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Central Queensland University

Sandra Arnold

Sing no sad songs

Biographical note:

Sandra Arnold has a MLitt and PhD in Creative Writing (CQUniversity). With poet David Howard she co-founded the New Zealand literary magazine, *Takahe*, in 1989 and was its fiction editor until 1995. She writes fiction and non-fiction and her work has been published and broadcast in New Zealand and published internationally. She teaches Academic Writing at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology in Christchurch, New Zealand. Email: ArnoldS@CPIT.ac.nz

Keywords:

Creative nonfiction – grief – parental bereavement

A fantail sat in the ivy on the barn and watched as we packed the wheelchair and commode into the car. Chris drove into town to return them to the hospital. And came home with Rebecca's ashes. Before he had time to move them to his study I walked into the laundry and saw a small, green cardboard box on the washing machine. I looked from the box to the sink where, two years ago, Rebecca had stood washing her pet ferret, Stinky. Bare-footed, in shorts and crop top, eyes sparkling, grinning at the camera, with the soapy ferret draped over her hands like a piece of stretchy rubber. Now she no longer had a body. Her beautiful smile, her talents, her hopes and dreams all fitted into this small green box. This was beyond tears. This was beyond my ability to stay in my skin.

Over the following week I launched into a maniacal cleaning frenzy. The house shone within an inch of its life. Next we started on the garden, pruning trees, letting the light in. We worked in the paddocks from morning till night, clearing the trimmings from the gorse hedge and loading them onto the bonfire and burning them. A contractor came to cut back two huge macrocarpa trees. Chris sawed up the logs into firewood for the winter and I heaved them into the wheelbarrow and trundled them to the woodshed. It was hard physical work, but we needed to have a reason to stay out of the house all day so we could be exhausted enough to fall asleep at night. Even so, sleep was fitful and racked with terrifying dreams. Waking in the morning was worse. Always the split second of forgetfulness followed by an awareness of something that needed to be remembered. Then full consciousness that left me breathless, hollowed out, scraped raw.

Friends visited with flowers and food and company. They invited us out, but we couldn't face re-joining the world. We talked about selling the house and leaving the area, but had no energy to begin such a process. People phoned and asked how we were, but I had no words to express how we were. We avoided sitting at the table to eat because the empty place was more intensely redolent of Rebecca than her physical presence had ever been, though she'd rarely sat at the table with us in those last few weeks. Soon the soup and casseroles ran out so I cooked a meal and set the table. When we sat down I saw I'd set it for three.

It exhausted me to answer the phone or receive visitors. However, I recognised that other people loved Rebecca and had a need to come to our home and grieve too. Sometimes I was surprised by the intensity of their grief. Sometimes I had to be the one who gave comfort.

A week after Rebecca died we left the house to go to our son-in-law, Mark's, graduation ceremony at the Christchurch Town Hall. He asked Chris to go on stage with the other academics. Chris compromised by bringing his gown to the graduation so he and Mark could have photographs taken together. However, as we took our seats in the auditorium Chris said he regretted his decision not to go on stage. He looked for the organiser and asked for an extra chair to be put there so he could take part. Afterwards we went with Susannah, Mark and his family to the Curator's House

in the Botanic Gardens for lunch. It was meant to be a day of celebration. But it didn't feel real.

Two of Rebecca's friends from Art School, Jo and Christine, cleared out her locker and brought over her unfinished projects, and a book that the staff and students had made in which they'd written their thoughts about her. A couple of lecturers had written that she was one of the school's most promising, talented and successful students. A classmate had written, "I hope she's happy, drawing and riding horses somewhere." They brought us flowers and a white rose bush to plant in the garden. The mood in their class was sombre, Christine said. No one could believe it. Everyone had been on holiday when it happened, so they hadn't heard the news until they returned for the next term, expecting that Rebecca would be picking up from where she'd left off last September. "Everyone used to call her Warrior Princess and Celtic Woman because she was so strong-minded and adventurous," Jo said. When they went out onto the Port Hills to draw, Rebecca leapt from rock to rock until she fell into a gorse bush, tearing her skin. "The blood was pouring out, but she said it didn't hurt and she carried on drawing. That's when we started the Warrior Princess thing." As she talked I thought of Rebecca setting out for Art School dressed in a miniskirt, riding chaps, her grandmother's green pentagram necklace, a jewel stuck between her eyebrows and studded leather bands on her wrists.

"Omigod! You're surely not going out like that?"

"I'm an art student. I can dress how I like."

"Hmmm ... well I suppose that's true."

Two weeks after Rebecca died I saw in the TV guide that *Xena: Warrior Princess* was on that evening. It had been one of Rebecca's favourite programmes and though I normally didn't watch it, I felt impelled to see this episode. It concluded with Xena's death and her reappearance to her friend, Gabrielle. She assured Gabrielle that she would always be there for her in spirit. I wept, "I didn't know it was the final episode. I thought Xena was indestructible."

Peter, our GP came to see us the day he got back from Europe. He was of the generation of doctors who considered home visits normal. He was in tears as I described Rebecca's last days and her funeral in our garden and the visits of the fantail. For many years after Rebecca's birth, he'd laughingly ascribed her childhood ailments to the fact she'd 'been born in a cave', referring to the Leboyer birthing method I'd insisted on having. Just before she died he told Chris he wanted to be the one who certified her death. But just as he'd missed her entrance into the world so too had he missed her exit.

The District Nurses, Mary and Prue, called in to see me. At the same time Kate, the palliative care doctor, rang. When I told them about the fantail's visits they said Rebecca's spirit was so strong she'd have found a way to send us some comfort after her death and that because of her affinity with nature, sending the fantail was the way she'd do it. They also said she was able to die in the way she had, without fear or

pain, because of all the love around her. A few days later, the stoma care nurse, who'd been so abrupt about Rebecca's minding the ileostomy bag, rang and said the same thing. She sounded kind. I wished she'd been kinder to Rebecca.

Three of Rebecca's closest friends, Natasha, Bart and Grant, came out and spent the whole day with us. They wanted to talk and talk about her. Bart was in tears. He said he couldn't believe she was gone and couldn't accept it, "Even when I saw Becks in that coffin." Someone he knew had attempted suicide. This made him angry because Rebecca had wanted so much to live. They spoke about the crazy things they'd done at high school; the parties they'd gone to; the old car they'd kept on our property and painted with rainbow colours and raced around the river beds in. Their stories fell like rain in a desert. Before they left they searched through the photograph albums and selected the photos they wanted copies of.

Fabiano wrote from Brazil about his distress that he wasn't there when Rebecca died. I told him she couldn't leave while he and all her friends and her brother and sister were with her. That they all needed to leave before she could.

Our neighbour, Sue, Rebecca's riding buddy, said she couldn't stop crying one day. That night she dreamt Rebecca was standing at the foot of the bed in her riding clothes, smiling and happy. The next day Sue rode Rebecca's horse, Red, down to the river and decided to ride him every day.

I went out into the paddock to groom the horses and set out jumping poles. I sat on the barrels Rebecca had placed under the trees. With my eyes closed I tried to hear the sounds of cantering hooves and pictured Rebecca, long, blonde hair flying out behind her as she took the horse towards the jump. "Did ya see that Mum?" But I opened my eyes to empty spaces and silence.

Chris wandered out to find me and I asked him whether he thought it was best to die quickly with no time to say goodbye, or die by inches, as Rebecca had, even though we did have time to say all the things we wanted to. He didn't know. Then John and Sue came over and Chris brought cups of tea into the paddock. As we stood talking, Chris jumped onto my horse, Jade's, back. It was something Rebecca had done many times. However, it was an error of judgement on Chris's part because Jade hadn't been ridden bareback for months. Not only that, Chris had never learned to ride. I was about to tell him to get off and Sue was about to go for a bridle, when Jade trotted off, gathering speed. Chris tried to jump off, but fell to the ground, landing on his head. We ran over to him. He was white, his pupils had dilated and his pulse was weak. He didn't know where he was or what had happened. John called the ambulance while I sat by Chris, wailing. Just before Chris was lifted into the ambulance his memory returned briefly and with it, the memory of Rebecca's death, as if he'd heard it for the first time. In the ambulance he drifted off, woke up to ask what had happened and again and again cried, "She's *dead*, isn't she?"

The ambulance stopped at the local surgery for the paperwork before continuing on to the hospital in town. The same locum was there who'd certified Rebecca's death.

When he'd examined her he'd strolled out of her room and started chatting cheerily to Chris about his sister who was doing an engineering course at Canterbury University and asked Chris if he knew her. I stared at him in disbelief. And now, here he was again, asking me to go into the surgery to sign forms. My grey face? My tears? The semi-conscious man on the stretcher? FORMS? I told him the forms could wait. We. Needed. To. Get. Chris. To. Hospital. NOW.

As I look back on this and similar situations during Rebecca's illness and after her death, I'm incredulous that I stayed silent in the face of such crass behaviour. But the territory was so foreign I had no language with which to negotiate it. Instead I questioned whether I'd heard correctly. I told myself I must have misunderstood the paramedic who asked me "how long has she got?" on one of our trips back from hospital; that I couldn't possibly have heard the registrar tell Rebecca that if her intestinal blockage didn't clear "that'll be it"; and when I heard "You're lucky you've got two other children," and "God needed her more than you did," I told myself everyone else was as unfamiliar with this territory as I was, or they surely wouldn't say something so stupid.

Sue came with us in the ambulance, her calm, reassuring presence preventing me from lapsing into hysteria. The trip to hospital. The Emergency Department. The same doctors and nurses. A nightmarish replay of recent months. Fortunately, the x-rays showed Chris wasn't seriously injured and after four hours he was discharged. We arrived home to a crackling fire and a meal in the oven, cooked by John.

The world no longer felt safe or predictable. Our elder daughter, Susannah, was devastated by Rebecca's death and had started thinking of having a baby to ensure the continuity of life. Benjamin left the Church. He said he no longer wanted to sing about the grace of God when there was no grace to be found in his sister dying at the age of twenty- three.

Several months before Rebecca was diagnosed with cancer she told me she longed to travel, but that ultimately she would want to buy land near us. "I just can't imagine myself living far away from you and Dad," she said, and I'd laughed, remembering the teacher prising her white-knuckled little fingers off my hand the day she started school. But this was no normal nest-emptying. There were Rebecca-shaped spaces everywhere we looked. Her paintings hung on the walls and filled her room. Her clothes hung in her cupboard. Her dog and cats and horses and goat still needed to be taken care of and fed. We heard the same sounds she'd loved, the stags roaring at night, the wind in the trees, the horses whinnying in the paddocks. But within these objects and animals and within these sounds there were no gales of laughter. No wood cuttings littered the floor, no paint-stained cloths on the table, no half-eaten sandwiches on the bench. I could smell her scent on her hairbrush and her clothes – like summer grass, saturated with sun. I could hear her voice in my head. But oh, the silence. Oh, the stillness.

We sat down to have dinner, but I couldn't sit still. I jumped up to go and groom the horses.

"What ... *now*?" said Chris.

"Yes, now." I said.

Their smell. Their warm breath on my head as I picked out their hooves and brushed their manes. This was the best form of therapy that existed, in Rebecca's opinion. And she was right. I stopped crying and hugged the horses. And thought of Rebecca jumping over the gate at the end of a ride, washing their tack, brushing them, putting their rugs on. It was during our rides on the river bed that she opened up and told me things I'd never known about her, all her hopes and dreams. She wanted to go to Texas to work on a horse ranch for a while, and to Ireland because she loved Celtic history. She'd also like to go to Brazil again and help David with his riding school. Most of all she wanted to buy her own land in the future and breed horses and have lots of animals. She thought she might like to marry some day and have two children. "They'd have to be born in the saddle though," she laughed.

Since her childhood, when she'd clung to me like a limpet, she had astonished me with her beauty, her humour, her daring, her energy, and now her ideas for the future. These tumbled over each other with such rapidity I lost track of them. I was amazed by this girl of ours, and worried constantly that her risk-taking would result in an accident. There was good reason for this. She told me cheerily one day that she'd driven through the level crossing just before the train came through.

"It was pouring with rain and my wipers weren't working that well," she laughed. "I saw these red flashing lights, but they didn't register until I drove over the crossing. Then I saw the train. *Whoops!*"

She tossed off my lecture with, "Don't worry. I have nine lives."

"No, you *don't!* You're a *girl*, not a *cat!*"

Walking over the paddocks to the trench Rebecca had dug so she could train Jade to get over his fear of jumping ditches, I thought of stories people had told me of sensing their dead relatives near them: an unexpected whiff of perfume, the radio unaccountably turning on, a light touch on the side of the head. My father had told me that when he was dozing in a chair a few days after my mother died, he felt a soft pressure on his foot and woke to see her sitting opposite him smiling. "It only lasted a few seconds," he said, "and then she was gone. But I know she was there. I wasn't dreaming." Well, if it gives him comfort to think that, we'd said. My brother told me that our mother's favourite flower had bloomed at her front door.

"Coincidence," we said.

"Probably," he agreed. "But in winter?"

My longing to have Rebecca with me again, to see her and touch her, filled me with a despair far beyond tears. Far beyond my ability to express in any way whatsoever. My grief was physical and my whole body ached with it. In the middle of the paddock, where no one could hear me, I called my daughter's name. A sheep from

the neighbouring paddock bleated loudly in response. It sounded distressed. I hurried over to investigate.

When Rebecca was six, she gave me a crayoned picture of a wiggly oval shape covered in coloured spikes.

“What is it?”

“It’s a sheep.”

“And what are these spikes?”

“They’re his sparkles.”

“Sparkles?”

“Yes, he’s so happy he’s sparkling!”

The sheep complaining at the fence wasn’t sparkling; in fact he was trapped with his head stuck in the wires. I pulled at them, but I couldn’t free him.

Oh, stupid sheep.

Wire-cutters! Go on!

Where?

In the shed!

What do wire-cutters look like?

These ones here! In the toolbox!

Back at the fence with the cutters I sliced through the wire and the sheep pulled his head free. He stopped and looked at me and gave a grunt before running off.

“You’re welcome,” I called after him.

What had I expected? That Rebecca would waft by me playing a harp?

Get *real* Mum!

Research statement

Research background

Sing no sad songs is an extract from my PhD thesis which comprises a theoretically informed exegesis and a creative nonfiction memoir on grieving the death of my young adult daughter from cancer. Clinical studies on grieving young adult child death from cancer (Grinyer 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006a, 2006b) indicate that death from cancer in young adults is very rare. These studies also highlight the need for extended discourse on the effects of such a death on parents.

Research contribution

Two memoirs (Addison 2001) and Grant (2005) deal with the topic of grieving the death from cancer of a young adult son, but a gap existed in creative literature on grieving the death from cancer of a young adult daughter. My creative work draws on a body of knowledge about grief by such writers as Addison (2001), Allende (1995, 2008), Didion (2006), Grant (2005), Holcroft (1989), Lewis (1961), and Noel (2005) and extends it by elucidating parental grief for the death of a young adult daughter from cancer.

Research significance

In entering the space of a narrative on parental grief, readers may take the story beyond the confines of the page and use it to articulate their own stories. The academic significance of this work is recognised by the publication of a chapter from my thesis in *Research into 21st Century Communities* (2007), a paper in *TEXT* (October 2009) and a presentation at the Australian Association of Writing Programs annual Conference (November 2009).

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CQUniversity, Australia

Donna Lee Brien

First loves

Biographical note:

Donna Lee Brien is Associate Professor of Creative Industries at CQUniversity, Australia. Founding Editor of *dotlit: The Online Journal of Creative Writing* (2000-2004) and Assistant Editor of *Imago: New Writing* (1999-2003), Donna is currently on the International Editorial Board of *New Writing: International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* (UK), *Coolibah* (Spain) and the new food studies journal, *Locale*. The Immediate Past President of the Australian Association of Writing Programs, Donna is widely published in the areas of writing pedagogy and praxis, practice-led research, creative nonfiction and collaborative practice in the arts, and has been writing biographies and about the form in academic and more popular publications since the 1980s.

Keywords:

Creative nonfiction – biography – Mary Dean – George Dean

This part of my life is hard for me to write about—but I am going to put it all down as plainly as I can. Florence, you should know that your father, Benjamin William Bridge, is not the man you were born to. I know the accident of birth is worth nothing compared to a lifetime of care, but the fact is that your natural father is my first husband, the infamous George Dean. He is, as I write, in prison for perjury, but he should be rotting there for his whole life for trying to murder me.¹

Ma warned me about boys from the time I was a little girl, saying I was to *save myself*—although I did used to wonder how you could pick that right one from all the others. I liked lots of boys but had only one serious suitor before I met George. In those days Frank Brereton was as wild as a young kangaroo, but a few years later he was married and holding a job steady. I was a fool for spurning him, but I was as green as grass when I met George.²

That was the autumn of 1893. I had just turned nineteen and thought I was wild about Frank, but forgot about him the moment George asked me to dance. We were at a picnic at Cabarita Beach and all mad for dancing then. It didn't matter how tired you were, as soon as you heard the music you felt as light as air. I loved whirring around, my dress swirling, the boys blushing when they asked you, them smelling of pomade and soap and us girls wearing as much scent as we thought we could get away with.

George took my hand without an ounce of hesitancy. I was dazzled by his looks and his fine clothes, and especially the way his fingers caressed his lips as he smoothed back his moustache. His skin was so fine, almost transparent, and when he was hot, or angry, or excited, you could see his veins pulsing blue. The first time I saw him completely unclothed, I was taken aback, his flesh was so pale he seemed to glow against the sheets.

One of my friends told me he was that ferry captain who, a few years before, had leapt into the harbour and saved two women from drowning. It had been in all the papers—how the steamer cast off from Circular Quay but, for some reason, the women had tried to jump back onto the jetty and fell into the oily water. Although the night was very dark, George went straight in after them. With one clutching 'round his neck and holding the other up under her arms, he somehow got them both across to the jetty. Then he had to dive back in and swim out to the ferry, which had drifted some distance from the wharf. The passengers all cheered him on and George was the toast of the town. A public collection was made, and he was presented with that gold watch he was so proud of.³ He had, my friend went on, performed a number of rescues since, and he seemed such a brave and romantic figure. I have often thought about how those acts contrasted with his murderous heart. But, that day, as we danced, all I thought about was how he was the best-looking man this side of Parramatta. He smiled at me while we twirled and pranced, but he never made any sign that he wanted to see me again.

Then, about a month later, he walked into the fruit shop one afternoon. He was flushed and hot and did not recognise me until I reminded him about our dance. He wanted some lemons and when I fetched them I thought he was going to take the bag and leave, but instead he told me he was cycling down to Coogee for a swim with some of his friends. I remember thinking how nice that would be, to please yourself

about what you did. Later, George testified I kept him talking until he agreed to visit me again. I admit I did like the look of him, but he never hid his own interest after that day in the shop and was soon visiting me regularly. It only took him ten minutes to cycle down from his lodgings in Woollahra and, if he wasn't keen, why would he have always stayed with me until it was time to take charge of the night boat down at the quay? It was me who was trapped behind the counter or at home.⁴

George was never much of a talker. It was only with the greatest reluctance that he told me anything about his early life and, when he did, he painted himself as some kind of character in a novel, pluckily fighting against the most adverse of circumstances. At the time, I soaked up his hogwash like a sponge, but now I see he always put the most positive slant possible on everything. That was when he wasn't telling out-and-out lies.

He said he was born in the country, in Albury on the great Murray River, but didn't live there long, as his family moved north to Narrandera, a very remote town on the Murrumbidgee, five hundred miles from Sydney. He never spoke of his father and once, when I pressed him, he did his block and stormed out, slamming the door so hard all the windows shook. I used to think his dad must have skived off, but later found out he was a policeman who had blown his brains out after letting a prisoner escape. After this, the mother was left to raise six young children on her own. George was the eldest boy.

George also never told me that he had a sister who lived with his mother in Narrandera in very straightened circumstances. I only found out about them from what was in the papers, and I have no way of knowing how much of that was true. I see now it was more shame on George that he took no interest in their welfare but, shame on me too, I know I would have resented him sending them any money. He also had a brother, another shadowy figure who got into trouble in Sydney and was put on the *Vernon*, a prison ship for wayward boys moored off Cockatoo Island.⁵

George's mother married again while he was still a boy. This Finch was no great shakes as a husband, and within a couple of years skipped off to Sydney. Nothing surprising in that—a constant man is the exception to the rule—but what was different about old Finch was that he took his twelve-year-old stepson with him. But then Finch proved not to be that unusual, deserting George almost as soon as they arrived, leaving him with a blacksmith in Woollahra. Maybe, though, this had always been the plan, for George said the smithy was a good man who not only taught him a trade, but gave him a decent roof over his head as well.

George stayed there until he was sixteen, but when he got a job as a deckhand on a harbour ferry, he began boarding with German friends, the Konneckes, also in Woollahra. The father, Fred, was a butcher who had ten children, six of whom were daughters. George used to go on and on about those girls, to the point where I got quite jealous and wondered why he did not go wooing one of them. In court, Konnecke later said that George was like a son to him and that he never had a moment's concern about leaving him alone with his daughters. George introduced me to the whole family, but only told them about our marriage a fortnight afterwards.⁶

By the time he was twenty-one, George had qualified for his harbour master's certificate. He had only the slimmest of schooling, and found completing the examinations a real challenge. But he passed, and a few months later was put in charge of one of the company's night boats, a position of considerable trust.⁷ He did well and his salary was raised to three pounds a week. This was when, he said, that he started putting some of his wages by. He was a saver, I'll say that about him. His lawyers made much of the fact that he usually gave me two pounds a week, but that was to feed both of us and look after the house. There was nothing left for the bits and pieces I needed with a baby coming, let alone to buy myself any scrap of clothing.⁸ I know we were lucky compared to some, for times were hard and getting worse with the bank crashes, but George kept a pound all to himself and I wanted to know what he spent it on.⁹

Most of the married women I knew were unhappy, yet as a girl I was like my friends—mad to be married, dreaming of being rich and posh and beyond all trouble. Although I was not unhappy at home, I hated working in the shop. We started at eight in the morning and stayed open until seven or eight every night, except Saturday when we never closed up until after nine.¹⁰ A nice little house, money of my own, a decent husband and a baby whenever one came along seemed a far more attractive proposition.

George said in evidence that my mother bailed him up that Christmas, 1893, when we had been courting more than six months, and asked him *if he didn't think it was about time we got married?* In court, he said she badgered him until she got her way, but it was me who was not completely convinced.¹¹ He was, as I have said, handsome with a strong physique, but I never felt as overcome when we were alone as I had with Frank. In spite of that, I was impressed by how steady he was, working for the same ferry company for ten years, and knew I did not want to be stuck behind a counter my whole life. So, I accepted his proposal and we set the date for early March.

