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POETRY, CREATIVITY, TRAVEL

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Paul Munden

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INTRODUCTION

Poetry and travel

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INTRODUCTION

Paul Munden

This issue of the *Axon* journal investigates ways in which contemporary poetry (and other forms of creative practice) constitute, result from or are otherwise connected to travel—whether this is understood literally or metaphorically.

I was not involved in choosing the theme, but it's one that is close to my heart, so I was pleased to have been given the task of editing the issue and writing these words of introduction. For many years, my own poetry was somewhat sidelined by my full-time editorial and administrative work, and it was travel—to Australia—that suddenly changed all that. The poetry I had always wanted to write came into focus, its language enriched by the new landscape I encountered. The horizons of my thinking—of my whole life—were transformed: it wasn't a case of simply writing a few poems about my travels; the breadth and depth of new experience seemed to unlock a new level of perception—and the ability to articulate what I discovered. Terra incognita became a shimmering, detailed world that my poetry could navigate.

Perhaps this sounds too heavily influenced by Aldous Huxley, if not mescalin. In *The Doors of Perception* (2004 [1954]), Huxley compares his mescalin experience to that of contemplatives who 'may bring back reports of ... a transcendent country of the mind', acting as 'conduits through which some beneficent influence can flow out of that other country into a world of darkened selves, chronically dying for lack of it' (25). He quotes the philosopher CD Broad (himself influenced by Bergson), who suggests that 'the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main eliminative and not productive ... to protect us from being overwhelmed' (10-11). Whilst an effective, basic survival strategy, this behaviour also limits our horizons as imaginative, creative human beings. It reminds me of the UK government's obsession with 'functional literacy', which has hampered creative development in schools for decades.

In Huxley's view, 'Certain persons, however, seem to be born with a kind of by-pass that circumvents the reducing valve' (11). I would argue that writers—poets in particular—are among this group and, crucially, can enable others to enjoy—and similarly replicate—the same 'privilege'.

Huxley also refers to the isolated nature of human experience: 'We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves. From family to nation, every human group is a society of island universes' (4). This perhaps explains why other people's holiday photographs, which they're so eager to share, are so often tedious. Travel writing at its most banal may also fall into a similar category, one of the reasons that articles in this issue of *Axon* tend to avoid that term (though there are of course marvellous examples of the genre), talking instead of 'traveling poetry' and other variants.

It is interesting, however, how something as seemingly banal as the postcard can be used to heightened effect. Paul Venzo offers a series of 'Postcards from Venice', each featuring 'a particular site or landmark, comingling references to my own and other poets' peregrinations around the lagoon and its immediate environs'(1). This, surely, is a pooling not merely of information but experience, challenging Huxley's assertion—through poetry. And Alyson Miller, in her 'ecopoetics of travel' article, refers to Adnan's collection *Time* (2019) being structured as

a 'poetry of the postcard'. As Miller describes it, 'the postcard is a marginal, fragmentary form, designed to capture an incomplete image or memory, and to be sent from transitional—as well as transactional—points of location' (3). This strikes an immediate chord with so much that has been written about prose poetry (e.g. Hetherington and Atherton 2020). Prose poetry is well represented in this issue, and the article by Amy Lilwall and Rupert Loydell introduces a sequence of prose poetry haibun, which takes us all around the world. In 'Coventry', we read how 'At night groups of bikers roamed the streets picking fights with scooter boys, others fought anybody they deemed foreign' (5), a snapshot that perfectly highlights the puffed-up, blinkered thinking and behaviour that a wider encounter with the world deflates.

In another haibun, 'Florence', the author(s) write: 'We have walked the children until they became teenagers'(6). I have written elsewhere (2017) about 'prose poetry and the elastic moment', and this line captures the very essence of such elasticity. The individual walk may be long, but it is also repeated over the years, and we are left with a rich evocation of present moment and time passing, compressed in the one image.

Something similar it is at work in the videopoetry analysed by Claire Rosslyn Wilson. In her own work, and that of others, she highlights the 'translocal' (and indeed transtemporal) poetic effects that are achieved by combining poetic text, recorded sound and visual image. She examines some of the 'swift territorial shifts by line, trope, sound, or stanza that result in flickering movements and juxtapositions' (Ramazani 2015: 53). In the case of her own work, the juxtapositions are made possible by 'knowing more than one place intimately'; 'the reader is encouraged to jump between places, often in a disorientating way' (3).

Both Rosemary Sayer—in discussion with Shokoofeh Azar—and Robyn Rowland make the important distinction between those who travel by choice and those who are displaced. This particular issue of *Axon* focuses primarily on the former. But as Julie Rickwood discusses, chosen pathways may also lead to distressing encounters, even if the further journey may be towards hope.

The gathering of articles here is itself a pooling, and we hope that the connections and reflections between articles—and indeed poems—are enlightening. The work is unanimous in its challenging of cliché, and specific, in a variety of ways, about poetry's ability to deliver something more revealing. James Harpur charts the journey—from those 'lazy negative stereotypes about Australia' (1) promulgated by the armchair traveler to the lived experience that dispels such prejudice. At the outset, Harpur quotes Jiddu Krishnamurti: 'one identifies oneself with this or with that group through tradition or habit, through impulse, prejudice, imitation and laziness' (1985: 12). Lilwall and Loydell's Coventry bikers fall headlong into this trap; the wider poetic adventures presented in this issue avoid it, with considerable rewards.

In their account of study tours abroad, Glen Moore et al. discuss the benefits for students experiencing first hand the places they will write about. Their attempts at Scandi Noir, for instance, gain almost instant authenticity. And yet this project asks other intriguing questions. If such authenticity in writing can only be achieved by visiting a location in person, what does this say about the role of the imagination—or indeed the ability of literary sources (including poems!) to transport us? And is 'authenticity' to remain the preserve of the privileged few, supported in making such tours? Perhaps, in the end, it is experience of travel itself—not necessarily to everywhere, or relentlessly—that provides us with the imaginative resources to travel empathetically, whether in poems or simply in our human interactions and understandings.

Travel is not entirely a panacea. It is fraught with its own issues, not least ecological, but its positive effects are undeniable. As Robyn Rowland writes, quoting Maya Angelou: 'Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try to understand each other, we may even become friends' (Angelou 1993: 12).

Cover detail

Watercolour of Venice by Fiona Edmonds Dobrijevich, 2015.

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About the author

Paul Munden is a poet, editor and screenwriter living in North Yorkshire. A Gregory Award winner, he has published five poetry collections, with another, *Amplitude,* forthcoming from Recent Work Press in September 2022. He is editor (or co-editor) of various anthologies, including *Divining Dante* (RWP, 2021), and is the current poetry editor of *Westerly* magazine. He was director of the UK's National Association of Writers in Education, 1994-2018, and is now a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at the University of Leeds. He is also an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Canberra, where he established the 'Poetry on the Move' festival. Having worked throughout the 1990s as reader for Stanley Kubrick, he has recently returned to the world of film as writer and co-developer of adapted and original screenplays.

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POSTCARDS FROM VENICE

Poetry and peregrination in La Serenissima

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Abstract

In the Manica Lunga library of the Fondazione Cini, San Giorgio Maggiore, is a small collection of historical travel guides to Venice. Many of these originate in the 19th century, when Venice was firmly established as a site for European tourism, reflected in representations of this unique city-state in both Italian and ex-patriot literature. Building upon previous scholarship in which I have explored Venice and the Veneto as a creative topos (Venzo 2015, 2019) this paper explores the connection between poetry and travel via a personal relationship to this place and space. Taking a creative-critical approach, this paper is structured as a kind of poetic travel guide, written from the perspective of the transnational, familiar-stranger (Jahan 2009, Simmel 1950). Each section of the article represents a kind of 'postcard' that features a particular site or landmark, comingling references to my own and other poets' peregrinations around the lagoon and its immediate environs. In doing so, I demonstrate how Venice functions as a geo-cultural, poetic map (Prieto 2012), onto which it is possible to plot ideas about literary nomadism (Braidotti 2011), exile, belonging and in-between-ness (Bhabha 2004), sharing my 'home-away-from-home' as a site for poetic self-exploration.

POSTCARDS FROM VENICE

Paul Venzo

Oci de bissa, de basilissa,
testa de fogo ch 'l giasso inpissa,
nu te preghemo: sbrega sù fora,
nu te inploremo, tuto te inplora;
móstrite sora, vien sù, vien sù,
tiremo tuti insieme, ti e nu
aàh Venessia aàh Venissa aàh Venùsia.
(Zanzotto 1976)

(Eye of serpent, the queen that lights
With fiery head the glassy ice,
We pray you break through,
We implore and beseech you:
Reveal yourself, arise, arise,
Lift us, together, unto the skies
Ah Venetia, ah Venezia, ah Venice)[1]

> *My dear Marlene,*
>
> *I look for you among the wicker chairs of Caffè Rosso, between the shelves of the little hardware shop near your bolthole at Rialto. All I see are reflections, sometimes of myself, but mostly the mangy cats that dough-about on window ledges. The Guggenheim is shut for renovations. My Mondrian, and your Magritte, must wait. Without you here, I can't even be bothered smoking. Instead, I draw salt air.*
>
> *Your 'diecimila' mate.*

Putting aside the interruption to international travel caused by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, Venice is one of the most concentrated sites for mass tourism in the world. Recent protests aimed at legislative change to prevent massive cruise ships from moving through the city via one of its major waterways and the decision to impose a daily visitor tax have reaffirmed the idea of Venice as a site saturated with international tourism. These developments aside, the association between Venice and travel stretches back many centuries: from the early history of the lagoon in which mainland exiles took shelter from northern invaders; to the rich tradition of exploration, naval warfare and international commerce associated with the Venetian Republic; to its reputation as a creative topos for both Italian and ex-patriot artists, musicians, and writers (Ackroyd 2010, Norwich 1982).

This paper is concerned with travel—not simply the kind of travel we might associate with tourism, but also the subjective and creative forms of travel that belong to those of us who have taken Venice as a site for artistic practice. To approach Venice and situate oneself in relation to it as a creative practitioner is to become part of a matrix of history, images, texts, languages, architectures, cultures, personalities, landmarks, and experiences that precede each footfall we might make in its serpentine *calli*. This is what I refer to as the poetics of Venice: a shared imaginary of the city and the lagoon that grows out of the myriad ways this space has been thought about, imagined, framed, discussed, and represented.

Such a poetics may seem overwhelming. First, we might point to the tradition of Italian and Venetian writing that takes this city as its focus, such as Andrea Zanzotto's unique 'Recitavo veneziano', above, that uses local dialect to exhort the city to rise before us. Alternatively, we might confine ourselves to the way Venice has been represented in expatriate writing; indeed, much academic endeavour has already been expended along these lines (Tanner 1992, Pfister and Schaff 1999, Beatty 2012). Even a very focused analysis of Anglophone poetry about Venice

would require considerably more than a few thousand words to account for the vast quantity of literary output along these lines.

Visitors to Venice face a particular challenge: how to make sense of *all this*? How might we map out a personal cartography that situates the self in this space? How might our experience of certain landmarks and sites explain something of a personal relationship to such a vast, multi-layered palimpsest and watery terrain? As tourists we might take a photo of ourselves standing outside the Basilica di San Marco or on top of the Rialto bridge, in the hope that signifies our being there, our involvement with Venice. Alternatively, we might write poetry about its gondolas and canals in our notebooks, trying to find a means by which to capture something of the sensation or phenomenology of a city-on-the-water.

Embracing the idea that any creative response to Venice is likely to be fragmentary, personal, and site-specific, this paper is structured around a short series of postcards, written from the perspective of a traveller to and in Venice. These postcards, and the critical discussion they generate, are mapped onto certain places and landmarks, in many cases connected to the way Venice has already been written by earlier poets. Some of these sites are well-known, while others are not: this reflects my own provisional relationship to Venice, a kind of home-away-from-home in which I am an insider-outsider, simultaneously familiar and foreign. While postcards, like travel guides, are an arguably outdated form of travel writing, their short form and fragmentary nature capture something of the fleeting ways in which we might map ourselves into a particular environment. These short bursts of subjective writing—in essence a form of prose poetry—pay tribute to the idea of poetics I have outlined above. While they may reveal a little of the geography, culture, and history of Venice, they have the capacity to reveal as much about the traveller as the spaces, places, and people they encounter.

> *Fabio,*
>
> *Palladio reigns above: pale, geometric, dragon-slaying. Underfoot, a peach-marble checkerboard. Monks. Cicadas. A maze garden – forking paths.*
>
> *Fra. V.*

The Nuova Manica Lunga is a library housed in a section of the Fondazione Cini, on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice. The name Manica Lunga refers to the 'long sleeve' of an upper-storey floor of a building that once formed part of a large monastery. Along this 'sleeve' rows of bookshelves are positioned, punctuated every now and again by doorways leading to more shelving, more books—in rooms once inhabited by monks. Leading off from the main section of the library is a map room, followed by a library housing a small collection of antique guidebooks and travelogues.

The oldest of these works is an example of a *portolano* or *isolario* by Benedetto Bordone: a travel guide from the 14th century, one of relatively few such books still in existence. Produced by early Venetian printeries, the *isolari* included maps with topographic and sometimes even demographic information about islands of the Mediterranean (Conley 1996, Stouraiti 2013). At times they also included references to myths and legends of the environments surveyed. In the case of the most famous of these books, by Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti, maps of Aegean islands were accompanied by sonnets (hence the author's moniker). The incorporation of these literary flourishes meant that dalli Sonetti's *isolari* were not simply cartographic guides for would-be sailors, but rather a form of imaginative entertainment that could be reproduced by

early Venetian printing presses and disseminated as sought-after keepsakes among upper and middle-class Venetian families, born into a Republic synonymous with international trade and travel.

The *isolari* may be considered a kind of prototype for the travel guidebooks that would follow in the 18th and 19th centuries. The cultural and technological developments of this period opened the possibility of inter- and intra-continental travel to greater numbers of people, leading to the evolution of the Grand Tour of European cities and landmarks. For those who could afford to tour, John Murray's popular series of guidebooks for travellers included the 'ubiquitous' *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy*, published between 1840–1860, material from which also appeared in newspapers and periodicals (Slater 2015). Around the same time, John Ruskin's 'very idiosyncratic' writings on Florence and Venice were reshaped with the 'specific purpose of accompanying travellers in Italy' (Damien 2010: 1). Whether consumed by the privileged few who could afford to tour on the continent or by would-be 'armchair travellers', such guidebooks contributed to a popular imaginary about destinations such as Venice, intersecting with other forms of cultural output such as poetry, and even architectural history, as in the case of Ruskin.

Readers of a certain age will recall modern incarnations of the travel handbook in series such as *Let's Go!*, *Frommer's* and *Lonely Planet*, superseded in the age of the Internet by sites such as TripAdviser and major tour and accommodation booking systems. Meanwhile, popular contemporary fiction such as Donna Leon's detective series featuring Commissario Brunetti add yet another layer to common perceptions about the city (Leon's stories are now the basis for guided tours where one can visit the landmarks, buildings and restaurants mentioned in her books). These modes of communication arguably do little more than recycle information about the most popular or well-known attractions, often unchanged since the time of Murray's handbooks. Nevertheless, they represent entry points for visitors to Venice who desire to place themselves in such a well-known and well-trodden space.

A contemporary practice of poetic flâneurie is my own modus operandi for exploring Venice and the Veneto as a creative topos (Venzo 2015, 2019). My status as an insider-outsider in this part of the world means that I move within it—as the original flâneurs moved about Paris, or Berlin—collecting images and conversation and interactions with the physical environment that are then transformed into writing. Just as the contemporary tourist attempts to personalise their interactions with Venice through taking selfies or attaching a padlock to the groaning beams of the Accademia bridge (a practice now strongly discouraged by the city's government) or indeed, writing postcards, my poetic practice is an attempt to map myself into this environment through words. When I do, I am reminded of the creators of the *isolari*, who turned to creative methods to map themselves into hitherto unfamiliar spaces and places.

> *Cara Marta,*
>
> *Mistake number one – took the vaporetto. Mosh-pit tourists leaning out for selfies. Hopped off at Accademia, pelted through Santo Stefano to F. in his little office – sun for lunch on the altana. Today 'she lifts San Giorgio Maggiore/and smiles idly into that lovely thing'.*[2]
>
> *A presto –*
>
> *P.*

'The boat's slow progress was like the passage of a coherent thought through the subconscious' (Brodsky 1992: 6).

If the layout of Venice does indeed resemble a fish (Scarpa 2009), then almost invariably the traveller begins their journey at its head, before making their way—by foot or by boat—through its innards, often by following the major arterial waterway that winds through its island parishes and precincts. The fascist architecture of the Venezia Santa Lucia train station has the uncanny effect of channelling visitors through a confined space and spilling them out all at once into the colour, movement, and spectacle of the Grand Canal. The contrast between unadorned modernist architecture of the station and the Baroque edifices in this area of Venice is profound, and travellers are at once confronted with a series of pressing decisions about what to do next, and how to get there. For many, arrival in Venice means joining the throngs at the *imbarcadero*: the floating platform where one catches a *vaporetto*—a waterbus—heading down the main thoroughfare of the city.

Venice is a city synonymous with coming and going, arrivals and departures, whether that involves travelling by plane, train, water taxi, on foot, by bus, by cruise ship, yacht, or skiff. The narrow streets that arrive in spacious *campi* before weaving away again into the serpentine innards of the city, the bridges that allow people to move from one *sestiere* to another and the to-and-fro of the vaporetti from one point on an island to another mean that, even when already in Venice, one is always engaging with arriving and leaving again. For me, the coming-and-going that characterises any visit to this city is part of an overarching feeling of being simultaneously 'here and there' whenever I find myself in this part of the world. Being born elsewhere I am inherently a visitor, a stranger to Venice. At the same time, my long association with the city and the surrounding region—where I have studied and worked and to which I have ancestral connections—means I am also familiar with and to this space.

Georg Simmel's stranger (1950) is someone who arrives and then stays, unable to or prevented from fully integrating into established society, remaining always somehow at odds with it. In contrast, while the tourist is typically transitory, the economic model and cultural and physical impacts they may impose on a site such as Venice may be understood as posing an existential threat to its environment. For some of us, however, it is possible to exist somewhere between the status of the 'native', the stranger and the visitor, being simultaneously at home and abroad in Venice. Jahan Ramazani, writing on transnational poetics, suggests that:

> Although national labels impute singularity and coherence, poets make and remake their often interstitial citizenship, as we have seen, through formal and ideological rewritings, through mutations of sound and trope that can span multiple nationalities. More than norms of literary citizenship based on either political jurisdiction and place of birth (dēmos) or on their filiative counterpart (ethnos), a concept of poetic citizenship allows for poems formed by both unwilled imaginative inheritances and elective identifications across national borders. (2009: 48)

The notion of citizenship implies at least a degree of fixity in one's relationship to any given site or culture, and that is arguably true of my own relationship to Italy, Italian and Italians. However, this relationship remains provisional, and is primarily itinerant: it is marked by persistent comings and goings, arrivals and departures. Rosi Braidotti puts forward the idea of the nomadic, multi-lingual, non-unitary subject who resists identification with a single point of origin or home culture (2011a, 2011b). This concept is particularly apt in the context of Venetian history, which

involved international trade, the colonisation of vast territories around the Mediterranean, the oftentimes testy and sometimes aggressive relationship with political foes in Europe and mainland Italy and the many artistic and literary figures who sought refuge here, Byron and Pound being just two notable examples drawn from the ranks of ex-patriot poets who took Venice as their home. This being the case, it might logically be argued that the poetics of Venice is, at least to some degree, a nomadic poetics, one that includes the creative responses of those of us who have an ongoing but provisional 'coming and going' relationship to this environment.

The nomadic self is an unsettled one, in so far as it remains untethered from any fixed point or terrain (Venzo 2019). One might reasonably describe this phenomenon, in the light of my remarks about the Grand Canal, as a kind of 'watery' identity that continuously attempts to find its level and equilibrium. Brodsky wrote of travelling along the waterways of Venice:

> There is something primordial about travelling on water, even for short distances. You are informed that you are not supposed to be there, not so much by your eyes, ears, nose, palate, or palm as by your feet, which feel odd acting as an organ of sense. Water unsettles the principle of horizontality, especially at night, when its surface resembles pavement. (1992: 7)

Those who have experienced *acqua alta*—the seasonal flooding in which the Venetian *calli* become waterlogged and it is impossible to determine where the flagstones end and the canal begins—will understand the struggle to maintain one's bearings that Brodsky describes. For the migrant, the nomad and the insider-outsider, our horizon lines are similarly difficult to define, with concepts such as 'home and abroad' often becoming indistinguishable one from the other. Along these lines, I understand my itinerant, provisional, and nomadic relationship to Venice as part of a broader, postmodern phenomenon in which the self moves across more than one home, language, and culture. Homi K Bhabha (1994) theorises that this movement creates a Third Space that is translational, polyphonic, and multilingual, in which modernist notions of home, identity, nationalism and so forth begin to break down, opening the way for writing that reflects hybrid and multiple identities. I am reminded of this Third Space whenever I am travelling through Venice in a water bus, zigzagging from one side of the Grand Canal to the other, navigating between fixed points on a winding itinerary.

> *Cara cugina –*
>
> *Al Lido neanche un cazzo of the chaos of VE. Must watch for cars though. Pistachio ice-cream stains on linen shirt after bumpy ride to Alberoni. Sunburnt in dark places. Early evening, lo spritz with a handsome Ukranian at a quiet little bar on Via Lepanto. Remember when we camped at Jesolo? Fewer Germans here this year.*
>
> *Il cuginotto.*

In his epic poem 'Sordello' (1840) Robert Browning referred to Venice as 'a type of life' that exists 'twixt blue and blue – a stripe'. This is never truer than when viewing from the vantage point of the Lido, where Venice appears as a tantalising, thin strip of life on the horizon, waiting for the visitor to arrive. Seen from a distance, Venice is something both already and yet to be written. At the outset of this paper, I outlined the contribution that guidebooks have made to a collective imaginary around Venice, especially for those outside of Italy and the Veneto. The rise in popularity of such texts built upon a long history of ex-patriot literature focused on Venice as a creative topos. This ex-patriot Venetian literature—as opposed to the writing in and

of Venice by Venetians and their compatriots—began with Elizabethan drama by Otway and then Shakespeare that framed the city as an exotic, liberal, Republican space of dubious morals (Beatty 2012). Later, the city was adopted by Romantic poets, who shifted this imaginary of Venice towards the notion of faded/fading grandeur, folding together ideas about the fall of the Republic, the erotic possibilities of a city synonymous with carnival and masquerade, nature, and death (Tanner 1992). While it is not within the scope of this paper to investigate all the many ways in which Romantic, Victorian and later Modernist writers took up creative residence in Venice, it is possible to say that with each successive generation another layer was added to the way readers from outside Italy might come to possess a pre-established idea of Venice through ex-patriot literature.

The setting of the postcard above is not Venice-proper but rather the isthmus that acts as a kind of gateway to the city when accessed from the sea. In summer months the Lido is a vacation hotspot for both domestic and international tourists. It offers the closest swimming beaches to the central Venetian islands, and its accommodation is relatively affordable, in comparison to areas such as San Marco, the Rialto or Dorsoduro. Locals travel about on bicycles and in cars: a novelty in Venice. The area at the end of the Lido, known as Alberoni ('large trees'), is an unusual combination of golf course, pine forest and unofficial nude beach. The lines '…the summer hangs like a heap of marionettes, / headfirst, exhausted, done in' from Rilke's poem 'Late Autumn in Venice' (2016) provide a perfect description of a drowsy, end-of-season day at Venice's own 'getaway' spot.

In addition to its identity as a beach resort, the Lido is also important to the emergence of the Venetian identity. Along this spit of land are remnants of the early settlement of Malamocco, seat of the initial Republic of Venice that spread out and took root on the islands around the Rialto in later centuries (Norwich 1982). The Lido is also caught up in the literary history of Venice: Byron was reputed to have demonstrated his physical prowess by swimming from Venice all the way to the Lido, where he stabled horses.[3] Meanwhile, the Grand Hotel des Bains, situated just off the main thoroughfare of the Lido, has been under renovation for over a decade, but is well known as the setting for Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice* (2010). This snapshot of the culture, history and landmarks of the Lido is offered here to suggest the composite ways in which any given site comes to embody its identity in the imagination of the people who traverse it.

Every physical environment is infused with experience, memory, history, and literature. The poem-postcard above is informed by the cultural and literary imaginary that precedes my 'being there', at the same time as it is a palimpsest of historical and personal imaginings and reflections that result in a piece of writing. For example, the postcard intersects with the persistent literary imaginary of Venice as a place synonymous with both liberal eroticism and faded glory, at the same time as it captures the somewhat mundane quality of a tourist resort at the end of the summer season. Eric Prieto, in the introduction to *Literature, Geography and the Postmodern Poetics of Place* (2012), uses the term 'entre-deux' to describe sites that 'fall between the established categories that shape our expectations of what a place should be' (1). A more accurate term for the Lido might be 'fra-tanti' (between many) in so much as its cultural geography is formed by more than two, or even three, frames of reference. Indeed, the Lido is representative of multiple forms of in-between-ness: as somewhere already imagined in past writing, as a bulwark between the city and the sea, and as a place that exists ''twixt' popular and personal imagination.

Carissimi,

After much organization: Cimitero S Michele. Legend has it that the Little Corporal filled the ditch and disappeared Saint Christopher, and his peace. Can report the two poets buried at a safe distance. Few faces in this quiet crowd. Pines have no petals, and their boughs are dry and grey.

Saluti e condoglianze—

P.

Michel Foucault considered cemeteries a form of heterotopia, a ritual space that is separate from but integral to society, with the specific function to manage the transition from life to death (1984). A cemetery is both a site for burial and a space for the living that allows for a controlled interaction with the deceased and the past life that they represent. We participate in the ritual aspects of such spaces by observing silence, placing flowers on a grave, or walking slowly among crumbling headstones and reading their fading inscriptions.

The Cimitero di San Michele is an entire, walled island, sitting just to the north of the main city of Venice. Just as Foucault noted the shift from urban burial sites (for example, churchyards) to those adjacent to or separate from city centres, this cemetery was effectively 'put together' during the Napoleonic era, when a canal separating the islands of San Michele and San Cristoforo della Pace was filled in to create a single, unified space for interment. The island is primarily defined by its function: a characteristic of the heterotopias described by Foucault (1984). Its identity as a sacred space is further underscored by the deliberate effort visitors must make to reach and access the island, as vaporetto services are limited, and the cemetery is only open to the public at certain times, and on certain days of the week.

