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Reviews contents

TEXT review

The role of creative practice in the formation of knowledge

review by Craig Garrett

Shane Strange, Paul Hetherington, Jen Webb (eds)
Creative Manoeuvres: writing, making, being
Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge 2014
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Hb, 180pp, GBP41.99

Creative Manoeuvres: writing, making, being is an important recent publication theorising Australian Creative Writing (CW) practice and research approaches. Its intention is to 'move the study of creative writing towards broader issues of how knowledge is addressed by, or incorporated into, or embodied in, art' (Strange, Hetherington & Webb, back cover).

For over thirty years – Australia's first Doctor of Creative Arts was awarded in 1988 (Shepherd 1988) – the combined effort of various scholars has driven the development of a body of Australian creative writing research. The political and economic imperatives for, and outcomes of this change are well-documented [1].

As both a reflection on and an example of the study of CW, *Creative Manoeuvres* takes its place with the likes of *Explorations in Creative Writing* (Brophy 2003); *Creative Writing and the New Humanities* (Dawson 2005); *Creative Writing: Theory beyond practice* (Krauth & Brady 2006); *Creative Writing Studies: Practice, research and pedagogy* (Harper & Kroll 2008); and *Patterns of Creativity: Investigations into the sources and methods of creativity* (Brophy 2009).

Theories of Creative Writing research, from Brady's 'bowerbirds' (1998: 29) onwards, all grapple with resolving the 'informality' of the arts practitioner's creative research and the 'formality' of the academic context. Historically almost all regulations governing academic research are tailored to orthodox forms of scientific-rationalist inquiry (Marshall & Newton 2000: 2). Where one paradigm commands power and influence, its 'ideological position of dominance' gives that methodology the authority to define future research (Lefebvre cited in Smith 2012: 50-51). More recently, sophisticated self-reflection including the likes

found in *Creative Manoeuvres*, has led creative writing scholars beyond only using orthodox methods of research, in search of theories, practices and axiologies that better suit their concerns. Creative Writing is interdisciplinary, taking on approaches from cultural studies, traditions of art practice, genre studies, sociology, psychology or ethnography – to name a few. Yet creative writing scholars also do research when 'chatting' in informal contexts, when they contemplate and reflect on snippets of information, peruse websites, and find intriguing books.

Creative Manoeuvres is not the type of book to read cover to cover. In Shane Strange's introduction, he says of the first chapter: 'How can seemingly unrelated but resonant texts work together … into making something at once engaged and personal, but aligned with an apparently amorphous "tradition"?' (Strange, Hetherington & Webb 2014: 2). The same can be said of *Creative Manoeuvres*. Each chapter covers a vast territory, and while some chapters converge, others don't. Its disparate set of essays encompass various aspects of Creative Writing practice, research and pedagogy, and form complex, covert and interactive relationships with each other and with the reader. The overall argument presented – via examples and representations of both critical analysis and creative practice – gives rise to an inquiry into what it means to create a written object, and sketches the role creative practice plays in the formation of knowledge. It calls for a 'deeper understanding of CW's historical context and its future possibilities' (Mitchell 2006: 4); adds to the discipline's growing set of research methods, theories and approaches, and illuminates some of the strategies creative writers use to function within both creative and critical domains. As Dawson says:

> [I]t is unproductive to dramatise the presence of Creative Writing in universities as a struggle between writers and critics over the integrity of literature or the importance of aesthetic value. The history of Creative Writing demands that it be seen as a flexible and continually developing set of pedagogical strategies… (Dawson 2005: 160, cited in Mitchell 2006: 2)

Creative Manoeuvres' authority comes from its refusal to limit itself to only one research approach or to submit to a research hierarchy where orthodox forms of methodology and inquiry dominate. It spans broad topics and explores both the act of (creative) writing and research into the (creative) writing process. It critiques the traditional view of writing as a purely cognitive process, critiques nonfiction writing, poetry, and the ethics of practice and research, discusses the issue of creative pedagogy, investigates how practice and lived experience effect both writing and research, and it explores the gaps between writer and subject. As a living document it is retrospective and thoughtful, contemporary and extant, but it's not a set of answers – nor does it claim to be. It is part of an accumulating body of literature that is forming the framework for argument, discussion and future CW research. It is a text to keep coming back to.

Notes

[1] For excellent accounts of this history see Webb 2012; Krauth 2011; Brady & Krauth 2006; Dawson 2005. return to text

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Craig Garrett is a Brisbane-based writer whose work has appeared in Voiceworks*,* Meanjin*,* Sleepers Almanac*,* Strange4*,* The Big Issue*,* Wet Ink*,* West of the West *and* Visible Ink*. He works as an editor, journalist and communications consultant, and edited* Voiceworks*. literary journal (1998–2000). In 2008 he completed a Masters in Creative Writing by research at RMIT. He's currently completing a PhD in Creative Writing at Griffith University, and writing two more novels:* Magpie *and* A Country of Second-Hand?

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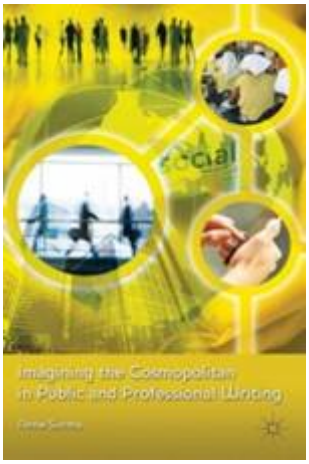
TEXT review

Imagining the world and global writing

review by Nikos Papastergiadis



Anne Surma
Imagining the Cosmopolitan in Public and Professional Writing
Palgrave Macmillan, London and New York, 2012
ISBN 9780230229938
Hb 184pp GBP53.00

In a networked society images and texts that are made in one place have the potential to reach out and interact with strangers across the world. Of course, not everyone is fully networked across the world. Internet use, for instance, is very uneven. Access rates are as high as seventy-five per cent in the United States of America but as low as twelve per cent in Africa. Nevertheless the levels of cultural interpenetration are rapidly growing and the use of digital media to circulate images and texts is at the forefront of this change. This spread of information can be witnessed at a range of levels. For instance, a celebrity can now maintain a global status because their messages to the world operate through an apparatus that can instantaneously connect them to a vast network of recipients. However, we are also constantly amused, informed or provoked by messages that come from ordinary people in distant places. A quirky incident captured on a phone camera, an eyewitness report, or a statement that speaks to a global issue but also resonates with our personal hopes and fears: these bits of information that have been produced far away are now capable of entering into our private sphere of attention.

In this book Anne Surma is interested in exploring the way we handle the global flow of information exchange. Globalisation has enabled an unprecedented level of growth in the speed and volume of information. It has generated both the mechanisms to coordinate the trajectories of flow and the systems for standardising the meanings of the images and texts that circulate in the world. This means that exposure to ideas that have originated from either a great distance, or from strangers is now a routine

occurrence. Does this banal and complex encounter with difference make us more aware of diversity, or is everything being funnelled through a structure that is making things more simple, uniform and homogenous? While globalisation has meant that access to and the accumulation of information from across the world has intensified and expanded, does this mean that we have also become more sensitive to the needs of others, more capable of translating across of differences, more able to evaluate the options, and thereby able to develop a knowledge of how local and global issues relate to each other. In short, Surma asks, have we learnt how to take care of our relations with others in the world.

Surma's pursuit of these questions is twofold. She tracks the use of language in key instances by which individuals, government agencies and corporations try to convey their belonging in and responsibility to the world. Her survey of examples is broad and representative. There is a vivid account of a woman who walks into a public meeting on the construction of a detention center for asylum seekers in her neighborhood wearing a t-shirt with the slogan 'Bomb Their Boat'. This image is caught by a photographer and published in the national newspaper. Surma questions the complicity between individual acts in local places and the national media strategies. There is a penetrating critique of the Australian Government campaign on You Tube that warns asylum seekers of the perils of sea voyages with unreliable 'people smugglers'. She highlights that this strategy is assuming that the messaging process that underpins chain migration can operate in the reverse direction. Recent arrivals are meant to pass on the images of risk to refugees considering their options. There is an analysis of the methods adopted by universities as they seek to deliver new flexible modes of learning and on-line forms of administration in order to make their systems compatible with the aspiration of the new global student. Finally, there is a rather humorous exposé of the public statements made by the Chief Executive Officers of transnational corporations like Coca Cola as express their wish 'to make a positive difference in the communities we proudly serve' (115): Starbuck's belief that they have 'a shared responsibility to give back to the communities they touch' (114), and then the higher note is struck by the Chief Executive Officer of McDonald's as he humbly acknowledges that they don't have all the answers and promises to collaborate 'with non-government organisations, academics, governments and others in the industry to help us reach our goals' (114). The point of the critique is not simply to expose the link between hype and hypocrisy. That is pretty easy these days.

Surma is more concerned with the way the discourse of commitment, engagement and belonging is structured in public texts. She then critiques these discursive forms through a theoretical prism that has been adopted from recent sociological debates on cosmopolitanism. This is an interesting and bold move. It pays close attention to the rhetorical flow and grammar of global citizenship and then proceeds to match them against the theoretical investigations into ethical responsibility and aesthetic possibility. The sociological debates on globalisation and cosmopolitanism are dominated by normative and ethical concerns, and as a consequence Surma's handling of this domain also falls mostly on issues of interpersonal care, mutual respect, compassion for the vulnerable and gives little attention to the field of aesthetics.

