Invited by *Westerly*’s editors to write their annual review essay of recently published Australian non-fiction, I had two responses. First, I confess to struggling with the very idea of non-fiction (not to mention the shifting landscapes of its various sub-genres) because as a category of literature, it is effectively defined by what it is not, by what it lacks. As U.S. English Professor Rob Nixon observed in a recent review in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, ‘The genre emits a whiff of the déclassé, served (especially in literature departments) with a garnish of condescension. The problem starts with the word: Like ‘childless’
(why not ‘child-free’?), ‘non-fiction’ packs a lot of social judgment. Nonfiction may be real, but in matters of creativity, it’s not quite the real thing.’

Second, as I scanned the books sent to me, although I read the works and inspected them from many angles, I could not satisfy myself that it was possible to connect them without a crude and very obvious shoe horn and without insulting the authors in the process. What did emerge from my thinking about the Australian ‘non-fiction’ writing sent to Westerly was the realisation that scientific writing was completely absent. And perversely, perhaps, I decided to write about what was not in the mix.

Maybe there was no scientific writing in the collection because nothing of note had been published in Australia in the last year. This conclusion seemed unlikely given the observations by Martin Rees, speaking in 2006 as President of the Royal Society who sponsor the Aventis Prize for Science writing. He said, ‘We are enjoying a golden age of science writing, and the entries for the book prize have set new standards of excellence as well as reaching new levels of popularity.’ As evidence he cited the fact that the ubiquitous Nielsen BookScan data on the sales in the UK of the four largest-selling entries on the shortlists of the major books prizes showed that for 2004, the Aventis general prize (1,612,858) was ahead of the Booker (577,691), Whitbread best novel (1,065,026) and Orange (919,621) prizes. I could find no comparable figures for Australia, partly because there is no national equivalent to the Aventis Prize (the Eureka Science Book Prize seems to come and go), nor is there anything like the very fine Oxford Book of Modern Science Writing edited by Richard Dawkins. However, there is no obvious reason to think that Australian writers would be less likely to write or readers less likely to appreciate quality science writing.

Especially puzzling was the absence of anything dealing with the science of the big practical and moral concern of our time, climate change. It seemed strange that there was nothing dealing with the enormous challenge to human viability that we have visited on our
descendants—to reverse the impetus toward destroying our habitat, to transform our cultural narratives in ways which will moderate our insatiable consumption of the planet’s resources. Having recently read Ian McEwan’s allegorical (fictional) and very funny treatment of climate change in Solar, I know the subject has all the necessary dramatic elements to absorb even the most jaded reader. I also know that several Australian non-fiction authors have tackled the subject in recent years—Tim Flannery and Clive Hamilton being the most notable—and my search for works published over the past year turned up several works, apart from Hamilton’s Requiem for a Species (2010) and Flannery’s Now or Never (2009), Ben McNeil’s The Clean Industrial Revolution (2009), Tony Kevin’s Crunch Time (2009), Will Steffan’s Australia’s Biodiversity and Climate Change (2009) and Barry Pittock’s Climate Change (2009), the last two written by respected climate scientists and published by the CSIRO. The climate change story is especially difficult because of its intangibility and remoteness in time; plotting the slow, largely imperceptible changes in ways that wrestle people’s attention away from more immediate preoccupations would severely test the skills of any writer. But close and patient observations of changes in the natural world which reveal the cumulative losses of our cherished places and stories may be more potent than apocryphal predictions and shrill hectoring.

Perhaps publishers do not normally categorise science writing as literature and the absence of science writing is a contemporary illustration of novelist C. P. Snow’s ‘two cultures’—the disjunction between the sciences and the humanities. Snow famously asserted that science and the humanities had so little in common in both their research methods and the way they thought and spoke, that they could be said to be separated by ‘a gulf of mutual incomprehension.’ In opposing the study of science and literature in this way, Snow firmly placed the two areas of inquiry in opposition, asserting that they had little or nothing in common. Like Ruston, it seems to me that we ‘should neither dismiss the literary from the scientific nor the scientific from the literary’ (p. 12). Although the tide may now be
turning in favour of a more inclusive understanding that science and the humanities are as one in seeking to capture human experience, for many it appears still to be assumed that science writing is simply a record of things scientists do and that they need not concern themselves with literary niceties.

Without replaying this by now well-worn argument, it is true that the degree of scientific specialisation (and academic specialisation more generally) means that very few people can lay claim to even partial knowledge of the scientific findings that shape our lives from gene therapy to bioterrorism. Even people researching related subjects within the same discipline appear not to understand one another; researchers seem to know more and more about less and less. The results of such research, however, often impinge (or are imposed) on us without our understanding or acquiescence. Equally, many of the analyses of the state of our planet and the solutions suggested derive from scientific inquiry which a great many of us find unintelligible, even when we know where to find it. At a time when science illiteracy is very costly, effective and engaging writing about science appears not to get the attention it warrants in the world of literature, partly perhaps because it labours under the pejorative label of ‘popular science’.

Although I am an avid reader of fiction—in part as a release from my day jobs which have required me to read vast quantities of non-fiction, much of it written in one or another variant of diseased English—I do appreciate well written non-fiction. There are, it is true, more than a few writers who can translate the often unreadable research published in science journals into serviceable English—they do a businesslike job of taking difficult ideas and making them intelligible to the average reader, a not inconsiderable skill and one which is evident in the Australian offerings on the subject of climate change over the last year. However, it is rare to find scientists writing for a general audience who can capture the excitement of discovery and the wonder that comes from creating new ways of looking at phenomena which we otherwise take as given. Even more
uncommon is the writer who can reach into our hearts and fire the desire for change—something much needed in the climate change debate. When the recent Australian offerings by climate scientists on climate change are examined in this light, they disappoint, although the writing and exposition are admirably lucid. They are workman-like and to the point, but for the most part, in the writing about climate and the natural environment, the language is stripped bare of emotion—and power. For example, Pittock, in explaining the effects of climate change on ocean circulation writes as follows: ‘A study by Michael Vellinga and Richard Wood with the UK Hadley Centre climate model suggests that weakening of the overturning in the North Atlantic may also lead to large shifts in precipitation in the tropics due to shifts in the thermal equator. Using an ecosystem model, they find that weakening of the oceanic circulation causes worldwide changes in ecosystem structure and function, including expansions of desert in the north of South America, West Africa and Australia, but reductions in desert in North America.’ (p. 123) I’m pretty sure I understand the very important point he’s trying to make, but it’s hard to care. I don’t mean to single out Pittock’s writing for criticism, because it’s fairly typical of writing on the subject intended for an ‘educated non-specialist audience’, but simply to illustrate the problem.

From my reader’s perspective, I know that even complex scientific concepts can be presented so that they are understandable, yet as gripping as fiction. Oliver Sacks and Jared Diamond come to mind. As O’Connor argues throughout his remarkable survey of the popularisation of geology in the nineteenth century (*The Earth on Show*), the best science writing does more than convey information; it can be a form of ‘creative non-fiction’ which uses storytelling techniques typical of fiction—plots with conflict and resolution, complex characters, extensive scene setting, illustrative anecdotes and a distinctive narrative voice. Good science writing, like all good literature, works by transporting us into worlds where we have never been or which we have not fully understood; our imagination is
engaged so that we are participants, part of the story. While we are not asked to suspend disbelief as we are with fiction, being confronted with the facts of our universe may upend our conceptions of ourselves and our world every bit as much as science fiction. Writing of this kind is memorable and far more likely to be persuasive than the anaemic style that permeates much scientific writing.

Primo Levi’s *Periodic Table* (1984), for example, while autobiographical in intent, celebrates the poetry of chemistry while remaining faithful to the actual qualities of the elements. As he says, ‘Mendeleev’s Periodic Table was poetry…and come to think of it, it even rhymed!’ (p. 40) His personification of the elements of the table, which might offend the more pedestrian amongst his scientific colleagues, is truly extraordinary. His characterisation of the elements—the ‘aloofness’ of argon, its ‘unwillingness’ to combine with other gases reminds him of his ancestors; the ‘volatility’ of potassium, the ‘affability’ of tin, the ‘gregariousness’ of carbon—is more likely to engender enthusiasm for the subject—and recall of the table—than the usual mechanical recital.

Rachel Carson is captivating in describing the seasonal changes in the oceans in *The Sea Around Us* (1989): ‘A hard, brilliant, coruscating phosphorescence often illuminates the summer sea. In waters where the protozoa Noctiluca is abundant it is the chief source of this summer luminescence, causing fishes, squids, or dolphins to fill the water with racing flames and to clothe themselves in a ghostly radiance. Or again, the summer sea may glitter with a thousand thousand moving pinpricks of light, like an immense swarm of fireflies moving through a dark wood. Such an effect is produced by a shoal of the brilliantly phosphorescent shrimp Meganycithiphanes, a creature of cold and darkness and of the places where icy water rolls upward from the depths and bubbles with white rippling at the surface.’ (p. 44)

Or consider the reflections provoked by a storm in the Amazon by noted biologist E. O. Wilson: ‘The unsolved mysteries of the rain forest are formless and seductive. They are like unnamed islands hidden in
the blank spaces of old maps, like dark shapes glimpsed descending the far wall of a reef into an abyss. They draw us forward and stir strange apprehensions. The unknown and prodigious are drugs to the scientific imagination, stirring insatiable hunger with a single taste. In our hearts we hope we will never discover everything. We pray there will always be a world like this on at whose edge I sat in darkness. The rain forest in its richness is one of the last repositories on earth of that timeless dream.

Or the science luminary, Carl Sagan, on the transience of life from Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors (1992): ‘Each of us is a tiny being, permitted to ride on the outermost skin of one of the smaller planets for a few dozen trips around the local star…The longest-lived organisms on Earth endure for about a millionth of the age of our planet. A bacterium lives for one hundred-trillionth of that time. So of course the individual organisms see nothing of the overall pattern—continents, climate, evolution. They barely set foot on the world stage and are promptly snuffed out—yesterday a drop of semen, as the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote, tomorrow a handful of ashes. If the Earth were as old as a person, a typical organism would be born, live, and die in a sliver of a second. We are fleeting, transitional creatures, snowflakes fallen on the hearth fire. That we understand even a little of our origins is one of the great triumphs of human insight and courage.’ (pp. 30–31)

Despite the examples I have cited, a lot of scientific writing erases the awe and wonder of inquiry and observation, making it difficult to understand what motivated the researcher in the first place. The best scientists are passionate—but paradoxically, may go to inordinate lengths to remove any traces of emotion—and their personality—from their report of the inquiries that fired their imagination. Some understand that how they write may be as important as what they write if they are to do more than converse with a coterie. The best science writers appear to understand that it is not enough for science writing to merely convey new information; it should also be ‘a cause for reflection, even revelation, as in a poem or painting.’ As Nobel
laureate, molecular biologist Max Perutz wrote in the preface to his book, *Is Science Necessary?*, ‘Imagination comes first in both artistic and scientific creation.’ (p. 204)

Despite the proliferation of text, on and off-line, our concept of literature seems to have narrowed while our willingness to eschew any judgment of the aesthetic qualities of writing seems to have expanded. One of the tragedies of the proliferation of writing which is designed principally to communicate facts is that it is rarely subject to examination for literary merit. But non-fiction can be as exciting and as aesthetically pleasing as good fiction; it can be as emotional, unexpected and absorbing as the best novels. Fine writing, no matter what the genre, is fine writing.

It would seem that ‘literature’ was once a much more inclusive concept that it is today. Educated nineteenth-century readers regarded works of history, philosophy, political economy and science as ‘literature’ in its broadest sense, as much as they did the poetry, novels and drama. As O’Connor reminds us, ‘science writing was an integral part of nineteenth century literary culture—not that science writing and literature enjoyed a fruitful relationship, but that scientific writing was literature.’ (p. 13). The contemporary practice of exempting non-fiction works from any serious criticism on the basis of style and literary merit diminishes the demand that writers, no matter what their subject, should cultivate and employ techniques which enliven their writing. A general, or even a specialist reader confronted by language bled of all colour and a structure which breaks all the rules of good story telling, will be less likely to follow a complex argument to its conclusion. In the novel *Solar*, McEwan who is noted for his grasp of scientific concepts, has his character, the appalling Michael Beard, Nobel Prize winning physicist and self-indulgent profligate, address an energy conference of institutional investors on the subject of climate change. In that speech McEwan illustrates the persuasive power of poetry and the ease with which complex ideas can be communicated. In explaining the concept of global warming he has Beard cite the pioneering work of John Tyndall who was the first to
describe the hothouse or greenhouse effect. Tyndall’s original words, referring to the consequences of removing the blanket of water vapour and gases from the atmosphere, were ‘You would assuredly destroy every plant capable of being destroyed by a freezing temperature. The warmth of our fields and gardens would pour itself unrequited into space, and the sun would rise upon an island held fast in the iron grip of frost.’ It’s hard to imagine many science writers of today using such language, despite the fact that climate change presents such apocalyptic possibilities.

A skilled writer can also assist us in seeing the practice of science as a human activity, fraught with the sorts of dilemmas and dramas we expect from people grappling with the big questions. The now notorious, cranky e-mails from climate scientists at the University of East Anglia were greeted with apparent disbelief by some sections of the community, perhaps because they conceive of science as some sort of black box operating automatically, unsullied by the fallible guidance of human minds.

Unfortunately, we appear to have succumbed to the idea that to enhance objectivity and avoid subjectivity in science means to eschew the techniques that make any writing interesting; many scientists seem to have forgotten the ‘power of the word’, using instead a desiccated shorthand understood by a few insiders. Too often the language of the scientific academy seems incapable of escaping the self-imposed bonds of ‘objectivity’, the abandonment of an authorial voice in favour of an impersonal style without agency; technical, bland and boring with no place for wit and satire. Aspiring scientists (and for that matter, academics, in general) are often exhorted to expunge any trace of their own personality—and any admission of errors and mishaps along to way—from their writing. As Locke has observed, ‘The Promethean scientist may uncover the secrets of the gods, but must whisper them—like someone with an artificial larynx—in a voice devoid of emotion so as not, as the Fiesers put it for their fellow chemists, to ‘divert attention from the story we are trying to tell’. Above all, scientist dare not run naked through the
streets shrieking ‘Eureka!’ or they will, as the Fiesers say, ‘violat[e] principles of good usage.’

We know that bad writing shrinks readership but some of the bad writing in the scientific academy, indeed the academy in general, is intentional. Novices have to learn to write badly to earn their professional standing; indeed failure to do so will leave them stranded at the margins, manuscripts rejected. They resist using the vernacular because it doesn’t sound smart enough. It is true that some things are hard to say in ordinary English, but not so much as many specialists pretend. The obscure language is a form of boundary riding—it keeps out the uninitiated marauders, but it may result in scientists speaking only to each other. While it is almost certainly necessary to write badly in the approved style to get published in some journals, it is also a guarantee that almost no-one beyond a vanishingly small ‘peer group’ will read the research. And once bad habits are learned, they are extremely difficult to break. As Shapin has argued, ‘More and more academic monographs and papers are written for the ‘files’—as aids in the construction of a career—and not to be read.’ He notes the comments of the U.S. News & World Report survey of graduate schools that ‘academic monographs (are) well suited for tenure committees, but ill-suited for bookstores.’

He goes on to say about historians of science, but it applies more generally, ‘We are increasingly successful in not being read’ unless someone with the skills to write takes the trouble to translate the barely readable prose into material suitable for the ‘educated common reader’.

While understanding the need for scientists to communicate precisely to their colleagues about their subject matter in what is sometimes called ‘technical writing’, perhaps we need to challenge the idea that language is no more than an instrument for conveying precisely delineated facts. It can be so much more; it might move and instruct, fascinate and astonish. Sagan, as he so often did, captured the essence of the argument about the importance of science literacy: ‘In exchange for freedom of inquiry, scientists are obliged to explain their work. If science is considered a closed priesthood, too difficult
and arcane for the average person to understand, the dangers of abuse are greater. But if science is a topic of general interest and concern—if both its delights and its social consequences are discussed regularly and competently in the schools, the press, and at the dinner table—we have greatly improved our prospects for learning how the world really is and for improving both it and us.13 (p. 12). If we were to subject science writing to the same scrutiny—and appreciation—that we extend to other forms of non-fiction—and fiction, the results might astound us. The ideas and discoveries of science could become a precious legacy we all share, not the defended province of a few.

Bibliography


Notes

8 Conditions for winning Lewis Thomas Prize for science writing from Rockefeller University
10 The authors of a writers’ guide for chemists.
You don’t like dusk. Everything turns monochrome and the day gets heavy with conclusion but isn’t quite done. Like one of those deep and meaningful films shot in black and white—the arthouse sort. You like the idea of them, but then you remember watching the black and white set as a child, and why would you want to go full circle? Like flares or platform shoes—not quite as appealing the second time around. At home, you always give dusk the flick. That neat little click of the light switches breaking the silence is comforting. You usually check the clock then: yes 6.05pm, so you pour the first glass from a bottle of red that’s breathing on the counter. It’s never quite as good as you’ve anticipated, perhaps because you’re too busy inspecting the yeasty loaf of skin swelling over the top of your work heels, or counting out the last seconds of daylight against the throb of the varicose vein behind your knee. Then again, it could just be the preservatives in those mass produced wines. You remind yourself that’s what you get for buying specials by the case.

You make sure you don’t drink every night. Usually Tuesdays. It’s discount night at United and you go straight there from work with takeaway sushi from Ginko’s. You don’t always choose the latest
chick-flick or blockbuster, but sometimes you just need something easy that takes your mind off the MSG in the miso or the metallic taste of the raw tuna that's a prescription for Alzheimer's. At least in the dark you can't see that rainbow sheen on the fish that reminds you of oil slicks and the state of the planet. Anyway, sushi's about the only low-fat takeaway you can buy in under a minute: something to dilute the réduction of guilt that slowly simmers when you're watching Angelina Jolie's buttocks on the big screen. On the way home you lament the state of modern cinema: the formulaic stories, the female role models, the special effects budgets that could feed an African nation, and promise next time to make the effort and choose a subtitled movie at the Dendy. Something Robert would have approved. It's not that you mind going to the cinema alone, it's just that you don't want to let your mind sag along with everything else.

Of course, you didn't always go alone. You used to like the cinema for first dates. It avoided those restaurant dinners of insufficient silences and furtive mutual scrutiny from the bathroom door, the tiring bravado of first date flippancy. You can get a good sense of someone in the dark, without conversation. There's the size and the weight of their presence; the quality of a coat or sweater against your wrist; the snorts and chuckles to the screen; the smell of a whisper. By the time the film was over you always know whether it was going anywhere. If you can't sit next to someone for two hours in the dark, what hope is there for the light of day?

Well, that's been your rule of thumb, anyway. Admittedly, there have been exceptions: Robert for one. With him, you almost got up and left halfway through Baraka. He twitched and fidgeted, scrunched and sighed so much, you assumed it was doomed. But during the credits he took your hand and spoke so convincingly into your ear, 'When something's this good I can't sit still.'

'Oh,' you said. 'Yes, it was good, wasn't it?'

'I'm not talking about the film,' he said.

You lived together for three years. You had preferred seating at the Orpheum and nearly always agreed who should have won the Oscar.
And then one day he didn’t live with you any more. Everything else was there, looking tired and rather smaller than before, but not him. He left a note saying something about life not being a dress rehearsal. After that you couldn’t believe you’d spent three years watching Indie films with someone who could end it on such a cliché.