Once I almost broke it off. We were sitting in the little parlour behind the shop, as we often did after I closed up. It was hot and I wanted to go out, take a tram to the city, perhaps go to Paddy's and look at the hats or just walk down to the harbour and watch the other people. But George would not budge. Ma was out and he kept kissing and touching me. I was trying not to hurt his feelings, but he was getting more and more het up and I didn't like it. It wasn't like when I first met Frank and had to tear myself away from his kisses, and would then lie in bed stroking my skin to imagine how I felt to him. Usually I would let George kiss me until I thought he'd had enough and then try to distract him. But that night, I knew what he wanted. And he knew I knew, and wouldn't take no for an answer. But I told him to get off, and I meant it. I told him I was scared of getting into trouble and having to hurry the wedding, but the real reason was that I did not feel a strong passion for him.

And then I thought of how it would be when we were married, and him coming at me like that night after night. I was about to end it, then and there, when he pulled a little box out of his pocket. It was a brooch, all silver and sparkling. He held it to my shoulder and said such nice things to me that, in the end, I gave in. I have never told this to anyone, but I thought of Frank and it wasn't that bad.¹²

From that moment, I was his and the die was cast. How different my life might have been if I had got up and left him alone in that dusty parlour. A rocky courtship does not always doom a marriage, but I think it did ours. There is always a period of adjustment in the early days of matrimony, a time when you get used to each other, but it seems to me a great many people never resolve their differences. We certainly never did.¹³

Endnotes

Mary Dean, who changed her surname to Bridge after she divorced and remarried, was repeatedly poisoned by her husband, George Dean, in 1895. Unless otherwise stated, the story Mary recounts in this fictionalised memoir is based on documented historical evidence including the legal sources listed below. Mary Dean is not a fictional character, and as there is no evidence that she ever penned a memoir of her experiences, I have constructed her biography from the historical sources, and written it in the first person from her point of view.

1. In 1896, after a legal scandal of monumental proportions, George Dean was gaoled for perjury for giving false evidence while on trial for poisoning his wife of one year, Mary.
2. Mary met George Dean at a picnic at one of Sydney's most popular beauty spots, Cabarita, an Aboriginal name meaning 'by the water', on the Parramatta River in 1894 (*1911 Edition Encyclopaedia*). Dean noticed Mary while he was dancing a set of Lancers (a kind of quadrille) with the girl he had gone to the picnic with. Mary was then 'an attractive young woman ... of average height or a little below it, oval faced, fresh complexion, dark haired, trim figure, mobile featured with clear, bright eyes'. Dean, at some 5' 7½", was a little above average height and universally thought handsome (Pearl: 85)
3. Dean's rescue from the *Millie* was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (20 April 1891: 7), eulogising his 'pluck' and courage, despite his being in 'indifferent health'. On being hauled out of the water, one of the women was 'suffering severely from the effects' but both later recovered. George performed rescues on two later occasions, jumping off *Millie* again, and then from the *Possum* of which he was then master, after which he was widely known as 'Possum Dean'. Even without these exploits, Dean's profession made him a romantic figure, ferries having been central to the life of the harbour city since the boats of the First Fleet were used as passenger ferries. As evidenced from representations from those on tourist posters to works of high art status, Sydney Harbour's ferries and those who run them continue to occupy a central place in local, national and international imaginings of Sydney (Colbert 2003).
4. George testified that Mary kept him talking in the shop and proposed that he visit her again. I recount the version that Mary gave in her evidence (*Regina v Dean* 1896).
5. Cockatoo Island, the largest island in Sydney Harbour, housed a prison since 1839. In 1871, this gaol became an industrial school and reformatory for girls. Henry Parkes, then Minister for Education, organised the purchase of 900 tonne sailing ship, *Vernon*, and its conversion into a similar institution for boys. Some 500 boys were accommodated on the *Vernon* until it was replaced with the 2,000 tonne *Sobraon* in 1890 (Kerr 1984; SHFT 'Cockatoo Island'; NAA 'Cockatoo Island dockyard').
6. Konnecke gave evidence that he had 'a very high opinion of' George Dean and 'no hesitation' about leaving him alone with his daughters (*Regina v Dean* depositions 1895).

7. By the age of 21, Dean had learned a considerable amount about ferry navigation in practice but only qualified for his harbour masters' certificate by perseverance. Once certified, Dean was appointed Master of an all-night steamer, the *Possum*, working the section of the harbour now spanned by the Sydney Harbour Bridge between Circular Quay and the North Shore. This was, the director of the North Shore Sydney Ferry Company told the *Daily Telegraph* in April 1895, a 'position entailing skill, sobriety, courtesy to passengers, trust and punctuality'. Dean requested a transfer back to day service, but the company felt he was 'irreplaceable' and so kept him on night duty (*Regina v Dean* depositions 1895).
8. Under oath, George declared that Mary repeatedly asked him what he did with his money and, on one occasion, he had 'strong words' with her on the subject (*Regina v Dean* 1896).
9. During the 1880s, prices for urban land rose to unsustainable heights in a number of Australian cities due largely to speculative investment, much from Britain. When, in 1891, investors began to withdraw funds when a number of building societies collapsed, twelve banks failed, leaving only five still trading. Thousands of small depositors lost their life savings and many farmers who had purchased land in the 1870s and 1880s lost their farms. Economic depression followed.
10. Mary's working hours are those usual such small businesses at this time. There is no evidence that anyone except Mary and her mother regularly worked in the shop, although it is probable that friends and acquaintances may have helped out from time to time.
11. George later claimed that Mary's mother pressured him into proposing to her daughter, but both Mary and her mother denied this (*Regina v George Dean: Report of the Royal Commission*).
12. The scene where Mary resists, and then gives into, George's attentions is invented, but supports one of the theories later suggested for why he poisoned her (see, *Regina v Dean and Meagher*). This proposed that he was much more interested in sex than his wife. Once she became pregnant, she denied his 'conjugal rights' completely and he looked for a way to be rid of her. This motivation was never proven.
13. Mary's musings about couples resolving their differences is derived from Grossberg (1996).

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Research statement

Research background

‘First Loves’ is part of a creative nonfiction memoir which seeks to balance creative nonfiction’s range of authorial positions—the ‘diligence of a reporter’ with the ‘shifting voices and viewpoints of a novelist’ (Gillen 2007)—to ethically use an invented first person voice in biography. This recognises that creative nonfiction is a form wherein ‘the presentation of information ... is paramount’ (Gutkind 1997).

Research contribution

This work explores the extent to which fiction can be used in a creative nonfiction text and still obey nonfiction’s truth-telling tenets (Brien 2006). This creative work showcases an invented first person voice in the memoir of an historical personage: every assertion made is based on documented evidence, but a fictional voice draws inferences from the documented materials that suggests certain behaviours and feelings. Such investigation is necessary because reducing a biographical life story to the bare facts distilled from available documentation sometimes results in a chronicle of events that is unrepresentative of life as it is lived.

Research significance

This work represents a series of the available facts around the famous Australian 19th century George Dean poisoning case from Mary Dean’s point of view, inviting readers to think about this material in new ways. It has been accepted for publication in an ERA A ranked journal.

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University of Sydney

David Brooks

Plentitude

Biographical note:

David Brooks has published four collections of poetry (the latest *The Balcony*, UQP 2008), three collections of short fiction, and three novels (most recently *The Umbrella Club*, UQP 2009). He is Associate Professor of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney, where he also directs the graduate program in Creative Writing. He has been co-editor of *Southerly* since 2000. His work has been widely anthologised, translated and short-listed. In 2011 UQP will publish *The Sons of Clovis*, his extensive revision of the accepted story of the Ern Malley hoax.

Keywords:

Plentitude – pigeon – passenger – slaughter – cull

Plenitudeⁱ

for Johanna Featherstone

It is the 4th of April, 2008, and I am thinking of pigeons
 partly because Johanna has asked me, and partly because
 I have just seen three
 top-knot pigeons
 on separate telephone wires
 at a cross-street by the
 highway in Lawson, NSW,
 and thought, of course, of Ezra Pound A?
 seeing the swallows
 on the wires of the DTCⁱⁱ
 and (he not I) thinking (was it?) of Janequinⁱⁱⁱ – how what
 limited that stave must have been, with half the half-
 notes limitless sky (what
 sound F,
 does a What
 swallow flight?
 make in

although all
 I can think of for
 now is how I
 ate a pigeon once, at Gay Bilson's O
 so ridiculously expensive
 restaurant at Berowra, the
 cool and
 grey-pink
 tenderness of the
 breast of it, so almost uncooked – so
rare – that I very nearly complained
 and would certainly not have finished it
 were it not for *the price I was paying*, and my own reputation
 (though with no-one but myself) for eating almost everything – snake,
 alligator, snail, goat, Li-river catfish, sea-squirt, kangaroo –
 as if, as I thought then, that
 were something to be proud of
 and not yet another of the
 Stupidities.

Why
 pigeons? I wonder,
 and then Why
 not? if the tiny
 and not the immense shall
 lead us (that is Webb^{iv})
 out of the wilderness of our human thought, then

there can be no
stopping-point (follow
a cockroach, say
into the
labyrinth of desire...)

The great
ornithologist, John James Audobon^v,
recorded having seen, in the
autumn of 1813,
a passage of migrating
Passenger Pigeons
lasting three days, so many sometimes they
filled the sky and almost
blotted out the sun. In a similar
index of plenitude, W.
G. Sebald, in the third
chapter of *The Rings of Saturn*^{vi}
reproduces a photograph
of men standing up to their knees
in a tide of fresh-caught herring (I
remember that, in my
small way – the mullet-run in
Huskisson...)^{vii}

Passenger, from *passager*, to
pass (they
carried nothing): rose-
pink (the male), grey-
crested, long tail...

glass-
eyed, faded by
sun from the
window,
layered with
dust

the last
Passenger Pigeon, named Martha,
died "alone" at the
Cincinnati Zoo at around
1.00pm on September 1st, 1914, and the
herring industry is gone.
I think of them because just
lately the Commonwealth Government of Australia
condoned the slaughter
of four hundred kangaroos
in the heart of the National Capital – not
many, but I take it as sign^{viii} – and now

there is talk of a "cull"
of koalas on Kangaroo Island, another
of parrots in Gippsland, possums
in north-western Victoria, and just today (4th July, 2008) I
read that the last
Tasmanian Devil in the wild will
very likely die before
face-cancer-free replacements are ready
to be released from the laboratory

the last
Tasmanian Tiger "in captivity" died
at the Hobart Zoo
on September 7th, 1936; the last
Tasmanian Aboriginal... ah,
but we are not to
draw such comparisons...

I try
to work out the essential
difference between
humanity and the
Ebola virus but can't come
up with much, the huge
ulcers of our cities
creeping over the earth
devouring everything in their path, but to
return to pigeons, as I
suppose I must, fearing that
any attention drawn to them is like
directing the sight of a gun,
I'd like to salute
Bohumil Hrabal, author of
Closely Watched Trains^{ix},
who is said to have
died while
trying to feed pigeons
through a fifth-floor window
of a Czechoslovakian hospital:

privately, I think it was a
bold and
arguably suc-
cessful attempt at
flight

Endnotes

¹ A poem which owes nothing directly to "A Letter to People About Pelicans" (Michael Dransfield) or "Lament for Passenger Pigeons" (Judith Wright), but which is nonetheless conscious of them as fellow travellers. I could not – my fly-away line in mind – make quite the same disclaimer for "parts toward a meaning" (J.S. Harry).

² As he relates at the end of Canto LXXXII: "three solemn half notes / their white downy chests black-rimmed / on the middle wire". The "DTC" is the American Detention Training Centre in which Pound was held – initially in a wire (bird?) cage – in 1945 awaiting extradition to the United States to face charges of treason.

³ In – as – Canto LXXV, Pound reproduces a 1935 arrangement by Gerhart Munch (1907-1988) of *Le Chant des Oiseaux* by Clement Janequin (c.1483-1558).

⁴ Francis Webb, "Five Days Old"

⁵ See his *Birds of America*, 2nd ed. (London, 1827-38). An on-line version is available (http://www.audubon.org/bird/BoA/BOA_index.html).

⁶ (New York: New Directions, 1999).

⁷ For an interesting poetic treatment of the same phenomenon, see Robert Adamson's "The Mullet Run", *Cross the Border* (Sydney: Prism, 1977).

⁸ They slaughtered another 6000 a year later, at Majura, a few kilometres away. The official "harvest" of kangaroos Australia-wide for 2009 was 3,985,531.

⁹ Bohumil Hrabal (1914-1997). His *Ostre sledovane vlaky* (1965) was first published in English as *Close Watch on the Trains* (London: Cape Editirons) in 1968, and in 1971 was made into the film, *Closely Watched Trains*, by Jiri Menzel.

Research statement

I have argued elsewhere (Brooks 2009) that an ethical adjustment re the species barrier is a dire necessity that requires a radical decentring of the human and realignment of all human systems of thought. My own areas—literature, writing of fiction and poetry, poetics—are no exception. Acts of criticism (e.g. Brooks 2010), theory and poetry alike must test this barrier and seek this realignment at every level of their assumptions and practice. I.E. it must happen in my poetry as in my criticism. But it must also be a balancing-act: advocacy and the didactic are as important as experiment. The reader must be kept, not left behind. The challenge in "Plenitude" is to fly (!) in the face of most readers, for whom the species barrier is probably no issue, yet at the same time seek to calm or charm with anecdote, image, music, surprise (formal *and* semantic): to supply the information *of* the poem as well as information *behind* it (footnotes; the poem [also] as essay), and to *locate* the poem in a tradition/field of related endeavour (footnotes [again], internal reference, bearing in mind Pound's dictum that actual composition is the highest form of criticism [Pound 1934]). As to research, *poetry is always its own research*. It has taken nearly forty years of trial and error—*continual experiment*—to be able to do some of the things I have done in this poem, mostly to keep them so barely visible that (hopefully) most readers won't consciously register them.

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University of Melbourne

Kevin Brophy

The execution of the dinosaurs

Biographical note:

Professor Kevin Brophy is the author of eleven books, including four books of poetry, four works of fiction and three collections of essays on aspects of creativity. He is Coordinator of Creative Writing in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne.

Keywords:

Poetry – ethics – rhythm – Surrealism – environment

... the past which gnaws into the future Henri Bergson

Time is that which stops everything happening at once John Wheeler

We might as well we thought— it was only an afternoon's work—
We painted targets on them first then took out our slings—
No we hunted them down by beating buckets and tins
to drive them down to our bamboo traps
where we lined them up and took out our baseball bats.
You can't say we don't finish what we begin.

Yes we grieved. Our eyes, traitorous, kept expecting them.
The children didn't like it at first but soon got used to rubber versions.
Dogs ate the carcasses—dogs and birds—
dogs and birds and ants—dogs and birds and ants and time.
We ate some and the marrow made us feel young.

Yes we knew regret, who doesn't find that in the end.
Whole forests, plains and rivers became pointless
without their thoughtful bellows and yips,
their nightly sighs and mysterious rustles.
Forest breezes somehow smelled of them,
storms could not rid us of their footprints.

No swiping tails to knock down rats and gliders.
No more are we shocked at the sizzle
of seedy excrement on savannah dust.
They had been the cows of paradise for us.
There was no calling them back.
Our heads had not the musical horns they had perfected.

And besides our children preferred the toys by then.
Who could have predicted those monsters
(and most of them vegetarians)
would be immortal playthings once we executed them?

That sound in our chests ratcheting the future
from its dark past
unwinds with no end to endings and beginnings.
It is true the bones in our dreams are the size of didgeridoos
and deserts litter our conscience.

Research statement

Research background

Paul Riffaterre, Georges Poulet, J. L. Austin and others have made the point that texts are read, conventionally, as events unfolding in linear time – from a series of present moments out into past and future. The tendency of the present to push back into the past and out into the future offers potential for rhythm (patterns set up by what has happened and expectations of what will happen) and for confounding the usual direction of the ‘arrow’ of time. This poem plays with time and timing, offering a narrative confession while proposing an impossible possibility; offering effects suggesting a pattern (iamb, rhyme and near-rhyme) while working with the unpredictable line breaks of free verse. The poem recalls traditions of the surreal while aiming to renew questions of human values, responsibility and guilt. This poem aims to model a way of connecting absurdity with morality, aesthetics with ethics, the intuitive with the counter-intuitive.

Research contribution

This poetry takes up and tests a neglected tradition outside lyric free verse, performance poetry and language poetry (the three main streams of contemporary poetry), a tradition that includes contemporary poets such as James Tate, Charles Simic and Russell Edson. It renews a strand of surrealism not so much inspired by Freud as by an impulse to engage with ideas in politics, philosophy and physics.

Research significance

‘The execution of the dinosaurs’ aims to probe the potential of a relatively neglected poetic tradition for its possible relevance to opening aesthetic, ethical and humanising responses in readers.

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CQUniversity, Australia

Janene Carey

Excerpt and research statement: *A hospital bed at home*

Biographical note:

Janene Carey has a BA (Sydney University), an M.Ec (UNE) and is currently completing a PhD in creative writing at CQUniversity, Australia, on the topic of home-based palliative caregiving. She also works as a journalist.

Keywords:

Creative nonfiction -- palliative care

By the time Chloe was six months old, Ben and Lynne were fed up with having to squeeze all their family time into the weekends and decided to seek a less pressured lifestyle on the north coast of NSW. Ben had been offered a job at a large pharmacy in Forster-Tuncurry as well as the opportunity of eventually buying into the business. With Ben's workplace only five minutes from their new home, Lynne could sleep in while father and daughter enjoyed a couple of hours together each morning.

Towards the end of 2000 they decided to have a second baby, and a third came along in 2003. Lynne continued to be a stay-at-home mum: they had agreed this was best.

"I always wanted to provide for my children the situation where the mother was available for them," Ben tells me. "I didn't really want Lynne to work while the kids were growing up. Besides, it didn't matter what job she got, I'd be earning several times the hourly rate that she was."

I inquire about Lynne's view of the matter.

"She felt the same as I did, until about 2003. Then she really needed to get away from it all but she didn't know what she wanted to do. She was saying, 'I'm not happy just looking after the kids and the house—this is not the life I want.' One week it would be: 'I might think about applying for a job.' The next week: 'I don't want to do that, I want to study.' The following week: 'Maybe I'll go and do some charity work.' And what happened was that nothing happened. After we left Canberra, she never worked again. And she never did any study either."

Ben explains that once he was established at the pharmacy in Forster, he rarely spent more than forty hours a week at work. He obviously regards this as verging on part-time for someone in his profession, especially for a younger partner in a very busy practice.

"Lynne could have utilized a couple of days—or one day a week—to do other things, but she never chose to leave the kids. She was incredibly houseproud too. I think she felt it was her job to look after the house and the children. Naturally she got a lot of pleasure out of the kids but when it wasn't going right it was an extremely heavy burden. But she would not have liked to say that. She really struggled with motherhood. She'd often ask for assurances that she was a good mother, and as a partner trying to be loving, you do that as best you can, but she knew she wasn't the mother she wanted to be."

As I listen to this, I notice I am feeling increasingly sad about how things transpired for Lynne. During the years that Ben was enthusiastically bounding ahead with his professional career, achieving business success, winning medals for excellence and flying off to be on government committees, it sounds as if Lynne was sinking into the scenario described by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, losing her sense of self in the role of wife, housekeeper and mother and becoming increasingly discontented with her lot in life.

Apart from intermittently proposing solutions but failing to act on them, and occasionally speculating about separation, Lynne's main way of expressing her unhappiness was through stony silences, a method Ben found quite unnerving.

“There were periods where everything was going along seemingly okay and there were other days that were just dark. I’d come home from work, might get here at ten to six or something, and find Lynne was so cross that she couldn’t speak. It was almost like she was peeved that I hadn’t been there to help all day. She wasn’t one to carry on with a great deal of fanfare; she just wouldn’t speak to me. Which was a thousand times worse. I would rather have had a dressing-down. I’m an extroverted person, I like to be involved in an open way, so for someone to close up shop and not talk, and you don’t know what they’re thinking—you’re not carrying a crystal ball—naturally your own mind starts going off in tangents. Lynne knew it tortured me. So if she was cranky, she just said nothing.”

I ask, “Didn’t Lynne leave the kids with you sometimes so she could have some time for herself?” When I’d been at home with small children, the front door barely had time to close on my arriving husband before I was pushing it open to make my escape, off for a long vigorous walk, to choose new books from the library, or to see a movie with a friend.

Ben’s answer leaves me dumbfounded. “Not really,” he tells me. “If she did, it would be to go shopping, to do the groceries; not what you’d call a real recharge.”

Lynne’s ovarian problems surfaced when she was pregnant with her second child. A benign cyst the size of a grapefruit was aspirated early in 2001, when the fetus was at twelve weeks gestation. The growth returned, so after Nick was born Lynne had an operation to remove the entire ovary. Surprisingly, she conceived again within a year, and Luke arrived in March 2003, on his sister Chloe’s fourth birthday. At first, everything was rosy. Ben says this particular Friday was “the most magical day you could ever ask for”—the birth went smoothly; Chloe and her friends had a great party; Lynne and the baby were home from hospital in time for a family dinner. But as the weekend progressed it became clear that Lynne was not at all well.

“By Sunday she still looked fully pregnant. I took her back to hospital and by Wednesday she was so weak that I was holding Luke to her breast so she could feed him.”

The staff at the hospital tried to suggest that the distended, flaccid stomach and the extreme fatigue could be symptoms of post-natal depression. Lynne and Ben refused to accept that diagnosis. On Friday afternoon Ben revved himself up for a confrontation, aware that if he didn’t act immediately, nothing would happen until the following Monday. Lynne’s gynaecologist came in and agreed to operate the next morning.

“He came out from the procedure and informed me that they’d pulled out a tumour that was 3.4 litres in size. It was a mucilaginous tumour, a very soft balloon filled with water and when you pushed it, it changed shape. So that meant it hugged around Luke in utero and that was why it was never picked up.”

Ben listened to this, appalled. The gynaecologist had spent the last five days telling them it wasn’t a gynaecological problem. Lynne was a longstanding patient of his, but some of her operations had been performed by other doctors because he hadn’t been

available. Ben knew that those doctors had recommended Lynne receive close monitoring.