A key starting point in this sociological debate is the work by Ulrich Beck (Beck 2006). He was one of the first to distinguish between globalising tendencies and cosmopolitan practices. He also advocated for a new

methodological cosmopolitanism to overcome the nationalist blinkers in the social sciences. Beck stressed that the consequences of global mobility of people, goods and ideas were also experienced at a personal level. In ordinary settings people not only saw and felt the force of global movements, but also experienced the sensation of intimacy, entanglement and dependence with different people, complex structures and remote entities. The interplay between socio-economic structures and cultural formations also necessitated a deeper understanding of the role of affect in the global imaginary. Beck's account of cosmopolitanism is an attempt to produce a comprehensive understanding of the social conditions in which people can co-exist. It is a method that is underpinned by a normative framework that begins with balanced comparative thinking, develops deliberative procedures and results in reasoned outcomes. The influence of the classic work on cosmopolitanism by Immanuel Kant is unmistakable. Despite the brilliant insights into the emerging cosmopolitan forms and practices in socio-political structures, the shortcomings in the handling of the affective and aesthetic domains are also equally glaring.

If we are to understand the possibilities for a new cosmopolitan society, then it is crucial that we identify the mechanism by which change is produced at the most basic level. A cosmopolitan imaginary would only be possible if there is transformation at both the individual level of consciousness and a collective commitment to create new institutions. Gerard Delanty's analysis of the cosmopolitan imagination has been a useful contribution to this field of research (Delanty 2009). In particular, he has focused on the stimulus that occurs in the encounter between strangers. This stimulus is interpreted as the basis for both productive transformation and reactive defensiveness. Delanty argues that the capacity to move in either direction is a result of the individual's capacity to translate differences and a cultural awareness of the creative opportunities that arise in these encounters. In more general terms, Delanty claims that translation is vital not only for the individual's capacity to articulate a cosmopolitan imagination, but that it is also expressive of the immanent and transformative dynamic of modernity. Translation is the process by which the stimulus of difference becomes a trigger for innovation. It is the basis for the openness and transformation that enables a novelty, or what he Delanty calls, the third culture of globality.

The idea that modernity spawns a third culture, one that is neither locally bound nor an empty abstraction, is also found in the writing of Judith Butler (Butler 2000). Translation also features here as a major trope for explaining the cultural capacity for 'restaging the universal' in the encounter with difference. Butler argues that this encounter invariably threatens the cultural narcissism that an absolute authority rests in every local culture. However, the consequence that she tracks is not a simple reversion into defensive cultural authoritarianism, or the passive acceptance of cultural relativism, but an opening up to the threshold space of the 'as if', a zone in which, neither the emergent difference, nor the established structure reign supreme, but both are re-imagined in the context of their interaction. Etienne Balibar makes a similar observation on the capacity to regenerate cultural authority (Balibar 2007). He also rejects the view that absolute universalism is confined to either a fixed code, or dispersed across an endless array of particularistic fragments. On the contrary, he suggests that the gaps within every culture provide the space in which difference enters, and also the dynamic for mutual transformation. As a foreign element enters in this space it is changed, and the host culture also changes through the dynamic of internalisation. It is indeed paradoxical, but also very appealing, to note that a strategic version

of cosmopolitanism also arises from the gaps within each culture rather than being determined through a fully furnished version of normative deliberation. If we follow this line of argument in the theoretical foundations for a cosmopolitan imagination, then the potential and possibility for dialogue with strangers is posited not simply as a cultivated form of willingness to show interest, care and obligation towards the other, but also as a consequence of constitutive gap in our culture.

At the outset of this book Surma reflects on the meaning of the cosmos in cosmopolitanism (20). Drawing on Cwerner's work she stress that the loyalties, identities and responsibilities associated with cosmopolitanism are usually defined across space. Cwerner also wishes to put emphasis on the temporal dimensions of the polity in the cosmos. This is a worthy supplement. However, it also marks another missed opportunity to reflect on the aesthetics of cosmopolitanism (Papastergiadis 2012). The ancient Greek etymology of the term cosmos not only contained a reference to an even wider spatial sphere than our global territory, but it also pointed to the identity of human race, and the aesthetic practice of making place attractive for another. The cosmos in cosmo-politan was not only a term of belonging in the widest possible sense, but also a reference to the aesthetic activity of bringing the other closer to you. The cosmos was both the source and expression of your own creative imagination. To make a cosmos was a world making activity.

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TEXT review

Points of arrival

review by Nicholas Jose

Exploring Second Language Creative Writing: Beyond Babel
Dan Disney (ed)
Linguistic Approaches to Literature 19
John Benjamins, Amsterdam 2014
ISBN 9789027234087
Hb 157pp EUR95.00

All writers learn to write somehow, whatever language they use. But what we call Creative Writing has its origins in English-language pedagogy, even as now it is being adapted into other contexts, from France to China, where the Anglophone version doesn't always translate straightforwardly. Creative Writing as a discipline has mostly assumed a monolingual English classroom. But that too is starting to change. One of the most exciting developments in the field is the extension of English-language Creative Writing into contexts where other languages are also in play, either in a multilingual classroom or where Creative Writing is linked to TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). The terminology may be problematic – not to mention the acronyms: the reasons for wanting to write in English are so many and various, as are the situations in which these developing writers find themselves. What they share is English as a language of choice for the exploration of their creativity and self-expression.

Creative Writing (SL), where SL stands for Second Language, is used here as an umbrella term for the wide variety of classroom experiments reported on by the lively and admirable teachers, writers and researchers whose contributions make up this book. As much as showing how it can be done, their work argues for the transformative potential of creative writing processes that have a crosscultural, translational dimension, for students, teachers and creative communities alike. The result is ground-breaking and quite inspiring.

In his essay on Creative Writing in Macao, Christopher Kelen usefully cautions that what he describes is 'a pedagogy for Creative Writing in a non-native context' (75). The specificity of each teacher's response to the complexities of the particular teaching situation makes for interesting reading, demonstrating how flexible and inventive the process can be. David Hanauer reflects on encouraging ESL students in the US to write poetry of 'presence and consequence' (15), starting from 'significant moments' (14) in their own lives, not as 'rehearsed narratives' but rather as openings to 'a conceptual space where new meanings can be found' (17). Jane Spiro writes of a collaborative 'four-part cycle' (23) … 'of choice and reflection' (40) in which her ESL students in the UK develop a distinctive 'second language voice', 'with awareness and aliveness to linguistic and artistic choices which all writers might relate to….' (28). Dan Disney's essay is based on his experience teaching Creativity and Literary Studies in English to university students in Seoul. He has a great story about asking his students to model Rilke's behaviour in studying the panther in the Paris Zoo before producing his break-through poem 'The Panther'. Only in this case it was a campus cat, that wasn't there on the Friday afternoon the class moved outside for the exercise: 'I am not sure whether it is the gloom, the catlessness, or the excitement of an impending weekend, but a range of hasty poems are written and many of these are vivid…' (48). These students share their first-language (Korean) cultural background and also a common education in literature, especially modernist poetry, which helps.

Eugenia Loffredo, who is associated with the University of East Anglia, and Manuela Perteghella address literary translation as a creative practice in the context of second-language writing. As practitioners of translation they want to use 'the presence of multilingualism in the classroom' (72) and the changing directionality that comes with translation in and out of languages to turn creative translation into transformational creativity, including within the same language, moving between versions and registers. They share the view that the process becomes critically worthwhile when accompanied by ongoing reflection in a spirit of 'response-ability', with the instructor as 'problem-posing educator' (72). Like other contributors in the book they cite Paolo Freire's dialogic and emancipatory educational philosophy. The emphasis is not on what is gained in linguistic competence, nor whether the outcome is standard or faithful, but on what can be created in and through a new language identity. For Eddie Tay, it also about community formation and cultural critique as emergent writers own their own identities and senses of locatedness. 'The English-language creative writing teacher of Chinese ethnicity from Singapore situated in the Department of English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong is a position nested within multiple linguistic and national zones,' he writes (115): that's a source of energy. Like Kelen at the University of Macau, who considers the Confucian Heritage Learning Culture in relation to creative pedagogy in a nuanced and revealing way, Tay shows how a charged environment can make writing purposeful, including for the dialogue with self it demands of the student writer. The marginalisation of local Cantonese culture in postcolonial Hong Kong and Macao provokes creative resistance in English, ironically, which can become 'a point of departure' (109) for larger, sharper transcultural, translinguistic, ultimately political moves.

Grace VS Chin's practice in Brunei, where students work collaboratively to write plays that draw on local experience, has the effect of underscoring 'their inter-connectedness' (133) across difference. Malay culture and language have official national status in Brunei, although the society

includes Chinese and other indigenous ethnolinguistic groups, with widespread use of English. Chin reports fascinatingly on techniques of acculturation she introduces into her teaching to tap 'the collectivist values and cultural identities of the students', encouraging them 'to bring food and drinks, as well as mats and cushions to class' (132-3). The students become 'core members of a community of practice' (124), their identities changing from apprentices to knowledge creators. To judge by the stylish, code-switching examples she quotes, it works. They are affirming the English that is theirs and it need not be labelled 'non-native' or 'second'.

