The man is a recent arrival in Australia: he has been welcomed at its borders, has paid a sum of money as an economic migrant and has passed the test of exceptional talent which may allow non-Australians to make this country their home. He has traveled extensively throughout his adult life and has already visited the major Australian cities; as well, he has been on a short walking tour in the deep forest of Tasmania and spent four nights in Broome with daytrips out to Cape Leveque and Beagle Bay. He intends to do more travel but in the meantime his understanding of the continent is limited to works he has read, mainly literary works – he is himself a writer of fiction and literary critical works – as well as a smattering of history, environmental studies, and political analysis. Patrick White’s vision of the flat hard earth, a relentless splendour of vast distances of sameness, subtle only if you look or know how to look, and the extremity of heat, is what has informed him, not to take up residence here but to begin to understand what sort of country it is and how it might be possible to call it a home.

He thinks often, and usually it is in a ponderous fashion, about the paucity of tools for recording the profound experiences of life. Making a way of holding these treasures for future reference, for times of need or satisfaction. It is always much easier to turn to the words of others, abstracted in various forms, than to attempt to describe directly any phenomena, with a startlement of the value of what had happened. In times of joy and despair, sometimes the same work can do the trick for him.

This major geographical re-alliance is one of those times for deep consideration, thinking through everything that comes before him with new eyes, and re-assessing key decisions of his life so far. To all intents and purposes, it appears that his will be a relatively long life; he is likely to be through just three of its quarters at his current age, the age that his father’s life ended.
He has already been blessed, his word, in this life. A life constructed out of selective ruin and now entirely re-made according to his design, his aesthetic; his benevolent forgiveness. Without malice or in memory of anything other than goodness, he has settled in a new country, Australia, on the bottom of the world-of-his-choice over the decades of his adult life.

In this reflective state, it is the arbitrariness of so many major life choices that puzzles him. He remembers an important one of his, imagining he understands it for the first time from this vantage, many decades later. In an impressive art museum on a major American university campus, with its marble and glass and domed silence, he identified the perils of fatherhood early — at age twenty-four and during his graduate studies — when he listened to an elongation beyond tolerance of the word daddy by a toddler all through the complex architectural spaces. Not expressed as a whine or any other sort of protest, but as a declaration of love and dependence. That monstrosity ensured no issue ever came from any of his marriages — legal or equivalent — in the face of the desire of some of his women to procreate. Perhaps that doomed them to shorter than till death us do part terms.

Even now, largely alone in another new country at what he considers a vulnerable age, he regrets none of this. Having always preferred the company of adults — even as a child — he is relaxed with his current degree of solitariness. It is in the light of such resoluteness that he wonders where these tears, moving into sobbing, and the general nightly dread he feels when compulsively watching the television news to be faced with the particular, individual stories of the suffering of children, alone or with their families, in desert detention camps; he wonders where this all comes from. The compassion for adults in this dreadful mess is ordinary; the impact of seeing the children and being undone by their despair surprises him, not because of any inherent callousness but because he has always found it easier to identify with like.

In his position of newcomer, or person-without-a-past in the psychic world of Australia, he is reluctant to take any type of stand, even as he recognizes these mistakes being rendered into the historical surface of this nation. It would be impolite; unacceptable. He understands this already from prior experience: in the contentious political field of his home nation he knew how counter-productive the moral statements of “outsiders” had been until the gravitas of a worldwide response has become a commonplace. Hard to imagine in this turbulent world when that moment might be arrived at, though, with the swirling of scandals and flouting of international codes and conventions. But he has noticed the disquiet. Families splitting into parts; this political fallout would require future repair work.
He knows how prone his migration is to failure: that all of the preparatory work could collapse in the whim of an ill-advised, spontaneous public statement. Any perceived heavy judgements could ruin the longer-term intention he has to reside in Australia. An early, but not particularly original observation he made to himself about Australians was the low esteem they held themselves in. Remembering the reception of the Australian-born like Germaine Greer and Robert Hughes when they stepped over a particular line. He has already established a pattern of holding back from discussions with colleagues at his places of intellectual work, people traditionally cast as liberals, as progressive thinkers, after some early attempts that were more like a cat-and-mouse game of disclosure, double-speak, obfuscation. Current politics makes for strange positions and speaking voices. Being more used to frank and fearless discussion with trusted friends and colleagues, this is a strange prelude to learning how to live here, a time of sorting out how trust works.

I know so much of how this is going to play itself out, he tells himself as a refrain; culpability less important than the immediate political considerations. This interior monologue always making him sound so priggish to himself, a strange indulgence. He desires a settling into Australia to take his own space, without the mantle of the expert from outside, with no rights to make claims or judgements. People in Australia were amazed, and honoured, that he had chosen to live here.

There is something of the quality of improvisation in the moments of high influence he finds himself enmeshed in. Introductions at Business Class airport lounges to the Nation’s Leaders (he has a tendency to use capitals whenever he contemplates such people) are attempted. They never appear to be encounters with professional people; much more the gawky discomfort of adolescents he recalls from the end of schooling than what this is supposed to be: the social intercourse of middle-aged people with power, influence, and enough money to allow them to do whatever they care to do, no matter where they had come from in the egalitarian world of their birth.

The one thing instantly proven in the Qantas lounges as he sits quietly, minding his own business, is that in this country as with most of the others he has lived in (apart from England) the general fear of writers by whole sections of the community is palpable. They need to be included in any make-up of a cultural and social world, but they could not really be trusted: observers, double-agents, betrayers. A dinner invitation is extended after of one of these exchanges of bland generalities en route to some other place. A dinner in the bosom of the Establishment, the ruling class of the post-colonial society. Not to his liking; not at all, and a genre he has avoided since
the regular invitations to this sideshow had started with early literary accolades.

One of the guests at this first dinner party is a senior Minister in the Federal Government. It may have been an opportunity, to voice his concerns, to protest, to offer his worldly advice, but this isn’t the way he has ever behaved. That he does not know how to act is disturbing, but without understanding the required codes he finds himself cautious and often silent.

The problem lies with sameness: he recognizes how easily he is folded into this community and how little it takes to deplete the contrary voice, the nascent challenge.

To be fair to the hosts, he isn’t a good dinner guest either; chances of repeat invitations are always unlikely. It’s not that he is rude, but he is one of those people – like the alcoholics, the ideologues, the randy man excited by an audience for his exploits – usually not offered a second chance. Talk just for the sake of filling the spaces around the table, using clever items of weaponry is not for him and turns him close enough to mute. Sometimes he has gone the whole way, though, into silence and discomfort, leaving the aftertaste of a bad reputation for being a snob. Smart arse wanker intellectual, he would imagine would be the first feedback after the event; he’d never had the slightest interest in his scores for performance.

So here he is in this funny new country. The mantra offered to him in virtually every exchange he has with humans – in company or mercantile contact of every sort – is the continuing claim that this is a new country. He knows that much needs to be done to settle his life again. Adopted late, in late middle-age, as his own good idea, he aspires to a clean slate. In response these people have collectively embraced him, even if there is suspicion about what he is doing here. With the prestige earned he covers them, nationally, in a glory-of-a-sort, it is the glory they seem to be enamoured with, rather than what it is that distinguishes him.

How can he do this? Tell them that this is madness, a betrayal of all that matters in a life. That they won’t be able to explain these policies of torture and deprivation to their future children and grandchildren when governments who imposed them have been replaced and motivations forgotten. By then, it’ll be the responsibility of the people; it’ll be their own burden of memory.

The flat hard earth, camps purpose-built or recycled from military barracks. Built to hold men, not designed for detaining vulnerable families. Writing of such places isn’t easy when other camps have the attention of the world, with names like Abu Graib and Guantanamo Bay – where the rule of law dissolves. The effect for him of imagining his new countrymen exiled from their own humanity offers nothing good in return. Barbed wire;
surveilled; the despair cooped up under the heat of the relentless sun. It turns on itself. Malicious acts of self-torture are observed by a camp psychiatrist who resigns in disgust and his own despair when the effective banning of media in the island processing camp of Nauru helps Australians to say, when all is over: we have not known of it! Where else in recent history did people say so? The processing centres with their subjugated and desperate population under the tropical sun is like the Heart of Darkness.¹

The camps in the desert are no better than the camps friends of his – or their parents – survived during the Nazi regime (and, it goes without saying, millions didn’t). As efficient as a way of silencing people and the needs they express, turning them into numbers and stripping them of their human rights.

This is the line proposed by one of his close friends. This is the man who assisted in his entry to Australia, who generously supported his application, a Jew from old Europe whose family went through the Final Solution and, in part, survived. Enough of them, anyway, to allow his birth in Sydney in 1946.

He cannot fully agree, but it is clear to him that the lines of efficiency, that clear-headed set of rules of operation – a contract to a lean commercial prison company from the USA – and the establishment of a code of conduct about media coverage, are a calculated risk by the government to ensure that Australia remains in control of its own destiny.

The Minister, a dour character, makes a bold statement upon introduction at the dinner party, foreclosing on opposition that is never expressed at all on the night, certainly not from our brave, weeping writer, folded into the homogeneity of his new country. I’m off duty tonight, and happy to not mix business with pleasure.

Sometimes, I forget. When I do, and feel my heart hardening against compassion, my own flesh calcifying around my true bones and my veins turning to rivers of iron through my new bones, I know it is time to go back to the edge of the desert. I shall be in good company there.

There are three petrified men standing in the country outside Tibooburra, whose hearts and limbs have been turned to the stone that my own become, sometimes. They are three rocks, although only one remains intact. The other two have bowed to forces beyond their strength over time and under the rain and wind and have broken apart. The story the Wangkumara Aboriginal people tell about the three stones is like this: three men fell in love with women from outside their tribe and were brave enough to make them their wives, in spite of the anger it caused among their people. For their courage or disrespect, they were turned to boulders by magic and now stand as a lesson to all other young men: do not go against the expected order of things. The word Tibooburra means “place of stones.” We four bodies, the rock men and I, are at home here.

Our spiritual home extends three hundred kilometres to the south too, where a “broken hill” was Charles Sturt’s only route through the Barrier Ranges in 1844. Thirty-nine years after Sturt’s journey, a stockman named Charles Rasp rode through this same region and observed the broken-down hill was rich in minerals. He laid a mining claim to the land and was vindicated by his speculation. The Broken Hill mine had some of the finest veins of silver, tin, lead and zinc ever discovered in Australia, and gave rise to one of the country’s most pervasive companies, the Broken Hill Proprietary Company, BHP.

When my heart is more a magnet than a living muscle and I feel drawn to this earth which is brimful with metal, I know that to be put right, I should give in to the attraction. It is the place that reminds me of my origins. It is not an easy journey to make though; eight hundred kilometres from
Melbourne to Broken Hill and two days driving. The road there winds through the grassy, basalt plains of the western districts of Victoria, across the Murray River and into the lake country of New South Wales. By the time I have arrived in the Silver City, several days away from Melbourne, I am restored. It is a journey that I have made only twice and dare go no further north than Broken Hill. I am afraid my car would never make it along the dirt road to Tibooburra, and I am afraid of being disappointed by the dreaming-country I have been thinking of all these years.

But I go to Broken Hill and stand on a cliff outside of town to look northward over the plains. Where the wind blows through the empty desert, it is like the first day of Earth, when only the light and darkness existed. In the Biblical account of Creation, the first man was made on the sixth day of the world, after the land and sky, night and day, the oceans, stars, plants and animals were created. He was formed from the dust of the Earth and was named Adam, from the Hebrew ademah, meaning ground. The Bible refers repeatedly to humankind being made from the soil and in Christian funeral ceremonies, it is said for the deceased, “ashes to ashes” and “dust to dust.” We came from the earth and will return to it. We arose from the ashes and will become them again. But in the years between birth and death, we shall be set afire to blaze with all the life that is ours to claim. In the deep, desert nights, I remember: it is easier to burn in the darkness than do battle with lights of a city that does not sleep.

The Psalmist also reminds us of our metaphorical origins in the earth. He says to the Creator, “You formed my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb...My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place...when I was woven together in the depths of the earth....” The cicadas and microbes and hidden streams and elm trees and humankind all struggle together in a common womb of soil then. In utero and afterward we are kindred. Sometimes, I forget.

On the desert cliffs though, I realise again the common heritage of my body and every other created being, that we come from the minerals of the soil, humus of plants a thousand years dead, from the star wreckage fallen on earth, from the air, the sky and the sea. In the wild places, I remember our dependence. In the wild places, I can feel my spirit and it is joyful. Because in the wild places, I know we are more than simple bodies: we are of ova and the ether both, of heaven and of earth.
THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER'S WIFE

Not an ordinary lighthouse,
her home on the hillside above the channel.
Not an ordinary lighthouse:
a cottage with a double-ridged roof,
south wall bisected by a weather-boarded tower
squared and copper-capped, three keeper-lengths high.

Not an ordinary cottage,
walls as wide as her husband's chest,
the tower-light a maypole the keeper's wife
and daughters skip around west-east, east-west.

Once, she saw a ghost, grey as possibility,
drip salt water along the passageway
some long-drowned former tenant drawn back to trim
the twin wicks, combined bright light visible for miles.

Not an ordinary garden,
she's cultivating granite where the lighthouse stands.
Not an ordinary garden, she's cultivating wind
to harass the keeper's tough-stuff,
growing stunted in kero drums,
through soils he's backpacked in flourbags.
The woman nurtures native rush-grasses in fault-lines,
a reclining melaleuca in the fertile gap between two boulders,
bright lichens as a border between the land and sea.
Not a connoisseur of silence, she's cultivating noise
the sea is never silent here, the nights are never dark.
Working against the keeper is not unlike embroidery and every time her sense of duty hems her in the keeper's wife dwells on the night the light went out, her second daughter's fall into her father's sea; and her own night-blindness; blundering around on the rock in her nightdress in the dark and knowing the storm was tearing the whitecaps from the waves, and she was two-times bereaved.

Working against the keeper is not unlike embroidery. With every pass of his magician's needle through the fabric of the sea, she has a counter-pass with thread: stem stitch becomes herringbone, blanket stitch chain, a temporary tack an oversew, and she resets the hoop daily, straining the weave until the grain is warped. And she rehearses tangles, French knots, lattice stitch, keeps her needles shining, her scissor blades sharp.

And just when she thinks she has her husband where she wants him, she stands at the table in the kitchen comparing cottons, sizing thimbles, tape's capacity to gauge her blackness. When from this vantage point she detects the keeper shepherding the channel current east, she turns it west, when he reroutes the cove rips north, she turns them south, when he guides a freighter cautiously toward the harbour she gouges its hull out on a hitherto unknown shoal.

From the light tower the kero drums, performing their daily cycle of expansion and shrinkage, toll dully. She knows the smell of kerosene as well as she knows her own distilled essence, the scent of her children's hair, the keeper's salty presence. Kerosene smudges everything with its hazy-blue skin: is the lighthouse's other tenant, always present, never seen, a bitter layer on the lips after she's kissed her husband's hand. And remembering her daughter's dog barking until its voice was gone, she wonders how long she could scream before she would not make another sound.
PHILIP SALOM

SECTIONS FROM THE MAN WITH A SHATTERED WORLD

A palimpsest on the story of Zasetsky, brain-damaged in WWII, and his attempts to recover from chronic aphasia, observed by his physician A. R. Luria, the Russian neurologist.

Face-down in Id
shellshock
mudwound
generalanaesthesia
patronymic dreams of
sex and death

as they lift you from your ditch of star-shells
your eyes a crocodile’s opening from the mud

the light is migraine the world is flat where
your name was clouds of smudge

when you lift your head from the pillow
the hospital glare overwhelming overlit

as heaven the wards crowded with the risen
from where dead as deep water the

poem of evermore begins and eats you
stanza by stanza from mud into mudlight

***
Being shot in his left temporal parietal lobes
ruined his right side of everything – a cat-like pupil
pounds like a splinter in his brain:

the images a needle in a groove
should play back crooning
its love of the world... but his universe
recedes by half of everything
and half of every half is infinity
like a metaphysical conundrum

as the tilting halves
of the township are watching
as the women at home are watching
he sees half of a full head of cabbage
on the table in front of him
then half of that leaf then
half a crease...

watching the physicians leaning forwards in their seats
as he stands nakedly before them:
like Rembrandt’s The Anatomy Lesson, the scalpel
and the colours of seriousness
above dissection of the corpse...
he is some kind of criminal?

Pedagogues, scientists, reductionists,
he is halved: his own sight
sections everything
    (the physicians are)
    (sicians a)
    (cia)
    (i)

* * *

He grips the pencil
like an etching tool
to make each sentence
score the surface so
deeply each letter
goes down up into
the blink-sheet of his
left brain, the dark.
Every day he forgets
and starts again.

Who could blame him
falling down drunk in the street
the words burning his stomach
in farmyard fury, trapped, each
hobble and joint pain
a wrecked syntax.

For twenty five years
trying to wake up free of it
the world in one place
the words filling into him
like champagne and listen
to them moved to tears

words which give him back and strip him
as he stares at the pixelating
blackboard.

***

Seeing is a fern in the brain
where the world still drips and whistles.
The eye shapes us, our three
dimensions the urge to copulate.

If he has a lover, if,
then just to see her he must scan
back and forth as if shaking his head.

He stares through the window at cars.
He is a cat, the pupil’s black line.
There’s truth to conjugate: If an elephant is
bigger than a tank, is a 20 year old soldier...?
"Perhaps they took my brain out altogether. Or cut the left side off and put it back in again. I dream. I can imagine with my right. I am a little brain left out in the snow."

At night the air is cold across the valley, a diesel beats like a slow repeating gun under the stars. Looking up he almost tastes the tang of constants the black roof of his brain scattered with salt. The sky is heavy as the Russian language. He its smallest black hole its beating syllable
ROSS BOLLETER

LATE SONATA

(to the memory of Mme Alice Carrard)

I arrive for my lesson
to find her muttering to herself
as she rehearses that late Beethoven sonata
dizzying the summer morning with it angling
its trills at heaven making the fugue an iron cliff that rings
each time she strikes nearly one hundred she lives
on a sliver of chicken and a spoonful of broccoli a day
arthritic eagle hunched over the blue gorge she quivers
an unfiltered Gauloise stuck to her lower lip smoke
pours up into her itching eyes over her wet cheeks
She forgets her way circles back and there again are the crags
and eagle feathers making a mess around the cave’s mouth

At nineteen she played this sonata for her Budapest debut
Weiner her teacher waddled towards her through battering applause
to kiss her and to give his blessing on her wrist his fingers’ fat warm arch
that Liszt had moulded as Czerny (Beethoven’s star pupil) did for him...
maybe lineage counts but she never warmed herself by that fire
just urges herself on scolds herself as her hands struggle with themselves
against their own tightening

No bigger than a child you groan at the dirty labour of uplift and uproar
as a starry sky twists and sings blind sighted a moment
you just miss old Ludwig drunk and beaming as he ambles
in the dazzled gap the intact swiftness of your mottled hands
swallow diving into ivory.
SOMETIME ON THE SHELVES

The first floor of the library
is a warm juggernaut of books
pushing north
in the worst April storm for decades.

The last window is a blear of leaves and rain
and there is no such thing as distance,
where I am bound in the journal collection
reading old editions of the TLS. And

here's a poem entitled Reading in the Library
I might have written had I been someone else
somewhere else. Like mine it deals with time
and place but not the ephemeral
curling of a page
nor the blanch of pen and ink.
I scan it a second time
as if it were a draft of mine:
a midwinter weekend at Margate Sands
each hour constructing an unthinkable fence
of wind and rain it would be impossible
to climb back from –

and what was broken irreparably
anyway, afterwards. As with a tendency of mine
I notice too many adjectives upon the noun
as if one could never be sufficient
for the construct of metaphor and meaning.
Outside the windows the hour is sinking
in cold dark waves of afternoon.
The newspaper pages are reflected in a damp blur
of light and the poem again settles as in a skittish
shower of strange droplets
giving a precipitate shape to words
before the first signs of wreckage.
STEPHEN MUECKE

JÉRÔME’S HAPPY HOUR

Time is suspended so sweetly, Jérôme might think, but he’s not, not like that.

