

Poetry and prose contents

- Marcelle Freiman, *2 poems* page 2
- Edith Speers, *3 poems* page 4
- Tara East, *Haunted* page 8
- Ronnie Scott, *My brother's map* page 11
- Rhys Stalba-Smith, *The humble tool* page 18
- Peter Nash, *You get what you dress for* page 23

TEXT poetry

Marcelle Freiman

2 poems

Salt

Greek olives taste
intense as salt crust around a dry lake,

edge-of-the-tongue words
want nothing but to carve

the face on which not even love
nor the losing of love

nor the bite of a sensual afternoon
will salve the bitter line, the sting on the tongue:

rather than wrestling for words, were I
to paint this table with brush in this hand,

I wonder, would your absence fold over
and move a more tangible language

for a throat hard-wired,
a bow-string wanting

mouthfuls of clear water
in dry cicada strip of afternoon?

Alleys

Like spaces between poems,
cracked concrete yards between buildings,
where weeds grow, are pitching for sunlight:

words creep
like rats, they scuttle the bins
and bottles of the night –

the back-lanes, if you go there
are sometimes soft as closed eyelids, blind faced
houses turned to the street: in the unlit night

the screeching of anarchic cats, a child crying,
a voice from somewhere could be of pleasure
or anguish. At dawn, exhausted fences lean inwards,

over palings where fruit-tree branches hang, dry
thick-skinned lemons, sun-hardened, bird-picked.
Wind gusts drift papers and grit into corners.

On a back step, a pot of scarlet
bougainvillea – the pavement gives way
to soft purple flowers of clover

their intimacy
of a naked inner wrist exposed
by a dressing-gown sleeve pushed

back from wet soapsuds in a sink:
back in alleys there's a thrumming, like heartbeats –
it thuds and blossoms and roars.

Marcelle Freiman is Associate Professor in English and Creative Writing at Macquarie University and, as past Chair of AAWP, a member of the AAWP Advisory Board. Her current research interests include: creative writing and cognition, ekphrasis, poetry and post-colonial literatures. She has published articles in TEXT and New Writing: The International Journal of Creative Writing, and contributed chapters to Creative Writing: Theory Beyond Practice (eds Brady & Krauth) and The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet (eds Cousins & Howarth). Her poetry book publications are Monkey's Wedding (1995) and White Lines (Vertical) (2010) and she has published numerous poems in literary journals including Antipodes, Southerly, Westerly, Mascara Literary Journal, Cordite and Meniscus.

TEXT

Vol 21 No 1 April 2017

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Kevin Brophy, Enza Gandolfo & Julianne van Loon

Creative Works Editor: Anthony Lawrence
text@textjournal.com.au

TEXT poetry**Edith Speers*****3 poems*****the writer as farmer**

when you work alone
you can swear at yourself
fart freely and spit where you want to
wipe your nose on your sleeve
the trees don't care
there is no etiquette
and it all comes out in the laundry

you can swear at the job to be done
and the tools you use
argue with wood and wire
steel and dirt
maybe the mosquitoes that mob you
the bracken fern and grass in a tangle
the bushes and brambles that bite

and none of it matters really
it's an old game
the sparring of good mates
both of them stubborn and willful
wanting their own way
taking the piss out of each other
and never conceding defeat

all the work of farm and garden
of carpentry and shed repairs
all the long hours of fencing
up along the stony barren ridge
or down in the willows by the creek
the digging and pulling and mulching
of weeds that won't go away

the come and go of the seasons
the ins and outs of a day
the back and forth with buckets
and hammer and pliers and rakes
among bull-ants that hang on with pincers
or fantails that flutter and dance
or flies that swarm round your face

with blockbuster and chainsaw and axe
with a hip-load of cheap wooden droppers
and a couple of expensive steel stakes
with or without those worn-out gloves

and occasional glances for snakes
with whatever it takes
to finally get there and do it

to walk there and do it alone
in hot sun so the sweat stings your eyes
or in rain that soaks to the bone
and while hands and muscles are busy
doing what has to be done
your thoughts fly the coop like raptors
and roam the world before they come home

the cage door is finally opened
the tasseled jesses are loosened
and the falcons and hawks and owls
of your locked-up mind are released
and up they go past the clouds in the sky
to soar and to hunt through the blue
and bring back their stories to you

R.I.P. Grammar

goodbye to good grammar
you are dead and gone forever
and most likely will never be missed

likewise the whole world has kissed
proper punctuation goodbye –
the commas are breeding like flies

yet speech marks are almost extinct
because modern writers think
they're too messy and break up the flow

of their aerodynamic prose;
while adverbs are pruned like shoots
back to their adjective roots

so we spread our butter thick instead of thickly
and athletes run quick instead of quickly
and play fair, we hope, but not fairly

yes, the '-ly' ending is heard very rarely
which shows how the murder of grammar is stealthy
because if you say food is healthy,

rather than healthful or wholesome, it seems
everyone still knows what you mean
and since, surely, the point is to be comprehensible

it all seems quite sensible
to use, say, the oxford comma
which reduces confusion and trauma

and there's no need to furiously throw a fit
when infinitives get split
or a preposition is what a sentence ends in

– after all, we’re speaking english not latin –
so maybe one day i won’t wince
as our beloved language is ground into mince

and flushed down the sewer
when i’m told that less people – instead of fewer –
even know what i’m talking about

let’s face it, it’s a rout –
if you understand me, you are in a minority
with only a sense of superiority

to compensate for teeth-grinding chagrin
as grammar gets chucked in the bin
so if your war cry is ‘Never to who – it’s to whom!’

then before it’s engraved on your tomb
treasure each sentence you parse
because no one else gives a rat’s arse

too sacred

talking about humour and satire
in the high school writing class and
one girl says

some people make fun of god and
there are all kinds of sick jokes
about war and famine

so i guess you can make fun of anything
so i guess nothing
is too sacred

anzac day
says a boy and they all nod in agreement
anzac day

Edith Speers emigrated to Australia from Canada after completing a BSc (Hons) in biochemistry. Her writing has won many literary awards; her poetry has been printed in major Australian literary magazines, many anthologies, and several Canadian and American journals. She is the author of two published collections of poetry and others awaiting publication. As proprietor of Esperance Press she published other Tasmanian writers, then completed a BEd in order to teach in her local rural school.

