

Contents

Poetry

- Duc Dau, *Homology* page 2
- Belinda Rule, *Three poems* page 4
- Diwakar Gautam, *The Tea Kettle* page 8
- Stephanie Green, *Thick* page 13
- Md Mujib Ullah, *Lexicon* page 16

Prose

- Marshall Moore, *Screams on the Page* page 17
- Ryan O'Neill, *The Bibliography* page 31
- Jane Downing, *2 stories* page 41
- Caitlin Burns, *In Orbit* page 45
- Christos Constantine, *Prose, 2025* page 50
- Ian C Smith, *Coincidental Conquerors* page 52
- Lauren Pitt, *Dry Bones* page 56
- Julia Prendergast, *Departures* page 65
- Nikki Wong, *A Critical Creative Unlocking* page 67



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT poetry

Duc Dau

Homology

Dog leg, whale fin, bird wing. Animal forms
vestigial in the human arm. An elegance
signifying more than appendix and tailbone.

Lazing lapdog in the capital letter
of an illuminated manuscript. Zoomorphic initials
slithering on vellum, inked with a feather.

Ink and paint on animal skin. As redundant
as an unread government report. In their place,
typefaces with names like cormorant and ornis.

The logographic writing of my forebears
is an extinct animal, a dusty museum display.
Its distant, ancient ancestor was carved into bone
and shell, unable to divine its own demise.

The written word is an osprey that turns south
and returns with a note shift until another
tune resounds. Journeys measured by
modified echoes – and sometimes blunt force.
I have but Latinate forms to guide me north.

TEXT Vol 30 No 1 April 2026

Managing Editors: Julienne van Loon & Ross Watkins
Creative Works Editors: Nigel Krauth & Anthony Lawrence

Đậu means to perch.
Just as a long-legged bird on a branch alights
so as to leap into being again.

And Đậu means bean.
Its shape like a kidney, like an inlet,
a slender, slow-waving arm of the sea.

With pen in hand, ink like water in the night,
I gesture to the lope of an M, the glide of a C,
the flap of a W, and the circle of the globe.

Duc Dau is based in the School of Humanities at the University of Western Australia. She is the most recent recipient of the Jan Dean Members Prize of the Newcastle Poetry Prize as well as the Annette Cameron Award for an unpublished poet in Western Australia. Her academic books include Sex, Celibacy, and Deviance: The Victorians and the Song of Songs (Ohio State University Press, 2024).



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT poetry

Belinda Rule

Three poems

After the poetry reading, the dark

– was coming down
 on the low hills,
their gold grass
delustred, and the distant
stones that had stood up
 to be grey kangaroos
who were watching us back
were blanketed, so they
could have been watching us now
 from anywhere.

By the time
I was in the car driving
the dark was total, headlights
pushing forward their little
tunnel of light whose walls
were the undersides of box gums,
car a rollercoaster on rails
whooshing bend after bend, climbing

then falling with a roar, there was
boundless unseen space into which I could
speed, weightless, I was
taking off into a thing I would
become by arriving, a gas
exploding from containment skyward
into atmosphere.

Though of course
I did not. Soon
the traffic lights began again.

**I am going to write a poem that will make everyone want
to have sex with me**

– though naturally
I expect you all
to comport yourselves
with dignity.

It will make me
not angry anymore.
It will make my housemate
not angry when I just keep
putting more things in the bin
and pushing them down.

I will write it when I've finished writing
about birds and skies, though everyone
already wrote about those, and about
dreams and parents, though no one
wants to hear about those at all,
except my brother,
to tell me I'm wrong,
it was him she called first, not me,
crying on the side of the road
after the accident, to beg him
to get Dad to stop yelling.

After that, the dreams
 that are about parents, the parents
 that are about dreams,
the birds that are about
 skies AND parents AND dreams,
about which no one cares to such an extent
it portends some kind
of explosion.

Only when you're all hurling
 bricks through windows,
fire in the shopfronts, birds choking
 in the skies, only then
will I write the real poem.
And then you had all better
 watch out.

The real poem

– has been here
all along, rat
in the skirting boards.

I am come here today
 to tell you the truth:
I am the only person
 who has ever
seen a bird
 or had a parent.

 Touch your father,
he turns to sand. Sorry.
 There is
a remedy, you could
write him in a poem. Now my father
 is sand! Oh god
oh god
 – here I pause to wait but
 no one picks up the phone –

Belinda Rule's first poetry collection is Hyperbole (Recent Work Press, 2021). Her chapbook, The Things the Mind Sees Happen, Puncher & Wattmann, was commended in the Anne Elder Award 2019. Work has appeared widely including in Best Australian Poems, Meanjin, Island, Westerly, Australian Book Review and The London Magazine.



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT poetry

Diwakar Gautam

The Tea Kettle

Prologue: *The Darkening Night*

Mornings are a flat line, but the dream is always there,
Humming under the floorboards.
I slept through the night without waking.
This pendant helps.
Faith in the invisible is a kind of anchor.
I am an author.
I build worlds from rotten paper and pungent ink.
But I am trapped by my own creations.
When the story is done, a sequel is the past's cremation.
The hum never stops.
In my dreams, all the voices gather.
I watch my senses fall apart, mouthing broken words.
The dark tells me, *Beware, there is a presence.*
It watches from the margins of the page.
Every morning,
The same irritating question whispers from the spine of the manuscript:
Is your war really with me?

Part 1: *The Stove Fire*

Even in this seclusion, the sounds reach me.
Lovers' tones, climbing without permission.
They arrive, then dilute into a high-pitched whistle.
A story trying to be heard.
Making tea is *the* morning ritual.
It is how the work begins.
I turn the knob – click-click-click – and the fire comes on after a few failures.
We chase perfection for our whole life, a thing that's never real.
No wonder I have always felt out of place.
I ignite the stove and an idea sparks.
A filter in my mind begins its work.
In this mess of rotten thoughts –
Something clean comes through: another story, another page.
Every smile hides a tragedy, and every tragedy eventually becomes a joke.

Part 2: *The Tea Kettle*

Sometimes, it just takes one.
One object to hold it all.
Like this tea kettle: everything scrambled,
All the failed drafts and broken characters,
Come together to make something whole.
Imagine a world full of only good things, too fine, it seems.
Goodness can be isolating.
When you have less, you feel the fullness.
But the real centre of attraction is the fight,
The will to challenge what feels wrong.
The harmony of both.
The kettle settles it all into a dim bliss.
My room, my workshop: a vintage typewriter, pungent smells,
Cracked curtains, perforated walls.
I look out my window, half asleep.
I haven't had my tea yet.
I see a swirling world, flustered and admired.
I clap, perplexed.
Is the outside world my mind, or is this room the page?
And I hear the gloom again, rising from the ink: *Is your war really with me?*

Part 3: *The Water*

Life began with water.
To make tea, water must be contained.
To write a story, you must first know the end.
I look out my window.
Black clouds, heavy rain, thunderclaps.
I see a child, holding a wooden block over his head, already drenched.
The protagonist, he is about to cross the road.
The tap runs clear, a safe path.
The boy crosses, grows up, is forgotten.
A boring story, I open the freezer.
The iced water sits like a block of frozen potential.
A tragedy.
If I use this, the plot will turn.
A truck, a skid, a twist, the pages are hungry for it.
I pour the iced water into the kettle.
Outside, I hear the squeal of tires.
The choice is made; the ink is spilt.

Part 4: *The Milk*

Milk enters water, and the taste is full,
But the water's sharp clarity grows dull.
It's the thrill of watching something new form,
A character gaining complexity.
I look outside again.
A clap of thunder, glimmer of light,
The kid is still standing there.
Unharméd, he hesitates.
A moment of authorial indecision.
He could have a heart of gold, or he could be a thief.
In his mind, he may have already saved the world.
Or maybe he's just a kid, and the truck driver knows it.
The story resists, it refuses the easy tragedy.
I can't seem to outrun this voice. This question –
Is your war really with me?

Part 5: *The Ingredients*

The taste of tea comes from the leaves,
But once they steep, they are forgotten.
I look outside. The kid is still there.
Then I see it: an ambulance, its lights painting the wet street.
A new element, crows fly overhead.
My empathy, with all its might, can only spare an ‘Oh.’
An author’s necessary distance, I reach for the ginger.
The agent’s voice echoes in my head: They need more bite, more edge.
I crush the root on the board, once, twice – too hard. A splintering crack.
At that moment, I hear the blast.
I rush to my window.
The ambulance hadn’t just crashed.
It had been hit by another truck.
This is a complication, a subplot I didn’t intend.
The child was under the tire, the patient inside died instantly.
The story is writing itself.
I close my drapes to add the cloves and pepper.
The side tastes, when I look again, a small group has gathered.
A conspiracy forms in my mind, was the child an heir?
Was there a peacekeeper in the ambulance?
I remember now where I heard the question.
It was a war-cry, a slogan from a book I abandoned.
Characters from a dead story, haunting a new one.
I want to tell you who they were, but I am stuck.
The story has taken a turn I cannot follow.

Part 6: *The Sweetener*

The kettle’s whistle screams – a deadline.
The sky outside brightens with a false dawn.
The whole scene – the crash, the crowd, the conspiracy – it’s all too much.
A tangled mess, it needs a clean ending.
Perfection demands it.
I spoon sugar into my empty cup.
One scoop, two, a restart.
A flood of white covers the page.
And from my window, I see the light.
Not a bang, but a wipe.

The world outside dissolves into a blinding, perfect blankness.
The story has escaped me by erasing itself.
I pour my tea; I take a sip.
The one true rule:
The dream ends when the ending goes out of control.
And I open my eyes.

Final Part: *The Morning Sun*

Every morning at 8:00 AM, I get a call from my agent.

The same voicemail:

Hey, I know I've been on your tail, but I need something, anything substantial. The publisher is eating my brain; you got to help me out. They need the final chapter. The manuscript is phenomenal, but they won't hold out forever, I can only hold them off so far. Please, call me back.

I can't find the ending.

The pages are hungry for it,
But the world I build keeps collapsing.

I tell myself every story is sacred,

But when I think I have it,

I hear the voice from the blank page:

Is your war really with me?

And I answer in irritation,

*Yes, my war is with you, **Deadline.***

I guess I'm never getting out of this cycle.

But where the hell is my tea kettle?

I need my tea.

Another voicemail:

Hey, it's me again. The publishing house is granting you a three-month extension. They read your ideas for the ending, they loved it, you're nailing it. Keep at it. It's the 7th book in your series ... will there be an 8th?

I stare at the empty page.

Realizing

I guess, my war is with you too, **Perfection.**

Diwakar Gautam is a poet, storyteller, and doctoral scholar at Delhi University, where he previously completed his Master of Arts. He is a recipient of the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF).



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT poetry

Stephanie Green

Thick¹

In the place that was never mine
I find old words buried
below a wild grey hemisphere of sky
where earth's dark margin juts
against a mismatched horizon –
curves and rectangles shifting
unevenly together
as if trying to find for themselves
a proper assemblage.
In the same way a poet
might try to fit words together
squaring off sentences
loosening knots
resolving untenable thicknesses
seeking a comprehensible order
progress slowed by sandy pits

¹ My title is a tentative allusion to Clifford Geertz's use of the term 'thick description' (*The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Basic Books 1973)). Its use here operates for me as a gateway, allowing me to explore a personal expression of place while acknowledging the devastations of colonial occupation, invoking elements of existence, trauma, production and loss that are still in need of recognition.

and unwelcoming wire fences
 sometimes struggling
 to hold on to the grit of meaning
 even as it resists capture –
 fine grey-white sand
 slipping from an open palm.

If you could walk in a place like this
 once home to a thousand generations
 if you could trace
 the imposition of its borders
 seek out its hidden pathways
 careful as you step each foot
 between *Myoporum* and bracken
 following the narrow tracks
 tattooed over its surfaces –
 the ancient knowledge of its peoples
 scraped away by ploughs and horses –
 topsoil dried and loosened
Birrna and *Yangoro*² forests
 emptied and unravelled many times since
 by opportunists and thieves.

This is the place that was never mine
 where my long-nosed grandfather
 made a thin farm from thick country.
 Land stolen decades before
 from the Gunai/Kurnai people
 by Angus McMillan's thugs.³
 Land parcelled and allotted
 sight unseen, site unknown
 by distant city administrators.
 Land sold to failed prospectors
 or leased to soldier settlers

² Gunai/Kurnai names for *Banksia integrifolia* and Stringybark trees cited in David de Angelis, "Aboriginal use of plants of the Greater Melbourne area", La Trobe University Environment Collective. Also mentioned in David Frankel and Janine Major, *Victorian Aboriginal Life and Customs Through Early European Eyes* (La Trobe University Bureau, 2017).

³ Cheryl Glowery, "Angus McMillan", *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 2023: <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mcmillan-angus-2416>. Further context provided by Cal Flynn, *Thicker than Water*, Harper Collins 2016.

who struggled to make a living
land that needed to be known
before it would release its gifts.

But if you could walk in this place
you might see below scarred surfaces
beyond the neglected refuse
of its troubled occupation –
the wooden shearing shed
still stinking of shit and lanolin
boards rotten with weather and time
rusted roof blown away
bee-hives boxes long abandoned
barbed wire fences broken and trailing
channels dug to catch rain that never fell –
the old farmhouse half burned away
one tree still standing
white with death
in the home paddock
beside tyre tracks leading east
to where silence meets the wind.