On a Friday afternoon at Black River, he has come back from the reef, pulled up his blue catamaran on the beach, and is hailing his friends, as Ayeesha looks after the catch.

They gather under the palms with a bucket of sweet rum coco. Before time starts again.

They spot the green Landrover coming from Flic-en-flac with the white-shirted driver. And have time for one “Missié James” joke, before he stops and walks over (Bonzour, bonzour!).

Mr James Merryweather, an agent of the modern, sent from the UK: to inject new life and vitality into the fishing industry

“Come on Jérôme. This is a glorious day for fishing. Why aren’t you working?”

“I don’t have to, Missié James. I came back yesterday with 75 pounds of capitaine and vacoas. I’ve got enough money to last the weekend!”
“Look, Jérome……”
He is ignoring the others who are smirking or sleeping.
“If you get more fish,
you can buy a big boat with an outboard.
And then take tourists out,
and make more money!”

Jérome’s eyes open a little wider
in mock-negro surprise:
“A big white house, more children
a gold necklace……. for Ayeesh”.
(kissing the illusory jewel away,
with a theatrical gesture, for the drinkers).
Takes a puff of one of Merryweather’s du Mauriers.

“And when I am rich, Missié James, what then?”

“You’d be an old man by that time, Jérome.
You could then stop working
and lie on the beach and enjoy the sun!”

“So what am I doing now? Enough fish, no work, plenty of sun!”
and he cackles until he coughs and spits.
And takes a good slug of rum coco.

And the Englishman goes off to his own clubby happy hour
at Flic-en-Flac,
watching the sun set in the ocean as
five women in red saris make pujas to Lakshmi on the beach.
And he complains to the teacher Ramesh Ramdoyal
who writes it all up in
Tales from Mauritius: A Supplementary English Reader.
There are questions at the end for the pupils,
Who were also becoming modern, in 1979,
as the reef fishing is running out and
ocean trawlers are coming in.

“In the story ‘Live Now, Pay Later’ who do you think is more sensible – Jérome or Mr Merryweather? Give reasons for your choice.”
As soon as you have choice, 
you are a modern subject. 
You can hone a moral technology, 
becoming professional, 
going about giving people advice.

But they might think. 
Did Jérome really have a sensible choice? 
Or Mr Merryweather? 
The only thing that can really compete 
with a fleet of trawlers, 
is the happiness of rum coco 
in the filaments of a long hour.
He places his suitcase on the slatted stand, his jacket on the bed. Unpacks only what is necessary. Journal, photo pouches, mobile, laptop, camera. He plugs the last three in. Underpants, toothbrush, belt, electric shaver, there's none provided, so now he'll need to buy another converter. He likes to shave without looking, while reading the English papers on the Web.

Next he hangs up his leather jacket, his one blue suit. The three new white shirts he always buys in airports, always the same brand if he can manage it, he puts on the shelf with the extra pillows and the duvet which will be too hot in this air conditioning and which features blue flowers, not pink. He arranges the toiletries on the white tiles of the bathroom, removes the small wrappers of the rectangular soaps that will never lather. He opens the shower cap, hoping it might be different, but it's the same crinkly type with elastic which breaks. Its cling film look reminds him of a BBC crime thriller he saw in the middle of his night, on the plane. A sucked in mouth, a look of genteel surprise. Red suffocation. There's always too much clutter in these rooms.

Next, without fail and no matter what time it is, because he has drunk already on the plane, he investigates the mini bar. Takes one Heineken, one baby bottle of vodka, nothing more. He leaves the crisps this time, as insurance. He has been to Munich before, he doesn't eat meat, knows very little German, even though he speaks French and Italian and Spanish, and he has nearly starved. He refuses to learn German, because of his father, because of the things they did. Words give power, so do pictures, well that's what people say.

He takes off his clothes, turns on the TV, flicks through porn and soccer. Finds a channel in English, turns down the sound.

The last thing he does is check the view. It is of concrete car parks, empty because its Sunday, stuttering in a cantilever pattern which an architect thought would add interest to the grey. Traffic lights glare red then orange.
through the fogged window, the slanting rain. The pavement is dotted with black umbrellas. The people under them in heavy overcoats, in black and brown and navy. Plump little rain clouds blossom mutely on the TV map.

It is to be expected. It is March in Europe. He shouldn’t take it personally. And much of Germany seems grey. The sky, the fields, the office buildings, the old men in tweed jackets at the airport, drinking steins of beer at seven in the morning. The road signs on the autobahn the only jolt of adrenalin, glaring yellow in the drizzle. Ausfahrt. The language growls and barks. The Australian he shared the taxi with, a computer software salesman who’d never been out of Adelaide, found this funny. His accent so flat and strangled after so much time away. He leant over, the smell of wet jumpers and Juicy Fruit rife on him. He poked Philip in the ribs. Gestured to something out the window, as if the whole of Europe was some sort of playground joke. Philip kept his eyes unfocussed. Watched the fields roll by, ploughed grey and grey and grey.

The beer is gone, the vodka is warming him. The ceiling is featureless, not a crack, not a stain. He opens the letter, turns on the bedside light. The same words unroll as they did in Paris, in Saigon, in Manila, as they did on the plane. For four weeks they’ve just bounced around different cities. Different rooms.

Your dog is well, although I had to take him to the vet the other day, he had flea allergy and dermatitis, from the hot weather, he was itching like crazy and he’d pulled out big hunks of his fur. I’ve tried a few but he won’t answer to them. He keeps sitting in the hallway and staring at your room. Do you know it’s been three years?

Philip any idea when you are coming back?"

It may as well be in German. He just doesn’t understand.

He folded the letter and puts it under the table lamp, which is pink and frilly and reminds him of busty ersatz German beer hall wenches, the little satin ribbons which tie up their overflowing tops. All of these things – the Neopolitan ice cream decor, the big busted frauleins, the cling-wrapped airiness, the black words curling in Alice’s frail-wristed longhand – float through his brain with the same precise weightlessness.

It’s a different country, a different room, a different moment. But nothing has changed.

* * *

“March 21, Munich, Flight long and uneventful, too many changeovers, had to wait for four hours in Charles De Gaulle airport, on a bench. Food was crap.
It was hot where I left, cold here. I have diarrhoea from the bad hotel with the off-smelling milk. I have the wrong clothes. The wrong money. Or I'm in the wrong place. Need to go shopping. Need some more euros. Conference starts tomorrow, 1pm. Have nothing prepared. No extrapolations or interpolations, no theories and scaffolds of reverberating meanings to impart. The photos will have to speak for themselves. Need to check out how to get there, the rail or the tram."

The pen runs out. He decides to go walking. The four walls of the room pressing in. A familiar feeling, as if there are just the walls and a vacuum between them, a vacuum outside. Arbitrary, the idea of home in a strange city, as if placing his toothbrush next to the sink gives some locus. This is the prescribed escape route, part of the system. Learn the metro stops, buy a bus ticket, see the locations and the architecture, trace the web of horizontals and verticals, let them define him, however sparsely. Find a space in which to stand.

* * *

The English Garden. In the German way of writing it, [you can almost hear the sneer – Q: do you really want this??]. A soft green stomach in the middle of this grey stone city, ribbed with curving paths. Where water breaks the landscape, perspectives beckon. An arch of bridges, receding like a raised eyebrows. No crematoria here.

Instinctively he frames the photo, considers it, holds it a moment, then drops it through the hierarchy. It wouldn’t translate, wouldn’t work. He can tell by now what will parlay its evanescence. What he can deliver, exposed and bloody, to the waiting eye.

The paths are clogged with nannies, puffing joggers, obnoxious children on wheels. German people don’t seem to know how to run. Beside the lake, a child, its tiny trench coat pulled tight over a sausage-filled stomach, almost throws itself in the lake after its piece of bread. Philip’s finger hovers on the camera button again but then its parents’ shouts bark out, full of crunching muesli sounds, that no nonsense brusqueness of people with well regulated bowels.

He walks away, fast. He’s getting hot, bothered, irritable. Alice’s letter rustling in his pocket. An insect flurry, a faint intercontinental whine. Alice following him like a crackly raincoat on a bolting horse. Turning a corner, the path splits, into the shape of a hand splayed rigid against glass.

He’s lost in a whorl of green arteries. Deep in the severe grace of linden trees.
Beside an old iron drinking fountain in a children’s playground – plastic, deserted, icy with shadows – there is, ironically, a smell of frankfurts in the air. It soaks his nostril hairs, he almost feels a boiled yellow scum forming on his tongue. But even with this gaudy stinking signpost, there is nothing in his head. No images spring to mind. Only photos. Alice’s photos. Alice remembering, with her camera-shaped eyes. Frankfurts spitting in a pot of pink water, splitting their skins. The larger ones his father favoured with mashed potato and Branston pickle, those were called saveloys. They were rudely huge and lobster red, something embarrassing about them. A faint memory, long ago, of the next door neighbour doing something furtive with one left uneaten on the barbeque. A florid man, in King Gee work shorts, laughing, winking, belly rolling, only just this side of humour, that laugh. On the other side of the fence, his skinned lasciviousness wobbled through a knothole. Philip only remembers this because – puzzled, curious, wanting to know the logistics – he went straight in and scientifically, like his father, wrote it all down.

There should be a tribal connection, something he owns, with this smell rising up. Somewhere way back his father’s family was German, and Philip’s father remembered this fact and passed it on, blunt and unadorned, in a letter. A fact cut from its underpinnings, dissected from his own grandmother’s memory, passed down by generations like the family Bible with its spiky sepia signatures. We were German, his father said, apropos of something or other. Later from books Philip attached postcards and notes and cliched detail – thick coils of thick sausage and head scarves and work ethics, their saving up for cold winters, wet firewood and pearl backed accordions and grey sauerkraut. Nothing rang a bell.

Philip’s birthday, nothing German about it. It was a hot Australian summer, with flies and chlorine pools and cricket played on the oval near the creek. Frogs, later, in the bowl of water softhearted Alice left near the back tap. Of course he doesn’t remember this. Alice wrote it in his journal. She took pictures. Rabidly, greedily, with an edge of desperation. Alice’s pictures record things as she would like them to be. She edits life like it is a magazine. Everyone in Alice’s photos wears a slightly weary smile. Usually blurry and out of focus and badly framed, but full of rose coloured hope.

The party was the only one and also the last before his mother ran away. There was fairy bread and party pies and cocktail frankfurts and chocolate ice cream, according to Alice and her never-ending photos. There were children of course, invited by Alice with her little homemade paper cards, entwined
with pink flowers and silver stars and dimpled hearts. She passed them around the playground to a lot of boys Philip barely knew.

Alice saved all the photos in a shoebox, under her bed. Insists now on sending them, at parsimonious intervals. Piece by piece, like a kidnapper. These arrived this morning. An ear lopped off. A boy beheaded. A child’s chocolate covered thumb. Philip himself, stone faced under a pointed party hat. Some child crowing over winning the parcel, which contained only a minutely wrapped packet of jellybeans. You can see it in the photo, the waiting disappointment curled like a snake inside flushed pink cheeks. Their mother, presiding over the birthday cake, in a starched white party dress, a cigarette between her fingers. Long grey ash hovering dangerously over Alice’s purple icing. She made the cake look like a telescope, joining log rolls together, for Philip, his favourite thing. Or so Alice had decided. A photo of the cake on a card table, looking like an engorged donkey’s dick. His mother regarding it slightly scornfully, the glint of a few gin and tonics in her eyes. A picture too of their father, interrupted in his work, dragged there by Alice, helping Philip blow out candles. Someone has stuck a too small gaily-coloured hat on Philip’s father’s head. What should be funny is chilling. No amusement in his eyes. He looks coldly affronted, stiffly polite. And one hand and a leg and an eyebrow and those eyes of his like Philip’s, grey-green, frigid as the North Sea, already travelling, already leaving, on their trajectory, out of frame. From no matter what angle you caught him, his eyes were a hall of mirrors, already somewhere else. His father only ever willing to donate an archaeology of himself the faintest trace. To find him was like trying to find a word for an unnameable but furiously perfect thing.

* * *

At dusk, the orange sits on the bedside table. He bought it from the hotel restaurant, the Wintergarden’s it called, they were using it for decoration, the only real piece of food in a platter of wax. He asked if it was plastic, mimed chewing, the waiter gave him a puzzled look. They understood that well enough.

He’d like to eat it, but the acid would be bad for his stomach. Also he likes the glow it gives in this grey-brown room. To unwrap it, peel it, cut it into quarters, would be to ruin it, reduce it to garbage. So he lies there, basking in its sun.

He’s taped his photos up across the mirror as usual, blocking out his face. There’s the one of the stick house in the river, angled with the current, like a tree blown into a leaning shape by wind. But this was no long erosion,
you can almost hear the creak of frail foundations, the suck of river mud. Two hundred killed by water the colour of cholera, a malicious yellow brown.

Grey driftwood, one old thin woman crouched over a cooking pot. Bangladesh. Five years ago, according to the journal. Her white hair fronds in an inappropriately girlish way to the corner of her mouth. His framing is perfect. The black cooking pot, her spindly house of sticks. Skin puckered with moles. No teeth. Her jaw lumpy with the lack of them, her eyes somehow dead in the water, lost the moment before.

A child, knee deep in dust. The Congo, last year. The pot belly of starvation on him. His small white penis, curly pale as a pig tail against brown skin. He holds a bowl out, a third world Oliver Twist. There will be a collective sigh of nostalgia at that one, he'll be able to set his watch by it. Here is something they can recognise. They like the neatness of the allusion, like to hear the suave easy echo of their internal hollowness, spinning round and round.

A man with one leg. Vietnam. The remaining leg thin and ulcerated. The lost leg, a bloody stump from the knee down. It blooms there arterially, in black and white. His face sullen. And why not. To what use will he be put. To what appreciative audience will he be served, like a dumb animal on a plate.

Phillip will of course offer a short potted history for the uninitiated. The needling little faux memory voice, it will be his father's. Precise, bloodless, taxonomic. Demanding he record these things, to what purpose, he's never sure. The war, the logistics and geographies, the official propaganda. Some local colour in case in the facts are too boring. The American aeroplanes still lying weed infested at the airport. The airport itself, a shed with computers that are really just disconnected grey boxes. The colonial architecture, old wedding cakes dripping grey in humid heat. The tales of the tunnels having to be widened to fit in fat broad shouldered GIs. The propaganda films shown in a small hot yellow museum amid the buzz of insects, the determined, sullen silence of slogan filled minds. Things in bottles. A hand, a foot, a thumb.

Skulls, finally. Cambodia. Rwanda. A famine or civil war somewhere anyway, the link is gone. A child's saucer eyed head next to a stack of them, he won an award for that. For the white teeth and visible joints and the tremulous smiles. Their big heads on tiny bodies, sickeningly similar to the celebrities in trashy airport magazines.

The close up of an old woman in a headdress. The vibrancy of her bandanna lost in Philip's taut strictures of black and white. She wore orange and purple and magenta, he knows this because he has a colour version, and he knows he took the picture but he can't remember pushing the shutter or how the street smelt or what the roasted guinea pig tasted like, although he
knows he was there, he wrote it in his journal. there are times and places and dates. And the pictures. But they are peculiarly lifeless here, as if the brown and beige and greyess is leaching out all movement, all personality. There is no topography any more, his photos offer no relief.

The orange though, it's here. It burns with unreal intensity under the pink frilled lamp. The skin bumpy, human like, with pores. It repeats itself gaily inside the empty bottle of beer. He thinks of lampshades and Nazis and a stretch of tattooed skin, a Poe story he read. He annotates the oranges with these fragments of knowledge he has gleaned. If he thinks hard about it, if he makes a mental list, he can even remember what it tastes like. No, remember is not the right word. He can construct, by a process of deduction and logic and elimination, the taste of the orange. There are words which spring to mind. Sharp, sweet, string, sting. He keeps a mental filing system for things like this.

He knows if he peels it, there will be thick white pith, the flesh of it also humanoid in its wrinkles and segments, its sinews and strands. It will be sweet or sour, watery or so juice filled it will spurt across the sheets. He knows that it is round, or in this case, sort of oval, with lifelike bumps. It's not plastic, it's irregular and cosily imperfect, or it is, before he takes a picture of it, freezes it forever in its imperfection, which does something to it, which makes it tasteless as the plastic grapes on the Wintergarden's buffet spread.

He remembers Alice talking about oranges, her favourite fruit. Well, he doesn't remember exactly, she wrote it down, at his request. Years ago. In his journal. On the very first page.

I remember, remember. They are always her words. He remembers her remembering. The sharp sting of orange juice in a split on her lip, after she fell off her bike and their father peeled her an orange, to cheer her up, distract her. The way her first boyfriend smelt of oranges, he was always eating them for breakfast and lunch, cutting them into small segments with his Swiss army knife. He smelt of oranges and of poppyseed rolls. His skin, scarred by acne, looked like orange rind. But blueish, she said it looked blue. He was lying under a mozzie zapper, they were having sex in a park. He had a lot of springy blue-black hair. There was orange juice on his chin.

She remembers too her grandmother remembering about the gem-like importance of oranges, how they had a different memory then, in the Depression or before, than they do now. How there was always an orange in the toe of her Christmas stocking, and a few walnuts, little simple treasures, and Alice would sigh and smile. The maudlin, the sentimental, the touching, these are Alice's territory. A wide and formless country, full of spiralling borders, dense jungles, female swamps. These are her memories, not his.

In their different ways, they are the same, Alice and Philip. Blank, white, bloodless. Like photos exposed too early to the light.
SISTERS

Stand waiting to sing at the silvery microphone. The song text is taped to the stand, the backing music will come through the headphones. Check your distance. Not the yards to the gates and the road, lined by the dark cypresses, where at some time Michael will arrive. I don’t mean, either, that two miles to the nearest town, pale Llucmajor, where Michael might pass through. Check simply those careful centimetres to the microphone. Look down to your feet: your spot has been marked by yellow tape on the floor. Willy himself jerked the tape from a roll, cut strips with scissors and stuck them there. (He held me by the arms showing me where to stand, held me in his blue-eyed gaze. I smelled his hair gel. He deliberately brushed my nipples; that’s Willy. But I ignored this because I know I am too strong for him, he will not have me, nor my sister.)

I’m alone with Willy and Terry the dog at his studio outside pale Llucmajor, in the middle of nowhere.

The town at least is on maps. Far from tourist trails, it’s a dusty pueblo of closed shutters in the statutory Mallorcan green. Where are we geographically? Splice Mallorca down the middle and you would go cleanly through Llucmajor’s Plaça d’Espanya, on Sundays turning it to a rubble of apricots and almond shells and fine shoes; on days like today turning it to plain dust; leaving an Iberian Mediterranean to the left and Italian Med to the right. (Think Mediterranean without the water: olives, citruses, fireflies, but no blue seas thick with life; this is dry land on the Mallorcan plain.)

It is the final day for recording, set aside for putting down the last singing track and a piano solo.

My sister Chrissie will pass through that dusty square with Michael, whom we are extremely lucky to have, excited to have. I’m willing them to arrive, don’t let them stop in Llucmajor.

“Wait for it, Denise.” My eyes meet Willy’s blue-eyed gaze, black and silver bristle, his glistening tan. “Before you give me soul —” I give him a
quizzical look: Soul? “You know what I mean, Denise – your soul. Before you do, first I have to cut back that echo. Give me one minute. Two.”

Two minutes to imagine Michael and Chrissie on the Harley-Davidson. I picture them already leaving the square, passing the statue in homage to the shoemakers of Llucmajor before building up speed. I imagine them glimpsing, laid out on trays, apricots which have been halved to look like ears; revving past the empty outskirts of the town at siesta. Soon to draw up at the studio, to buzz the intercom. It takes a minute for Willy to go to the gates with Terry, a golden Labrador, an unlikely breed to protect recording equipment in the middle of nowhere.

Terry is the same colour as the town. Terry and Willy, two lone dogs.

Our souls are very small and difficult to see and find. This is because they are not in our hearts but in a drop of blood. This drop of blood may be used once in a lifetime.

