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When dreams turn archaeological: The poetic dreamscapes of Anna Jacobson

Abstract:

This paper explores the dream-inspired poetry and video poetry of award-winning Brisbane poet Anna Jacobson. Jacobson's surreal poetic narratives draw on memory, dreams, desires and destiny, using simple language and vivid imagery to evoke strong emotional responses. Her manner of exploring dreams in a number of poetic and narrative forms allows whimsical, gentle but also vigorous creative work of personal resilience and understanding. Her work is framed also by explorations of her Jewish culture and family and driven by unbridled imagination. In particular, the paper investigates Jacobson's process of interweaving visions and memories for the purpose of tracing personal histories lost through periods of mental illness, exploring how she mines dreams for the purpose of writing and healing. It questions how her poetic process allows her to reclaim agency through unpacking experiences she wants to recover or further understand. Distilled from a series of interviews with the poet, the paper explores Jacobson's interest in working at the cusp of different media and how this blend of the word and the visual image is particularly apt for dream exploration.

Biographical note:

Dr Jane Frank lectures in creative and professional writing at Griffith University. She is the author of *Regenerating Regional Culture: A Study of the International Book Town Movement* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) and two books of poetry, most recently *Wide River* (Calanthe Press, 2020). Jane has research interests in both poetics and cultural sociology, particularly literary culture and the ongoing significance of books in the Digital Age. She is a member of Queensland Poetry's Management Committee and a former director of Regional Arts Australia.

Keywords:

Poetry, dreams, mental health, memory, healing

Introduction

Poets use dreams in myriad ways: they draw on single dreams or intricate dream sequences, try and remember the exactness of their dream experience or use their recollection of the dream as only a kernel of a larger poem. Dreaming is about personal experience – “manifestations of sensations, thoughts, feelings, images, sounds and other experiences” but also riddles, absurd fragments, or illogical episodes (Pirjo 2017, p. 57). Bessis and Petrich (1979, p. 316) suggest that “dreams may occur while sleeping, they may be the delirium of fever, they may be irrational or vague thoughts or distractions. They may represent thoughts seen as in dreams or the passionate desire for something as yet unattained”. Anna Jacobson’s poetry is immersed in dreams, both the images she mines from her unconscious while she sleeps but also the poems she strategically invests with dream imagery using a variety of methods including extended metaphor, imaginings, magical realism, mixed media layering, dream research and note-keeping, assemblage and bricolage. Dreams for Jacobson are like “fissures or crevices” that provide a way of entering what Jung refers to as “a collective and individual storehouse of the unconscious” (Vakil, 2013, p. 366).

Jacobson is a multi-award-winning creative writer and artist from Brisbane. *Amnesia Findings* (2019), her first full-length poetry collection, won the Thomas Shapcott Poetry prize in 2018. She is also author of *The Last Postman* (Vagabond Press 2018), a poetry chapbook. Jacobson has now been writing for more than a decade and her writing has been published widely in literary journals and anthologies including *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Griffith Review*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *Rabbit: A Journal for non-fiction poetry* and ABR’s *States of Poetry QLD Series 2* (2017). In 2020, Anna won the Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Writing and was awarded a Queensland Writers Fellowship and is the recipient of other awards. Her art has also been exhibited in the exhibitions including the Olive Cotton Photographic Portraiture Prize, the Blake Art Prize and the Marie Ellis Drawing Prize. She has been described by the judges of the Queensland Literary Awards as one of Queensland poetry’s “brightest new lights” (Jacobson, 2017).

The process of writing this article began with research for an earlier conference paper about the rise of video-poetry (Frank, 2020), which included Jacobson as one of three poets interviewed. We met at the State Library of Queensland in 2020 and Jacobson took part in a semi-structured interview for approximately an hour. While some material from that earlier conversation is incorporated in this article, a portion of it is not especially relevant. The *TEXT* “Dreams” Special Issue provided an opportunity to pursue my ongoing interest in Jacobson’s work, and she agreed to a second interview with the focus being on dreams as powerful literary devices in her poetry and other creative pursuits. Again, I used a semi-structured interview approach. In both cases, Jacobson requested the questions beforehand and provided written responses to each, elaborating or digressing further when we met face-to-face to discuss the connections between dreams and her creative storytelling and distilling of experience. Jacobson was generous and enthusiastic in the answering of questions but also particular about phrasing in the draft article when invited to edit it. Jacobson made a number of changes to wording in sections where her mental health was discussed and as these are personal and

sensitive subject areas, I welcomed the fact she felt comfortable with the final copy. Jacobson agreed to a final online interview later the same month to discuss her new work.

