

JOHN BENNETT

Real fables

Sunday April 7, 2013, Toormina, NSW.



We gather by the playground for a rollcall by the volunteer guide. I look up, a Tawny Frogmouth looks down; our reciprocal gaze (or stare) is speechless. I take this photograph at the start of a koala hunt. How can humans connect with the wild and natural? Making these connections can slow the momentum of our ecological crisis. We are connected intimately to each other, to other biota and the planet. The fates of animals and humans are entwined, but through our social, cultural and even aesthetic concerns, we are failing the future. Cognitive scientists suggest we make rational decisions before conscious reasoning and emotional connections with nature and the wild place us at home. The problem is we don't live in the land with totems and Songlines that locate us within the fabric of creation and everyday life and death.

We were once intimate with animals and now gaze from behind windows, or through books and the media. Animals were the first elements we depicted in the depths of European caves and Australian overhangs going back over 40,000 years. How close can we get to animals, with or without E.O. Wilson's hypothesis of biophilia as our evolutionary trait? Can a naturalistic art that pays attention with affection and interest help connect us? Or keeping animals as pets? Or simply being in their presence?

Copernicus and Darwin only weakened anthropocentrism; we still use allegory (fables, animal characters as people) and personification (human qualities projected onto animals). We can't escape our human perspective, but should be aware of our limited understanding of animal behaviour/cognition.

I'd like to introduce four British nature writers, three of whom I read as a young boy at boarding school on the South Downs of England, and then suggest an alternative approach from an Australian perspective of ways to connect with the wild. My world was like theirs back then, with no guilt over the Empire, no sign of computers or social media, and no sense of a global ecological crisis. I played rugby and cricket, got beaten for poor marks in Latin, played in the woods, caught voles, newts and lizards. I read Gerald Durrell and wanted to become a naturalist until I read *On the Road* in my mid-teens. All three of these writers attempted to write from the perspective of an animal's universe; all were eccentric outsiders sharing Tom Buchanan's view that "Civilisation's going to pieces" (*The Great Gatsby*).

Henry Williamson

In 1922, Henry Williamson rented a cottage in Georgeham, North Devon. WW1 had damaged him and the moors offered solitude and comfort. He lived alone, often slept rough and gathered a menagerie including an otter cub rescued after a farmer had shot his mother. He named him Tarka (meaning little water wanderer). Williamson would crawl with him, trying to enter the otter's world in Dark Hams Wood or Horsey Marsh. One day Tarka walked into a rabbit trap, panicked and ran. Williamson spent years searching the Rivers Taw and Torridge but never found Tarka. Published in 1927, *Tarka the Otter*, one of the first books written from the animal's point of view, became a best seller.

He followed Thoreau's advice for language "concentrated and nutty. Sentences which suggest far more than they say, which have an atmosphere about them, which do not merely report an old, but make a new, impression; sentences which suggest as many things and are as durable as a Roman aqueduct; to frame these, that is the art of writing" (*Journal*, Aug 22 1851). Williamson's style influenced Rachel Carson, one of the bravest and most important of environmental writers, and Ted Hughes described him as "one of the truest English poets of his generation".

Rousseau refigured the Fall, describing men as "happy slaves" living in "vile and deceptive uniformity", a thread sewn by writers as different as Thoreau and Adorno. He thought man was unique for his self-fashioning: "no-one has ever seen a people, once corrupted, return to virtue." Williamson was a fascist and fascists believe in order and uniformity for redemption from personal, social and economic difficulties. In 1935, he visited the Nuremberg congress and greatly admired the Hitler Youth movement. Auden thought he understood fascism from being a public schoolboy and recognising Nazis as "a mixture of gangsters and the sort of school prefect who is good at Corps." They were worse, finding animals in what were humans, spitting out *ungeziefer* (vermin) to describe Jews. Being a keen supporter of Oswald Mosley, even after the Second World War, took the gloss off Williamson's reputation and his conservation work.

He rejected offers from Disney to make a film of *Tarka* before choosing wildlife filmmaker David Cobham. Suffering from senile dementia, he died in 1977 the day Tarka was being killed for the film with a screenplay (packed with violence) by Gerald Durrell.

T.H. White

White was Head of English at Stowe Public School in Buckinghamshire and fond of hunting and fishing. He kept owls and paid the boys to catch mice to feed them. He wrote: “I had two books on the training of the *falconidae* in one of which was a sentence which suddenly struck fire from my mind. The sentence was: ‘She reverted to a feral state.’ A longing came to my mind that I should be able to do this myself” (*The Goshawk*, 1951).

White became a full time writer after the success of an autobiography about country life (*England Have My Bones*, 1936). He practiced falconry, hunting and fishing while living in an old labourer’s cottage at Stowe Ridings with books, owls and hawks – no running water or electricity: “Part of the joy was that now, for the first time in my life, I was absolutely free. Even if I only had a hundred pounds, I had no master, no property, no fetters . . . I was as free as a hawk” (*The Goshawk*). He was a bi-polar loner, homosexual and reportedly a sado-masochist who relished privacy and had no intimate friendships.

He bought a young goshawk, ‘Gos’, from Germany not knowing how to break him in beyond the old practice of denying sleep; together they became delirious and intimate with anger and attraction. White did not know that Goshawks are the most difficult raptor to dominate and train: “I did not know then that this was a common state of affairs with goshawks, that the best of them were always haunted by moods and mania” (*The Goshawk*).

He kept a daybook detailing his obsession, his patience, impatience and the stubborn spirit of the hawk. He worked these writings into *The Goshawk*: “To write something which was of enduring beauty, this was the ambition of every writer . . . It was not the beauty but the endurance, for endurance was beautiful. It was also all that we could do.”

He underwent psychoanalysis and blamed his unhappy childhood in India for his isolation and alcohol dependence: “Life is such unutterable hell, solely because it is sometimes beautiful. If we could only be miserable all the time, if there could be no such things as love or beauty or faith or hope, if I could be absolutely certain that my love would never be returned, how much more simple life would be” (*The Troll*, 1975).

In 1939 White moved to Ireland to avoid the war and began his most famous book, the Arthurian fantasy *The Once and Future King* (1958), influenced by Thomas Malory and in turn influencing J. K. Rowling. Nature has become a fantasy. The Anglo idea of nature became informed by art and English landscape gardening, particularly Stowe as it happens.

Charles Bridgeman designed the famous garden (1713) where White had worked as formal French and Dutch styles were being replaced. William Kent later embellished the “poetic” garden with the Temple of British Worthies, filled with busts of heroes from Francis Bacon and Shakespeare. Capability Brown’s artful naturalism followed Kent, though his gently sloping Grecian Valley took two years of shifting earth.

Untamed English gardens became associated with political freedom and in the case of Stowe overt Whig political meaning. George Monbiot was a pupil at Stowe and reminds us a village was removed: “Kent and Brown constructed a paradise, in fact part of the grounds are called ‘The Elysian Fields’, but their classical wilderness was an artefact of social cleansing” (‘Gardens of Eden’, ABC RN, 14.09.2003).

William Gilpin conceived Picturesque while visiting Stowe in the 1740s. This fashion enticed people out into the countryside to see landscape as a sequence of changing vistas as if viewing paintings by Claude Lorrain. Emphasis on the eye and the mind alienates unique ecologies.

Gavin Maxwell

Gavin Maxwell, Scottish grandson of the Duke of Northumberland, was educated at Stowe School. He never knew his father who died in WW1. As a boy he became an expert shot and worked with SOE (Special Operations Executive) during WW2. He tried his hand at exploration, shark fishing, being a naturalist and finally writer. He lived at times in an abandoned cottage (Highland forced clearances) on a friend’s estate at Sandaig on the Sound of Sleat opposite Skye. He started by hunting, describing in detail shooting a fox, but then immersed himself in the landscape from the animals’ points of view. He loved the wildcats in the chimney, wild geese overhead and dolphins in the sound.

In 1956 he explored the marshes of Southern Iraq with Wilfred Thesiger and his account of the travels ‘A Reed Shaken by the Wind’ was well received. Thesiger bought him an otter whom he took back to England. He was identified as an unknown sub-species of Smooth-coated Otter and named ‘Maxwell’s Otter’ thought to be now extinct. The Bible places the Garden of Eden near where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers split and soak wetlands and alluvial salt marshes before emptying into the Persian Gulf. It was home to human communities for five millennia. Saddam Hussein’s regime destroyed the Marsh Arabs’ way of

life (a pitiful one Maxwell thought) and an estimated 90% of the 20,000 square-kilometres of marsh described by the UN as "one of the world's greatest environmental disasters".

The otter 'Mijbil' was mischievous and energetic and ransacked his London flat, so Maxwell took him to the Highlands where Mijbil exhibited curiosity and displayed that universal instinct, playfulness. He had distinct preferences, like sleeping in bed head on a pillow. Maxwell was happiest alone with wildlife but shared his home with young men drawn to him and his conservation work. His overpowering egotism and possessiveness drove them away. He had an unconsummated relationship with the poet Kathleen Raine who adored him, but he was gay and probably bipolar. Angered by his homosexual affairs, she cursed the place and let the otter roam north when she'd been warned not to. A roadworker killed the otter and later when the house burnt down both attributed the misfortunes to her curse. Maxwell never mentioned her in his book, using her poetry for the title 'Ring of Bright Water', published in 1960 to great acclaim. The writing is prolix compared to Williamson but his passion for the wild landscape and the otters shines through, and the detailed sketches and photographs helped change the image of the otter. It was because of Maxwell's efforts that otters became protected. He would have despaired of this December 2012 headline, "2013 will decide whether the Scottish wildcat lives or dies: Highland tiger on its last legs following persecution by gamekeepers and interbreeding with domestic cats."

Animals have personalities and cannot be fully tamed. Maxwell shows new otters Edel, Teko, Mossy and Monday as having different personalities in a sequel to 'Ring of Bright Water', 'The Rocks Remain' (1963). Edel bit fingers off a fifteen year old assistant and the otters were caged. The last of the trilogy 'Raven Seek Thy Brother' (completed 1968) is a discursive revelation of the end of Maxwell's dream, mentioning the curse, a poltergeist, accidents, mismanagement and financial difficulties. He suffered writer's block, I can imagine how. Language is natural and constitutive in that rather than representing the world it builds on it, but being involved with an animal and entering the animal's orbit is far removed from sitting down at a desk with an empty thin sliver of tree to write on. Can writing, a technology that has meshed with our bodies and minds, be the basis for writer or reader to develop an understanding and ethical relationship with their environment? After all "Writing and reading are acts usually performed indoors, unachievable without long shifts of attention away from the natural environment." (Lawrence Buell, 'The Environmental Imagination, 1995). Wordsworth and Coleridge ('The Ancyent Marinere') admit animal otherness as a key to community, even if through violence ('Hart-Leap Well'). These three nature writers were

outsiders who provoke us with a tantalising world that refuses to treat animals as signs, symbols or metaphors, though the ethics are outdated.

What one should learn from artists – How can we make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not? . . . we want to be the poets of our life – first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters. (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1882)

Grey Owl

The last writer I will discuss is new to me. Grey Owl also depicted the world from other species perspectives. He worked the Canadian wilderness as fur trapper, wilderness guide and forest ranger. Wounded in WW1 he was shipped back and learnt from Ojibwa Indians of north-central Canada harvesting, trapping and hunting techniques and their culture. He lived with a young Iroquois girl Anahareo (Pony). After trapping an adult beaver he rescued two young beavers he'd just orphaned which triggered his love for beavers. "I had laid in wait for beaver and killed them with a club, and their resignation in the face of death was always disturbing; some of them had tried to shelter their heads from the blow with their hands. One, badly wounded with shot, had swam ashore within a few feet of me, and had lain there looking up at me so that I had boggled the execution most horribly. The incident had haunted me for days." ('Pilgrims of the Wild', 1934) In 1930, Parks Canada made a film about Grey Owl and his beaver conservation work. He had built his cabin around a beaver lodge and wrote 'Pilgrims of the Wild' believing in beavers as a symbol for vanishing Canadian wilderness and decline of "the capabilities and possibilities of the wild creatures involved." With its sketches and photographs of the young beavers, it sold well:

Yet, on reflection, it struck me as passing strange that we, representatives of two tribes who, above all others, had each in their day made the war-trail a thing of horror (an art, by the way, in which the whole world is at present busy in perfecting itself), should be wearing ourselves to a frazzle over the likes and dislikes of two miserable little creatures that were not, according to civilized standards, worth the powder to blow them to hell. ('Pilgrims of the Wild')

Grey Owl's use of 'capabilities' echoes Martha Nussbaum's Aristotelian approach to ethics, "there is waste and tragedy when a living creature has the innate or "basic" capability for some functions that are evaluated as important and good, but never gets the opportunity to perform those functions" ('Justice for Non-Human Animals', 2002). A life born into the world

should flourish in its abilities and capabilities. This is a useful naturalistic framework supporting the rights of all species.

Grey Owl successfully campaigned for nature conservation. 'Pilgrims of the Wild' was continually reprinted, but his alcoholism became problematic. He travelled to Europe lecturing to over a quarter of a million people. On his second tour, he gave a command performance at Buckingham Palace saluting the King in Ojibwa. "I come in peace, brother." When he died it was revealed that he was Archie Belaney, fascinated by Native Americans as a boy, and that he was a bigamist from Hastings, England. This cast rather a pall over his conservation work.

The four writers I've discussed were flawed, weird, inspiring characters who sought intimacy from wild animals. Their writings inspired others to appreciate and help conserve nature and perhaps even a re-imagining towards Ojibwa cosmology. Anthropologist A.I. Hallowell described the Ojibwa as considering animals, like the bear, as people- but without anthropomorphism, the intimacy of pets, or treating animals as children. Ojibwa relate to animals as creatures on the same level as themselves because they are capable of metamorphosis, of shape shifting. "The social relations between human beings and other-than-human persons are of cardinal importance in the worldview of the Great Lakes Ojibwa" ('Ojibwa Ontology, Behaviour, and World View', 1960). Aboriginal totems likewise offer intimacy with the wild. Bill Gammage writes, "totem is a life force stemming from and part of a creator ancestor. An emu man does not have emu as a mere symbol: he is emu, of the same soul and the same flesh. He must care for emu and its habitat, and it must care for him." ('The Biggest Estate on Earth', 2012)

Aged eight I saw Walt Disney's 'The Incredible Journey' about an epic journey home by two lost dogs and Tao the Siamese cat through the Canadian wilderness. When we got a cat I called her Tao. Tao was my last pet. I know people who treat pets as people and vice versa, but why own an animal? What kind of love requires dependence? Pets are commodities.

A koala



On the koala hunt I look for birds as well. I'm no twitcher, but enjoy being in their presence, itself an index of environmental health. I consider myself relatively normal despite living in shorts, but Sean Dooley points out, "Even Keith Richards would not look cool with a pair of bins around his neck . . . [it] invites hostility as people think you are either a rabid Greenie or a pervert" ('The Big Twitch', 2005). Birds are individuals, some risk takers, some aggressive, some socialisers, some promiscuous. Montaigne noted: "Even among wild birds, songs are not equal to each other; all birds learn according to their own skills."

Our guide points out Tallowwood and Swamp Mahogany, the koalas' favourite food trees, then Wyn spots a young one having a quick scratch then moments later back to dozing high in a Bloodwood. Koalas are an example of Australia's unique fauna. Our guide explains they have a metre long appendix, eat over a kilo of leaves each night then sleep for up to nineteen hours. They regularly browse several trees in rotation, called home trees. He shows us a photograph of a truck piled high with koala skins (see below). An estimated 800,000 were killed that year (1927) in Queensland alone.

We've heard a male squealing like a speared pig in search of a mate in Jagun Nature Reserve that backs onto our garden and have seen some in the area, always alone. Australia has the worst mammal extinction rate of all and the future of koalas here in the Mid North Coast, with such fragmented habitat from development and so many cars and dogs, appears bleak. In serious decline in NSW and Queensland, populations thrive in Victoria and South Australia but are a different sub-species using different food trees. I have no desire to hold one, tame one or live with one, I just want them to survive in healthy populations.



A truck loaded with 3,600 koala skins collected in the Clermont area in one month, 1927. The John Oxley library.

Roos

Monday April 8

I grew up in England reading the three British authors and later Gerald Durrell ('My Family and Other Animals', 1956). Any vague thoughts of a career were with wildlife. Nature is rich in obvious aesthetic values from sunsets to birdsong, but informed even scientific knowledge increases aesthetic appreciation by guiding our attention. I can attest to this from my bird-watching. Mark O'Connor in 'Wordsworth's House at Rydal' suggests that informed knowledge of nature also enables the large questions to be asked, "this / bright-eyed hook-nosed eighty-year-old/ starving for information."

Eighteenth-century thinkers wrestled with human/non-human animal distinctions. Jeremy Bentham asked if animals suffer. We now know they feel (Jeffrey Masson and Susan McCarthy, 'When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals', 1995) and realise animals are individuals with unique behaviours and unique skills and personalities, but humans rarely observe them close enough to realise this fact. Desiring clear categories we are

disturbed by Chuang Chou dreaming he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou. “Do we agree to presume that every murder, every transgression of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" concerns only man?” asks Derrida (‘The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)’, 2002)

Kangaroos are emblems of the uniqueness of Australian fauna. I photograph them in our garden, but keep my distance. I recognise some individuals, but they come and go, blur and have no names.



Jan Aldenhoven and Glen Carruthers’ documentary ‘Kangaroos - faces in the mob’ (1992) followed kangaroos for over two years, advised by academics who had researched the large mob for fifteen years. They showed that the marsupial’s remarkable reproductive system, often disparaged as primitive, is superbly adapted to Australian conditions. Carruthers explains, “We wanted to do two things: one was the normal in-depth behaviour of kangaroos, the other was in showing the individual differences. The latter is where it became hard.” To depict differences and individualise them, they felt they had to name them but used non-human names. They have been criticised for anthropomorphism and a normative stance, for example when contrasting good and bad mothers, yet, they attempt the animals’ viewpoint and the narration avoids dramatisation and omnipotence. Richard Mabey comments on a scene in David Attenborough’s ‘The Life of Mammals’: “it seemed like a particularly surreal version of Alice in Wonderland.” (‘Biophobia’, 2003). Jane Goodall

gained a PhD in ethology while rebelling against her supervisors by naming the chimpanzees she studied, getting to know them as individuals.