Apart from a litany of well-known Italian figures from late 19th century Venetian society, the cemetery is also the resting place of foreign artists and writers such as Sergei Diaghilev, Igor Stravinsky, Frederick Rolfe (Baron Corvo), Ezra Pound and Joseph Brodsky. Ezra Pound spent the last years of his life in exile in Venice, returning to northern Italy after being charged with treason for his pro-Fascist activities in World War II and his subsequent incarceration in a psychiatric facility in the United States. The body of Joseph Brodsky, Russian émigré and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, was taken from New York to be buried on San Michele, in recognition of his connection to Venice, immortalised in numerous poems and his essay *Watermark* (1992). Brodsky was initially slated to be buried next to Pound, but after protest from his family and friends another plot was found, closer to Stravinsky (Turoma 2010: 4).

Decay and mortality are common themes in the expatriate literature of Venice. Examples of this include Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, Henry James' *The Aspen Papers*, Daphne du Maurier's macabre short story 'Don't Look Now' (1971) and Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters* (1996). Arguably, this is because the fall of the Republic to the Austrians under Napoleon shaped a mythos around Venice as a kind of mausoleum; its fame and beauty dependent on the idea of a magnificent past; a space synonymous with a fall from power and grace that was never regained, even in the era of Italian unification. As Byron put it in 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage', 'In Venice Tasso's echoes are no more, / And silent rows the songless gondolier; / Her palaces are crumbling to the shore, / And music meets not always now the ear: / Those days are gone' (1812).

For contemporary visitors to Venice, part of its attraction may be caught up with this idea of a place of faded glory that remains present in its architecture and its culture. To step into Venice

is not so much to step back in time, but rather to continuously step through various histories as one passes through the city. Foucault's fourth principle of heterotopias includes his theorisation of heterochrony: spaces that offer people a 'break with their traditional time'; where we might encounter 'slices of time' that link us beyond a fixed point in the present (1984: 6). He observed that '…the cemetery is a highly heterotopic place since, for the individual, the cemetery begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which [our] permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance' (6), a description that echoes the Venetian mythos I have mentioned above. Moreover, there are also 'heterochronies of indefinitely accumulating time, for example, museums and libraries' in which 'time never stops building up and topping its own summit' (7). San Michele, like the museums and libraries for which Venice is famous, is a space that 'accumulates' time, a space where we might encounter some of the many layers and strands of history that characterise this immortal city and its lost souls.

> *Pinguino mio,*
>
> *In partenza. Left something for you with the portiniere. Heading to BL. Beyond Mestre/this lacey rain are mountains, and Monday morning silence. Mi raccomando: waterproof boots today. Già mi manchi –*
>
> *P.*

From certain vantage points—such as the belltower above the church of San Giorgio—it is possible to see as far as the Dolomite mountains, once a Venetian province that supplied the city with important materials such as food, timber and, on occasion, artists such as Tiziano Vecelli (Titian) and poets such as Andrea Zanzotto, mentioned above. From this height it is also possible to see boats making their way to and from the lagoon, the smokestacks of the industrial centre of Marghera, the railway lines that snake into and out of Mestre, and the planes that circle high above the international airport, appropriately named after Marco Polo. Of course, this 360-degree view is impossible to take in all at once; it can only be appreciated as a patchwork of moving parts on a vast topological stage.

I began the journey of this paper in a library, to suggest the sheer breadth of possibility faced by the traveller to and in Venice. The library is, of course, the ultimate guidebook, filled with references to art, architecture, dance, music, drama, maps, poetry, philosophy, biography, history, with seemingly endless stories and touchpoints the borrower might pursue. Venice is home to libraries of great renown, not only La Nuova Manica Lunga, but also La Marciana and the library of the Museo Correr, not to mention one that cannot be visited, the lost library of Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch). Indeed, we might consider Venice itself a library, a labyrinthine space in which we are invited to wander, pausing to read a story or two as we go and, perhaps, to leave our own names within those pages.

Notes

1 Translation my own. Veneto poet Andrea Zanzotto created two versions of this poem; one in dialect, as reproduced here; and another in Italian. In the translated version I have attempted to preserve something of the rhyme scheme featured in both of Zanzotto's poems. Readers will note I have used the Roman, Italian, and English names for Venice in the final line; a nod to the different ways the city is referred to across cultures and languages in the original.

2 From Rainer Maria Rilke's poem 'Venetian Morning' (2016).

3 In an illustrated account of his life and works, Byron is quoted as saying that he transported four horses to the Lido, to enjoy a '"spanking gallop of some miles daily along a firm and solitary beach, from the fortress to Malamocco, which contributes considerably to my health and spirits"' (Brockendon 1833, n.p.). Readers may note that this account, and much of Byron's literary output, was published by John Murray, the same publisher of popular travel guides, noted above.

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About the author

Paul Venzo (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in writing and literature at Deakin University. His research spans critical and creative practice on identity and subjectivity, with a focus on linguistic and cultural hybridity. Self-translation is a hallmark of his poetic practice, and Venice and the Veneto are often featured in his writing. A specialist in scholarship on literature for young people, Paul is the co-editor of *Sexuality in Literature for Children and Young Adults* (Routledge) and has recently published his first picture book, titled *The Great Southern Reef* (CSIRO Publishing).

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3 POEMS

Lorette C. Luzajic

SOBREMESA

Lorette C. Luzajic

at the Prado, 2019

In Madrid, Giacometti's outstretched hands. I follow the spindly-legged ones along the Prado corridors—they show me where to go. Goya's black dogs, the other Mona Lisa. Bosch's menagerie of menace. Charon beckons me toward perdition, rowing the sapphire surface of Styx. I find the famous and fat Eugenia, naked, then hidden in heaps of crimson ruffles. Olives and offal glisten across the dark, oiled centuries—*naturaleza muerta.* I find Fortuny's Faust fantasia, get lost in Pujol's piano, all those ghosts. You find me among the Velvet Breughels, sorting through dusty cabinets of marble heads, swaddled in garlands of carnations and tulips. How I hesitated before joining you here, reluctant to share my dream, accustomed to travelling alone, and always unlucky in love. Not the victim, understand, but the curse. How could I trust myself to choose wisely? And how to protect you from my storms? We will not make it to the Sorolla museum, or the Thyssen; I have already dragged you to the Reine Sofia for collage and Guernica, for Ponce de Leon's assassination prophecy. But it is my old legs, not yours, that are too tired to carry on. You guide me to a garden outside, going slow and patient, until we find a seat in the sun. The locals glide past on motor scooters. A filthy old woman with a floral kerchief holds out her hand across the lane, catching coins from passersby. Another with orange lips and wrist tattoos strums a guitar. Soon it will be time for *calamares,* for *patatas bravas* in the square near the hotel. There will be Garnacha afterwards, or cava, as night falls, chitchatting with new neighbours, more watching of the world. We move without hurry toward the taxis. On the corner, a poster for the exhibition—Giacometti's skinny fingers pointing home.

THE NIGHT DETECTIVES

Lorette C. Luzajic

after Nebra Sky Disk, by Bronze Age or Iron Age peoples (Germany) 1600-600 BCE

The sky would still be buried, hidden away in the earth, if not for the men with their detectors and shovels. The metal detectives, always digging up trouble. Among the Neolithic hills of Saxony where the black forests circle ancient barrows, a cache of hatchets, swords and spirals, and a bronze plate hammered in Carpathian gold stars. Henry trembled in the darkness as his flashlight danced across the dazzling display. He had dug up a lot of soda cans and bottle caps in his day, a few nickels, old boot buttons, toiling for treasures from time that always turned out to be from yesterday. But here was the ancient world he'd been prowling the night for, the whole damn thing, moon, sun, Pleiades, flickering in his fingers like a magic spell. Mario dropped his hand tiller, retrieved it, took in a deep breath. Holy shit, man, he said. They were holding the earliest known depiction of the cosmos, a Bronze Age beauty, a disk UNESCO would later dub "one of the most important archaeological finds of the twentieth century." It would be sold on the black market, not the proper channels: the laws revile men who dig up the past where scholars can't be bothered. Such detectives toil by trowel in frozen backyards or streamside sites, finding the odd trinket and no glory. They do it for the story, only, of mankind, for puzzle pieces to the past and destiny. They will go to jail anyways, charged as looters when they finally find something the world wants. Later still, the disk will be re-dated, a thousand years further into the future, unravelling all the hype created about the cosmically savvy Aunjetitz people and handing it back to the age of Iron. The disk will be tried as an archeological forgery. It will be part of a sting operation after changing hands for two million dollars. But for now, in the still of the night, the portal to the past and future, only ancient constellations held in humbled hands. The silence is as vast as anything has ever been and they listen, for a moment, to eternity echoing: *as above, so below.*

THE FAIRY COFFINS

Lorette C. Luzajic

At Salisbury hill, boys scaling the escarpment outskirts of Edinburgh. The jagged crags of a long-tamed volcano. Each with trowel and pick, spelunking bunny burrows, wandering after warrens for rabbit curry stew. Instead, one boy twists toes on misplaced slate, slabs of stone wedged into skyward aperture, and loosens the small hole. Inside, a cache of caskets, itsy-bitsy, miniscule. Minikin coffins, crudely carved, embellished with tin seals, rows of them, none longer than a man's main finger, and seventeen. *Fairy coffins!* exclaimed one boy with wonder, and the other, all bravado, crowed as he caught up a handful and tossed them down the shallow cliff. Later, *The Scotsman* reported that many "were destroyed by the boys pelting them at each other as unmeaning and contemptible trifles." They could not know how nailed inside were small wooden dolls, sewn into checkered gingham, and sealed to sleep. At auction, still later, for just four pounds, "the celebrated Lilliputian coffins found on Arthur's Seat, 1836." They were not destined for institution, after all, perhaps better lost on the Holyrood hills, if uprooted from rest, and still scattered under Scotland's stars. But the boys' teacher was a member of the local archeology society, and this small turn of fate is how the story unfolded, how they got from there to the national museum. The why is still a mystery: perhaps some sad soul sought symbolic burial for effigies of sailors drowned at sea. Speculation reminded others of some grisly local sadism, seventeen dissected and sold to the medical school by body-snatchers of the times. Could these be some marker, in memoriam? And what of the secret ceremonies of the Lothian pagans or the Windy Gowl witches? Who knows what wrath or curse these entombed boxes were meant to conceal or put to past, what we have now exhumed.

About the author

Lorette C. Luzajic is a writer, artist, and editor in Toronto, Canada. Her widely published prose poems are mostly inspired by paintings. She is the founding editor of *The Ekphrastic Review*, a journal devoted to literature inspired by art.

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3 POEMS

DeWitt Henry

ON MAPPING

DeWitt Henry

I like knowing my way without a map.
Like giving directions (more than asking, I admit).
Like knowing short cuts, mastering terrains:
my boyhood home of Wayne PA
(revisited for a 50th high school reunion).
My Watertown neighborhood west of Boston;
Boston itself and the surrounding burbs.
New here as a grad student, I learned my way
by getting lost. Kept a street map in my car.
"No particular place to go," sang Chuck Berry.

"I see (as in a map) the end of all,"
says Queen Elizabeth in Richard III; no palmist,
but could have been, reading fate's trails.

I click on Google Earth, enter my address,
watch the satellite image of North America
zoom to the Northeast, to Boston, to Watertown,
to my street and house. See an aerial photo
from last fall, last bright leaves on trees,
red Ford Focus (since replaced by gray
Honda Fit). At max zoom, everything blurs.

Fun to try my Sister's Pasadena address
where I haven't been in years, although
we keep in touch and she's often in mind.
On past visits I learned her streets and town.

Boy Scout woodcraft taught me
to read the stars, the compass,
follow the stream or river,
follow trails and mark them.

After years of using road maps,
I key in the address on my iPhone, choose
shortest route; on screen, a map appears;
a marker follows my progress. The female voice
alerts me to turns or tells me
to continue straight. If I miss
or make a wrong turn, she recalculates.
At destination announces, "You have arrived."
I'll never be lost again, as long as
I'm in the USA and the signal is strong.

The GPS satellite passeth understanding,
like Santa Claus or God, simultaneously,
each instant, listening to every wish,
and tracking every car and route.

No more terra incognita? No trails
to blaze? No ocean depths? We act as if.
Exploring in our bodies, minds, and
outer space. Calculating velocities
and vectors to the moon, then Mars.
Extra-terra incognita. Mapping
surfaces we've never walked.

An age of probes and drones and MRI.
Cartographers of the brain. Here
the regions of love and fear.
Here memory, short or long term.
Here imagination. Circuits like the Interstate.

Overland trails become roads.
Sea roads, ocean charts. Genghis Kahn's
Silk Road. Our Oregon Trail. Our
National Road (now US 40). In crowded skies
flightpaths, skirting storms and traffic.
Earth shrinks. Perspectives, peoples, trade
are woven into states, nations, inter-nations.
And then the internet. Hive mind!

X marks the spot. And what of time?
Identity? The child is father of the man.

We search in different mirrors, he and I,
each with his own desert places.
There, that youth, so full of dreams
and arrogance, he can't conceive
of this autumnal self, except
in scorn and disbelief. Could I comfort
or advise him? Can he sympathize, embrace?
Can we admit and wish each other well?

What else is memory, but mapping the heart?
Like feeling your way into a dark room,
even if you've seen it once in light.

ON ORDEALS

DeWitt Henry

A test of character. A trial.
Will you break, endure?

The ancient rites:
To walk on coals, for instance.
Physical punishment, not
as punishment, per se, but
as a lie detector.

Once proven guilty,
still worse awaited—
maiming, exile, death—
yet most, I'd guess, confessed
in order to escape the trial.

Imagine Hotfoot,
a rogue with feet so
calloused and quick
he always danced free.

Or Job, divine initiate,
"blameless and upright."
His earthly goods taken,
ten children killed, his body
afflicted "with loathsome sores,"
counseled by friends in patience,
rebuked for justifying himself
rather than God, then finally crying out
only to be shouted down by the creator
of Behemoth and Leviathan,
who nonetheless delivers him,
fortunes restored with interest,
ten new children born (same wife),
and blesses Job with ripe old age.

Or Oedipus, ignorant of his own
crimes while seeking to purify Thebes.

Or martyrs to belief,
Saint Joan, Sir Thomas More.
Anonymous self-immolators
protesting unjust war.

Soul-making, Keats thought.
Soul-revealing, Plato.

Raising children. Laboring for hire.
The rituals of grading, obliged
to sort my students' thoughts
as my best teachers sorted mine.

Politeness and forced smiles.
The marathon or mountain climb,
because it's there. To prove I can.
Football practice in high school.
Stacking hay bales on a baler sled.

Over-reaching as a writer.
Career reversals and demotions.
Petty rivalries and tenure fights.
Courting readers never found.

Root canals; accidents and surgeries.
Alcohol and other addictions.
Loved ones lost to sentences of pain.
Traffic jams on necessary routes.
Death camps.

We make the gods more just.

I'd run through fire for love,
flame-resistant; or perhaps duly purged.

Cremation, since you ask.

ON ROCKS

DeWitt Henry

Slept like one,
once lava,
now of ages.

Steady as, hard.
Split by lichen,
water flow or chisel.

Stoned, stoner.
Bone-breaker. Rolling.
Candy. Cocaine.

Wall, path, plinth;
face, quarry,
and foundation.

Testicles. Jewels.
Engagement ring.
Alcatraz. Gibraltar.

First tools.
Climber and jock.
Beats scissors, not paper.

Statue's flesh.
Forest petrified.
Idea fixed.

Alternative to hard place.
Shipwreck, marriage, vodka.
Third from sun.

No relation to motion,
such as earthquake,
music's wild beat,

or cradle's calm,
chorus line kicking,
thrusters towards stars.

About the author

DeWitt Henry's recent prose collection, *Endings & Beginnings: Family Essays* (MadHat Press, 2021), was longlisted for the PEN/Diamonstein-Spielvogel Award for the Art of the Essay, 2022. His chapbook, *Foundlings*, will be published by Life Before Man/Gazebo Books in September, 2022, and his collection, *Restless for Words: Poems*, in December, 2022 by Finishing Line Press. He was the founding editor of *Ploughshares* and is Prof. Emeritus at Emerson College.
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WHEN WE WERE THERE

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Abstract

When We Were There is a collaborative sequence of short prose-poem haibun whose subject is ostensibly the 40 cities of their titles. Unlike most gazetteers, however, they are not about the architecture, geography or history of a place but are personal responses which implicitly consider how we relate to and interpret the places we visit, remember, travel through or around. The extract from the sequence published here is followed by a contextualising statement.

From WHEN WE WERE THERE

Amy Lilwall & Rupert Loydell

A lifetime of travelling has taught you that nothing is as bad as it seems at first, that every curious space you have ever spent time in will become part of your own inner landscape.
—Cees Nooteboom, Venice: The Lion, The City and Water

There are many stories, not one; stories that do not yet know their place; stories where the compass is spinning in every direction.
—Rod Mengham, 'Stephen Chambers: Spinning the Compass'

A road trip with the imagined passenger does not need a destination.
—Amy Hempel, 'Cloudland'

A city is only a city when over the course of time so many contradictions have accumulated there that it defies explanation.
—Cees Nooteboom, Venice: The Lion, The City and Water

ATHENS

Smog and endless ruins. I was grubby and tired from weeks of travel, two days of sunstroke and map-reading mistakes. We camped on the outskirts, a bus ride out of town, locked our helmets to the motorbike and went to play at being tourists. Everything was crowded, hot and dusty; I couldn't speak a word of Greek. History blurred into history, the past became the past. I found an abandoned army jacket in the quiet lanes on the wrong side of the Acropolis and brought it back to England, wore it for many years. My big adventure sometimes turned sour: it was a joy to leave this city and drive into the hills, be back on the road. We headed for Mycenae where we had a campsite to ourselves and sat in the only bar being shown photos of the archaeological dig by a wizened old man keen for us to buy him drinks. Later, it was the sight of lemon groves and blue water I would remember, days kicking our heels by the sea, failing to learn to windsurf as we waited for the ferry from Patras to Ancona.

Out of place, out of sorts, views back across the years

ATLANTIS

(for Natasha)

The answer is never, an underwater swansong which got away. But I would have liked to visit caverns without sunlight and to have swum offshore before the island sank. The gods declared otherwise and civilisation ended; we question and conjecture, draw cartoon visions of crystals and impossible technology, rippled dreams and desires. The city blueprints were a shimmer of sunshine and air, construction a hymn of impossible architecture; an attempt to create a self-serving myth. I love the liquid city that never was, each week we watched the scratchy video you borrowed from the library, wondered about submarines and scuba gear, and why this film was so ignored. If I could I would gift you air and light, time and story, to transport you there; would conjure a forgotten civilisation into the past, who would patiently wait to be discovered. Welcome to the citadel.

Who would but think and hold their breath

BABBACOMBE

I know it's not a city, just an area on the edge of a seaside town, but I had many happy holidays there as a child, and it seemed bigger and more exotic then. We'd take all day to drive from London, pausing for breakfast near Stonehenge and lunch at the Fleet Air Arm Museum before finally turning into my distant aunt and uncle's drive. We'd unpack and walk to the cliff top, treat ourselves to fish and chips on the way home. One of the small islands out to sea became Kirrin Island from *The Famous Five,* a book series I was immersed in when six or seven; several years later I'd sing my heart out in teenage epiphany in one of the rocky coves. There's something about returning to places that offers a safety net under all the unknowns; I still like to holiday where I've been before. When we moved to Devon I sought out aunty and uncle, who I hadn't seen for years, and was distressed to find the winding cliff paths had all been declared unsafe and shut off. But we took our daughter to the model village, on the cliff railway, and to meet relatives so distant it hardly counts.

Faded grandeur, long summer holidays, palm trees and blue skies

BARCELONA

Intestinal architecture, brutalist streets, and Miro's painted blobs. The view from his gallery up in the hills was amazing, Merz's igloo was made of glass. There was a minimalist pavilion, and a whole park of shadows and mosaics, with a lizard in a pool. The Tapies Foundation had wires stroking the sky, there were curved windows everywhere you could not see into, and a cathedral still being built without a plan. You liked the fishes in the aquarium, and we learnt to eat at lunch then persuade a local bar or café owner to cook you an egg before the night arrived. You liked the tiny bed the hotel had put in our room for you, liked the little dusty park nearby, with its dirty pond and café, stacks of unused chairs. It is not a place I will rush to go back to, that trip's memories are further south, at a relative's house, and on the beach nearby where you started paddling before gradually discarding your clothes. You live to different rhythms with a child, learn to rise early and not stay up late, to curtail museum visits and always carry food.

Long incline down to the ocean, thousands of unexplored streets

BOSTON

(for Bob)

It is a very English city, uptight and over-polite, well-dressed and softly spoken. The airport seems only a short ride away from downtown, so short in fact we've been known to check our bags in then catch the subway back to town. One time you came and met us and entertained my daughter with the bronze ducks in the park, then took us to see 'the world's largest toy shop'. The previous visit we'd been to a shopping outlet to buy baby clothes before she'd even been born! Mostly, however, we've only been passing through, on our way to see family further North, coming to stay with you out in New Hampshire, or flying home avoiding New York, which for a time seemed nasty. They know how to ruin lobster in Boston, know how to make great beer, know how to big up whale watching, know how to look after the past and place it around green spaces and fresh air. I watched my daughter splash and paddle around a massive children's pool, reclined in the shade of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum courtyard, visited private

galleries and got lost with you in Harvard. Now we only occasionally email, something slipped away. I never knew Boston that well.

Drifting apart, someplace else to be, visiting for the day

BRATISLAVA

The old town is eroded away by the tide of newer buildings, but that doesn't matter; I feel at home. Strangely, you feel like the foreigner; they know you are from the East as soon as you speak. We return to the Slovak Pub each time; they serve the best *bryndzové halušky* and it's fun to watch tourists as they try to work out what's on their plates. The restaurant is behind a large stable door on a grimy main street of squat, prefab shops and once grand old houses. I made up my mind that I liked Bratislava better than Prague. There is graffiti and communist architecture and litter in the streets. People live here, which is hard to believe about the toy-street set design not two hours away. I closed my eyes in the lift to the UFO. It was so high and constantly juddered by the bridge below. You wanted to go on its roof and look over the edge; I felt very boring. Only in Slovakia have I noticed that people talk to you for a mere second before they smile. Two languages means two personalities. I like the one you have at home.

Find me on the narrow sloping roads, by the white incisor castle

BRUGES

The outskirts are red-brick rows, low like a northern industrial town. We walked from the station to the city centre. You can walk that far now—there was a time when you couldn't. We were served coffee at a B&B that didn't serve coffee to the public. We felt awkward—but unwilling to refuse the kindness—and drank it in an empty dining room with breakfast crumbs on the parquet. You bought turquoise jeans in C&A, the changing room assistant told you to put unwanted items back on the rail. We raised our eyebrows at each other, the way we do. We stood in the main square watching the horse-drawn carriages pull around people in wide rimmed hats and sunglasses. I don't know what I expected from Bruges, but it wasn't the palimpsest of style we found. You had been there once before, when you were a young girl, and the city was largely unchanged since your last visit. That was interesting too. We survived on cake if I remember correctly. They were too thick and yellow to ignore. I am hazy on the details… Did we go on a boat trip? I don't think so. Did we buy souvenirs? I don't have any. There is a photo of me sat on a low wall by the canal with a big smile. I think I must have liked it there. It's amazing how places exist in scrapbook patches in one's memory.

Let's eat nothing but cake and admire the jagged gingerbread buildings

CANTERBURY

A nesting city, with the cathedral at its centre. The large, private school exists behind stone walls and gates. The road beyond the wall is cobbled and boutique-y; there is a neat greengrocer's and a shop that sells coats for small dogs. Narrow streets lead from it to the pedestrianised thoroughfare, thick with tourists and shoppers in the day and clip-clopping young people at night. The next layer is the ring road. I often wondered why they built the new flats there, with balconies that face its widest section. Come to think of it, the flats are no longer new. Crossing

the ring road is not a good idea when you are alone, late at night. Well, certainly where we used to live; do you remember when we were burgled? There is an underpass that I would hesitate to use even in the day. I was braver back then... Now, this outer coat of the city is dark. I pass by the petrol station that looms and creaks. It has the only 24-hour shop within walking distance of the centre. We were proud of this fact when we went out at 2am for cigarettes. I see the firework shop on the corner of the road where we lived. It is still closed.

Gardens and gondoliers, cathedral ghosts laughing well into the night

COVENTRY

'Sent to Coventry'—oh, how we laughed. But it was where I'd been assigned, it really was my destination. I motorcycled there and slept on a sofa for three weeks until several of us rented a house together. Every other Friday we'd travel from the suburb where the community centre and men's hostel were into the city centre to collect our volunteers' allowance from the council office. Some of the people we worked with had never been into town, certainly not to Birmingham or London, trips I regularly made to see an aunt or visit home. It was the first of several rough places I lived in, a shock to my middle class upbringing. At night groups of bikers roamed the streets picking fights with scooter boys, others fought anybody they deemed foreign, gangs ran shouting through the shops on Saturday afternoons. But there was new music brewing, bands to see, safe refuges around the city if you knew where to look and how to get there. I'm still in touch with several friends from those days, though wonder what happened to good looking Steve and his girlfriends, and Honey Monster Guy, whose dad was a famous science fiction writer.

Broken cathedrals, backroom gigs in rundown pubs, cheap synthesizers and guitars

DUBLIN

A city that is light on food—we were hungry that night. The plane was late so we arrived late to the hotel. We sat at the bar and stuffed ourselves with mixed nuts. You didn't mind—the bar tender was from Košice and chatted to you. He gave us a steaming tawny glass and a slice of clove-studded lemon. When I think of Dublin, I think of barrels, I think of that picture we have of you wearing your smart jumper, holding a tumbler in front of a tall stack of whiskey casks. In December, warm amber fills the windows, the fairy lights, the glasses. It is reflected from the wet pavement and shines on the body of an acoustic guitar. We did all the things you're supposed to when you are in Dublin—we didn't even try, really. I had been before, fifteen years prior, and remember moving across it from right to left, strangely. This time, the reels in my mind consistently send me in the opposite direction, parallel to the river that fingers its way in, straight and purposeful. I wonder what that means.