During all three conversations, I explored a range of topics with Jacobson's full consent, including a period of mental illness she experienced more than a decade before and how this experience impacted her creative practice, influences on her work including magical realism and Victorian "spirit photography", the significance of layering and assemblage through video-poetry and combinations of images and words. Significant to our conversations were Jacobson's processes of exploring dream meanings including the presence of family members in dreams and the manifestation of inanimate, often domestic, objects. Jacobson's Jewish identity and the stress arising in more recent years from the global pandemic are other important key themes that intersect with her poetic processes and intent to create poetic dreamscapes that I address in this article. When I ask Jacobson if dreams, dreaming and dreamscapes function as literary devices in her poetry, artwork and other creative practice, she says that she unequivocally finds these oblique and unconscious experiences are a rich ground for creativity.

Illness and wellness

Over ten years ago, in 2011, Jacobson experienced psychosis and underwent electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) which resulted in memory loss for a time. Illness and dreaming are constant themes in her work, particularly in *Amnesia Findings*. Jacobson often refers to her time of madness in the poems in this book:

Sometimes I have dreams where I imagine what it was like to be mad, having had my own memories from this time taken from me. Sometimes I'll dream of the ECT machine as a machine spurting black smoke and choking me, though I haven't written a poem about this yet. 'On Madness' (p. 20) is a recurring dream about the series of mistreatments from my verbally abusive case manager, who I had to see in the year after my psychosis. In that dream, she sent me back to grade one to paint with glitter. Expressionless as always. This was how my unconscious felt. That she was treating me like a misbehaving child, when all I needed was compassion and understanding for what I had been through. (Personal Interview, 2022)

In the year after Jacobson's illness, she was seeking help from doctors and psychiatrists weekly. These characters are significant to her poems and creative inspiration in *Amnesia Findings* (2019) and elsewhere. Whether these experiences were positive or negative, their inclusion in her poems and dreams becomes inevitable (Personal Interview, 2022). When asked if writing about dreams is also connected to healing and wellness, Jacobson explains that for her, dreaming and having an active creative life is more connected to collecting experiences, understanding, observing and remembering. Jacobson clarifies that dreams deliver understanding rather than resilience. For her, the process of piecing together feeling and experiences that weren't entirely clear

was empowering. I try to tell myself it's probably a good thing I don't remember most of my time in hospital but the writer and observer in me wants to know what it was like. This loss of agency was very hard to come to terms with. (Jacobson qtd in West, 2020)

By telling her story, whether through incorporating her dreams in poetry or recounting what she experiences in the world, Jacobson needs to feel her "own voice being heard and not that of a medical professional" (Personal Interview, 2022), and in this sense, writing about her dreams is connected to a sense of healing and wellbeing.

A large number of poems in *Amnesia Findings* incorporate dreams in their title or contents. I asked Jacobson how dreams and memory loss are connected for her, and if dreams step in for memories. Jacobson explains that she unfortunately has not gained access to memories lost during psychosis through her dreams, yet dreams are an essential part of her work, regardless. Music and sounds can deliver strong sensual memories for Jacobson. She explains that music is a language without words, so she sees it as connecting to memory and the subconscious for that reason. 'Harp Strung' (2019, p. 90) is about a dream where Jacobson tried to record memory onto a music device. It didn't play back the memory, but instead played back music. In another instance, 'French Horn Dream' (p. 8):

is the first of many recurring dreams about something going wrong with my French horn when I start to play it. In this poem, silver rings fall from the bell. In another dream, clumps of sand fall from the instrument. It's about the instrument breaking from the inside. These recurring dreams started when I took a break from playing in the band. Perhaps it was guilt that I was not keeping the instrument alive and that it was falling apart because I wasn't playing it. I gave many loaned French horns names. The one in the dream was my own second-hand French horn.

She has always been interested in dreams, regarding them as memories in themselves. In a more recent poem called 'One of these scenes is not real' published in *Rabbit Journal*, Issue 30, she writes:

Do dreams count as reality? If you have dreamt something
and remember it, the dream becomes a memory;
something real to the dreamer. What is reality?