Listen: the technology is perfect. Listening through the headphones is like hearing outer space, hearing nothing. When I push the headphones half-off both ears: not even the air-conditioning, nothing. If Llucmajor is on maps, the studio is on nothing, amid nothing. Beyond the silvery microphone, past the sliding glass doors of the studio: nada. The half-dozen cypresses, rippling and waving. Indigo-grey clouds, set fast in the sky. To the right, a patio with a white table and chairs. No life the other side of the glass doors except sporadic forays by Terry, sniffing and searching the haphazard searches of a dog. Beyond him, in the driveway of cracked concrete, between kerbs of cheap brown tiles: still nothing. Panning left, there is that old Citroen stopped in the grass, between bamboo clumps; a delivery van with rusted blue and silver panels, halted for ever just short of the swimming pool, an indecipherable name above its twin windscreens. An N, a G, possibly IR at the end.

Still Willy is sliding the switches at the console. Captain on the bridge, he adjusts dials, swivels aside on his black leather chair. What are we waiting for? Where are Michael and Chrissie at this very moment? “Nearly there, Denise.” He and Michael are so different. Yesterday Willy said: I would like a young air hostess – as if he was hungry for some juicy chicken.

“Ready. Watch the third line again,” he says pushing his sunglasses firmly up in his hair. “My brother knows where the best bars are. Aim for best bars the whole time. So it’s best bars.”

But a phone rings: Willy disappears from his place at the console. A bridge with no captain. I re-tape the text (Crescent City by Lucinda Williams) to
the music stand, hang the headphones on the headphone stand.

I leave the room to stroll to the Citroen. It’s warm out. Years before, the van must have been driven across the neighbouring plot to stop at the pool. At its tail the rusted roof of a rusted counter is propped open still, like a roadside stall selling fish, eggs. I hear the cypresses. I walk over and touch one as cars zip by, headed west towards Palma, causing the branches to spring back and forth. Terry barks and I head back past the pool, a pit of leaves and brown stains. There goes a red dragonfly, quivering. I stroke Terry behind the ears and he beats his tail against some bamboo. Other than the Citroen, he’s the only attraction. The count of activities between takes is: three strolls to the Citroen to two playing with Terry, to one encounter listening to takes and watching the seismographs of sound on the screen, fielding Willy’s flirtations. I see there’s a tree with blue plums beside the studio wall.

Slipping through the sliding doors I reinstall myself at the stands and the headphones and the tape on the floor and the silvery microphone.

Willy comes back brashly, ripping the wrapper off a Mars bar, a panther with a lump of meat. Energised, as if he’s been vigorously showering. As if he and his wife have been fucking. Something I don’t want to think about. “OK Denise. How come you don’t look really like your sister, by the way?” I don’t answer; I dangle my arms. “I mean, you are twins, mm?” “What’s that to do with you?” “Just wondering, Denise. No sweat.” “Chriissie was in a bad way for a long time; ill. That’s what made her so thin.” “You two are so different,” says Willy ignoring this information, “yesterday it crossed my mind you might have been after Michael; interested. Today I thought: So how come Chriissie’s the one on the motorbike?” He stops chewing and scrunches the wrapper, dropping it carefully in a bin. “Denise?” “She likes motorbikes. Can’t you spare me your inanities?” “Sure, I’m very short on inanities.” “Well then,” “We’re all set. Sing into the mike from any side, any way you want. Could be the last take. Best bars.”

Big Michael is astride his Harley-Davidson with Chrissie behind clutching what she can of his great girth. Barely able to see in front of him, she drops her head to look back one last time at the valley of Sóller, the sprawl of town and sprinkling of orange plantations. She looks up and the silvery forks of the handlebars dip and twist through a narrow gorge. She leans with Michael. Under the mountains the road is clear; they roar through the cool tunnel connecting Sóller with the Mallorcan plain. Michael accelerates. Chrissie shuts her eyes, trying not to suck in tarry air. Underground video cameras would catch big Michael in sunglasses, turning to grey his French-blue aertex shirt; would see Chrissie in a sweatshirt, without the pink hoops on grey. It
seems they are below the mountains only a matter of instants, before Chrissie, eyes still shut, feels her eyelids turn orange, filtering light. Out of the tunnel, back in the sun – still ten miles from pale Llucmajor – and groves of olive and almond trees fly by, attached to pale fincas set back from the road. Chrissie feels magnetised by a sense of adventure.

For a few hundred yards they draw alongside the rattling carriages of the old Sóller train. Michael glances at it; a boy waves; the boy would see Michael’s greying hair beneath his helmet, Chrissie’s blondness fluttering. The Harley veers back to the centre line. They bear down on a station; the road arcs away from the tracks. Chrissie inhales lungfuls of happiness. She looks at her watch: they are making excellent time. They speed on, over the plain of La Pla towards the mountains of Randa and Llucmajor, where Michael is to lay down his piano solo.

People say Michael is a musical genius.

I said to Chrissie: Chrissie, I hope for poetry. I pray.

After that: I pray he will want me.

Willy’s studio may be in the middle of nowhere but access to it is dangerous. The blue gates with their spikes and alarms (for show, admits Willy) shut directly onto the road. As a car waits at the intercom, its rear blocks the road and a sudden chicane forms on the C171, the fast straight crossing the dry fields between Palma and pale Llucmajor. Those Spanish cars fly past at eighty, ninety miles an hour. A crazy car could crash into you as you wait. Does Willy care? Willy? Willy cares about Willy. He has Terry and he has glacier-blue eyes and an expensive studio and no other cares; he has no wife or air hostess in the back or anywhere.

Nonetheless he is worth having for his work, his energy. Willy is energy, Chrissie reckons. Sometimes misdirected. But energy is good, good for making music. Energy is good for love-making, but not always enough. Chrissie says he would not be tender with a woman.

Would Michael be tender?

I can see my sister leaning, catching sight of him, unable to make out his words, and him leaning back, guessing at hers. The Harley decelerates majestically to turn off the main highway, for Bunyola.

She presses a hand on Michael’s great shoulder. I want to stop, she shouts in his ear.

Here?

I’ve been loving it so much, she says as the revs die. I want to feel there’s a second ride to come.
The Harley pop-pops to a halt by a field. They lift off their helmets. Michael’s shoulders are brown against the blue of his shirt. Chrissie walks about, stretching and shaking her legs. Michael sits against a grey stone wall, his hands behind his head.

Chrissie, he says, you and I can go for a ride any time.

My sister – Denise is wondering if you’re going straight back home. After the recordings are done.

No, I don’t think so.

She’ll be pleased. We’ll all be pleased.

Ah, don’t tell me, Chrissie, you are trying to precipitate events –

We are sisters.

I like Denise, of course.

God what are those?

Those are watermelons.

On the ground? Like that? I thought they always had stripes.

We can take one with us. Or look for a striped one in Llucmajor. They’ll have all kinds.

Let’s not stop there.

We should. It’s a historical town.

Chrissie reaches over and strokes him on the chin, her hand barely touching. Or does she? Would she do this?

Historical? she says. As in what?

This would be a familiar talk, I heard it from him last night as we ate fish from the grill and drank wine. Chrissie had turned in, leaving us alone at the big hotel table under the vines and the fairy lights. It was warm out still.

Does history matter? Michael can make you think it does.

It was just our second encounter.

He sat across from me. There were dishes and bottles and paper and pieces of bread strewn about the table.

I recognised you by the beach this afternoon, I said. You were deep in a book.

Yes, he said. Getting my bearings in Mallorca.

I’m reading A Winter in Mallorca by George Sand.

Well, he said, two people reading. It’s an ancient art.

Reading is?

Yes, he said: reading is.

I sipped my wine. There were stars out over the mountains. Reading is. I asked about his book. It was a history book.

Long ago, under the same stars, there were kings of Mallorca. The last,
Jaume III, was killed in battle at Llucmajor. He had striven to reclaim the island from his hated cousin of Aragon, who had held it for six years. By the time they were reinstalled on the island, Jaume’s forces were sick, debilitated, and they fought. Jaume was beheaded by a common soldier. It was 1349.

Michael looked at me steadily as he poured himself water.

I’ve looked carefully at the map, he said.

What map? I asked.

Several maps.

You like to be thorough.

I am.

Is it also an ancient art?

Being thorough? I don’t know.

Apparently, careful study of these maps revealed the very path of C171 was the line of march taken by Jaume’s army. On this ancient track, Jaume passed Willy’s studio going east, that is, from left to right. The following week the armies of Aragon tramped by in the same direction. Another week and the same armies of Aragon, but reduced slightly in volume, passed back from right to left. There followed a week empty of marching armies. Willy and Terry would have waited, looking right, listening for the sound of feet from the right, in a march that never came. Jaume’s army did not, could not, would not pass again. In the week following that week of waiting, Mallorca was declared definitively part of Spain.

“Denise I was just aiming to be friendly.”

“Back, Willy. Just put the coffee in the cup. Then push it this way.”

“Why sit so far off? I don’t bite, Denise. Come on.”

“It’s a big table out here. I’ll sit where I like.”

It’s no use telling Willy about souls, but the drop of blood of a singer may appear in one word on one note in one song. Everyone has their drop, which may appear in a remark, a gesture, an insight. A kiss.

Even then, only the persons themselves may be aware they are showing their souls. Recognising them is almost impossible.

“Something to eat, Denise?”

“No thanks. Why do you keep calling me Denise?”

“Isn’t it obvious. Or would you prefer something more – more tender?”

“No. Let’s change the subject.”

Does Willy have a soul? Surely, somewhere, even Willy. This place has a soul: in an old rusting van. A line of dark trees.

“OK Denise. Change to what? Do you know any air hostesses? Flight attendants?”
“Forget it, Willy. Do you think we’ll make money on all this?”
“We have to. Or we have a problem. And we have a problem anyway.”
“What?”
“Because, Denise, as I don’t need to tell you – our young customers out
there don’t buy their music any more. What’s more, they don’t even have to
decide what to buy, because they don’t buy. They don’t need to discern
what’s good and what isn’t. And it’s good to be able to choose, it makes you
–”
“– stronger”
“Stronger, thank you. Denise. Now I’m a discerning person.”
“I was wondering about that.”
“I choose you.”
“I choose Michael.”
“Well, that’s illuminating.”
“It’s been an illuminating break, Willy. For you at least.”
“It’ll be the last. It’s back to work. I make it três horas.”

I see the Plaça waiting for them like a film set. Its narrow triangle, dull as
dust. The church dominates less like a church in a square than a silo in a field.
There are shut doors, a dingy supermarket, the red-awned Bar Tabú and
white Café Colón. Will they stop there, and where will they go? Willy and I
eat breakfast to a jangle of discotheque music in the Bar Tabú. Café Colón –
we saw through the doors – has marble-topped tables and white crockery
painted brown and swirlingly Café Colón, but is even more dead to business
than the bar.

The Harley draws up, or does it draw up? If it draws up, it will be not to
local consternation but to indifference. Indifference, because there is
something impenetrable about Llucmajor: impenetrability is a crimson
thread running through it. It is crunchy nuts and handmade shoes, is old
discotheque music and marble together. Llucmajor is as exciting as a

(For the soul of a place, unlike that of a person, is never disguised; is pre­
cisely what is on view; is as it appears.)

My talk with Willy has cut a knot. Now I can sing fulsomely. I can see Michael
in front of me and I can’t describe the moment we kiss but I think there must
be many opportunities for people who want this, if he wants this, and I sense
he is coming to want it.

“That’s it, Denise. Just drop everything, leave it where it is.”
“Finished?”
“Just Mike now.”
Damn right, Willy. I leave the silvery microphone, go and join him and Terry in the next room. He’s in the thrall of his switches. Now I’m done I’m less tense. I feel like I’ve been drinking wine. Last night we drank enough. I can still see Michael pushing back the table to make more room for himself.

So what, he asked, befell George Sand?

I was able to tell him that after a dire winter on Mallorca with a sick Chopin, she claimed Mallorcans were a lazy bunch, lazy for not exploiting the natural riches of their island. Instead of turning more pesos by, say, organising the transportation of more oranges to a second port as well as a first, they mooched off and ate the oranges themselves. They sat around playing cards.

Also an art, said Michael.

We looked at each other without wavering.

Reading is.

Thoroughness may be.

I remember too thinking: to George Sand Mallorca lived in an air of defeat. It felt like a dilute version of what it could have been.

She could have claimed that king Jaume’s contribution, his drop of blood, had been to leave the island with this desultory air. So ignoble are souls sometimes.

If we lie in bed together I will tell him about souls. When we lie there.

Forget the stripes on the melons. Let’s skip Llucmajor, Michael. We can reach Willy’s down the back roads.

OK Chrissie. That may be shorter.

We go so fast.

Do you want us to go slower?

No. It’s a thrill.

I had plucked a plum from the tree beside the studio and was peering in through the windscreens of the Citroen, wondering if animals might use a rusted old van, and what animals could those be, when I heard a motorbike stop at the gates and heard the buzzer press for Willy and heard Terry bark and heard desperate tyres. The plum was full of juice. I felt the juice on my chin just before I heard the motorbike approaching, I guessed it was them. The juice felt good, in the way I had come to realise that all excess, trying everything, can feel so good. I had put everything into those songs, as I knew Michael would too. The moment I heard the Harley I ran with Terry to greet him.
"THEY HAVE TO COME SOONER OR LATER IF YOU STICK AT 'EM": HORSE-BREAKING AS METAPHOR IN AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL DISCOURSE

I am the captain of my pain
'Tis the bit, the bridle
The thrashing cane
The stirrup, the harness
The whipping mane
The pickled eye
The shrinking brain —
O brother, buy me one more drink
I'll explain the nature of my pain
Yes, let me tell you once again
I am the captain of my pain

It is the contention of this essay that popular Australian representations of the breaking of wild horses consistently speak of a number of racialised and gendered anxieties. Tim Flannery argued in 2003 that the "Man From Snowy River" myth of the mountain-bred boy who captures a wild stallion and becomes a "man" in the process epitomises a whole series of "beautiful lies": "lies" that have led Australia to what many perceive as a current environmental and humanitarian crisis. Flannery drew attention to the way in which "our worship of the self-reliant stockman neatly sidesteps the fact that the men of the cattle frontier were the shock troops in our Aboriginal wars." Indeed, it is demonstrable that in many of the classic "horse stories" set in the alpine region of south-east Australia, the capture and taming of brumbies facilitates the process of "indigenisation" for white Australians. Brumbies were historically part of the ecological arm of European colonisation of this country. And yet, through their positioning as the "spirit
of the land” in texts like A. B. Paterson’s “The Man From Snowy River” (1890) and Elyne Mitchell’s Silver Brumby series (1958–66), they have provided waves of new immigrants with a means of “earning” legitimate possession and a sense of connection to the land. I have argued elsewhere that the presence and/or absence of real indigenous “others” is often a striking anxiety in the south-east Australian “horse-breaking” texts. Despite the contrasting situation as regards to the actual presence of indigenous stockmen in the nor-west of Australia, I seek to demonstrate here that a consistently “gentle” iconography of “the bit, the bridle” is also utilised in Jeannie Gunn’s We of the Never-Never (1908) and Katherine Susannah Prichard’s Coonardoo (1929).

According to her memoir, We of the Never-Never, Jeannie Gunn entered the “Never-Never” in 1902 “sitting meekly on a led horse.” She left just over a year later having learnt to “hand[l]e” a “little brown filly,” freshly cut from a brumby mob (236). That the controlling of wild horses is an integral component to this memoir of frontier life is not so surprising, given that a station like the Elsey in the Roper River region of the Northern Territory needed 200 horses over the course of a year and drew these from a roaming pool of stock (154). More significant, and as yet unremarked by literary criticism, is the way in which Gunn uses the mastery of horses as a felicitous metaphor for a number of things within the text, ultimately legitimating her own white female presence in the North with an extended play on this particular image.

Gunn published We of the Never-Never in 1908, six years after the unfortunate death of her husband and her return from the Elsey Station. As Katherine Ellinghaus notes, We of the Never-Never is frequently listed as one of Australia’s most popular books, and has rarely been out of print since. Not least amongst the reasons for this is Gunn’s status as a pioneering white woman: a fact that is of particular interest to feminist scholars seeking to reconstruct a formerly neglected aspect of Australian history. Since 1990s’ wider recognition of Aboriginal dispossession, however, the book has become difficult to read as anything other than an “artifact from our colonial past.” Peter Forrest’s analysis of Northern Territory historical documents, published in 1990, Francesca Merlan’s 1996 publication of Mangarrayi testimony, and the publicity surrounding the Elsey land claim, lodged in 1991 and finally won in 2000, resituate Gunn’s account of gallantry, forbearance and humour in the North as a spectacular compensatory narrative. Not only was the Elsey station evidently some of “the worst pastoral land in the continent” in 1902, plagued by Redwater (cattle) disease, low meat prices, and, just five years previously, a cyclone, but it had been, since 1881, a particular focus for
violent confrontation with Aboriginal people." It is instructive to compare these brutal facts with Gunn's romantic catalogue of the joys of doing things from scratch; of being reacquainted with the deep meaning of simple things. Forrest also pointed to the widespread fear at the time "that the coming of the white women would end forever the ways of life which were the reasons for so many men staying in the Territory" – "ways of life" amounting to "sexual enjoyment on demand and without responsibility." It is noteworthy that, far from acknowledging the relationships of white stockmen with Aboriginal women in her text, Gunn displaces it with a picture of remarkable celibacy. We are at one point asked to believe, for example, that a traveller who had apparently seen "neither a cabbage nor a woman for five years" would lament the cabbage first (127)! Gunn's "never-never" has been exposed as terra nullius in microcosm: a blatant and frenetically anxious attempt to wipe out or "mask" prior ownership of land and inscribe it as an imaginary idyll.

What I want to add to this discourse is recognition of the role wild horses play in both these racialised and gendered masking functions of the text. These occur primarily in relation to Jack the Quiet Stockman, one of the Scottish station hands who breaks horses on the Elsey. Jack is introduced as a young man who "had always steered clear of women" on account of them being "such terrors for asking questions" (48). When he hears that the boss has brought a wife with him to the Elsey, his first reaction is to try to leave. Although it is Aeneas Gunn who initially dissuades him from this, it is Jeannie Gunn who eventually wins this reticent extreme of settler masculinity over and changes his views on white women. This triumph, mediated through an elaborate play on horse-breaking, becomes Gunn's means of salvaging achievement and purpose from the otherwise tragic experience of her frontier encounter.

Gunn is drawn to Jack, and he to her, when they meet at the horseyards to look at freshly mustered stock. When asked to choose her "fancy," Gunn astutely picks the colt Jack has already selected as prime catch. This gives her the first glimmer of his respect, whereas Gunn's appreciation of Jack's "inner character" is won as she watches him break the horses:

If anyone would know the inner character of a fellowman, let him put him to horse-breaking, and he will soon know the best or the worst of him. Let him watch him handling a wild, unbroken colt, and if he is steadfast of purpose, just, brave, and true-hearted, it will all be revealed; but if he lacks self-restraint...he will do well to avoid the test, for the horse will betray him.
Jack's horse-breaking was a battle for supremacy of mind over mind...To him no two horses were alike; carefully he studied their temperaments... - using the whip freely with some, and with others not at all; coercing, coaxing, or humouring, as his judgement directed. Working always for intelligent obedience, not cowed stupidity, he appeared at times to be almost reasoning with the brute mind, as he helped it to solve the problems of its schooling... (73)

Because Jack demonstrably achieves the trust of wild horses, sometimes within minutes, Gunn has her proof that he is “just, brave, and true-hearted.” Here, as in recent media items in Australia about horse “whisperer” Monty Roberts, there is slippage between the man who can quietly achieve the “surrender” of horses and the “good” man whose views and methods must ultimately be sound in other respects (76). Having established Jack’s credentials in this way, the stockman himself becomes a prize that Gunn seeks to win. The horse hails him and, recognising the value in this, she needs him to hail her to validate herself.