I'm writing this review at the University of the Philippines Diliman where I'm attending the 6th Asian Translation Traditions conference, which has two sessions on literary translation and creative writing, where Philippine writers and creative writing teachers discuss the rich language environment in which they work. One writer, John Bengan, spoke about incorporating Davao City gay slang into an English-language short story. Another, Isabela Barzon, read her poem 'Clear as Mud', imagining how a barrage of hostile Australian slang must strike an asylum seeker with textbook English.

Editor Dan Disney pinpoints the key issue in his introduction and his own fine essay: 'how to feel like ourselves in a language we do not quite feel at home in?' Most writers will recognise this pressure, but it can take an acute form when writing into English from somewhere else. It can also be a creative opportunity, a plus. To recognise this marks a divide between an educational frame that seeks to 'confer [and measure] critical literacies' and one that seeks 'to augment creative production' (43). As Disney wryly puts it, 'the emergent Creative Writing (SL) field remains largely unsupported by interdisciplinary theoretical discourses' (55). The volume he has put together makes a valuable start. It communicates the insightful, playful and rewarding inquiry that comes with this growing field, while lighting the way for all of us, as pedagogic practitioners, to test what can happen when, in Eddie Tay's words, 'the English language is viewed as a space of possibility and emergence' (103).

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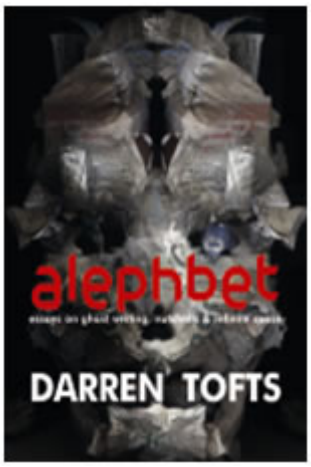
TEXT review

Fervor de la letra, disturbance of the text

review by Dominique Hecq



Darren Tofts
alephbet: essays on ghost writing, nutshells and infinite space
Pragensia Books, Prague, 2013
ISBN 978-80-7308-479-0
Pb 142pp EUR12.00

> O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a King of infinite space…
> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, 2

'*On ne peut pas*,' Guillaume Apollinaire once said, '*transporter partout avec soi le cadavre de son père*'/ 'You can't carry your father's corpse around everywhere you go' (Apollinaire 2004: 93). In what may be a speculative and ironic allusion to this aphorism, Darren Tofts elegantly carries around the ghost of his symbolic father, Jorge Luis Borges, in *alephbet*, a book about nutshells and infinite space. The book takes its cue from 'The aleph', a short-story by the Argentinian writer about a point in space through which it is possible to see all other points, and from a quotation from *Hamlet* cited by Borges himself as the first epigraph to the story (Borges 2004: 118). A character himself in the story, Borges is introduced to the Aleph by Carlos Argentino, a poet who attempts to convey the effects of the Aleph in his work. Borges' avatar is wary of the Aleph and, wisely, tries to avoid the ambitious and boisterous Argentino. I have reproduced Borges' Shakespearean epigraph above to warn the reader that Tofts' own confrontation with the infinite promises some spectral and sublime moments.

Darren Tofts is renowned as a cultural critic who writes on culture and new media, a reputation built on his fascination for the codes and discourses of cyberculture in the 1990s, but he also has more traditional

antecedents in the field of literary studies as a respected Beckett and Joyce scholar. With *alephbet*, Tofts acknowledges his debt to Borges, an author whose works he read avidly aged sixteen and whose avatar, he admits, haunts him: 'I am haunted by the avatar of Borges' (12).

Alephbet is a collection of essays on 'the uncanny prescience' of Borges for the age of the hyperreal, cyberspace and posthumanism. As such, it is a companion piece to *Memory Trade: A Prehistory of Cyberculture* (Tofts & McKeich 1998) where Tofts sought to define a new kind of discourse that would encompass the vocabularies of literature, art, philosophy, punk rock, cybernetics, typography and computer graphics. But the scope and tone of *alephbet* are quite different. In fact, the scope and tone and subject matter of each essay varies. We move from the nutshell of poems and short-stories to the infinite of the internet via sweeping vistas of the cinema, especially the Wachowski brothers' film *The Matrix* (1999), the object of analysis in 'The crystal method' down to Plato's cave and up again into the light and highrise of the hyperreal to encounter prose that is self-reflexive and increasingly reflective, only to be tricked in the last instance, when the spectre of Apollinaire returns not in Parnassus, but in Montparnasse.

Having read some of these essays earlier – many were published in journals including *TEXT*, *21C magazine*, *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* and *H+ Magazine*, collections such as *Contemporary Poetics* (ed Louis Armand) and *27/7: Time and Temporality in the Network Society* (Robert Hassan & Ronald Purser), or as catalogue pieces for mainstream art galleries – I was interested to see how they would work in book format. As a book complete with preface and postscript, the reader is offered the chance to experience the full range of Toft's versatility and to experience the essays' interrelation. While Borges is our guide in this labyrinth about textuality, writing, and authorship, his short story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*' (Borges 1970a) in which, except for the signature, the novelist, Pierre Menard writes a text identical to Cervantes' quixotic novel (1605), is the link between Borges and Tofts. At the intersection of their worlds, authorship is a casual, haphazard business and it is the reader who determines the nature of the text through, among other factors, attribution. The standard is set by Monsieur Teste (Mr Head), the avatar of the intellect who '*ne connait que deux valeurs ... le possible et l'impossible*' / 'knows only two values … the possible and the impossible' created by Paul Valéry in 1896 (Valéry 1999: 66). Or is it rather that the standard is set by Louis-Nicholas Ménard (1822-1901), an early Parnassian poet and author of the epic *Prométhée* délivré */ Prometheus unbound* (1844), better known as a scholar and thinker? Such is the wealth of literary citations, allusions and enticements in this book that the idea of a definite answer to these questions is impossible. *Alephbet* is indeed alluring precisely because Tofts constantly gestures towards new possibilities and thinks outside the cultural logic of linearity and binaries. His best essays are intertextual, intercultural and interdisciplinary.

Although primarily inflected by Borges' artistry, Tofts' writing is also informed by the styles and ideas of writers as diverse as James Joyce, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, William Gibson, Gregory Ulmer, Philip K Dick, Italo Calvino, Umberto Eco, and others. Such writing resists categorisation, of course. Toft's approach is an anti-method resembling that of Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). This anti-method is 'metonymic', by which he means it 'dislocates and relativizes'. It 'posits that the here is only a larger whole, the now an instant, in an ongoing process' (Tofts, Kinnane & Haig

1994: 259). The nature of this anti-method is best described as 'heuretic', a Gadamerian neologism (after Hans-Georg Gadamer) sourced from Gregory Ulmer's *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention* (1994). In *Heuretics*, Ulmer argues for a theory of invention based on Derrida's technique of deconstruction (the act of inventive reading) toward a new pedagogy based on grammatology (inventive writing). Tofts, Kinnane and Haig define the term as follows:

> Heuretic: adj., neologism: a mode of discourse, style of presentation which conceives of knowledge as inventive, creative (euretic); focusses reader/spectator as productive locus through empowering of discovery, of abductive negotiation of text via provision of guides to self-learning (heuristic). (Tofts, Kinnane & Haig 1994: 257)

This oddly resonates with creative writing research whereby the act of writing constantly entails the 'creative' and 'abductive negotiation of text', the invention of a new textual alchemy, the making of 'a new abc' (Tofts 2013: 10).

Alephbet is a playful book thus it is apt that the image reproduced before the preface comes from Jacques Tati's film 'Playtime' (1967). It is also a serious book. It is a hybrid, oxymoronic and telescopic book. In '*Incipit, incipience, inception',* Tofts explains how in the 1990s he turned his practice as a literary theorist towards media studies of the then emergent internet. Looking back to this transition, he is struck by the similarities between the worlds of literature and cyberspace. In particular, he is startled by those moments when Borges' fiction anticipates ways of understanding the ambience and impact of computer networks; by the sheer power of the word:

> On the page, on all those countless new edge screens and protean writing spaces there are still only 'Words, words, words,' often authorless, usually orphaned. And while we read differently our wrestle with the base matter of literacy is still the same alchemical hacking through a jungle of woods, the 'alphybettyformed verbage' that precedes us. The already said is an unavoidable pathogen of being literate. But writing cures forgetting by forgetting who has spoken before. (8)

In many respects, *alephbet* is a response to Borges' comments that 'I do not have aesthetics' (Dutton 1977) and further that 'I have used the philosophers' ideas for my own literary purposes, but ... I have no personal system of philosophy' (Dutton 1977). Invoking precepts from Plato to Baudrillard, Tofts explores modes of representation and, like Borges, suggests that language is the tenuous fabric that connects meaning and existence. Using the concept of avatar – a word that existed long before cyberspace [1] – he emulates a Borgesian subjectivity informed by two values that are crucial to Borges' conception of reading, namely, the *intellectual* and the *ethical*. The *reading subject* is thus revealed to be a divided essence, appearing as both a product of the machinations of representation and an agent of those machinations.

'Leanne, Borges & metaphysical perplexity' re-introduces us to Borges's world of textual mazes and mirrors, seeking and linking, unlinking and seeking anew across planes of perception and reception in some infinite library of the real, the unreal and the hyperreal. In some ways, it is a

meditation on how metaphysics fares in the thoroughly mediated, digitised, networked, and programmed world we currently inhabit. It is informed by 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1940) (Borges 1970b): what world is this and what am I in it?