She therefore maintains a fascination for things that cannot be explained, often experiencing déjà vu in dreams involving:

the landscape, a room or a piece of woven carpet that I might have dreamed about ten years ago might suddenly appear in a current dream and I'll remember it as I'm dreaming. I like to acknowledge this connection in my dreams and love the mystery surrounding things that cannot always be explained like déjà vu, ESP and coincidences. (Personal Interview, 2022)

Jacobson says that she still “revisits dreamscapes” such as the one in ‘When dreams turn archaeological’ (*Amnesia Findings*, 2019, p. 11), explaining:

I can still see the beautiful fresco that has never existed under the white paint of the lounge-room walls. This is a poem about things that have always been there and are rediscovered, but on waking, there’s a realisation that they were never there. (Personal Interview, 2022)

This idea of additional possibilities for what is real is key to her work and imagery.

Magical realism

When I ask Jacobson about her specific literary influences, she immediately cites magical realism, a mode of writing originating in Latin America in which “magical elements are presented alongside realistic ones as if there were no difference of kind between them ... supernatural occurrences [happening] as if they were perfectly natural ... [incorporating] fantastic elements into the realm of history and objective materiality” (Warnes & Anderson Sasser, 2020) and a derivation of the Spanish phrase *lo real maravilloso*, translating literally as *the marvellous real* or *marvellous reality* (Ríos, 2020, no page). In his article about magical or magic realism and the sociology of possibility, Ríos is averse to a definition because magical realism is about possibility “so that trying to define it is a way of wounding or diminishing it” (2020, no page). However, he explains that despite it not being an intellectual movement with any manifesto:

Magical Realism is not so much about ghosts as possibility; not so much about the strange as a value judgement as the personal in actual experience; not so much about science as singular circumstance, what might be called *personal science*. It is a literature in continual exception to the rule, whatever the rule may be. (Ríos, 2020, no page)

Jacobson is drawn to the idea of dreams as a kind of magic that can infiltrate her writing. Magic has an impossibility about it, a fear associated with the power to scare readers but also childlike because of its distinctly naïve elements akin to fairy story, fable or night-time story (Ríos, 2020, no page). Ríos writes of the whimsicality of the writing where magic becomes “jejune, quixotic, amusing, even as it is simultaneously memorable ... lyric leaps, metaphors, similes, new ways of seeing: these are all impossible possibilities” and this is exactly what strikes me about Jacobson’s writing which is humorous, whimsical and fun but at the same time, poignant and true. Magical realism helps Jacobson express her attitude to reality, using dreamscapes as a way of untangling and discovering life’s mysteries. Her writing is not about inventing imaginary beings or worlds but uncovering the mystery of the relationship between herself and the world. Often, Jacobson explains, key events do not have a logical or psychological explanation, so instead she writes to grasp the mystery that hovers behind things – “I enjoy magic realism”, she says, “because it can show the world in a more real way than realism ... it

allows me to get to the heart of what a feeling is. It holds truth within” (Personal Interview, 2022).

The whimsical way Jacobson paints the truth extends to the line drawings that accompany many of the poems in *Amnesia Findings*. Jacobson explain that “because I am drawing an element of the poem, it often comes out as dreamlike. For instance, in [the poem] ‘Earliest and Latest Memories’ (2019, p. 50) my earliest memory contained a rhinoceros story and an apple, so I drew an apple on the tip of the rhinoceros’s horn, next to a young apple tree” (Personal Interview, 2022). She confirms that this is a poem where the events seem dreamlike but are actually recollections, strategically crafted this way. The line drawings accompanying ‘Creatures in my Attic’ (p. 48) is, arguably, the most dreamlike illustration in *Amnesia Findings*, where seven dancing creatures move in a circle, hands intertwined, each with the head of a different animal: fish, donkey, lion, snake, bird, dog and perhaps, cat. The short five-line poem reads:

My mind’s attic is weathered timber,
psychosis-scorched at its centre
the creatures dance around it,
their harmony as certain
as the burn mark is circular.

Jacobson says that she cannot remember whether ‘Creatures in my Attic’ was a dream first, or a poem first: “It was certainly a strong image I had of my own mind, where there was a burn mark on the floor and the animals were slowly dancing around it” (Personal Interview, 2022). The magical nature of the image is a way of accounting for her real experience.