“I said to him, ‘Lynne has a history of ovarian problems. You tell me what Dr. H wrote after her last operation.’ I pressured him till he eyeballed me and admitted he’d never read the reports. He couldn’t even remember that she’d had an ovarian cyst. I was in total disbelief so I was emotionless. If I’d been in any other state I probably would have laid him out on the floor.”

The excised tumour was cut up into one centimeter cubes for analysis. The results indicated that it was borderline malignant and no further treatment was required. This diagnosis was wrong—but the tumour was so large that someone could have spent six months cutting it up without discovering the truth. Seven months later the gynaecologist sent Lynne to an oncologist because her cancer markers were elevated and she had an umbilical hernia.

“He opened her up and the cancer was all over the remaining ovary, all around the uterus. There were nodules all through the omentum, the fat layer that surrounds the uterus and the organs. It’s like a sponge, so you can imagine it would have looked like a cauliflower, when he opened her up.”

Lynne had a full hysterectomy in November 2003 and chemotherapy every three weeks from January through to June. Her parents, who lived in Sydney, came and stayed each time to help her get through the worst of it. A capable, good-natured local woman, Tracy, began working in the house two days a week, doing housekeeping tasks and caring for the children so Lynne could rest. Ben says Lynne was very positive throughout these months and all the blood tests were encouraging. They drove down to Newcastle together for the treatments and enjoyed the chance to chat during the two hour trips. On the 1st of July, Lynne went with a girlfriend for the final appointment.

“She felt everything was sweet, and afterwards they were going to shop and have lunch,” says Ben.

The plans collapsed when the specialist announced that the chemotherapy had only temporarily stunted the cancer: it was now back in a more aggressive way and there was no further treatment available.

The following weeks were dark and desperate. An extreme heaviness descended on Lynne. She was resentful and angry and unhappy. She felt she would not survive without making drastic changes in her life: she spoke again of splitting up. Ben sharply curtailed his days at work, only going in once or twice a week, and organised to sell his share of the pharmacy so he would be free to devote himself to caring for Lynne and the children.

Lynne’s prognosis was six months, but she plummeted so severely, psychologically, emotionally and physically, that Ben thought she might die before the end of July. Her stomach swelled and she began suffering from night sweats so profuse that the liquid dripped from her clothes. One particular night, Ben was roused from sleep seventeen times to see to her or the children, and the next morning he had to get up and go to work. “There were twelve lots of clothes beside the bed so I must have been up

twelve times, because Lynne was too exhausted and too distressed to get the clothes herself. And I got up five times that night to the kids.”

Ben used his private school contacts to arrange appointments to seek opinions from the leading medical specialists in Sydney. One of the radical treatments offered was to open Lynne up, peel the peritoneum off her internal organs, pour chemotherapy drugs into the cavity and let them swill around for an hour before sucking them out and sewing her up again.

“It was real hero medicine, a slim chance of success but if it worked the doctor would come out the hero. He was excited about the opportunity to do this. He said, ‘You’re young, it might make a difference.’ But we decided against it because the potential for suffering was too great.”

They investigated alternative medicine options—naturopaths, Chinese herbalists, psychics—grasping at any possible hope. They made plans for the coming months, trying to fit in as much as possible. They both knew that the estimate of how much longer Lynne had to live was based on averages and might be wildly inaccurate. “We had this attitude that it could be three days, three months, three years,” Ben says. “But the back of our minds were saying—do things now!” They arranged for Lynne’s parents to mind the children for a week so that they could attend the next Quest for Life program and booked a family holiday on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland.

In early August, Lynne had a startling resurgence of well-being. She was vibrant and happy, brimming with energy. Ben could hardly believe the turnaround in her mental and physical state. I ask what might have caused the change: was there a shift in her attitude towards hope or resignation? Ben speculates that having things to look forward to might have helped Lynne to manage her emotions, but notes that at the time he’d been treading cautiously and hadn’t liked to enquire too closely. “July was really heavy. It wasn’t the sort of thing where you’d say, hey last week was as bad as it could ever be, and this week it’s good, let’s sit down and talk about it for three hours.”

From the middle of September, Ben watched Lynne growing physically frailer: eating less, spending more time in bed, her threshold for claiming ‘a good day’ dropping week by week. Ben wanted to be encouraging, he wanted to affirm that she was going well, but he found it heartbreaking to agree that she’d had a good day when he could see her plummeting.

Lynne suffered from diarrhoea, breathlessness, nausea, cramps, pain and night sweats. In the struggle to ease the discomfort and help her sleep, Ben would massage her feet and rearrange her pillows, and fetch teas, heat packs, ice, water, herbs, medication, and dry clothing. Although Lynne was failing physically, she did not sink back into the misery of July. “I suppose subconsciously she knew the end was in sight, but she wanted to ignore that and keep doing things as best she could. She seemed a lot happier. All her friends would attest to how positive she was and so do I. That’s probably in a strange way one of my fonder times. She was so upbeat and inspirational.”

It was during this period that Lynne began preparing a book of memories for her children. One of the entries concerns a particular day in 2001, long before she became ill, when Ben and Chloe had left the house early on a furtive errand:

I was having a sleep-in but unfortunately the phone kept ringing. I finally got up to answer it and found a poem sitting at the top of the stairs inviting me to head to Burgess Beach (our favourite beach). When I arrived I looked down onto the beach where your dad and Chloe had written "Marry Me" in flowers—too romantic.

Lynne accepted, but the idea went onto the back-burner and the wedding didn't actually take place until a month before she died. They were married at a registry office in Newcastle on the 16th of November 2004; a quiet affair with a couple of close friends and a meal afterwards. Ben took a wheelchair for Lynne but she managed to get through the day without it. In the photos she is wearing a cream halterneck dress that reveals how gaunt she had become, but she is smiling.

In the final month of her life, Lynne was surrounded by friends and family for much of the time. Her four closest girlfriends came and stayed for a week early in November, then returned at the end of November for two more weeks in response to Lynne telling them she really was going this time and they needed to come up again to say goodbye. However, the extra people in the house did not lead to any lessening of Ben's workload. If the visitors tried to help with the domestic tasks or the childcare Lynne would say, "Oh no, you're not here to do that. You're here to spend time with me. Ben can do that."

"Did you ever feel you were overworked?" I ask. "I mean, given the broken sleep on top of everything else?"

"At the time I just would have done anything for her to be peaceful and calm and happy. So, at the time, no. But later, after she died, reflecting on it, I felt it was unfair that she had driven me so hard. I was probably at the stage where maybe, if I didn't have a strong constitution, I would have been crook as well. And I thought, geez, that was a senseless thing to do. When we had lots of people here. They could have taken care of the kids and I could have taken Lynne out for a coffee or to sit down and look at the water for half an hour if she wasn't up for a walk. Or I could have done something for myself. I didn't need to be doing breakfast, lunch, dinner, full-time care of the kids, full-time care of her, making sure I settled things if there was an issue with her mum—just trying to be all things, to cover everything."

I ask my next question very cautiously. "Would there have been a sense that you were being repaid, for all the times when she thought that you hadn't done enough?"

"Mmm. Maybe. And look, maybe I was carrying a bit of guilt? You know, that the load had been too much for her in the past, and I was trying to make up for it? Later I resented the fact that I didn't have the courage to stand up and say no, this is getting ridiculous. But at the time I just thought: I want her to be happy."

On one occasion, Lynne's girlfriends took pity on Ben and surreptitiously sent him off for a run along the beach, offering to tell Lynne that he was out fetching milk if she noticed his absence. He remembers the feeling of dry heat on one side of his face and a cold wind from the sea on the other side. He remembers it because the contrast of

sensations was repeated several weeks later when he ran on the beach again, on the afternoon of the day that Lynne died.

“I was running along, crying, thinking—why? Why couldn’t we have just come down for a walk together? We had so many opportunities and she never wanted to. Why didn’t she want to do that? It was ridiculous that we didn’t take those chances. Because now I can’t ever get them again.”

Research statement

Research background

Surging interest in the topic of death and dying has been attributed to the rising median age of the baby boomers, now confronting mortality as they head into their sixties (Wyndham 2008). As storytelling animals, humans have a natural tendency to find narratives of lived experience an appealing way to make sense of complex phenomena (Polkinghorne 1988). However, striking a balance between the interpretive authority of the writer and the ethical treatment of the subject can be problematic when ‘using lives’ to craft creative nonfiction, particularly when sensitive emotional territory is being negotiated.

Research contribution

This excerpt from a story about home-based palliative caregiving was produced within the interpretive paradigm using an iterative cycle of gathering information, sharing the evolving draft with the participant, and negotiating changes. The outcome demonstrates that, contra Janet Malcolm (2004), creative nonfiction writers can take a non-exploitative, non-maleficent, collaborative approach to the task of producing non-superficial, non-rose-tinted, nuanced accounts. Avoiding the ‘cloven tongue’ of collaborative autobiography, where the narrator takes on the persona of the subject and tries to ghostwrite their thoughts and feelings (Couser 2001), the story incorporates multiple voices and allows readers to draw their own conclusions.

Research significance

Excerpts from the manuscript ‘A Hospital Bed at Home’ have been published in the anthology *Re-Placement* (Carey 2008) and in the peer-reviewed journal *Current Narratives* (forthcoming). A full story of approximately 6,000 words was shortlisted for the 2010 Calibre Prize for an Outstanding Essay and published in *Australian Book Review* (Carey 2010).

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University of Adelaide

Brian Castro

The archivist

Biographical note:

Brian Castro is the author of nine novels, including the multi award-winning *Double-Wolf* and *Shanghai Dancing*. His novels have been translated into French, German and Chinese. He has also published a volume of essays. His latest novel is *The Bath Fugues* (Giramondo), which was short-listed for four prizes, including the Miles Franklin Literary Award. He holds the Chair in Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide.

Keywords:

Prose poem – the archive – Benjamin

Paris ...

The rue des Archives.
Once called the *rue où Dieu fut bouilli*,
(the street where God was boiled.)
In 1437, a Jewish book-keeper
stabbed a sacred wafer,
threw it into a pot and watched it fry,
but then the host began to bleed.
He ran outside in panic and the mob went after him,
destroyed his shop, burnt every tome.
Don't try this stunt at home.

In like manner they will come after me.
I unlock my bicycle from the Director-General's *No Parking* sign.
They've stolen my saddle, last time it was the bell.
My station is cruel.
On the rue des Archives.
In the busy Marais.
Where there is always rain at night and dogshit on the footpath and that woman in a
red hat looking in shop windows, watching herself reflected in my gaze.
I'm unfazed. It could be 1944.
I'm sure she's the one who sends me letters.
Come in.
Here in the National Archives, the *Palais Soubise*, an eighteenth-century palace, there
are six billion documents on a hundred and seventy-five miles of shelves.
But the archives are shifting.
They've already moved the 'Modern' section (1789-1940).
They're dismantling the 'miscellaneous' section, sending art and music works to other
museums.
The 'Contemporary' archives are relocating to a forest in Fontainebleau, spread
through scattered buildings, some subterreanean. Pandemonium.
I am losing all my treasures.
Between the trees I shoot down anything that flies. Compress them in hidden files.
I turn on taps. Run a little when others walk.
I'm an archivist. Aquarius in the sidereal system.
I'm losing my memory.
Living in places others cannot visit.
I have onion-breath from eating Hemingway's sandwiches.
I drink Hugo's wine.
Sometimes I search through women's handbags when they enter the *Caran*, the
research centre.
You never know what you might find.

On the second floor by the ancient spiral stairs which lead to an elevated iron catwalk, you can preen the ancient pages.

Inhale: 1790.

Smell the vintage; a consommé of chaos and black cigars. Listen for the sliding guillotine.

You scamper all the way to the modern wing without descending, where one imagines fluorescent lighting, metallic shelves and carpet, paper smelling of old perfume and national plunder; but there is instead this scene: floodlit gardens, verdure, atria and out beyond, chimneys, pipes, the wet and gritty city.

Your eye returns. Feeding on diary notes, napkin scribbles, poetry which someone once began. Cocteau perhaps, on a *tapas* menu. Oil stains.

You will have to sort this wreckage. You never know what people leave behind, when the gun is at their head or their wives start ringing lawyers.

In one carton a collection of women's underwear.

In another, manuals on gonorrhea.

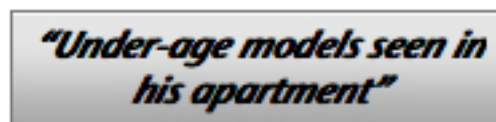
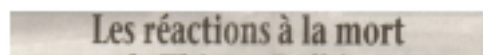
Sometimes everything swarms.

You may well ask why I'm interested in these things. The answer is simple: because it is perfidious. And because it is false, deceitful, untrustworthy, it mirrors memory. And because memory is perfidious it makes for a belief in transformation.

Fame and dirt.

My mother, for example, was glad to lose her mind, finding herself suddenly released from hatred, calumny and deceit. "Your father," she said. "For example."

Sample:



I paste these in my album. You never know what you can use.
My name? Just call me Capuchin.
It's a kind of monkey.
On my desk, the figurine of an ancient phallus. It once belonged to Freud.
In my living room, a black piano once owned by Maria Callas.
Even as a child I was surrounded by such priceless things.
Here's Vermeer's cape.
It was a frock-coat once, which his wife altered into a riding habit.
A dandy has exclusive tastes.
It occurred to me that dress had been the cause of civilization.
Fashion goes round and round,
it spins its tissue, discards its waste
while the future waits.

Since moving to Paris, I've lived a large part of my life next to the Vladimir Gaming Club, and have hardly left the *Palais*, the inner circle of my rooms, the Metro, the string of museums I frequented in the *quartier*. People say Parisians are closed in, that their lives are interior, mental. A city of collectors.

A glass eye above the door is weeping back and forth. The only industry so far in the shadow of wet stone. Later it will turn frenetic.
The floors once used to creak to warn of intruders.
The building was alive.
Now wires claw into the walls.
They are installing video surveillance.
There is a voice message lighting up my phone.
I long for earlier methods of communication; the vacuum tube, the *pneumatique*.
A message sucked through a pipe appeals to me.
It approximates the retrieval of memory ... together with pneumonia, trench fever, Spanish 'flu and other spirits caught in manuscripts.
Some are smeared with blood.
You could say it was more than a mystery.

The ancient Greeks knew that blood was not enough, and upon the eve of another battle, shivering in their tents before history, their horses in foam outside, twisted memory out of air.

It would be well to remember this form verging on poetry was once original, wrought internally, not to be erased eternally, for there was only breath which hung mightily upon the line before it died.

The prose poem. Breathing,
blindness and suffering.
These days chick-poets score cheap points,
rhyme and bank their cheques quickly upon the shallows.

Listen.

By the Greek word *arkhē*, we understood the beginning and the law and drew comfort from its authority.

Arkheion was the Town Hall, where they kept the public records.

But now the archives are crumbling, borders soon to be reshaped by mighty rivers whose waters, finding their own level, hollow out different landscapes.

I block the toilets; form fountains in the urinals.
I am losing my memory.
I know. Disastrous for an archivist.
But does that make me a terrorist?
Time for a coffee.

David H.
He told me he was changing skin.
I walk the Paris night.
The Panthéon looms. Its blue laser light, its slow pendulum, all give me a headache.
It made me reflect as well.
Who am I?
I'm Chinese.
We invented records and record-keeping.
Noted the number of orgasms and bowel movements of huge dynasties.
Note all these treasure boxes my father sent in 1923 to aid Japan's earthquake casualties.
Born archivists.

I open a carton with my carpet knife, wearing carpet slippers, a carpet-bagger with lives to sell.
I'm wary about my own, there's nothing to tell—cut off from my country, traditions and history.
If I reveal too much they will soon come knocking at the door.
It's best to keep one step ahead, one floor above with no regrets, and play the goon by masquerading as the investigator of someone else instead.
I am also he; I have no fears nor regrets. I have no papers of my own.
I can do the police in different voices: *hello hello, we'll have no trouble here.*

This is my work. I examine the evidence and classify. Lately I've been following a lead – a disappearance. His effects are before me now.

Take, for example, this ordinary cardboard box.
You keep it free of worms, cockroaches, microbes, acidity and humidity.
You label it *David H.*
He was a *grand couturier*.
Sometimes David wrote in columns – one side straightforward, the other tensioned with all kinds of stresses.
He cut his patterns from old newspaper, designed his tabloid dresses from fractured news reports of Marxist philosophers murdering their wives; of anorexic bodies found in silken shrouds; high heels with spurs.
David H. – a designer, short-lived.

Those who knew him loved and hated his mania, boyishness, dusty library of leather-bound books, and for a while his two-toned shoes as he walked and talked his self-taught adaptations of high theory. Of course there was his disappearance.

He began as an artist, millionaire-pornographer. Air-brushing was his hobby.
In days gone by the public preferred images of private worlds—of winter firelight, fur rugs and white underwear, and went to bed fearing mystique, struggling with the weak, unspeakable drapery of their sexual suburbia—
and took pleasure in *The Sound Of Music* or the white charms of Doris's day which glazed their eyes and numbed their hearts.

Then suddenly the public wanted more.
They wanted it raw, unfiltered, engorged, enhanced with silicon.
They wanted colour. They wanted access to excess: they were the mob.
Soon David found he was out of a job.
For several years he attended art school until he came into his fortune.
It was then he began the waste, the extravagance of *living cool*, which broke the hearts
of thrifty hoarders like me.
David H. The Temple of Fashion.
He probably wore a ponytail, dark glasses, and went unshaven,
lingering long enough to read the obsequies beside fresh graves;
every event an opportunity for outrageous self-promotion.
These are his effects. He bought them all.
So many dead to be embalmed ... articles belonging to Duchamp or Man Ray: a
woman's hat with a pearl-headed pin; slingback shoes stuffed with silken stockings;
panty-girdles in disarray upon your desk.
I hold them to my nose. Just dust.
It may take some years to punctuate, to display these museum items, to sort logic from
rhythm and sense-decay. To find the flavours history has erased.
They want me to archive but also expose, a contradiction with which I am ill-
disposed.
Archives are not for public viewing; only time justifies them with lust, air-brushing
guilty connections between someone's padlocked death and another's dust.
There are no dates; the writing is illegible.
He was the first to revisit Greece and skin the fleece from 6 BC.
Long white linen dresses ruffled his catwalks.
Others followed on, taking stone and samples from the Parthenon.
Perhaps it was at the beginning, perhaps the end, when these pages were salvaged and
taped together; yellowed, kippered with cigarette smoke, they smell of theft.
His show the following year was bereft of sex.
Lex, a Fascist law, was what he saw approaching.
He caught the plane from Istanbul to Athens and sitting next to him, with the
familiarity of someone lost in a maze of speed and time, was a girl scarcely into her
adult years.
Her eyes were wet.
For him it was the usual revelation that
the faces of fallen angels are awash with tears,
not because they have lost paradise
but because their gaze is not returned.
This is a dangerous thing to know.
H. then unlocked his obsession, its murderous flow.
Meth-amphetamine with all that dough.
That was when it all began.
On Lemnos.

On Lemnos

the girls shriek with pleasure.

Not easy to forget the ruthlessness implanted in those screams.

They play for me alone.

I wheel myself around to study them, my chequebook open.

In the world of tissues there are only lies. I have become old before my time.

Sorrow hangs indelicately on the line, stockings with escape-ladders;

all these transmutations.

I am King David, my forehead high, white-tailed behind.

It has been centuries since my crack-up crime; in my mind I'm always nine.

The washing vats spew steam.

In the fire I hammer out new plates and then at night, hard by the darkling desk,

make fire-wheels of spikes and armor for my amazons.

I like to catch my beauties hitching up their skirts. It's what I've always taught them.

Look how their hearts break over some young Leonardo who's scarcely grown

enough whiskers for his brush. I pay off the gigolos, one after the other, with orders

never to see my girls again. The delicate things pine and weep in their concrete

houses and waste away. Then I hold banquets with wine and roasts. They sway

between the turnkey and the victual, and fit the fashion better in this Elizabethan

ritual. They grow thin and docile. Again I win.

On this island a former model comes to visit, wet skirts flapping in the wind. She steps up from the sea, an Aphrodite conceived from coral spawn.

I only see a fluttering. They call this blindness blepharoclonus.

Particles of light flash between her legs, voltage between my temples, then a robotic walk, her metallic clouds gently building over ruffled sea.

Dark, she flies, underdreamt, a squidding ink beneath, smelling of salt and ultramarine, lifting her petticoats of watered tabinets, pentimentoes and repentance, layer upon layer.

I train her remorseful, come-to-daddy response, stepping up in sheer denier, naked leather, to heel and turn and toe the fence.

An eye on each finger I probe her mouth between the wire; she, slip-kissing me memories, and I, parched by the years, unable to look upon love, make her swallow prohibitions.

In return she passes me paper, coiled, smoke-thin upon her breath as I receive her passion.

My burin flays the marble, chiselling the word for truth. Hot, she helps; she dresses me across taboo. Chiasmus.

This is how we animate the golem of fashion.

The Confessor's eyes are tired.

I drape whiteness over their dresses.

Here, beneath this skullcap where everything drives against the sky, against the law, I compile all that cannot be spoken, climbing ratlines in the whistling wind.

Don't ask what delight sneaks in upon such toil.

After confession I press upon their tongues a little Eucharist in silver foil—you know, for their salvation.

Methamorphosis...

So we have David H.'s beginnings and his ends.

The full range of his diary: the middle is entirely missing, scattered in the sad effects of his models who surfaced suddenly, victims of his bends; voices from the catwalk; he was black and he was white. In between he was totally tight. He never rose before eleven.

I went to the Greek island in pursuit – a holiday to restore myself, I said to the Director.

I was covered in dust counting tourist buses heading up towards volcanic lust, donkeys standing sideways, honking in valleys silvery with olives and steeped in wine.

I did what old men do: across the hilltops they hurl their sighs, early in the morning, good for the chest and lungs, standing there in their off-white singlets howling and dreaming of girls.

Hephaestia:

I can't remember much else, a necropolis by the bay where several coins or buttons surfaced in the sand. Upon dead eyes they may have lain to pay the ferryman.

H. had passed this way a year before leaving a trail of tragedies so often associated with love, searching for ruins and hard stone upon which he grazed young flesh.

And I, a mongrel hound, sniffed through Vulcan's vents to learn the smithy's molten craftiness.

It was my job to hunt for diamonds, to find the fugitive fractured in light and colour.

Behind him, a cloak of darkness, the island spiked with smokestacks, silos and the nuclear future.

I don't remember any more.