The next essay 'Epigrams, particle theory and hypertext' is an examination of the visual epigrams interspersed through works by Borges, Calvino and Deleuze and Guattari. The essay enacts the circularity at the heart of their iconic books and gestures towards *'When avatars attack!'*. The link is provided by Calvino's 1979 novel *If on a winter's night a traveller* (Calvino 1982), which begins only to begin again, performing the impossibility of the possible, the possibility of the impossible, the anxiety of influence, confluence and recurrence.

But where is Ariadne when you need her? I must confess that I got lost in 'Virtual curb crawling'. My excuse is that it was originally – and I am aware of the irony of using this word in the context of Toft's work – a floor talk on Frances Stark's *My best thing,* delivered at the Ian Potter Museum of Art in Melbourne (April 2013). If I understand correctly, the piece highlights that the future has already arrived and that the textual and intertextual only anticipated the hypertextual. 'Ow ah oo ga ma ma'. Yes, you could say that. I was resistant to the catalogue essay bearing that title, probably for lack of reference. Perhaps this is a comment on the fact that the forces conspiring against artistic expression are not those of tradition and its conventions, but a barrage of consumable discourses unleashed in the massive production machines of entertainment, commerce, and media.

With each passing decade the increase in the sheer scale of visual, verbal, and media culture is unprecedented. The question today is not simply how individual voices can take shape in such heteroglot ambience, but how they might register and be heard at all? 'Echolalia' goes some way to answering this question. 'When avatars attack' then answers the question by way of palimpsests. This essay reflects on the act of composition – rather than creation – as dream, borrowing, citation, allusion, pastiche, parody, plagiarism and remix enter into play. The avatar cannot theorise, let alone legitimise its own existence, except through writing. And so it does in a postscript titled to appeal to *bon vivants,* 'amid the ceaseless aroma of turbot à la royale', that may or may not have been translated by a photographer known for subterfuge or by a politician renowned for similar liberties.

Alephbet will inform, delight and entertain. It will give the reader some intimation of the origins of its alphabet. What it will not do is disclose its own code. There is no list of references, and no index. This is particularly annoying as some works – for example 'The twilight' – are not referenced. But perhaps this is because we are already in the future.

Consistently, Borges upheld the deep division that exists between the man and the writer. As suggested above, Darren Tofts implies that this division is at the heart of the aesthetics Borges denied having. As a man, and paraphrasing Dante, Borges also said; 'I have committed the worst of sins… I have not been happy' (Dutton 1977). Yet as a writer he succeeded through his writing in making each of his readers a companion and rescuer from the oblivion of death into a living presence. By conveying the anachronistic presence of Borges, *alephbet* emulates the Borgesian triumph that repeats the myth of Plato's cave where the shadows return to life with blood. And Borges returns to life with our reading, even in the hyperreal. This is a wonderful homage.

Notes

[1] ‘Avatar: *n.* L18 [Skt *avatãra descent,* f. *ava* off, away, down + *tar*- pass over.] 1. Hindu Mythol. The descent of a god to earth in incarnate form. L18. 2. An incarnation or embodiment (of another person, an idea, etc.). E19. 3. A manifestation to the world as a ruling power or as an object of worship; *gen*. a manifestation, a phase. E19’ (Brown 1993: 154). return to text

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TEXT review

Registering the world

review by Tina Giannoukos

Jeri Kroll
Workshopping the Heart: New and Selected Poems
Wakefield Press, Adelaide 2013
ISBN 9781743051283
Pb 224pp AUD24.95

In any poet's career, the publication of a 'New and Selected' is a significant event. Such a publication signals to readers that a work has reached a critical juncture of achievement and anticipation. Jeri Kroll's *Workshopping the Heart: New and Selected Poems* does not disappoint: it maps the poet's preoccupations to date and points to future pathways of concern. The collection includes poems from her first book of poetry published in 1982, new poems written between 2005 and 2012, and excerpts from a verse novel. It shows Kroll to be a poet concerned with the unfolding of experience itself. There is the sensory enjoyment of the world in the early poems as much as the intensifying dilemmas of life in the later work.

Throughout *Workshopping the Heart: New and Selected*, Kroll infuses the world with her singular vision, and though she registers her response to the world, she does not ignore the Other. This is most powerfully expressed in her early poems of love and motherhood. In the poem, 'Pearl', erotic love and motherhood are twin poles of experience:

> You and I at home in a distant city
> across the country
> our child asleep
> our bed achingly cold
> bodies chafing to ignite the sheets. (71)

But what makes Kroll a subtle, if directed, poet is the way she registers the hesitation as much as the excitement of encounter. In 'Stepdaughter' from *Monster Love* (1990), Kroll writes: 'We are waiting for home studies to begin, / both of us pupils needing to learn / how to knit together something warm' (80). In the sensual, lies illumination. In 'Winter Mornings' from *House Arrest* (1994) she writes suggestively of renewal:

> Mornings like this, as ordinary as sleep,
> as predictable as a child's cold feet,
> are somehow like stories we've heard before
> told by a voice with a gift for remaking the world
> as raw and translucent as ice. (96)

In a postmodernist world of questioning narratives, Kroll produces transparent poetry of experience. She is in and of the world. She registers the contours of the world around her with a sensual delight. Yet in this world of the senses, spiritual integration of negative experience cannot be put off, even if it can be ostensibly delayed. In 'The Night Before the Funeral', a poem for her father from her first collection, *Death as Mr Right*, Kroll writes:

> I must finish my hair,
> collect my purse and my mother.
> We're expected at chapel.
> You won't go anywhere.
> You're a record I've time to play
> starting sometime. (23)

Kroll's use of language is unadorned, but this is to do justice to the naturalness of her line. Moving effortlessly between different poetic forms, Kroll never strains for a metaphor; rather her metaphors emerge out of the dynamics of the line itself, its rhythmical and expressive play. In 'Monsoon at Kovalam Beach', from *Indian Movies* (1984), Kroll writes:

> Still stiff two weeks through vacation,
> we stand outside this universe of mist
> some god's thrown up in the last half-hour:
> a gray-blue bowl in the bay.
> Rain softens as mouths after love. (48)

Kroll's poetry registers the ordinary and not so-ordinary shocks of living as the flow of life itself. Writing of her mother's dementia in *Workshopping the Heart* (2004), Kroll records the way her mother becomes one with the world:

> My mother has taught me a lesson
> without a sound.
> Words wash over her now.
> It doesn't matter what she's floating in.
> Even the word *sea* means nothing
> because she becomes it. (126)

In her recent poems, some of Kroll's early sensory engagement with world gives way to a more distanced stance. In 'Rush Hour' she notes:

> Have you missed your stop?
> Can you even recall its name?
> It's hard to peer through the smudgy windows.

> What can you listen for now?
> Only the final gasp and squeal of brakes. (176)

Yet this tougher voice is already present in the questioning, if softer, tone of poems such as 'Translations' from *Indian Movies* (1984):

> I have never seen these mountains you cannot resist,
> sort through the photos,
> imagine you stopped on steep paths,
> the senses blown clean.
> And you lose yourself there,
> drifting beyond the snowline?
> Are colours then only frozen light? (51)

The verse novel has become a familiar form of Australian poetry. A writer as much as a poet, Kroll's gift for narrative and poetry come together in an extended way in *Vanishing Point*, a work about a nineteen-year-old girl's relationship with her body. The extract in *Workshopping the Heart: New and Selected* shows Kroll's capacity to tell a story. But it also shows her turn for the lyrical. This extended poetic narrative allows her to explore different formal territory from the earlier work:

> Later I'd drift asleep until I heard
> his angry snort. Swept up on the wind
> from his swishing tail, I'd untie his lead.
> He'd toss me on his back and we'd escape,
> galloping out of our proper forms
> into a truer astral shape. No longer
> animal or human, male or female,
> forever shifting vivid points of light. (190)

Kroll may not be interested in the linguistic games of more self-conscious poets, but her poetic project of registering experience as both sensory and ecstatic makes her a poet of life's vicissitudes.

Tina Giannoukos is a poet, fiction writer and reviewer. Her first collection of poetry is In a Bigger City *(Five Islands Press, 2005). Her poetry is anthologised in* Southern Sun, Aegean Light: Poetry of Second-Generation Greek Australians *(Arcadia, 2011). She has a sonnet sequence in* Border-Crossings: Narrative and Demarcation in Postcolonial Literatures and Media *(Winter, 2012). A recipient of a Varuna Writers Fellowship, Giannoukos has a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Melbourne and has read her poetry in Greece and China.*

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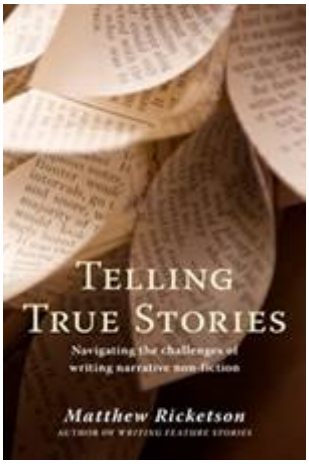
TEXT review

Truth without cruelty

review by Helen Gildfind



Matthew Ricketson
Telling True Stories
Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW 2014
ISBN 9781742379357
Pb 288pp AUD39.99

Telling True Stories opens with Matthew Ricketson recounting his frustrations as a cadet reporting on Ash Wednesday. This event revealed to him how the 'inverted pyramid form of the hard news article' prioritised information over emotion, the concrete over the abstract, the active over the reflective, and reduced human tragedy to 'bland, bite-sized morsels' (3-4). Ricketson suggests that narrative non-fiction has more scope than any other genre to explore the 'complexity' and 'full humanity' (1) of such events and to thereby make people reflect and act in new ways. This genre is thus 'of profound importance in a democratic society' (2). Over twelve chapters Ricketson unravels narrative non-fiction's 'complex and knotty' (235) ethical and practical problems, articulates his own tripartite framework for approaching the genre, and ultimately distils his findings into a 'roadmap' (238) for writers.

