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Cover: Kampala Girgiba, *Jurnu near Kiwirrikurra*, 2011, acrylic on linen, 91cm x 91cm. Courtesy of Martumili Artists.

p7: Photograph of Ali Jane Smith by courtesy of Ali Jane Smith.

p10: Photograph of Samuel Wagan Watson by elena the wise/Bigstock.com. Courtesy of University of Queensland Press.

p30: Photograph of Julie Chevalier by Thomas Gallane, Lilyfield, n.d. Courtesy of Julie Chevalier.

p58: Photograph of Tasos Leivaditis. <http://www.lifo.gr/team/sansimera/37687>.

p110: Photograph of Gail Hannah and Kevin Pearson in the back yard at the home office of Black Pepper Press before leaving for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, 2014. Photograph by Ruth Jeffries.

p138: Lightweight Eight (November 1946), Herald (Melbourne, Vic.). State Library of Victoria – H2009.12/7

Erratum

In the previous issue, Vol 4 No 2, Andy Kissane's poem should have been titled 'Shooting Footage'. Australian Poetry apologises for the error.



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Foreword

Michael Sharkey

If this issue has any theme, it could well be 'generosity', in light of several felicitous occurrences during planning.

First came the sponsorship by a Sydney poet, who wishes to maintain anonymous, of an annual 'great poem' that has appeared in the previous year's issues of the Journal. The sponsor of this award has been long associated with small poetry presses and little magazines, and continues to handsomely support other poetry publications. As a result of his offer, each year we will award a poem from the previous year's issues a prize of \$250 and reprint the poem, along with remarks by judge and poet. The award for 2014, nominated by the donor in consultation with the editor, goes to Ali Jane Smith's poem 'Another Literary Life'.

Generosity is revealed also in our review essays profiling two small presses, Black Pepper and Ginninderra. The enviable reputation of Black Pepper Press is a result of care with production and promotion, by the poet Kevin Pearson and his partner Gail Hannah, of books carefully selected for their high aesthetic and, it must be said, commercial appeal. Margaret Bradstock outlines Black Pepper's brave beginning and subsequent successes, at the same time surveying appreciative reviews of some notable recent titles.

Ginninderra Press has provided a more extensive platform for mostly new poets, as well as many whose reputations are well established. Some poets have appeared as authors more than once in the catalogue of nearly two hundred books the press has brought into being. Often thought of as verging on vanity press status, Ginninderra's record, in Tasmanian

poet Tim Thorne's account, belies that assumption. The ongoing production testifies to its founders' and its current editor's enthusiasm for and support of poetry. One could expend one's energies in a host of other ways besides poetry publishing.

Melbourne poet and philosopher N.N. Trakakis, whose work as an anthologist also typifies the spirit that lies behind promotion of others' work, carries forward our exploration of the work of Australian poet-translators with his account of a literary love affair with the work of Kazantzakis and his ensuing engagement with that of Tasos Leivaditis. Some readers might be surprised that the editor of the groundbreaking 2011 anthology *Southern Sun, Aegean Light: Poetry by Second-Generation Greek-Australians*, which finds space for several dozen poets of such varied experience and poetic practice as Kominos Zervos, Christos Galiotos, Koraly Dimitriadis, Rachael Petridis, Anna Couani and Zeni Giles, might reveal such depth of response to another poet as he does in his essay on the evolution of the poetry and values of the politically committed and existentially questing Leivaditis, one of the unacknowledged greats of Modern Greek literature.

These features aside, this issue contains interviews with Queensland poet Sam Wagan Watson and Sydney poet Julie Chevalier, as well as reviews of Lesbia Harford and three notable contemporaries. As usual, we offer an extensive budget of poems submitted from writers including, in one or two cases, the poets' first appearance in print.

As always, I wish you provocative and rewarding reading.

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Australian Poetry Journal's Prize for 2014 Poem of the Year

Michael Sharkey

In a conversation in 2014, a Sydney poet told me, 'I am most impressed with the even sensibilities, well-ordered attitudes and presentation of the journal'. He observed that 'every literary magazine at one time or another has made itself known to readers and public alike with a poetry prize or competition in its name'. He thought the *Australian Poetry Journal* should follow suit, but in a different manner: the editor or judge should select a prize-winning poem from a field of poems already published in the journal in the previous year. 'A great poem,' he said, 'should be honoured when it appears'. The prize could be about \$250, which would make it one of the smaller literary prizes going around, but one of the more generous and innovative in that the following issue of the journal would feature the poem itself and some comment from the writer and judge. The judges would change each year. I agreed that it would be a fine thing to draw attention to what we considered 'a great poem' chosen from each year's issues. My friend remarked 'Such a prize would be more open, in that it would allow the poets and punters to read form before the starter and stewards let the horses go'. Finally, he offered

a cheque to institute the award, on condition of his remaining anonymous.

Wollongong poet Ali Jane Smith's 'Another Literary Life' headed a shortlist of eight poems the sponsor considered from issue 4.1 and issue 4.2. In the nature of the award, which is not a public competition, we won't offer comment on any but the chosen poem. What impressed concerning 'Another Literary Life' is the assured handling of the variations on what makes a 'writer's life'. It has as model a structure employed by Laurie Duggan, and in that sense, its literariness is intensified. Smith's self-awareness, tempered with alertness to the absurdity of her domestic and artistic roles, has some kinship with Duggan's sense of the conflicting responsibilities involved in being true to all one's relationships.

Ali Jane Smith has published poems short stories, reviews and criticism in newspapers, literary magazines and anthologies. She has been an active supporter of poetry in association with the South Coast Writers Centre, of which she was formerly Director. Five Islands Press published *Gala*, a small collection of her poems, in 2006. Ali Jane Smith says this about her poem 'Another Literary Life':

I was sitting on the bus reading a secondhand copy of UQP's *Laurie Duggan: Selected Poems 1971-1993*. I came to Duggan's poem 'A literary life'. Duggan is good at describing what it's like to trying to get your bearings in an awkwardly transplanted Antipodean version of European culture. I wanted to describe my own strange literary life, fragmented, distracted, banal, but endlessly interesting, at least to me. On the strength of this lovely prize, I have just ordered a copy of Duggan's new book, *Allotments*.

We'll invite readers to nominate their selection of the best poem of 2015, on Australian Poetry's website early in 2016. The 'readers'

choice' nominations can include comments. The readers' choice may not necessarily coincide with the judge's.



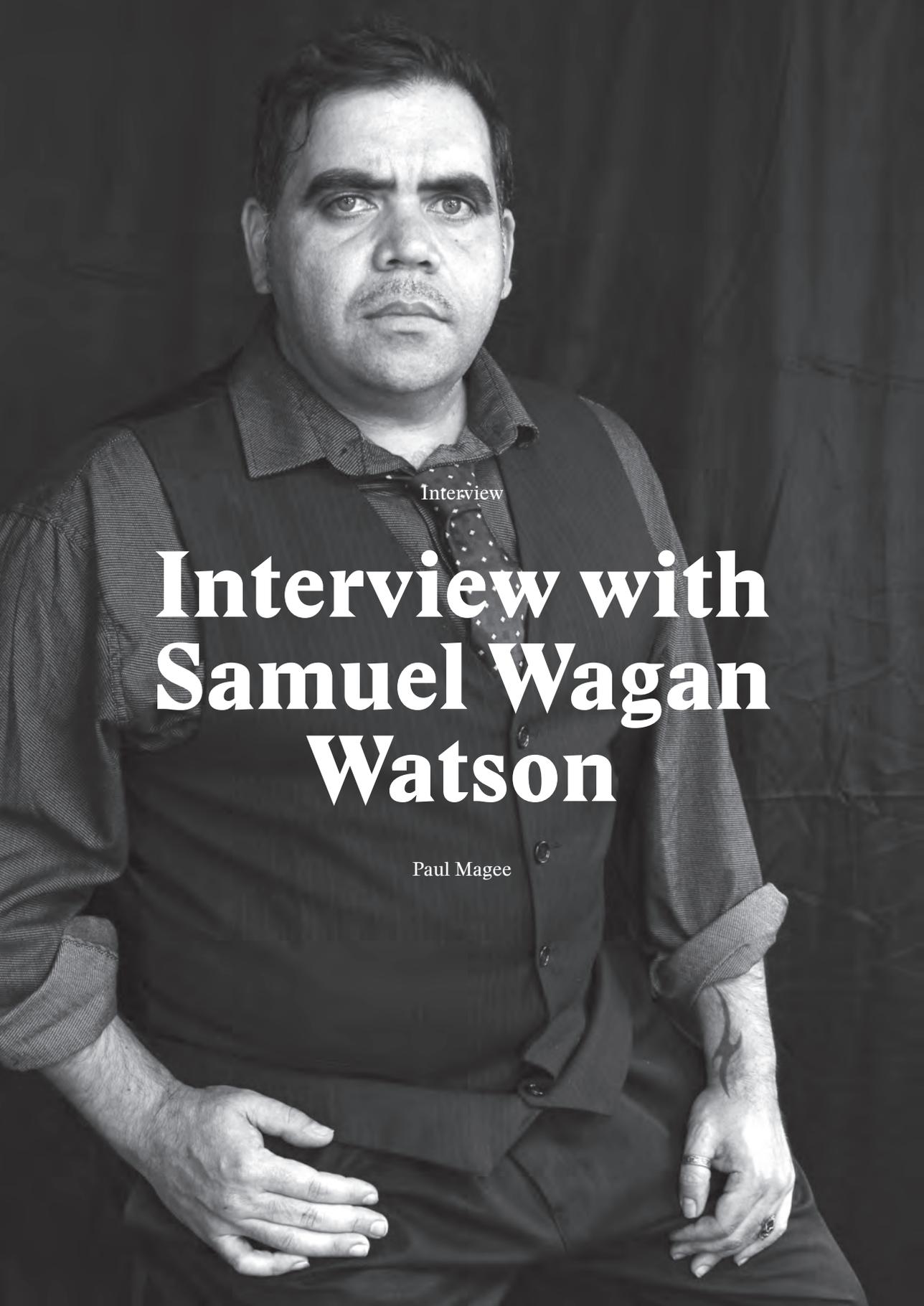
Ali Jane Smith
Another Literary Life

An old new and selected on the kitchen bench
beside a bowl of prickly chokos
I can't bring myself to peel, slice, cook and eat
despite the melting welfare state and icecaps.
I'm reading an approachable analysis of the debt crisis
while the children are preoccupied with scraping
the crusted remains of breakfast from their dressing gowns.
Today's lunch is good-enough fishcakes
a celebrity chef's recipe, potato replaced with sweet potato –
a vine I've always meant to try and grow –
to lower the glycemic index. I consider at times my life
a lucky escape from non-being. The audible traffic
shuffles between places mentioned in Blue Hills
a line, a burst of internet window-shopping, another line.

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A black and white portrait of Samuel Wagan Watson. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair and a mustache, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. He is wearing a dark, long-sleeved button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up, a dark vest, and a dark tie with a small white polka-dot pattern. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a curtain or fabric. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting his face and hands.

Interview

Interview with Samuel Wagan Watson

Paul Magee

Paul Magee interviewed Samuel Wagan Watson in September 2014 at the University of Canberra. Samuel was poet-in-residence at the time, a guest of the university's International Poetry Studies Institute. Two of Sam's hosts, both working on PhDs, are referred to at the end of the interview, Paul Collis, a Barkindji man, and Wayne Applebee, who is Kamilliroi. Samuel Wagan Watson's publications include *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* (2004) and *Love Poems and Death Threats: A Collection Of Poetry* (2014), both published by University of Queensland Press. The interview was recorded as part of the Australian Research Council funded project (DP 130100402) *Understanding Creative Excellence: A Case-Study in Poetry*.

§

What would you describe as your key points of connection to the world?

Every day I wonder how I connect to the world. I am forty-two years old. I remember the night September 11 happened. I never thought I would see that. It was not a world that I knew, even though I had grown up with surreal figures in my life—the Muppet Show, The Bionic Man—from popular culture. But seeing a plane driven into a building—I never thought the world I was in was capable of that. I think I have quite a romantic connection to the world: through sunsets and butterflies. I prefer to live in a world where there's tranquillity and goodness when you reach out for it.

You have described points where you do not connect with the world, or where there is a mystery. Does your poetry arise from those moments?

I am still trying—after a lifetime of being a storyteller—to define what I do with words. I do write from those moments of wonder. My first reaction might be sceptical. But then I will hit the journals and that sceptical moment will become a micro-concept, that I will write into.

But really, this question about connections makes me reflect on how insular my life is as a writer. I work from home now: I go out to the shops, I go for a walk, and I pick up the kids. Maybe once a month we go to a friend's place for dinner. As a kid I was so active. I was into surfing. I was into living outdoors. I knew the world a bit better then.

A number of your poems seem to come from the experience of exploring the world when you were younger.

I remember being so tiny I could stare at the ants in the grass and map out their navigation for myself in the backyard: where to run, where to play without someone standing on me. It is sad to think that you lose that when you get older.

So many things take over: sex, money, politics. I started getting into really serious relationships in my thirties. I remember buying trees and pot plants once, and they died on the front veranda. As a kid I would have cared so much about those little things. I mean, I really love gardening now that I have my own children. I make a day just to be in the garden. But you go through that silly stage where you forget about the world: it is all in here [gestures]. The world is in your head. It becomes all about you.

This question is going to make me be a bit more interactive with my world when I get back home. It will play on my conscience: do not drive to the shop. Walk and look at a tree that you have always thought about when driving past.

The internet definitely takes you out into the world too. I know poets who have not been able to go back to their homes in Kosovo and elsewhere, due to fighting in the Balkans. There is a big Balkan community in Brisbane, with a lot of really talented writers. They knew people who are lost—their country was lost—and they could not go back. Yet they wrote beautiful poetry about their grandfather's patch of land, about things they only knew from Skyping with family. We are seeing a generation of kids who know more about the world that way than by going into their backyards.

So does the place where you write matter to you? Does it affect the poetry you produce?

I find I love having distraction. When I was a kid, I thought you needed solitude, and cannot have noise. But the older I get, the more I realise that it does not have to be Shangri-La. The sound of the traffic can be good. I like to leave the front door open when I write. Then I can look down the corridor of the house, and see when the postie is coming—I like going out to my postie and saying g'day. Their jobs are getting phased out, the old Australia Post delivery guys. I depended on those guys when I was emerging. I would wait every day for that letter that said, 'Yes, we are going to accept your poems'.

So, yes, place is important. A good writing space is important: I like to share it with people now—as long as it is good, healthy interaction. There is a mental health to writing. If there is someone in your space who is not particularly positive, it will affect your writing. I also think—I don't have a romantic notion of this at all—you should go on a road trip.

And do your writing while on the trip?

Yes, take your journal and get out. Sometimes your own space can get stale. If I have a week where the writing is not paying off, when no one is returning my calls, I can get a bit cagey. It is really nice then when my son says to me, 'Dad, can you drive me to the North Side?'

I'll be, 'Right, let's jump in the car, let's go for a cruise'—go down streets that I haven't been on since I was his age.

What about your experience of writing in other places? For instance Canberra, where you have been writing this week. Is writing a totally portable activity for you?

It is so low maintenance. My laptop died. I came down here with paper and pen. And I have done so much work here. I am knocking over a couple of thousand words a day, words that I will use. I wrote a good article for the Wheeler Centre this morning. I have been thinking up material for the Literacy Foundation I work for too. I've come up with some cracker ideas. When I get home, the next writing workshop I do, I want to go to Bunnings, buy a stack of sandpaper and just throw it on the students: 'Let's write poetry on sandpaper. How do we do it?'

On the sharp, or the smooth side?

The sharp side.

That's working with place, working out how to do that.

I am going to do that when I get home.

If you had to describe yourself as a particular sort of poet, is there any label you would be happy with?

Labels are a funny thing. Once a week I am introduced to an audience as 'one of Australia's leading indigenous poets'. Am I? Am I really? I don't know. I like the term 'textual practitioner'. My publisher is very supportive, but if I was not coming up with the goods, they would not be. And if I am not producing every day, am I really a poet?

Auden says we are only poets in the moments we are writing great poems.

Only at those moments?

And he says a moment later comes the thought, 'Will it ever happen again?'

Probably once a month we go to a Sunday afternoon barby at someone's house. My partner is a filmmaker and she loves introducing me as her partner the poet. People say, 'Oh, a poet. Well, give me a poem'.

And I say, 'No, well, it doesn't work like that, dude'.

Then they ask, 'You really do that?'

I say, 'Yeah. I jump on a plane and go to Sydney, and do this. Or I go here and do that. I've gone to gaols and worked with people there'.

They reply, 'I thought a poet was some guy that sits in a little dark room and listens to Nick Cave and smokes a cigar and drinks a bottle of wine and has all this anger at the world'.

I might have acted like that, when I was younger. But it is not really productive. I am a productive person.

So the label you are most comfortable with is writer?

Writer, textual practitioner. But even then, if I go a week and no one returns my calls, if I have not made anything off my writing, nothing has come in, then I do not feel like a writer. It is when I get that phone call, or that email saying, 'Hey, we want you to write this', or 'Here's two hundred bucks, to write a thousand words'—then I feel like a writer.

That is to talk about your writing in a professional capacity.

As a job.

What about if you received a letter from someone saying, 'I really loved your book', or 'I really loved this poem'? Isn't that going to make you feel like a writer too?

If someone wrote me a letter to say, 'I really liked your work', then I would become their audience. I would want to know who this person talking to me is. When I am on a signing table and someone buys my book, I want to know why. What are they going to do with the book when they get home? Are they going to do

some writing themselves? ‘How much writing and reading do you do a day?’—I ask them that.

There is a beautiful, symbiotic relationship between author and audience, that you really need to follow up.

I have met and made friends with people whose books I have bought because I think their writing is really good. Those writers turn out to be totally different to the people I imagined. You sit down with a good book and you really embrace it. You embrace it so much it gets dog-eared. You are waking up next to it in bed. You get intimate with this book—and then you meet the writer and they are a totally different person. You really do not talk a lot about writing. You talk about fishing or sex, partners, the relationship troubles you are having, where you went last summer on holidays.

Sorry, I’ve probably gone off topic.....

But is the reason that those conversations drift away from writing because writing is a job, and we don’t want to talk about our jobs too much?

Encounters over writing can be really special though.

You brought up a poem from the Boondall Wetlands Project the other day: I was at the Brisbane Writers Festival just before coming here. I met this old bloke, who is a poet himself, and a teacher. He gave me that poem. He actually quoted it to me, knew it off by heart. He said he teaches that poem to his kids. He thinks it is my best poem.

It’s a beauty.

The funny thing is, I rushed it. I rushed it, because it had to be finished. We were on print. So that’s why it is called ‘Poem 9’. The body of the poem was right. But I didn’t know what to call it.

The first couple of stanzas are particularly lovely: the line breaks really capture the sense of someone thinking, then and there. The poem is spiritual, but without implying that anyone out there, a God or whoever, might actually have the answer. That’s why I like it. But how do you think about it?

As a kid I was always told that on country you do not hurt a tree, you do not hurt anything, because it will come back on you. I have new cars at home, I have a nice house—it’s not flash, but it’s nice. I have technology. None of this matches the power of spirituality, on country.

I was brought up a Catholic. I did mass every Sunday, and communion. I was an altar boy. I really had the fear of God in me at times. But I also remember my pop, my father, and my grandmother saying, ‘You have to respect country, when you are on it’.

When I was writing that poem, what came to my mind was a time when I was in my teens. One house in our street had a Rottweiler, always locked up because it had bitten someone. I was out with my mates, riding our B.M.X. We came across a carpet snake that had been hit by a car and we were teasing it a bit.

I thought at the time, ‘It’s not good, us doing this’.

I was riding home and someone had left a gate open. That Rottweiler came out

and bit me. Not badly. But it gave me a good enough scare that I fell off my bike. Someone from another house then chased it off.

Twenty minutes before, I had been poking a carpet snake. We should have gone to someone and said, 'Look, there's a beautiful old carpet snake there that's hurt', Or at least gone to get my Pop. He probably would have put it out of its misery, poor thing. But no, we tampered with it.

So I thought, 'This is total Karma'.

That is why I asked in that poem how we know, when we stand on a mudflat, that we are not hurting something. That has always been in my conscience when writing: if I am living and thinking and moving through a piece of country, why would the tree next to me not be thinking the same thing as me? Where is it going to get its next meal from? Is tomorrow going to be a good day for it?

I am not trying to be New Age. It is just something I have always grown up with. It just seems natural to me to think this way.

Is this sort of thinking often behind your poetry?

Often. Places carry scars. I always try to get that out in my poetry. There is one poem—every month I am one word closer to finishing it—which I started writing in a place called Barrow Creek, that's north of Alice Springs. It is where the backpacker murders happened. And an incredibly brutal massacre happened there in the early twentieth century. It is a really scary place. You feel the hurt of country there.

There is a pub, in the roadhouse there. The local farmers and police got drunk on rum, and then rode out and killed the tribal members of the Waramu, and other tribal people that were living along the Coniston River. For two weeks they went up and down that river bank, slaughtering anyone they could find.

You feel it there, you really do feel it, without anyone telling you. It is really bad country.

There are all these mesa formations, and honestly, if there is an acoustic resonance of the shots and the screams of those people being massacred by drunken buffoons, it is there in that land.

Acoustic resonance is something I want to do research on. I want to think about the extent to which country, or even made forms, can carry the acoustic resonance of something that has happened.

The Boondall Wetlands poem we were discussing feels like it does.

Dad was one of the chief surveyors of the North team for the Gateway arterial, so he worked on all that stretch. He used to say, 'I'm walking through country. I'm sure I'm walking somewhere where I shouldn't really be walking'.

But he had mouths to feed. He was on a job, working for one of the biggest road companies in Australia. They are mathematical thinkers, these engineers. Dad has an engineering mind too. But he also has a very spiritual mind. And he is a fantastic raconteur.

He would get home, so knackered after a day working on the road, and he would tell us things: "We had a bushfire today. And a big black snake came out. And I looked at that black snake and he looked at me. Then he went away."

Dad taught us how to feel country.

What about finishing such a poem? How do you know a poem is finished?

I don't. I have absolutely no idea if it is finished. It's like that Lennie Kravitz song, 'It Ain't Over Till It's Over'. You could write our discussion up tonight, and someone down the track might pick it up and say, 'Paul, I want to turn this into a public art piece'.

It's not over till it's over. I keep that in mind with my writing.

And when you publish a poem and a guy comes up to you at the Brisbane Writers Festival ten years later and says, 'I've learnt this off by heart, I teach it to my students', that poem isn't over yet either, is it?

Still going, still being thought about.

It is a weird thing: you asked me to read that poem yesterday, and only a couple of days ago that guy recited it to me at the Writer's Festival. But I had not looked at it for years. That has happened with a bit of my writing. Years later, it gets turned into other things.

The poem that you read to my class yesterday, 'Visiting Hours', had a real impact on the students. It had a real impact on Paul and Wayne as well.

Yes, Paul kept talking about it, about the notion of the prison cell.

I would say to any emerging writer that anything you write, that gets out there, has the capacity to evolve down the track, and come back and bite you. It will come back and bite you. You will think you are finished with that poem but no, you are never finished with it.

Mark Young
Comping

This was when he felt it most, that part of the evening put aside for playing music together. A string quartet, of which he was the fifth member, sharing neither their musical tastes nor their DNA. Usually he would provide the audience, or be the page-turner if the piece were long. Sometimes he would follow the score. He had learned to read music, had studied it, composition, contrabass, first classical & then jazz, many years ago. Years without playing.

Later, when everybody had gone to bed, he would sometimes sit at the piano & pick at tunes, single-fingered like his typing, but eventually he would get there, could recognise what he was playing. Some things never left him. He could still do a little Bach, the harmonies of Debussy's *Clair de Lune*, the chord changes for a twelve-bar blues. Clunk. 'Don't the moon look lonesome . . . ' clunk ' . . . shining through the trees'. Clunk.

& then he would drift, & his hands would hover above the keyboard, & the music would flow. Perfectly, telekinetically. He would think & the keys would depress in the right combinations, in the right sequence. He was Monk, playing *Straight, No Chaser* at the Blue Note, he was Ray Charles on the stage at Newport, he was J. S. Bach on the well-tempered clavier, he was, he was.

But in his most secret moments he was an anonymous piano player in a smoky nightclub in Paris last century, backing Juliette Greco as she sang the latest poem Jacques Prévert had brought in for her. Her voice would build the song, the audience would push her along, he would help, chords & little runs for emphasis. & then he would pause, & the audience would catch its breath, & the last words of the poem would drift alone, out there, spreading, until everybody was caught up by them & they would finish together.

*Pourquoi me questionner
Je suis là pour vous plaire
Et n'y puis rien changer.*

Lynne Arjava
This is the Suitcase

I

This is the suitcase.
This is the owner.
There goes their flight now
to Barcelona.
Inside the owner
inside the airplane
forty-four years
of solitude pain,
forty-four years
of fruitless waiting,
and ten love-long months
internet dating.
Inside the suitcase
inside the cargo bay
two Carmelite nuns
kneel in panties and pray.
A virgin mermaid
with pink sea-rose breasts
pats a lean kelpie
that restlessly rests.
This heart's hoping big,
this heart's fearing farce.
Twenty-three kilos,
economy class.

II

This is the suitcase.
This is the owner.
Here comes their flight now
from Barcelona.
Inside the owner
in seat 16C
two weeks of censored
feelings disagree,
mocked by the woman
who couldn't be touched
by love, by a hand,
by anything much.
Inside the suitcase
in the cargo hold
a convent of nuns
keep their urges controlled.
A tireless kelpie,
faithful as sin,
stalks them with a gaze
and herds them in.
A mermaid asleep
in a tank of water,
sequestered in weeds,
hugs her still-born daughter.

III

This is the suitcase
back home intact.
This is the suitcase
that can't be unpacked.
This is the suitcase
world without end.
This was open-and-shut.
And this is Amen.

Hugh McMillan
Caroline Herschel's Christmas

They pitied Caroline Herschel,
marked by typhus,
but while other girls picked goose bones,
dreamed of kissing-boughs,
she was in the garden
with a 2.2 Newtonian Telescope
pointing at the northern part of Monoceros
on the midpoint of a line
from Procyon to Betelgeuse,
where the ionised hydrogen forms
a haze of stars
that emerge from leaves of sky
like pearls.
When they wondered if she might
be tempted inside
for pudding, some society,
she demurred,
preferring instead
to watch the birth of light.

Jane Frank
Another Day

On TV, a girl on a talk show has
sailed solo around the world.
I wonder what it would be like to sail to Spain,
Win the Archibald Prize,
Write a novel that's half good.

In the meantime,
life is broken into fifteen minute segments —
an assignment marked,
a stir fry diced,
a basket of laundry folded,
a short story read from the book by the bed.
Enough bits like that
make up a day
that can be crossed off,
so one runs into another.
It's an achievement of sorts.

I liked it better when
the light in the bathroom
was softer, more forgiving.
Middle age is unquestionably upon you,
the expert in today's paper said,
when one day
the image in the mirror is quite foreign.
Watch for the jolt, he said,
the reaction to
the slip of youth,
the futile hope,
the wish still to run headlong
before it's too late
into the remarkable.

Jo Emeney

Norma-Jean, Naomi, Tammy and Grace

Ladies,

 You're killing me
with your bulkiness,
your outmoded styles,
the long, odious fringes that fall
where eyebrows should be. No surprise
wan, bashful women sink
under the weight of your personalities
when all they were seeking
was something unobtrusive
that made them feel mildly healthful,
little changed, walking out
into the world of observers again
after so many months in hiding.

Bad wigs,

 with your timeless names,
you serve as reminders of all the bad bald stories—
the shower blocked with hanks of hair,
that embarrassing, thick moult
down the back of a coat two days unnoticed,
 and once,
a sleepless five-year-old
found knotting pieces from her pigtails,
cut with dangerous blades,
onto a hairband for Mummy,
whom she'd espied crying
naked in the bath.

Rob Walker
Eisoptrophobia

self-reflection is dangerous.
that man pretends to be you
but he knows nothing,

except his left hand knows
what your right's doing.
his asymmetric face

the obverse of yours,
unknown
to your friends.

he watches you shaving.
flashes his teeth. ejects adolescent
pimples at you.

knows your every flaw.
stares at you long enough
to make you feel guilty.

says good morning, goodnight,
avoids you for most of the day.
pops up in unlikely places.

men's rooms.
sideways glances from shop windows.
his twisted Andrew Lloyd Webber face

glares back at you from the backs of spoons.
keeping tabs on you.
always mocking.

reminding you daily
of the passage of time.
you wish

you were a vampire

so you could be
rid of him.

Simon Patton
King Hong Kong

I: Mountains Finally Make Themselves Felt (Sha Tin 沙田)

The Mountains — grow unnoticed —
— *Emily Dickinson*

It's eerie to see how here
mountains once were. Where
the head hits unexpected angles
they loom, unbuilding
backbone highrise with natural incongruity
while displacing a moment monumental
displacement in me. Where had my eyes
been all this time? I — now resighted —
wonder. What fixes them so
religiously to that precinct of the geometric-human?
Meanwhile, from the thirtieth floor, trees
grow real sky, disturbing sheer wall,
unnerving unmathematically the rigorous town-planning
of 'home'.