High street Christmas shine, hot whiskey, night

EDINBURGH

I would know I was in Edinburgh if I was put there blindfolded. The smell of the brewery gives the city its salty air. It's an aroma that one shouldn't like, yet it allures. Princes Street falls away to the park on one side, the silken shoe of the greying castle. You could always tell a tourist from

the way they got on the bus; trying to pay the driver—but of course, that was me when I first moved there. It's probably all contactless now. My student cell led from a corridor that was so long and dizzying it seemed to pitch. At least, that's what my memory has done to it. We went out on winter nights without coats so we didn't have to queue for the cloakroom. The thought makes me shiver. I had met friends for life, in fact, I left my guitar there when I dropped out of university. You learn, as you get older, not to leave things with people in far away places as you never go back for them. The strongest friendships freeze in the past.

Skipping class, pipers at Waverly station, I remember you all

EXETER

The year we moved there the newspapers said it was the best place in the country to live, and for a while it felt like a proper city. There were hidden parks and routes to avoid the high street, pubs by the river, even an Indian grocer who stayed open late. There was a cinema, three bookshops, and we quickly made new friends. Gradually, however, the world shrank and we started to ignore the cathedral and river, forgot about that marvellous first summer we spent exploring with nothing to do. We moved from flat to house to house over the years, mending the roofs and shaping the lawns. We finished doing up our Victorian terrace a few months before we moved away: your study painted the colours of the seaside, our new wooden shed where the asbestos garage had been, the playhouse built of scrap wood beyond the kitchen door. I miss it now but back then I couldn't wait to leave, had been restless and bored for too long. I was the last to leave, after a night camping on the floor, can still walk through the house we left behind when I shut my eyes.

Itchy feet, the need for change, places that once felt like home

FLORENCE

You'd think I've been so many times that I'd be bored but apart from hypocritically wishing there were less tourists that will never happen. There is always a new painting to make friends with, a building or facade to see. Turn into the sidestreets and find the shade, revisit a cathedral and look again at who is buried where or how the angel interacts with Mary, announcing his great news. We have walked the children until they became teenagers, eaten ice creams in impossible colours, and skirted crowded areas using diagonal paths and streets. There are still small parks and squares to be found, new restaurants whose waiters are delighted to see you, there is plenty of sunshine and love to spare. We have learned to visit one day at a time, get an early train or park outside the centre; and we have been lost too, have driven through the pedestrianised cathedral square at midnight on a seemingly endless diversion, then waited for a driving ticket and fine that never came. In the evenings, the pavement gives out slow heat as the city fades into pink and grey, with only the rustle of angels' wings and the clink of wine glasses to hear.

Dreaming backwards, recalling the soft embrace of marble and air

GDANSK

We booked this city break and you packed two head torches (in case one died) and I laughed and laughed. Gdansk knew how thrilled we were and threw its best bits in front of us as we bounded

through it. Or maybe we were just excited by the smallest details. We could see the Motława if we knelt on the hotel dressing table and craned our necks. On our first night we found a galleon and we sat inside, drank grog and talked about men; the brewery fermenters shone like foil. At lunch we sipped deep hot chocolate in a dolls-house patisserie that used to be a water mill. It was impossible to feel cold in all that indulgence. I fell asleep while you read about Einstein's theory of relativity. I wonder if you ever slept at all. You went to the very top of St Mary's church but I had to stop halfway and come down. A year later, I became bad-tempered, but you had given me a job and shown me how to charge my car battery. You were only ever good. Now we hardly speak.

Best friends, a street of amber stalls, night air fat with twinkles

GLASGOW

(for Chris)

Wasn't what I'd thought it would be. Wasn't like the few hours I'd once spent with thirteen others early morning, waiting for a bus and train connection to the Outer Hebrides. Was cultured, light and civilised, though some of the pubs didn't have any chairs and sometimes I couldn't understand the accent. The record shops were great and you knew every one. I found a rare LP for 10p with Richard Thompson on guitar and sold it back home for 800 times what I'd paid. You and everyone else lived in flats, floors of handsome brown apartment blocks; near enough to walk into the city centre. We ignored the No Entry signs and walked into the Art School library to admire the curved and fretted wood; we saw some weird performance art, indie bands and contemporary dance. You were the perfect host, nothing was too much bother and you made my visit a delight. Last time I visited the city was for your wedding. I stayed with other friends on a (literally) flying visit; witnessed your vows, heard a zen speech, and was glad that I had come. Soon after, you moved to Chicago for many years, now you live outside London; we still swop music and ideas.

Friendship without effort, picking up where we left off

HAMBURG

The water sparkles throughout the city like silver thread through patchwork—I hadn't realised that. Both times we arrived by boat. Both times we booked a bus tour because your legs were tired and that's when I noticed. The second time, there were five of us and you couldn't walk nearly as far. I think you were sad about that. No matter, go on without me. We didn't, but now I wonder if you wanted some peace. We marvelled at the wedding-cake houses around the lake, the brick mills on the canals, the size of the cinnamon rolls. The quirkiness of the city revealed itself to us via punks and cat-cafés and colourful bowls of food. The taxi driver read a ragged paperback when he stopped at traffic lights. Everywhere was bright, the water made it so. The buildings had large, serious windows for all that daylight to take shelter somewhere. In the evening, leafy streets were strung with lights, the night curved over us, bouncing the city hubbub inside it. Now you can walk further than you have done for years and this warms our memories no end.

I see you striding through compressed light, beside the mirrors of water

LIEPĀJA

There is a statue by the beach that looks out to sea; she is waiting for her husband to return. The sand is pocked with shadows from where the sun hits it sidelong. Sometimes the sea is so alight, you can't look at it. Along the coast is a town where blackened, windowless buildings surround a gold-roofed church. We covered our heads to go inside but it was locked. Before you left England, you whispered to me that you had fifteen thousand pounds in your suitcase. You bought a flat on the fifth floor of a building with no lifts. The window ledges were thick enough to sit on and watch trams amble back and forth below. I came to visit when C was a puppy and you trained him to jump over a chair. Later, I came when you had baby E and then baby K. You built a cabin where you grew tomatoes, then snails. I liked it but you swapped it for a plot of land. I remember the pictures of the foundations for your house, the glass staircase, the Belfast sink, the red door. I miss you, you say, when will you come? Soon, I reply. The world is not safe now.

Empty beaches, quiet supermarkets, daylight well into the night

LONDON

Lived there long enough to know it's home and always will be. Lived there long enough to miss it and know it will never be home again. Lived there long enough to get lost when I go back, failing to find shops and clubs and bars which I thought would always be. Lived there long enough to miss the friends who've died or moved away, lived there long enough to explore new places and not go back to childhood photos and stories. Lived there long enough to enjoy not thinking about school, to openly sit outside the pubs we had to skulk in when we were under age. Lived there long enough to still miss walking by the Thames, long enough to sniff my way across London without a map, long enough to know there's no other city like mine. It isn't mine any more, but let's pretend. My bike and skateboard, my school and friends, the concerts I attended, my first kisses and first beers. My patch, my neighbourhood, my aspirations and daydreams. My paper round, my Saturday job, my summer jobs, my first LPs, the time I moved away. Lived there long enough to know I didn't live there long enough, know I should have stayed.

Birthright, family, heritage, tube trains and yesterday today

Contextualising *When We Were There*

Following three previous prose-poetry collaborations, *When We Were There* endeavours to find a new approach to this form. We became interested in subverting the concept of a gazetteer to include the tangles of memory and emotion that places trigger within us, drawing upon Psychogeography and the idea that places contain traces of the past, be that historical or social artefacts, or some kind of resonance of human activities and feelings. This resonance is at the core of our project, as is the transitional nature of place and the fallibility of memory, concepts which relate to creative non-fiction and its blurring of storytelling, memoir and the invented. In *Reality Hunger,* David Shields notes that '[e]very artistic movement from the beginning of time is an attempt to figure out a way to smuggle more of what the artist thinks is reality into the work of art' (Shields 2010: 3) and suggests that we have perhaps run out of of made-up stories to tell so are turning to actual events. In contrast, Carole Angier, in *Speak, Silence: In Search of W.G. Sebald* (2021), appears outraged that Sebald turns out to have poached and recycled whole biographies of people he knew, attempting to legitimise them by changing names, and by using found photos with misleading captions. Shields, however, notes that:

> [f]acts quicken, multiply, change shape, elude us, and bombard our lives with increasingly suspicious promises. [...] No longer able to depend on canonical literature, we journey increasingly across boundaries, along borders, into fringes, and finally through our yearnings to quest, where only more questions are found. (Shields 2010: 31)

Longing to escape the confines of our own back yard has become a cliché of our times; it is with this in mind that we allow the vibrancy of place in the mind to take us elsewhere. Karen O'Rourke defines Psychogeographic writing as 'an alternative way of reading the city' (O'Rourke 2021: n.p.) and in this collaboration we have chosen to identify the maps formed from our brightest memories and transfer them to the page. Philip Sheldrake comments that '[i]t is appropriate to think of places as texts, layered with meaning. Every place has an excess of meaning beyond what can be seen or understood at any one time' (Sheldrake 2001: 17). Our palimpsest of experience merges with the palimpsest of physical place, teasing out personal significance from layers of meaning. Following one's map of memory is unique to the writer yet an experience lived by all, as is the responsibility of the psychogeographer; we question the 'right' way of navigating a city. Guy Debord (1956) advocates the 'drift' as an essential component of psychogeographic experience and it is this that allows each line to transcend time, accuracy, clarity and reality to create a complex interaction with place. To quote Will Self, we become 'ambulatory time travellers' (Self 2007: 15).

Sheldrake goes on to suggest that:

> Memory embedded in place involves more than simply any personal story. There are the wider and deeper narrative currents that gather together all those who have ever lived there. Each person effectively reshapes the place by making his or her story a thread in the meaning of the place. (Sheldrake 2001: 16)

Compiling this haibun collection has been an exercise in experiencing place through feelings and the power of hindsight, capturing pictures that render each new place sensitive to the currents of the past and present. Stockdale notes that, 'Within the hazy fringes of shifting time there are ghost-like qualities haunting the text' (Stockdale 2022: n.p.). To quote Walter Benjamin: 'The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes

up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again' (Benjamin 1950: 247). Debord elaborates, noting that '[t]he variety of possible combinations of ambiances, analogous to the blending of pure chemicals in an infinite number of mixtures, gives rise to feelings as differentiated and complex as any other form of spectacle can evoke' (Debord 1955: n.p.).

Previous collaborations have consistently drawn us to the prose poem. The form simultaneously directs the reader towards specific meaning and allows for interpretation; it is playful, generous and complete. Most notable, however, is its capacity for storytelling. Rachael Barenblat reflects that '[t]he writer of a prose poem does away with the expectations of verse, and is thereby freed to borrow from other forms of discourse and create something new and surprising' (Barenblat 2005: n.p.). Writers such as Barenblat and Tony Leuzzi consider the difference between the prose poem and microfiction, the latter commenting on the move away from the traditional ingredients of story, and an inclination 'to lose control, to dispense with gravity, to bark at the shape of air, which is without color or shape until I've barked at it. The end result may meet some (or even all) of my requirements for a flash fiction but this is purely coincidental' (Leuzzi 2003: n.p.). As Leuzzi suggests, the story is often still visible; rather than formed of a defined beginning, middle and end, it exists inside, as Santilli terms it, the 'implied contexts':

> Despite commentaries that classify the prose poem as an experimental branch of free verse, the form of the genre is unequivocally prose [...] The way in which the prose poem achieves a high level of intelligibility within a minimal number of sentences is, I believe, made possible by the absences that it accommodates. As a fragment, the individual prose piece is an inevitably elliptical text and always stands in relation to a larger absent whole that represents the sum of its unselected contexts. I give the term 'implied context' to this active space of signification. (Santilli 2002: 22)

In *When We Were There* the 'absent whole' Santilli refers to primarily takes the form of relationships between the writer and the place or the writer and the 'you' or the 'they'. The specific images spill their meaning from the confines of the line to indicate complex story. An example from 'Babbacombe' demonstrates this: 'We took our daughter to the model village, on the cliff railway, and to meet relatives so distant it hardly counts.' The narrative advances logically, yet the story is present in the gaps: outings which wouldn't happen with adults alone, family links neglected.

Campbell McGrath suggests that:

> A prose poem is essentially a shortish piece of imagistic, lyrically written prose that employs poetic structural strategies, in particular poetic closure. […] A prose poem is not written in lines, but in prose sentences – it surrenders the poet's most valuable tool, the line break, but in return gains access to a broader palette of syntax and sentence structures. I find prose poems particularly accommodating to poems with a strong narrative line, or a lot of landscape detail – a lot of hard-to-digest data.' (McGrath 2020: n.p.)

The brevity of the prose poem contains morsels of 'landscape detail' and 'hard-to-digest' data—particularly landscape descriptions, in this collaboration—in a way that propels the narrative rather than pauses it. The 'broader palette of syntax' creates familiarity in abstractions, and narrative in the lyric.

This brings us to the haibun. Considering it as a midway point between poetry and prose, the haibun seemed a suitable form for this collaboration. Originally a short prose poem followed by a haiku, the haibun allows for only a snapshot or moment of experience that obliges the writer to condense and focus their experience. In the western(ised) haibun, that we have used, the haiku becomes a sentence without closure. Our version takes the form of approximately 200-word blocks of text, each followed by a final line which summarises, tangents and flies off into new ideas and associations. Visually, the arrangement of space places emphasis around the haiku, declaring it to be the truth that remains beyond the events experienced in the prose paragraph. Fink describes the line space as 'a wonderfully white space' that 'take[s] on properties of a sentence, yet without quite reaching that level of declaration' (Fink 2005: n.p.). For Rasmussen, '[t]he space between the prose and the haiku is kind of a long pause, one where the reader shifts mental states from reading a story to entering the sparsely styled world of the haiku' (Rasmussen 2007: n.p.).

The form lends itself well to our gazeteer, notably for the play on fictionality that although, as Ray Rasmussen explains, 'can be a dream or even a fantasy episode', is often 'reality based as opposed to fiction' (Rasmussen 2007: n.p.). We offer readers the opportunity to experience a succinct montage of details that relate directly to the writer's most vivid and precious recall of a given place. The restrictions of the haibun, even in its westernised form, naturally lead the writer towards summary, juxtaposing moments from an undefined period of time to suggest movement through it. Paul Munden observes the 'elastic treatment of time' as a potential trope of the prose poem. He elaborates:

> It is startling […] to find within a single paragraph – the prose poem – shifts that might be more familiar in the breaks between paragraphs, or, even more characteristically, between chapters, and not necessarily those adjacent to each other. In narrative terms, prose poems that exhibit this treatment of time are actually compacting it, and quite radically. (Munden 2017: n.p.)

When We Were There endeavours to recreate the disorientation of dream while maintaining the aura of reality. The fictionality of the haibun seeks to bring the reader closer to the writer by allowing the emotion to override the events in order to present a different kind of truth. Rasmussen elaborates that '[h]aibun tend to be accounts of personal experiences in the present or past that the writers have had, that somehow stand out in their lives, that are deemed worthy of writing about (call them "haibun moments")' (Rasmussen 2007: n.p.). The final haiku brings this truth to the fore. Sheila Murphy explains the charm of this pairing:

> For me, the relationship between the prose passage and the haiku that follows is the key to the form. Therein lies a spectrum of kindredness and tension. As discoverer of that relationship, the writer is gifted by surprise as the image starts to clarify within the figurative pan of water being touched to urge forward a kind of small song. (Murphy 1998: n.p.)

Our gazetteer is an attempt to answer some of our own questions about our own lives, yet with the awareness that, '[a]s a work gets more autobiographical, more intimate, more confessional, more embarrassing, it breaks into fragments. Our lives aren't prepackaged along narrative lines and, therefore, by its very nature, reality-based art—underprocessed, underproduced—splinters and explodes' (Shields 2010: 27). What we have written is a writerly version of our own visit or visits to each city, a chance to re-experience and reflect upon a place, but some

parts are invented or researched; all of it is subject to the workings of memory, time, regret, nostalgia and the desire to produce 'good writing'. Working collaboratively provided contrasting and complementary voices as well as critique, encouragement and surprises.

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2 POEMS

Paul Venzo

C. SAN B.

Paul Venzo

Each day I trip on cobbled memories. My thoughts are shredded suitcase wheels on flint flagstones. The hum of appliances unpunctuated by midday bells. The ever-on computer overheats, unaided by *aperitivo*, Alpine snow, or lagoon water. Eyes hover over a postcard of Campo San Barnaba. I'm delighted to bump into an old friend – that phone booth where I jammed a robber's worth of coin into the slot calling you, calling my mum and dad, calling Ivan in Padova about a tattoo. Occasionally it would spit up change, a metal baby with telephonic reflux. In those days we paid with lire. We were lirionaires. Pockets were more fun then, filled with ticket stubs and soft-pack smokes, lighters, notebooks and keys, a nub of hash in a serviette, a scrap of paper some guy gave me through the letter-box slot of a train window, his number written in loopy euro-numerals. Today I would make a shrine of all that junk. I would pray to it. I would stick it all to the goddamn fridge, which is staring at me, hoping I might go away.

FIUMICINO

Paul Venzo

Somehow it is morning. Night occurred somewhere over the desert, briefly, as oil refinery lights flickered, spent themselves, surrendered to a peachy daybreak. Here, businessmen hunt themselves down on cell phones, checking with their 11-o'clocks in Milan, Zurich, Dubrovnik. I can smell it before I can see it – coffee and *cornetti*, as they call them here. I can feel the soft abrasion of icing sugar on my fingertips. The guy behind the Perspex asks, in Italian – "you're Australian?" as if this makes no sense. He's right, it doesn't. At the gate I Whatsapp my cousin, who's already up and about, sitting outside Mon Ninì. I ask her to buy my favourite rolls, the ones that look like bready lobsters. Laughing emoji. Thumbs up. I turn back to my fellow travellers, all sharp-suited, buff-shoed and hair-slicked. I must look a mess. A cat-dragged-in rumple-mess of creases and stubble. We ascend the metal stairs to the plane. I pretend that I do this every other day: take a hop north, with my rucksack and snap-back and teeth I've just brushed in the airport bathroom.

About the author

Paul Venzo (PhD) is a poet and academic whose writing focuses on identity and self-translation. Paul has been a visiting scholar with the Fondazione Cini, Venice, and is an alumnus of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection internship program. Together with colleagues from Deakin University he contributed to the European Cultural Fund's *Personal Structures* exhibition at the Palazzo Bembo, part of the 2019 Venice Biennale. In 2021 he released a musical work titled *The Venetian Sonnets*, based on poetry contained in his doctoral dissertation.

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4 POEMS

Kristin Sanders

A REVIEW OF MY AIRBNB IN AVIGNON

Kristin Sanders

The building clicks at night. I was sad here. The windows open wide onto a quiet, safe street. The kitchen has every cooking tool you'd need. I only ate cheese and tapenade on baguettes. That the frame of the mirror above the mantel is painted the same color as the wall pleased me. The owner's son, in his twenties and thinking I was younger than I am, brought me a houseplant. I stayed one month. It was more space than I needed. The muted blue-grey paint, chalky and calm, soothed me at night. I often slept till noon, then crept out for cold afternoon croissants. I stayed awake until the early morning hours. I did not write. But the chair, moved into the afternoon sunlight streaming through the open window, is perfect for writing. It was autumn. Please forgive me for not loving the way a woman should, for being here, alone, for loving so much and yet so little of the world. I hope to return.

CAPTURED IN A POEM, A PLACE

Kristin Sanders

I used to think the antidote to social media is poetry. How the meaning unfolds hours, years later, after reading, considering, and teaching, then reading again. As an undergrad, my professor once emailed me after a class discussion to say she'd never thought of Frost's poem that way, she thought I might be right, he might have meant to depict the colonists' claim to America as irony, not patriotism. Now I travel often and post photos on the internet to convince others I have something to say, a vision of the world, my place in it. That same professor, a poet who has won awards but whom not many have heard of, once sat with me in a bar. I was now her colleague. We clutched our beers in two hands while I confessed I had eleven thousand dollars saved and was thinking of Paris. Yes, she said, go to Paris. We clinked our glasses. I went, but soon returned. Of course I was wrong. I was young, and she was kind to be so patient. A poem cannot keep you safe. Neither can a city promise happiness or love. It's only longing that lasts.

IN THE CINEMA OF SEX AND VIOLENCE

Kristin Sanders

you are much too gentle with me. I want you to stop agreeing with everything I say. Just when you think you are giving me exactly what I want, what I want is to be denied. If you kept pieces of your life apart from me, locked shut, that might help. Instead, everything I have asked to see you've spread open, gaping, inviting me in. I saw the mess of it, your life. Saw the meanness of your ex, a bitter woman. Decades of loss, how you didn't make art out of it but always planned to. How you hold on. To see so much hurts me. I would like to run away from your problems, the toxic people in your life, *her*, the trauma your children have already learned to hold. You say life is suffering but me, I do not suffer. I draw a curtain, escape into aloneness, choose only myself. I mean to say I protect myself from the suffering others cause. I wanted you to hurt me in a sexy way, artificial, wanted degradation I could stand behind, come from, a safe word before pain blooms into blood. Instead, there is your gentle, devoted mouth for as long as I need, while my heart fears what lurks beneath the surface of things, the darkness against which you seek moments of joy—the way we held each other in shallow salty water, teal as far as the eye could see and us bobbing there, laughing, your hand not on my throat.

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG WOMAN, I THOUGHT IN TERMS OF LACK.

Kristin Sanders

Now, I think in terms of more. Also, time is running out. Also, if I choose one abundant life, other abundant lives fall away. As in: lovers, located as they are across the globe, my little possible lives within their arms. As in: bouquets of cut flowers dying in crystal vases in the two rooms of my apartment. My one small closet of clothes. The love I have, now, for myself. Back then it was all lack, what felt missing, cavernous. I ached to plunge into the world, other bodies. I was small for as long as I could be small, the same goes for sad, until I rose up in my age and my beauty, yes, I can say that now, though it was always true. I filled my life with love and thrilled at their bird song, the little dears, how could I cut them free? Who was I without them? And did you see them? Did you see me seeing them? May I show them to you? Did you see what I made, did you get my text, did you read what I wrote, did you understand that I was all alone there in that country until I was no longer alone and even then I had to capture the evidence to make it real for the audience I imagined? You.

Look— I want to show you how.

About the author

Kristin Sanders is an American poet and writer. She is the author of *Cuntry*, a finalist for the 2015 National Poetry Series, and two chapbooks: *Orthorexia*, and *This is a map of their watching me*. Her poetry has been recently included in *Prose Poetry: An Introduction* (Princeton University Press) and *LIT, Eleven Eleven, The Feminist Wire, Powder Keg*, and elsewhere. Her essays and reviews have been published in *Longreads, LitHub, Los Angeles Review of Books, Bitch Magazine, The Guardian,* and *Weird Sister*. Originally from Santa Maria, California, she currently lives in Paris, France.

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SO, IT IS OVER

An ecopoetics of travel in the poetry of Carolyn Forché and Etel Adnan

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Abstract

Focusing on poetry's connection to movement through time and space, this paper examines the works of Carolyn Forché and Etel Adnan. It argues that their subversive use of the tropes of travel engage with a complex ecopoetics concerned with climate disaster and the devastations of human violence. Ihab Hassan suggests travel as both action and metaphor 'transgresses lines, limits, liminalities' (1997: 177) to 'raise fundamental problems of human existence' (166). Indeed, replete with ghostly hauntings and geographical wanderings, the poetry of Forché and Adnan reveals a troubling, dystopian vision of environmental destruction, the horrors of a vanishing world. Attending to how these poets utilise an intricate series of travel tropes and metaphors, this paper contends that Forché and Adnan present a 'textuality of motion' (Hassan 1997: 163) in which the transactions between self and other, nature and culture are exposed in terms of horror, loss, and exile.

SO, IT IS OVER

Alyson Miller

Introduction

Poetry, as Jahan Ramazani observes, is a genre uniquely aligned with expressions of travel: able to 'leap across national and cultural boundaries', it is defined in relation to ideas about movement and transportation, 'practices of crossing and interaction', and transformative, transitional shifts (Ramazani 2007: 281-2). Following James Clifford's ethnographic examination of 'travelling culture' (1992), Ramazani explores how poetry might 'leave home and return' (282), and in doing so, not only enact 'differently centred worlds' (Clifford 1992: 103), but also operate as a 'globe-skipping form' (301) that traverses disparate cultural, political, and geographic landscapes. Certainly, as a 'figuratively rich discourse' reliant on compressed, symbolic language, poetry is intricately bound to travel at the level of metaphor, a term derived from the Greek 'transfer' or 'carry across' (Ramazani 2007: 288). In the work of poets such as Etel Adnan and Carolyn Forché, attention to the 'temporal rituals of leaving, moving, and returning' (Fullagar 2002: 59) is transformed into a model of ecopoetics that witnesses the traumas of human violence and the devastations of climate change. Focusing on liminality, identity, and the body, these poets map a dystopic image of 'the end of the world' (Forché 2021: 6), creating an ecology of disaster premised on a human/other divide. In doing so, travel is figured not only as a form of witnessing, in which readers are brought 'face to face with strangeness' (González 2017: 97), but also as a mode of disruption, through which Clifford's notion of 'differently centred worlds' (1992: 103) might be glimpsed through unsettling, nightmarish images of death, exile, and uncertainty.

Indeed, through metaphors of travelling, the poetry of Adnan and Forché reveals a series of profound anxieties about the horrors of a vanishing world, in which nothing seems left 'but darkness' (Forché 2021: 24). Attending to the violations of war, migration, and ecological crises, the transactions between self and other, nature and culture are exposed in apocalyptic terms, where sequences of loss depict an unnerving vision of the future, as well as a reflection of the violations of the past, one 'full of ghosts' (ibid.: 70). Examining the poetic interventions of Adnan and Forché, this paper argues that the language of travel enables a critical form of witnessing through which the tragedies of the human and non-human might be perceived. By drawing on and subverting tropes such as beginnings and endings, borderlines, otherness, and notions of time, these poets rupture chronologies and geographies in order to insist on the interconnections of the natural world, and map what might be found in the 'white realm of nothing left' (ibid.: 72): its histories, memories, and disappearances.