Aesop's fables mention wolves frequently. In one the wolf and lamb drink peacefully together, in another the wolf prefers freedom and hunting, even if a poor living compared to the life of a dog, fed, chained and restricted. Wolves are under threat and still persecuted. Wolves howling in the Tatras Mountains carted memorable shivers down my spine. There are about 150,000 wolves left in the world and 400 million dogs, all descended from the wolf, nearly all with names, some bred to work, most bred to pander to human needs, whether aggression, needy doting, stupidity, or obedient companionship (Argos, Cerberus, Black Bob, Snowy, Timmy, Buck, Fang notwithstanding). Konrad Lorenz loved dogs but realised they were all emasculated substitutes for their ancestor, the wolf, having diminished brains, serious congenital defects from inbreeding and lacking the intelligence and independence that 'wild' engenders. Newborn dogs and wolves look similar, but a wolf skull takes twice as long as a dog's to develop. It is larger with sharper teeth and has a bigger brain to body ratio. Dogs are not as alert and attentive to the environment. You can tame a wolf by hand rearing a cub, but the offspring will be wild not domesticated. Jake Page writes, "To truly domesticate a plant or an animal you have to engineer it" ('Dogs: A Natural History', 2007). Evidence is clear, pedigree dogs have been engineered for genetic malformation and pain.

That mysterious evangelical self-mythologising artist Josef Beuys believed art could energise society and forge reconciliation with nature. For the performance 'I Like America and America Likes Me' (1974) Beuys, covered in felt, was transferred by ambulance from the Airport straight to a New York gallery where eight hours a day for three days, locked in with a coyote, he remained mostly hidden beneath his felt. Not much happened. The coyote is a sacred animal in Native American mythology, but this coyote was actually half-wolf/half-husky bored and indifferent to the allegory.

The alphabet

I am trying to teach you that this alphabet of 'natural objects' (soils and rivers, birds and beasts) spells out a story . . . Once you have learned to read the land, I have no fear of what you will do to it or, with it.

– Aldo Leopold ('A Sand County Almanac', 1949)

We are usually outsiders inside looking out. Parking his car in Alaska, John Burnside met a fox, “accustomed/ as I was not/ to the rule of the tundra/ the logic of the wilderness that says/ where nothing seems to happen/ all the time/ what happens is the chance/ that something might” (‘Arctic Fox’, 2007). The wild is a civilised dream. Christopher McCandless read Thoreau then died aged 24 in Alaska of starvation. His final journal entry was “Beautiful Blueberries” with a torn page of Robinson Jeffers’s poem, “Death’s a fierce meadowlark: but to die having made/ Something more equal to centuries/ Than muscle and bone, is mostly to shed weakness,” with “I have had a happy life and thank the Lord. Goodbye and may God bless all”, scrawled on the back.

Ted Hughes was a farmer and fisherman but his famous ‘The thought-fox’ is that common device - a poem about writing a poem. There is no fox and outside in darkness nothing has changed: ‘The window is starless still; the clock ticks, / The page is printed.’ Hughes later commented, “So, you see, in some ways my fox is better than an ordinary fox. It will live for ever, it will never suffer from hunger or hounds. I have it with me wherever I go. And I made it. And all through imagining it clearly enough and finding the living words.” (‘Poetry in the Making’, 1967). The four writers would disagree. They show that genres like Eclogue, Georgic or Pastoral are out-of-date though all tend to the tragic. Joseph Meeker, argues tragedy is unhealthy, the genre emphasises egocentric individuals tending to dominate nature, whereas play and comedy are adaptive. (‘The Comedy of Survival’, 1972)

The Australian wild is Aboriginal, fire-stick farmed, hunted, gathered, danced and sung in over 270 languages whose presence and practices have been disrupted. The way to connect is not by taming the wild but learning place in a bioregional, ecological and communal way. Contemporary ecopoetics explores interconnections, celebrates and condemns from experiences and a political stance. It’s an urgent task, 12% of bird species and 25% of mammals are threatened with extinction this century. What is an appropriate response? Anger, sadness, work?

Poetry can spell out Leopold’s alphabet with its concerns and joys. The best poets get down close: “I dropt down on a thymy mole-hill or mossy eminence to survey the summer landscape.” (John Clare quoted by Richard Mabey from ‘The Autobiography’); “We need the tonic of wildness, - to wade sometimes in marshes . . . to smell the whispering sedge . . . We can never have enough of Nature.” (Thoreau, ‘Spring’) “No way to travel off the trail but to dive in: down on your hands and knees on the crunchy manzanita leafcover and crawl around between the trunks.” (Gary Snyder, ‘Crawling’). “A step down and you’re into it; a

wilderness swallows you up: ankle-, then knee-, then midriff- to-shoulder-deep in wetfooted understory, an overhead spruce-tamarack horizon hinting you'll never get out of here." (Amy Clampitt, 'The Sun Underfoot Among the Sundews').

Alice Oswald, to whom I dedicate the following poem, is an English nature poet who crawls and lies on the Earth attempting immersion in the landscape.

Invitation to Jagun

for A.O.

Last week in the British Library I asked you to Australia,
you submitted fear of flying but it would make a change
from lying at gravity's suggestion on cool Dartmoor earth.

You could walk out of our house straight into Jagun
spread a dizzy balance on our old impoverished soils
under towering Bloodwoods, Blackbutts and Turpentine.

Expect some discomfort from marauding ants, leeches
and ticks, hungry and chewing at all angles, perhaps head
for the roar of the Pacific washing up on Letterbox Beach,

relax on the hind dunes among the crab holes below Coastal Banksias
and become intimate with the Black Cockatoos, noisy eaters
shredding breakfast, burying you in sage-green flower spikes.

Our art collection hangs Hyacinth Orchids, flashy Painted
Jezebels, the golden Regent Bowerbird and volatile Scarlet Honeyeater,
but it is the haptic and aural that interest you – a White-throated

Treecreeper tapping lightly, the mercurial scatter of skinks, slewed
rustle of a python, crisp scrunch of a goanna taking off up a tree –
and the music of avian choirs of fantail, thornbill, whistler and wren.

Stay under night's roof, watch the Southern Cross abseil
through the open architecture of the forest and sense
the silent manoeuvres of Frogmouths, Boobooks and Gliders.

Thoreau was content with a flute, Homer and home-made cakes,
but stay much longer and your language will become dishevelled,
syntax will slough, verbs bounce and rusted nouns splutter.

If you sleep a deep sleep deft Wombat Berry, Arrow-head Vines,
insistent sharp-thorned Sarsaparilla and with a bit of luck
the threatened Cryptic Forest Twiner will parcel you tightly.

Gumbaynggirr time flies by the self-presence of Romantic poets,
your skin will grow afresh, your cheeks will welcome the primary
colonisers, smooth Blackwattle lichens that come in a choice

of green or ivory, foliose lichens will root Cats Eyes to the tips
of your fingers and toes and feathery grey fruticose species
will bodice your torso, all symptoms of a healthy world.

By now Jagun will be a new wood, its stumps and history mulch,
its ground a palimpsest of psalms, a browse of leaf and stem
its scripture, and our star sinking behind *Nungu Mirral* its benediction.

An old mystery, the Green Man may trace a songline from the Dart
to Oyster Creek (I've just felt a wallaby running off thumping the bank).
You showed I must touch more if this place is to become a coming home.

Notes:

Jagun is Gumbaynggirr for home. The poem is way too romanticised - lying on this ground could lead to snake bites, infected leech bites, Lyme disease, Barmah Forest virus, Ross River fever, Lyssavirus or Murray Valley Encephalitis. How to connect with the natural environment needs much more than imagination, but less than an all-consuming vocation.

MELISSA BOYDE

*Cultural Myths and Open Secrets:
The Cattle Industries in Australia*

In a meditation on the “question of identity” Gertrude Stein, modernist writer, art collector, dog lover, writes about one of the dogs she and her partner Alice B. Toklas lived with: “I am I because my little dog knows me” (*Geographical History* 99). In a later discussion on identity and creativity Stein again includes the statement about her dog, adding:

I was just thinking about anything and in thinking about anything I saw something. In seeing that thing shall we see it without it turning into identity, the moment is not a moment and the sight is not the thing seen and yet it is. (“What Are Master-Pieces” 146–47)

With regard to Stein’s unusual acknowledgement of the dog as a subject, and with respect, I rework her meditation to describe the moment when I turned on the television to watch the ABC current affairs program *Four Corners* and was confronted with a disturbing report which publicly ‘outed’ cruel practices taking place as part of the live animal export industry¹:

I was just thinking about anything (in the lounge room relaxing at the end of a working day, television on in the background) *and in thinking about anything I saw something*. Suddenly images of steers being tortured to death were before me on the screen. *In seeing that thing shall we see it without it turning into identity*. We look at what is happening to individual cattle in an Indonesian abattoir but it is not us, it is them, or conversely one can simply turn away, turn a blind eye. *The moment is not a moment*. We know that it happens again and again. *And the sight is not the thing seen*. This is TV footage, we are not there in the abattoir. *And yet it is*. We know it happens

¹ “A Bloody Business.” *Four Corners*. ABC Australia. 30 May 2011. <<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2011/s3228880.htm>>.

and now we can see it. *Shall we see it without turning it into identity.* We see a steer but we don't recognise him as a subject and he cannot see us.

The public outcry following the exposé on *Four Corners* prompted the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard to call for a temporary suspension to the trade of live cattle to Indonesia. The animals in the *Four Corners* report are just a few of the millions of calves and cattle in the Australian cattle industries who are killed year in and year out for human consumption of meat and dairy products. The conditions of their lives and their deaths are geared to human profit and pleasure. It is an open secret. And the structure of the open secret depends on turning a blind eye.

Part One: The Letter

A couple of Christmases ago, inserted inside a greeting card from a former colleague (coincidentally once my high school teacher), was a letter she had written to me:

Dear Melissa,

I have wanted to tell you about this visit to a big dairy when I was doing a certificate in agriculture. You very possibly know how they treat dairy cattle but I didn't until I went there. All the cows lived in a huge shed (rarely got out to eat or wander around in nature). Twice a day they trooped in like Zombies – each backing into their own spot to be milked by machines – standing on concrete. Then after 20 minutes or so they all trooped back – (none of them interacting with each other) – and huge cascades of water sloshed into the giant milking shed to clean it. To me they seemed dead inside – like automatons.

The cows are artificially inseminated with semen that is geared to producing heifer calves (the male calves are slaughtered pretty quickly as vealers – approximately 6 weeks old). When a cow is due to give birth she is penned up and the dairy hands hover very close. Their task is to snatch the calf away from the cow the split second it is born with others holding the cow's head so that she cannot turn round and lick it or in any way touch it – to avoid contamination. The calf is taken to what seems like a large dog kennel and tied up with a collar and chain.

There are rows of these calf kennels in a paddock half a kilometre from their mothers living in the mega-shed. The chain on each calf is perhaps one to one and a half metres long – short enough so that the calves cannot possibly have any contact with each other. Thus they spend their youth.

I was deeply depressed (sickened) for weeks afterwards. Felt you are the only person I knew who I could tell. Anyway, not a topic for the ‘festive season’!

This letter, written by a woman who has lived much of her life in the country, is remarkable in that it clearly shows that she did not know what happens to cows in parts of the dairy industry. At a personal level there was a sense of paradox that this person was sharing secrets with me – that I was the only one she could tell. Over forty years earlier, when she was my teacher in high school, she had been the object of my nascent desire. At age thirteen, and in the days before the gay rights movement fully evolved in this country, this became my first experience of being ‘in the closet’ – I kept my feelings secret, not only from her but from everyone I knew.

The letter inside the Christmas card, sent to me as someone known to care deeply about the welfare of cows, brought these two secrets together. The woman ‘came out’ to me as a witness to the institutionalised cruelty to dairy cows and in the process handed to me an ‘open secret’. The operation of the open secret is embedded in the epistemology of the closet, which Eve Sedgwick identifies as “the defining structure for gay oppression” in the twentieth century (71).

The work of Sedgwick and others has shown that at the moment when gay identity was being publicly discussed, defined and categorised in medical discourse it was, paradoxically, constituted as a secret, an open secret. The conditions of secrecy that marked the entry of homosexuality into public discourse were necessary for what queer and performance theorist Lynda Hart, following Lacan, terms the maintenance of the “Law of the Father” whereby the retroactive constructions of sexual identities are necessary to uphold the fictional coherency of that symbolic order (Hart 17). As Hart points out, “the secret is thus not about the substance of something

hidden, but rather it is a construct born in the desire of the one who proposes a narrative of secrecy” (16-17).

The historical emergence of homosexuality in medical discourse meant, in Michel Foucault’s words, that “the homosexual was now a species” (Foucault 43). Those in the field of animal studies are aware of the repercussions for individual animals when categorised as species, as Dale Jamieson points out: “individual creatures often have welfares, but species never do” (qtd. in Margodt 21). Marked as outsiders the new human species, the homosexual, was the subject of (pseudo) scientific scrutiny in medical discourses such as phrenology and sexology. In what Bram Dijkstra refers to as a “nasty exercise in phrenological fanaticism”, forensic scientist Cesare Lombroso put forward a detailed connection between criminal behaviour and bodily signs (Dijkstra 289). As Hart suggests, Lombroso’s pairing of so-called inversion with the female offender, which emerged from “the excruciating, painstaking calculation of his subjects’ physical attributes; the obsessive measuring of their crania, anklebones, middle fingers ... is a wedding that has continued well into the twentieth century” (Hart 12–13).

Cows were and are subjected to the same kind of scrutiny. In an early instance, circa the 1820s, a version of cow phrenology developed in France whereby identification of certain markings on the back of cows’ udders were said to “infallibly” predict cows who would produce the greatest amount of milk. The classificatory system was taken up with the view to create a superior “race of cows” (Valenze 279). Such eugenic practices foreshadow the industrialisation of cattle breeding which is now widespread.

The ‘findings’ of sexologists and criminologists conflated ‘inversion’ with the working class and criminality. Similarly marked by speciesism as abnormal, that is as not human, cattle are an unpaid working class. As a recent book on milk puts it, “the most modern dairy farms now rely on sophisticated technology that Karl Marx would recognize as ruthless agents [sic] of alienation” (Valenze 8). As well, cattle were and are treated as criminals with respect to the fact that they are held captive and have few individual rights. Animal welfare lawyer Malcolm Caulfield points out the inadequacy of existing laws to protect farm animals. He cites dairy and live

animal export as two industries with high levels of cruel practices built in as standard operating procedure (Caulfield).

In this paper I consider some of the factors that have contributed to the open secret of the practices of the cattle industry and the implications for animals. Sedgwick suggests that the terms “‘the closet’ and ‘coming out’ now verg[e] on all-purpose phrases for the potent crossing and recrossing of almost any politically charged lines of representation” (71). The ‘outing’ of the cruel practices of the live animal export industry, publicly exposed in the *Four Corners* report, is an example of a politically charged line of representation, which has subsequently been crossed and recrossed.

Part Two: Us and Them; Then and Now

In 1985 the late Val Plumwood, philosopher and environmental activist, survived a crocodile attack whilst canoeing in the Kakadu National Park. Twice she was released from the crocodile’s death roll and twice recaptured until, after the third death roll, severely injured, she somehow managed to scramble up a steep muddy bank and first walked then crawled her way to safety until she was eventually found by a ranger. Woven into the narrative of this near-death experience is a broader discussion: firstly of the framework of human subjectivity “structured to sustain the concept of a continuing, narrative self” and thereby viewing the world “from the inside” (Plumwood, n.p). For Plumwood the near-death experience showed a glimpse “from the outside”: “I was prey.” With this first-hand experience she observes that humans “act as if we live in a separate realm of culture in which we are never food, while other animals inhabit a different world of nature in which they are no more than food, and their lives can be utterly distorted in the service of this end” (Plumwood, n.p).

The cattle industries in Australia, with their focus on cattle as food for humans, began with the importation of a small number of cattle by ship from South Africa c.1788. In an archaeological dig undertaken about twenty years ago in The Rocks in Sydney thousands of bones were recovered in the backyard of former convict George Cribb’s property where he lived from

1809 to the 1820s (The Cumberland/Gloucester Street Archaeological Site, 5-6).



Figure 1 Cattle long bone chopped from Midshaft: Collection of The Rocks Discovery Museum. Courtesy of the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority

Archaeological evidence of slaughter waste covering the site suggests that Cribb, a butcher, supplied his shop with cattle and other animals who were slaughtered on his property (5–6).



Figure 2 Cattle butchered/chopped skull fragments: Collection of The Rocks Discovery Museum. Courtesy of the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority

Instead of showing these kinds of realities for animals, works by colonial artists, such as John Glover’s watercolour *Patterdale Landscape with Cattle* c.1833, tend to reinforce a utopian vision. Art historian Jeanette Hoorn notes that by the 1830s “pastoral capitalism was changing the patterns of land use in Tasmania” (Hoorn 78). Glover’s farm, “Patterdale”, in

northern Tasmania, was a 7,000 acre property run by his sons with convict workers. Hoorn suggests that in paintings such as *Patterdale Landscape with Cattle* “the right of Europeans to exercise their gaze is being asserted” (78). Paintings of cattle grazing peacefully in the Australian landscape created an “arcadian vision of nature providing for the European” (78). But the promise of abundance for the humans is predicated on loss for the cattle themselves.