II: 萬佛寺 The Ten Thousand Buddhas Temple

Hardly a temple: it's more like a zoo
of enlightened beings. They watch me
mount the concrete stairs, sculpted
slightly larger than life and painted
mock-gild gold. They're no match
(of course) for the jungle butterflies
vivid in Summer air. Here's one now,
sunning itself on the merciful, all-compassionate tip
of Kwan Yin's nose.

III: Blind Choir (Nam Shan Estate 南山邨)

Between the concrete wall of a block of flats
and—flightless—concrete stairs
this was no place on Earth we'd ever expect
a Christmas choir. I was caught
as I think I always am
when the once-in-a-lifetime moment comes
in two minds twice unequal to the task.
By the way they looked crookedly through their song
I could tell they all sang blindly by ear
and I realized how my thin sightseeing power
was stone-deaf here to the sonic invisible.
The harmony of so many separate shared voices
none of which carried the main body of music
across the arid hubbub of human noise
braked my heart:
this was the concert of the fragment,
soaringly restored to charismatic wholeness,
rock-solidarity made possible by breath.

Ouyang Yu
Voices

One said it's a tewu guojia, a Nation of Secret Agents
 One said wo xiang ni, I think you
 One said it's fulan touding, rotten through
 One said wo fachu, I grew timid
 One said chizao yao wandan de, it's going to be finished sooner or later
 One said wo zui taoyan bianpao, I most heartily detest firecrackers
 One said wo haishi xiang ni, I still think you
 One said da chengshi you shenme hao, what's good about big cities
 One said that's jew in you
 One said labuchu jiushi labuchu, if you can't pull you can't pull
 One said shi er houyi, poetry till you end
 One said but you are kidding
 One said niandu shiren buxing, poets of the year no good
 One said bu fazhan yeshi ying daoli, non-development also a hard reason
 One said shui huaile, xin jiu huaile, bad water, bad heart
 One said wo xiang ni, I think you
 One said wusuowei, past caring
 One said fuzhou, city of comforting
 One said linghun zai jiao, soul calling
 One said yiqie guiyu wu, everything gone to nothing

Ross Donlon
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For Enda Coyle-Greene

Xanadu, Inisfree, Elsinor
are gone for poets ever more.
Prufrock can leave and eat his peach.

Ice box plums can't be re-stolen
in a common red wheelbarrow
then tipped on Dover Beach.

Paradise is as lost as the Inferno.
Brooklyn Bridge is sold, as is love
when blushed then applied to a rose.

The ball turret gunner will stay at peace.
He will not be demeaned in death
like that again. The State can rest.

For that dread shape with Shakespeare's
head and poetry's insatiable maw
is consuming last metaphors

as it slouches toward Coole.
It makes swans fly then honk at us below,
'Whose woods these are I think I know.'

John Kinsella
Wren's Electric Field Strength

Out of the furze and fuchsias
to whisper sweet nothings,
wren pivots as fast and sharp
as thought. With the domes
sending out high volts-per-metre charges,
a house comes available.
Wren says, I'm resident year round,
and will greet you here
on St Stephen's day. I won't die
at your door, I will fly
below radar. And I say: I am not one
for the old ways, and for
what it's worth, I'll watch out for you —
nobody will put you
in a box, stick you on a beribboned
holly branch, bury you
with a red cent. We never required
Gothic in these parts,
says the Wren, the intricate vaulting
of the hedges suffices,
and it always aspires up beyond
the mountaintop. A gang
of boys passes by, striking hedges
with hurleys, wary
of the girls walking ten steps behind.



Interview

Interview with Julie Chevalier

Josh Mei-Ling Dubrau

Before I come to Annandale to meet Julie Chevalier for our first chat in 2014, the interview has been lined up for about five months. The strange elliptical paths of writers mean that our first ‘contact’ was back in 2011 when I held in my hand a review copy of a book of short stories until then unknown to me: *Permission to Lie*, published by the small press Spineless Wonders in Darwin, 2011. [Spineless Wonders subsequently published two volumes of other writers’ short fictions, edited by Chevalier and Linda Godfrey: *Small Wonder: An Anthology of Prose Poems and Microfictions* (2012) and *Stoned Crows and Other Australian Icons* (2013) – Ed.]

Permission to Lie had an earthy cover, decorated with two roughly sketched naked figures laid out head to head: a man and a woman. Around them were placed clothes with small tabs appended, the sort one uses to dress paper dolls. The twin concepts of both deliberate disguise and the powerlessness of the doll figures in deciding on their own choice of clothing intrigued me as a potential metaphor for the book’s title. So did the idea of the naval signal-flags code used when a ship’s captain seeks ‘permission to lie alongside’—for the purpose of docking, fuelling or transferring of cargo.

What really struck me in this series of partially interlinked tales was that they could view humanity and human actions with such an accurate and unflinching gaze, and yet still retain compassion in the telling. Reading certain characters, I had the feeling that that same stern gaze had been, at times, turned on the author herself. The cover really started to make sense. Incidentally, the theme of dolls or figures of representation is flagged in Chevalier’s first published story, ‘The Doll Who Faced the Wall’ (*Southerly*, 2005) and, following *Permission to Lie*, the books of poetry, *Linen Tough as History* and *Darger: his girls*, both of which were published by Puncher & Wattman in 2012. A few weeks after my review appeared in the *Australian*, I received a much re-directed thank you card. I was thrilled and surprised. I didn’t find out until I interviewed Julie that not only was *Permission to Lie* her first book; it was also the first book from Spineless Wonders, so every review mattered. Since then Julie and I have exchanged the occasional email. I wrote a blurb for *Cracking the Spine*, a book of Australian short stories with accompanying essays by the authors, which she co-edited with Bronwyn Mehan (Spineless Wonders, 2014), and when she came to deliver a guest lecture to a first year fiction course I was teaching, the class and I listened, amazed, as she detailed the thoroughness of her drafting process (which we talk about here). That was the first time we met face-to-face, around April 2014.

§

In November 2014, I stepped through the wooden gate of her Annandale front yard for the first time, finding myself pretty uncomfortable in the position of being a guest whose job is to be nosy. The house seems purpose built as a writer’s retreat; there’s a tiny picket fence outside: hinting at a desire for private space. Inside, light paintwork, touches of dark wood, comfortable lounges, even big glass doors onto a small balcony, a rarity in this part of town. It seems as though everything has a place, but it’s also fine to take your shoes off and tuck your feet up on the couch. We’re chatting over snacks when a soft clang draws my eye to the front door, and

the appearance of another, smaller, eye in the letterbox slot (Julie is facing in the opposite direction). I tell her about the eye. ‘Oh that’s my young neighbour’, she says, unfazed; ‘sometimes he likes to make me a cup of mint tea. But he needs to learn to use the doorbell.’ Does Julie know all her neighbours? Yes. I’m not surprised.

That first session went quickly, with much of it escaping my haphazard note taking; more of a back and forth discussion than a formal Q and A. Julie has lived such a rich life, and her account of her research for her poetic portrait of Henry Darger, outsider artist and social isolate, is so interesting, and also, at times, resonant with her previous life in the US, that I sometimes feel I am confusing her real and imaginary worlds. As I reread the books at home, I wonder if I am making up facts in my readings between lines.

For our second talk, I realise I’m going to have to use a dictaphone if I want to get everything down. At least it’s only my phone, so it looks like it belongs on the coffee table and its presence isn’t too intrusive. I notice again the deep blue of the lounges we’re sitting on, and touches of blue around the room. Is it her favourite colour? Yes, she says. We’re easing into this. There are photos of grandchildren, and I know Julie does a fair bit of ‘grandkid duty’ as she puts it. I decide not to ask too much; this is about writing—but bits and pieces of family history and family present trickle through as we talk.

Embarrassingly, I’m tempted to ask Julie her star sign, because she reminds me of my mum. Practical. Left-leaning. Minimalist. Maybe a little reticent. Efficient. Good time-management skills. We’re having this chat between her morning Italian class in the city, and going together to Little Fictions at Knox St Bar that evening. Capricorn? No. Virgo? No. Cancer. In that way it has that makes it ‘work’, astrology makes sense in hindsight. Cancerians also are reserved, prudent, not quick to talk about themselves, compassionate, but with emotions kept well below surface level. Julie tells me about recently writing a poem about Jesus, being convinced he was an Aquarius. I tell her my Mum’s birthday is the 27th, so he’s definitely a Capricorn. Prudent, cautious, economically sound. Doesn’t sound like Jesus. Is the poem published, I ask? ‘Oh no’, she says. ‘When I realised the star sign didn’t work, I ditched it. It takes a while to write poetry, and often by the time the thing is completed I’m sick to death of it.’

§

I know that you’ve devoted a lot of your creative (and professional time) to other art forms, like ceramics and painting. When did writing become important to you? Was it some kind of sudden revelation or had it always been there in the mix?

I wrote when I was at Uni; I was in a poetry group.

This was before you came out to Australia?

Oh, yes, a while before.

Were you studying literature or creative writing at that stage? Or interested in writing but studying in other fields?

Oh no—did every poetry course I possibly could. Every time I had a chance to do a thesis, I did it on poetry. Then I was in this little poetry group at the uni...

So, a group of student poets, swapping poems ...

Critiquing each other's poems. I don't think we had a clue.

I don't know that that matters, especially at the start. I think for every class I've taught, there's been a group of students who've set up their own group outside of the class workshop-ping time we have. It's all practice.

Mmm, I always encourage that in my own writing classes—much better than friends or relatives.

Oh definitely. And I've found myself, as I've gotten older and have written more, that you try and form or join a group with people who are roughly where you're at yourself with your writing.

Yeah, yep—and people with similar interests. Because often the poetry people are happy to critique prose, but prose writers seem less comfortable with poetry. There was a group I was in for years and years that was a disaster, really. Though it got me into the habit of writing three thousand words a week when I was working full-time for the Department of Education, which was a huge achievement!

Yes it is. Were you an early morning writer, or a late night writer?

A bus writer.

It didn't make you feel sick?

Well, I guess if you sit there on the bus with the pencil and the paper, you're thinking, aren't you? But at home I wrote more at night than early in the morning.

So I'm guessing your first full-time work was in America too, then?

Yes—Boston Public Library. I'd already done a Bachelor of English in upstate New York, but at the library's suggestion, I started a MA in Library Science at Simmons College. I only completed four courses but around the same time I was taking evening and summer courses at Boston University and Harvard—that was great; I was overwhelmed thinking of all the footsteps on the grounds there.

And you came out here to Australia in 1965. How did that happen, and what was the experience like for you?

Well, I married a PhD who lived across the road from me, and we came to work out here. He worked at the University of Sydney for the rest of his life. I came with a background in poetry and English, and I remember really pushing to do a Masters in English at the University of Sydney, but when I got there, I was devastated. It was very Anglo-centric. They were teaching Leavis; I'd been reading Williams and Stevens, not Robert Frost. So I went further back, to Donne and Blake instead, which was acceptable. I also missed the food, being able to go places at night—bookstores, ice-cream stores.

So, certainly since you've come to Australia, you've had a lot of different jobs. And I think it is worth talking about, because there are definite ways in which your working life shows up in, or certainly informs, what you write. Has it been chance, or maybe restlessness, that's seen you flourish in so many careers?

No, restlessness...

That was my guess; just a feeling...

Oh, definitely restlessness. It's like: if I'm not learning, why am I doing this? Let's learn something new instead! Where it's interesting; where I'm getting something out of it. Then you're not just there for the money, you're there to learn.

Does this restlessness ever make it hard for you to finish things?

Every time I left a job, I took it with me, so that I could go back to it if I needed to.

I suppose I meant that more in the sense of finishing creative projects, than careers – but it's a great perspective – that instead of these one-eighty degree turns on a career path, you find a way to bring what you've learned in other settings into play.

When I was a child, there was a whole string of unfinished projects, including a green cotton apron, which followed me around for about fifteen years, y'know, and my Mother and Father thought I should finish! I don't think I'm like that now...

No, you do seem pretty organised... [laughs] James Valentine on the ABC had a call-in segment once for the longest unfinished piece of craft. There was apparently a cross-stitch that had been on the go for about fifty years!

[Laughing] My green apron with the apple dot-embroidered on the pocket would be high up there! Really hideous!

I remember that when we were talking about working and writing full-time last time—I think this was on the phone, you said that you'd find it impossible to write and to teach at the same time.

Oh, yes, I think so. The only work I'm doing now is writing related. The only paid work... the unpaid work as well.

That's pretty endemic to the industry, isn't it?

Yep.

How do you start the writing process? I think I remember you talking about writing on shopping docketts and envelopes when you came to talk to my class.

Oh I like to write and do the first edits in longhand, shifting things around. I enjoy shredding the drafts.

I can't imagine shredding all my drafts!

Well, then you know you're finished with them. A year and a half ago I deleted about a hundred poems.

Were they unfinished?

No, just awful and cringy. I should cull again. You don't go and get back a great poem from a lousy start five years ago, do you?

I live in hope!

Maybe yours were further along? Better?

No, no way—but I also like to have a record of what was going on at the time.

I'd do that with a painting, a drawing. It's more of a record of a social time, when you're outside with people, painting. Poetry's just kind of isolating, you're sitting at a desk. Painting at summer schools, etcetera: you're painting or drawing most of twelve hours. You were so tired, you were often completely uninhibited and did the best work. You don't have that with poetry, the physical exhaustion, stretching canvases, although I used to go away writing with poets very often. We'd rent a house and break up the time into solo writing, workshopping, exercises.

When Ron Pretty ran the Poetry Australia residential sessions in Wollongong, you needed twelve poems to apply. I don't think I even had twelve then. So I took some of my prose and Linda Godfrey helped chop it up. I got in. I went feeling like a fraud and I left feeling like a poet. Poetry Australia ended up using that as a tag-line. It was great being immersed in poetry. I'd get rhythms in my head when I was walking around. We got coaching on how to read in public, and someone read every night. That's where I met Michael Sharkey, Jennifer Harrison, Susan Hampton.

Are the new lit journals that are proliferating in print and online combinations a new model for young writers, do you think?

They have a lot of energy that I find very appealing.

I think we are used to this idea of a more rigid hierarchy in terms of publishing in Australia.

Yes, and links to universities: chapters of theses, research, creative writing undertaken at universities. I think flash fiction is the most exciting thing at the moment. Prose-poetry/flash fiction—I'm finding it less interesting now to write the three thousand word short story. But American authors seem to be moving towards writing longer, four to six thousand words, and I find Australian male authors are quite interested in it too: Ryan O'Neill, Andy Kissane, Mark Vender, who has just moved back to Melbourne after some years in Columbia.

We were talking about Cordite earlier on the phone: I think it's a very early example of that kind of more open experimental approach to publishing ... even from the outset.

Yes, it's immaculate isn't it? And Kent is so good at making it feel personal. The administration's great.

On the phone I got that sense again, that I'd already picked up on, that you're, sort of, a natural-born educator... and mentor... and that, this is the thing I mentioned in the introduction, how unflinching your writer's gaze is, and yet there's still compassion.

Oh, that sounds nice! That's a lovely thing to say...

I think it's true! You know, you talked about your time teaching; and how it doesn't mesh with writing, and you said, 'because there's never going to be a time when adolescent problems don't come up', and you didn't say it in a groaning kind of way, or even a sad way. It was just like it's this fact, and you knew it would be something you'd have to be there fully to help people deal with.

I enjoyed that energy. I like working with adolescents. One of my good friends, Bryan, was one of those students. I had dinner with him and his wife, Vicki, about two weeks ago. And I saw her last time I was in Melbourne. We've all kept in touch, through all these different changes. But I taught at the Australian International Independent School—it was a Year 11 and 12 school then; it was set in the bush, around North Ryde. And there was this really close network of community that I just loved!

That's always special, when it's real.

I think it was the first time in Australia that I felt part of something I believed in.

So this was, essentially, a private school? But presumably not too heavy on the fees?

Oh, low fees. And we would take kids that had just been chucked out of all the local schools; like private schools. At one stage they were caning pupils from Normanhurst boys—and we were getting the boys in alphabetical order! I sent my kids there too. Ahh, like a breath of fresh air. It was as left-wing as left-wing could be: Friday nights we'd cook up brown rice, and some kind of a vegetable thing to have on top; we'd have an Indian banquet.

But it wasn't a boarding school? Everyone just stayed around on Friday night?

Nope. It was just on a hill in the bush near Macquarie Centre. It's now under a freeway. It really was idyllic; almost all outside. Everyone used first names; there were no uniforms; the seminars were eighteen people maximum and I taught with everybody sitting in a circle, and they all contributed all the time. I had my own big room to teach in. So on one side of the wall, I had the students write up quotations they'd read in literature that they liked and on the other side we had a time line that was our Western literature, music and history. Like 1400, 1600, 1800. And we'd just write. Whatever came up, we'd just write it in the place. So you could see what was going on in a certain year with different forms. That was fun! I also taught pottery there. But the minute I left they repainted that room... but it was really significant for me, all of that. I think it's because it wasn't 'lecturing'. I enjoyed it so much more than teaching in the public system!

That's right—you've done that as well. Where were you? I remember you saying you read Bleak House three times!

Oh, out in the western suburbs. And yes, all seven hundred-odd pages of it. When you teach you really have put all of yourself into it.

You certainly seem to like high-energy jobs!

Oh well, then, yeah—I had more energy, my kids were little.

I'm not sure everyone would agree with you that having small children is a time when you have lots of energy! What about the work you've done in the Correctional Services system, I imagine that required a lot of stamina—physically and mentally.

Again, I think I'm always escaping from the middle class. You know, trying to learn about the other. Maybe that's a point of view thing too, learning to see things from someone else's point of view.

I think it shows in the topics you write about and the way you write about them. It's going to be very clear, I think, when we talk about your most recent work, the book on Henry Darger—but I'd really like to talk about Linen Tough as History too. I'm now wondering if the title might be a sly nod to your unfinished apron! I laughed out loud at the poem about Chedo's, in Coledale. My partner lives at Scarborough so I've had coffee at Chedo's lots of times. You have everything so perfect at the house and at the café, there's the speaker, making everything there shipshape in her mind also: 'focussed on perfection, you adjust Chedo's doormats / move the sea blue dog bowl one-half centimetre to the right'—and then you have the woman in the dressing gown going into the bottle shop next door, and I had one of those irrational 'Oh God, could that have been me?' moments—because I have done it!

[Laughing]: I was minding my daughter's house, which was up for real estate open days, and so everything in the house had to be absolutely... and Linda Godfrey and Dael Allison were there with me because it was a great place to do our workshops. So I was sleeping on two single bed mattresses in a corner of a room, and I had to make that look like this beautiful bed, and we had incense, and scented soap.

Can't you even buy a magic spray that makes houses smell like you're baking cookies?

I don't know—but we did do the coffee thing, and in one of those local 'house' type shops in Thirroul, they had a carved chrysanthemum thing, which you were supposed to leave in the bathroom, and it was supposed to sell the house for you. It was really expensive. So I had to dig that out every time. I was a bit sad because I loved that house. It was just an old brick veneer house but with the escarpment up the back. They had lyrebirds and wallabies and bush pigeons; oh, it was great. Chooks...

I was really interested in the voice of the poem—is the speaker's constant adjusting of everything at Chedo's because of being in this mode of constantly adjusting the house?

Oh, you're so conscious of every detail, you know, when you do the real estate thing, everything has to be perfect. There can't be a wrinkle on a pillowcase! Linda and Dael and I went down for coffee while the real estate agent was taking people through, and we had to sit there and write a poem while we had a coffee.

I was trying to work out when the poem was first written, or when you would have been staying there, because I thought that the escarpment real estate gurus might be trying to distance themselves from a 'Coal Coast' image now.

Oh—I changed it; I altered that because it was for an issue of *Griffith Review* that was on coal or something. I tweaked the original a bit.

Having said that, I liked it being in there, because if you look past Chedo's and the kind of shop where you would have bought the chrysanthemum, a lot of 'the coal coast' is still there. A lot of the houses, as you said, are still old fibro or brick veneer—I think there are plenty of families that would be second or third generation householders by now.

Yes, I was glad to have that in it anyway, too, because you know, there's still the coke works at Coalcliff, and it's a big part of the area's history.

There are some amazing contrasts in the area, aren't there? Plenty of tough linen and tough history in the mix there. And then, not too far down the coastal trail, you have the 'towradgi girl' poems; have you spent time there as well?

Oh, Towradgi. They just kept coming. Every year I'd write another one out of the clear blue: 'That's the Towradgi girl again!' It was based on nothing!

Really? Because I was reading them, thinking 'Who's Towradgi girl? It must be a relative.'

Everybody said that: 'Is that your daughter?'—'Is it your grand-daughter?', and it's not at all. The only thing real in it is once I went to the Chauvel cinema, and I had to wait for the film to start and I wrote about the setting!

I think that when a poem is realist, we do tend to assume it might also be real...

Yeah, I hate that when people say that! But nobody thinks Towradgi girl's me, luckily. She hasn't come back anymore.

I thought Linen was a very diverse collection.

Yeah, probably because it was my first book.

I read several reviews of Linen, and I noticed that a couple of them were along the lines of 'the wordplay's great, but there's a bit much of it', whereas I thought I could see a nod to the materiality of language and a bit more going on than just light puns or jokes—so I wanted to ask you what you feel the role of things like wordplay or neologisms is in the text?

I love words, obviously. I would hope it would go on the side of wit rather than being stupid. Judy Beveridge talks about the wordplay and compares me with joanne burns, which is very nice. joanne was my mentor for that book.

For wit and brevity I really enjoyed 'Letter Perfect', one of my favourites in the book.

Now that's one I never read anywhere. I read the Chedo's one.

Well it is very visual; it makes me think of some of Johanna Drucker's work – this real focus on materiality at the level of the individual letter. I can imagine it would still sound good read aloud, but you do need to be able to see the shapes of each letter to really appreciate their description. Like 'D Mrs. Monotit / the department teacher'.

I had a friend's son who referred to his teacher as Mrs. Monotit.

Well how could you not use that! The opposite problem is when you wear something strap-less that's too tight, and you get the four-boob.

Oh, quadruple breasted [laughing].

I just loved 'Letter Perfect' because it's visual, but it's more than just visual punning and a riff on the theme of a child's alphabet primer. The way that the letter D is focused around 'M' sounds for instance. Or 'i the all-seeing lyrical/ I/ wears her self-indulgent hat/ indoors': You've got the 'i', the 'eye', and the hat. Or: 'q:/ he'll never amount to much without/ you'. It's great – maybe you could do it next to a chalkboard, and draw the letters as you read. I love that kind of work—multi-modal performance. I suppose not many venues have a blackboard spare.

Well actually, the original one I did had all those letters in India ink and I did them with a quill so they splattered all over, deliberately. And then I'd made a paper that was full of things like the holes punched out—you know, the paper holes—I put them on, and other bits of little stuff, and more ink and so I printed it on that.

So it was just a one-off?

Well... nobody was very interested in it. I don't think that poem's ever been published anywhere but in this book.

I liked 'jalapenos' too:

breakfast at the pub:
y'all want red or green chilli with gravy
red or green jelly? you asked

That's why for me the wordplay is really interesting. Some of it's true to life; it's this idea of accents making the same language different. Then you have a poem like 'barn dance at westport island' that has something like the word 'fun(d) raiser' as a one off, but then you have something like: 'fiddler magicians saw the lady of the lake in four-four time'. That's a very extended and complex one. Is it just something that happens naturally as you write?

Mmm, yeah. The first one was mishearing. I was actually writing last night and I was very conscious that I was cutting out a lot of those easy wordplays and a lot of those easy vowel repetitions and when I looked back at what I'd written, I'd killed the darlings, you know?

And how did it feel?

Well I went back and looked at it, just before you came, and I didn't put any words back in, but I changed it from two lines to three lines—three line stanzas instead of couplets. I thought—it needs more material, because it needs more explanation.

It feels to me like you're very in control of the diversity of the material for a first collection. Especially in your ekphrastic works. In a strange coincidence, as I was walking down to your house, I spotted half a mannequin—a pair of male legs to the waist, lying next to some bushes on the footpath!

Like it fell off a mannequin truck, or something?

Oh, it looked a bit more beat up than that, probably from someone's sharehouse. But I'd wanted to talk about the poem 'hans bellmer stuffs dolls'; so it felt like a sign. I wasn't familiar with Hans Bellmer; I looked him up last night.

Nasty...

Pretty disturbing!
He's nasty...

I was very curious about the layout...
With the boxes? He used boxes.

Oh, to put the dolls in. It was a bit hard to tell from the artworks I saw.

But I also wanted to have that feeling of claustrophobia, and I wanted it to be able to be read across as well as down. It isn't something I've used before or since.

Well, I think that's why it stood out. I like to think that as a poetic audience we're getting more comfortable with different devices in the construction of poetry.

No one's ever commented on it before.

Really? Even with lines like 'it feels like your legs / are attached back to front / fitted with someone else's cunt'? And then across the grid: 'that sick feeling when your forehead touches the floor'. [Julie goes to get the book for me, that has the artworks in the boxes.]

These are probably more horrific than what you saw. The ones that are out in the woods I don't like much. I don't like any of them really. I used to like him when I was an art student because I'd seen his pencil drawings. And they were so delicate and that's what interested me—and then I got these books. Yuck! I couldn't get into it.

'flesh pillowing around fishing line / delicately rendered in 4H pencil'?

Here's a pair of legs attached to legs; there was one I had in a book of German surrealist drawings or something, and it was this very, very beautiful delicate oval sort of eyelid with a fishhook through it, and it was done in 4H or something. It was so delicate; that was what interested me.

So you haven't gone on to write a series?

Nope. Here's one with the boxes. And here's one I think is really moving – it works. It's his wife. Here's another box one.

It's a bit of a Wunderkammer style. Some of the sculptures, the contorted bulbous ones, like the kind you write about actually made me feel a bit sick to look at.

I don't want to revisit him [laughs wryly].

It's a great poem though. I found it pretty powerful. And I love the way that it's ekphrastic, but it's not the poet musing on the artwork – you let the artwork speak; give it agency.

No one's ever liked it. I don't think anyone's read it!

What would make you think that?

Because it's horrible...

But it's so interesting: when you look at the picture, the doll is so inhuman looking, but you give her a really human voice, and a punchy one too, that goes against what appears to be her total incapacity. And still on art poems, I loved 'The intimacy of the shelf'.

The Giorgio Morandi one?

Yes, the narrative you've created from this beautifully simple still life: after describing the objects very humanly, you have the stepchild wriggling into the 'hot bed', which I think is suggested just by that strip of brighter reddish colour between the vase and the bottle. I just found the second stanza very touching: 'bribed into exile with new crayons' ... those memories – of kids waking up way too early. 'Go put the cartoons on!'

[Laughing] 'Go and raid the cookie jar!'

And 'morandi spins a white bowl in a microwave' ... that was one of those poems for me where I just wondered: 'how do people put these ideas together?'

Because you sit there looking at the microwave, waiting, and there's this white bowl going, with the shadow changing on it, and you're thinking, 'Oh my God, Morandi should see this! He'd love this! You know I'm a real fan of Morandi—I went to the Museo in Bologna, and I couldn't get into the house because it was Saturday.

Bit unfair. Like a Tuesday in Paris!

I think it was about two hours on the train each way. Again, I've tried to write some about Morandi, and he had such an exceedingly tedious life, you know, aside from being bombed and selling two paintings to Mussolini, not much happened.

Of course now you say it, I can see it – but on the first reading I just wondered how someone comes to put poetically together the inventor of the microwave oven with a twentieth century Bolognan still life artist!

It's that light and shade in the microwave going round. There's another poem about Morandi in the latest *Australian Poetry Journal*, a sestina. He lived at home with his three sisters all his life.

I also had to google the Anselm Kiefer sculptures you write about. I haven't been to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in way too long.

I've seen Kiefer shows as well overseas.

*I'm thinking about the three poems in *Linen* that are in response to the Kiefer works: the three women, 'Myrtis', 'Hypatia' and 'Candida'. Do you think you could have, or would have, written these poems based just on historical research?*

Without the visual? Why do I use the visual? Oh, that's a hard one! I mean obviously I did research as well.

Well, it's particularly interesting in this case, because the Kiefer visuals are quite bold and abstract in some ways, although they are certainly representational of the lives of these women. So you would be researching and working with both the historical and the visual, I suppose.

Yes, there definitely is an appeal in the visual. And then, with the Darger, you've got his autobiography as well. That was a gift, having that. It was like a kind of a touchstone you could go back to, to use as a measure for other things.

At the beginning of the first poem in the set, 'Myrtis, poet', the lines:

a bronze gown binds my torso
 its folds
 fissures
 where poems brood

there's a bit of ambiguity as to whether we are necessarily talking about a statue, or a bronze-coloured dress; and if we do take it to be a statue, it could be any number of statues of a woman of antiquity. But when you move to the next section, starting with 'instead of a head / on my shoulders / a book droops - / greased wings of geese', you're clearly in the world of the Kiefer statue.

Yeah, Yeah—and that sort of heavy lead weight of it. You know, having this heavy lead weight with the open book almost being wings. Do you know these?

Yes, I looked at as many pictures as I could before we talked. I think they're incredible. He did forty of them. I tried to visit him in France and wasn't able to.

For you, does seeing something like this sculptural representation give you a better sense; a sense that makes sense to you, of who this woman was?

Maybe it's another dimension. Maybe it's another person's view to bounce off: so you have her, and you have his interpretation of her, and then you have your interpretation, so it's a three-way thing.

That's a really interesting way to look at it, I think.