There is a lot going on in this passage. If Jack is a “good” man, not cruel and inflexible, but “humouring” and “self-restrained,” he not only deserves his mastery when it comes, but it is represented as downright inevitable: “they have to come sooner or later if you stick at ‘em” (76). Over the page, he speaks with “a strange ring of ownership in his voice” (77). If it immediately seems that the “beaut[iful]... surrender” of more than horses is being spoken of here, this is because the structural logic of the passage is used throughout the text in specific relation to the traditional owners of the country. Gunn positions herself in a slightly earlier passage as “having got the mob well in hand now” by deploying similarly adaptable tactics of coaxing, humouring, and coercion (53). “The mob” in this context are not brumbies but her Aboriginal staff, whom she demonstrably helps “solve the problem...of [their...] schooling” by letting them think she is stupid. In another key passage, Aeneas is excused for his part in a “blackfellow hunt” because of his personal adherence to a “give and take” policy of fair “recompense” (185). It is salutary that no “wild” blackfellows are killed on this occasion, but, wild horses “being [another] one of the problems of the run,” three brumby stallions are shot instead (189). There is a slippage between wild horses and indigenous people at such moments in the text, with the “gentle” method of horse-breaking functioning both as a model of colonial relations and a self-legitimating rationale for their existence.

Gunn also displaces the issue of sexual relations between coloniser and
colonised through her use of horse-breaking imagery. Having established Jack's sound “inner character,” Gunn needs him to acknowledge hers. She textually achieves this, not by explaining his real reasons for regretting the arrival of white women in the North, but by teaching him to read. Significantly, reading is figured in the text as a kind of super species of horse-breaking. “You don't say he's got the whole mob mouthed and reined and schooled in all the paces?” (217), is an example of the way horse-breaking is used as metaphor in this part of the text – with “the whole mob” here standing for the written word. It is through the one-upmanship of teaching a horse-breaker to “horse-break” that Gunn proves her skills have valency in the North. If he is “just, brave, and true-hearted” then she must be even more so, and bringing the boon of literature to the North must be an even greater justification for coming. Jack's hailing of Gunn with the gift of a newly broken filly is the symbolically fitting conclusion to this spectacular colonial fantasy.

I use the word “fantasy” because of what happens to Gunn's logic when the horse-breaker in question is not white. Most stockmen in the North and West of Australia were not white (nor even male):¹⁴ and hence the argument that he who is hailed by the horse as master has an ethical mandate for dominion is patently false. This fact is itself acknowledged in Coonardoo, where the horse-breaker and most of the stockmen are Aboriginal. However, in many other respects, Katharine Susannah Prichard's 1929 novel perpetuates Gunn's representational tropes of the brumby. Like We of the Never-Never, this text projects supreme horsemanship as supreme belonging; again providing a point of access for white Australians to the land, but this time also naturalising the incongruous presence of white settlers and horses in the Nor-West of Western Australia from the imputed viewpoint of Aboriginal people.

Many critics have noted the way in which Coonardoo is a progressive text in its representation of indigenous Australians in some respects, and complicit with imperialist discourses in others.¹⁵ Prichard's tragic tale of Hugh Watt's love for the Aboriginal station-hand, Coonardoo, on his remote cattle station undoubtedly broke new ground in Australian literature when it appeared in 1929. No one had previously dared use the word “love” to describe these cross-cultural sexual relations, nor had they given so much textual space to pondering the complexity, motivation and comparable depth of Aboriginal traditions.¹⁶ On the other hand, the novel undeniably espouses now discredited Darwinist views about the inevitable extinction of the Aboriginal race.¹⁷ In one of the most recent critical responses to Coonardoo, Anne Brewster has argued that Doris Pilkington's Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence
should be seen as “writing back” to Prichard’s text. Brewster observes that Pilkington’s narrative, set in the same time and place as Coonardoo, points up the way in which Prichard displaces the “vast [State] apparatus[es]” of “Protection” into an individual relationship of honour and love. As a consequence of such scholarship, it would now seem impossible to read Coonardoo in purely aesthetic terms. Yet Prichard’s text was still ranked in the top thirty in the list of “Australia’s Favourite Books” put out in 2003, and in many ways remains an iconically enigmatic and resonant Australian “literary” experience.

Attending to the horses within the novel may be a means of reconciling these somewhat conflicting assessments of Prichard’s legacy. Horsemanship is used in Coonardoo in two principle ways: to discriminate between characters who belong in the Nor-West and those who don’t; and to establish a marker of functional happiness and joy within the text which naturalises European colonisation. That is, when Hugh contends that his “regard for Goonardoo” is only “admiration of her horsemanship,” he is actually speaking a species of truth. Both of Hugh’s other love interests are scared by the wild Wytaliba horses, as was his father, and four of his daughters. None of these characters could find happiness in the Nor-West. Goonardoo, by way of contrast, is “the best stockman on Wytaliba” and perfectly at home there. Admiring someone’s “horsemanship” in this novel, is already code for an admiration of much more than their ability to sit a buck. Mrs Bessie Watt was a “great horse-woman”, so is Hugh, Phyllis, and, despite his faults, Sam Geary. Cock-eyed Bob is not bad, but rather overflaunts it. Billy Gale, on the other hand, has the “slouch and bend of a horseman”: he presents as “something free and untamed” – with “the air of someone belonging to the country” (190). All these characters can demonstrably “hack it” in this remote country in direct proportion to their horse-handling skills. A kind of hierarchy of respect is established, in which it is significant that the Aboriginal characters, Goonardoo, Winni, Chitali, and, especially, Warieda, rank highest of all.

Warieda is the “pride of the station” because he is the “best horseman and breaker in the Nor’West” (152). It is worth unpacking exactly what this means. Warieda has lived all his life on the property in communion with his ancestral land and traditions: this handsome leader in his “white moles” represents Prichard’s extreme counterpoint to the “degraded wretches...remnants of a dying race” whom one apparently finds on the coast. He also employs rather different horse-breaking techniques to Chitali, whom we are told is good, but not quite as good. Whereas Chitali uses fairly conventional “cowboy” methods, Warieda greets his catch “like a brumby boss”:
[He goes] up to the horse, his arm, the dark sinewy arm of a black that was like the branch of a tree, stretched out before him. Imperious, irresistible, he approached, something swaggering, gallant, of a triumphant lover, in his attitude. His hand going straight to brain communicated the spell of the man, in the language of the flesh, an old forgotten flow of instincts. Warieda was nearer to the horse than any of the white men about him. Handsome, aboriginal [sic] as he was, that was perhaps the secret of his power.

Warieda’s hand reached the forehead under the forelock of silky black hair. The filly quivered and broke away; but came up again when Warieda held out his arm with thin fine fingers stretched....Gently, every gesture slow, restrained, he rubbed her between the eyes, under the forelock, along the nose; the little mare snuffled the dark hand, so caressing, reassuring, sleeking and rubbing her. It passed over and over her thick-haired pelt which had known no touch but the wind’s, or a leafy branch, on the hills. (58-59)

Note the way in which Warieda’s “branch-like arm” becomes metonymically a “leafy branch”; the imputation that the horse-breaker’s “Aboriginality” somehow places him “nearer to the horse than any of the white men”; the blatantly sexual language. Over the page, it is hard not to snigger when the long-widowed Mrs Bessie declares that she’d “sooner watch Warieda horse-breaking than do anything I know” (60). It is clear from this passage that, when the fortunes of the station are aligned with Warieda’s horse-breaking skills, they are being aligned with a combination of potency and understanding quite literally rooted in a connection to the land.

This cuts two ways. If supreme horsemanship is a natural extension of Aboriginality, then it stands to reason that the white horsemen who approach this standard can also find a connection to land. Through horses, anyone can become rooted and potent, symbolically attached to the wind and the hills. In this sense, a good horseman is more than a man: he is a man who has already passed a test of belonging. On the other hand, by implying that horsemanship is an “Aboriginal language,” Prichard is able to suggest that the incursion of white settlers and their stock into the Nor’West is a blessing for Aboriginal people. Coonardoo, for example, claims that “the joy of her life was to ride out over the plains...with the men and the horses” (17). This is very like Mrs Bessie’s claim about watching Warieda already cited, and Phyllis’s
later claim that she “never enjoyed anything more than watching Hugh cut out on Circe” (185). Such horse-inflected moments are set up as “the good things in life” by the text, belying the fact that they are actually relatively recent importations. While it is undeniable that many Aboriginal stockmen did take to the new lifestyle with pleasure, the point here is that horses are presented in *Coonardoo* and as much part of the Australian landscape as thunder.

The “gentling” of wild horses functions in *Coonardoo*, as in *We of the Never-Never*, as a metaphorical means of “deserving” the land. Despite a different geography and proportion of indigenous workers, both these texts mirror the “Man From Snowy River” texts of the east in mythologising a non-coercive relationship with horses. Horses are emphatically not subjected to the oppressive or sado-masochistic connotations of “the bit, the bridle” in any of these Australian settler texts. Indeed, it is only the inadequate Mollie Watt who utilises any language about “whips” and “scourging” in this text (148). Here, such references are part of a carefully developed sequence in which true horsemanship is linked not to violence, but to a “language of the flesh” akin to making love (59). Mollie, with her whips and “clicking tongue,” just doesn’t get it. A gentler iconography of “the bit, the bridle” is endorsed by both *Coonardoo* and *We of the Never-Never* for the ultimate purpose of staging legitimate possession via right of passage. The remarkably consistent deployment of horse-breaking in Australian cultural discourse is not only noteworthy but speaks of deep-seated anxieties we are yet to completely unravel.

Notes

3. Flannery, 6.

Ellinghaus, 90.

See, for example, Peter Forrest, *They of the Never Never*, Occasional Papers No. 18 (Darwin: Northern Territory Library Service, 1990); Francesca Merian, comp., *Big River Country: Stories From the Elsey Station* (Alice Springs: IAD Press, 1996); *Elsey Land Claim No. 132* (Canberra: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1999).

Forrest, 6.


Merian points out that, after Gunn’s departure in 1903, a policy of “systematic extermination of Aboriginal people over the whole area” was increasingly implemented (xv). Some of the “bush-folk” immortalised in *We of the Never-Never*, and especially Head Stockman Dan and the Dandy, continued at the Station and were personally implicated in this violence (Merian xv).

Forrest, 8–9.


*Goonardoo* was number 27 in the “List of the Top 40 Aussie Novels” put out in 2003 by the Australian Society of Authors. See “Authors’ top reads,” *Sydney Morning Herald* (27 May 2003).


McGrath, 46–47.
The nights had suddenly gone from being mild to cold. A brittle wind blew every morning across the flat, making her eyes water and nose run when she stood at the edge of the lawn. She would look out towards the hills, watching the bleached grass ripple as though it were solid like water. A stray cow might bellow and a dingo might howl from somewhere out there. By mid-morning, the wind would have dropped, the sun would be strong and the light would have washed out the colour of the earth. By then she would have been up for six hours. She always started before dawn because that was when John wanted breakfast. Sometimes he would drive out to where the men were mustering but most of the time he went with the bore mechanic to learn where there was water. Half a million acres: much of it stony country where rangy cattle clustered in small mobs. They were wily beasts, difficult to muster and the terrain was hard on the horses. That's what he told her when he came home at night.

Susannah looked down at the diary left behind by the previous manager. John had been studying it over breakfast. It told him where the other man had found cattle last year, how many head had been sold and where they had gone. The men’s wages were listed at the back. She hadn’t seen any of the stockmen yet, only Gerry now and then. They were still out at the stock camp. Before John left he told her there was a cattle truck coming. The driver would drop off some fruit and vegetables from the co-op in town. Then the truck was to continue out to the yards to pick up some steers for the meatworks. John used the Flying Doctor radio, a thin metal box with black knobs that sat at the end of the bench in the kitchen. It crackled with static and heaved with the sound of a sigh breathed into a microphone. But other than that it was silent. She hadn’t told John she didn’t know how to use it. She turned the knob marked channel. It clicked heavily into the next slot. A woman’s voice spoke loudly through a whining, celestial noise.
“She said she’d manage. There was nothing more I could do for her. Over.”

More static before the woman replied.
“Yeah. He took her to the races. What more could you ask? Over.”
She clicked on to the next channel. It was a male voice.
“to be picked up Monday. Over.”

Back to the woman.
“Knew when she didn’t come on that she was gone. Wouldn’t go to hospital. Had the men to look after, she said. They sent out the plane to pick her up. But it was too late. Over.”

Crackle.
“Yeah. Don’t know how he’ll cope. Or the kids. Over.”

She switched it back to the other channel and gathered up the papers and the diary and returned them to the old table that was pushed against the wall in the sleepout. John was using it as a desk. She could hear the boys in their bedroom.

They were eating lunch in the kitchen when a truck rumbled over the cattle grid into the station paddock.

She stood at edge of the veranda as the boys tore across the yard. Dust caught up with the vehicle as it stopped. A hand swung the door closed and a man in a blue shearer’s singlet and brief stubbies shorts emerged from behind it. He pushed his hat further back on his head.

She was at the fence with the children.

“I have the map. My husband said the cattle are at number eight yards. He said to follow this race.” She pointed to the stony track that led away from the homestead. It wound around the worksheds and the homestead yards and down towards a creek. On the other side of the creek was a wire gate. The track continued over the hill. “You need to go through that gate and then follow the map after that.”

“I know it,” he said.

He was looking at her instead of where she was pointing. Ollie was trying to escape through the fence. She let him go, gritting her teeth. Ned pulled to go after him. She gave up on both of them, conscious of the man watching her. The children crawled through the fence.

“Come back. Not outside the yard,” she said weakly.

“Where do you want this stuff?” asked the driver.

“I’ll show you.” She spoke over her shoulder.

They reached the step up to the veranda.

“Would you like a cup of tea?” Her face reddened. She hoped he had to get going but it would be rude not to offer.
“The cattle won’t be ready,” he said, following her into the kitchen.

She moved awkwardly, aware of him behind her. He set the stores down by the cupboard. The kettle had boiled a little while ago. His chair scraped the concrete floor. Through the louvres she could see the boys playing in the dirt beside the truck. The fan creaked above their heads. Red brown hair coiled moistly above the neckline of his faded singlet. He seemed vaguely amused about something.

“How’s your old man doing?”
She looked blankly then realised he was referring to John.
“Fine. I think.”
“He was up here before, wasn’t he?”
“Yeah. A few years ago. Before we were married. He was a jackaroo.”
“I know him, eh?”
She wanted to ask how but something in his manner kept her quiet.
“He was that fella that got in trouble.”
“Oh...” she straightened her shoulders. “I don’t think so.”
He leant back in his chair, smiling.
“He thinks he knows this country. He’s just had a taste of it. That’s all.”
She brought the mug of tea up to her mouth and swallowed noisily.
“Have you always been a truck driver?”
He moved in his chair, leaning forward as though to get up but settled back in it again.
“Done all sorts. Cartin’ cattle, tingin’, horsebreakin’.” He looked into his mug. “It isn’t the same now. Too many cowboys.”
“What do you mean?” she asked.
“They were ringers back then.” He seemed to be talking to himself.
“Now you wouldn’t pass the time of day with any of them.”
He looked out the window. There was a long pause. A cricket started up in the corner. She would look for it when he was gone.
“You know things have happened up here. Things you lot know nothing about.”
He leant back in his chair, crossing his ankles. His calves were muscled and scarred.
She couldn’t contain herself.
“What?”
He looked at her and shook his head slightly.
“I don’t know anything about this country.”
She was pleading.
His eyes narrowed. She was stripped bare.
“You see them old yards by the turnoff from the main road.”

She nodded.

“There are yards like that about every ten mile or so through this country. You don’t know how they got there, do you?” He was waiting for her to react but when she didn’t he continued. “Blackfellas,” he said. “They cut em, eh? Big solid trees you get down by the creeks. They dragged them one by one behind donkeys. They’d dig a big hole, same height as you. And if they got it wrong they’d have to sit there for twelve hours, no dinner, nothing. And if they moved they got shot.”

The fan whirled lazily above them, clunking when it caught momentarily at the same point on its rotation.
Someone might have seen you, down there in the fading light. You with all your heart, the barefoot wanderer from the east. Just a shadow in that light. A lone silhouette on the edge of the world. You don’t think of the land behind you, of the rushing night. You just stand and know your place. You watch a sunset like you’ve never seen one. This is your life, and you know your place.

In another life he’s walking whiskey, twenty-two in the city. Bang bang: footsteps on a pavement. Night-time streetlight he keeps the beat: bang bang he’s a country boy. Later he picks a fight with a uni crowd at the pizza joint. Throws a hook and watches the kid spin like a top. He’s sober and sorry before the kid hits the ground, thinking about home, thinking about dad and mum, and the farm. This time it’s a young kid on the deck, and he wills them to make this pain go away. But now he’s down and they’re into him with the boots. Before he blacks out he’s crying. At last he’s crying.

Back at the farm they want to know why he’s chucked it in. He says it’s his knee, that he’s slow and they won’t sign him. They see the lie, but what can he tell them? That he couldn’t fake it? That it was all a lie? That he doesn’t know?

– Anyway, I’m here for the muster.

There’s an awkward silence. His mum goes back to the stove and his dad mumbles something about the crop and he’s out the door before it’s registered. Before it’s got time to sink in. That look. That split second look between his mum and dad. What was that? A silent agreement? Like everything, he’d missed the point.

He comes in after work one day and there’s a book on his bed. There’s no note but he knows it’s mum. He crashes down to give it a go and avoid the looks out there in the kitchen. He doesn’t know that it’s him in the book. He can’t imagine the places it’ll take him. He doesn’t know this book will change his life.

Out in the scrub the old Holden’s parked up in the shade of a few gums.
A teenage girl in her school uniform rummages in the glove box for condoms. She pulls out the book.

- What’s this?
- It’s a life – my other life. You should read it.

She opens a page and feels his hand up her skirt, inside her knickers. She drops the book and hitches up her skirt to straddle him. She is the envy of her friends. When he was school captain they dreamed of him. Her dad would kill him. She undoes her bra and cradles his head against her breast, feeding him her nipple. She leaves on her schoolgirl skirt – he likes her to leave it on. She feels his rough hands cupped against her buttocks and his cock inside her. He fucks her and fucks her. He feels the tightness of her cunt and the warmth of her juice run down his balls. They will fuck until he comes, and the guilt and the shame of what he is doing will follow, and it will be more that he can bear.

She hands the book back to him.

- Ahh, you read it!

- Your other life – am I just your Lucy Wentworth?

She’s embarrassed to ask it and afraid of what he might say. The question cuts him like a knife. He thought she was too thick to work it out, but now its there and he can’t go on hiding from it. He takes her breast in his mouth before he blurts out the truth. But it’s enough to let her know that this game of grown ups is over, and this guy’s gonna bolt for sure.

It’s evening out in the muster paddock. Two brothers ease along the fence line, rolling in time with the pitch and rock of the truck. One drives, his arm sweeping the spotlight in a wide arc of scrub. The other nurses a gun, following the light with a rigid stillness. He fingers a spent casing and tells himself he’s Quick Lamb in the wheatbelt – Mr. Crackshot. Theirs is a silence that only brothers can know. They’ve done this all their life: lived, shot, played, cried and fought side by side. They know each other better than they know themselves. The night is hot, thick with the heat of the earth. There’s a brooding edginess to the sky that has the roos on the hop. Suddenly the driver swings onto a mob and lurches for the shooter. He lines up the boomer who’s stayed to challenge. He’s blinded but won’t leave to protect the mob. Through the sights the buck’s chest heaves in panic and wonder yet he won’t run. He can’t. He lowers the gun, maybe more like Quick than he knows. His brother says nothing, just sits there at the wheel and nods his head.

- Go.

It’s an order and he knows what it took.

- Yep.
Where?
West.

And there it is.

Around the table they huddle over a map, giggling like schoolkids. Mum points to a dot and smiles. Dad spills his beer and yelps like a kelpie.

Up on the hill the old Holden crunches into second and pulls out onto the blacktop. It's early, but already there's a glow in the East. He idles there a minute. Inside the cab he's tense. The cold air stings, fogs the windscreen. He cleans it with the jacket, and checks a fuel gauge that hasn't worked for years. Before him is night. Before him is a long and lonely road. Before him is a chance at a life. He feels the tyres flex away into the night, already in the life of a west coast world.

At a lonely roadhouse he stops for fuel and sees three camels and a blackfella walk out of the scrub. As they cross the road the old fella gives him a nod and they disappear back into the bush. He blinks, and wakes up to the overfilled tank pissing fuel all over him. Back on the road he wonders about the blackfella. He drives on smelling of super and the road unravels out of darkness toward him.