Figure 3 John Glover, *Patterdale landscape with cattle* c.1833

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, and the National Library of Australia, Canberra. Rex Nan Kivell Collection

Historically both economic and political interests have converged in the development of the cattle industry, particularly in the so-called ‘frontier’ lands of northern Australia. In the early decades of the twentieth century the development of the cattle industry in Australia was considered important on several counts: “in an era where the imperial bond was paramount, the export of beef was a tangible reminder of the alliance between Britain and Australia” (May 1). The “empty north” was felt to be vulnerable to foreign invasion and the cattle industries were considered to be part of a solution to this threat. In 1928 the North Australian Commission put forth a case that the Kimberley district needed to be populated: “It is so rich in natural resources that an enemy could land here and produce all their requirements” (May 1).

The white men who worked in the cattle industries in the frontier lands have been made the subject of nationalist mythmaking, although such mythologising often requires whitewashing. One example is Matt Savage, known as Boss Drover, who is remembered as a “peerless drover and cattleman ... a great name not so long ago around the campfires of central Australia and the desolate Kimberley region to the north” (Willey). Savage worked in the cattle industry in the Kimberley region for over fifty years, commencing as a boy in the early years of the twentieth century. The many stories he tells reveal brutality and indifference to the lives of animals and in many cases to the indigenous inhabitants: “he tells of a cattleman who chopped a stockboy’s head off; then without wiping the axe, calmly returning to the butchering of a bullock” (Introduction). His stories mention in passing dogs killed en masse for their scalps which attracted a bounty paid by the government, a practice reintroduced in 2013,² and cattle, stolen, abandoned and killed for any of the many reasons that suited the cattlemen:

At one time Victoria River Downs employed men to brand cattle on contract. There was nobody in the yard to keep tally and they were paid so much for each ear-mark they brought in. The mark was a little square – called a “block” – taken from the bottom of the ear with a pair of pliers.

Of course it was much more profitable to shoot an old bull – or even a prime bullock – because then you could cut about three blocks out of the bottom of the ear and another two or three from the top, and claim the money for half a dozen brandings. (50)

The novel *Man-Shy* (1931) by Frank Dalby Davison provides a counter-discourse figuring cattlemen as “hard-bitten fellows ... armed with whips” (Davison 5). The novel is distinctive in the way the narrative focuses on the

² “Pastoralists are being offered \$100 for each wild dog scalp they claim under a bounty scheme being trialled in Western Australia to reduce attacks on sheep and cattle. The state’s agriculture and food minister, Ken Baston, said the \$75,000 programme would target an 88,000 sq km region encompassing more than 50 stations in the Murchison region ... Only pastoralists will be allowed to claim bounty payments, but they can give permission to external parties to kill wild dogs on their properties and pay them privately” (“Western Australia puts \$100 bounty on wild dogs”).

point of view of the cattle, in particular a red heifer who is orphaned when her mother, described as an old, thin cow, gets bogged in the mud of an over-used water hole while her few days old calf sleeps on the bank. The calf wakes up and calls for her mother:

The old cow heard it. She answered, and her cry was a blending of physical and mental agony – the same as that of any other mother in like circumstances. Then she struggled. It was a terrific effort, and it racked her old frame to pieces. It was a losing struggle, for with each wrench of her body she slipped further back. The water rose up to her neck and bubbled round her nostrils. There was a short turmoil and swirling under the surface, as she drowned. (14)

Created from material Davison had previously published in *Australia* (1923–1925), a magazine owned and run by his family (Rorabacher 43), *Man-Shy* was originally rejected by publishers “because it was about a cow” (Dow 6). Davison and his brother printed and distributed the novel themselves and their father entered it into a literary competition established by the Australian Literature Society, in which it was awarded the gold medal for best Australian novel published that year (Rorabacher 43). *Man-Shy* starts with what Davison’s biographer in the 1970s called “an opening sentence now familiar to every Australian with any knowledge of his nation’s literature and to many readers abroad”: “The mustering for drafting and branding was a distressing time for the cattle” (Rorabacher 45).³ The orphaned red heifer is eventually caught by the stockmen to be branded:

One man knelt on her neck. He gripped her jaw by thrusting his fingers in her mouth, and twisted her head up so that she could not move her fore-part. Before she could use her hind legs, they were in the noose of a rope, and stretched out and tied to a post. (32)

Two men hold her down while the branding iron is heated:

“Hang on!”

It was the warning word from the brander before he applied the iron.

The two assistants took a fresh grip and tensed their muscles.

³ The novel and its opening sentence are no longer as well known as they apparently still were in the 1970s.

The red heifer did not know what happened – or how long it would last. She felt the scorch of the iron, and bellowed and wrenched her body in one convulsive effort to free herself; but the pull of the ropes and the weight of the men had been applied in just such a way as to cope with that. She was helpless.

To the touch of the second and third iron she lay quiet, except for a painful quivering of her muscles. (50–51)

She later manages to escape from the cattle-yard and the novel tells her story of living in the bush, always on guard to evade the cattlemen's muster. *Man-Shy* and its popularity with readers provide evidence of an empathetic counter-discourse in Australian literature and culture which recognises the cow as a subject challenging or disrupting the default discourse about cattle.⁴ Sales of over 250,000 copies of the novel strongly suggest that this story, with its unusual focus on the animal's subject position, captured reader's interest, despite initial publisher concerns of the value of a story "about a cow".

In contrast *The Overlanders*, a 1946 film starring Chips Rafferty, creates a romanticised view of the drove. Critic Paul Byrnes notes that:

This film began as a propaganda production while the war was still going on. In 1943, the Australian government asked the British Ministry of Information to make a film to publicise Australia's war effort ... The inspiration was a true story told to [filmmaker] Harry Watt by an official of the Australian food administration. During 1942, 85,000 head of cattle had been driven south from northern Western Australia in order to protect them from the Japanese attack. Watt ... wrote a screenplay that brought together a set of strong characters projecting his sense of Australian values: self-reliance, bush toughness, ingenuity and egalitarianism.

Scenes shot from above showing men on horseback droving long, moving lines of cattle slowly across the desert landscape are accompanied by a sound track which features dogs barking, whips cracking and music which is "vigorous, with sweeping gestures and a heroic mood" (Stevenson). The myths of the drover as a dusty, hyper-masculine and patriotic hero are

⁴ I am indebted to Associate Professor Annie Potts for this insight.

evidenced again in the more recent blockbuster film *Australia* (2008), directed by Baz Luhrmann. Like *The Overlanders*, *Australia* renders the cattle industry, in particular the live export of cattle, as integral to the war effort (Boyde).

Representations of the dairy industry are generally of a different kind, figuring it as peacefully bucolic and gendered female, thereby obscuring the harsh realities for the animals. The Australian dairy industry depends on the deaths of an estimated 700,000 calves annually (Animals Australia) and a similarly high number of “redundant” dairy cows, but despite this is rendered as clean and green in promotional material.

The dairy farms found on the pages of several of Olga Masters’s stories, mostly set in the 1930s, are in the lush country of the south coast of NSW. The stories reveal the close proximity of the lives of humans and cows, especially at milking time when the cows are milked by hand. But despite depictions of intimate human-animal contact the cows, and their bodily product of milk, are for the most part figured as displaced metaphors for the lives of the humans. Literary critic Dorothy Jones points out that the “pattern of allusions to milk and milking ... establish[es] the pervasive presence of the dairy industry” and the way it shapes, in particular, the women’s lives (Jones 5). In *Loving Daughters* (1984) the characters’ lives are so immersed in the routines and practices of dairying that the limited choices for one young woman – who returns to the dairy at milking time after a quarrel with her fiancé – are suggested in an image of flies trapped in the milk pails, “caught in the foam, struggling” to stay afloat (Masters 320).

In the short story “The Chosen Vessel”, published in 1896, Barbara Baynton interweaves the situation of a dairy cow with that of a woman. Alone in the Australian bush with her baby while her husband is away shearing, the woman is murdered after night falls by a swagman who earlier had called at the house for a handout of food. The story opens with a scene of the woman separating a calf from its mother, a daily ritual:

she had been a town girl and was afraid of the cow, but she did not want the cow to know it. She used to run at first when it bellowed its protest against the penning up of its calf. This satisfied the cow, also the calf,

but the woman's husband was angry, and called her – the noun was cur. It was he who forced her to run and meet the advancing cow, brandishing a stick, and uttering threatening words till the enemy turned and ran. "That's the way!" the man said, laughing at her white face. In many things he was worse than the cow, and she wondered if the same rule would apply to the man, but she was not one to provoke skirmishes even with the cow.

Leigh Dale suggests that the scene allows Baynton "to depict the trauma and the potential of violence which accompanies the separation of mother and child" (376). The effectiveness of this metaphor is that it is grounded in the revelation of a standard practice of dairying, the forcible separation of a calf from its mother so that the humans can have the milk instead of the calf. Dale notes that the overnight penning shown by Baynton has now been replaced by permanent separation of calves from their mothers (383 n.15).

The industrialisation of dairying and the hidden secrets of how cows have been transformed into units of production are what provided the shock that impelled my colleague to describe to me in the letter what she had witnessed:

When a cow is due to give birth she is penned up and the dairy hands hover very close. Their task is to snatch the calf away from the cow the split second it is born ... The calf is taken to what seems like a large dog kennel and tied up with a collar and chain. ... Thus they spend their youth.

In a recent media release from the "Young Dairy Development Program" (established to support the work of young dairy farmers aged 18–40), the Australian dairy industry's ambitions are figured in a scenario that is already a reality for many cows throughout the world. Gone is any notion of green fields and contented cows:

Farms with 70,000 cows might seem like science-fiction to most Australian dairy farmers, but to Charlie Perotti they're all in a day's work ... Mr Perotti, a Senior Executive at Alta Genetics who manages its Global Reproduction and Premier Dairy program, will tell of his

experiences at some of the world's biggest dairy farms at the Milk it 4 More "Pathways For Your Future" expo. (Young Dairy Development Program)

That this undeniably dystopic scenario for the animals is promoted as aspirational necessitates the large-scale turning of a blind eye to the suffering of animals.

Part 3: Blindspots

Luis Buñuel's experimental modernist film *Le Chien Andalou* (1929) emerges in violence – of both an overt and secret kind. A literal and figurative blindspot appears in the most famous scene in the film which shows a woman sitting on a balcony when a man approaches her from behind with a razor blade in his hand.



Figure 4 Image from *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) directed by Luis Buñuel

The sequence which follows includes a close up of her eye being slit open by the razor blade. The scene has been the subject of much critical discussion over the past seventy years. Taking note of Stein – “*the moment is not a moment and the sight is not the thing seen and yet it is*” – one finds in this case that the cutting of the woman's eye is not the cutting of a woman's eye.

It is an edited sequence to make it appear to be the cutting of a woman's eye but in reality it is the cutting of a calf's eye, which the filmmaker used instead of a human eye.



Figure 5 Image from *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) directed by Luis Buñuel

For the majority of critics of the film this fact and all the implications associated with it remains a blindspot. If it is mentioned at all it is merely an insignificant footnote.

The *Four Corners* exposé on national television of the plight of individual animals in the live animal export trade, made explicit in the graphic footage of deliberate cruelty to steers, including having their eyes stabbed and gauged, should no longer be a footnote. However the 'outing' of Meat and Livestock Australia and Livecorp's alleged prior knowledge and failure to act to protect the animals may become just another open secret with vested interests putting forward a strong case to retain cattle workers and their trade as an integral part of the fabric of Australia. Following the *Four Corners* report advertisements were placed in the print media such as "The human cost of animal cruelty" with a portrait style photo depicting a farming family and a personalised letter from a female farmer appealing to the Australian public for support and explaining how her family has been affected by the suspension of the live animal export trade: with three children under four and large overheads associated with the running of their herd of 10,000 cows, including fuel for their "vehicles and helicopters" she

writes that “we are left lying awake at night, contemplating our future”(“The Human Cost...”).

The Labor government’s decision to recommence the live animal export trade to Indonesia after the temporary suspension, and to provide financial compensation to the farmers affected by it, indicated that it felt confident that the majority of its constituents, however moved by what was revealed in the *Four Corners* report, were able to live with the open secret of that industry. An article in *The Australian*, “I’ll say sorry to Jakarta for cattle ban: Tony Abbott”, which showed a photo of cattle strung up on ropes, (according to the caption a photo of the cattle being unloaded in Indonesia), states that:

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott said if elected the Coalition would never make such a “catastrophic decision”, which not only hurt the domestic cattle industry but soured trade relations with Indonesia...

Tony Abbott is now the Prime Minister of Australia, recently elected with a substantial majority. One of his first actions as Prime Minister was to travel to Indonesia and offer the apology:

“We can work together – but it will take some effort, especially after the shock of the former Australian government cancelling the live-cattle export trade in panic at a TV program,” he told a business breakfast.

“Nothing like this can ever be allowed to happen again.” (“Tony Abbott’s Indonesia visit seals deal over live-cattle trade”)

Following Abbott’s visit the industry has agreed to supply Indonesia with:

53,000 “slaughter-ready” cattle, in addition to the December quarter quota of 46,000 head for fattening in Indonesian feedlots ... Australian exporters hope the new system will let Indonesian shipments next year reach 500,000 head and build from there towards the 2009–10 peak of 718,074 head. (“Tony Abbott’s Indonesia visit...”).

Clearly there are powerful intersections between cultural representations and the politics and economics of the cattle industry that inform a secrecy structure and its maintenance in Australia. The operation of the open secret is not to conceal knowledge, so much as to conceal knowledge of the

knowledge. The open secret enables denial, the choice of turning a blind eye. Perhaps the lessons learned by individual gay people and brought to light in queer theory may be useful: there is never one simple moment of revelation – of crossing the threshold of the closet – that will lead to permanent disclosure. Instead queer theory shows how the endlessly negotiated and renegotiated cycles of coming out – the crossing and recrossing of politically charged lines of representation – can eventually lead to social change. When knowledge of knowledge becomes public knowledge and cultural secrets are recognised as open secrets then the practice of turning a blind eye becomes visible. As Stein says: “Let me recite what history teaches. History teaches” (“If I Told Him” 221).

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ANGELA ROCKEL

Owl

February 2013

*Round eye out of feather and fur, their tracks are all over me, map and compass
bearings, my belly the night sky*

Our farm is in the Huon municipality, west of Cygnet on the ridge of a kind of peninsula or promontory that runs roughly north-south, bounded on the west by the Huon River and on the east by the bay at Port Cygnet. The eastern slopes of the ridge are mostly cleared and farmed, while the steeper western slopes, although logged last century and extensively burned in 1967, are now largely reforested. In the drier places eucalypts grow, stringybark and blue gum and the cypress-like native cherry that's parasitic on their roots; on the southern slopes of gullies and where the soil is better, silver wattle, pomaderris, daisy tree, white gum. An understorey of varnished wattle, peaflowers, prickly coprosma, shrubby helichrysum and goodenia, with bracken and blackberry and grasses in the more open places. In October and November the intense blue haze of love creeper appears from nowhere, with yellow hibbertia, pink heath and purple, green, white and blue ground orchids.

In the 1960s, for a nominal price an uncle gave Terry a block of this regrowth forest, just along the ridge to the south of the farm. Stony and steep, it was judged to be nearly worthless (uncle Tommy had bought it for a bag of potatoes). In the days before chainsaws, a local contractor had worked over it with an axe, cutting the smaller timber for furnace wood for fruit-processing factories in the area. After the 1967 fires burned through, Terry and his father sowed grass seed in the ashes of the less steep parts up near the road. At that time they were dairy farming, and as the block has a permanent spring, in winter when the cows were not in milk, Terry used to walk them along the road and turn them in there to graze the rough

pasture. Since he stopped dairying in the 1970s the block has been left to grow up in forest once more.

Now that the bushes and young trees of the understorey aren't chewed or trampled by the cattle, there's food and cover for all sorts of creatures. Thornbills and wrens and ringtail possums nest there, and pademelon – the little local wallabies – have grazed fine lawns in the open spaces where some grass has persisted. There are insect grubs and other invertebrates for bandicoots; there are bull ants and jackjumpers for echidna; plenty of food and cover for root-eaters and fungi-eaters like potoroo and bettong and for rats and mice, local and introduced. Nest-holes in mature trees for parrots and owls and cockatoos and bats and brushtail possums. Birds – insect-eaters and honeyeaters, forage their specialised feeding strata from ground level to the top of the canopy. And the predators that follow all these creatures are there too – antechinus and quoll and devils and feral cats and raptors.

In early February last year I went for a walk there with Terry, where neither of us had been for many years. I don't know what prompted me to suggest it – I usually walk alone, on the road or in bush closer to the house – except that I was restless and heartsore and full of dread at news from New Zealand that Michael, my brother-in-law and friend, was sick. The day was fine and still, with the first feeling of autumn in clear, cool air. We pushed through waist-high undergrowth. Wallabies crashed away in the bracken; a snake moved off its sun-warmed patch of flattened grass; a yellow-throated honeyeater called loudly somewhere close by – *pick-em-up, pick-em-up* – and the warm, astringent resin-smell of varnished wattle was close around.



After about twenty minutes we came out onto a dry ridge that overlooks a steep gully. To our left was a big native cherry, perhaps five or six metres tall. There's something about these

trees that draws the eye – a kind of backlit darkness, yellow-green against the grey-green and red-green of the growth around it. As we looked, there was a movement in among the branches and a slantwise lattice of sunlight and shadow resolved to barring on the plane of a wing. Then out of the dense shade of the foliage a face turned to us. Dark eyes in a chestnut disc circled by a brownblack line, like a Wandjina cloud spirit blown here from the Kimberley, a face looking into us from another world. It was a masked owl. Half a metre tall with a wingspan of nearly a metre and a half; biggest of all the barn owls – big enough to take possum and wallaby. I'd seen one only a couple of times before, at intervals of years, hunting around the windbreaks close to the house.

She (the dark disc told it) watched us over her right shoulder. I held my breath at the delight of it, the wondrous luck. And then she turned to face us, and we saw why she was in plain view in daylight. Blood streaked the left side of her chest and the feathers on her shoulder were dishevelled; she kept lifting her left foot as if it bothered her. We stepped closer and she turned again as if to fly but fell flailing, hard onto the hard ground. When we reached her we saw the damage: from the wrist where the flight feathers should spread, her left wing was gone. I remembered a friend saying, when he heard that there'd been a murder in a park he loved and went to for refuge and solace, *I felt as if it had happened inside me.*

She leaned back and clashed her beak at us when we approached, showing her talons. Her feet were huge, the size of my hand, and handlike with their padded grips. She was strong, the wound was fresh, the wing-stump still bleeding. Ah, what to do. What prospect for a wild owl that can't fly? Should we kill her? Leave her? She seemed to want her life.