They're made out of lead—they must weigh tons and yet here are these people whose bones ... you know, one of them had her bones scraped with shells. And she sounds so fragile.

Hypatia. I was very curious, I hadn't heard of that. You sound slightly vulnerable even talking about it. So that's that thing of really wanting to get rid of someone completely. Like throwing bones in a river, so there's nothing people can form a cult around. Well, given that we've just talked our way through a fair bit of Linen, do you feel like your next collection might be more targeted, or are you maybe just a diverse writer? You seem to like to play?

Mmm, I like to play, yes. Possibly slightly less diverse. I mean, at the moment, I would have a couple of different themes in the book so that ... I mean I've recently done one set of poems that's maybe fourteen pages of related poems. So that could slot into a book. And I have the theme for the book. The question mostly is things jumping around from being stories to being poems! Not knowing where they're going to end up.

You mean as you're writing them—not where their place in the book will be? They're fluid as you write?

Yes, and having similar themes running in the two genres.

That sounds great! I love books and styles that move around.

The problem is that I think there's a push to review books as a thematic whole and to look at books for awards as thematic wholes.

I was surprised that, of the reviews I read, people didn't seem to comment on the geographical scope of the book, which is big—or the recent historical scope. I like that, too. Very different to Darger.

It's always an issue, particularly with short stories. I mean if you write a short story, and you put it in the United States, it immediately gets looked at as 'This is American, not Australian, so we won't publish it. So it's very hard to know how to sort of honour the experience I had in the United States, without transferring it here. So in a poem I've been working on, I'm hitching back and forth all the time: do I call this car a 'car', or do I call it a 'Pontiac', or do I call it a 'Holden'? You're sitting on the fence if you call it a car, aren't you?

At least you would have been able to get away from that geographical split in your second collection, Darger: his girls, but even though it's set in America I imagine that working on a very focused project like that brings its own challenges?

Well, yes it does. This project involved a lot of research where research materials weren't always easy to find. For the voices, being raised in America helped. Even though my family's from New Jersey, I was able to use my Grandfather as a model to some extent—because they would have been contemporaries.

Oh, not because your grandfather reminded you of Darger though?

Oh no; it was about voice, and mannerisms, and just, I suppose, the social and cultural mores of the time.

I have to admit, I'd never heard of Henry Darger until reading the book. When did you first come across him?

On the back of my 2008 Poetry and the Trace Conference program, I had scrawled 'Why all this attention to Henry Darger? A misfit artist from Chicago who traced colouring book outlines and glued them on to street debris. He spent his life mourning a lost newspaper photo?' In a paper session I'd heard that day, and from some subsequent googling, he appeared to be an untrained artist and a social isolate who was obsessed with little girls. There was definitely a sensationalist angle. After his death, his room was found to be full of paintings and collages and writings, some of which are quite disturbing.

Knowing nothing about Darger initially, except those basics, how did you feel about writing him? What prompted you?

Initially, I was just curious—the book took three years in total to write. It started with one long poem, maybe two pages, that was looking at that more sensationalist

side of it, thinking it was true. It sat there for about a year, but it became the germ of the story. I did a bit of research and reading during that time, and then after I got the MacGregor book, it really took off for me. John M MacGregor is an art historian and psychotherapist, he was living in California, I think, and he spent twelve years looking at Darger's art and writings, including actually staying in his rooms for some of that time.

So what came out of that?

Well, the book weighs in at seven hundred and twenty pages, and I felt that some of his argument about who Darger was as a person, and as an artist was unfair. Using his authority as an art writer and a psychotherapist to read the artworks and the man. He came to the conclusion that Darger had the potential to be a murderer or a serial killer. The more I researched, the more I found that there was no evidence of Darger ever having been accused or ever suspected of any kind of violent or sexual misconduct.

In a recent radio interview you did on Darger for Radio Skid Row, I remember the interviewer wondered whether you might have thought of Darger as, in some ways, a kindred spirit, or felt some kind of connection with him as a visual artist?

I didn't feel like he was a kindred spirit. It's more that I came to understand him differently. Some of the paintings are so visceral—here, I'll get the book for you—but I feel very strongly that a person should not be judged by the subject matter of their paintings. Maybe that's the outlet that they need.

[Julie already has her Darger books piled on the bench, and pulls one out for me. I'm entranced. Some of these works would sell fabulously as prints in today's vintage-mad consumer climate. Hundreds of delicate images of little girls, in the style of the clothing catalogues of the time, often traced onto transparent paper and collaged or painted onto backgrounds of cardboard, or whatever material Darger could find on the street. These pretty little girls are sometimes in soldiers' uniforms, sometimes in dresses, and sometimes naked, with small penises, or with tissue-paper traced, or cut out viscera glued over their small bellies. These works are literally visceral. The effect they have on a first-time viewer is overwhelming.]

I guess I can see where the sensationalist angle came from. But at the same time the little girl figures are so beautiful; the innocence—and some of the colours are so bright. After hearing 'outsider artist', 'obsessed with little girls', I was expecting something even more disturbing than the Hans Bellmer works you wrote about in Linen; some real predatory depravity, but this doesn't strike me that way at all.

This was in the age of the Andrews sisters and the Dionne quintuplets, so Darger would have been aware of them. And in his fictional work, some of which is represented through these artworks, he had a band of seven little sisters called 'The Vivian Girls'. They look identical because they're often traced from the same model. In the writings they are rebelling child-slaves.

I really liked the poem in which you talk about the transgenderism of Darger's work, and the framework you posit for it in the poem—because after all, as you say in the introduction, no one knows why he drew penises on these figures, and you get the fictionalised voice of his one friend Whillie in there too:

after one of our walks to the ice pond whillie suggested
 I draw the girl slaves with the waterworks on the outside
 like us so I traced each girl
 then added the details freehand
 quickly got into the three-stroke swing of it gave a penis to each Vivian
 girl as well for balance and strength

lucky little hermaphrodites not old enough
 to grow breasts or need the pads
 stacked in convent cupboards, on shelves in bandage rooms

Well when people talked to his neighbours after his death and the discovery of the artworks, a lot of people thought he may not even have seen a naked female form. But at one point, he was at a Catholic home for boys, and later, as an adult, he worked at St. Joseph's hospital, so he was familiar with both hospitals and convents, and a lot of the work he did was things like rolling and packing bandages. He would have had some idea of their function, and from the viscera in some of the works, it definitely seems he had a basic knowledge of anatomy.

Well, even though I was expecting a different kind of disturbing feeling from this book, I still felt a kind of menace, and a sadness around what happened to Henry in his early years. The menace came often from the sing-songy nursery rhyme sections you insert. The first poem, just after Henry licks his thumb to turn the page of his father's newspaper:

four year old darger
 squats in a corner
 eating motherless pie
 he sticks in his thumb and pulls out
 'i didn't mean to papa
 i didn't mean to'

I nearly teared up there, on the first page. It just sets a tone.

The strange thing is that no one really comments on the word play in the Darger book. And it's full of it.

Very much so...

The nursery rhymes: I didn't know whether to take them in, or leave them out.

I think because it begins with a childhood, the nursery rhymes suit, and then you're just in that space.

Yeah, and one comes in toward the end. The people in my poetry group said, 'Oh, leave them, leave them!'

I'm glad you did! And the next poem telling of the death of his mother during childbirth, and how his father gave the baby up because he was lame: that's very affecting too—and he wanted a baby sister, didn't he?

Oh yes, I think so, and after that, when he started school, he began acting out. Lashing out at other children. He started school in grade two or three, because he could already read: his father had taught him a lot about the Civil War. But he ended up in the Lincoln Asylum for Feeble-minded Children. And really, he remained institutionalised for the rest of his life, if you include working in the hospital environment. It definitely affected him. In one of the paintings, there are rows of children in beds with fiery red hands coming down to throttle them.

I think again, this is an example of that unflinching but compassionate gaze I talked about. I think you saw something unfair in Darger's life-journey, and in the aftermath of it, perhaps.

There was a vulnerability that I found appealing, and also a strength. I mean, this man, after being released from the Asylum, and rejected by the Army, supported himself his entire life working menial jobs. And the artwork was so intriguing.

I'll definitely be scouring the net for some more information on Darger, and some more of his artworks. I suppose this is a bit like the Anselm Kiefer portraits we talked about earlier; his artwork is a third party in your exploration of his life. I believe you're off to Italy before this will go to print. Does this relate at all to your next collection?

Well as we've talked about already, I do have a great interest in ekphrastic work, and I'm particularly keen to look at more Renaissance Art. I've also been thinking a lot lately about Leichhardt, which I live very near to.

Well, I hope you have a fantastic and productive trip, and I'm sure I and lots of others will be interested to see what's in your poet's suitcase on your return!

Anne Elvey
Freight

My ravelled pasts uncoil along the level way I take
to Spencer Gulf. The Murray stretches beside me—
a diversion unseen in its shell. Its pipeline is like the lizard
that warmed itself, under the road-train of the nation.

Strong curves lie on the verge, ochre and ruddy, hide
and hind. The rust of the soil runs in Clare's wine, the lead
of Pirie in the children's blood. Sheep are the colour of country.
At Port Augusta I read that Flinders sailed—until the water

turned to ground. In his Ranges dry scrub hugs the soil.
I hug the road. A kingfisher holds to a dead limb.
Three emus pause in bow and peck beside a fence
while a raven tastes the blue tongue's broken flesh.

Caitlin Maling
At the Excalibur

He and I are meant to get married the next day.
There's a chapel in one of the turrets,
or we can do as the taxi driver suggests,
just drive down Flamingo and stop anywhere.

I'm trying to think of what the dancer on the party-pit stage
is thinking, but I can't. He uses the break between hands
to say *even you are a better dancer than that*.
I know not to say to him,

that the fifty-year-old waitress
bringing us drinks in a midriff top and heels
makes me want to be outside
under a more manageable sky.

The dealers all have nametags listing their hometowns.
Really everyone says Las Vegas,
but the imperticular English suggests otherwise.
Seshat the new dealer is from Egypt.

You have a God's name, I tell her.
She would prefer I tip.
Two chairs down a man repeats:
Is everyone as beautiful in Egypt as you?

I keep telling him that he looks like he's from Perth.
Which he doesn't understand.
I mean he looks like where we come from, or maybe
he is where I am from.

Five double G+Ts deep I tell him,
Excalibur was Arthur's Sword.
Which he already knew.
I say: *He died for love, too*.

The dancer starts to move again
back and forth in front of us,
like how I've heard a horse does,
after you shoot her, before she knows she's dead.

Julie Maclean
Far From

I was happy in crowds until I met you,
man in nest above the Bullring,
Lama praying in a cave,
but now I want
my nearest neighbour
ten miles away
down a dirt track miles from town
red gum flowering.

I won't care if my wall of quiet
is fisted by the sound of
an indeterminate engine
because there will be one
but it won't get through
and I won't need to hide behind
the slatted pine where
passion fruit is dropped
by a greedy parrot.

For all they say
I won't be lonely
in my life less shared,
but invigorated
not taking a shower
and making up lies
should a stranger appear
and expect the door
to be opened It won't be
and when it turns chilly
I am in my hut on McMurdo,
gorging on the belly of a seal,
no manners at all
in this exquisite laboratory
where the only chatter is mine
thanking some god for the physics
of hot buttered toast, a cup of tea.

Bruce Shearer
He was very smooth

He was very smooth.
That's right there was no doubt about it.
I think it was his voice?
Or his sparkling eyes.
He had it.
Something or other.
He wasn't that handsome.
No, not in the typical way.
Not in any way.
But yet.
I've got to admit it.
Even against my better judgment.
Perhaps it was the smile.
He could light the room.
When he wanted.
But he could turn it on and off.
Oh yeah, I've seen that.
He was kind of oblivious to his powers of charm.
Mostly, but he also knew what he wanted
And generally got it too.
He was very smooth.
Too smooth by half.
Did I ever speak to him about it?

Oh I tried time and time again.
He'd give you a wink.
And a bit of a smile.
Then you'd almost forget what you were saying.
People don't realise I'd say.
Particularly the ladies.
They think you're serious.
And I am serious he'd say, with a laugh that was half growl.
It wasn't just the words, it was the way he'd say them.
With those eyes just seemingly, casually, locking deep into their souls.
It was too easy.
Far, far too easy.
He didn't respect it, he didn't respect what he had.
Because he knew it wasn't fair.
It almost embarrassed him.
Yes he couldn't handle it.
Nor could I.
He'd often go missing.
Wouldn't see him for days.
Then he'd reappear.
As if nothing had happened.

Stephen Edgar
The Life and Times

When all is said and done, what is it worth?
What's left of us?
Carbon and oxygen and hydrogen,
A little calcium and phosphorus,
Sulphur and sodium.
Mere elements. About five dollars, then,
Of value to be turned into the earth.
A tidy sum.

No more than meat and gristle, fat and bone—
Now here he lies.
No consciousness, no point of view, no feeling,
No backward longing look or wild surmise
For what may be in store.
No ghost in this cold chrysalis appealing
To be seen through by love and fully known,
And know what for.

So comes the pallor, now the heart is still.
The blood will drain
With gravity towards the lower side
And spread across the skin its purple stain.
And so the rigor grips,
Though soon enough the body's mollified,
Resolving into gas and grume, until
It simply slips

The complex net of sense it lived to serve.
The rule of law,
The burden of possession are resigned.
The scenes of what he felt and did and saw,
Like boxes by Cornell
Arranged and lit and furnished in the mind,
Go out. No more to see of that *chef d'oeuvre*,
No more to tell.

So many years preparing for this end,
Trying to shore
A memory picture up against this day,
For someone to acknowledge and restore,
As though alive, to sense,
An image they can summon and survey,
Remembering and trying to comprehend
Its elements.

Mike Ladd
Back Again

Went out a door in Prague summer,
came into this wintry house in Adelaide;
hibernation time again
on the forgetting side of the world.
Temporary, horizontal, raw...
suburbs that seem to say
'Don't get any grand ideas—
you and this sea of sheds'.

Now we lie close in the middle of the bed
remembering the warmth
our children came from.
Awake before dawn,
I listen to your lagged breathing,
imagine how cruel it would be here without you.
Would this house be a burial cave,
or would I dig myself out again?

The moonlight, even in winter,
is clearer and brighter here,
and there are birds instead of bells.
Our magpie (we call it ours)
tries its run of notes, falters, repeats;
like our writing and art careers.

I regret switching on the radio—
a voice from the regime
boasts its 'perfect score'
turning away the desperate.
We will lose our public service jobs,
retreat to our gardens,
drink alcohol around the fire,
protest, write blogs, and wait
for the unauthorised return—
summer shining there under the door.

Dugald Williamson
Calls like storms

A bluestone house next to the park,
Near the edge of a country town.
No scores to settle, yet a voice
That wants fear to be the answer.
Unrecognisable laughter.
Look, he could taunt a bear, tell you
He knows where your children are on
A spinning globe, make stars break down
Over cypress that shuts off light,
Out of thin air make headlamps flare
On the bay window, and set fire
To a brace of brollies by the door.
 Friends wondered who, why. A hard fact:
 Some wed dark fantasy, and act.

Norm Neill
innocent until

There hasn't been a murder here in years:
the razor gangs have gone, the bookies too
and vice-squads bought with cash, hot goods and beers,
as have the girls who hurried clients through
the brothel managed by a psychopath
shot dead one night by a fiery pimp, whose sun
flared briefly till he died, the aftermath
of third-rate gin. Life changed and no one won.
Now corporate traders share good-humoured meals
in bistros, boasting of the ways they wring
fat profits from their tax-reducing deals
and renovations, scorning anything
suggestive of the days of gangland crime,
conspiring artfully while killing time.

Paula McKay
Baptism of Fire

See judges and priest: brushwood, straw
bramble, thorn, wood stacked at a pitch,
whatever would burn. The world turned
in patterns of fire.

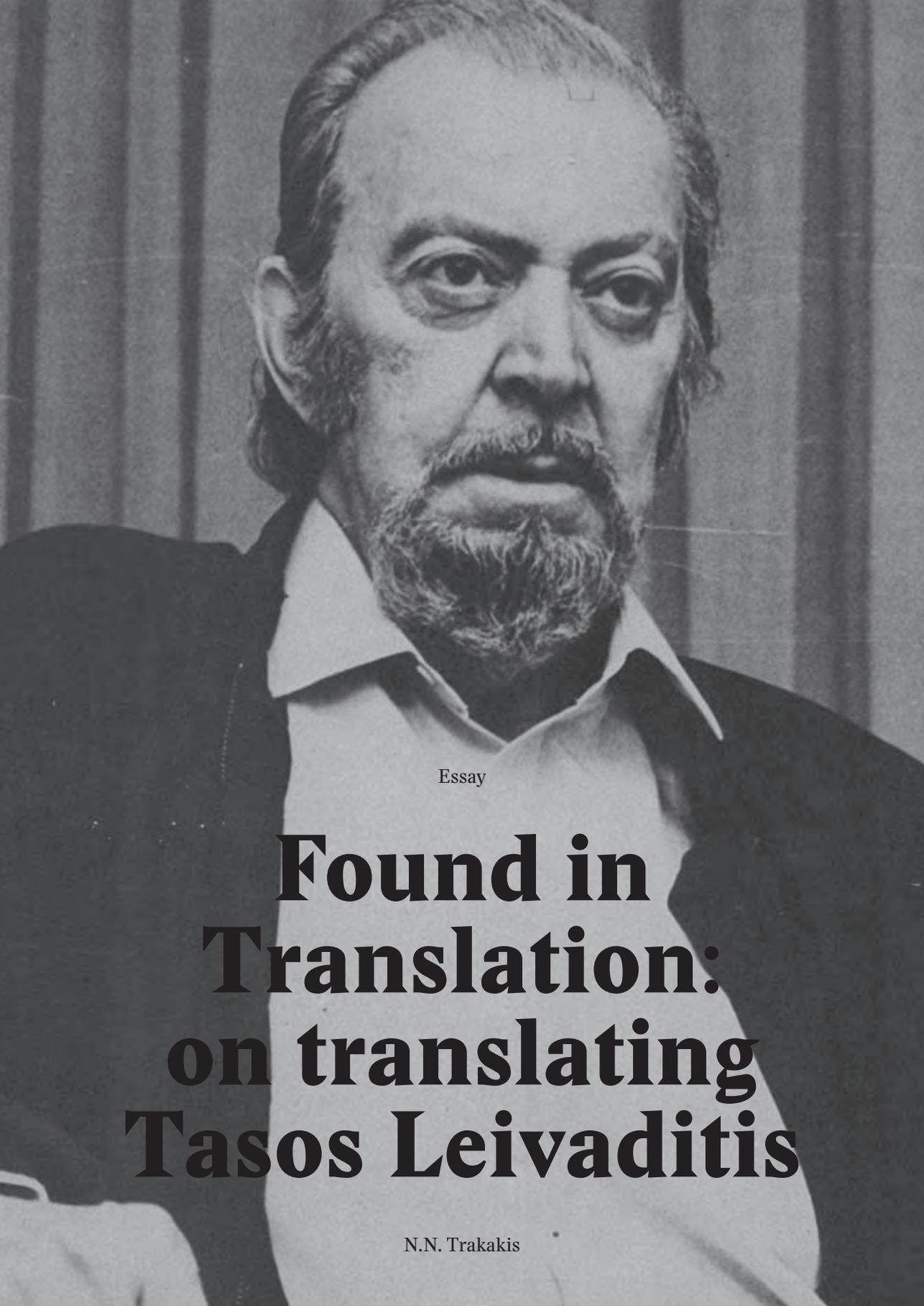
Charge and denial. Torchlight and chain.
Stripped to her shift, head shaved,
Mistress Massey was not the first
nor last female burned for heresy.

An attempt made to strangle her beforehand,
but the rope broke. So fastened to the stake,
green branches slowly burning upwards,
she gave birth to a boy.

One eyewitness rushed through smoke,
leant across the pyre and saved the bloodied child.
The crowd, six deep, watched her mouth
open in a scream when her feet began to peel

in a wind-fed rapture of flames.
The Bailiff cried *That child is born in sin!*
grabbed it from the man
and threw it back into the fire.

(Perotine Massey, condemned as a heretic & while
tied to the stake, gave birth to a boy, burned in
July 1556)



Essay

Found in Translation: on translating Tasos Leivaditis

N.N. Trakakis

My first literary love was Nikos Kazantzakis. Not long ago I broke up with Kazantzakis because of Tasos Leivaditis.

This is a brief account of my translation of the work of Leivaditis, from Greek to English, and at the same time of my own translation from one writer to the other.

My first language was Greek (modern Greek, of course, not the ancient variety, alas). This was the language spoken at home, given that both parents had only the barest of English. After a long but failed attempt to fulfil what seems to be nearly every boy's dream (sadly even more so today), to become a professional football player (I still refuse that dreadful Americanism, 'soccer'), preferably with Liverpool, following Craig Johnston's hallowed footsteps, I turned in senior school to other pursuits. No, not to flirting with girls—thank goodness, that would have been the end of me! Somewhat unexpectedly, and certainly unaccountably in the eyes of family and friends, it was the life of the mind that I began to pursue. As I would open books, for the first time seriously, new worlds began to open before me—and I was taken in. It was a thrilling journey!

The one writer who served as my trusted guide from the very start was the great Greek novelist, Nikos Kazantzakis. I recall having to read an excerpt in a Modern Greek class from Kazantzakis' controversial novel, *The Last Temptation*. The excerpt was in the original Greek, and soon enough I was enthralled. After class I scoured bookshops for an English translation, finally found a second-hand copy and devoured it.

Kazantzakis is a highly philosophical and religious writer, in a way that I suspect would alienate many contemporary fiction writers and readers. The word 'God' appears on every page of his novels, often numerous times, though what exactly he means by that elusive three-letter word remains hotly disputed. After a distressing loss of faith in traditional Christianity in high school (attributed to the double dose of heliocentric astronomy and evolutionary biology), Kazantzakis was to embark upon a deep religious quest for something that would both fill the gap created by the lost faith and provide the foundations for whatever he was to write in the future.

These foundations were to be laid during Kazantzakis' postgraduate studies in Paris, where he attended the lectures of Henri Bergson in 1907-08. It is well to remember that Bergson was something of a celebrity at this time. His lectures at the Collège de France, for example, were filled to capacity, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1928, and his attempt to provide an alternative to the prevailing materialist and mechanist view of life was to influence a whole generation of philosophy students and poets such as T.S. Eliot. Kazantzakis' sources are of course many and varied, ranging from *The Odyssey* and the Bible to Marx and Nietzsche. But it was arguably Bergson's 'vitalist' or dynamic conception of evolution—where a battle is waged between the *élan vital* and materiality, the former surging forever upward toward new expressions of creativity, while the latter pushes downward toward equilibrium and stagnation—that was to leave the most profound traces in the young Cretan's mind. Peter Bien, Kazantzakis' tireless translator and interpreter (the one person who is perhaps more responsible than any other for introducing Kazantzakis to the Anglophone world), goes so far as to contend that Kazantzakis' major writings can be read as a transposition into

a poetic or fictional idiom of the Bergsonian worldview. This I now regard as an exaggeration, for it sidelines other significant philosophical and religious currents in Kazantzakis, especially those emanating from the East (Kazantzakis had a life-long fascination with Eastern thought and culture, above all with Buddhism). But Bien is correct to highlight the centrality of Bergson, particularly in Kazantzakis' development of a 'post-Christian' account of the divine.

In order to better understand Kazantzakis, I felt I had to delve into some of Kazantzakis' primary sources. And so, rather than sweating over a football during lunchtime at school, I would now be found in the library trying to make sense of *Creative Evolution* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. At one point I was even failed in English, and rightly so, for daring to style my assignments after Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo!*

Now I was on a quest of my own, and I was quickly making my way through Kazantzakis' vast corpus. One of the gripping features of his works is the impregnable faith they display in the human spirit. In his epic poem, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* (to give it its full title in English) and in the plays and novels written the final decades of his life, Kazantzakis traces the heroic struggles of a series of protagonists, from Odysseus and Buddha to Zorba, Christ and Francis of Assisi. These larger than life, Nietzschean 'supermen' (note: men, not women) set out to realise, each in their own way and often against all odds, the ultimate vocation of humanity, what Kazantzakis (inspired by Bergson) called the 'transmutation of matter into spirit', a creative process of ever-increasing freedom from materiality and reconciliation or union with 'God'. A stirring synopsis of this heroic outlook is given by Kazantzakis in his quasi-autobiographical *Report to Greco*. The context is a short 'ascetical' stay he spent in Vienna in 1922, during which time he shunned the enticements of Viennese life and immersed himself in a study of Buddhism while also contracting an alarming facial disease that miraculously disappeared after a session of psychotherapy. Reflecting on this psychosomatic illness and its cure, he wrote:

Ever since that day I have realized that man's soul is a terrible and dangerous coil spring. Without knowing it, we all carry a great explosive force wrapped in our flesh and lard. And what is worse, we do not want to know it, for then villainy, cowardice, and falsehood lose their justification; we can no longer hide behind man's supposed impotence and wretched incompetence; we ourselves must bear the blame if we are villains, cowards, or liars, for although we have an all-powerful force inside, we dare not use it for fear it might destroy us. But we take the easy, comfortable way out, and allow it to vent its strength little by little until it too has degenerated to flesh and lard. How terrible not to know that we possess this force! If we did know, we would be proud of our souls. In all heaven and earth, nothing so closely resembles God as the soul of man.¹

Passages such as these in Kazantzakis gradually awakened me to a more courageous and meaningful vision of life, one not generally associated with a generation stereotyped by Richard Linklater's 'slackers'.

But then one discovers that the so-called ‘great souls’ are not so great after all. One of the most disturbing characteristics of many of Kazantzakis’ heroes is their frequent use and valorisation of violence, with the ferocious Cretan freedom fighter, Captain Mihalis in *Freedom or Death* (modelled after the author’s own father), providing perhaps the clearest instance of this. Even God is often portrayed by Kazantzakis as malevolent and ferocious, ‘a merciless and inhuman force’.² Consistent with this, Kazantzakis extolled some of the most ruthless regimes of the twentieth century, those of Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini. The cruelty of these figures, their lack of benevolence and compassion, is loathsome enough. But also troubling is the fact that they exhibit little or no *vulnerability*. This is a feature shared by Kazantzakis’ heroes: they are not susceptible in any fundamental way to doubt and confusion, to harms and illnesses, to foibles and blunders, at least not in a way that threatens to undermine and destroy, or make a mockery of, their entire life’s journey. In Kazantzakis’ novels, as in the Hollywood blockbuster, the hero predictably wins out in the end, even if the nature of that victory may not be what one initially expected.

In a diary entry, after having returned to Athens from studies in Paris, George Seferis wrote: ‘The only way to be sure that genuine heroes can exist, is to try to become one yourself.’³ Most who venture, I would speculate, fail, sometimes miserably. In our decidedly pessimistic, anti-heroic age, even the very attempt is derided. But one need not go that far in order to appreciate the dangerous implications of the heroic ideal, in light of the devastations it has wreaked upon the stage of history. This is what the poems of Leivaditis have helped me to see, compelling me to renounce my earlier devotion to Kazantzakis. But in this I am at least comforted by the following story told by that other celebrated Kazantzakis translator and scholar, Kimon Friar:

When, because of the great harmony-in-difference between us, Kazantzakis once hesitantly told me that he looked toward me to complete some of his tasks after he had gone, I said to him, ‘But, Nikos, you must understand that to fulfil this I may perhaps have to do the opposite of what you intend, and even give you the Judas kiss of betrayal’. His eyes lit up, he tossed his head in proud excitement, and he exclaimed: ‘Bravo! Bravo! To destroy in this manner is only to rebuild’.⁴

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A few years back, on a cold autumn evening in the Cambridge University library I chanced upon the collected works of Leivaditis. In a quiet and faintly lit corner of the library I began leafing through these volumes. This was one of those turning points where nothing would be the same again. I was profoundly moved, the same way as when reading my first excerpt of Kazantzakis in school. As I sat there, reading and rereading Leivaditis’ poems, I couldn’t believe I hadn’t already encountered this writer. Before I knew it, it was midnight, the doors of the library were about to shut and in heavy rain and strong winds I made my way back to my lodgings. But the weather barely touched me, for my mind was elsewhere and I

was in a trance. The next morning, and indeed each day for the remainder of my month-long stay, I would revisit this now sacred section of the library, poring over pages of Leivaditis, discovering new gems and resolving that I must translate him if he hasn't already been translated. To my surprise I couldn't find any English editions of his work, and so I took up the task there and then. On scraps of paper I would draft English versions of bits and pieces of his work, and by the time I left Cambridge I had finished a rough draft of *The Blind Man with the Lamp*, Leivaditis' 1983 classic.

Since then I have continued translating Leivaditis, often astounded and always grateful at what these works have to offer. I have also spent time standing back to reflect upon what it is that caught my attention and captivated my entire being. Perhaps the best way to put it is by way of a contrast with Kazantzakis. The ethic of heroism embodied in the lives and deeds of Kazantzakis' great men no longer appears convincing or even attractive, when compared with the realities revealed in the short, unassuming but potent prose-poems of Leivaditis. Humility has displaced heroism. Stated simply, human beings are complicated: neither angels nor beasts, neither heroes nor villains, but creatures easily broken. The age of 'heroism' is over: 'we don't need another hero', Tina Turner sang. The super-man strikes me now as super-stupidity.