TEXT

Vol 21 No 1 April 2017

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Kevin Brophy, Enza Gandolfo & Julienne van Loon
Creative Works Editor: Anthony Lawrence
text@textjournal.com.au

TEXT prose

Tara East

Haunted

Daff's Saturday morning changed with one phone call. She'd reserved these precious hours for the nutting out of Liam's complex narrative. By accepting the unexpected call, that freedom vanished instantly.

Lyn had rung in sick, again, and Nancy was doing the ring-around to see who else could cover the shift. 'You don't need to lead any services today, but I need someone to do the preparation for tomorrow's *presentations*.'

Nancy didn't usually speak so tactfully; guests must be gathering in the foyer already. Daff agreed and an hour later she pushed open the swinging doors of the morgue. Though she felt a tinge of regret for her lost hours of solitude, she knew that not all writing took place before pen and page or keyboard and screen. Truthfully, her best ideas came when she was out participating in life's ordinary routines. In fact, the premise for her current crime novel started after discovering a watch amongst the sand at Golden Beach. She didn't know the owner, obviously, and yet their identity was shaped into the mould of the red silicon band and scratched glass face.

With no other staff members on shift, Daff would have the place to herself. She could feel the watch's light weight inside the pocket of her scrubs; a slight reassuring pressure that said, 'You're not entirely alone'. *At least I'll be able to speak to Liam freely; he can finally show me who he really is.* The last thing Daff wanted was for her colleagues to think she had an invisible friend. Though one could argue that's precisely what he was.

'So, this is your office?' Liam walked the circumference of the room. He was tall, but aren't most male protagonists? His hair was shaggy, the tips brushing against his wide shoulders – another typical feature. She watched as he stopped before a steel wall. The metal ran from floor to ceiling, segregated by two rows, each containing five small doors.

Daff stepped forward and gripped the chrome handle on the bottom left door. 'It's a cold chamber. If you were wondering.' She pulled out the body tray and checked the deceased's wrist band: *Jake Riley*. The name matched the death certificate in her file.

Liam leaned over the young man as though he were only asleep. 'Never trust a man with two first names.'

'Traditionally speaking, Riley *is* a last name. Now, stop distracting me.' Daff waved him away, though she was secretly pleased by his outgoing nature. Extroverted characters were so much easier to work with; they'd usually show up on the page fully formed. Returning to her file, she searched the paperwork for an age: Twenty-one.

There was a deep gash on his forehead and bruising around the neck. The cut would require adhesive, but the bruising could be hidden with cosmetics and a high collar. The cause of death was listed as a motorcycle accident. He looked like the type too. His shaved head gave the sharp angles of his face a mean quality. Rough tattoos dotted his arms, chest and stomach. Spider webs were etched into each elbow, a hula girl danced over his heart and a blotchy Southern Cross covered the back of his right hand. There were swallows, a reaper, a pirate ship and an anchor. The strangest, though, was a simple circle on the top of his arm, slashed by a slanted line.

‘And I thought you were chatty at home.’

Daff looked up and realised she’d been staring. She coughed dryly and connected the tray to its wheeled counterpart and rolled Jake over to the work area. ‘I didn’t have to bring the watch with me, you know.’ That was a lie and they both knew it. Looking closer, she could see that Liam had the same peculiar tattoo, its gentle curve peeping beneath the sleeve of his tee. Could that symbol be a gang sign? Clearly, Jake was into motorcycles. Maybe Liam could be the member of an outlaw bikie club. It was certainly a timely topic.

She unravelled the hose and turned the tap. The water ran over the steel table in ripples, reminding Daff of the creek she had played in as a child, only this water was clean and cool instead of thick and muddy. One hot day, her old man came home early and suggested that they go for a swim. Jon Lawrence wasn’t a playful man. For him, police work had always come first. On nights when he did come home early, he would shower, eat dinner and collapse on the couch. But that day at the junction had been different; he was different. He’d laughed. He’d swum. He’d been there. Daff shook her head. She hadn’t thought about her father or the river in years.

Liam waved a hand in front of Daff’s face. ‘Careful love, I think you’re in danger of drooling.’

‘What?’ Daff patted her face and realised she’d been staring, again.

‘Now that you’ve finished checking out this stiff, how’s about we flesh out some kind of a backstory?’

She could have corrected him, but that would only lead to more questions and she didn’t feel like talking about Jon. Though he hadn’t been the greatest of fathers, he was a valuable resource in terms of research. The biggest obstacle in crime writing was getting the police procedural stuff right. ‘Trust me, I’ve hardly forgotten about you.’ Daff shut off the valve, grabbed a towel and started to pat down the body, wishing Liam could give her a hand. ‘I’ve three days off, starting tomorrow. That will give me some time to work out who you are and how you died.’

The file lay open, displaying a photograph of a younger Jake, pre-tattoos. He looked about fifteen, his cheeks were flushed and face damp from perspiration. He wore a blue cap backwards. Daff wondered what sport he’d been playing that day as she pulled out the dyes needed to recreate his colouring. His cheeks had sunk and hands withered too; both would need plumping up. *Humectant will help with that.* She opened a drawer and drew out the syringe needed for the restorative fluid.