After Robert, the years of same-sex cinema outings made a comeback. At the time it seemed the grown-up version of the sisterly solidarity you’d relied on at 15: all us girls feigning annoyance through third and fourth viewings of Greece or Saturday Night Fever while boys in the back row threw popcorn down our imagined cleavages. Secretly, you were thrilled they found you more interesting than the film and worth the popcorn. Twenty-five years later, you needed that strength in numbers again. Only this time it was less about attracting attention, than being able to blend into the queue behind those same boys who had married other, younger girls; to sit in the dark next to the small habits of long-term monogamists. Of course you weren’t the only one who needed the support of shared sugar hits and no judgements to see you through the highs of a vicarious screen life, where you re-inflated your ideals of manhood and steeled yourselves against compromise for the sake of conformity. How else could you have dealt with the key in the lock of the silent flat, the vaguely interested cat, the bedtime wine and a couple of Zoloft? There’s nothing wrong with having high standards.

But you really do prefer to go to the cinema alone now. No need to be magnanimous about the choice of film, no need to pretend your friend has not put on weight, or that her latest cyber date is more interesting than the trailers. No need to suspect that your dismal sympathy for her might be self-pity. Which, of course, it isn’t, because you have so much more in your life than she does. There’s just a point when solidarity of the spinsterly sort becomes too close for comfort. It reminds you of that awful euphemism of your mother’s: women of a certain age. She probably got it from Jane Austen or the Brontes. But you only truly understood what your mother must have meant by it when you were with Nicole watching Million Dollar Baby and you
bumped into Stuart Simmonds. You’d been holding Nicole’s handbag in the foyer while she went to the Ladies. Stuart had his arm round his new wife, who looked too small and young for the enormous belly that swayed before her. She spoke a few bubbly sentences about the baby’s due date and probable names, but all you could look at were her straight, unstained teeth, like a teenager’s with the braces just removed. He asked if you had come alone and you laughed and said, ‘Oh, no!’ That was when Nicole returned, taking her bag from you and tucking your coat label into your collar at the same time. Stuart raised his eyebrows and pulled his lips taut into what was meant to be a smile. But it was the way he so diligently held out his hand and pointedly said, ‘Nicole, is it? Very pleased to meet you,’ that made you see what he was seeing. Two women of a certain age. Sometimes, you wish it were that simple.

After that you thought about Stuart for a long time, how still he was during your first date—Dangerous Liaisons—the way he made love to you on your stairs afterward. You never needed the movies much, you and he, just each other in the dark. Or perhaps that’s just your memory of it. It was a long time ago, after all. You might be confusing it with a film you saw. Anyway, it doesn’t really matter. Four months after it began he told you he was going back to his wife and kids. That cut. But not as much as being overlooked in the running for the new family.

And now you’re losing your teeth. Last week the dentist mumbled through his mask that you needed two root canals and a crown. He held that little stainless steel pick on the exposed nerve of your molar as he told you the cost. It’s not the money that matters. You’ve done all the things single women of a certain age should do these days: private health insurance, topped up your pension, paid off your apartment, invested in blue chips to cover the nursing home fees. The financial adviser tells you that you’re in good shape. You remember his eyes on your breasts and feeling a little excited, even as you cringed at the nylon crackle your thighs made rubbing together on the way out. In the mirror of the Ladies afterwards, you saw a shirt button had
popped off and was dangling by a thread, the mockery of a favourite bra, once white, now dishrag grey, peeping through. Well, perhaps that blouse has shrunk a little since you bought it. That’s what you get for buying cheap clothes made in Asian sweat shops. It’s amazing what the poultice of a Belgian Chocolate Connoisseur ice cream and 27 Dresses can do for burning embarrassment.

Really, it’s not like you’ve never had a proposal. Marriage, that is. When you worked in Singapore in your thirties, your housemate proposed. Michael, the American architect, found the 1920’s black-and-white terrace, which crumbled and cowered under the shadows of condominium blocks, and told you he could only share with someone who truly appreciated it. On Sunday afternoons, the two of you would escape the clack-clack of mah-jongg games from the balconies overhead to watch anything at the Lido, luxuriating in the air-conditioning that didn’t come with the colonial charm of your house. You’d collapse into the velour seats that smelled of pandan leaf and hokkien mee, refusing to let your hangovers take hold by sipping the margaritas that Michael poured from a chilled thermos into plastic martini glasses. The cinema with Michael was never just about watching the film. Half way through he’d be shouting insults, perhaps at the projectionist for cutting the sex scenes in Leaving Las Vegas, or perhaps at some unsuspecting Singaporean for dealing with phlegm during the great kiss in Before Sunrise. Afterwards you’d toast your superiority with more margaritas at Harry’s until you fell into a taxi and then into the gutter outside the little house, the last vestige of architectural integrity in the jungle of development which you were both being paid to fertilise. One night he sang to you in the smooth tenor voice that Mom and the Lutheran choir back in Iowa had so carefully nurtured. At the end of Abide With Us, the Day is Waning, he sang, ‘MARRY me, marry me, marry me, Sarah. HAVE my babies and make it all OK.’ Then he dropped his head onto your lap and fell asleep, while you pulled out his tight child’s curls, listening to the mosquitos under the strelitzias. You really did love each other. It was such a shame you had to refuse him. ‘We could get married,
Michael,’ you said, ‘but you’d still be gay.’ Anyway, you could never have married anyone who talks during the movie. Eventually he met a nice Jewish boy. They still send you Hanukkah and Christmas cards from Seattle.

Yes, you really do prefer to go to the cinema alone these days. Then you can concentrate on the stories. No black and whites. Just the glorious technicolour ones that stop a little short of real life. You don’t mind going home in the dark. It’s the dusk you can’t stand.
Despite the GFC, the twelve months covered by this review have produced another strong crop of fiction by Australian authors, both new and established. Given recent emphases on the cosmopolitan and international contexts of Australian literature, it is interesting to see others following David Malouf, whose *Ransom* was discussed in last year’s survey, in seeking inspiration from earlier literary works as well as from contemporary trends and events. Thankfully, however, the self-conscious intertextuality of the 1970s seems to have been largely abandoned in favour of a focus on the enduring problems and joys of the human condition, on life rather than art.

Steven Carroll’s *The Lost Life* follows hot on the heels of his Miles Franklin-winning *The Time We Have Taken* but takes us to a completely different time and place. Like several other recent Australian novels, Carroll’s mixes imaginary figures with characters from history, in this case the poet T. S. Eliot and two of the women in his life, his estranged first wife Vivien and Emily Hale, an American loved in his youth. On an autumn day in 1934, Eliot and Hale visit the rose garden at Burnt Norton to carry out a private and belated
ceremony. But they have been preceded there by two much younger
two much younger lovers, Catherine and Daniel, and a light-hearted prank by Daniel has
consequences for all of them. The narrative is mainly presented from
the point of view of eighteen-year-old Catherine, as she discovers the
wonders of first love but also becomes increasingly involved in the lives
of Miss Hale and her ‘special friend’. In a particularly strong episode,
Catherine travels to London to deliver a message from Miss Hale to
Vivien Eliot. The description of the latter’s flat, its walls covered with
pictures from her life with her husband, beautifully illustrates the
dangers of living in the past, as in a different way does Miss Hale’s
attachment to her role as Eliot’s first muse. Daniel leaves Catherine to
study abroad, just as the young Tom Eliot had done earlier with Emily
Hale. But through the events of that autumn, Catherine has learnt the
necessity of living in the moment rather than the past, the dangers of
being the muse rather than the creator. Far from being a footnote in
someone else’s story, she is to go on to an independent and fulfilled
life of her own. In this elegant novel, Carroll demonstrates that he
can evoke the England of the 1930s just as stunningly as he depicted
Melbourne suburbia of the 50s in his much-praised trilogy.

While *The Lost Life* takes place primarily in the past, Kirsten
Tranter sets her highly accomplished first novel *The Legacy* very
much in the present. It does, however, also refer back to the work of a
canonical author, Henry James, specifically his *The Portrait of a Lady*
which, as Tranter’s epigraph reminds us, earlier inspired a poem by T.
S. Eliot. But it is also a ‘post-September 11’ novel, though unlike most
others in this category its focus is on home-grown violence rather than
the external threat of terrorism. Most of the main characters—Ingrid,
Fleur, Gil Grey, Maeve, Ralph—parallel James’s Isabel, Pansy, Gilbert
Osmond, Madame Merle and Ralph, as their names make clear, and as
in James’s novel the plot is set in motion by an unexpected inheritance
which leads to an unwise marriage. But *The Legacy* is, unlike *Portrait
of a Lady*, mainly told from the point of view of a young woman who
is not the ostensible heroine and whose descriptions of student life
in Sydney and the streets, buildings and institutions of New York
clearly draw heavily on Tranter's own experiences in both cities. Julia Alpers, a university friend of Ingrid and Ralph’s, who has been strongly attracted to them both, travels to New York to try to unravel the mystery of Ingrid’s life after her marriage to Grey, and her apparent loss of it on 11 September 2001. Through discussions with Ingrid’s supervisor at Columbia University and other friends of hers, as well as Fleur and Grey, Julia gradually begins to piece together the reasons for Ingrid’s unhappiness, and discovers the secret which links Grey, Maeve and Fleur. In keeping with twenty-first-century attitudes, this involves far more than concealment of a sexual scandal, the mystery at the heart of Henry James’s novel. *The Legacy* also concludes on a note more attuned to twenty-first-century expectations of female agency and empowerment than was the norm when *Portrait of a Lady* appeared. There may be a bird cage on the balcony outside Julia’s New York apartment but, significantly, it is empty.

Another very impressive first novel, Cate Kennedy’s *The World Beneath*, takes a wry look at many aspects of contemporary culture: desire for a wilderness experience, nature photography, popular music, alternative life styles and spiritualities. As in Joan London’s *The Good Parents*, Kennedy’s starting point is the very different world views of baby boomer hippy parents and their teenage daughters. But for Kennedy’s fifteen-year-old Sophie, only her mother has tried to be a good parent, her father having walked out when she was a baby in order to continue travelling the world as a photographer. Now he decides to try to reconnect with her via a visit to Tasmania to walk in Cradle Mountain National Park, where things go badly wrong when he ignores warning signs. Presenting her narrative from the alternating perspectives of these three characters, Kennedy subtly reveals their preoccupations and shortcomings. Initially we are encouraged to share Sophie’s view of her parents: her mother Sandy, seemingly still mired in the past, making jewellery to sell at the local market; her much more glamorous absent father who works in television. But we soon discover that Rich’s glamour is built on shaky foundations. His work involves editing infomercials and his attempt
to seduce a glamorous presenter comes to naught. For him, as for Sandy, the high point has been participation in the fight to save the Franklin River; both of them also have unresolved issues with their mothers. Thanks to Kennedy’s skilful characterisation, however, we are ultimately able to sympathise with all three characters as they are forced to reconsider their priorities: Sophie recognises the value of her mother’s love, Rich proves that he really does care about the wilderness and his daughter, and Sandy gives up some of her old beliefs to move more confidently into the future.

Relationships between parents and daughters are also central to Alex Miller’s *Lovesong*, his ninth novel. As its title might suggest, *Lovesong* is less complex and much less political than some of Miller’s earlier works, though it still displays his interest in traditional cultures and his masterly ability to evoke other times and places. At its centre is a story told to the narrator over a series of meetings in a Melbourne café: that of an Australian man, Jim Patterner, Sabiha, the Tunisian woman he met and fell in love with in Paris many years earlier, and ‘the beautiful and terrible story of their little daughter Houria.’ The narrator, we learn, is an aging novelist who lives in Melbourne with his divorced daughter and who, before meeting Jim, believed he had written his last novel. This framing device allows Miller to have some fun at the expense of the literary establishment. The narrator’s last novel had been called *The Farewell*:

I thought this was a pretty direct hint for reviewers and interviewers, who are always on the lookout for metaphor and meaning in what we do. I waited for the first interviewer to ask me, ‘So, is this your last book then?’ I was ready to say, ‘Yes, it is.’ Simple as that, and have done with it. But no one asked. They asked instead, ‘Is it autobiographical?’ I quoted Lucian Freud: *Everything is autobiographical and everything is a portrait*. The trouble with this was that they took Freud’s radiant little metaphor literally.
So of course *Lovesong* is not autobiographical, despite one of Miller’s more recent works being called *Landscape of Farewell*, and despite his acknowledged use of stories of friends in many of his novels. Indeed, the driving force of the narrative is something no man could have direct experience of, the desperate desire of a woman for a child, specifically a daughter. Sabita has been very close to her own father who, recognising her special qualities, sends her to Paris to help her recently-widowed aunt run a little café. When she falls in love with Jim, Sabita is convinced she will soon have a daughter to take back to El Djem and place in her father’s arms. But the years pass without any child and when Sabita’s father falls seriously ill she becomes desperate. Inspired by some of the old songs of her grandmother, she takes a radical, though it is suggested also a traditional, action. This essentially simple story is made vivid through Miller’s skills in characterisation, especially of the quiet, book-loving Jim and the more passionate and resolute Sabita. The beauty and terror of their story is also nicely set off by the humour of the framing narrative, as the novelist finds himself far from happy over his own daughter’s choice of lover and discovers that Jim is also planning a novel. But he knows that Jim’s story will inevitably be different to his: it is hard not to read the final sentence as Miller’s direct address to the reader:

Sabita’s story had come out of her and been carried to me; now, after I had lived in it jealously myself for a while, I would carry it to others, and in the end would let it go and be done with it, like all the other stories I have carried.

Although many novels have turned upon unwanted pregnancies and the desperate measures women have taken to resolve these through abortion or suicide, and many others dealt with the effects of adoption and illegitimacy on both mother and child, few have attempted to convey the suffering experienced by a mother who is unable to give birth to a child. It is therefore surprising to come across two recent Australian novels where this thwarted desire
is the driving force. Interestingly, both also use a double narrative structure, allowing past events to be viewed from a new perspective. In Enza Gandolfo’s first novel *Swimming*, seeing her former husband at an exhibition of photographs leads the central character, Kate Wilks, back to a novel she had written twenty years earlier. There she had tried to describe the impact on herself and her marriage of her repeated failure to give birth to Sarah, the daughter of her dreams. Skilfully shifting between the chapters of ‘Writing Sarah’, told in the third person, and the first person of the framing narrative, Gandolfo, like Miller with Sabita, tellingly conveys the intensity of Kate’s desire for a daughter and the pain of her repeated failures to carry a child through to term. While the two novels differ in their outcomes, Kate also takes a radical action and must live with the consequences. By the end of the novel, however, she has come to terms with her past, accepting that creation takes many forms, as do daughters.

In Kristina Olsson’s *The China Garden* we are in more familiar territory of babies who arrive when they are not wanted or even expected. The novel opens with a brief prologue describing news of an abandoned new-born baby and the impact of this on three of those who are to become its central characters, before taking us back two weeks in time to an orchard in Italy. There Laura, one of characters briefly introduced in the prologue, hears of the death of her mother Angela in a northern New South Wales coastal town. As Laura flies home, we learn more about the other two characters through whom events are to be focalised, the elderly Cress and her grandson Kieran. Olsson’s portrait of Kieran is one of most original features of this novel; while physically an adult, in many ways he remains a child, capable of simple tasks in a sheltered workshop but not of holding down a regular job. We are never told exactly why he is the way he is and Olsson’s avoidance of labels helps to engage the reader’s empathy for Kieran, with his intense interest in words, his careful observations of both people and the natural world and his special friendship with Angela. Olsson delicately unfolds the ways in which Angela has made a life as a painter, and has helped, and been healed
by, those around her, especially Kieran, after giving up her own son for adoption. The title refers to Angela’s garden and its broken pieces of china, an evocative image suggesting that beauty can be created from what is broken and apparently irretrievable, but also the danger and sharpness of buried secrets. Without feeling the need to resolve every absence or mystery, Olsson gently suggests that it is always possible to make new things out of the past, however apparently fractured or painful.

In contrast, Andrea Goldsmith in *Reunion* looks at the problems that arise when four friends are reunited in Melbourne twenty years after their brilliant days at university there and later in Oxford. All but one of them have since become part of the Australian diaspora: Ava a well-known novelist, Helen a cutting-edge molecular biologist, Conrad a philosopher and TV personality; only Jack, held back by his unrequited love for Ava, has failed to build on his earlier promise as a historian of Islam. Ava’s husband Harry, though regarded with disdain by her friends, especially Jack, has also done well and, as the head of a new organisation, the Network of Global Australians, has provided the funds to bring Conrad, Helen and Jack back to Melbourne. Of course, it is never possible to relive the past, and the reunion goes far from smoothly as each of them has to face up to new challenges: changes in their bodies as the result of aging, changes in society and culture which make different demands on their expertise. After September 11, there is a new interest in Jack’s specialisation in Islam; conversely, Connie’s style as a TV guru no longer appeals to a generation immersed in new media, and even his serial seduction of young women is becoming harder to keep up. Helen is forced to compromise her beliefs in the independence of science in order to continue doing the work that is her lifeblood. When Ada’s challenge becomes too much for her to bear, help comes not from her husband or friends, not even the enamoured Jack, but from someone even further back in her past. Although the novel’s main focus is on Jack and Ada, Goldsmith makes us share the dilemmas of all her characters, and care about the outcomes. Along the way, there is much witty
commentary on contemporary life and culture and some great set pieces, including the NOGA cocktail party and the disastrous pilots for Connie’s proposed TV series.

One of the many current issues raised in Reunion, that of the right of an individual to choose when and how to die, and the impact this can have on their relatives and friends, is central to Susan Varga’s Headlong. Although written as fiction, it is clear, especially to those who have read Varga’s earlier Heddy and Me, which centred on her often difficult relationship with her mother, that this is a novel with strong autobiographical underpinnings. After the death of her husband, Julia, who like him had managed to survive the Holocaust, decides she no longer wishes to go on living and searches for ways to commit suicide. Her doctors and members of her family, believing Julia is just depressed and grieving for her husband, make unsuccessful attempts to talk her out of this. Varga provides a thought-provoking portrait of a mother-daughter relationship always fraught with guilt and pain that is intensified when Julia survives an overdose of pills supposedly guaranteed to end her life. After her daughter refuses to provide any further help, Julia, with the resoluteness that has earlier helped keep her alive, takes things into her own hands in a final brave if shocking act. And the novel’s title and the image of the diver on its cover take on a new and much blacker meaning.

Loss and suicide are also strong undercurrents in Emily Maguire’s third novel, Smoke in the Room, in which three ill-assorted characters share a flat situated on Sydney’s Broadway. The flat belongs to Katie’s grandmother, whose attempts to be choosy about who shares it are regularly thwarted by Katie’s self-destructive behaviour. Adam, a visiting American still recovering from the death of his wife, is no match for Katie’s alcohol-fuelled powers of seduction. The second tenant, the much older Graeme, works at the nearby office of the Refugee Assistance Foundation, where he remains a loner, concealing his life and plans from his colleagues. It is Graeme, however, who is able to show true empathy for Katie and to take the, for him, radical step of asking one of his colleagues to help her. By the end of the
novel, it seems that there may be a future for her, even if it is too late for Graeme. *Smoke in the Room* demonstrates a new maturity in Maguire’s work, with convincing portraits of three very different and complex characters grappling with the impact of depression, personal loss and a sense of hopelessness in the face of the widespread misery and violence of the contemporary world.