The ethos of humility exemplified by Leivaditis offers the artist a much-needed alternative to a culture obsessed by the public heroics and private misdeeds of celebrities and sports stars. The allure of a Leivaditis fragment is grounded in its understated, quiet resonance, working unobtrusively, moving gently, not performing pompously, or tastelessly 'blowing one's own trumpet'. We are not confronted with big-bang works, but with lines of discernment and discretion, the kind of discretion that we show a word when we enclose it in quotation marks, as if holding something back, communicating without drawing attention to oneself, refusing to position oneself as a panoptic and controlling 'I', not showing-off but showing up the 'I' as unreliable, uncertain, tentative and whose every declarative statement is provisional and qualified, allusive rather than direct and domineering. 'To speak directly of pure things (assuming that there are any), to speak of pity, of saintliness, and of virtue, as if such possibilities were already given in ordinary language, that is, as if they were possibilities of this language, is to speak the most vicious and impious language'.⁵

The quote is from Maurice Blanchot, a writer who, like Leivaditis, is known for his immense personal reserve. It has been said of Blanchot, for example, that, 'From the outset, his journalism was predominantly anonymous: he never became a "signature" on the *Débats* [i.e., the *Journal des Débats*]. Indeed, as he became established, the number of articles bearing his signature dwindled to nought'.⁶ There are few photographs of him, no published accounts of his life, and little in his work that would seem to warrant biographical extrapolation.

De nobis ipsis silemus (of ourselves we are silent). This became Blanchot's 'rule' of life, one handed to him by Kant and Bacon. A pledge of secrecy. Kant inherited this from Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620) and employed it as an epigraph to his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). For Bacon and Kant, this is intended as an exhortation to objectivity. But it also signifies complete renunciation and loss, the submersion

of a life into a work. In this sense, at least, ‘there is nothing outside the text’: all the action, every explosive thought, occurs in the text, in the study, in the library, not outside it—so don’t go looking there, outside: in the biography, you will not find anything.

This is not to say that the life does not inform the work: it can, does and should. Indeed, any division between life and work is arbitrary and artificial. That’s why if the work is no good, the life will not make it any better. Today, however, the opposite is the case: even if the work is poor, the life—if interesting enough—can redeem it, even raise it to the status of a classic. Consider how awful music is often transformed into a chart-topping album only because it is the product of a ‘pop’ star; or, similarly, ‘celebrity’ philosophers whose books become highly acclaimed, at least within certain circles, even though they are tedious and unreadable.

Gustave Flaubert, by contrast, recommends: ‘The author in his works should be like God in the universe: always present, but nowhere visible.’⁷ The artist withdraws from his creation, and lets it speak for itself. It is difficult to do so, however, given that the present-day pre-requisite for artists has become a circus-master’s talent for promotion, the kind Leopold Mozart taught his son, Wolfgang. For the likes of Leivaditis, the true artist shuns self-aggrandising self-exposure in order to affirm the value of distance and silence, by so doing preserving (what Blanchot called) ‘the right to the unexpected word’ (*le droit à la parole inattendue*). This is a right had only by those who have died: the death of the author. Effacement, disappearance from view, loss of self. How foreign this appears in view of the ‘cult of power and personality’ manufactured by the economic and entertainment industries of capitalism and neoliberalism. Contesting such industries, and inviting their wrath or ridicule, Blanchot looks for non-power:

To write is, at the limit, what of itself cannot (be done), therefore always in search of a non-power, refusing mastery, order, and first of all the established order, preferring silence to a word of absolute truth, thus contesting and contesting ceaselessly.⁸

To speak at the level of weakness and of destitution—at the level of affliction—is perhaps to challenge force, but also to attract force by refusing it.⁹

How then does one arrive at this anonymity whose sole mode of approach is a *haunting*, an uncertain obsession that always dispossesses?¹⁰

That is the sixty-four-thousand dollar question. At least the beginnings of an answer might be fashioned from a form of ‘the good life’ founded upon anonymity, invisibility, fragility, vulnerability, softly spoken, naturally and unforced, without violence, without will or will-to-power. John O’Donohue, in a volume of beautiful benedictions, includes a poem, ‘In Praise of Water:

Let us bless the humility of water,
Always willing to take the shape
Of whatever otherness holds it.¹¹

Water: colourless, odourless and transparent, also lifegiving—in the same way a work works: unseen but also regenerating, raising from the dead.

This too is the medium of Leivaditis. Those who knew him personally testify that he would always seek to change the subject whenever the conversation turned to his poems. He never accepted any of the literary awards bestowed upon him (in his office he did not hang any degrees or awards on the walls, but only had a portrait of his mother). He would never pass a negative judgement, orally or in print, on any fellow poet—a complete lack of combativeness or competitiveness is evident in his many reviews of poetry books. Above all, he entirely refused interviews: ‘Everything can be found in the work’, would be his regular reply to inquiring journalists.

Leivaditis has often been classified as a poet of the margins, even the ‘guardian angel’ of the marginal, the outcasts of society that repeatedly populate his poems: the blind, the forgotten, beggars, anarchists, prostitutes, drunkards, the mentally ill—‘those poor and mad souls who imagined themselves to be birds, ladders or trees’, as he wonderfully put it.¹² Leivaditis helps us see that the marginal is that which cannot be placed under the rule of the conventional and the socially acceptable, and so it resists falsification, dishonesty and dissembling. The real critics of the establishment are therefore those who live precariously on the margins, not those ‘professional sceptics’ (e.g., academic philosophers) who invariably turn out to be the system’s co-conspirators.

Perhaps the greatest value Leivaditis unearths in these marginal characters is their anonymity, a value he wants to ascribe to writing as much as to existence. In a prose poem entitled ‘Anonymity’ and displaying Leivaditis’ characteristic magic realism, anonymity is linked to notions of authenticity and freedom:

No-one waited for him. And he himself knew no-one. Who was he? Where was he going? This was never discovered. The only established fact was that the other day he was found dead on the street and when they went to lift him, as they would have been expected to do, they saw that the dead man—despite the continuing rain—was untouched and his old worn-out clothes were dry. They were naturally taken aback, for they of course could not see the beautiful cover of anonymity...¹³

There is no attempt made by such outsiders to ‘make a name for oneself’, to secure a place in the cherished annals of history, for they recognise that, ‘What else is anonymity but to live in purity and to depart even purer’.¹⁴ This naturally provokes perplexity and fear in those who have compromised with the standards and expectations of society:

At times mother would ask me with tears in her eyes, ‘Why do you like to humble yourself?’ ‘I want to understand, mother’.¹⁵

It is only the anonymous themselves, Leivaditis writes, who ‘comprehend the mystery of being a nobody’.¹⁶ Anonymity, to be sure, may well arouse in self-defeating fashion curiosity. But the point of anonymity is not to incite in an underhand way the interest of others, but to open up another way of being and writing.

Anonymity as a matter of not merely going underground, but as emerging onto new ground.

Together with anonymity, one can detect an insistence in Leivaditis on ‘lightness’—to be become unobtrusive, like light, remaining invisible so as to make it possible for the other to be seen. At work here is something like a Levinasian principle of ‘substitution’, reflected in Leivaditis’ oft-quoted line: ‘And when one does not die for the other, we are dead already.’¹⁷ The life of the writer, on this model, is sacrificial, commanded by a call to give, and so always at a loss and always at sea.

But always needing to return to land. To the landscape, to place, for to be is to be in place.¹⁸ And to be human is to return to the place where one came from: the earth—hence *human* is derived from *humus*, ‘earth’, just as in the Old Testament *Adam* (‘man’) is created by God from *adamah* (‘ground’, ‘earth’). The starting-point of philosophy and art, therefore, is not death, as Heidegger thought—that remains too abstract; rather, it is corpses, bodies buried in the earth, lying under the ground, perhaps shaking and subverting the foundations above, yet remaining unknown and insignificant—the humble. *Human—humus—humility*: the triangulation of the writer. Leivaditis: always angular, standing like Cavafy ‘at a slight angle to the universe.

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By way of further introduction to Leivaditis’ work, I offer the following in translation:

THE SCENT OF THE NIGHT

Sometimes the isolation becomes unbearable, you then phone some number
just to hear a voice, you ask for someone by name, ‘wrong number’ comes
the reply
everything is wrong, including the roads we took and the words we spoke
and the hands we held... As a child I would hide behind the chest of drawers,
the infinite lay there, but it couldn’t contain anything other than me—
that’s why I tell you let’s not ask for anything more, and later, having reached
adulthood, I would sit behind the window and look at the lights of the city
in this way I came to know the inescapability of separation—what will
remain, then?
what will remain from so many hopes, so many sighs?
a name and two dates engraved in stone which will be eroded by the weather
slowly
slowly.
We are all leaving, without anyone learning anything at all about anyone
else. Why?
What’s to blame?
Or is it possible that everything happens for some mysterious reason: an
unsolved
enigma perhaps, or some punishment?

But how beautiful the earth smells at night! O flowering futility of the world...¹⁹

This prose-poem occurs in Leivaditis' posthumously published *The Manuscripts of Autumn*, published in 1990, two years after his death. By that time he was a well-established poet, and indeed one greatly admired and loved though almost completely unknown outside of Greek-speaking circles (a predicament he seems to be overcoming only lately). Of all the magnificent poetry he wrote during his career, it is the above short piece that I think captures his sensibility and outlook best; it may serve, in short, as his credo.

And an amazing piece it is. The English does not do it sufficient credit, try as hard as any translator might. The Greek original flows effortlessly, with a kind of grace that could only be the result of many years of labour at the craft of poet-making.

The images and symbols, the moods and nuances that permeate much of Leivaditis' corpus, particularly his later work, can be found compressed here in these few lines. There is, to begin with, the profound sense of loneliness. The Greek word is ἐρημιά, literally a desert, a space of alienation from every form of life, where death and destitution reign. And the desert is the city, not the barren plains and dunes of the Sahara, but the overpopulated urban centres, crowded with commuters and buildings, teeming with life and movement. That is the opening paradox Leivaditis presents us: intense isolation exists at the very place where it shouldn't. And the experience of loneliness is so overwhelming that relief is sought by any means available, no matter how illogical they might appear: you pick up the phonebook, dial a number at random, simply in the hope of hearing another voice, just so as to obtain proof that, yes, there does exist at least one other person in this world.

The answer the caller receives is yet another telling symbol in Leivaditis' universe, or better his 'mythology'—not in the narrow, pejorative sense of a false or inaccurate representation of the world, but in the sense of a non-literal depiction or narrative that addresses us at a primal level of being, disclosing how things mean and relate. In this case, the answer arrives as a one-word reply in the Greek original: λάθος—'wrong'. More fully, the caller is told: 'There is no one here by that name. You must've dialled the wrong number'. But how could a number dialled purely at random be a *wrong* number? What would have been the *right* number to call?

The protagonist is thus prevented from finding solace and remains imprisoned in isolation. And this is only the beginning. Not only was the number that he dialled wrong, for it did not bring about the much sought-after connection and conversation; but *everything is wrong*. Life itself is wrong, for it has wronged us. The paths we travelled upon did not take us where we wished to go, but led us elsewhere or even nowhere, into dead-ends. And the words we proclaimed proved to be equally useless and meaningless, falling on deaf or uncomprehending ears. This is the sense of disillusionment so keenly felt by Leivaditis and his contemporaries following the brutalities of war and the injustices of persecution.

To appreciate the originality and importance of the work of Leivaditis' generation, it might help to set it against the contributions of their predecessors, some of whom were already towering figures in the Greek and even international literary landscape. While Kazantzakis was continuing and extending the nineteenth-century cult of romantic genius and heroism; while Angelos Sikelianos sought to scale

the heights of the inspired sages and seers of ancient Greece; while Yannis Ritsos and his followers doggedly refused to relinquish the red revolution, even in exile and detention; while Odysseus Elytis beamed with Aegean light and joy; while George Seferis allowed neither optimism nor pessimism to defile his sparse style... while all this was brewing in the background, a new generation was emerging in Greece, the so-called first postwar generation which gave birth to the fine poetry of Aris Alexandrou, Takis Sinopoulos, Miltos Sachtouris, Manolis Anagnostakis, and Mihalis Katsaros, all deeply marked by their wartime experiences of the 1940s. It is to this group that Leivaditis belonged, and although the work produced by these writers is too rich and diverse to be neatly summarised and categorised under a single slogan (even that of 'the first postwar generation'), there was something significant that these writers shared and sought to express.

Causes, these former 'comrades' came to see, are inevitably lost causes, doomed to failure because they cannot accommodate the complexities and contradictions, the vagaries and frailties of life. 'I loved the ideals of humanity', Leivaditis wrote in an earlier work, 'but the birds always flew further'.²⁰ The poet can now see through the easy solutions of both Right and Left, and begins to recognise that there is no way of mastering reality in the way that ideologies, particularly political and religious ones, seek to do:

... but how many questions in this world have answers
and honesty always begins there, where all other ways of salvation have
ended.²¹

These 'ways of salvation' often serve as pretexts for base desires and weaknesses, as is indicated in another poem from the posthumous *Autumn Manuscripts*, aptly entitled 'Ideologue':

Naturally he would try to conceal his maimed arm
and so he would always be holding a flag.²²

Causes not only 'cover up' ulterior motives and ambitions, but also tend to bring out the worst in individuals and governments, justifying and legitimating terrible evils and crimes (consider only the state-sanctioned evils of communism). It did not take long, therefore, for the enthusiastic faith and hope in Causes exhibited by Leivaditis' generation in its youthful days to give way to an attitude of scepticism and distrust. But this was not exactly a recipe for cynicism and political malaise (which would mean, indirectly, lending support to the status quo). It was rather a refusal to commit to ideals that do not adequately reflect the realities of humanity (and so can easily become 'inhuman').

One could chart, as many commentators have, this internal transformation in Leivaditis, from a doctrinaire communist in his student days at the beginning of World War II, to the existentialist crisis precipitated by the defeat of the Left in the Greek Civil War. By the time *The Blind Man with the Lamp* was published in 1983, Leivaditis no longer hesitates to speak of 'that great error in which we took refuge'²³ and of 'broken dreams and dead music',²⁴ leaving the precise error and

dream unnamed, but no less obvious for that. In the same work Leivaditis recounts that ‘the protest march had just finished and the police officers were erasing an entire revolution that was written on the walls...’²⁵ The revolution barely got off the ground before being quashed, just like the phone call that quickly comes to naught in ‘The Scent of the Night’, or the letter that the postal system jettisons:

We took a letter without address to the post office, because our childhood friend from summer days suddenly disappeared without saying a word to us. ‘But it has no address’, the post office worker said. From that time you come to learn that the world is of no help whatever.²⁶

Post-war, it was no longer possible to connect, whether by post or by phone. What followed was nothing less than an existential breakdown and, simultaneously, a break-through. There were the inevitable crushing feelings of disappointment and indeed betrayal in the leftist movement Leivaditis had earlier championed and risked his life for on the battlefield and in detention camps. But it was this very despair that made possible a certain lucidity that could not have been achieved otherwise.

What is it, then, that the poet is now able to discern amidst the rubble of the war, with a clarity and honesty not available previously? The poem ‘The Scent of the Night’ once more holds the key.

To begin with, there is the reference to childhood, a recurring theme in Leivaditis’ work, filled as it is with reminiscences of a joyful upbringing in the suburbs of Athens prior to the poverty and despondency brought on by the bankruptcy of his father (a formerly prosperous merchant) and the German occupation. These memories of light and carefree youth are often saturated with sadness, since many of the people appearing in the memories—school friends, parents, relatives and teachers—have since passed away. Even entire buildings and neighbourhoods have gone and are mourned. It is this painful nostalgia that often gives Leivaditis’ recollections a melancholy tinge. But occasionally in these childhood scenes one also senses a sinister undertone, some dark or dangerous spirit lurking close by. In the above poem, we are told that the narrator-as-child would hide behind a commode, and it’s not clear what it was he was seeking to escape from. What the boy encounters behind the chest of drawers is named the ‘infinite’, a term Leivaditis usually links with God, but in this case it may be demonic as much as divine.

The word Leivaditis employs for the ‘infinite’ is *ἄπειρο* (lit. without limit, *πέρας* = limit), a notion that arose very early in the history of Western philosophy and science, and continues to bedevil philosophers and theologians today. On the whole, however, ‘the Greeks abhorred the infinite’, as the old adage has it. In classical Greek philosophy, ‘infinity’ is a pejorative term, representing a substratum that is formless, characterless, indeterminate—an unintelligible chaos. From the Presocratics through to Plato and Aristotle, it was held that something is real, true and good to the extent that it is limited by form, while the absence of form and limit is indicative of failure and evil. But attitudes to the infinite began to

change, particularly with Plotinus (205–270 AD), the great philosophical mystic and founder of ‘Neoplatonism’. With Plotinus, the infinite begins to be assimilated to the divine, and later Greek thinkers—the fourth-century Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nyssa, chief among them—develop this further by taking infinity as the determining trait of divinity. For Gregory, in fact, the divine infinity is paralleled by the infinity of humanity: since God is infinite, our journey towards God must also be infinite, without end. The human being, on this conception, is a bundle of endless desire (for God).

What drew me to both Kazantzakis and Leivaditis is this yearning for God ever-present in their work. Both writers ‘reek of God’ (to borrow a phrase Laurence Hemming has applied to Heidegger²⁷), and neither is afraid to draw from their Greek Orthodox heritage, as well as to deviate from it when necessary. Unlike the unmoved mover of Aristotle or Aquinas’ changeless deity who is unaffected by the world, Kazantzakis and Leivaditis can only accept a heterodox ‘God’ who suffers, cries and strikes out, a God who depends on us as much as we on Him. This way of thinking about God is evident in abundance in Kazantzakis, and Kazantzakis scholars such as Daniel Dombrowski and Darren Middleton have drawn attention to connections with the process philosophy of A.N. Whitehead, who spoke of God as ‘the poet of the world, as a sympathetic participator and ‘the fellow-sufferer who understands’. A similar strain of thought also runs through Leivaditis, particularly in his increasingly religious (though ‘mystical’ would be a better descriptor) later writings, where the passion for God burns as brightly as in Kazantzakis’ St Francis. To take only one example among many, in an awe-inspiring set of twelve ‘Conversations’ with God in *The Blind Man with the Lamp*, Leivaditis writes:

Lord, what would I do without you? I am the vacant room
and you are the great guest who has deigned to visit it.
Lord, what would you do without me? You are the great silent harp
and I am the ephemeral hand which awakens your melodies.²⁸

Returning to ‘The Scent of the Night’, the poem swiftly moves from the narrator’s childhood to his adult life, where he would waste time staring out the window at the lights of the city, coming thereby to learn of ‘the inevitability of separation’. One way to see this is as a passage of return to the pristine condition of childhood, where things are appreciated as they are, not blighted by the obligations of later life, whether they be raising a family or an insurrection. It is a return that follows essentially the same trajectory as that depicted by Paul Ricoeur in what he called the ‘hermeneutic circle’.²⁹ According to Ricoeur’s dialectical schema, we moderns have irretrievably lost the kind of original naïvety enjoyed by our ancient and medieval forebears, where religious faith came easily and remained largely unchallenged. For since the Enlightenment we have built up an impressive tradition of scientific scholarship and critical inquiry (or a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’, in Ricoeur’s words) that has dismantled and demythologised the premodern world. But we cannot rest content with this negative or at least critical posture, but must seek to surpass it so as to attain a ‘second naïvety’ (or a ‘second faith’), where awe and wonder are restored but are purified from credulity and superstition. This

voyage of exploration, which ends at the very beginning, is memorably encapsulated in T.S. Eliot's conclusion to 'Little Gidding':

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.⁵⁰

A return of this sort is also made by Leivaditis. Rather than remaining fixed in the consoling allures of a magical past, or being overtaken by despairing doubt and disillusionment, the goal is to discover—after passing painfully through these successive stages—a new and deepened sense of wonder and place. That is why Leivaditis' poem ends in rapture at the pungent scents of the earth that arise at night-time. There is no denying any longer the futility and absurdity of the world, and the lucid awareness of this opens up the path not to suicide but to the freedom to rise above our fate, passionately living in and for the present 'without appeal' and 'without consolation', in much the same way that existentialists like Camus and Sartre enjoined us to do.

Unlike childhood, however, life is now ineluctably marked by melancholy, a sadness so strong that at times it imperils any possibility of 'return'. Before arriving at the concluding line of the poem, Leivaditis passes through the dashed dreams and the sighs and groans left in their wake. Countless heroic fighters who lost their lives defending a national ideal (the 'motherland') or an international principle ('justice for all') now lie dead and buried, just like the causes they championed, and all that is left behind are tombstones with names and dates engraved on them — and even these will eventually be eroded by the weather. In the end, nothing remains, nothing matters: the cosmos gives no support to distinctively human aims or values, and may even be actively hostile to these aims and values. This is the cosmic nihilism widespread in the European continent at the time, with Sartre depicting the nausea and Camus the absurdity created by the great gulf separating human aspirations and an indifferent and inexplicable world. We depart life, Leivaditis writes, without ever learning anything about anyone. Only connect? If only. The world of idealism, with its unitary vision of reality as a rational and harmonious whole (the Absolute), was shot to pieces by the bloody wars of the first-half of the twentieth century. Church and state, reason and faith were left in ruins. The world reverted to its primordial strangeness and density.

This shift is highly pronounced in Leivaditis' later work, where the earlier communal political struggle is replaced by a solitary journey to figure out who we are, where we come from and where we are going. What Leivaditis discovers is that 'meaning' in the existential sphere does not come as quickly and unambiguously as ideologues would have us believe. In 'The Scents of the Night' he is provoked to ask why this is so, and whether someone or something is to blame. 'Or is it possible', he goes on to ask, 'that everything happens for some mysterious reason: an unsolved enigma perhaps, or some punishment?' I am reminded in this context of an analogously indistinct sense of responsibility for the woes of the world, evoked by Australian poet Bruce Dawe:

What have we done? we wonder
 as the ambulance passes, a sense of guilt beating feebly
 against the dark one-way glass
 of our condition.³¹

The ingenious image of a ‘dark one-way glass’ underscores the fraught mind-world relationship, with the human mind obstructed from piercing this invisible partition or veil in order to perceive things as they really are. This resonates with what might be called (in light of his Eastern Orthodox inheritance) Leivaditis’ ‘apophaticism’, his ‘learned ignorance’ regarding the difficulty, elusiveness and obscurity of life, our own life and our own selves included.

The sense of life’s impenetrability finds expression in other parts of *The Manuscripts of Autumn*. In ‘The Bird with the Truth’, Leivaditis writes:

One morning a bird sat on the opposite tree and whistled something.
 O, if only I could understand what it was saying to me! Perhaps I could have
 found the
 meaning of the universe.³²

Similarly, in ‘Correspondence’ from the same collection, there is no way of deciphering the letters or signals that are sent our way:

At times it rains as I sit in a café, people as they grow older become more
 foreign
 and I notice some despondent individuals waiting at the railway station, not for
 a train
 but for a dream,
 while drops of rain come together to make up a great message on the
 window. Who
 sends it? What does it say? Will you answer?³³

But the ‘other’ is not restricted to the people or the world around us. Our own selves also resist understanding; we are often puzzled not only by our thoughts and behaviour, but by our very nature and identity. ‘How incomprehensible it is to live!’ the poet has his interlocutor say at one place,³⁴ while in ‘Thought at Twilight’ the dark thought is articulated as follows:

Each of us has a great secret and we will depart without finding out what it is
 —neither we, nor anyone else.³⁵

Against such a horizon of hiddenness, my translation of Leivaditis continues. My experience of this work of translation has taught me that if poetry is what gets lost in translation, perhaps it is also what gets found.

Endnotes

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- 2 Nikos Kazantzakis, *Saint Francis*, trans. P.A. Bien, Loyola Press, Chicago, 2005, p. 168.
- 3 George Seferis, *Days I: 16 February 1925 – 17 August 1931* [in Greek], Ikaros, Athens, 2003, p.16, diary entry for 6 September 1925, translation mine.
- 4 Kimon Friar, 'Preface' to *Pandelis Prevelakis, Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey: A Study of the Poet and the Poem*, trans. Philip Sherrard, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1961, p. 8.
- 5 Maurice Blanchot, 'The Laughter of the Gods', in Blanchot, *Friendship*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1997, p. 175.
- 6 Michael Holland, 'Introduction' to *The Blanchot Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, p. 4.
- 7 Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance* (1852), 2:155.
- 8 Maurice Blanchot, interview with Catherine David in *La Nouvelle Observateur*, May 1981; quoted in Christopher Fynsk, *Last Steps: Maurice Blanchot's Exilic Writing*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2013) p. 70.
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- 10 Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, trans. Lycette Nelson, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1992, p. 36, translation modified.
- 11 John O'Donohue, *Benedictus: A Book of Blessings*, Bantam Press, London, 2007, p. 93.
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- 13 Leivaditis, *Discovery* (originally published in 1977), in *Poetry*, vol. 2: 1972-1977 [in Greek], Kedros, Athens, 2003, p. 244, translation mine. (All subsequent translations from Leivaditis' works are mine.)
- 14 Leivaditis, *Small Book for Great Dreams* (originally published in 1987), in *Poetry*, vol. 3: 1979-1990 [in Greek], Kedros, Athens, 2003, p. 376.
- 15 Quoted in Yannis Kouvaras, *To the Flowering Futility of the World: Meanderings in the Poetry of Tasos Leivaditis* [in Greek], Kastaniotis, Athens, 2008, p. 100, translation mine.
- 16 Quoted in Kouvaras, *To the Flowering Futility of the World*, p.100, translation mine.
- 17 Leivaditis, *Small Book for Great Dreams*, p. 380.
- 18 On the ancient insight that 'to be is to be in place', see Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1993.
- 19 Leivaditis, *The Manuscripts of Autumn*, in *Poetry*, vol. 3: 1979-1990 [in Greek], Kedros, Athens, 2003, p. 425.
- 20 Leivaditis, *Small Book for Great Dreams*, p. 352.
- 21 Leivaditis, 'The Key to the Mystery' in *Handbook for Euthanasia* (originally published in 1979), in *Poetry*, vol.3: 1979-1990, p. 96.
- 22 Leivaditis, *The Manuscripts of Autumn*, p. 518.
- 23 Leivaditis, *The Blind Man with the Lamp*, p. 84.
- 24 Leivaditis, *The Blind Man with the Lamp*, p. 87.
- 25 Leivaditis, *The Blind Man with the Lamp*, p. 35.
- 26 Leivaditis, *Small Book for Great Dreams*, p.356.
- 27 Laurence Paul Hemming, 'Heidegger', in Graham Oppy and N.N. Trakakis (eds), *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 5, Acumen, London, 2009, p.175.
- 28 Leivaditis, *The Blind Man with the Lamp*, p. 47.
- 29 See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan, Harper & Row, New York, 1967, pp. 347-57.
- 30 T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems: 1909-1962* Faber and Faber, London, 1974, p.222.
- 31 Bruce Dawe, 'Accident and Ambulance Siren', *No Fixed Address*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1962, p. 52.
- 32 Leivaditis, *The Manuscripts of Autumn*, p. 418.
- 33 Leivaditis, *The Manuscripts of Autumn*, p. 422.
- 34 Leivaditis, *The Manuscripts of Autumn*, p. 480.
- 35 Leivaditis, *The Manuscripts of Autumn*, p. 545.

Dave Drayton

a/the/my heart as metaphor and strained organ: aortic stenosis

a reminder that this isn't just an organ
 a reminder that I still can't play the organ well
 a reminder that
 while the organ's broken
 in some regards
 the pill box filled and emptied weekly
 the annual cardiology
 in others it works fine

mine works fine sometimes
 or somehow
 in some ways
 it feels weakly when it needs to//it fills too much
 it is more than blood mechanics//it's an engine that can leak and rush

skim read results
 thin blood and skin
 why I oughta thin aorta
 then I order more Abisart 30 ABISART 150MG TAB
 Take ONE tablet daily
 And she asks (Irbersartan 150mg Tab (AF))
 In the discount chemist
 (pregnant beneath the white blouse and nametag)
 if it's for me
 seems I'm too young
 in the way someone has made her swell
 revealed the body for more of what it can be
 taught an old dog new tricks
 you kick-started the hard heart a Turramurra GP compared the beat of
 to a London traffic jam
 the maze and the mechanics
 the cacophony
 I'm coughing
 The Knowledge that each of you possess of my arterials
 a doctor and my love

Tracy Ryan
Poem for Ash Wednesday

How his thumb smudged it on
like marking a page
for later reading

exactly the way
the checkout man
licks & swipes to open

a bag that won't cooperate
when the queue's endless
— so many penitents!

He was teaching a posture
a mode of carriage
to fix it there

only the smoothest
uncreased brow
could bear witness

What you are and
where you're going
you will remember

Andy Kissane
Alone Again

Walking alone, my toes sinking into the wet sand
of this primordial beach, the sloshing pull
at my ankles reminding me of the dark certainty
of the womb that I can now only barely

imagine—that second when I slipped suddenly
into the hands of another and bawled my first
barbaric yawp into the warm pulse of the night—
a moment as precious and as easily forgotten

as the multitudes that follow. Each day begins
with snatches of birdsong, the smallest flicker
of eyelashes, a tempting laziness and a yearning
that I struggle to name and understand. While

eating alone, like a dog, in stately Vienna
and sipping what the waiter calls the best beer
in the world, I listen to Louis Armstrong sing
of the saints, the saints, and as the sax blows

heaven ever closer, I tear the sweet lamb
from the bone, the light blazing off the silver
and for once I don't think that I have wasted
my life. Hopefully, I will feel this way again

at the hour of my death, when my feet
turn blue, when a flying ant buzzes, trapped
between the blind and the window, when
I am about to fall or rise into who knows

what mysterious space, aware that I alone
can do this, and must, aware that I cannot
defer or control what will be—my eyes
now opening for one last glimpse of beauty.