Another key aspect of Jacobson’s use of magical realism is the way she breathes life into inanimate objects, suggesting a lack of control of what occurs during our lives. This idea of an inherent life in things recasts the world as a place where imaginative and dreamlike events are occurring all the time, with or without us. Else Dowden, in her review of *Amnesia Findings* states that Jacobson’s “world-objects [teapots, furniture, heirlooms, kitchenware] occupy narrative positions in their own respective universes” and belong to a traditionally feminine domicile (2021, p. 228). Imagining inanimate objects in a multitude of ways is made possible through poetry, where many words can be used to describe a single thing. Two inanimate things, a passport and a pastry for example in ‘Danish Pastry Passport’ (*Amnesia Findings*, 2019, p. 66) can be bridged in engaging ways to allow possibility – in poems, we can have all of these possibilities simultaneously – what Ríos refers to as a “rugged pluralism” (2020, no page). He suggests that in this use of magical realism “we are *more* connected to the world, more in it, not alienated or removed or disjointed from it” (Ríos 2020, no page). Things that initially seem mundane are allowed hundreds of incarnations, allowing a multidimensionality, and an endless impossibility not unlike Emily Dickinson’s assertion in her poem ‘I Dwell in Possibility’ (Ríos, 2020, no page). This sense of possibility is expressed in metaphor and extended metaphor in many works.

Jacobson's writing is rich in implied comparisons between disparate things. She provides dramatic visual images that engage the mind of the reader. Sometimes whole poems use extended metaphor as a means of explaining a complex idea in simple terms, explaining a concept by directly mentioning a related image or idea and drawing multiple parallels between them. Often, when Jacobson uses an abstract concept, it is a way of evoking emotion and imagery. I ask Jacobson about the fact that in some poems, for example in 'Butter Snap Letters' (*Amnesia Findings*, 2019, p. 13) there is a dreamlike quality about the writing, despite the fact the narrator of the poem appears not to be dreaming, and how this effect is achieved. Jacobson explains that:

I take an extended metaphor and I run with it until it seems dream-like. I like to push images and behaviours to the extreme. Like a girl collecting letters in snap-lock bags, then frying them and eating them, using a similar method to making French toast. That the letter "J" might get lodged in her throat seemed the next step. So instead, she wraps it up in the freezer for later. (Personal Interview, 2022)

Vagabond Press, publisher of Jacobson's first chapbook *The Last Postman* (2018), summarise that first published collection as a chapbook of unusual poetic letters delivered by a girl to characters on a train that:

give intimate glimpses into the lives of everyday characters ... with themes of the domestic, yearning, hope and a hint of magic realism ... these are poems of quiet and acute observation grounded in the experience of a familiar contemporary urban environment. (Vagabond Press, n.d., no page)

When I read this work, it was like being transported into a character-rich series of dreams, and I asked Jacobson to explain the book's intent:

It is a dreamscape in one sense – the characters in the poems are all caught up in its dreaming. However, the work ... draws on elements of magical realism. Incidentally, the first poem in the sequence, where the girl becomes the last postman and delivers letters to the people on the train in the sky, was one of the first poems I wrote soon after I was released from hospital after my episode of psychosis in 2011. Later each poem was created as an inspiration from the first poem. They are extended metaphors. (Personal interview, 2022)

There is extensive imagery about sleep and waking in this book – letters found in the laps of poem characters as they sleep, especially the "drunk dreaming of the Old Museum Building in Carriage 13" (p. 14) and the "girl in the wedding dress folded into the Vinnies bag in Carriage 11" (p. 17). Jacobson explains that she uses the idea of

dreams as portals – I observe a lot of people when I catch public transport. Sometimes I wonder about the stories [of these people] and what I might say or write to them. *The Last Postman* is my celebration of the characters we see and observe. (Personal Interview, 2022)

Some of the dreams, she confirms, are very much grounded in real events. The drunk’s story, for example, can be traced back to a night of music rehearsals at the Old Museum Building in Brisbane where there was “a drunk person wandering around the building as we left for the night. I wondered to myself, what adventures would he go on? What would he dream?” (Personal Interview, 2022).