The suicide of the Harvard professor who is supervising her doctoral thesis forces Simone Harlowe, the heroine of Larissa Behrendt’s *Legacy*, to reassess her own life and especially her relationship with her father, a prominent Aboriginal rights activist. As in Behrendt’s first novel, *Home*, there are strong emphases on Indigenous history and politics and clear autobiographical elements. But these are set within wider questions of individual responsibility: how does one balance personal needs and desires and the needs of others; how does one balance the needs of family members against the needs of the wider community? Publicly, Tony Harlowe has been a hero since the days of the Tent Embassy but, as Simone discovers, he has been far from heroic as a husband. Paralleling this is her discovery that Professor Young, whom she has also greatly admired, has been a failure as a husband and father. *Legacy* is a much stronger novel than *Home*, with Behrendt confronting complex, contemporary issues which impact on both the Indigenous and wider communities.

While the history of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy plays an important role in *Legacy*, two first novels are less successful in attempting to combine historical material with a contemporary story based on the author’s personal experiences. In the engagingly-titled *A True History of the Hula Hoop*, Judith Lanigan writes equally engagingly about the life of burlesque performer Catherine Barnier, drawing on her own experiences as, to quote her bio note, ‘an international street theatre and circus artist’. The intriguing little interspersed notes about the history of the hula hoop culminate in Catherine’s discovery that hoops were indeed being manufactured in Australia two years before they were supposedly ‘invented’ in America. Less successful is the parallel story of a troupe of *Commedia dell’Arte* actors who
are trying to travel from Italy to Paris in 1572. Despite a few half-hearted attempts to link these episodes with Catherine’s own travels through Europe, this historical material does not add much to the novel, especially as there are too many jarring anachronisms in language and incident. I would have much preferred to learn more about Catherine and her adventures, though others less familiar with the history of street theatre may feel differently.

In Robyn Mundy’s *The Nature of Ice* the parallels between the contemporary story, based on the author’s own regular travels to Antarctica, and the historical one, based on Douglas Mawson’s expedition of 1911–14, are more obvious. Again, however, the very different styles of the historical and the contemporary sections seemed to detract from rather than add to the novel, coupled with the fact that Mawson’s story is now a fairly well-known one. In contrast, the contemporary story is very engaging, thanks to strong characterisation and a fast-paced narrative. Mundy provides vivid and original descriptions of the Antarctic environment and the difficulties of working there, with many insights into how this affects human relationships. It is pleasing to see she has recently been awarded the Watermark Fellowship for environmental writing.

In another first novel, Goldie Goldbloom’s *The Paperbark Shoe*, the problem is not one of a mix of historical and contemporary material, since the novel as a whole is set in the 1940s, but of a mix of styles. It is told in the first person by Gin, an albino and champion pianist, who has grown up in comfort in Perth but has been forced to marry Toad, a short, misshapen person with strange sexual preferences, to escape from the asylum where she has been sent by her wicked stepfather. Together, they slave to develop Toad’s farm, situated on third-class land near Wyalkatchem; then their subsistence existence is considerably enlivened by the arrival of two Italian prisoners-of-war to work as farm labourers. Gin falls in love with Antonio and, believing that he also loves her, is devastated when he leaves her without a word. After the war, she manages to raise enough money to travel to Italy in search of him. In the final chapter, with its abrupt
switch from the grotesque comedy of the earlier episodes to the historical realism of the massacre of Antonio’s wife and children by German soldiers, we are in very different fictional terrain. Gin is forced to reassess Antonio’s feelings for her but the reader is forced to question the overall success of Goldbloom’s novel.

Andrew McGahan’s *Wonders of a Godless World* is perhaps the most unusual novel to be published in Australia recently, one that demonstrates yet again McGahan’s ability to combine literary fiction with more popular genres. After making his name as a writer of grunge fiction, McGahan went on to win the Miles Franklin with his pastoral epic *The White Earth*, followed by *Underground*, a satirical thriller. All his work, however, has had a political edge and *Wonders*, which can perhaps best be described as an ecological fantasy, is no exception. At the most basic level it is about the age-old conflict between man and his environment in a world where, as the title indicates, there is no such thing as a benevolent creator. In a mental hospital on an unnamed island, a man and a woman come together. She is an orphan, who cannot speak, read or, indeed, understand any form of symbolic communication, though she has peculiar powers that allow her to manipulate matter; he, known only as the foreigner, is in a coma after a horrific accident. Thanks to the foreigner’s special mental powers they make amazing journeys through time and space, and the orphan learns about many of the world’s wonders as she experiences the earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions that have destroyed so many lives. Ultimately, however, McGahan suggests that men, in their determination to survive whatever the cost, represent the real threat to the future of life on earth.

If McGahan is a writer of literary fiction with a popular twist, then the publication of *The Broken Shore* in 2005 drew widespread praise for crime novelist Peter Temple from literary circles. *Truth* is billed as the sequel to *The Broken Shore*, and does feature some brief appearances from its central character, Joe Cashin, as well as an even briefer one from Jack Irish, hero of several earlier Temple novels. But Inspector Stephen Villani, first met in *The Broken Shore*, is a less
Westerly 55:1

original and compelling figure than Cashin, despite struggling with the breakdown of his marriage and other family problems while trying to solve two violent crimes. *Truth* also lacks the wonderful evocation of the Victorian countryside that was one of the highlights of *The Broken Shore*, though Temple again shows his skill in appealing to all the senses in his vivid depictions of contemporary Melbourne. One of Villani’s own special skills, his sense of smell, proves crucial in solving his cases but in other respects this is a fairly conventional crime story, though a well-plotted and fast-paced one which will certainly not disappoint lovers of the genre.

2009 also saw new novels by Gerald Murnane, David Forster and Brian Castro, for Forster and Murnane, the first for many years. Indeed, Murnane devotes most of *Barley Patch* to the question ‘Must I write’ and to describing the fictional work he gave up writing several years ago. In the process, he claims he has no imagination and does not create characters; as those familiar with his work would know, Murnane also does not believe in anything resembling a plot. Nevertheless, *Barley Patch*, a title explained in the last few pages, is always fascinating, especially in its accounts of Murnane’s early reading and how he began to explore the images suggested to him through comic strips like ‘Mandrake the Magician’ and serialised fiction in the *Australian Journal*. It is of course the images, many of them recurring throughout Murnane’s work—racecourses and horses, the colours of jockeys’ silks, houses of more than one story, grassy plains—that link the various parts of this fiction. In the face of Murnane’s frequent reminders that what we are reading is fiction, only a brave or foolish reviewer would note that *Barley Patch* seems to be strongly autobiographical. This of course is part of the problem of representation. As Murnane reminds us, he ‘can never be any more than a personage in the mind of any reader of this writing.’

Problems of representation are, as one might expect, central to Brian Castro’s ninth novel, *The Bath Fugues*, which consists of three interlinked novellas, ‘Beckett’s Bicycle’, ‘Walter’s Brief’ and ‘Sarraute’s Surgery’. These titles point to some of the novel’s literary
references; their epigraphs indicate others: Baudelaire, Benjamin and Montaigne. The two epigraphs to the novel as a whole provide some further clues about how to read it: a Wikipedia entry describes Bach’s Goldberg Variations and pianist Glenn Gould, best-known for his recordings of this work, notes that it is ‘music with neither real climax nor real resolution, music which like Baudelaire’s lovers rests lightly on the wings of the unchecked wind.’ In novella three, we find what seems to be a fairly clear statement of the novel’s structure:

Bach wrote fugues. The important thing about a fugue or ‘flight’ is that all the voices are equal and independent in counterpoint. They are all relative to each other, and in this organised complexity, they speak together, drop out, become fellow travellers, form pairs of dialogues, and in general, mutilate the subject by inverting, augmenting, truncating or copying it.

Of course, the speaker here is not Castro but Dr Judith Sarraute, one of these ‘equal and independent voices’ through whom the novel is narrated. Others include Jason Redvers, artist and forger, Walter Gottlieb, academic and would-be biographer, Camilo Conceição, a Portuguese poet and art collector, living in Macau in the 1920s, Julia Grace, an Australian cubist artist with whom he has a liaison, and an unnamed man who lives off what he can garner from others and is perhaps closest of all to the author figure. All of them are related in various ways, come and go throughout the novel, and interact as described above. But what is the subject? There is much here about art and poetry, the anxiety of influence, copying as against authenticity, madness, opium and baths, not to mention bicycles and jellyfish. And plenty of the puns and game playing which, as Bernadette Brennan notes in her book discussed below, have always been part of Castro’s work. Perhaps it’s best just to immerse oneself in the writing, enjoy the wonderful descriptions of life in Sydney, Macau and North Queensland, and admire the intricacies of Castro’s counterpoint.

David Foster’s thirteenth novel, *Sons of the Rumour*, also pays
tribute to literary forebears, especially Richard Burton’s translations of the *Arabian Nights* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, but unlike Murnane’s and Castro’s moves well beyond questions of representation. As other reviewers have noted, the most brilliant section describes a pilgrimage to Ireland by Al Morrissey, failed scientist, failed jazz-drummer, failed husband, in which Foster the satirist gets stuck into such contemporary horrors as long-distance air travel and the decline of once great cities. It is hard not to see this 100-page tour-de-force as a male equivalent of Molly Bloom’s soliloquy, though one that ends in death rather than sexual delight. Likewise, the novel as a whole reverses the main premise of the *Arabian Nights*: the Shah finds Shahrazad’s tales boring rather than enthralling. Instead, he spends his ‘Iranian Days’ in visits to the Sons of the Rumour. From them he hears tales and sermons that range through many religions and regions, in which sexual desire jostles with the desire for enlightenment. ‘The Man Who Fell in Love with His Own Feet’, for example, gives a marvellous account of the origins of the Chinese custom of female foot-binding while ‘Blue Melons’ combines the wonderful, the horrific and the abject in true Foster fashion. Foster claims in his ‘Author’s Note’ that *Sons of the Rumour* was inspired by his presence at the Cronulla riot of 2005 and aims to explore the current conflict between ‘(fundamentalist) Islamic man and (anti-Christian) secular Western woman.’ This is clearly a topic of vital importance and one can only admire the immense amount of erudition, imagination and passion that has gone into this novel, though at the same time wondering how many readers will make it through to the end.

Despite the success of Nam Le’s *The Boat*, collections of stories are still thin on the ground in Australia and published mainly by smaller presses. The winning book in the University of Queensland Press’s 2008 David Unaipon Award for a manuscript by an Indigenous author was however a collection of stories, Marie Munkara’s *Every Secret Thing*. Set on an Aboriginal mission in northern Australia run by the Catholic Church, much of Munkara’s humour and satire is reminiscent of *Bran Nue Day*, though her vision is ultimately a much
bleaker one. The somewhat over-insistent ironies in the opening story ‘The Bishop’ made me fearful that this would be a one-note work in which the whites could do not right and their ostensible charges no wrong. But Munkara spreads her sympathy and her criticisms more widely. ‘Pwomiga’ reveals some of the problems that can arise in traditional cultures when a man with little interest in women and children inherits the wives and offspring of his dead brothers. In marked contrast, ‘Mira’ tells the story of one of the nuns, who has taken to the veil after being betrayed by her lover, only to find him turning up many years later to die at the mission, so ensuring that even after death she will not be revenged on him. ‘Marigold’ describes the even sadder life of a mixed-blood woman, sent to the mainland as a child, who later returns to the mission to find her mother. Marigold’s education in white ways, however, has left her stranded between cultures: ‘As a product of the bush mob and the mission mob Marigold’s place was with neither of them and it was with a heavy heart that she watched her dreams of a life with her family disappear.’ Behind all the comic bumbling of the missionaries and the often subversive activities of the ‘bush mob’, is the inescapable pain caused by disruption of traditional cultures and failures of love and understanding.

Marie Munkara’s stories, for all the variety of their themes, share a common time and place. In contrast, Archie Weller’s collection, *The Window Seat*, brings together stories written over many years, including ones commissioned by various publications. Early stories, ‘Stolen Car’ and ‘Dead Dingo’, are similar in style and subject matter to Weller’s first novel, *The Day of the Dog*, describing the misadventures of Aboriginal youths as they hit the big city. Later ones, though still mostly dealing with Indigenous issues, naturally take on the genre and themes of the anthologies in which they appeared. So ‘Dead Roses’, named by Weller as one of his favourites, is a murder mystery and ‘It’s Only a Game’ a comic piece for an anthology on Australian Rules football. ‘67 Yagan Way’ is a futuristic story along the lines of Weller’s more recent novel, *The Land of the Golden Clouds*, while
the zany ‘Confessions of a Head Hunter’ was also inspired by the story of Yagan, though here it is Aboriginal youths who collect the heads from statues of white men. Other stories in a more realist mode describe personal relationships that rarely have happy endings, as in ‘The Island’, where an idyllic love is only possible in a brief escape from normal life. Since Weller is not a prolific writer, this collection of his short fiction is especially welcome.

Unusually for a collection of stories, Richard Rossiter’s *Arrhythmia* features not one but two family trees as an appendix. Despite some initial confusion caused by the characters ‘Emily’ and ‘Ellen’ having different husbands in family tree 1 from those they have in the stories, the appendix is useful in keeping track of who is who, since the stories feature people from four generations and do not follow a strict chronology. Many of them, however, focus on two characters, Roland, the grandson of Samuel and Emily, whom we meet in the opening story, and their great-granddaughter, Laura. As Roland is the product of a later, second marriage, he is probably much the same age as Laura, daughter of his half-sister Leah, although the two never intersect. In ‘Roland’ he reflects bitterly on his parents’ disastrous marriage, blaming them for all the problems in his life, and things do not improve for him in the following stories. ‘Present Tense’, for example, describes his increasingly more bizarre attempts to live wholly in the moment, something he perhaps achieves, though in an ironical way, in the final story, ‘Roland Redux’. Laura’s life appears to have a more hopeful trajectory; introduced to us while involved in an unsatisfactory relationship in ‘Her Next Lover’, by the end of the collection she is settled on her father’s farm. Despite the mystery of his disappearance it is possible her rootless life is at an end. While the 26 stories in *Arrhythmia* are all quite short, recurring themes and characters allow Rossiter to explore many of the complexities of family and contemporary life.

Mainstream publishers seem more prepared now to publish new anthologies of short fiction, one of the most recent being Mandy Sayer’s *The Australian Long Story*. In her introduction Sayer discusses
differences between a long story and a novella, provides a brief history of the short story in Australia and explains why she has not included any works written before the 1970s: it seems they were too short! (There are in fact some great long stories by nineteenth-century women such as Tasma and Ada Cambridge: see another 2009 publication, *The PEN Macquarie Anthology of Australian Literature*).

Sayer has, however, selected some wonderful long stories, including Elizabeth Jolley’s chilling ‘Grasshoppers’, first published in a shorter version in *Westerly*, as well as other established classics by Malouf, Garner, Carey, Winton, Mears and Goldsworthy, along with Nam Le’s more recent ‘Halfleads Bay’. Indeed, the only real surprise is a story by Louis Nowra, known more for his plays and memoirs than his fiction. Sayer claims Nowra’s ‘Ten Anecdotes About Lord Howe Island’ is ‘a rare example of the comedic long story’ but also acknowledges that he is her husband.

Meenakshi Bharat and Sharon Rundle, editors of *Fear Factor*, an anthology of fiction relating to such current issues as terrorism, refugees, and fear of the other, present an intriguing mix of work by Indian and Australian authors, new as well as established. Alongside extracts from novels by Tom Keneally, David Malouf, Salman Rushdie and Kiran Nagarkar one finds stories presenting very different aspects of the main theme. In ‘Packing Heat’, for example, Devika Brendon provides an insight into the mind of a female suicide bomber; in marked contrast, Meenakshi Bharat’s ‘Compensation’ shows that an act of terrorism can sometimes have unexpectedly positive outcomes. Picador Australia are to be congratulated on releasing this book originally published by Picador India.

If short fiction is generally out of fashion with mainstream Australian publishers, works of literary criticism, especially comprehensive studies of our leading writers, now get published overseas if at all. In 2009, UQP bucked this trend with David Callahan’s *Rainforest Narratives*, a study of Janette Turner Hospital’s fiction, perhaps because they publish her novels. Despite his title, Callahan does not confine himself to Hospital’s Australian novels but covers all of her
work—eight novels and three collections of stories—up to *Orpheus Lost* (2007). He also includes an excellent bibliography, listing her uncollected stories and numerous articles and reviews, as well as publications on her fiction. As a title, *Rainforest Narratives* is used metaphorically, to refer to ‘the bewildering oversupply of information’, the ‘networks of connection, entanglements of involvement’, and the sometimes disorienting questioning of time and identity found in Hospital’s fiction. In contrast, Callahan’s approach is clear and lucid, providing interpretative guides to Hospital’s fictional labyrinths. As he indicates, problems of identity, related especially to cultural and gender issues, together with the use of unreliable narrators and an increasing emphasis on violence, are hallmarks of Hospital’s work. He notes, in her two most recent novels, a move to a more accessible style and more linear structure, one that perhaps mirrors the move away from postmodern reflexivity in contemporary fiction generally. Nevertheless, Hospital’s novels continue to make many demands on the reader, besides offering much in return, and Callahan’s comprehensive study will be welcomed by her admirers.

In *Messengers of Eros*, French scholar Xavier Pons presents the first extended study of ‘representations of sex in Australian writing’. Despite the subtitle, with the exception of a chapter on A D Hope’s poetry, his focus is on fictional representations, primarily from recent decades. In his conclusion, Pons admits the impossibility of demonstrating ‘an identifiably Australian way of writing about sex’. This may explain why the most interesting of his sixteen chapters are the later ones that look at one or two texts or authors in detail. Although Pons demonstrates wide reading of both Australian and international literature in his more general chapters, there is some repetition and no sense of a developing argument. Another difficulty is that some novels that were much discussed when first published because of their highly erotic nature—such as Linda Jaivin’s *Eat Me* and Justine Ettler’s *The River Ophelia*—have not lasted. The best chapters, however, offer new insights into works that have not received much critical attention, such as Peter Carey’s *The Tax*
Inspector, discussed alongside Christos Tsiolkas’s Dead Europe as representations of sexual abjection. Another valuable chapter selects three very different historical novels, Tom Keneally’s Bring Larks and Heroes, Philip McLaren’s Sweet Water...Stolen Land and Richard Flanagan’s Gould’s Book of Fish, to discuss the use of sexual encounters as metonymic representations of the colonial process. These chapters demonstrate the value of an external perspective on Australian literature, one that also allows Pons to address what has seemed a taboo topic locally, ‘Homoeroticism in David Malouf’. In a sensitive reading of Malouf’s fiction, Pons sees him as concerned to ‘free his characters from an imposed binary categorization of sexualities’, pointing out that difference as it relates to sexuality can be regarded as just as much part of the postcolonial condition as racial difference.

Given the subtitle of Bernadette Brennan’s Brian Castro’s Fiction: The Seductive Play of Language, it may seem surprising that Castro’s fiction is not discussed by Pons, especially as he was the French translator of Castro’s first novel, Birds of Passage. But, as Brennan makes clear, Castro has always been more concerned with linguistic seductions, with the play of words and meanings rather than lips and limbs, with death rather than sex. She provides detailed analyses of his eight novels published between 1983 and 2008, reading them chronologically and in conjunction with his own essays and a wide range of fiction and essays by others. Her emphasis is on Castro’s imaginative concerns and strategies, especially his celebration of language, as seen in his love of puns and literary games, his breaking of narrative and genre conventions, his linking of writing, desire and death. Castro, as she notes, runs the risk of alienating readers through his constant playing with and subversion of our desire to impose meaning or anything in a way of a unitary interpretation on his fiction. Autobiographical readings, in particular, are rejected, especially of his ‘fictional autobiography’ Shanghai Dancing. Brennan’s chapter on this, arguably Castro’s most important work to date, is one of the highlights of her monograph, though she is concerned to stress
that her readings of Castro’s novels are not to be seen as in any way
definitive. This first extended study of Castro’s fiction is a welcome
addition to Australian literary criticism and offers many insights into
his work, as well as an excellent bibliography.