We wrapped her in a shirt and took her home. Half an hour from here is a place where a local man, Craig Webb, has established a refuge for injured raptors, caring for them and releasing all those that have a chance of survival. I phoned him and we drove there with the owl. I had a sick apprehension that I was merely passing on the job of killing her. He unwrapped her and looked stoically at the wound, holding her firmly by the legs and talking to her as he handled the damaged wing. He thought she'd been hit by a car while hunting insects in the headlights; it happens all the time, he says. He didn't know how she'd go – we'd just have to wait. With the help of his young son he transferred her to a dark box in a quiet place where she could rest and we went home.

All night her face was in my mind, fierce. She can't survive, I thought; unable to fly, unable even to reach a perch, she won't want to live. I should have killed her. I couldn't kill her. And we had walked straight to her in 50 hectares of bush unvisited for years. Foggy rain

fell through the darkness and in the morning, light came up blue through mist with the sound of black cockatoos in the pine hedge, their creaky speech, their wild wailing, cracking cones and throwing them down.



It's a very young self who is summoned by the wounded owl, looking as if for the first time into the face of damage and death, understanding that some hurts are irreversible and must be assimilated, somehow. Feeling the dread of that knowledge, bone-deep and throwing out links across all space and time to other damages suffered and inflicted.

The next day there was an email from Craig – a few hours after we left, the owl took food and let him dress the wound. “If she survives”, he said, “she can share an aviary with another female masked owl, who can't be released because she's blind in one eye and can't hunt.” Day 5: “The owl is one of the most amazing birds I have dealt with. I moved her into the aviary after 4 days and she went straight to the mid-height perches (tho I had placed lower ones for her). Today she was on the highest perch. She has great courage, strength, spirit. She has met the other owl and the 2 sit together.”

Now it's one year on. The owl is healthy and moves around a lot, jumping big distances from perch to perch and from perch to ground. The aviary has a pool, trees, cover. Owls love water and she's often down by the pool in the early morning. She interacts with the two others now in the aviary with her, a male and a female. There's also a wild male who visits; there's thought of making a hole in the netting so that he could come and go. Craig hopes there will be a mating – it has happened successfully in other places and the young birds seem to do well when released. Something from the wreckage. A life; new lives.

When I was young I would have found intolerable her adjustment to being confined, to being unable to fly. I had a great need to see damage resolved, healed, made good, and

assumed that I knew what healing was, what good was. I would have had an idea of what being an owl must be. Now it seems to me that the owl wants to live and she's accepting the life that's possible. The ongoing negotiation of the grownup self – how to tolerate limitless uncertainty about what you must have or be.

As seemed somehow presaged by the meeting with the owl, in July our Michael died, a few days after his sixty-fourth birthday, following a return of the cancer he had first experienced twenty years earlier. In my adolescence, the friend who described his response to the murder in the park also said, speaking about his father's last illness, "He struggled bravely to stay alive." I was shocked – my friend knew about suffering yet praised the desire to continue, right there in the midst of it. More than anyone else, Michael was the one who showed me how that contradiction could be lived. He loved his life and drank it to the last drop, the bitter with the sweet, enduring his own pain and grief and also ours. He lived from the clear heart of an understanding that it's all worth it, accepting loss as one of the faces of love, knowing that, as Mary Oliver puts it:

To live in this world

you must be able

to do three things:

to love what is mortal,

to hold it

against your bones knowing

your own life depends on it,

and, when the time comes to let it go,

to let it go.

"In Blackwater Woods"

The family story about our surname is that it means owl, and that the clan chose or were chosen by it somewhere in the forests of northern Europe, up near the Baltic Sea: *rockel* – a piece of onomatopoeia like *morepork*, *boobook*, *ruru*. Humans love to identify with nubles in the fractal soul of things as it buds up, buds down to infinity, its parts at once discrete and

unified, continuing. Universes come and go. The cosmos has these ideas – starfields with their planets, planets with their landscapes dreaming up stringybarks and truffles and bettongs and owls and humans.



Early in the morning a few of weeks ago I heard a racketing of honeyeaters and blackbirds and thornbills and wrens in the hedge. It wasn't the hawk call or the snake call but the one they make when they've found a ringtail possum outside its nest or a young morepork caught in daylight before it can find dense cover. I went out and found the birds, beaks aligned like filings to a magnet, calling and pointing to a place about six metres up in one of the macrocarpas. And as I stood and watched, out of the background twigs and chiaroscuro emerged the form of a masked owl – my death, my life regarding me, calm, alert, wild.

CHRISTINE TOWNEND

The Cat Experiment

Outside, people were walking on footpaths, but inside you went through passageways and corridors to a set of small rooms where the researchers worked.

The doctor greeted me. He was tall, handsome and full of power. At first I only saw the equipment, which consisted of walls of computers, knobs and tuners, visual monitoring, sound-wave pick-ups and needles, and dials. But then I saw the cat.

Early that morning they had prepared him. Now he was ensconced in finery, the best that science could provide. He lay on a special platform. His head was fixed by a clamp so that his whiskers and cheeks were pushed upwards, and his teeth were hidden behind a metal frame. His throat had been opened, and a double set of tubing inserted into his trachea. A drop of clear blood ran down the clean white fur of his neck. The tubing and pipes joined him to a cylinder of oxygen and a cylinder of nitrous oxide. A system of dials and gauges told automatically how the balance of anaesthetic was maintaining itself.

“These pumps have been used for fifteen years,” the doctor said.

The cat’s back had been slit open also, and apparatus inserted between his shoulder-blades to assess his temperature. For the experiment it was necessary that he should be kept alive for one day, one night, and half of another day. But his normal body regulator had been paralysed by the anaesthetic. Therefore they had attached him by probes and wires to a computer which regulated a specially designed electric blanket wrapped round his lower body. You could tell, by looking at a dial, how his temperature was behaving itself. The electric blanket turned on and off automatically in a manner as efficient as natural flesh.

His wrist had been opened above the paw. The pink cushions and neat white socks of his foot lay inert on the table, and tape bound another system of tubing fixed into his vein. This

was a saline drip to prevent him from drying out. It also contained other chemicals, and kept him paralysed, so he would not twitch in a vital moment, so that he could not rebel as an electrode slipped into his brain.

Clamps were inserted deep into the holes of his ears. Some blood was on the long, soft hairs. The doctors had sealed his hindquarters in a plastic bag so that when the cat urinated it would not be offensive or messy. His tail and back paws were pressed against the plastic and he looked like a fur wrapped and packed for sale.

His breath rose and fell regularly, the only signal that he was alive. They had stitched closed his eyelids so that his eyes would not dry out, and they had stitched open his nostrils so that breath was available. His head had been slit open across the skull, and the skin clamped back. Already the bone was drying, but blood and fluid oozed from the folds of his withdrawn skin. With a drill, the doctors had made a neat hole in the skull. The brain lay exposed, pulsing in time to the pulse of the living heart, rising and falling, glistening with clear fluid which seeped from the exposed tissue.

“Now this is a delicate operation. We must remove the dura. This is the hard protective layer, which would break our needle otherwise.”

The scientist bent through the microscope. With forceps and scalpel he picked away the protective skin.

“This is long and concentrated work,” he said. “We have been here since eight thirty this morning, and we’ll continue until midnight tonight. Then tomorrow again, we’ll continue very early.”

“Aren’t you afraid the cat may die in the night?”

“The equipment’s fully automatic and maintains him in a constant state,” he replied. “Have you ever seen a brain?”

“No,” I answered. I stood up on the stool and stared down the microscope. In the circle of lens I could see the living brain, pink and radiant, crossed by red blood vessels. I stepped down again from the stool and the experimenter began to work with acrylic.

“This is to make a funnel,” he said. “The brain pulsates, and that means we cannot locate a single cell. So we must fix it in a position. There’s a plexus between the brain and skull we fill with wax, and later, when a clot develops it can be removed.”

The preliminaries were almost over now. One of the doctors produced a new instrument from a box.

“Look at this,” he said to his colleague. “Not bad eh?”

The other experimenter took it and fiddled with it. He stared into the cat’s eye, then at the wall, focussing and un-focussing the light.

“How much?” he asked.

“A hundred and eighty dollars,” the other replied.

They played with it a bit more.

“There must be so much work and knowledge involved just with the equipment,” I said. “Before you even begin it must be very exhausting.”

“It’s probably like writing a poem,” the researcher replied. “There’s a great satisfaction in doing it well, within the confines of the rules. It’s creative work – it has an aesthetic pleasure for us.”

“But if you don’t get it published there’s no point to it?”

“It’s entirely wasted,” he replied. “The knowledge you have gained dies with you.”

I thought of the vast amount of experiments that never went to print.

“At least with a poem,” I replied, “You can enjoy it for the sake of writing it. I suppose on the contrary your work would be just gruelling, if it didn’t have a purpose.”

“No,” he replied, “We enjoy the work for itself.”

He was unstitching the eyelids, and the round clear eyes of the cat stared at the screen in front of it. The experimenter squirted fluid into the eyes. A few drops ran down the animal’s cheek, and onto his nose. Then the doctor inserted contact lenses, which he chose from a box full of variety. There was so much variety – such a choice of instruments. They had drawers full of tweezers, scalpels, electrodes, wires, bottles, and all the paraphernalia of a lifetime’s collection.

“Here”, he said, “Have you ever looked into an eye?”

“No”, I answered.

“This is how you focus the instrument,” he said. “And you turn it on here. Now get very close, and look through the lens.”

I leant over the cat, the instrument between myself and his pupil. I peered deep into his eye. I saw there a magnificent fluorescent blue light, the blue of the world viewed from space. I felt something soft on my cheek. I realised it was his breath. Our breathing was mingled. His signal of living, his constant, gentle inhalation, made me draw away in shame.

“Now we have to go into the darkroom so that we can become accustomed to seeing in a dim light,” the researcher said.

I went with him into a small room. It was totally black. We stood there in the dark together, unable to witness anything about each other. He talked of rods and cones and receptors. We were locked there together in a close space.

“My eyes do not see black,” I said. “They only see blue.” It was confusing what eyeballs took and randomly decided to disseminate.

“It’s is an interesting fact,” the researcher said, “That black is actually a perception. The nerves are working all the time to pick something up, and what we see now, this blue, it would be difficult to describe.”

He was a precise, intelligent man. His voice came softly through the darkness. There was little he had not analysed.

The blue I saw was the same eternal blue which I had witnessed when I stared into the living eye of the cat, the same blue of the globe, the blue of space, the wrapping of holes beyond ordinary consciousness.

“You can come out now,” the other experimenter called.

We opened the door and went out. A dim yellow circle could be seen outlined on the screen in front of the cat. The experimenter circled it. The cat’s unconscious field of vision was fixed.

“Everything’s ready to begin,” the scientist said.

“Hey look at this,” the other remarked, going over to the screen where the heart beat of the cat was registered as a dazzling green line running in wobbles and bounces from side to side.

“Not too good, not too good,” the other replied.

“Is something wrong?” I asked.

“It seems the cat might be dying,” one said.

With so much equipment, so much electricity with so many computers, scalpels tubes and electrodes, with so many lenses to view, they still could not control life and death.

“You chose a bad cat,” one laughed.

“I’m very embarrassed,” the other joked.

“How did you choose the cat?” I asked.

“He was there in the animal house with a label and my name on it. He was the only one. We usually choose cats. You take a rabbit, and it’s just as likely to die if you give it an angry glance. Dogs come in all shapes and sizes so they mess up the equipment. But cats are similar, and they have your proverbial nine lives. They don’t usually die on you. They just go on and on living and breathing away there.”

“Is it true that sometimes experimental animals are paralysed and not anaesthetised?” I asked him.

“Sometimes,” he replied. “When you have to investigate the motor system, if the animal’s anaesthetised its nervous system doesn’t function properly. So we paralyse them instead.”

“Then the experiment would be very short?”

“Oh no, it would go on for more than one day, like this one.”

“With the animal conscious, unable to move?”

“Yes, they give it a local anaesthetic when they open up the scalp.”

“They do that here in Australia?”

“Yes,” he said. He was pressing buttons on the computer. The cat could still die if it chose to do so. But if he had stopped breathing, they would have used another. It would not have thwarted them. They had determined what they desired to do, and nothing could interfere.

“We may as well have lunch now,” the scientist said. “While it’s deciding whether to live or die.”

I was left alone in the room for a few minutes. I sat on a stool beside the living, unconscious cat, with all the tubes and pipes protruding from its veins and mechanics. I watched its heart-beat racing across the screen in fluorescent green; I watched the breath come in and out of its crumpled, clamped mouth. I watched the clear, large eyes staring

vacantly at the screen in front of it, and the pink fluid oozing from the holes in the brain. I wanted to rip the machinery from his living body and stitch his wounds. But he could not ever live again now. He was so much a mutilated scrap, just a body of fur that could never be mended.

Soon the scientists came back into the room. We sat in the dim light, beneath the computers, the heart rate and temperature readings, at the verge of discovering brains were nothing except mechanics. Because he was a conjurer, with power over living things, there in the dim lights I confided to him my life story while the cat breathed on the table behind us, forever breathing and never quite dying.

After we had finished lunch, they lowered the electrode deep into the brain by slowly twisting a knob. They turned on the sound and the room became filled with the static of the brain. We stood in the noise of thinking, in the currents of consciousness, being showered with the crackle and exchange, the discharge of life itself.

The cat was still alive.

“Beautiful” the scientists shouted. They had located the point of vision of a single cell as it perceived a disc, resulting in an outpouring of noise. Their faces were glowing. Their work, the painful preparation, the days of planning, the years of learning, the drawers of instruments had not been wasted.

With the green messages registering on the screen, and as they began to compile their information in figures and lists, I thanked them and slipped from the room. I went down the corridor, and out again into the world where people were walking, and driving in cars.

NB: This experiment took place in 1975 at the University of Sydney. When I wrote recently to the Animal Welfare Review Panel of NSW, my local State member, the NH&MRC, and other relevant authorities, none of the recipients were prepared to state that similar experiments are no longer carried out. One can therefore only assume that such experiments are still being conducted within NSW. At a recent meeting with two people involved with animal experimentation at the University of Sydney, I was advised that this experiment is no longer being carried out on cats. It is now conducted using rodents.

SUSAN ADAMS

Slow Bleeding

Thin air takes.
Drift, and hallucinate.
Pain moves to slow places,
my fingers start to freeze.

The face in the mirror
wax yellow lips on a parchment skin.
I'm staring at my grave.

Surgery has taken much blood,
didn't consent to it being this way.
It's hard to breathe, each step is weak,
waves roll through space in my head.
I feel the distance.

I can hear a cut goat bleating for hours
get slower and see him again in Pakistan
tethered to a stake
brutally purified by slow exsanguination
the red circles getting fainter.
We totter with the frailty of beasts
and I know he is a brother.

CHRIS BROWN

The nocturnal ceremonies

There are the turnstiles to NUMBER EIGHT
or the dealer's codes compulsion ignores

darn it! the basement blown globe drowsy end
ings unresolved but morning brings me up to date

the *City sweats* or someone's does faint-
of-breath curtains of a bay window

painted shut eleven mute the skies, rattling sill

--

Overplayed street names of our golden image
fling the kid home on the spinning seat

of an office chair send me the bill.

*Guilt me in the guest-room (from which
all sound carries!) I'll have my humanity to blame.*

The fugitive scales the fence, skims a bonnet,
and backtracks as any roving beam of blue moonlight testifies.

MICHAEL FARRELL

Character

You don't know how to write yourself, the instructors would say when the character fell down between the blackboards. You're like a meal that thinks it's a cook, they'd add. Then if it was allowed, the character would go out, to wander the hills of fire. It carried all its meanings in a swag, and bowed down like a penitent, with a golf ball in its mouth instead of a plum. It was autumn. Other characters roamed the hills in solitude. Up and down like a fork to a mouth, a mouth hooked on canned tropical foods, but no such mouth existed. What would you do if I turned into libido incarnate, the character asked a fountain. Waves crashed against the cardgame. It was the south, where it took too few sailing boats to give the area an aura of cosmopolitanism. The servants of one hill, smoking on the balcony of its chateau, mistook the character for a doctor and took ill. They all yearned for the drugs that were carried in the character's bag which contained but a roadmap and a few peanuts (seven peanuts say). Let us out! is what the peanuts said, but for the character to notice or to hear the voices of peanuts ... that would not be the road to autonomy, which was not marked. Everything went to form – and deform – but nothing to inform, this bootlike truth is what the character digested alone with all the others on the hills of Bombay or was it Cootamundra. They could have taken a bus or taxi (there being enough of them to share and it still be cheap) to shelter (from the tyranny of instruction) in a wormhole

on the fourleaf coast, yet why they might've
asked, hasten the process. And if so much might be accrued from the known or
apparent, what strings of popcorn – and what flavours – might be popped
from the unknown. The army base at least had melted under the burden of its own
propinquity. Living through the war was the only reward
they sought, that and a lining to the harsh
voices that resounded like a stapler chewing gum in an
iron tank or a cash register mistaken for toffee.

ALISON GORMAN

January water dragons

All summer he watches
me heft my basket down
the grassy slope and slip
on fallen longan fruit.
Today, he lies on sandstone,
next to the pegs
pressing a push up,
with muscled forearms
and a rusted belly.
He wears reptilian plaid.
A grey, nubbled suit
splashed with ink. A tiny
crest runs down his spine
and he is still, except
for one sweeping eye.
A small, dark moon ringed
with gold.

Peg by peg, towel by towel,
sheets and shorts, I move
along the line. My bare legs.
His black claws. I taste
the salt on my top lip.
Two towels away from him
I drop a peg. His head

begins to bob and tilt
as he warns his hidden
harem.