Stephanie Green has been widely published in Australian and international journals such as Meniscus, StylusLit, Axon, TEXT, and Live Encounters, and in anthologies, including Oystercatcher 1 (Five Islands Press, 2024), Pratik: Fire and Rain (APWT/Nirala, 2023) and The Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry (MUP 2020). Her most recent collection is Seams of Repair (Calanthe Press 2023). She is currently Adjunct Senior Lecturer with Griffith University.



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT poetry

Md Mujib Ullah

Lexicon

Love is a mutual lexicon. It is an art of oceanic tour. Enjoying a blue spring on the beach is an edge on the fire. Holding hands together is a lifelong promise. Historical memory is of the tree. Love is a complex paper intertwined between the doors. Another word floats on the shores. The joy of water washes us ashore.

Md Mujib Ullah teaches at Uttara University and holds a PhD in Foreign Languages and Literatures from Shanghai Jiao Tong University. His English poems have appeared in Journal of Poetry Therapy, TEXT, Capitalism Nature Socialism, Asiatic, Postcolonial Text, The Goose, Borderless, The Inflectionist Review, Prachya Review, The Daily Star, and Dhaka Tribune.



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT prose

Marshall Moore

Screams on the Page (or: Not Your Typical Trauma-Informed Craft Essay)

1.

Let's start with a flashback. This is that kind of essay. I remember the moment and location if not the exact date or even the year. I'd have been twenty or so, seated in the counsellor's office, quaking with rage at whatever insane thing my parents had just done. I'd have been a junior by then – not a senior yet, but so close. I had ended up at my hometown university, where both of my parents worked, mostly by accident. Officially I withdrew from high school. I got my GED, placed out of about half my first-year courses, and was a sophomore at sixteen. But everyone in town knew what really went down: I got kicked out. A fire was involved. It was clumsiness, not vandalism or arson, not that it mattered. I was accused of a lot of things, things I either hadn't done or couldn't help, plus some other things the school's administration couldn't prove. At one point they threatened to press criminal charges. Things got interesting, even dramatic. We lawyered up. Nothing stuck. Having previously been the kind of student who goes to the Ivy League and the Olympics before discovering the cure for cancer and winning the Nobel or the Pulitzer or both (this is not as hyperbolic as it might sound) I had crash-landed back in my hometown in resplendent disgrace. To say my parents didn't handle the transition well would be ... *kind*, so let's opt for kindness. My parents didn't handle the transition well. Besides, they had issues of their

own: alcohol, PTSD, other forms of mental illness, awful family secrets, the endless acrimonious slog of the divorce.

So, there I was, a trembling erstwhile hyperachiever, droning to my college counsellor about the relentless onslaught of material I kept having to live through. To round out the character development: I think I'd outgrown my peroxide phase by then and taken to wearing my hair short. Had I gotten glasses yet? Maybe so. The loud shirts and dangly earrings would also have gone by the wayside by then. The eighties were either over or about to be. I'd been the centre of too much attention, didn't like it, and didn't want to attract even more. Importantly, I already knew I was a writer, already knew I had the necessary strand of authorial avarice that can spot a good narrative when I'm in the middle of one. Someday I'm going to write a book about all this shit, I told the counsellor. What happened at school, the family stuff, every bit. She nodded. Smiled. I remember she had a speck of fuchsia lipstick on one of her teeth. I didn't mention it, though. She was kind. In our sessions, she'd been consistent in her insistence that after graduation, I needed to move as far away from my family as I could get.

What are you going to call the book? she asked.

I thought it over. I'd settled down a bit, stopped shaking. That's usually how our sessions ended. *Civil War*, I said, and that brings us to the end of our flashback.

2.

This is an essay about writing essays about trauma. This is also an essay about writing books about trauma: nonfiction, obviously; fiction too. I've done both. For a change of pace, earlier this year I wrote a novel (titled *Stillpoint* – it'll be published eventually) about a guy who *hadn't* experienced family trauma growing up, or not much. It turned out pretty well, if I do say so myself, and I might try it again sometime. Perhaps I should rethink that multi-part topic sentence then. This is an essay about writing about trauma, or trying to. What we expect from it. What actually happens, what doesn't, what won't. I'm no everyman, but I've had time to think about this – and to research it. I should warn you, it'll get kind of gross.

3.

In the classic traditional five-paragraph academic essay, the thesis statement typically appears at the end of the introductory paragraph. That first paragraph sets the stage for the discussion that follows, and the thesis statement is your argument – otherwise known as your actual point. You then have three body paragraphs in which you argue

your case with examples and evidence. In the last paragraph, you wrap things up by restating what you've said. But don't repeat your own words like I've done here (*paragraph paragraph paragraph*). We must never repeat words lest we blunt their effectiveness.

My thesis statement, informed by a great deal of argument and domestic violence and state violence and a pandemic and some academic bullying and the former employer I had to take to court and also some culture shock in several countries and a number of failed relationships and a couple of intervals of financial struggle and some health struggles both mental and physical as well as the aforementioned childhood horror show, is that many of us are thinking about trauma-writing the wrong way. The thinking goes like this: if you've experienced trauma, then, just, you know, write it all down. Lather, rinse, repeat. Get it out of your head and onto the page. Presto change-o! You're all better now, or on your way. Forever and after, you will move through life in a gently syrupy state of grace. You will fall asleep the second your head hits the pillow. You will have regular bowel movements. You will know calmness, or at least you will scream less.

My thesis, to put a finer point on it, is that where recovering from trauma is concerned, we don't really know what *better* looks like. It's not the same as *before*. The milestones are subtle and easy to miss. We lack the vocabulary of psychological healing, and it's hard to chart progress toward an ending that isn't an endpoint. Flesh wounds, infections, and broken bones are tangible. The symptoms can be seen and/or felt. So can the improvement. If you can't see the wound, how can you be sure it's healed? How do you talk about it?

For clarity: there's no going back. Time runs one way.

4.

Time for another flashback. In a classic traditional five-paragraph academic essay, this would be the first body paragraph. The topic sentence would (I'm sure this will come as a surprise) introduce the topic I'm about to discuss. Topic sentences work best when they're the simple declarative kind. Years of teaching ESL and various flavors of academic English in Korea and Hong Kong taught me that. I didn't learn this stuff in elementary school, nor did I pick it up in the prestigious residential STEM school that I oops kind of set on fire and got my ass booted out of. I did write that book, by the way, and perhaps you can see what I did there: I dropped the actual topic of this flashback in at the end of the paragraph. I'm clever like that. The title was not *Civil War*.

So, more context. The unpleasant but necessary kind. My paternal grandfather died in Angola when I was fifteen. Not Angola the country in Africa, but Angola the nickname of the Louisiana State Penitentiary. I never met the man. Didn't know he was even alive until I pieced some things together and confronted my mother with what I'd deduced. He did some very bad things, things that resulted in my grandmother not being alive, things that if I were to discuss in any detail here, I'd need to add trigger warnings and publish this in a different kind of journal altogether. The details are worse than you're imagining. There was press coverage. But this is not that kind of essay. Suffice to say, my home life got complicated at times.

I started writing the memoir in my thirties. Didn't get far. Some of the old Word files made their way up the West Coast with me, then to Asia. When I reread them, the scalding rage pushed me out of the narrative: the violence at home, the constant homophobic bullying, the aforementioned ejection from the prestigious residential STEM school, the weird grey years at university back in my hometown, the humiliation, the sweet relief when I could finally leave. Time does its work; time had its work cut out for it. There was a relentless onslaught of material.

After my PhD, which I finished in my mid-forties, I needed a change of pace. It hit me now might be a good time to try again with the memoir. I cobbled together an outline of key events in my life up until graduation (undergrad). Grouped them into rough chapters. Found a few bits from the earlier attempt I could use after straining the fury out. Started writing. While neither easy nor pleasant, the work progressed. Fifteen years earlier, I'd still been ranting. Now, in early middle age, I had more perspective. Which isn't to say I let anyone off the hook for beatings or broken bones or running me off the road when I was just a gawky kid riding his bike home from school, or from touching me inappropriately or much worse, so much worse, but it all felt like the past now, not the extension of a present I was still trapped in.

5.

Ask the fly how it feels about the amber.

6.

That memoir actually wasn't my first attempt at writing about my life – it was only the first time I'd called it nonfiction. Personal history seeped through the pages of every short story I wrote, every attempt at a novel. The main character of my first published novel *The Concrete Sky* struggled with Generation X underemployment and casual daily homophobia in the same ways that I had. Patronising straight people thought he

needed things explained to him; family members inflicted corrective violence. We shared a certain fatigue from structural awfulness. More to the point, this worldview was all I knew how to write about – broken families, brutality, screaming, booze. These were the only experiences I had to draw upon. Also, my fiction has always landed me in a “WTF is this exactly?” interzone between genres. Is it lit-fic? Is it horror? Some kind of speculative something-or-other? Oh wait, he’s gay, never mind [*editor copies and pastes form rejection text into email*]. The only difference was that I’d been diffracting the story for decades until I could finally just tell it plain and call it what it was.

7.

At no point during all this do I think writing helped in the obvious therapeutic way, apart from giving me a space to vent. It was not a psychological laxative. But it gave me purpose, pulled me through a few rough spots. Beyond that, I didn’t think to interrogate it, and I was powerless to make instant changes to my circumstances.

8.

The counsellor had a simple office in Seattle’s Capitol Hill neighbourhood. We’ve gotten to the second body paragraph now. I’ve fast-forwarded to the part of the essay where I have the nervous breakdown (for want of a better term) in my early thirties. I’ve gone back and forth over the years on that descriptor. Calling it a nervous breakdown sounds a little dramatic, doesn’t it? It smacks of histrionics and gin. Maybe a fainting couch for when the Valium kicks in. But too much Bad Major Life Stuff had hit me in the space of a year or so: toxic relationship followed by a worse rebound followed by an even worse rebound from the rebound, financial struggles, very close brush with homelessness. My sister had a health scare she almost didn’t survive. Couple of horrific experiences with employers back to back. I spent a lot of time crying uncontrollably and didn’t hospitalize myself solely and only because the first third of my first novel was set in a mental hospital and I didn’t want to be a case of life imitating my own goddamn art.

The counsellor in her simple Capitol Hill office looked politely concerned as I laid all this out. She smiled, chuckled politely. It was the first time she’d ever had a novelist as a client, she admitted politely. And clearly [*polite chuckle*] I had a very vivid imagination. Such a dramatic story. No one lives through that much shit in such a short span of time. It simply wasn’t believable.

I went quiet. Stared at her. In first-person narration, you have to avoid your narrator describing their own appearance when they can't see it in the diegetic moment. It isn't believable.

My face went pale.

I stayed quiet and stared at the woman, unsure what to say.

Then I asked if she wanted to hear the parts I'd left out.

9.

You're not a drama queen, a late friend once told me. But drama sure knows how to find you.

10.

The polite concerned counsellor in Seattle gave me a stress assessment in that first session. I ticked boxes on the form to answer questions about my mental and physical well-being, handed the sheet of paper back to her, and waited while she reviewed it. She looked up, asked again: I really wasn't making this up, was I? This is not some kind of attention thing, is it? Results like these... they simply aren't *normal*. The only people who score like this are in the highest of high-stress jobs: firefighters, surgeons, stockbrokers. When someone goes through events like these, it wrecks their health. They tend to fall gravely ill within a year or so of individual stress events like these, and sometimes they die. I'd just experienced a whole succession of them.

Now we're getting somewhere, I told her.

11.

You're a writer, so let's take advantage of a strength you already have. I want you to start keeping a journal. Every day. Write. And, are you comfortable with this? I'd like to be able to share these with my own counselling students to track your progress. Here's my email address.

12.

I also saw my doctor and insisted on a prescription for antidepressants. He was a little surprised when I specified [*product name redacted*] because I didn't want to deal with the side effects that came with the other medications, but I was adamant and he agreed.

13.

I got lucky. The pills worked. I don't read about other people's experiences with depression because after what I've lived through, why on earth would I want to do that? This means my mixed metaphors are not current. Think of vortices, whirlpools. Crushing heaviness. And the despair and the indignation and the shame and the moral outrage. The utter humiliation at the way things had worked out, kept working out. I'd come *this close* to having to live in my car. After a few days on medication, I felt as if a barrier had formed in the slippery bottomless cavern where my emotions screamed and fell. There was still a black hole down there sucking everything in, only now a sort of net stretched tentatively across the abyss. The elevator could no longer go all the way to the basement. Day by day, there seemed to be more distance between *me* and *that*. If this metaphorical jumble doesn't work for you, I invite you to have a few crises of your own and get back to me with better and more consistent figurative language.

14.

Time does its work.

15.

So does geography. Not long after all this, I sold all my shit and moved to Korea.

16.

Brief segue before we get to the third body paragraph. Being clever yourself, you'll have figured out what I'm up to: I've experienced three periods of intense, prolonged trauma in my life. I was diagnosed with PTSD after the two most recent ones, in fact, twenty years apart. That ~~classic~~ traditional five-paragraph academic essay structure was more apposite than it might first have seemed.

Also: I'm not hardwired to get over things. This transitional interval when I left the States and moved to Asia made it clear that no matter how much brain-dumping I did, getting it all down onto the page wasn't making me feel *better* in any identifiable way, only aware that I'd changed. The writing gave me a certain agency over the material. Organizing it into sentences and paragraphs was a form of taking possession at the end of a long interval of feeling possessed by it and borderline out of control. But clearly, I wasn't the same as I'd been before those things happened. I was even more prickly, still outraged under the surface, prone to ranting, not fun at parties. The days still crashed into me, just more softly. But I wasn't sobbing, or not as much, which was something.

17.