In conclusion, a brief mention of a novel written in 1864–65,
though published only this year: *Tom Hurstbourne or A Squatter’s Life*
by John Clavering Wood. Gerard Benjamin, a descendant of the
author, was given the manuscript by a family member, and has edited
it in conjunction with his wife, Gloria Grant. Originally believed to
be a diary, the manuscript was in fact that of the second novel to
be written about Queensland and offers some fascinating insights
into colonial life, despite an over-melodramatic plot. Even in these
cosmopolitan times, history returns in unexpected ways.

**FICTION RECEIVED 2009–2010**

*Those marked with an asterisk are mentioned in the above review.*

We visit them all, the banks of Mysore,
climb grimy stairs to enter each time
a room with a cashier’s cage. Rows
of key-hole eyes suck specks of figures
from brown sheets and tiers of ledgers
out of which paper and cardboard
have been made infallible, cash-flow temples.

Each of my smiling supplications
meets the same routine reply…
‘No, don’t have arrangement
with your bank.’ (Polite, they
won’t admit my bank does not
exist, our pilgrimage useless.)
‘No, no cable transfer of dollars
Australian has been received.
But the next bank, on contrary,
is certainly having correspondence
with your bank. Please to enquire there.’

That day, apart from a shared one-cone
ice-cream, we ate no lunch.
We lose our way among burnt-toast houses. Beggars missing
limbs or organs, branded with disease,
blotched, nibbled by leprosy,
must be joking!…Don’t they know
our money hasn’t arrived?

Blood Bank
Syd Harrex
This day, for once, we are saving even our lightest coins.

Finding our Guest House at last, its fronds of soothing shade, our feet feel hot and flat as spitting irons. I sink onto my hard bed, doze in parchment of bankrupt myths, stories of financial asceticism, neither hearing nor seeing mosquitoes amend my thrift, mosquitoes en masse filling their black bellies, withdrawing my only currency, my bountiful, my profligate blood.
Word

Jazra Khaleed

Translation from the Greek by Sarah Katherine McCann

I have no homeland
I live within words—
Words of mourning
Words enchained—
You hear, Mustapha Khayati?

The power lies in language
And police patrol up in there—
No more poetry series for us
No more Seferises—
In my neighborhood, they sacrifice virgin poets

Dust-eyed rappers in baggy pants
Push rhymes on kids sniffing words

To fall down and get back up: the poet’s Art
You hear, Jean Genet?

My words are homeless
Sleeping on the benches of Lamentation Square
Covered with IKEA cardboard

My words don’t make the evening news
They walk the streets each night
My words are proletarians, slaves like me
They work the sweatshops day in, day out
No more dirges for me
No more verbs from those not fighting

I need a new language—no more pimping

I’m waiting for a revolution to invent me
I’m longing for the language of class struggle

A tongue with the taste of revolt—
I’ll cook it up!

What arrogance!
Alright, I’m out.

But look: the dawn of a new poetry etched in my face

No word left chained

I’m searching for a way through
the seduction
Adrian Flavell

the bird

with its eye torn
and hanging like a
cherry

has no choice

but to shuffle
within broken shade
and tremble

to the pleasure of cat
The Snake

Graham Rowlands

I was late pedalling to soccer practice on my green semi-racer bicycle & guessing I’d just have to make do with parking it on its side in the dust or in the gravel when I noticed one side of just one tree free of the bikes leaned against the others. In the second I took to see snake, snake I saw live snake twisting down on me—no more than a medium-size carpet snake aimed, dangled & literally dropped dead. So becoming a snake-charmer wasn’t for me & any career in snake-catching or milking to face & stare down the stares of snakes could have ended up a statistic on the news. Now, after forty-nine years, I find myself reaching up into the branches of that tree & bringing down the snake, dead or alive.
Foreword

This is a translation of a poem written by Maung Swan Yi (actual name Win Pe) (born 1937), a Burmese poet who has been residing in the United States since late 2002. The poem was written in remembrance of two of his fellow poets Tin Moe (actual name Ba Gyan) and Kyi Aung (actual name Kyi Lin) who died respectively in Los Angeles in January 2007 and in Mandalay, Burma, in March 2009. All three are Burmese poets with perhaps the most prominent poet being Tin Moe (who had lived in exile mainly in the United States and other countries since about July 1999 till his death in January 2007).

Tin Moe wrote his last poem on the night of 21 January 2007 just about 18 hours before he died the next day. Among well over a thousand poems written by Tin Moe, one of the most famous, due both to its brevity, enigma and beauty as well as its philosophical significance, is a poem which can be entitled as ‘The Guest’. In the original Burmese it runs thus:
In my translation it reads:

**The Guest**  
By Tin Moe  
Translation by Myint Zan  
The cigar’s burning down  
The Sun’s brown  
[Will someone] Send me back [to my place]

The translator is unable to do (full) justice to the original but an attempt has to be made. In place of the ‘burning down’ a more literal translation could be ‘the cigar is shortened’. In a translation by Maung Tha Noe (born circa 1933), who is also a friend of Tin Moe, Kyi Aung and Maung Swan Yi, first published in the early to mid-1960s, Maung Tha Noe (from this translator’s memory) translated the first line of the poem as ‘The cigar’s burnt down’ but the cigar has not (totally) ‘burnt down’ as yet. Though syntactically and perhaps grammatically ‘the cigar’s burnt down’ would seem a better translation, in order to get as ‘proximate’ as possible to the original, I have translated it as ‘the cigar’s *burning* down’ partly to rhyme with ‘the Sun’s brown’. A more literal translation though would be ‘the cigar is shortened’. In the original poem the phrases [Will someone], and [to my place] did not appear.

On the few occasions that this translator met the poet Tin Moe in the 1970s in Rangoon, Burma and in December 2000 in Melbourne, Australia, I did not directly enquire from him as to the ‘occasion’ or
the ‘trigger’ which prompted Tin Moe to pen this enigmatic poem, though I have heard a few stories about the ‘origins’ of the poem. These include the claim that Tin Moe penned it at a road-side tea shop when someone ostensibly stated ‘The cigar’s shortened, the Sun’s brown’ and Tin Moe supplied or added the last line of the poem of ‘sending back’. After Kyi Aung, whose native place Ava (Inwa) which is several miles from Mandalay, Burma’s second biggest city and considered its cultural capital, died in March 2009 at the Mandalay General Hospital, the news was mentioned on several Burmese websites including at Moemaka media (www.moemaka.com a mainly Burmese language website). Maung Swan Yi wrote and published the poem in remembrance of his two departed friends at the above website.

It was only around early August 2009 several months after Maung Swan Yi’s poem was first published that I came across the (to me and in the original) affecting reminiscence by Maung Swan Yi of his two friends. Only after reading Maung Swan Yi’s poem did I become aware of the actual circumstances pertaining to the composition of the poem. ‘Shortened Cigars Stained with Nostalgic Tears’ confirms the ‘story’ that I have heard that some person other than Tin Moe composed or at least stated the first two lines of the poem. Until I read Maung Swan Yi’s poem I did not know the identity of the person who uttered them. In early 2004 and 2005 I had the chance to meet Kyi Aung twice in his native Ava and also in Mandalay briefly but had never asked and did not know that he was the ‘protagonist’ of Tin Moe’s ‘The Guest’ poem. Based on my incomplete knowledge I had written in my tribute of Tin Moe in ‘Tin Moe: An Exiled Burmese Poet of Simplicity and Humanity’ (Bulletin of the Burma Studies Group, 79 (2007), 18) about an ‘apocryphal’ story of how Tin Moe composed the poem in a tea shop (which apparently was not the case since he actually he composed it in the ‘Tamarind Villa’ in late 1958 or early 1959 where he and Maung Swan Yi were housemates) and that Tin Moe collapsed and later died in a cafeteria (‘teashop’) in a suburb of Los Angeles on 22 January 2007 which was what had happened. The story I heard that Tin Moe composed the poem in a ‘teashop’ (in late
Myint Zan

Tin Moe, 2006

Kyi Aung (centre facing camera), 2008

Maung Swan Yi at his New York apartment, 30 March 2010
1958 or early 1959) turns out, from Maung Swan Yi’s account, not to be true.

Tin Moe, Kyi Aung and Maung Swan Yi, all natives of upper Burma and all aspiring and later established poets and writers, attended Mandalay University from the mid-1950s to the late 1950s and beyond. They became friends during the course of their studies. This tribute and the ‘nostalgic’ poem by Maung Swan Yi indicates the way they ‘discoursed’ among themselves about poetry and literature. Tin Moe’s first published book of poems _The Lantern_ won the national prize for poetry awarded by the then Burmese government in 1959 and Maung Swan Yi helped include ‘The Guest’ poem in _The Lantern_. In a phone conversation with Maung Swan Yi in September 2009 from his current residence in Queens, New York, Maung Swan Yi indicated that he had to persuade and almost cajoled Tin Moe to include ‘The Guest’ in the _The Lantern_. Maung Swan Yi indicated that Tin Moe was initially quite reluctant to publish a three-line ‘doggerel’ in his collection. Hence Burmese poetry lovers owe it to all three persons, Kyi Aung, Tin Moe and Maung Swan Yi for ‘The Guest’ being published soon after its composition.

Since some of the terms and contexts used in the poem do require elaboration or explanation in order to highlight the cultural, contextual, at times etymological meaning and connotations I have—at the possible risk of effecting an aesthetic and smooth reading of the translation of this poem—inserted explanatory notes at the end of the translation.
In Mandalay, on the South of the [Mandalay General] Hospital, a ‘dog-bark’s away’

at the eastern side of the railway quarters

on the other side of ‘the red dirt road’ quarters

near the tamarind tree

there was a two-roomed house with two trees in the compound

[in] part of the two-roomed house

there lived Ba Gyan and I

the name of the house was

‘tamarind villa’

there was no signage at the house

though verbally, people have referred to it thus

I don’t know who gave this name to the house

or when it started

I do not recall, I do not know

what I know is

Tin Moe is the person who was wont to [give such names]

Tin Moe’s name is also Ba Gyan

Ba Gyan and I

[while staying at ‘Tamarind villa’ ] composed poems together

slept on the same mat

used the same cotton blanket

and the same mosquito net

and used the same [set of] pillows
once a day
Kyi Aung visited us
and he brought along with him a book of poems
[also] clutching a packet of cigars
he arrived furtively
wearing a hat
stating ‘[I] have come without going
to school [classes at Mandalay University]’

Tin Moe, the poem
has just awoken
amidst puffs of [cigar] smoke
coughing
‘Good-Ta-morning’
friend, come, come
welcomed him

[we] went to the vermicelli soup
[moant-hingar] shop
talked a lot
went to the teashop
talked some more
if we are hungry for rice [and curry]
went to the food shop
eating followed by further eating
talk continued after talk

talk and talk
when one talks much
out of the talk poems arose
slouched on the house’s wall
to ease digestion
they, [Tin Moe and Kyi Aung] would puff the cigar
though in the puffing and inhaling [of cigars]
I did not join
[I joined the talks] based on and sentiments about poetry
busy with poetry talk
how happy we were!
O! How beneficent it was
that was when we were young

one day
Kyi Aung came
and was about to leave
graping the match-box
wearing [his] hat
stretching body and limb
wearing his slippers, gazing and whimsically [stated]
[Kyi Aung said] ‘Ah—the cigar is
shortened
and the Sun is brown’
while this was being said
in a hurry, Tin Moe
rose from the seat, laid [on the floor]
picked up the pen
impromptu and straight away
composed poetry
’—my friends:
you listen to this for a while
‘the cigar is burning down, the sun’s
brown
send me back’ thus was the poem
the title was ‘The Guest’

the guest [Kyi Aung]’
in amazement, clicked his tongue
snapped his fingers  
“hah! ah! Such excellence  
three persons rejoiced” as though three  
flowers bloom, the past is nostalgia

In ‘The Lantern’ [collection of Tin Moe’s poems]  
this poem  
I have ‘hooked’ it [arranged to put into print]  
the story from the past  
I want to be nostalgic  
yet I do not want to [be so]  
[since] grief follows nostalgia:  
unending nostalgia  
this sustained nostalgia, left behind  
by nostalgia [of events] fifty years ago  
hey—how quick[ly] [time moves]  
the great Guests  
whenever the Sun is down, have left  
leaving me behind  
following the path of No Return

I, who is left behind  
fumblingly  
whenever in search of rhymes  
with heart aches, and grievances
the smoke from the cigars  
would blow through the wind [:]  
do they include Tin Moe?  
do they include Kyi Aung?  
startled  
I strain my ears to welcome [them]  
I open the door [only] to weep
Notes

1. A colloquial Burmese usage meaning a place where a dog’s bark can be heard.

2. In or about the years 1958 and 1959 Ba Gyan and Win Pe (Maung Swan Yi) lived at the same house in Mandalay ‘a dog’s bark away from Mandalay General Hospital’. About forty years later starting from mid-1999 Tin Moe became an exile first in Belgium (where one of his daughters lives) and later in the United States, living most of the time in either a suburb of Los Angeles with another of his daughters or occasionally in Fort Wayne, Indiana where a large expatriate or exile(d) Burmese community lives. It was in Los Angeles that the guest’s (a refugee from Burma) cigar’s burnt down and the lantern-owner died. Maung Swan Yi came to the United States in late December 2002 and the two poets did meet in the United States fairly often though Maung Swan Yi was living in Queen’s (Quarter) in New York, a far place from the ‘Tamarind Villa’ in Mandalay of yore of fifty years ago and from Baldwin Park, a suburb of Los Angeles where Tin Moe lived some of the time during his exile—and where he died. Kyi Aung, who had never left Burma, met his end in Mandalay quite near his native place of Ava.

3. The phrase is literally translated as ‘the poem Tin Moe’ rather than the ‘poet Tin Moe’ for that was the term Maung Swan Yi used inferring that Tin Moe, in a metaphorical sense, was ‘poetry’ or at least produced or embodied poetry.

4. I have exactly transliterated ‘Good morning’ as ‘Good-Ta-Morning’ as it was the wont of some Burmese perhaps including Tin Moe to pronounce it that way.

5. Moant-hingar a Burmese food, if not delicacy, is loosely translated as ‘vermicelli soup’. One website states that Moant-hingar ‘is a mixture of the thick fish soup and thin rice noodles [together with] roasted chilly powder, a squeezed lemon, fish sauce and coriander’ and ‘Myanmar food’ http://www.uniteam-travel-myanmar.com/food.html (accessed 4 September 2009). The food is available in roadside stalls and the customers usually eat it from low-lying tables while sitting on stools.

6. This is a ‘play’ (though not a pun) of two Burmese sayings one of which asserts ‘talk, talk, too much talk, from the talk [one’s] origins (literally ‘birth’) is revealed’ and another which reminds that ‘talk, talk, too much talk, by talking too much mistakes are made’. Maung Swan Yi, appears to be asserting (apparently going against the ‘grain’ of conventional wisdom) that ‘out of talk, too much talk’ (and for those with a poetic bent) poetry or at least talk about poetry and poems can also arise.
7. The ‘guest’ to the Tamarind Villa all those years ago was, of course, Kyi Aung and the guest helped Tin Moe write The Guest. In this particular paragraph Maung Swan Yi narrates how the guest was affected by The Guest poem. And it was the guest Kyi Aung’s words that inspired Tin Moe to compose The Guest.

8. Initially I was uncertain about the phrase ‘three flowers’ and thought that it might have been a typographical error. With the removal of two ‘dots’ in the phrase သံုးပန္း thone-pann (‘three flowers’) in the Burmese spelling the phrase could be transformed into သံု႔ပန္း thoant pan (‘prisoner’). Hence I have translated the poem initially as ‘prisoners of joy’. When I telephoned Maung Swan Yi in early September 2009 to check the meaning of the phrase he stated that it was ‘thone-pann’ (‘three flowers’). As a translator, I am of the view that the phrase ‘prisoners of joy’ rather than ‘three flowers’ [rejoicing at the fruition of the poem] could be equally—if not even more—appropriate. This is so since the next phrase ‘nostalgic past’ (the past as nostalgia) could be construed to indicate that by being nostalgic of his two departed friends in remembering things past (or ‘in search of lost time’—to quote directly from Marcel Proust’s masterpiece) the poet’s memory can be held ‘prisoner’ to the joy and later (see the end of the poem) the hurts emerging from them. It is said that when one translates poetry one ‘loses’ but also at the same time ‘gains’ from what is stated in the original. Though the phrase ‘prisoners of joy’ rather than ‘three flowers rejoiced’ is a modification or innovation of the translator it is indicative of the addition or ‘spill-over’ that occurred in the translator’s mind in reading this part of the poem.

9. A more literal translation would be ‘Nostalgic Past’ or simply ‘Nostalgia Past’ since Maung Swan Yi juxtaposed together these two words. I have taken the liberty and paraphrased the statement ‘[t]he past is a foreign country’ to ‘The past is nostalgia’. Indeed from a foreign country (the United States) Maung Swan Yi expressed his ‘nostalgia’—with acknowledgment to Marcel Proust—in ‘Remembrance of Things Past’ or ‘In [Nostalgia] for Lost Time’.

10. I have proximately translated the Burmese phrase ၱန္ၿငိဳး Yan Hnyo as ‘grievance’ when it can also mean, in the context of the poem, a sustained sense of grievance and ‘unforgiveness’ arising out of hurts done and received. Just as time moves unforgivingly and relentlessly the heartache and the sense of grievance equally relentlessly cloud the memories of the poet through the suffocating and grief-inducing ‘cigar smoke’ which makes the poet—as the last lines of the poem movingly states—open the door(s) (of cognition and nostalgia)—only to weep.
Afterword

A few weeks after the editor(s) sent the translator a lightly edited translation of Maung Swan Yi’s poem and my comments for possible emendations the translator met Maung Swan Yi at his studio apartment in Queens, New York, in the United States on 30 March 2010. I did not discuss with the poet much about my translation of his poem beyond stating that it was scheduled for publication and that the editors and publisher wished to obtain a better copy of the photos of the two late poets Tin Moe and Kyi Aung. During our conversation Maung Swan Yi also ‘reminisced’ about the late Tin Moe and Tin Moe’s (charming) almost child-like idiosyncrasies especially when they were students at Mandalay University in the mid to late 1950s. When at the end of the meeting and while I was about to leave his apartment I casually asked him whether he has written his tribute of his departed friends with ‘tears as investment’ (or ‘capital’). Maung Swan Yi did not reply—perhaps the only time during our conversation he had not responded to my questions. I might add here that there is a Burmese saying that ‘silence means admission’ မ်က္ရည္နဲ႔ရင္ေပီး Maung Swan Yi did not reply—perhaps the only time during our conversation he had not responded to my questions. I might add here that there is a Burmese saying that ‘silence means admission’ ဆိတ္ဆိတ္ေနဝန္ခံ My (perhaps for him as well as for myself) slightly embarrassing and partly self-conscious query—as I was moved and touched each time I re-read, even when I occasionally think about the last lines of the poem—was answered by Maung Swan Yi in silence. I would also point out that the phrase ‘tears as investment’ or ‘investing in tears’ was used by Maung Swan Yi himself in one of his article/reviews published in the mid-1990s. When the Burmese writer Paragu (born 1921) published a book reminiscing about some of his writer colleagues, a chapter of it was a touching tribute by Paragu of the late respected, leftist Burmese writer Bhamo Tin Aung (1920–1978). Maung Swan Yi in his review of Paragu’s book stated how moving Paragu’s tribute of Bhamo Tin Aung was and that he (Maung Swan Yi) ‘wondered’ whether Paragu ‘invested’ his tears in writing the tribute. As I asked Maung Swan Yi the question I used the exact phrase he had used in describing Paragu’s tribute of Bhamo Tin Aung.
The next day, on 31 March 2010, I attended a partly religious ceremony near Maung Swan Yi’s apartment in Queens, New York, where he held a ceremony to feed food to Burmese Buddhist monks ဆြမ္းေကြ်း as is his wont to do so every Wednesday which is the day of the week he was born. I briefly discussed with him my translation of the heading of his poem as to whether it should be ‘Shortened Cigars Covered with Nostalgic Tears’ or ‘Shortened Cigars Soaked in Nostalgic Tears’ or ‘Shortened Cigars Stained with Nostalgic Tears’. This thought has been on the back of my mind, so to speak as to which particular phrase covered/soaked or ‘stained’ I should use. Partly due to the fact that he was hard of hearing and (had to) use a hearing aid and partly due to the intricacy of the language barrier and also due to shortness of time the poet said that he was unable to respond or suggest. After much ‘internal conversation’ (almost) struggle I have decided to use the word ‘stain’ instead of the more literal translation ‘Shortened Cigars Covered with Nostalgic Tears’ or ‘Shortened Cigars Soaked in Nostalgic Tears’. For the tears may have soaked the cigars (metaphorically if not literally) but the theme of the ‘stain’ of nostalgic reminiscences and hurts was the enduring poetic imagery, impression and cognition that I felt as I read and reread ‘Shortened Cigars Soaked in (and Stained by) Nostalgic Tears’.
It’s long ago now, that jungle. I grew up there, the changeling from a young man to madness, when Saigon took a knife to its own throat. Once you have seen the flat pain of a country bleeding to death, you accept your own, not as a matter of course, but a matter of time. Land of lush grandeur, you peeled back your skin again and again, bringing the leeches of your leaders up from the paddies and canals where they breed. I am better now than before, of course time heals, etcetera. I wanted to see then the blue-black night asleep with stars, not spring alive with flares and tracer rounds. I wanted to hold his hand and say to him, you are me, and I am you. But the night closed in with much smoke and noise that I tried to let you go, young man, but instead I lowered myself into your flesh.
Kythera

Geoff Page

He has the language well by now although the word for \textit{thalassa} is hardly like the sea—

or not the sea at Kythera. ‘Ocean’ has the wash-and-toss of Bondi back before he came up here to help out cousin Loukas.