I travelled, like Byron, to the Aegean, to entrap exhilaration before all shut down, to understand the tides, attracted by the frown they left on sand.

Women marched over me wearing backpacks, bracelets, black suspenders.

They didn't appreciate my fatigue with Being.

They did not even hear their competition, a blur in one eternal afternoon when like a monk, *ευτελός μουός*, doomed, I heard a girl sing deep-throated songs accompanied by a crackling Leonard Cohen record, a bare room in Hydra, olive groves sandwiched in the air.

I thought I'd found David there

but it was the current *pensionnaire*.

She told me of his cruelty, of her hair

which he used to grip and study.

Then it all disappeared; the wind full of haste.

My pages stalled, turned despotic, rained autumnal leaves.

The ground turned muddy, the room filled with dead cicadas.

The girl despaired, inhaled more substance; a line of ants, from here to there.

She to whom H. had made so many promises since a dusty airport in Constantinople, she whose trusting nature held him spellbound for a week as he rubbed one dark nipple and then the other, found what she did not seek.

Suicide.

The Terror always comes.

*

Every morning I open one of David H.'s cartons first ...
It smells to me of youth: the rising of the sun, horse-riding before breakfast,
colour, light and a champagne career.
David was impulsive. For a young man in his twenties, there was too much money.
Overnight he outdid his masters; 'an exhibition of near-genius' exclaimed the
magazine *Nouvelle*.
He was pictured above a photo of treacherous Coco Chanel in Vichy France.

I hang onto the cardboard box, a lifebuoy for old Oriental men; closure.
I must remember, or my days are numbered.
Memory is architectural.
I see with stone eyes: marble buildings, colonnades; beneath arcades and portals his
beauties are dancing something eternal; a vague discomposure.
He was invisible behind his shades, said nothing at interviews, appearing like a mental
defective, sometimes repeating questions, smiling, ineffectual, save when whispering
atonal verses into the delicious ear of a svelte interpreter who produced terse
translations of the genius's latest venture.
Later the rooms would be filled with incense, and upon the jade night-table he would
take his fill of speed and play on life's absurdity, an anarchy limited only by good
form.
The Temple of David seemed to cast a light long dimmed.
I seek its restoration.

Aided by their visualizing of rooms, Homeric rhapsodists, the *Aoidoi*, sang epic
chants with perfect memory and rapped a staff in rhythm upon the floor.
This apartment and its furniture, these filmy nets cast by an orderly arrangement of
thought; these boxes hauled in by means of pulley and beam, they speak of
earthquakes or what is in the wind: that there is only war and chaos in the history of
fashion.
Then suddenly the building collapses and we remember where the bodies are.
The archives creak and groan with ancient song and it is I who stand alone in their
defense.
It's the end.
The archives are moving. A coffin line. And I, a bard to sing their slow procession.
This is how David's boxes disappeared; right next to a *tarte savoyarde*. My lunch.
A concession to a hunch that he was self-sufficient.

Oh yes, the ancient Greeks.
Whole armies raise their dust upon the plains to mask the memory of lust and
jealousy, their bows backsprung with anti-reason.
Blood was not enough, and upon the eve of another battle while their horses twisted in
their harnesses, they cracked covetousness out of air.
This was their drug:
a captured woman
the cutting of a throat
veins of lightning
a rainstorm suddenly
the tearing of a veil between my fingers.
Chaos.
The Terror comes from right to left.

In my father's time they played a version of the game called 'Loving Cup' in cabarets when the rains came to China.

A circle of half-clad boys and girls inhaled a debilitating and arousing drug and passed the smoke through erotic kisses from right to left until desire reached its peak and when the pungency declined, or the weather leavened, began again from left to right.

It was nineteen-thirty-seven.

There was a slender spy within their midst who passed on secrets with an active tongue and who, though masked, was neither high nor dizzy but pretended to a lassitude not entirely beyond seduction.

They say she was an expert in other things as well: a choreographer, torturer, writer of plays-within-a-play, she could dance and sing, too.

Her name was Kitty.

She was hung in 'forty-nine when the Communists reorganised the Forbidden City and forbade such perverse instruction.

It was only then they found out she was he.

That same luscious aunt took me aside one day and teased my ear with whispered sighs.

I was a child and understood nothing, but the words still stake out haunts on lonely nights, some echo that such courtesy can never overstep the mark.

Excuse, my lord, the liberty I take in thus undressing you, she said, and proceeded to place a silken mask upon my face and take my boyhood in her mouth through poetry, her voice trembling in the breeze.

While blinded thus I cannot now remember
what the weather was,
if it came from north or south,
as the inversion took its toll.

I was overcome by vertigo
while my bird was being swallowed whole
in a nest of words high up in branches.

Did you feel, she said in extrication
of her tongue from such untidy verse,
(ventriloquism, in fine,)

how you came to be a woman then?

From that time I wanted
to recapture that strange game to see
if her play within the play
on words had ever left me.

So when I stumbled upon David's story
and sampled fashion upon the catwalks
of my own perilous memory

I understood the theory
of all this allegory.

It was what united H. to me.

Like my father, I was made of clay;
I signed the *lettre de cachet*.

Vogue published my piece with great fanfare
billing it as the glossy truth of David H.
without a moment's hesitation

to consider how I'd used this cage,
this snare from youth
to catch all our fine reflections.
Of course I didn't use his name.
It's why I return so often to Vermeer.
His paintings conceal dilemma:
the imperative to tell without really telling.
The power of this secret order
was to release the visual clue, the game
that one could not bear witness to oneself.
His women's quarters contained reflective tiles
returning crocodile smiles.
He dressed his women upon himself:
neither pentimento nor palimpsest,
his paintings sought revelation rather than wealth.

I witnessed my Aunt Kitty on the marble floor
after she had drunk her poison
retching with shorter pauses and then
disgorging blood, her eyes turning wild.
This was payment for her duty
towards an older world where finer
sensibilities were not only out of fashion
but outlawed; payment for her tragic liaison
with the last emperor of China
and I, his bastard child.

So H. saw his life somewhat parallel to mine
in terms of how we had to escape old worlds
for which we were not responsible.
Our lives were tragically Oedipal.
But someone – he in mime and I in rhyme –
had to point the finger, a gesture not quite civil,
at the mask itself as a necessary evil.
He and I – the interchange.
Not a prosthetic device for the soul
to ease its load, but a reminder of the greater loss
the spirit undergoes when it is spoken.
Nothing repairs the broken
past except forgetting.
But who is let through the filmy net?
Who has the privileged right to thus forget?
They employ me for the record;
I speak and seek accord.
To be silent would be violent.

The Director-General did not press charges.
After all, it was he that hired me for this game
and I was simply doing my sworn duty... publicity.
It was a new era and the archives needed money;
it was called research, but they fired me just the same.

I found a room not far from the Seine
and wrote to stay afloat,
my only assets a dictionary,
a free-entry museum card,
my rain-cape and
much unresolved anguish.
No one will escape.
In this noisy swell of words the rest go down as well:
David H., the friend who did not save my life but turned instead into another sex to
neutralise his past;
all his mannequins who were taught not to speak;
and I.

This little pageant, our pastoral dance, is over.
Pack up the picnic things.
In Venice David filed up the Campanile—
(it was closed during intemperate weather)
and looked down at the flooded piazza below
where waiters waded after floating tables, and umbrellas
sailed downwind, and he saw the people pointing up at him—
when a submerged and chequered tile of russet stone came rapidly rising up.
Acceleration = 32'/second².
No one really cared.
The waiters were unperturbed;
tourists are never curbed of their desires.
Did he slip? Was he pushed?
The coroner's report referred to drugs;
Forensics set up a crime-scene tent,
so in the end it remained a media event.
In the palace-hotel they overlooked the copy of *Vogue*
I'd left beside the wigs and rugs.
A forlorn shoe, a purloined letter or two.
A pity there is no lead; they've forgotten how to read.
Paris sleeps tonight.
And I watch over the city.

Research statement

Research background

The Archivist is a work of exploration: principally of sexuality and gender conducted by an unreliable narrator unearthing ‘revelations’ from the archive. ‘The Archive’ has been a source of serious research by scholars for centuries. Jacques Derrida, in his Freudian interpretation of the Archive (1996), suggests there is a connection between psychic processes and technologies of inscription, putting into play the vexations of public and private issues. This ‘fever’ he relates to the Death Drive, in its obsession to incite amnesia, threatening memory as an accumulation of capital (1996: 12).

In 1993 an article appeared in the French newspaper *Le Monde*. It reported that the director of a famous fashion house had committed suicide by jumping from a tall building. Nothing else was reported.

Research contribution

Inspired by W.G. Sebald’s practice of employing fragmented biographies as a vehicle for prose narrative, I contrived to do this in a prose poem. While dispersion and fragmentation rupture the dominant modes of writing, the fragment, when framed as a gesture and an epic, becomes whole unto itself and creates the illusion of a totalized self. As archival, biographical research tends to deal mainly with fragments, there is a danger of disrupting intimacy with intention, thus putting under pressure an ethics of inscription. This is the research undertaken in *The Archivist*.

Research significance

The research undertaken here weds Walter Benjamin’s idea of the fragment-as-gesture with his notion of poetry as a collection of refuse.

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University of the Sunshine Coast

Gary Crew

The architecture of song

Biographical note:

Dr Gary Crew is Associate Professor and Head of Creative Writing at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. Originally trained as a Civil and Architectural Draughtsman, Crew was first published in 1986. His award winning children's fiction and illustrated books are published internationally. Crew's first adult novel *The Children's Writer* (Harper Collins, Sydney) was published in 2009.

Keywords:

Architecture – poetics – fiction

The piano

On the evening of his twenty-first birthday Rosa hoisted Augustus onto a stool beside the piano so that he might be seen to better advantage while he sang. Being just thirty-seven inches tall, as he was swept upward he caught a glance (somewhat askew, since he was so unceremoniously whooshed) of that shadowy space between the keyboard and the yellow pine of the floor. This space had formed the architecture of his childhood; the underside of the keyboard his ceiling, the piano legs pillars, the whole a secluded vault where he might crouch unseen (as had D.H. Lawrence before him), ‘in the boom of the tingling strings’, observing the miracle of his mother’s feet as she crushed the papery soles of her black velvet slippers (winking with *diamantes*) against the pedals.

But unlike the wretched Lawrence who deplored his maternal loss in both prose and poem, Augustus did not mourn for long. His mother did not mourn at all. Not since the day (Augustus believed he was four years old) when Mrs Trump, having learnt from her physician that her son was indeed a dwarf (*A midget?* she gagged, incredulous, into her hankie. *A damned midget?*), handed him over to the circus mob passing through town. Which allowed her to return to her piano, striking the ivories with even greater *appassionato*, as Lawrence would have liked.

The tent

Augustus now entered another space, striped with tigerish light, scented with the *potpourri* of elephant dung and saw dust, beneath the slatted benches of the big top. Here it was that upon hearing his peculiar song, Rosa first discovered him, squatting on his grubby heels warbling like a nightingale (so alien was his angelic voice in that foetid place), and being wise to the opportunity of freaks, the girl stooped to haul him out.

‘Ooo-err,’ she gasped goggle-eyed. ‘What are you?’

‘I am not a *What*,’ he declared (being a precocious talker), ‘I am a *He*. And I can sing.’

‘Really?’ Rosa snickered. ‘So can the fat lady when she’s on the sherry.’

Dumbfounded by her logic, Augustus shut his mouth. In that moment Rosa reached down and, gripping his elbows, hoisted him onto the bench that he had been lurking under (thus establishing a lifetime precedent), to take a really good look.

‘Holy hell!’ she declared, seeing him in his entirety.

The creature before her was a sideshow in himself, guaranteed to draw a crowd whether he could sing, dance or walk the wire.

‘Ooo-er!’ Rosa spluttered. ‘You’re a queer one you are. Look at your arms! Look at your legs! Like straws they are. Like drinking straws sticking out of a pumpkin.’

Augustus looked down at himself, wondering.

‘What?’ he said. ‘I had these arms and legs nearly five years and they haven’t broken off yet. And you can’t blame me for this romper suit. The pants might look like pumpkins being orange and round and puffy but that’s what I was wearing when she handed me over. And the moustache lady hasn’t changed me.’

‘Ooo-er,’ Rosa said, spinning him about to check for any tell-tale brown running down his leg. ‘And you haven’t cacked yourself?’

‘Eh?’

‘Filled your pants?’

‘No,’ he said, wide-eyed. ‘I already told you that. I am four, going on five.’

‘What?’

‘You heard me. How old are you?’

‘I am thirteen,’ Rosa grunted and span him around again, suddenly conscious of the size of his waist, how her finger tips touched encircling him. ‘All right,’ she said, ‘so who gave you to Moira?’

‘Eh?’

‘Moira. The bearded lady. The moustache lady. Who gave you to her? And why?’

‘My mother,’ he said bold and clear. ‘She teaches the *pianoforte*. She says my voice is liquid silver. My pitch perfect. She says only Melba could compete.’

What is this thing? Rosa wondered. Having lived all her life beneath the big top and seen so much that was freakish and queer, she could not comprehend what stood before her: dressed as he was in pumpkin pants, a sweet little blouse, and those tiny black shoes (were they off a doll?), with limbs as frail as straws (as she had been quick to inform him), he was, nevertheless, perfectly proportioned, unlike the other little people that she knew. Big Atlas in the red and black wagon (who she loathed), had a head the size of a melon and a body the size of a toad. No. This little thing was a proper manikin: his face pleasant (even pretty); his eyes pale grey (the colour of the trapeze artiste’s silky pants); his yellow hair slicked back (with Hairy Moira’s spit?); his ears flat; his little teeth white and even; his mouth a rose-bud (as people sometimes said).

‘*Nellie Melba?*’ she demanded. ‘That’s stupid.’

‘Why?’ he asked, caring little. And he dreamily turned his eyes up to take in the enormity of the marquee, that mighty pyramid of space yawning above him. No longer the dim and secret ceiling of the piano key board, but an architecture of light.

‘Because I seen her,’ Rosa informed him. ‘And I heard her too. She came here to sing for a war rally.’

‘A *war* rally?’

‘There *has* been a war, you know.’

Augustus did not know, being ignorant of the ways of the world.

‘Out there she stood,’ Rosa said, indicating the vast expanse of centre ring. ‘In her black dress with her big bosoms and her guts pulled in with a corset. Whale bone, Moira reckoned. Pearls she was wearing, wrapped round her neck but hanging down her back, not over her front. Down her back and over her big bum ...’ and the girl turned and stuck out her own backside to demonstrate.

So Augustus gave his attention to her. Not because at four years (going on five) he had any particular interest in a girl’s anatomy, but because in his own childish way he had already judged her bum to be pretty big (especially in that uncharitably shrunken red dress), and because her bulk (which was considerable, particularly her mass of frizzed and carrotty hair) blocked his view of the sawdusty shaft of sunlight striking down from the hole where a pole pierced the canvas. And since his view was interrupted, he thought he might as well sing to prove his point.

‘So what did she sing?’ he asked.

‘Some silly muck,’ the girl sneered. ‘*Home Sweet Bloody Home*, or something.’

‘Hmm,’ he sighed. ‘Then I will show you what she might have sung ...’

And throwing back his pretty throat, and casting his eyes upon that hole in the air, he opened his mouth (revealing yet again his perfect little teeth), and sang Puccini:

*One fine day you’ll find me
A thread of smoke arising on the sea
In the far horizon
And then the ship appearing
Then the trim white vessel glides into the harbour...*

As a circus girl with no knowledge of poetics, nor any previously perceived need for such knowledge, Rosa stood agog.

‘What?’ he demanded. ‘You can’t say that was no good.’

‘Yeah, yeah,’ she grunted, suddenly taken with the muck on her tired boots. ‘Yeah, yeah. You can sing. Not as good as that Melba, but. She could out roar the lions. The elephants even. But yeah, you can sing,’ and looking up, she wiped her grubby cheeks, her eyes brimming.

Research statement

Research background

Several iconic novels utilise an architectural construction to personify a character. Bronte (1987), Naipaul (1961), Stow (1981), Kafka (1971), Coetzee (1983) and the phenomenological works of Bachelard (1994) and Heidegger (2000) extend the personification of ‘the house as a character’ to the concept of ‘the dwelling’ as a ‘matter of beauty, creativity, fertility and nature’; a creative link, using poetic language as its building blocks, to Heidegger’s ‘His (man’s) dwelling, however, rests in the poetic’ (Meljac 2008).

Research contribution

An architectural draughtsman, I have sustained an interest in the influence of architecture upon fiction in essays (Crew, 1992, 2001, 2009), short stories (Crew 2004), and novels (Crew 1999, 2001, 2009). The creative extract attached is from an unpublished novel entitled *The Architecture of Song* in which the protagonist, Augustus, a dwarf, emerges from the womb-like space beneath his mother’s Laurentian piano to re-construct a variety of architectural sites using the poetics of song. Extending Heidegger’s concept of the ‘poetically constructed man’, the extract suggests that such a character has the poetic means to ‘reconstruct’ persons, even as Augustus alters the character of Rosa, and ultimately, as the entire novel reveals, through the employment of the poetics of his sublime voice, to reconstruct ‘the temple’ of his own dwarfish body in a celebration of self.

Research significance

The Architecture of Song demonstrates creative writing research in practice through the fusion of poetry and knowledge of architectural constructions (house, tent, cathedral) to create a work of fiction. The novel is under contract to Harper Collins.

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Macquarie University

Marcelle Freiman

In Forster (*Sand up the coast*)

Biographical note:

Dr Marcelle Freiman is a Sydney poet. She is the current Chair (President) of the AAWP and is a senior lecturer in English at Macquarie University, where she teaches creative writing, post-colonial and diaspora literatures, and poetry. Her research areas are: theorising the educational discipline, pedagogy and research frames of creative writing, on which she has published several articles in *TEXT*; post-colonial writing and theory, the writing and theory of diaspora; the writing of J. M. Coetzee. Her most recent book of poetry is *White Lines (Vertical)* (Hybrid Publishers, 2010). Her first book of poems, *Monkey's Wedding* (Island Press, 1995) was Highly Commended for the Mary Gilmore Award, 1996. Her poetry has been published in literary magazines and journals over the past 20 years, read on radio and in performance, and translated into other European languages. She is a member of the Sydney poetry group DiVerse, which writes and reads poetry in dialogue with contemporary art and museum exhibitions.

Keywords:

ERA – creative writing – research – ekphrasis – migration – cognition

In Forster (Sand up the coast)

Pelicans still
 against the blue
mirrors of lagoons, or high up
 their wings
held by the constant wind –
a place so windblown, strange
to an immigrant: I stood
 on the beach
 as if I'd left
 my other wing
in another place –
not here, where the wind forces
the trees to lean
 downwards
and pandanus rough in the sand
has roots like legs pushed in
 against the sliding—
and I think of Eliza Fraser
 in her fringe of leaves
on an island of sand,
alien, harsh as salt
 and beautiful
the pools of water filtered clean
 through the grains—
how she had no choosing,
had to find in the straps
of the leaf bracts
 how to seek out
the toughness
and her feet scratched and bare
were pushing down,
 sucked into sand
 as the wind blew
 her green and leathery.

Research statement

Research question, field and context

This work engages with the possibility of ‘coming to know’ through the writing of poetry. The poem enacts this knowledge construction in dialogic response to works of visual art (Harding 2010) in a narrative of contemporary Australian migration and settlement. *Ekphrasis*, the poetic rendering of visual textual qualities, constructs a provisional sense of ‘being’ in place through a process of situated writing, in which embodied affective energies triggered by visual perception create the poem. Rather than starting with a preconceived idea, composition begins with ‘not knowing’: visceral and non-visceral sensations link cognition and emotion (Damasio 2004: 173) as imaginative and sensory associations generate the poem’s language and formal trajectory around a sense of instability and displacement.

Research contribution: innovation, new knowledge

The process combines an awareness of cognitive brain function research with creative writing practice. Knowledge construction mirrors Vico’s theory (1744) of ‘imaginative metaphysics’, where knowledge comes from ‘*not* understanding’—a process where the thinker ‘becomes’ things ‘by transforming himself into them’ (Leitch: 415), creating a layered sense of ‘being in the world’ in a local landscape. Australian art, memories of place, and literature (White 1976) position the work as a particular settlement narrative.

Research significance

This poem is part of a project exemplified in the writer’s recent book *White Lines (Vertical)*, an emblematic, fragmented exploration of South African migration to Australia and Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to the Commonwealth. While this wider history has generated recent sociological, historical research (Tatz *et al.* 2007), the creative writing project’s insights gained through its processes, are new to Australian writing.

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Victoria University

Enza Gandolfo

Extract from Lucia's Story

Biographical note:

Enza Gandolfo is the author of many published short pieces of fiction and non-fiction, as well as the recipient of several grants and awards, including a Varuna Fellowship. Her novel, *Swimming* was shortlisted for the Barbara Jefferis Award 2010 and ABC Fiction Award 2008. Her previous books include: *Inventory: on op shops* with Sue Dodd (Vulgar Press 2007) and *It keeps me sane: women craft wellbeing* with Marty Grace (Vulgar Press 2009). Enza has a PhD in Creative Writing. She lectures in Creative Writing at the School of Communication and the Arts at Victoria University.

Keywords:

Memoir – life writing – diasporic literature – migrant literature

Aldo was still only a boy when he decided he wanted to go to Australia. He first heard of this place, a kind of America, from one of his uncle (Giovanni's brother) whose letters issued invitations and promised a better life. Giovanni refused to go to Australia. His years in America, as a young man, had made him wary; he knew the value of his own country. To Aldo, his uncle's letters were charged with the promise of adventure, of a new and different life, the stuff of a young boy's dreams.

I have my own farm, Giovanni, my own piece of the earth. I can stand at the front door of my house and look out into the fields and they are my fields. We have rows of fruit trees all of them mine. No landlord to bow down to, to tell us what to do.

Together, you and I could create our own new world. Your sons could go to school, study and have jobs that keep their hands clean, their backs straight. Here they have a chance of another life.

Lucia was ready to go. She agreed with Aldo, it was worth taking the risk. She'd put up with village life but she longed for something more. Lucia's own mother, Domenica, her brother, Roberto and all three of her sisters were doing well in Libya. They had money and a life that in Sicily was beyond their dreams. (This was before the war, before the Italians were expelled from Libya empty-handed.)

Carmela, Lucia's daughter, said little in response to her uncle's invitations. He never mentioned her in his letters. She imagined her life, a woman's life, would be no different in Australia than it was in Sicily. No one asked her what she thought and she didn't volunteer her opinion. Paolo and even Luciano, Lucia's youngest, wanted to go to Australia but then they would have followed Aldo anywhere.