Amy Crutchfield
MH17

Speck

Bright insect
inching across the firmament.

First the shock front.
Then the blast wind.

Bodies fall like rags
into an airless sea.

Pixilation

Tiny squares unite to divide.
We see an ashen heap,
but the seal is not complete.

Here, a pair of legs alone.
There a shoulder with its arm,
and then the hand, fingers spread.

Apron

A flap of the plane's skin
hangs in the forest's canopy
like titanic picnic litter.

Another sheet, insignia unfurled,
stands ready to sail
across a sea of rippling wheat.

Seats bask in the fields
in clusters of two or three.
Some on their sides,
others facing back up to the sky.

Each chunk of wreckage
with its apron of personal effects.
A suitcase, open-mouthed, allows
a deep pink cardigan to escape.

Turbine

Your blades once sat
snug as gills inside their toadstool cap.
Now skewed and compressed
the blades look like the cutaway

of a chambered nautilus
nestled far from its element.
shell bound by its ratio,
its beauty chained yet infinite.

Julian Croft
The Art of War — Europe

the morning after

— *Coventry Cathedral, February 1940*

John Piper

those broken slabs of colour were waiting
in november slanting light
the morning after the nighttime raid

a cubist composition of total war
a hint of what all of us were in for
right up to a two dimensional

Hiroshima, end plate of this album
put away among all the others:
frozen history, the rubble

of medieval stone, Christian
Europe eating its own,
Asia poisoned, the world convulsed

until the holy light of the atom
irreducible ultimate
sucked all colour from creation

but on that cold morning
propped on still hot saints
infernal smoke in the nose

someone saw beauty in light
and stone and the ordinary business
of cleaning up the mess

and getting on to tomorrow

the new apocalypse

— *Shelterers in the Tube*, 1941

Henry Moore

the colours of judgement day
are black and white
wrapped in grey earth we lie and wait

above, the busy din of angels:
the wailing siren, the crump
and shake of heavenly wrath

it's time to hide pull close the covers
and will the flickering light of life
to stay alight for one more mortal moment

before the earth will part
and we will be sucked upward
in pillars of transforming flame

to face the awful truth
that it is not God nor Beëlzebub
nor frightful Moloch

who consumes us in the fiery furnace
but our neighbor and ourselves
the black and white of rage and love

perspective

— *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox*, 1943

Paul Nash

the hill the tree the moon
of such things
is the world composed

spring in the middle
of that war which gave me life
and took so many others

a place a time
the rigid geometry
of all compositions

vanishing points
of sentences
the hill the tree the moon

setting the scene

— *Human Laundry - Belsen*, April 1945
Doris Zinkeisen

the dead and near dead are being washed
laid out on cots in converted stables
bleached skin and bones groomed

by well-fed guards in butchers' aprons
this is the post-war world
the sudden shift from abattoir to hospice

how did she make sense of this?
one week the smell of burning flesh
the next carbolic and rice gruel

pre war she designed for Noël and Gertie
dressed mannequins and sketched Lalique
and then the curtain dropped, scene change

and here we are as the players pack up
the tragedy complete, the dead carried off
the audience sent home to lick their wounds

and on the washing lines across five continents
soiled sheets will flap in cleansing winds
and shrouds wrap lovers in a sun-struck world

war artist

— *Nuremburg Trial* - January 1946

Laura Knight

'the ordinariness of evil'—don't you believe it:
'unser Hermann' sits opposite me,
his enormous head wobbles, the grin

waxes and wanes like the tide, his
eyes sparkle, he jokes, and nudges,
then falls into a dark mood—he is

the weather we've been sheltering from
these six long years, cyclonic egos
who have unhoused and killed millions

it's hard to be dispassionate, that chin,
like a tyrol rock shelf, the sleek seal skin,
how they filled Speer's arc-lit spaces

no different from Ingres' Napoleon, or
busts of Caesar or Hadrian, the ego
celebrated, the petty man obliterated

but here that day I saw it all, even down
to the fountain pen in his bank manager's suit
which hid the cyanide signature on his great work

the leader

— *Winston Churchill, 1954*
Graham Sutherland

the war is nine years gone, and after seven
years of famine, call it 'rationing', and seven
years of 'never having it so good' to come

Pharaoh sits on his commoner's throne,
rotund in plenty, still glorying in triumph
over his teetotal, vegetarian antithesis

he is Empire in an age of existential doubt
Victorian certainty in a ruined Europe
ruthless to protect decency and law

his purpose to keep the scepter in its isle
and this above all - to be victor
and write the history of his times

no wonder he thought this portrait 'filthy'—
its after-the-war-to-end-all-wars modernism
shows true colours seeping through a public varnish

and in that bull-dog certainty one can see
doubt, the scars of 1945's rejection
and the scowl and defiance that anyone else

should make a likeness

Sharyn Anderson
About Town

If stone is what you're after, you've come to the right place.
There's a quarry and evidence that what's in it works.

The streets are broad and straight and lined with stone,
The feeling is that people here want things to last.

What's lasted's there for all to see. What you can't see is
Those who've left. The young leave early and the old, well,

There's a place on the edge of town
That has a view, we're told, to die for.

The church bell still rings; that sweet peal of comfort on a Sunday morning,
While the fire siren wails its frightening song in summer.

Some remember what it's like to work. The old men talk fondly of the days of wool,
How the big drays would line up in the main street on their way to the brokers,

Loaded to the top with huge bales that made
The fortunes of a fortunate few.

These days, they have jobs in the city and their ancestral pile
Out in the backblocks grows little except Scotch thistles and second mortgages.
Still, you have to keep up appearances.

For the rest of us, the sun rises and sets beyond the Mount
As it always has, but there is talk that old volcano could, one day,

Become active again, about the same
Time the town does, set in stone, as it is.

Carolyn Gerrish
Familiarity

make the music stop the tune is unfamiliar
 & why have those Schumann etudes deserted me
 & given the choice i would always prefer the
 accustomed knife-thrusts of Bernard Hermann
 to some anodyne soundtrack & the climax of
Vertigo always reassuringly distressing
 watching Kim Novak die again as she falls
 from the bell tower & there's the happiness
 of recognition when you meander through rooms
 of paintings rediscover *The Peaceable Kingdom*
 naïve piles of quiescent animals staring ahead
 at the viewer & the sense of déjà vu
 that i might have lived in that desolate grey
 Edward Hopper house on that uncanny quiet
 street

*to wander about in times
 that do not belong to us*

& finally to return to the predictable
 assuagement of home what a revelation
 to surprise a recognised intruder who's
 usurping your bedroom just your own
 reflection in the cheval mirror

*for what is life
 for me
 without thee*

David McCooey
Two Pastorals

(i)

How To Be a Better Elvis

The Parkes Observatory, surrounded by
its wheat and alien sheep, listens to the stars.
The town statue of the Founding Father looks
to be singing or preaching, an over-sized book in hand.
In January, the Elvis Festival herds in
the over-weight men, the Priscilla look-alikes,
the memorabilia's promise of a Golden Age.

I'm not interested in the Vegas era.
I return each summer like an old-time itinerant,
getting younger every year, reaching back,
until I find that boy in a Tupelo shotgun
shack, crazy for music and listening for God.

(ii)

Monody: Joni Mitchell Recalls Laurel Canyon

I arrived just after the Manson murders, in another part of the hills, when everyone
locked the doors of their cul-de-sac homes.

Some nights I would think of the day in Canada when I gave away my child.

I left for Malibu before the killings in Wonderland Avenue.

Had I come to the Hills because of the names, the poetry of it all?

Mostly now I remember the endless talking; the songs we wrote so quickly, in answer
to one another.

Why should I not prize words, despite the times, like some love-sick swain?

Where but in language would you find *cloudberries*, *ukulele*, *riverbed*, and
dépaysement?

How else would I save the canyon now, as I recall it best: the lens-flare of afternoon
driving, as the sun stretch'd out all the hills?

Adam Ford
Anti-RomCom Pop Song

the girl that I like doesn't like me
so I
respected her decision as an autonomous human being
and rejected the false promises fed to me
by the prevalence of stories about nerds made good who
waited around and around and around in the hope
that the girl that they liked who didn't like them
would change her mind when the nerd found a way
to prove his love, which he would (and she would)

and so I got on with my life
and left her to get on with hers
and so I got on with my life
and left her to get on with hers
the end

the girl that I like doesn't like me
so I
rejected the inherent chattel implications
that paint all women as not only a prize
to be won or earned but invariably heterosexual
and left her to a life of her own determination
and went on to follow my own life path
without her, allowing myself to feel
regret but not anger, not stooping to allow

my sense of regret to convince me that
romantic relationships can ever be anything else
than based on mutual feelings of attraction
which if absent should not be taken as a sign
that any kind of coercion or cajoling is
an appropriate response to the circumstances

and so I got on with my life
and left her to get on with hers
and so I got on with my life
and left her to get on with hers
the end

the end the end the end

Allis Hamilton
Mrs Piper

—after *Pied Piper of Hamelin*

He came home with that wooden whistle
one blustery winter's day.

Said he found it on the snow
at the crossroads of Hamelin and Coppenbrügge.

It was just lying there he said.
He learned to play it fast enough,

one could well say he was a natural.
But I got rather fed up with his playing here in the cave.

It bounced off the stonewalls and I could get no work done,
so I sent him out.

The first time my husband returned after a day out with that whistle,
it was flies that followed him.

All a-buzz in swarms like swallows on a summer's eve.
Next it was the worms slithering along behind him

like one enormous python.
He used them to catch us plenty of fish.

When he brought home the rats,
that was quite something.

I smoked the meat from most of them;
we had a winter's worth of food.

And I tanned their skins of course;
they made for wonderful shoe warmers.

But when he brought home all those children,
that was something else altogether.

Essay

**Ginninderra's
Hundred
Flowers: a
review of eleven
recent poetry
titles from
Ginninderra
Press**

Tim Thorne

My favourite slogan from the early years of Maoist China was ‘Let a hundred flowers bloom’. Whereas the Chairman’s vaunted embrace of diversity was only temporary, Ginninderra Press has been encouraging and assisting the publication of verse and prose from a very large number of Australians for the best part of two decades.

Although named for the part of Canberra where it was founded, the press has been based in Adelaide since 2008. It operates as a matter of policy without any form of government subsidy, and believes, to quote its website, that ‘subsidies encourage over-production’. It runs, therefore, on a very small budget, especially as it can hardly expect to make much in the way of profits from poetry sales. Ginninderra’s philosophy can be summed up in the words of the press’s owner, Stephen Matthews, ‘I do it because I believe that all people—not just a privileged few—have a right to participate actively in cultural production rather than just being passive consumers of mass media. Our culture is enriched when everyone is encouraged to fulfil their creative potential and diminished when that creative potential is stifled or thwarted. I love to see the transformative possibilities for people when they see their work published and acknowledged—getting published can and does change lives, even if only on a small scale’. [Email, 16 September 2014]

A scroll through the names of poets Ginninderra has published will reveal few that are familiar to aficionados of Australian poetry. Stefanie Bennett, Geoff Page (as editor of an anthology), Jude Aquilina and Molly Guy are among the exceptions, but most of the almost two hundred poetry titles promoted on the press’s website are by those who have had little exposure through other publications. This is, on the one hand, to be lauded; we all know how difficult it is for poets to find an outlet for their work, especially those just starting out on their career. The counter-argument to this is that one of the traditional functions of the poetry publisher has been quality control, and that this operates really well when it involves constraints on quantity.

Stuart Rees is an internationally known and lauded activist in the field of human rights. He has been a Professor of Social Work and helped found the Sydney Peace Foundation. He has received honours and awards from universities in the UK, Hong Kong and Japan, has worked for Save the Children and the Aboriginal Reconciliation Commission, and is a regular contributor to serious discussions on ABC Radio. One might think that this busy life devoted to worthwhile causes left him little time to master the craft of poetry, and on the evidence of his collection, *A Will to Live*, published by Ginninderra, one would be correct.

Poetry, of course, consists of more than craft, and Rees’s book should not be lightly dismissed. The issues with which he deals are vital issues, fundamental to human life and wellbeing, and it is a salutary exercise to engage with such matters by reading pieces of less than a page in length, divided into lines of ten or twelve syllables instead of longer prose dissertations with footnoted references and academic language. What is missing, however, from, for example, the poem ‘Against the Latest War’ is the kind of vivid imagery that would drive home in a visceral, emotional way the points he makes intellectually. We get that the writer is outraged, but he does not engender an outrage in us, the readers, through his language; we do not smell the death, see the suppurating wounds or hear the gunshots. Our response remains abstract, theoretical.

Where Rees does evoke sense impressions, as in the last stanza of 'May Day at the Bastille', it seems like light relief, almost throwaway references to matters that are peripheral to the weightier, more cerebral concerns. Even in poems that should be entirely sensual, such as 'Raspberries in the Cotswolds' or 'Arctic Dawn', he labours to make points that demand a lighter touch. This is a book by a highly intelligent, profoundly moral man, a compassionate and rational thinker, who has obviously read a lot of poetry and understands in general how it works.

Phillip Gijindarraji Hall's *sweetened in coals* demonstrates a much firmer grasp of how language matters. While not entirely devoid of the flat and hackneyed phrase, Hall's verse can rise to a level that his subject matter deserves. He understands the importance of allowing vivid images to speak for themselves, without interposing banal commentary. In the short poem, 'Red Gold', for example, the final image of 'gold-grained stumps' acts as a bright and clear focal point to a meditation on the interaction of humans and nature. The complexity and ambiguity of the history of the Australian bush is encapsulated in eight short lines and, although one might quibble at the facile 'Rainforest giants', the result is an exquisite gem. He even gets rhyme to work for him, something that is beyond most of the other poets represented here.

His 'colonial heads' sequence, on the other hand, reads in some measure like a botanical compendium. This is probably because the content generally trumps the form. In 'red cedar', the final poem of the sequence, there is a much more successful synthesis of the two, and also of observation and thought. The tree as 'a gentleman gone awry' is a deft touch, and the references to coffins and board-rooms give the reader a history lesson without the least didacticism, leaving a lasting impression that more abstract or self-consciously powerful language could never do.

The collection is uneven but at his best, Hall is a powerful and compelling presenter and interpreter of landscape (in the fullest meaning of that term). One could make an argument for tighter editing out of this, but on the other hand, many publishers would pass over the collection in its entirety on the grounds that it does not contain enough of the really good stuff to make a book. I, for one, am glad that Ginninderra has given us the chance to sift through these pieces and glean the brilliant specks.

Ray Carmichael was born in 1939 and, according to the back cover blurb of his *no secret fear* (what is with this growing tendency to use lower case for titles?), 'has been writing poems for most of his life'. It would seem fair to assume that this book contains a selection of the best work from more than half a century's worth of poetry, long enough, it would seem, for the poet to have worked out that strict adherence to a metrical and rhyming pattern imposes the kinds of restrictions on tone that make serious meditative verse very difficult, if not impossible, to bring off. The opening handful of poems in this collection exacerbates this problem by their use of half rhymes and occasional metrical dislocations that appear to have no intrinsic function. Carmichael's verse works best when his tone is lighter and conversational and when he allows his wit and warmth to show through unhampered by the felt need to be 'poetic'. Although there is the danger of slipping into the prosaic, he usually manages to avoid this, resulting in pieces that both charm

and hint of further depths. It is often in such pieces (I am thinking of ‘into a shed of giggles’ and ‘the diamond not so far’ for example) that he employs the kind of language that adds a genuine poetic dimension. Phrases such as ‘the back fence of the world’ and ‘human in that tangled urge’ show what Carmichael is capable of.

There is a poignant quality to the short poem, ‘time stretched by time’, a title that depends for its impact partly on the reader’s understanding of what happens to reel-to-reel recording tapes as they age. Perhaps for those not of Ray Carmichael’s or my generation, it also depends on knowing what a reel-to-reel tape is. Unfortunately the poem requires a footnote that is more than twice as long as it in order for the full meaning to be grasped. I, for one, would love to see this poem expanded into a longer piece, or into a sequence of poems based on the contents of the said tapes and incorporating the substance of the footnote. This would necessitate an expansion of the poetic into the political, or at least the socio-historical, a realm that the poet, at least in this collection, prefers to avoid.

Pam Morris understands the value of the light touch. Her collection, *In the Breathing Space*, attains at times a delicacy of texture that sits happily within that tradition of Australian poetry running from John Shaw Neilson through Robert Gray and Judith Beveridge. Of course there is always a danger with attempting poetry in this vein that one will tumble off the tightrope into banality. Density and complexity offer more hiding places.

At her best she can summon a whole loving relationship by the sensitive use of peripheral details, as in ‘Speaking of Love’. Tackling bigger, more public themes, such as in ‘Beslan, North Ossetia’, however, her technique proves less adequate and the result is on the verge of mawkish. Morris is more at home with the domestic, the evocation of a moment, of a child or of a remembered scene. The short lines of ‘How it Was’, ‘A Brown Dog in Spring’ and ‘Red Hearts’, for example, help the poems keep the necessary tautness, the pizzicato quality that complements the limpidity of the language. In fact, the last two mentioned are very much in the vein of Neilson. Longer lines allow her more latitude and are generally speaking not as conducive to the clarity and subtlety that are her strengths.

In *Moving With the Times* Cynthia Hallam seems to be attempting a similar lightness, but succeeds less often than Morris. The short line is a much more difficult proposition than it appears. Here it works better, for example, in ‘The Pedestrian’ with its understated humour and expression of shared humanity. In ‘Cold Call’, where the humour is more obvious and the narrative element more important, it adds nothing to a piece that could work as well if all the lineation were abolished and it appeared on the page as prose. The combination of short lines and long words is especially problematic, as shown in ‘Growing Up’, resulting in lines like ‘this providential solution’ (which sounds as ugly as it looks) or ‘with determined resignation’ (which might be suggesting how best to complete reading the poem).

It might seem harsh to dwell on such low points, but they do indicate a problem with self-editing. There are glimpses of an ability to use language to telling effect scattered throughout the collection. Hallam has a good ear for overheard speech and a good eye for interesting detail, social or scenic, and the sonnet ‘Volcano’ demonstrates a facility with formal structure, but these highlights are not sufficient to carry the reader along enthusiastically for the whole book. A more

rigorous attitude to selection might have given us a slimmer but more consistently good book; alternatively, it might have meant postponing publication. It is a matter of weighing up the benefits of getting a book out there early against the chance that the best bits will be overlooked.

John Egan is another who tends to favour the short line, despite what might be inferred from the title of his collection, *Lines Continue Forever*. It was the Imagist poets of about a century ago who popularised this approach and it is certainly more appropriate for those poems where the presentation of images is paramount. Certainly, for Egan, the short lines work much better in, say, 'Rain at midnight' than in the more contemplative pieces such as 'The wolves'. But then, regardless of line length, it is imagery that is his strength. Attempts at more depth result in the gap between the weight of thought and the power of language to bear that weight becoming unfortunately obvious. An example of this is the last line of 'The transaction', 'of life and growth and death', where it is the concepts themselves that the reader responds to, not the words that embody them. Herein lies the difference between philosophy and poetry.

The cover of Sue Donnelly's *Heartfelt Moments* does not bode well. For all that one shouldn't judge a book by... it is difficult not to approach this with an apprehension about its contents. The expectation of full-blown romantic kitsch, however, proves for the most part unwarranted. The poems are sharper, more tactile, more connected with the diurnal than the fluffy clouds and the monstrously symmetrical heart nestling in the palm of a grossly oversized hand seem to predict.

There are some charming observations here, presented in many instances with a tightness and clarity of diction that delights. 'A different perspective', for example, avoids both mawkishness and condescension in presenting an encounter with a beggar while Christmas shopping. The quirky, self-deprecating humour of such pieces as 'Lost and Found' is welcome. As an aside, there is far too little humour and even less wit, in many poetry collections, and I don't mean just those under review here.

Donnelly is yet another devotee of the imagist short line. Hilda Doolittle and Dorothy Porter have a lot to answer for. Many of the shorter pieces here read like haiku written by an innumerate. This is not necessarily a comment on their quality, but more a plea for the vivid sense impressions to be incorporated into something of more substance. I have no quarrel whatsoever with the absorption of elements of Japanese culture into Anglophone traditions, nor do I think it valuable to insist that when this happens it should be holus-bolus, but I find it frustrating that even the best short imagistic poems, with all the keen perceptions and skilled presentations that are in evidence, have no dynamic, that they leave all cerebral engagement to the reader. Once again, it is Donnelly's humour that saves the best of the examples here, such as 'Baby Lambs' where the eponymous creatures 'count sheep'.

Humour is a not inconsiderable contributor to the success of Ian McFarlane's work in *The Shapes of Light*. His 'Hooking the Flipper', for example, I found enjoyable on a few levels. It is an attempt to do an updated 'Ern Malley' with the target being postmodernism rather than modernism. Although more deliberately comic than McAuley and Stewart's original, it achieves a similar outcome by succeeding as a poem in its own right. Some commentators have opined that the Ern Malley

poems were among their authors' best work; I leave such judgments to others, but I certainly found 'Hooking the Flipper' among McFarlane's best.

At the other extreme is his 'Echoes from Treblinka', where the grimness of the subject matter overwhelms the poet's ability to summon up words strong enough to carry its substance through to the reader. Adorno's famous line, 'There can be no poetry after Auschwitz' may have been an exaggeration, but it seems appropriate to invoke it here. Still, it is salutary to find between the same covers, not only the two poems mentioned, but a wide range of competently structured light verse, meditations on landscape, love poems and earnest social commentary, to mention just some of the genres he attempts. McFarlane is nothing if not eclectic. There is even a homage to John Shaw Neilson that wears its tribute on its sleeve with lines like 'Your song, so delicate in bloom'. The influence of Neilson is not as pervasive in this book as it is in, say, Pam Morris's, and it is unambiguously acknowledged, but it does give rise to what might prove an interesting field of study: the impact of John Shaw Neilson on minor Australian poets.

The first section of *Upon Reflection*, by Antony Fawcus, is set in the Ethiopian Afar region and, we are told in the first of the accompanying useful and interesting notes, its poems 'were originally written to accompany photographs'. This is perhaps the strongest section of the book. Some of the poems in this section exhibit an awkwardness of sentence structure and others fail effectively to marry tone to subject matter, but there are some strong lines scattered throughout and many examples of a mastery of form sufficient to carry off a dignified and satisfying articulation. 'Boys of the Afar' is marred only by the unfortunate inversion of 'with their guns they shoot'; otherwise it is a fine example of a traditionally patterned poem in the vein of AD Hope.

The fourth section (of five) of the book, 'Affairs of the Heart' contains far too many romantic clichés ('Soft spoken whispers'—are there any other kind?—and 'nothing can tear us apart', and words apparently chosen for rhyme rather than tone, such as 'eschew' and 'anew'). The book would be much stronger without this section.

Another section, of pantoums and villanelles, demonstrates understanding of the forms without showing an ability to use them to create anything serious or substantial. Perhaps this is too carping a criticism, as these forms do not lend themselves easily to poems of great substance, but if light verse is the intention, then Fawcett would do well to follow the examples of Ian McFarlane and Pam Morris and learn from John Shaw Neilson.

Adrian Rogers trumps Antony Fawcus by dividing his even shorter book, *The Sun Behind the Sun*, into twelve sections plus an epilogue. The sections, consisting of a few poems each, are not given titles, only numbers, and there seems to be no obvious reason for this fragmentation. We are once more back in the realm of the short line. Aspiring poets should realise that the pentameter and free verse lines of roughly equivalent length have dominated English poetry for centuries for a good reason. That reason is the flexibility they afford, along with the opportunity for using any number of variables: rhythm, tempo, internal rhyme, enjambment, etc. The short line, though its appeal is clear, is a trap. To use it well is much harder because that opportunity is curtailed.

A third of the poems in this book have first lines consisting of either one or two words. In 'Alone', it is easy to see why, as the title is repeated as the first line. It stands alone, thus using a formal technique to emphasise the meaning. Fairly basic primary school creative writing class stuff, but there is, at least, a point. The poem immediately preceding this one has as its opening line 'Waking'. There seems to be no valid reason for isolating this word in such a prominent position. Much the same could be said for all the very short lines throughout the book. The reinforcement of the separation of language into short phrases by turning the slight pauses into line breaks takes away the chance of playing one set of structures against another, and leads to monotony. Listening for the small differences in length of the pauses in natural speech rhythms and giving the reader some caesuras to affect how the mind's ear works could make for much more interesting verse.

That said, Rogers has some nice turns of phrase. I liked the ending of St Kilda, 'sediment to steel / continuity / through time' (although I contend it would be better as one line instead of three) and the effect of chaos and confusion he creates in 'The swallowing twentieth century', in part by the clever use of fragments of language rather than whole sentences. In fact, fragmentation at various levels is the hallmark of this collection.

Brenda Eldridge's *Tangled Roots* is a triumph of content over form. It is difficult, perhaps the most difficult thing in writing poetry, to get the balance between them right. In the best poetry, of course, the two are seamlessly united and both contribute to the overall result. What is good about this collection is the variety of subject matter and the appropriateness of tone. Where the temptation to fall for the easy, hackneyed phrase has been avoided, Eldridge demonstrates an ability to surprise with the felicitous and the unexpected, such as the line 'When my heart was lilac'.

Too often, however, this temptation is not avoided and the result is somewhat drab. The sun, for example, 'shone brightly' in one piece, and in another 'Everyone was having a wonderful time'. The lack of punctuation is telling. There is no reason at all why punctuation should be used, although many poets use it skilfully as another element in the poem's structure, another chance to include subtle variations of meaning and tone. Here, however, a deliberate decision to do without it seems to have been driven by a desire for the work to look more 'poetic' or 'experimental'. The line endings and stanza breaks have to stand in as the visual elements of division.

Occasionally this can lead to a charming ambiguity, as in the book's final poem, 'Two Old Ducks':

Daring to walk the roads
Less travelled by

Paths only intersecting

where the possible reading of 'bypaths' sets up a nice tension across the stanza break. I would have liked to see more of such playfulness.

Too often *Tangled Roots* reads like the proverbial 'chopped-up prose'. This phrase, originating as an insult to free verse by those who didn't understand its

more nuanced formal character, is usually misapplied, but a simple test can be conducted. If one were to set out all these pieces without line breaks, with or without the reintroduction of punctuation, what would be the factors making them poetry? To my ear, at least, there are not enough.

Ginninderra Press is to be congratulated on its sterling support of Australian poets who might find it very hard to be published in the current economic climate, given that even the very best poetry is not a commercial proposition and the major publishing houses are more and more inclined to turn their backs on it. There is something worth reading in each of these publications, and it is doubtful whether without Ginninderra we would have the opportunity to discover this. As in most gardens, there is a sprinkling of weeds, but the policy of letting a hundred flowers bloom has generally paid off.

§

Titles Reviewed

- Ray Carmichael, *no secret fear*. ISBN 9781740278669. Port Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2014. RRP \$20
- Sue Donnelly, *Heartfelt Moments*. ISBN 9781740278652. Port Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2014. RRP \$20
- John Egan, *Lines Continue Forever*. ISBN 9781740278751. Port Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2014. RRP \$18.50
- Brenda Eldridge, *Tangled Root: New and Selected Poems*, ed. Jude Aquilina. ISBN 9781740278690. Port Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2014. RRP \$20
- Antony Fawcus, *Upon Reflection*. ISBN 9781740278782. Port Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2014. RRP \$18.50
- Phillip Gijindarraji Hall, *sweetened in coals*. ISBN 9781740278584. Port Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2014. RRP \$20
- Cynthia Hallam, *Moving With the Times*. ISBN 9781740278614. Port Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2014. RRP \$20
- Ian McFarlane, *The Shapes of Light: Rediscovering Poetry in a Post-poetic Age*. ISBN 9781740278447. Port Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2014. RRP \$20
- Pam Morris, *In the Breathing Space*. ISBN 9781740278621. Port Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2014. RRP \$20
- Stuart Rees, *A Will To Live*. ISBN 9781740278706. Port Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2014. RRP \$27.50
- Adrian Rogers, *The Sun Behind the Sun*. ISBN 9781740278607. Port Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2014. RRP \$18.50

Peter Lach-Newinsky
Sense of a Century

1913

Your father four, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*
analysed into English, a suffragette beams
at a camera from a broken window in Holloway
after her sisters have tried to blow it up, US

Customs asks if you're an anarchist, polygamist,
idiot, the Paris audience riots on the opening
night of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, Berlin crowds
clap on three monarch cousins of England, Prussia,

Russia, whose beards wag a third of the world, the
bordellos' tight tango pulses through Buenos Aires
in sync with the sly sterling of London Banks while
Villa & Zapata ride peasant rage into Mexico City

& *The Economist* opines the spread of capital &
beneficent boots of empire make war impossible.

1963

Fourteen & neither here nor there.
Books begin to open an escape hatch.
Just down the hill from high school
Parramatta Road's *telos* is fulfilled

& LA enters as a drive-in milk bar
while Ramsey Road gets a supermarket
where you can buy without talking.
You prefer I Want to Hold Your Hand

to She Loves You. Neither is true.
No girls at school, or anywhere else.
Dominus vocat, servus advenit, non
je n'ai pas la plume de ma tante.