A dragoness tail
disappears in a thin
streak through the fence.
Others run like overwound
toys through a flurry
of leaves up into the loquat
tree. As I walk backward
to collect my basket,
he lies still again, his eye
half closed.

At our back door, three
baby dragons drink
from a dripping tap.
Heirs to a dynasty
from the Miocene.
We are tenants in their kingdom,
living on summer's lease.
I step closer and the babies
slide into the drain.
They swim as the water
eddies and pulls them
into the pipe that will take
them back to the garden
and beyond.

JOHN KINSELLA

Birth on the Road to Gubbeen

I didn't match the noise, the bellowing
with anguish of that kind, but Tracy did.
I did notice the plethora of rooks and brethren
on wires, in trees, even over the fields —
their croaks were deep and rich and disturbing
outside the usual ontological scratching.
We showered. I looked out towards Mount
Gabriel, the radar domes glowing through cloud.
The corona of rooks had widened, as if warning
shots had been fired, but there was silence.
And then a four-wheeler kicked over,
and a cow called out to the coast,
her voice reverberating deep into hills
burrowed and lacerated by Neolithic miners
frantic for copper to mix with Cornish tin.
A bronze age in the bronze horns and bells
of all cows fallen here. So many reverberations,
so much pain in the most beautiful moments.
This cow is marched down the road, afterbirth
hanging from her vagina, a thread of making
going back to single cells, to cosmology.
Divining her bereft, bloody sway
you'll contemplate past and future, rooks
notarising an apologue of origins sharp as birth.
And the four-wheeler with newborn calf
slung over the lap of the master, midwife
to economy, the fleshpots of capitalism.

FRANK RUSSO

A Ponsonby Road menagerie

See the woodblock-mounted rabbit stretched out mid-leap –
ears upright, hind legs kicked back as it jumps
over tannin-coloured jars of Wild Rosella Body Balm
and Dauphin Cleansing Body Milk –

its feet fixed to a log, glass eyes set to catch
the gaze of passing shoppers. On the wall a fox has snared
a rodent. It hangs beside a triptych of the Stations
of the Cross. A woman's hand

reaches to sample a tube of certified organic honey
and paw paw (petrochemical free). Her hand drops a shelf
– she can't resist brushing the rabbit's delicate pelt.

In World, the bust of a moose is mounted
beside a wildebeest, an ibex, a roan antelope.
They watch over racks of Beau Brummel waistcoats
and belle époque reproduction dresses with leopard brocade,

saying *Here, there's a hunt to be had*
on sale item Prussian suits and autocorrelation shirts,
millennial pants and flamingo trousers in fire engine red
and Yves Klein blue. Nearby gift stores sell

ceramic parrots in shades of mint and Persian green
and cardboard trophy deer heads
with machine-cut slots to affix fragments of antler and snout.

In the gallery at number 10, nature
isn't something to be tamed, but modified:
on a pedestal sits a baby doll, its head replaced with a bunny's.
Its plastic arms and legs reach out as if longing for a hug.

Here the hindquarters of rodents
trail brightly-dyed cotton balls
and birds have clusters of glass beads for breasts –
they lie on their backs, tiny feet curled up in search of a branch.

And when all this art becomes a wild boar, at Murder Burger
the venison is served with sporty spice hunting sauce;
at Sidart, the ostrich with liquorice and haloumi.

At Wunderkammer, amongst the cabinets
stuffed with rose quartz cat rings and garnets
set in sterling silver, a pole cat hisses, ready to spring
from its wooden shelf. Wax models

of stillborn calves are set amid the men's costume shoes.

A school of dried piranha swims in a waterless tank,
a sparrow's frame is caught in a resin coffin.

In the window two mallards are on display,

necks stretched, their faces inquisitive.

Such perfect specimens, they could be exhibits,
if it weren't for the red bowler hat

the larger duck sports

– a nice touch

when surrounded by so much death.

COREY WAKELING

Ombudsman Reader

An acceleration to good news not Fairfax nor News Corp but
A spectacular slap to the jowl, Australian reader.
We all went to Oxford but then took Auden's class at Michigan
During which he dreamed his departures – there are many,
Some national, some intellectual, some formerly private – indeed,
How many British sowed cattle prods on the Eastern coast of America,
Of which we were not capable, furniture removalists to Pembroke
And others when not in Oxford, making a side quid
On bare knuckles. We rap the knuckles ourselves.
Hope the late-blooming pervert too savages the selfie trend
Of a funereal canon. Dig yourself, Lazarus: better, mortify yourself.
Seek out all measles. Salt your sores, scratch them and then roast
Them, then sell them back as volumes, because my bookshelf
Lain bare and my still undressed children need sustenance
And shelter in the miner's cottage. Fed, ombudsman reader settles
Into the stone bench outside by the wayward daisies and the monument
Waratah, behind which the hagnoscope, which gains the view
Of despondent nudity to this poverty. The contracts to local council
Remit, but fain class anyhow, which the family tries to conceal
With jam trees, which are never privet. Where is the privet I can't
See the forest for, anyhow? Happiness can take over affirmation,
Which still makes of the colleges a briny rhetoric for self-presence
And self-preservation. What you called salty, once upon a time.
When we're beef steaks, how soon Indonesia, because knowing
The primeval inhale of all metallic alarms, fate of the hagnoscope
Head, if it has its own gestures, might drink in the evaporate.
Artisan automata mechanic and my friend uses the word

Breatharian, which is likeable on the East coast, since it has little
Masonic origin, whereas get further south and you might have
Protests against your Rosicrucianism. Fuck such protests
When the slap or the knuckle rap bests alertness.
The caravan has cruised all day without interruption, if
We keep pushing we'll make it to camp in time
For the burials. No contract has any place there, and though
They might get us to sign some documents later
I do think we've out-run the bureaucrats, their manners
Giving our acceleration more than a day's grace.
Can the selfie face the bankruptcy, though? Make more musical
Trinkets to invite, if not gods, then sacrifices.
We are happy invoking our names in sport, it appears.
Eddie Goes to Poetry City but do I go to Adelaide, and is this
The joke behind the waiter that does not act.
This sounds like all the political writers condemned to death,
Antipathetic even to the casual foodie at the upmarket
Restaurant where Mephistopheles always eats,
Surrounded by a goat herd whose landscape feed is replaced
With corn, and we know what this does to their eyes:
It turns them red waratah. Speechless, reader.
Do not eat what aspic preserves.

HETTIE ASHWIN

Roadkill

It would be so easy to just close my eyes. But I can't.

I should be crying or screaming until my throat is raw and my tears cut canyons into my cheeks, but I'm not. I feel ... scared, although this word doesn't seem enough. Fragile? Broken? I think I feel broken.

My eye is level with the gritty, pale brown dirt. Every tiny little pebble, every minuscule stone is there, mocking my short life. They probably have been on the earth for a couple of millennia and I've only been here for fifty years. A mere squib. If I make my eye turn and try to focus, it hurts, but I can see the roo that hit me. Smack across my chest at the speed limit. We slewed across the road, the bike flipping onto our tangled lives, thumping, rolling, crashing over and over, bruising, burning, breaking until the inertia petered out, the energy spent.

We are linked, he and I. He is breathing. I am breathing and we are broken bodies, colliding through space. An accident in time. Of all the places in the world, the universe, the cosmos, we came together. It's almost a miracle.

I know this road. I have ridden this black strip thinking I had a purpose. Going places, on the move. It's been a theme of my life. Don't stop, or you will see the truth. Keep travelling. There are cars that travel this highway. People with a destination, a sense of an idea, a usefulness.

A car will be along and I'll be taken to hospital, patched up, flowers, well wishes and I'll go on with my life. All I need is someone to see me. Just one person. One person in the whole world who will be on the road going somewhere – and see me.

I know I will be alright, because ... I just know it. Hope is all I have and I can't let it go, not yet.

I want to move, and my mind commands my body, but there is something in revolt. The chain that links who I am to what I can be has snapped and all I can do is think and look and listen. The roo is thinking too. He is looking at me, I can feel it. He knows we are dying. We have each other and that is all. He knows there will be no rescue. No flashing lights. No sirens wailing their lament as they race along the bitumen ribbon, the white lines counting the minutes until a life is spent. There will be silence, and dreams.

A warm trickle is working its way down my leg. I try to believe it's my blood, my life leaking onto the ground, but I would be lying to myself, because I know it is the last vestige of civilised life letting go. It is too steady, too insistent and hot to be anything but piss. Then it stops and my degradation is complete. When the blood does come it is from my neck. Primordial ooze that seeps along the ground picking up the earth, bits of sticks, stones and carries them along in a trail that leads to nowhere. It congeals and slows its journey, turning dark red in the sun. My life is that trail. I raced out to see life, and then people and things attached themselves to me along the way. I had a vigour that was bright red and insistent. A desire to move beyond my confines and reach out. But I was caught in the sun and began to slow. Began to congeal and set boundaries until I was just a dry withered track. A trail blazed that no-one wanted to follow.

People just don't die on the side of the road. It doesn't happen like that. I will be missed. Someone might miss me. I should have made friends more easily. I should have let people in my life. Things can get so complicated with others, but I should have tried. I'm not a bad person just because I don't have friends. Relationships are complex, demanding, thorny, like three corner jacks.

The roo is rasping. Small gulps of life that spark and fade, spark and fade. With each laboured breath he knows he is closer to death. I don't think he will struggle. I wonder if I should. I'm just another animal, like him and why should I think different. I hope he doesn't suffer. My breath sounds like bubbling water. Does he know I'm dying? Does he feel any empathy for me?

I want to comfort him, but I can't move. I'll watch over him until he's gone. A lone sentinel to his passing. He is big. Probably two metres. Thick back legs, a strong tail. His body is still, just a faint rise and fall from his chest. I can just hear him and so I close my eyes against the inevitable, just for a moment, when there is a scream. A howling from the depths of his soul. A cry against all the injustice of the world to be caught on a road, in the middle of the bush, against the odds and smashed to the ground. For what? A bellow of pain and misery

at the inadequacy of his body to heal, to mend, to own the land once more. He spasms and turns his head to look at me. A look of understanding. A look of compassion. I want to howl, to cry, to beat my chest, but all I can do is blink. My throat croaks, my lungs are washed with blood and all I can do is blink.

I hear a car. It is so real I can see the passengers inside, air con on, radio on. They are going somewhere and are having a good time. I can see them look out the window and notice me. See the roo and my bike, broken. They will stop and call on their mobile phones. I'll be put in an ambulance and I'll be saved. It's close and I'm breathing hard, expectant.

I know if they had seen me they would have stopped. I might be in a ditch or behind a bush. Stinging tears of hope scold my wishful thinking. I squeeze me eyes shut and curse my optimism through gritted teeth.

Nature is all around me. If I'd only taken the time to look, to feel, to enjoy. Now I can see ants, bugs, tiny insects and flies. The flies are drawn to my blood. They scurry over the sticky pool, greedy for nourishment, not realizing I have to die to give them life. It's the natural order of things, but somehow I feel cheated. I feel I have more of a right to life than the flies, the ants and the insects. How can they profit from my life? It isn't fair. The roo can see that as he watches his own battle with the flies around his eyes.

"Close your eyes," I say to him from my mind, but I know he wants to face death head on, eyes wide open. He doesn't want to be blind to the inevitable.

The ants are methodical. Their scouts have found a source and it's like a gold rush. They are no different to us. Deplete the resource and move on. I can feel an ant on my face. It is looking for a way in, a way to the mother lode. All I can do is close my eyes.

It's hot. The sun is burning through my eyelids and I can hear feet. I can't help it, but I'm excited. Now I do want to live. I want to go on, to see things, to have a second chance at everything. I could make some friends. I might try to be open to love, to drink the cup of life. I can only open one eye, the one nearest the ground and so I search for salvation.

It is a crow.

It's pecking at the roo. He can't move, his eyes are fixed on me and he is pleading. I feel so totally helpless. So useless. It's been the story of my life. His last request and I can't accede. If I only do one thing in my life, this has to be it.

My mouth is dry. My tongue is cracked. My lips are blisters of raw meat. I know I have to think it to do it. So I begin to imagine how I can call out. How I can spit, cry out, move. It seemed so simple as a child. I used to do it without a care in the world. The action starts in my lungs. They are popping now. Big vomits of blood and air gurgle up my wind pipe and threaten to choke me. I don't want to think what they look like. So I imagine they are sprinter's lungs, bursting with life, oxygen and youth. They fill to capacity and the air travels up to my voice box. Those tremulous cords ready to sing at my command. Strings eager to vibrate with defiance. I open my mouth; the corners tight like dove-tail joints, and imagine I can shout to that devil in black. Get away, we're not done living yet.

I can feel life coming up and I look over to the roo.

I thought I made a noise. I felt I did, but the crow remained. I want to try again, but the disappointment of my attempt breaks my heart. I failed. I always fail. My eye is stinging and I know there are tears. Who am I crying for? The roo, or myself?

I'd like to believe in God. Perhaps that was missing in my life. Perhaps that's why no one will come. I don't believe. Would it seem opportunistic if I started now? Would my conceit let me? Even now I have to hold onto my pride. The roo has no notions of purpose. He sees life as it comes. I look at him and know we are not so different. No-one will mourn his passing. No-one will grieve for me. To the crow, the ants, the ground, we are nothing more than a way to survive. A nourishment to the cycle of life.

How long have I been dying? Perhaps my whole short life. The roo's breaths are shallow now, whispered, quiet as he waits. He's holding onto life by our connection. There is a thin line, a thread of life that we share, but it will be broken when he closes his eyes. If I am rescued, he will be left behind. Life isn't fair and he knows this truth, we all do.

I can feel a rumble from the ground. It's a low vibration that feels like the earth is getting ready to embrace us.

It's a truck.

Hope wells in my throat, my lungs, my broken heart and I try to temper the feeling. He won't see me. I'm too far in the bush. I think I'd rather die out here, nobly, silent, with pride, than be rescued and know no-one thought about me, no-one cared.

The truck is stopping. Air brakes hissing their protest as the rig comes to a halt. I try to be angry, but I'm grasping, greedy for life. Someone is running through the bush, blundering, cursing, thrashing to get to me. I can hear them breathing, panting, then nothing.

My mind is playing a cruel trick and the despair is a weight crushing my very soul. I can't even cry.

A voice.

I can hear a voice and I want to wallow in the joy, the moment of hope. A boot appears in my field of vision and it has stepped in my blood. We have made a connection. I can see the roo and he knows what I now know. Would I swap my life for his?

There is running and then I have a moment alone with the roo. It's never fair, I tell him in my thoughts. The boot returns and I know what I hear, but refuse to acknowledge it.

The roo grabs my gaze.

I care, I tell him. He holds me with his eyes and a single shot rings out.

His ordeal is over, mine has just begun.

TEJA B. PRIBAC

Fishy feelings

After Victoria Braithwaite¹

*Zhuangzi and Huizi were strolling along the bridge over the Hao River.
Zhuangzi said, "The minnows swim about so freely, following the openings wherever they take them.*

Such is the happiness of fish."

Huizi said, "You are not a fish, so whence do you know the happiness of fish?"

Zhuangzi said, "You are not I, so whence do you know I don't know the happiness of fish?"

– Zhuangzi: *Essential Writings*, translated by B. Zyporyn

Trout made headlines in May 2003. No, it was not the Year of the Trout according to some newly discovered astrological system, nor was it Steve Raymond's book with the same title in which the author's little fella salivates "as he feels the strong pull of a bite on the line" (as Amazon.com describes the unfortunate event of an angled fish).² Steve's book was published back in 1985.

No, it was a scientific paper published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*. And it was not really the trout who made headlines – you know, the individual trout who suffered and died for the supposed benefit of the whole of the trout race, a bit like Jesus or our soldiers, except that the trout never volunteered. No, the media attention focused on Victoria and Mike who had just conducted experiments on trout trying to establish whether fish feel pain. You know, fish. I mean, you don't hear them screaming *Mama!!* or going *Oh fuck that bloody hurt!* or shedding oceans of tears like children, or doing faces like a human or a dog does, which would kind of indicate that some nociceptor (receptor of noxious stimuli) somewhere detected the damaged tissue, sent the signal off to the spinal cord, then to the brain and voila! *live or die!*

Pain detection is really quite important for animals, it triggers all sorts of actions that potentially benefit survival. Like when you experience some serious injury: if your body didn't detect it and alert you to it, you could start counting hours – so to speak, because without such information you wouldn't really know you should be counting.

¹ Braithwaite, V. 2010. *Do Fish Feel Pain?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

² <http://www.amazon.com/The-Year-Trout-Steve-Raymond/dp/0832903841>

Okay, this is not quite so straightforward after all. As P.D. Wall writes: “Nowhere is the problem of pain in humans and [other] animals more deliberately confused than by the introduction of pseudoscience surrounding the word *nociception*.”³ But definitional and practical issues aside, you’ve got to start somewhere, and Vic and Mike naturally thought it would be a good idea to check out if trout have nociceptors. Believe it or not, at the end of the twentieth century we still had no idea whether the largest group of vertebrates possesses the gross anatomy that might enable some kind of feeling of pain. Gross! Of course, we had lots of reasons *not* to.

Between the mere presence of nociceptors and the subjective experience of suffering there’s a whole huge world of neurobiological and chemical activity as well as several important unknowns, such as what is referred to as the ‘hard problem’, which describes the gap in our understanding of how *physical* processes inside our body and brain translate into *subjective* experience, i.e. our feelings. We don’t know how this works in humans either. We just know that we feel and that we are conscious because we can tell it to each other. Other animals of course don’t speak our language so some people say we’ll never know if other animals are conscious, and use this *cognitive deficiency* as an excuse to position themselves above all other animals. You know, the human way.