‘Why do I have to be dead?’ Liam stood back, crossing his arms over his chest.

Daff's mental work plan vanished in an instant. 'Because that's what will make this novel different, innovative! We've talked about this, remember? Your spirit will be attached to the watch that is discovered by the embalmer, Nora, while she is walking along the beach. You'll have no memory of your former life and Nora will be compelled to uncover your identity and solve your murder. It's called *supernatural suspense*.'

'I thought you were writing a crime novel?'

'It's an offshoot of the genre.'

'You think that will sell?'

She shrugged. The plot was still a work in progress, but between the best friend's theory of 'unfinished business', the psychic insightful reading, and Liam's apparent amnesia, Daff thought the manuscript was shaping up nicely.

It made sense that Liam was a homicide victim. After all, if he'd died peacefully, surrounded by family and friends, then why had he shown up in chapter two with no memory of his former life? Funerals are for the living, but they must serve some purpose to the dead. If Liam's body received proper preparation and burial, then why was he haunting the watch? In chapter seven, the psychic claimed there was a connection between Liam's death and a sharp chest pain. Sure, he could have had a heart attack in a remote location, his body never found, but there was nothing interesting about that. If his body were discovered (even without a wallet) it wouldn't take long for coroners to ID the body, so that was a major plot killer. Nora stepped on the watch while walking along Golden Beach, a highly populated slim strip of sand with little vegetation. Liam could have drowned there, but it's unlikely. The Pumicestone Passage that carved the eastern boundary of Golden Beach was a calm flat channel, the currents of the coming or receding tide barely caused a ripple to the water weeds. There was no alternative for Liam. Murder was the only logical explanation.

Liam stepped forward, breaking Daff from her reverie. 'Will Nora find out who I am? Will there be peace for me ... in the end?'

'Someone will know who you are. She'll just need to find them.'

Tara East has completed a Bachelor of Journalism (JCU), a Graduate Certificate in Editing and Publishing (USQ) and a Masters of Professional Practice Creative Writing (USC). Her non-fiction work has appeared in The Townsville Bulletin, The North West Star and ABC local.

TEXT

Vol 21 No 1 April 2017

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Kevin Brophy, Enza Gandolfo & Julianne van Loon

Creative works editor: Anthony Lawrence
text@textjournal.com.au

TEXT prose**Ronnie Scott*****My brother's map***

The dissemination of my brother's will had largely been a bust. Other than bequeathing his record collection to 'all dudes globally' and a light-up sign above his bed that said 'no fat chicks!' to our mother, the only unambiguous thing was that the job of cleaning out his apartment fell to me. I was bent over a final 'file box', which was turning out to be a set of cardboard beer coasters he'd leavened from bars, when my wife eased up from my brother's floor and slapped me on the back.

'I'd stay longer,' my wife said, 'but the thing seems to need some cookie dough.'

'Don't call your mouth "the thing",' I said. 'It's a lot more than that to me.'

Now we knew it was a boy inside her, my wife's job had been to sit there and call out stupid baby names while I dumped my brother's life into garbage bags and tied them off. 'Rover' was her top pick: like a trusty, sturdy dog. And now that she had gone I really wished that she had not. With my novel going under, and my brother having gone, my wife was the only thing that made me feel like me at all.

Near the bottom of this box, there was a worn-looking paper which turned out to be nothing but a tourist map of our city, one of those too-glossy, unwieldy-looking things they give out at the information centre for free. And the only thing that made me look at it as long as I did was that my brother had lived here in this city all his life. It was not that he had settled, but more that I couldn't even imagine him organising an itinerary into his hand. There was my street, I saw, and the ten blocks between us, and I thought of how often he had ordered my wife and I unasked-for pizzas right on closing time. I was lucky I had found a wife who had a stupid sense of humour. Just weeks ago, we'd come home one night to ten plastic lawn chairs stacked against our door, which I had made my wife step away from and allow me to unstack. But it had been her, six months pregnant, who'd carried our broom all the way to his door; rung the doorbell; then witnessed the half-awake bleached-blond girl open the door instead of my brother. The broom had fallen violently and quickly against her brow. My wife filled a tea towel up with ice cubes and held it on the girl's broomed dome. Then she'd giggled from my brother's house, all the way to ours, where she'd woken me and given me a detailed run-down.

I'd been so sure that the event had been loaded with resonance; it seemed like perfect polish, to rub into the scuff of my book. But in the morning, the story was just a broom, a girl and a brief encounter between two strangers,

opening a door. It was exactly the kind of encounter people were having all over the world, all the time, united by chance, then divided by life. Depressingly, it was also a sign of my own life's stuckness I had found it so briefly frazzling at all.

I moved my finger along the tacky map, tracing the ten blocks from his apartment home to mine. I pictured my brother sneaking, then my wife sneaking, down that line: purposeful paths, carved by prankster people, alive.

That was how I noticed my brother had dashed a rhomboid of highlighter ink just off the road, in a little cul-de-sac between our two apartments. I could not picture my brother holding a pen of any kind; he'd thought my own aspirations were somewhere between fanciful and fancy; he had perhaps expressed bemused admiration, once or twice.

But when I scanned the map concentrically, I saw there were other marks, other wedges of ink clustered closer to this address. The entire map, in fact, was studded with markings. They got scarcer, the farther into the suburbs you walked.

I felt a little sick when I was looking at the dashes. Not because they were weird, exactly, but because *I* was being weird. Most of my brother's things had seemed to be things, unimbued, but everyone has their special somethings that they do choose to keep private, and I had feared – I will admit – that eventually I would see one.