No TV, you don't see dogs & fire-hoses
in Alabama, nor King having a dream.

2013

Carbon passes 400, mother dies & reality
TV plans to send two keen people to Mars
in five years, forever. Early adopters go gaga
over Google Glass, eyes leaving their eyes

& planet for an algorithm. As Typhoon Haiyan
smacks the Filipino poor, the first lab-grown
meat is eaten on YouTube. The first child is born
from an IVF batch whose genomes his so-called

parents screened for what they consider ab-
normalities, mice are shown to be connate
with a smell encountered by their grandparents
& Snowden leaks our total Stasi State. Mother

dies, we get a map of first mama universe's
relic light & new data confirm God is a particle.

Kevin Brophy
Eaten Moon at Easter

The eaten moon is fattening
Again. White robed priests pray aloud.
The palest pigeons hide from Popes.
We aim to die like foolish soldiers
And rise naked round the churches
Copying the faded frescoes
That predicted how this goes.
A eucharistic moon is falling
Into our mouths fallen open.
I'm taking notes and shopping,
Noting how the pale moon's growing.
Can we talk without mentioning
That the infinite capacity
Of prisons is a miracle,
That bullets better made than ever
Deliver puzzling parables?
I'm buying eggs and planning routes
Out of here; the jets are chalking
Shaky lines above the city.
The moon's forsaken colour.
The blue bed's made for us tonight,
Our window's open to the moonlight,
Our room's a basin
For its pale pooling liquid light.
Pigeons bundle out there cooing
Some ancient, wordless song.
Old priests lift their hands to this,
The broken columns of the empire,
The resurrection of the enemies,
The prisoners, the armies—armies of them
Lost and standing.
The eaten moon returns again
As though death will never really happen,
The gods will see to that.
The sleepy gardens, fallen trees,
The automatic gates and entry fees
are here to stay.

Fay Zwicky
Boat Song

Speed, bonnie boat, like a bird on the wing,
'Onward', the seekers cry;
Speed, you will not, but sink like a stone
Down on the seabed lie.

We once had a country', the desperate cry
'Now we're officially dead'.
The Ministers grin, 'You cannot come in.
You'd consume all our daily bread'.

The debris of massacres, blitzkriegs and bombings,
Putsches and pogroms, war's goings and comings.
Tyres are for burning and cobbles for throwing,
Army surplus for wearing and weeds fit for mowing.

Lie in military tents with fear gripping breath,
Forget that you're living, expecting a death.
Remote ideologies send bonnie boats
Like broken-winged birds to our merciful votes.

And we turned them away, yes we turned them away
As we went out to play
In our dead-hearted country, the bounteous place
Where neighbourly love puts a smile on each face.

As we golf and we gamble, eat, make love, and die,
Raise shrines to our roadkill, release a brief sigh—
Only heaven knows why—and for hours upon hours
We bring photos and candles and
Mountains of flowers upon flowers upon
Flowers upon flowers.

Anne M Carson
: meditations on melancholy

You said melancholy, I said Chopin; a poultice
you could put on pain. Dark notes held by beauty

in a soft hand. Not cry-your-eyes-out, slumped
in blurs of despond. But clear-eyed chords;

elegiac philosophy carried on rivers of soul.
Comfort for the bloody business of loss,

the carnage of having what is as close to you
as your own limb, lopped. The nocturnes lasso

darkness with light; ever-widening stories to which
your tale belongs. The simple peace when pain

is consented to. Silos of silence to sink into.

Mitchell Welch
Love your Neighbour

Before the tray tables came to brood in our laps
In the prelapsarian wunderkammer of night
(Who knew a wasteland so crowded by light?),
Decent people rested in short, malarial shakes.
Paradisiacal, the hours held each other's wakes
And we lived as innocent of innocence. Ersatz.

The world moved beneath us like the slow plot
Of a single-camera sitcom projected on the sky.
It was funny; we didn't have to watch, but why?
We traced the sad labyrinths of our fingerprints
Across unopenable packetlets of airline mints,
Cryptic crosswords in the dialects of polyglots.

But after the inflight service my neighbour fell
Im Halbschlaf, babbling from his deepest well:

Bush ghost faces, he said. Plastic bags in trees.
His businessman's erection levitated the tray
Above his lap. I saw the gross metamorphosis.
People in bags, Herr Doktor. Faces in plastic.
He snored in English. I felt a skin of meaning
Shrugged from the Airbus A380 like a carapace.

I saw him again when the landing gear dawned,
Seatback in full upright position, tray table up.

Yve Louis

Walk as though being followed by three men

1 movie

Click! Sharp as ice picks spiking hold in verglas,
her stilettos strike frozen pavement . . . (Better

she was anywhere now but on Glinkastrasse,
those midnight shadow-shapes closing behind.)

O, why did she leave Berliner Ensemble alone!
And why is she walking the longer way home?

Clink! clink! the pick-beat of fright hitting faster,
clink! into ice — the dark, your own racing heart.

No. Wait. See? She's flashed the perfect weapon.
The stiletto that freeze-frames, heel against night.

'Vile rapist-slasher-thugs!' And she's spun, virago,
braced to fight . . . huh? Just actors? a hired chorus?

Ah, but it's the masks. It's the channelled voices
— Hauptmann Weiss Brecht —

it's the line they lip-sync. Of all lines, it's the one
that must hold, or lose, her. *Be aware, only be aware.*

2 . . . and star

Segue, a sunny spring day in the Third City
of the Arts, New South Wales, Australia. Fronting

the new shoe boutique, hand scribed in multi-
lined texta, the whiteboard pitch insinuates:

Walk as though you're being followed by 3 men.
Well, of course. (Isn't there some echo there?)

And now the smell of coffee, wafting, narcotic
from the Paris end of town . . . and right on cue

a busker on accordion with his cover of
Je t'aime . . . Tu es la vague, moi l'île nue . . .

Click, click, o dance those heels, sway those hips
Gainsbourg, Clayderman, Aznavour are close behind.

Judith Beveridge
Clouds

I'm tired of these endless high-faluting blue skies—
I want clouds common as whisked egg-whites, or mashed
potatoes on a plate. Clouds that by dusk are the colour
of fish-gutters' gloves. Wage-earner clouds working
like Lanarkshire bog farmers, or Mongolian horsemen.

I want blue skies to admit their bumbling stewardship
and own up to their enormous cost. I want dissenting
thunderheads with their cloud-to-cloud lightning,
clouds recruited from monsoonal lows and Scotch mist,
clouds circumnavigating the planet then signing up

for Greenpeace. I want clouds to resist the oligarchic
reign of blue and come striding in like men and women
who fling their bodies in protest against the dirt,
then get up praising the wings of birds. Clouds whose
fluffy tops kiss in public, and without embarrassment,

enact the restlessness of the soul inside the body.
Let blue skies stop their rhetorical grandstanding.
We know they're filled with the breath of men cocked
and fettled by greed. One by one I call the clouds in.
A cloud for each child hungry, ragged, naked. A cloud

for all exiles whose voices can't find a single raindrop,
whose eyes are stones that out-weather the past.
A cloud for those in war-ravaged places where shadows
terrorise doorways, and the old live between rubble
and crumbled bread. Blue skies will break the windows

of your house; they will offer you their emptiness
and your life at a knock-down price, their lips will pronounce
only names written in expensive ink. Let the clouds
come and cross over each other in a gust of wind, scrubbing
away the ubiquitous azure that remembers nothing

except the value of the moon's silverware
and the silken dreams of dictators and their priests.
In the distance two clouds are touching, twisting
into a lintel of sanctuary where the blue can't trespass.
I want clouds thick as laundry, soaking under stars

that wash away spilled blood. Handkerchief-clouds
waving fondly as we drive off towards fields, waterfalls
and laughter, sick of counting the cerulean jewels
on the ocean. Blue skies rebuke all who come down
from the burning mountains, those who believe

in snowflakes, rainforests and in the scorpion's sting,
who know the heat calving the glaciers is as convincing
as pain. A good cloud will precipitate the deepest
source of our moral passion, our principal wisdom,
and our affection for those who argue with the dust.

Helga Jermy
The poppy pickers

They're bent over in fluoro like poppies soaked in rain
although their stalks seem much more brittle.
Preoccupied, in profile, they're posed like nineteenth
century Millet gleaners searching for spare change.
The years between are a sequence of hard labour, the chain
linked now by cash strapped backpackers. Opium picking
has a nice ring about it for future storytelling though reality
is bruised and scratched in hot red earth with threat of snakes.
It's a slow procession in furrows where once there were white petals,
a few red rogues in the resistant genealogy. Keep out.
There is something arresting about being fenced in on the wrong side
with public warnings. Keep out. By dusk there are spinal creak and groans,
and still the bark of orders. Wages relate to rates of production.
All rights are wrong in this image, the pastoral more postmodern.

Gita Mammen
Homage

Where he'd come from and how
through several sets of manned doors
drawing no one's attention
was something that later generated
much delight
and several high level inquiries.
The vulnerable nape of neck
guileless skull curvature
slicked down cow-lick
and waddle with not a hint of swagger.
Quietly seated in the mezzanine gallery
a young duck, not quite duckling
but not very much past
despite the mature freckles.
Okay, allowable the first time but day
after day?
Not a quack.
No droppings.
Not even a feather.
Firmly holding his ground
a good minute before allowing himself
to be ushered out by two security guards
only to reappear the next day
before the Bonnard.



Essay

Black Pepper Press: Spice and Grit

Margaret Bradstock

Black Pepper obviously knows what is the spice of life.

– Andrew McCue, *Ulitarra* 14, 1998

Back in 1995, when the major publishing houses began withdrawing poetry from their lists to concentrate on more lucrative areas, small presses stepped in to fill the resultant gap. Black Pepper was one of these. Kevin Pearson, who describes himself as a ‘troubadour poet’, was born in Melbourne, spent time on the road travelling between states and, while working in Adelaide during the early ’80s, established a reputation for his poetry. Publishing projects for the Wakefield Press gave him the experience needed to start Black Pepper when he returned to Melbourne and settled in North Fitzroy.

Gail Hannah had worked as administrator, assistant manager and publicist for the Almost Managing theatre company in Melbourne, and had begun her own creative enterprise by the time she met Kevin Pearson. She became the artistic director for Black Pepper and is credited with the high quality of book design for the press. The seed funding for Black Pepper was provided by the sale of Kevin Pearson’s parental home. The offices, warehousing and design room are courtesy of Gail Hannah’s large Victorian house, giving Black Pepper rent-free premises. Neither receives a salary from the business venture, which employs part-time assistant editors, web designers, publicists and book producers.

To begin with, Black Pepper did not have the advantage of assistance from the Literature Board of the Australia Council but, once established as a significant publisher of works of literary merit, the press had a long run of support on a fairly regular basis. In the case of Tasmanian authors, Black Pepper has also received assistance from Arts Tasmania. With the recent reduction of Government funding for the Arts, publishers again face the difficult task of keeping poetry afloat, and it is noteworthy that three fine collections from Black Pepper in the past year do not bear State Government or Australia Council logos. On the other hand, print runs have become easier now technology has caught up. A minimum of 500 copies was once necessary, when text and covers were both printed offset. With digital printing, according to Kevin Pearson, his first run will now be 200 to 250 books, which is fairly standard for small presses, and after that copies can be printed as required. Poets are not asked to contribute to the cost of publication, and receive royalties of ten percent of RRP. They tend to buy copies for readings, which are a major outlet for sales. ‘Almost all the press’s poetry titles break even’, says Pearson, ‘or generate a small profit which is recycled into ongoing production’.

In 1995, Black Pepper published ten titles—short stories, a novel, novellas, a book of meditations and five collections of poetry, two of which were Pearson’s own. When asked whether one of their reasons for this generic mix was to establish a sound financial basis for the press (since poetry tends to have a limited popularity and saleability), Pearson responded:

While we were hoping for a boost from fiction sales, it was also the fact that we felt there was neglected prose work going unpublished. Sales did not generally match expectations, as fiction is a more contested market where the Big Boys can more incisively wield advertising dollars

and influence. However, there was the success of Wayne Macauley, now regarded as a crucial Australian novelist, first published by us when no one else would touch him. This has been a historical function of the small press—the discovery of the unknown.

Jennifer Harrison's first poetry collection, *Michelangelo's Daybook*, was launched to strong critical acclaim (with reviews by Jennifer Strauss in *Australian Book Review*; Alan Gould in *Quadrant*; Catherine Bateson and Barbara Giles, judges of the Anne Elder Award, won by Harrison in that year). Laurie Clancy, in an *Age* interview with Kevin Pearson about the Melbourne poetry scene in 2000, is remembered as saying 'If Black Pepper had done nothing else, its discovery of Jennifer Harrison justifies its existence'.

John Anderson, whose experimental text *the forest set out like the night* had been rejected by Island Press, Paper Bark, Angus & Robertson and Penguin Books, ultimately found, as a rejection letter from Penguin Books intimated, 'the right publisher and audience' with Black Pepper. In 1999, Gary Catalano wrote in *Ulitarra* that 'Pearson suggested that the length of the original manuscript was an issue', yet he chose to print it in its entirety (complete with illustrations). Clearly, Pearson saw the merit of the collection and was willing to take a gamble where bigger presses were not. Anderson was not widely known, but was admired and respected by fellow poets and published alongside Kris Hemensley, John Tranter, Robert Harris and John Jenkins in Robert Kenny's first (1974) volume of *Rigmarole of the Hours*. He is compared favourably with Les Murray by Catalano, and Murray himself, in *The Poetry Book Club of Australia*,¹ said of *the forest set out like the night*, 'I would highly commend John Anderson's distinctive experimental text, one which is bound to be influential'. Anderson's next collection, *the shadow's keep*, was also taken up by Black Pepper, in 1997, the year of his early and unexpected death.

The pattern of across-genre publishing has continued up to the present day. In three years only (2007, 2008, 2012) there were no poetry collections, but in 2013 four of the five titles were poetry, and in 2014 two out of three were poetry, all from well-known poets. Overall, the press aims to maintain fifty percent of the mix as poetry titles. Books selected for publication throughout Black Pepper's history reflect the publisher's eclectic taste, but include a number of established and significant poets, who have chosen to remain with the Black Pepper 'stable'. Repeat appearances come to us from Jordie Albiston (*Botany Bay Document*, 1996; *The Hanging of Jean Lee*, 1998); Adrienne Eberhard (*Agamemnon's Poppies*, 2003; *Jane, Lady Franklin*, 2004; *This Woman*, 2012); Stephen Edgar (*Other Summers*, 2006; *History of the Day*, 2009; *Eldershaw*, 2013; *Exhibits of the Sun*, 2014); Jennifer Harrison (*Michelangelo's Prisoners*, 1995; *Cabramatta/Cudmirrah*, 1996; *Mosaics and Mirrors*, with Graham Henderson and K.F Pearson, 1996; *Dear B*, 1996; *Folly & Grief*, 2006; *Colombine*, 2010); Homer Rieth (*The Dining Car Scene*, 2001; *Wimmera*, 2009; *150 Motets*, 2013); Andrew Sant (*Album of Domestic Exiles*, 1997; *Tremors, New and Selected Poems*, 2004; *Fuel*, 2009; *The Bicycle Thief*, 2013); Nicolette Stasko (*The Weight of Irises*, 2003; *The Invention of Everyday Life*, 2007).

Four poetry collections are listed on the Black Pepper website² as bestsellers: Jordie Albiston's *The Hanging of Jean Lee*, Homer Rieth's *Wimmera*, Jennifer

Harrison's *Colombine*, and Stephen Edgar's *Eldershaw*. The story of Jean Lee, the last woman hanged in Australia, as late as 1951,³ proved inherently fascinating and disturbing to readers, and critics almost unanimously praised the poetic skills and techniques involved in presenting the narrative as dramatic monologue. No fewer than fifteen reviews appeared in Australia's most prestigious literary journals at the time, and in August 2006 a new opera was performed at the Sydney Opera House, based on Albiston's 'verse biography', with Andrée Greenwell as composer and artistic director. In November 2013, Radio National presented a two-part feature in which Albiston walked the streets of Melbourne re-visiting Jean Lee's haunts, and in December of the same year Lee's story was played out in a dramatic post-pop concert version, such was its hold on the public imagination.

But was it the melodramatic nature of the subject matter, the lyric power of the poetry, or a combination of both, that destined this book to be a bestseller? Perhaps the best answer to this is Judy Johnson's comment that she saw Albiston's work 'as an example of how accomplished poetics and sensational story line can come together to create something memorable'.

Discussing the HSC syllabus in *Quadrant*, Alan Gould commented that the committee 'might do well to place *The Hanging of Jean Lee* [...] before its students [...] a thoroughly compelling, incisive and finely wrought sequence of poems'. He expands this suggestion with reference to Albiston's 'acute eye for period and sociological accuracy', her impressive constraint, an ear 'as finely tuned to child speak as it is to Australian working-class argot of the 1930s and 1940s' and her 'great art in structuring her story'. Such considerations find an echo in other critics' responses. Judy Johnson claimed for Albiston 'a particular gift for conjuring immediacy through unerring colloquial voice and a historian's concern with re-creating time and place accurately'. Shane Rowlands commented in *Meanjin* that 'Albiston is scrupulous in avoiding anachronisms. A meticulous researcher, she has a thorough understanding and sure grasp of the broader socio-historical context, economic conditions and significant public events'. David Wood drew attention to the 'elegance and technical accomplishment [...] a highly refined sensibility, a deft poetic talent with a sensitive ear for cadence and tonal modulation'. Structure, it is agreed, is not linear narrative, but thematic, varying and integrating perceptions, disrupting the reader's expectations. Judy Johnson, in particular, noted how Albiston 'dislocates the story line—time and perspective leap deftly forwards, backwards and sideways'.

A fine reception indeed, but there were reservations. Writing in *Antipodes*, Julian Croft drew attention to the way in which 'occasionally Jean Lee's voice sounds more like a radio drama of the time [...] which though it makes sense in a way, sounds thin and trite at times. On others, Albiston gets the right register and makes her subject's voice move away from flat prose into poetry'. He concedes that 'the blend of direct and indirect narrative through real and imagined sources and revelation from Lee herself create a finely realised and sympathetic account of a blighted life. And there is the added benefit of some very moving and intelligent poetry'. By contrast, David Wood concluded his review with the remark that 'It is a pity that the collection does not climax more effectively', attributing this shortfall in part to the lack of strict chronology, and partly

'because Albiston's technique lacks sufficient muscularity'. Barry Hill questioned the quality of the poetry:

As a whole, the book works in the mind like a novel [...]. Poem by poem, though, it is patchy, and only breaks out of its tabloid strongly in the poems about God. That is the challenge to which the book has only partially risen: how to tell a tabloid story without the tabloid murdering the art?

Dorothy Hewett declared herself 'dissatisfied with the verse novel in general', and asked, 'why this fascination with a particular genre, apparently growing in popularity? [...] The result is a tendency towards a flattening of diction, a uniformity of tone, that it seems difficult in the long run to transcend'. Gig Ryan, requiring both narrative tension and convincing poetics, is more specifically damning in her *Age* review:

These monologues [...] never entirely jell [...]; there is little suspense or explanation. Lee's character seems intermittently bland, religious, superficial but strangely not tragic and Albiston's insistent rhythm and rhyme seem at odds with the subject.

She concludes, 'This book does what it intends, calling Lee and capital punishment (abolished in Victoria, 1975)⁴ to our attention, but Lee remains somehow incomplete'. Geoff Page noted in *The Canberra Times* that, 'perhaps disconcertingly', a number of the poems are written from the vantage point 'of an omniscient narrator or from the point of view of other key figures', and suggested that they 'diminish the claustrophobic intensity that might have been achieved if the reader had been confined to Jean Lee's head throughout'. Page points out that 'Traditional metres and rhymes set up firm expectations which are interestingly, and often frustratingly, denied, and draws attention to 'a curious kind of moral ambivalence', but agrees that 'the book certainly succeeds [...] mainly through its original poetic technique, in creating a sense of Lee's humanity'.

The feminist perspective is introduced by Bev Braune in *HEAT*, adding a further dimension to the controversy: 'It is the judgement of Lee as an "unrespectable woman" that has captured Albiston's imagination'—a stance underlined by Edward Reilly's contemporary memories of the event: 'there was some sympathy amongst the local women: most of them thought Judge Duffy was too harsh in applying the law [...] to do that to a woman was considered to be little more than judicial murder'.

What might be concluded, in response to the varied critical reactions to *The Hanging of Jean Lee*, is that, in this case, the momentum of the whole is greater than the sum of its highly ordered and uncompromising parts. Fortunately, Kevin Pearson recognised its potential, and the book's widespread public recognition speaks for itself. What we are left with is an image of finality, reminiscent of the awful precision of Bruce Dawe's 'A Victorian Hangman Tells His Love', or the newspaper accounts of the execution of Chambers and Barlow in 1986, the mindless reassurance of 'a good death':

I tie her carefully to
 the chair that she may feel held as
 she falls Adjust the hood and get
 the nod then let the trapdoor go

Homer Rieth's *Wimmera* (2009) was an even more significant publication for Black Pepper, selling over 5,000 copies. *Wimmera* is an epic poem in the classical mode about the Victorian district in which Rieth came to live, replacing the battles of heroes and gods with the struggle of human beings against the environment. In his foreword to the book, Justin Clemens suggests that 'in its spiritual vision, it is reminiscent of the cosmic speculations of Wordsworth and Whitman'. Brian Edwards, in *Australian Book Review*, likewise rated it highly: 'Grand in conception and impressively detailed in execution, this is a significant achievement indeed, and a major contribution to Australian literature'. Geoffrey Lehmann had also reviewed the publication positively, and *Landline* (ABC-TV Broadcast on 21 February 2010) featured a reading and discussion, with Tim Lee as reporter and input from Dr. Brian Edwards and Kevin Pearson. Pearson's account of *Wimmera*'s rise to fame is memorable:

Theoretically the book was totally unsaleable. It is a 374-page unpunctuated epic poem dealing with the flat dry land region of its title. Like every other title, we valued it for its worth firstly and took our chances with its success. However, we deliberately promoted it to the ABC. Landline made a twenty-minute documentary about the author and the book, called 'Homer's epic'. The minute after the program ceased we sold thirteen copies by telephone order. We sold to every quarter of Australia, from Groote Island to Bruny Island. The important thing is that it was selling to the common reader and not to the literary elite. We believe all poetry which has clarity has this potential.

Pam Brown was less impressed:

Although divided into 12 sections, at 360 pages the poem is a bit relentless, having little variation in tone throughout.... No matter how judicious and broad the reportage, range of form and topic, antithesis of allusion and the literal, I found that I began to flip through sections and felt that it might be easier to come to know the *Wimmera* by reading an actual history of the district.

Jennifer Harrison's *Colombine: New & Selected Poems* (2010) represents a very different kind of collection. Reviews were fewer, but were more unequivocally positive, and the book was shortlisted for the 2011 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards. As a New & Selected, it includes poems from Harrison's first four poetry collections as well as new work, comprising two long sequences, 'Fugue' and 'Colombine'. Poems like the haunting 'Glass Harmonica' (from *Folly & Grief*, 2006) are well worth revisiting and serve as prelude to the next stage of her poetic development. In 'Fugue', as Geoff Page remarks, 'the poet employs a variety of forms which rely on repetition,

most notably the pantoum and variations of it. The cumulative impact of repeated lines (or nearly repeated lines) can be considerable but much depends on the quality of the line itself. He cites a line that fails to make the grade, and admittedly the repetitive nature of the pantoum, experienced *en bloc* as here, rather than adding meaning to the opening stanza has a tendency to detract from the overall emotive force of individual lines. Against this, a repetition of some lines, or parts of lines, in many sections of the sequence 'Colombine' works powerfully and cumulatively towards the success of the dramatic monologue, building on figures already met in *Folly & Grief*. At this point it might be appropriate to pay tribute to Gail Hannah's stunning cover design for *Colombine*, with its evocation of sorrow behind the mask/masque, reflecting themes and preoccupations of the book as a whole.

Martin Duwell believes Harrison's fourth book, *Folly & Grief*, 'contains her best work so far and deserves to be celebrated as one of the books of the decade [...] marked by an extraordinary richness of invention and poetic performance'. Based on the selection in *Colombine*, however, it is difficult to agree that the earlier poems overshadow the new, standing instead as sketches for the more cohesive yet thematically complex 'Colombine' sequence. As Susan Healy has said, "'Columbine'" as a sequence is a remarkable, original achievement and is worthy of being extended and published as a single volume. When "Colombine" stands alone her resistance to easy meanings can be better understood on her own terms'.

The fourth poetry bestseller from Black Pepper is Stephen Edgar's *Eldershaw* (2013). *Eldershaw* was shortlisted for the 2013 Queensland Literary Awards, came equal first in the 2014 Colin Roderick Award, and was shortlisted for the 2014 Prime Minister's Literary Awards. The story of the Colin Roderick Award is an interesting one. Novelist Ashley Hay asked Edgar, whom she had never met, to write a poem for her 2013 novel *The Railwayman's Wife*. She sent him some of the imagery required for the poem and information about the character to whom it was to be attributed, and Edgar obliged with a poem which she said 'fitted the voice of my poet so perfectly and contained all the imagery and ideas I'd sent'. By a strange turn of fate, Hay and Edgar met for the first time as joint winners of the Colin Roderick Award, for 'the best book published in Australia which deals with any aspect of Australian life'. It is a tribute to Stephen Edgar and to *Eldershaw* to have won this award across all genres.

Like Dorothy Hewett, I would have to admit that I'm not, 'in general', a fan of the verse novel. It lends itself too easily to the prosaic when important information has to be conveyed to the reader, as in:

Martin had been engaged as union brief
 To fight the Marshall case, in which the two,
 Marshall father and son, were holding out
 Against compulsory union membership
 In a union which, they claimed, was being run
 By communists. And Lex was, truth to tell,
 A member of that party, as were all
 The national executive at the time.

However, as Martin Duwell points out, ‘the whole poem works alarmingly well. Unlike a conventional genre piece, it is alive and convincing at every point, crackling with engagement and intensity. Working out why this should be the case is a tricky critical issue’. In the same review, Duwell also looks extensively at Edgar’s earlier books, identifying many pieces as preludes to this final coming-together of recurrent themes, ‘one way of approaching Edgar’s work as a whole’.

It is perhaps for this reason that the middle section of the sequence, ‘The Fifth Element’—dealing with the empty relationship between Luke and his father, Evan’s war memories and impending death—soars above conventional narrative verse, arriving at moments of pure lyrical poetry:

[...] this surge of recklessness
 He’d call exhilaration if it weren’t
 Such folly for the lives he might be risking
 Compels him to fly upwards, up and up
 To the ceiling, thirty-seven thousand feet,
 As high as the Mosquito’s built to stand.
 Up in the cold clear night, floating between
 The two bright galaxies, he breathes again
 And looks out at the sky bending around
 The shoulders of the world, lit by a moon
 That has its back half-turned to him. If they
 Can only fly beyond that curvature,
 Tangential to the folding dark [...]

Part II of *Eldershaw* comprises sixteen poems in Edgar’s familiar rhymed and scanning style, encapsulating many of the themes and scenarios that continue to haunt him: time, the past and memory, significant moments lost forever, or transmuted into art. As such, they are closely linked to, and present in sharp relief, the concerns of the opening sequence. The text is beautifully produced and will no doubt see re-editions or re-printings, as its enthusiastic reception to date foreshadows. If so, I’d like to suggest that the line ‘Silent upon a peak in Darien’ (p.9) appear in italics or quotation marks.⁵

Hard on the heels of *Eldershaw* comes Stephen Edgar’s *Exhibits of the Sun*, as a Black Pepper current release for 2014. In many ways, the poems in it are in the Stephen Edgar style we are familiar with, similar in their stanzaic patterns of rhyme and rhythm. Like the Australian artist Lucy Culliton, Edgar looks from the microscopic to the macrocosmic and sees beauty. His familiar subject matter, flooded with light, frequently challenges the ambiguous effects of light. In ‘All Eyes’, as the Huygens spacecraft approaches:

A ghostly Ferris wheel frozen in space,
 Saturn comes looming at the satellite
 With all its shattered rings of icy lace
 Exquisitely beyond repair.

Light itself is tempered by time, as in 'The Clues':

The green light in the leaves
 At evening, cloud like breath upon the sky's
 Dark windowpane, the slate-grey reservoir
 And the shadow of the heron it retrieves.
 Such recollected scraps will rise
 And haunt them with the quest of what they are [,]

as time is adjusted by memory:

That in between one eye blink and the next
 Time paused, allowing time to be installed
 Within that countless interim,
 Coiled up, on hold,
 A memory predicted and recalled. ("The House of Time")

Mention should also be made of Patricia Roche's beautiful cover photograph, *Paperbarks*, which introduces and illuminates individual sections of the text. Recent positive reviews of *Exhibits of the Sun* have appeared from Peter Goldsworthy, who says of Edgar, 'There are few as accomplished in the English-speaking world, or with as large a command of forms', and Geoffrey Lehmann, who suggests that Edgar 'is now ripe for a major Collected Poems'. Clive James has recently (28 November 2014) nominated *Exhibits of the Sun* as one of the TLS picks for 'Books of the Year', stating that 'The sudden lyricism of his images grows even more amazing, not just for their accuracy, but for their impetus'.