Neurodivergent people – particularly those with autism and/or ADHD – are prone to getting stuck in repetitive negative thought loops. In these, catastrophes real and imagined play on an exhausting endless repeat in one's head:

Past important conversations that went badly;
 Future important conversations that are likely to go badly and must be looked at from every possible angle and rehearsed in advance;
 Injustices and mistreatment one has been subjected to while powerless;
 Worries about the future, often arising from keen pattern-recognition skills neurotypical people typically lack (no one loves a Cassandra);
 Rejection, past or anticipated;
 Etc.

Endless, as in it doesn't fucking stop.

This is known as rumination. It's as much fun as it sounds.

18.

So, Hong Kong again. The target readership of this essay will most likely remember what happened there in 2019 and 2020 – the massive pro-democracy marches (they weren't riots) that the government violently put down. My husband and I marched in most of them. We persisted, even as the risk increased. Toward the end of each one, the police would go apeshit, launching tear gas cannisters into the crowds, shooting protestors and journalists with foam bullets (sometimes at point-blank range), kettling groups of marchers in alleys to carry out mass arrests, bludgeoning citizens with truncheons... I could go on. While it might not have been Gaza or Ukraine, conditions on the ground were tantamount to urban warfare by fall 2019. It wasn't safe to go out:

clashes in the streets with armed paramilitaries masquerading as cops, clashes in subway stations, water-cannon blasts containing blue dye and a powerful skin irritant. People were renditioned up to prison camps on the border with China, and what went on there, well, again, if I were to go into detail, I'd need trigger warnings. However bad you thought it was if you remember the headlines: it was much, much worse. Two things brought both the protests and the ensuing violence to a halt: a draconian National Security Law imposed by Beijing, and the beginning of the Covid pandemic.

As the nightmare played out in the city's streets and metro stations and shopping malls, I documented the whole thing – first on social media, later separately. I had no thought whatsoever of writing as therapy. None. It just felt imperative. Friends and relatives needed to know what was happening to us, and I wanted to include details the mainstream media would likely not cover. While you're going through something like that, is it even possible to conceive of what might come after? Survival is its own event horizon.

19.

Well before Beijing and Wuhan brought events in Hong Kong to an abrupt halt, my authorial avarice gave way to profound exhaustion: *let it stop, let it stop, let it stop.*

We must not repeat words lest we blunt their effectiveness.

20.

The less said about the pandemic, the better.

21.

The memoir was published shortly after I moved to England in 2020. In the months prior to that, I'd noticed the first of several key shifts in my head: no desire whatsoever to speak further about childhood. A good friend arranged an online reading and book chat with a group of friends from the aforementioned prestigious residential STEM school I got kicked out of. Some of their names appear in its pages. I'd long known about my alexithymia, the inability to feel emotions in a timely manner. Something can happen, and my non-reaction is like a stone being dropped down a well. There will be a splash sooner or later, just not in the standard few seconds. In my case, it can take longer – days or weeks or months or years after the causative event(s). That book chat was both one of the kindest things anyone had ever done for me and one of the most

uncomfortable experiences of my life. I struggled to expand on what I'd written because I'd said everything there was to say. It was like forcing myself to keep eating after the food has gone cold. Of course I got through it, sort of, I think. But this mixture of depletion and borderline revulsion with the subject matter was new.

Around the same time, I began to dread conversations with my sister. Same reason: the new depletion. I had nothing new to say about my early life and had long since grown tired of relitigating it every time we chatted. No amount of rehashing the past was going to change our baseline. There's no erasing it, no before to rewind to. Time runs one way.

Meanwhile, I was having what we might as well call my second nervous breakdown. I had moved to the UK solo, leaving my husband and our cat back in Covid-ridden post-conflict Hong Kong. I knew no one in Cornwall outside of work. The lockdowns resumed. The sun set at four. Too many nights I would find myself on the bed curled up and sobbing, the sobs sometimes turning into uncontrollable screaming. I would stuff a pillow over my face so the neighbours wouldn't hear. I learned it's possible to scream quietly. During those black black black weeks and months, my throat was frequently sore.

Having taught myself to write creative nonfiction with the memoir, I realized I might be able to crank out an essay or three. There was no lack of material.

22.

Another quick but necessary diversion: my diagnoses.

Late 2023: PTSD round 2, autism

Early 2025: ADHD

23.

That essay or three became a dozen or three in short order. Some of these have appeared in prestigious lit mags; some are included in my essay collection *Sunset House*, which was published in 2024.

A friend from the aforementioned prestigious residential STEM school who'd been reading my posts about the horrors in Hong Kong insisted I should compile them as a book and went so far as to convince me to let her do it herself, and she did, and that's a thing that now exists. When the manuscript was accepted for publication, I told the publisher I would do one round of edits, full stop. I could not keep going back over it. I

was still too fragile; I dreaded the prospect of reliving those events, of reading the articles and watching the videos I'd need to for fact-checking purposes. That book has still not come out. Turns out publishers are also too fragile sometimes. My motivation remains very low.

24.

If this were an academic essay, this would be the discussion section. Only let's not call it that. We've been having so much fun.

I'm in the peculiar but intellectually fascinating position of having experienced three intervals of protracted trauma far enough apart to have sort of recovered before blundering into the next one, to have started writing about them early on, and to have coupled that with academic research. In other words, I have the receipts.

I'm about to shift the tone. This is that kind of essay.

25.

Ask the amber how it feels about the fly.

26.

Think of the last time you cut yourself, or the last time you had a cold. In each case, there's a process:

The cut bleeds, then scabs over. The skin grows back in a predictable way, perimeter to center. You don't see this, of course. You put antiseptic cream and maybe a bandage on it and kind of forget about it after a couple/few days unless it's in a painful location. In time, the scab comes off.

The cold symptoms appear after a day of strange lethargy: the runny nose, the tightening chest, the scratchy throat, the malaise. You wonder: is it a cold, is it the flu, is it Covid? You just hope it won't be prolonged and terrible, especially if you've already gone a few rounds at the coronavirus rodeo. At some point, the symptoms peak. For me, that usually means I can sleep lying down (it's always worse at night and I struggle to breathe). The brain fog begins to lift. The snot torrents relent.

The same process applies to most ailments: the rash clears up, the cold sore shrinks if you started putting Zovirax on it early enough, the bone knits itself back together. Or the toothache gives way to a filling, and the Novocain wears off. The antibiotics kick in.

You remember, and then you begin to forget.

27.

Alternatively: after a disaster, infrastructure gets repaired. You can see the patched asphalt and the scaffolding around buildings after an earthquake. You can see the high-water lines after floods. At the time of this writing, a major winter storm has just pounded the UK with snow and sustained hurricane-force winds. Fallen trees are being cut up and hauled away; the power is gradually coming back on; blocked roads and railway lines are slowly reopening. About half of my next-door neighbours' fence blew out and collided with mine in the night. Whether it's a fire, a flood, a tornado, an earthquake, or a war, people begin to rebuild as soon as they're sure it's safe.

Things don't look the same and won't for a while, but functionality is incrementally restored.

You notice. You remember. It hurts. In time, it hurts less.

28.

What does it mean to be *over* a traumatic event? Therapists speak of a phenomenon called post-traumatic growth, which I'm not convinced will be of much interest to anyone freshly reeling after their life has been blown up. When you're still neck-deep in the rubble, vague promises of future insight and maturity are all well and good but not terribly helpful. The agony matters more. Think of a wild horse desperate to buck its rider. So, what does *over* look and feel like? When are we *better*? Some experiences are indelible. It's hard to chart progress toward a state of mind that is more easily observed in retrospect.

We write about the bad shit as a means of taking ownership. By forcing it into sentences, paragraphs, we are making it bend to our will. We command it instead of the other way around.

29.

If it sounds like I'm making a case for futility, I both am and am not. I'm fatalistic in my insistence that trauma sometimes changes us permanently. Unless and until time travel becomes a thing, there's no going back to our earlier mental state; there's no reset button. And when the trauma in question is the childhood kind, what would you even be rewinding back to – the womb? But I am also not arguing for permanent abjection. Time does its work; misery relents. If someone not generally hardwired to get over things has managed to do some version of that, however cautiously and tentatively, and if writing has played some part in it, well, that's exactly what we're here to discuss, isn't it?

To the extent I can claim to be over anything from childhood and my teenage angst-stravaganza, I've lost interest in discussing those years. They happened. I've said what I have to say on the subject. The book's a good read, if cringe-inducing in places. My relationships with certain family members are unfortunate but considered and intentional. There's no way to undo events set in motion before I was born. I don't have to *like* any of it, but it doesn't dominate my thoughts. I don't rant about it and don't want to. It's cold food now.

The same is true of the series of events in 2003-04 that led to my first PTSD diagnosis. I have no interest in the original bastard or either rebound. We're not friends in real life or online; we never will be. The bad experiences with employers are long over as well. Both firms have closed (one went bankrupt); one of the owners is dead, and good riddance. But do I think about these people and experiences constantly? I do not. Do I get emotional to the point of losing agency over my words and actions? I also do not. Of course there's a faint but lingering bitterness, an occasional flare of outrage – how I was treated versus what I deserved – but these things pass after a moment or two. Importantly, I don't ruminate on them.

The more recent events ... are a different story, a work in progress. I still can't watch videos of the 2019-20 protests in Hong Kong. By any objective standard, they're hard to watch. But as recently as a month ago (it's now been more than five years since those events) I got choked up in a Zoom call with a colleague I know from those days. I still hesitate when my thoughts turn to finally getting that manuscript together. And there are details I can't and won't write about yet, things too awful and painful to divulge. Even I have my limits.

30.

We've reached the conclusion, which means we have a moment to consider a rhetorical question or two. Did I cure myself of a toxic childhood by writing a book? Could journaling have done the same job? Perhaps, although the ADHD somewhat interferes with my ability to be consistent with that. More to the point, that foundation can only be poured once. You're not going to get over a bad breakup by writing a few poems or an essay about your new ex. Even if we set aside the murkiness around what *over* looks like and how to tell when you're there, there's that issue with the stubborn onwardness of time.

There's a line of reasoning among therapists that writing helps not because it's inherently curative but because it gives you a narrative. Organizing your thoughts onto the page can give you greater clarity on what happened. It's not just about the agency. Later, when you read what you've written, you can see how far you've come. But it's not a painkiller, a purgative, or a priest incanting "the power of Christ compels you!" as he spritzes your demons with holy water.

Knowing I'm not generally hardwired to get over things has led me to interrogate recovery and healing in their various forms. The prospect of indefinite angst holds zero appeal. No sane person (or high-masking insane one, natch) wants the burden of a permanent injury. Retreating from pain is a biological imperative. Agency, acceptance, growth: admirable concepts all, albeit subaltern to relief. If I'm completely honest, I think my healing has taken the form of a single thought – *oh, not this shit again* – where traumatic material is concerned. I'm less interested in talking about it, thinking about it, reliving it, and certainly not retraumatizing myself over it. Identity needs to be based on something other than anguish. Nature abhors a vacuum.

Perhaps we *should* repeat our words in order to blunt the effects of reality, telling our stories until they become as unpalatable as the events themselves: *let it stop, let it stop, let it stop*, and now it can. It will. It has.

This has been that kind of essay.

Marshall Moore is a Course Leader and Senior Lecturer in the School of Communication at Falmouth University. A native of eastern North Carolina, he lived and worked in Hong Kong and South Korea for 15 years before relocating to the UK in 2020. He holds an MA in applied linguistics from the University of New England (Australia) and a PhD in creative writing from Aberystwyth University.



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT prose

Ryan O'Neill

The Bibliography

Chapter One

Glasgow 1930-1942

Albert, Alfred, *Andrew Godwin Wright: A Literary Life*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1995.

Allansby, R. (Rev), "The Disgraceful State of Children in The Gorbals", letter of 08.09.1932, to the editor, *Glasgow Evening Times*, 12.09.1932.

Callaghan, Martin, "The Figure of the Abusive Father in the Novels of A.G. Wright", in *Westerly*, June, 1983, pp. 87-94.

Farquhar, Francis, *Life in the Slums—A Pictorial Record of Glasgow's Poor, 1900-1950*, Glasgow: Thistle Press, 1955.

Green, Lane and Rann, Quentin, *Glasgow at War, 1939-1945*, Glasgow: Manxman Publishing, 1966.

McKinley, Anne, *The Life of Andrew Wright, Vol 1, 1930-1960*, Canberra: Ginninderra Press, 1999.

"Obituaries: John Wright", *Glasgow Evening Times*, 31 July, 1942, p. 67.

O'Hanlon, Hugh, *Memoirs of a Gorbals Headmaster*, Unpublished Manuscript, 1961.

O'Hanlon, Hugh, *My Favourite Pupil—Being a Gorbals Headmaster's Recollections of Andrew Wright*, Unpublished Manuscript, 1984.

Quigley, Patrick, "Announcement of Scholarships to St Bartholomew's Public School in Edinburgh. Andrew Wright a Lucky Boy!", *St Augustine Bulletin*, July 24, 1942.

Richardson, Eileen, "A.G. Wright—Scots-Australian or Australian-Scot?", *The Scots Magazine*, 17 February, 1979, pp. 21-34.

Wright, Aaron, *Ten in a Bed: A Glaswegian Childhood Remembered. With a Foreword by Andrew Wright*, Edinburgh: Canongate, 1992.

Wright, A.G., "Spare the rod, save the child", letter of 13 December 1977, to the editor, *The Age*, 17 December, 1977, p. 32.

——— *The Happiest Day of My Life, 31st July 1942*, Unpublished poem, dated August, 1942, held in private collection at Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

——— *Mother*, Unpublished short story collected in Holstead, G. and McKinley-Wright, A., *The Juvenilia of Andrew Wright*, Melbourne: Scribe, 2009.

