “And you’re right, you shouldn’t bother with us. You’re way too good for us and we’ll only treat you like crap.” He nudges her, a sly grin on his face, trying to get her to smile. He squeezes her left breast underneath the koala.

“Are you hungry?”

“I guess.” She doesn’t want to sound like a pig.

Hassan gets off the bed and begins pulling on his jeans. “I haven’t had anything to eat for ages. I’m starving.”

“Actually, I’m pretty hungry too,” she concedes. “But there’s nothing to eat in this apartment. Lisa and Damo finished all the Rice Bubbles.”

“I’ll go out and get us something. Some real food.”

“It’s like four in the morning. Nothing will be open.”
"I'll find us something." He seems buoyant, cheerful. "Come on, I'll make you a feast of a breakfast, I promise."

"What about the others?"

"Fuck the others. I just want to have breakfast with you" and he surprises himself by bending down and planting a kiss on her cheek.

He walks along the beach strip in the grey-brown, pre-dawn light. He stuffs his hands into his jeans' pockets and feels the coins knock against one another. Maybe Coles is open, or a bakery. As he walks he starts to feel pretty good. Maybe after breakfast he and Bree can go down to the beach for a swim. Right now, the beach seems deserted but as he walks along the promenade, feeling the crisp early-morning air on his face, he thinks he hears someone yell out behind him.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ALISON BARTLETT teaches Women’s Studies, English and Cultural Studies at The University of Western Australia. Her previous publications are mainly on contemporary Australian women’s writing and discourses of embodiment, including Jamming the Machinery: contemporary Australian Women’s Writing (1998).

ROSS BOLLETER is a West Australian improviser/composer. His work with ruined pianos was the focus of Tura New Music’s 7th Totally Huge New Music Festival in October 2005, The Ruined Piano Convergence where he created the installation Piano Labyrinth. Rob Castiglione is currently making a series of films on Ross Bolleter’s work.

JENNIFER COMPTON is a poet and playwright who also writes prose. In November she will be a creative writing fellow at the Liguria Study Centre. Her most recent publication is a chapbook called Roma from PressPress.

BENJAMIN CORNFORD studied history and literature at the University of Sydney, before being awarded a scholarship to complete a PhD in Late Roman/Early Medieval Italian history at St John’s College, Cambridge. He is currently living in the UK.

BRIAN DIBBLE is Emeritus Professor of Comparative Literature at Curtin University. Doing Life, his biography of Elizabeth Jolley, will be published by the University of Western Australia Press in October 2008.

HILARY EMMETT recently completed a PhD in English Literature from Cornell University. Her interest in alternative ways of imagining kinship arose out of her doctoral research which explored the poetics and politics of sisterhood in American fiction of the past two centuries. She will take up an appointment at the University of Queensland in 2008.

SARAH FRENCH’s first poetry collection Songs Orphans Sing was published by Five Islands Press in 2007.

LUCY FROST is Professor of English at the University of Tasmania and Director of the multi-disciplinary Centre for Colonialism and its Aftermath. Her most recent book, Una Convicta Española en la Australia Colonial (1838–1877), was published in Barcelona in 2007. She is currently working on a book about female convicts convicted in Scotland and transported on the Arwick in 1838.

JENNY DE GARIS facilitates residential workshops in national parks and creative interactions with artworks. These areas of interest have come together recently in her first published book of poems and photographs, Dance of Light.
JEFF GUESS from a background of teaching English in high schools now teaches poetry at the Adelaide Institute of TAFE. He is currently a writer in residence at an Adelaide secondary college. His eighth collection of poetry was *Winter Grace* (2004).

HELEN HAGEMANN has had poetry and prose published in Australian literary journals. She has an MA in Writing from Edith Cowan University, and teaches creative writing on Fridays at the Fremantle Arts Centre in Perth.

SYD HARREX teaches Creative Writing and is engaged in research into the New Literatures in English at Flinders University. His sixth collection of poems is due to be published this December.

ANTHONY HASSALL is Emeritus Professor of English Literature at James Cook University and Honorary Research consultant at the University of Queensland.

SUSAN HAWTHORNE is the author of three collections of poetry, *The Language in My Tongue* (1993), *Bird* (1999) and *The Butterfly Effect* (2005). Her work has been widely published in Australia and overseas. She is a Research Associate at Victoria University.

GRAEME HETHERINGTON is a Tasmanian poet who these days divides his time between Europe and Australia. He is the author of four books of poetry: *Remote Corners*, *In The Shadow Of Van Diemen Land*, *Life Given*, and *A Tasmanian Paradise Lost*.

TREVOR HOGAN teaches in Sociology in the School of Social Sciences at La Trobe University. He is Deputy Director of the *Thesis Eleven* Centre for Critical Theory, and Director of the Philippines—Australia Studies Centre, La Trobe University.

SUSAN HOSKING is a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Adelaide. Her research interests are contemporary Australian literature, particularly that representing interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures.

JILL JONES’ latest book, *Broken/Open* (Salt, 2005), was shortlisted for The Age Poetry Book of the Year 2005 and the Kenneth Slessor Poetry Prize 2006. She won the Kenneth Slessor Prize in 2003 for *Screen Jets Heaven*, and has collaborated with photographer Annette Willis on a number of projects.

JEAN KENT lives at Lake Macquarie, NSW. She has published three collections of poetry. Her most recent book, *The Stain Bronzehair* (Hale & Iremonger), won the 1998 Wesley Michel Wright Prize.