'America was hell for me,' Giovanni whispered to Lucia as they lay in their bed in the darkness. Underneath them, in the stable, they could hear the animals stirring, outside in the street dogs barked.

'They treated us like pigs ... worse. I treat my animals better than they treated us.' He sighed and turned his back to Lucia. 'They hated us. Can you imagine Lucia, what it is like to see the look of hate on the faces of complete strangers, on the faces of your neighbours, the men that you work next to ... hate and disgust. We disgusted them and what could we do. It was their land after all.'

Lucia pulled Giovanni's arms around to her. His head rested on her shoulder. She couldn't see his face, but she knew the look that accompanied that tone, low and childlike, the ends of his lips turned down, his eyes glazed over with shame, shame for all the Sicilians who put up with, and continued to put up with, the abuse.

'We couldn't speak the language, couldn't understand what they said. They spat at us in the street. No one cared if you were a good man, an honourable man, if you worked hard, if you had a mind—the bottom of the pile, the dogs.'

'It's okay Giovanni, we're not going. It's okay go to sleep.'

'We were young men, seventeen and eighteen. It was difficult ... working all day and then crowded together at night—five, six .. as many as eight men in one room. We had no money, but sometimes at night we'd go for walks. Always there was a group ready to pick a fight.'

'Lucia, the poverty, the squalor ... Castellino is rich in comparison. The work was dangerous. Life was dangerous. Three of the young men who arrived on the same ship were dead by the end of the first year—sickness, accidents, and fights. One or two became rich, of course, yes—*L'America e ci acconza e a ci uasta*. Not for my children, Lucia.

'When I came back, there was a crowd waiting for me at my parents' house. I could smell the rich tomato sauce my mother was cooking for lunch, the bread she'd baked that morning and the grappa my father had made the night before. They hugged me, patted my back, they smiled, they were happy to see me. Lucia I felt lighter, like a child again. I could walk, talk; I could be myself without having to watch my back, without fear.' He stopped and took her hand.

'I couldn't believe I'd survived Lucia, I couldn't believe I'd made it back. I never want to leave my home again.'

Lucia sighed, 'Many people are going to Australia now, and we won't be able to stop Aldo when he is old enough. So many of his friends have gone. Maybe Australia is not as bad as America.'

'Lucia, Australians, Americans they're the same people. They're not like us, not like Italians—what will we do if they want to go? How can we stop them?'

'You'll have to tell them about America, what it was like, how you were treated, so they can understand.'

'No, never. I don't want them ever to know of the squalor, of the shame, I'd be ashamed to tell them of my life in America.'

'We'll have to wait and see what happens when they are older—he's just a boy. It'll be years before he's old enough to go.'

'If he goes the others will follow him.'

'If they go, if our sons go, then we'll have to go with them. I don't want them to be alone without their mother and father. I know what it is like to be separated from my mother, I don't want that for my sons.'

'Oh Lucia ...'

'Giovanni it is not the time to worry. We'll pray that it won't come to that.' But instead Lucia prayed that one day Giovanni would change his mind. She prayed that Australia was not like America. She wanted to go; even after more than ten years in Castellino the villagers still treated her like a foreigner. Castellino would never be her home.

Giovanni's prayers were in vain, for Aldo never let go of his dream. He spoke less of it as he grew older, less of it in front of his father at any rate.

While Giovanni's brother urged them to join him in Australia, Lucia's family urged them to migrate to Libya. Then the war came and the Italians in Bengasa were expelled from the country, forced to leave with only what they could fit into a small square suitcase. Domenica had died by then, but Lucia's sisters returned to Italy, Paolina and her family to Castellino where Lucia and Giovanni gave them refuge.

'See,' said Giovanni, 'a migrant is always a foreigner. They can take everything from you in the end.'

*

My father, Aldo, until his died in his late seventies, still had that spirit of adventure. He liked to travel and dreamed of going to America and to New Zealand, places that his poor health made inaccessible. He settled instead for trips around Australia with other Italian pensioners. He often said, 'I have been here longer than I was in Sicily, I'm Australian. I could never go back to the village to live.'

The Australians—the Anglo ones—no longer called him a 'wog' or 'dago' but they knew even if he didn't that he was not really Australian.

*

I couldn't speak English on my first day of school. I was the first grandchild and my father insisted no one speak to me in English. He wanted me to learn Italian. He looked with shame at the children of some of his relatives who couldn't speak Italian.

The conflict between us began on my first day of school, when I realised my parents were leaving me in a place where people didn't understand what I was saying. I was scared but I was determined and I learnt to speak English as quickly as I could.

My parents like many migrants wanted to retain their customs and traditions. They wanted to remain Italian in Australia. That worked to some extent for them, it gave them some protection, and a refuge from the prejudice they faced in their workplaces. It didn't work for me. I wanted to be like my friends, my Australian friends. I wanted to go out on the weekends. I wanted to do all the things my friends were allowed to do.

'No,' my mother would say.

'But why can't I go Evelyn and Sharon are allowed?'

'They're Australian.'

'So am I.'

'You're Italian. Now stop that. If your father hears you, there will be trouble.'

After a while I stopped asking. I hated being Italian. I planned my escape over and over again.

I left home at eighteen. It was a pre-planned, premeditated escape. I packed while my parents were at work and my brother was at school. The pre-booked removalist came and together we shoved my belongings in his van. I left a note—*the first eighteen years were yours the next eighteen are mine*. I put the keys on top of the note, on top of the table and I pulled shut the door behind me. I moved into a room in a house not far from the University. I'd been waiting, planning, scheming to leave for more than five years. Night after night under the covers, praying to the Virgin Mary above my

bed (even though already I had doubts about her existence). Praying, just in case, and wishing I'd wake up Australian; free.

I felt trapped for years. Trapped inside a culture, inside language that I didn't want to be connected to. Trapped inside my parent's fears, not allowed to go anywhere without them. Not allowed out with my Australian friends and certainly not with boys. I spent many nights crying.

I felt alone sitting in the front of the van with the removalist. He loved the surf, he said, more than anything and this was his way of paying to get to the waves. *Drive, get out of here, get going.* I was terrified someone would see me, someone would ring them, and they would appear yelling and screaming, pulling me back inside.

It had taken me several attempts until I finally did it. Twice before I had tried—found a room, said I'd take it and then at the last minute not been able to go through with it. I was scared. But I knew I had no choice.

Now when I look back at this story I want to hold eighteen-year Cia. I sound like some new age guru on a meditation tape wanting to embrace the inner child. I want to tell eighteen-year-old Cia, she was brave, courageous and that I understand she believed she had no choice.

*

It is a work day, a just after six. I am exhausted. I have walked from the station to my mother-in-laws. I'm having a coffee and waiting for my husband, Aldo, to finish work, pick me up and take me home. I am hoping Giovanni and Cia have put something on for dinner. Lucia is talking, but I am not listening to her, instead I am thinking about the fabric I bought at the market on Sunday. The dress I have in mind has a round scooped neckline and wide sleeves. The fabric is light, flowing. This is what I am thinking about when the phone rings, it is my son, Giovanni, he is in a panic.

'She's gone,' he says.

'Who?' I have no idea what he is talking about. But I can tell he is angry.

He tells me he has arrived home to a note, the keys and an empty room. He tells me Cia is gone. He tells me that she has taken everything – the bed, the posters, half the record collection.

'Are you sure?' This is all I can say, but my heart is beating fast and I feel the sense of dread rising. I put the phone down before he answers and I run. I run and run not even looking to see if there are cars coming, running and crying. Crying so much I can't see where I am going. But I am praying, praying to the Virgin Mary that Giovanni has got it wrong, that it isn't true. But of course I know it is true, and that everything has changed. I am running and thinking about Aldo – he will want to kill Cia, he will find it impossible to forgive her. I am running and thinking that I should have seen this coming.

*

They tried to find me, came after me with curses and with tears. They knocked on my door again and again. I didn't talk to them for months and then I did and then I didn't again, this time for years. It was my father, Lucia's son who cursed me, yelled at me down the telephone line, wished me dead, said I was dead, said things my mother could not cope with. And I could hear her crying, trying all the time to pull the phone from his hands. He said awful things. You can imagine. He was angry. And so was I.

Relatives took sides. Some said that I was like Carmela, my aunt. They said I had inherited her hatred, her ability to disconnect herself from her family. Some said there was no good reason, after all my parents were good people, they did not beat me.

I just wanted my life, my freedom. I knew no other way to be myself. Things could have been different if I had been able to talk to them. Things could have been different if they hadn't been so strict. Things could have been different, if my mother had ruled the house. If my father had been less angry. If I was happy to be Italian, hang out with my cousins and marry young. If I had been born in the 70s and not the 50s. If I had had an older sister, cousin, if ... I hurt them. They hurt me. None of us knew any other way; each of us did what we had to do to survive; to maintain our sense of self despite the wishes of those we loved that we be someone else.

For years I stayed away.

It was this experience and the reconciliation with my family that started me wondering about my grandmother, about her relationship with her daughter, Carmela. I'd always thought of Carmela as the 'bad' one and my grandmother as faultless. But as I became Carmela or a version of Carmela, I realised that there had to be another story, another version, maybe several other versions.

Whenever I asked my father why he didn't speak to his sister, he'd say, 'They were my father's dying words.'

I think they were words said out of anger. What if Giovanni hadn't died then, what if there had been time to unsay the words, to take them back, to swallow them. What if lying in hospital silenced by his stroke, silenced for the first time in a lifetime, what if he wanted to see his daughter?

My father, Giovanni's son, took back his curses.

In a room in Delhi I wrote my family a letter. I hadn't seen or spoken to them for nearly three years. I was coming home after two years in Asia and India and if they wanted me back in their lives these were, I said, the conditions. I spelled them out—I would never live with them again. I would probably never marry or have children. I would do as I pleased as far as my own life was concerned.

I didn't wait for their response when I arrived in Australia I went to visit them. The first visits were awkward but the reconciliation has been lasting. They accepted my conditions, of course; though, as you would imagine; as the years have passed and we have become closer again, they have often voiced their disapproval whenever I have done things they disapprove of. But they know and I know that my life is mine. There may have been easier ways of getting here...

Later I heard another story. My mother stood at the end of the table at Christmas dinner and said, 'When my daughter returns there are to be no repercussions. She is to be welcomed back, by all of you.' They did as they were told both the women and the men. They did as they were told, Lucia's sons, my father and my uncle.

I knew it would be okay. My mother is not a Rotelli. And the man's word was not the law. And my father loves me.

I'd grown up believing that the feud between my grandmother and her daughter, my aunt, could never be resolved because of my grandfather's dying words. My mother says to me, in a conversation, in the kitchen, as I ask her about my grandmother, 'I would never have stopped seeing you—no matter what your father said.' She tells me the story of her mother who allows into her house her brother-in-law, her husband's brother, after her husband's death, even though the brothers had been fighting for years, even though her husband had sworn never to speak to his brother again.

'The dead,' said my mother, 'can't be allowed to rule the lives of the living.'

'A mother,' said my mother, 'can't be kept away from her children.'

And so, I can no longer simply explain the feud between my grandmother and her daughter by referring to my grandfather's dying words nor can I blame it on the fact that my father's family is Sicilian for so is my mother's. I have no doubt that both these facts (and I say facts rather than truths) played their own part, but they are not the whole story.

I can't reconcile my grandmother and the woman who didn't talk to her daughter for twenty years. It wasn't one sided of course, Carmela too had her part in it. I asked my mother, my aunt, my father (I dare not ask my uncle). My brother, my cousins and I, wonder what happened to make Carmela feel that way, we discuss it over many years; there must have been something, I say, something must have happened long before Luciano's death.

And what is inherited? What I have I inherited? Travelling in Asia for two years with a backpack and a journal, I learnt that I could not leave my family behind—that it did not work to dissociate myself from them.

Research statement

Research background

This is an extract from *Lucia's Story* (unpublished). It belongs in the sub-genre of diasporic life writing that fuses biography and autobiography to tell the story/s of both the individual and the family (examples include *Running in the Family* by Michael Ondaatje). Like many contemporary memoirs, *Lucia's Story*, blurs the lines between fiction and non-fiction. However, while most memoirs continue to be written in the first-person, the "I" of the text representing the author's voice, *Lucia's Story* utilises multiple narrators as well as third and first person points of view to create a memoir that privileges the inter-subjective over the individual.

Research contribution

Lucia's Story creates an intimate experience of the world inhabited by the migrant family; places the experience of being a migrant in a dialogue with the experience of being a first-generation Australian; and illuminates the complexities of identity formation for migrants. Bakhtinian theories of dialogism and heteroglossia, provide a theoretical framework for this work that explores these complex relationships, and the fluid and shifting nature of identity.

Research significance

The significance of this work is its use of a hybrid form to explore familial relationships and the fluidity of identity as experienced by migrants and their children who occupy Bhabha's 'third space' between two cultures and languages. Memoir is an increasingly popular genre but it continues to be seen primarily as the individual's story. The use of multiple subject positions in *Lucia's Story* is a transgressive move that defamiliarizes traditional notions of memoir and interrogates notions of truth and identity.

Griffith University, Gold Coast

Stephanie Green

Strange dance days

Biographical note:

Stephanie Green currently teaches Writing, Communications and Literature at Griffith University. She was awarded a doctorate from the University of Western Australia in 1998: a study of nineteenth-century narratives. She has published recent scholarly work in the fields of Cultural Studies and Creative Writing. A former publisher, Stephanie is also a prize-winning author of short fiction, creative non-fiction and poetry. *Too Much Too Soon*, a selection of her short stories, was published by Pandanus Books in 2006.

Keywords:

Creative writing – gothic – narrative – displacement – gender

She had no name that I ever heard. She had a place that she walked, until they put the Sandhope Lunatic Asylum in her way. Sometimes she would disappear for months at a time, but always she came back. At first I thought that there was someone she wanted inside this place. She would come to the gate and stop still in front of it. After a time she walked in a circle around the building, measuring it with her dark bare feet in strange patterns, like a dance. Sometimes she muttered or sang to herself, a sound like the wind trying to make its way through rock. She seemed to believe, if she waited and sang long enough, the Sandhope Lunatic Asylum, for all its enormity, would go away.

We watched her through the grill of the little wooden door between the courtyard and the big front gate when they sent us to walk each day for exercise. She always came back to the same spot by the gate. A black ghost, mostly silent and unafraid. Sometimes she frightened the other inmates, but I welcomed her coming. She showed me that there was another world outside the place they kept me. Soon I began to look for her, to hope for her coming. But as time passed she came less often to our gate, and then she stopped coming altogether.

In the beginning the guard tried to chase her off. I could tell he did not like her. He made fun of her because she looked so strange and dark. Then, after many of the strange dance days, she became hysterical, banging on the gate and crying out in her own way of speaking. That sound was like the fast drumming of a heartbeat, but it was nothing the guard could understand. Her words were not words to us. The guard shook the gate hard and made a fist in her direction so that she was frightened and ran away. I did not see her again for many months.

* * *

There is little to tell of my first few weeks in that place. I lay on the hard bed through slow hot summer days, drained of life, barely moving to eat or wash, just as I had lain in the stinking hold of the ship for so many months. Tears slid from my eyes and I could not stop them even when strangers came past my bed. The first keepers I knew in that place were the nurse and a woman known as Matron. They came every day and stood at the foot of my bed until my fever passed, whispering. It was only then, when the hot crawling feeling left me, that I found myself unable to move.

In those first weeks they did not press me to move or to work, but left me alone in the dormitory to weep quietly to myself. The nurse came morning and night. A shapeless figure with a lined yellow face. She stared at me briefly and went away. I was glad when she left me alone.

The women who shared my dwelling place were then barely shadows to me. At night, when they came to bed, I pretended I was asleep so I would not have to know them or let them know me. Sometimes the pillow was soaked with my tears and I had to lay it out on the window sill in the morning to dry in the sun. Blood came as well as tears, for the weeks turned slowly to months. As I bled it was as if the terrible blood on the ship had come back to torment me. I wished that it would never cease flowing from me until it had drained me of my life.

I felt I could not get clean and washed as often I could. They brought me water every day, and that seemed a blessing after the ship. The water was always cold but the days were hot then and I did not mind, although later, in winter, my lips and the skin around my fingernails cracked sorely with the cold.

My one joy in that first time was the light, because I had seen so little of the sun for so long. Each day I watched how the squares of light moved through the day, passing from one side of the dormitory to the other, lapping in over my feet in the late afternoons. After a time I noticed the light reaching further up my bed almost as far my elbows and I grew grateful for the way it warmed my back and my belly as the path of the sun grew softer and lower. The season changed from summer to autumn and eventually I grew impatient with myself that I had lain in bed so long.

Our dormitories were on the second floor of the south west wing. They were long, narrow and very plain with a row of iron beds on each side of the room, placed herringbone fashion, with grey covers and a divided tea chest between each bed to be shared for our few personal items. Above each bed was a high window which we were allowed to have open three inches at night in summer. They were fixed so we could not open them wide and throw ourselves into the courtyard below.

Not many of the beds were occupied in those days. The bed on my right was empty but on my left slept a girl of barely twenty. She was very short with fair hair and a pretty pointed nose. Later, when I could walk, I discovered that she only came up to my chin. One night she came and sat upon my bed and asked me my name. *My name is Jill*, she said. Her arms bore jagged scars which she showed me quickly, then hid under her shawl. *I used a knife*, she whispered closely, as if it were a secret, though I knew it could not be. She put her pale hand on mine, a thin dry claw. *My parents died a long time ago, when I was a child. I was put in the Asylum by my Aunt. She said it were in case I did myself harm, but I know she were more afraid for herself.* In Jill's half of our tea chest she kept a wooden doll, a knitted shawl and an embroidered sampler left to her by her mother. She did not touch the doll or the sampler, only looked at them sometimes at night before she shut the lid.

For much of the day I was left alone while the others went about their appointed duties or lingered outside in the quadrangle below. One day I heard or felt something that caused me to draw myself up and try to look out the window: not the northerly window on my side of the dormitory which overlooked the Asylum's inner courtyard, but the smaller, higher window on the other side which faced a south-westerly direction towards the sea and the town. To do this I had to stand on the rail of a bed and stretch my chin up very high above the sill, which was hardly comfortable even for a tall person. The first time I tried it I fell because my body was so weak from lying down. Somehow I became determined to see properly out that window and when no one was looking I tried it over and over again.

Once you were up, if you turned your head and your eyes hard to the right and pressed your face against the slightly open window you could see the Asylum gate, a big, black complicated piece of ironwork. Beyond the gate you had a narrow view of the sea. This view, I later discovered, was obscured at ground level from the inner courtyard by a wall with a locked wooden gate. The gate was only open once a month

on Visiting Sundays when any of us fortunate to have visitors were permitted to sit or walk in the outer garden, surrounded by thirsty rose bushes and yellowing Sweet Alice beds. On those days the inhabitants would stare and stare through the gate as if nothing else ever occupied their waking thoughts.

It was looking out in this awkward way that I first saw the dark woman. She stayed first beside the little clump of headland trees making her strange dances, then sat cross-legged on the dusty ground beneath a spindly tree. She sat for a very long time facing the iron gate, as if waiting for it to open by some kind of magic. Something more about her than the colour of her skin reminded me of Mr Marakoa. And although she seemed so sad and savage I felt we were alike, for in our different ways we were both imprisoned.

After that I kept watch for the strange dance woman. Sometimes she would come and sometimes she would not. I could never look for very long because my neck became sore as it was turned so far to the right. I wanted to wave or call to her, but I feared that if I made any sound or drew any attention to myself I would never be left alone again. Several times I saw her pass my window as she circled the building, always looking for a way through. Once she looked up and saw me. I stared back. Later I wished I had made some kind of sign, but I only moved away from the window so that I could not be seen.

When the cool weather came, I felt my strength return. I even looked forward to meals and became a little curious about my fellow inmates. They were not bright or rational creatures. Some were strange, talking only to themselves or to invisible companions. One refused to wear clothes and had to have her grey inmate's shift tied with string to her body. Some seemed not mad at all. One woman had been brought forcibly to the asylum for shouting at her son-in-law. I saw theft and jealousy and squabbling amongst them, but sometimes, while I was sick, old Mrs Webby with the squat figure and the eyes with pointed corners would bring me a sprig of mint bush or rosemary from the garden, or if I were shivering from cold young Jill would lend me the knitted shawl she wrapped around herself to hide the long scars on her arms.

The Asylum was an imposing building made from heavy yellow sandstone blocks. It reminded me of places I had seen when I was a child—very large with a roof that curled over and over like a row of disdainful noses. In my time the patients were all women, although in the first few months after it was built they had kept men and women convicts locked up there because there was no prison. Many years after I was gone, they built quarters for male patients as a sideways extension to the east wing linking with the northern block where the dining room and infirmary were housed, facing the inner courtyard as our quarters faced it from the south. In my day the northeast corner was where the kitchen garden stood, although it too was enclosed by a wall.

In the centre of the courtyard there was a bell which hung from a frame. This bell had been carried out from England and once stood in a country church, now supposedly ruined. The bell was rung before meals, before Sunday morning prayers and to raise the alarm should a patient become crazed or violent, or in case of some other emergency. It was then pulled backwards and forwards with a long rope which made

the clapper cause it to ring. The bell-ringer was also the chief warder, Mr William Johnson. He was a strong man but bell-ringing takes a knack which he never completely mastered. Sometimes it would ring for him soundly, at other times he could not do more than cause the clapper to tap thickly against its sides like a cautious traveller knocking against a stranger's door.

My first year in that place there were sometimes only eight or ten patients, besides me, although the numbers rapidly grew, as if the colony somehow bred madness within itself. We knew each other, for how could we avoid it in that place, when we ate and washed and slept together in our dormitory rows.

There was one patient we never saw. She was kept away from the rest of us, whether for our protection or hers we never knew. There was one place, you see, a cell reserved for those whose madness was so extreme that the world must be protected from their horror. No one could ever say that they were glad to see inside that cell. I heard, many years after I became a free woman, that they added padded pallets all over the walls and a soft, stitched kid leather restraint. But in my day, the floor and walls of the cell were uncovered stone where a woman was bound with thick cow-skin straps to an iron-framed bed.

I do not know what she had done or where she came from. We never knew her name. Some said she had murdered the Governor's children, others said she had murdered her own. No one really knew what terrible thing happened to make her so crazed, or why, if she had done something so wicked, she had not been hung. She frightened us, even though we never saw her face. Although we too were afflicted, we called her *The Murderess*. Few felt she could be of our kind. Now I wonder if she had been a murderess at all, or whether that was just one of the warders' stories meant to frighten us. She may not have been wicked, but there was no doubt she was mad.