Ricketson argues that the genre's lack of definition has seen 'literary journalism' and 'creative non-fiction' left with no 'natural home' or 'champion' in the academy (17). This diminishes the genre's funding opportunities and cultural status. He notes how the very 'profusion of terms' (14) describing non-fictional texts reveals the form's identity crisis: journalists prickle at 'literariness'; literary critics bristle at journalism; no-one wants their work defined in the negative (*non*-fiction); narrative method is conflated with literary merit; literariness is conflated with fictionality and, of course, the nature of truth is forever contested (15). Ricketson settles on the term 'true stories' (18) for which he identifies six defining elements (20). He concludes that the value of true stories lies in

both their style and substance: they offer fresh information, more information, and contextualised information that is meaningfully shaped into engaging narrative (39).

Ricketson's third and fourth chapters enact detailed analyses of Bob Woodward's and Carl Bernstein's *The Final Days,* and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood.* These are the first of many close readings Ricketson uses to expose how such writers as Helen Garner, John Hersey, Estelle Blackburn, David Marr, John Bryson, Hunter S Thompson, Joan Didion and Tom Wolfe address (or ignore) the ethical and practical problems attached to narrative non-fiction. In his fifth chapter Ricketson introduces his 'tripartite' framework for understanding the non-fiction writing process (research, writing, reception). Ricketson argues against Janet Malcolm's famous claim that nothing can be done about the 'canker' at the heart of journalism, namely its 'morally indefensible' dynamic of seducing and betraying sources (Malcolm qtd in Ricketson, 91 & 99). He suggests that anthropologists' use of 'informed consent' and their genuine concern for their subjects' well-being (93) can do much to counter unethical practices in non-fiction writing.

In further chapters Ricketson deepens his discussion by using theoretical and non-fictional texts to explore many compelling questions. Does narrative's emplotment (118) – a literary operation – automatically make a work fictional? How can a reader decide if work contains 'good or bad fact' (122)? How is 'factual status' and 'factual adequacy' (122) communicated between reader and writer? What are the implications for readers when writers use a 'realist' voice that speaks omnisciently and 'claims to represent reality', or a 'modernist' voice that speaks subjectively and emphasises 'the inherent difficulty' of representing reality (130)? Do different voices simply force out alternative perspectives in different ways (133)? Does voice choice necessarily reflect a writer's world view or research methods? Ricketson warns readers that a 'superbly written' book might 'intensify' – rather than rise above – the need to ask such questions (127-128).

Ricketson goes on to discuss the devices of detail, scene, dialogue and interior monologues. He suggests that these tools are most usefully understood as 'story telling' rather than 'fictional' devices (127). He uses Garner's work to show how details can (in John Carey's words, from *The Faber Book of Reportage*, 1987) 'imprint themselves scaldingly on the mind's eye' and always have ethical implications (Carey qtd in Ricketson, 154). What do readers need to know? What is private? Is description being used 'as a substitute for argument' (160)? Is cauterising emotion from a description less manipulative than trying to evoke an event's 'emotional texture' (156-7)? Ricketson notes that although Lillian Ross's brilliant powers of observation saw her described as a 'fly on the wall' and 'the girl with the built-in tape recorder,' these assignations contradict her own assertion that 'a reporter is always chemically involved in a story' (165-7). Nevertheless Ross, unlike Garner, still effaces herself from her writing. Ricketson wonders if writers should represent themselves in scenes they've witnessed and if they should *ever* reconstruct scenes they haven't. Finally, as 'accuracy is the cornerstone of narrative non-fiction' (179) Ricketson believes that the interior monologue is a dangerously unverifiable device that can hide such ethical problems as a writer's overidentification with a subject (182). Despite this concern, Ricketson rebuts criticisms that Tom Wolfe's monologues all sound the same, arguing that readers understand his monologues as impersonation. This seems an important point, and one that respects readers' intelligence and

critical literacy. However, Ricketson never considers the interior monologue as an analytical device aimed at achieving empathy, rather than as a realist device aimed at achieving representation. He thus concludes that such monologues best belong to the realm of fiction (189).

The book ends by exploring how writers can establish a relationship of 'informed trust' (215) with readers whilst reaching the 'broadest possible audience' (190). Ricketson warns that writers' narrative powers can induce a 'dream' or 'trance' like state in readers which might see them dangerously 'enthralled' by a story they'll thus read as real (192-4). Ricketson cites reader outrage in response to perceived fabrications in the work of James Frey and Helen Garner, showing how, when readers cannot tell what is 'true' in a story, the 'earth begins to skid underfoot', they lose their 'moorings' and feel 'misled' (219-221). This distrust ruptures the implicit 'contract' between reader and writer, and the book's power implodes (219-221). These examples also show how, unlike news media journalism, a book's author (and not its publisher) will be personally discredited if the text is seen to mislead. Ricketson suggests that non-fiction writers can win 'informed trust' with their readers through transparency, achieved by their choice of narrative voice and their use of 'explanatory devices' in the book's paratexts (233). Through such means writers can empower readers to 'assess their book's truth-telling claims' (233).

Telling True Stories is a thoroughly researched and argued exploration of the ethical and practical problems that characterise narrative non-fiction. Whilst this thoroughness sometimes makes the text read too much like a thesis (with overwhelming or pedantic details, and convoluted or repetitive insights and arguments), Ricketson's intelligent enthusiasm is contagious. He ultimately convinces readers that narrative non-fiction is as rich in substance as it is in style and that it will continue to evolve as an important genre which maximises truth and minimises harm (241).

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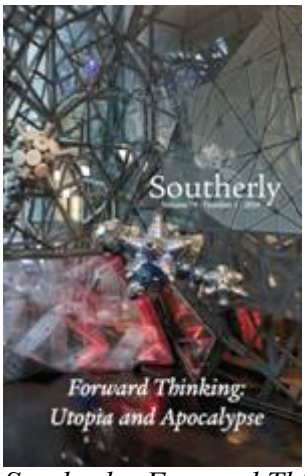
TEXT review

A rich mélange

review by Eugen Bacon



Southerly: Forward Thinking: Utopia and Apocalypse
David Brooks and Elizabeth McMahon (eds)
Volume 74, Number 1
Brandl & Schlesinger, Sydney 2014
ISBN 9781921556722
Pb 275pp AUD26.95

The Journal of the English Association flourishes still. Here its only failing, if one must be named, is that – for all talent spotting – its editors find need for an elaborate belaboured editorial, sombre as a eulogy. A vivacious rather than a disanimated synopsis would mirror the flamboyant cornucopia that makes *Southerly: Forward Thinking: Utopia and Apocalypse* a privileged read.

The title emphasises multiplicity: forward thinking, utopia, apocalypse. Forward thinking denotes time, the future. Bill Ashcroft in 'The Horizon of the Future' (12-35) addresses forward thinking well. He refers to a notion of 'horizon' in reference to literary texts. While a horizon confines our view of the earth or field of vision, it also gives us a 'permanent sign of spatial possibility' (20). Literary language is familiar with that which is near or far, that boundary of perception, the phenomenon of meaning and open possibilities relevant to the limits of own language (21). Utopia may be a place or a concept; in Ursula K Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1994), utopia models a society, 'a social commentary that presents communal cooperation as the truest human ideal' (Strauss 2000). As for apocalypse, it is an event or a revelation, sometimes synonymous with holocaust, catastrophe or Armageddon.

The memoirs, only three, hold my attention. In Stephanie Bishop's 'Weatherman' (167-181) we come together to scatter the ashes: *his*. The writing, in second person, invites the reader to such a personal space that you feel guilt for intruding. 'P, his name was P', I read, into the night, unspooked by the newly dead. The story is sad and dark and bright and

poignant; filled with the vividness of new death, as when the little girl asks: 'How do you talk to died people?' (175). Liesl Nunns' 'And in our room too' (130-141) is also vivid:

> One night this winter, nature surprised me. Not like the halt, the gasp, when rounding the corner of a winding track in marble mountains to see a lushly forested sinkhole plunging to ancient memory and quiet. That sort of surprise is hoped for, photographed, recounted, marketed. (130)

Written with mastery, with assurance, Nunns speckles her memoir with stories within a story. What loveliness in words about something deadly. The dread, the thrill of knowing: 'Our wooden houses perch on the sheer hills, ready to plunge' (132). Rozanna Lilley's 'The Little Prince, and other vehicles' (40-50), a story of rapport with cars, focuses on the character of dad, Merv, inflexible as he is likeable. Whether the story, befitting the past – a looking back – regards utopia as a time rather than a concept or a place, is unclear. The ending riddles in a present, and a future:

> But, wherever we roam, I keep my eyes fixed firmly on the rear view mirror, just in case that belligerent bastard is still behind the wheel. (50)

Gretchen Shirm's review of Richard Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* by Random House (236-241) attracts for its detail, interrogation, and insightful knowing of the character Dorrigo Evans. Enchanting prose describes the horror of the prisoner-of-war camp on the Thai-Burma railway, reminiscent of *The Railway Man* (Lomax 1996). Ali Jane Smith's review of Jill Jones' *The Beautiful Anxiety* (263-267), a riveting read, tells us about Jill Jones:

> She is a walking poet, like Wordsworth, but she beats urban tracks: that exhilarating burst of gold is a dandelion, remember, not a daffodil. Her experience of cities, however, is always embodied, sensory, it is a human relationship with place, the city a crowded savannah… (264-265)

Smith describes the poet's 'delicious game of drawing tension into the relationship between sound and meaning' (264) and her confidence to let 'the reader finish the idea for themselves while she moves on to her next image' (264).