Jacobson describes the dreams she remembers as “full of imagery and symbolism” and she explains being driven to observe and document them. Russo (2020, p. 26) states that the formal demands of poetry introduce a unique type of critical thought into the creative process that develops the dream material into art. The symbolic artefacts and symbolic images are connected to the “real and truthful-feeling incidents” of which Vakil (2013, p. 374) writes. Jacobson also incorporates myths and legends as “they feel very dream-like to me” (Personal Interview 2022). She includes references to both King Arthur (p. 6) and Macbeth (p. 22) in *Amnesia Findings* (2019). Another significant reference is the Behemoth, the Jewish legendary creature that the poet “imagines herself into the shoes of” in ‘Waiting for the Big 80’ (p. 45) where:

The end of days will be porridge weather.
For now, I snack on cows and sheep
of one thousand mountains. The entire city’s river
is not enough to wet my tongue. I sit astride
my own chest, heavy, pressing myself to earth’s core

Jewish culture, faith and familial relationships are explored in many poems and Jacobson explains the inevitability of this as these factors have had such a significant impact on her life. Examples include ‘Passover Seder Plate, 2011’ (pp. 36–37) and ‘Dream Diary – Tuesday and Wednesday Night’ (*Amnesia Findings*, 2019 p. 22) where she dreams that her sidekick is putting her own food on the table of a restaurant: “These items were schmaltz and fishcakes, typically Jewish foods, salmon patties especially. I have grown up with Jewish culture and food so it is inevitable that these things will find their way into my dreams” (Personal Interview, 2022). Another vivid example is contained in ‘Letter 1: To the boy with blue hair in carriage 2’ (*The Last Postman*, p. 7):

Last time I saw you your hair was pink
and you had misplaced your umbrella and my name.
I kept talking, my words bumping into each other
as you searched for both. It was the second night
of Passover and already I was sick of matzah,

missing bread, missing you. The train leaned left
 as though following the ritual of last night's Seder
 and the umbrella rolled free from under your seat.

She also gives the example of 'Spot the Difference Had Gadya' (p. 56) that references a Jewish Passover song 'Had Gadya' (One Little Goat) which is sung in Aramaic and Hebrew at the end of the Seder and is Jacobson's response to Fay Zwicky's poem, 'Kaddish' (*Amnesia Findings*, 2019, p. 95) where she "turns the words upside down, making familiar melodies unfamiliar through metaphor. As I have recited the Passover songs every year since childhood, Zwicky's inversion of 'Had Gadya' is like a spot-the-difference game of rearranged fragments" (Jacobson qtd in *Cordite Review*, 2018). Jacobson reviewed *The Collected Poems of Fay Zwicky* (*Cordite Review*, 2018) at the same time she was writing "a thesis about tensions between her Jewish identity, memory, mental illness and hybridity as mediated through cultural objects and poetry" (*Cordite Review*, 2018) as well as *Amnesia Findings* (2019). Jewish Australian poet Zwicky (1933–2017) remarked that "a writer has to emerge from family, religion and other ties" (Zwicky, 2017, p. 2) and like Zwicky, in places Jacobson tries to give voice to not only herself but others unable to speak and not given a conventional means of expression – the characters she imagines from her family's past, the homeless, those that she encounters on public transport or in other public places, for example.

At times, Jacobson's Jewish heritage and identity provide dramatic intensity in her poems, allowing an interplay with significant themes including death, memory loss, and the weight of the past, and more broadly, an enmeshing of the very personal with more universal concerns. James Arbuthnott (2019, no page) who reviewed *Amnesia Findings*, describes Jacobson's poetic voice as "haunting and beautiful ... depicting diaspora and survival. Poems borne from hospital records and revisions of Jewish songs and stories help to heal her fading memories of displacement and family lore". In a similar way to Zwicky, Jacobson demonstrates an infectious and dreamlike play with language which appears in references to rhymes and fables. Dowden (2021, p. 229) remarks that "part of Jacobson's recovery process is the sharing and recreation of memory via the assertion of Jewish identity. The poet's homage makes a timeless and resonant call across cultural histories". So, for Jacobson, dreams are an important window to the imaginative and cultural sources that nourish her writing, allowing excavation of her imaginative power to create worlds in which the colour and intricacy of her religious, familial and creative life are able to be revealed.

Video-poetry

Jacobson came to poetry on the page after first creating video poems as a photography student in 2009 – these pieces had no words but consisted of soundscapes and visuals (Personal Interview, 2020). Photography is still central to some of her work today and particularly in terms of "place" as she tells stories through the visual form. She experienced "spiritual experiences" of alive spaces, drawn to places like the Old Museum Building and its "hidden secrets and layers of history" (Personal Interview, 2020). Through what she terms "photographic acts", she enjoys enabling appreciation of forgotten spaces, inspired by the