'Leave, yes, but go where?' On Beginnings and Endings, Home and Exile

According to Simone Fullagar, travel is a 'paradoxical space, an elsewhere that is at once leaving home and encountering the multiple ways of being at home in the world that are as much temporal as spatial relations' (Fullagar 2002: 69). Home not only 'situates our self in the world', but also 'mediates our subject position through class, gender, culture'; further, it is the ability to return that 'turns a journey into travel rather than exile' (ibid.: 69). Fullagar suggests that the 'sense of endless movement' so often framed as desirable in Western discourses is one located within privileged forms of masculine behaviour that 'seek to grasp and capture difference, including those of exploration and colonisation that invisibilise the specificity of

different cultures and places' (69). The tension between home and away, then, is frequently one contextualised in relation to a resistance to containment and the ostensible freedoms of a world to be traversed, made possible by the power to return to a point of safety. For a poet such as Etel Adnan, the boundaries between home and exile are, however, significantly complicated, marked by the dislocations of war, violence, and migration. Tanyss Ludescher notes that Adnan's 'life is a study in displacement and alienation' (Ludescher 2003: 229-30). Born in Beirut, the poet later studied and worked in France and America, and experienced a series of catastrophic events, including the Algerian War of Independence, the Lebanese Civil War, and the ongoing Palestinian conflict. Adnan's transnationalism has arguably resulted in a poetry of in-betweenness, one characterised by ceaseless movement and 'rapid shifts between times and places' (Alghadeer 2014: 62) that emphasises global connection through a crisscrossing of past histories and present realities. *Time* (Adnan 2019), for example, is structured as a 'poetry of the postcard', each section dedicated to a specific experiential moment, such as 'Return from London' and 'No Sky', or to a temporal location: 'Friday, March 25th at 4pm'. Each poem is composed as a 'breath or two' as well as a mode of correspondence, a reply to the Tunisian poet and publisher, Khaled Najar (Riggs, qtd in Adnan 2019: 135). Whilst designated or anchored to a brief feeling of the particular, the postcard as vehicle suggests impermanence, and a nimble mobility in which the ephemeral and the profound collide: 'this morning I killed a fly / had I been a State / I would have destroyed a city' (Adnan 2019: 85).

A relic of travel, the postcard is a marginal, fragmentary form, designed to capture an incomplete image or memory, and to be sent from transitional—as well as transactional—points of location. As an object of movement, its symbolism is an apt reflection of a subject only tenuously grounded, and whose restive search for belonging results in an increasingly refined capacity to 'walk on the perimeter' (Adnan 2019: 28). Indeed, the postcard speaks to the periphery, and to the liminal spaces occupied by the traveller-poet, whose exile is marked by an attention to those provisional moments in time that might well be captured for the mementos of tourism: sunsets and shorelines, the enigma of 'half-light' (ibid.: 74), the 'silver edge of the sea' (37), and a horizon which 'travels to the rhythm of / our non-existence' (35). Such borderlines reflect the contradictory desires of travel, Fullagar notes, 'in terms of the abandonment of self to wandering, and the mastery of surmounting the unknown', a tension that can 'effect the transformation of self' (Fullagar 2002: 62). As an émigré marginalised by war and dislocation, however, the relationship of the poet to landscape and subject is irrevocably altered, suspended in the spaces between motion and stillness, fixity and change: 'Clouds pile up, / turn into human forms / on riverbeds / the same inscription / always dissolves, / then reappears, / as the sky has / already told me' (Adnan 2019: 20). Hessa A. Alghadeer observes how as a 'transnational subject, Adnan explicitly inhabits … conflicting worlds, shifting … from one into another, and reimagining different spatial identities' (Alghadeer 2014: 65). Indeed, the poet often identifies with the sublimities of fog, an amorphic, ambiguous form that defies clear boundaries and perceptions yet is also undeniably present, and plural in its inhabitations:

> I return to the
> fog because
> it is me.
> it has a magnitude
> that humans
> lack, it covers
> spaces (Adnan 2012: 107).

The association with fog also suggests a quiet despair, speaking to the distress of the refugee and the compulsion to define selfhood in relation to absence. As Adnan describes in 'Voyage, War and Exile',

> for the Arab, the existential statement that defines him would be: "I am not, therefore I am." Exile is the awareness of … marginalisation and irreparable loss. And exile is not any loss. It is irretrievable loss. It is the loss of what is closest to one's identity, the one tied to history and geography. (1995: 13)

Even in confinement, Adnan thus expresses a constant and agitated movement, a desire to be re-located, transient, and un-fixed, if only psychically: 'I will travel, / motionless' (2020: 123). In *Shifting the Silence* (2020), images lurch from 'the café Adonis in Sopelos with its chairs painted in blue' (51), to 'Paris now' (52), 'California's beauty', and 'nights in Yosemite Valley' (54), an urgent leaping from place that suggests the impetus to escape or evade through perpetual journeying; to be both nowhere and everywhere. In these terms, there is no sense of destination but rather a sequence of staccato instances, memories of visitations, aligning with Fullagar's observation that 'travel is marked by beginnings and endings; movement is not simply an undifferentiated flow, but rather a rhythmic series of pauses within motion' (Fullagar 2002: 68). Importantly, as an endlessly migratory figure, Adnan's occupation of multiple geocultural spaces produces a de-centring effect, one which resists attempts to be distanced from catastrophic events happening elsewhere. Memories of the trauma of the Lebanese Civil War, for example, are visceral and affective, carried within the body and unable to be left behind: 'from the boat that took me away, I've / kept the nausea, and the scent of oil. / from the city where I landed, I / remember a defeat' (Adnan 2019: 16). Like the postcard, the horrors of violence are written onto (and into) the self, travelling from a point of origin but remaining in-flux, possessed, as Adnan writes, 'by a nameless acceleration' (ibid.: 122).

Given the return to home is an impossibility—'it does not exist anymore and will not exist'—Adnan seems ensnared within the interstitial, constantly seeking a way 'out of marginality' (Adnan 1995: 15). In *Shifting the Silence*, the poet vacillates between a need for 'place', for example, and an ambivalence towards its relevance, expressing anxiety about becoming a prisoner of 'webs, cobwebs, tightening circles' whilst grappling with the imperative to find roots, and be permanently grounded:

> I took a train and went through the immense plains of a golden hue. The land looked soft, marked here and there by rows of trees. The TGV was roaring. Reluctantly, I reached a city I didn't care for. Have no heart for such a place. But where's my place? Still looking for one, it seems. But I loved so many of them, so deeply…I should come back on my statement; am looking for almost nothing. Too much of a past, too little ahead. (Adnan 2020: 35)

The compulsion to move means a state of always leaving and returning, and thus a subject constantly split due to the repeated negotiation of being both *here* and *there*. Adnan suggests that such an unrelenting restlessness is in part a condition of exile, echoed in the poet's use of imagery that reinforces 'the notion of unfailing mobility' (González 2017: 97), including repeated references to evanescent clouds, the fluctuations of the sea, and 'the violence of the wind' (Adnan 2019: 28). Adnan, depicted as a 'current of air' (ibid.: 14), becomes part of an elemental force that defies belonging in the singular, but is central to patterns of behaviour that characterise both the human and the non-human; part, that is, of an ecology reliant on

movement. As Manuela Palacios González argues, 'the etymology of the word *diaspora—dia-spora*, to sow through—directs us to the natural world, the scattering of seeds, and the fertility of dissemination' (González 2017: 97). In these terms, the liminal inhabitations of Adnan's exile, in which the poet describes living 'in an invisible' without 'entryway' (Adnan 2020: 13), reflect a different kind of web, not one that constricts but rather emphasises the associative—and transitory—networks in which all living things reside. Further, given 'exile is dispossession with no recourse' involving the 'violent and involuntary loss of all the living symbols of one's identity' (Adnan 1995: 8), such in-betweenness becomes a powerful expression of both defeat and resistance, one that situates Adnan both *nowhere* and *everywhere* in quasi-transcendental terms: 'I am half of the universe / will I ever be a whole being? / silence / and empty garden, / more ephemeral than a cloud / I am a speck' (Adnan 2019: 72).

'Lost the whole for its parts': Travel/ler as ecopoetic witness

Importantly, Adnan's evocation of the natural world often utilises the language of conflict, as the 'merciless' (Adnan 2019: 23) movements of oceans and time battle across a 'slowly dying' planet (27). Read as a form of ecopoetics, the treatment of human violence and ecological disaster within a shared language or symbolism highlights what Geneva M. Gano describes as an 'interdependent mesh' (Gano 2021: 729), or what Forrest Gander conceives as an 'economy of interrelationships between human and non-human realms' (Gander qu. Gano 2021: 729-30). Within such a matrix, 'genocide, war, human trafficking, and global capitalism' are connected to other environmental concerns, such as 'the massive and intentional poisoning of the earth's waters, lands, and air; the heedless endangerment and abuse of human and non-human animals; and the desecration of … landscapes, airscapes, and seascapes' (Gano 2021: 730). By insisting upon a 'cyclic feedback system' (Scigaj 1999: 37), ecopoetry not only maps the traumas of loss, but in doing so, also seeks to 'awaken' readers to their 'irrevocable and inexhaustible responsibility to the other' (Forché 2011: 162). As Adnan expresses, there is no separation of human activity from other ecologies, per a traditional notion of hierarchy; rather, there is only an ever decreasing and circular complex, in which the capitalist drive for more feeds yet further degradation. Resultingly, Adnan argues, 'we have lost the whole for its parts':

> Yes, the house is cluttered, the brain too. We're people of accumulation and therefore, ironically of waste. I dream of a room with no furniture, of a past with very few friends, of a country with no weapons. We are tired beyond our capacities for renewal. Oh, what's left!
>
> Dark animals return to the forest, just to be swallowed by huge waves that leave huge masses of wine coloured areas on the ocean's darkened surfaces, and I am asking for help, merging my voice with the winds' (Adnan 2020: 14).

Leonard M. Scigaj therefore argues it is no longer ethical to compose 'poems that present nature as a benign and reliable backdrop for human quests for an authentic voice' (Scigaj 1999: 5). Certainly, by attending to the imbrication of the human and non-human, Adnan depicts a 'sense of inhabitation and connectedness with planetary process', evincing a 'biocentric view' that attempts to erase the conventional structures and binaries imposed upon the natural world (ibid.: 10). As Adnan writes: 'The radio says that Paris is experiencing a heat wave. The temperature will rise to 40° Celsius … The fish is calling for help. As I am, often, these days' (Adnan 2020: 19). Bordering on the elegiac, crisis is immediate, and loss positioned as inevitable; it is the last days of this civilisation' (ibid.: 18), and 'we stare at it with total helplessness' (24). In these terms,

death is the only certainty, unless, to return to Clifford, there is the possibility of a 'differently centred world' (Clifford 1992: 103), one in which the fragments are reunited with the whole.

Moving beyond the singular interests of self, Adnan as traveller-poet is thus witness to the 'horrible truth of ecological harm', revealing a 'shameful inability to fulfil our ethical relation even to other humans, let alone the ecological whole' (Gano 2021: 732). According to Forché, witness is 'neither martyrdom nor the saying of a juridical truth, but the owning of one's infinite responsibility for the *other one* (*l'autri*)', an emphasis on connection critical to the ecopoetic, but also, in its desire to occupy or engage a state of otherness, to the metaphors and impulses of travel (Fullagar 2002: 61). Forché's *In the Lateness of the World* (2020), for example, attends to the consequences of human and environmental devastation to represent an ecology of disaster in which the privileges of the powerful are exposed. Like Adnan, Forché adopts the role of the poet as outsider, a 'wanderer, stranger … ein Fremder on earth' who watches (Forché 2020: 23), and moves through numerous shifting, and often ambiguous, spatial and temporal locations. The effect of such endless migrations is less a sense of alienation and fragmentation than an insistence on those associative webs that make clear the irrevocable connections between self and other. In doing so, Forché frequently relies on elision to convey the ubiquitous horror of the violations of 'human-caused crisis' (Gano 2021: 730), forgoing, as Teow Lim Goh notes, 'the particulars of time and place' to focus 'instead on the specifics of the disaster' (Goh 2021: n.p.). In 'The Boatman', for instance, the immediacy of the refugee experience is conveyed in abject terms, a vision of the 'living and dead' floating from 'war to war': 'We were thirty-one souls, he said, in the gray-sick of sea / in a cold rubber boat, rising and falling in our filth' (Forché 2020: 5). The agitations of the sea mimic the conditions of exile, now understood as an impossible limbo of imprisonment and death:

> …Leave, yes, we'll obey the leaflets, but go where?
> To the sea to be eaten, to the shores of Europe to be caged?
> To *camp misery* and *camp remain here*. I ask you then where?
>
> (Forché 2020: 5)

The poem echoes Adnan's expression of fixity and movement, a liminal tension in which the notion of destination becomes an illusion within the necessity for constant motion. There is no return to home, reduced to 'ruins of stone piled on ruins of stone', but only the enigma of a 'safe place' (ibid.: 5), a haunting that defines the perpetual search for asylum. The inability to find safe landing, and the nightmare of war, is captured by an image of a child, fetched 'from the sea, drifting face- / down in a life vest, its eyes taken by fish or the birds above' (5). The anonymity of both the mutilated child and the boatman 'talking nonsense' (5) powerfully underlines the familiarity of a narrative in which the victims of conflict are figured as human waste, the unwanted detritus of the urge for violence and domination. While the poem later makes clear its political context—'Aleppo went up in smoke'—its initial ambiguities are testament to the silences of history, and to the implication of the reader in the documenting of catastrophe: 'You tell me you are a poet. / If so, our destination is the same' (6).

Similarly, in 'Water Crisis', Forché portrays a pending catastrophe by eliding its identificatory features, a strategy that protects, perhaps counter-intuitively, against the dissolution of a moment into a vanishing sense of the past. The effect is an apocalyptic vision, a 'matter of thirst' in which the powerful are safeguarded from the potential for annihilation:

> They have cut off the water in the sinking metropolis.
> *Do not wash clothes! Bathe only with small buckets!*
>
> Meanwhile, cisterns on the roofs of the rich send it
> singing through the pipes of the better houses.
>
> (Forché 2020: 7)

Whilst the lack of mapping or naming seems to be a version of what Muriel Rukeyser might call 'unverifiable facts' (1968: 3), the absence of the specific works to intensify and defamiliarise a social order accepted as norm. As Goh suggests, such crises are pervasive, 'brought on by a lack of investment in infrastructure and a lack of regard for the poor' (Goh 2021: n.p.), who, locked out by the 'security gates' (Forché 2020: 7), suffer the overwhelming effects of climate change: 'The rich will have what they want. Is this a relief? / The last cloud is empty. The first death is reason enough' (ibid.: 8). Likened to the 'gamecocks … forced to fight with knives taped to their feet', those without privilege are dehumanised as an expendable mass, policed by 'sirens' and corralled by the state into compliance (7). While the wealthy remain safe from the fear of poisoned water, as in Flint, Michigan, or the alarming consequences of ongoing drought, the landscape is witness to the devastations of an ecological emergency in which both human and non-human life is slowly, and horrifically, eroded: 'Many songbirds have been roasted by the heavens' (7). By exposing the ever-widening inequities of suffering, Forché reveals the imbrication of the environmental and the economic, in which the interests of the capitalist drive for more continue to dominate. In 'Report from an Island', for instance, the poet describes a land mass constituted by 'bottles and other trash', the waste of rampant consumerism becoming a simulacrum for the natural world, mimicking life whilst destroying it from within:

> Plastic bags become clouds and the air a place for opportunistic birds.
>
> One and half million plastic pounds make their way there every hour.
> The pellets are eggs to the seabirds, and the bags, jellyfish to the turtle (9).

Foreign visitors 'smoke the bats out by burning coconuts, / calling this *the bat problem*', while the useless objects of a disposable culture 'flow to the sea' (9), emphasising the implications of an ecological web in which self and other are inextricably, but not equally, linked. The consequences of the waste, that is, are endured not *here*—the privileged home of the Western subject—but *there*, disappearing into the horizon and away from immediate view. As a destination of exotic travel and the victim of environmental degradation, the island is trapped within a complex cycle of destruction, its key mode of survival, tourism, linked to the root cause of its gradual disappearance. Further, as part of the 'global south' (9), situated in the Malay Archipelago, it is figured as a locus of human and natural disaster, including the most likely gravesite of missing flight MH370, and casualty of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and earthquake, after which islanders, exiled from home, 'moved into the family tombs' or 'the dumps in trash cities … sorting / plastic, metal, glass, tantalum from cell phones' (10). Through a series of fractured links, Forché thus insists upon an 'intersectional vision of eco-justice' (Gano 2020: 728), one which recognises the accumulative nature of socio-economic structures in determining who suffers. As the world begins to disappear, the unspeakable nature of loss is framed in terms of the refusals of the powerful to 'act towards reparative restitutions' (ibid.); the anguish of both the human and non-human an inconvenience of elsewhere, a reality for anonymous strangers and unknown places:

> Wind has lofted the water into a distant city, according to news reports:
> most of that city submerged now, with fish in the streets.
>
> (Forché 2020: 9)

René Dietrich observes how, in bearing witness to these horrors, Forché crafts a 'fragmented poetic speech' to reflect the 'changed status of language in … a traumatised world' (Dietrich 2010: 347). Its gaps and fissures conjure the ruins of landscapes in the aftermath of war or disaster, but also align with the nature of trauma as a profound rupture, which might only be glimpsed or understood via the partial: 'We are waiting to breathe again' (Forché 2020: 7). The effect, Dietrich contends, is one of 'world-unmaking' (Dietrich 2010: 348), a defamiliarizing process in which poetry might come close to capturing the ineffable. In 'The Ghost of Heaven', for example, Forché conveys the terrors of the Salvadoran Civil War through a sequence of haunting snapshots, a list of ghoulish postcards which shift eerily between memories and dreams, and confrontations with grotesque cruelty:

> 7.
> When a leech opens your flesh, it leaves a small volcano.
> Always pour turpentine over your hair before going to sleep.
>
> 8.
> Such experiences as these are forgotten
> before memory intrudes.
>
> The girl was found (don't say this)
> with a man's severed head stuffed
> into her where a child would have been.
> No one knew who the man was.
> Another of the dead.
> So they had not, after all,
> killed a pregnant girl.
>
> (Forché 2020: 41).

The act of 'unmaking' occurs in abject terms, a further play upon the transgression of borderlines that speaks to an urge to resist containment. Hal Foster argues that 'a special truth seems to reside in traumatic or abject states, in diseased or damaged bodies. To be sure, the violated body is often the evidentiary basis of important witnessings to truth, of necessary testimonials against power' (Foster 1996: 123). In Kristevan terms, abjection refers to that which 'disturbs identity, system, order … the in-between, the ambiguous' (Kristeva 1982: 4), to a 'fragility of boundaries' (Foster 1996: 114) that in turn discloses the rituals and structures of mapping. In the poetry of Forché, bodies become alternate landscapes that reveal the abuses of war, but there is also a sense of return, in which the subject becomes part once more of a perverse ecosystem, an object of waste amongst the discarded: 'bones still sleeved and trousered, / a spine picked clean, a paint can, a skull with hair' (Forché 2020: 39). The reduction to materiality suggests erasure, but more powerfully evokes the images of a living-death, in which ghostly remains continue to haunt as mementos of a vanishing past. In *The Angel of History* (1994), for example, Forché represents the nuclear annihilation of Hiroshima both in terms of grotesque physical devastation, and as a 'world robbed of its substance, evaporating before one's eyes'

(Dietrich 2010: 349). Attention to the destruction of the physical self operates as a metaphor for damage wrought more broadly, and of the chaos of the atomic site, in which nothing ordered has been retained. In 'The Garden Shukkei-en', 'She strokes a burnt tree trunk wrapped in straw: / I was weak and my skin hung from my fingertips like cloth' (Forché 1994: 70). Violences against the body are reanimated by way of natural phenomena, creating a visceral, and surreal, pattern of association that conjures and memorialises past trauma: 'I don't like this particular red flower because / it reminds me of a woman's brain crushed under a roof' (ibid.: 71). The precision of the abject is juxtaposed against an ambiguous tension between the real and the unreal, marked by a series of absences—'a vanished bridge', 'no teahouse'—and the echoes of ghosts, such as corpses whose faces are memories etched 'into the water' (70).

These half-presences produce, as Dietrich notes, a 'paradoxical combination of silence and expression' (Dietrich 2010: 349), exposing an anxiety of witnessing in which the past is never fully captured or recovered; subsequently, both the 'living / and the dead' are left 'crying for help' (Forché 1994: 70). As both Adnan and Forché roam through and within geographic and spatial locations, temporal boundaries are shifted and erased to reveal landscapes populated by shadows and ghosts, figured as the memories, histories, and dreams of devastation. Certainly, for these poets, the human cannot be separated from the ecologies of non-human worlds, nor can the living be detached from the dead, as all are caught within a network in which self and other, *here* and *there*, collide. As Adnan writes:

> under our
> footsteps a ghost
> rises and instantly
> disappears
>
> (Adnan 2019: 121)

Conclusion: 'I'm dying / but the process is not that stunning'

In *Shifting the Silence*, Adnan describes history as a form of interconnection, as 'made of everything that has ever happened … humans … dirt and galaxies. You are History, the squirrel is History, the Universe is History' (Adnan 2020: 72). Whilst the image appears to be an encompassing, if not ecopoetic, vision of unity, it also presents an unnerving glimpse into the future, one defined in the past tense, and in which the 'whole trajectory' has simply disappeared; become, that is, historic. The effect, as Forché suggests in 'What Comes', is a persistent in-betweenness, an abiding uncertainty that is neither here nor there, hopeful nor condemning, but held in moments of 'the not-yet':

> to speak is not yet to have spoken,
> the not-yet of a white realm of nothing left
> neither itself nor another
> a no-longer already there, along with the arrival of what has been
> light and reverse of light
>
> (Forché 2021: 72)

By utilising the tropes of travel, marked by a crossing of borderlines and the liminal inhabitations that movement between places produces, Adnan and Forché examine the interrelationships between the human and non-human, what Gano defines as an 'interdependent mesh' (Gano

2020: 729), and in doing so, offer witness to the tragedies of a vanishing world. In the transitional spaces between home and away, past and present, the poets convey the dislocations of war, migration, and environmental devastation, via what Forché describes as the 'specular itinerary of exile' (1994: 43): through the vivid postcards of the traveller-poet, a global image of connection and detachment. In wandering across spatial and temporal geographies, Adnan and Forché thus associate with the 'clouds that pass and pass' (Forché 2021: 45). Such an identification emphasises the ephemeral, transactional nature of identity, yet also speaks to a profound sense of loss, both of the self and, riddled only with violence and ghosts, 'this civilisation as we know it' (Adnan 2020: 18).

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About the author

Alyson Miller is a prize-winning prose poet and academic who teaches writing and literature at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Her critical and creative work, which focuses on a literature of extremities, has appeared in both national and international publications, and includes three books of prose poetry, *Dream Animals*, *Pika-Don* and *Strange Creatures* as well as a critical monograph, *Haunted by Words: Scandalous Texts*, and an edited collection, *The Unfinished Atomic Bomb: Shadows and Reflections*.

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4 POEMS

Tony Kitt

LIMBOED

Tony Kitt

I move, I am the release clause
of a pea pod, a skylark, a planet.
If you call me the world, will you provide
a fitting cradle?

These non-existent “for no-one/for everyone” things:
a faucet of emotions, a window mist of yearning...
I could be a rain river,
I could be the jettisoned air.

Petrichor. Trepidations. The greener
the sleepwalker, the steeper the roof.
I’ve got no identification to write upon.
Don’t catacomb me here.

The mirror fogs the future us.
The time is now. The place is
placelessness. When I scream,
out comes a sea fret.

MOTHERLAND-IN-LAW

Tony Kitt

I discovered a judge in a journalist,
a jail in a journey.
Things are untheorised.
I am my motive, I use a borrow snail
to attain stealth.

My sophistry is sleeping in the rosary.
Welcome, my nineteenth objector!
Our fruit eyes picture the planet
as an ice globe, a melt.
Every pear has a pink heart.

Men who exist in written form;
a night wrapped in “what you are not.”
Which parts of your body are owned
by the department of nonsense and which ones
by the mind military?

Withering ideas linger
in the fear-brick kennel. No eyes
burrow through their fig leaves.
Do we need a dogma in a tall skirt
or a shot of sanity?

No one hedges us into being here.
History freezes our breath.
Lemongrass never says never.
Who will sing us
into the season of no season?

IN MID-AIR

Tony Kitt

I once stumbled across a man
dressed in information. He antennoed
his hands, as the trapdoor of space
opened for him. Nothing

but sparks of disinterest,
or disinfection of statistics.
What was mirrored in his irises?
In his zen-book?

He logged in to emptiness and watched
the circumstances fly by. He
followed them at his peril.
Away with the leprechauns!

In mid-air, frightened wing assistants realised
they had an Icarus on board.
An undocumented one.
They wouldn't be allowed to land. They began

rationing oxygen. The flying device
was called philosophy. Everybody
was asking his ozonised mind,
estne equus credibilis?

The moral machine entertained the passengers
with a quiz:
Is there a hunter fond of unhunting?
Is it so hard to believe in phlogiston?

Note

Estne equus credibilis? is a paraphrase of the line from Virgil (*Aeneid*, II. 48–49): *equo ne credite* (don't trust this horse).

NINETY YEARS A GROVE

Tony Kitt

Our articulate necks, our sap friendships...
It's ninety years since we cross-specied
into trees, ninety years
since the rooting out of movement.

First came bobtailed bonuses for staying put
during the national discharge. Then we
let out leaves to elevate oxygen levels.
Now they cut off our limbs for fire.

The parenthetical god, his
trial rabbits…
Why can't we make our future
incubatable and reusable?

We dare not speak of railways
or airports. We speak of fire ways,
instead of fairways.
Roads speak of the absence of dust.

Bulbul birds soil our hair; bush-baby drizzle
laments our dead buds.
The spiders who study the bark
can't cobweb our hollow heartbeat.

After ninety years, genetic memory
won't save us.
After ninety years, who can
resurrect a race?

About the author

Tony Kitt lives in Dublin, Ireland. His poetry chapbook, *The Magic Phlute*, has been published by SurVision Books (Dublin, Ireland) in 2019. His collection, *Endurable Infinity*, is forthcoming from Pittsburgh University Press in the Pitt Series. Another collection, *Sky Sailing*, is due from Salmon Poetry in Ireland. His poems also appear in such magazines as *Oxford Poetry*, *The North*, *Plume*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Prague Revue*, *Cyphers*, *Under the Radar*, *Shot Glass Journal* and *Stride*, as well as in a number of anthologies. In 2022 he edited the anthology entitled *Invasion: Ukrainian Poems about the War* for SurVision Books. In 2003 he won the Maria Edgeworth Poetry Prize.