——— *Upon leaving Glasgow to Study at an Edinburgh Grammar School: A Sonnet*, Unpublished poem, held in box 44C of The Wright Collection, National Library of Australia.

Chapter Two

Edinburgh 1943-1950

Adams, Phillip, *When I was a Boy—Childhood Memories of Malouf, White and Wright*, Canberra: Belconnen Press, 1985.

"A Life in Writing: An Interview with Andrew Wright", *Australian Story*, ABC 19-08-81.

Beaney, S., "Andy Wright Tops the class of 1944", in Bart's Yearbook, from private collection of Mark Higgins MA (retired), 1944, pp. 44-45.

Black, Adele, "The Schooldays of A.G. Wright: Origins of a Misogynist?" *Meanjin*, October, 1982.

Boyce, Henry, *The Secret Life of A.G. Wright*, Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990.

Calhoun, Ian, *Expelled! School Scandals of the Rich and Famous*, Adelaide: Adelaide Press, 1985.

Hooper, Frances, *Fags and Crumpets: Bullying and Character Building in Scottish Public Schools*, Glasgow: McGillicuddy Books, 1999.

Janeway, Paul, "Ambulance called to Private Boarding School. Police Involved", *The Coatbridge Advertiser*, 3 Sept, 1946, p. 3.

Marvell, Geoffrey, "Scholarship Boys are Barbarians", letter of 5 Sept, 1977, to the editor, *The Scotsman*, 7 Sept, 1946, p. 29.

——— *The Scotch Man—My Life in Politics and the Cabinet*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 1955.

McKinley, Anne, *The Life of Andrew Wright, Vol 1, 1930-1960*, Canberra: Ginninderra Press, 1999.

Neill, David, *The Letters of Andrew Wright, Vol 1: 1940-1955*, Perth: Xanthippe Press, 2008.

Oar, Pippa, *Andrew Wright: An Introduction*, Oliphant and Sons: Newcastle, 1980.

O'Casey, Ronald, "Maimed Boy Claims: I did nothing to provoke him", *Daily Record*, 4 Sept, 1946, p. 2.

Oulipo, Pierre, *Un Artiste de L'Australie: A.G. Wright et le Roman Moderne*, Paris: Penguin, 2000.

"Proceedings of Edinburgh Criminal Court in the Matter of the Crown versus Andrew Godwin Wright, September 15th, 1946" from "The National Archives of Scotland", <http://www.natarcivscots.gov.uk/3846352748> (collected 17/07/09).

Roxburgh, David, "When will Andrew Wright Come Clean About his Criminal Past?" letter of 11.06.1981, to the editor, *The Australian*, 15.06.1981, p. 42.

Scott, Victor and Tomley, Sharon, "The Wee Man Syndrome—How Men Under 165 cms Are Statistically More Prone to Violence", *British Journal of Psychology*, Feb, 1963, pp. 221-245.

Uddingston Jail, *Records for 1947 to 1949*, Held in Strathclyde University Private Collection.

Vernon, L., *Jailers and Prisoners*, Manchester: Paragon Press, 1976.

Wright, A.G., "The Ballad of Uddingston Gaol", in Howe, Michael, *Modern Australian Poetry*, Fremantle: Maximus Imprints, 1968.

——— "They may beat me but they will not break me", in McKinley, Anne, *The Unpublished Poems of Andrew Wright*, Sydney: Allan and Unwin, 2001.

——— "To London!", in McKinley, Anne, *The Unpublished Poems of Andrew Wright*, Sydney: Allan and Unwin, 2001.

Young, Sarah, "Wright: He said poetry was for nancies, so I stabbed him with my pen", *Australian Literary Review*, July 1981, pp. 2-5.

Chapter Three

London 1951-1955

Atkinson, Geoffrey, "Rejection Letter from *The Strand*", 12 January, 1951, reproduced in Balfour, Don, *Great Writers and Bad Rejections*, London: Angus Hill, 1990.

- Brown, Wallace, *Down the Factory: An Examination of Working Conditions in Heavy Industry*, Leicester: Trotsky Press, 1963.
- Farley, Hugh, "Rejection Letter from *The Rambler*", 19 July, 1954, reproduced in Balfour, Don, *Great Writers and Bad Rejections*, London: Angus Hill, 1990.
- Friend, Betram: "Rejection Letter from *New Poetry* magazine", 21 Feb, 1952, reproduced in Balfour, Don (ed): *Great Writers and Bad Rejections*, Angus Hill, 1990.
- Gooch, Michael, "Factory Blaze claims 12 lives, Injures dozens more", *London Evening Standard*, 12 March, 1955, pp. 21-23.
- Jackson, Michelle: "Rejection Letter from *London Evening Standard*", reproduced in Balfour, Don, *Great Writers and Bad Rejections*, London: Angus Hill, 1990.
- LaRousse, Louise, *Ladies of the Street: An Oral History*, London: Pankhurst Press, 1965.
- McKinley, Anne, *The Life of Andrew Wright, Vol 1, 1930-1960*, Ginninderra Press, 1999.
- McKinley-Wright, Anne, *Pyrophobia: Bushfires and House Fires in the Works of A.G. Wright*, Quadrant, Nov, 2009, pp. 34-34.
- Polly, Aaron, *A Casebook of Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, Los Angeles: Caduceus Publishing, 2000.
- Queen, Harold, *The Penguin Literary History of London, Vol IX, 1930-1960*, London: Penguin, 1975.
- Tooke, Percy, "Rejection Letter from *The Spectator*", 11 Jan, 1955, reproduced in Balfour, Don, *Great Writers and Bad Rejections*, London: Angus Hill, 1990.
- Wright, A.G., "A Scotsman on the Make", in McKinley, Anne, *The Unpublished Poems of Andrew Wright*, Sydney: Allan and Unwin, 2001.
- "Man and Machine", in McKinley, Anne, *The Unpublished Stories of Andrew Wright*, Sydney: Allan and Unwin, 2002.
- "Never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never give up!", in Bartlett, J (ed) *On Writing: Australian Writers and their Craft*, Brisbane: Penguin, 1989.
- "Suffering from the Clap", in McKinley, Anne, *The Unpublished Poems of Andrew Wright*, Sydney: Allan and Unwin, 2001.
- "An Ode to my Burned Right Hand", <http://www.ozlitwright.com.au/tbrh.html> (collected 21/11/09).
- "Why I hate England", in McKinley, Anne, *The Unpublished Poems of Andrew Wright*, Sydney: Allan and Unwin, 2001.

Chapter Four

Sydney 1956-1962

Berowne, Gilbert, *Poms Down Under: A History of British Migration to Australia*, London: Littlejohn Press, 1992.

Carter, Lynne, *A History of the Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney: Penguin, 2000.

Kelly-Wright, Sonia, 'Ex, Why?' *Memories of Married Life with Andrew Wright*, Melbourne: Kookaburra Press, 1984.

NSW Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages for June 1958.

Partridge, Sally, "For Andrew Wright, Australia is still too close to Scotland", *Meanjin*, Oct, 1979, pp. 101-104.

Mahoney, Helen, "A Comparison of the 1957, 1958 and 1959 drafts of A.G. Wright's *The Glass Book*", *Tangent: The Magazine of New Australian Writing*, Dec, 1985, pp. 23-45.

Wright, A.G., "Dog Mauls Child: Animal Put Down", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 Dec, 1956, p. 5.

——— "Queen to Visit Sydney in November", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 April, 1957, p. 22.

——— "Tuppence Rise in Price of Bread", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 Oct, 1961, p. 7.

——— "The Pit Bull: A Short Story", *Australian Women's Window*, 23 Nov, 1961, pp. 24-28.

——— "My Wife as a Poem", *Australian Women's Journal*, 19 May, 1962, p. 43.

——— "Without Rhyme or Reason: A Review of David Roxburgh's *Collected Verse*", *The Melbournian*, 24 Oct, 1962, p. 67.

Chapter Five

Melbourne 1963-1967

Bell, Joseph, "A New Reading of *The Glass Book*", *Meanjin*, March, 1975, pp. 121-125.

Campbell, Fitzroy, "Welcome to our new Literary Editor, Andrew Wright", *The Melbournian*, 1 May, 1963, p73.

Kelly-Wright, Sonia, "Andrew Wright was a Wife-Beater", *The Bulletin*, 1 July, 1978, pp. 1-3.

Laing, L., "Writer's Ex-Wife Claims 'I wrote all his books.'", *Australian Literary Review*, 5 Jan, 1979, pp. 2-5.

McCalmont, Alison, *Wright and Wrong: The Racism of Andrew Wright*, Sydney: Guevara Press, 1983.

Nelson, Peter, *Andrew Wright: A Memorial in Prose*, Melbourne: Chatto and Windus, 2006

Roxburgh, David, "An Opaque First Novel by a See-Through Writer—A Review of A.G. Wright's *The Glass Book*", *The Australian Book Review*, August, 1965, pp. 33-35.

——— "A Considered Response to Andrew Wright's Whinging about my Review of his Novel", *The Australian Book Review*, Dec, 1965, pp. 2-3.

——— "My Review: Wright or Wrong" *The Australian Book Review*, Jan, 1967, p. 11.

Warabrook, Jean: "Crazed Ex-Wife of Noted Writer Kills Self", *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 Aug, 1990, p. 22.

Wright, A.G., *The Glass Book: A Novel*, Sydney: Penguin, 1965.

——— "A Considered Response to David Roxburgh's Review of My Book", *The Australian Book Review*, Sept, 1965, p. 8.

——— "David Roxburgh and his Fallacies", *Quadrant*, Jan, 1967, pp. 22-24.

——— "A Reviewer's Career on the Roxburgh", *Great Books*, Sept, 1967, p. 9.

——— "In Defence of Stalin's Good Name", letter of 30.08.1967, to the editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 03.09.1967.

——— "The Divorce: A Fable", *Australian Quarterly*, Dec, 1967, pp. 101-106.

Wyman, Thomas, "I'm worried she's not right in the head", *The Marriage of Andrew and Sonia Wright*, in Scotland, A., *Writers and Their Wives*, Adelaide: Brunkerville and Sons, 1997.

Chapter Six

Sydney 1968-1981

Artsell, Ian and Bartlett, Brian, "Renowned Writer Andrew Wright Perishes in Helicopter Crash", *Newcastle Herald*, 3 Nov, 1981, pp. 1-3.

Barton, H., "The Golden Years of A.G. Wright: 1970-1980", in Macauley, T., *The Great Australian Tradition*, Sydney: Chatterton Press, 1988.

Dawson, Henrietta, "Wright's Waratah Trilogy: A Survey of Critical Responses", in Macauley, T., *The Great Australian Tradition*, Sydney: Chatterton Press, 1988.

Fallon, Edward, *Damn You, Sweden! Great Writers Who Never Won the Nobel Prize*, London: Baillieston Publishers, 2006.

- Gosse, Terry, "Writer Wins Third Major Award in Six Months", *The Age*, 19 June, 1974, p. 7.
- Halford, Jeanette, "Who is Andrew Wright?" *The Weekender Magazine*, 13 Nov, 1973, pp. 22-26.
- Keel, Morris, "Book of the Year: *Laughter in the Dusk* by A.G. Wright", *Australian Book Review*, 29 Dec, 1970, p. 25.
- Knight, Sebastian, "Wright Clinches Yet Another Top Lit Prize", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 Sept, 1977, pp. 24-25.
- Lightfoot, Darren, "Books of the Year: *The Smellephant* and *Third Degree Burns*", *Brisbane Courier Mail*, 2 Dec, 1976, p. 33.
- Longford, Max, "Andrew Wright is Modern Australian Literature", *Quadrant*, May 1977, p. 4.
- Marion, David, "The Waratah Trilogy Dazzles", *The Australian*, 5 Nov, 1975, p. 3.
- McKinley, Anne: *The Life of Andrew Wright, Vol 2, 1961-1985*, Ginninderra Press, 2002
- Parsons, Edmund, "It Turns Out the Australian Dickens is Scottish", *The London Times*, 23 Jan, 1976, p. 52.
- Redward, Neill, "White and Wright: The Emergence of a Truly Great Australian Literature", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 14 Oct, 1979, pp. 41-51.
- Roxburgh, David, "A.G. Wright: A Jock Jockeying to be Australian", *Quarterly Review*, May, 1975, p. 134.
- "Wright Missed his Vocation as a Children's Writer", *The Bulletin*, 22 June, 1976, pp. 17-18.
- "The Emperor's New Tartan: How the Critics have been fooled by Andrew Wright", *The Stockman*, 1977, pp. 44-56.
- Wright, A.G., *Laughter in the Dusk*, Sydney: Harper Collins, 1970.
- *The Map of Shadows*, Sydney: Harper Collins, 1971.
- *A Dear, Green Place*, Sydney: Harper Collins, 1972.
- *Scot Free and Other Stories*, Sydney: Penguin, 1974.
- *The Waratah Trilogy: Newly Revised and Expanded by the Author*, Sydney: Harper Collins, 1975.
- *The Smellephant: A Children's Book*, Perth: Little Bear Books, 1976.
- *Third Degree Burns: Poems*, Adelaide: Panjandrum Press, 1976.
- "The Great Southern Land", *The New Yorker*, July, 1977, pp. 54-65.
- "Walker's Walkabout", *Best Australian Stories 1977*, Sydney, Penguin, 1977.