As Lucy Van has said in her *Cordite* review of *Paths of Flight*, 'we need all the good poetry we can get', and Black Pepper Press continues to fulfil that aim, creating opportunities for good new poets to establish themselves.

Paths of Flight (2013) is Luke Fischer's debut collection and, as such, is subject to varied critical responses. Ian McFarlane noted that 'Luke Fischer is described as a poet and scholar, and the poems [...] reflect the intellectual gravitas of the label, which made things difficult for me, since I've always believed poetry is more akin to dreaming than thinking'. For MacFarlane, 'These poems embrace a wide-ranging pastoral philosophy [...]. The result is a curious cornucopia that shimmers with brittle beauty [...] but struggles to escape a studied air of academic function'. Geoff Page is kinder: 'Like most first books, it heads in several directions at once and it is not yet apparent which will be the next, or the ultimate, one'.

Many of the poems are, in fact, highly reliant on description, and written from the first-person perspective; the best of these culminate in a volte-face, or unexpected reversal, as in the following:

Even as I write
 my pen
 erases

Other poems personify nature, birds, insects and there are some excellent similes:

you stood with wing-feathers slotted
like Swiss army knives,

My favourite poems are 'In Late Winter', which reverse the relationship between artist and artwork ('my hands etched in a pentagonal plate of silver'), 'Grasshopper in a Field' ('your legs,/ folded leaves like origami/ to make a pair of wings?'), 'Band of Cockatoos', 'Augury?' (winner of the 2012 *Overland* Judith Wright Poetry Prize for New and Emerging Poets) and 'Owl', which I quote in full:

Its frontal eyes
(new moons)
kept us under watch
long before we noticed.

Vigil in a cell
of twisted boughs
habit like forest
mottled under a crescent
gleam.

More or less than stillness
an omission (like death),
an eraser pushed
until a hole was
in the page;
feathered disguise
of Night's contracted
sentience.

No light source
other than your face
revealed you,
presiding and flat
as the moon's chalky
disc.

You stared without a blink, while
we turned and never lost
your look.

As well as its compelling imagery, this poem hinges on a duality of perspective that epitomises the persona's familiar stance—that of the watcher watched.

Todd Turner's *Woodsmoke* (2014) is another debut collection of poems published by Black Pepper. Turner is described by Anthony Lynch as 'a younger poet' although, at 43 years of age, this is surely in relation to the longevity of many of our 'more mature poets' today, or perhaps to his emergence as 'new kid on the block'. Nonetheless, he is referred to as the heir of Geoff Page (by Lynch), of Philip Hodgins (by Geoff Page) and also both Hodgins and Brendan Ryan (by Autumn Royal). This is not a bad line of descent for a debut poet.

The collection has a number of different, but interrelated thrusts. There is the pastoral, arising from the landscape of the poet's family history; the anti-pastoral (whereby the persona escapes to the city, but never quite succeeds in leaving behind memories of a natural world); and there is the metaphysical, celebrating a 'benediction' or 'grace' in nature. Poems like the eponymous 'Woodsmoke' are couched in lyrical images more revealing than those of the more pragmatic anti-pastorals, and invoking that third, more abstract, spiritual dimension:

I think of it as what

passes for benediction; the tenured
door through which seasons pass,

[...]

Somewhere lost among the welcome
arms of the woodland trees I see it,

adrift in a smock of ribbons....

Again, in the concluding poem, 'Fieldwork',⁶ the poetry soars to match the complexity of thought and emotion:

I know what the cycle
serves, but what is being served by
cycle?

Two poems to do with the everyday working world have been interpreted by critics as possibly having reference to the making of poetry. In 'Shelling Peas', suggests Autumn Royal:

the 'rhythm at hand' puns on the crafting of poetry and also emphasises the cadences of domestic labour, the obligatory cycles that can inform our imagination [...] one may understand the metaphorical process of 'the run of the thumb' as a means of extracting a moment or idea from its 'hull' and containing it—like the 'peas into the pot'—within a poem.

Martin Duwell considers that 'the repetitive nature of the activity [...] might be no more than the conventional trope of the artist finding the valuable fruit inside the dry shell', but thinks 'the emphasis is rather on the poet's use of his hands "intent/ and nimble as a lace maker's"'. Duwell posits a stronger case for

‘Apprentice’, a poem about the making of jewellery—the profession Turner himself practises: “‘Apprentice’ might—“in its blueprint of allegory”—be about making poems’. (Carol Jenkins makes a similar case in her recent review in the *Australian Poetry Journal*.) These are both fine poems in their own right. If they have that added numinous dimension, and they can certainly be read that way, this interpretation further contributes to their function within the collection. Poetry, like pea-shelling or jewellery-making, is arduous but skilled toil.

As well as current releases and the more recent bestsellers, several other titles are still available from Black Pepper Press: K.F. Pearson, *The Apparition at Large*; Andrew Sant, *The Bicycle Thief*; Homer Rieth, *150 Motets* and Bron Nicholls’ memoir, *An Imaginary Mother*, among others.

§

Endnotes

- 1 *The Poetry Book Club of Australia*, vol. 1, no. 2, December 1995. December 1995. See Black Pepper website <http://blackpepperpublishing.com>. All reviews cited in this essay are available on the website.
- 2 Black Pepper website. Two novels, Miranda Burton’s *Hidden* (2011) and Susan Hancock’s *The Peastick Girl* (2012), are also listed as bestsellers.
- 3 By comparison, the last woman hanged in NSW was Louisa Collins, in 1889.
- 4 The death penalty for federal crimes was, in fact, abolished by the Whitlam Government in 1973.
- 5 From John Keats, ‘On first looking into Chapman’s Homer’.
- 6 ‘Fieldwork’ was co-winner of the inaugural Jean Cecily Drake-Brockman Prize and was highly commended in the 2011 Blake Poetry Prize.

Select Titles reviewed

- Jordie Albiston. *The Hanging of Jean Lee*. ISBN 9781876044251. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 1998 [reprinted 2013, 2014]. RRP \$22.95
- John Anderson. *the forest set out like the night*. ISBN 9781876044053. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 1995 [reprinted 2013]. RRP \$24.95
- Stephen Edgar. *Eldershaw*. ISBN 9781876044787. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 2013. RRP \$23.95
- Stephen Edgar. *Exhibits of the Sun*. ISBN 9781876044886. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 2014. RRP \$22.95
- Luke Fischer. *Paths of Flight*. ISBN 9781876044855. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 2013. RRP \$22.95
- Jennifer Harrison. *Folly & Grief*. ISBN 1876044454. Melbourne: Black Pepper Press, 2006. RRP \$25.95
- Jennifer Harrison. *Colombine: New & Selected Poems*. ISBN 9781876044657. Melbourne: Black Pepper Press, 2010. RRP \$28.95
- Homer Rieth. *Wimmera*. ISBN 9781876044619. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 2009. RRP \$39.95
- Todd Turner. *Woodsmoke*. ISBN 9781876044862. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 2014. RRP \$22.95

Ross Gillett
Jealousy

1

The dunes are simmering.
Sand swarms across the beach at ankle height.
I tell you

it all remembers you.
This daybreak darkness,
the obsessive surf,

our old future.
If you have a promise to keep
be sure it isn't broken first.

*

You came back from these corners of the sea,
these angles of land,
a born mermaid.

I tasted the salt on your lips,
peeled the scales from your shoulders.
Your sun-blasted innocence convinced me.

I should have seen
the night sky in your eyes.
I should have looked for moonburn.

*

The sea keeps beaching itself,
sliding big sentences up the slope
in a hissed scrawl.

It knows something.
It won't stop
giving me its overlapping hints,

its sprawling news.
The oceanic script
sizzles and fades.

*

Tell me about that rogue summer,
you and your perfect stranger
making a home of this loose shore.

I want traces
of the pressure you put on each other,
signs of your settling in.

I am looking for what's left
of the shadows of clothing,
the remains of your whispers.

2

Tell me
the story.
Lean on your elbow
and let me have it, your slanted narrative.

How everything
turned on almost nothing,
a beach cliché.
Those long crashing whispers of ocean.

Then something about the bravery of strangers
losing themselves in each other's lives.
How we take to betrayal.
I wonder if truth

is always like this,
the brand new thing that's been happening for ever.
The flash of surf at night.
Being this close

while sleep threatens,
the decades intervene
and your story
wraps itself around me in the dark.

Jenny Pollak
Like seed that falls

there's so much innocence left in the woman
of the young girl

who dreams of what she never had
and sees

through the magnification of salt
as though through diamonds

how casually
love is handed out but not to her.

Only later, watching how her body leads
her step by

awful step towards her death
(like seed that falls on impervious stuff

and not on soil),
she feels betrayed.

Carol Jenkins
10,000,000 Years Ago We Take to Drink

Ethanol, un-metabolisable—hardly wise
for animals eluding carnivores or swinging
on lianas—fermented in fruit that dangled,

toxic, from low boughs, or fell in gelid sacks
from likely trees, and as forests shrunk, even less
of these, leaving rotters, a niche supply

of punch-drunk fruit. Then that singular
mutation, a jackpot forty-fold activation
of alcohol dehydrogenase, so it leans its elbow
on the bar, *my shout, this one's on me,*

and sip by nip, our improved enzyme rendered
meals from poteens of fallen fruit and now turns
them into party favours, analgesics, the nectar
of the gods, hilarity, not to say next-day-at-sea,

and addiction. Some say wine is evidence
that gods exist and want us to be happy,
but this is proof that inside us all there is
a screw that winds the cork from every bottle.

Jeff Rich
Not getting things done

They are evasive—those things
That will not be done.

Like lifting a hero's burden,
Unravelling mysteries,

Forgetting about money, or
Making sense of your super.

They slide from your grasp
Like an eel to be cut.

Politics freed from corruption.
Emotions made into intelligence.

Power's maze escaped.
A mentor's influence overcome.

Secure from lifehackers—
they slow you down like a virus in your boot sector.

They pile in corners, messed up, with no priorities,
But asking you each day to return to their call.

When, after all, will you get around
To relinquishing your youthful strength,

Saying, at last, comfort is attained,
Settling on the meaning of your dreams?

You know you want to spurn productivity,
Refuse luxury, and tarnish beauty's sheen,

But these undone duties
Make their way to daily lists,

Debts demanding payment,
At the bottom of the diary's page.

Heartache unmended, dreams undiscovered
Quests unheeded, pain undressed.

As the day proceeds more futility is added
to the list for ticking off;

In meticulous notebooks they wait,
Expecting never to be.

Whole careers, projects without plans,
Journeys of recovery and feats of weakness

Pile like chaos in the attic
Awaiting defeat

By distraction and habit and boredom and chance:
Four deadly horsemen more real than the rest.

Chloe Wilson

Medico della Peste

The nose (is) half a foot long, shaped like a beak, filled with perfume...

– Charles de Lorme, chief physician to Louis XVIII and designer of the protective clothing worn by plague doctors.

Picture his visit from the perspective
of the one presumed condemned—
a rat-a-tat-tat—the scrunch and creak

of head to toe goatskin approaching,
and then, when he enters, the fevered thought—
how you weren't expecting death

to have a beak and spectacles
or such a distinct perfume—is that
clove, cedar, vetiver—could it be

a hint of myrrh? The medico della peste
would demur, continuing to rifle through
his swag of talismans and tinctures,

his charms—a dead toad threaded
onto a necklace, a baby's fingernail, or
a pebble, resembling a heavenly intercessor,

if tilted towards light. He'd palpate
the afflicted with a purpose-built stick,
or sometimes beat them senseless,

to expedite their entry into heaven.
Then, having listed the names
of the afterlife's newest inductees

he'd trundle blithely on to spread news
and buboes to the next town,
and the next. And yet, we resurrect him

annually, the medico della peste—
at carnivale, he's always
rounding one corner or another

among the crumbling Venetian facades,
that beak emptied of everything
except the damp heat of his breath.

It's as though we call back some
unassuaged god, half-avian—as though
we wish to settle all our debts

by letting him scavenge
through the revellers,
keeping any he can catch.

Stephen Smithyman
At Castle Howard

That afternoon we arrived late—too late
for admittance—but failed to heed
the Head Gardener's suggestion we return
some other time. Instead, we walked
around the front lawn, admiring the great
Baroque pile of the house and the view
of its private wood, lake and immense tract
of surrounding countryside—no other
house in sight—while the kids fed a pony
they found in a small enclosure down
by the lake. We walked to the back of the house,
where we admired the formal garden,
with its fountain sculpture of Atlas, holding
the world up, all by himself, another
immense, empty tract of surrounding country
and the slope, awash with daffodils, leading
to the Temple of the Four Winds, while the kids
chased peacocks between hedgerows.
The sun set and the evening air was freezing,
so we turned to go, but not before we saw
one tired peacock make its heavy-tailed way
up the steps to the great French windows
of the Garden Hall to stand in lonely splendour—
that perfect image of the aristocracy—
lost in contemplation of its reflection in the glass.

Tiggy Johnson
Ice breaker

The year I coloured my hair
pink, pierced my nose and got a tattoo
I achieved my second ever
new year's resolution—to sleep
with a different man every
week and forever after
ignore his calls.

Despite never being fast
enough to make the Olympics
or State championships
I once beat an Australian Olympic
swimmer in a fifty metre race.

When I left my infant son
and his father
I planned to stay away
forever
start a new life in a new place
with a new name
but instead returned
in less than one week.

One of these things is not true.

Rob Wallis
Speaking Up For Those Men
After *Arundhathi Subramaniam*

I want to speak up
for those men
with comb overs
stretching long hairs
like guitar strings

who hitch their trousers
up under their armpits

who wear socks with sandals
in case they get wet feet

whose love life
was swallowed by a sink-hole

who spent
their entire working life
in a denture clinic

who have a different denture
for each day of the week

none of them fit properly

whose social life
is focused
on a poker machine

who never
did anyone any harm

who still believe
they'll meet the right woman

these men with comb overs.
I want to speak up for them.

EA Gleeson
Companionship in my Aged Care Facility

In the years when I was compelled to attend workplace meetings
I would take my head on an hour-long holiday, assessing the merits
of colleagues as travelling partners or ‘stuck on an island’ companions.

Sometimes the same three men came on every trip with me.
When I varied the destinations to include building projects, festival
attendance and time in third world jails, the group identity shifted.

It is not that I wouldn’t choose those men as companions now
were I to island sit or trek through remote regions. But I’m thinking
about who I will encourage to share my aged-care facility.

ABC weather reporters with their ‘easy to listen to’ voices might
have been my residents of choice had I not pondered all that reliability.
Day after day sensibleness packaged in steel grey suits.

I could invite farmers; take it on the chin, character built by adversity types.
I’d be right with the talk of rain and crops and productivity. I could even
bear the constant anti-government sledging, but not their schedules.

Someone who thinks he’s hilarious, life of the party, punch line of the joke
suggested to me that I’d be an ideal companion in a place like that. I’m not sure
if that was intended as a compliment but he is not on any of my lists.

Karen Murphy
Sixty Years

After ten years
my parents' marriage
broke apart
like a kitkat bar,
wafer biscuit,
leaving behind
the crumbs of
their old house;
lampshades and video cassettes.

They twisted in
opposite directions
like an Oreo cookie,
it's debatable who got
the cream—
my father got us kids.

My sister
had been with
the same man
since I was born,
they broke apart when
I was 24,
she slid off him
the way arms drop off people
in scary movies;
with a short delay
and then all at once,
cut cleanly off.

Then there's that
one couple
that keep
piecing themselves
back together
like a mosaic portrait;
each broken saucer,
chipped royal Doulton
tea cup,

they took turns
gluing the pieces on
with white cement;
dropped vase
from a child's
sticky fingers,
broken dinner plates—
low pay check week,
each asset broken
and divided,
shared between them
like handfuls of chips,

there are people
that have tried to
pry
those pieces up,
leaving little craters
behind like
bullet holes
to show where they've been hit;

that's the kind of marriage I want;
I don't want to look back
in sixty years at a perfect print,
I want to see the messy
brush strokes
chipped paint
and peeling canvas,
I want to know
I lived.

Rachael Guy

Drone

What would be left of our tragedies if an insect were to present us his?

— EM Cioran

I watched him die this morning.

His pollen-encrusted legs scabbled
on cement,
scattering a constellation.

Sun shone brilliantly on the mustard coloured hairs of his body,
the iridescent wings,
pitch-black eye.

Winding down into death's irrevocable spin, his body hummed—
the memory of a hive.

Finally, with a single quiver of the antennae—
life was gone.

His body lay toppled,
Its amber perfection immutable

The cloying scent of bellflower permeated the air
like a lie.



Reviews

Lightweight Eight.

John Kinsella's Wild Ecology of Thought

Bonny Cassidy

It must be said, straight up, that this two-volume publication (*Spatial Relations: Essays, Reviews, Commentaries and Chorography*) is unlikely to attract the recreational reader. There's little that's aesthetically attractive about the presentation of its volumes. They are procedural and thorough in their arrangement and inclusive editorial approach. Between drafts of this review, I worked on my bicep curls with a volume in each hand. Published by international scholarly press Rodopi, it is pitched towards libraries, academics and critics of poetry and poetics, John Kinsella's work and Australian literary tradition, and other disciplinary areas visited in its pages.

With this in mind, however, *Spatial Relations* is a unique trove of Kinsella's uncollected non-fiction to date. It provides a sense of the scope of his work that one may lack from the immediate reception of his publications month-to-month and year-to-year (such is his proficiency as a poet, critic, editor and essayist). Kinsella and his editor Gordon Collier have organised its contents into a series of sections and subsections. While encouraging a false sense of progress in the reader, the sections also function as broad indicators of the various interests and forms that Kinsella's critical writing has taken: from overviews of Australian poetry to studies of individual writers; from memoir to international reviews. The sections could also be roughly distinguished as 'regionally' classified, be it under 'Australian' poetry, 'international', modern British poetics, or the pervasive presence of Westralian writers in Kinsella's critical work. In this way, *Spatial Relations* de-emphasises the chronology of the critic's career, focusing, rather, on its thematic, philosophical and personal nodes. This is a rare type of publication in the local context, for how many Australian literary critics have been collected in the form of what is essentially a print archive? As I'll attempt to elucidate here, its structure is both respectful of how Kinsella works and frustrating to the reader.

Volume One opens with Kinsella's signature statements on Australian poetics, defining his theory of 'international regionalism' ('Quarantined Spaces, Groups and a Crisis in Modernism') and how 'classic' Australian literature may be constituted by groupings, 'maverick' poetics and self-evident internationalism, rather than by canonical lineage ('Literature of Australia Past'). These statements provide platforms for the sympathetic criticism and studies of individual poets that follow. Focusing on poets such as John Mateer, Lionel Fogarty, Judith Wright and Coral Hull, Kinsella's plain-speaking and accessible register tends to be the vehicle for overviews and descriptions of their work rather than searching analysis. Interestingly, his studies of Australian poets were originally pitched at American audiences through journals such as *Poetry* and the *American Book Review*. To that end, they are informative yet wide-ranging: little coloured panes that will make for excellent teaching and research resources, providing a model of open critical reading and achieving Kinsella's aim to 'demonstrate that relationships between poets in Australia are anything but straightforward'.

A related and remarkable quality of this work is its generous and open-minded tone. Very occasionally, there are odd remarks of cryptic superiority such as this one on reading CK Stead: 'It is rare for the reader to be able to see beyond the idea of the poem, to have the still moment or emotional insight that invariably informs Stead's poetic spirit, but that's not a problem for me. It might be for others'. And because Kinsella is a reader with passion and purpose, there is also a dash of

hyperbole (numerous subjects are, in various ways, 'the most significant' in their field). Yet even when discussing poets like Robert Adamson and Anthony Lawrence, with whom Kinsella has had notorious public clashes, he sticks to the purpose of his writing—the nature and significance of their poetry—with intimate and thoughtful understanding. Perhaps this is the pacifist at work.

Spatial Relations extends these shorter studies with a section of uninterrupted evaluations of mid- and late-career poets, 'Longer Views on Individuals'. This section arrives at an apposite moment in Australian poetry publishing. Not since the well-thumbed UQP selected/collected series of the 1990s and the Australian Resources editions of SETIS has there been such a collective movement to collect, reissue and critique single oeuvres of Australian poetry. Look at the contents of *APRIL*, and the recent catalogues of UWA Press or Grand Parade Poets. Even younger poets are being 'omnibused' in John Leonard Press's new releases, and current PhDs on modern and contemporary local poets are currently at an all-time high. Joining this moment, and including poets who have received more continuous critical airtime such as Les Murray and Peter Porter, *Spatial Relations* allows us to revisit Kinsella's overviews of Michael Dransfield, David McComb and Charmaine Papertalk-Green.

Another timely aspect of *Spatial Relations* is the counter-narrative that it provides to recent, conservative commentaries on Australian poetry made by editor, poet and critic Geoff Page. In particular, Kinsella's interest in opening up the definition of avant-garde and experimental poetics, particularly by exploring them regionally, offers a sane and refreshing way of reading and critiquing local poetry in contrast to Page's unilinear views. As Kinsella argues in his introduction to the *Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry*, republished here in a new version:

I see 'experimental' as referring to a conscious movement away from critically and publicly accepted standards of 'good' poetic practice in any given period. This is evidently subjective, but we may always submit critical discourse and publishing tendencies to scrutiny [...] to assess what that 'standard' might have been, and why a piece of writing might venture away from that standard in content and technique.

Kinsella has engaged with Australian modernisms on a number of occasions, elevating writers like Zora Cross and Christopher Brennan while downplaying the importance of Kenneth Slessor. This collection of studies challenges Page's notion of monolithic culture with the belief that, 'even a basic grand narrative such as "modernism" skews when applied to Australia' ('Quarantined Spaces, Groups, and a Crisis in Modernism'). Kinsella expands this point to argue that, 'Australian modernism had its own directions and triggers, and any model for comparison with other modernist poetries/poetics from beyond Australia needs to be reconsidered in this light' ('The New Penguin').

One of those directions, as he presents them, would be the promise of an anti-pastoral tradition in Australian poetry, and a trigger for this perennial concern of Kinsella's is the tension between settler poetics and colonial history. He invokes Lionel Fogarty as the supreme postmodern, postcolonial reaction to this tension. While Fogarty is frequently cited through the first couple of sections, it's not until the 'Longer Views' section that Kinsella engages in a close exegesis of his poetry. That essay, 'Lionel Fogarty: The Hybridizing of a Poetry', first published in 1999, remains a seminal study of Fogarty's poetics. Radically revised in 2011—the version published here—it has since been joined by further analyses of Fogarty's work but still stands as a key reference point for any reader making a first foray into this importantly complex poetry. One of Kinsella's notable insights here is the nature of 'origins and intactness' in Fogarty's poetry, whereby the Western construct of time as a 'fetishised' vehicle of progressive adaptation/improvement is countered by qualities of persistence and continuity.

We should notice that Kinsella and Collier have set this essay in close proximity to Kinsella's discussion of Les Murray, titled 'Incalculable Influence'. Kinsella's deep regard for Murray's poetic voice is evident throughout these volumes, but while Murray, too, 'frames his poetry around the conflict between the old values and the new', Kinsella shows us that he characterises the 'old' as 'ancestral purity'—a distinctly different idea from that of cultural persistence as it runs through Fogarty's work. (This idea may explain Kinsella's regular deferral to the platitudes of WB Yeats.) The theme of persistence could be followed through any number of Fogarty's poems, but one selected by Kinsella is 'Scenic Wonders—We Nulla Fellas', published in 1983 and anticipating Aboriginal counter-movements to the 1988 Bicentenary of invasion/colonisation/settlement. As Kinsella writes:

This is Fogarty's own wartime 'propaganda' (to thwart that of the invader) but also a highly spiritual and witnessing text that is ultimately about praise and respect for country. Furthermore, as a counter to Western science, Fogarty establishes an investigative language of observation that works as its own science with as much validity, intensity, and authority as that of the colonizers.

A section of the poem appeared as an epigraph to my own poetry collection, *Final Theory*, not only because of its interest in an alternative paradigm of time and space to the classic Western version but also for its constant references to 'invader-tourists', the impact of their incursions articulated in Fogarty's poem through 'the language of the pubs, brutal and threatening, morphed with language of navigation and exploration [...] an attempt to keep language moving'. In this way, argues Kinsella, 'the imaginary structure is the page—that is, 'a place that refuses closure', so long as its language does not solidify into a text with a single possible reading.

In his Introduction to *Spatial Relations*, Gordon Collier makes a passing but candid remark about Kinsella's poetry: 'I suspect that Fogarty's is a voice [Kinsella] would have liked to have had'. Towards the end of 'The Hybridizing of a Poetry', Kinsella draws their work into comparison via the shared (though linguistically different) intention to 'hybridize' language in the interests of postcolonial expression. On re-reading this essay, I felt strongly that Collier's observation could—positively—be extended to a number of Australian poets developing alongside Fogarty's oeuvre. It's an argument that needs to be drawn out at length beyond the bounds of this review, but I think it's worth highlighting here how Fogarty's voice appears as one of the key influences on current poetries that want to express the realities of postcolonial Australia. Provisionally, I would cite the work of Michael Farrell, Peter Minter, Sam Wagan Watson, Stuart Cooke, Toby Fitch, Tim Wright, Corey Wakeling and Fiona Hile as some examples of this influence. In this regard, it equals John Forbes' impact on the same generation; and both Fogarty and Forbes far exceed Murray as a conscious reference point.

The 'performative honesty' of Fogarty's poetic voice is also comparable to the way Kinsella understands the writings of Ouyang Yu. This is clear when Kinsella comments: 'Along with Lionel Fogarty and Javant Biarujia, [Yu] might be one of the few poets in Australia, maybe the world, who have been driven to create a new language because of the limitations and complicities of an English that is exclusionary, protective, and deleting' ('The Space of the Tale'). In this regard, it's fascinating to compare Kinsella's study of *the* Maori poet Robert Sullivan, whose similarly 'hybridizing language' again invites the idea of a cultural 'intactness' that resists being talked over by the coloniser's language ('The Work of Robert Sullivan'). Or, as Kinsella puts it more directly in the companion piece, 'Letter to Ouyang Yu': 'Language as closer to who we are than anything else?'

The latter sections of Volume One reflect Kinsella's special relationships as a poet and scholar with Cambridge and Kenyon College. Their purpose is

uneven, however. Some of the pieces in these sections are very much about and for Australian readers, including 'A Poet Laureate for Australia? God Forbid!' and 'From Assimilation to Multiculturalism'. In others, Kinsella writes for North American and British audiences as he goes about defending and situating 'Australian' poetries and poetics. Still others ('Plagiarism: A Beginner's Guide') seem misplaced rather than specially related to international points of contact. Both volumes end with a miscellany of short arts reviews, 'Australiana' and 'A heteroglossia'. It's good to see Kinsella's poetically informed views applied to non-fiction, fiction and music in his short reviews. As with so many poets and poetry, his cultural life is deeply involved with other media, and his views of the arts are interrelated. Rather than being massed together, however, many of these reviews could have been more deliberately aligned with the book's other thematic sections, including theatre and British poetry.

This raises the question of how Kinsella's voice is 'managed' or presented in *Spatial Relations*. Such a collection is defined by its breadth; the point of it is to make the constellation of Kinsella's criticism available at once. It is not intended for cover-to-cover reading. While he and Gordon Collier have done their best to neaten a ranging body of work into themes that show the continuity and persistence of Kinsella's critical attentions, the collection becomes something of an echo chamber from the last third of Volume One onwards. At this point, his essays, reviews and forewords begin to overlap and sometimes directly parrot one another. Upon encountering the third introduction to the Athenian–Boeotian dialectic, you might decide it's time to skip to the next section in search of new pasture. (In the latter chapters of Volume One a number of typos appear, as though Collier or his proof-reader has simply run out of puff.)

One reason for this issue is that so many of the collected pieces are editorial introductions; as such, they are bound to *re-introduce* a pool of critical problems, queries and concepts. Another reason is Kinsella's style itself. In his own editorial introduction to *Spatial Relations*, Collier remarks somewhat passively on the idiosyncrasy of repetition:

[...] in some sections it can be *déjà lu* all the way. There's no point in putting the patient on an editorial gurney and wheeling it into the operating theatre, save perhaps for some minor plastic surgery [...]. For me as editor (and apropos of 'mantra'), the matter of the *déjà lu* often has a magical quality to it, when professional 'facts' and aesthetic evaluations dropped in casually here, and again there and there, begin to nudge one towards a true awareness of their centrality in John's life and ethos.

For Collier, Kinsella's tendency to return to the same nexus of subject matter and argument is a symptom of the frequently 'occasional' nature of Kinsella's critical publication; 'on the fly, as it were'. If this is the case, it makes the graciousness of his critical voice all the more impressive. But it also shows up how a more interventionist, stylistically driven editorial approach would have benefited our appreciation of Kinsella's critical significance and diversity.

One can envisage the discriminating progression in critical thinking that dwells within the rather bloated collection presented here. Couched among the more monologic pieces on personal poetics in Volume Two are some interesting engagements with individual artists such as Shaun Atkinson and Sidney Nolan, and delightfully earnest praise of Jarvis Cocker. Elsewhere, in Kinsella's theatre reviews, the critical voice is typically focused but much sharper-tongued and less generous: 'bland and poorly scripted'; 'gratuitous and clunky'; 'facile and puerile'; 'boring ... pedestrian, and ... twee'. It's an economical, journalistic register, sure, but it's also the voice of a jobbing writer. Showcasing this diversity is valuable, but its effect would be enhanced by less, not more.