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5 POEMS

Helen Ivory

THE COMMONPLACE

Helen Ivory

Look at the woman's walk to the post,
how she holds the parcel close
like a swaddling unable to settle.

You'll see her hands are parched
and notice a bleached tide at her hem
where the pigment has leached away.

If you float up high, you'll see her washing
almost dry now, in that fair wind
and the bundle has gone, her hands are bare.

Her shadow finds its way home
and you watch till the door declares itself shut.
It's time to look away now.

And then they'll say:
oh, that house; don't go to that house;
Mother Goose had a house
It stood in the wood
Where an owl at the door
As sentinel stood.

NIGHT HAG

Helen Ivory

It begins with a nightmare
that rides you
deep into the forest's yawn.

And the forest at first is all heart
with its mothering arms
and plentiful kindling.

Soon enough the trees will fall barren
and their branches claw through
the skin of your sleep.

When you wake gasping
she climbs from your chest,
complexion the tincture of liverwort.

The vial in her clasp
holds your stolen breath
and your body is dead as can be.

THE MAKINGS

Helen Ivory

There were sprits in the fire
shadows stood about,
livestock gone lame, fever
and that perpetual winter
that nearly finished us all.

On those grounds
we festooned a flesh and bones puppet
placed green wood all about—
thence the burning was slow
and we all warmed our hands.

The wails didn't matter
because she was not human
she was barely a *she*;
a barren nothing, a wraith
fused together by spite.

MARGARET JOHNSON

Helen Ivory

1633, Pendle Witch Trials

Days were moonless, drab
and I was a sack of bones
in my widow-house.

Seven years this went—
part-sombre, part-vexed,
wholly disremembering of the sun.

Then he came, all silk-garbed, all sleek furred—
and the promises!
it was as if he'd heard my prayers indeed.

He pricked my flesh
supped my slow blood till I quickened
and felt my spirit siphon into him.

Though I repent this transaction now
I had no prestige until the devil
lodged his shadow at my hearth.

Since this trouble hatched, he has forsaken me.
I cannot send my spirit out
to avenge those who need tormenting.

Yet history casts me out as *not a witch*—
if I was *not* a witch,
how did I meet the night's wings? how did I fly?

ELIZABETH TIBBOTS

Helen Ivory

1672, Stoneleigh

Time goes, people go;
their names and majesty
all sawdust swept
between flagstones.

Yet you call me
and three centuries dead
I'm up on two legs
in your room.

You might fancy
I walked these years
in the shape of a dog
in quest of an audience.

You've a hankering
to see how I vomit up
a pocket pistol,
a pair of pincers—

you'll want to examine
my throat for signs of violence,
my flesh for claw marks.
I'm here; let us make the most of it.

CONTEXTUAL STATEMENT

The Anatomical Venus (Bloodaxe, 2019) centres on the 'othering' of women through history. My current project, *How to Construct a Witch,* focuses this 'othering' on the witch, and the fears, appetites, and fantasies she embodies. The witch is traditionally a symbol of female persecution, and I am interested in how the witch identity has been forced onto women over the centuries and how some choose the witch identity as a form of empowerment.

Margaret Johnson, an impoverished widow came forward and confessed to being a witch in the Pendle Witch Trials, but was declared by the Bishop of Chester on the 15th June 1634 'not a witch'. I wanted to show a woman whose imagination is brought to life, a woman without agency who begins to summon her power, thwarted with the stroke of a pen by a man. The women found guilty were hanged. Imagine a world where you'd rather be hanged as a witch than live on in poverty, unseen. I cannot help but imagine.

I am likely the 'you' I was addressing as Elizabeth Tibbots. An online search will conjure up a long dead woman, who would have passed unnoticed were it not for the Pendle record. You read her story, are fascinated by how witnesses saw her vomit up sundry objects, and how this might ravage a body.

There is a wealth of historical sources and writings about the witch; of grotesque representations of the ageing female body mounted on broomsticks; of pointy hats sold at Halloween, and I have only just begun to pick my path through the woods. I should scatter some breadcrumbs, hope the birds are not hungry.

About the author

Helen Ivory is a poet and visual artist. Her fifth Bloodaxe collection is *The Anatomical Venus* (2019). She edits the webzine *Ink Sweat and Tears* and teaches creative writing online for the UEA/NCW. A book of mixed media poems, *Hear What the Moon Told Me*, is published by KFS, and a chapbook, *Maps of the Abandoned City* by SurVision. She has work translated into Polish, Ukrainian and Spanish as part of the Versopolis project. Her *New and Selected* is forthcoming from MadHat (US) and she is currently working on her next collection, *How to Construct a Witch*.

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WITH SAPPHO IN THE ANTIPATHIES

James Harpur

In this extract from my short unpublished travel book, *With Sappho in the Antipathies*, I describe my impressions of my first visit to Australia in 2017, a result of winning the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize, an award designed to bring Irish poets to Australia and vice versa. The narrative was inspired by Matsuo Bashō's classic *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2005), written in the form of *haibun*, a mixture of prose and haiku. I begin by experiencing a series of lazy negative stereotypes about Australia and Australians that the trip will dispel. The underlying theme—that our personal conditioning presents us with innumerable fears, prejudices or romanticised illusions about other people and the unknown that stop us seeing the world freshly every day—owes much to the works of Jiddu Krishnamurti, who once wrote:

> Why do you identify yourself with another, with a group, with a country? Why do you call yourself a Christian, a Hindu, a Buddhist, or why do you belong to one of the innumerable sects? Religiously and politically one identifies oneself with this or with that group through tradition or habit, through impulse, prejudice, imitation and laziness. (Krishnamurti 1985: 11-12)

This extract describes the start of 'one of the most memorable and enjoyable months' of my life.

WITH SAPPHO IN THE ANTIPATHIES

James Harpur

It was early on the morning of March the twenty-seventh that I took to the road. There was darkness lingering in the sky, and the moon was still visible, though gradually thinning away.
—*Matsuo Bashō,* The Narrow Road to the Deep North

Down, down, down … I wonder if I shall fall right through the earth! How funny it'll seem to come out among the people that walk with their heads downward! The Antipathies, I think … but I shall have to ask them what the name of the country is, you know. Please, Ma'am, is this New Zealand or Australia?
—*Lewis Carroll,* Alice in Wonderland

Take-off

I close my eyes and see the full moon hanging low in the pre-dawn sky over the packed terraced houses of Acton in the west of London. It has the same vanilla tinge as the street lamp glowing at the end of the road.

A sudden judder: the moon shatters and a seat-belt sign pings red.

A few hours' ago I was with my friend Eileen, creeping woozily from her flat at a sacrilegious hour in the morning, already feeling jet-lagged and heavy footed: the click of Eileen's front door lock felt as if it would wake the neighbourhood.

Now, as if it's suddenly realised how high it is above the clouds, the vast Airbus is trembling all over, as it glides like a spaceship to the Antipathies.

• • • • •

I cannot stop myself reflecting on the current conflict in the Middle East and whether over its airspace we'll be mistaken for a bomber and dealt with accordingly. After all, the Russians did shoot down a South Korean passenger plane in the early 1980s. I know this outcome is unlikely. But the fear resists all banishment.

I try to catch the eye of the man next to me. It would be nice to have a distracting chat about something anodyne like the weather or football. But he's hypnotised by a computer game. I swivel my eyes like a weird deep-ocean fish and see that his game involves firing missiles at an aircraft.

Airport farewell:
every hug a rehearsal
for the final take-off.

I take refuge in a crystal ball of memory: I see Cork airport in drizzle; I see the pub where I'd had my ritual send-off. A slouch of old friends around a table, having fun by preying on my fears. Ian is clutching the bridge of his nose, eyes screwed up: 'Australia! You must be mad. I can't think of a place on the planet I'd rather *not* visit. A friend of mine was in Australia, swimming in the sea, doing the breast-stroke, and a big blond Aussie swims up alongside him and says, *angrily*:

"Nah, nah, nah—that's not how a bloke swims, mate—breast-stroke is for Sheilas, you've gotta do the crawl, mate."'

Richard says: 'You'll take one step outside the city limits, *just one step*, and bang!—a boomerang will get you. Smack round the back of the neck. It only needs *one step*.' He demonstrates this by letting his head droop brokenly from his neck. I'm expecting a dry laugh, but his lips are set horizontally, razor-blade thin, and his eyes look up at me with the glitter of a Tarot reader who's just seen the Hanged Man.

Of course there's the usual dull hilarity over redbacks, crocodiles, cane toads, hurricanes, and brutish Australians asking me what the eff a poet is. Everyone thinks they can do an Australian accent.

Faye introduces a note of sobriety: 'Just remind me. Why exactly are you going?'

She knows I'm semi-phobic about flying. I hate travel and technology. I can't take sunshine, can barely swim, and I'm scared of spiders, and shy and introverted. I have perfect qualities for sitting in a room and writing poetry, and *never going out*; but not for flying to what my friends are depicting as a circle of the *Inferno* painted by Bosch, after a tooth extraction.

'I won the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize—named after one of Australia's finest modern poets. The money is to enable me to spend time in Australia.'

'To do what?'

'Write. Meet other poets. Foster cultural relations between Australia and Ireland.'

Everyone reacts as if I've told the best joke in the world.

• • • • •

The plane continues to shudder—or perhaps it's dead still and my soul is shuddering?

I reflect on what Eileen has said about Australia. She spent her youth in Adelaide—her family had arrived there from Glasgow on a 'ten-pound-Pom' ticket—but she left at the earliest opportunity. Broiling summers, lack of culture and endless materialism and suburbia were some of the reasons for her departure. But that was way back in the late Sixties. People change, countries evolve, *surely*? She said Melbourne was the best place to go to, followed by Sydney. Luckily, those are my two destinations.

It will be fine. Of course it will be fine. I don't have to interact with Australians if I don't want to—perhaps the odd poet and university administrator. The toads and spiders will be far too busy scaring the bejabbers out of folk in Queensland to bother me down south. It will be good. Plenty of time to write in solitude and sunshine. A Mediterranean climate and everyone speaking English and eating fish and chips. Perfick.

> What world is this—
> the clouds below my feet
> the setting sun rising?

The man next to me is still computer-fixated. I reach up to turn on my reading spotlight and hit the wrong button; an icy beam pinpoints his screen like a death ray, but nothing deflects him from shooting down aircraft. I am equally absorbed—about missing my connection in Dubai, as well as getting from Singapore airport to my hotel for one night. My left brain knows that

it's completely simple; my right one's having fun creating nightmare fantasies. The aeroplane to Singapore that has a dodgy engine. The taxi driver who's a Jihadist. The Melbourne customs officer who says my visa is invalid and I must go to a detention centre. O my kingdom for a pair of dream-catcher earrings, upgraded to ensnare anxieties.

• • • • •

I flick around the in-flight entertainment and find, improbably, a film about Emily Dickinson in Amherst. Emily must be the patron saint of non-travellers, and the conscience of all poets. Her poetry world was the antithesis of that of the modern poet, who must joust in tournaments of literary festivals, workshops, creative writing programmes, book launches, and so on. Emily wrote 1,800 poems and published about six of them during her lifetime. Her idea of a book tour was a stroll around her garden reciting to the marigolds.

The film shows her being intense, witty, acerbic—a virgin wearing white and married to the solitary life. She hardly sets foot outside her soothing Puritan bedroom, yet she leaves it daily in her imagination. How I wish I could swap places with her, at least for the next twenty hours. She said that poets should see the world 'slantwise', a way of perceiving that she shows in her quirky gnomic poems, some of which are used in the film as voice-overs.

> I reason, Earth is short –
> And Anguish – absolute –
> And many hurt,
> But, what of that?
>
> I reason, we could die –
> The best Vitality
> Cannot excel Decay,
> But, what of that?
>
> I reason, that in Heaven –
> Somehow, it will be even –
> Some new Equation, given –
> But, what of that?
>
> (Dickinson 1998: 427)

The film reminds me poetry is an affair of the soul, the imagination, the inner world, not of travelling to a continent of vast open spaces, blue skies and rolling waves. Australia may be ripe for painters and photographers, but surely not for poets?

Dubai is ascending towards us and we have escaped the missiles.

'But what of that?'

The plane suddenly tilts: a line of skyscrapers appears giddily at the window, and yes, they're slantwise!

> Dubai shimmers—
> a runway stretching
> the whole world over.

My sightseeing in Dubai consists of checking flight information.

I follow signs, go through security and stretch my legs along a corridor, past Arab men sailing along in voluminous white robes. Through vast polaroid windows I can see forty degrees of heat wobbling from the ground; skyscrapers and towers out of a futuristic Arabian Nights spike the horizon.

The departures lounge is filled with lugubrious be-suited souls—oil executives, engineers, quantity surveyors—not a Bermuda shirt among us; and we all behave as if we're in a doctor's waiting room, checking watches, letting out aggrieved sighs; or as if we are as still as corpses, and have an obol under our tongues.

It is strange being in the Middle East—a place I've always dreamed about—but not in it at the same time. Airports are like the colonial outposts of a huge amorphous empire that has no capital city. The governors are the airport CEOs, the civil service are the air traffic controllers and the security officers the police force. Each colony has shops, a bank, a chapel, entertainments and places to stroll, cafés and cleaners, and the language spoken is a TEFL English reminiscent of 'Newspeak', in which the word 'great' becomes 'plusgood', and splendid becomes 'doubleplusgood'. Every citizen seems to be affluent, and every citizen is homeless. Seven hours down, seven more to Singapore.

> Flight information:
> Oslo, Tokyo, Moscow—where else
> will I never visit?

Time to Sin

Another plane, another take-off, another prayer to St Christopher.

This time I soar to the south of France via a film about Emile Zola and his friend Cézanne. The action is set in and around Zola's house in the country, surrounded by sun-dappled olive groves, hills and streams.

Zola is depicted as a bit of an Emily Dickinson, inhabiting an interior world, conducting his life from a quiet book-lined study and supremely comfortable in his smoking jacket. Meanwhile the peppery Cézanne sets up his easel in various Arcadian glades and is driven to smash his canvases when his paintings fail to reach perfection. I remember his dictum: 'The day is coming when a single carrot, freshly observed, will set off a revolution.'

Later when I take the tin foil off the small container of my 'vegetarian option', an overcooked carrot winks at me.

Now we're travelling through the night and Father Time is performing a cunning sleight-of-hand.

> Time zones:
> Am I five hours younger?
> Or older?

The cramped seat, endless films and time-shift are working their subtle disorientation. I find a still point of the turning world in the kinetics of 'Flight Information' on my screen, updated by the minute. Facts and figures are as cosy as a hot water bottle. Miles travelled. Maps. More

detailed maps. The ETA in Singapore is regularly flashed up under the heading 'Time to SIN', like a neon billboard in the garden of Eden.

My eyes are full of sleep and my mind is fighting it. Part of my fear of flying is common sense—along the lines of how the medieval pilgrim Felix Fabri felt about ships. Fabri recalled the ancient traveller Anacharsis saying that 'Those who are at sea cannot be counted among either the living or the dead because they are only removed from death by the space of four fingers, four fingers being the thickness of the sides of a ship'. Flying requires suppressing the imagination, something I am trained to do the exact opposite of.

Another reason for my aerophobia is an irrational one, which occurred after I saw a documentary about a rock star who had taken drugs during a flight and described how he had felt himself floating away from the plane into outer space, but at the same time being able to see his body on the plane. Hence my dread that if I go to sleep, my soul will drift off into the vast night and watch my body as it's left behind on the plane. Everything can be solved by simply not going to sleep.

It's nine o'clock in the morning. Time has done another long-jump and Singapore's skyline has sprung up from a sea of morning light, like a pop-up book of modernist architecture. Soon: Time to SLEep.

• • • • •

I have become an extra in *Zombie Apocalypse* making my way through customs, security and, finally, to the entrance area of the airport. Beyond the air-conditioned lobby the great steamy mass of Singapore city is waiting to embrace me.

Baggage reclaim—
end-of-term boarder,
Mum last to arrive.

About the only thing I know about Singapore is Raffles Hotel, and the Second World War, when the British general Arthur Percival handed over the city to the Japanese, the largest surrender of British-led military personnel in history. I recall that in 1920 the brutally efficient Percival had been a young intelligence officer in the Essex Regiment in Ireland during the War of Independence. The regiment had been stationed in West Cork to root out the IRA and had even used my tiny village as a local operational centre, requisitioning the local Catholic primary school as an HQ. The very same school which was later turned into a house, and where I now live. *Percival might have slept in my bedroom*.

And I remember a village neighbour describing how her father had been one of many local men rounded up by the Essex soldiers and forced-marched to an internment camp. When her father became elderly, about the only thing he could remember was tramping down a local lane, hands on his head, and a British soldier saying to him incessantly in a whining voice, 'Give us a fag, Paddy. Give us a fag, Paddy'.

• • • • •

A taxi to my hotel would be quicker; but there is so much news about Islamic State at the moment and who knows whether the driver is a fanatic and next thing I'll be chained to a radiator? I opt for the hotel's tiny shuttle bus—at least I will have the silent intimacy of complete strangers.

The vehicle is a ten-seater and the driver is curt. When we're all crammed in, he lets out a heavy Sisyphean sigh, turns over the diesel engine into a deep-throated clucking and continues his day of eternal circuits.

• • • • •

I try to feel excited. For the first time ever I'm in—clash of gong—the *mystic east.* The road to Mandalay, pagodas! But everything is *uber*-occidental. Limousines, skyscrapers, suits, ties, summer dresses; it's like entering the humidity of a vast cosmic greenhouse and finding yourself in Frankfurt. I feel less intrigued, somehow, than when I was on holiday in Co. Laois as a child and saw an Otherworld of hedgerows, low hills, Norman ruins and drizzle on the whitethorns. Perhaps it's all to do with your age when you see something.

The airport road unzips
the tin light of Singapore—
where is the East?

We head for the centre and eventually chug past Raffles Hotel, an over-iced wedding-cake hemmed in by frantic roads. I'd been fantasising about having a 'Singapore Sling' in the bar at Raffles, as one does, but someone told me the hotel had been bought by a new owner, who was reserving the bar area for residents only.

Raffles:
riff-raff-
less.

As we motor along I keep thinking that at any moment Singapore must at some point become *oriental*; that we'll turn a corner and get hopelessly mired in street markets, rickshaws, chickens in cages, peasants wearing loose cotton clothes and sandals. My kingdom for a stereotype! Alack, the conditioned mind!

• • • • •

We head out west to my hotel, which turns out to be yet another rendering of muzak in vertical concrete.

The receptionist is a charming but over-fawning Indian lad, who keeps complimenting me on my hat, which is broad-brimmed and made of grey-green fabric. I had bought it, second-hand, in order to blend in with Australians. What he doesn't know is that ever since I purchased it I've been worried it will make me look foolish. It unnerves me when he keeps saying with a big smile: 'That's a fine hat you have there, sir. It's certainly a super-cool hat, sir. Oh, yes, super-cool.'

I crash out on my bed; my body is still maintaining my foetal aircraft-seat position, but now at least it's set horizontally.

After the flight
drifting to sleep—
the hotel taking off.

I wake up. The day-glow hands of my clock tell me it's 4 pm, but my body is adrift somewhere on the sea of midnight.

I venture out onto the streets of Singapore and realise what a clever trick the air-conditioning has been playing: it's more than thirty degrees and low grey clouds have sealed in the humidity.

The famous but cruelly named Orchard Road is flanked by giant hedgerows of modernist department stores selling delectable fruits of perfumes, shoes and handbags. The road is more of an inner-city highway, up to six lanes across, and stretches as far as the eye can see; huge crowds gather by traffic lights; the gents in jackets, the ladies in shorts, and almost everyone seems to be wearing glasses. A large young man waddles across the road and is so slowed up by his need to text while he walks that I fret the straining traffic lights will unleash a stampede of cars on him.

• • • • •

Out of the blue I feel giddy; perhaps the heat, density of buildings and people; perhaps the flights, the distance travelled, lack of sleep and change of time zones. I remember Sir Laurens van der Post citing the Kalahari Bushmen's notion that on long journeys the body has to pause to allow the soul to catch up.

I sit down on a bench and take a few polluted breaths, but my soul feels a long way away, as if it's still lingering in Clonakilty. Here I am a dot among five million people on a small island—equivalent to the population of Ireland being transported to the Isle of Man. I don't know a single person in the place; more to the point, there's nothing to make me feel at home spiritually, no crumbly old castle or ancient cemetery or medieval church. No building seems older than twenty years.

Because Singapore's population is a mishmash of Malays, Chinese, Thai and Indians, who all communicate with each other in English, there's a post-Babel atmosphere of people trying to find a common tongue. All the outward trappings of a Western city are present and correct, but bigger and more gleaming, while the roads and pavements are totalitarianly tidy.

I continue my dopey peregrinations, and my spirits lift feebly when I see tree-lined side-streets with lovely old names: Dublin Road, Exeter Road.

I choose Killiney Road—Killiney is a leafy district of outer Dublin—which has a line of low-key restaurants with tables under awnings.

I walk up and down, not daring to take the plunge. I'm easily put off by groups of locals tucking into rice and noodles, feeling that if I walked in they would all look round as one and stare at me, noodles dripping from half-open mouths like walrus fangs. But I'm also put off by the emptier establishments, with sleepy, hangdog fellas behind the counter.

I pass a Chinese café, which has a neon-lit menu advertising 'Claypot porridge with frogs legs'. This is accompanied by a helpful image showing a bowl of grey mess with little green legs sticking out of it. Next door is a Thai café with tinkling music; then another Chinese restaurant, which calls itself 'Jew Kit' for some reason—perhaps meaning it serves kosher Jewish food (Kit = Kitchen?). It refers to its 'Operating Hours'—perhaps it's a surgery in disguise, a vet amputating frogs for porridge?

I choose the Thai café and sit at a pavement table by myself. I do my checks: enough Singapore dollars; no hidden charges on the menu; vegetarian food. A waiter comes and I can't believe how smooth the process is. He speaks perfect English and has a friendly manner. I sit back and, for the first time in what seems an eternity, almost relax, or, more precisely, I don't quite not

relax. I feel pretty proud. Here I am in Singapore by myself, ordering food in a café. Surely this makes me—the person who gets anxious trying to find a parking spot in Clonakilty—a fully-fledged international traveller. Even the disjointed music is sounding pleasant and vaguely familiar. The notes begin to hit memory cells and yes, it's an infinitely baroque version of 'Bridge Over Troubled Water'.

As my food arrives the melody changes to 'Auld Lang Syne', a festive accompaniment to my mixed veg rice, two bottles of water, and mango and sticky rice for pudding. For my in-house meal entertainment—a habit I have acquired from watching aeroplane screens for fourteen hours—I gaze at the building opposite. It's the underground car park of Singapore Telecom. It seems pleasantly familiar and stable and reassuring. Then I notice that as each car arrives, two thin white-haired men dressed in grey emerge from the shadows like ghosts, wielding bomb detectors on the end of long metal rods. They sweep the bottoms of the cars for devices in a routine that has the compulsion of Russian roulette.

Singapore at night,
glitter-sweep of Orchard Road—
where's the Milky Way?

Next morning. I pull the curtain and my window's flooded by the grey bulk of the neighbouring hotel, only a handful of yards away; my window is like a sad square eye long accustomed to the prospect of creeping glaucoma.

I have an evening flight and therefore time to kill—if only I could catch the hours first. I decamp to the hotel's small swimming pool, that lies like a royal blue button below a tall grey suit. Even out of the sun it's too hot and dazzling to read. I lie on a lounger and bake in the oven of the shade.

Later, I retrieve my bags and hat from reception. The young Indian is there: 'We have taken good care of your hat, sir, your cool hat.' Still no irony, but he makes me anxious. Will I dare wear it in Australia? I need a hat. My hair is too thin, my skin too fair.

The taxi to the airport is courtesy of a driver who has one arm in a sling and seems to have developed in his other one compensatory joints and muscles to weave in and out of traffic lanes. Meanwhile, he rattles off Singaporean history and his experiences in Melbourne. 'You must go Victoria Market—so cute! You see central reservation in this road? Look solid, right?, with all the flower beds. But God, man, it's moveable. Why? Because the Air Force can roll it up and use road for an airstrip. See that sports stadium—retractable roof. *One Direction* play there, last year was it? God, man, my daughter says they're one cute band.' He drops me off and I shake his one good hand and give him one cute tip.

Singapore taximan:
one arm
two eyes
for all—
except
the swerving road.

At the airport I potter, muddle, fuss, sit for a while. I check, re-check my watch and saunter to the departures lounge, daydreaming.

Australia now seems disturbingly less unreal. In seven hours I will be looking down on the coastline I used to draw at primary school with the aid of a plastic template. I never really understood why lesson after lesson we had to study savannah grassland and merino sheep. Australia—the place we'd dig to on beach holidays; the land of Christmas turkey on the beach, barbies in the backyard, the land of the long white socks, streets thronging with tall smiley women and bronzed footie jocks wearing vests and swathes of tattoos. But also the land of my putative ancestor, Charles Harpur, known as the 'father of Australian poetry', and one of the first native-born white Australian poets. It's my hope I'll be able to get onto the Charles Harpur trail at some point.

> Australia everywhere—
> a croissant, a slice of soda bread
> after a Bight.

The departures lounge is unexpectedly empty. I must be far too early.

There's a thoughtfully placed water dispenser—I start filling my bottle when I hear a shout from the door: 'Hurry up sir, you're the last one on the plane!'

I look over my shoulder and can't see whom the official is talking to. I keep filling my bottle.

'You must go *NOW*, sir, the plane is ready for take-off!'

Still filling my bottle, I turn round and see him glaring at *me*, then I look at my watch. I never changed the flipping time! I shoot across the lounge and into a tunnel that's like a birth canal projecting me towards the door of the plane.

I plunge like some scrappy new-born thing into a blurry sea of wedged-in weary faces and feel a volley of a thousand eyes shooting me down. I mumble apologies to a Qantas hostess and her male colleague, both refreshingly in their fifties, with lived-in faces and a bit overweight and cheery, like an uncle and aunt. For my pains I receive my first indigenous 'No worries, sir', spoken with such genuine warmth I want them to adopt me as their son.

• • • • •

The flight takes place at night, but again we will do a sudden kangaroo jump into the morning.

The aircraft lights are dimmed and inklings of sleepiness insinuate themselves. I almost succumb, but jolt myself awake before my soul floats off—by recalling there are less than four inches of aircraft between me and oblivion.