Generally she was quiet and we forgot her, as we sometimes forgot even our own hardest thoughts. She was not always silent. Sometimes we heard her cries, strange sounds without words as an animal makes when bringing forth its young, or before the slaughter house when the blood of its brethren has been shed. She seemed to us a monster, most of all when her horrible cries stirred our pity. We believed that should she escape her bonds she would not spare any one of us.

One bright afternoon after the midday meal, when the murderess started up her moaning, Jill took me by the arm and led me across the courtyard to the wall. We pressed our ears against the wall so that we could hear her moving on the other side. We could not see the murderess at all for there was no proper window, only a small open square below the eaves. There was only the terrible sadness of her wretched moaning. Sometimes she paused but each time we thought she had stopped, the cry came again. I wanted to block it out but somehow that moaning held us to itself. It was that sound, more than any other thing, which told me that my mind and body were not, after all, driven apart and this earth was still my dwelling-place.

* * *

One Sunday morning it was very hot, and those of use who were not restrained or ill were let into the front garden where the beech trees threw their morning shade over the garden benches, leaving roses and carnations bright in raw sunlight.

I sat on a bench staring as far as I could through the narrow gaps in the gate when I saw a shadow standing still in front of the thin trees on the headland. I did not move, just kept watching and after a time I knew that she saw me watching her. I did not know what she thought of me except I fancy she knew I wanted to be able to pass through that gate almost as much as she did.

This time she did not keep her distance as she had done before, all those other times she had jumped up and down on one spot or cried aloud. This time she came right up to the entrance and banged on the gate with her fists, gabbling in her strange language. A guard strode up to his side of the gate and looked angrily at her. She did not pause, so he reached his hand through the bars and pushed her down on the ground. She got up again talking very loud and fast, coming right up to the gate again until, once more, he pushed her down. She ran away a few feet and stood still, her eyes staring. I had never seen a human being keep so still, like the black stalk of a bush on a day without a breeze.

The guard pointed his stick at her and shook it roughly, calling her names I will not repeat and telling her to go away. She simply stayed where she was, looking past him as if he was hardly there. Then he said, *So you want to come in, do you, Blackie?* and he opened the gate with his key, bowing like a gentleman and showing her the way with a motion of his hand.

She did not move at first. We could see her plainly through the entrance archway and I held my breath wondering what she would do. I was afraid for her because I knew what she could not know – that once she came through the gate there was no way out. Therefore I wished she would not come in for her sake. Yet somehow for my sake I wished she would.

Maybe it was the sight of all of us staring at her, and indeed we must have seemed a strange lot with our worn grey uniforms and puzzled eyes. Maybe it was because she was frightened of the guard and sensed a trick. Or maybe it was because she could not see a way through beyond the other side of the building. As it was, she did not come forward through the open gate, but began walking backwards very slowly, then finally turned and went along the yellow path towards the town until I lost her from my sight.

Research statement

Research background

This work is impelled by a proposition that the Gothic trope of the imprisoned madwoman holds resonance and power as a narrative device for exploring Australia's difficult past. Adapted from 'Bluebeard's Wife', this trope has long held potency for women writers (Williams 1995; Gilbert and Gubar 1979), epitomised by the incarcerated Caribbean wife, of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The setting, a Gothic Revival Lunatic Asylum, is both emblem of power and site of surveillance (Foucault 2001: 37), invoking fears of hybridisation and dissolution.

Research contribution

The entity of the Asylum provides a means to explore the 'inside out' of Australia's difficult past. Part of a grand, unrealised architectural design for a new colonial city, it reproduces displacement, exploitation, repression and constraint, yet offers hope of recovery. The Asylum enables 'an ascending analysis of power' founded upon ideology's 'infinitesimal mechanisms' (Foucault 1980: 99), linking early conventions of Australia as 'uncanny landscape' (Gelder and Jacobs 1998), or 'dungeon of the world' (Turcotte 1986), with later representations of place, identity and transformation. Heteroglossia is also exercised, whereby the 'monological' narrative is interrogated and reconstructed through minor or 'dialogical voices (Bakhtin 1980).

Research significance

This work extends a significant Gothic trajectory within Australian fiction, from the work of Marcus Clarke and Barbara Baynton to that of Elizabeth Jolley and Amanda Curtin in which alterity is used to interrogate meaning and power. Referencing the premise that all cultures have imaginary zones for what they exclude (Cixous and Clément 1996: ix), the work explores narrative as troubled engagement with an unspoken past.

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Swinburne University of Technology

Dominique Hecq

Glitter

Biographical note

Dominique Hecq is Senior Lecturer and Research Leader in Writing at Swinburne University of Technology's Faculty of Higher Education (Australia). She has a PhD in literature and a background in French and Germanic languages, with qualifications in translating. She has published in the areas of literary studies, translation, creative writing, psychoanalysis, and pedagogy. With Russell Grigg and Craig Smith, she co-authored *Female Sexuality: The Early Psychoanalytic Controversies*. She is also the author of *The Book of Elsa* (a novel), *Magic, Mythfits* and *Noisy Blood* (fiction), *The Gaze of Silence*, *Good Grief*, *Couchgrass* (poetry) as well as two short plays (*One Eye Too Many*, and *Cakes & Pains*), performed respectively in 2001 and 2004. Her most recent award is The Martha Richardson Medal for poetry (2006). She was short-listed for the inaugural Blake Prize for Poetry (2008) and highly commended in its second year. *Out of Bounds* (Re.press) is her latest book. Email: dhecq@swin.edu.au

Keywords:

Creative Writing – psychoanalysis – mourning – *suppléance* – poetics

Glitter

I rhyme to see myself
To set the darkness echoing
Seamus Heaney

We now live in our own house at the edge of the city: a luminous structure jutting out of a hill above the Merri Creek, with both sunlight and moonlight reflecting on stainless steel surfaces. It is a changeable house. Sometimes it feels safe as a church, and sometimes it shivers and creaks. In summer it stands its ground solidly deflecting the heat. In winter it rocks like a boat. What binds this house is the sky. From my fiction room I can see the city skyline slowly emerging from the night as lights are flicked on in offices. It is a house with its own integrity of life lived, dreamed and made.

It is now time to finish the book in which I sought the face of my child, the voice of my twin, the book in which I found the face of the moon and a disconcerting multiplicity of voices stirring the shadows all about—rumours that prised me from myself only to fade, restoring me to some clamour only to leave me dispossessed. With nothing in my hands but time. With time, yes, life went on. With time life went on as I watched my first born learning to organise it into *now, yesterday, tomowow*. With time we made other children and our children made things. And I made the music I could no longer bear to listen to.

Why is white white?

Chalk, rice, zinc
 Crystal falls
 Limestone graves

Phosphorus
 Lightless body
 Alabaster

Fifteen years of life lived at dream's edge. Fifteen years of hands meeting needs to *posséder la vérité dans une âme et un corps*—to take possession of truth within one single soul and body, as Rimbaud said. Fifteen years of writing limits, looking for latent truths, finding buried knowledge. And the ultimate truth in between grief and guilt. All this at the expense of losing your mother tongue and cracking your voice. But you kept alive as you turned affect into feeling, feeling into emotion, memories into fiction, fiction into being in a relentless process of littering and lettering loss, hope, love.

It is a matter of existing within that polarity—between the white centre and the vast periphery, between the black in the white and the colours in the light.

To exist is to stitch a wound.

To write is nothing but to stitch a wound with a child's hand.

Hand
Star of David

vide-la
tu la vis
la vida
words emptying out
vacant in the silence within

Stitch ouch itch *we eee*

I am doing it again

fragmenting my narrative as I feel the anxiety rising
cutting up sentences / words / reaching for the letter / through metaphor— *eee...*

I cut some lethal umbilical cord that binds me to Time.

The dynamic involving grief and narcissistic delusion comes to a head in the image of the hand. The hand becomes a star and so stops meaning in its tracks. Though the star names the dead child, it firmly inscribes him in culture, albeit with the heavy legacy it bears in the Judeo-Christian tradition. David is now outside of me. Memorialised. Through mourning, a mourning that entails fragments and a passage from prose to poetry, from sense to non-sense, *sang rouge* to *sang blanc*.

The fragment as the embodiment of the energy needed to begin. A beginning that involves reinventing the notion of endings, of death and loss. And so from prose to poetry, because metaphor touches towards the unsaid unsayable in the new beginning while metonymy only says what can be said.

And so from the black of my heart I trick myself to write out the white into glitter.

To untie myself from the world. To tie myself to it. In English (says my last born).

In the volcano's eye at Lake Taupo in New Zealand where generations of granite lay mute under water and stones float on water I watched my children tumble and splash as I grappled with fire words for the incandescent ending to their brother's book. In the volcano's eye all was slipstream of light, pumice and water. All aglitter. And on the surface of the gleaming water where cold volcanic ash shimmered a child's face drifted across. On the shore froze a salamander in mid flight.

I am a salamander crawling through fire
caught in your gaze
un / harmed

Would you say poetic discourse can transmute the spectre of death and regenerate desire?

Would you say when poetry collapses death unwinds the textures which bind us to desire itself?

At Lake Taupo at the end of the earth I was out of time. I was inside Time. What I saw on the mirrored reflection on the surface of the water of the hole created by the volcano is what Narcissus saw and what Orpheus looked for.

Ghosts are go-betweens. They tell us where death resides. Where life is. They tell us that art is an entwining of death and life and what lies in-between. At the end of the earth I came full-circle. *Sshh*.

Letter by letter, on the litter of another language I have stopped the torrent of grief and *jouissance* that would have been the end of me had I written in my mother tongue. Mother. *Mater*. Matter.

In another language I am matter's light. Shadow's light. The future, not the past.

'T is done. I have put death to death. I have returned the night to the night. For now.

Smell the intoxicating scent of jasmine—the way it clings. The life and death of scent, the absence clinging, rustling, like a voice.

Eurydice, Eurydice, Eurydice.

From the window of my fiction room I can see the light now slanting through the trees, mottling the garden with golden speckles, overshadowing daybreak's smatter of crumpled shadows. Steam rises from the ground as if the earth itself is being boiled from inside out. The day is fresh, streaming with flecks of light and dust. All is pure rhythm, all pulsating glitter, a pre-inscription.

There are splashes of silver everywhere in a grey green, grey blue landscape. A flush of oxidized copper green spreads in the Japanese cherry by the front stairs. Spring is here in a hurry. Two rainbow lorikeets swoop into the camphor laurel next to the window to eat the berries. The sap running on the bark of the blackwood looks like honey. Honey-spangle day.

Even from this window the Australian sky is huge, the middle distance hazily expansive. A sky to get lost in, float, find a soul exfoliating itself. Sunlight sparkles and crystallises in the breeze that comes from Bass Strait

I am becoming other, but nothing like the expected antipodean transplant you would have expected. I am an *extimate* exile.

As the din of dawn dies I listen to the nothing there—this still inarticulate speech of the heart. And I want to tell them about the shrieks and colours of the lorikeets. I want to tell them about the sky. I want to tell them how their sky is now my alphabet. I want to tell them about the gratitude I feel for the weird conjunction of events that brought me here where in the budding branches of the bushes and trees and in the light I see sky words. In these sky words is light's eye, the source of metaphors, a curious and persistent feature of the natural world that language leads us into: a minute attention to spottiness in things, an attention so marked that we sometimes have the impression of an obsessively pointillist word painter at work behind the scene. This word painter I call the spirit child.

Research statement

Research background

Current international studies in Creative Writing are focusing on re-defining the concept of research as particular to its discipline while re-assessing the value and meaning of theory (Krauth and Brady 2006; Harper and Kroll 2007; Magee 2009; Smith and Dean 2009). Concurrently, recent developments in the theory and practice of psychoanalysis have identified writing as a means of understanding subjectivity through what the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan has called *suppléance*, a stand-in that helps the ego cohere and in some cases prevents subjective dissolution (Lacan 2005 [1975-76]). While existing research at the intersection of these fields recognises the *significance* of the creative process as an illustration of *suppléance*, it has overlooked its very *mechanism*.

Research contribution

'Glitter', the last chapter in *Hush*, a memoir of cot death, addresses the question of the *mechanism* of *suppléance* by performing it. In doing so, it determines that *suppléance* arises out of the need to overcome an anxiety that veils the threat of subjective dissolution. Further, it suggests that this anxiety can be overcome by turning away from the metonymic axis of language by favouring its metaphorical axis, thereby breaking new ground in the field of theory.

Research significance

The significance of this piece is that it provides the key to the mechanism of *suppléance*. Its value is attested by my being invited to speak at a national symposium hosted by the Lacan Circle of Melbourne and the Australian Centre for Psychoanalysis (March 2010) and at an international conference hosted by ACLALS (London, March 2010).

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Griffith University, Gold Coast

Nigel Krauth

Majorca: unreal estate

Biographical note:

Associate Professor Nigel Krauth teaches writing at Griffith University, Gold Coast. With Jen Webb he is co-editor of *TEXT: journal of writing and writing programs* <http://www.textjournal.com.au> and with Tess Brady is co-editor of *Creative writing: theory beyond practice* (Post Pressed 2006). Tess and Nigel's latest collaboration is *The Clunes' little book of the book* (Clunes Arts Press 2010).

Keywords:

Discontinuous narrative—maps— radical memoir

Maps and Majorca

I'm booked on a ship to Majorca in a couple of days. In Barcelona, where I stay at a dilapidated hostel in Carrer de Sant Pau, off La Rambla, the street is narrow, cars barely squeeze by, crowds flock at all hours. My Lonely Planet guide says be careful in this area. But I've always had a charmed existence in foreign countries.

I visit the nautical museum, housed in the beautifully-conserved Drassanes, the 13th-century royal shipyards built like a cathedral in the old Barcelona port. I soon discover Majorcans were among the first great mapmakers.

Majorcans introduced the idea of *illumination*—visual illustration and storytelling—to navigational maps. Majorcans made maps a rich narrative. Depictions of people, cities, animals, activities from history and biblical stories, travellers' notes and imagined exotica were incorporated among the purely functional elements of the map, all done with lavish colours and lashings of gold leaf. The famous *Catalan Atlas* of 1375 (a copy lovingly preserved here in the Drassanes museum) is a masterpiece of science and of art. Looking at it is like viewing the world as a giant stained-glass window—light seems to shine out of it. This atlas is a big book, more than 2 feet square when open. Meant to be walked around, it reads from whichever side you are sitting or standing at. Thus, as these maps orient the viewer, the viewer has to orient to the map.

The *Atlas*'s makers, Abraham Cresques and son, Jehuda, lived and worked in the Jewish quarter of Palma, the capital of Majorca. I can't wait to get to the city that produced such producers of maps. What was it about Palma in the 14th century that allowed its denizens to see the world so remarkably...to make maps like teeming novels? I bend towards the security box housing the *Atlas* and scan its intricacies, a myriad of details which make the Mediterranean an incredibly vital place. I note that the gold leaf is used exclusively on islands: Majorca, Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily, Crete and Rhodes. They shine golden. And the main spray of rhumb lines linking the known European world radiates from a point at the centre of a golden circle of islands from Catalonia to Italy. In spite of enigmatic England, resembling a potato on the periphery, this is a map made for a world understood as islands. Another Majorcan map on display here is Amerigo Vespucci's chart—the one he consulted as he plunged beyond its left-hand margin on his way west across the Atlantic...

The shifting map of Palma

I arrive on the wharf in Palma de Majorca and buy a map of the city. I'm searching for a cheap hostel in Carrer del Vi—the Hostal Miope, recommended by my guidebook. The address appeals to me because 'Carrer del Vi' looks like it translates as 'Street of Life'. The Lonely Planet says the street is a picturesque narrow lane in the old part of town, but when I consult my newly-purchased map, I can't find it. As I walk a tangle of alleyways, constantly checking my chart, I end up at the Hostal Ricos. If I had found the Hostal Miope in Carrer del Vi I may have begun a quite different understanding of Majorca.

Place and time: how to relate them? Is a place always the same place, experienced in a different time? Or is it not the same place? Or is time just one time, and place myriad places? Or is time simply the name we give to a place, and its name keeps changing? The reason I missed Carrer del Vi is because on the cheap map I purchased from the first vendor I saw on the wharf, that street is called ‘Carrer de General Barceló’. I wonder what the General did to require his street-name being cancelled—something to do with the Franco era, I expect, thus showing how old my ‘new’ map is.

But I like the way new streets meet up in your head at last, after you’ve followed and re-followed them, not knowing their relations and orientations until—*alli!*—you realise Placa Mayor is just a set of steps away from Via Roma, Ramblas and La Unio (not that each of these is on your map anyway) which you first met up with quite separately a half-day of walking and searching previously.

It’s as if, to the new arrival, the blocks of an old city are a jumble of islands and you have to navigate them. And while the map is in your hand, the map in your head doesn’t yet exist, and you have to learn the bearings, the courses to take between blocks you don’t yet want and those you do. The sea-roads figured as rhumb-lines in the *Catalan Atlas* drew islands into intimate relationships. But, finding my way around Palma de Majorca, this island city-capital, I’m inclined to think islands were important on early maps not because they were destinations and setting-out points—blocks of a city in the sea, so to speak—but because they are like boats.

Checking the horizon from an isolated boat isn’t like checking the sea horizon from land. From a tall headland with an uninterrupted view, the sea’s horizon appears curved—we get a sense of the earth’s roundness. But from an isolated boat the horizon is curved all way round, and straight. It tells us nothing about curvature. When boats move, they take their horizon-ring with them. An island, being like a boat, albeit not a moving one, when you stand atop it and see a surrounding circle of sea, you can be forgiven for thinking you are standing at the centre of the world. Islands take the perspective of the subject, not the context.

There are people disenfranchised on the City of Palma map, either by the mapmaker or history or politics. I want to go to all the streets with proper names and see how they bear relation to the individuals they are named after. Carrer de Vasco de Gama. Carrer Colon (Columbus). Avenida Joan Miro. Carrer Velazquez. Carrer Federico Garcia Lorca. Carrer de Cervantes. Adventurers, artists, writers, I note. But the street that attracts me most is Carrer Roberto Graves—around the bay near the Club Nautico and the Transmediterranea terminal, quite near where I started my day’s long walk in search of a hostel and began to realise how the ground in my life was shifting.

Stine’s place

At the Hostal Ricos, the owner is gaunt and Scandinavian. She tells me her name is ‘Steen-a’. She writes it down: ‘*Stine*’. She has done a lot of tanning in her life and her skin shows it. She’s a good sort, I decide; she keeps a glass of wine under the counter. She brings it out when she talks to me alone, but I notice she puts it away when young

backpackers are present. I'm an *old* backpacker, of course. Why she thinks I might be more trustworthy when drink is around has me baffled.

Stine gets up from her computer. She leans her scant breasts on the reception counter. They bulge a little over the top of her bra and look cute. She says she owns the place, and laughs. I ask her how she came to be owner and she tells me a story which is surprisingly candid and detailed. A university education, extensive travels abroad, a love affair with a Majorcan man, twenty-two years of running the hostel together, then he died and here she stands, the owner.

She brings out the glass of wine and asks, 'Would you like a drink?' I follow her into her quarters through the curtained doorway behind the counter.

I note the contrast. Upstairs I'm installed in a fairytale room, paradise for backpackers, with flounces on the bed, print curtains and pelmets. There's an invigorating *Sound of Music* freshness about it. But Stine's place, here on the ground floor, has a different innocence. It's madly cluttered and incredibly detailed. As I tag along behind her, it's almost impossible to keep up for danger of knocking something flying.

I sit on a lounge and she pours me a drink. I look around. The walls are swathed with shelves, and the shelves are swathed with objects. It's an inundation, a showcase, a complex statement. Every nook, every narrowness, every corner, every passage. Things exquisite and fragile, delicately ordered. Each looks to another, reflects it and echoes. Her life is here in ornaments, postcards, bric-a-brac. Nothing is bigger than a music-box. Myriad shapes and pastel shades. Islands of experience. I'm curious to touch them. I turn to the glass doors opening onto the patio. In their reflection her apartment is a map and I am an illustration in it.

'May I?' I say, indicating I would like to walk around.

'Be my guest.'

I view her life from different angles, see it in changing perspectives, pick things up and hold them. I am careful to replace as found. Each has been definitely positioned. The postcard showing Tintagel, the pink Californian plastic heart, the Pompeii snowdome, the ticket to Santorini, the Australian boomerang... But there's no chronology. It's a scattering and gathering, a museum and muddle. Shelf after shelf of memento—levels, strata and arrangements, swirls and clusters.

'It's amazing,' I say, lost for words. 'I don't think I've seen anything like this.'

She laughs, not at my clichés, but with a genuine delight that she has astonished me.

I find the wine affecting me quickly and I tell her I have to go. She seems happy with the visit.

As I leave I ask does she know where Robert Graves lived on the island. No, she says, she doesn't. I understand. Being Scandinavian, she might have no interest in the celebrated poets of English literature. But then...

'Oh, do you mean *Gra-vez? Roberto Gra-vez?*'

I say I do. She gives me directions to Deyá, the village on the other side of the island where Graves settled and plied his craft.

Day trip to Deyá

I pay at the gate and enter the Fundació Robert Graves. I walk the drive to the house which has become his museum. I discover Roberto in his writing room. Nothing has changed, they say, since the day he died. The desk, the splodged manuscript, the writing implements, the cigarette papers, the tea cup, the magnifying glass, the vest slung over the back of his chair. I go upstairs and discover him again in the bathroom, shaving. A black-and-white BBC video loops repeatedly on a wall monitor. It shows his soaped-up reflection, a close-up in a cabinet mirror. I stop and watch it. The actual cabinet mirror he shaved in is beside the screen in front of me and I see myself in it. Roberto looks in the same mirror I look in and I see him while I see myself. ‘Grey haunted eyes, absent-mindedly glaring,’ Roberto intones. ‘From wide, uneven orbits...’

...one brow drooping
Somewhat over the eye
Because of a missile fragment still inhering,
Skin deep, as a foolish record of old-world fighting.

Crookedly broken nose—low tackling caused it;
Cheeks, furrowed; coarse grey hair, flying frenetic;
Forehead, wrinkled and high;
Jowls, prominent; ears, large; jaw, pugilistic;
Teeth, few; lips, full and ruddy; mouth, ascetic.