Where his work moves toward the personal essay and its specific, exploratory questions, Kinsella achieves a textured and challenging mode. In an essay such as ‘Sighting’, directed toward a like-minded local audience via the online journal *Thylazine*, we discover Kinsella the stylist. In this essay, he navigates themes of belief and doubt, circling representations of Aboriginality in settler poetry, while weighing up how to deal with sighting a thylacine in 2001:

I have been resisting a return to the text because of the need to feel an increase in doubt, to foster an environment of scepticism. Distance is a way of testing credulity. In reconfiguring the experience, a number of issues became paramount in terms of both the articulation of the moment of contact and what its significance might be. Always trying to find a language that might express my respect for Indigenous claims to custodianship of the land, I considered how easy it is to conflate issues relating to extinction of animals and plants, the decimation, event attempted genocide, of peoples.

This inviting personal tone doesn’t work as well in a ‘reply’ piece such as “‘Farther off than Australia” (with Tracy Ryan)’, from a 1997 issue of the Oxford journal *Thumbscrew*. As we read this account of Sylvia Plath’s poetic voice, it becomes apparent that Kinsella must be responding to a previous, absent commentary by Ryan. With his asides to the elusive presence of Ryan’s text—‘you were speaking of’, ‘the images you just mentioned’ and so on — we are presented with half of a dialogue. Either a clear editorial note should have been provided with this piece, or it ought to have been cut in favour of stand-alone essays.

Comparable criticism might be made of Kinsella’s introduction to Robert Adamson and Juno Gemes’ poetry–photography collaboration, *The Language of Oysters*. The introduction includes snatches of Adamson’s poems, but without the accompanying visual text of Gemes’ images, Kinsella’s intriguing insights into her art lack context. A much briefer, more contextually appropriate commentary on their collaboration follows this piece in the volume. Why wasn’t it selected to represent both pieces? As Kinsella himself writes: ‘One should consider how the photographs are presented to a viewer. Arrangement – context – is everything’.

This mantra might also have been applied to the album of colour photos from Western Australia (lizards, empty roads, a parking lot) that is inserted into the centre of Volume Two. A sweetly personal touch, the pictures are nonetheless amateur in quality, tiny in size and only broadly relevant to the immediate content, a section of memoir called ‘Life Links’. It might have made more sense to separate and enlarge the images as section breaks or occasional illustrations throughout the two volumes.

On the flipside, Kinsella and Collier have made some productive choices around presenting multiple reviews of individual poets. For example, Kinsella’s very engaging review of David Brooks’ *Urban Elegies*, published by the ABR in 2007, opens with the normal, temporal situating that reviews do: ‘Brooks’ last volume of poetry ... was published in 2005 ... Now, after only a two-year gap, Brooks’ new collection ... has been published’. It is followed by successively recent reviews of Brooks’ subsequent books, creating a critical archive in which we can compare and observe both the subject’s changing poetics and Kinsella’s own growth as a critical respondent to it.

These examples show that Kinsella’s non-fiction is at its best when turned outwards, towards an external text, interlocutor, or critical issue. To this end, the sequencing of Volume Two is able to create some effective extrapolations on particular topics. For instance, the rather generally directed ‘Why I oppose the genre of “Nature Writing”’ is followed by a highly critical review of Tim Flannery’s *An Explorer’s Notebook*. In setting these pieces side by side, Kinsella and Collier invite us to enjoy Kinsella’s application of personal poetics to another writer’s voice.

This enjoyment can be found, also in Volume Two, in his review essay of Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* ("Western Sensibilities: "A Bulging Backpack of Myth and Recollection"). Here, Kinsella constructs something of a parallel narrative to his frequent quotes from Schama's book. Highlighting the narrow geographical and cultural scope of Schama's views on primeval landscapes, Kinsella uses his immediate Perth landscape as well as other local allusions to test the appropriateness of Schama's thesis to Antipodean place:

Schama is at his best in forests. His presentation of forests as the source of a nation's power is intriguing [...] One is reminded of the Australian fear of forests as places of dope plantations and buried corpses [...]. The vignette on Horace Walpole and Thomas Gray discovering the wondrous threats of the Alps is a joy to read [...]. Reading Henry Kendall's 'To A Mountain' in the light of Schama's theories, you can't help recognising the familiars. Most critics accept that Kendall was one of the first European Australian poets to attempt to give the landscape a voice of its own, but still the same old references and codes occur. It is only later that these codes become subtext. And this only comes with a reinventing of the old inherited myths (in a poem such as Judith Wright's 'The Solitary Mountain').

In this way, Kinsella brings his considerable knowledge of both European and Antipodean poetics to bear upon Schama's text, as it were 'improving' the book under review by mounting an extension of its ideas into Australian experience.

Finally, a notable inclusion in this volume is a lengthy correspondence between Kinsella and American poet Rosanna Warren. Liberated from his own voice for a spell, Kinsella finds an interlocutor and not simply a dramatic audience: Warren is a sometimes sympathetic, sometimes contrary and always rigorous listener and writer, bringing in discourse from the field of visual art, and pushing some of Kinsella's more fixed notions of artistic value to be cross-referenced and nuanced.

To me, Collier's hands-off approach to the shape of Kinsella's oeuvre sounds resigned, possibly even fearful, in the face of Kinsella's ideas about how he wants to present himself. We get a strong sense of those ideas in the second volume of *Spatial Relations*, which projects Kinsella's philosophical and literary concerns through the lens of his own poetry and poetics. In the first two essays, he undertakes articulate self-exegeses, albeit occasionally self-righteous. Here, Kinsella introduces a political problem in detail, then shows us the poem that addresses it. It seems to be an effort to demonstrate the currency and attentiveness of his poetry to the issues that concern him, notably the complicated intersection between Aboriginal land rights, ecology and agricultural settlement. In some instances, this mode of demonstration is useful, for example, when it concerns an issue of poetic tradition like classical pastoral and Kinsella's desire to shape a 'counter-pastoral' theme for the postcolonial landscape ('Southern Winter and Northern Summer: A Dialogue with Rosanna Warren'). In other instances, however, such exegesis in fact serves to reveal a tension between Kinsella's prose and his poetry.

He feels that poetry, unlike commentary or speeches, is a superior form of activism: 'language that squeezes past the censors, is able to go where posters of objection might be pulled down' ('My Participation in Poetry Parnassus'). Kinsella seems compelled to publicly demonstrate the conviction of his views by enacting them poetically as well as personally; to constantly proclaim that his poetry must 'do something', not loaf behind the '*cordon sanitaire*' of pastoral aestheticism ('Southern Winter and Northern Summer: A Dialogue with Rosanna Warren'). This view is reinforced by his repeated insistence that language is to be inhabited by the reader and can be a fluid, morphing sign in poetry. Again and again, Kinsella argues for the "performative activist poem": one in which action is an implicit part of the writing, delivery, and hopefully the reception of the piece' ('The Performative

Activist Poem?'). Yet Kinsella himself seems unconvinced of his poetry's performative efficacy. In some of these essays, including those in the section 'Towards a Personal Poetic', he is caught in a loop of explaining himself and correcting critical summations of his work with which he disagrees. In fact, I increasingly felt that the exhaustive and repetitious arrangement of *Spatial Relations* was precisely for that purpose: to defend, justify and explain his poetry, for fear that it be misunderstood or misread. This conclusion is an unfortunate one to be left with, since there is so much enquiring, intelligent and purposeful critical work to be found here.

Reading *Spatial Relations* has turned me back to Kinsella's poems, in search of a deeper understanding of how their aesthetic possibilities (which he denies) offer something more than his procedural explanations of them. It has also, perversely, underlined for me the importance of a duality of poetic activism and poetic reticence (including how the 'unsaid' might be politically and poetically 'productive'). Both volumes of *Spatial Relations* have ultimately assured me of the strength of Kinsella's critical and essayistic voice, and have confirmed my belief that, at its best, this is his true medium as a writer. Paradoxically, to enjoy the fruits of this book is to take a pastoral route; a matter of carving a pathway through the wild ecology of Kinsella's thinking.

- John Kinsella. *Spatial Relations* (Volumes One and Two) Edited with Introduction by Gordon Collier. Cross/Cultures Series Vol. 161–162. ISBN 978-94-012-0938-0. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2013. Hardback \$US199 (vol.1), \$US196 (vol.2)

Intimacy and Otherness; Home and the Road

Andy Jackson

First of all, whether the author is dead or not, the poet isn't. There is a particular body behind each poem, a body that is the poem's soil. Poetry in the contemporary era reminds us of the complexity of the body and of the self, and operates according to an uncanny paradox. It blurs the boundary between self and other, carrying us into experiences we have never had before yet which are oddly familiar. At the same time, it amplifies and clarifies the texture of the particular social conditions that define and separate us. These two new collections of Australian poetry—*Salt and Bone* by Zenobia Frost and *Vagabondage* by Beth Spencer—attain this paradoxical state, yet they take very different approaches to the poetics and politics of intimacy and otherness.

While Beth Spencer's earlier prose work has been described as surreal, fragmentary, hybrid or exploratory, the poetry in *Vagabondage* is none of the above. The book declares itself as a 'verse memoir', tracing 'the pleasures and challenges of being in service to freedom'. As she turns fifty, Spencer buys a campervan and takes up, by herself, the alluring promise of the road. The courage of this is laconically yet powerfully captured in the poem 'Shipwreck Coast': 'Feeling weak and vulnerable? / Try something harsh and challenging, / That'll do it'. But it is also evident in the profound intimacy of the poems. It's as if Spencer has opened the door of her little van and ushered us in; we knock knees, smell each other's emotions, and laugh in embarrassment and recognition.

These poems derive from an aesthetic of intense exposure. They value and foreground the particularity of personal, embodied experience. They hold the reader within painful and complicated emotions and situations, often beyond the point at which you feel comfortable and detached. This is partly a result of their length (most

poems run over two pages, many substantially longer), but even the four-line poem 'Intimacy' manages to embody the experience of its title in a way that is both claustrophobic and expansive.

I like to go
away alone
to lick my wounds.

I wish I didn't.

Similarly, in 'Reasons to leave', Spencer evokes with an accumulating claustrophobia the underside of hospitality, the intense discomfort and restlessness that is generated in the body of the guest, who feels trapped in the presence of her host. The poem is searingly honest and sometimes darkly funny, a relentless list of all the 'reasons' or excuses.

because there's tension in the air
and I'm absorbing it like a sponge
and I've got to get out of here

because you just want to watch tv (really?)
and I've come all this way

...

because I've been here a few days already
and you must be getting sick of me

...

because I'm in your driveway
and I know you would prefer to put your car in here

But it is the interplay between the particular and the general that is most invigorating about *Vagabondage*. The poem 'Carnage' begins with a childhood reverie about those ubiquitous and poignant rural Memorial Avenues and the war dead they represent, passes through images of bloody roadkill, then pauses in a country museum and ponders the destruction not only of young soldiers in war but of Aboriginal lives and culture in the period of 'settlement'. As I write this summary here, the parallels that the poem makes may seem fraught or too easy, but 'Carnage', in its nine short sections, manages to weave them together with a deep respect for their affinities as well as their difference, so that as Spencer returns to childhood memory the direct language is suffused with a mourning for the losses that have accompanied 'progress'.

And I remember sitting in the back seat
on long journeys through the Wimmera to visit relatives.
Staring out at wide yellow paddocks. I loved the flatness,
the vastness of sky. The straightness.
The movement of the car underneath.
The rare satisfaction of having both parents
in the front seat together.

Oblivious, as we drove through
unmarked graves, the ghosts of forests.

In his *Sydney Morning Herald* review ('Michelle Leber and Beth Spencer explore mythography and autobiography') on 31 January this year, Geoff Page parenthetically complained that 'there is not a lot on landscapes... and her road map is far from clear'. There is something to this critique. Certainly, at times I wanted more of a sense of place, to shift the balance of attention more towards what was going on outside the van. But in this way, Page and myself have misunderstood the nature of the road trip. The fundamental arc is always internal and relational. And it is in the nature of travel that the self is brought into question. We observe the landscape through windows that always reflect back our own image. Hence, in 'The pain body', Spencer gazes at the ocean nearby, while 'wracked / inside / waves / of my own / making'.

While *Vagabondage* is undeniably personal, the continent and its particularity does make itself subtly known through these poems. Their language is laconic and self-deprecating, with a sense of storytelling that is fluid and engaging, yet rich with telling digressions and sudden pauses, with an Australian silence beneath them. Spencer's poetics operates in a confessional mode that does not exclude these essential silences. The poems are also interspersed with numerous photographs—maggies, clouds, vehicles, the coast, cobwebs, the shadow of the author on the ground—which at times illuminate the poems, and at others speak to them in an intriguingly oblique way.

There is still a recurrent complaint that free-verse is merely prose chopped up, with no sense of meter or internal, coherent form. The poems in *Vagabondage* see this complaint on the road ahead and swerve around it. They are not fundamentally concerned with language-play, but with affect, emotion, the travels and travails of the self. While the poems affirm the wilderness within (most overtly in 'Free Camping (Wild Things)'), underlying them all is a sense that freedom itself is an illusion, or a horizon that recedes as we approach it.

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Salt and Bone travels in different directions, both more internal and more expansive. This is Zenobia Frost's first full-length collection of poems, and on first glance, it adheres to the expectations that attach to a first book—a core of poems that arise from personal experience, from which branch off a number of explorations of other historical and mythical lives, woven through with nods to poetic form and history. First books announce that the poet has done her apprenticeship, knows herself and the tradition, but is limited to neither. *Salt and Bone* does this, but goes further. Frost is not anxious to prove herself or to make the poems singularly clear or fixed. The poems address the reader directly, often casually, yet they are possessed of a discomforting incompleteness and multiplicity, which is amplified, importantly, by the order in which they appear.

The first poem, 'Warning', is addressed to the reader as she is about to enter a graveyard, and implicitly the book itself, beginning and resting in the negative: 'never believe the stone angels ... draw your eyelids shut as you leave'. The second, 'Auf Wiedersehen Spiegeltent', evokes the departure of a circus sideshow, and the poem shifts intriguingly between *they* and *we*. The first-person singular makes its first appearance only in the third poem 'The Hobby', but here Frost speaks as another, Anatoly Moskvín, a cemetery archaeologist arrested for committing crimes with the dead. Frost conjures the subjectivity of this man with great empathy, yet the overwhelming heart of *Salt and Bone* is with the departed and their continuing, difficult presence with the living. This is expressed, not so much through self-exposure in a confessional mode (although there is certainly great courage within these poems), but through an immersion in diverse psychological realities and the affect of place. To this end, Frost has crafted poems that articulate her own life and extend into the lives of others with clarity and vividness. The cumulative effect of the book,

as it regularly shifts perspective, is one of stimulating disorientation, where the self (of the poet and of the reader) is revealed to be multifaceted and unstable.

Quite apart from this expansion of identity, *Salt and Bone* is also a book of memorable music and imagery rich with implication. 'Before the Funeral' begins, 'You find her in the kitchen and your lungs empty. // This is the room where they cornered the fox'. Houses and the suffering and pleasure they contain is a recurrent motif. 'Something Left Over' is a prime example, a poem stitched with disparate domestic moments and permutations of language:

Our houses are like this:
 a brace of curlew in muddy yard;
 traffic cone tossed on the roof;
 mould on the ceiling left from the flood.

In the poem 'Moving', Frost evokes the uncanny and painful extraction of the self from its home, with a nonchalance that implies its opposite underneath: 'In the end, / it's like clearing a hotel room'. Seeing the old house again, 'you realise / you scrubbed yourself out / of that ghosting house'. At the word 'scrubbed', the text is just slightly blurred, as if the still-drying ink were brushed by a finger. The effect is visceral and compelling; the poem opens out to the real. A little disappointingly, I'm told this is a serendipitous printing accident, but its impact is indicative of the generative ambiguity of the poems, how they prime the reader to consider multiple meanings, even at the level of concrete texture.

The final two poems, 'Aftershocks' and 'A Letter to the Romans Sealed with Beeswax', leave the reader with their own dark reverberations and messages, emblematic of how *Salt and Bone* negotiates with contemporary oppressions and the resources of history. The former uses unsentimental language to dwell compassionately within the long aftermath of sexual assault, and the pressure to downplay its violence:

you binned the evidence
 and laughed because it couldn't have happened

washed your skirt and washed
 the spiked glass with the others

...

a shrink asks if you were drunk
 offers hypnosis

instead you become the mute epicentre
 of a word of warning

The latter poem conjures a historical Zenobia, Queen of the Syrian empire in the third century CE, who was known as a formidable warrior and intellect, conquering Egypt and claiming territory from the Romans. Though she was captured by the Empire, her ultimate fate is debated by historians—one version has her granted clemency and continuing life as a renowned philosopher. The poem is defiant: 'Let my chest be an oven of courage, / my breath on your neck a warning'. This repetition of the word 'warning' is no coincidence. The counter-Empire figure lives on, powerfully within this poem, but also within the bodies of those who claim her legacy.

Taken together, the covers of these two books remind us of the paradox of poetry and bodies. *Vagabondage* shows a impressionistic open road, green and suffused

with light. Inside, the expansive and difficult terrain is revealed to be flesh and bone, the intimate paths within. *Salt and Bone* shows in linocut an archetypal Brisbane house, a Queenslander, with a curlew perched on the bottom step. Here, the familiarity and stability of home becomes illusory, and the poems reach outward towards history, weather and friendships, as fuel for the journey ahead.

- Beth Spencer. *Vagabondage*. ISBN 9781742586342. Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing. 2014. RRP \$24.95
- Zenobia Frost. *Salt and Bone*. ISBN 9781877010644. Hobart: Walleah Press. 2014, RRP \$20

Ania Walwicz: A Sense of the Prodigious

Jacinta Le Plastrier

Author Rebecca Solnit, writing on Virginia Woolf last year for *The New Yorker*, observed: 'There is so much we don't know, and to write truthfully about a life, your own or your mother's or a celebrated figure's, an event, a crisis, another culture is to engage repeatedly with those patches of darkness, those nights of history, those places of unknowing.'

It is a sparkling, thought-rich essay, one that honours Woolf's capacity to assert and explore the reality of life's and self's mystery and multiplicities, the ungraspable and unstable; her will to celebrate darkness, while simultaneously, almost always, destabilising her right to assertion. *I think ... I don't know*: these qualifiers mark her meditations, notes Solnit.

Reading and re-reading the four poetry books of Australian writer Ania Walwicz, recently—including her latest, *Palace of Culture* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2014)—I was struck by the resemblances between Woolf and Walwicz. This is not only in regard to common (uncommon) themes shared by the two writers, and the demonstrable pleasure both impart in mining and honing a literary language that is at once idiosyncratically radical, and immediate. Both dedicate, lifelong, their writing to doing so, while inherently the work sits cradled by fault-lines that cannot be consolidated, only acknowledged and accommodated.

It is difficult, at least fruitless usually, to excerpt single or double lines from Walwicz's poetry, and this is a fact across all the books: *Writing* (Rigmarole, 1982), *Boat* (Angus & Robertson, 1989), *red roses* (UQP, 1992) and the 2014 collection.

This is due to an assiduous methodology that holds sway across Walwicz's output—despite huge sweeps in the subject matter—almost without exception: an idea is thrust forward on the first line, usually schematically, an idea is briefly phrased or assized, then it is subjected to furnace-grade interrogation. It is undone, rephrased, re-syncoated, turned on its head, its side, upside down; then other related-in-some-way words will begin to interfere with what has been going on, insert themselves. It is like a game of musical chairs (or *Twister*), only, rather than one by one the party shrinks, here the party of words grows, expands in numbers. The party grows unruly. Mad-hatterish? Only a little—the truth is that Walwicz's imaginative control and circus-mistress skill is never wholly surrendered; a lucidity prevails, at times a luminosity. It is, indeed, for all appearances to the contrary, work that is utterly sane. To return to the methodology: Phrases, through

repetition, then near-repetition, then deformed repetition, shift one idea to another, invert one idea to another, alter the means for which that idea is being written. A new trajectory erupts, another idea is schemed and posited, and the same furnace-roasting begins anew.

Here is an early example from *Writing*, the first thirteen lines of 'rip', which are justified hard right and left throughout the poem:

saturday night and I just got paid going to rip it up going to live it up on a
 saturday night saturday night and I just got paid saturday night and I just got
 paid i just got paid i just got paid i just got paid i got paid I got paid I got paid
 paid i paid i paid now i'm going to live it up going to live it up going to live it
 up i up i up i up i rip it i rip it i rip it i rip i rip i rip i live and i live and i live
 what rip is what rip what rip rip is rip is rip is one to two to three without stop
 rip is from 1 to 3 rip is 1,2,3 in a quick rip is so fast to me rip is straight away
 without a wait for it and a one two three and a one and a two and a three that's
 what rip is rip to rip to rip through to rip to break through what i can break i can
 break i can break all the way through i can rip she couldn't rip through paper
 she couldn't she was so weak i can rip i just jump through i just go through i
 just run though she couldn't do it they were holding the large paper up she
 couldn't run through it she had to break it with her hands she had to tear it

The poem closes with the image introduced, five lines from the end, of the narra-
 tor being now 'paper barrier footballer':

[...] i come through i break through to the
 other side i so quick and so quick with a 1 and a 2 and a 3, 1,2,3, 1,2,3, i rip
 from 1,2,3 i rip from the beginning to the end i come through i get through i
 break the paper with my body i ran through my barrier and i broke it i come
 through flying colour i rip i rip i rip

I am not going to spend time 'ripping' this poem apart. It is a thing to marvel at, as much skipping-girl as footballer stride in its syncopation: it is strange, it brims with intelligence, aesthetic and worldly, it is disturbing, and extremely clear. One could have chosen to sample others instead, including 'male soldier', 'New World', the well-known and anthologised 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'Australia', or 'traveling': so many. For despite the long time-gap between the two last volumes, there is a sense of the prodigious throughout Walwicz's oeuvre; the attention, apparently self-generative and self-spawning, is multi-vocal; foot-sure in its slippage, it never slips. It is also colourful and, bizarrely (and this is encountered across a lot of poems), hilarious, Chaplinesque: 'but i/ don't drive now i can only drive cardboard car made of card board/ said to me now' ('taxi', *Palace of Culture*), or, acidically, as in an earlier poem:

[...] as karen watched she
 felt a strange combination of pride and guilt she's damn
 good did you read that piece about the dachau
 concentration camp brilliant and that one about the the
 bombing mission over hamburg she had a magic touch
 everyone in the business knew it nothing could stop her
 keep free go where the worst trouble is take whatever
 screwing presents itself [...]

('red roses', *Writing*, Melbourne: Rigmorole, 1982, p. 23)

Horror, of the insidious kind, of the kind that incessantly yet unnoteworthy seeps in and rots away foundations till they seize up and give in—be they buildings, vehicles, selves, relationships, situations—is betwixt in Walwicz's poetry with the magic (remain astonished!) of fable, the child-regent's impetuous and unwavering will (remarkably like an adult self's in her work, really), the mockable yet dignified imperative of a self, ever imperilled, to yet strike out to live and love in force with the good. For Walwicz's work, it seems to me, is highly moral; it posits ethics continually.

To write 'truthfully', about 'a life, your own or your mother's or a celebrated figure's, an event, a crisis, another culture'—that's how Solnit describes the subject matter of Woolf, and though it pinpoints some of the range of Walwicz's, one also need add 'culture' (also in Woolf's case) and 'popular culture', especially that of the fairytale, Disney cartoon, and Hollywood flick and stars, whose personages and tales are especially warped by Walwicz in her retellings. The disfiguring/redemption of fairytale is central to *red roses*, a book-length poem.

While giving a nod to the fictional revolutions of Gertrude Stein, James Joyce and Surrealism, Walwicz has also said previously that she links registers in her work to the 'tradition of electronic music, John Cage, language and sound composition', especially in regard to devices of modern minimalist music, and Cage's, where repetition yields gradual transformations (see *Australian Poetry since 1788*, eds. Lehmann and Gray, UNSW Press, 2011). But she is also suggesting at heart, I think, that this is how a self/its selves grow and are shaped, whether that is of expansion or diminishing. Selves are suddenly or inexorably re-located, dislocated across her poems.

Walwicz, born in the German-speaking part of Poland, came to Australia in 1963, as a girl verging on adolescence; this at least duplicity of nationality is present in her work, its themes at times are of a European bloodline. Walwicz, alongside her writing, has also spent her life performing (as well as painting), in theatres, galleries, festivals, here and in Europe. She is a performer, and of the multiple self whose identity at any instant might be revoked, traumatised, at the least, is rupturable. This is essential to approaching the poetry: it is performative, scripted, voiced. This is from the latest book's 'prince':

[...] prince begs a bend me
to forgive me please forgive me but i don't forgive any body never
forgive me never no no no no no what i do now no no no no that's
what she'll say to me that's what i say to me prince asks my hand
to give me prince buys a ring now but i step on me prince asks to
see me but I can't see me no [...]

It is an experience to hear this poet perform her poems, as she did at La Mama for the Melbourne launch of *Palace of Culture*. Diminutive in stature, her aura is not. 'Dee', theatricalised then, is one of the stand-out poems of the collection, with its riff of the tyrannical 'baby said no'. 'Has her style changed?', a peer asks. No; and it is one all her own.

I think again of Woolf, especially of her *The Waves*, with its multi-vocal mapping of the patternings of the mind, its workings out and penumbrations. Brave and lyrical, it is a sensibility that also ceaselessly, I think, continues to pressure Walwicz's poetry.

→ Ania Walwicz. *Palace of Culture*. ISBN: 9781922186508. Sydney: Puncher & Wattmann, 2014. RRP \$25

Contributors

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Peter Lach-Newinsky's publications include *The Post-Man Letters* (Picaro, 2010), *Requiem* (Picaro, 2012), and *Cut a Long Story Short* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2014). He has also received the Melbourne Poets Union Poetry Prize and the Vera Newsom Poetry Prize.

Yve Louis' five poetry titles include *Lilith's Mirror* (Kardoorair 1999) and *The Yellow Dress* (Five Islands 2005); the most recent, *A Door in the Forest* (Blue Tongue, 2012), received the 2013 Society of Women Writers biennial Book Award for Poetry. She lives in Armidale on the NSW Northern Tablelands.

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Tim Thorne, author of 14 collections of poetry, was the 2014 recipient of the Gwen Harwood Prize. His latest book is *The Unspeak Poems and Other Verses* (Walleah Press, 2014).

N.N. Trakakis is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the Australian Catholic University. He has published extensively in the area of the philosophy of religion. He also writes and translates poetry, his most recent poetry collection being *Appearance and Reality* (2015).

Rob Walker writes poetry, music, essays, short stories, reviews, occasional Christmas cards and shopping lists. Some of these have been published all over the world. *Tropeland*, his newest collection, was published by Five Islands Press in June. He lives an isolated existence in the Adelaide Hills with his wife, donkey, cows and sheep. robwalkerpoet.com

Rob Wallis' chapbook, *My Life As A Sheep Dog* (Mark Time Books) was published in 2009. His poems have appeared in *Woorilla*, *Poetry Monash*, *Wet Ink*, *Westerly* and *Blue Dog*, and his awards include the FAW J.S. Neilson Poetry Award (2006) and the Martin Downey Urban Realism Prize (MPU) in 2010.

Mitchell Welch is a writer, editor and poet from Brisbane. He currently lives in Melbourne where he is writing a novel and working as a cemetery administrator.

Dugald Williamson lives in Armidale, NSW, where he teaches and researches writing and media at the University of New England. Recent publications include the co-authored *Australian Documentary* (Cambridge, 2011).

Chloe Wilson's first collection, *The Mermaid Problem* (Australian Poetry Centre, 2010), was commended in the Anne Elder Award and highly commended in the Mary Gilmore Award. She won the 2014 Arts Queensland Val Vallis Award for Unpublished Poetry, and was a co-winner of the 2013 Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize.

Mark Young's most recent books are a chapbook of visual poems, *Arachnid Nebula* (Luna Bisonte, Columbus OH, 2014), *HOTUS POTUS* (Meritage Press, California, 2015) and the ebook *A Small Compendium of Bats* (Swirl, Sweden, 2015).

Ouyang Yu is alive and writing in Australia and China.

Fay Zwicky has published eight books of poetry, most recently *Picnic* (Giramondo, 2006), edited several anthologies of Australian poetry, a book of short stories (*Hostages*, FACP, 1983) and a collection of critical essays (*The Lyre in the Pawnshop: Essays on Literature and Survival*, UWAP, 1986). Her awards include the NSW Premier's Award, the WA Premier's Award, the Patrick White Award and the Christopher Brennan Award.

How to submit

Poetry submissions open twice a year; the second submission round for 2015 will take place between 1 July and 15 August.

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Essayists and reviewers should send short pitches describing potential articles to editorapj@australianpoetry.org. Please specify whether your article would best suit the print edition of the *APJ*, or is designed to explore the capabilities of our electronic edition and website.

A list of books received available for review will be published online and updated regularly.

Though two essays appear in this edition with annotations, please also keep in mind that the *Australian Poetry Journal* is not refereed, and that we cater to an intelligent generalist readership. Citations should be kept to a minimum where possible.

Intending contributors of reviews, memoirs, interviews and other prose should note that the journal's preferred style for punctuation, quotations and presentation of titles is based on the *Australian Style Manual*.

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