2:30 at the Paramount (he loves that Hollywood allusion)

is like the lull between two waves: first the farmers; then the kids; the farmers with their wives at lunch,

...toasted sandwich (ham and cheese), with milky tea to follow, in here from the morning sales,

the man’s white line of forehead as he’s taking off his hat, the wife’s mouth harder from the years.

The kids who come for ‘spiders’ or malteds after school will offer some relief, it’s true, their gossip and their mooning. It wouldn’t do in Kythera—no time there to flirt or dawdle,
those fathers with their fiercer eyes
and life so much more serious:
not just the Nazis in the war

but also what came later,
the fighting which had sliced through towns,
brother killing brother.

Kythera was rich with myth;
its paddocks, though, were small and stony,
especially for surplus sons.

This town’s an island too at times,
surrounded by its sea of wheat;
its summer days are much the same,

though even dryer in the mind
without the sea at evening.
Kythera to Eurandangee.

Quite a way, he thinks,
looking at the booths,
the green formica tables,

the vinyl seats, the Worcestershire,
the salts and peppers, bowls of sugar.
Odysseus himself stuck here

would soon lose heart, he reckons.
Tonight there will be travellers
and stock and station agents

looking for their T-bone steak
with chips and peas and carrots.
Once he wondered why his cousin
always served a piece of steak
longer than the plate it sailed on.
‘No need to be stingy, Niko.’

Such meat back home would be a treat,
would have a saint’s day’s name attached;
the vegetables, more slowly done,

would not be broken in a saucepan.
‘You give the people what they want,’
said Loukas six years back,

seeing Niko staring at
the fare he brought in from the kitchen.
‘Forget your moussaka.
Forget your baklava.
It’s steak and chips out here,’ he’d say.
‘We want them coming back, OK?’

But now it seemed they’d all lost interest,
out there driving straight roads home
or still at school and watching time

go slowly round the clock.
They’d had those Latin numbers too
back there in Kythera.

Time’s what they grow out here, he thinks.
But don’t they have enough by now?
He looks along the cubicles

and suddenly he’s seen two ladies
up there, second from the front,
waving for their scones and tea.
Grave Rubbing

Jesse Patrick Ferguson

Just grave robbing with different tools, and O they come for the kindred dead, these pilgrims tramping through rows of white crosses for long-lost blood relations, or else hunting down Byron’s or Keats’s granite slab to squeeze poetry from stone.

They haul rolled butcher paper and charcoal, which one can buy in a handy kit at the tourist boutique. And, bent on taking, they bend to their task, feel for the depression, watch epitaphs appear under the coal-dark conjuring wand. For best results use a figure-eight motion: symbol of infinity, rubbing off, rubbing out.

Superstitious, you may shiver, wondering if some alternate-reality self is running fingers over your headstone. But shake it off and head home through French, English or Roman afternoon sunlight. Your rubbing rolled and tied with twine, parcelled carefully beneath an arm like tenderloin or T-bone, the paper’s rough edge reddened by a small escaping trickle.
Then there, mid-paragraph, as he read the final lines of Joyce’s ‘The Dead’, Yukio decided that this would be the work that he would copy. He had read of others who had copied works by Soseki and Tanizaki and many other famous writers; others who had copied their favourite work by their favourite author numbers of times and reported things like: ‘during the sixth copying something magical happened.’ The magic had not been explained but Yukio did not doubt that it existed. It was all tangled up in the language spirit, the kotodoma, that he believed would come alive during the copying process.

Yukio had fantasised about kotodoma for a long time. He had been waiting to find the right work to copy—copy over and over, if necessary, until he experienced the magic for himself. Then there, in the late hours of a stifling July night, as he sat in shorts beneath the slow moving fan and read the vital sentence, the hair on his neck prickled and goosebumps rose on his chest as he realised that this, this would be the work that he would copy.

It mattered not that his copy was a translation, nor that the original was by a Westerner. It was something to do with that line:

**Blinded by the Light**

**Martin French**
‘seibu e no tabi ni shuppatsu suru jikan ga kitanoda’—‘Westward journey…depart…time came’. It was like Proust. And it was not.

But Yukio realised that he could copy this; could copy ‘The Dead’ and be the first Japanese person to make that connection, to feel that magic. When he read the line: ‘The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward,’ Yukio nodded to himself. Yes, depart time had come, and his journey westward was in his hands, waiting to be copied.

That sentence: the syntax itself marked the difference between the languages and cultures of East and West. In Japanese, sentences ended with the verb—the means; while in English, the sentences ended with the object—the goal. Japanese and English; East and West; Means and Ends. Yukio decided on a brush and ink, rather than pen; wanting his characters to flow down the page, into one another, as he copied. It would be messier and more time consuming, but the end result, Yukio hoped, would be an artefact worthy of ‘The Dead’.

He fantasised that, one day, odd pages of his copy would be found in galleries and museums all over Japan—or even on postcards that would be sent around the world. Like the poems of Shiki and Soseki, corrected by one another—such beautiful writing. Then Westerners would see how beautiful their literature was when written in such a beautiful, flowing script. Yukio nodded again to himself. A magical script. ‘The Dead’ would remain still, but his copy would add much—his copy would be alive.

Yukio decided that his third copy would be written in brush and ink. He would do two draft copies in old school notebooks and then buy good paper, ink and a new brush for the final copy. Laying back under the fan, his arms folded behind his head, Yukio virtually dreamed himself to sleep: thinking about the snow, the feet stamping on the doormat, Freddy Malins, and that boy who had died. The unintelligible singing drifting down the stairs…Gabriel was like a ghost; his wife like a painting of a ghost; the snow falling in the night…laughter…the clopping of horses…the silent chopping of the fan above in the thick darkness.
First Copy

As he writes the first copy, Yukio double-checks each character to make sure that nothing’s missing. He prints the copy, so unlike the cursive one he dreams of producing. It’s a beginning. The process so slow that it takes almost two months to complete. Yukio has plenty of time to think as he copies. Too much time. He wonders about Gabriel’s mother; how she died. He notices in fact that there are quite large numbers of dead peopling the story—dead that he hadn’t noticed on his first, fateful reading: Gabriel’s mother, his uncle, those monks who slept in their coffins; the dead opera singers and absent faces of Gabriel’s speech; grandfather Patrick Morkan—going around in circles behind Johnny The Dead Horse; and, of course, Michael Furey—the singer of the ‘distant music’—more distant than the music Gabriel could hear there that night. Even the living dead Aunt Julia, ‘arrayed for the bridal,’ as it were. Time.

Yukio’s paperback had been given to him as a graduation present by Megumi, his High School sweetheart. It was more than a graduation present but Yukio neither appreciated that at the time, nor thought about it now. When he read the passage where Gabriel was watching Gretta at the head of the stairs, and Gabriel asked himself ‘what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to music, a symbol of,’ he answered aloud, just in response, without remembering and without emotion: ‘Death’. Which death and whose, and how and why, did not blip on his radar. It was a dead death he spoke. Dust. Or snow.

When Megumi had given him the book, Yukio had given her nothing. He was going away to Tokyo and she was not. He had decided that he wasn’t coming back, but he did not tell her. He was seventeen. He expected her to have understood as much. Perhaps she did.

When she died he did not visit her parents as he should have. He did not even go to her funeral. Rather, he pretended not to have known. When he did think about it, he thought that he never would understand what he’d done, or not done. From everything to nothing,
just like that. Instead he had picked up the neglected copy of *The Dubliners*; held it rolled in his hand like a magazine; imagined it being held and wrapped by Megumi, his thumb tracing an arc across its cover. He opened it and read it through the summer.

When he finishes the first copy it is Autumn. He hadn’t noticed the trees starting to change. When he looks at the finished copy, it doesn’t seem to have been written by him. The characters are too neat, too formal. Like little statues, row upon row. If he closes his tired eyes he can still see them. When he rubs the ache is no better, his vision blurs a little. It doesn’t seem to have been written by him at all.

At night he is haunted by the little things: Freddy Malins’s ‘*tumid*’ lips—‘but Freddy was alive,’ he thinks, ‘or was he?’; Gabriel’s dead mother—‘how *did* she die?’; the feet on the floor overhead, shuffling and scraping; the ‘*indelicate clicking*’. When he sleeps he has a nightmare of a rabid dog with paralysed hind legs, dragging itself across the wooden floor, panting and slavering towards his own sleeping form, toenails clicking, scraping. In the dream he watches himself asleep on the floor before the dog, as if dead. He wills himself to awaken. Yelling. Yellering.

When he awakens, eyes aching, he rubs them with the knuckles of the backs of his fists. He thinks of Freddy Malins.

**Second Copy**

When he begins the second copy Yukio wonders how ‘The Dead’ managed to reach in and grip at his heart—that swelling fist, un-punching—a strange, empty blow. So much talking going on, so much babble—a whole crowd. A gaggle. But so what? As he copies, so much seems to be preamble, seems to be nothing at all. Some old geese and a few drunk ganders, and Gabriel getting paranoid over the hissing and flapping. What is it? Yukio thinks that Gabriel gives far too much importance to the outbursts of the various women he encounters through the night. Even Gretta near the end, what is that? It makes no sense.
Yukio cannot think, he just keeps copying. Copying faster and faster. Copying as he reads.

It is no good. It isn’t working. His characters slip, they start to flow into one another, draining down the columns. Eddies and pools, puddles of slush. He doesn’t care. He isn’t watching his copy, just the original. His pen scrawls down the page, even abandoning some characters into unintelligible swirls or scrawls at the ends of lines. No time. No time. What he thinks is that Joyce was hen-pecked; that he couldn’t and didn’t order his ‘bath, meal and bed’ in sharp enough barks. Too busy trying to insinuate. Yukio nodded when he arrived at the serpentine verb; started drawing scales on the back of his hand; waved it back and forth at ‘The Dead’, as if weaving a spell.

‘Joyce is a snake,’ he thinks to himself, ‘a little garden viper trying to wriggle between two rocks in the garden of the world. ‘The Dead’ is just his shed skin.’ Yukio decides that it is in what comes after that he lies. That there is yet more for the eye to meet. Elsewhere. In the shadows. In the past even. That there’s more to copying than simply copying. That all the circumstances need to be right in order that the experience rings true; that the copy becomes truer than the original. That it becomes a more complete work of art in itself.

There is a kind of life in the second copy—a venom. The confused fury with which he wrote seems to rain itself down the pages. Its unreadability, indecipherability, gaps and tails, swirls and scrawls, all bespeak Yukio’s confusion, his anger. It’s a copy that’s ready to be screwed up and thrown in the wastepaper basket. There’s something in that. Gabriel should kill himself. That’s what Yukio thinks. Fuck him.

The same dream again. Yukio, the body, before the slavering dog—closer, inexorable. But before he can scream out, before he can wake, his sleeping form opens its mouth and a tree sprouts up. Shoots up. A Spruce, like a spear, shooting up, forcing his mouth wider, wider, stretching it. He cannot scream out for the tree—his jaw opening further, dislocating, like a snake eating a head. His sleeping form snaps open its eyes—wide open, startled. And Yukio is there. In there. Looking up at the tree growing out of his mouth. He cannot shout,
cannot scream. A breeze caresses his cheek, he can smell mushrooms sprouting nearby.

When he awakens, for fear of sleeping again, Yukio turns on the light and stares at the motionless ceiling fan.

**Third Copy**

He begins it by closing the shutters, locking down the house. The blinds are lowered, the drapes are closed, the world outside is muffled.

He has decided to write this third copy by candlelight, in lieu of the appropriate gas lamps that he imagines the original story was written under. Instead of sitting on the floor and writing at his usual table, he has set up his kitchen table with a wooden chair, three candles, ink, brush and the most expensive writing paper he can find. He has a supply of Irish Breakfast tea and several new bottles of whisky to help him through the work. He does not intend to do anything else until the copy is finished; thinking that this work will become him, in the flattering sense, when it is complete.

On the appointed morning, after his first shot, he begins: ‘Kanrinin no musume Ririi wa…’

Each stroke of his brush has a history, is a history. The whole of his history, his language’s history, the history of Japan—Yamato. The whole of the earth resonates with each stroke: mountains, rivers, heaven, man; from a time when the very rocks and trees could speak. A whole ancestry in each stroke and character.

It may be the whisky. From the outset Yukio feels drowsy. Blinking, dry-eyed, he brushes on, one character after another. When he gets tired he naps, when hungry he eats onigiri or rice cakes, whatever he can grab or warm without effort. When he wakes or finishes eating, he has his Irish Breakfast Tea and whisky and continues to copy.

When he sleeps, when he closes his eyes, when he rests, all he can see are Kanji. All he can see are the strokes and the copy in his mind’s eye. It is no longer a story. It is an object, an artefact, a dream. In the poorlight, bent close to the page, Yukio copies in a world of
ghosts. Kanji float off the page, adrift in his eyes. Tired eyes like he’s never had. Motes of Kanji float in his eyes as if burned there by the candle flames at the edges of his vision. Among those blind spots the Kanji swim like bacteria, shifting, changing, colliding, linking: ‘ki, hon, inu’—tree, book, dog. ‘Hito’—man.

In the dim room, smelling of candle wax and smoke, time passes. For Yukio, time is unwinding; it too has floated off its moorings. Where he is, inside his language, it is timeless. When his copy reaches the last paragraph—his last paragraph—he knows what will happen. As he writes that line: ‘seibu e no tabi ni shuppatsu suru jikan ga kitanoda,’ he understands where is journey westward is going to take him. As soon as he finishes that last line: ‘the snow falling faintly…and faintly falling…’ Like the Shiki poem: ‘forming then falling / falling then forming’. He can almost feel himself, at once forming and falling. Fallen as he forms—like the raindrops in Shiki’s Garden Pines. Ah.

And out into the December day he wonders how the seasons could have changed. It has been snowing overnight, but now the sky will clear. He walks out alone, ‘first along by the river and then through the park.’ Snow lies on the branches of the trees; down the avenue of bare Sakura that lead into the bowl of the park where the great Pine stands. The old tree, with snow on the branches—drooping moustache and milkshake.

As Yukio begins his descent the sunlight cuts through the clouds, a sword of light slicing into the day and spreading across the bowl of the park. The glare stabs into his eyes as two square blocks of pain. Such pain: reaching and swelling into his head, making him blanche and reel. Yukio raises his hands like a defeated, falling boxer. His mute hands, like mits, one shading his eyes, handback against the brow; the other fending off the reflected light as if it were a small dog about to leap and snap.

Yukio staggers towards the Pine, seeking the shelter and the shade of its trunk. But it isn’t Yukio. The sun melting the snow. It starting
to drip from the branches. The whole tree dripping, beginning to rain
down. ‘Ahhh, Shiki...’