He sees the border behind a foggy windscreen. There's just the one bloke on the crossing. He wanders over:
- Anything to declare?
- No mate.
- Where you headin'?
- That way.

The border guard knows all the types - these young ones, the hobos with their dreamy looks and bullshit preachings. They're usually back within a month. All homesick and sullen looking, running back to mummy in the east. This one's a bit different though, bit of a steely edge to the kid. It's got his back up,
- Best you pull over soon young fella. Roos ya', know, pretty bad this time of night.

He nods to the guard but this awkwardness is killing him. He drives off. The old bloke watches him go and wonders if he'll see this one again. The kid's rattled him and he's not sure why. He stands there in the cold stillness of the desert, watching the red glow of the taillights fade into the night. Up past Eucla he takes a dirt track to the left, doesn't think about it, just does it.

Around midnight he leaves the ute and tracks off into the dunes. Up on the crest he reefs off his clothes and walks naked and blind into the blanket of moon shadow below. There's no sound down here, and nothing moves but the slow soundless dunes around him. He hadn't meant to come here. It was
just an impulse up there on the highway and before he knew it he was on the station track. There’s a vague memory here, a nostalgia. Thundering down the dunes with dad and his brother. Is that why he’s naked? Is it the freedom he longs? That innocence? Up the next dune he tracks out into the light, and beneath a full moon retraces invisible footprints across a silver landscape. Past the telegraph ruins he wanders through a pearly world until at last he’s reached the end. On that last dune, naked, with the known world behind him he stands on the brink, before him the Great Southern Ocean. Moonlight slips in a silver stairway from shore to horizon. He’s filled with a sense of where he is, as if time and space have ceased and all that has happened has led up to this point. He has a sense of who he might be. Time falls away and he stays there into the dying night, naked and alone on a lonely sand dune. He holds on as though he rides a knife on the edge of the world.

He wakes himself calling the dog off but it won’t let up. There’s a bark. The moment catches him and he throws open the swag to see a bloody great dingo leering out of the darkness. He fumbles for a weapon. Finds something hard and pings it at the bastard. There’s a yelp as the torch smacks it across the nose and it falls back to the edge of the clearing. There’s the soft pad of a footfall and bang he’s up there into the ute holding his privates like they’ll save him. He stands there a minute, straining in the darkness. Nothing. He does a bolt down to grab the swag, thinks bugger the torch and jumps into the cab. Makes it. His heart is pounding. There’s something out there he can sense it. He fumbles for the keys, finds them and turns her over. He takes a big breath and flicks on the lights and there’s four of the mangy bastards right there at the door. He tramps it and flies out of the truck stop in a scream of dust. Fifty k’s down the road, freezing and hungry, he manages to stop and pull on some clothes.

He wheels around the river past the old brewery and for the first time in months he feels himself relax. The engine hums its familiar tune. Yachts bob out on the ferry wake. He winds down the window and a hot easterly rushes in and turns the cab upside down. There’s rollies and reefers and all kinds of shit flying everywhere, and then they’re out the widow and into the Moke that’s too far up his arse anyway. The driver’s givin’ it to him but he can’t stop laughing. Smoke in a Moke. He’s lost it, killing himself laughing and what a fool he looks driving past the uni with his Vico plates and his arm out the window floggin’ the old girl like a wild horse, scared any minute now he’ll piss himself if he doesn’t stop. He drives on, past the millionaire mansions, past the sign to Fremantle. He drives on in a dream.

I have west coast sand between my toes, I know my place. I watch this day end with a sun that dips in an ocean horizon. At my back lies a desert
interior, and the 2000 miles through which I've fled. Dust settles like a
dream. I am back in the west. I know my place.

*Quick Lamb and Lucy Wentworth are references to characters in Tim Winton's
Let me begin by saying what I’m not going to do in this paper: I’m not going to do what used to be called a “close reading” of Tim Winton’s Cloudstreet. I’m not going to wheel out a theoretical approach through which to interpret the text, as if the reading I could produce by that means were somehow more authoritative than any other. Instead, what I will do is situate Winton’s career and this particular novel in what can be called the field of Australian literature. In using this term field, I mean to indicate the whole system involved in the production and reception of Australian literature. This is now a very broad spectrum of institutions, personnel, practices and values that is surprisingly complex and diverse. It is now so extensive that it isn’t even confined to Australia. And academic literary criticism – in the sense of theoretically-driven textual analysis – is only one part of that field. Many would say that it’s not even the most important part.

This idea of a “field” derives from the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Much of Bourdieu’s work was done on French art culture of the nineteenth century, but it has been widely used in recent years as a tool for thinking about how other culture industries work, including print culture, cinema and music. When Bourdieu talks about a field of cultural production, he means to identify the entire set of institutions, personnel, practices and dispositions that work in combination to shape its possibilities and outcomes. In the case of print culture, these include the publishing houses that produce and distribute books; the bodies that award literary prizes; the government departments that give grants and frame cultural policy; the shops that sell books; the reading groups in which books are variously discussed; the mass media that report on books and writers, including newspapers, radio and television; and the schools and universities, which set courses, select some books and writers above others, and publish literary criticism in scholarly journals. Working in these different institutions, each with its own values and
practices, is a range of personnel involved in books and writing: they include authors, literary agents, editors, publicists, reviewers, academics and school teachers. As David Carter observes, in the last twenty years, the field of Australian literature has achieved a certain maturity or “density” that allows it to be self-sustaining in relation to other fields, including the global print economy.

This account is not meant to be comprehensive or even theoretically rigorous, but it gives some idea of the field of cultural production that both enables and constrains what it is possible for a writer like Tim Winton to achieve. *Cloudstreet* does not have a single and definitive meaning. Rather, it is a textual site that lends itself, albeit actively rather than passively, to a variety of uses. It is a commodity produced by many hands that circulates through a range of institutions and practices, and which comes to have many different meanings and uses as it circulates through the field. A good deal of a book’s meaning is produced by what the French critic Gerard Genette calls paratext: that is, the “heterogenous group of practices and devices” that mediate a book to its readers, ensuring its “presence in the world,” its “reception” and “consumption.” These comprise both peritext (the devices located inside the book, such as chapter titles, prefaces and epigraphs) and epitext (the devices located in the physical and social space outside the book, generally with the help of the media and the web, such as interviews, promotional dossiets, and weblogs). The field of Australian literature is so diverse that it puts different tastes, values and preferences in competition with each other. Editors and publicists, for example, don’t have the same “vision” for a book as its author, but they make an important contribution to its eventual realisation. Newspaper reviewers do not value the same books as university lecturers, and they tend to use and interpret them in different ways. These divisions within the field also affect us as individuals. I might want to say very different things about *Cloudstreet* if I were in a university English tutorial as opposed to a book group in a friend’s lounge room. I might read it very differently on my Christmas holidays at the beach to the way I would when preparing an article about it. This means that there is no single kind of reader or way of reading – rather, there are different ways of reading that any one individual might practise in different situations.

Academic literary critics are often reluctant to concede that there are more important influences in the field of literary production than themselves. But the reality is that the academy has had a powerful influence in shaping literary taste for only a relatively short period of time. In Australia it was not until 1950s that the universities began to teach Australian literature and to shape its values. In the case of the secondary school
classroom, it was not until the 1960s or even 1970s that Australian novels, poems and plays made their appearance alongside Shakespeare, Dickens and TS Eliot. Prior to this time – roughly the mid-twentieth century – it was more likely to be the journalists and free-lance public intellectuals who had the greatest influence. This was the situation Patrick White wrote about in 1968, recalling his return to Australia from London in 1947:

In all directions stretched the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions, in which the rich man is the important man, in which the schoolmaster and the journalist rule what intellectual roost there is.

As recently as 1958, then, Patrick White was lamenting precisely the absence of the complex and mature literary system I've just described. Ironically, it could be argued that academics today are once again losing ground as arbiters of literary taste, as general readers look to other sources such as newspaper reviews, radio programs and reading groups.

**Tim Winton**

Let's turn now to Tim Winton's place in this field. I'm not going to attempt a comprehensive biography of Winton for the same reason that I'm not going to do a full critical analysis of the novel – this is because literary biography, like literary criticism, is just one among many ways to approach books and authors. But we do need a few facts in order to map Winton's career on to the field. What we want to understand is how the phenomenon we call “Tim Winton” is an artifact of – that is, something produced by – the system of Australian literature.

Winton was born in Perth in 1960. He spent his early life there and at Albany on the far south coast of WA. During the late 1970s and early 1980s he was among the first students to graduate from a new course in creative writing at WAIT, the West Australian Institute of Technology (now Curtin University). Creative writing courses are now common in Australian universities, but at the time it was among the first of its kind. Winton became a professional writer in 1981 when, at the age of 21, he shared first prize in the Australian Vogel National Literary Award for what become his first novel, *An Open Swimmer* (1982). Winton now has national and international reputations, and his books have been translated into other languages and adapted for the stage. *Cloudstreet* (1991) in particular has attracted major attention, and has been set widely on university and secondary school curricula. Some reviewers in the early 1990s asked whether it might be “the Great Australian Novel.”
Winton began writing *Cloudstreet* in Paris while staying in an apartment maintained by the Literature Board of the Australia Council to give Australian writers an opportunity to live in Europe. The Literature Board is the major institution, dating back to the 1970s, through which public funds are granted in support of creative writing. As the acknowledgements page of almost all his books will show, Winton has been a frequent recipient of Australia Council grants. He has also won a staggering number of national and international literary awards, some of them worth tens of thousands of dollars. *Cloudstreet* received the National Book Council Award, the West Australian Premier’s Award and the Miles Franklin Literary Award. In 2003 the Australian Society of Authors conducted a poll to determine the top 40 Australian books. *Cloudstreet* was rated number 1 and *Dirt Music* number 4. Patrick White and David Malouf also made it into the top 10. Surprisingly, perhaps, Peter Carey did not, with *Oscar and Lucinda* appearing at number 11.

These few dates and facts reveal the relation between Winton’s career and the history of the field. Winton was born at almost exactly the time when Australian literature became institutionalised as a marketing category, as an object of government policy, and as a field of study in schools and universities. He went to university to study creative writing at exactly the time when such courses were being established. He wrote his first novel, won a prize for it and had it published during a period of massive and unprecedented growth in the system of prizes and grants that arose to foster Australian literature. And he went on to be a regular recipient of Australia Council funding. In other words, Winton’s career corresponds exactly with what David Carter calls the moment of “maturity” or “density” of the Australian literary system.

What would have happened if Winton had not been born into this mature system? We can get some idea by looking briefly at the career of the person who taught him creative writing at WAIT. As a young student in the late 1970s, Winton was taught by the novelist Elizabeth Jolley. The differences between their careers are startling. Jolley was born in England in 1923 and emigrated to Perth in 1959. She arrived in Australia to find what Patrick White had just described as “the Great Australian Emptiness.” She’d been writing for years but couldn’t find a publisher and had to work as a nurse, a real estate agent, and at various other jobs before being appointed as a tutor in creative writing at the Fremantle Arts Centre in 1974. Later she became a key figure in setting up the new course at WAIT. Although Jolley had been writing for many years, her first book was not published until 1976, when she was well into her 50s. From that point a flood of books was published, some written long before, and her reputation soared during the 1980s, a decade now regarded as a golden age for Australian women writers. Now although
there are many reasons why Elizabeth Jolley was relatively slow to publish and achieve fame, one of the major reasons that both her career and Winton's took off exactly when they did was because they corresponded with a key moment in the growth and maturity of the field of Australian literature. Winton's career, in other words, like Jolley's very different career, can be seen as an artifact of this field – that is, as something both enabled and constrained by it – something literally made possible by its enormous expansion in the 1970s.

The Tim Winton Phenomenon
To understand more about the Tim Winton phenomenon, I want now to ask, which elements of the literary system have been most active in enabling his success? I'm curious about whether his success has been academic or what we might think of in the broadest sense as “popular.” In other words, has it been the universities and academic critics that have contributed most to his reputation? Or have those elements of the system outside the universities been more important? Here again, the contrast between his career and Elizabeth Jolley's is instructive.

Jolley's reputation is sustained by those sections of the field associated with 'the literary.” Her books have attracted mainly theoretically-driven (especially post-structuralist and feminist), text-based readings by academic critics, but they are not widely “popular” in the sense that Winton's are, and not all of them have remained in print. Winton, on the other hand, has had surprisingly few academic articles written about his books: Andrew Taylor's article in *Australian Literary Studies* is a rare exception. But he has been very widely set on undergraduate and secondary school curricula, he maintains a constant presence in the mass media, and he is a favourite with reading groups and the educated general reader. Readings of his works have been less theoretical and text-based, preferring instead author-centered, thematic and regional approaches. Where writing about Jolley's novels has appeared as critical analysis in scholarly books and journals, writing about Winton turns up most often in the form of interviews, feature articles in newspapers and magazines, and on radio and television.

Let's look at the evidence for this. The electronic database *Austlit* lists hundreds of “works about” Tim Winton – round 400 in fact. But very few of them are academic books or articles published in serious literary journals. The vast bulk of this *epitext* is short articles in the mass media, especially newspaper, magazine and radio reviews, and notices about his many awards. Second to this is a large amount of biographical material, especially author profiles and interviews. Even a cursory look at the media reports shows that
they come in waves, reflecting the publicity campaigns associated with the promotion of new titles and the annual cycle of literary prizes. This is now one of the most important components driving the literary system as a whole. The novelist Kate Grenville has said that “Prizes give writers headlines in a society where writing doesn’t usually make headlines. This society doesn't value writing as much as we'd like it to, but it does value competition.”

Prizes impress publishers. They know they can use them to promote an author. And the media are fully complicit in publicising awards, especially if they create controversy or heated responses. There have been numerous scandals and controversies such as the Demidenko affair of 1995–6. The number and variety of Australian literary awards continues to grow, but there are a select few that are capable of creating a reputation, endowing critical acclaim and attracting constant waves of media attention. These are the Miles Franklin Literary Award, the New South Wales and Victorian Premier’s Literary Awards, the Banjo Awards (prior to 1988 known as the National Book Council Awards), the Australian/Vogel Award, and the Children’s Book Council Awards. Winton has won most of them at one time or another. I find Kate Grenville’s choice of the word “competition” interesting – she realises that this part of the system is governed by the logic and values of the market place, with its competitions and top-ten lists, all of which exist to promote authors and books as commodities.

The secondary schools curriculum
Another element of Winton’s success has been the penetration of his books into the lucrative secondary school curriculum. Writers and publishers are especially keen to crack this high volume market, where books are sold as class sets. Being set on courses has two important consequences for sales: it makes sales figures high, and it extends the sale period beyond the year of release, keeping titles in print sometimes for decades. Some Australian authors have virtually based their careers and reputations around the secondary curriculum. It would not be difficult to draw up two distinct lists, one of “literary authors,” whose works are not often set in schools but are often out of print, and one of “school text” authors who are rarely out of print. The poet Bruce Dawe is a leading example. Dawe’s reputation as Australia’s favourite poet derives substantially from his long association with the secondary school curriculum. His publisher, Longman, is a textbook specialist and does not otherwise publish poetry. Dawe’s Collected Poems has never been out of print and sells in massive numbers. Yet his career and reputation are artifacts of this niche market, and he does not have quite the status in the tertiary sector that he does in the secondary sector. By contrast, more
"literary" writers like Patrick White and Christina Stead are rarely set in high schools because their novels are regarded as "difficult." Even though White is our only Nobel Prize winner, his most famous novels are often out of print.

Like Bruce Dawe, Tim Winton has now established himself in this important niche market. And like Dawe, this is reflected in the kinds of books and articles that are written about him. To date there have been three books about Winton, and these reflect his popularity with the general rather than the academic reader, and with the undergraduate and secondary school curricula. Academic criticism often takes a text-centered approach and has been driven in recent years by theories like poststructuralism, feminism and deconstruction. By contrast, the issues and approaches that dominate the three books about Winton are author-centered and thematic, focusing especially on biographical and regional issues. These approaches are more representative of the secondary curriculum. Reading Tim Winton, edited by Richard Rossiter and Lynn Jacobs, is typical. It begins with a selection of quotations from Winton's many interviews, organised thematically according to his life story, his regional background, and his family-centered and Christian values. These author-centered issues are set up in Winton's own voice, then echoed in a series of readings of the major novels, including Cloudstreet.

Author-centered and thematic approaches are also reflected in the many Winton web sites. Type “Tim Winton” into Google and you'll come up with two main kinds of site: first, publishers and book-sellers' promotional material, and second, sites relating to Winton resources for the secondary school and undergraduate class room. For example, Trinity College, a private secondary school in Perth, keeps an on-line resources site to assist high school teachers and their students to teach and study Winton and his books. There are no links to academic articles. But there are hot links to publishers' sites, interviews with radio and TV journalists, news items about his prize wins, and short reviews by students and fans. There are even sites where essays can be downloaded for a fee, tailor-made to assignment topics. There are also web sites by school students exchanging views about their favourite author. At this level of fandom, Winton operates much like a popular TV star in a show like Neighbours - to which Cloudstreet, significantly enough, has sometimes been compared. Here's a blog kept by a fan:

Tim Winton is my favourite Australian author. The man is a creative genius. He writes as himself, a Western Australian bloke who spent his early childhood in Perth before being transplanted into the country when his Dad was stationed to a town called Albany on the south-west coast...

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I've just seen a fascinating interview between Winton and Andrew Denton on *Enough Rope*, and am looking forward to reading *The Turning*, a collection of short stories that has just been published.14

Notice how fandom operates. The approach here is not “literary” or theoretical or text-based. Fans read Winton biographically, assuming that his novels are a transparent expression of his life. Note too the ease with which fans move from Winton’s persona and novels to his other media manifestations such as the appearance on the Andrew Denton show. And finally, note the promotional aspect, the link to the latest Winton title. This is typical of the way celebrity operates in the mass-media. For Tim Winton, we could substitute Britney Spears, Brad Pitt or David Beckham.

**Literary celebrity and the public sphere**

In talking about literary celebrity, I’m drawing now on the important work of Graeme Turner.15 Turner has shown how books and literary celebrity are caught up in the representational systems of the mass media, including newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Publicity and promotion are now part of the author’s profession. Successful authors are expected not only to make regular appearances at universities and writers’ festivals, but also in the pages of the weekend newspapers and on television chat shows. Peter Carey turns up in *Elle* magazine, Thomas Keneally on *Burke’s Backyard*, David Malouf on breakfast television, and ‘Tim Winton on *Enough Rope.*’

But the literary discourses favoured in the media are not those of the literary academy. In fact they are frequently anti-academic, and particularly hostile to theoretical modes of literary enquiry. Graeme Turner gives the example of David Malouf being interviewed by Liz Hayes on Channel 9’s *Today* show. When asked what his latest novel was “about,” Malouf was clearly embarrassed at having to come up with a simple answer. Liz Hayes did her best but was visibly uncomfortable when Malouf began, “It’s about the Latin poet, Ovid …”17

It would be interesting to compare the public media personas of Australian authors. Winton’s is obviously very different to Malouf’s. Malouf appears as a sage-like, cosmopolitan man of letters. Winton is younger, and more down-home and folksy. An important part of his persona has been his physical appearance, which is a constant theme of the many interviews and newspaper articles about him. There is a distinct Winton look: the plaited pony tail, the flannel shirt or T-shirt, the jeans and the Blundstone boots. And there is his love of fishing and the sea, his close family life and his Christianity. What do these signs mean? At first, they appear to signify a
young or at least young-ish author. But is it really fashionable now for a man in his mid-40s to have a pony tail? The "real" trendy young authors of the 1990s, the so-called "grunge" novelists, lived in inner Sydney or Melbourne; they had spiky hair and body piercings; they talked about hip hop, not rock and roll; sex and substance abuse, not fishing. Winton's persona, then, signifies not a radical young writer, but a slightly old-fashioned identity committed to regional and working-class traditions; one resistant to the postmodern and metropolitan trends of inner Sydney and Melbourne, someone who espouses tradition, family life and Christian values, which are associated with regional rather than urban Australia. In a number of interviews Winton has sought to distance himself from the Sydney and Melbourne literati, and from academic literary networks. These themes are inscribed in Cloudstreet in Rose Pickles's brief flirtation with the aspiring modernist poet Toby Raven and their humiliation at the hands of Perth's literati, who gather in the University suburb of Nedlands.