The most difficult thing about the future is that it doesn't exist (12): Bill Ashcroft's 'The Horizon of the Future' is solemn yet aesthetic academic writing. He embraces with tenderness and gusto the forward thinking / utopian theme in a long enlightening narrative:

> Our crystal ball gazing offers us a mirror to ourselves, yet in literature it is this 'ourselves', this present, to which the non-existent future constantly speaks. (12)

His article, containing Bloch, Husserl, Ricouer, Malouf, Latour, even Ueding, stands out as exemplary. Other contenders in the anthology are Robin Gerster's walk on uranium street (55-69) and Lucy Sussex's guide on apocalypse vs. utopia (90-97).

Sian Lu's 'The Canton of our subconscious choreography' (75-89), a translation, is a satirical monologue that builds to a climax. The unreal city

Port Man Tou, or its director, offers a story that is scandalous and hilarious; sombre in its lightness. Susan Midalia's 'The hook' (199-212) is compelling, enticing in its detail; its fine imagery and characterisation. We discover departed Connor through Marina's solo trip from Perth to Manhattan. It is a trip of rekindling after a personal apocalypse. The title is equivocal, and the writing itself uses unobtrusive trickery – linguistic flow, syntax, repetition – to imprint the narrative. Lucy Sussex's 'Apocalypse rules' (98-102) connects to her article and is unconventional, almost incoherent; in its listing of the wiki hacker's rules, it amuses.

Distinctive selections of poetry include: Ariel Riveros Pavez's mathematically inclined poem 'While I was here with you and living on the other side of the world' (36-38); Bev Braune's immortality story 'Waiting my turn' (39); and Mark Roberts' walk through history in 'museum' (52-53). The pleasure to be gained from these pieces, for their sense or nonsense, is astonishing. There's also Toby Fitch's redacted poem 'from Jerilderies' (71-74) and Andy Jackson's order and disorder in 'Double-helix' (127) – with its pattern of repetition.

In the *Long Paddock* – the online section of the journal – are four short stories, seven poems and five reviews with dirge, ghost-town and Armageddon themes: as Amanda Hickie warns in 'Looting Lucy's': 'You can't wipe your bum with an iPad'. Shevaun Cooley's poem 'the bone the island' is notable for its blackness, pathos and arrangement.

The *Macquarie Dictionary* defines 'speculate' as follows: 'to indulge in conjectural thought'; 'to engage in thought or reflection, or meditate' (2009: 1582). This literary anthology invites or portrays speculation. While a single writer may address a single motif, the mélange as a whole speaks in many genres and multiplies possibilities. The reflexive space it opens is one in which you immerse yourself as a reader, without concern for time, space or event. The juxtaposition of forms does not create a transcendent unity. But the disunity is a creative one, a fresh one that approaches the heart of human nature from logic or illogic.

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Eugen Bacon studied at Maritime Campus - Greenwich University, UK, less than two minutes' walk from The Royal Observatory of the Greenwich Meridian. Her arty muse fostered itself within the baroque setting of the Old Royal Naval College, and Eugen found herself a computer graduate

mentally re-engineered into creative writing. She is now a PhD candidate in Writing by artefact and exegesis at Swinburne University of Technology.

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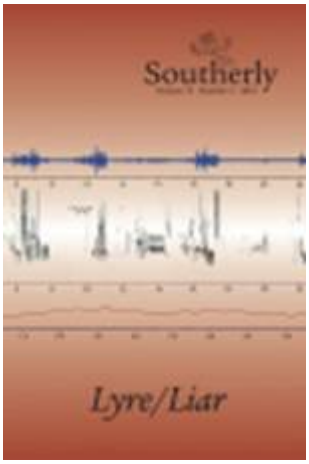
TEXT review

Literary perspective: a writerly lens

reviews by Mary Pomfret



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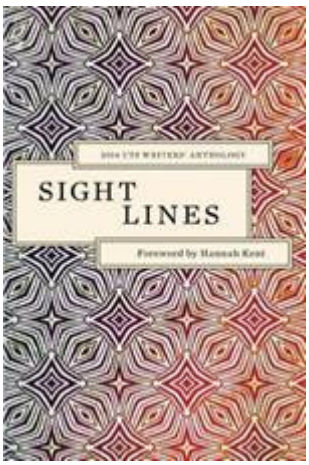

Sight Lines
Kate Adams and others (eds)
UTS Writers' Anthology
Xoum Publishing, Sydney 2014
ISBN 9781922057815
Pb 288pp AUD26.99

This themed issue of *Southerly* questions the innocence or otherwise of our writing positions and seeks to address 'the moral responsibility of the writer' (blurb) through interrogating', 'words as a life-giving or a life-

taking tool' and the act of 'Writing as moral outlet' (7). 'Lyre/Liar' is not an innocent title. The subtle play on words juxtaposes the deed of human mendacity with the image of the classical string instrument, the lyre. The title is also suggestive of the lyrebird, alluding to the concerns of this issue with the natural world.

Guest co-editor Teja B Pribac begins her editorial with a reference to the song of the nightingale. Pribac suggests that the human pursuit of writing is not always as self-aware as we would like to believe. 'Like the nightingale's song, poetry – and literature generally – is replete with nuances and implicit, disguised messages which are not always recognised by the author herself/himself' (6). This issue of *Southerly* brings together poems, fiction, essays, articles and reviews which 'explore some emerging ethical implications of writing, with a particular emphasis on nonhuman animals' (7).

It is a difficult task to select and highlight certain poems over others. However, John Kinsella's 'Mouse 'Plague' Cycle' with its accompanying notes expresses how violence damages and hurts both the wrongdoer and the victim. He writes:

> We were trained to kill mice by the bucket-load, using lengths of poly-pipe to 'whack them.' The only thing that ended the plague was the mice themselves, self-destructing. The violence we meted out didn't even reduce the impact: rather, we killed and hurt without achieving the purported goal, and the damage was also to ourselves. (123)

The poem asks, 'How far into our heads have the mice burrowed? / Do we carry them inside out with us everywhere' (130)? This suggests that cruelties committed remain forever in the psyche of the perpetrator.

Stuart Cooke's poem 'When Are You Coming Back' pulses with a sense of loss and yearning. It suggests that 'you' are never coming back, and that damage of the natural world by humans can never be repaired: 'You've flown away / into time's smooth beak'; 'I remain a tear trying to solve its own theorem' (168). Christine Townsend's poem 'The Body on the Railway Line, Jaipur' (11) compares two different forms of violence. A schoolboy is killed because 'He was Muslim,' Daya said. / 'Hindu kills Muslim in these times' (12). This simple statement suggests that the death of an innocent young boy whose 'exercise books lay on the path/with a satchel' (12) is justifiable on the grounds that a war exists between two religious groups. In an ironic contrast, 'rescued cows' are left to die because 'It was forbidden to kill a cow' (11).

David Brooks' essay 'The Fallacies: Theory, Saturation, Capitalism and the Animal' suggests cryptically 'in every poem, as in every human artefact, there is, inevitably, the trace of slaughter.' Brooks considers that even the word 'animals' is 'a conceptual violence, a means of shielding ourselves *from* what we like to think of as "*them*"'. Brooks writes that 'much of our ontological distress' stems from our denial of our own 'animality' and that daily we engage in 'acts of cannibalism' (47). Stevie's thoughts in Kim Hunt's story 'Totaranui' express a similar sentiment: 'She didn't understand how anyone could eat and kill an animal they acknowledged and interacted with each day; it seemed such a profound betrayal' (19). Peter Downcy's story, 'These Lonely Hills', recounts the intense feelings of sadness and loss which a man shares with his father at the death of their cattle dog.

> I felt an overwhelming oneness with my father, the likes of which I had never felt before; yet at the same sad time, no part of me wished to approach that grievous creature. (44)

The story acknowledges the bonds connecting humans and animals, yet also suggests a realisation of the differences between them.

*

Sight Lines is a fitting title for the twenty-eighth UTS Writers' Anthology, an annual production produced by the writing students at the University of Technology, Sydney. How you see things depends on your position, your vantage point, your point of view or line of sight. In the forward for this anthology, Hannah Kent writes that the collection features 'thirty-one new ways of seeing the world', different understandings of 'displacement, of the frailty and poignancy of human connection' and is a literary transportation 'through time, ages, landscapes and cultures' (viii). The anthology does not have a unifying theme, however there is a sense of cohesion throughout, in that all of these short works emanate from a singular viewpoint about a particular visceral situation.

In the opening story 'The Ends of the Earth', Mack is preparing for calamity and the possible end of civilization. He spends his days bottling peaches ready for the impending catastrophe he feels is looming, and when it comes, he has readied a shelter in a cave. His wife, Chantou, however, has in fact experienced cataclysmic events through a real war not just the fear of one. She tells him, 'You have never been to war, Mack. You don't know. Me? I know… War is not a hobby, Mack. It is not some stupid game' (10).