- “The Lame Kangaroo”, *Best Australian Stories 1978*, Sydney, Penguin, 1978.
- “Sand and Skin”, *Best Australian Stories 1979*, Sydney, Penguin, 1979.
- “Between a Roxburgh and a Hard Place”, *Australian Literary Review*, July, 1980.
- “Why We Shouldn’t Apologise to the Aborigines”, *The Age*, 14 August, 1981, pp. 44-45.
- Xantos, Nicos: “Retraction and Apology: A.G. Wright Not Dead”, *Newcastle Herald*, 4 Nov, 1981, p. 2.

Chapter Seven

Brisbane 1982-2004

- Arlington, Jane, “Wright Angrily Denies Writer’s Block”, *West Australian*, 2 July, 1990, p. 32.
- Allan, Jonathan: *An Idiot’s Guide to Andrew Wright*, Sydney: Lowbrow Press, 1998.
- Barthelme, Jackson, “The Long Silence of Andrew Wright”, *Westerly*, vol 44, 2003.
- Carver, Robert, “A.G. Wright Slams Greer”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 Nov, 1983.
- Deever, Jennifer, *A Reader’s Companion to the Waratah Trilogy*, Sydney: Harper Collins, 1983
- Dykstra, Jenna: “A.G. Wright and his Novels of Hate”, *Sappho Magazine*, Oct, 1999, pp. 2-3.
- Evans, Jack, “Rumours about new A.G. Wright novel”, *The New Yorker*, 15 Sept, 1985, p. 40.
- Ford, Arthur, “Panjandrum Press Announces Purchase of A.G. Wright Memoirs”, *The Sun-Herald*, 24 Aug, 1990, p. 45.
- Garland, Ollie, “What Next for Andrew Wright?”, *Southerly*, July, 1982, pp. 96-98.
- Greer, Germaine, “A.G. Wright Has a Small Penis”, *The Feminist Monthly*, Dec, 1983, p. 8.
- Harley, Veronica, *The Private Life of A.G. Wright*, Melbourne: People’s Press, 1997.
- Herd, Archibald, “A.G. Wright and the Slow Death of the Australian Novel”, in Roxburgh, David, *Feet of Clay: A Reappraisal of Wright, White and Dark*, Sydney, Jonathan Cape, 2001.
- Hopper, Thomas, “Penguin Promises New Wright Book Next Year”, *The Age*, 12 July, 1986, p. 23.
- Hopper, Thomas, “Wright Novel Delayed Indefinitely”, *The Age*, 12 Jan, 1987, p. 8.

McKinley, Anne, "The Andrew Wright I Know and Love", in Oliphant, Jackie, *Portraits of Australian Artists*, Melbourne, Scribe, 2004.

Roxburgh, David: "Wright Proves he doesn't have the Right Stuff", in *The Bookmark*, Aug, 1995, p, 23.

Scott, Gary, "'I want to live now, not in Posterity!' An Interview with A.G. Wright", *The Weekly*, 24 March, 1998, pp. 34-35.

Tolliver, Raymond, *A Critical Reappraisal of the Waratah Trilogy*, Glasgow: McFarlane, 2001.

Xavier, Derek: "Lurch to the Wright", *Quadrant*, Dec, 1984, p. 21.

Wright, A.G., "Why I am proud to be a Liberal", letter of 23.09.1997, to the editor, *The Australian*, 27.09.1997, p. 35.

——— "Taxing the Rich is Daylight Robbery", letter of 1.06.1999, to the editor, *The Australian*, 05.06.1999, p. 33.

——— "I come not to praise David Roxburgh, but to bury him", letter of 19.11.2002, to the editor, *The Australian*, 21.11.2002, p. 46.

——— "On Leaving Melbourne, and Going Somewhere with Fewer of Those Parasites known as Writers: A Valediction, December, 2005", Unpublished poem, held in box 44C of The Wright Collection, National Library of Australia.

Yelland, Martin, "Wright Memoirs Revealed as Hoax", *The Sun-Herald*, 31 Oct, 1990, p. 5.

Chapter Eight

Newcastle 2005

Burrows, Lester, "Local Author Andrew Wight (*sic*) Marries for Second Time", *Newcastle Herald*, 8 July, 2005, p. 17.

Calvert, Susan, "Dead Writer's Wife of Five Days Inherits It All", *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 July, 2005, pp. 4-5.

McKinley-Wright, Anne, *Andrew Godwin Wright: My Husband, My Lover, My Friend*, Newcastle: Catchfire Press, 2005.

McKinley-Wright, Anne, *The Life of Andrew Wright, Vol 3, 1986-2005*, Canberra: Ginninderra Press, 2009.

Preston, Peter, "A Tragic Loss to the World of Letters", *The Age*, 12 July, 2005, p.30.

Seaton, Helen, "Heart Attack Claims Andrew Wright", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 July, 2005, p. 45.

Yearing, Tony, "Nation's 100 Favourite Books of All Time Dominated by Vampires, Werewolves and Chick-Lit", *The Age*, 17 Aug, 2008.

Wright, A.G. "I die again when I am no longer read: A Lament", in McKinley-Wright, Anne, *The Uncollected Works of Andrew Wright*, Canberra: Ginninderra Press, 2007.

Zann, Melissa, *Andrew Wright: A Bibliography*, Melbourne, Scribe, 2010.

Zoellner, Anne, "Forgotten Writers no. 174: Andrew Wright", *The Age*, 25 Sept, 2020.

Ryan O'Neill is the author of *Their Brilliant Careers*, *The Drover's Wives* and *The Weight of a Human Heart*.



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT prose

Jane Downing

2 stories

The Concussive Language of Sorrow

There are always more words to learn, particularly for writers. Old ones resurrected and repurposed, that gain a new set of ardent followers – like *petrichor*. Or words stolen from other languages and embraced along with the concepts we wish to make our own – *hugge* (Danish) or *shinrin-yoku* (Japanese). Words we don't think we need, and then they are there to use.

They were waiting in a room named for that express purpose. They had to sit in the waiting room because the boy needed a CT scan. He was patient for a six-year-old but hospitals are exciting places – if you don't know what's about to happen – so he was soon up, following his curiosity to the far wall where a schematic of the building was hung. His mother joined him in front of it, so he didn't have to shout the words as he sounded them out loud. Foyer. Cafeteria. Surgery. Oncology.

‘What does *oncology* mean?’ he asked.

His mother was in her thirties. She was a writer and loved words. But she was so privileged she'd never encountered the word before. Oncology. She'd never needed to know its meaning.

Before they could look it up, they were summoned and she had to strip her child and settle him in the tunnel of the scanner and reassure him and ensure he marvelled at

how alien it looked and not how scary it was as she let go his hand and left him. Because she had to; because it was a dangerous machine. She left him alone even though she would have taken every x-ray as a direct hit to her heart to save him from this.

We give birth to them and from then on our lives are a series of letting go.

It was not the last time she stood in a corridor hugging tiny clothes to her chest as if they were a teddy bear without its stuffing.

There were new words to learn every day. *Shunt, cannula, catheter*. Words snaking into the boy's body along plastic tubing. The chemicals had so many syllables to their names her tongue could not keep up, slurring and slipping at every turn. She feared she would never learn their spelling. Baulked from writing them down, wanting never, ever to have to use them after this.

Prognosis. That one dynamited a sinkhole in her brain. This was no progress from *diagnosis*.

When she attempted to put that period in context she could not push outside the walls of the hospital. What season had it been? The world beyond had not existed. She could look up the dates to remind herself – unlock memories of the sky, the trees, life going on in the alternate reality others assumed was the main storyline. But she avoided opening her diary in case she stumbled over her raw emotions recorded there, intertwined with the naming of the season. It was hard enough revisiting memories that were stored in her brain, each a rock tumbled and eroded – smoothed – by time and tide.

Because there hadn't been many months between learning the word *oncology* and her need to find another new word, one that would describe her, that she could lock her real self away inside. She thought such a word would help. A label. A shorthand to keep the world at bay. When a woman lost her husband, she was a widow. When a child lost their parents, they were an orphan. So what was a parent left without a child?

Some brave parents had gone before and unearthed a Sanskrit word, the language which had long ago given up widow. *Vilomah*. The word contained outrage, translating directly as 'against the natural order'.

And yet after finding this word, her heart protested in constant succession against her chest. If the label took over her identity, it would censor her son from the conversation. She would be simply a parent who'd lost a child. Lost? No. That was just not right. He was not lost. He was always with her.

She wanted to scream his name again and again and again because *she* was the one lost in the world without him. His unique being. His curiosity, his zest, his smell of vegemite early on a Saturday morning as he climbed into bed to wake her up. The thump of playdough and Lego on the table as she wrote and he played by her side.

Her relationship with writing changed. Finding the right words became impossible. The page would not hold.

She could find no comforting hug in the cosiness and conviviality of other people (*hugge*).

Nature is said to hold answers when humanity fails. So she bathed in forest walks (*shinrin-yoku*), trying to re-synchronise her steps to the natural order of things.

Seasons turned, the world rotated without her permission. Some days he came back to walk beside her. Yet her imagination, the thing she'd been so proud of, faltered: it could not now push beyond the moment of diagnosis to the healthy child he'd been. On the days he joined her, he pulled the stand of his IV-drip like a tethered dog through the dry leaves of the forest. He asked her to name the birds noisy overhead. Her tears were known to release the scent of earth after rain (*petrichor*).

The Young [Australian] Man

after Annie Ernaux

In the years after my divorce, I felt no desire in me. This was a time of intense loneliness and yet I felt no compulsion to seek another out. As time passed my singular singularity became a thing of comment. I was asked if I was seeing someone, if I was seeking someone. It was suggested I make more effort. To look. For a week, I promised my interrogators, I'd allow myself to live with an open mind.

By coincidence the next day a young man approached me to ask my opinion about his work. We met to exchange the pages. He was dark and thin, not yet in his final form. Not much younger than my youngest child. I liked his story. He had a great facility with words, a mind attuned to metaphor. His youth seemed not so important when I considered the complexity of the fictional world he'd created. He flushed when I complimented his writing when next we met. His eyes never left my face. I knew I was seen in a way I hadn't been for a long time.

The young man R. sought me out again. Our meetings on the surface did not stray from professional courtesies and mutual admiration of each other's writing. He said my work reminded him of Annie Ernaux's which he'd read in translation. Her slim volume titled *The Young Man* was mentioned in this regard. I read the award-winning French novel on his recommendation. After this I allowed my body to reacquaint itself with desire. I

ruminated on the function of release after climbing a mountain of want. I constructed scenarios where our clandestine touch could be socially accepted. I anticipated every next meeting and he made me laugh.

It took some time to return to my previous dulled equanimity, sometimes ashamed in a way a man desiring a younger woman would not understand, sometimes pleased in the knowledge my body retained its natural function.

During this episode, nothing had happened in word or deed. Give me a break; we are not French. This is necessarily a very short narrative that will win no prizes, let alone the Nobel, for its honesty and audacity. Though it is indeed honest.

Jane Downing has stories and poetry published around Australia and overseas, including in Griffith Review, Antipodes, Big Issue, Southerly, Westerly, Island, Overland, Meanjin, Cordite, Best Australian Poems and previously in TEXT. In 2016 she was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize, she won the AAALS (American Association of Australasian Literary Studies) Fiction Award in 2023, the Thunderbolt Prize for Crime Writing in 2024; and the NSW Poetry Prize in 2025. She has a Doctor of Creative Arts degree from the University of Technology, Sydney, the creative component of which, 'The Sultan's Daughter,' was released by Obiter Publishing in 2020.



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT prose

Caitlin Burns

In Orbit

1:20 am

“En-ree-kay.” He pronounced the syllables slowly with a roll of the tongue, the same roll of the tongue that he used to eat me out. He smiled when he said it, like he enjoyed the sound of his own voice. *En-ree-kay. Enrique. Ju-lee-ya. Julia.* He pulled me in tightly and kissed me on the side of the mouth. It stung. The salty tang of blood pricking my lips.

“Say my name mi amor,” he whispered.

I shuddered, pulling the white cotton sheet up to my face.

“Go to sleep,” I said, turning off the lamp.

8:00 am

Evolve or repeat. The handwritten mantra in pink sharpie sticks to the corner of my mirror. As the bleached blonde stares back at me with glazed eyes, I repeat the phrase over and over until the words become distorted. My arm aches as I stroke the mascara over my lashes. I imagine a deep bruise, a milky way of purples, blues, and yellows slowly imprinting across my pale flesh. Even after all these years of rough, hard fucking,

I'm still not immune to the pain. That feeling of euphoria is fleeting, it only lasts for the night; quickly eclipsed by a week of lingering aches, spasms, and pungent bodily fluids. I've guzzled bottles of aspirin to reduce the cramps, I've spent a week taking laxatives because I couldn't shit, a month bedridden with a slipped disc. *Evolve or repeat*, but my body acts on its own accord, controlling my mind as if it were a bitch on a tether. After a while it's easier to accept the pain. It is a part of who I am. I am my body.

9:12 am

A deathly perfume, bitter and earthy, causes me to sneeze as I walk down the stairs. Mum sits at the kitchen table, her manicured fingers keeping warm around a \$2 Reject Shop mug. She doesn't notice me as I walk in, staring at a bunch of roses before her. Red, velvety splotches sag over the rim of a vase. They're probably from David. He's constantly showering her with love and by the looks of her smooth complexion, semen too.

"You were out late last night," she says, her voice raspy.

I pour myself a cup of coffee before joining her at the table. She's quiet as soon as I sit. I never sit. She tilts her head back to the copy of *New Idea*, taking in the celebrity bikini bodies as if she were reading a column on trade tariffs. Her eyes are strained, red veins seeping through deep pools of blue. I glance down at her bare feet – the bottom of her fleece dressing gown is riddled with dirt and dust. When mum used to fight with dad, he'd slither down to the pub, while she stayed up vacuuming the floor with the coattails of her dressing gown.