I watch a film about Abraham Lincoln but cannot concentrate: what will Australia hold? I'll be house-sitting in Fitzroy, the arty quarter of Melbourne, in a place owned by two retired teachers, Yolande and David, whom I've never met before, themselves off to New York for three weeks. My one big duty is to look after their ancient cat, Sappho. Will she mew at me in dythrambs? Can I remember enough ancient Greek to respond in kind?

I picture a small house, a sunny backyard and a few weeks of writing and revising poems. I want to see a bit of the outback and Australian art; meet a poet or two. See a wallaby. And then a week in Sydney with an old university friend. 'Time to MEL' keeps being updated. Time to mellow, please God, time to mellow …

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About the author

James Harpur has published several books of poems, including his latest, *The Examined Life*, an odyssey through boarding school (Two Rivers Press, 2021). His debut novel is *The Pathless Country* (Cinnamon Press, 2021). He has won a number of prizes and awards, including the UK National Poetry Competition, and is a member of Aosdána, the Irish academy of the arts. He lives in the wilds of West Cork. www.jamesharpur.com

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3 POEMS

Hoyt Rogers

LEAVES

Hoyt Rogers

Voices, interrupting, intertwining with our own, broken off where the weather drives them down in tattered clouds, in helpless rain, in the uneven dispensations of the light.

Here, she whispers, with that kindness shadows mask, telling of the years when she wandered, the years of her imprisonment...

Our words are lifted for a moment, cresting like a wave: love itself, brief but unafraid, tilting in the dominant air.

We can never understand without a witness, she insists. We're too weak to see the truth.

Our features in the mirror turn and blur, clouded by the profiles of our past and future selves...

I'm twenty, I answer. Thirty... forty... fifty: it's written in my eyes. I want to read these final pages as they fade.

Our tales grow more forgiving, more forgetful as the meaning ebbs away from them, takes time with them.

The tree is alone with its branches. The leaves are alone with the wind.

REEF

Hoyt Rogers

1

Jagged scraps of iron, rusting on a sea where night, casually dropped, goes down to meet them: islands, from the airplane, quickly eclipsed.

But later—it seems years afterward—riding past the hills I couldn't see from above, the dim, tarnished bays glint like gunshot.

2

In the dark the sheets begin, the sails. Coils of rope sprawl calmly on the deck. Your arms are bound together in the knot that covers your face. Your body surrenders—willing, headless.

The canvas luffs, billows, veers... You toss me overboard into a vellum undertow... No motion in the air but dawn, though lines go taut around the mast.

The whale spout rises in an urgent, waveless sea.

3

Am I still that bashful child who wouldn't play? Drowsing on the latticed summer porch, I hid behind wooden blinds, cradled by viscous heat. Gray-green slats swayed to and fro; their flimsy shadows inched across the bed.

I can't surround you with my arms. Even while you dream, you're cautious of the burden.... Dawning, bold as the sun, you shake me off again, like sleep.

4

A goat trail crumbles into red along the hill. Words: a death that survives us under the skin of things, the landscape more than apparent.

I climb to the cliff where the fort stood. Cannonballs and hurricanes have thrashed its tabby ramparts to the nub.

Suddenly I'm walking on the fierce blankness of the sea—blue, at noon, another sky below the sky.

A boat fastens the horizon, rocking with the wide, white metric of its sails. The rhythm blinds me, turning me inside out, out further.

5

Below the fronds of mottled color, ochre-blue and bottle green, trunks of coral distend, patient and unmoved, in the necessary light—their ventricles and valves, though the tide pulls through them, hardened.

Here I relive the familiar, the invisible... waves, along the reef, that never reach a shore. They fracture on hidden walls, and the foam leaps in circles, lapsing, repeated.

In the distance, out to sea, there is nothing—nothing we have known can still occur. That is why the heart does not fail us.

TRANSIT

Hoyt Rogers

I follow humpbacks, their migration through the sea... starlings that swerve in patterns... billions of species now extinct.

The door swings wide, a lantern. My casual ghost speeds through grasses on low hills. Cicadas, crickets, their unobtrusive deaths.

Imagine if we were invented but outpaced—our chronicles, our fables swept away with us.

This tangle of knowledge, bloodshed, and desire, unraveling like a threadbare rag.

We dismantle our own machines, salvaging no parts—not even what we prized, the wrecked stillness of love.

The world recoils the more it advances, the more we cling to its crannies, to boulders as they heave and somersault.

The mind has also suffered—crushed by that avalanche, imperious as rock.

About the author

Hoyt Rogers is a writer and translator. He translates from the French, German, Italian, and Spanish. He has published many books; he has contributed poetry, fiction, essays, and translations to a wide variety of periodicals. His edition of Yves Bonnefoy's *Rome, 1630* received the 2021 Translation Prize of the French-American Foundation. His forthcoming works include a poetry collection, *Thresholds* (MadHat Press), the novel *Sailing to Noon* (book one of *The Caribbean Trilogy*), and a translation of Bonnefoy's *The Wandering Life* (Seagull Books). hoytrogers.com

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3 POEMS

Susana H. Case

SLAMMER

Susana H. Case

On the mountain footpath to Santa Caterina,
where we're going for lunch,

lingering, taking photographs of the lake, of volcanoes,
a man is slumped in a cracked adobe shack

the size of an outhouse
padlocked with metal bars on one side—the local jail.

Two hippie girls with backpacks
are not enough to cause him to lift his head. His shirt

and pants are frayed, as if he's been there a long time;
he has no shoes. This is before the luxury hotels,

second-home villas, even before right-wing death squads
kill the local priest, before slaughter of the Mayans,

hundreds *disappeared* across the water,
the Guatemalan Army opening fire on an unarmed

crowd. It's an indigenous language that slides
off his tongue as he mumbles to himself.

Through the bars, I hand him the hard
cherry-flavored candies from my backpack.

He's unwrapping one as we walk away.
We don't look back.

NIGHT, GUATEMALA CITY

Susana H. Case

Prostitutes line streets of the rich, *ambulantes*
outside fancy houses, walls around properties
topped with broken glass. It's where to find men
with money, not like La Línea, sex
sold in shacks by old railroad tracks
where even driving by to look is dangerous.
Babies are sold too, children selling children,
beholden to gangs. What can philosophy say
about adversity like this, really? Schopenhauer
thought suffering was inevitable, the nature of life,
life not worth living, that we should shelter
ourselves with art. We could be like my dogs,
heads hidden by blankets—each believes
itself protected. Oh, painting, how can art blanket
anyone? Prostitutes line canvases of impressionism—
dancing, drinking, resting. See Olympia reclining,
her face coarse, sallow, expressionless.

The marketplace is busy.
Everywhere, working women die destitute.

AT THE *POETS' CORNER,* PARIS

Susana H. Case

You grieve
at Jim Morrison's grave
in Père Lachaise,
graffiti-defaced site

with guard.
I, too, am like a deity
in your eyes.
You attribute perfection

to the undeserving.
I'm so tired of it,
feel like a stiletto
sticks out of my skin.

In my hands,
for when we later visit
Colette's bed-shaped stone,
a pot of violets quiver.

We shiver in the rain
and wind,
as if we were warm-
blooded fish.

From Pessoa, I pilfer
a question: are you in love
with the me that I am
or the me that you see?

About the author

Susana H Case has authored eight books of poetry and five chapbooks, most recently *The Damage Done* (Broadstone Books, 2022). *Dead Shark on the N Train* (Broadstone Books, 2020) won a Pinnacle Book Award for Best Poetry Book, a NYC Big Book Award Distinguished Favorite, and was a finalist for the Eric Hoffer Book Award. *The Scottish Café* (Slapering Hol Press) was re-released in a dual-language English-Polish version, *Kawiarnia Szkocka* by Opole University Press. She co-edited, with Margo Taft Stever, the anthology *I Wanna Be Loved by You: Poems on Marilyn Monroe* (Milk and Cake Press, 2022). www.susanahcase.com

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SERENDIPITY AND THE CURIOUS MIND

Case study of a poet travelling through history and place

Robyn Rowland

Honorary Fellow, Marmara University

Abstract

In *Wandering Poets in Ancient Greek Culture*, editors Richard Hunter and Ian Rutherford point out that in ancient times it was common that poets were travellers. It was their living, and as in old Ireland, their tasks were to relate story/history, criticise politics, and bring the foreign back home. Audiences travelled with them as they saw places and learned history through the eyes of the poet, experiences they might never have themselves. 'Good poets are the explorers of the world. Out on the frontiers, they send back bulletins', wrote Irish writer Eamon Grennan (1999: n.p.). Tools of the creative mind are curiosity, observation, courage, and a recognition of serendipity. Australian-Irish, living between two countries, in 2009 I read in Istanbul. Following that I was drawn through the old Ottoman Empire, connecting place and surprising fragments of history. *Mosaics from the Map* (2018) travels those pathways; *Under This Saffron Sun /Safran Güneşin Altında* (2019) explores the Turkey of today.

SERENDIPITY AND THE CURIOUS MIND

Robyn Rowland

In 2018 I asked the organisers of Lismore Travel Writing Festival, County Waterford, to consider poetry as a form of travel writing. They invited me to give a workshop, requesting another in 2019 with an evening address. I explored war, change, family and friendship, in poems set in Ireland, Turkey, the Balkans and Australia, through a fusion of slides, prose and readings.

I recognise that my work comes from a position of privileged travel, not movement forced by politics, necessity or economics, which Amanda Skamagka (2018) calls a 'special subgenre of travel poetry, narratives of melancholy, discomfort, bitterness and homesickness' (Skamagka 2018: n.p.). I focus here on those who intentionally travel, expanding and connecting their art with the 'other'.

Mine has been supported by my working, first in academia, then in poetry (festivals and workshops), and by travel grants (from the Copyright Agency Limited, Australia Council). Fortunate to follow a thread that keeps unwinding for me, I've read in countries as diverse as Italy, Bosnia, Serbia and India, and have been living between Ireland, Turkey and Australia for many years.

In many ways our recent travel has been hindered by tourism, by the ability of (too?) many to move around the world. Poets often have to find ways around the influx of cultural surface travellers, to reach into place, hidden history, culture and language of a country. A rare example of why and how contemporary poets travel, *Deep Travel: Contemporary American Poets Abroad* (ed. Sandra Meek 2007), covers landscapes from Antarctica to Zagreb, Italy to India and Iraq. Thirty-four poets introduce their poetry exploring a range of reasons: to find roots, to work, to return to a place of devastation or after war, to explore the intrigue of archaeological interests, or to explore languages and cultures.

Diane Thiel, widely travelled in Colombia, Germany, Greece and Russia, echoes my experiences, writing:

> I have always been deeply interested in politics and history made personal in poems … and have always travelled 'deeply', spending significant amounts of time in each place and being dramatically influenced by the culture, nature, language, politics, and personal relationships in each region. (in Meek 2007: 227, 228)

As a child, my curious and restive mother dragged us across Australia: from Tasmania to Cairns; to Lightening Ridge and Broken Hill. In 1978 I moved to Waikato University, New Zealand. A single parent, in 1995 I bought a camper van and unwittingly followed my mother's habit by dragging my young sons across Australia, this time into the centre.

In my academic life, until 1996 (before breast cancer, and burnout), I had moved between England, the US and Canada, but my own 'deep travelling' has been undertaken since 2000. Invited to speak in Portugal at a conference on The Human Condition 2000, with leading researchers in genetics and reproductive technology critiques, I became enlivened again by interconnections. There, inside a cork and olive tree forest, I encountered the largest standing stone circle with intact Ogham I'd ever seen. There I learned about links between countries that history has been casual about.

I'd travelled to Ireland every year since 1983, working as a feminist social scientist and a poet. In 1999, on a poetry excursion with readings, I took my father and my two sons for six weeks. Traveling with my sons continued until the first turned 16 and left the wagon train; the other followed suit after our last journey together to Turkey in 2009. I lived between rental houses on the Atlantic in west Ireland and Victoria. Since 2009 I've found a further 'home' in Turkey, resulting in two bi-lingual books, and I've travelled solo, deeper and deeper into difference, linked history, culture, and language.

Ireland, in particular, enabled me to re-find my own history, to find myself inside that land. That was travel for belonging; a sense of family continuity; to find a fit, a home-ness. But the curious mind breeds restlessness, a need to experience cultures, histories, differences and similarities, to enter new landscapes, to experience the serendipity of unexpected meetings. Basho experienced 'home' as the road in the 17th century. His unsettledness drove him forward/outward: 'The gods seemed to have possessed my soul and turned it inside out and roadside images seemed to invite me from every corner, so that it was impossible for me to stay idle at home' (Basho 1966: 97).

Traveling enabled an unforeseen change and growth in my poetry, away from the personal, narrative lyric. I had begun what I call Documentary Narrative poetry with poems on the Japanese kamikaze in *Seasons of Doubt and Burning* (2010). But this developed in Turkey, resulting in 'history poetry': my bi-lingual *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915* (2015) sponsored by the municipality of Çanakkale, published in both Turkey and Australia, with Turkish translations by Dr Mehmet Ali Çelikel. I found, as did Garrett Hongo in Japan following Basho's path, that travel deepens 'one's humanity, one's connection to history and the unconsidered histories of other peoples as well as one's own' (Meek 2007: 99).

Later, in *Mosaics from the Map* (2018), I explored ways in which histories intersect, making history intimate, drawing links through personal stories of war, change, family and friendship, in Ireland, Turkey, the Balkans and elsewhere. History, I found, is an interconnected mosaic. For example, the poems touch on Cork, the city from which my family emigrated to Australia, and where an Ottoman Armenian created Hadji Bey's Turkish Delight in 1902, caught between empires, Ottoman and British, and the Irish War of Independence. Poems on Sarajevo, flowering after a brutal Balkan war in the 1990s, canvas a war waged to 'take revenge for the Turks' centuries earlier. Alcock and Brown first flew across the Atlantic to Clifden in 1919, landing at the end of the track where I lived, having served time in POW camps, Alcock in Turkey after he bombed Constantinople in 1917.

In 'Salt Mosaics: Note in Vienna', the first poem in *Mosaics from the Map* (2018), I strove to conceptualise history as a constantly moving cartography, using a tidal form:

> History is a wave washing back and forth across maps, dragging empires
> behind, trailing haphazard shapes. It leaves salt mosaics.
> Time is synonymous with itself – a point, a circular
> continuum, a series of parallel links, so histories
> co-exist. Story survives through time.
> Feelings, friendships, grief, all our
> leavings.
> Tides wash into Viennese museums – tiny Venus of Willendorf, bulging belly,

25000 years old; Ephesus Aphrodite, headdress of white marbled bees,
AD 50; Jews here from Spain, from Isabella's 'cleansing', always
struggling with tolerance, intolerance. History is sometimes
a mirror, still as a reflection of Belvedere Palace
in its lake, those female
sphinx
beside, firm-breasted allure. Vienna, heavy with structure, its grace in Klimt's
pressed gold, Vermeer's light coming in through the window. Murano
chandelier in Demel café, coffee taken from the Ottomans, 1683,
paper-thin smoked salmon, orange-bright Russian caviar,
cakes of poppyseed, crushed walnuts, plum and
apple. Take a place, any place;
thread
it into a frieze. This Jewish quarter with the *Nameless Library* memorial,
concrete block of books, camp names engraved. So many cities, so
many memorials. Repetition. History is repetition, connection,
ravelled braids, webs of Irish lace, Ottoman inlay,
Greek meander, spirals, sailors' knots,
twisted thread, linked, often
frayed.

Poet Susan Rich has travelled Niger, Israel/Palestine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, resulting in an engaging metaphor of poet as cartographer:

> The act of mapping seems right to me in terms of exploration: the poet's and the adventurer's. The process is ongoing: the constant questioning of which road or line break to turn on and which one to privilege or revise altogether. The daily accidents that bring the poet, the traveler, into unexplored territory may offer new experiences that knock us off balance, literally and figuratively, so that we no longer know who we are or where we stand. The poet-traveler rearranges the geological terrain with her own nomadic coordinates. (Meek 2007:175)

Poets often write *about* journeying itself as experience. 'No image for the process of composing or enacting a poem is as common as that of a journey', write Richard Hunter and Ian Rutherford, in their book *Wandering Poets In Ancient Greek Culture* (2009: 7). And the purpose of journey is also an exploration into ourselves; about growing. It's a consistent theme in myth and also in the words of spiritual poets.

A favourite is Cafavy's 'Ithaka', translated here by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard:

As you set out for Ithaka
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
…
Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you are destined for.
But do not hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,

so you are old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you have gained on the way …

(Cafavy 1975: 36-37)

But to write *out of* journeying is different: travel for the purpose of 'knowing', understanding, finding the treasures of difference or commonality, being inspired to write, to bring it to others. I've found a common humanity, a deep kindness in people. It's enabled me to experience *being* foreign, and from there to 'see the other side'. For example, in 'The Other Side of Things' I narrate the story of Alcock's bombing of Istanbul from the eyewitness account of Irfan Orga, aged nine, which I'd read in his autobiography, *Portrait of a Turkish Family* (1950).

I feel a pull to experience 'awe', which becomes a compulsion: to stand at the top of Mount Nemrut among those giant heads, the work of thousands of invisible hands. Astonishing. I've danced with the Roma in Edirne, West Turkey, seen the great 16th century Turkish mosques of Mimar Sinan who lived a hundred years, sat in Newgrange Ireland built before the Great Pyramids and wandered around the Taj Mahal. Each experience filled me with an overwhelming sense of wonder and a deep joy; the majesty of history and building. It seeps into both my self and my work.

Traveling solo and with immersion necessitates communication through a quick learning of phrases, and a struggle to fit the tongue around the different shapes of new words. Without the chatter of English, my senses are more alert. I feel more open, less afraid. Barbara Hambyr uses Zen Buddhism's idea of 'beginners mind': 'travel gives me a kind of poetic beginners mind, especially in a country where I don't speak the language' (Meek 2007: 89). Being confronted by a foreign language puts us in a position of 'being a displaced person, a state that tends to call our familiar and comfortable set of values and assumptions into question' (41).

Hambyr writes in her poem 'Lost in Translation':

Traveling into each new lexicon
is to inhabit a new country,
map its pathways into the mind

Every language a labyrinth, weaving
more than words, but a cultural Psyche
sorting the grains in the syntax.

(in Meek 2007: 232)

To wander inside language difference can be a release. For example, on a Turkish bus, not knowing the language is less stressful than hearing talk about the brother-in-law's drinking problem on the way to Dublin. They could be saying anything. It becomes a kind of travel music:

I feel bonded to their journey, cocooned
in the soft rumble of Turkish voices

(Rowland 2019: 104)

In the Australian poetry my father recited, I learned that words sing. Some foreign tongues do this for me too, especially Irish and Turkish. I found those words entering my poems as companions to my English. I became so immersed in Turkish that I felt suddenly a sparsity in English for some experiences, such as love. Macaronic lines emerged comfortably in my work,

both in Irish and Turkish. This led to some complications when translating into Turkish, as the words could not just be repeated in Turkish side by side; my translator Mehmet Ali Çelikel (2020) has written of these issues and our discussions. The following extract from 'Different ways with love' offers an example of the original:

> That love is clear — soul friends. In Irish, *anam cara*, in Turkish,
> *ruh ikizleri*? Deep friendship, *derin dostlar*, long-loving.
> Not the love that tears flesh from your bones,
> so without the desired one, fires inside never quench,
> self melted into the other, all hope after their death gone.
> *Tutku*. Passion. Cruel love. Once in a lifetime, no more.
>
> This new feeling in the long-numb heart makes the aging body sing,
> alive again in its well-worn carapace. *Sevda*, love with some kind of
> sadness in it? Perhaps. *Hayran*, admiration for his youth, language of smiles,
> the beauty of his voice reading aloud my poems, your translation,
> his eyes burnt-umber, tear-wet? Perhaps *gerçek aşk*, true loving,
> when we have learned to leave the other be, asking nothing in return.
>
> (Rowland 2019: 102)

I had difficulty finding publishers for both bi-lingual books. I felt strongly that with *This Intimate War* the poems belong to both Turkish and English speakers; just as the soldiers faced each other across the trenches, so does language page by page, bi-lingually. In *Under This Saffron Sun*, I felt too that those poems are an integral part of Turkey.

Interestingly, being where we are not known we can redefine ourselves, mask, remake ourselves; even re-find ourselves. I like to walk through a world of strangers; to disappear inside difference and become invisible, which can introduce a new kind of freedom.

In 'Venice', struggling for space under the duress of travelling alone with children, I wrote:

> Masks are hanging from the walls
> crowding windows of small shops
> in the market off *Canale di Cannaregio*.
> Silver and peacock-blue, raven-black and scarlet,
> their shape-shifting visages await the gift of sight
> we alone can position there.
> Here is the place to lose myself.
> One step inside this face of gold: all children left behind, all worries,
> and the dent of daily life in the goblet of fancy evades recognition
> along with the name, the obligation of returning.
> Sheathed with disguise, it is free.
> I could do anything here.
>
> (Rowland 2006: 15)

Anne Marie Micari writes: 'something of me is erased, some boundary, and I can step out of myself. That is one of the great joys and even addictions of travel' (Meek 2007: 160). Rilke captured it so well:

> To travel far, far – and that first morning's awakening under a new sky! And to find oneself in it – no, to discover more of oneself there. To experience there, too, where one has never been before, one's own continuity of being and, at the same time, to feel that something in your heart, somehow indigenous to this new land, is coming to life from the moment of your arrival. You feel your blood infused with some new intelligence, wondrously nourished by things you had no way of knowing. (Rilke 1923: 321)

Serendipity: Entering Turkey …

Everywhere serendipitous meetings set me ablaze and draw me on. I was in Turkey first in 2009, urged by my Turkish sister-in-law, with whom I shared a love of archaeology and ancient history. In Istanbul my son and I visited the major sites, but also the Islamic Arts and Craft Museum, an astonishing historical collection of all art forms. I was captivated there by superb writing equipment for calligraphy from the 16th century, which has led to many poems.

The Australian Embassy arranged for me to read in an Istanbul festival. Poets were grouped in different hotels. Ours was The Titanic! In my group were a Russian, a Palestinian, a Lebanese poet living in Vienna, her English husband and a couple from Bosnia.

The more I learned, the more I was captured by Turkey, particularly the period of Suleiman Kanuni, and the great architect Mimar Sinan, who lived to be 100 under four Sultans. He built the skyline of Istanbul we know today as well as hundreds of bridges, mosques, türbe, hamams and hospitals, over 300 of which remain throughout a number of countries. Here is a flavour in my saga poem, 'Say, *Istanbul*', after *The Saga of Istanbul* by Bedri Ramhi Eyüboğlu (1913-75) in *Under This Saffron Sun*:

> Say *history* and hear names reach out from before and after
> Christ – Greek, Persian, Roman, Turk. See a city crushed
> and risen, crushed and risen, crushed and risen, her library
> burnt, her gold stripped and stolen, walls strong and breached.
> Here arts flourishing in the 'golden age' left their legacy –
> illuminated books, calligraphy, Iznik pottery, tiles, poetry,
> hand-woven carpets that gathered their threads along the Silk Road.
> A city so large it stands astride Europe and Asia.
> A city of so much waterside it shivers at the cold Black Sea
> in the north, glides along the Bosphorus, Golden Horn and
> Sea of Marmara, its boats under a crescent moon heading
> into the blue Aegean, into the warm south over Mediterranean ruins.
>
> …
> City of Emperor and slave, Sultan and janissary,
> city of mosque, church and synagogue, of fisherman and girls at study.
> Headscarf or unveiled face in the sun, the street accommodates both.
> Not just a city for the young, old sunning themselves in gardens
> brimful of rose and hyacinth. Men entwine their arms with men,
> women laugh with women, children delight in ice cream.
> Skyline of dome and minaret, seven hills of the Second Rome,
> mythic city, imagined, unwearied, curious for the yet

> undiscovered, it never tires of its load of people, past and
> passing, and to come. In a city too old to remember all its names,
> say *Constantinople*. Say, *Byzantium*. Wisps of the ethereal nostalgic.
> Say, *Istanbul*. Worship, and dream.
>
> (Rowland 2019: 24, 26)

Six months later, I was invited to Sarajevo Poetry Days in Bosnia; a different education. I arrived early to see as much of the history of the city as possible. To my surprise, parts of the city were like a smaller Istanbul. With my translator, I visited the Jewish museum and synagogue, the mosques and churches, Ottoman housing, the 1990s war graves filling the Olympic stadium and every available park; and the tunnel under the airport through which people, including my poet friend Hadźem, crawled in and out of Sarajevo during the four-year siege in order to get food for their families.

The organisers took us into Bosnian villages and countryside. I was fortunate to go to Mostar. Here was the work of Mimar Hayruddin, a student of Sinan who designed the beautiful Stari Most bridge over the river Neretva. From 1557 it took nine years to build and the technical details still remain a mystery. It connects both sides of the town. Traveller Evliya Çelebi wrote in the 17th century that the bridge

> is like a rainbow arch soaring up to the skies, extending from one cliff to the other. ... I, a poor and miserable slave of God, have passed through 16 countries, but I have never seen such a high bridge. It is thrown from rock to rock as high as the sky. (in Dankoff and Kim 2010: 215)

I started to write the poems about that war in 2010 and finished them in 2018, published in *Mosaics from the Map*.

In Istanbul I had met Hanane Ad from Lebanon, who invited me to Vienna. Arriving there next, I saw the imprint of that other Empire which dominated Sarajevo. Large and impressive buildings declared power. The archaeological museum housed the collection of many finds from Ephesus in Turkey, Austrian archaeologists being a major partner in that dig.

Physically, emotionally and unconsciously those experiences of the remnants of empire and war were to inform a great deal of my writing and my research thereafter.

Before that work was complete though, I had to find a balance, as I'd felt quite anti-Serbian. By 'chance', on a return flight to Ireland, I sat next to Zoran and his son, 21, returning to see family in Serbia. His son spoke of the prejudice he'd found studying at Melbourne University. Hesitantly, I spoke of my mystification at the violence of the war that could turn neighbours into murderers. Zoran told me the hatred came down 'with mothers milk' and a story which helped me to understand—as explanation, not as excuse.