The glare is too much for his eyes, the pain in his eyes too great.
Now he understands. Yukio, the young man, now the form of a young
man, standing under a dripping tree, blinded by the light.
Sky Burial

Ali Alizadeh

for John Kinsella

I really want to be fed
to vultures when I’m dead. My toddler
on the verge of using spoon
will be assigned to serve, when I’m done
his father’s cadaver, sliced and spread
to sky’s black scavengers. Why not
—my wife often asks—cremation
à la her desired dissemination

of charred fragments in the breeze
wreathing a mountain range? I answer
to confess. To a lifetime of feasting
on birds. (She’s baffled, a vegetarian
alien to guilt accumulated
in the gullet of a carnivore hooked
on the thighs, breast and wings
of the avian.) A concatenation

of culinary memories. Chicken
kebab: grilled squares stabbed
onto a bayonet-like skewer
at my uncle’s wedding just before
the War. Poultry so scarce in Tehran the viscous taste became a hunger

for an end to Saddam’s bombing raids and when Mum did somehow bring home

a frozen, beige clump and cooked us *khoresht baadenjan* with *morgh*

the other three in the family gave me —without my comprehending

the complexity of their munificence— all the tender, fatless, skinless fillets

and I devoured. When we finally fled the acerbic scent (‘secret herbs, spices’ and all) of cheap deep-fried flesh a vital emblem of the American empire

galvanised my senses upon arrival in Australia. Chiko Rolls at the tuck shop

(made with mutton, I later discovered, despite the name) diverted, occasionally

from the howls—‘Speak English! Say something, camel fucker!’—and then

smoking with a surfie dope-dealer who worked at Red Rooster between art

classes at university. I lived off bread, baked beans and starchy noodles
but for a treat—to recover
from rejections by girls, ridicule by lecturers

who found my thoughts and paintings
pointless—I’d resort to a sodden

marked down BBQ chook
wilting below the deli counter, late

at night at a Gold Coast supermarket
biting the singed bird’s sinews

with terrible anger. Finally I left
for Melbourne to ‘make it’ as a poet

and to locate a hypothetical woman
who’d tolerate me. When I did find her

I also found (to my gastronomic
terror) she was a vegetarian. The end

of my fetish for feathered beasts? Hardly
could you call her a proselytiser

but what a traveller. Honeymoon
in Vietnam: tofu tossed with lemongrass

for her, pieces of quails and other murdered
birds decked my chopsticks. In China

I struggled to order without
embarrassment at the restaurants

since ‘chicken’ in Mandarin
distanced by one tonal accent from

‘prostitute’. And so on. Tavuk
shish kebabs in Istanbul, turkey strips
(ersatz bacon) in Dubai. Can this addiction be assuaged by the virtues of ethical consumerism, barnyard fowls? My wife looks away. The truth hurts even more because what’s wasted on feeding me meat becomes heat and melts the world. And I had a pet rooster once, regal with his red crown fierce after the targeted killing of my sister’s speckled hen by one of Tehran’s infamous crows. I can still hear my rooster’s sad, lonesome howl piercing from his quivering beak when I enjoy murgh tikka masala (or shamefully for an anti-capitalist, a Zinger). I cringe past the glistening corpses of Beijing ducks but my mouth moistens. So please a secular sky burial for me. A machete doing the work of the maggots’ teeth on my dead body. And proffer the chops to the vultures to apologise for a lifetime of eating their kind. Aquiline beaks tearing morsels of my muscles and then tenderised and regurgitated for frenetic, squawking chicks.
Us & Them

Ali Alizadeh

after Judith Beveridge

A familiar emptiness for me
left others sad, enthusiastic
to signify his departure
for a purpose: to raise awareness

of a so-called illness (funded
by a drug company?) a tribute night
touching eulogy by his girlfriend
but most directly his portrait

enlarged, framed, panoptic
behind the microphone and lectern

signposted the simulation
of the ceremony for the suicide

of a classmate on the Gold Coast
in early 90s. Yet, superimposed

on blonde people in blue jeans
swarthy Basijis in khaki and women

in chadors, lachrymose, lamenting another working class adolescent
charred by another Iraqi chemical attack. Such wailing intermingled
with such macabre elegiac Arabic from the mullah’s loudspeaker
and the boy-soldier’s solemn face festooned by votive candles
of the funeral shrine in Tehran near my primary school in early 80s
demonising a distant killer (the apostate Saddam or the infidel West?) precisely as malevolent as manic depression (or was it bipolar disorder?) that martyred the promising Creative Arts student who threw himself under the train one sunny day, at Southport Station.
She seems to be pushing the white wine and then I realise she just needs someone to talk with about her life in New York City; how many countries away from Bulgaria? We talk of Sofia, the red-tiled roof buildings, so different from the flat squat dingy buildings she sees every day out the train window on her way to Astoria, and back again night after night to Times Square to a bar cum trattoria where she serves strangers glasses of red and white wine, bottles of beer, and vodka drinks; New Yorkers do seem to love their vodka drinks. At that moment, the hostess screams. The bespectacled manager in white shirt, black vest jumps up and runs over to squash what to my jaundiced eye seems to be a giant roach. I ask the short, dyed-blonde with the black jeans from Sofia about the roach and she tells me that every week, every bar, every restaurant in Manhattan sprays for bugs, that every week one shift begins with removing all the bottles, all the glasses, all the ice from the bar and after spraying she places them all back together again. I look at my glass, no ice, just white wine and I look at the place where the ice lives, and I think for just a moment.
a bad thought then I turn to this bright-eyed resourceful young woman who works three jobs, has a degree in advertising from Bulgaria matched with an incredible will to survive in New York City, and I drop an extra five on the bar and bid her goodbye.
Rituals: In a small country town these include the bringing of food, the visit, with soup, a cooked chicken, a chocolate cake and then, avoidance, the crossing of a street to avoid meeting, necessary since the subject itself will never be mentioned.

The past is a place. A one-pub, one-wheat bin town with perhaps ninety towns-people and many surrounding farms. A shop and a shire office, a bank and a tiny library that can be read in three weeks by a thirteen year old if she reads a romance in the morning and a gardening guide in the afternoon.

My sister Jill and I are standing on the side of the road in front of our house, waiting. Our house is the first or the last house in the town, depending on which direction you’re coming from. Next to our place is the bush, the road further east. As we stand, an old Renault drives past, backs up, veers over the wrong side of the road and parks next to us. Angie leans out of the car window.

—Hey you two. If the wind changes you’ll stay that way.

We look twice. Angie’s bare arm rests on the door ledge. She’s wearing bathers. In the back of the car Tara and Sam are grizzling in their baby seats.
—I’m going for a swim, Angie says, leaning even further towards us. Want to come?

Jill and I look at each other. We’re in the middle of the worst drought the wheat-belt as seen for decades. The ocean is hundreds of miles away. The lake might be an hour away, if it hasn’t dried up. None of the locals would dream of swimming in the lake. I say no thanks. Angie drives away.

I like Angie. She’s tall, thin, yet squarish with white skin and floppy black hair cut in a bob. Sometimes I babysit. Not so Angie can go out. Just so she won’t go mad, she says. So she can get on. Getting on is Angie’s term for her endless home decorating. Her husband, Eric, is the new bank manager and they live in the only brick house in the town. The rest are transportable or asbestos and weatherboard. It seems to Angie that she has a duty to renovate.

Angie is wallpapering the lounge room with Regency wallpaper. She has begun, also, to re-cover the dining chairs, bought on a rare trip to Perth, in red velvet. Several of the chairs have no seats, are always waiting to be assembled.

I keep the children at bay in the kitchen, feeding them, singing, making faces with the boundless energy of one who still lives in the present.

Angie calls constantly through the doorway, talking half to herself, half to me.

—Poop! she says loudly if she makes a mistake. And,

—Of course I love the little devils but they are a bloody nuisance.

—Are you growing tits yet? Look at this, she says, touching her own flat chest. Nothing there. You’d never believe, when I’m pregnant my breasts become simply enormous.

Angie has a visitor. Alina comes all the way from the city. Alina has long white frizzy hair and green eyes. Angel’s wings, says Angie. Alina dresses in pale voluminous skirts and skinny tops.

Angie and I put a lace cloth on the table. I take Sam and Tara for a long walk until they fall asleep, then I serve sandwiches cut in triangles, scones with sultanas and pots of tea.
Angie winks at me.
—We can pretend we’re at the Savoy. She has shown me how to cut the sandwiches, to place them on a doily, to add a sprig of parsley.

Alina and Angie sit among the seatless chairs and the half-covered walls. Alina talks constantly about men.
—I like him but did you ever notice his eyes? They drop as you speak. I can’t bear a man with dropping eyes. When I was with John I took taxis everywhere. After I’d been with him I’d say, —I’ll just pop over and see so and so. Just put me in a cab. I’d turn up all over the place saying,—I have a wealthy lover. I’m being a lady today. Only taxis for me.

—Angie, Alina would say. Look at you. I hope you aren’t going to be one of these women who has to have a man’s baby every time she feels she loves him.

—It’s lucky you aren’t like that, Angie would answer. Or you’d have ten children with ten different fathers.

For a dollar and to be with Angie I go when my services are required. My mother wonders why I go so often when there are children at home I can be looking after. I go, guiltily, sometimes to escape our house. One day I’m returning late from Angie’s and as I walk towards our house I can see straight through two windows to the bush at the back. I remember watching my mother walk into that bush late one night when she’d had enough. There was nowhere to go. Was she coming back? Now my parents are two shapes caught in the light at the window. The light is hardly a glow, hardly the breadth of a candle-flame against the black of the bush.

Soon afterwards I begin to dream of a child, a small girl who jumps in and out of a coffin like a jack-in-a-box. First in, then out. First alive, then dead. Then it’s all been a mistake and she’s alive again. I wake up and there’s my mother standing at the bedside. She’s there and yet somehow so familiar that she’s invisible.

What I like about Angie is that she keeps some things for herself. An old cracked china cup. If my father ever saw a cup like that he’d
insist on it being thrown away. A bottle or two of perfume. A Japanese
doll, white-faced doll in a red kimono with silky hair and bound feet.
Prettily bandaged satin feet. Between her feet, caught in with the satin,
Angie points out a tiny wooden stick that cements her to the stand.

I believe that Angie will keep her things hidden, even when her
daughter is my age. She’ll never give in and let her children play with
the things and then be sad and disappointed when they are broken
or lost.

I tell Angie stories, half made-up, half true. I say, the reason I wear
my hair like this, covering up one eye, is that in the school photo I
noticed that my eyebrows were too thick. I decided to pluck them but
I ran into difficulties getting them even. I ended up with only half a
right eyebrow so now I have to cover it up with my hair until it grows
again.

Angie doesn’t laugh.

She listens to everything I say, then she replies with something
like,

— I must cut back the blue salvia. Did you know it regenerates? No,
perhaps it sows more seeds but anyway I think if we cut it back it will
help the blooms to grow again.

Or,

— Let’s make a cake and let’s eat it.

I tell Angie my fantasy. We’re on the school bus, all of us who take
the hour-long trip to the next town. The boy I like is on the bus too. On
the way to school there’s a terrible accident. Everyone is dead except
the two of us. As I say the word dead I stop. Everyone is injured, I
say, rewriting the scene. Angie smiles with mock relief. — Good. No
deaths please. No killing for love, and she finishes the story for me.
She has me ministering to him, maybe a kiss, at least a declaration of
love.

One day as I approach the brick house I hear Eric and Angie
shouting at each other with phrases I’ve heard before.

— What the hell. We have to stay at least three years, Angie... You
know that... But you just don’t know what it’s like for me.
Angie is pregnant again. I watch her through the pregnancy, becoming bigger and more resentful. But she stitches, by hand, a fine cotton brunch coat for herself. Her needle goes under, over, dives into the cloth and comes up again, making straight sloped lines of thread.

She prepares everything, wants everything done. I see that she is like a bride, waiting for the moment, suspending everything until she is delivered, after which the course of her life seems uncertain.

The day before she goes, she tells me there is some chocolate hidden at the back of the mantle-piece and I’d better take it because Eric doesn’t like sweet things and there’ll be no-one else to eat it while she’s away.

After the baby is born Angie comes to the door with the baby in her arms and Tara and Sam hanging on to the brunch coat. She asks if I want to watch her bath the baby. She talks softly and seriously, asking me if I know about the umbilicus, where the cord has been cut, how a little of the cord remains, how to treat it, how to test the water, how to unwrap the baby. I listen and watch the tiny slippery baby crying and wet and the way Angie’s hands are dipped in and out of the water until at last Angie is silent and the baby clasps its mouth onto Angie’s enormous breast.

One morning very early my mother asks me to go with her. She wants me to help her with Angie’s children. I ask why but she refuses to speak until we’re out of the house. In her hands she holds an enamel plate covered with a tea-towel. I’m afraid. I follow her down the road to the only brick house, noticing on the way, as if to record the facts, that it’s a clear October day and that Angie’s blue salvia is in full bloom.

I wait for my mother to speak. — Angie’s left, she says. I shiver with relief. She’s alive, I think.

Inside, Eric is sitting at the table with his fists in his eyes. Tara is playing noisily. Sam is throwing toys around. The baby, by now ten months old, is sitting in a wet heap on the floor. My mother motions me to take the children out. I bathe and dress them and when I come back into the room my mother has uncovered her plate to reveal eggs
and chops. She cooks these, talking to Eric all the time, explaining how food is cooked and what’s best for the children. Eric’s face is mottled grey, white and when my mother tells him to eat he eats, taking one mouthful after another, slowly, not looking up from his plate.

Two years later I see Angie in the city. She smiles brightly for a moment then she looks hard at me and I watch her glance at my small breasts, my slightly rounded hips, the way my hair has grown. —Ah, she says, I see you’ve become a little woman.

Eric stays in the town. He hires someone to look after the children while he works. For a time the women bring food. The men cross the street. I pass the house sometimes and one day I’m walking, looking through the fence at Tara and Sam on their swings. Then I see Eric, behind the swings, watching me and I say to myself, that man has dropping eyes.
Catherine Martin (1847–1937) was a South Australian writer whose first novel, *An Australian Girl*, published in 1890, remains her best-known work today. The novel received a mixed, though generally favourable response from the critics. It is a serious novel of ideas, rather than a romance, and the inclusion of quite extensive German material in an Australian novel appears unusual. It has been described recently as ‘a novel which celebrated German literature and philosophy’,¹ but in 1891 it was republished in an abridged version (reprinted in 1988 and 1999²) which removed 50,000 words, including much of the German material. This aspect of the novel was consequently lost to the reader until the publication in 2002 of the Academy Edition which restored the full text. The following account concentrates on those aspects of Martin’s life which are relevant to the genesis and development of her enduring interest in German culture and, in particular, on her youthful contacts with German literature and thought. It also traces some of her uses of German elements in her total oeuvre.

Catherine Martin was born in Scotland on the Isle of Skye as Catherine Edith Mackay, the second youngest of ten children, and...
came to South Australia with her family in 1855, when she was eight years old. As the Mackays were assisted migrants, they were sent to the South-East of the state to work as farm labourers. Catherine’s father found work on a property in the Naracoorte district, an area in which both English and Gaelic were spoken, as on their native Skye. He died soon after their arrival and the elder sons supported the family for about ten years until Mrs. Mackay and the younger siblings eventually moved to Mount Gambier. Catherine was then about eighteen. There her mother and an elder sister, Mary, opened a girls’ school, in which Catherine later taught. Catherine was apparently educated privately, at home for the most part, and the family atmosphere in which she
grew up appears to have been sympathetic to her intellectual activity and to have encouraged her studious habits.

Catherine Martin’s most formative years were thus spent in Mount Gambier and it was almost certainly there that she first developed her deep interest in and knowledge of German culture and literature. She became acquainted with the local German population which made up a significant proportion of the town and its surroundings. She also learned German, although it is not clear when or how she learned the language. She may have had private tutors, perhaps clergymen, as she grew older. This possibility is suggested by her description in An Australian Girl of the heroine’s learning German and philosophy during bi-weekly visits to a Lutheran pastor. During these early years in Mount Gambier Catherine would have had a range of opportunities to improve and extend her education, by means of the libraries at the Literary Institute and the Mechanics Institute; public lectures and evening entertainments organised by various groups and institutions in the town; and the private tutors and evening classes available in the town.
Mount Gambier is not generally thought of as a German settlement, yet it is evident that the town included a well-established German community. The picture which emerges from contemporary descriptions in the local newspapers, in particular the *Border Watch*, between 1861 and 1875 reveals the interaction between the different cultures which coexisted in the area. The various groups maintained their own traditions but were interdependent. The reasons for Martin’s interest in German culture are more easily appreciated when viewed in the context of the society which had evolved there. Catherine’s choice of subject matter, while unusual in an Australian novel, nonetheless appears a natural development given the environment in which she grew up.

The Mount Gambier in which Catherine Martin lived and worked, from the ages of eighteen to approximately twenty-eight, was a rapidly developing town in a fertile and productive agricultural and pastoral district. It was remote from both Adelaide and Portland, the nearest Victorian port of any size, and became the foremost business and commercial centre in the South-East region. The district was first settled in the 1840s and Germans are recorded as established there in 1850. The first local newspaper, the *Border Watch*, whose name reflects the Scottish presence in the region, periodically printed descriptions of this burgeoning centre. These emphasise the speed of the town’s development, the solidity of its public buildings and private residences alike, the range of commercial, cultural and social facilities available in the town, and the ethnic and social mixture in the population.

An article by a former inspector of schools provides a description of the town and district in the early 1850s. He writes of a visit to the township containing, perhaps one hundred inhabitants, farmers and tradesmen. Throughout this oasis, for ten miles round, a number of other farmers raise their crops and feed their cattle. Most of them are Germans or Scotchmen; the former from the Adelaide side, and
the latter from Portland, away in Victoria. Their nearest market is Portland, a fearful road through the sandy waste for sixty miles; thence their produce is shipped off to the colonial capitals.

So long isolated from civilization as to be for several years without the visit of a clergymen of any kind, they have not wholly neglected their religious interests. The Germans met for Sabbath service among themselves...

In 1862 there is the comment: ‘There are a large number of Germans on the Mount’. Other descriptions underline the speed of the town’s growth and in January 1869 the editorial of the Border Watch recorded that

…the development of Mount Gambier has been not only steady but rapid… Around the wooden hotel and the unpretentious store have sprung up costly and elegant places of business, and the streets that not many years ago were grass grown in summer and a series of mud holes in winter, and on which at the most a few stray horsemen, and perhaps a team of bullocks, might be seen, now team, we might say, ‘at morning, noon and night,’ with eager buyers and sellers. We have come to assume all but city proportions, with city habits and interests.

It is clear that, at this period, Mount Gambier was a flourishing town growing out of its recent pioneer past and attracting an increasing number of residents. By 1871 the town had a population of close to 6,000.

Although it is difficult now to know precise numbers, there are indications that the number of Germans living in and around Mount Gambier was significant. For example, in 1867, when a delegation was formed to make representations to the Governor of South Australia regarding Mount Gambier, nine gentlemen were selected, but when one of these withdrew he suggested that a German farmer should be included so that this section of the community would be represented.
Attendances at events organised by the German community also give some general indication of numbers, though it should be emphasised that the English and German speaking populations were in many ways well integrated, so that many German social events were attended by members of both communities. In 1867 a picnic arranged by the *Deutsche Liedertafel* [German choir] had an attendance of over one hundred, while an evening performance by the *Liedertafel*, given in aid of a Lutheran church, attracted an audience of over two hundred. The number of Germans in Mount Gambier fluctuated over time, with some leaving Mount Gambier for cheaper land around Hamilton and, later, for areas in the Wimmera district of Victoria near Horsham, while others arrived from areas closer to Adelaide which had become worked out. In 1868 the *Border Watch* recorded the unexpected arrival of a group of fifty to sixty members of German farming families. In other articles it is suggested that at least one hundred German families might leave the district.

A particularly significant indication of the importance of the German community in Mount Gambier is, however, the agreement arrived at in the matter of the establishment in 1873 of a secular boys’ grammar school there. (A Church of England boys’ grammar school had closed a year or so earlier.) The arrangement was that the school would have an English-speaking master as principal and a German-speaking assistant master, who would be suitably qualified to teach German as well as English. It was even suggested at the opening of the school that its establishment was in fact an initiative of the German community. All students in the school learned German and were examined in the language at the end of 1873, three months after the arrival of the German master.

Although there are frequent references to the German farmers as a section of the community, the farmers were not the only Germans there; German professionals, businessmen and skilled tradesmen were well represented in the town. The *Border Watch* features regular advertisements for a German doctor, a veterinary surgeon, music teachers, a steam flour mill, a tannery, a brewery, manufacturers of
aerated waters and cordials, a wheelwright and carpentry business, cabinet-makers, saddlers and harness makers, boot and shoemakers, a watchmaker and jeweller, bakers and pastry cooks, butchers, at least one general store, specialist stores, a German boarding house, and German hoteliers, while German pastors and teachers are frequently referred to in items of local news. It is clear too from news reports that these townspeople were integrated into the total community and participated in general local activities of many kinds.

The degree of integration of the German population into the general community is illustrated by the number of marriages between English and German speakers, and the number of naturalisations of Germans reported in the *Border Watch*. In this respect the German community in Mount Gambier was very different from the closed, rural communities of Hahndorf, Lobethal, Tanunda and the other communities in the Barossa Valley. The Mount Gambier German residents formed a group which was self-sufficient in its own right, while retaining its cultural identity. In its openness and ability to integrate, it probably more closely resembled the city-based German population in Adelaide. Where there was no language barrier, the two groups worked and socialised together, and entertainment and music offered many opportunities for harmonious integration.

The German community was marked by its two Lutheran churches, its impact on schooling in certain parts of the town and district, its German Club, with its Hall and its strong links to the Farmers’ Club, all of which helped to underpin the maintenance of their common German culture. While there appear to have been no schools exclusively for German children, there were a number of schools in which German teachers taught and German children predominated—in at least one case eighty percent of the pupils were German. In all of them, however, instruction was given in English and, to varying degrees, in German as well. In these schools all children learned both languages, and were often examined in both languages, but, in all other respects, the curriculum appears to have been the same as in the English-language schools. A few schools offered an
almost bi-lingual approach; in most, German was taught in addition to the basic curriculum. Some private schools—including the majority of the small academies which came and went, and the two boys’ grammar schools—offered German as an additional attraction, frequently together with Latin, Greek and French. In the licensed schools with English-speaking teachers, German was sometimes offered, usually taught by a German speaker.