ANTHONY LAWRENCE’s most recent book of poems is *The Sleep of a Learning Man* (Giramondo, 2004) which was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier’s Award, The Age Book of the Year Award, and The Tasmania Prize. A new book of poems, *Bark*, is forthcoming from University of Queensland Press. He lives in Hobart.
RICHARD LAWSON is a writer of short fiction who lives in Sydney. When he’s not looking for reasons why he can’t write, he coaches high school students in English.


DEANNE LEBER has been published in various journals, anthologies and newspapers. Her first collection of poetry, *Book of Days*, was shortlisted for The Western Australian Premiers Book Awards 2006.

CARMEL MACDONALD GRAHAME is a West Australian teacher and writer who has spent the last several years living overseas. She has had poetry and short stories published in Canada and the US as well as in Australia. She currently resides in Victoria.

SHANE McCAULEY has had five books of poetry published. The most recent, *Glassmaker*, was published by Sunline Press in 2005.

LÁN McCREDDEN is Associate Professor in Literature and Cultural Studies at Deakin University, Melbourne. She reviews poetry for newspapers and literary journals, and continues to be astounded by the depth and richness of poetic writing in Australia.

PETER NEWMAN is Professor of City Policy and Director of the Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy, Murdoch University.

MARK O'FLYNN lives in the Blue Mountains where he writes poetry, fiction, and for the stage.

PETER PIERCE was foundation Professor of Australian Literature at James Cook University from 1996 to 2006. Books written in that time include *The Country of Lost Children, Australia’s Vietnam War, On the Warpath* and *Thomas Keneally*. He is currently editing *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*.

GEORGE RAFTT practices law in Melbourne. He recently completed an MA at Deakin University with a thesis entitled *Alchemy & Ambiguity: Poetic Responses to Visual Art, Primarily Portraiture*. His current research project is in the field of screen adaptations of literary works.

VIVIENNE ROBERTSON currently works in arts management with Avon Valley Arts Society and freelance as arts consultant. Her photographs have been widely exhibited.

JENNIFER ROBERTSON’S fiction has appeared in *Meanjin, Griffith Review, The UTS Writers’ Anthology* and *Oberon Magazine*. Her short story, “Paradise”, was selected for *The Best Australian Stories 2006*. 
GRAHAM ROWLANDS is an Adelaide-based poet who has published very widely in Australian magazines, newspapers and anthologies since the late 1960s.


ANDREW SLATTERY is a Newcastle poet. His work has appeared throughout Australia, Europe and North America.

MARIA TAROLANDER is a lecturer in Literary Studies at Deakin University in Geelong. She is the author of the poetry chapbook *Narcissism* (Whitmore Press 2005) and of the critical work *Catching Butterflies: Bringing Magical Realism to Ground* (Peter Lang 2007). A full-length collection of poems, *Ghostly Subjects*, will be published by Salt in 2008.

ALF TAYLOR was born in Perth but was taken from his family to New Norcia Mission as a young child. He has published three books, including the poetry collection *Winds* (Magabala, 1994). His short story collection *Long Time Now* (Magabala, 2001) was translated into Spanish in 2006, and he won the 2004 Patricia Hackett Prize.

ANDREW TAYLOR'S *Collected Poems* was published in 2004 by Salt Publishing. He is an Emeritus Professor at Edith Cewan University, and poetry editor for *Westery*.

GEORGE TOSKOSKI was conceived in Macedonia and born in Wollongong, continues to live in South-West Sydney. He works in a library and grows his own tomatoes.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE is a Melbourne poet, art critic and essayist. His forthcoming collection is *Telling a Horse from a Humidity* (Caracaner), while his recent book of critical essays was *Read It Again* (Salt). He is Chair of the newly-established Australian Poetry Centre.

ANGELA WHITTON was runner up in the *Women's Weekly/Penguin Short Story Contest* 2007 and is completing her first novel.

TIM WINTING is a West Australian writer and campaigner for the coastal environments of the West. His latest publication is *The Turning*, a collection of short stories, and a new novel *Breath* will be published by Penguin in May 2008.
STORIES
Benjamin Cornford
Richard Lawson
Jennifer Robertson
Angella Whitton

POETRY
Jennifer Compton
Sarah French
Jenny de Garis
Jeff Guess
Helen Hagemann
Syd Harrex
Susan Hawthorne
Graeme Hetherington
Jill Jones
Jean Kent
Anthony Lawrence
Roland Leach
Deanne Leber
Carmel Macdonald-Grahame
Shane McCauley
Mark O'Flynn
Graham Rowlands
Knute Skinner
Andrew Slattery
Maria Takolander
Alf Taylor
George Toseski
Chris Wallace-Crabbe

ARTICLES
Alison Bartlett
Ross Bolleter
Hilary Emmett
Susan Hosking
George Raitt
Andrew Taylor

COMMEMORATIVE ESSAYS
Brian Dibble
Lucy Frost
Peter Newman &
Trevor Hogan
Tim Winton

REVIEW ESSAYS
Anthony Hassall
Lyn McCredden
Peter Pierce

Single copies of Westerly
(not including postage):
Aust $25.95
NZ $30.40
USA $19.80
UK £10.40
Euro €15.50

Print Post Approved PP639699/00008

ISBN 978-0-9804371-1-9