> In starlight it could have been a mountain of dented orbs,
> or a pile of moons, making faces from man-in-the-moon
> shadows – eyes, mouth, nose. But it was the Tower of Skulls.
> The Ottomans built it from the skinned heads of near a thousand
> Serbian soldiers as they rebelled against their vassal state in 1809.
> Hollow-eyed, voiceless, they stood as a warning, breathless bone
> on the roadside to Constantinople. Effective. Offensive.
>
> from 'The Skull Tower of Niš' (Rowland 2018: 54)

I also looked for evidence of resistance, as there is to every war. I found it in the number of soldiers who deserted and in a group of women demonstrating daily:

> They won't do it, the Mothers for Peace,
> standing solid as scarred stone in the city centre
> chanting for the war to end, their sons to be returned.
> ….
> Unions hold strikes against increasing shortages, job loss.
> Women in Black stand weekly vigil in the Republic Square,
> silent and cauled. Or they lie in a circle, feet to the centre,
> spokes of a stilled wheel ringed by white daisies
> their hearts the size of black suns.
>
> Colour will die on them as the sons of too many states
> are mauled by the creature of religious certainty.
> Each year for seven years, they appear
> with banners and posters stridently raging
> 'Not in our name' and 'Pamtimo' – Remember.
>
> from 'Resistance, Always' (Rowland 2018: 49)

In 2013 I was invited by the Australian consul in Çanakkale to the Australian-Turkish Cultural Centre at the university. I taught workshops, gave a lecture and through staff met my friend and translator, Mehmet Ali Çelikel, then Professor and Head of the department of English language and Literature at Pamukkale University.

From that time onward I was involved with the consulate and in 2015 published *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915* – **İçli** *Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915* (2015). The local council sponsored publication of the book in both Australia and Turkey.

Many serendipitous meetings fed this book. For example, when we spoke of my research, Aykut, the young manager of my hotel, brought me a book of photographs the local council once printed. One in particular stuck deep. A group of Turkish child soldiers aged about 12 were marching to war. One looked remarkably like my younger son. It was a shock to research and discover that every country had them. 'Children of Gallipoli' emerged from that. Invited to read at O'Bheal Winter Warmer festival in Cork, I read that poem and a young man in the audience, Finn, said he'd connect me with his father Alastair McCleod on Orkney, whose uncles had both served at Gallipoli, and so 'The Shattering' was born.

Both edition covers have paintings by Fehmi Korkut Ulüg. On my second visit to Çanakkale Naval Museum, I saw his series on the war, stunned by the empathy with all sides. It took four months to make contact, and hear his own story. This led to my sequence on painters, 'Ways of Seeing', poems on Ulüg's series, Nolan's series, which I'd seen by chance in Geelong, and Major Hore's work painted at Gallipoli.

During those years 2009 to 2019, I was pulled by a silken thread through the old Ottoman Empire, seeing the incredible complexity of that history, art, culture and politics, as well as the modern world which has grown from it. I learned about an Islamic culture up close. Tina Barr, writing of Cairo, echoes my feelings about Turkey:

> my fascination grew unconsciously, and I wrote out of an interest in difference, in the layering of occupation cultures in Cairo evidenced by the buildings, the decorative arts … beauty of visual patterning, an aspect that exists in ancient cultures but not my own country, in my awareness of the attendance to religious devotion, I found a deep sense of contentment. (Meek 2007: 27)

Maya Angelou has spoken of 'the necessity to travel' as a way of breaking down barriers, for Americans to experience cultures other than their own:

> being exposed to the existence of other languages increases the perception that the world is populated by people who not only speak differently from oneself but whose cultures and philosophies are other than one's own… Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try to understand each other, we may even become friends. (Angelou 1993: 12)

In my own early years in Turkey, I was shocked to experience myself as 'the enemy' for the first time, in the Naval Museum in Çannakale. Though a well balanced representation of WW1 and Gallipoli, each plaque, each exhibit of letters from allies, named Australians as 'the enemy'. Of course. I'd already begun my investigations into the experiences of Turkish people during the war, but this struck. The astonishing acceptance and forgiveness the Turks expressed towards their enemies left me shamefaced. Irish citizenship later enabled me to name myself as *Irlander* there rather than being labelled as 'Anzac'. (Ironically, at the same time in Ireland, it was hard to escape the label of 'blow-in', which people there for generations still carry.)

It's not new ...

Though little is written about modern traveling poets, historically we know from ancient Greece, India, from European middle and earlier ages, that poets were often attached to courts or patrons. Often their task was to praise but also criticise those in power. Hunter and Rutherford (2009) write of the reasons for poets wandering in Ancient Greece and many of these are still apt. Their task was often to recount/refind the history of a place; to include the myths, history, people of that place. These '*poeti vaganti*/wandering poets' were often commissioned but also roamed for work/income and for recognition. I was particularly interested in the women poets traveling in the Hellenic period, as poetry as a profession was most often practised by men. Often they were rewarded with 'decrees'; for example, Aristodama in the third century BC was awarded citizenship, lands, safety of travel, and income for life for herself, her children and brother. From Smyrna she was awarded the Lamian Decree for recounting 'the race of the Aetolians'.

More attention has been given to 'place' in poets' works than travel: the way they bring to life the place they inhabit, perhaps call home. Issues of 'place' are rooted in questions of where best to fulfil a poet's creativity. Is it served by home locale, by rootedness in particular landscapes, city, country or otherwise? That creativity may be continuous through our writing lives, or might change as we ourselves age. My own poems I think 'enter' landscape. But my relationship to various places has changed over the decades. For example, living in New Zealand I wrote of Australia in 1979, 'I need that dry brown country like a fix' (1982: 68); yet on retuning to Australia from Ireland, 'everything's turning to dust here Grace' (2004). The multitude of poems on Ireland as 'home' similarly reflect change (2010; 2018). In *Under This Saffron Sun* (2019), Turkey pulls me into a 'home-ness' there on Bozcaada. [2]

To stay then or to go … is creativity best served here or there?

Neal Alexander (2014) summarises differing attitudes to 'place' as the situation for creativity, contrasting Seamus Heaney's approach to that of Jo Shapcott. For Heaney, he concludes that

> place is most often the first place of home and provides a steady anchorage in the world, offering not just a context for the poetic imagination but also emotional sustenance … place provides an essential grounding for the poetic sensibility, and it is to 'the stable element, the land itself, that we must look for continuity. (Alexander 2014: 5)

Indeed, reading Heaney's Richard Ellman Lectures (1989), his discussion of Yeats and his construction of his Tower, clarifies that a poet might write up a place (for example in John Montague's work), or, write a place into being, as Yeats did with Thoor Ballylee.

Jo Shapcott, by contrast, attends 'instead to the exilic example of Elizabeth Bishop' and 'how to be a different kind of writer, for whom place and language are less certain, and for whom shifting territories are the norm' (Alexander 2014: 17). Bishop's work grew out of constantly moving in her childhood. Her work repeatedly asks the question, 'what if we don't go'. She sought the newness of change with a kind of restlessness I find familiar.

> Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
> Where should we be today?
> …
> What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life
> in our bodies, we are determined to rush
> to see the sun the other way around?
> The tiniest green hummingbird in the world?
> To stare at some inexplicable old stonework,
> inexplicable and impenetrable,
> at any view,
> instantly seen and always, always delightful?
>
> … But surely it would have been a pity
> not to have seen the trees along this road,
> really exaggerated in their beauty,
> not to have seen them gesturing
> like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.
>
> (Bishop 1965: 15)

Often being 'here' also clarifies 'there'. Northern Irish poet Sinéad Morrissey writes of a clarity born of confronting herself in a country where she knew no language: Japan. 'Good poems come out of tensions; and by travelling you are deliberately putting yourself into a situation where there's a tension between the new and the old, where you are and where you've come from' (Morrissey, quoted in Delap 2003: n.p.).

There are some who argue that poetry itself is travel. The reader is transported inside poetic language; and because poetry changes ordinary speech it is possible to think of a poem as a

'travel experience'. Alfred Corn (Meek 2007) draws similarities between entering a country with a 'foreign' language and entering a poem.

Billy Collins discussed this in an interview on 'The Poetry of Travel' after his poetry was included in air listening for Delta Airlines.

> Poetry for me is a kind of travel writing—travel writing of the highest order because it provides not only a change of scenery, but a change of consciousness. The poem's music and its rhythms combine to form the sound track to these mental excursions which carry us in two directions at once: out into the world and back into ourselves, for we read poetry not so much to discover who the poet is as to discover who we are. (Collins 2005: n.p.)

Because I aim for authenticity in my poems, I feel the need to enter the experience or place I'm writing about. 'To write about a place, its dust has to silk my feet and toes' writes Anne Marie Micari (in Meek 2007: 161). I have the need to see it, smell it, taste it, watch the people as they move, meet strangers, notice colour, use all my senses in that place. I find that seeing things I don't understand makes me alert and open. At many levels I want boundaries moving—between me and object, me and place—yet at the same time connection. Rilke was convinced of this:

> For poems are not, as people think, simply emotions (one has emotions early enough) – they are experiences. For the sake of a single poem, you must see many cities, many people and Things, you must understand animals, must feel how birds fly, and know the gesture which small flowers make when they open in the morning.
>
> You must be able to think back to streets in unknown neighbourhoods, to unexpected encounters, and to partings you had long seen coming … And it is not yet enough to have memories. You must be able to forget them when they are many, and you must have the immense patience to wait until they return. For the memories themselves are not important. Only when they have changed into our very blood, into glance and gesture, and are nameless, no longer to be distinguished from ourselves – only then can it happen that in some very rare hour the first word of a poem arises in their midst and goes forth from them. (Rilke 2013: 111)

Modern travelling poets

Modern traveling poets are not in the tradition of the great travel writers such as Ibn Butta, the spiritual journeying of Lao Tzu, or the recorders of geography and culture such as Elivya Çelebi. Travel today is far removed from the great adventures of risk in earlier centuries, undertaken by women such as Gertrude Bell (1898-1926)—adventurer and scholar, taking off across Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, the Ottoman Empire; creating ten new paths into the Swiss Alps and climbing Mont Blanc; translating Hafiz in 1897—or Margaret Mee (1909-988), botanical artist travelling up the Amazon on fifteen expeditions, often alone, to find and paint rare flowers and plants. But we modern *poeti vaganti* have some characteristics in common with those past: travelling to earn, to investigate, to experience, to give witness to things otherwise hidden.

Curiosity is, I think, a hallmark of the traveling poet: a desire to understand difference; to meet the unusual. Curiosity involves an openness to life, an ability to say, 'yes!'—for example, to dancing with the gypsies in Edirne in my poem 'Say, *Yes*!'. It allows an often thrilling serendipity. The Meriam-Webster dictionary tells us the first noted use of 'serendipity' in English was by Horace

Walpole in 1754. Walpole explained to his friend Horace Mann that he'd read a Persian fairy tale, *The Three Princes of Serendip*. The princes, he told his correspondent, were 'always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of'.

I have met two poets who were active in the military: Brian Turner in the US and Michael J Whelan in the Irish Peace Corps. Both write visceral and shocking poems about war from inside the experience (Turner 2005, 2010; Whelan 2016, 2019). Yet when Turner was awarded the Amy Lowell Poetry Travelling Scholarship in 2009, he wrote in 'Wonders of the World':

> As with life itself, I offer this proviso: though I may think the day ahead will hold a certain possibility, that day—once it arrives—may hold something entirely different. And that's exactly why I love to travel in the first place. Ancient mountain top monasteries. Dusty elephant trails. Mt. Kilimanjaro melting in the late afternoon sun. The Pillars of Hercules. Who can say what tomorrow will bring. (Turner 2009: n.p.)

The ache of the Covid prison

In December 2019 I returned to Australia, intending to live in Turkey in 2020, but my healthy father at 100 had started to tire. For over two years, cut off from my usual life by a Covid/Carer serendipity, I have missed friends in many countries, the ease of traveling relatively safely, the newness of cultures and the salve to my restlessness. But I am also grateful. Like Charles Wright, I feel that through travel, I've had

> a cultural and intellectual reformation that never stopped … All subsequent stays (and there have been many over the years) were just to drink from the original waters and to be whole again … Without travel, I wouldn't be who I am, have had the life I had, or would not have tried to write what I have been fortunate enough to have written. (in Meek 2007: 260)

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About the author

Robyn Rowland was living in Ireland and Turkey until late 2019. She is currently an Honorary Fellow of the Department of English Literature at Marmara University, Turkey. She has 11 poetry books, most recently *Under This Saffron Sun /Safran Güneşin Altında*, (Knocknarone Press, 2019) and *This Intimate War: Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915* (FIP, 2015), with Turkish translations by Mehmet Ali Çelikel. *Mosaics from the Map* was from Doire Press, Ireland, 2018. Robyn's *Seasons of Doubt & Burning: New & Selected Poems* (FIP, 2010) represents over 40 years of publishing. Her poetry appears in national/international journals in eight countries, over 45 anthologies, and eight editions of *Best Australian Poems*. She has read in India, Portugal, Ireland, UK, USA, Greece, Austria, Bosnia, Serbia, Turkey and Italy, and is published in translation. She is filmed reading for National Irish Poetry Reading Archive, James Joyce Library, UCD, on YouTube. https://robynrowland.com/

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3 POEMS

Indran Amirthanayagam

KONPA CLOCK

Indran Amirthanayagam

The clock strikes once, twice, thrice when the children
are home, when Mother is walking strong, when poetry
flows like water from the falls, dappled in sunlight,
fish leaping forth in the froth, and no angler in sight.
The poet is the angler and he throws prey back into
the water, images digested, poem growing
in the womb, and you, my reader, eager for
the latest story on the tape, the rat-a-tat tat of type
now a silent key stroke but the words explode
and console, nonetheless, tear and assemble, this
is the way the clock strikes once, twice, thrice,
and the alarm rings, and it does not matter as you
are up already writing and angling and dancing
the *konpa*, one step forward, one across, smiling.

NOT OUT

Indran Amirthanayagam

'Wickets are falling fast, and Basil
is bowling off breaks'—Mervyn Taylor

Wickets are falling fast,
my friend, but you are holding
up your end smacking every
loose ball to the fence. Basil

may be bowling off breaks
but you read his line, his turn
tucked away down the leg side
for runs every time; your stand

unveiling my front garden
again when Tom Graveney
came to dine with Basil
d'Oliveira, Imagine those

stars in 1966 eating string
hoppers with the family
at Kynsey Road, and Basil
bowling to my brother

and me before the great banyan.
That was boy-dreamed eternal
life, before we retired the next day
to the match at the Colombo Oval:

England versus Ceylon. Now
England is poetry, a record shop,
primary school, off to Lord's
on a Saturday to see Lloyd,

Kanhai and Kallicharran
smack bowlers everywhere,
and so much more, the line
heavy, dense, packed, bursting,

and Ceylon a tuck shop,
a civil war, tsunami. How
many lines, verses, books?—
and cricket despite everything,

always blood, always
sorrow, always perseverance,
batsman not out, innings
declared, match drawn.

THE GUEST

Indran Amirthanayagam

Mother is furious, unleashing
everywhere, the storm no
longer giving reason to curl
up with a book but to run,
although there is nowhere
to hide, to run to a gym,
a reception hall, but
the tornado turns
to the door, insists
that it too has an invitation.

About the author

Indran Amirthanayagam published three new poetry books written in three different languages in 2020: *The Migrant States* (www.hangingloosepress.com, New York), *Sur l'île nostalgique* (L'Harmattan, Paris) and *Lírica a tiempo* (Mesa Redonda, Lima). His new books are *Ten Thousand Steps Against the Tyrant* (Broadstone Books, 2022) and *Isleño* (RIL Editores, 2021). Amirthanayagam writes in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Haitian Creole and has published 22 poetry collections and recorded a spoken word/music album, *Rankont Dout*. He edits *The Beltway Poetry Quarterly* (www.beltwaypoetry.com) He won the Paterson Poetry Prize and has been the recipient of fellowships from the Foundation for the Contemporary Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the US/Mexico Fund for Culture and the MacDowell Colony. Amirthanayagam hosts the Poetry Channel on Youtube (https://youtube.com/user/indranam). indranmx@gmail.com.

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2 POEMS

Kimberly L. Becker

IN THE MANNER OF COTTONWOODS

Kimberly L. Becker

Flagrant display, the way, that first night,
you pulled me to you with unexpected ardor

and the way we swayed, trunk to trunk, in slatted light
from parking lot and the way you said my eyes had gone to silver

VENTUS

Kimberly L. Becker

This wind whittles down to essential form
Riderless horses returned from Little Big Horn

Always we are pulled towards the idea of home
Water and wind form cannonballs of stone

We trade words of greeting: NAheesa atistit/osd sunalei
Wind loosens our hair, growing out after grief

Shame burns like flares on the Bakken
Wind tosses flames like horses' manes

In Germany, sirocco from Spain a soft caress
Distances deceive in this vast space

Palms almost touching, energy palpable
To track Aurora, I download an app,

imagine us lying magnetized under neon skies
You say the Missouri is called the Great Mystery

I introduce myself as I would to any person
You point out strong current's direction

under what I perceived as only swirling surface
We remember flooding of ancestral

homelands, dams built to harness force
while river and wind keep adjusting course

About the author

Of mixed descent, including Cherokee, Kimberly L Becker is author of four poetry collections: *Words Facing East* and *The Dividings* (WordTech Editions), *The Bed Book* (Spuyten Duyvil), and *Flight* (MadHat Press). Individual poems appear widely in journals and anthologies, including *Indigenous Message on Water*; *Women Write Resistance: Poets Resist Gender Violence*; and *Tending the Fire: Native Voices and Portraits*. She has held grants from Maryland, North Carolina, and New Jersey and residencies at Hambidge, Weymouth, and Wildacres. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart. Reading venues include Busboys and Poets and The National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC. She has served as mentor for PEN America's Prison Writing and AWP's Writer to Writer programs and has also adapted traditional Cherokee stories for Cherokee Youth in Radio. www.kimberlylbecker.com

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A WRITER'S LIFE

A discussion with Shokoofeh Azar

Rosemary Sayer

Curtin University

Abstract

In this article the lived experience of Iranian writer Shokoofeh Azar is discussed in conversation with writer Rosemary Sayer. The collaborative life writing highlights the role of the refugee narrator and non-refugee narrator. Azar shares the story of her family, her life and career in Iran and Australia. She travelled the Silk Road alone for many months and was incarcerated several times as a journalist before her perilous journey to Australia as a refugee. The article explores the travel Azar undertook voluntarily around Iran and other Middle Eastern countries, and involuntarily as a refugee around the world. The discussion also documents her journey from journalist to literary writer.

A WRITER'S LIFE

Rosemary Sayer

This is a conversation held over several months with Iranian writer Shokoofeh Azar. This collaborative life writing article captures the discussions and provides insight into Azar's life in Iran and in Australia.

> 'I would like to thank my father for teaching me to fly in the sky of literature freely. I owe a debt of gratitude to my mother, without whose support I would not be living in the free country of Australia, able to write without censorship.' (Azar 2017: ix)

I ran my fingers over the words of acknowledgement penned by Iranian Shokoofeh Azar inside her novel The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree. I love the sense of anticipation I feel when I open a new book. The pages are crisp, and no-one has been inside this imagined world. It's like falling onto a bed and being enveloped in a soft duvet and there are few falls more thrilling than those taken through the imagination of a good novelist. But these two sentences stopped me from turning the next page. The words expressed love and gratitude, of course, but I understood the sadness too. Persecution and politics had separated the writer from her parents, family, and home.

I did not know much about Iranian writing. As a long-time member of PEN International I knew being a journalist or writer in Iran was a hazardous occupation. I knew there was a rich Persian literary history and I understood that poetry and art are central to many Iranian people's sense of identity. Researcher and writer Sanaz Fotouhi highlights so-called 'trauma texts' by Middle Eastern Women and notes that 'of the 50 or so memoirs published in the last 30 years, nearly half use the formula of a veiled woman with exotic eyes looking at the reader from the cover' (Fotouhi 2015: 122). I remember the flood of books produced by Western publishers who tried to exploit the concept of women from the middle east as 'the other' by supposedly giving readers an insight into life beneath the veil. Shokoofeh loathed this style of book. I had read the memoirs of Azar Nafisi and Roya Hakakian years ago and I was working my way through a translation of Attar's The Conference of the birds. People I had met from Iran in Australia often seemed pained by the negative ways their country was portrayed in the west. The rich Persian culture and language was often ignored by readers, booksellers and the media, willing only to think of an evil and corrupt regime.

A ping on my mobile phone signalled an in-coming text. 'This is me,' was the message under the photo of a woman with piercing eyes and dark curls around a soft olive complexion. I smiled to myself, found my own photograph, and sent back a reply. 'And here I am. See you tomorrow.' At that first meeting in the courtyard of the Fremantle Arts Centre, Shokoofeh and I didn't notice the clusters of people scattered around in shady corners. I think we were too interested in each other. We sipped our tea and began a friendship steeped in literature.

Shokoofeh was born into an intellectual middle-class family. Her mother was a teacher, and her father was a respected poet and literary figure who craved a peaceful lifestyle to pursue his creativity. When she was a baby, the family moved to the north of Iran away from the capital city Tehran. Two-thirds of Iran is either desert or mountains, but the family's home was situated in the beautiful Hyrcanian Forest. Now registered by UNESCO, this unique heritage area of lush lowland and mountainous forests covers about 55,000 square kilometres near the southern

shores of the Caspian Sea in Iran and Azerbaijan. The forest is named after the ancient region of Hyrcania, which means wolf land. It is a rich wonderland blooming with great biodiversity thanks to its rich soils, high rainfall, and temperate climate. Deciduous broad-leaved trees of beech, oak and chestnut attract diverse bird life alongside native fauna including leopard, lynx, wild boar, wolf, and badger. As I scrolled through image after image online, I felt as if I had entered a magical dream world. Images of ancient, gnarled trees and splashing streams filled my screen and I was sure much of JR Tolkien's imagined Middle Earth must have looked like this. I also began to understand why nature plays such a large part in much Iranian writing, including Shokoofeh's. The garden or forest may be a physical setting, but it is also an allegorical space referring to a person's relationship with the spiritual or divine. Shokoofeh explained:

> We owned about 13 hectares of land and if I close my eyes, I can still smell the fragrant plant blossoms, hear the wind in the trees and imagine our gardens. My father's studio was full of paintings, sculptures, and books. Every day we passed our time with reading, art, and music. There was so much light and joy in my life both inside and outside our home. My grandfather and uncle were poets, my father was a writer, artist and journalist and my mother was a teacher. I remember growing up in a home where every room was filled with books. These help give a home an identity, I think.

I smiled because books remain an abiding love for me; not just reading them but seeing them on the shelves, knowing I can escape into another world whenever I want. If they happen to stream onto table tops, I think of them as artful decoration. An architect once told my husband, Terry, as he surveyed our bookshelves, that books don't just hold stories between their covers, they tell a collective story about the people who live with them.

As a writer of non-fiction, I often draw on my own experiences to develop my storylines and I knew Shokoofeh did the same in short stories and novels. She was in primary school after the so-called Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, which changed the country's socio-cultural landscape permanently. I can't imagine my country caught up in a revolution. Iran's king, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was ousted and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was installed as the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic by his radical allies. Two and a half thousand years of monarchical rule ended immediately, and Iran's revolution set off a series of events that triggered conflicts in the region, starting with Iraq's attack on Iran. It is from these times that Shokoofeh drew inspiration for her novel The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree. She wanted to explore the pain and suffering of the Iranian people after the revolution. 'We must never forget what happened to human beings,' she told me.

> I was forced out of my own country, and I was so angry when I came to Australia. I wanted to stay in Iran with my family and friends. I miss my mother so much and I can't tell you how much I yearn to sit in my own garden in the shade of my trees. I am devastated about what has happened. But it wasn't safe for me to stay so The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree is my revenge on Khomeini.

The novel is written in the style of magical realism and is a way of seeing reality through all its cultural aspects, fantasies, and beliefs. 'Metaphor and allegory allow me to show the reality of life in Iran through fiction. Does that make sense?' she asked me. It did. After I had read The House of Spirits by Isabelle Allende, I understood the lure of the style. Like Allende, Shokoofeh uses magical realism to explore an oppressive regime that she knows intimately. Her book is a family portrait with extraordinary characters, both real and mystical, alongside a dramatic

political commentary. It draws you into the lives of an Iranian family caught in the chaos and brutality that swept across Iran in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The important themes of the novel—the unfolding family story and the graphic polemic about the revolution—are populated with jinns, faeries, spirits and ghosts who represent parts of Iranian society. The tortured souls of the family and others who spill anguish and horror from the pages bring into focus some of the trauma suffered after the revolution. The ghosts of five thousand prisoners murdered by the regime, the haunting of Khomeini in the palace of mirrors and a brutal assault of a sister turned mermaid are powerful allegories. Shokoofeh says that, while she drew inspiration from her own family, none of the characters is exactly one person. She used aspects of her own life and her father's struggle after the revolution to represent the struggle of all Iranians.

I asked her if she had thought of writing about these experiences as non-fiction, using her journalistic background. My sense of news and current affairs would have dictated that style to me, but Shokoofeh felt the only way to write this story was through fiction. She believes that the more deeply we are cast under a story's spell, the more potent its influence.

> After my third draft, I decided that this book must be written for an English audience and the narrative voice that I found was in magical realism. My 'go-to' book is the classic One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez. I read it every four or five years because it inspires me. I knew I could show the truth of Iran—both the beauty and the politics—through magical realism.

I asked Shokoofeh to reflect on her early influences and education. Her parents played a major role, alongside one of her favourite uncles, who was a regular visitor to their home. Shokoofeh was taught by her mother at the local village school for the first five years of her primary schooling before changing schools to finish level six, seven, and eight.

> We walked the seven kilometres each way in all kinds of weather—snow, sunshine, wind, and rain. For us, we knew no other life, so we considered it an ordinary thing to do. I have such fond memories of those years when I look back now. I learnt so much from the village girls. Of course, I was always different because I came from Tehran. I was a city girl, and my parents were teachers and artists. People still call my mother 'Miss Teacher' in the village today. I loved that time.

High school was a different matter. Located 20 kilometres away in another town, she needed to catch a minibus at 5.30am each day. After the revolution, many schools enforced strict conservative Islam codes and at Shokoofeh's high school girls were forced to cover themselves. The chador is an outer garment worn by women particularly in Iran and Iraq. It is a semi-circular, floor-length covering that hangs from the top of the head, flowing over the clothing underneath in order to hide the shape or curve of a woman's body. In Farsi, the word *chador* literally means 'tent' and Shokoofeh hated it. She also hated the compulsory praying and participation in government protests organised by the school.