In 1873 the Mackays’ school offered German for the first time, and it is possible that it was Catherine who taught it, since there is no mention of a German teacher having been engaged. It is not clear, in general, whether learning German was considered an advantage from a cultural point of view or from a practical and business-oriented standpoint, but the presence of the German population in the district certainly affected the curriculum of many of its schools. At various times German classes for adults were also offered by several institutions, such as the Mount Gambier Institute, and by individuals.

The German Club was probably established in 1866. The Club had a number of functions apart from a purely social one: it was one of the numerous Friendly Societies active in Mount Gambier, it had strong ties to the Farmers’ Club, and it contributed to the maintenance of German culture in the district. The Liedertafel was associated with it, and early in 1870 performed at a concert in aid of the German Club Library. This library of several hundred books was later offered for sale to the Mount Gambier Institute and hence became available to a wider readership in the town. The removal of these German books from the Institute Library during the First World War later aroused the ire of Catherine Martin.\footnote{The German Club was also very active during the Franco-Prussian War in raising money for the relief of war wounded, and for the widows and orphans of fallen soldiers. News of peace prompted a German service in the Evangelical Lutheran church, a torchlight procession and a fireworks display.

In 1872 some of the more intellectually inclined German citizens formed a \textit{Fortschrittsverein} [Progress Association], the objects of which were to be: ‘the social and mental improvement of its members}
by means of dramatic, conversational, and vocal and instrumental musical exercises, &c.’ and the proceedings at meetings were to be conducted ‘solely in the German tongue’. Their first public entertainment, to raise money for a library, consisted of vocal and instrumental music, together with the performance of scenes from Act V of Schiller’s Maria Stuart and a melodramatic comedy. The evening attracted an audience of almost two hundred persons, despite the fact that all the items, including the prologue and epilogue, were presented in German, with only a printed synopsis of the comedy supplied. A very detailed account of the whole evening, and the text of the prologue in German, were printed in the following edition of the Border Watch. Numerous similar evenings followed where admission was by invitation only.

Several traditional German celebrations are repeatedly reported in the Border Watch. One is serenading which was, as the Border Watch reports, ‘one of those pleasing continental observancies, indicative of respect towards the individual to whom they are offered’. Another is tin-kettling, not always appreciated by the non-German section of the population. German Golden Wedding celebrations, with which English settlers were unfamiliar, and German Christmas customs, including the tree and decorations, are reported on in detail.

Frequent reports of news of importance to the German community in the Mount Gambier district appeared in the local newspapers, including news from the various German states in the quite extensive international coverage. Notices of special events pertinent to the German population, such as church notices, calls to vote in elections, appeals for support in patriotic matters, such as war relief collections, for Schleswig-Holstein and during the Franco-Prussian war, and some social events, were all published in German, and this appears to have been accepted without comment. Some English-speaking advertisers also added a segment in German which was presumably intended to appeal to German customers and so increase business, though some of these attempts were couched, unintentionally, in comically bad German.
It is interesting to note that, in the general South Australian and Australian news reports in the *Border Watch*, the names of Germans appeared quite frequently, as acknowledged authorities in particular fields, and they were apparently sufficiently well-known to require no introduction. These included regular reports concerning the botanist Dr. Richard Schomburgk and Dr. Carl Mücke, in particular. Others mentioned include the botanist Baron Ferdinand von Müller, the musician Carl Linger, the scientist Professor Georg Neumayer, the botanist Ernst Bernhard Heyne, the journalist Dr. Ulrich Hübbe, the politician and land agent Friedrich E. H. W. Krichauff, the zoologist Gerard Krefft, and the journalist Karl Eggers.

Another feature of the German community in Mount Gambier which is brought out in reports in the *Border Watch* is the intense loyalty of its members to the British royal family. The attitude of the early settlers towards the various German heads of state had been mixed, since many had left Germany because of conflict with authorities arising from religious and political differences. While many would not have felt that they could ever return to Germany, they nevertheless valued their German cultural heritage and still felt strong ties to their country of origin. The royal families of Great Britain and some of the German states had been interrelated since the accession to the British throne of George I of the House of Hanover, and had been brought closer together by the marriage of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. There may well have been a certain perception in the Australian colonies that Germans could be considered in some sense ‘cousins’ of the British. Certainly Germans, rather than other Europeans, were actively recruited as settlers. Since the Queen was more than half-German, her husband was German, and her children were raised speaking German and understanding German culture, it was probably natural that the Germans in Australia should demonstrate loyalty to members of the British royal family. This was expressed in the form of separate formal addresses in German, torchlight processions and fireworks displays, such as those during the visit of Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh.¹⁷
This is the environment in which Catherine grew up. Mount Gambier was a prosperous town in a fertile area in which a strong sense of identity had developed among its townspeople. The population was formed of people who came from many different environments and from different educational backgrounds. A leading figure in the town was Dr. Edward Wehl, a medical doctor who was one of a group of German intellectuals who left Germany for Australia after the failure of the 1848 revolution in the German states and became known as the Forty-Eighters. The presence of such a person in Mount Gambier, together with the two Lutheran pastors, made a significant contribution to the intellectual climate of the German population and of the town. From a relatively early age Martin’s interests went well beyond simply learning the German language. These well-educated Germans must have influenced her studies and creative beginnings. In later years she referred to Mount Gambier as the place ‘where some of the friends to be valued as long as life endures were Germans, who fostered an intimacy with all that was best in the immortal literature of their country.’

The stimulating endeavours of the German Forty-Eighters and the religious beliefs and practices of the Lutheran church all formed part of the fabric of the community and contributed to the intellectual climate in which Catherine Martin lived and began her literary career. It was there that she developed her abiding interest in German literature and culture, and the resources were there to both arouse and foster those interests. The residents who chose to live, work and socialise together harmoniously must have been enriched by the sharing of the cultures in Mount Gambier, as in South Australia as a whole.

It is clear that by 1871 Catherine was well acquainted with German literature, especially of the Classical and Romantic periods. To this she added knowledge of the works of the German philosophers Kant, Fichte and Hegel. Shortly after her arrival in Mount Gambier she began to publish poems in the local newspapers, the Border Watch and the Mount Gambier Standard. An early poem written for the
Total Abstinence Society’s Temperance Column, appeared under the initials ‘C. M.’ in the Border Watch in 1865. Over the next few years more poems appeared under the initials ‘M. C.’ As Martin published almost everything she wrote under a variety of pseudonyms, it is difficult to trace all her work with certainty. By the beginning of 1872 she had combined her interest in German language and literature with her activities as a writer, and began to publish translations of German poems and dramas. The first of these translations to appear under the initials ‘M. C.’ was ‘Dolce Far Niente’, adapted ‘from the German of Gustav Pfizer’. This was followed by translations of poems by Ludwig Uhland, Heinrich Heine, Joseph von Eichendorff, Wilhelm Müller, August von Platen, Gottfried Kinkel, and Johann Wolfgang Goethe. An earlier poem, entitled ‘More Light’, inspired by the reading of a biography of Goethe, had appeared in 1871. This poem, appearing under the initials ‘C. E.’, may also be attributable to her because of its theme and subject, and the fact that she seems to have been the only person in Mount Gambier at that time publishing translations from serious German literature. To these she later added translations of French poems and drama as well. In these translations she shows a thorough mastery of the German and French languages.

In 1874, at the age of twenty-seven, Catherine published a collection of poetry entitled The Explorers and Other Poems. It is difficult now to gauge its reception, but a review in the Leader states that it contained ‘not poetry of the highest order, it may be, but poetry sufficiently genuine to arrest the reader’s attention’. Michael Ackland identifies major themes and preoccupations in her work, noting that the three quite different sections ‘have in common a concern with issues of faith and related moral predicaments: all with potentially contemporary application’. The final section of the anthology consists of a diverse collection of Catherine’s translations of poems by Adelbert von Chamisso, Johann Gottfried Herder, Ludwig Uhland, Muehler [sic.] (probably Wilhelm Müller), Heinrich Heine, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, and segments of dramatic works by Friedrich Schiller and Jean Racine. Some of these translations had already been published.
in the Border Watch in Mount Gambier. Ackland finds the last section to be significant to the structure of the total work in that ‘it affords an “archeology” of the poet’s ideas’ and an indication of the literary heritage from which many of her leitmotifs developed. However, the influence of German literature is not limited to the section comprised of translations. It is evident too in poems in the first two sections of the collection, such as the poem based on the German legend of the Mouse Tower, and another entitled ‘Heimweh’ [Homesickness]. An opening dedication concludes with five lines in German taken from Goethe’s drama Torquato Tasso, a feature which serves to emphasise the esoteric nature of her preoccupations, and in which she expresses her feeling that she is writing for a limited and perhaps elite group. Clearly, the influence of German literature played an important role in her creative work at that early stage of her life.

Around 1876 Catherine decided to move to Adelaide to try to earn her living as a writer. There she developed a circle of friends and acquaintances who included writers, teachers and people who were deeply committed to social issues. In 1882 she married Frederick Martin, and her husband’s sister, Anna Montgomerie Martin (Annie), who ran a progressive school for girls, was a close friend. Annie’s love of learning, of English and French literature, her passion for Germany and German culture, love of travel and interest in serious religious and social questions must surely have influenced Catherine Martin. Other significant friends were Edith Hübbe, who had attended Annie’s school and had married a German, and the writer Catherine Helen Spence. Catherine Martin clearly moved in a group of independent-thinking, innovative and socially-aware people. In Adelaide she continued to write and publish literary articles and shorter works of fiction, probably including an article, or work, entitled ‘The Life of Heinrich Heine’, listed in Macmillan’s records of manuscripts received, prior to 1888, from Catherine’s husband. In mid-1888 Catherine travelled alone to Europe and continued writing there. Her first major novel, An Australian Girl, apparently written largely or entirely in Germany, was published in London in 1890. On that
trip she visited Freiburg im Breisgau (mentioned by the heroine of *An Australian Girl*), Dresden and probably also Berlin, of which she gives some detailed descriptions in the latter part of *An Australian Girl*.

The picture of Australian society that Catherine Martin gives us in *An Australian Girl* appears to have been informed in part by her experiences of growing up and living in Mount Gambier. Stella Courtland, the heroine of *An Australian Girl*, lives in Adelaide, and while some of her German acquaintances reside in Adelaide, some have their homes in small German settlements to the north of the city beyond Gawler, in the fertile vine-growing district. Martin’s nostalgic descriptions of these rural townships and their inhabitants evoke the German life-style in Australia, comparable to that of the Mount Gambier district, some fifty years after their establishment. An appreciation of the history of German settlement in South Australia and of the forms of integration between the German and English-speaking populations as described in Mount Gambier assists the reader’s understanding of the place that German farmers, pastors, and educated men occupied at that time in the South Australian milieu.

Stella’s learned German teacher, Pastor Fiedler, with his ‘little sitting-room… and the big bookcase that took up the whole of one side of the room’, resides in Blumenthal [Valley of Flowers]—an ‘old-world charming little German-looking township’ with ‘quiet, shadowy woods all round, broken up by farms and vineyards and numberless homesteads, nestling among fruit-trees’. It has, of course, its small Lutheran church. The extended Schulz family is also to be found there, grandparents, parents and grandchildren, reflecting the usual pattern of German migration in which whole families and whole villages moved together. There is also a description of a *Dankfest* [Harvest Thanksgiving Festival] at the little church, and mention of an imminent golden wedding celebration.

Dr. Stein, a long-time friend of Stella’s deceased father, lives in Adelaide and thus represents the city dwellers. His home is named ‘Rosenthal’ [Rosedale] and Stella returns from there one day appropriately laden with roses from his garden. Dr. Stein plays host to the
Berlin-based Professor Kellwitz, a friend from their student days in Germany, whose field is archaeology and ethnology. There is a strong suggestion here of the intellectual world of the Forty-Eighters.

Finally there is the figure of Frau Kettig, an elderly German woman, ill and left alone in the world, whom Stella visits and to whom she reads a comforting hymn. Cheerful and long-suffering, Frau Kettig illustrates the fate of some of the immigrants who have lived out their life in Australia but who have no family to care for them in their old age. Martin draws some very affectionate portraits of the members of the German community with whom Stella interacts in Australia. These appear to reflect Martin’s own experiences while growing up in Mount Gambier and in later life in Adelaide.

Stella greatly admires the works of Goethe, whose writings she translates in order to understand them better, and whom she describes as ‘One who is not only among the most majestic sons of light, but a frontier savant of life—who penetrated to the outposts of human nature, und unflinchingly noted the vantage-ground of good and evil’.33 Stella falls in love with a doctor who is half English and half German. Her sister comments, tellingly: ‘You do so love the Germans’.34 The earlier examples illustrate the variety of immigrants and lifestyles in Australia and provide touches of local colour. More significantly however, the original novel draws widely on German philosophy, literature and contemporary political and social conditions in Germany. Stella discourses at length on Kant and his *Critique of Pure Reason* and introduces allusions to writings of Fichte, Schopenhauer, Heine and Goethe. Stella’s eventual renunciation of her love for the doctor can be traced back to these philosophical and ethical underpinnings. A significant portion of the latter part of the novel is set in Berlin, where Stella becomes aware of political unrest, poverty and suffering as Social Democracy makes increasing inroads on the political *status quo*. In this section Martin’s acquaintance with Marx and Engels also becomes clear. Seen in this light *An Australian Girl* is clearly a novel of ideas.

After the publication of *An Australian Girl* Catherine and her husband made extended trips to Europe of three to four years and
travelled widely in Europe and England, staying for lengthy periods in various places in Germany, France, Italy and Spain. Another little-known work by Martin, *The Old Roof-Tree* (1906), is also intellectually oriented and in part describes travel through Germany. She again writes in praise of German scholarship and the selfless dedication of German professors. In passages strongly reminiscent of the descriptions in *An Australian Girl* of Dr Stein and Professor Kellwitz, Martin writes of

the men that have made the Universities of this country so renowned—who make the influence of German research, of German thought and knowledge, so deeply felt in every centre of intelligence in the modern world. Living so obscurely, so simply, as indifferent as Anchorites to the dignities of a good position.\(^5\)

After her husband’s death in 1909 Martin continued to make prolonged trips to Europe, where she appears to have made England her base, but in 1932 she returned to Adelaide, where she died in 1937.

Although Martin also read widely in other languages, German literature and culture remained one of her abiding interests throughout her life. In 1920, aged 73, she described the writings of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing and others as ‘some of the noblest productions of human genius.’\(^6\) The years spent in Mount Gambier clearly provided experiences which formed the basis of Catherine Martin’s on-going and ever more intensive study of German literature and philosophical thought, which found expression in her early writings and in the novel which made her name.

Notes

Australian Literary Links in Catherine Martin’s *An Australian Girl* and Henry Handel Richardson’s *Maurice Guest*.


3 *AAG*, pp. 75–77.


5 The *Border Watch* [hereafter *BW*], 19 November 1864, Supplement sheet.

6 The *BW*, 18 April 1862, p. 2d.

7 The *BW*, 06 January 1869, p. 2ab.

8 The *BW*, 30 August 1871, p. 2e.

9 The *BW*, 05 June 1867, p. 3a.

10 See *BW*, 18 April 1868, p. 2b.

11 An advertisement states that: ‘The School will afford a thorough English and sound Classical Education; the subjects in which instruction will be given comprising—Greek, Latin, French, German, Arithmetic, Algebra, Euclid, Trigonometry, and Ancient and Modern History and Geography, the elements of Statics, Dynamics, Optics and Acoustics, Reading and Elocution, Writing and Composition, and Drawing. The *BW*, 05 July 1873, p. 1f.

12 See the *BW*, 03 February 1920, p. 2.

13 The *BW*, 25 May 1872, p. 2e.

14 The *BW*, 16 October 1867, p. 2d.

15 See the *BW*, 04 September 1869, p. 2d.

16 See the *BW*, 18 November 1865, p. 2d.

17 See the *BW*, 06 November 1867, Editorial, p. 2.


19 The *BW*, 02.09.1865, p. 4a.

20 The *BW*, 27.01.1872, p. 4a. Any doubt as to whether M. C. and C. M. are the same person is dispelled by a report in the next issue of the *BW*: ‘C.M.’ draws our attention to the fact that the sixth line of the third stanza of her translation of ‘Dolce far niente’ in our last was omitted, viz.—‘With unsatiable eyes and rapt soul to behold,’ and that ‘words’ in the fourth stanza should have been ‘viands.’ The word ‘adapted’ was also misprinted ‘adopted.” *BW*, 31.01.1872, p. 2c.

21 The poem has the following introduction: ‘To the Editor of the *Border Watch*. SIR - The subject of the following lines, was suggested to me by reading a life of Goethe, the poet, who, it is said, on his death bed, kept continually calling for ‘MORE LIGHT’. *BW*, 02.09.1871, p. 3a.

22 Michael Ackland sums up Martin’s competence in German: ‘to judge from her translations and scattered later comments, she gained a high

23 M. C. *The Explorers and other Poems* (Melbourne, George Robertson, 1874).

24 Ackland, *TSB*, p. 93.


27 See Ackland, *TSB*, p. 98.


[Only of you did I think when I mused and wrote, / To please you was my highest wish, / To delight you was my ultimate aim. / He who does not see the world in his friends / Does not deserve that the world should learn of him.] The German word used for ‘you’ is a plural form. See Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, *Goethes Werke*, Erich Trunz, ed., vierte Auflage [Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden] (Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag, 1959), Vol. 5, p. 85.


31 *AAG*, p. 75.

32 *AAG*, p. 125.

33 *AAG*, p. 110.

34 *AAG*, p. 255.


36 Quoted by Margaret Allen in ‘What Katie might have learned in Mount Gambier or some early influences on C.E.M. Martin’, p. 8.
The girls dance a silent circle
around my gravid tomb. They know
the story: that I was left here by accident
or design, that I died with the baby
still feeling its way through a puzzle of bones.
They know their grandmothers forged letters
from him to me, which I pretended
to believe.

They think this grave holds me,
this recurrent image to which I turn
and return. The girls and little, young men
dance their maze-dance for me
because their lives belong to mine.

This island isn’t mine. I came ashore
morning-sick and sea-sick, and the wind
took the hero’s ship away. Then the god arrived
with his sleek cats and drums in crazy rhythms
as far from a heart-beat as the planets’
odd arisings, his harmonies that were just as much discords.
I could never have married the city hero
whose muscle would slowly go to fat,
courage to cruelty.

My soft body was made
to be clothed in stones.
What else remains of me is rumour.
I’m a doll to grieve for, a cup
to squeeze a little bitter into.
Each year they sing their dirges over me,
and in the right season hold their celebrations
in my name. The children sing what they’ve never felt
and in the grove they name for me
a pubescent boy is lying, miming labour pains.

They say I killed him, my brother who was
shaggy and strange as a father to an infant,
say I guided the hero home
with a trick of thread. It would have been
the last of his betrayals. He was a thing rejected
who could stand bullish and unafraid
in the Cretan daylight.

At night we heard him snuffling,
feeling his way along blind walls,
wearing his fingers numb.

All through these islands: the traces of my feet
and fingers. There are manikins of bronze
and gold, the wooden statues whose stories
have shivered into uncertainty.

These are outsiders
among the white figures with just a hint
of face, hip and breast. There are bones
and the shore where I disappeared.