I had felt ashamed of my own special somethings before I wound up, finally, in a good relationship, which is when I learned, pretty late in the game for pretty much a happy person, that winding up with somebody isn't about eliminating your special somethings, and leaving a kind of spotless Siamese union in their place. It's about allowing for the spaces between you to live and lie. Sometimes I like to make animal noises when I'm writing, which is why I always put on music and lock the study door. My wife must have a different special something, because there is no room in our house she seems to ever lock at all. But somewhere, I know, she has a keep, a sealed-off space – somewhere to which no map will ever lead me.

I poured a glass of water, and went to rinse the glass. Then, of course, I realised the uselessness of the behaviour, threw this last glass into a garbage bag and tied it off.

There was nothing in my brother's apartment anymore. So I closed the thin door to the apartment behind me, depressing the lock for the last time with my thumb. I slid my brother's keys under my landlord's door, with a note, expressing luck in finding another tenant, because he had seemed as unprepared for my brother's death as anyone.

Walking home, I was intending to spend my time formulating stories for my novel; I tried to make myself receptive to sights and sounds and bugs. Each morning, my wife left for work and wished me luck with the novel, with the same kind of formality I'd used for my brother's landlord; she was unprepared

for the possibility that I might fail. But the truth was, more and more often, I was thinking less and less about the crystalline vision of what my novel might become. I was churning out text, but it wasn't purposeful. Sights and sounds and bugs and things was more or less what it was. On a good day. More often, the text was nothing more than an expulsion, a way to cycle through the sentences; people performed inscrutable actions for no cause. My days, to my horror, were starting to mirror the sentences. I was moving through line after line while the planet rotated, and bedtime, like a full stop, was the natural result.

I wish I could tell you that the vision of my book was being slowly superseded by the imminent child. But this was a destination I could picture even less; it was, instead, an accretion of facts – scans, classes, images, and instructional books – the sum of which were situated firmly somewhere else.

I knew there was an outcome, and that it would be a child; and that this child, this Rover, would define my life forever on. But I was living in a prior life, circulating and recirculating; a kind of backwards movement that felt much like going forwards. My wife and I had met when she'd taken me home from a nightclub, and for various reasons, I had never really left. And the rest is a long story devoted equally to things like mortgage applications and also semi-seriously trying to pee on each other while we were walking home from somewhere drunk. In fact, she had initially had trouble disguising her pregnancy because people noticed how she wasn't drinking, and we would shinningly say that she was detoxing 'for her health'. Sometimes I can't even wait to see my wife when I get home, and I have to text her not very long before I walk in the door. And then the thought that my poor brother is dead in heaven, never had a wife and doesn't have a baby to be born.

I said before that I'd been worried, when searching my brother's apartment, that I'd find something secret, something that belonged just to him. But really, I was worried about the opposite idea: that there would be nothing of my brother in the living space at all, nothing beyond my idea of who he was, and how he'd lived. It was one thing to have found myself in a newly purposeless life, running through page after page in my calendar like a guilty secretary with a document shredder. It was another to imagine my brother having done the same thing – he was a purposeful prankster. He had to have a secret thing.

So in the last light of a cross-street, I unfolded his strange map, and followed the rhomboid of highlighter ink down the little cul-de-sac, an unremarkable byway in the ten blocks that ran between my brother's apartment and home to mine.

There's no easy way to say this about the recently deceased, but my brother had not been an enterprising man. Many things happen when you grow up side-by-side, and the hardest to account for is also the largest of them – the gradual definition of your two differing roles, perhaps established in opposition to each other, perhaps as an accompaniment, or a counterpoint. Or perhaps they just look that way, because of proximity bias – are we different from each other thanks to a dialogue of call and response, or are we simply different people who happen to live nearby?

Either way, it was established, incrementally, piece by piece, that I would spend my life pursuing goals, moving towards the future, and my brother

would be comfortable letting life happen to him. In some ways, you could say that he didn't have a wife or child because he had died a couple weeks ago, so his options were now closed. In other ways, these facts were established even in our childhood: his journey was, in certain fashions, over long ago.

All of which is to say that I was feeling lots of trepidation. The house that corresponded to the mark on my brother's map was an unremarkable terrace, with empty lots on either side. There was a big soily pot parked in ceramic out the front, and the porch light lit the wan rope of a dead basil plant. None of this was surprising; all of it disturbed. Anyone who floats through life, however good-naturedly, finds themselves arriving at this kind of unremarkable house; some of the places my brother landed were squalid, or just odd. Finding my brother's map was not like finding a map to a treasure island. It was more likely to be a map that would lead you to accidental places, places whose use-value would be dubious, or worse.

The woman who responded to my knocking – three times, fast – took me in with one frank gaze. 'I know who *you* look like,' she said.

And I knew who she looked like, too. She looked like the blonde girl who had caught my brother's broom; she looked like the girl my brother had dragged to our grandma's funeral, who wore sunglasses on a grey day and whom we'd never seen again. She was just his type, in other words: a perfectly nice girl, who seemed nice and well and generous as anyone else in the world. Any one of these people would've been good in the long term, but my wife and I had long since stopped letting our hopes fly. My brother wasn't exactly a gross promiscuous guy. He was just unable, or uninterested, to pick a goal and see it through.

'There's no easy way to say this,' I began.

The woman frowned. 'It was probably a lot harder for you to hear,' she said.

The feature of her lounge room was a cold picture window, which let you look at the backs of fences on the street behind hers. I sat down at the table beneath this picture window, and she set a kettle to the boil before joining me.

'Now, here, how are you doing?' she said.

I didn't know what to say. 'I'm excited for the future,' I blurted. But this was not the case, and I came up quickly with a considered-seeming phrase: 'I'm not sure what the world will be without my brother in it.' This was a good, ambiguous answer for a person whose position, re: my brother, was mysterious to me.

'Well,' she said, and took a deep breath, and blew. 'Speaking as a person whose world has almost *never* had your brother in it, it's really just a nice slice of fine life either way. I'm glad he had a brother. I have a really crappy brother.'