In 'Backslidden' a woman empathises with the loss she imagines her birth mother would have encountered when she relinquished her at birth 'into a stranger's longing arms' leaving her 'with an empty womb and aching breasts' (24). The woman's relationship with her adoptive mother is somewhat fraught and appears to revolve around her adoptive mother's religious convictions and needs. The daughter seems to yearn for her point of origin, her birth mother. When she takes up with a non-Christian man, her adoptive family are aghast. She reflects that her adoptive parents see her as 'Backslidden … fallen away, turned back' (29). Yet, the term carries a dual meaning when is it used to describe how 'when a calf is being born, it sometimes slides back into the womb of the mother' (29).

In 'Epiphany in Three Parts', an art curator views the world through the prism of synaesthesia in which 'the sensory connections are so interlinked that sometimes they don't even know the rest of the world is bereft of them' (60). The poem 'synaesthesia' uses this particular sensory phenomenon to frame the description of a death:

> as you die, sounds become heavy, smooth and malleable
> like wet sheets, or muscles. Maybe if I empty myself,
> like pouring water from a jug, the light will never go
> out, through many damnable people throw tears,
> whole rivers, and their many, many sins like / grains of rice.
> (170)

The image of the pitting of cherries in which 'it even hurts to scoop the seed / from the flesh, to separate the sour from the sweet' (168) suggests

the nature of death – the materiality of the body is cast off, leaving behind the source: the seed.

'A Winter Solstice' is an exploration of the loneliness that sometimes exists in a marriage. '… Joe pictured himself and Ellen moving on different planes, occupying the same house, but not at the same time' (193). This story explores the separateness of the experience of two people in a relationship and the effects of compromise. At a dinner party, Joe enjoys the company and his wife Ellen does not. 'For the first time since they had moved there hadn't felt like a diluted version of himself' (185). As well as loneliness, 'Jealousy is a strange companion' and perhaps no one person can totally meet the needs of another. Maybe it is this thought that occurs to Joe when he asks his wife, '…are you looking for something, Ellen?' (196)

Alice finds a strange solace from her isolation and loneliness when she conducts her own private music show 'The End of the World Radio Hour' in the story of the same name. She plays records for people who are no longer there although it is not clear if the isolation Alice encounters is real or imagined. Is she really the last person left on earth or is this an illusory state of exile and isolation? 'During the day she could admit she was alone. She could roam around town on her bike and be the queen of her castle. At night she needed to believe' (225). In her private radio show Alice plays songs for people who have disappeared from her life for reasons she cannot fathom: 'Aliens felt more rational than her other explanation' that the 'whole of the God-fearing town had been taken … leaving her – the heathen – behind' (226).

The points of view presented in *Sight Lines*, though arguably not 'new', nevertheless offer a reminder of how individual our ways of 'seeing the world' really are.

Mary Pomfret is writing a creative PhD at La Trobe University, Bendigo. Her work has appeared in a variety of Australian and international journals. Ginninderra Press published her short form collections Writing in Virginia's Shadow *in 2012 and* Cleaning out the Closet *in 2014.*

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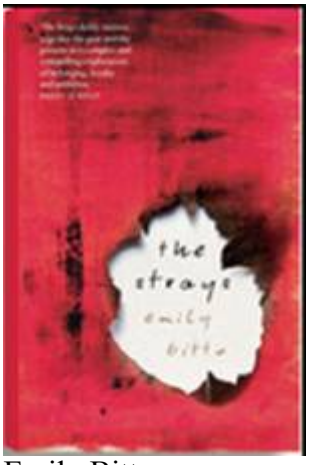
TEXT review

Speak, memory

review by Ruby Todd



Emily Bitto
The Strays
Affirm Press, South Melbourne 2014
ISBN 9781922213211
Pb 290pp AUD24.99

In LP Hartley's classic coming-of-age novel *The Go-Between*, famous for its evocation of the past as a foreign country, narrator Leo comes to terms with long-buried memories of his loss of innocence half a century ago. He recalls one fateful summer in 1900, when at twelve years old he went to stay with a school friend at his family's Norfolk mansion, Brandham Hall, to become enraptured by the lively idyll of life at the Hall, the freedom of its abundant park, and its cast of characters. Yet this pastoral scene is, from the outset, shadowed by the knowledge that it will not last, and we read on to witness Leo's implication in a web of adult attachments that will haunt the rest of his life. As an adult, from a critical distance of fifty years, Leo imagines telling his younger self: 'You flew too near to the sun, and you were scorched' (Hartley 2000: 17).

I found myself, at times, recalling the tone and preoccupations of Hartley's wonderful book while reading Emily Bitto's debut novel. While *The Strays* is in many ways a vastly different tale, like *The Go-Between* it converges to powerful effect around the monumental impact that certain singular events in childhood can exert on our future lives and selves, and testifies to the strange capacity of the past, through memory, to animate the present. Like *The Go Between*, Bitto's elegant novel is retrospectively framed, and narrated by a mature first-person protagonist who remains haunted by events that took place decades ago in youth. In the novel's movement, these long-ago events are at last recalled, with more immediacy and intensity than the present can summon, while the reader is drawn on toward a dark reckoning as finally, past and present converge.

Bridging the two very different historical periods of 1980s and post-Depression 1930s Melbourne, *The Strays* opens with aged Art History lecturer Lily recalling the years of her childhood and adolescence in 1930s Melbourne, spent within the ferocious embrace of her friendship with Eva Trentham. Lily is immediately captivated by Eva's charismatic and unpredictable parents, who are so unlike her own – the mercurial Evan, a celebrated yet controversial painter of surreal, Gothic scenes channelling Bosch in the Australian landscape, and the glamorous yet aloof Helena. An only child of doting but conventional parents, Lily becomes increasingly integrated into the radically different world of the Trentham family, a world of art, impromptu parties, intellectual passion and conspiracy. All is staged daily in their sprawling ancestral home and garden in Bulleen, a real yet mythical place with an obvious resemblance to Heide, where adult Lily 'still wander(s) in dreams between the pale grey pillars of the lemon-scented gums' (15). Enthralled by the glamour and freedom of this world, Lily longs to truly belong in it, and increasingly looks upon the values and aspirations represented by her parents as stifling and alien. With the intensity of an imposter, 'a cuckoo in the nest', Lily at once idealises the Trentham clan, and, in her self-conscious distance from them, observes and catalogues their activities in her journals (141). In doing so, she not only preserves the triumphs, intimacies and devastations of a vibrant family she loves, but the private daily reality underlying a pivotal moment in Australian modern art and cultural politics.

Evan and Helena live by their ideals, cultivating around them a community of like-minded artists by inviting them into their family and home, to share the 'luxury of carefree detachment' offered by Helena's inheritance (151). These "strays" of the title, all of them in different ways displaced from the conservative society around them, find in the Trentham home a freedom from the constraints that work and rented lodgings place upon their artistic freedom. Together, they convert stables into a shared studio, and form the Melbourne Modern Art Group, a movement reminiscent of the Angry Penguins, intent on challenging realist tradition and invigorating the landscape of Australian art by drawing from Modernist innovations in Europe within a uniquely Australian context. In this unstructured atmosphere, Eva and her sisters Bea and Heloise, and Lily among them, are an afterthought, left much to their own devices and constantly privy to the ongoings of an adult world, forming 'their own small democracy' (82).

When Lily goes to stay with the Trenthams for the summer at fourteen, she witnesses in this community something close to a utopia of excitement and vision. Finally, as the tenuous balance of the Trentham home descends into chaos, Lily witnesses the downfall of Evan and Helena's bohemian dream, and learns the cost of ideals in a life lived for art – a cost that may continue to incur in time, to be paid by those least responsible for it. The meditative recollection that constitutes *The Strays*, at once tender and painful, is the measure of Lily's own reckoning with this cost, and with the tragic ironies of its consequences for Eva and her sisters, and for herself. Lily's narrative illustrates the sadistic potential of artistic creation, when such creation, albeit unintentionally, is predicated on the sacrifice and sublimation of real people – and questions the cult of the male artistic subject whose work thematises the feminine. Moreover, it questions the mechanisms of the wider cultural system through which artists and their oeuvres are mythologised – to the extent that the real historical forces and people that inspired an artwork are ultimately totalised by it, reduced in art history and popular imagination to just another 'interpretive lens' by which to approach that artwork (277).

Bitto has created an elegantly formed, resonant novel, melding vivid images, an ear for dialogue, and a well-measured narrative pace with the current of humour that always runs through human tragedy. With delicacy and restraint, *The Strays* explores rich terrain – the violence and redemption of art, the ever-presence of personal history, and the interrogation of childhood selves by adult selves in search of understanding and absolution. Perhaps more than anything, Lily's narrative attests to the powers of memory to vividly summon past experiences and past selves, and to offer repeat encounter with the forces that have shaped our present lives and selves. Being able, through memory, to revisit the foreign country of the past, the country in which she too was scorched, is a process by which Lily, like Leo, becomes more answerable to herself and to her future.

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Ruby Todd is a PhD candidate in Creative and Critical Writing at Deakin University, Melbourne, where she is completing her second novel and researching the operations of absence in literary language and the authorial impulse.