Anyway, taking all these things into consideration, if they were to demonstrate that fish feel pain, Vic and Mike, inspired by the freshness of the Edinburgh mountain air, or perhaps quietly intrigued by Nessie up north, had to design experiments that would address a few major issues. (P.S. Nessie is actually a trout! Huge, like a whale, you could ride her if she let you. She chooses to remain invisible most of the time though. She feels safer this way because there are too many humans around, she says. She’s like god. She *is* god, the god of trout: all the other trout were created in her image. And trout apparently really like teasing other peoples, especially humans, even though humans are not aware of this. They say: “Our god lives in Scotland! Where does yours live?” I saw Nessie once. Some ten years ago, I was walking past the Loch after a guided tour to the nearby whisky distillery, and there she was! In all her magnificence. She spoke to me. I couldn’t believe it. And nor do other people when I tell them. You know, people have to see, touch, taste, dissect, destroy, annihilate before admitting existence. That’s why she hides.)

³ Wall, P.D. 1992. Defining ‘Pain in Animals’, in: Short, C.E. & A. Van Poznak (eds), *Animal Pain*, New York: Churchill Livingstone.

So, for a start Vic and Mike had to find nociceptors. If they discovered nociceptors they'd have to carry out further experiments to make sure that these nociceptors are actually nociceptors and respond to noxious stimuli, then further tests to establish whether the fish are aware and conscious, or even self-conscious. So complex and challenging is this process that it's no wonder people hadn't bitten into it before.

But let's start from the beginning.

To find out whether fish have nociceptors, Vic and Mike had to kill the fish. Okay, you might think maybe they didn't need to go to such an extreme, they could have just pricked the fish or something moderately less fatal. But no, see, they weren't recording nociception in the process of killing the fish, the murder was *necessary* so that they could then slice up the fish and watch the nerves under a microscope.

The first stage was a real success because as it turned out trout have nerves and fibres that look like other animals' nociceptors! (You can just imagine Nessie leaping in and out of the Loch that day because she hadn't known this either; she's not really into science...)

Okay, now that the nociceptors had been found, the next thing to do before moving to difficult questions such as fish awareness and consciousness, was to record electrical activity in the nerves to establish that these supposed nociceptors actually relay nociceptive signals.

To do that, they had to... well, find a new trout to start with, and then knock the trout unconscious. You might think this is weird (especially given that at this stage we don't even know if the fish possesses consciousness), but no, it works. As Vic says: "Although the fish were 'knocked out' and unaware of what was going on around them, their nervous system was still functioning, and with the appropriate form of stimulation, electrical impulses could pass along the nerves."

And they did! The impulses came through, which brings us to a successful completion of the second stage and the confirmation that nociceptors are well and alive in fish and doing their job.

The next thing to check was whether this nerve activity had some kind of impact on the fish that could suggest that fish are capable of *experience*. Using the dying art of common sense thinking, Vic and Mike figured that to establish the presence of an impact or lack thereof, they could look for physical and behavioural changes such as those that occur in humans when they experience pain. So they settled on observing the trout's breathing rate, heart rate and drop in hunger level. Still far from the big question of fish self-awareness,

feeling and consciousness, to measure the trout feeding behaviour, knowing how wary trout are of humans, the researchers placed the tanks with the fish in them behind curtains and watched the trout through the slits in the curtains, ensuring in this way that “we could move and make notes about the various behaviours without the fish being aware of us,” as Vic explains.

(Just on the side, in case you don't know: This awareness business is a huge puzzle, I'm not sure it will ever get solved. Most scientists, philosophers and others preoccupied with the issue agree that nonhuman animals are aware of other creatures and things around them, but they are not sure that animals are aware of themselves. That is, the mind that is aware of the other might not be aware of the self. In other words, I am aware that you are here, but I am not necessarily aware that *I* am here while I am here being aware that you are here, or I am aware that you are here but I am not aware of the fact that I am aware of your presence while I'm being aware of your presence. This capacity of utter detachment that some humans attribute to nonhuman animals is so amazing and so hard to conceive that we should give big grants out to people willing to work on this mystery.)

But back to the trout; sure enough, the trout exhibited all the predicted, human-like changes, confirming in this way that noxious stimuli impact the trout. But do they *feel* pain?

Vic and Mike wrote up their findings up to this stage, and probably much to the satisfaction of the grant-giver they appeared in the above mentioned prestigious publication. Speaking of grantors though, according to the first grant proposal Vic and Mike submitted, they wanted to focus their research on fins and flanks, having the potential welfare of farmed fish in mind, but the scientists judging the application suggested they focus on the mouth, with clearly so-called recreational fishing in mind. And so they did: Vic and Mike explored the mouth of the trout. But not with hooks, as the grantors suggested, no, that would have probably been too *impactful* for the fish (we wouldn't want to use the term *painful* yet since we are still trying to work out if such a thing as fish pain exists), so they used bee venom and vinegar instead. And much to the disappointment of the media surrounding the publication of the study, Vic and Mike could not answer the only questions the media seemed to be interested in: Is angling cruel? Are the fish in pain?

This is because Vic and Mike didn't research angling. They researched the impact of bee venom and acetic acid on the fish nerves and behaviour. (And we shouldn't underestimate vinegar and bee venom! You have no idea how many fish get bitten by bees! Seriously, bees are second to humans to induce strong fear-like responses in Nessie. Also think of all the

citric acid [maybe lemon juice would have been a better experimental choice than vinegar] that at least in the Mediterranean cuisine is constantly poured on heat-exposed and anaesthetised beyond recovery [read: grilled] trout!)

But the real problem of answering the media questions was that none of the evidence gathered in these experiments sufficed to claim without doubt that fish are conscious, self-aware, and can actually *feel* pain.

The best answer Vic and Mike could come up with to address the question about the cruelty of angling was: “Well, possibly...”, and they were not thrilled when the media twisted their words and made angling sound cruel. Because, you see, no good professional will scream in horror and urge the world to stop angling (and similar practices) until further research establishes that fish *don't* feel pain. No, a good professional will leave the society and all its weird habits and (mis)conceptions alone until there's absolutely no doubt that suffering beyond measure *is* occurring, and only then will they advance the idea that perhaps, you know, if there's a chance, maybe, if it's not too inconvenient economically or too disruptive to your weekend plans or Friday night dinner with friends... we might, you know, possibly... try to find a more humane way of ...?

So scientists designed other experiments that would address these big dilemmas around fish subjectivity, like many other scientists are doing with other animals, over and over again, trapped, caged, electrocuted, starved, prived and deprived, sliced up and sewn back together, dead or alive, to prove something that can never be proven to those who refuse to see, touch, taste... with their heart.

Hide, Nessie, hide.

ROO STOVE

Vagrancy Act 1966

The blue of the night was superb. Never was there full darkness in this part of the city – like it was never really quiet, never very clean. Night was merely an adjustment to more absence. The people left, but you knew that they had been. They left their remnants. It blew down the streets and overflowed from bins. They left bits of their auras oozing about the railway stations, caught in perfumes and sweat.

As I walked home I dreamt of their lives, these commuters with computers and rewards for their diligence. Was it worth it? Did it cost as much as they earned? Did they miss too much? Children growing, flowers blowing, the wind taking off with their lives. Money bought too many choices.

I gave away the choosing – accidentally at first. A boss, disagreeing with my work manner, showed me the door and as I went through, the absolute relief taught me to fly. I was made light. Of course, my parents were saddened that I'd *lost* my first job. But I hadn't lost it. I knew exactly where it was; in that pokey, smelly institutional maze, with cubicles repeated, filled with bent heads. The job was still there, not lost, it just had a new doer. When I *lost* the next job, my parents weren't sad anymore. They were disappointed, and it grew from there to what was an ugly anger by the time I was sacked from my fifth place. I was still flying, buoyed by the liberation when my father showed me our own doorway and told me not to come back through it until I was secure in a job.

I never really knew what that meant, so I've never been back. Well, just that once. Secure? Who is? My father had been in the same job since I'd known him and had probably remained there even after he had un-known me, but was he secure in his job? I had my doubts. Was he even still alive?

I had doubts about a lot of stuff. I knew I couldn't survive in the suburbs so I took a train to the city. No return ticket for me. Not ever again. But I had

uncertainties about the quality of life I could afford. Twenty five dollars and some chewing gum would not last.

When I arrived at the doors of what was then known as The Department of Social Security, I couldn't walk in. There was a sinister but invisible punch going on. You could see people, actually watch people, walk up to the doors with a straight back and as they went through the door an unseen force would whack shame right on into their being and they would slump, beaten. The Government had to write instructions and directions on the floor of the office because nobody would look up after that punch. The shame was too heavy. "Wait here. Follow the Blue Line to forms. Red Line to Family Allowance."

Secure. Security. It seemed important to my father and to the Government, so it began to scare me. To do all you could do to gain a sense of security in society's eyes appeared to ultimately lead to humiliation, or some form of submission. I saw the people leave that Government building compressed small into their own sense of failure. Nobody smiled leaving. In the end I remained on the outside, I did not apply for the Dole. I could not walk through that door. Surely I could make it on my own? Really, did I even need to be that socially secure?

That was many years ago. Eventually, the Government changed the name of The Department of Social Security. They knew they were aiming too high, professing to provide social security to the needy. Give the perpetually poor a Welfare Department that does not offer them the unreachable. Social security for every underprivileged person costs more than any Government can afford.

It began to drizzle a little bit, making oily road rainbows under each street light as I walked toward my place. I could hear sirens in the less sleepy part of the city; the area that rouses when the rest of town slips to sleep. Where once in the middle of the night I'd had my identification stolen and I thought it best to let it become the last time I was ever irrefutably me. I didn't replace any of my personal documents. There didn't seem to be a point. It meant I could be anyone.

I didn't want any documents or cards confirming I shared my father's last name. The man would never let me back home; he proved it that first winter when I had pneumonia. All I had really wanted was a soothing word from my mother,

but she shut herself in their bedroom afraid, while my father, irate, sent me away again, rejected and cold. It was a tough winter but I made it through.

The theft of my ID was like a new beginning. With a new cheerfulness, I wanted to put from my mind the false start of a scanty childhood and construct a new start, a purposeful middle and perhaps a spectacular end. No more would I carry reminders of who I was. That person was my father's failure. I could be my own success – on my own terms.

Around this time I met Balthazar. He fast became my best friend. We hung together most days and I learnt a great deal from him. For someone young, he was sophisticated, street-wise and world-wise. There was confidence in his every move. People openly stared as we walked down the street. Balthazar had a presence.

One Friday we were sitting in a cafe having a silly religious debate about the legitimacy of the Bible as basis for religious construct.

“The Bible is not about truth of mind, but truth of heart,” Balthazar was saying, when two policemen approached us. “It's...”

“We're going to have to move you on,” one of them said to me.

“What? Why? Were we being too loud? We can quieten down.”

“Do you have any money?” the Policeman asked me as if I hadn't spoken.

“What? No. But Balthazar here's going to pay.”

The Policeman looked confused.

“Do you have any ID?” he asked me.

“No, but...”

“Do you want to be charged with Loitering?”

“No! Of course I don't. But we weren't loitering. We're waiting for an order. Get your hands off me!”

The back of a Paddy Wagon is not very comfortable. The Psychiatric Unit the Police tumbled us toward has since closed down, and that's a good thing. It was appalling. They had me on a seventy-two-hour hold, but after seeing the magistrate, it was another two months before I was allowed out. Needles were

plunged into me. I was separated from Balthazar. I could barely function. Nothing made sense. Ugly things happened in there that I cannot even begin to talk about. It was like I'd been plunged off the irregular edge of reality and was never quite able to regain my footing. Eventually, I realised that I needed to deny Balthazar even existed before I'd be released; which was crazy.

“Balthazar is not real,” I finally said, trampled into acquiescence. “I was delusional.”

The whole experience left me with a healthy fear of policemen and doctors. It was so long ago now, but whenever I see a policeman I have a full blown anxiety attack and I need to put distance between us immediately. Even the sirens I heard as I made my way home tilted my world unsteady.

However, there is joy in my life, when it is still. Nobody can take that away or make me deny it. A warm afternoon in the park with the regulated sound of the sprinklers twirling arcs of water across the gardens can soothe me to sleep. The crackle of autumn leaves under foot can put a snap in my step, and finding money on the ground can buy me a bonus cup of coffee.

When I finally reached my home I found there was someone asleep in my doorway.

“Balthazar?” I asked, excited.

“Go away,” mumbled the stranger. He was wrapped in my blanket.

“But this is my spot.” I said, before I walked away. Peace being all I've ever really wanted.

The rain had eased and I thought perhaps I'd wander up to the church. Sometimes I'd find Balthazar there in the walled gardens, always ready with his hello grin and a story. Other times, as the city's night sound muted into that fleeting hush before the rush, I'd just find a little peace.

MILLY VRANES

Heat

It gets cold in Leura during winter. The air crackles and a powder fine frost crystalises on windows. Mists often roll in and thickly cover the area. If you blundered outside you would think you were the only person alive so thickly does the mist descend about your head. It surrounds you like a curtain made of white moiré fabric. Only the mist is not warm. Droplets of water accumulate on your skin and soon run down your face. A single droplet can hang off the end of your nose and quiver till, with an annoyed wipe of your cold and damp hand, it is flung off. It leaves space for another to form and draw ire as your clothes condense and the cold insidiously creeps into your bones. Lips do turn blue and they can turn your mouth into a postbox-like slit. This was why William Beck avoided the great outdoors on days like these. But even indoors on days like these he could not escape the cold.

His house was set in the exact centre of ten acres of bush. It was old. It cost a fortune to heat and so not all rooms were heated. Heat cost money and money, cash money, was something Beck lacked. In fact, the library was the only room with a still functioning fireplace and it was here that a small fire roared. Its light played lovingly on the spines of books some of which were so old that they were worth more than the house.

Beck knew that heat was not the best of things for his books. But, he often thought, as long as his books lasted for the duration of his life then he would not worry. And he was an old, old man. Besides, his beloved loved warmth, too. He could touch their spines gently. Of course the epitome of his tomes were well cosseted behind glass. They sat like the magnificates they were – untouchable and off limits. These were only to be admired from an appropriate distance. They were to be revered.

There is none so obsessed as a book collector. Same book – one hundred editions. Special gloves. No one is to touch. So was William Beck. Huge house, one man, one love. Books. Well, two loves really – books and warmth. Not to say that he also did not love money. He loved money only because he could buy more books – and the fancy shelves that his books required. You did not set a \$50,000 book on a cheap pine bookcase. Over the years his obsession had made Beck cash poor. When one visitor had suggested he sell his books they had been escorted to the door and curtly told to mind their own business. Beck would have sworn that he had heard the pages of his books rattle in delight and paper-thin applause.

Beck did not need real people. He had people in his books. He also had love, adventure and heroics. He was Achilles. He was Lord Byron and Don Juan and Manfred. But, he was also Henry Lawson. He was John Paines. And he had even been Titania. And the list went on.

He never entered his library without the thrill of pleasure tingling along his spine and in his fingers. He lived alone and his library was the only room he cleaned thoroughly. Dust could be several layers thick elsewhere but here there was not one speck. House-keepers be damned was Beck's thought about help.

The thing with having a fire in the library was that all the books came alive without his having to open them. The light of the fire danced on their spines and sent pinnacles of light shining. But today he had no more wood. This fire was the last of his wood for now. He had run out. But worse, he had no money to replenish his supply. His last few thousands had gone towards a folio edition of Shakespeare's works. Yes, it was a reprint but it was worth every cent for it was beautiful.

Beck sighed and sat in his fraying armchair and gazed around him in contentment as his last logs burned and the flames slowly subsided. He gave an involuntary shiver as the flames got lower and lower and just the embers glowed. He pulled a blanket over his knees. Yes, he was cold but he had his books and the sight of them warmed him. He brooded. Oberon at midsummer was not cold. Think about that marvellous wood and how beautifully warm they all were. Just imagine being inside Bottom's mask sweating in the heat of midsummer. Or better still being Puck flittering about in the warm sunshine and causing chaos just for the fun of it. Yes, during the summer, Leura's wild bush could well be hiding the fairies and the lumbering "rude mechanicals". Beck's

head rolled as he fell into a slumber filled with the rustle of leaves and the soft voices of fairies and the warmth of the summer sun on his skin.

But he was distracted by the sound of a car. It crunched its way rudely along his drive. Losing his concentration he shivered. With effort and annoyance he rose from his chair, hobbled to the window, which overlooked his drive, and tweaked the curtain aside. Beck squinted until his eyes adjusted to the view outside. Then, when he saw who it was, he ground his teeth in irritation.

The two figures, one standing by the car and the other just emerging, were unaware they were being scrutinised.

“Silly old codger,” remarked Morton Roland Standish as he emerged from the car and looked up at the house. “Why doesn’t he get the house fixed?” Looking about at the crumbling pile and the wild gardens he shook his frozen head.

“Money,” remarked Lara as she brushed at her red nose with a drip forming on its end. She wiped her mittened hand against her coat. “Every cent he has goes on books. The books are his gardens I suppose, you know, like *The Child’s Garden of Verse*, only this is *William Beck’s Garden of Books, Books and More Books*.”

“He must have billions of them by now,” said Standish and he shivered as the cold found its way down his spine despite several layers of clothing and a thickly padded coat. “His books just cause misery. He once told me off for daring to try and touch one of his precious first editions. And it wasn’t even the only first edition he had.” Standish’s face flushed warmly at the memory but the momentary heat of memory was not presently strong enough to stave off the cold for longer than seconds. His face returned to its rigid white as his jaws clenched against the cold and his mouth turned into a postbox like slit. “Come on, let’s get inside before we freeze.”

“Stupid car,” said Lara as she followed Standish. “What a time to conk out on us.” Wrapping her arms about herself she tried to keep up with her husband’s pace. “Fancy the heating going like that. I can’t wait to get inside and get warm!” Lara only thought of comfort. She did not like confrontation or argument, only comfort.

“We’re going to have to spend the night. We won’t be able to find anyone to come out now to fix it.”

“Do you think he’ll let us?” Lara looked towards the windows half expecting Morton’s uncle to be standing there and waving them away from his house and his books.

“We don’t have a choice and neither does he.” Standish gritted his teeth and ploughed towards the front door.

Lara looked towards the house again. “I wouldn’t be too sure,” she whispered.