Through the echoing sea and bones of islands
that ring with underwater sounds
like xylophones, I hear others
of my mixed nature, who are lamented
and placated to avert their returns.
I hear Achilles’ broad, violent hands
plucking a blues for Homer, hear
the son and mother caught forever
in the giddy horror of their leap
and quiet in the rocking of the sea.
Blood Plums

Anthony Lynch

We collect mail, and the years pass
Dark plums swamp the neighbour’s tree
Vampires in the shed she has no key for
Then the starlings, the driveway paved with bloodied stones

Dark plums swamp the neighbour’s tree
I found this black box at the end of the garden
Then the starlings, the driveway paved with bloodied stones
The rooms of that house never seeing sun

I found this black box at the end of the garden
By the side fence where a tricycle rusts
The rooms of that house never seeing sun
At night he fed her fear spoonful by spoonful

By the side fence where a tricycle rusts
These white plastic beads like somebody’s childhood
At night he fed her fear spoonful by spoonful
One day I saw her mouth open and silent

These white plastic beads like somebody’s childhood
Vampires in the shed she has no key for
One day I saw her mouth open and silent
We collect mail, and the years pass
Migration

David McCooey

Houses contract in the night,
and relax in the ivory morning.

The roots of plants travel
through the secret world of earth.

Brilliant parrots colonise the
foreign trees of winter.

Each Wednesday morning rubbish
is collected by the noise of trucks.

People walk or run past windows,
from one part of an hour to another.

Throughout the day, rooms are
occupied and then left, like memories.

A child’s goldfish migrates from
one piece of food to another.

The river at the end of the road,
and everything thrown into it,

makes its way to the coast, where
the sea unravels into rain clouds.
Rain flushes out suburban cats
and the sound of metal roofs.

At night, headlights measure walls,
and citizens fall into their sleep

as the moon moves across the sky,
or the sky moves across the moon.
We no longer dress them with ribbons, nor do outriders ride before us and after. We arrive on our red bicycles without fanfare. Yet the more humble we become, the more the public holds us in exaltation. Our response has been to expand our numbers and increase direct contact with the thousands upon thousands who turn to us in need. All else is as before: the training, with its rightly famous seminars, the internal oral examinations. There were murmurings for change, but they were no more than murmurs. They were so quiet it became impossible to truly identify their source, and then they blew away. There was never doubt that our bicycles would remain our insignia, our calling card. They are still shined for us in the night, under bright lights at the depot. Into homes across the land we go. The bicycles are a national institution, as telephone boxes once were. Wherever they appear we cannot be refused entry, but it is years since anyone wished such a thing, and he was struck and paralysed by a sudden illness of the ear.

I left my three-speed across the street, in the glory of its crimson livery; it seemed leant against a column of air. The roadway, long and winding, down-dipping, was empty, but even as I looked a knot of
people headed this way. The fact it was a weekday made no difference. One of the pleasures of the Order is the effusion, the delight of people at the sight of our gleaming roadsters.

I remember taking stock: this is an unusually finely painted door, a wealthy Georgian home. Who will it be this time?

Shadow me, is my advice to the curious.

No one answers the doorbell. At an upstairs room a cardboard tube props a sash window open. A Mrs Rochester in the attic? I would like to know what goes on the other side of this door. Are millionaires more or less passionate than the rest of us, give me the hard data Henderson.

A click.

Yes? she says holding the latch. She is all handsome head above darkness—clear-eyed, grey, alive at sixty; while I wait for my esteemed entrance. Yes? I reply, faltering at her sudden energy, yes I have come for your consultation. Consultation? Yes, you must be Clara, yes that is my bicycle propped next to a column of air. Ah, she says registering it, smiling, dazzled momentarily by the bright model of the Order but without her eyes being all bolts and blazes, setting the doorway alight as some can—but I’m losing it, an infatuation has descended on me like sunstroke and in the upside-down instant it is me looking admiringly at her hairslide.

Come in, she says. In view of her photogenic looks, health, Bardot at sixty, she deserves italics. Garbo, Monroe, Bardot: all three find an echo. I thought you wanted to know the colour of the door so you could paint yours the same colour. We get asked that regularly. She runs her fingers over the paint. The name has a Dutch connection, what was the name of this blue, I do know it’s Farrow and Ball, Clara would know.

I check my diary, clawing to regain authority.

Let me see. It’s Clara I’ve come for.

My daughter. She’s very busy.

Clara is writing?

Not directly, not physically. Reading rather than writing. She mustn’t be disturbed. I’ll consult you on her behalf.
In her kitchen Ms Bardot seems a little less special, well, enough to drop the italics; but still an incipient Dame of the Empire. We have lived here fifteen years, she says setting an expensive kettle on a hob—and you will have a cup of tea, or something, you can’t just advise and walk off—

We don’t. We stay until all is said.

Oh well, I must be out of touch. Anyway, make the most of it, life is soon over and you have to squeeze all you can out of every situation—

_Flett, says my diary, Cumberland Street._

—he it writing like Clara, she continues while reaching for a tin on a shelf—or swapping yarns, paring a lobster, making love, bearing babies. Or like you, splendidly advising us how to live and breathe our fictions—I hope you’ll be splendid. Trading shares, fetching the children, meeting the challenge of not getting what you want when you want, now don’t tell me none of that applies to you. It does apply, I say; tea will be fine. I’m not surprised you called by, she says, do you believe in horoscopes, do you read them, tell the truth. I read them sometimes, I tell her; apart from which I had an appointment.

Distracted by shadows at the window she says, Who are those people outside?

A crowd always gathers, Mrs Flett, I should lock my bike. Lock your bike? she repeats irritably, touching up at her Bardot hairslide. Oh well. Then lock it, go. Or could I bring it in here? Very well, you shall do that, and I shall shut the door, we may proceed from there, but quietly. Go go.

I make my way through the knot of people—as such gatherings go, small and unusually still: it was that kind of area. Not a hint of those whoops or shouts. I cross the street and return pushing the threespeeder, shaking a quick few hands.

This is the first bicycle to enter these premises, neither I nor my husband had a use for them, she says with the door wide open and curious heads at my shoulder. Oh _my_, come in and I’ll shut the door, what a _noble_ machine. Is it true they are all made in Durham and cost
thousands of pounds? And did you use to have tandems? Is that true?
Just wheel it over the carpet. I could never manage handlebars with
such a plunge like that. Mind my desk, my one precious thing. Other
than Clara.

You’re busy writing yourself I see?

Occasionally. We all do. But you didn’t tell me your name—your
first name. Second names always sound more dangerous. Are you
dangerous?

It’s Barry.

Is it. I haven’t told you mine; I’m not sure it’s fitting. Aren’t you
supposed to produce some credentials? Sugar? Say yes and one day
you will see it on a database—Barry, two sugars in tea. I am not
serious. Besides, there is no sugar. Not within spooning distance. Do
you go street by street? Have you seen my neighbour Geoff—he is a
writer. I don’t know anyone who isn’t a writer. Do you?

Certainly.

A writer is such a busy bee. Having to know so much. Take Geoff
across the road. Where your bicycle was propped up. Why didn’t it
fall down?

It was on a kind of stand. Titanium. Very thin.

Oh titanium, vanadium, London Palladium. Clara is the busiest
bee of all. What do you think she’s up to now? Guess.

I’ll try. If Clara is as young as I was told—I can’t guess.

Guess.

All right. She is reading Tolstoy to find out how to write a great
novel.

You really are guessing. Will you be taking notes?

When I can find my pencil. Where did I put my rucksack? Here it
is. And we never had tandems, not that I know of.

Well well, the myths that rise and fall. In fact Clara is upstairs not
reading Tolstoy. She is reading, though. What would you advise? The
other day she just sat at her keyboard, a sphinx all morning. She says
wanted to get someone through a door so everyone could get on with
things, but they were stuck outside in some interminable reverie.
That may have been when she called the hotline.

The whatline? I told her she should read Hemingway to get her person through the door—Hemingway, to know how to get the cat round the corner, as Gabriel García Márquez said. Do you agree? Anyway, since you mention Tolstoy, I think she should read Gabriel García Márquez to find out how the objects Tolstoy...so quietly enlivened...can be filled with wonder. Then she will get her person through the door with bravura and everyone will be delighted. Well, we’ll see how it goes.

Indeed. There are no hard rules.

Exactly, it isn’t as if there’s a syllabus. I tell her: Clara, read all writers known for their poetry. Read Hardy to learn how to make the countryside unfold. The lanes—

She could read DH Lawrence for the messages in flowers.

Yes! And Carson McCullers, because no one knows how Carson McCullers puts a story together and she will find the secret. Flannery O’Connor to see how fear grips and builds...What do you say?

I don’t think she needs me in the least. Not at this juncture. I will dispatch a set of books from the depot tomorrow. From our top shelf.

Top shelf? Well I suppose you know what you're doing. Meanwhile I will see she studies all of Shakespeare to make sure she has missed nothing. Have her watch the films of Truffaut and that Finnish director and the Pole who was so good. We can watch together. Her with some dip or raisins, me with a double gin and tonic. Only the best will do, don’t you agree? There is so much to do but she is young. And you can count on it: she will learn Portuguese to be able to breathe in António Lobo Antunes. Italian for novels by Celati lost to English. Can you follow me? Say something.

So—what blue is your door exactly? Here, says Ms B producing a Farrow and Ball paint chart from a drawer which she jerks shut. She folds the chart with firm new creases. What did I tell you? Hague. A strong blue, reminiscent of Dutch external woodwork. Clara? What are you doing on the stairs?

Clara in a long red cardigan holds a paperback floppily about her hand. I listened, she says. I do have to read Tolstoy. I have to read
Tolstoy for these fields that are greened over and quiet, which no one dares touch, years after the battle.

Yes dear.

I have to read Julio Cortázar to see how to become an animal; to not just sleep like a fish, but to be a fish asleep.

Hello Clara.

Hello. You are from the Order. I saw your bicycle from the window. The sun was flashing off it just now. I had a beam on the ceiling.

You were at the window propped up by the cardboard tube.

Oh that. Everybody needs air.

That’s enough now Clara.

I think I have enough advice already. Some questions do not in any case have answers. I’m going back upstairs.

All right, Clara.

What about Onetti, mother? she says turning on a stair. Should I read Onetti?

Of course. Onetti. Lispector. Buarque. Now off you go, darling. Where were we—Barry? Don’t you at least have a card, a badge? A silver star would be a fine thing.

Nothing. As for where we were, I asked about your door. As well as wondering about the cardboard. Now I know. And I must cycle back to the depot. I will arrange that dispatch right away.

And to think I imagined—I did know you were coming, it has been the gossip of the street. I expected you in a long dark coat. Like a buildings inspector. I do find you a bit stiff, if I may say so. But I see you have a rucksack. How about spilling the contents across the table?

I have to go.

Until all is said, you say.

I’ve three more appointments. Two in Castle Street, one in Victoria Road.

I lift the bike and open the door onto the reverent gathering, which turns as hushed as carol singers between their carols. I have decided I would simply swing into the saddle, be on my way.
A red delivery van charges by, squeezing the throng back onto the pavement. I look back to where Ms B still stands at the doorway; to the cardboard tube.

Clara will do it, I call to her as I put my feet to the pedals. She will.

I see your bicycle has no bell, she calls back across the street. What happens if you need to ring one?

Happens? I slow down instead. The world is quieter on my account.

An appreciative *Ah* seems to float through the air. I steady the handlebars ready for off.

Really? calls Ms B. I make it *sparklier*. With a Dutch door. The writing life.

Faces look at one another in delight.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS


KIT BROOKMAN is a Sydney-based writer, although at the time of publication he will, by a strange twist of fate, be somewhere in Tasmania, or in Griffith.

JEN JEWEL BROWN is a widely published writer across many genres whose poem ‘breath’, is in *Best Australian Poems 2009*. She has won several awards and her poetry has been published in *Cordite, Going Down Swinging, Meanjin, Salt-Lick, The Age* and numerous anthologies. She wrote *Skyhooks’ Million Dollar Riff* and poetry books *Marsupial Wrestling, Alleycat* and *gutter vs stars*.


JESSE PATRICK FERGUSON is a poet who currently resides in Fredericton, New Brunswick. He is a poetry editor for *The Fiddlehead*, and he plays the guitar, mandolin, bodhran and fiddle with varying success. In fall 2009, Freehand Books published his first full-length book, *Harmonics*. 
ADRIAN FLAVELL’s poetry has appeared in a number of magazines, journals and newspapers in Australia and New Zealand. McGraw-Hill has published his series of three children’s books (‘Dan’s Days’) in their Signature Series.

MARTIN FRENCH is a Melbourne writer and scholar whose time is divided between caring for his health, his sons Haruki and Hikari, and teaching in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Melbourne.

Tasmanian by birth and upbringing, SYD HARREX lives in Adelaide, South Australia. His poetry and critical writings have appeared in national and international journals, anthologies including *The Oxford Book of Modern Australian Verse*, and his six collections of poems. He is currently working on his seventh collection, tentatively titled *Where Grasshoppers Fly*.

MIKE HEALD teaches Foundation Studies at Trinity College and Poetry and Poetics at Melbourne University. His last collection of poetry, *Bodyflame*, was shortlisted for the Queensland and West Australian Premiers’ Awards, and his next collection, *The Witness*, which explores the articulation of meditative experience, will appear in July 2011 with Fremantle Press.

JUDY JOHNSON has published three volumes of poetry and a verse novel *Jack* which won the Victorian Premier’s Awards CJ Dennis Prize. A novel *The Lizard* is forthcoming from Harper Collins.


JAZRA KHALEED was born in Grozny, Chechnya, in 1979. He lives in Greece, writes and publishes poetry in Greek mainly in samizdat and online, and is known both as a poet and boxer. He is an editor of the Athenian literary magazine *Teflon*, where he has published, among other things, translations and features on hip hop poetry and Australian Aboriginal writing.
**CARMEN LAWRENCE** is a Professorial Fellow in the School of Psychology at the University of Western Australia where she is working to establish a centre to research the forces driving significant social change in key areas of contemporary challenge as well as exploring our reactions to that change. A former Premier of Western Australia, and the first woman Premier of a State government, she entered Federal politics as Member for Fremantle in 1994. She retired from politics in 2007.

**BRONWYN LEA** is series editor of UQP’s Best Australian Poetry series. Her most recent book of poems, *The Other Way Out* (Giramondo 2008), won the SA Premier’s John Bray Poetry Prize. She lectures in poetics at the University of Queensland.

**ANTHONY LYNCH** writes poetry, fiction and reviews, works as an editor with Deakin University and is the Whitmore Press publisher. His short story collection, *Redfin*, was shortlisted for the 2008 Queensland Premier’s Literary Awards. A collection of his poetry will appear late 2010.

**SARAH KATHERINE McCANN**’s poetry has been published in many journals including *MARGIE*, *New Voices* (ed. Heather McHugh), *Broken Bridge Review*, and the *South Dakota Review*. Her work also appeared in an anthology on Robert Frost, *Visiting Frost*, and she edited *Tertium Quid* by Robert Lax. McCann has several translations in *Poetry International*, *World Literature Today*, and *Words Without Borders*.

**CHARLES McLAUGHLIN** is a researcher of Western Australian Literature for AustLit, based at the University of Western Australia.

**DAVID McCOOEY**’s book of poems, *Blister Pack*, was awarded the Mary Gilmore Award in 2006, and was short-listed for four other major awards including *The Age* Book of the Year Award. *Graphic*, a chapbook of poems, is forthcoming with Whitmore Press. He is the deputy general editor of the Macquarie PEN *Anthology of Australian Literature* and is an associate professor at Deakin University in Geelong.

**GIOVANNI MESSINA** is a PhD student in Catania, Sicily, who is carrying out research on Sicilian ethnic minority writing (written in English) in
Australia, particularly the work of Venero Armanno and Antonio Casella. His focus is on the ‘uncanny’ aspect in minority writing.

**SUSAN MIDALIA** is a fiction writer, freelance editor and teacher. Her collection of short stories, *A History of the Beanbag*, was published in 2007 by the University of Western Australia Press and was shortlisted for the Western Australian Premier’s Literary Award. She is currently writing a second collection of stories.

**GRAEME MILES** grew up in Perth, where he studied classics at the University of Western Australia. After various travels in Europe and India he is now a lecturer in classics at the University of Tasmania.

**GRAHAM NUNN** is co-founder of Small Change Press and Brisbane’s longest-running poetry event, SpeedPoets. He blogs fiercely on all things poetry and music at, Another Lost Shark: grahamnunn.wordpress.com. He has published five collections of poetry and a spoken word CD, *The Stillest Hour*, with local musician, Sheish Money.

**BARRY O’DONOUGH** lives in Brisbane. He was conscripted and served in the Vietnam conflict in 1968–69, and his poem is a reflection of how he was changed from a ‘country kid’ into a man virtually overnight, courtesy of a war. He harbors good feeling towards the Vietnamese people, and offers this poem as a part of himself given over to reflection.

**GEOFF PAGE** is a Canberra-based poet. The most recent of his eighteen collections are *Agnostic Skies* (Five Islands Press) and *Seriatim* (Salt). He is also the editor and author of the recently-published *60 Classic Australian Poems* (UNSW Press).

**RHODORA PENARANDA** was born and raised in the Philippines. ‘One self to the other: Why Poetry? It’s constitution. We can’t escape from it in the end, can we? In attempting to express—with poetry as my means—I enter a process to understand my own distinction. I am—as we all are unto ourselves—a great mystery worthy of that process.’ Rhodora now lives in the Hudson Valley in New York.

**DUNCAN RICHARDSON** has published poetry and prose in magazines
and books since 1982, including work for children. His verse play ‘The Grammar of Deception’ was produced and broadcast by ABC radio in 2008.

JO RICCIONI has a Masters in Medieval Literature from the University of Leeds in the UK. Her short fiction has placed in competitions in Australia, Ireland, the US and the UK. Her story ‘Can’t Take the Country Out of the Boy’ placed second in The Age Short Story Competition 2010.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS is an Adelaide-based poet who chose 245 of his 1000 individually-published poems for his Collected Poems (Lythrum Press).


ENID SEDGWICK has a PhD from the University of Western Australia and studied German language and literature at Freiburg University on a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service. She lives in Perth where she has worked as a teacher and later lecturer in languages.

SARI SMITH (formerly Sari Hosie) has published short fiction, critical work and memoir. She taught Creative Writing and Autobiography most recently at the University of Melbourne and is completing a PhD at LaTrobe on Women’s Memoirs of Sibling Bereavement.

MARC SWAN lives in Portland Maine. His work has been published in Exquisite Corpse, Rattle, Takahe, Slipstream, among others. Simple Distraction, a collection of his poems from 1989 to 2009, was published in fall 2009 by tall-lighthouse in London, England.

ELIZABETH WEBBY AM FAHA is Emerita Professor of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney. She has published widely on Australian literature, with an emphasis on writing from the nineteenth century and work by women. From 1988–1999 she was editor of Southerly, and from 1999–2004 a judge of the Miles Franklin Award.
YANG XIE is a Chinese poet born in the early 1970s, now based in China.

OUYANG YU is a poet and novelist based in Melbourne, Australia, whose forthcoming novel is *The English Class*.

MYINT ZAN is currently an Associate Professor in the School of Law, Faculty of Business and Law, Multimedia University, Malacca, Malaysia. He has taught in a wide range of law topics to law and non-law students at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels in Universities in Australia, Malaysia, South Pacific and the United States. He has published extensively in scholarly law and non-law journals including in literature and philosophy journals that are published in Australia, India, Italy, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States and Vanuatu.
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where only the queen
lives longer than the memory
of flowers

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