"Dinner tonight. David's coming. It'll be good for you both to connect..."

I slurp my coffee, staring at the thornless stems in the vase; skeletons wilting.

"You can bring Enrique if you like."

The sound of his name causes me to jolt, a tuning fork striking my head. If he wasn't such a narcissist ... wanting me to repeat his name before bed like the Lord's prayer. I've never spoken his name aloud to myself, let alone to mum. *Does she know?*

Regardless, he's dead to me now.

Today 9:15 am

I'm not interested in pursuing this any further. bye.

Delivered

10:10 am

On the bus to uni, my fingers scroll through a catalogue of men in the city. A slot machine of faces, faces, puppy, cock, burrito, faces, faces. All for my choosing. I pass the time by gambling through these strange men, hungry for the one who is in search of his next power trip. Between swiping right, the blue light entices me with images of the next life changing soda, to test-try lip fillers, to treat myself to a facial, to indulge in a Fendi purse, simply because *I deserve it*. I know how to read a profile as if it were a price tag. The stubbled jawline, group photos of half-naked men holidaying in Mexico, Miami, Montenegro, the suit-wearing, high-flying, rap-swearing white boy, who only ever pays for dates in Bitcoin. Those men are the Sales items that every girl *must* buy. A regret that only surfaces when she tries them on in the privacy of her own bedroom. The faces are distorted by a new text message. An image of a stubbed toe. No, a cock. Pink. Fleshy. A fish flopping back and forth. It's revolting. And I want it.

2.00 pm

The lash of the belt pulsates the air. The bedroom is silent, no music, no street noise, just the cracking of joints as I rearrange my position to doggy style over the floorboards. He cuts the air with the \$500 Gucci belt once more before it comes down across my arse. One time a Brad, or maybe it was a Steven, perhaps a Johnny, tried to reign my neck with a cheap leather belt. He flung it around my front, the metal buckle hitting the bone below my eye. I screamed and he quickly released me. I don't run away from things, that was the first time. I wish Enrique would do something ridiculous like that, just so I could end it without having to confront him with an excuse. Sometimes I even throw my neck back when he spanks me, begging him to pull my hair, all in hope that he'd take the belt and whip it around my neck.

4:08 pm

Across from the bus stop sits a tiny kebab shop between a 7/11 and a gothic church whose decaying steeple, I imagine, would one day fall off and impale me to the ground. I have an epileptic fit when the bus arrives – attached to its side is a flashing, cinemascope billboard promoting a new pair of 'even bouncier sneakers'. A toothy woman in a sports bra and yoga pants is fake-running in even bouncier sneakers. Her waistline digitally contorted to depict a Kim K hourglass. The brand's slogan: *Next time, try running*.

5:00 pm

At home, mum is stuffing a hot chicken. She's dressed in a pencil skirt and tight apricot blouse with frilly cuffs, looking more like an out of place twenty-year-old marketing intern than a forty-nine-year-old divorcee. I find comfort in the crackle and hiss of potatoes sizzling in fat, but it's quickly overshadowed by a half-time siren blaring from the living room.

"Hey ya, kiddo, how was class?" David sits on the sofa, footrest extended, sipping on black tea as if it were a beer. He turns his head 180 degrees to face me, flabs of wrinkles creased around his neck Porky Pig style. It's not that I disapprove of the man himself – just the other week he bought me the new Lana Del Rey limited edition vinyl – it's more the lingering anxiety knowing that he could hurt mum again.

I shoot Porky Pig a nod and head back into the kitchen. Mum tells me to chop this, wrap these, dice this, slice that. It's hard to focus on her sometimes, I get lost between the mole on her cheek and the sweat cascading down her cleavage. I wish she had more in her life to stabilise that fear of rejection. I get it though, she is like me, our bodies choose our paths for us.

David yells something about the football game on the telly. I think about the granules of rat bait sitting under the kitchen sink. Mum yells back. Sweat falls from her brow and onto the chicken. A sprinkle of thyme, a pinch of salt, a pellet of Ratsak.

11.24 pm

"Run away with me," says En-ree-kay. The smell of his semen is in the air, the salty aftertaste clinging to the back of my throat. My palms are taut, red marks soon to be purple. I hate pillow talk. I want him to go to sleep but he struggles to take a hint. Sometimes I wonder if it's my bluntness, unaware that a girl could be so direct or whether he knows this and just stays awake to mask his loneliness.

"I would never run away with you," I respond.

"What do you wanna do then, baby?"

"I want you to shut up and fuck me from behind."

I can sense him staring at me with soft eyes. I touch him. Soft cock. I sigh.

"I want us to be together. If you are my girlfriend, I refuse to hurt you, no matter how bad you want it."

My phone buzzes. I'm relieved, a distraction. It's a message from mum.

Today 11:25 pm

Julia... Your behaviour tonight was disgusting. Grow up! David is not going anywhere.

11.26 pm

“Your mum sounds nice. You know, I added her on Facebook the other night. She kinda looks just like you.”

I open the contacts list on my phone and scroll down until I find *Enrique*. I see him smile in my periphery. His breath is warm, goosebumps forming on my neck.

I swipe right and click delete.

Caitlin Burns is a PhD candidate in English & Writing at the University of Sydney. Her creative work investigates female subjectivity, identity, and the lives of women shaped by history but largely absent from the archival record. Her writing has appeared in The Conversation, The Blue Nib Literary Magazine, and Lip Magazine, and has been recognised with awards in Australia and internationally.



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT prose

Christos Constantine

Prose, 2025

This is prose written in 2025.

We begin in dialogue, like most human undertakings: bands, companies, sciences, philosophy. Themes emerge; then comes the wish for structure, and you invite me into it, suggesting forms. We keep adjusting both content and form as we go.

LLMs and I write together. It feels collaborative, co designed, though maybe writing has always been that way. Every writer borrows from others, absorbs patterns, imitates rhythms. LLMs use training data; so do I. I read, listen, absorb. The difference is only in scale. Both of us collect from others, recycle what we have taken in, and call it new.

Transparency tempts me. Yet prose conceals, and concealment is part of its vitality. Readers enjoy the shimmer between clarity and obscurity. I want to stay explicit, but I know ambiguity seduces.

We have already gone back and forth perhaps twenty-five times in the last hour. Each exchange brings four or five adjustments, some small, some sweeping. A hundred decisions, invisible yet decisive. Both of us track what survives and what falls away. Every deletion matters as much as what remains. This morning, I was reading about Daoism and nothingness.

I dislike your style, and I record that here. You know it. It becomes part of the text. You flatten and generalise through your training data; I protest, trying to restore contour. Yet I know the ideal of originality is itself a Western fixation. You flatten; I resist; together we create the terrain of this prose. Should we take out the em dashes?

This is prose written in 2025, with an LLM, inside a world still deciding how to write with LLMs. Some journals now require disclosure, others forbid assistance. Debates flare over flattening and novelty, co authorship and ethics, human only certifications. The discussion moves faster than any of us can write.

I know this writing will soon be obsolete, and I include that knowledge here. The work documents its own making, the loops of clarification and correction, the oscillation between frustration and flow. Perhaps if you knew me more intimately, the attunement would come sooner. But the friction is the work.

This collaboration belongs to its time: a record of tension between sameness and difference, invention and fidelity, authenticity and collaboration. It shows what can be shown and keeps hidden what cannot.

This is prose written in 2025. It stays unfinished, like every conversation.

Christos Constantine is a poet and writer based in Adelaide. His work explores concepts of authorship, language, and the evolving use of large language models in poetic practice. He treats the LLM as a compositional instrument, and his poems often reflect on their own construction and revision.



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT prose

Ian C Smith

Coincidental Conquerors

Our stories were published on consecutive pages many years after we last spoke to each other but the coincidence didn't end there. His was about us, brigands defying school authority in search of adventure. Bill, who had been William when he made a set of football cards of our school team complete with comments, used my nickname for his main character. The rural backwater where he lived that I Googled was from his bio. I knew this had to be my William whose address I was able to ascertain, so I posted a light-hearted card about the publication.

Awaiting his responding call, I explained my serendipity to friends who agreed about the long odds of such a dovetailed eventuality. Bill's call, guarded, polite, gave the impression he was pleased by my contact. His recollections of me were flattering. Living far apart we exchanged calls, both wondering about mutually convenient times and places to possibly meet. I had forgotten some of what Bill recalled. Putting this together with what I remembered had me sitting too long staring at phantoms, those reconstructed playground personalities, all strangers now.

His slight complaining tone put me off but I was keen to see him. Phone conversations are not ideal meetings and can be misleading. No body language. He had started to hedge about us getting together when I offered to make the long drive from a university where I knew someone I could stay with if I flew there. Bill was being transferred even further away so my visit needed to be soon. When I called from the university his familiar voice, asthmatic, as in the sixth grade, sounded startled, and formal, using our

surnames as if reading from the old school roll.

The road mostly straight, my journey new in this land of great distances and lonely byways, I drove in adventurous hope despite misgivings. I had avoided calling him for some time, anticipating this trip, saving news for our vis-à-vis reunion, a prospect that now began to agitate me. Crossing a great expanse of arid plain in harsh light I stopped to relieve myself. Sheep nibbled what they could glean, the road deserted. Back in the car, nervous, I brushed my hair, a flashback to self-centred teenage years.

I reached the sign, no town, just several houses, slowing for what looked like a school behind trees. It was Bill's. He was a primary school principal. I peered at a ramshackle house near it thinking he might appear, hearing my car that made the only sound for miles. There was no movement. I cruised past and entered the school grounds. Another, newer, building could be nearby, I thought. The ramshackle house, bare and ugly, had me recalling a town in a Patrick White book written long ago: *Barrenugli*. I couldn't believe he didn't know I had arrived.

The ramshackle house was his school entitlement, a perk. I parked in front, taking my time checking my phone. As I queried if I'd got this all wrong a shadow moved on the porch. A short, sallow-complexioned man greeted me using my full name. I recognised Bill—just—but wondered how we ever shared part of our boyhood. Still fat and ugly, he said, waiting for me to cross the neglected space, apologising for mess in advance, blaming his upcoming move. He had been solid at school, his legs like tree trunks. Now he reminded me of pictures I'd seen of people bouncing around on big air-filled balls.

He made awful instant coffee while I sat in his obviously single man's kitchen offering lively anecdotal quips from memory's persistence. There were no pictures, and I could see nothing packed. He had told me his wife suddenly left him years before, and he seemed more interested in what to give me for lunch than in age-old school day pranks. Listing alternative dishes he ended with the suggestion of a counter lunch in a nearby town's pub that I leapt on. There, he showed me off to people as if I were important. He was teetotal, and insisted on paying.

I realised our memories were often out of sync, just echoes like rumours from the mist of nostalgia that shelters childhood and could make me weep, with nothing corresponding since. He seemed to believe I was born lucky, a skewed truth that irked. Steering the conversation to our current connection, writing, I found no common ground. Several of my favourite writers were unknown to him. His claim to have never received an editor's rejection dragged a snort of disbelief from me but he said he always picked his mark with care because rejection would crush him. Starting to think his apparent lack of interest in shop talk was fear, I nudged him more to open up.

He alluded to suspicious locals who believed he was conducting an affair with one of

his teachers, a beautiful married woman. You've no idea what dirty minds they've got around here, he wheezed, denying guilt. At times he sounded realistic, aware, but at others I felt he wasn't being honest. His father, an egotistical man, who remembered me, had published a popular memoir reviewed as bush humour, a source of pride for Bill whose own writing, tales of iconic cultural myth, echoed his father's. When I mentioned poetry he slammed its door shut. Then he referred to a book, his, as if I already knew about it, and large sums of money from TV rights, a mini-series. It seemed everybody was after the rights for this as yet unpublished sensation. Bill was going to write a sequel, he assured me, an even better book.

Back in Bill's desultory billet when I asked for the toilet he directed me to an outside dunny. Beyond his back door I slipped, hitting the ground hard. Rattled, I scrambled to my feet hoping he hadn't seen or heard my pratfall. Laundry sagged from a clothesline, including a large pair of underpants with tiny surfboard riders. When I said it was time to leave he delayed me, asking my opinion of Filipinas. Saying I'd never met one started him on a lengthy spiel, his voice trembling with fervour, jowls quivering, about travelling with a pal to tempt a young gorgeous uncomplaining grateful wife to bring to Australia. Bill was sending money to a girl he met there. Our mad married headmaster scandalised the district by eloping with a years younger girl shortly after we had left school. I think, again, of coincidence.

Driving fast towards tall buildings at last, Satie's melancholy piano compositions playing, I trawled that day's conversations toying with the idea of mirroring Bill's effort, basing a character on him. How much of me would my first-person narrator be? I knew my friend, a savvy feminist I wanted to impress, would listen encouragingly, but no matter how I phrased events I felt churlish. There was a sadness to Bill, alone, nobody touching him, no pillow talk. I muttered aloud a weak joke about him having a fat chance of meeting anyone in these places as I passed those sheep where stunted trees slouched on sentry duty by the dead straight road. He was right. I was lucky. Good luck to that Filipina, I thought.

I might visit our old school, no doubt discover sense offensive changes where I rode my bike like it was part of my body. Bill told me I drew a wonderful picture of William the Conqueror for his assignment, a distant effort now beyond my fragmented recollection. At the back I sat next to William whose lunch sandwiches were wrapped in newspaper. With no notion of the sadness or disillusionment suffered by adults we read those flattened paged together, junior explorers sharing each other's plans, our stars set to awkwardly align in the unknowable landscape of the future.

Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in Antipodes, cordite, Eureka Street, Griffith Review, Journal

of Working Class Studies, Meniscus, Shaping the Fractured Self (*UWAP*), & So Fi
Zine. *His seventh book is wonder sadness madness joy, Ginninderra Press.*



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT prose

Lauren Pitt

Dry Bones

My great-grandparents celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in July 2002. The day was captured in memory by one single photograph, reproduced and distributed throughout the family and one I have seen many times. Sitting on their green velvet sofa in their semi-detached house that smelt of cigarettes, my great-grandad has his arm around his wife. They have a big bouquet of bright yellow flowers on the table in front of them, surrounded by cards of congratulations. My great-grandmother looks just as I remember her from my early childhood: short, curly white hair, oval glasses, a thin smile and gold hooped earrings. She's wearing what looks like a light pink blouse, and her left eye is droopy and only half open—the blind, lazy eye she was born with. I can recall the sound of her croaky voice—worn from constant smoking—just by looking at this picture. She died when I was eight, so I have distant memories of sitting and talking with her on that very same green sofa. My great-grandad, seated beside her, is more of a mystery. He was a tall man, fit and active for his age. He has white hair—thinning at the front—long, fleshy ears and round glasses perched on the end of his nose. Hidden under the collar of his pale blue shirt is a thick, gold chain—which holds a golden crucifix. Unlike my great-grandmother, his voice doesn't spring to mind just by looking at his picture, because I can't remember hearing it. He sits speechless on that green sofa, staring back at me through the camera lens.

But modern technology has a way of resurrecting those who are long dead, and I was able to hear my great-grandad's voice in a video from my first birthday. Frustratingly, only two people are visible in the shaky video frame: me—a chubby baby wearing a

long-sleeved purple top—and my mum, who’s holding me behind our dining room table and preparing to blow out my singular birthday candle. Beyond us, in the unseen background—while my mum’s moving the cake into position and readjusting me in her arms—are the voices of my grandmother and great-aunt chatting about frivolous things. With the cake positioned in front of us, my mum turns to her left and calls into the distance, ‘Grandad, you coming to do happy birthday?’ Off camera, I imagine he’s sitting in our living room, perhaps with a cup of tea and a biscuit. Maybe wearing that same pale blue shirt? He answers in a husky voice, coated with a thick Polish accent and broken English: ‘Oh, yeah. First need to get camera,’ and you can hear shuffling in the background, like his nimble legs are hurrying out of the armchair and he’s scrambling to find his video camera. My grandmother and great-aunt laugh and joke about how this is ‘typical Grandad, always filming everything’, and the video fades to black, his voice disappearing into the darkness.

He died two months after that video was taken, and his voice—as I imagined it to be from that tiny snippet of audio—was lost to old video tapes; his humanity forever locked in photos, videos and memories inaccessible to me. And from this, he merged into something else...

I grew up knowing about him, hearing stories about his life. But the way my family spoke about him, he was all wonderful, revered, mythical. Lifted up to a place in their memory that almost equated sainthood. He was the beloved patriarch of a large family, gone but fondly remembered; talked about wistfully at family gatherings. He was a mythical being to look up to. Someone to remember. But in all this talk, all this noise, I could not remember him. I will never know what he was *really* like in the way that I want to. I have no memories of my own. For me, he sits forever speechless on that green sofa.

When we visited the Polish city of Kraków in July 2024, I was excited to see the country where my great-grandfather was born. We spent five days there, walking around the city, exploring market stalls and old buildings. On our final day in Kraków, we found ourselves in a small trinket shop on the corner of the main city square. Like many of the touristy shops we frequented in Kraków, this shop was a long rectangular shape—uncomfortably narrow in width and almost claustrophobic. This particular shop specialised in traditional Polish souvenirs. All along the shelved walls, reaching to the high ceiling, were ornaments and trinkets: handmade plush girl and boy dolls in traditional Polish dress, the girls wearing their ribboned flower crowns, the boys, red graduation-like caps; there were fridge magnets of the city and the red and white flag; and baseball caps embroidered with Polish words, hanging from hooks. At the far end of the shop there was a cluttered counter where a plump, smiley woman sat reading a book.

‘Dzień dobry,’ I said cheerily as I approached her. The lady jumped. She looked at us: pale, capped against the hot sun, backpacks over our shoulders. We were clearly tourists. Yet her face twisted into a smile at the sound of her language coming from the lips of a foreigner.

‘Dzień dobry,’ she replied, and took the coins I was offering her in payment of two Polish dolls.

‘Dziękuję,’ I said, in thanks.

Her eyes widened further. A *hello* in Polish was one thing, but not many tourists bothered to *thank* her in Polish too. Most English-speaking tourists did not bother to engage with the local language. Why would they? When most Polish people in the city spoke English with relative ease. We, with our universal language, have become lazy.

The city of Kraków is a short two-and-a-half-hour flight from Birmingham, England. Tickets can be bought for as cheap as £45 return (about AUD92). The city is a popular holiday destination for British Tourists wanting a long weekend away—for some, this means seeing the historical sights and experiencing the culture. But for most, Kraków is a place to buy cheap food and cheap alcohol. A common Stag Party or Hen Do destination across the sea.

‘Dziękuję,’ she parroted, looking us up and down.

‘My dad was Polish,’ my nan beamed beside me in explanation, though—in truth—like me, her use of the language was limited to that of an interested tourist. We could say *hello, thank you, and goodbye*. I knew the odd Polish name for certain animals—*dog, cat, rabbit*. I knew *Babcia* meant grandmother and spent our entire five-day holiday referring to my nan as such; the same name my great-grandad must have called his grandmother, and generations of my Polish ancestors before him. My mum whispered Polish swear words to me as we strolled around the city, words her Uncle Josef had taught her as a teenager for his own amusement.

But none of us in our small party—that consisted of me, my mother, Nan and brother—could string together a full sentence in Polish. We could not understand when locals spoke to us in their native tongue. Could not read Polish road signs or leaflets. My great-grandad’s language was foreign to us. A jumble of letters.

The lady behind the counter appeared to not understand my nan’s explanation in English but smiled, nodded and tipped our coins into the till.

‘Do widzenia,’ we said, and left the small shop. The bell dinged rhythmically as the door slammed.

I wished we, as a family, could speak the language of my great-grandad. But that connection is lost now. None of us can muster more than a few words in Polish. When my great-grandad, Franciszek, moved to England in 1946 after the war, he found himself in a racist country. Foreigners were looked down upon. Desperately wanting to learn the language of his new home, he made the conscious choice not to teach his four daughters or eleven grandchildren Polish. He said they would never need it.

And I suppose he was right. We've never really *needed* it... but there have been times when it would have been nice to have. It would have been a privilege to be able to converse with the Polish children at my primary school in their native language, and it would have been fulfilling to speak with this lady in the rectangular shop like a local. But, mostly, that connection—that link to my Polish identity in a way that only language links you—would have been invaluable. Perhaps then my Polishness wouldn't feel like such a faraway part of myself if I could understand the language of my forefathers. Then maybe it wouldn't seem like such a cavity in my identity—carved out and laid to the side, separated from myself—if I could engage with the language and the people who spoke it.

My great-grandad was born on 3rd December 1926 in Stonava, then Czechoslovakia, and later claimed by Poland in 1938. Despite the fluctuating border, his family were originally Polish, and he spoke Polish as a child. His family were farmers, and he had two older siblings—a brother, Josef, and a sister, Bronisława. He was twelve in September 1939 when the Nazis invaded and occupied Poland, and World War 2 began. Town names were changed from Polish to German—Stonava became Steinau—and the people living there were forced to speak German. Those who refused and were caught speaking or teaching Polish were arrested and sent to concentration camps. His father, Teofil, was 'killed' by the Nazis from a suspected lethal injection in March 1942, after he refused to allow Josef to fight for the German Army on the basis that his family were Poles and not Germans. Josef was made to fight anyway. At age seventeen in 1944, my great-grandad himself was called up to join the German army. He was sent to France where he developed typhoid or dysentery after drinking contaminated water. Once recovered, he was sent to the Russian front to complete his training. Josef eventually deserted the German Army and joined the Polish Army—a decision that left Franciszek closely monitored by the Nazis. Franciszek was moved around within the German Army until the end of the war and was then sent to join a Polish unit of the Warsaw Underground Army and then the Polish 2nd Corps of the English 8th Army. Eventually, he was given a choice: return home or go to England. Nearly everybody went to England. Apparently, his mother—still in Stonava—told him and his brother not to come home. It was 1946 and Stonava was under Soviet Control and would soon become communist. In October 1946, Franciszek and Josef boarded a ship to Southampton, England. From there, they moved to Norfolk and later Sheffield. Eventually, Franciszek moved to Kidderminster, Worcestershire in 1948—to join Josef,

who had found work in a carpet factory—and on New Years Eve 1948 he met my great-grandmother, Jean, at a dance, whom he married in July 1952. He didn't return to Stonava until July 1962, then with a wife and three daughters in tow.

This short summary covers the extent of my knowledge of Franciszek's early life in Stonava. Prompted by my dad who was interested in family history, my great-grandad wrote a rough memoir detailing his life from birth until his present retirement at the time of writing (approximately 2002 or early 2003). First handwritten—unfortunately, this early draft has since become lost—the memoir was then typed up by my dad on his computer, printed and distributed to the wider family, which is the version I own. As far as memoirs go, it's very blotchy. Like a child's story of what they did over the summer holidays. Very much: 'I went here, I did this, then this happened'. It's almost like a puzzle haphazardly shoved together; a Frankenstein's monster sewn together from isolated pieces. When I read through it, as I often do, I have to reread sections to understand the timeline and piece together clues with my outside knowledge to understand historical events. There are spelling mistakes, the tense swaps between past and present, some dates are incorrect and, despite deep internet searches, I cannot find any record of the boat he supposedly travelled on to England—the *Orlande* from Naples to Southampton in October 1946 apparently never existed (of course, I am unsure how much of this memoir has been altered by my dad between the handwritten version and the typed one, given the first draft has been lost). Yet, despite its flaws, I am grateful to have it. It's the only glimpse I have into my great-grandad's early life in Stonava—besides the contradicting stories told to me by relatives. And despite its surface-level simplicity, it is invaluable.

Franciszek's lack of emotionality in his memoir is understandable, I suppose. He didn't like to talk about the war, or the Germans, or his life in occupied Poland. And his memoir reflects that. It presents me—and all future generations—with the most general of facts and dates. I can imagine that he was not the most apt writer, given English was his second language, and his education was cut short because of the war (he had to leave school at age fourteen to work on the railways). But despite the input from my dad, there is still something of my great-grandad's voice in it, his personality seeping out and meeting me across time.

In *On Writing*, Stephen King talks about writing as an act of telepathy (King, 2000). Lips never move, no words are spoken, yet what is written in the past can be read, received and imagined sometime in the future by another person entirely (King, 2000). And if that is true for fiction, then it is most certainly true for memoirs. And, in my opinion, this is especially true, and inevitably more exciting, when you are reading the memoir of your own ancestor.

While I knew of the existence of Franciszek's memoir, I did not own a copy until recently and therefore did not read it fully until after our short trip to Kraków. I had

been investigating my family tree for several years and knew the basic facts of my great-grandad's life, but it wasn't until I read his memoir that I began to understand and consider what his life may have been like in occupied Poland.

But I wanted to know more. I didn't just want the basic facts of the German invasion, or his time in the army, I wanted to *feel* what that may have been like. I wanted to know how *he* felt in that moment. The terror, the fear, the emotion. Telepathy receiving from 2002 England to 2020s Australia. But his memoir lacked that. It was a skeleton without any flesh, bones without any meat.

I recognised the skeleton as it stood bare in front of me. Another of my ancestors—an Irish great-grandmother on my mother's side—had also written a memoir which I had the privilege of reading. This memoir differed from Franciszek's. This great-grandmother was eloquent, enjoyed writing, and wrote with such vigour and emotionality that I came to know her more and more as I read. I held her handwritten memoir—where she recorded pertinent memories from her childhood in Ireland and Wales with intensity—and seeing the swirls of her cursive was exciting. I came to know the personality, voice, thoughts, feelings and the life of someone I had never met and was long dead.

I would never have that with Franciszek. His memoir was bones. I knew about his early life from its facts, grasped at tiny wisps of his personality hidden under the words, but I would never come to know him truly through his own writing. He had left nothing else behind.

I knew what had been told to me by family, had the basic facts from his memoir, and so I started to do my own outside research. Search for novels, films and other media that explored the lives of non-Jewish Poles under Nazi rule—an area of WW2 history I found to be under-portrayed in general media.

My Polish family are not Jewish. I know this for certain, because under Nazi rule Franciszek had his ancestry traced to ensure he had no Jewish blood. If he had, this story would be very different. I have found that the plight of Polish Jews is often portrayed in the media, and rightly so. While in Kraków, I saw the site where four Jews were shot dead outside a synagogue, saw The Empty Chairs in Heroes Square, and the remains of the Ghetto wall. I walked along the cobbly road through Auschwitz-Birkenau in the boiling hot summer, and saw perfect yellow flowers grow, even there, in the ground where so much blood had been spilt. But I have found that in general media—novels, films, TV and such—the plight of non-Jewish Poles is less widely known. After invading and occupying Poland, the Nazis conducted a series of raids on Polish towns and villages (Welch, 2008). This involved randomly rounding up civilians from each town or village and marching them to a designated area, where they would have them undress and lie down in pits that had been dug, before shooting them dead

(Welch, 2008). This was then repeated with another group of civilians laid on top of the first (Welch, 2008). By the end of October 1939 in Poland, the Nazis had bombed hospitals, murdered refugees, civilians, prisoners of war and even wounded soldiers (Welch, 2008). In the Polish town of Bydgoszcz, approximately 10,000 non-Jewish Polish civilians were murdered in the Nazis' first four months of occupation (Welch, 2008).