And so she started telling me about her brother, too. It was a long, boring story, full of minor details that mainly seemed to turn on matters of comportment and long-term familial debt. I realised, as she told me this, that she was being kind; she was pouring events onto me, people, places, and things, which was soothing – in fact, it almost convinced me that nothing in the

world needed to be meaningful – it just had to occur. It made me worry less about my novel, which did not have to be good; and it made me worry less about my parenting abilities, which would only be discovered when they were put to the test.

And it made me worry less about my brother's tax receipts, and about another thing that didn't matter anymore: I hadn't known, I had admitted to my wife late one evening, what my brother's relationship to our baby would be. I had hoped he would become a cool, good-vibey uncle – who blew in on the breeze and dispensed groovy wisdom, the last among us to be young. But I'd feared he would remain young in the ways that keep an uncle distant, and by extension, keep their brothers moving down diverging paths. I knew we couldn't live ten blocks away from each other forever, and that there is more than one way to live ten blocks apart.

I wanted to throw myself forward into the future, and discover what I would tell my son about this guy. Then I realised – to my own surprise – I could say anything I wanted. The nature of my brother's story was unambiguously mine.

But I hadn't been listening. 'And that is why my family still *has* a Christmas, but doesn't *call* it Christmas,' she said.

'That's amazing,' I said.

She looked up sharply.

'Terrible,' I said, and put my hands down on the table. My thick wedding ring clicked on it, and she noticed.

'I should pour us some tea,' she said.

'I'm okay, actually.' She looked briefly perturbed, but was trying to repress it; she was a sympathetic person who didn't like to waste tea. 'You can just have some yourself later,' I offered. She gave me a withering smile.

'Now look,' I said. 'I don't know if you're wondering how I found your house.' I searched her eyes carefully, to see if this question was hurtful; perhaps she was a person whom I was meant to know. But she regarded the map with interest as I tugged it out of my pocket. She was more perturbed by my refusal of the tea. 'I found this at my brother's,' I said. I unfolded it on the table. 'And here is his apartment...'

She moved close. '... And here is me,' she said.

She shrugged, looked at me flatly. There were no answers here. But she moved her gaze back down and scanned it over the whole broad city, because I didn't need answers; and neither did she. The map was just a map of women my brother had dated; it didn't need to be anything. It was enough to record. But I was moved – nearly floored, though I was sitting at a table – by the fact that he had kept this one, stupid, secret, private thing. He hadn't been enterprising, or creative, or ambitious, or messed up. He hadn't been an uncertain person, but here this map was – just a brief, dull record of where he'd been and whom he'd known; probably none of them meaningful, but was that such a crime? His whole short life, my brother had never pursued anything, or anyone. But you can't stay still in life, either; movement isn't optional. And I got grand dreams, scanning the map, while the kettle screamed on the stove. Instead of my novel, instead of my wife, instead, even, of the child, I would spend my life tracing this map of my brother's, notifying people of his passing

who didn't need to know. I would follow his completed path, instead of finding my own. I would stay stuck here, forever, in a beautiful closed loop, while steam spread around my head and occluded my view – a view I no longer needed, because here I was, I was done, and had no need to face a future of my own.

I raced the last few blocks to my house and slammed the door when I got home.

'Hello?' I called.

'Yes, sure, hi,' my wife said, then fell back on the pillow. I dropped my house keys and the map and ripped off all my clothes, scrunching in under the covers like a scared, excited child. 'Hello,' I repeated. But she only snored. So I lay my arm on her belly. And who knows what bellies hold? In these places elephants are born, in these places scorpions are born, here dog-headed beings are born.

Dr Ronnie Scott is the author of Salad Days (Penguin 2014), an essay on food and money, and founder of The Lifted Brow, a literary magazine. His essays and journalism have appeared in The Monthly, The Believer, the Saturday Paper, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Australian, the Weekend Australian Magazine, SBS and ABC Radio National. He is the recipient of Fellowships from the MacDowell Colony and the Wheeler Centre. He teaches Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne and RMIT. His website is www.ronaldscott.com

Research statement

Research background

This creative work contributes to a body of writing and research that seeks to elevate space in narrative to the level of time. If '[e]verything suggests ... that the mainspring of narrative is precisely the confusion of consecution and consequence, what comes *after* being read in narrative as what is *caused by*' (Barthes 1977: 44), then narrative depends on events being arranged in sequence, rather than a series or a set. But this arrangement poses challenges to narratives that seek to explore modes of time which have already been completed, and thereby 'reduce[d] to modes of spatiality' (Grosz 2001: 140). The act of tracing a narrative turns that narrative into a contested site, with a temporal (sequential) process disturbing a spatialised route.

Research contribution

According to Ryan, spatial information in a narrative can be organised as the map and the tour, or the survey and the route (2009). The map, or survey, is 'pure vision', dividing space into segments and covering them systematically. By contrast, the tour strategy 'simulates the embodied experience of a traveller', 'represent[ing] space dynamically from a mobile point of view'. Certain stories 'about' space might divulge this information according to a logical system, or alternately, employ a reader substitute, a character who is discovering. In this story, a tour strategy (temporalised, towards the future from the past) is made to disturb the map – logical, spatialised, durational, complete. The meaning of the spatialised narrative, the map, is withheld from the reader; the narrator must trace a pre-determined route to both discover existing meaning and arrive at new meaning. The spatialised map, already experienced, is reactivated as a space (de Certeau, 1984), becoming a contested site; it offers a possibility of narrative completion (a record, and a death) while also pushing the protagonist forward through the present. When the meaning of the map is disclosed, this occurs at the same time as the

protagonist's tour is spatialised (finished, revealed). The protagonist understands the meaning of the pre-existing narrative at the same time as he reaches the conclusion of his own.