American photographer Francesca Woodman (1958–1981) known most for her black and white photographic images and tableaux, often taken indoors, in abandoned and derelict spaces (Raymond, 2017, p. 107–109). Woodman was heavily influenced by Surrealism, but also Victorian “spirit photography” where photographers combined tricks including slow shutter speeds, lens flare and double exposure to create the effects of ghosts being caught on film (Dickson, 2021). Woodman, who took her own life at the age of 22, similarly described her process as an opening up of possibilities: “I feel that photographs can either document and record reality or they can offer images as an alternative to everyday life ... places for the viewer to dream in” (Woodman qtd in Dickson, 2021, p. 6). Jacobson shares this viewpoint, and like Woodman, dreamlike as many of Jacobson’s images are, they did not occur by accident. At times, stories are half-told, or images are not fully revealed and there is evidence of humour, as well as a determination to invent a language for people to witness the mystery of the everyday. Woodman and Jacobson share an interest in the city’s intoxicating mix of beauty and dilapidation, and at times there is a similar theatricality and an interest in dark spaces interspersed with light as photographic or poetic dreamscapes.

Jacobson’s work is laced with dualisms. Many poems are based on intensely vivid dreams that inspire the creative act of writing, but at other times, she “disguises reality as dreams as it seems too strange to be believed” (Personal interview, 2020). She explains, for example, the intention of layering images in video-poetry to create a new alternate space for expression of self, using revisitations of video footage collated in Melbourne just before she became ill, and more recently in Brisbane. The overlaying of footage in this work titled ‘A Collaboration Between my Part 1 and Part 2 self’ (2021) incorporates Jacobson’s own feet walking in stairwells and lift levels, made to feel hauntingly dreamlike. She states that, “The overlaid footage sparks uneasy recollections... I walk through altered spaces, retracing my steps, the sounds and images all around me” (Personal Interview, 2022). As this walking occurs, the viewer encounters a collage of images including traffic light people motifs, bottlebrush flowers, crows calling from powerlines, a cat climbing a wall and shrugging under a wire fence, puddles on a pavement, a diamond-patterned Besser brick wall, a large sign reading 9, a fairground carousel lit up, a surreal scrub turkey crossing the poet’s path and a train station clock.

Jacobson explains that her part 1 and part 2 selves were separated in the schism between her life pre- and post-illness and psychosis. Another way of describing this split, she says, is “the time before” and “the time after” (Personal interview, 2022). Her creative concept for the work is video-poetry that “weaves the two split selves together” (Personal Interview, 2022). This idea of weaving or sewing herself back together through layered imagery is a means of exploring the intermediate space between dream and reality, also expressed in some of her other poems about real events that read as dreams including the suite of poems in *Amnesia Findings* ‘How to Knit a Human’ (2019, pp. 38–39) that refers to her hospitalisation and what she describes as the “tug of memories from that place, the split in self as if they were dreams” (Personal Interview, 2022). Others include ‘How I Escaped Death’ (p. 29) in which she recounts almost saving the world at midnight through a re-imagining of the items she had

packed in her backpack – “clothes, my camera, a candlestick holder, Mentos from the doctor’s desk” of which she now has no memory.

Assemblage is important to Jacobson who enjoys putting things together through bricolage – the construction or creation of creative material from a diverse range of available things. She enjoys stop motion work and layering through animation in video-poetry as a “way of bringing things to life” (Personal Interview, 2020). She also enjoys op-shopping and using old items as a way of connecting to the past and her family’s history, referring to this process as a “re-assemblage of myself and my memories ... in evoking the poetic” (Personal Interview, 2020). The dreamlike narratives incorporating the overlaying of domestic furniture and household accessories are a distinct motif in her photography and video-poetry work (Artbuthnott, 2019, no page). Schwenger (2003, p. 2) likens dreams to mental debris, stating that “within the drowned world of debris, narrative and dream clasp hands”. He states that narrative debris is a way of working that recalls the way children jumble conventional narrative order and references Claude Lévi-Strauss who describes the myth-maker’s narrative invention as taking “from other contexts images, symbols, narrative fragments and arranging them to express a tension or a desired resolution that is psychological as much as cultural” (Lévi-Strauss cited in Schwenger, 2003, p. 6). He compares this process to Freud’s principles of dream construction, commenting that bricolage is an example of the way fragments from many contexts can be “reassembled into significance by an elusive ‘binding medium’ that is ultimately a mental operation” (Schwenger, 2003, p. 7). In Jacobson’s case, this is the creation of the artwork where everyday objects or subjects in a poem may be freed from their original contexts and assembled in an amusing but moving way.