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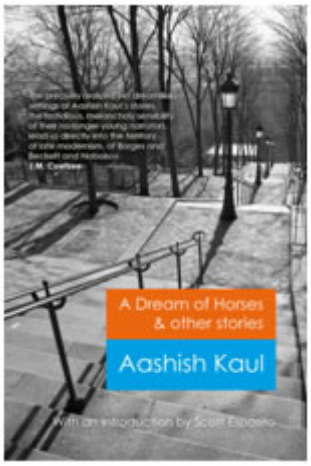
TEXT review

The wandering writer

review by Nadia Niaz



Aashish Kaul
A Dream of Horses & other stories
John Hunt Publishing, Alresford HA, 2014
ebook ISBN10: 1782795367
pb ISBN13: 9781782795360
Pb 117pp AUD7.99 ebook, AUD12.95 pb

In *A Dream of Horses and other Stories*, Aashish Kaul presents the reader with seven different narrators, all of whom seem lost in some way. Some enter dream states while others speak from liminal or even dissociated spaces. Their individual realities are fluid, making 'reality' itself ultimately unknowable. In this way, Kaul is able to take the reader through landscapes and images that are woven together from a host of influences, all of which he acknowledges in turn, some in the epigraphs that accompany each story, and some in the narrative itself. This engagement with other writers suggests a desire – and an invitation – to meditate on and explore the nature and purpose of the creative impulse itself.

In the first story, 'The Parable of the Archer', we meet an expert Chinese archer who, in seeking to become a true master, must face a trying path. In 'The Passage', a young soldier is seen running from trauma. In 'The Light Ascending', a demoralised author wanders a hillside and has a dream in which he meets his idol and has an epiphany. 'A Dream of Horses' takes us to Paris, where we encounter a writer regaining his strength after an illness. In 'Phantom Days', two friends on holiday in the mountains discuss the value of art in a world full of suffering. 'Tahiti' moves between an Indian hill station with a mysterious library and Paris with an enigmatic woman, as well as between dream states and wakefulness. 'Two Travellers' consists of an imaginary meeting and conversation between Samuel Beckett and Jorge Luis Borges, both of whom haunt the rest of the stories in this collection.

Among the motifs and themes in these stories are paths that wind and travel uphill, old buildings hidden by trees or looming over the landscape, discussions and musings about the act and point of writing, old men guiding younger, haunted, defeated or convalescing men, libraries, bookshops and collections of books, wind and the sounds it makes, flutes, and, most of all, journeys. Most of the stories suggest fugue states, though there is rarely any explicit trauma to point to as the cause. The narrators all wander through the world simultaneously burdened by an awareness of their own mortality and futility, and alive to the beauty of both the landscapes they inhabit in the present moment and those they have passed through previously.

There is a strong lyrical quality to Kaul's work, and the landscapes themselves are often well-realised. The ideas and tone of the stories are engaging, even enchanting; Kaul's writing has moments when it rises easily into the poetic. The collection suffers, however, from overwriting; the prose is weighed down by extraneity that might have been more rigorously edited. This is most evident in 'A Dream of Horses' with its many initially pleasant if arresting images that go on for far too long. For instance:

> Crows perched on telephone poles and the wires linking them, clutching countless conversations in their claws which escaped through their claws all the same as the crows stood still and the world spun beneath them and they with it. (27)

In contrast, in 'Two Travellers', perhaps the most succinct and skilfully written story in the collection, we meet an old writer – an imaginary Samuel Beckett – who feels he has lived

> …all his life in a soft fog of memories… Sounds and images come in flashes, while washing, cooking, walking. Everything he tastes, sees, touches, smells bursts into impressions. The solitary yelp of a dog reaching him from across the Marne is already that of many dogs barking in the stone quarries up in the hills in a night of his childhood. (92)

Kaul demonstrates the way each memory dissolves into the next, sometimes triggered by the previous one, sometimes by a passing impression. The effect of image turning into image is hypnotic at first, but after two pages, the spell wears off. Although Kaul cleverly includes images that range from lofty to everyday, he might have limited the list to a well-chosen few. Given that the narrator is the ghost of Beckett, however, the stylistic overlay may be intentional.

The thematic similarity to Borges – the other ghostly figure that pervades these stories and manifests in 'The Travellers' – is undeniable, but where Borges masters the art of dream states and multilayered narrative, Kaul falters, though not from lack of imagination or sensitivity. With strong editing, the quiet, brooding lyricism that Kaul aims for could be both sustained and captivating.

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TEXT review

Rummaging in our souls

review by Amy Brown

Mary Pomfret
Cleaning Out the Closet
Ginninderra Press, Port Adelaide 2014
ISBN 9781740278560
Pb 71pp AUD18.50

'I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in...,' Virginia Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf 1928: 6). As the epigraph to Mary Pomfret's second collection of short stories, it establishes a mood of psychological, domestic claustrophobia shared by the protagonists, each of whom seeks a release from her present situation or self: a mother cleans out her son's bedroom the day before he leaves home and finds 'memories tumbling over one another while she was down on her knees retrieving the last of the Lego pieces' (9); an eldest daughter is the only one of her siblings unable to forget or forgive her father's violent temper; a woman observes her small daughter's popularity at school and realises her contrastingly peripheral social life; a contemporary Tasmanian Cordelia fights with her sisters over her father's will; and a contemporary Anna Karenina meets with a divorce lawyer. Each story demonstrates how meditating on ostensibly mundane tasks or preoccupations, which usually obscure or dull personal trauma, can expose the troubling and closeted parts of oneself.

At their best, the ten stories in this collection convey familial relationships with the composure and acuity of Alice Munro or Lorrie Moore. We are introduced to narrator Roisin in 'Mother Superior's Garden Party'– a wry and raw vignette about intergenerational denial and domestic violence. At her mother's seventieth birthday garden party, Roisin is shunned by her brother and sister, who have forgotten their father's abuse. Both Roisin and her mother leave the party early; it is not a celebration for her mother, after all, but rather an opportunity for her father to hold court, and present

himself as a hero, expunging the reality of his bullying. The scenes are vivid fragments; the reader is invited to question Roisin's reliability. Later in the collection, 'Gravy and Tragedy' dramatises one of the traumatic memories responsible for Roisin's opinion of her father. Having helped her mother prepare a meagre Christmas dinner, Roisin calls her drunken father to the table to carve the bird.

> All trace of laughter and talk had disappeared as we all sat there motionless, watching as our father mutilated the pitiful chicken. The Christmas chicken was now an irreverent pile of flesh and skin, the bread seasoning scattered in hunks on the table. Plunging the fork in, he pulled up the chicken's anus and held it high in the air. Now, who is going to be the lucky one – who is going to eat the parson's nose?' (36)

Had Roisin's stories come in immediate succession, there would have been less opportunity for the reader to assess the narrator's reliability and to question the sources of tension pulling at what ought to have been a pleasant family event. By interspersing them with other narrators' voices, Pomfret allows the details of Roisin's stories to emerge gradually and partially, mimicking the creative act of memory, and demonstrating the different lifespans of pain and its origin. The strength and resonance of the stories mentioned above is perhaps a testament to the fact that Pomfret is currently completing a creative writing PhD concerned with presenting intergenerational trauma.

The interleaving narrative could also have served as a reinforcement of *Anna Karenina*'s opening; while the voices in this collection are almost unanimously female and concerned with familial pressures, their experiences of unhappiness are, it is implied, distinct and particular. However, while reading the collection, I found myself hoping for more sustained reflection on the causes of familial rifts. Instead, the stories tend to depict the effects of such tension, the pain that has been closeted away. This is an abundant subject, but it allows for little modulation of the emotional register across the collection. While the characterisation is often compelling and substantial enough for the reader to believe in a more complex existence for the narrator beyond the bounds of the text, the painful focal point of each story risks becoming predictable. In our 'Our Darker Purpose', Claudia (Cordelia) is grieving for her father:

> I'd walked into our father's room just a few days before he died. Gloria was there; Gloria was always fussing over him and if she wasn't, Raelene was. Asking him where he kept his financial papers, if they could help him with his banking, but never once did I see them cut his toenails or empty his bedpan. The nurse or I would do that. Now his room smelled of illness and death, a smell that even Gloria's perfume could not disguise. (25)

This approach to *King Lear* results in an interesting voicing of mental illness, but its interpretation of the sisters' rivalry comes across as a sketchy parody. Pomfret makes better use of *Anna Karenina* in 'La Tristesse...'; a train station scene that could easily have descended into sentimentality instead deftly demonstrates how tragedy is not separate from but endemic to the commonplace. It is a reminder of Anna's declaration that 'rummaging in our souls, we often dig up something that

ought to have lain there unnoticed' (Tolstoy 2003: 157), which is an apt metaphor for Pomfret's collection as a whole.

While much of *Cleaning Out the Closet* is in the same key, it is inhabited by relatable characters who deserve to be cared about and remembered. The promise of this collection is somewhat marred by haphazard copy-editing; spelling and typographical errors of a frequency that distracts from the quality of the prose. This disappointment aside, Pomfret's writing is enjoyable and affecting.

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Dr Amy Brown is a New Zealand poet and novelist, who lives in Melbourne. In 2012, she completed her PhD at the University of Melbourne, where she now teaches creative writing. Her first book, The Propaganda Poster Girl*, was shortlisted for a New Zealand Book Award in 2009. Her latest book, a contemporary epic poem titled* The Odour of Sanctity *was published in 2013.*

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