Research significance

'My brother's map' tests the relationship between discovery and creation – in employing a map, a completed, spatialised narrative, the protagonist is at once tracing a pre-determined route, assigning it new meaning, recovering from the recent past, anticipating the future, and moving linearly through the narrative's present. It builds on a series of scholarly works as a creative academic, including a doctoral thesis 'Another World: an argument for the primacy of space' (The University of Melbourne, conferred 2014), 'Slowness in Comics' (paper presented at Inkers & Thinkers Symposium, The University of Adelaide, May 2015), and 'Materiality and Narrative' (paper presented at Voyages International Conference, The University of London Institute in Paris, June 2015).

Works cited

Barthes, R 1977 *Image-Music-Text*, Hill and Wang, New York
de Certeau, M 1984 *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans S Rendall, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles
Grosz, E 2001 *Architecture from the Outside*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London
Ryan, M-L 2009 'Space and Narrative': <http://users.frii.com/mlryan/spaceentry.htm> (accessed 3 November 2015)

TEXT

Vol 21 No 1 April 2017

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Kevin Brophy, Enza Gandolfo & Julienne van Loon

Creative works editor: Anthony Lawrence
text@textjournal.com.au

TEXT prose**Rhys Stalba-Smith****The humble tool**

‘This is remarkable! Look at it all! Incredible ... what did you say this was again?’ William asked, taking off the goggles.

‘Virtual Reality, Shakespeare. Uh, I mean, William.’

William waved his hand and returned the goggles to his face. Max watched the man in front of him in awe. Literature that had lasted thousands of years, characters that captured the human condition so superbly, so incredibly accurate, and yet here he was impressed by simple VR equipment.

‘You know, I always thought the nose bleeds were the best seat in the house at the Globe. You got to see the entire stage ... and yet, I can’t help but love it down here in the front! The pauper’s seat! Fantastic.’

Max moved to the window of his apartment as William babbled on. His lesson prep was not going to plan. The William Shakespeare he’d been given by the Department of Education was stuck in the ‘awe’ stage of his accelerated living.

‘When I was a lad, Max, we just read books. None of this cloning stuff.’

Max snapped back to the room, William was standing next to him by the window.

‘I was a man so in love with his own imagination, yet, for all the pieces that I wrote, ideas I loved, I never would have imagined this.’ William gestured at the city.

It was the year 3085, almost *fifteen hundred* years since the Bard had lived. Cloning technology had become the rage during the mid-2000s, which meant the answers people wanted could be fulfilled. Meanings, themes, ideas, all proven because the *real* Shakespeare *was* there.

Shakespeare, while still revered, was alongside many other great philosophers now teaching their own works in school. A teacher undertaking the Shakespeare unit registered with the Department of Education, applied for rent assistance, and picked up the man and carer’s box on the set date. There was a day or two of transition from tube to talkative person, but most kinks were settled before anything bad happened.

‘While one’s *genes* are manipulated before he has a chance to meet them,’ William said, ‘it is still baffling standing here. I know I’m going through the “motions” – I’m not crazy, Max. You can take that look off your face. I’m just saying, this *is* surreal.’

Max looked on at the passing hover cars, towering skyscrapers, and endless grey of city life. 'I think I understand what you mean,' he said to the cityscape. 'I'm not sure whether I find this whole business overwhelming, or if it is my newness to being a teacher ... with you.'

Shakespeare smiled. 'Well, it's to be expected, my dear boy! You're interacting with a man almost 1500 years your senior! Hah! Indeed though, had I met Pluto, Aristotle, Thaetus, or Cleopatra herself, I would be confounded. But no, books, our memory, and our imagination; I felt as if I knew them sometimes, as if I knew their personality through the pages. I must insist to you though, I am not *him*.' William moved back to the couch. 'As much as imagination and faith might entail, I am not him... Of course, we *knew* what was around us too,' he said before Max could reply. 'We looked within and found the answers. If not from boredom, then interest! If one is going to look, Max, then *look*, dammit! Stop thinking! If one is going to think, then stop looking; start feeling. It is easy to find the answers one seeks when looking with their eyes and not their mind. Is it not the eyes that tell us we are hungry?' William laughed.

'But didn't you ever feel – '

'Overwhelmed? Like people were *putting* words in my mouth? All the time! We had the King breathing down our necks! The Black Plague at our door! Of course the clouds descend, but it's one's sense of duty that keeps them sane. What he *does* with himself. And *you* have a duty too. This lesson plan – what would you like to know?'

Finally! Max thought. He made his way to the table and looked for the curriculum.

'Well, the first week or two will be covering your major plays, characters, and themes. Then we'll move into – '

'What about my co-wrights? Thom was always a good chap. Great with finishing things off.'

'Well ... yes. Then we move into theories about your writing, who else you worked with – '

'You know I invented the word elbow? I despised the word we used before. Phaw! I won't even say it now, but let me tell you, it fixed a lot of plays back in the day.'

Max continued. 'By the end of the course we want the class to feel as if they know you... Or, at least pass the final exam.'

'And *who am I*, Max?'

Max paused. It was true; the younger clones of Shakespeare were better, more stable, more suggestible – more expensive. But overall, they were a whole lot more compatible. The older Shakespeares were known to be quite philosophical and probing, of not only their self, but their new *masters*.

'I will answer and help you wherever possible, Max, but do ask yourself that question too. All this work to *reincarnate* me, to educate me, and thrust such monstrous questions upon me, yet I get the sense you don't *know* yourself. Where do you think I got most of my characters from?'

'Well, Michaelson of 2074 supposed – '

‘No, no, no, not Michaelson of 2074! Or any other *Shakespearian*! You! Where do *you* think I got my inspiration?’