Is Winton, then, one of the Great Australian Authors? If we take Malouf as an example, the Great Writer is usually male, intellectual, metropolitan and sage-like, with interests in high culture. Women writers cannot easily assume this mantle. As Gina Mercer has shown, Helen Garner is usually gendered as emotional rather than intellectual, and her novel The Children's Bach (1984) was considered too "small" and "slight" to be a Great Novel. Similarly, Winton is regional rather than metropolitan, physical and intuitive rather than intellectual, young and egalitarian rather than sage-like and elitist; he likes rock music, not opera. Winton's down-home, regional and populist persona may therefore be a barrier to academic or literary Greatness which, in any event, he openly rejects.

Cloudstreet
So far I've been trying to work out which parts of the national literary system have been most active as paratext in mediating Winton's reputation. It is important, though, not to fall into a naïve determinism, which would see the author and the text as passively produced by the system. In fact, as we've just seen, the author is actively involved in providing a product – both the persona and the text – which has positive attributes that are attractive to the system, or to certain parts of it.

Let's try to think, then, about Cloudstreet as contributing actively to its own reception. What kind of book is going to be successful in this system? What kinds of qualities will it need to achieve success in this field, or within certain of its niches? What kinds of stylistic and thematic features will be preferred? In particular, what were the tastes and interests of the Australian
literary system as a whole during the period when the novel was written and first received – the late 1980s and early 1990s?

As a novel conceived, written and received during the decade around 1990, *Cloudstreet* was much affected by the moment of 1988, the Bicentenary of European settlement in Australia. In so far as the Bicentenary affected the arts, it created a distinct climate of expectations, values and interests that can be seen reflected in the literature of that period.¹⁹ I’d note the following interests, in no particular order:

- an interest in the Australian “identity” at all its levels, and the ways in which they might be connected – regional, national and international; or, to put this another way, an interest in achieving, simultaneously, a sense of Australian regionalism, nationalism and internationalism
- related to this, a fascination with history, with Australian traditions and their place in the modern world
- an interest in certain affective qualities to be achieved and performed at this time, such as “nationalism,” “celebration,” “community” and “consensus.”

What kind of book would fulfill these interests?

- an historical novel of considerable scope and substance
- an historical novel demonstrating the connections between the regional, the national and the international
- a novel tracing the relation between tradition and modernisation
- a novel that celebrates the extraordinary in the ordinary, the transcendent in the material
- a novel about community
- a novel whose style and concerns could be read back into the tradition of the Great Australian Novel, but also forward into international print culture
- a novel that would appeal “consensually” to popular, middle brow and high brow readers
- a book and an author that formed a “saleable” and prize-worthy package at this time, that could be marketed, celebrated and “loved.”

In approaching *Cloudstreet*, then, there is a strong expectation that a Great Australian Novel must be grounded in a regional or local identity, while also
attaining more national or universal significance. This is especially so with writing from West Australia, which has a strong sense of its regional identity. Randolph Stow’s *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1968), for example, was taught in schools and undergraduate university courses for many years. It is about a boy growing up in Geraldton on the coast north of Perth, then moving to Perth as a young man. More recently, Robert Drewe’s *The Savage Crows* (1976) and *The Bodysurfers* (1983) established Perth, the Swan River and the city’s beaches as a character in fiction. Winton has acknowledged these regional influences.

The sense of the national emerging out of the regional is artfully inscribed in *Cloudstreet* by the two initial settings with which it opens, and the two families’ moves to Perth. The Pickles begin in Geraldton, the setting of Stow’s *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, while the Lambs move up to Perth from Margaret River in the south, whose Karri and Jarra forests were the subject of another WA classic, Katherine Susannah Prichard’s *Working Bullocks* (1926). The plot, then, folds the regional into the urban, the traditional into the modern. In the Perth suburb of West Leederville, the two families both encounter and resist modernisation – World War Two and the coming of the Americans, the Bay of Pigs crisis, the assassination of Kennedy, the coming of modern supermarkets and the new brick suburbs. The plot of Winton’s saga enfolds the regional in the national, the traditional in the modern. Put another way, it discovers the regional as national.

This theme is doubled, at another level, by the novel’s discovery of the extraordinary within the ordinary, its quest for metaphysical transcendence within ordinary Australian life. This is a central theme of *Cloudstreet*. The metaphysical is folded into the physical and the everyday, just as the regional is folded into the urban, via the river. The Swan River is a conduit, bringing traditional Australian life in to the modern city, and also a switching point between the physical and the spiritual. We see this in the celebrated boating episode, when Fish Lamb looks down into the river and up into the stars at the same time. Ordinary family life is seen as sacred and devotional. Although *Cloudstreet* is therefore set in urban Perth on the cusp of modernisation, it is as if the modern urban world does not quite exist for these two families: regional life-ways, and the forces of the natural and even supernatural worlds are channeled right inside the city by the all-pervasive water of the river and its relation to the night sky. The novel’s spiritual quest for atonement parallels the Bicentennial quest for social consensus and community. These two levels, the social and the spiritual, are constantly inscribed in the plot: in Oriel Lamb’s performance of neighbourly love through good works in a bad, perhaps manifestly evil world; the coming
together of the two families through the marriage of Rose and Quick, and the birth of their child Harry; the final removal of the fence between the two backyards; and Quick’s recognition during his vision in the wheat field that he is, after all, his brother’s keeper. The novel’s twin themes of social consensus and spiritual transcendence are strongly supported by Winton’s public references to his Christian, family-centred values.

Another common feature of the Great Australian Novel is that it has tended to be an historical saga. I’m thinking, for example of Patrick White’s *The Tree of Man* (1955), which has many similarities to *Cloudstreet*. The status of historical fiction was greatly enhanced by the Bicentenary and its popular historicism. Peter Carey’s *Illywhacker* (1985) and his Booker Prize-winning *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988) are both sweeping historical sagas that operate simultaneously at the regional, national and international levels. Although it was not published until 1991, I would regard *Cloudstreet* as Winton’s Bicentennial book.

Andrew Taylor asked Winton about the historical and nostalgic aspects of the novel in a 1996 interview. Taylor asked:

Cloudstreet…it’s the childhood of your parent’s generation, isn’t it? Why did you choose to write about that generation in particular?

Winton replied:

I remember walking around in the streets of the City of Perth and being appalled. What I hadn’t realized before was how much of the city had been destroyed in the orgies of development in the 1960s and 1980s. The places I grew up with…had simply become mythic because the bulldozers had got to them and those shiny reflective shit boxes had been put up in their place…I was re-imagining it…the city of your parents, the city of your grandparents…It sent me off…thinking about the destruction of community, the destruction of neighborhoods…the loss of the corner shop, all the kinds of things that people get nostalgic about for good reason…Plus I was documenting all the verbal history and the nonsense and the tall stories I’d grown up with…listening to all these people talking in accents and inflections that had become pressed out of reality, out of existence by the Americanisation of our culture.20

Winton is quite explicit, then, about the novel’s nostalgia for lost places, for an Australian accent and culture that are pre-American, pre-modern, pre-
1960s. These qualities find expression in the novel’s rich registration of Australian idioms of the 1940s and 1950s, and its superbly lyrical descriptions of places and landscapes in and around Perth. This goes a long way toward explaining the popularity of the novel, at least for a certain generation of readers, the baby boomers, who were the major cultural force in the 1990s, when the novel was published. But nostalgia is by its very nature conservative: it prefers the past to the future; it is at best ambivalent about modernity; it prefers the local and the traditional to the global.

Stylistically, too, *Cloudstreet* can at once be read back into the Australian tradition and forward into certain forms of internationalism. I’ve already mentioned a number of Great Australian Novels whose saga form is echoed in *Cloudstreet*, such as Randolph Stow’s *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* and Patrick White’s *The Tree of Man*. But it was another aspect of the novel’s style that allowed it to seem fashionable and even international in the 1990s – that is, its affinities with magic realism. This is most often associated with the Latin American novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, whose *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1971) combined elements of the national historical saga with eruptions of myth and magic into the plot as if they were “real.” Winton flirts with magic realism in a few notable episodes, such as the fishing episode at Margaret River, where Quick sees the Aboriginal angel and his boat magically fills with fish. This Bruegel-like domestication of one of the miracles in the New Testament is an example of Winton’s quest to locate the extraordinary in the real, to show, literally, that ordinary life overflows with divine grace.

The other important magic realist device is the haunting of the house by two dead women: the old lady who turned her home into a charitable institution for Aboriginal girls, and the Aboriginal girl taken from her family who committed suicide in the house. This is almost certainly derived from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), which is set in a house haunted by the ghost of a negro baby killed by its own mother to save it from a life of slavery prior to the American Civil War. Eventually the houses in both novels are exorcised by the establishment of a positive community, and especially through the nurturing efforts of women. Angels and spirits were in fashion in the 1990s, appearing in a number of other Australian novels, short stories and films, including Helen Garner’s *Cosmo Cosmolino* (1992). Winton, though, risks the charge that he is appropriating Aboriginal and African-American trauma as a way of expressing the dilemmas of poor white Australians.

One other element of *Cloudstreet* that has contributed to its popular readability is its rich and much-publicised interaction with Winton’s own biography, which he discusses in almost every interview he gives. Like Oriel
Lamb, his grandmother lived in a tent; one of his grandfathers was a vaudeville performer like Lester, who kept mannequins in his shed; his father was a policeman in Perth during the 1960s like Quick Lamb; and he used to listen to his father telling stories to his mother. Quick and Rose's son Harry is born around the time of Winton's own birth in 1960. These biographical inscriptions indicate how a text can interact with the public life of its author's identity, which Winton actively promotes.

In its style and themes, then, *Cloudstreet* operates simultaneously at a number of levels. Its greatest achievement, I think, is the way it orchestrates them:

- it locates the national in the regional; or elevates the regional to national significance
- it richly recreates the colloquial speech and places of an era that is now felt to be lost, and for which Australian readers of a certain generation feel a great nostalgia
- it locates the spiritual in the physical and the everyday
- it performs an appropriate affective response at each of these levels: a sentimental commitment to region and to nation; a nostalgic interest in history and tradition; a "celebration" of grace, community and atonement in ordinary life.

The negative side of these strengths is that they make Winton seem like an anti-modern, anti-metropolitan, even anti-intellectual writer. This makes Winton a novelist quite unlike his contemporaries, such as Helen Garner and Peter Carey, who are distinctly modern, cosmopolitan writers. He is also distinct from the younger "grunge" writers who came after him in the mid-1990s, beginning with Andrew McGahan's *Praise* in 1992. Winton's persona and values are more akin to those of the poet Les Murray, who also champions the traditions of the rural battlers above the metropolitan and the modern. There are, then, both positive and negative reasons why, in the 1990s, the field of Australian literature, in its broadest sense, established *Cloudstreet* as a Great Australian Novel. Or, to put this another way, Tim Winton and *Cloudstreet* have done all that the field of Australian literature, in all its diversity, expects them to do. It was the ideal Bicentennial novel, championing traditional Australian values and social consensus, and appealing to the varied historical, literary and even spiritual interests of mainstream, middlebrow, middleclass Australian readers.
Notes


5 The following biographical information is derived from Austlit.


8 See, for example, Paul Salzman, Helplessly Tangled in Female Arms and Legs: Elizabeth Jolley’s Fictions (St Lucia: UQP, 1993).


10 Cited in Anne Galligan, “Build the Author, Sell the Book: Marketing the Australian Author in the 1990s,” in Australian Literature and the Public Sphere, eds., Alison Bartle, Robert Dixon and Christopher Lee (Toowoomba: ASAL, 1998): 152.


17 Cited in Turner, “Australian Literature and the Public Sphere,” in *Australian Literature and the Public Sphere*, 1.


The plain, the lines of trees, the semi-distant hills all tilt as one comes around the bend in the road, about to descend the slope.

The sway of the world that governs us is there. It's not unlike the lift that you feel deep in water with aqualung and flippers when a tiny foot-move, with arm-adjustment, enables you to glide over or past the rock that suddenly faced you.

It's not exactly flying as a bird can, entirely at home in the element it moves in. But it is, I think, at least as if the air, at ease, eases us to notice that all of us who live here, birds of a feather, take to things at an angle.
DIANE FAHEY

BEACH

Sharp winds as I hit the beach; rain that will stay far off, a spray from towering cloud-surf.
I pass the co-ordinates of a gull, its head a stone’s throw from raised wing planted in sand.
A day of odysseys... With hauled water, children build worlds between tents and tideline, the youngest in bliss as waves lick and jump like a small dog. By the pier restaurant - adventures in sipping and forking - a squad of catamarans have blown in from Torquay, the sailors jubilant, striding up the beach.
Under nib-scratched waves, a gold skin covers ribs of sand. Dreambodies plumb water's weight, store cold as quickness, heat as strength.
TURTLE LAKE, VILLA DORIA PAMPHILI

Copulating turtles plop sideways into the lake as the amateur photographer approaches – if only all caught in flagrante delicto had such swift cool escape! The waters are not, however, underpopulated: each of these almost unnoticed shadows is a burst of dark life, a small head here gulping at the August sun, congregations of carapaces, blurred shapes at ease in their green piazza, surfaces rife with silence. Even Aeschylus could have felt no premonition here, where life swims microcosmically without a sense of menace, as if peace could always be the same as ignorance, face of fate casually neither denying, nor saying yes.

RIG VEDA CONSEQUENCES

He swore to his wife that he would agree never to be seen fully naked. But the gods, as is their delight, tricked him and in one stroke of lightning showed him up to angry Urrasi as the mortal manikin that he was.

She left, tossing mortality like a useless skin at his feet,
returned to the lake
and adorned herself
in the water-bird garments
of eternity.

He found her, pleaded, held out
his frail flesh to her. But she
had played the game that mortal women
play and here was no contest;
I give birth to fire and life,
she said, while all your descendants
will be surnamed Death.

What man now snug in his bed
can ever be sure on waking
that what he clasps will be
a familiar form or simply restless air
where once a goddess slept?
Never forget the names:
Bush, Howard, Blair.
(Howard is the little one in the middle,
so little you would hardly know
he was there.)
Never forget the major pair:
Bush and Blair,
like Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee,
twin towers of brutality.
Your medical treatment,
far from your rubbed home,
they will use for election victory.
They will shake many hands
(though, of course, not yours)
in the course of the campaign.
They will rouse mothers and fathers galore
(though of course, not yours –
who can never be roused again).
They will claim they care
(though you know better).
Bush, Howard, Blair:
Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee,
and the little grinning one in between,
those three stooges
who murder language
with impunity,
as if words were children.
1. We lost our limb whilst still a twig; Ever since our love’s been still. Were that soul to live again – rise, as if to calling – find a frame, then the much-loved bastard that we buried would finally have a name.

2. We rekindle the flame in the tomb of our affection. By candlelight, the walls, incarnadine, resemble a womb of arcane protection. You emerge from this seamless skin. For too long moth prone, your soul now hovers with our shadowy lovers. Pleasure seekers, our profane worship is bald, shivering with purpose. We leave as treasure keepers.

3. If ever a conception refutes our origins, defies an interminable death, it’s yours, from me, back to me, lulled by the waters of the Lethe. And yet you’ll come into the world maligned: too much Mars in your horoscope. Yours a nativity of agitators and insurgents, an arrival toasted by irreverent orators; none of whom finger a strand of small stones.

4. Opinion is cleft across Channel and Bank: I’m considered dissentient, my child misbegotten, from an alliance they resent. Diverse advice: from retirement to prayer to abortifacient ‘remedies’. Only sacrifice can appease these judicious men: Druids each and every one. For what shall I atone? I will hold her proud head up, and not a single, precious drop will spill in their votive bowl or cup.
5. The epitome of our marriage is this wedding photograph – more’s wrong with the picture than the frame – an ignominious ceremony; comrade you traded your name, for a ring – beneath the flag of the Irish Brigade, one free hand upon your revolver, an enemy of the King. Now I’ve a battle on the home front to win. That swaggering Hector – he’d relegate me to a lesser order, an Irish rose motif sewn on a fabric border; my own narrative within. Separation: an unsanctioned relief. Independence, still the theme of every speech; each word curls like a leaf.

6. Tonight the Abbey became a sideshow of knock-kneed prevaricators – vindicators of their so-called hero despite his obloquy. Wrongly they judge him worthy. But even fools can set their terms – they scratched my name on a shard of stone. For all the good I’ve done, the world’s still full of mice and worms.

7. They monitor my public silence. My private discourse is my only recourse, a jeremiad that I vent although it falls on deaf ears. If, outwardly I pretend, if I conceal my disillusionment, at least it’s a perjury that no-one hears.

8. Gyres: one such place is prison, where time encircles itself, mensurable by a roll-call, a meal, a turn of a key in the lock. As always, I’ve relied on myself, counted five menses on my own body clock. Free to go, it’s not the same as free to roam; the cuckoo in me is resolute. Faith renewed, I tell the mirror cynic I know – God leaves no-one destitute – then I return to a ransacked home.

9. By sea cliffs we walked, talking symbols into crag and nest, and those which represent us best – I chose the gull; pensive you debated its portent of danger or death – you, who see me as a swan, if as a bird at all. I’ve been your ancient literary queen, and thrice I’ve had the chance to be your wife –
but I've had more, not less to say.
Face-full of a sudden airborne spray I tell you why.
Sea birds are visionary. They drink the wind with every cry.

10.
Your proposal was impotent. Complicit with her predictable answer I gave
my consent.
Charmed by her lunar temperament, giddy from Minnaloushe's mystic
dance –
a heady infatuation for romance wound round you, like an incantation for a
spell;
yet her cascade of luxuriant hair fell – only on translations of her favourite
French writers.

11.
One remained constant: In days gone by, he and I made lofty plans.
As yet they lie, inchoate. In a Tower of Babel, our venerable dead;
learned, rowdy, dispossessed – accustomed to otherworldliness:
to meditate on their lot.
I could not tolerate a life half-led. Without my own key, I'd have severed my
braid
and clambered down – prepared to face the Dagda at the gate;
fearing nothing but a mirror's reflection of one grown sedentary and staid.
THE BALCONY
(for wendy whiteley)

awake beside the old railroad tracks & disused jetty, listening for the last of the cicadas.
a commuter train from milson's point
flashes its morse in the bridge's dark undercarriage.
who was there to witness our subterfuge?
without permission we imagined things differently

the white line of a seagull or the slow & fastidious ferry from garden island transepting the bay. or there is a garden & in it the statues grow past adulthood to cancer-stone & petrified driftwood – débris of those whose lives we are far from now. a vapour trail arcing at dusk drawn by a child's finger across mirrored glass & staring at the smudge-divided cruciform

forgetting the gun in the drawer, the nude shamming dead upon the divan – aware that the real enemy is within. partially blind or gradually mad.
black on the canvas silence on the screen
an empty sheet of white paper – each singles out its opponent. but why does it seem necessary to make the assumption or pass the judgement?
DEAR SUE LETTER
for Sue Williams

No matter who you are and where you come from, no matter what I was once and now am, ever since I’ve enjoyed your intersecting compassionate intellect which sees us eye to eye with things great and small… so my sonnet letter to you begins:
rolling craft afloat and a cork assure – ing finger triggers that the line’s alert to nibbles; adventures that may, sweet bait on the hook, breed ecstasies not captured in photographs but sumptuously hidden in novels we like and the pursuit of tales which are the fictions of the universe, and this verse to you that refuses to rhyme.
Redundant, middle-aged, for makeshift shafts of time adrift in shady fantasies, he's found and lost the plot. So what, he thinks, dead-pan as movie heroes might. To fill the day, he wanders scarce-equipped to meet new-fangled life: bank robbers, beggars, muggers, porn-shop entrances and exits.

He is thinking, therefore he exists among quotidian signs and wonders, never suffers circumscribed unravellings that writers put you through but minor dips into imagination's tide: what might be taking place in other heads, believing he's opaque, transparent all at once, like anyone with anything to hide.