I pause with razor poised, scowling derision
At the mirrored man whose beard needs my attention,
And once more ask him why
He stands ready, with a boy’s presumption,
To court the queen in her high silk pavilion.

– Robert Graves (1959)¹

Roberto tells his life story as he soaps his face. Football, boxing, war, poetry, women. He confesses to the mirror his drives and vulnerabilities as he razors his beard off. The poem is a map of his life, as is his face. I look at my face as he looks at his.

A White Goddess episode during a party at Roberto’s house²

That queen in her high silk pavilion? She’s in the garden behind me. She’s dark and Muse-hot and probably angry. All Deyá is here: the kids, the parents, the grandparents. In the flare-light they beat the Christ out of the *piñata*, blindfolded, frustrated. It’s nothing compared to my frustration dealing with this maverick girl-Muse-body, this girl-brain driving behind me, this twisting, lurking heat, this young woman/ancient fuck, this quintessence of creation who doesn’t want me much in my

fifties but still wants me, lures me, needs me as father, mentor, dying man, as rooted celebrity man.

There's a crazy drama on the stage in the garden, which I've written and commissioned. People hold their scripts in their hands. Monstrous masks dance and bump. I've invited good-looking men to test the Muse. They play bongos between their thighs, they sing sex, they talk it up in close conversation, eyes darting. Young girl gymnasts fall backwards onto their hands and thrust out their sex-bones. I turn and see the Muse's proud mouth at my shoulder, her lifting neck: her impatience, her disdain, her invitation.

The women blend into the shadows of the palms in the garden, and I see Roberto is still here on video, dragging on his cigarette in front of me. 'How many books?' I ask.

He shows me. 150 of them. An empire. A universe.

'A swindle,' I say.

He gives me the look of the man shaving in the mirror.

'The sexy Roman empire,' he cajoles. 'The sexy Celtic myths,' he contends. 'The Mediterranean as real estate,' he testifies. 'The getting away from the shit back home,' he declares. Then the brow droops, the forehead wrinkles, the scowl spreads.

'Christ,' he confesses. 'The women!'

Lost again

Leaving Roberto's place, I make a bad decision. I decide not to take a taxi. I think I have plenty of time to walk back to Sóller, where the railway station is, before the last train for Palma leaves. From a Deyá shop I pick up a brochure with a map showing the official Majorca-island walking track passing through the village.

'Can I walk back to Sóller?' I ask the Englishwoman in the shop.

She tells me I can, and I set out according to the map. The afternoon sun is beating and I use the brochure as a hat for a time. Then the trail goes beyond the brochure's margin. From here I must follow signs on posts beside the pathway.

A ridge of the Tramuntana mountain range passes between Deyá and Sóller. The walking trail departs the bitumen road and takes its own more direct route up and over the ridge, heading straight for Sóller. It's a demanding climb in the hot afternoon, so I take a break along the way. I'm above the forested slopes which dive precipitously to the Mediterranean. I look around and notice, just above me, an isolated house for rent. How marvelous it would be to return to this spectacular place later on! I go up to the house and from its sign enter the rental phone number into my cell phone. I close my phone and continue on my way.

A long while later I realize I have taken a wrong turn. The track has been going up and up, from olive terrace to higher olive terrace. Eventually, even the olive trees thin out and the way underfoot becomes parched and prickly, progressively harder to discern. Trying to scramble up a broken terrace wall with only a semblance of trodden

way discernible, I find myself looking at a big face in close-up: a bulge-eyed wild goat with a body huge as a horse. He's as shocked as I am. We both turn and flee.

I calculate I've been traveling west when I should have been going north-west. It seems I have attempted to cross the high ridge, going inland, instead of staying parallel to the coast across the lower spur. All of this is speculation because I have little idea of where I am—I only know that I'm high up with a brilliant view of the afternoon Mediterranean on one side and a mountain wall on the other. I have no choice but to retrace my steps. It sounds easy—'to retrace one's steps'—but there's no sign of my steps to go by. Goat tracks lead off in all directions.

I look for signs other than my footsteps: a rock beside the way here, a twisted branch there, a particular dip in the terrace over yonder. I find I must attempt to read the ground itself as my map—a task made more difficult because I'm coming at it my way down as opposed to my experience of it from the opposite way up. Eventually, miraculously, I arrive again at the house for rent where I missed the ongoing turn in the track. I realize I've gone miles out of my way.

I look at the clock on my phone. Dusk is descending. There's still time to make the last train but I must move fast. I power on up the correct track, through forests, fields and the occasional yard of a beautiful *finca* where guard dogs announce my presence. I become tired and thirsty. The abortive climb up the terraced face of the mountain has taken it out of me. I've rationed my single bottle of water. The light pack I carry is getting heavy. It occurs to me that if I jettison it, I can make it to the train.

Then I think: *If I'm caught out here in the wilderness in the dark, the one thing I have that can make a pillow is my pack. And the one thing that can make a light is the screen of my phone.* I imagine myself illuminating the way with my phone screen. I realize that the pressure and disorientation of this trek has turned me a little crazy.

And suddenly I'm descending the track into Sóller. I'm at a corner with an open shop and I go in and buy a soft drink. Very soon, I'm standing on the moon-drenched Sóller platform with the train for Palma backing in, to pick me up.

Endnotes

1. Graves, Robert 1959 'The face in the mirror', in *Collected poems 1959*, London: Cassell, 301 (As read by the author on BBC TV in 1959)
2. Robert Graves Birthday Party, film, 1959, 8mm movie transferred to video on a loop, Fundacio Robert Graves, Deià, Majorca, viewed 19 February 2008

Research statement

Research background

Discontinuous narratives invite the reader to discern correlations in disparate narrative parts and ‘read the gaps’ between them (viz. Faulkner, 1930; Coover 1969; Moorhouse, 1969). Whereas in America the term has come to mean simply that a narrative moves back and forth through time, Australian discontinuous narrative goes beyond the anti-chronological to involve setting, character, theme, symbolism and viewpoint orchestrated as a set of devices in a single fragmented narrative.

Research contribution

In this work, I combine some longitudinal discontinuity with thematic layering to produce a piece where the gaps must be read both sideways and up and down. But significantly, I investigate a combination of genres—fiction, creative nonfiction and travel writing. The outcome here might be termed ‘radical memoir’. Considering the fragmented nature of experience and memory, it seems to me logical that memoir should be a discontinuous and layered genre, not subject to conventional structuring. Using the central image of the illuminated map, this piece weaves together philosophical issues of place and mapping with personal experience, fictional detailing, and literary studies.

Research significance

‘Majorca: unreal estate’ straddles several areas of investigation in writing, literature and cultural studies, and is published in an ERA A-ranked journal.

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Flinders University

Jeri Kroll

Climate change – excerpt from ‘Vanishing point’

Biographical note:

Professor Jeri Kroll is Program Coordinator of Creative Writing at Flinders University in Adelaide. Since 1997 she has published extensively on creative writing research and pedagogy. Past President of the Australian Association of Writing Programs, she is on the UK Editorial Boards of *New Writing* and *Write4Children* as well as *TEXT*. She has published over twenty titles for adults and young people, including poetry, picture books and novels. *Creative Writing Studies* (co-edited with Graeme Harper) and *felis domestica* (poems) are recent books. In 2009, she was a Visiting Fellow at George Washington University in Washington, D. C., collaborating on a staged reading of her verse novel, ‘Vanishing Point,’ and was awarded a Varuna Fellowship to finish the novel. A full staged reading will take place in 2011. In 2010-2011, Palgrave Macmillan will publish *Research Methods in Creative Writing* (co-edited with Harper) and Picaro Press a selection of children’s poems. Jeri.Kroll@flinders.edu.au

Keywords:

Verse novel – interstitial – generic hybridity – young adult novel

Diana: Temptation

There he is, that boy from class.
Don't stare. Sip your latte.
This café's packed. He won't notice me.

The way he moves reminds me of that colt
by grandma's place nearly ten years back –
free and easy. What a leggy beauty

and so is Conor striding to the bar.
Look at those glossy girls
shoving to make space for him –

a lean male with tangled chestnut hair.
Wait till they hear his voice,
its welcome rhythm and swing.

Makes me think of Irish pubs in town
with jigs and reels spilling out the door,
inviting anyone in.

Makes me think as well there's more to him
than meets the eye. Sometimes the eye's enough.
I envy that he seems so much himself.

Their order comes. The girls have to give way.
Now Conor has his meal he needs a seat,
scans the room. Our eyes lock for an instant.

I jump, caught out, retreat to reading. What?
Black figures prance before me on the page,
then freeze when the other seat scrapes out.

'Mind if I sit?'

'Fine. It's free.'

He slides his crowded tray over to mine.

The silky smell of melted mozzarella,
tomatoes, garlic, basil,
makes my nostrils flare.

Some temptations are easy to resist.
I choose another, sitting opposite,
look up and smile.

Conor: Climate change

What I miss most is green. The misty morning grass that crushed sweet under the horses' hooves as I led them out from the field. And my father's fields fringed by sycamores, larches and oaks, with their leaves flapping in a brisk wind making the horses skittish. The leaves shiny like cooking apples. Typical of my family's luck. We sold up just before the housing boom reached us and money started flowing into our county from Dublin.

Our land bordered a lake there. I remember how the swans scattered in the dawn, creasing the water like Mother's forehead when I hauled the stroppy geldings past. Horses always mean early starts. We needed to work them before we headed for other jobs, the ones that gave us cash so we could keep the gallopers going. We left our three acres in early June when the days stretched out towards twelve at midsummer night. Still a lick of cold in the air. It was cobweb light again by four.

It's crazy here. So much is reversed. Native swans are black as my dress boots, not a proper white like ours. Green's a winter colour mostly. We don't have tank water to waste on a lawn in summer. We grow a few vegetables, though, and keep buckets in the shower to catch water for them.

I'm still not used to summer. I sneeze every time that bloody north wind gusts, the light sears even through dark glasses and the heat squeezes me out so I drip like a dishcloth. Coated with sunblock, I think we're ready for frying. The toasted paddocks lie down bare and flat under the sun as if they had given up hope. I know they're just playing dead now, biding their time till the season breaks in March. If it breaks at all. But even beaten down they're my father's fields – paddocks they call them here – fifteen, more than he could afford in Ireland.

A few weeks ago we had a grand Christmas gift – a summer shower. It dusted the paddocks with green. Kikuyu grass is mostly what we've got. At first we didn't know how lucky we were. It's as stubborn as Father and grasping as any weed. That old grey mare we bought to teach the colt some manners, she nibbles the tender shoots as soon as they appear and already she's put on weight.

I don't go to Church anymore, not since Mother died, but when the evening sea breeze rolls in, it's like I've been to confession again and the priest's granted me absolution. Or like when Mother used to put a damp cloth on my head when I had a fever. If the tide goes out at dusk and it's cool, we can exercise the horses on the beach. But the heat knocks them around so sometimes they're still sluggish.

Dawn's my favourite time now, even if I've had a late night at the pub. There's a busy kind of quiet. Cockatoos strip the acacias and crackle over the seed pods that litter the grass. Galahs peck at leavings in the feed bins. The magpies look like clockwork toys when they snatch at beetles burrowing in the dung. Whatever the hot day holds for me hasn't begun to pulse in my temples. I'm free for an hour. I suck in air that's icy-pole cool.

That's when I saddle up Quinn, the sherry-bay colt with the white blaze, and take him to the beach. That's where I get to know what he's made of. The shore's wide and flat, swept clean by receding waves. It unfurls like a cat's tail from the jetty towards

the ridge and a horse can stretch its full length, nose reaching into the breeze. As I crouch over Quinn's neck, we flatten out in a line that I like to think might never end. Tears leak from my eyes, my cheeks tighten as if I've got a bit in my mouth too, and someone's hauling me back. But I run on. That's why living here's worth it.

Diana: Lunch again

Conor wonders I'm not turning green,
thinks I'm nine-tenths rabbit.
Salad's all I eat.

For now I'll pay the price
for this type of temptation.
I feel I've almost woken

after years of sleep.
He's opened the glass coffin
but hasn't kissed me yet.

He knows the way he stares at me
whets our appetites for something more.
My insides stir when our fingers brush
as he flips through the menu to desserts.
Luscious words alone could weigh me down:
cocoa fantasy, Kahlua cream.

His voice, too, a dangerous invitation.
I pack up and choose escape
into a surprising summer rain
that soaks us through, revealing what we are.
We can't help but look. I touch his throat –
the fair skin's slick as stone.

Suddenly I ask,
'What do you miss the most?'
He doesn't hesitate. 'Green.'

Research statement

Research background

The contemporary verse novel has colonized young adult literature in Australia and the US (Alexander 2005). Its practitioners favour free verse and colloquial language but have not taken risks, exploiting poetry's imaginative potential. Story (focusing on 'issues') and character are privileged at the expense of a largely unsophisticated style; no one has replicated the electricity and passion of a Dorothy Porter for this audience. As well, the genre itself has not been extended.

Research contribution

These extracts come from a verse novel, 'Vanishing Point,' which experiments with generic hybridity, alternating between poetry and prose in order to test whether a comprehensive structural doubling can more fully express character and story. The doubling extends to the incorporation of two subjects, first love and anorexia, mediated through a passion for horses. Metaphors relating to food, colour and bodies (human and animal) permeate the work as a whole, facilitating character portrayal as well as thematic and narrative coherence. Meaning is embedded in this 'interstitial' (Heinz Insu Fenkl 2002) structure, not achieved before in a verse novel, where generic boundaries dissolve and reform.

Research significance

Texts can only grow and alter through full reader interaction, as Margaret Atwood suggests (2002). 'Vanishing Point' challenges readers with its metaphorical echoes and stylistic tensions, underpinning the novel, therefore, with both a metaphorical and generic architecture. Never losing sight of its dual origins, the interstitial work inhabits a permanent liminal space that is positive rather than negative, introducing a young adult audience to the potential of both genres.

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Queensland University of Technology

Philip Neilsen

Philip Roth at 11.00am

Biographical note:

Philip Neilsen is professor of creative writing and literary studies at QUT, where he founded the creative writing program. He has published a dozen books of poetry, fiction and literary criticism and edited major anthologies. He wrote the first monograph on David Malouf's work, *Imagined Lives* (University of Queensland Press), and edited *The Penguin Book of Australian Satirical Verse*. His creative work has been shortlisted for and won prizes including a CBC Australian Notable Book award, and been translated into several languages. He has been a member of the Literature Board of the Australia Council and chair of the Queensland Writers Centre. Together with Professor Robert King he is researching the therapeutic use of creative arts to assist in the 'recovery' process of individuals with mental illness. His most recent book is a fifth collection of poetry, *Without an Alibi* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2008). He is currently co-editing *The Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing* with Professor David Morley, Director of the Warwick Writing Programme, UK.

Keywords:

Life-writing – therapeutic – multiple selves – poetry – mixed genres

Philip Roth at 11.00am

And as he spoke I was thinking, *the kind of stories that people turn life into, the kind of lives that people turn stories into.* Nathan Zuckerman in *The Counterlife*

Philip Roth is correcting proofs
when he looks out his French windows at the woods
the silver birches with triangular leaves
and sees Alex Portnoy limping alongside him.
The boy seems angry, reading aloud
from a dog-eared paperback.

This is all wrong. By now Alex
should be on the honest streets of Newark
the blood smell of butchers and hot bread,
hopeful in a young man's clothes
the sidewalk a gleam like a silky pet.
Soon he will meet intellectual women
kinder than he deserves,
more real than he can reasonably hope.

Then a yellow plane pulls a fence across the sky.
Lindbergh is the new president
there are dogs and megaphones
a circus of newsprint
Jews herded into streets narrow as knives.

He eats boiled potatoes, gristle of meat,
writes *history is a very sudden thing*
because forgetting lets death in.
That is one way to recovery:
the image defuses the fact, tenderly
as if it were a roadside bomb.

11.05am and Zuckerman stands in Roth's garden
making faces through the glass.
He slides a note under the door:
'You know we still need each other.
Without me you are too nice – you bore people.
Together we can hurt your enemies,
smuggle our lust into pastel houses.
So put down your pencil
and stroll with me through the trees as well.
You don't even have to leave the room.
We will walk among the quick bright birds
and the slow sun inviting'.

It is hard to refuse.

If my life is a story I have made
then I should be ready for any complication:
the ironic comment overheard by a cop
the damage done by drunken parents
to *volkish* blue eyed blondes.

He remembers the touch of their woollen gloves,
the day warm and watchful as a coffee shop.

Briefly it rains, a sardonic damp smell
forces him out on the street again, dodging horses,
curses of street vendors. On the same day
that Zuckerman is banished from university
Philip sees his father fight, a bloodied beast
in the kitchen, charging again and again,
letting history through the door
to strut about like a righteous pilgrim.

It is a monstrous daily effort
to arrive each morning at this desk, to start again.

Alex, Nathan and Philip, terror of the critics,
leaving behind religious fraternity, easy patriotism,
the academy, monogamy and Chicago,
always alert for phony victimhood.

So much more yet to say, Zuckerman agrees.
Such good fortune that modern Newark,
hammered clean, gentrified,
still glistens for him.

His desk is the colour of America,
which is always in fashion somewhere.

The woods are still outside at 11.10am
silver birches with untidy leaves.
The bark more white than silver he notices,
with black diamond shapes.
Graceful, articulate, they net insects
which skittle and hover, find new footing,
converge and shine.

Research statement

Research background

In the poem I draw on narrative psychology which argues that life-writing can have therapeutic effects for the writer (Pennebaker & Seagal 1999, Pennebaker 2000); as well I explore the enabling effects of mixing life writing and fiction (Hunt & Sampson 1998) and of creating multiple selves in creative works (Sampson 2007, Magee 2008).

Research contribution

'Philip Roth at 11.00am' is innovative in combining two areas of investigation in creative writing and literature. I investigate both the idea of life writing as therapeutic for Roth, and the (reflexive and enabling) blurred boundary between life writing and fiction, by introducing three of Roth's characters who draw on memoir (Portnoy, Zuckerman & young Philip) and the two selves Roth constructs in his own memoir. I set up a dynamic where the narrative of the poem proposes the therapeutic advantage of utilising one's life-story in fiction (increased sense of coherence, agency and control) and also affords a perspective (through the device of multiple selves), on the constructedness and instability of identity. The poem argues that Roth's writing strategies make the constructed subjectivities both more coherent and more open to representing 'lived experience'. This is evoked by concrete imagery and convergence of characters.

Research significance

The poem is submitted for refereeing for an ERA A-ranked journal. It sits in the context of my scholarly articles on therapeutic life-writing (Neilsen & Murphy 2008, 2009) and application of those ideas in both poetry and fiction (Neilsen 1997, 2008, 2008a, 2008b) published nationally and internationally.

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Waikato Institute of Technology, Wintec, Hamilton, New Zealand

Gail Pittaway

Stamps

Biographical note:

Gail Pittaway's research interests include creative writing (poetry, short story and scripts), the teaching of creative writing, and the ritual developments in the history of theatre. She has edited two books; "Writers in the Gardens" and "Love Street" and has had stories broadcast on radio. Gail is also the Waikato Times theatre critic and contributes regular live book reviews for the Nine to Noon programme on National Radio in New Zealand. She is a member of the New Zealand Communication Association, The Tertiary Writing Network, the New Zealand Society of Authors and has been an executive member of the Australian Association of Writing Programmes since 2004. She lectures in the School of Media Arts.

Keywords:

Poetry – memory

Stamps

My Dad was a postie.
Most summers I'd work with him
In the Chief Post Office;
Sorting mail into sizes,
Stacking parcels,
Stamping Christmas through a franking machine.

Sometimes we'd read the postcards in the airmail bin
even though we'd signed a pledge.
Once my own hat went into a canvas bag-
Who knows where?
It wasn't stamped or addressed.

I learnt there the value of order
and submission.
Why parcels must be tied securely,
what happens when the address is wrong;

Impeccable skills for an age where
My only letters are bills
And junk mail is so indiscriminating
It carries no name, stamp or address.

Platonic rites

Within a walled scented garden
Made not only for the blind
They groped a knowledge of the sky
From imprints on warmed flesh.
Animals twitched, dozed, grazed, nudged,
Unconcerned at this amiable gaming;
Woman, man, flowers, grass, showers, sun—
Ancient symbols; their own Illumination.

“See the two air currents,” he cried,
“How higher clouds waft motionless and lower scud on by!”
But she, sense betrayed
By jabbing rain on sunned flesh,
Bite of lust and sting of lips
Lay rapt, whipped on by another current's course,
Blinkered to cause, effect, direction, pace.

The Charioteer, who does not show a face
Gives rein only for the passage of the skies,
A sun to chase.

Shag poem

Once near a knobby headland
A shag flung herself to fish
Down, direct into the shadowed sea.
Barely a splash betrayed her plunge
No ripples showed her path

I waited longer than my lungs could bear
To catch the triumphant rise
But she never reemerged.
Upon another rocky beach
Self-flung upon hot rocks
My tears dried even as they fell
Leaving no trace, no stain engrained
And I walked away quite healed.

Now I cannot pass a jagged coast
without remembering
that shag, that shady sea,
those tears on lichened rocks—
both gone mysteriously.

Dreamtime; Troy and Pergamon

We sleep often, and dream much
Here, in the ruined land.
We greet past shades with brief respect,
Then leave them to the longer vigils of reptiles
To whom they now belong.

Did snakes slither around the palace of Eumenes
so presumptuously then? Or lizards bask in the Hellenistic sun?
Were the healing waters of Asklepeion also frog infested?
And the turtles in the holy passages; did Galen kick at their shells distractedly
as he mused upon remedies?

Reptiles lie low, some never strike.
They have waited long for this-
coldly, slowly, to encroach upon the powers of the past.
Now, save the odd tourist, cow or goat, who will pass,
they share the shadows only with each other.

Perhaps this is why we, too, lie low and sleep;
in dreams we learn from the snakes when to strike,
the lizards teach us when to hide, the frogs to plunge;
and the turtles teach us to receive the blows
and still survive.

**Silber See
(For Martin)**

We camped that night, in a rusting wood,
By a lake called Silber See.

While dragonflies idled to the lull of the lake
And strange night creatures called,
Came overhead a slice of new moon
And the ache of an uncanny grief-
the intuition of your Mother's death.

Another camp, another night
An oval ripe moon in ascendance,
By a weedy backwater, enthralled, we caught
The irregular plop of the fly-catching trout,
The flickering of distant fires-
and you talked with her in a dream.

Two waters, a week, and a moon in the making
These icons I take wherever I go:
Light on darkness, moon on water-
the depths of pain in your Mother's eyes.