‘I’m, I’m not too sure. If I’m completely honest.’

‘Good!’ William said. ‘Great, even! An honest man that doesn’t know a thing! Few and far between you find a man concerned with truth and not ego. I loved finding the truth! Beautiful, as horrendous as it was. Maybe it *had* begun in my time, if it did I wasn’t paying attention, but if it did ... if this *need* to know things began then, then it has only gotten worse over time. James had to know things actually, sorry *King* James. It always annoyed me. The buffoon asked any and everything about my plays! “Who was such and such? Why did she have to become a he? Why do I feel these things, William? How do I love like you?” Phah! All redundant questions – he just wanted to be lazy.’

William pulled at the collar around his neck, loosening its grip. ‘But see that’s the answer, no one wants to look! Not anymore. I merely gazed at the pond, saw the surface, *and* the depths below! But it’s as if people look at the pond and ask what to see! And then, you create me as puppet evidence!’

William crashed down onto the couch. This must be the unpredictability he was informed about, Max thought.

‘And stop thinking I’m crazy!’ William said.

Max tried and failed to hide his surprise. ‘Look, I understand how crazy this all seems – ’

‘Do you? Do you really, Max? To be, or not to be awoken *fifteen hundred* years later against my will, was not what I had in mind!’

William stood up with his hands akimbo glaring at Max.

‘Tell me, Max, what are *you* doing to be awoken in fifteen hundred years? What great *thing* are you achieving to cement your name in destiny as a *somebody*? I challenged how one truly lives, or does not ... and *this*,’ William said gesturing at himself, ‘makes that redundant. What if I’d rather be some *one* else?’

‘Uh, well, I haven’t really thought about it. I’m just trying to teach and – ’

‘Get by? Me too. Surely you understand my fascination then? Surely my *surprise*, and *intensity* over this situation is not too “odd”?’

‘Sure, I understand,’ Max admitted. ‘I just – ’

‘The oddity that exists *here*, is that I can be reincarnated millennia after my death! Re-educated before my “birth”, dressed as a clown...’ he tugged at his Jacobian clothing again, ‘...and paraded like a show pony. You’ve spent so long wondering what I meant and what I wrote in my works, that *this* is just a charade to back up your agenda. I see none of you have become your own *Shakespeares* by the way.’

Max felt like a child being told off by a parent. ‘Look, I’m just a high school teacher. I chose to do Shakespeare 101 for my class. I didn’t realise how much it affected you clones. I apologise,’ Max said.

William sighed.

‘Oh fie, Max. The human condition, ey? Or should I say clone condition? The burdens of being torn between Heaven and Hell. Cannot a man exist in a realm between? Cannot a man live in Limbo? Not worrying about such trivialities as this? But then, when would life be exciting! It’s funny isn’t it, pining over boredom. This is how it happens by the way. We’re so aroused by the future and the past – yet longing for the present in life’s adventure – that when we’re there, we don’t even notice. An achievement either feels easy or too hard! You’re in awe of my abilities, but for me it was a daily thing. Anyone that spends enough time in their trench will learn its tricks and shadows. But I am in awe of you! This world! Never could I picture such things.’

William picked up a pencil from the table. ‘Even this. The humble tool. Has one instrument ever told the truth of one’s character so well? To be a master of stonework, a warrior of steel, or a humble farmer, and cower at such a monstrosity? You could conquer scores of scriptures, command throngs of people, communicate with the higher power, and appear *bound* by such a tool. Your life recorded and never read again, or your words nothing more than an exhaled breath... Don’t forget that what is heroic to some, may be commonplace for others.’

William stood up and walked over to the fridge. ‘And this! What an invention!’

Max sat staring at his paperwork. He could feel this semester becoming heavier and *emotionally* heavier; if this is what each evening entailed.

‘You wonder how I wrote all those plays, don’t you? Not just you alone Max, but all of you – *society*. Conversation. This. Adaption. Standing around. I imagined a lot of those things in a small room, nothing grandiose. I held conversations with older, younger, exotic, more susceptible, better, pathetic, selfs. I am a man, just like you. But, rather than dwell on the pressures of expectation, I enjoyed the ride. Wrote down what I saw, what intrigued me, what puzzled me. I truly was just a note-taker of mankind. I didn’t tell people who or what to be, nor who they were. I told them *what* we were. What we are. And we are humans – thinking, feeling, laughing, and crying, humans. We are capable of so much, Max, yet tripped up by such small pebbles... We wish to be told of our lessons, not to uncover and experience them.’

William sat down across the table from Max, and poured a glass of milk for both of them.

‘I will answer your questions, Max, but be warned, you said you wanted to *know* me by the end of this course.’ William began to smile. ‘You’ll definitely know *something*.’

Rhys Stalba-Smith is currently finishing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing and Communication, with a sub major in Editing and Publishing, at the University of South Australia.

TEXT

Vol 21 No 1 April 2017

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Kevin Brophy, Enza Gandolfo & Julieanne van Loon

Creative works editor: Anthony Lawrence

text@textjournal.com.au

TEXT prose**Peter Nash*****You get what you dress for***

Roy was blocked. Crumpled bulbs of paper lay on the floor under the bath like giant confetti left over from a monster wedding. He had tried everything. Epiphanies on index cards, scribble scratched into serviettes, he even strung a string across his finger tied tightly to a Staedtler 3B pencil...

He woke, showered and pulled on a sharp starched shirt with double smile pockets then tucked it firmly into fresh pressed Wranglers. He eased, literally (wrote down 'Not sure about literally'), into a pair of his favourite 'Screwed Stewed and Tattooed' brand Alligator-hide high-top cowboy boots.