Standish picked up the brass door knocker which was in the shape of a lion’s head and let it fall. When there was no answer he tried again and again. He stamped on the doorstep in cold and frustration as he waited. He knew his uncle was there.

Beck opened the door to them on the ninth knock. A wave of air, colder than the Arctic, hit Standish and Lara as they stood on the doorstep.

“Ye Gods!” exclaimed Standish as he pushed his way in past Beck. He was not going to give his uncle a chance to slam the door in their faces. “Don’t you heat this place? It’s colder in here than it is out there. The car’s grounded for now so we thought we’d pop in as we were so close to your place.” His jollity sounded false even to himself.

The forced jollity and entry was not lost on Beck. His beady and blurred eyes gazed at his nephew who was now firmly planted in the hallway. “What are you doing here?” he asked.

Standish forced a smile. It was a mere slit in his face and with no teeth showing. “Visiting my favourite uncle, of course.” He then turned and caught Lara’s hand in his own and pulled her inside.

“It’s warmer outside,” said Lara. Her teeth chattered.

Beck turned his bleary eyes on her. “You’re welcome to stay outside,” said Beck.

“Don’t be like that, Uncle. We can’t see your books from outside.” Forcing a laugh from between his frozen lips Standish then proceeded to squash Lara’s hand in his own and plough along the hall with Lara in his wake. She stumbled behind him. Standish knew his Uncle and so made straight for the library. But when he got there he was disappointed. Only the final few embers burned in the grate. Standish ground his teeth in intense irritation. In milliseconds he realised there were no logs inside. The log

basket stood empty. He pushed Lara into a chair. She sat abruptly and shivered. Standish stood and shivered.

Beck shuffled into the room. As always when he entered his library his eyes travelled lovingly over his books. It only made him more irritated when Standish came into view and interrupted the graceful sweep of his library.

“Where are the logs? I’ll bring some in,” Standish said to his Uncle.

Beck snorted. “There are none unless you chop down a tree which you don’t have permission to do.”

“What are you doing for heating?”

Beck shrugged and then shuffled over to his armchair where he sat and pulled his blanket over his knees. His fingerless gloves exposed his red fleshy fingers which had grown swollen from the cold.

“It’s going to hit below zero.” Standish couldn’t keep the hints of irritation, and even desperation, out of his voice.

“I didn’t invite you.” Beck was trying hard to visualise Titania and to ignore his unwanted guests.

“You’ll freeze, too!” Standish somewhat regretted the retort. “I must be nice,” he thought to himself.

Beck smiled vacantly and looked at his books. What did a fool like Standish understand? Beck knew that all he had to do was open *Treasure Island* or *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or even *Gulliver’s Travels* and he would be in worlds that sweltered with heat. Or he could be one of the three hundred Spartans in midsummer fighting at Thermopylae. He would most probably be King Leonidas, of course. But wait, he could be Achilles chasing Hector around the walls of Troy and working up a sweat in exertion and hate. Or he could be standing by the burning funeral pyre on Achilles’ final release of the dead Patroklos weeping with grief. Or he could be on the Dawn Treader nearing the end of the world where all was mild and still and he, too, could be seated in a coracle following Reepicheep to the end of the world.

“Uncle William!”

Beck was not so much jolted out of his thoughts as only mildly compelled to look at his nephew. This was the one condescension he made to politeness. He shivered as he

did so and huddled further into his chair. To Beck, his nephew left much to be desired. He was not handsome nor tall nor heroic. He was a just a middling man and he would never amount to much. Beck's rheumy eyes took in all Morton was and everything that Morton was not and would never be.

"He's gone ga-ga from the cold," Standish remarked to Lara.

Beck looked at his nephew more closely now. The rheumy eyes of Beck sparkled suddenly. "Ga, ga black sheep have you any wood?" he sang. In his normal voice he followed with, "No, Morton, no wood and I'm not ga-ga. I am merely an old man bothered by his less than welcome relatives."

Standish ignored the last remark. "Haven't you at least got a radiator?" he asked. "And don't call me Morton. You know I hate it."

Beck shrugged. "Roland isn't much better," he remarked. "You're a far cry from *Childe Roland*. Unless you see my house as your dark tower." He smiled suddenly in remembrance of the time of Morton's birth. "Your mother was quite surprised when I laughed at the choice of names. She, too, thought I was ga ga but it was her who was ga ga, hey Morton?"

"This is ridiculous." Standish wrapped his arms around himself and ignored the jibe. "It's dipping to zero, you do understand that?"

"I can't stand it," moaned Lara. "We'll all turn into icicles."

Beck was surprised to hear her voice. He had forgotten she was there and he looked at her. "You can always leave," said Beck.

"We can't!" Standish snapped. "Something's wrong with the car. You know that."

Lara and Standish exchanged a look. Standish's gaze shifted and he glanced from shelf to shelf of Beck's library. Spine after winking spine looked back at him. Standish, caught as if by a spell, started to roam along the shelves. At the back of his mind he remembered some books from his childhood. He stopped before one. This one he remembered achingly well because he was there at its arrival. This was the particular book that had caused his uncle to snap sharply at him not to touch. What was it he had said? Oh, yes – "Sticky young fingers cause damage. Don't touch." And Beck had whipped the book away from him.

Standish's brow clouded as the hurt he had felt then rose again and flooded through him. His young face had burned with the heat of both hurt and shame. He remembered looking at his hands which were cleaner than Beck's and wondering how they could possibly damage a book. How could his uncle think he was too filthy to touch his books? His fingers back then had not been sticky. All he had wanted was to share with his uncle the joy of the new arrival for Beck had been so pleased – infectiously pleased. And like contagion Standish had caught it and paid for it.

Now, carefully, and with a slender and well-manicured finger, he levered the book from the shelf. This was a feat in itself for his fingers were so cold. It was a slender volume with hard covers. Inside, however, it was different. The pages were brittle and yellowing. *Heart of Darkness* – a first edition. He half expected an echo of his uncle's voice from the distant past to dash him down again. But it didn't come.

Standish looked up suddenly and looked into the shadowed eyes of his uncle. A light seemed to flicker in Beck's eyes. Did he, too, remember the arrival of this book and the hurt of a young boy? Standish looked towards the fire. In the grate the final embers were making a valiant effort to survive. What was left of the fire was as hushed as the rest of the room.

Standish's thoughts took a connecting road. How simple it would be, he thought, to keep the fire alive. A single page of the book he held would ignite and keep the embers glowing. The heart would be dark but the flesh warm. Standish considered. He looked back at the book in his cold hands. He knew about warm flesh and he was not thinking of Lara or summer. He was thinking about the slow burning and smarting his uncle's words had caused him all those years ago and all over this book. The hurt had never been wiped from his psyche and moreover Standish knew he had not forgiven his uncle and nor would he. The images of that day were etched into his mind as finely as one of the etchings in a William Blake illustration – and just as ghoulish and long-lasting.

With the book in his hand Standish moved towards the fire. He could keep this fire burning and send his boyish hurt into it. What did he stand to lose? Beck was old. It wasn't as though Beck could wrest the book from him now. As he moved towards the fire Standish opened the book and bent it back. He heard the spine snap. Wanting to look to see if his uncle had heard it Standish exercised a control over himself that he did not know he had.

From the depths of his armchair Beck watched his nephew and the progress of his treasured book. The loose pouches under his eyes seemed heavier. Everything had turned to slow motion. His nephew was walking deliberately, and with purpose, to the grate in which dying embers flickered and receded. He watched as his nephew stood before the grate. He watched as his nephew considered the book he held. Beck's brain, however, was not slow. Even though not quite believing what he was seeing he had to act. But his body, however, was slow. He was slower than slow motion. His movements were like a caricature of slow motion. His nephew tore a page – how dreadful was the sound! – from the book. Settling it gently on the embers the fire spurted. It took ten pages before Beck arrived at the grate. There was nothing slow about his fall. That could not have been executed any faster by an athlete who had plunged over the high jump. Smacking smartly onto the floor full-length Beck's eyes were now on a level with the fire as his chin rested on the hearth. The brittle pages of a first edition were going up in smoke. From somewhere behind him he heard a scream. In front of him he only felt heat.

And Standish? Fingers burned, he felt the heat of his boyhood transfer from his burning face to his heat stung fingers as his uncle lay warmer now than ever in a winter, for it gets cold in Leura during the winter – and as Morton would find out, even colder without a bookish inheritance, as the anti-hero to the dark tower had come.

JAL NICHOLL

Matthew Hall, *Hyaline*
Black Rider Press, 2013, 94 pp pb
ISBN 9781621540564, RRP \$19.99

Rebecca Law, *Lilies and Stars*
Picaro Press, 2013, 64 pp pb
ISBN 9781921691614, RRP \$15

“Hyaline” is a synonym for “glassy”; it is also the title of Matthew Hall’s latest collection, of whose verbal contents it provides a fair example and warning. It is also, clearly enough, an irony. To paraphrase a gnominically combative statement by Louis Armand on the back cover, Hall’s poems in their linguistic ruggedness do stand “ranged against” the forces of literary reaction, especially within the contested terrain of the pastoral.

There is plentiful evidence here, as in much other poetry being written in the present cultural nexus, of the author’s academic background. It cannot be said that Hall wears his lightly, from the author biography which has the topic of an ongoing PhD thesis as its first item of business, to the portentously colon-ised poem titles, to passages like the following, from “a light wake” (part five of the “containment” cycle): “we are almost together moving casually towards the referent” (which I gather means, essentially “we are on a road trip”) to uninspired abstractions such as “economies of isolation”. But these *sophistiqué* mannerisms do give way to the promised referent as “sharp brake marks signal tire tracks that furrow through purple crocus and wild grasses”.

“How do you atone for history”, Hall asks rhetorically in a poem addressed to Ali Alizadeh (“a red turning earlier: a postulate”), in which the unpromising personification “history” “clamours for ritual” – a ritual which, by “the reflection of the white pall of image’s field” appears funerary in nature. What is laid to rest is difficult to make out, but according to the political theology of multiculturalism it is unlikely to be the original sin represented by the tree of knowledge-as-imperialism, aka “world’s white armature”; Christianity, too, required continual repentance of its votaries.

Then “a still life in red”, as if in reply to that question, offers what might be read as an illustration of Heidegger’s concept of *Raum*:

a place cleared and freed for settlement and lodging. A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing*. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary.

This notion of a qualitatively definite space is proposed here in contrast to a space characterised by boundlessness and universal homogeneity. The “red” of Hall’s “still life” is no longer that of a blood debt, but of a bloodline, while the “bronze” is that of the earth, “The trodden path whose witness is just / That which we are”:

Mark me in bronze whose limits
Are underfoot, the bare turn
ing of earth, of gluttoned horizons
Matching the trail of morning dust.

Besides the use of metalanguage and language as metaphor, a yet more striking fact about Hall’s style is how, at the expense of frequent obscurity, he is able to clear a space for a kind of concrete description that is very far from naturalism. This can be felicitous on an intellectual level:

All aspects of the visual field
Annealed in the rotund horizon
The intrinsic curve of a tungsten sky
(“artifice”)

The pairing of “annealed” with “tungsten” works because that metal, it turns out, has the highest melting point of any element. The resulting figure is a metaphor resting on a scientific allusion that lacks intrinsic emotional resonance because the physical properties of most entries on the Periodic Table (oxygen, gold, etc. excluded) have little to do with the perception of landscape – outside, perhaps, of a descriptive passage in a novel whose protagonist is a research chemist.

So as not to hang too much weight on a single example, I quote the following as well, from “screens westward of migration”: “Blotched skies the colour of lectin erasures”, which I gather may have something to do with the deleterious behaviour of a particular class of proteins in the small intestine. However, Hall also writes passages which fascinate with a genuine lyricism: “Our treasured loss in the curve of grainfed light; cut by stalk, elated in the

vertices of claw” (“what wildly halts: a meditation on clearing”). Here, the use of agricultural and mathematical imagery is apt to communicate in clear and affecting images even where the poetic argument is suppressed.

Matthew Hall is a serious poet, and *Hyaline* is a book for readers prepared to give as well as to receive. Many an avant-garde poet lapses into sentimentality the moment he or she allows ingress to recognisable emotion; Hall’s challenging aesthetic pays off, however, enabling him to richly explore and dramatise his meditative habitations and cohabitations. As a result, *Hyaline* is a rich, exploratory and unexpectedly dramatic work.

Like Matthew Hall, Rebecca Law lists her academic credentials; in her case, however, it seems that wry humour is in play, noting as she does that she received second class honours in her Masters (in Poetry, at The University of Melbourne). Of course, going to university for a decade or more is just a rite of passage in today’s world, and rites of passage are undoubtedly a prominent theme in the volume. On the first page we find a meditation on a different kind of journey “into adulthood”:

Mother you are always old
for your years, my own growth
distanced more and more
into adulthood, the shade
stepped out of once, debutante
to world ...

(“Infusions of Shoreline Flora”)

What does it mean to be a “debutante” today? The word is an archaism mocked by the coming-of-age rituals of suburban youth, and the poem’s subsequent imagery of scented pillows, lavender bouquets and starry nights is apt to seem sentimental. But is sentimentality the same as nostalgia? A concern with childhood and, by implication, innocence is cultivated from the outset in “The Shivering Song”, with its evocation of nursery rhymes:

Round, round a moat must lie
Cross the bridge and never die

Here the fairy tale image of a moat is telling in its inherent archaism and as a symbol of protection. “The Purpose of Purity”, too, illustrates a proto-narrative of winged purity and freedom (the image of the dove with its amorous connotations), imagery of child’s play (blowing soap bubbles), and the conclusion:

Once we gambolled
to victory
and found shelter

That is, “Shelter” of the kind depicted in the image on the volume’s cover: Pierre August Cot’s *The Storm*, which depicts a young man and woman fleeing the elements together.

The longer poem, “Braids, Snow and Clouds”, begins with a detailed description of riparian scenery near the shelter of “our home”. A prose description of a storm intervenes, during which a pair of undefined cohabitants amuse themselves in a cosy domestic setting; then there follows a dialogue in which the content shifts from love (“Do you think love is about pyjamas?”), to reminiscence of family (“My mother used to be an ice-skater”), to death (“Death is not the end of living”), to a loneliness assuaged by mysterious communion (“I can almost stop pretending I am all alone”). The final part of this poem develops the latter theme into a confession that, in fact, the speaker has been alone all this time. To whom the poem’s various pronouns refer is deliberately rendered mysterious.

It is not solely the *sturm und drang* of romantic love à la Cathy and Heathcliff that is the object of longing in these pages; the storm imagery prevalent in the book refers, here at least, to something that is to be enjoyed at a distance and in its season, but from which shelter is ultimately sought, even if “my shivering / is more reverence / than dislike” (“Kalorama Park”). The adult female speaker recalls her own childhood and, interestingly, her mother with nostalgia while braving her current loneliness:

I do not cry because I have my little black cat
I do not cry because I have my little brown dog

That the speaker’s mother was an ice-skater is telling, given that this is all we find out about her. Ice-skating is a venturesome activity that the advanced practitioner makes appear easy. The most obvious contrast between the speaker and her mother in the poem is that the former remains indoors, consoled for her loneliness and fear of death by fossils (“signs of life”) and other solaces of doubtful efficacy.

It is possible to read the vexed identities of the speaker, addressee and “friend” in mythological terms as Aphrodite, Persephone and Adonis respectively, the myth functioning as an allegory of the tragedy inherent in modern courtship from a female perspective. Adonis is the perfect consort that the modern woman is liberated to pursue but whom she cannot lastingly possess; Aphrodite is, of course, the eternal symbol of female desire and

desirability; Persephone, in contrast, the consort of death, with whom the goddess of love must cyclically share her beloved; yet this same Persephone, also known as Kore, “daughter”, represents the transience and cyclicity of life to which Aphrodite is blind. It is a short step from classical mythology to evolutionary psychology, which would comprehend the cyclical sharing of Adonis between the two goddesses as symbolic of female hypergamy. Aphrodite’s eternal pursuit – hunting the hunter – will obviously tend towards pathos when translated from eternity to the mortal world. Here the metaphorical “howling” of wind, in a continuation of storm imagery, redounds in a subtle de-sublimation upon the noise of animals in heat:

It was this howling
I wanted to love forever

heaving my backbone
in my sleep
(“Form Of”)

According to one possible reading, the elemental imagery of this collection might be taken for the revenants of the passion of youth transmuted to “eternal moods of the bleak wind”, to quote Ezra Pound (“[Greek]”).

I have discussed what appears to me to be the dominant theme in what remains a many-sided and sophisticated collection of lyrics. Not all the birds are swans or doves, however, and neither the shelter of love and home nor the freedom of the open skies is presented in excessively utopian terms. *Lilies and Stars* is, as its title suggests, a volume replete with romantic longing, but also with romantic irony as the persona and her world participate together in what feels like a passionate and two-sided love affair.

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SARAH DAY

Jane Williams, *Days Like These:*
New and selected poems 1998-2013
Interactive Press, 2013, 126 pp pb
ISBN 9781922120649, RRP \$25

Days Like These is a new and selected volume taken from four existing collections and including a body of new work. Certain things can be said about Jane Williams's work as a whole. This is a social collection— its pages are peopled with vivid and tender portraits. Jane Williams is a close observer of humanity; she writes about the relationships between people, often the relationships between strangers. Public transport invites such correspondence, as do queues – in banks and supermarkets. She observes closely the effect one human can have on another, often without verbal interaction. Williams's world-view is a compassionate one. This is evident in all four of her preceding works and in the new poems too. She pays particular attention to the marginalised and disenfranchised and speaks up defiantly on their behalf. She glimpses into lives, predicaments, emotions, recording frustration, isolation and suffering as well as joy:

On a good day you are living in paradise
With the forty spotted pardalote
thriving invisibly

(“Tips for the last tourist”)

There is a compassionate radar behind many of these poems which notices and responds to those on the periphery: the child in the wheelchair, homeless people, refugees in detention, the young mother trying to cash her welfare cheque; in each case it's the specifics of the individual's circumstances that disarms, the *detail* that takes the reader close to the experience of the other.