How do conductors know exactly who has paid the fare? Who has got on, got off, the when and where? Whenever ticketless he tries to weather what's afoot, conceal the sleight, sit still
but always finds the patient
watcher near his shoulder
trained to spot the guilty
twitch, the lowered head
(he’d know for sure his wife’d
been cheating on him seconds
after coming home).

He knows for sure
he’ll never know what everybody
seems to know. Or do they?
Buttoning down the doubting surge
he wanders double-thinking
with himself to take a lift
and ponders why the 14th floor
is actually the 13th.
Never worked it out. If danger
lurked in 13 wouldn’t’ 13th floor
be dangerous no matter what
its name? Would God be bothered
by a number switch? They
(who are ‘They’ anyway?) must
consider deity a humbug if
they thought He wouldn’t twig.

What kind of world is this
that hands us questions,
answers of this sort? What
are we like, he thinks, if
this is how we catch ourselves
in thought, a spectacle
avoiding making of ourselves
a spectacle?

   More like a spectre,
guessing when and how we might
meet death, escape the train
conductor’s gimlet stare, or,
peering at libidinous magazines
with awe, too coy to pick one
up, ducking the fat man at the
till’s bored gaze, still
pondering that 13th floor.
THE ENGLISH CLASS

Part I. The Little Aristocrat

At 23, Jing was not married. He had not done anything great in his life. Probably the only great thing he had ever done was to survive the Great Cultural Revolution like hundreds of millions of his fellow countrymen, contrary to the Western belief. He was a small man, with a large square white face shaped like the Chinese character for nation that easily got sun-tanned in summers but went back to its creaminess in winters, a feature that would often draw comments from people behind his back: "How come he looks so white?" Or "Did he originally come from the cold North?" Or "Was there a foreigner in his family?" He had ambitions but did not quite know what they were. When he was an educated youth in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, he had wanted to go to school to spend his days reading books instead of planting rice and wheat in spring or carrying the back-breaking rice stocks on a shoulder-pole back to the village in summer and autumn. Now that he was a truck driver, after he graduated from the wrong school, a driving school, the old urge returned that he wanted to learn more, to know more about the world outside the little village of one hill, forty-odd households and one creek.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was at an end and China was beginning to open up. For the first time, the university entrance examination, banned for many years, was reintroduced, bringing a ray of hope for aspiring youths such as Jing, who had spent years farming the land with peasants in a mountain village by a nameless creek and had, as luck would have it, got where he was, becoming a driver in the Truck Team attached to the Shipyard in White Sand. Apart from his whiteness, there was nothing to suggest what this small man was capable of, standing in his blue overalls wearing a coat with a badge that showed he had received training from a driving school. No one paid much attention to him in the Team. They had seen the likes of him
in the past: kids sent by their powerful parents to stay in the Team as a jumping board to launch them somewhere else when opportunities arose. No one stayed long enough to strike roots. As Old Canton, an experienced mechanic who had been demoted from his position of professorship in a university for some overseas-related reasons, said, in his heavily accented Cantonese Mandarin, the Team was a temporary haven for the well-connected “bastards” before they got onto some better jobs. Few in the Team questioned the legitimacy of this practice, though, taking it for granted that it was part of a reality in which if one had power one would naturally take advantage of it before it was too late, just as Whooping Xu – he earned the name because he was suffering from a chronic bronchitis – aptly put it, youquan buyong, guoqi zuofei (one should make use of one’s powerful position before it’s too late).

Jing had no powerful parents although he did have some connections. His aunt worked in the Bureau of Transportation Administration. Over the phone, she told him he had two choices; he could either stay with the Provincial Transportation Team or go to a shipyard. It did not take Jing long to make up his mind. The Transportation Team was a hell of a job, where you had to drive trucks around the province and between the provinces, rising before daybreak and going to bed at midnight if you were lucky. The money was good but not worth the risk involved. Some classmates of Jing’s from the same driving school had come to early grief, breaking their backs or necks as a result of head-on collisions or their trucks being overturned. The shipyard did not sound like a bad idea. If there was not much work to do, judging by the word shufu or comfortable, that Aunt used, it was even better for he could effectively use the time for his studies. He enjoyed reading and would very much love to go to the university one day, his secret wish being to follow his father’s early career in becoming an English major. So, it was with some expectation that he came to the shipbuilding factory and registered at the Team one spring day.

The shipyard at White Sand consisted of three parts: a dry dock with a half finished ship sleeping in it, surrounded by heavy lifting equipment that scarred the sky; the central part with a row of black-tiled, white-walled office rooms; and, to the side, a stand-alone two-storey building wrapped in rusty sheet steel salvaged from sunken ships. From the dock on the edge of the Yangtze River, Jing could see, miles downstream, the Great Yangtze Bridge between Snake Mountain in Wuchang and Turtle Mountain in Hanyang, the river lined with ships of all kinds. At the sight of the surrounding weeds turning green in the cracks of the mud left from last year’s flood, Jing’s heart
gave a leap. This was where he was going to spend his next instalment of life, possibly alone again, like in Grass Village, for he did not know how long he was going to stay in this strange place. And, when the shrill siren of a five-level passenger ship pierced his ears, his eyes were drawn towards its familiar sky-blue shape with three red Chinese characters painted on its bow: The East is Red, chugging away against the stream on its way to Chongqing, a City of Mountains. Outside the walls of the shipyard was a flatland green with river growth, willow trees and soft hair-like grass, shimmering with small ponds or industrial lagoons. His sense of loneliness was relieved by the comforting thought that he could come here in the evenings if being alone with oneself was too much to bear.

When he went to the Truck Team the next day, Jing was disappointed by what he saw. It was not just the ironclad ramshackle affair that assaulted his eye. Added to that was the stark reality that the Team did not even have a proper parking site next to its repair shop, shaped like a box open on one side beneath the steel structure. In front of the open side, there was a strip of muddy ground covered with sands and deep dry ruts where the assorted vehicles were parked, some head first, some tail first, depending on the driver’s whim. Nothing like what he had seen in the Transportation Team, with shiny dark-green Jiefang, Liberation, or its semi-trailers, hundreds of them that occupied the expansive old Horse Racing Ground in neat military rows, these were inferior stuff of unknown brands. One bulgy-headed 4-tonner resembled a Jiefang but turned out to be a Hubei, a brand that Jing’s mates in the driving school would scoff at. A Fiat with peeled paint perched over a black hole with one wheel gone. An elephantine truck stood in his way, dwarfing him, that he had never seen before. Next to it was a tiny little specimen that could neither be called a car nor a truck as it was too small for either, a cross between Hubei and Jiefang in miniature form, looking like a poor little joke.

All told, there were less than ten vehicles.

When he stepped inside the workshop, it was like stepping a century back into a darkened cave. Jing was astonished to see a cave painting: A room of tools, lining the walls, hanging from the ceiling and carpeting part of the floor. Spanners, pincer pliers, boxes of screws, screw drivers, crankshafts, crankcases, ignition plugs, and a lingering smell of grease and oils assaulting his nostrils. Sitting in this cavern were a group of people, frozen, as if painted, in various postures. Old Canton on a tool box covered with a clean towel, scowling at this nondescript newcomer, holding a smoking cigarette in his right hand and a large mug of tea in his left, his hand hovering over it as if
over a fire; Whooping Xu coughing and turning his thin chin around as he reached to open his cabinet to fetch a spanner when he noticed the student-faced Jing; Old Zhu quickly suppressing an abusive, “Cao, here comes another one,” by presenting a smiling face with an “Oh, that’s good, that’s good,” in response to Ba, the team leader’s introduction.

In as few words as possible, Ba told Jing what he was supposed to do. He was to act the replacement driver for anyone who could not come to work due to illness or family commitments. If there was no work available, meaning no vehicle was left unoccupied, Jing was to stay around and see if there was anything he could help with in the mechanics’ workshop.
He has lived in this coastal town for many years, long enough to know its skies and how they change from light to dark to light. In his house there is a wall of glass that overlooks the restless ocean and behind this wall he paints drowned and drowning women. Sometimes he paints the women naked, sometimes he gives them white dresses that gather and flow about them like lovely shrouds. Sometimes (though very rarely) the women are strewn with flowers - his floating Ophelias, he calls these flower-strewn women.

His fame has grown, his paintings have become much sought after, they hang on important walls in great cities of the world. He has captured sadness, the critics say, the sadness that is unique to women. Because of his fame, women come to his door from time to time. To reach it, they must climb a long, steep path from a beach where waves move endlessly against fine white sand. Behind his glass wall he can see the women climbing towards him, and he will watch them come and marvel at their female grace. He does not open the door to all these pilgrim women but sometimes, having watched a woman ascend, he feels he has no choice. Not all the women to whom he opens the door are beautiful (though most are, it has to be said) but all have a quality of sad beauty that interests him - sometimes it is the way light catches at their hair, sometimes the movement of a shadow across their eyes, sometimes a hesitation he sees near their mouth.

They come into his house and he takes them to every room but one; in each room they visit there are paintings of drowned and drowning women. This is what they have come to see, this is what they have expected, but when they see these paintings in such profusion they are overcome with feelings that are deeper than anything they have known. They tell the artist he has seen inside their hearts, the secret sadness there, the grief that is beyond words.

But it is not beyond words. They will then, without exception, tell him what it is that his work has so remarkably stirred in them: their sweet first
love, lost when they were young and careless and did not know it could not be found again; the child they carried, only for it to be born lifeless; the child that lived, only to die; the child that did not die, only to live in endless pain; the endless pain of a love they could not have; the father who came too close, whose touch was wrong; the mother who would not touch; the unsaid words that would have revealed their heart; the ache they can never lose.

He listens to these stories with a stillness the women find comforting; though he does not offer sympathy or advice, they know, they know, he has truly heard what they have said to him. And there is always one other thing the women want: it is that he should paint them drowned or drowning, naked, or perhaps in a white dress that gathers and flows about them like a lovely shroud. They want to see their face in the water, they want to see the secret sadness there, the grief that is (they think) beyond words. The artist tells them he will do this thing for them, but there are three conditions: the woman may see the painting when it is done but it must remain with the artist to use as he wishes (perhaps it will stay here, in this house, with the hundreds of other paintings of drowned or drowning women, perhaps it will hang on an important wall of one of the great cities of the world); the woman must make love with the artist; the woman must leave the artist’s house after they have made love and she has seen the painting, never to return.

Though these are harsh conditions to come from such a seemingly gentle man, most of the pilgrim women agree to them, such is their need to see their secret sadness, if only for one day, to have its nobility revealed. And so they go with the artist to his bed where, he tells them, he will move against them like the sea moves against the fine white sand on the beach below. Some of the women are taken by the poetry, or what they think is the poetry, of these words, though others are less sure. However, they allow him to grunt and suck above them, though often they will be crying long before he has finished. You see, he says then, you see how your sadness has come forth? And then, true to his word, he will paint them drowned or drowning (he decides which it is to be), naked or in a white dress that gathers and flows about them like a lovely shroud (he decides this, too – he is the artist, after all). The women will then stand in front of these paintings, sometimes for hours, seeing, for the first time, the manifestation of their secret sadness. The artist allows them this time but when he has decided it is sufficient he asks them to leave. And they do so without argument, most of them.

On this particular day rain is falling, as it so often does in the coastal town where the artist lives. He is watching a pilgrim woman climb the steep path towards his door, and, as always, he is taken by her female grace. As she comes closer he sees she is beautiful, with long, dark hair and eyes that hold an
interesting sadness. So he opens the door to her, invites her into his house, shows her the paintings of drowned and drowning women. She is affected, as all pilgrim women are affected, cries, tells him her name is Shelley (a name that belongs with the sea, with things that are hidden, he thinks), tells him (as he knew she would) of her secret sadness. Her story is of a child who died, her child, a boy. He drowned, this boy (and so perhaps the paintings are doubly painful for her to see, though she does not say this). She tells the artist the boy’s death was an accident but he watches her with his usual stillness, listens to what is deeper than her words, and thinks perhaps this is not so, perhaps this woman is not telling him everything. He does not care about this; it is the woman who interests him, not her story. When she has finished she asks the artist if he will paint her as a drowned or drowning woman (he knew she would ask this) and he says he will do so, subject to his usual three conditions. She agrees, and they go to his bed where he tells her he will move against her like the sea moves against the fine white sand on the beach below—she does not seem to hear him, makes no response, anyway. Then he grunts and sucks above her, looks into her sad eyes and is done. She does not cry during any of this; it is as if her mind has gone to another place, he thinks. Afterwards he paints her drowned and naked, and then she stands in front of the work, drawing in its secret sadness, seeing herself (she tells him) for the first time. Eventually he asks her to leave but she just smiles at him and says she has come home.

This is not what the artist wants, of course. He broods behind his wall of glass, watches the ocean, watches the rain, tells her he cannot paint; no sad women will come through his door if he is not alone. She must leave, he tells her, if not for him then for her sisters, and for the sake of art. But she will not go. She spends much of her time in front of the artist’s mirror, studying her eyes. Sometimes she will use the artist’s paints and canvas, attempt to recreate what she has seen, what the artist has already rendered in his painting of her. She studies this painting, too, tells him again it shows her sadness, shows her heart, asks him to reveal his secret. He shrugs, says it is only a painting. She sleeps in his bed but he does not tell her now about the ocean and the sand. Sometimes he grunts and sucks above her but this is not what he wants—not for more than a few moments, anyway. Weeks pass, and then months. The artist watches many pilgrim women climb towards him but he does not open the door to them. Eventually—because he needs the sadness of new women, because he needs to paint again—he decides he must act as he has acted in the past when he was unable to persuade a woman to leave. He does not want to act in this way—he truly does not, it gives him no pleasure—but, he tells himself, he has no choice.
So he takes Shelley to a room in his house that he has kept locked for the whole time she has been with him. She has, of course, asked him what is in this room, asked him to open it for her. But he has until now refused to do so, telling her it is just more paintings of drowned and drowning women, no different from the ones she has seen. But now he tells her to come with him to the room; he will unlock it; he will show her something she has not seen—and when she sees what is in the room he will give her two choices. She agrees, says the room will surely reveal something of the artist’s heart, something she will need to see in order to better know her own, something that will enable her to evoke, transform. He unlocks the door. The room, like the other rooms in the house, contains paintings of drowned and drowning women. But unlike the women in the other paintings, the women in these paintings are strewn with flowers; arum lilies in particular. These are my floating Ophelias, he tells her—you may look at them and then either you must leave my house forever or you must allow me to paint you as I have painted them: strewn with flowers, floating. Shelley enters the room, regards these paintings, sees immediately they have captured a deeper, much deeper sadness than any she has previously seen, including that deep sadness she has seen in the painting of herself. It is truly a transformational sadness, she thinks. Yes, she whispers, yes, losing herself among the flowers. What is your choice, then? the artist asks her. She replies it is her only wish, her only longing, to be painted in such a way. He knew this is what she would say.

He tells her she must then come with him to a place, where the delicate and elusive quality of light on the water will allow him to create what she wants. He has lived in this coastal town for many years, he says, and knows its skies and how they change from light to dark to light. There is a pool he knows, surrounded by high walls, surrounded by rocks—if she looks at the paintings she will see this pool—and it is here they must go if she is to become a floating Ophelia, as she desires. She is anxious to go immediately to this place but he tells her they must wait until later in the day, when the sun is at a particular angle and the water in the pool shines in a particular way.

Finally he tells her the time is right, collects everything he needs to paint her, and they set out for the pool. He leads her down the steep path to the beach where the water moves against the fine white sand, though he does not draw her attention to it. They go along this beach for some time, heading south. Eventually they reach an inlet. He leads her along a path beside a river, through dense bush, until the river disappears underground and they hear the sound of roaring water. She thinks it is a waterfall but when they reach it she sees it is a weir from which water spills down a high wall into a pool surrounded by rocks. This is the place, he says. She sees there are arum lilies...
growing beside the path, she sees the light on the water is as delicate, as elusive, as he said it would be.

You must pick a garland of lilies, then plunge into the pool and remain in the water while I paint you, he says. She looks with some apprehension at the water—it must be cold, and the drop is a long one but she knows more surely than she has known anything that she must see the painting, must see herself as a floating Ophelia, with all the guilt and grief and, yes, hope she feels in her woman's heart: hope that the secret sadness may in time leave her (though she knows it will not); hope that the artist may in time love her (though she knows he cannot). So she picks a garland of lilies, moves with female grace to the edge of the weir and, with only a moment's hesitation, leaps into the water which immediately closes about her, pulls her down just as the artist knew it would. Within seconds she has gone from his sight. He paints her from memory. The light is perfect. Then, as darkness begins to fall, he starts to walk back to his house. The rain comes just as he reaches it.
Each evening, on the television, I find myself watching for blood. There it is, and there. In films, it appears like a child’s painting, what we imagine blood to be, and what I too would like of it. In one, a woman carves her arm with glass, working as studiously with it as if she were preparing a menu or an installation. Another woman, in a quick half pirouette toward him and away from her bright sink, stabs her startled husband in his buttery chest. A man breaks open his wife’s head with a hammer as she bathes. Her meagre blood sprays one inoffensive trail across his face as a child might from a water pistol.

And then, one evening, a German KFor soldier stammers something like people were herded in this room, a policeman threw in grenade, finished them with machine gun...so much blood it ran down walls into basement.

And I am at my kitchen table, surrounded by a vase and papers and pens and washing. I am holding on to an open book, a book someone has given me. I am looking out the window, beyond the computer where one day I will write, into the almost-dark, at the newly turned earth at the base of the lemon tree and at the white chrysanthemum my son laid there. And I remember the first time I see a basement. I am in Vancouver where, even in summer, the air is sharp with cold and the light shifts all day with the rush of clouds. In Vancouver I felt for the first time that I was on the edge of something, standing on its very edge as if land were just a platform after all and I was leaning out over that edge much too far northwest and into the teeth of something huge and inhospitable, feeling its teeth pricking my ears and nape. So, I could understand the need for basements: the central heating control unit; the stack of precut firewood; shelves lined with tinned and bottled food; the ham radio; a water tank. In the evenings, they tell me, he will excuse himself and disappear. He has people to talk to in Fiji, South Africa, Argentina, England, New Zealand, Poland. His disappearance is not to be taken personally, and am I quite sure that I understand?

After we ascend the simple concrete steps, my host makes tea in an elegant pot and we sit by the large windows that overlook their garden, green and moist and soft with July light. And it is here she points out to me
something I am having trouble seeing. Have you ever noticed, she says, how the Negro has a prominent forehead? I look at her for a few moments. Behind her own head, wind blows her wet trees about and the slant of the sun catches drops of water on so many leaves that, for a moment, there is light enough for it to be as if jewels are falling. Did I nod? Or is it her, that encouraging nod, the nod of someone grandmotherly, two generations ahead, and me both unaccustomed and disbelieving, respectfully nodding back? Well you see, then, she says. Like monkeys.

Should I be afraid?

In the Christmas of 1959, my parents found a photographer whose paper and chemicals were so stable that the colour shots he took remain as reliable as if we were still standing there, my mother and I. My child hair springs from me like angry copper wire. My eyes look deep into the lens, my gaze direct, if apprehensive. Behind, the Christmas tree is large and furious with lights. I wear long white socks and tiny blue, buckled shoes. I could not be called a beautiful child but there is something intense, something that flushes me now with a quick embarrassment. I stare into the parent's eye, down the long lens of history, and spy something there, moving.

The hair on the back of the photographer's neck rises up. The shutter opens. Her cardigan is blue; the pleats in her skirt are small, white knives. Keep very still, somebody says. And she does, knowing already the harshness of light, what this might mean. She keeps very still, knowing the flashes of things in the world - fireworks, the sun on the water, anger, the blades of knives.

For decades I continue to see ghosts. They run and run around the house; they stare in at windows, hold their limbs up to the glass. They like a game. They know just how much to show, for just how long, and how quick to run. They are not the ghosts we read in books - those elegant, serious figures. They don't stand tall or turn slowly to meet one's gaze. They are not sad. These ghosts like to hide; they are nimble and young.