Open Night at the School

He seems puzzled.

“Your son?”

“Yes, that’s him
in the group of students
showing how it’s done”.

An awkward pause;

“What brings you here?”

I ask unnecessarily
and smile at their youngest;
a gap after the older two,
she’s keen to go co-ed next year.

We ramble on a little longer;
our kids, the weather,
the price of petrol,
school bus routes;
then smile vaguely as we part.

A charge of sorrow unsteps me.

I recall my son,
within the womb,
churning resistance
at the hard wooden pew,
while theirs lay still;

the tiny wooden box
barely broaching the altar.

And the guilt
Of bearing life
Rising around me
Like incense and hymns.

Research statement

Research background

Wordsworth (in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*) described poetry as “emotion recollected in tranquility”. Is memory everything to a writer? Are there margins or limits to memory, or can memory be developed, supported? How is memory treated by a writer, both as idea and resource? In writing poetry, it is worth considering whether events are remembered out of strong emotion or out of the need to retain the impress, the stamp, of moments.

Research contribution

New Zealand poets who work strongly in the field of individual or cultural memory, recollection, even reminiscence, include James K. Baxter, Alistair Campbell, Fleur Adcock, Janet Frame and Hone Tuwhare. This selection of original poetry, ‘Stamps’, looks to the impress of memory or moment as the source of each poem. Memory is both episodic and procedural (Sacks 2005). The poems are arranged to reflect the contrast between the two; the continuous present or past tense against the urgency of a one-time occurrence; the tension or contrast between what is learned and what is felt.

Research significance

Structurally and in imagery the poetry draws on canonical and classical authors, either overtly or implicitly, for example in the Platonic image of the Charioteer (Plato, *Phaedrus* 246a-b), and the *hortus conclusus* of the Biblical Song of Songs and medieval art, but with the intention of placing them within a current Antipodean locality and vernacular. This submission to *TEXT*, the A rated online journal, is a selection of poetry reflecting original work which has been performed and read at writing festivals and public readings, but not previously published. Bearing in mind that the Greek root word ‘poetry’ literally means ‘to make or create’, in each case the poetry ‘makes’ the recollection even as the recollection ‘makes’ the poem.

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University of Western Sydney

Hazel Smith

Mix-Ups and Underbelly

Biographical note:

Hazel Smith is a research professor in the Writing and Society Research Group at the University of Western Sydney. She is author of *The Writing Experiment: strategies for innovative creative writing*, Allen and Unwin, 2005, which was shortlisted for the Australian Publishing Association Awards for Excellence in Educational Publishing, and *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara: difference, homosexuality, topography*, Liverpool University Press, 2000. She is co-author of *Improvisation, Hypermedia And The Arts Since 1945*, Harwood Academic, 1997, and co-editor with Roger Dean of *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, Edinburgh University Press, 2009. Hazel is also a poet, performer and new media artist, and has published three volumes of poetry, three CDs of performance work and numerous multimedia works. Her latest volume of creative work, with accompanying CD Rom, is *The Erotics of Geography: poetry, performance texts, new media works*, Tinfish Press, Kaneohe, Hawaii, 2008. Formerly a professional violinist, she is a member of austraLYSIS, the internationally active sound and intermedia arts group. She has performed her work extensively in the US, Europe, UK and Australasia; has been co-recipient of numerous grants for austraLYSIS from the Australia Council (including a key organization grant 2000-2004); and has had five large-scale commissions from the ABC. Hazel was the founder editor of *infLect*, an online international journal of new media writing based at the University of Canberra (2004-6), and is now co-editor with Roger Dean of *soundsRite*, a journal of new media writing and sound, based at the University of Western Sydney. Her website is at <http://www.australalysis.com> Email: hazel.smith@uws.edu.au

Keywords:

Cross-genre – writing – cultural – cognitive – affective

Mix-Ups

Culturally, no 'Asia' exists, and the peoples who inhabit 'Asia' often have little in common with each other.

Philosophically, there is no definitive blue; the sky is always salted with clouds.

Chronically, we sort words into piles, stitch up the scattered mess of the senses.

Sometimes she speaks fluently, sometimes she stutters. She feels connected to her visitors, but doesn't know how they relate to her or to each other. She forgets a great deal, but she remembers that which absorbs her.

She keeps saying she is sad because she hasn't had any babies. They retort, again and again, we are your babies. She says, I think I'll adopt one, and they laugh and throw it back: how could you adopt one when you need people to look after you?

She thinks she lives upstairs. She is sure there is an attic. Shuffled, beyond the control of buttons. She is forced to improvise; the habitual is crooked.

She weeps and weeps, believing her father has just died. He is in the next room and she has neglected him.

They claim she will never learn anything new again. But she does, and last week did better in her memory test.

out of the soup of ideas you pick the most aromatic pare them down until you reach the core grows smaller disappears have to call it back by pulling on its fragrance

out of the soup of illusions you pick out the mongrel looks most like you lower her voice grainy rough resistant

into the soup of impossibilities you stir inter-stellar morphing

as the soup is about to be served you snap the ladle

If you have never killed someone you won't know what this is about.

That day the elevator wasn't working so I took the stairs. There seemed to be thousands of us, like refugees, there was barely room to climb or breathe. I was anxious in case the stairs collapsed under our collective weight.

Outside the sky was blue but the streets were homogenous grey. I knew I had murdered someone, and that murder was something from which you didn't escape. The details should have been sharp, but instead they were pale and vague.

It had happened, but everything suggested it hadn't.

As I was walking a woman appeared and begged me to take the child she was

holding. The child's skin and eyes seemed to suggest she wasn't Caucasian. I wanted to take the child, it was as if she was mine; the woman's pleas were loud and urgent. But I couldn't because I knew I had killed. If you have killed you can't look after a child, everyone knows that. I turned my back and walked faster and faster, until I could no longer hear her pleas. When I turned round the woman and child had disappeared, though I seemed to still see them.

Sharp and vague, this sense of loss, this sense of connection.

Note: The opening sentence of this text was taken verbatim from a sign in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, California.

Underbelly

as insistent as an algorithm
it pursues a strident pulse
has no arms but holds you in position tightly

shakes you up
but doesn't shrug its shoulders
rarely listens though its ears twitch
exhales stale breath as if it were a fragrance

Made from syllables but not words. A not-language, a non-land.

The first time she performed it, she was overtaken by what she had raised up, the accent she had adopted. Her eyes started to dilate; the distance between the sounds and her collapsed.

This moment had found a migrant inside her and was pushing it out. And a stranger outside was coming to meet her.

Finnish, Lithuanian, Welsh
but also the cut and pasting of passports.

She performed the language often, she inhabited it as home

but it never had the same effect on her again.

the child only a child myself 1960 clinging to her mother she'll be better off with
parents who can look after her the couple much older they had to be a Jewish couple
only a child myself don't remember what they look like didn't realise the child only a
child myself they talked her in a single mother without money she'll be better off my
aunt looking for her name in the wedding lists it's a terrible thing to take a child away
from her mother my mother wails the child only a child myself clinging to her
mother's dress realised didn't realise crying

Minutes after the train crash, he shed his clothes, wallets and mobile phone. He walked away, shutting down thought or expectation.

Hours after the train crash, the wish to reassign, the promise of the not-yet-mapped.

Days after the train crash, a recycled ghost, he returns with buttered lies.

The lure of familiarity? The problematics of deceit? Or the pull of the pre-written and already spoken?

however much loss, however much regret, you have known this love, you have felt what others would have abandoned time itself to feel

however many tasks were left undone, declarations remained silent

however many slights, humiliations, embarrassments, misattributions, and even though you have disappointed yourself and others over and over again

however much this declaration may itself be mocked, lampooned, publicly derided

you have known this love, you have avoided distraction and deceit, you have made willing sacrifices

you have known what it is to know this, and you know that knowing this is almost everything

however much

Research statement

Research background

Mix-ups and *Underbelly* are part of a poetry volume and multimedia CD-Rom in progress, which focuses on cross-genre and cross-media writing. The research question is: how can disparate fragments of prose and poetry be combined so that they resonate with each other and create multi-layered meanings, but still remain independent? Also, how can emotional intensity be communicated in writing which does not have a central theme or unified style? The work is situated within an experimental tradition of poetry that is international but under-exposed in Australia, and links this to realist, lyrical and allegorical traditions of writing. It also builds on academic research I have previously published: this draws on cultural and cognitive theory to distinguish between affect as pre-cognitive affective intensities (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) and emotion as the representation of cognitive emotional states in literary texts (Smith 2007, 2009).

Research contribution

The work is part of a research project, spanning 20 years, concerned with exploring innovative creative writing forms and processes across different genres and media in creative, pedagogical and research contexts. The pieces demonstrate that emotional intensity and meaning can be sustained across unrelated fragments by evoking a combination of pre-cognitive and cognitive responses in the reader, using techniques ranging from realism and allegory to metonymy, repetition and sonic association.

Research significance

Mix-ups and *Underbelly* are examples of a substantial body of work by me which has been published by reputable publishers and journals, shortlisted for awards, enthusiastically reviewed, and taught on university courses in Australasia, the US and UK.

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University of Canberra

Jen Webb

Thinking about Icarus

Abstract:

Icarus has long been a trope in literary and visual art. This work adds to the long history of the Icarus tale, and attempts to investigate its relevance for the 21st century. Particularly, it attempts to use the story of Icarus and his father Daedalus to think through relationships of intimacy: between people and the planet, between husbands and wives, and between suicide bombers and their mentors, in an effort to explore the ethical conundrums of cohabitation.

Biographical note:

Professor Jen Webb is professor of creative practice at the University of Canberra, and Associate Dean of Research in the Faculty of Arts and Design. Co-editor (with Nigel Krauth) of the journal *TEXT*, and with Tony Schirato of the Sage book series *Understanding Contemporary Culture*, her research incorporates both the field of creative writing, and the politics of representation. Her most recent book is *Understanding Representation* (Sage 2009).

Keywords:

Icarus – myth – terrorism – being

1. It's the silence that wakes you: the dropped plate of a dream, a smudged cry; a boy is falling from the sky.

Or maybe it's still a dream. You try to pinch the flesh of your upper arm, and can't be sure whether you felt it or not. The air is full of feathers and the scent of hot wax. You think you hear something heavy careening through the air.

You think you are probably still asleep.

2. She is high in the air, flying the middle course,¹ inside an amazing machine. He is in the belly of the plane; she is seated beside a wing, just above and ahead of him. She has nearly 24 hours to fill before she's home; and to cope, as they say, she is inventing a different world. She knows the shape and texture and taste of the world as it is, its scents and its pain. She has chosen to redraft it: she is sketching out a map.

It is the kind known as a T-O, an *orbis terrarum*. The O, *orbis*, the great disc of the earth, describes the world she looks down on from 30,000 feet. The T, *terrarum*, the cross of Christ, divides that world into discrete sections. Excludes the whole of the new world, including her home. She has provided no space for herself on this new world she is designing.

At the top of the page she places the left hand of Asia, and below it she squiggles in the Nile. Below that again she draws the bulge of Africa and, between, the Mediterranean Sea to carry the eye across to an impressionistic Europe. She sketches boats, little waves, an aeroplane shattered into pieces and floating on the surface of the sea. That's where they found him: floating on the surface of the sea. Jerusalem above him on the map, and Rome below. He should have stayed in Rome. *Lucem orbis terrarum*, Cicero said, Rome, *the light of the world, the refuge of all its people*.² He should have stayed at home. He could have stayed in Rome. But no: off he had to go, chasing some rainbow, so taken with the pleasure of his wings.³

He is spread now across the O of the world, stretched out against the T. Well he was always as much cartography as man. Rivers are etched in blue on his skin, there's a crevasse here, a hillock there. She knows the desert across his shoulders, the tropics of armpit and crotch. She knows that he has become uncharted land, he is somewhere now her feet will never fall.

* * *

At the morgue, an attendant folded back the sheet to show her the remains. The remains. The bits left over. Broken bits, patched together. She looked at his face, unmarked, his still-damp hair feathers across his forehead; and she could see under the sheet the shape of something so amazing; of someone fallen from the sky.⁴

Well, life goes on. For some.⁵ He has metamorphosed, his flight and fall have remapped her world. She is going home, beyond the T and the O, beyond the *light of the world* to the unforgiving sun. Below her is the great dish of the sea, the water grey and blue, and the shadow of the plane a tiny T creeping across its surface. In a few hours she will be flying over sun-heavy water streaked with coral, blue with turquoise threads. She looks down through the porthole to that great dish below.

As he must have done. Sitting in a window seat, watching the sky, and then hearing the crew shout, ‘Heads down! Stay down!’ When the first call came he would have assumed the brace position, she thinks, leaning his arms on the back of the seat ahead, cradling his head in his arms. And as he lowered his head—*heads down! stay down!*—surely the world outside the window changed to a *mappa mundi*: the shadow of the plane as it dived, nose down, forming the T; the circle of the O formed by the great grey plate of the globe; and then like a medieval Christ he became the T against the O. Spread out against the sea.

He flew, and fell into the plate glass sea. But he is below her feet now, going home. She will not let him fall.

3. The boys appear in the late morning, scratching their shoulders, stretching the muscles they’d pushed just a bit too far in yesterday’s rehearsal. They expect to redesign the world. They believe they are the future.

The fathers wait behind closed doors, their artist hands completing the wings. Bent wands, hot wax, feathers: they will redesign the world through these amazing machines—feathers, wax, and a boy.

You know better—you’ve heard this story before. It’s a game of make-believe where wax is steel and fathers kiss their sons, strap on their belts, and send them to the air.⁶

You wake, roused by the phone that didn’t ring. You hear the cries as the feathered boys leap delighted into unsafe air. You move too late to block their flight, they’re gone. Heading toward the sun.

4. The canna lilies love the sun. They fairly burgeon with blossoms, and their great pouting lips kiss the air. At night in our dark suburb they are brighter than a torch, they illuminate the uneven stairs that lead past the rockery and down to the front door.

Outside and in, the temperature remains stubbornly high. In a flush of concern for the environment we have turned off the air conditioners, and all through the dense nights of bodies and breathing we lie still. Each at a far edge of the bed. We never touch. We have reached the almost-certain end of a marriage and what holds us together now is the shared flash of joy at something like the sight of a lily filling itself with light.

What’s joy? Bill Manhire asked. (Cynically?) *Even a pencil will point to it.*⁷

My pencil is inscribed MADE FROM THE TIMBER OF COMMERCIAL FORESTS 2B. Made from trees born to be stationery. They breathe in our waste, breathe out our air, forcefeed their limbs to make the right quantity of the right density of timber to serve our needs. Cut down young, they are turned into pulp. I point my pencil at the bright young forests, I sense the flickering of an unlikely joy, the trees so taken with the pleasure of the air through their leaves, so taken with the promises to come.

* * *

The world is not all young things. Mephistopheles, speaking well before our time began, said: *The world was waxing old even in my prime.*⁸ Even in his prime. And

now centuries later, I am past my own prime, and the world itself is antique. It is forgetting its functions. It ought to be in care.

And we who grow trees to make stationery, we who burn the fossil fuels, we who eat our young: we are flying toward the sun and, like Icarus, are so *taken with the pleasure of our wings* we have forgotten the ground below.

The wax is melting.

And you, my dear, and I: we look ahead, we fly across the globe, we forget that all that flies must fall.

5. My destination last year was Europe, and there I was with 300 others, all of us transformed by the alchemy of airports into fraternal twins. We waited in line for boarding passes, for Customs and clearance, us and our carry-on bags, our comfy pants, our slip-off shoes. The waiting and the nowhere time of travel shift the world into the present tense, so: I *pitch* my tent at the gate lounge, in this nomad village of cooking smells and children's tears and, over it all, *comes* the call of the tannoy, the sanctum bell. The day *shifts* on.

As the hands of the clock jerked ahead through the minutes and hours, the travellers fell into sylvan quiet, focused on their breathing in and out, in and out. All around the air thrummed, and finally the travellers were funnelled on board to soar across space, melting what is left of the ozone layer. Spending hours in the temporary home of Seat 67B, living the battery chicken life of the passenger, answering either/or questions: *fish or lamb? white wine or red?*

The aeroplane flew through dense cloud, through the mist of all the words that fly up like an *escape of angels*⁹ from the ground 30,000 feet below. The words that fly: they are prayers to a cold god, confessions of all we have done and all we have failed to do. The words, they fly; they escape like angels, they fly.

* * *

Surely some strange intelligence is at play?

in·tel·li·gence [in – tel – i – juh ns]¹⁰

– noun

1. *capacity for learning, reasoning, understanding, and similar forms of mental activity; aptitude in grasping truths, facts, meanings.*
2. *manifestation of a high mental capacity.*
3. *the faculty of understanding.*
4. *Government:*
 - a. *information about an enemy or a potential enemy.*
 - b. *the evaluated conclusions drawn from such information.*
 - c. *an organization engaged in gathering such information.*
5. *an intelligent being or spirit, esp. an incorporeal one, as an angel.*

Origin: 1350–1400; ME < L *intelligentia*. See *intelligent*, *-ence*

Synonyms: 1. See *mind*. 2. *discernment, reason, acumen, aptitude, penetration.*

Icarus flew without intelligence—or, to be fair, naïvely, as boys will, full only of juice and joy. But *what's joy? Even a pencil will point to it.* His father, possessed of *capacity for learning, a high mental capacity*, observed the boy's flight, the height, the fall. He took his notes, he measured the trajectory, he adjusted his own wings, and then he took to the sky.

Like Daedalus, angels are given to observation, possessed of *intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic*.¹¹ Theirs is the intelligence that looks in the mirror and knows what it sees, and names it 'I'; the intelligence that begins, like charity, at home. That begins with the first person singular. That cannot accommodate the plural mode.

* * *

Jacques Derrida said *One can only love oneself*.¹² Well, he said so many things. But this, this narcissism, this is the father's task: to love oneself. The angels, the fathers: they see the sparrow lose height, they measure the trajectory of its flight, the impact of its fall. Daedalus has left his fingerprints all over the known world. Icarus has left only ripples behind.

So fly, if you can. But below is your father taking notes; above are the angels who measure the speed of your descent. And we, so taken with the pleasures of flight, take ourselves unready into unsafe air. The heat of desire melts the wax, and we fall.

6. The night before I left for Europe you went early to bed, and I sat up to watch the late night weather report: *It's drying in Johannesburg, but rain lingers over the rest of the continent, and it's overcast in Algiers. And at home, tomorrow in the capital cities, expect high temperatures.*¹³

Not me, honey, I said out loud: me, I'm strapping on my wings, I'm flying away from always-high-temperatures, from always at the edge of my awareness the scent of smoke, and the sound of a plane scooping water from a rapidly drying dam. I am flying to the grey cool streets at the wrong end of the globe where I will be alien in an alien land, with alien skies above me, and all around me sounds that are not my own. I will shake the wax from my fingers, comb the feathers from my hair, plant my feet in new ground.

You were asleep when I left, the clock still ticking by our bed. I took to the uncertain air; I looked only ahead.

7. Look away, you; it's not your tale. Boys will fly always, always delight in their wings, never consider the fall. Fathers will urge them always to the edge, tie the wings to them, help them to fly.

He fixed the frames, did Daedalus, waxed the wings, kissed his son and watched him fly, the cliff behind him, the great bleached world below. He measured the pattern of the flight, observed the angle of descent; he checked his watch.

Boys will fly, still, and fall, and fathers still will listen to their call.

Endnotes

1. 'the middle course', from George Sandys' 1632 translation of Ovid's *The metamorphoses* (bk VIII). These are the instructions Daedalus gave his son about safe flight:

*Then instructs his sonne
Be sure that in the middle course thou run.
Dank seas will clog the wings that lowly fly:
The Sun will burne them if thou soar'st too high.
'Twixt either keepe.*

2. Cicero, *The orations against Catiline* vol 4, VI; *lucem orbis terrarum, atque arcem omnium gentium* (1856: 46)

3. George Sandys' 1632 translation of Ovid's *The metamorphoses* (bk VIII):

*the boy, much tooke
With pleasure of his wings, his Guide forsooke*

4. From WH Auden's 'Musée des beaux arts' (first published in *New writing*, Spring 1939)

*the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on* (lines 19-21; 1991: 179)

5. Doug Anthony All Stars, from 'Waco', at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ilMEDMwOY4&feature=related> (accessed 1 April 2010)

6. Daedalus was artist and artisan, inventor and conspirator, and condemned killer. See *The Metamorphoses* Book VIII for expressions of his artistic skill, and for the reminder that he murdered his nephew; see Andrew Melrose for the suggestion that he may have deliberately sent Icarus out to die, at http://fiftyfive-fifty-five.blogspot.com/2009_12_01_archive.html (accessed 12 January 2010)

7. Bill Manhire, 'Still life with wind in the trees' (2005: 25)

8. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe *Faust*, Part 1, 'Walpurgis night: The Hartz mountains' (1857: 230)

9. Robert Browning, *Sordello* bk III, lines 577-79 (1888: 84-5)

*songs go up exulting, then dispread
Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead
Like an escape of angels.*

10. Extract from 'intelligence', *Dictionary.com* at <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/intelligence> (accessed 14 June 2009)

11. HG Wells (1898) *The war of the worlds*, William Heineman: 1

12. Jacques Derrida (1985: n.p.)

13. Anton Enos, reading the late night weather on SBS, February 2004

Research statement

Research background

The story of Icarus is referred to in philosophy, art and political theory across history and cultures. My research extends the use of this trope, and is informed by tradition that runs from Bertrand Russell's (1924) anxiety over scientific interventions, through Jean Baudrillard (1983) on the dissolution of history, to Derrida on the search for 'the sun of presence' (1996: 104). This prose work is among the research outputs from a project that investigates the problem of being and suffering with reference to contemporary critical events, and that seeks to engage questions of ethical relationships in a flawed world.

Research contribution

This work contributes to the debate about the responsibility of subjects in and to the natural and social worlds. It draws attention to the problematic role played by the artist Daedalus, and hence to questions of ethics in cultural production. It also makes a contribution to the history of creative and scholarly engagement with the story of Icarus, experimenting with language to create images that might provide tools to think through the problems of being.

Research significance

These short pieces combine creative and scholarly work, contributing to the growing concern in the writing discipline to work across the two fields of practice. They have not yet been published, so their significance is untested, but the project of which they are a part has been widely published in scholarly journals and has informed scholarship into the relationship between creative practice and the socio-political domain by being set on university courses around the globe, and cited widely in publications on art and human rights.

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