Finding out what dreams mean

Jacobson is open about her interest in dream interpretation, or the “attempt by someone (often the dreamer) to attribute meaning to the content of dream[s] for ... personal/social growth” (Krippner, 1999) as a method of understanding the meaning of her dreams. This understanding is important to her as a means of then applying the knowledge in her waking hours (Personal Interview, 2022). Jacobson Googles a dream dictionary, a resource dating back to ancient times and still popular today (Russo, 2003, p. 15) to make sense of thematic and symbolic dream components. Some searches result in a conclusive single dream interpretation whereas others are less conclusive, offering many potential meanings and different interpretations, but any kind of reduction is useful.

She refers to poems as “dream diaries” – “there are short and condensed poems that a dream can bring. I love the epistolary form of a letter which can also be brief. The poem, through these two lenses, seems the perfect medium to capture dreams” (Personal Interview, 2022). Jacobson actively mines her dreams for creative inspiration. As soon as she wakes, if she remembers the dream, she writes down images she can remember, words, numbers that seem important, or:

sometimes it will just be a feeling. Not all dreams have this rich ground but the ones that fill me with intrigue and curiosity, I develop further... I love seeing how a dream can be interpreted and how it might reflect what I might be feeling or going through at the time. (Personal interview, 2022)

The explorations of meaning and the mining of dreams from notebooks are fitting metaphors for the dream-led writing experience Jacobson often follows “like dynamite shattering rock to open a path to gold” (Vakil, 2013, p. 368), dreams delivering an explosive clarity and sureness of image.

Jacobson explains her interest in other people’s dreams: “the images and symbolism and colours, as I feel it reveals their character and what they might be thinking and feeling and worrying about” (Personal Interview, 2022). For example, the poem ‘Split’ (*Amnesia Findings*, 2019, p. 35) is about her mother dreaming of an outdoor sculpture being struck by lightning, despite her mother’s care to bring ornaments and clay pots to the safety of inside:

When lightning cracks eggshells
across sky, she dreams the sculpture splits
in two. The dream lies forgotten
only remembered when gazing
at the sculpture’s face the next day,
relieved it is whole.

Jacobson explains: “Mum forgot her dream until she saw the sculpture in the garden. Memory and forgetting is a theme that repeats in my writing: remembering through triggers can be connected to dreaming” (Personal Interview, 2022).

Again, in ‘Twin Erosion Dreams’ (*Amnesia Findings*, 2019, p. 23), the subject of the poem is a conversation with her mother about walking through an eroding city where water was lapping high above the ground. Her mother tells Jacobson that she had a similar erosion dream the same night, in which wine she had been making in the swimming pool had been spoiled by eroding dirt. Jacobson’s mother had looked up the meaning of the erosion dream and discovered it that it meant “we are going / through times of emotional stress, / new beginnings”. (Jacobson, Personal Interview, 2022) Many of the poems in *Amnesia Findings* feature Jacobson’s mother who played a significant role in her recovery and who she describes as her “memory keeper when all seemed lost, and who helped me find my way again” (Jacobson cited in West, 2020).

In ‘Wilt’ (*Amnesia Findings*, 2019, p. 12), we encounter the domestically grotesque when she writes about her mother keeping flowers until they wilt with the consequence that one flower in the bunch refuses to wither and instead prospers so that:

Four months pass, and it mutates, edges expanding.
Vase shatters. We sweep glass, wrap shards

in newspaper, eye the flower wearily. Soon it takes
up the kitchen bench. The petals cover
our round wooden table. We pull them off to use
as tablecloths. Heirlooms to hoard
in the linen cupboard.

Inanimate objects, full of their own life and power, such as this cut flower appear to deliver macabre warnings to the reader, and the poet's role seems as a voyeur among them "coupled with a past and impending fate" (Arbuthnott, 2019, no page). There is a darkness about these dreamlike images.

When I interview Jacobson, we don't discuss nightmares at any length, but Jacobson says she has them, admitting that medication can cause intensely vivid dreams and nightmares, especially if a person is going on a certain type of medication for the first time, or is withdrawing from medication, but emphasises that in her own case, she always had vivid dreams, even before being unwell (Personal Interview, 2022). The first poem in *Amnesia Findings* is about unearthing a set of worry dolls that she had buried years before under palm trees to absorb "night fears / beneath [her] pillow as she slept" (2019, p. 3). Joyce Carol Oates recounts thralling in the aftershock of bad dreams, and the need to transpose "these images, these emotions, in themselves unspeakable into *strategies of words* ... in order to be contemplated at all" (Oates, 1998, p. 167). This is also Jacobson's process. She is forthright in painting her own intimate vulnerability in the face of illness and recovery.