They appear, of course, in unexpected places: in the street, walking away; on a passing bus; exiting a bank or cinema. I have learned the ways of ghosts - that they sunbake, drive cars, enjoy parties more than I do, and that they must have access to surveillance equipment. This can be the only explanation as to how they follow me from house to house, suburb to suburb, beach shack to wheatbelt farm, to interstate cities and other continents. They even follow into dreams, where they smile and pull up a chair, or watch me pass by, leaning easily in open doorways.

*My girl, come closer. What is it?*
*Nothing, grandmother.*
*What is it you want?*
*Nothing at all.*
What is it you want from me?
I want nothing from you.
You want nothing from me except - what?
I want nothing, not one thing, no thing at all. No thing - no stone, no tree, no blanket, no cup or car. No book, no word, no touch, not one song. No thing, no thing. No house, no house from you. No fire or light or star or dawn. Turn your back, your stoop, your tight black shawl. Turn your long thick hair, your skirts, your coins, your crucifix, your strong brown arms, your singing arms, your arms once full of bracelets and your bracelets full of song. Turn away. Be still. Be statue, be stone. Ask nothing. Ask me nothing. Ask nothing of me. Don't look, don't look my way, don't look at me. Do nothing, be nothing, be not one thing to me. Not one thing. Leave me. Leave me. Leave me be. Be tree, be stone, be still. Let me leave, let me just walk by. Let me leave, let me leave, believe me. Be a tree, a stone, be a stitch, be still. I will take up threads. I will stitch you up. My needle is sharp and intent. I'll use skin and hair - my angry wire hair, your long thick plaited hair. I'll use your house, your light, the long light of your stars. I'll use your arms, your soft, your singing arms. My needle is immense; my needle is obliging. My needle offers neither resistance nor opinion. My needle does my bidding, my dumb needle. Your eyes and lips like three dumb leaves. I'll sew them up with my own dumb needle, our skin and hair and your own dumb song. The dumb leaves of your face.

Hosanna, Hosanna, I've seen you always, everywhere I look and sleep. I want only to touch you. Come closer. Please, just one step closer. Speak.

Someone phoned me. He had heard about the story I was hoping to write and he had a book that might interest me. He had found it in his late father's shed. I drove to his home, an old, sprawling, stone house by a river. Frogs and cicadas croaked and whirred in the thickly shaded lilies beneath the trees along the bank. He stepped out onto the wide, cool veranda, and handed it to me. I knew it at once: The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. I had a library copy at home. I smiled and thanked him. And don't worry, he grinned. I don't work for the Turkish secret police. I looked down at the book, searching for something to say. I felt my mouth move, but no sound came. Believe me, I've thought about that, I heard myself say at last, not looking at him. Then we smiled and I thanked him again, and all the way home I could think of nothing else.

The book is open to page 17, to a letter written by a Mr Rushdouni about what happened in the city of Van in 1915. I don't even know where Van is but it is something someone has said that has stopped me, something Mr Rushdouni reports that a Mr Proudian's wife says: Show me at least the bones of my dear one.

Read me slowly, my paper skin is brown and folded. Open me here, and here. I am dry with years and dust. You are breathing me in. Look - I am all
over you. Open yourself here. And here. Open your mouth, your hands, your arms, your eyes. Can you smell me? This is my undoing. I am unravelling my skin, my skin thin as paper. Hold me. I am coming apart. For you. Despite you. I am old between your fingers. What will become of me?

Hovsanna, Hovsanna, I have seen you always.

My blood is hot beneath my skin; it takes my anger everywhere it goes. My veins are stretched, grandmother; they throb. Blood rushes to the end of the line and back, ninety seven times a minute, carries itself, its cargo, to the tips of my fingers, the edge of my ears, the beds of my nails. Cells open in my sleep, divide, divide and multiply. My nails become thick, white, curve. The speed of my blood, the speed of time. I am a sudden forest sprouting, my hairs curl black from my skin. I am evening morning evening, a flushed sky. I am bougainvillea, hibiscus. I am rampant lantana. I am wasp, ambulance, pillar box red. I am blistered, sunburned, fevered, rashed. I am pandemic; I am volcanic, flood. I am all bridges swept away. I am the tumbling of houses; the floors all slip beneath our feet.

I am the Earth split open, Mount Saint Helens, her bare southern face, that great grey scar. I am ash, Krakatoa, a darkness over land. I am a B29, its belly open. I am a plane falling. I am all blood slowing. I am breath and prayer, vapour, space. I am the suffocating chambers of the dead, the Jewelled Lady of Pompeii, fingers curled about her rings, her throat packed with dust, her mouth forever wide against the avalanche of time.

Slow me, my heart, the hurtle of my blood. Give me this: a long cool night, new sheets, crushed ice against my lips; a wide bright bowl glazed blue, its twitching rim of yellow fish. Stand it by my bed, fill it brim full. Let me hear you tear an old white sheet. Fold that soft familiar cloth, let me hear you dip and squeeze it, the soprano trill of water falling. I will imagine fountains, lakes, the rowdy course of water over rocks and into streams, the thundering of rain onto mountains of trees. Let me feel it slide against me, against my skin, my feet slide in the mud as I descend, panting and driven, slipping through a forest like a throat.

Allow me this: beneath this ring of light from soft bed lamp, meniscus taut and glistening like skin trembling as I shift my weight, this hot, this burning mass of me; that turning, my breath, my bloodied anger, the splitting off of all my cells, will make that mark upon the world, that trail.

And give me this: a day; a beach in the curve of a bay, a steep cliff at my back; a small, cold stream; a wide blue bowl of fruit. Give me bluster and sun; time enough to feel my bones long and white against the sand, my quiet unrepentant heart, the patience of my belly.
Short, broad, fierce
my warrior mother
spine curved
like a question, marked
by years of unrequited
hunger, you
squinted at the world
through tri-focals
only one ear could catch
the frequency
of the moment
in the other shell
just the echo
of your father’s fist
trapped forever
like a hissing sea.

The frost of your uniform
the white flag
of your cap
a lie of surrender –
babies nested
in your arms, photo
after photo
of these smudged survivors
born too soon
yet somehow, they snuck
their way through pavement cracks
then bloomed
like sunflowers, huge
outrageous as velvet
paintings, loud against
the whisper
of hospital walls.
Those long afternoons reading *New Scientist*
looking up as people came and left
with daughters spouses chatted with the staff
from time to time declined a cup of tea
nibbled a biscuit watched as the timers chimed
evening gathering and one by one
the chairs around me emptied –

one issue of *New Scientist* lasts three hours
if you read the Letters and the Book Reviews –

released at last I’d make a dash to the loo
Sarah would drive me home and then I’d cook
dinner for you and manage to eat some too
after a glass of vermouth and lemonade.
My sex drive idled in neutral much of the time
as chromosomes forbidden to uncurl
withered and let the cells around them die.

The Lesson Today was Patience, we would agree
or maybe Perspective, sorting things out
so that death was not to be feared and life
– for this was the same – is a gift enjoyed
with love and not a rag-bag of regrets.

Those afternoons finished a year ago –
my body has still to accomplish a task called life
alone, without drugs, but with you. That’s when
I hit on the plan to come to Rome
and write a poem that would see me through
for another six months.
MICHAEL ACKLAND teaches English and Australian Studies at Monash University. His biography of Henry Handel Richardson was published by Cambridge University Press in 2004.

LOUIS ARMAND directs the InterCultural Studies programme at Charles University, Prague. His most recent book is Solicitations: Essays on Critidm & Culture (2005).

BRUCE BENNETT is Group of Eight Professor of Australian Studies at Georgetown University, Washington DC 2005–2006. He was co-editor of Westerly from 1975 to 1992 and has published widely on Australian and International literature.

ROSS BOLLETER is a poet, composer and Zen teacher. His book of poems, All the Iron Night (2004), is published by Smokebush Press. He is currently involved in setting the work of Australian poets such as Slessor and Webb to music, making full use of the Ruined Pianos in his kitchen.

CAROLINE CADDY is a West Australian writer who has been published in numerous magazines and anthologies and broadcast on National radio. Her book Beach Plastic won the 1990 Western Australian Week prize for poetry and Conquistadors won the National Book Council Banjo Patterson award for poetry in 1992. Her book New and Selected Poems will be published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press in 2006.

ADRIAN CAESAR is a Canberra writer. Until recently, he was Associate Professor of English at UNSW at ADFA, where he remains an Honorary Visiting Fellow. His most recent book publications are The White: Last Days in the Antarctic Journeys of Scott and Mawson 1911–1913 (Picador: 1999) and The June Fireworks: New and Selected Poems (Molonglo Press: 2001).

“Very Pale Meat” is extracted from MARION M. CAMPBELL’S new novel, Shadow Thief, to be published in 2006 by Pandanus Books. Her previous works include Lines of Flight, Not Being Miriam and Prowler. She teaches Creative Writing in the Department of English at the University of Melbourne.

ANTONIO CASELLA is a novelist and short story writer. His titles include the novels Southfalia and The Sensualist and the short stories “San Rocco Comes to Visit,” “Boatphobia,” “A Misfit in Heaven” and “I’m Bored said Lucifer”. He was born in Sicily and migrated to Australia at age fifteen.
STEPHEN DEDMAN is the author of three novels and more than ninety short stories published in an eclectic range of magazines and anthologies. His latest book is Never Seen By Winking Eyes, a collection of dark fantasy.

ROBERT DIXON is the ARC Professorial Fellow in English, Media Studies and Art History at the University of Queensland. He is preparing a book on the career of Frank Hurley and an edition of Hurley's diaries.


ROBERT DREWE'S fiction and his prize-winning memoir The Shark Net have been widely translated and adapted for film, television, radio and theatre. His most recent novel is Grace (Viking Penguin: 2005).

DIANE FAHEY has written seven collections of poetry. She has received various poetry awards, and several writer's fellowships from the Australia Council. She is a Fellow of Hawthornden International Writers' Centre, Scotland, and holds a PhD in Creative Writing.

PAUL FAHEY gave up lecturing at RMIT some time ago. He now lives in central-western Victoria, and is pretty keen on twentieth-century Russian poets and on Chaucer.

SARAH FRENCH was awarded an ArtsWA Grant in 2005 to complete her first collection of poetry, a brittle fleet.

KERRYN GOLDSWORTHY taught Australian literature and creative writing at the University of Melbourne for seventeen years and is now a freelance writer and independent scholar living in Adelaide. She was a member of the Miles Franklin Literary Award judging panel in 2004.

NIGEL GRAY is an Irish-born West Australian author of more than sixty books (mainly for children), which have been published in twenty-six countries and twenty-four languages. He is a past President of the WA Centre of International PEN.

JEFF GUESS has a background of teaching English in high schools and now tutors at the University of South Australia and teaches poetry at the Adelaide Institute of TAFE. His eighth collection of poetry Winter Grace was launched during Writers' Week in March 2004.
SARAH HAY'S first novel Skins won the 2001 Australian Vogel Literary Award. She grew up in Esperance, WA and has had a career in journalism and public relations. She is currently a second year Arts student at UWA and writing another novel.

SYD HARREX is a part-time teacher of creative writing at Flinders University, where he continues to be engaged on CRNLE research projects, contributing to the Centre's conference and publication activities. He is currently preparing his sixth collection of poems for publication with Lythrum Press.

MIKE HEALD was born in Grimsby, England, in 1959, and came to Australia in 1972. He completed a PhD at UWA in 1999, and currently teaches Literature in the Foundation Studies program of Trinity College, Melbourne University and lives in Ballarat.

D. J. HUPPATZ lives in New York, working at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn. This poem was written while on an Australia-China Council Residency to Beijing in 2004, a residency also funded by an Australia Council Grant.

VAN IKIN is an Associate Professor teaching in English, Communication and Cultural Studies at UWA. His first short story was published in 1968 and he has edited three science fiction anthologies as well as being co-author of the first critical history of Australian science fiction.

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

GRAEME KINROSS-SMITH is a poet, writer of fiction and photographer working in Melbourne, Geelong and Port Campbell. His literary novel, Long Afternoon of the World, will appear in 2006.

JOHN KINSELLA'S new volume of poetry is The New Arcadia (FACP: 2005), the third volume of his “pastoral” trilogy that also includes The Silo: A Pastoral Symphony (FACP: 1995) and The Hunt (FACP: 1998).

KRISTEN LANG lives in Sheffield, Tasmania, and has completed a PhD in poetry with Deakin University. She has poems published in Southerly, Space, Famous Reporter, LitQ, Poetry Monash, four W, Woorilla, Hecate, and on Radio National’s Poetic A.

ANDREW LANSDOWN'S latest books are a collection of poetry titled Fontanelle (Five Islands Press: 2004) and a collection of stories titled The Dispossessed (Interactive Press: 2005). His fantasy novels With My Knife, Dragonfox and The Red
Dragon are scheduled for publication as a trilogy by Omnibus/Scholastic in early 2006.

Simone Lazaroo was born in Singapore, and migrated with her family to Western Australia in 1963. Her award winning novels The World Waiting to be Made and The Australian Fiance have been broadcast on radio, and The Australian Fiance is currently being adapted for film. Simone was the David T. K. Wong Fellow at the University of East Anglia in England in 2001. Her third novel, The True Body, was written as part of her PhD, and will be published by Pan Macmillan in 2006. She lectures in Creative Writing at Murdoch University.


Shirley Geok-Lin Lim is Professor of English at University of California, Santa Barbara, and was 1980 Commonwealth Poetry Prize winner and 1997 American Book Award recipient for her memoir, Among the White Moon Faces. Her first novel, Joss and Gold, appeared in 2001.

Miriam Wei Wei Lo lives in Perth with her husband and two small children. Her first book, Against Certain Capture, won the Western Australian Premier’s Book Award for Poetry in 2004.

Kate Lyons won the Nita May Dobbie Award in 2002 and her first novel, The Water Underneath, set in an outback missing town, was runner-up in the 1999 Australian Vogel Literary Award. Her poems and short stories have been published widely in literary journals.

Peter Manning seems to have a preference for characters and narratives that might evoke a sense of don’t look down, of uncertainty and precariousness. We are the stories we tell about ourselves, yet these stories are not our “real” life.

John Mateer is a poet and art-critic. His recent publications are an essay on Domenico de Clario for a major show of the artist’s work at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne, a travelogue, Semar’s Cave: an Indonesian Journal, and the book of poems The Ancient Capital of Images, which gathers together work previously published in chapbooks in South Africa and Japan.

Shane McCauley was born in England in 1954. He has had four books of poetry published. A fifth, Glassmaker, is due for publication by Sunline Press this year.

Megan McKinlay lives in Fremantle and teaches in English, Communication, and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia.
CHRIS MCLEOD is a West Australian writer. He is the author of three novels and two collections of short fiction. His most recent novel is *Man of Water*, published in 2005 by Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

MEG MCNENA is a Melbourne physiotherapist and writing student whose poetry has been published locally and overseas. Several of her plays have been staged.

STEPHEN MUECKE is a writer and research professor in Cultural Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney. He has written on Indigenous Australia and more recently on the Indian Ocean. He was a finalist in the 2005 Byron Bay Writers' Festival Poetry Prize.

J. P. QUINTON is an ambitious poet from Perth. He is currently studying Landscape Architecture at UWA.

OUYANG YU has published thirty-two books of poetry, fiction, non-fiction and literary translation in both English and Chinese; his latest book of poetry is a reprint of his first in English, *Moon over Melbourne and Other Poems* (October 2005, Shearsman Press: UK). He is now chair of Australian Literature, English Department, Wuhan University, China.

MARCELLA POLAIN has published two poetry collections with Five Islands Press, *Dumbstruck* and *Fetch Clear Night*, teaches writing at Edith Cowan University, and is WA editor for *Blue Dog: Australian Poetry*. “Skin” is from a novel (entitled *The Third Collision*, forthcoming from Fremantle Arts Centre Press), about the Armenian Genocide.

TRACY RYAN lives in Western Australia and has published two novels as well as four volumes of poetry, the latest of which is *Hothouse* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press: 2002).

PHILIP SALOM was born in Western Australia but now lives in Melbourne. Best known as a poet, his *New and Selected Poems* and *Sky Poems* both won international acclaim and *Sky Poems* won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in London. His most recent books are the collection *A Creative Life*, a hybrid novel *Toccata and Rain* and the republication of his earlier novel *Playback*. His new collection *The Well Mouth* is due out in September. In 2004 his poetry was recognised with the FAW Christopher Brennan Award.

JOHN SAUL was born in Liverpool, England, and now lives most of the year in Hamburg in Germany, where he is a translator. He has published two novels, *Heron and Quin* and *Finistère*, which London’s *Time Out* said deserved to make the shortlist for this year’s Booker Prize. A collection of short fiction, *The Most Serene Republic: love stories from cities*, has also appeared.
Kim Scott’s most recent book is *Kayang and Me*, a collaboration with Noongar Elder Hazel Brown. His second novel, *Benang*, won the Miles Franklin Award, the WA Premier’s Book Award, and the Kate Challis RAKA Award.

Sari Smith was born in Collie and lived for many years in Western Australia. She has published short fiction widely, is currently writing a memoir of sibling bereavement and teaches Creative Writing in the School of Creative Arts at Melbourne University.

Rebecca Smith is completing a PhD in molecular biology at Monash University. She loves travelling and is fascinated by the spiritual and biological connections of humans with the natural world.

Andrew Taylor’s *Collected Poems* was published in 2004 by Salt Publishing, UK (www.saltpublishing.com). He is an Emeritus Professor at Edith Cowan University, and has recently completed a book-length poem while on a residency at the E.B. Whiting Library in Rome funded by the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

Alf Taylor was born in Perth and spent his early years there with his family. He then joined his brother at New Norcia Mission. As a young man he worked around Perth and Geraldton as a seasonal farm worker, then joined the Armed Forces, living in several locations around Australia. He began publishing his poetry in the 1990s.

Barbara Temperton’s first collection of poems “The Snow Queen takes lunch at the Station Cafe” was published in *Shorelines* (FACP: 1995). Her second, *Going Feral* (FACP: 2002), won the 2002 West Australian Premier’s Book Award for Poetry. “The Lighthouse Keeper’s Wife” won the 2002 Tom Collins Poetry Prize which Barbara has won twice.

Jessika Tong is twenty three years old and has been published in the *Tajh Mahal Review, Polestar, Arrow Publishing, Valley speed poets zine* etc. She is resuming study in Bachelor of Fine Arts Literature

Karen Welberry is an Associate with the school of Communication, Arts and Critical Enquiry at La Trobe University, Melbourne. In 2005 she lectured in Australian Literature at La Trobe University and Victorian Literature at the University of Melbourne.

Linda Weste is currently completing a Master of Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne. Recent works explore the use of “voice” in “personae” poetry, monologue and script. Other “subjects” include Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddall, the biblical Judith, and the artist Jackson Pollock. The latter poem was published in *Best Australian Poetry, 2004.*
TERRI-ANN WHITE'S stories and other writing have been published widely; books include a collection of stories entitled *Night and Day* in 1994, and *Finding Theodore* and *Brina*, a family saga, in 2001.

DAVID WILKINSON left his home town in country Victoria in early 2003 with a full tank of petrol and a feeling in his gut that he'd find answers in the West. He found an Arts degree and a friend, but what David was searching for proved more elusive. He still lives on the West Coast.

TESS WILLIAMS is the author of two science fiction novels, *Map of Power* (Random House: 1996) and *Sea as Mirror* (Harper Collins: 2000) and co-edited the collection *Women of Other Worlds: Excursions Through Science Fiction and Feminism* (UWA Press: 1999). She has just completed a one year Research Fellowship as writer in residence at SymbioticA, a science/art collective allied to the School of Human Biology at UWA. She is writing a non-fiction book on evolutionary theory and has begun her autobiography.

MYINT ZAN is currently teaching at the University Malaysia Sarawak in Malaysia.

STORIES
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ARTICLES
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Bruce Bennett on Westerly Through the Rear-View Mirror
Robert Dixon on Tim Winton: Cloudstreet and the Field of Australian Literature
Karen Welberry on Horse-breaking as Metaphor in Australian Cultural Discourse
Myint Zan on Minthuwun: A Tribute to a Gentle Burmese Poet

PHOTOGRAPHS
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REVIEW ESSAYS
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Kerryn Goldsworthy on recent fiction
Syd Harrex on new Australian poetry, 2004–2005