He perched (wrote 'sat better?') in a chrome-plated cream pleated chair that only last week he had rescued from the road. He pulled open a drawer, reached ('Change reached') and preferred ('preferred weird?') a turquoise fountain pen with a gold and black nib. He scribbled frantically for a handful of time then replaced the pen, closed the desk, undressed and stretched on the sheets...

The next day Roy wrote recklessly fast free-wheeling the gold and black nib at high speed along the thin blue line. At 3:47am the words completely vanished. At 3:48am he mixed 'Southern Comfort' with a sweet old tune and got all hung up on a line that advised a person to,

'Always tip your hat to a lady.'

Roy guessed he finally understood.

That was the only story of Roy's last five attempts to survive. Some were ruthlessly murdered during infancy, others aborted while incubating, and some only lasted long enough to suck their first tooth.

Try again.

'Ya fall off the dadgummed horse, ya git right back on the sumbitch.'

That's what 'Rattlesnake Carl' out at the 'Flying-Double-B-Bar-J' ranch had said to him one time.

Change the voice, Roy. You dumb shit. He wrote that down in upper case letters and then completely crossed the letters out in big bold x-strokes of the Staedtler 3B.

The Blue Flames. A Story by Rory Rickenbacker.

I remember when it kicked off. The three of us—me, Jimmy, and Earle Ray—buzzing high on residue rhythm. Jimmy off key at first then hitting smooth like a honey dripping Humperdinck. Later lots of loose talk snap electric, like the Stones was gonna come rollin' down the driveway. Jimmy cool green Hawaiian shirt attired and Pork Pie slanted down to the left. Hard. Rakish. We had set the basement up good acoustics perfect. Installed a 1947 Kool Aire reefer to cool the libations. Jimmy caught the beer that Earle Ray slid across the table top.

'Thing is,' he said, he always began with 'Thing is', 'Thing is, we got an offer.'

And that was when the whole crazy trip started and it was never the same again.

The Blue Parrot Saloon. A dive. A joint where a person can dissolve into midnight twilight at high noon. A joint with a single TV strung below two pastel lights hung above the bar. A joint with cigarette haze. Thick. Menacing. Like when you know somebody is close on your neck in a tight alley at twilight. You could almost taste the blood. You could smell the spit. Gritty crunch of busted teeth ivory under your boots.

Charlie Dell's phone rang.

'Charlie this Charlie?'

'Yeah who the fuck's?'

'Awright. Hey Charlie it's Jack from the bar you know, the Parrot.'

'Let me guess the gigs fuckin' gigs cancelled.'

'It ain't cancelled but I gotta nother suggestion if you guys think you can make it.'

'What's up?'

'What's up is I got dis guy right came in yesterday wants a private blues da guy says, hasta be blues so I thought of you guys.'

Charlie Dell said, 'What's it payin?'

'I'll pay ya what we agreed on for the other gig an' if it's good I'll give ya Sunday night.'

Charlie was answering when the phone went dead.

There wasn't a song written that Earle Ray Luttrell
could not pull apart and re-assemble so it swung
smoother. He had the hands for it too. Big raw-
rough-hewn hands carrying long sinewy tattooed
fingers custom made to spider a guitar neck and
cradle a harmonica close like a Friday night lover.
To make that dirty velvet sound.

It ain't how you blow it it's how you make
love to it there's 10 holes and every one of them

The Blue Flames. A Story by Rory Rickenbacker survived the cut.

What you have to do now, Roy, is write a letter, critique this work.
Imagine that you are an 'Esteemed Critic' and a story entitled *The Blue Flames*
by a writer named Rory Rickenbacker has arrived on your desk. But first
Google 'How to be an esteemed critic'. Make copious and salient notes. Then
objectively read the story with a fresh pair of eyes under the presumption that
you are, indeed, an 'Esteemed Critic'.

Dear Mr Rickenbacker,

The story *The Blue Flames* certainly contains a
modicum of potential in that it is, indeed a story.
However, it lacks structural substance. For
example, why does the narrative end without
concluding the final sentence? Writing such as
that, Mr Rickenbacker, is effluvious and
malodorous. One might even refer to it as obscene.
Further the protagonist named Earle Ray Luttrell
sounds to me suspiciously like an individual that
would possibly reside in a mobile home
somewhere south of the Mason Dixon line.

A person that chews tobacco and drives a pick-up
truck. I might add (although I abhor speculation on
every level) that more than likely, that is to say, an
individual who would consume a large quantity of
beer every night and frequent ramshackle
establishments, with disparate names such as
'Billy Bob's Burgers and Beer', 'The Dew Drop
Inn', and 'Alabama Sam's Snake Pit Honey Hole.'

Mr Rickenbacker, allow me to be absolutely
crystal clear on this point. Clichéd cardboard
characters such as Earle Ray Luttrell are not only a
literary abomination, they also un-authenticate and
denigrate the more serious engaged authors. Under
the usual circumstances I would not have set aside
the time to address your story. However, it must be
your lucky day as a meeting I scheduled for this
morning has just been cancelled. A meeting, I
might add, with a brilliant young up-coming writer

who has just completed a brilliant work set in 19C England. All about a young couple who fall madly in love and then elope late one night in order to seek employment on a farm. Thus, as aforementioned, lucky old you Mr Rickenbacker, as this most unfortunate occurrence has provided me with an opportunity to put pen to paper.

(signed) Oliphant Sterling Washington III
Esteemed Critic.

Peter Nash, born 1958 in Perth, Western Australia, third year undergraduate studying creative writing and English literature at Griffith University. Passionate about American V-Twin motorcycles, custom cars, old country and western music and the 'blues'.

TEXT

Vol 21 No 1 April 2017

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Kevin Brophy, Enza Gandolfo & Julienne van Loon

**Creative works editor: Anthony Lawrence
text@textjournal.com.au**