Often it's innocence that these poems see in others:

Two girls get on a bus wearing matching mini skirts

Stations of the Cross, God. These poems re-imagine spiritually or culturally mythologised stories and convey them via intimate and experiential voices. “11 Stations of the Cross” is a powerful and moving poem with universal themes about the way humans respond to the suffering of others, or indeed perpetrate it.

I like the voice of God in the poem called “Final Draft”. In this poem God is assessing his newly made world, a world he seems to have already had a few goes at. He’s unsure, he’s lonely; he lacks clarity, certainty. He’s ironic:

I try putting man to the North
And woman to the East
In between large moss covered boulders
Self seeded olives and the fog

I make the usual wager with the snake.

Later he says:

I know the ending by heart and ask again

Tell me
What do I look like?
But the woman is gone
And the snake is a smile
And only fog is real.

If I had to select one thing in particular that I like about the poems in this book beside the fact that they are well-made poems, it would have something to do with their *attitude*. They observe people with a clear eye and they care. I hope that doesn’t sound trite. I don’t think its importance can be underestimated. Margaret Thatcher once famously said “There is no such thing as society, only individuals.” There is a moral sentiment at work in the pages of *Days Like These*, an assumption that we’re all, in John Donne’s words “part of the main”. Importantly, when the opportunity arises, these poems skirt around cynicism in favour of empathy.

CLAIRE NASHAR

Mogwie-Idan: Stories of the land by Lionel Fogarty

Vagabond Press, 2012, 159 pp pb

ISBN 9781922181022, RRP \$25

This latest collection of poems by Lionel Fogarty is a generous book. For one thing, it's 159 pages long, which amounts to sixty poems and nineteen of the poet's own illustrations - a plentiful offering. But there's also something about the spirit of this book - the way it's put together as well as the way it's written - which speaks more meaningfully to an idea and practice of generosity. The following appears between the book's dedication and contents pages:

Jingi Whallo

Hello how are you all?

Nunyan Nyarri Lionel

My name is Lionel

Gita Gita Yoondoo Jarjum

Good morning you children

Yuway Yoojum Dhagun

Yo Yoogum Yoogum Balugalun

Kanungin Whallo

We pay our respects to the ... people and spirits of this area.

*I come from Yugambeh Yuggera and Kutjela people and I am proud to
acknowledge the custodians, the traditional people the...*

This greeting and recognition of country welcomes the reader into Fogarty's book. It also provides, for those willing to be taught, an opportunity to learn these important words of respect in the Munultjali dialect.

Mogwie-Idan is dedicated to Fogarty's son, Jabreeni, and to his grandchildren and "family kinship grandchildren". So the children he greets in his welcome might be these young family members. They might also be the children of Aboriginal Australia or, even more broadly, all Australian children, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. Whatever the case, there's a sense that Fogarty writes for the future, for the embattled idea that poetry really might provoke change - in us as individuals as much as in the governments we vote into power.

Fogarty's poetry has long been aware of its divided audience; of the differences between its Indigenous and non-Indigenous readerships. This is evident in the poetry of *Mogwie-Idan* which, as the initial welcome signals, often takes the form of direct address. In "TOKEN BLINDFOLDED ADVISORY ABORIGINAL COUNCIL ZIG ZAG NEWS WE BLAME YOUSE":

ABO'S THAT ARE IN THE PIT OF ASSAULTING JARS
MY PITJANTAJARA CRY
A SAD MELTING LAND RIGHTS
COPE NO MORE
DON'T DO IT.
THE FIGHT STILL CRY
CRY FOR YOUSE
I DON'T HATE WHITE PEOPLE
I DON'T SAVE BLACK PEOPLE
I WON'T HELP KILL YOU
STRANGLED OPPRESSED RUSHING AFRAIDNESS
FOR USE
BUT PURSUE FREEDOM I DO
BUT KILL INDUSTRY RACIST I DO
JUSTIFY TO YOU I WON'T DO
FUCK YOU

In this passage alone, the 'you' to whom the poem speaks shifts a number of times. Sometimes it addresses "BLACK PEOPLE", sometimes "WHITE PEOPLE", and other times it appears to concern itself with both groups. Within these categories of address, Fogarty's tone also varies considerably. It ranges from a deep sadness and tenderness for his people, like the Pitjantajara cry above ("STRANGLED OPRESSED RUSHING AFRAIDNESS / FOR USE"), to the militant imperatives of "PARADOX HEARING":

KILL THE OPPRESSOR BLACK WRITERS
AS BLACK WRITERS WE MUST CAUSE PRESSURES
TO THE BLACKS TO GET UP AND FIRE THE WHITE EDITORS
AND WHITE PUBLISHING HOUSE DOWN TO THE GROUNDS
WHERE WE TAKE AND BURN THE MARKET PLACES

TO A UNFAMILIAR EXCHANGEABLE

As always with Fogarty's work, the non-Indigenous reading experience of *Mogwie-Idan* is often uncomfortable: "BUT SITTING HERE BLOCKING OUT THE UNJUSTIFIABLE SINS / SINS ARE WHAT YOU ARE DOING" ("BURN THE BRIDGES"). This book remains in many ways angry, and in no way weakens the unrelenting brand of activism that has grown to be part of Fogarty's hallmark. There is, however, a sense of frustration in the poems of *Mogwie-Idan* that feels more urgently sorrowful than in his earlier books:

I DON'T LOVE YOUR DAUGHTER FOR FUN
I DON'T SADDEN YOUR FEELINGS FOR FUN
I WON'T LIVE WAYS YOU GIVE
KNOWING IT CEASES WHEN YOU WANT IT TO
I WON'T LAY MY MIND TO BE PICKED
I WILL FORM MY BODY FRESH
I WILL LOVE YOUR CHILDREN
BUT FUCK ME WHEN I SAVE YOU
SOMETIMES THAT'S ALL I DO

The book is divided into two sections. The first, stunningly named "CONNECTION REQUITAL", won the 2012 Scanlon Award as a chapbook, and is written entirely in capital letters. The second, and longer of the two, shares its name with the book's title and contains a range of poems, some written in the last few years, others (like "Overseas Telephone") dating from as early as May 1990.

Ideas of kin and kinship, and their importance in keeping Indigenous culture alive, recur again and again throughout both sections of *Mogwie-Idan* in poems like "Murri Yubba Paul in Goori", "Our Dance Must Never Die", and "Yugambah Talga". The last of these is a song "taken from the book *Yugambah Talga, Music Traditions of the Yugambah People*". "Lottie (Levinge) Eaton", a note at the start of the poem tells us, "remembers her grandmother, Mrs Jenny Graham, singing [it] to her when she was a little girl". Such intergenerational transmissions of culture seem to be a part of what Fogarty means when he writes of "CONNECTION REQUITAL". In the title poem of that section:

GENERATIONS OF SANDS MOVING BY THE WINDS
ALL YOU ARE MY RELATIONS MIXED ELOQUENTLY
AS LIFE GOES ON

For the most part, the poetic tactics of *Mogwie-Idan* remain those of Fogarty's signature 'guerrilla poetics'. The first line of "Priority" is a good example: "Void mirrors worth life reflections". The agrammatical form the poetry takes characteristically disrupts and resists

any attempt at a conventional English reading experience, and in its place substitutes a proliferation of experiences and meanings. The words “void” and “worth”, for instance, could be read as imperatives - “Void mirrors! Worth life reflections!” - or they might be nouns, connected by the word “mirrors”, now a verb: “Void mirrors worth”. Another possibility might be to read “void” and “life” as imperatives, making “mirrors” a possessive: “Void mirrors’ worth! Life reflections!” As Ali Alizadeh points out in his introduction to *Mogwie-Idan*, it would be to oversimplify and understate the sophistication of Fogarty’s poetry to frame it exclusively as “the application of a postcolonial poetics” – designed to turn the tables on colonial oppression, and not much more. The poems, he argues, “remain too linguistically mischievous and conceptually challenging to be seen [solely] as celebrations of a cultural milieu or the articulations of an ethnic condition”. It’s an observation which strikes true: the sense of verbal play and intellectual verve in Fogarty’s poetry overreaches such attempts at classification.

Alizadeh’s introduction is attentive to Fogarty’s poetry, and to the poems of *Mogwie-Idan*, but also can’t seem to resist having a few digs at the rest of Australian poetic culture. It describes a “literary environment saturated with hyperbolic praise and prize money heaped upon young mediocrities and their older, overrated mentors and benefactors” - a criticism levelled equally at the “proponents of popular culture and postmodernism” (who cherish “superficial, playful experimentalism”) and at the “conservative aesthetes” (who expect only “facile, sentimental” evocations of “place and landscape” from Indigenous artists). Such arguments are no doubt designed to demonstrate the singularity of Fogarty’s poetry, but they do so in a way which undermines *Mogwie-Idan*’s impulse towards the generosity of “CONNECTION REQUITAL”.

BONNY CASSIDY

Tracy Ryan, *The argument*

Fremantle Press, 2011, 87 pp pb
ISBN 9781921361807, RRP \$24.95

Tracy Ryan, *Unearthed*

Fremantle Press, 2013, 115 pp pb
ISBN 9781921888632, RRP \$24.99

The rewarding variety of Tracy Ryan's *The argument* (2011) is somewhat lacking from her most recent poetry collection, *Unearthed* (2013). There are numerous points of dialogue between these books, each published by Fremantle Press: both rest heavily on the elegiac mode, for example, and engage a confessional voice. The descriptive surprises that Ryan brings to these in *The argument*, however, are replaced in *Unearthed* by a more monotonous treatment of poetic identity.

The argument adopts a thematic approach that Ryan follows into the later book: circling a subject repeatedly, using successive poems to work over a problem – in this case, the “argument” of that very human dialectic, loss and preservation. *The argument* introduces this problem with a run of poems on motherhood and Ryan's young son, which are addressed not only directly but also via broader allusion – two poems, for instance, focus on a “pregnant” moon and a newborn lamb. Ryan's occasional tendency toward cliché (such as the tired metaphor of the moon as womb, “blooming they say beaming / leaning above hills like simply so many / undulations of labour, the waves / set off by her shudder”) is balanced by more imaginative language, like the keen, intricate phrases and internal rhyme of the lamb, “surprising herself, ad libitum, / a sneeze, a seizure in motion, a tic / ecstatic, mini-mystic, pure impulse, hauled up / and dropped by magic, now limp as a hanky”.

This balance reflects the book's tonal scope. Strong emotions are wrought throughout *The argument*, and in some instances this produces sentimentality that, employed without irony, may stifle the reader. Examples of this can be found in the titular poem, about near-loss of a loved one, and “Lost Property”, which describes lost objects from the childhood home. Yet, as in her spirited and descriptive poem of the vulnerable lamb, Ryan's intensely focused imagery and detached sense of reflection enable her to strike notes that are more considerate of verbal complexity and more aware of the act of perception itself. Epigraphs from Wyatt, Wordsworth and Emily Brontë suggest

Ryan's models in achieving that quality of poetic voice. I would argue that the outstanding poems of *The argument* are those in which Ryan turns her lyric concentration away from personal loss, towards meditations on the more-than-human world. She creates memorable, fleeting glimpses of fauna in "Frogmouth" and "Deer and Sylvia"; and constructs a suite of poems about the transient nature of inanimate subjects such as dust, cobwebs, smoke and mould:

In this unprecedented heat, like one
slow to take note though not yet quite insensate, I begin
to catch on: that fruit, uneaten on the bench, keeping
roughly its shape but on the turn, gone lean
with subtle putrefaction, lost collagen in an old cheek, learn
what we are dealing with here,
your only sign a tiny under-puddle, impolite
on otherwise neat formica. Ever efficient,
you strike from the inside.

("Mould")

"Mould" and its fellow 'substance poems' might borrow from medieval riddle: dramatising their unlovely subjects, they spin accretive metaphors. As *The argument* continues Ryan takes this approach further, through a series of long sequences. The confessional voice is pleasingly complicated by the uneven respiration and narrative potential of these linked short poems – culminating in a dreamy, haunting sequence, "To Abelard, Heloise". Here, Ryan's elegiac conceit takes place on the page, since the broken structure of the sequence form mimics dialogue and shifting viewpoints. Simultaneously, she moves toward extended lines that tend to atomise the more unified, subjective voice in *The argument*. These long lines are exemplified in "The Fall", which achieves a structural match for its subject – autumn – by using paratactic phrases to negate, gather, then scatter images:

Not slowly and piece by piece like those leaves
in the Gambier woods, death's legerdemain,
distraction, not tantalising, not promising
but sudden as new snow, heaped instantly, or icy
downpour out of season – neatly, craven in capitulation, my body found
it could meet its match: that interval not yet chalked or cordoned
off where I too must stretch and lie, I too, as if it's taken this long
and this much to whittle the monstrous ego down.

("The Fall")

In her latest book, *Unearthed*, Ryan explores the possibilities of formal "reconstruction" to a lesser extent. A notably strong poem in the collection, "Unearthed [1988]", is comparable to the

structural conceit of “The Fall”. It is fragmentary in order to represent memory’s shredded images – allowing a new, ironic voice:

holding off pleasure, eucalyptus-scent
of armpit and neck, the wild dry fringe that dipped
over the mole on your brow; the furrows there
I’d yet to understand. The lines end where
the poem is torn away from memory,
blazon of air, itself a phantom body.

Again, this quality of voice – in which the self is othered or split – tends to appear where Ryan addresses the present rather than the past. A self-aware streak can help to offset the sentimental belief in permanence and preservation that elegiac and eulogistic modes inherently promote. Yet it’s rare in *Unearthed*. Unfortunately, a sense of irony or reflexiveness appears to me in only a handful of poems in this collection: striking lyrics about illusory moments, like “Fox Absence” and “Reflection”; and witty studies of materiality, as in “Food Ode”, “The Pawned Wedding Ring” and “Pictures, as Promised”, in which voiceless objects absorb metaphysical purpose.

By contrast, the first half of the book comprises a section, “Karlsruhe”, which narrates Ryan’s emotional and psychological movement from one partner to another. Its monotony of voice and deeply personal address to specific, absent figures is problematic for this reader’s engagement. For example, a sequence, “The Sleeper”, wavers between describing what is out of reach – the dead lover – and simply gathering private allusions:

I Liebestod

Wraith-man, Toggeli, coming to wake me from life
into dream, dragging, soothing, You are my wife
and so I was, but the dream-you has forgotten
the twenty years that followed: decrees nisi and absolute,
remarriage and two children. Mephistophelean,
you come to make your claim, and come again
and each time, for the dream’s duration, Sandman,
I accept the bargain, This is where you belong, am lulled,
see them receding, my little family, love you only, how could I not
remember, of course, walking death-wish, O much-older but
none-the-wiser, first stakeholder, first foot in the door before
the wicked fairy’s prick came into the picture,
and we know where it went from there.

As Maria Takolander has noted, *Unearthed* brings to mind the deliberate if somewhat prosaic elegies of Ted Hughes' *Birthday Letters*. Ryan's considerable skill with rhythm and internal rhyme creates a kind of balladry: a self-elegising, whereby the poet makes myth from her life, remembering the present as though it were the future, and setting it into sequence with the past. If a public biography is what saves Hughes' uncharacteristic self-obsession in that book, however, Ryan may be unable to rely upon such interest from her reader. In *Unearthed*, her poetic eye remains fixed on its subjects, searching for metaphors that will inscribe and set the image. The risk of this fastidious style is myopia: for the most part *Unearthed* is a collection that, for all its elegising of other people, remains so close to the single, subjective persona of its author that neither poet nor reader can escape the limits of "I" and "you". At its nadir, this mode can become tiresome: poems like "The Homecoming" see Ryan exhaustively drawing upon a store of memory. Correspondingly, the formal control evident in *The argument* seems to dissolve from this collection: a more static view of the self and others is echoed in the book's second half by the mannered structure of a sestina, "Vertigo"; and a sequence, "Doubles", which finds its mark as a lyric essay but lacks snags and edges in terms of linguistic adventure.

Revealingly, perhaps, it is Ryan's translation of Rilke, "Requiem for a Woman Friend" – the final poem in *Unearthed* – that combines her rhythmic talent with a sharper sense of phrasing and a dramatic tone, creating a more interesting progression from the paratactic poems in *The argument* than many of the set pieces in this book. With such poetic muses alive in her work, Ryan's next collection may open up fresher lyric ground.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Hettie Ashwin's short stories have been published on line and in print in Australia and overseas. She's contributed to anthologies and also writes novels. Two of her novels are published by Morris Publishing Australia and a humorous novel with Blackbuck publishing India. Hettie is now crowdfunding for her next humorous novel: <http://www.pozible.com/project/174149>

John Bennett left Sydney's Inner West over three years ago to live beside a forest by the sea. His intention, to write a book on natural aesthetics, is being sidetracked by poetry, photography, poetry commissions on the Solitary Islands, and Guunumba, helping in the development of Aboriginal writers.

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John Kinsella's most recent collections of poetry are *Jam Tree Gully* (WW Norton, 2012) and the just published *A Vision of Error: A Sextet of Activist Poems* (Five Islands Press, 2013). A new collection of stories, *Tide* (Transit Lounge), was also published in 2013. He is a

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Frank Russo's writing has appeared in *The Weekend Australian*, *Southerly*, *Transnational Literature*, *Blue Crow*, in various anthologies and broadcast on radio. The manuscripts for his novels have been short-listed for the Vogel/*The Australian* Literary Prize and other prizes. He is completing a Doctor of Arts at the University of Sydney.

Roo Stove attained a Master of Arts in Creative Writing in 2012. 'On completion,' she writes, 'exhausted, the idea of actually writing again seemed absurd. But, before too long, there was a trip over the perpetual inclination to write and once more words began to fall on to paper. Some of them made sense.'

Christine Townend has had poetry, short stories and seven books published. She founded Animal Liberation in Australia in 1976 and in 1980 she and Peter Singer founded Animals Australia. For 17 years she lived in India as managing trustee of an animal shelter in Jaipur. During this time she founded two animal shelters in Kalimpong and Darjeeling (West Bengal).

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