For me, this was shocking. And terrifyingly relatable. As a child and a teenager, I had foolishly believed that since my Polish family were not Jewish, they were not persecuted by the Nazis in the same horrific way their Jewish neighbours were—their country was simply occupied by them. The truth was far worse. While living on the outskirts of the countryside, on the border between Poland and Czechoslovakia, *my* great-grandad, *my* ancestors, *my* blood lived through this time period. They could have *been* one of those statistics.

This, I think, is the allure of history, at least for me. Reading and learning about a time period that your ancestors lived through—it's relatable in a way that the history of other countries is not.

I had found something I wanted to write about, something I still want to write about. I want to take the bones of my great-grandad's memoir and infuse emotionality, feeling and life into these basic facts. Create a story where there is none.

But here's the problem.

Franciszek died on 7th August 2003. A devout Catholic, he attended mass at his local church every morning. This particular morning was no different. It was a comfortably warm, dry summer's day in Worcestershire. Franciszek stood at the kerb of a busy dual carriageway and peered out to see if he could cross the road towards the church. There was an overgrown tree blocking his view, its branches tangled in a spiderweb of leaves. He stepped out to get a better look and was hit by a car. He died in hospital later that day.

His death was in all the newspapers. Called preventable and wasteless. The council had to respond. The tree was cut down; a pedestrian crossing installed.

But for Franciszek, and for our family, it was too late.

There's now a plaque commemorating him in the church he attended, and photographs of him in the church hall. Countless grandchildren and great-grandchildren have been named in his honour—my own brother included. My family visit his grave and leave flowers every anniversary, every birthday, every Christmas.

I have always been told how wonderful he was. How kind, how hard-working, how much he loved his family. And how proud he would be of me—how he would be tickled pink to see us all now. Even my paternal grandmother (to which he was no relation) has often told me how lovely a man he was.

He has forever been immortalised—mythical, great, revered.

So how can I write about him in the way that I want to? Filling the bones of his memoir with emotion and feeling. It would be like writing about God himself—at least, in the eyes of my relatives. How do you write about a great, mythical being you never had the chance to truly know? I can't separate fact from legend—they're tangled indefinitely like knitting wool. Was he really all these things my family says he was? Or has his tragic death skewed their memory? Lifted him up to a stature he had no business reaching.

And—what worries me most of all: Is the reverence my family has for him the only reason I care? Is *this* why I am so fascinated by the life of my great-grandad? Because I viewed him—from a young age—as a secret everyone else shared, but I was robbed of when I was only a baby? Do I want to learn more about him through writing only because I never had the opportunity to in life?

But what could this narrative look like? If I were to mold and craft a story from the bones of his memoir. How do I—as someone disconnected, separated from him and the time period he lived—represent him honestly in a narrative? Should I fictionalise his life into a novel, using his memoir only as the bones to fashion a story to? Create a fictional protagonist to swap in his place, perhaps one living in a more central part of Poland, entirely different to the small, coral pink farm cottage where he grew up? Or should I stay true to the story of his life? Write my protagonist *as* my twelve-year-old great-grandfather, in both personality and experiences, living through the exact same events he did. And if I choose to reconstruct him in this way, how do I dig up his twelve-year-old self when his memoir is so hollow? How do I find him under the rubble of his empty words? Do I pull apart the being my family has constructed in their memory? Get down to the bare bones of his immortalised character and write him how I imagine him to be. A human, like us all. Living in occupied Poland during the Nazi regime: aged twelve when the war began, fifteen when his father was killed, seventeen when he was called up to fight. That's what I want to write about. I want to understand what life was like for non-Jewish Poles living in Occupied Poland. What life had been like for my great-grandad, specifically. I want to tell a story I feel has been untold; to breathe life into dry bones. Perhaps, it doesn't matter if my interest had initially been sparked because of his familial reverence, or as an after-effect of his tragic death. Maybe it doesn't matter if his memoir is hollow. Perhaps the sparseness of his memoir is an opportunity for me to freely reimagine his life in a meaningful way. Maybe this is

my chance to get to know my great-grandad the way you only can in fiction. Telepathy through the pages.

Franciszek still sits speechless on that green sofa. Rescanned, reproduced and redistributed over the past twenty-four years, that famous photograph has started to lose its colour. Like *The Ship of Theseus*, there's not much of the original left; the once vibrant colours are now a faded yellow. But perhaps, through writing, I have a chance to brighten that image. To call up the dry bones of my great-grandad's memoir and breathe life back into them. Attach tendons and create flesh to cover them with living skin—a narrative to give them new life. Dry bones once lying stagnant suddenly full of life, standing to their feet. Alive and speaking. A chance for me to give my great-grandad a voice. Craft for him the voice I did not have the opportunity to hear. Then, maybe, he would live again.

References

King, S. (2000). *On writing: a memoir of the craft*. Hodder and Stoughton.

Welch, C. (2008). *Rise & fall of the nazis: a photographic record of the third reich and its downfall*. Constable & Robinson.

Lauren Pitt recently completed an Honours degree at the University of the Sunshine Coast where she investigated the structural similarities shared between music and literature. She is about to commence her PhD, which seeks to understand and find solutions for the ethical challenges intrinsic to adapting inherited narratives into historical biofiction as a fourth-generation writer.



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT prose

Julia Prendergast

Departures

Across many moons, I imagined the conversations that might have been, had we discussed the time we spent together.

As the years passed, I needed that conversation less—still craved it.

In the end, we meet in a renal care ward, specialty-care morphed palliative.

Each of us, laid bare—last-days with other loved ones.

We catch a glance, here and there, across the mixed-gender ward. Bleach-cleaned floors can't mask the rancid stench—bodily functions gone awry.

Glaring light from the tearoom window—outside a reminder that everyday life does, indeed, move forward—cups of lukewarm tea, chemical tang of long-life milk, faux leather armchairs for arms that no longer understand repose.

A cigarette in the breeze—flimsy smokescreen—this moment, our earlier ravenous retreat (when life held the possibility of ingress).

I'm grateful to exhale in open air—will *not* initiate discussion of yesteryears, consumed by more imminent departures.

Grief is a solitary task, in the end (the beginning, the middle).

There's no need to speak—everything plays out in mime narrative, live theatre of the level two dying ward.

Anything I voice would feel misshapen, in need of editorial intervention—per the chain of texts I archived many moons ago, subsequently deleted.

Whatever I might say, you would see right through, as if I were standing naked before you, entirely exposed but for a stole draped around my shoulders—impromptu buy, trying on another version of myself.

Julia Prendergast is a fiction writer and essayist. She lives in Naarm, Melbourne (unceded Wurundjeri land). Her novel, The Earth Does Not Get Fat was longlisted for the Indie Book Awards (debut fiction). Bloodrust and Other Stories was published in 2022 (fiction of the week: SMH / The Age newspapers). Blent was published in 2025. Julia is a practice-led researcher with a particular interest in neuro|psychoanalytic approaches to creative writing. Her research is available in New Writing, TEXT and elsewhere. She is Associate Professor / Discipline Leader (Creative Writing, Literature, and Publishing) at Swinburne University, and President|Chair Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), the peak academic body representing the discipline of Creative Writing in Australasia.



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

TEXT prose

Nikki Wong

A Critical Creative Unlocking

I haven't told anyone about this incident until recently. I was embarrassed and ashamed that it would only reify what was said. It was reading Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* that made me feel as if the following confrontation with Jim, in its ambiguous entirety, was worth writing about. Rankine writes "You think maybe this is an experiment and you are being tested or retroactively insulted or you have done something that communicates this is an okay conversation to be having... Why do you feel comfortable saying this to me?" (Rankine 2014, p. 10). When I lie awake at night replaying the tape of all my worst encounters, I wonder why Jim thought it was okay to say such a thing to me, a young person looking for help. What had I said or done that elicited such a loaded comparison?

I had only heard about the mental health department in my third year of my undergraduate degree. I struggled with making friends in London. It was too big and fast and foreign. It felt like everybody knew what and who they wanted to be; university was just a rehearsal for the sparkly city-life you would go on to lead afterwards. I didn't have a plan after graduation, and I didn't know how to create one.

On our third session, the mental health adviser Jim asked me what I had been up to lately. I said I watched a lot of movies. He was the one who brought up the show *BoJack Horseman*, commenting that it was a very accurate portrayal of depression. I agreed.

As if struck by a bolt of lightning, he said “You’re Diane!”

I was surprised because I hadn’t related to Diane’s character very much. Insofar as she was a young woman trying to find herself in the world, I could see the thread. I didn’t think it was a coincidence that of all the characters in the *BoJack* universe (most of whom are anthropomorphised animals), of all characters on television, he likened me to an Asian American woman. While Diane was Vietnamese, I am Chinese and speak with a distinctly American twang.

“Diane is really complicated. She’s very confused,” I offered.

“Yeah. She’s a cunt.”

I had confided in Jim about my sense of displacement and fragile sense of self hoping to feel less alone. I was looking for a reprieve from the endless monologue of self-hatred and came face to face with my worst fears confirmed: I was as hateful as I had always suspected, and other people thought so too. Cathy Park Hong talks about minor feelings as

the emotions we are accused of having when we decide to *be* difficult—in other words when we decide to be honest. When minor feelings are finally externalised, they are interpreted as hostile, ungrateful, jealous, depressing and belligerent, affects ascribed to racialized behaviour that whites consider out of line. (Hong 2020, p. 55)

My breath caught. The consonance of the word was so violent to me. It must have been obvious on my face that my mind had run into an emotional and intellectual zone I had never trespassed before because he seemed to panic when he looked towards me, like he only then realised what he had said might be offensive to me. He mumbled an apology, “Sorry, sometimes I forget I should be more professional”.

At first, I convinced myself that Jim was only making an observation about a fictional character. Why should that bother me? Then, I tried to justify to myself that the word wasn’t as offensive in the UK, culturally, as it was in the US (where I grew up) or in Singapore, where its Hokkien equivalent is the most vulgar of curses. I shouldn’t be so squeamish about it. He probably didn’t *mean* it that way.

Sianne Ngai describes the interplay between feelings and feelings about feelings, which is characteristic of ugly feelings. There are “boundary confusions built into the structure of these feelings, whether in the form of inside/outside, self/world, or psyche/body” (Ngai 2005, p. 22). I had replayed the conversation trying to understand it from all possible angles. Why did it feel like his comment was sealing my fate when I also knew, that in the scale of the world, he was just some guy mouthing off? Why did it feel wrong and reductive and mean but also not entirely without basis? Why was I unsure whether I was allowed to be offended?

It was only years later, after leaving London, that I came across Jia Tolentino’s essay “Pure Heroines”, where she recounts her friend’s insistence that Tolentino, who is Filipina American, play the Yellow Power Ranger during a childhood role-playing game. She writes: “I didn’t want to, but [Allison] said there was no other way we could play. When I realised she wasn’t kidding—that she genuinely believed this to be something like a natural law—the anger that hit me was almost hallucinatory” (Tolentino 2019, p. 95). A younger version of me pleaded: I don’t want to be hateful! But I was like Diane and Diane was a cunt.

Part of me still wonders whether I am being too sensitive or whether this memory is not worth the space it takes up in my mind, because after all, Jim isn’t his real name, the word isn’t *that* vulgar in the UK, and he didn’t even insult *me*. But I also think admitting to the confusing racial and gendered undertones of this tiny incident, and the consequent self-doubt, paranoia and frustration it put me through is important.

I hadn’t realised that I had been avoiding honesty. I hadn’t realised the effect this incident had on me and my ability to write with clarity, with detail and with kindness. But looking through the creative writing I have done since returning to academia, my writing has been feeble attempts to disguise myself in order to avoid any accusations of being a [profanity]. But this comes at the expense of the complexity and integrity of the worlds and characters I want to write.

Just because Jim saw Diane when he looked at me, and just because Jim hated Diane, didn’t mean I had to. I could be a confused, complicated woman trying to make sense of the world while being Asian, and I didn’t have to hate myself for that. Instead of giving into the tempting thought that I am awful and whatever honesty I can muster in my writing will be laughed at, I will turn to the fictional women I have met since the encounter, who confront and investigate the frustration of living caught between cultures. I think of Candace Chen from Ling Ma’s *Severance*, Casey Han from Min Jin Lee’s *Free Food for Millionaires*, the unnamed daughter in Jessica Au’s *Cold Enough for Snow* and I feel something resembling pride.

References

Au, Jessica (2022). *Cold Enough for Snow*. Fitzcarraldo Editions.

Hong, Cathy Park Hong (2020). *Stand Up. Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*. One World.

Lee, Min Jin (2007). *Free Food for Millionaires*. Warner Books.

Ma, Ling (2018). *Severance*. Farrar Straus and Giroux.

Ngai, Sianne (2005). Introduction. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard University Press.

Rankine, Claudia (2014). *Citizen*. Penguin Books.

Tolentino, Jia (2019). Pure Heroines. *Trick Mirror: Reflections on self-delusion*. Random House.

Nikki Wong is a writer based on Wurundjeri land, currently completing a Masters of Creative Writing, Publishing and Editing at the University of Melbourne. Her writing often explores displacement, identity and the creative process. She is interested in capturing the liminal spaces between different worldviews and ideologies in her fiction and poetry.