The global Covid-19 pandemic engendered anxiety-related dreaming that has impacted Jacobson's more recent creative work, and she states that:

I dreamt vividly at the start of the pandemic and many of my dreams took on persecutory tones or had themes of exhaustion ... a butterfly enclosure where all the butterflies were fluttering low to the ground or dead, while exotic birds struggled to breathe... I feel [these dreams] matched the current feeling the world was going through. (Online Interview, 2022)

Jacobson explains that pandemic stress also brought on a Holocaust dream where she was being separated from her family at a train station, and a dream where her eyes were being charted by an astronomer – the bigger her eyes, the more lethargy she felt. Dreams, but also opportunities, meant this was a creatively industrious time for Jacobson as she was both completing her doctoral studies focused on creative memoir work but also writing "a lot" of poetry "as this is how [her] brain processes stressful situations" (Online Interview, 2022), despite the impacts of brain fog and exhaustion.

A Museum of Brisbane Artists@Home Residency, a Queensland Writers Fellowship and a grant through the Resilience Create Fund enabled Jacobson to work on a new poetry manuscript

titled *Anxious in a Sweet Shore* (2020) in the first year of the pandemic. In this yet to be published collection, the:

“sweet” whimsical, humorous and quirky is juxtaposed with the “anxious”, dark and disabling forces of mental illness ... themes of food, family, dreams and culture crystallise while my mind is fizz bang sherbet on the tongue. (Jacobson, Online Interview, 2022)

This new manuscript is compiled in four sections: Rocky Road, Liquorice Allsorts, Dream Block and Memory Curls, the Dream Block section containing poems about dreams that rest like squares in a chocolate block, including poems such as ‘Dreams During a Pandemic #1–3’, an anxiety dream called ‘Offerings’ and a villanelle titled ‘Good Night, Sleep Tight and Don’t Wake the Fox’ about a time when Jacobson was taken to see the “sleep lady” at the age of six to help her sleep in her own bed after a nightmare: “I couldn’t sleep in my own room for years. The sleep lady asked me to draw my dreams with packets of coloured textas, but how could I draw the dogs that bit off my hands each night and the fox who shadowed my room?” (Online Interview, 2022)

In the villanelle, Jacobson paints the “sleep lady” aka “child psychologist” as the villain, “exploring guilt tactics she used on me ... accusing me of making others around me ‘sick with my antics’” (Online Interview, 2022), thus the inverting of the “good night, sleep tight” phase in the poem, referencing the well-known children’s bedtime story by Mem Fox (1988). The Dream Block section of the new manuscript is therefore not only dreams-focused but also explores the “institutions and people who do their best to ‘block’ someone else’s dreams, whether this be a job interview, Centrelink or anxiety and depression itself” (Online Interview, 2022). Again, this new work provides a sense of rediscovery allowing reflection and a processing of painful dream experience for the author.

At the time many of her dream poems were being written, Jacobson was emerging as a poet. Her growth as a writer has been about investigation, uncovering and self-understanding, an epiphany that she is able to create in poetry and other artforms. This process of questioning and discovery requires discipline and has the capacity to elicit an intense emotional response in the reader. Dreams, however, do not conjure complete poems and Jacobson actively feels and constructs the content, structure and form of poems. This is a deliberate and strategic process – a kind of strategic dreaming. Her prowess blurs lines between memory and dreams, reality and fiction to construct a capricious dreamscape that invites the reader to both reflect and question the notion of truth in relation to memory.

Among some of the dark themes in her book, there is also a distinct warmth, a sentimental sense of enchantment and a thread of optimism. In the trancelike poem ‘You just wanted to show me,’ (*Amnesia Findings*, 2019, p. 93) the addressee of the poem cups light, makes a golden ball of yarn and in “quick clicks” stitches the poet a pair of socks so she can feel the heat “pulse in her souls”, sensing “the light wanting to return”. The final poem in the book (p.

94) consists of three brief lines, and is titled ‘Heal’, beginning with “she distils healing from poems”. Significantly, Jacobson elects to finish *Amnesia Findings* with poems that communicate light and hope.

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