After high school Shokoofeh studied classical Persian literature at a university in Tehran. Female students were required to wear a Maghn'e, which was better than a chador according to Shokoofeh. It is a long rectangular scarf wrapped around the head and tucked or pinned at the shoulders. Students were scrutinised at the entrance of the university by inspectors.

> You were not allowed to wear make-up or nail polish. I remember being sent back home because my Maghn'e was too short, or I was wearing white socks or the wrong

> type of shoes. I didn't find attending or studying at university particularly satisfying. Life and teaching from my family had already challenged and expanded my mind. Sometimes I found no stimulation at university.

Shokoofeh began her career as an editor. She loved the work and developed many skills over a number of years. She wrote and co-edited The Encyclopedia of Persian Literature with a group of other writers and editors in 1997. It was awarded the distinction of being the best book in Iran that year.

> During this time, I lived in Tehran with my father because this was expected in my culture. By then he was a publisher with his own small press. My parents had separated which was difficult for me, but I knew they both loved me. After a number of years, I realised I did not want to stay behind a desk, like all the other white-collar workers, for the rest of my life.

A friend suggested journalism to Shokoofeh, and she began freelancing as a writer before securing a full-time position as a newspaper editor. She studied for her diploma of journalism at the same time. We talked and laughed about our early working years in newspapers. She clearly remembers the first article she wrote about the importance of literature in Iran. My first by-lined story as a journalist was about a broken water main in a suburban street.

Under President Mohammad Khatami, elected in 1997, independent newspapers began to flourish as he relaxed many of the social controls that had been in place. This included the easing of women's strict dress codes. The scope of Khatami's reforms, however, was limited by opposition from hardline conservatives and the security forces that were ultimately answerable to the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamene'i (Foltz 2016). Over the years, the leadership of the Islamic republic has remained overwhelmingly conservative and Shokoofeh forged her journalistic career under these restrictions. The situation continues to deteriorate, and the government is relentless in its persecution of independent journalists, citizen-journalists, and media outlets. It uses intimidation, arbitrary arrest, and long jail sentences imposed by revolutionary courts after unfair trials. The organisation Reporters Without Borders ranked Iran 174th in the world for press freedom alongside countries such as Yemen, Saudi Arabia, China, Bahrain, and North Korea (Reporters Without Borders 2021).

'It is different for many journalists in the west,' she murmured. 'It was a hard life for me in Iran. Your salary was not much but you wrote because you loved it and it was important. My editor told me he could always smell the blood pouring from my stories.'

The journalist in me craved to write stories that mattered like Shokoofeh's, but when she told me how, after the first few months, she had started to think about how lucky she was to be alive, I reflected that maybe that wasn't a good idea. We discussed why writing the news mattered so much to each of us and agreed that journalism is critical for society as a way of communicating information, keeping those in power accountable and, above all, keeping people connected to each other. 'I wanted to write the truth about what was really happening on the street and in Iranian politics,' Shokoofeh told me.

> I wrote about human rights issues: women's rights, child rights, labour rights and teachers' rights. Sometimes I had to meet my sources in secret to protect them. Every few months the government would come and close down an independent newspaper and arrest many journalists for what they wrote. I was jailed three times. I was

> interrogated and kept in isolation in rooms or cells with no light. I was frightened and feared for my life, but I don't want to make a big deal out of it because twice it was only a few weeks. The last time was two months. That was the worst but many of my colleagues spent years behind bars. Some are still there now.

I felt distressed imagining this vibrant woman, who had become my friend, locked up in isolation and in the dark for weeks. We stopped talking for a while. I looked up through the branches in the trees and realised I take the blue sky for granted. It reminded me that I never have to think about having freedom; it just is. Spending 'a few weeks behind bars' sounded like a big deal to me.

Each time we met we discussed writing and journalism. Shokoofeh agonises over her English skills and gets frustrated when she can't find the right literary term. I tried to imagine not being able to find the words I wanted. It must be like digging in the dirt for nuggets you know are there. I keep telling her that her English (her second language) is very good. Frankly, I don't have many discussions with native English speakers about the influence of Camus and Sartre as great French moralists.

One day when we were discussing Persian poets, I began to think about the challenges of translation. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss translation theory in detail, but the following statements serve to preface our conversation on this matter. Dutch translation theorist André Lefevere contended that 'translation is, of course, a rewriting to the original text. All rewritings reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given way' (Lefevere 1992: vx). For Karen Emmerich, a translation creates a new layer: 'A translation adds a new iteration in a different language to the sum total of texts for a work' (Emmerich 2017: 1-3). Margaret Sayers Peden argues there is no scientific or objective way to judge a translation. There are only better and worse subjective methods. (Sayers Peden 1987: 159).

Shokoofeh hid her face in mock horror when I asked about the common translations of Rumi and Hafiz, seen in the west on posters, cards or fridge magnets. Most of them seemed to offer words of wisdom and are obviously bought like talismans for inspiration.

'I want to tear out my hair in frustration when I read some of them. Sorry Rose, but they are just so bad,' she laughed.

She tapped out different rhythms on her knee like a musician keeping time and explained how different rhythms are important in classical Persian poetry. I wondered if it was possible to translate rhythm in any language.

> Every line of Iranian classical poetry is full of simile and metaphor, innuendo, and references. For example, if I wrote: 'my lover drinks wine,' it does not literally mean my lover drinks wine from a bottle. Wine could mean the inspiration and love between you and another person, or between you and God. There is a history to the word, and you draw on this as a poet. Wine can imply many things just like the greengage tree in my novel which is a metaphor for life.

Re-writing any text manipulates it to different ideological and artistic ends and demonstrates how re-writing works of literature can imbibe a new and sometimes subversive historical or

literary status (Lefevere 1992:17). In 2005 the New Yorker magazine featured an article that highlighted the centuries old debate again. Author David Remnick reminded readers of the work of Constance Garnett, 'a woman of Victorian energies and Edwardian prose who translated seventy volumes of famous Russian prose including all of Dostoyevsky's novels and hundreds of Chekhov's stories' (Remnick 2005: n.p.). It is argued that without Garnett the 19th-century Russians would not have been as influential, but apparently Garnett worked with such speed that when she came across a word or phrase that she didn't understand she would skip it. Multilingual Russian scholars and writers such as Nabokov who followed were scathing in their criticism of her work. But without it we may not have had any knowledge of the Russian classics at all. Is that better? I don't know. The award-winning Iranian American poet and translator Sholeh Wolpé says translation is a scalpel because it cuts to reveal and to heal. As a bi-lingual and bi-cultural poet, she believes the freshness of a text is best communicated when the translator does not attempt to translate the untranslatable (Wolpé 2017: 19). She states the obvious—that 12th-century Persian and contemporary English are as different as sky and sea. I especially like the explanation she gives about her translation of Attar's The Conference of Birds: 'the best I can do as a poet is to reflect one into the other. The sea can reflect the sky with its moving stars, shifting clouds, gestations of the moon and migrating birds—but ultimately the sea is not the sky' (2017: 24).

For Shokoofeh's first novel in English she was determined to use a translator whose first language was English.

> I did not want a translator whose first language was Farsi. I wanted an English speaker who was intimately connected to the Persian culture who had grown up with a strong literary tradition and was able to understand the magical realism style. I believe our sense of spirituality is guided by art not by a god. Life is a continuous cycle in nature, and we are part of that. I feel there is energy in the universe that influences us. When someone is really alive and has a kind of knowing through life experience, we say they have 'erfan'. This is not religion; it is a connection between your heart and mystery.

I decided I could do with some erfan. As a former Catholic, totally disillusioned with my religion and church over its dark past of abuse and secrets, I wondered whether finding erfan would help me more. Shokoofeh laughed. The environment and everything in it constitutes an important pillar in her life, and to stay balanced she spends as much time as she can outside and in nature. I used to be a girl who enjoyed the outdoors and camping and hiking, but now my family laugh because I have more T shirts monogrammed with five-star resort names than most people. When I learnt that Shokoofeh became the first Iranian woman to hike solo along the Silk Road in 2004, it was hard not to be impressed with her three-month journey. She set off on her trek after she and her husband separated. 'When you can walk for days and days, so full of sadness and emotion experiencing new things, it gives you a different perspective I think.' Ernest Hemingway felt that it was easier to think if you were walking and doing something. As I took my daily walk around the neighbourhood to clear my head after hours at my desk, I felt there was some truth to that. Not all of us can immerse ourselves in walking and thinking for three months, but for Shokoofeh the experience was life changing.

However, even for such an independent and self-assured woman, it can't have been easy. It was certainly unusual for a single woman to undertake such an arduous journey and she became 'the news' on her return, as the media sought out her story. Reports and photos of her three-month journey were published in the leading newspaper, *The Shargh*.

I used to have a romantic notion of the Silk Road. I imagined strings of laden camels winding along routes that connected grasslands, passing over mountains and through deserts, stopping at oasis towns where busy bazaars exhibited fragrant spices and rich silks. Of course, this notion of the Silk Road is more fantasy than fact. It is not one single road with an identifiable point of departure; it is a loose network of mostly land but also sea trading routes. The Silk Road stretches from China to Korea and Japan in the east and connects China through Central Asia to India in the south and to Turkey and Italy in the west. Whilst it's true that trade was a key focus along the ancient Silk Road, trade was not its primary purpose. 'The Silk Road changed history, largely because the people who managed to travel along part or all of the Silk Road planted their cultures like seeds of exotic species carried to distant lands' (Hansen 2013: n.p.). For an adventurous traveller like Shokoofeh the ancient route provided an opportunity to see other countries and experience different cultures with a magnificent backdrop for self-reflection. Some routes now transit war zones; many pass through regions that used to be hidden behind the Iron Curtain—the so-called 'stan' countries of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.

Starting her journey in Iran, Shokoofeh walked or hitch-hiked her way through Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, through parts of China to Pakistan and India. She lived a simple life, often staying with nomads in the mountains or taking refuge at villages when she happened upon them. 'I didn't have much money, so if I found myself in a city, I could not afford to stay in a high-class hotel,' she explained.

> Living and travelling the way I did I came to understand what I call the heart of life. I realised how important it was to understand different cultures and ideas, then you can free yourself from sadness and emotions through this type of experience. I learnt about choices by taking charge of my life this way. When I returned, I knew I wanted to focus all my energies on being a writer.

She had written a children's book before she left for her Silk Road adventure, and I asked her what it was about.

'Love between a butterfly and a crow,' she smiled. 'Before I became a serious writer of short stories and novels I used to live in this kind of suspended imagination of childhood.'

'Weren't you already a serious writer when you were a journalist?'

'Yes, but I wasn't a literary writer. Now the literary voice inside me is so strong that I must listen to it and write what I feel.'

Shokoofeh came to Australia by boat in 2010 as a political refugee and sadly some Australians find this the most interesting thing about her. '*How I got here is not what I'm about. I have stories I want to tell. I had a life before I came, and I have a new life now.*' She's right of course. Surviving a boat journey should not define a person for life. Shokoofeh's short stories and novel have been published in Australia, translated into several European languages, and won national prizes for literature, but the label that is sometimes still used to describe her is 'boat person.'

Writer and journalist Ben Dougherty (2015) argues that refugees and asylum seekers are defined by the language used by others to describe them. They are often voiceless in the public discourse and some stories surrounding refugees and asylum seekers go to the heart of our anxieties about 'the other'. Shokoofeh, like many people from a refugee background, is not voiceless and doesn't consider herself any sort of victim. 'I am so much more than a refugee who came to

Australia by boat. I am a mother, a daughter, a writer, a woman making her way in the world. Why do people want to label me as this one thing?'

I am at a loss to explain this adequately to her, other than to say a succession of Australian politicians have become fixated with asylum seekers arriving by boat, painting it as a national security issue rather than a humanitarian one. How can I explain that many Australians do not understand that it is legal to seek asylum? I can't explain how some Australians don't understand that it is a fundamental right set down by the United Nations. The Australian government makes little fuss about the estimated 7-9,000 asylum seekers arriving by plane each year. They are not being kept in detention centres around the country or on an offshore island. Politicians shout they have 'stopped the boats' to keep us safe from terrorism and to stop people smugglers exploiting our immigration system. They mischievously manipulate language and stories to their own advantage when discussing people who seek asylum. We both shake our heads.

Shokoofeh gained Australian citizenship and is now making a new life for herself and her five-year-old daughter Rama. At our next interview she is keen to talk about her writing process and the positives of life in Australia. 'I want to build my life here. I don't know the future for Iran. I once had a beautiful home, and it was destroyed. Of course, I miss my life in Iran, but I can't go back. It is over.' Seeing her sadness, I was reminded of Sholeh Wolpé and her short poem:

> *Home is like a missing tooth*
> *The tongue reaches*
> *for hardness*
> *but falls*
> *Into absence*
>
> (Wolpé 2013: 31)

We discuss how hard it is to be without family in a new place. Shokoofeh misses her mother enormously and we don't continue this conversation because it obviously upsets her. I chose to live in different countries without my family and while I missed my mum, I could not imagine having her or my other immediate family torn from my life with little chance of seeing them again. My mother died from cancer and losing her was heartbreaking, but I was with her until the end. She is gone, and I know I can't see her anymore, but I wondered how it would feel not to be able to see your mother, but to know she is still alive, a phone call away, but unreachable in so many ways. 'It's not just about family; it is about place too,' Shokoofeh tells me. 'I miss my favourite streets in Tehran; I miss the smells of my homeland and I miss my favourite trees and gardens. Some days I can almost hear them whispering in the breeze because my yearning for the past is so strong.'

> I have 40 years of history from Iran. I am like a snail… I carry this home around on my back wherever I go. In my writing I always want to stay true to myself and who I am. This has not changed. Inside, I am the same person in Australia, driven by the same goals, as I was in Iran. Of course, in the first few years I felt bewildered and lonely in Australia because I had lost connection with my language, and I did not have the words in English. When you have no language in a new country you have nothing.

Her views echo what every person of a refugee background has said to me. Language isn't simply an optional extra: if you don't have the opportunity to learn, you are cut off, not by wire and fences, war, or persecution, but by the language barrier. My friend Piok commented that he

would like all Australians to be more patient and understanding about the language capabilities of new arrivals.

> People come from different countries, with different backgrounds and different exposure to schooling. Many people come from villages, have no literacy skills, or have spent years in a refugee camp. You don't learn English in that environment especially if you have suffered trauma or live in fear. (Sayer 2015:157)

Each person may need different lengths of time and support in learning English, and he compared learning English to running a marathon. Some people run fast, some people run slowly, and everyone finishes at different times.

I find it interesting that Shokoofeh feels she will never be able to write her fiction in English. 'I could not find the words and the richness of voice and language for a literary novel in English,' she explained. She will always write in Farsi and work with the best translator she can find. We discuss Milan Kundera, one of Shokoofeh's favourite novelists from Czechoslovakia, who lived in exile in France. After 20 years he wrote a novel in French which was heavily criticised, and he was told to go back to writing in Czech with a French translator. 'Imagine that—even after 20 years,' Shokoofeh exclaimed. 'I am certainly no Kundera. While I feel confident about my writing and art, I must continue to write in Farsi,' she concluded.

One of the interesting insights she gained after four decades of living in a country with an autocratic government was how self-censorship had become her default position as a writer.

> When you live with censorship for so long, you are always thinking, can I say that? I must change that. Of course, this affects your creative process. You see how your country is censored and you begin to write accordingly. When I first sat in front of my computer in Australia, I felt heavy and unable to write anything and kept telling myself, no, no, no, I can't say that. But of course, I could.

I reflected on this as I sat down in front of my own computer to write. I don't know what it means to be censored; to be unable to write what I or say what I think. Shokoofeh said: 'When Australians complain about their lives and their government, I feel like saying try living in Iran. Don't forget the freedom you have, the benefits of democracy and the beauty of your country.'

When we talked about women's rights in Australia, Shokoofeh laughed when I rolled my eyes and grimaced. She talked about her Australian friends who felt, like me, that women were still a long way from achieving equality. She patted my hand and again suggested if I thought it was a problem in Australia that I should try living in Iran.

As we finished our coffee, hugged, and said goodbye, we promised to keep in touch. I hoped she would find the peace and sense of belonging that she still desperately craves. Six months later, in an attempt to do just that, Shokoofeh and her daughter re-located to Melbourne, one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world. Widely regarded as the arts capital of Australia, Shokoofeh hoped Melbourne would help inspire her writing more and enable her to connect with a larger literary community.

Her immediate focus was to improve her English language skills, so she returned to TAFE for further study and was then accepted into a creative writing master's program at Deakin University.

Shokoofeh stood for press freedom in a country that locks up its writers. She walked and explored countries along the Silk Road unaccompanied. She escaped persecution from her government and travelled to Australia where she spent months locked in an offshore detention facility while her asylum claim was processed. As a refugee she made a new home in Australia for herself and her daughter and wrote and published her English novel. She taught writing classes to women from Persian backgrounds, and she painted vibrant canvases infused with magical realism that were always popular at local art exhibitions. Before she left Perth, she reminded me that one of her dreams after she arrived in Australia was for her writing to be considered 'seriously' in literary circles. She achieved that when her novel The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree was shortlisted for the International Booker Prize, the Stella Prize, and the University of Queensland's Fiction Book Award. Shokoofeh found herself in demand for media interviews and appearances around the country, alongside some of the giants in Australian women's literature. I hope that Victoria becomes a place that she can call home; a place where she feels safe; where she feels she belongs and where her literary aspirations continue to be met.

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About the author

Dr Rosemary Sayer is a former journalist who has written three non-fiction books and several articles. In 2019 she completed her PhD at Curtin University which explored her dual interests of writing and human rights. In recent years she has worked as a sessional lecturer, tutor, and research assistant in the school of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry, and at the Centre for Human Rights Education at Curtin University. She is currently an Adjunct Research Fellow at Curtin University. Rosemary serves on the board of the Edmund Rice Centre, a not-for-profit organisation that helps people from refugee and migrant backgrounds as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. She is also on the board of CARAD, an agency assisting asylum seekers.

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2 POEMS

Josie/Jocelyn Deane

C=O=D=A

Josie/Jocelyn Deane

after Ceryth Wyn Evans

It strobes out the walls
until white is left
the threads in the air
strings supporting
possibly cursive. It hums
ominously, a lack
of detail, the ceiling pegs
a cartography
of white, the air
conditioners, speakers…
You see in the neon a whole
of gestures, what could be
a bicycle, a woman walking
down the stairs, the currents
of air left in a crow's wake
a representation of the Voyager
space-probe, strung
together, a spider consuming
—not a fly— but the word 'fly'
whatever is
there disappears while it still can,
naked over naked.

NATURAL/TRANSQUEER BURIAL

Josie/Jocelyn Deane

The wind is leaving
the leaves, behind you
through a sprig in your hand
the pressed daffodil petal
a small feather in bush.
Light a match between them
ignite them together:
scent is the most bio-degradable
sense; they are entangled there
like tea, sugar and soy milk in the fume/loam.
They are all a part of you—you go
by they/them—in part—for the air's sake. When
you finally stop, gut biome
taking over, a perfect revolution, your rib cage
springs apart: a whole
daffodil, minah bird and rosemary brush
bursting open. That will be
your body, more
extra than embalming
fluid.

About the author

Josie/Jocelyn Deane is a programmer/freelance editor/translator. Their work has appeared in *Rabbit journal*, *Overland*, *The Suburban Review* and *Going Down Swinging*, among others. They were one of the recipients of the Queensland Poetry Festival Ekphrasis award for 2020, as well as the Ultimo Poetry Prize and the Harri Jones Memorial Prize in 2021. They are one of the recipients of the 2022 New Chapter fellowship. They are a genderqueer femme. They live on unceded Wurundjeri land in Naarm.

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2 POEMS

Dominic Symes

SPEEDING UP AND SLOWING DOWN

Dominic Symes

there's immense pleasure to be had
speeding up
& slowing down

in waking yourself up
before you're really awake

in pulling the train's emergency brake

launching yourself
into a cold shower
or an icy lake

picking up a log off of the fire
for a laugh
with your mates

I think about ripping up the handbrake
on my best friend's mum's dihatsu
on the way to school

snaking our way through the teacher's car park

arrested
in motion

together

it's seeing a magician on the television
at your uncle's place & yanking the tablecloth
out from underneath the set table just the same
in your imagination

& shaking you out of your ruminations
the pilot jams on the thrusters
as the plane nears the end of its descent
to even up the wheels

like being overfed but undernourished
coming down fast
from a sugar high

until you're watching daylight pass

through the soft fabric of the curtains
making beautiful jellyfish
silhouettes over the parquetry

on the edge of falling sleep
having spent the afternoon
sweeping up the thousand shards
of your too fragile
bohemian crystal
self

QUEERING THE CANNON

Dominic Symes

I love the phrase *queering the canon*
because it always makes me think of Cher

even though I know it's not *that* kind of cannon
every time someone says it all I can see
is her on that battleship in a leotard
queering the *fuck* out of the cannon

this may mean nothing here
but everyone should read the poet Thom Gunn
for the Apollonian form
& for the Dionysian content
    psychotropics never hit harder than
when experienced through iambs

how Larkin said the 'h' in Thom was only there to confuse
but then Larkin *would* say that

fair play – I like his jazz criticism
yet I can't get past the thought that
he probably masturbated a lot
or at least was a slave to some
delightful kink

it's ok if right now you're imagining Larkin
astride a cannon in a leotard

the canon often inserts itself unwantedly into conversation

sometimes I find myself talking to students
who are too young to understand my niche references
& too old & too smart to listen to anything I have to say

like this ad from my childhood
we got on like a house on fire
until the house literally caught on fire

The Rolling Stones have always been old to me
though I love the rumour that Jagger & Bowie were an item

I've been instructed by The Guardian

—which I pay for now
after being guilted by that widget which kept telling me how
many free articles I'd read & which I'll admit
feels kind of like paying a bully at school to stop you from
getting beat up (I believe that is called a 'racket')—

to feminise the canon

it's like the Hells Angels telling the Stones
they couldn't go on stage in San Francisco
because they'd just stabbed someone in the front row

trust? the ad goes
who can you?

I worked in an English department with only female lecturers
& tutors while all the profs were male & getting paid more
when I taught Romantic literature it seemed
all the texts were by male authors

except for those by Anna Leticia Barbauld Mary Shelley
Mary Shelley's mum Mary Godwin
all three Brontë sisters (the 'ë' only there to confuse)
Austen obviously

actually charge up queens

I like the way being surrounded by good art
is like being surrounded by a thousand camp sailors
on a battleship

queer & comforting

About the author

Dominic Symes lives and writes in Naarm (Melbourne). His poetry and criticism have appeared in *Overland*, *Cordite*, *Australian Book Review*, and *Australian Poetry Journal*. His debut collection, *I Saw the Best Memes of My Generation*, will be published by Recent Work Press in late 2022.

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THE 'SIMULTANEOUS SITUATEDNESS' OF VIDEOPOETRY

Exploring the dislocating experience of living between localities through poetic form

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study of videopoems made as a way to further understand translocal experiences, paying particular attention to the way the form can 'travel' between localities. The turn to the translocal is an endeavour to 'deliberately confuse the boundaries of the local in an effort to capture the increasingly complicated nature of spatial processes and identities' (Oakes and Schein 2005: 20). This paper explores the ways in which videopoetry as a form reflects the translocal process of 'a simultaneous situatedness across different locales which provide ways of understanding the overlapping place-time(s) in migrants' everyday lives' (Brickell and Datta 2011: 4). Through layering poems, sound and moving images the videopoetry form has the potential to provide insight into the dislocating experience of living between localities. This paper analyses some videopoems and reflects on the relevance of the videopoetry form in the context of translocal poetry.

THE 'SIMULTANEOUS SITUATEDNESS' OF VIDEOPOETRY

Claire Rosslyn Wilson

This paper explores the characteristics of translocal poetry and investigates the ways it can be expressed in videopoetry. The 'measured integration of narrative, non-narrative and anti-narrative juxtaposition of image, text and sound as resulting in a poetic experience' (Konyves 2011: n.p.) of the videopoetry form has the capacity to create a space of 'simultaneous situatedness across different locales' (Brickell and Datta 2011: 4). The distinct tracks of moving image, sound and text (written or spoken) can talk back to each other and provide a subtext to the main theme of the poem. I will explore two examples of videopoems, paying particular attention to techniques such as cuts, layering, juxtapositions and split screen, before turning to examples from my own practice-led research. I will mostly pay attention to the visual and aural elements of the videopoem and the way they can speak back to the text.

Translocal poetry

There are many ways to write between places, such as being inspired by diverse cultures, writing experiences of migration, writing about travel or writing experiences of having a hybrid identity, to name a few. Literary theorist Ramazani refers to some of these as 'a variety of transnational templates – globalization, migration, travel, genre, influence, modernity, decolonialization, and diaspora – to indicate the many ways in which modern and contemporary poetry in English overflows national borders' (Ramazani 2015: xi). This paper will analyse one type of travel between places, specifically translocal poetry.

I am using translocal as a term as it seeks to understand the experience of being situated in two or more places at once (see for example Smith 2011). Rather than dwelling on the sense of being nowhere or suspended in a space of in-between, the term focuses on the multiple localities that make up the experience of migration. This turns the attention from the idea of being uprooted, or travelling, to a reading of the experience as being place-based, in which 'the importance of localities in people's lives' (Oakes and Schein 2005: 1) is not lost. This approach is useful for taking into consideration the impact of macro, transnational flows on migrant lives as well as the everyday living that occurs in a particular place.

But how might this 'simultaneous situatedness across different locales' (Brickell and Datta 2011: 4) be expressed in poetry? Ramazani argues that it is through a close reading of 'figure, rhythm, allusion, stanza, line, image, genre' that one 'can foster an aesthetically attuned transnational literary criticism' (Ramazani 2015: xi). He highlights the importance of paying attention to these transnational elements in poetry by explaining the following:

> When we track the strange twists and turns of transnational inheritance and adoption, we find stories with [...] unpredictable patterns of convergence, resistance, and imaginative assimilation. To trace these complex intercultural relationships across boundaries of nation and ethnicity, without erasing those boundaries or the earlier hybridizations they contain, is to begin to explain and vivify how poetry helps newness enter the world. (Ramazani 2006: 354)

Throughout his study on transnational poetics Ramazani explores the ways these cross-border influences can manifest in poetry, such as the 'geographic room' of the stanza acting as a

doorway between cultural worlds (Ramazani 2015: 54), the metaphor as movement across cultures, or travel between cultures through 'a substituted letter, a varied rhythm, a pivoting line' (59). These quick shifts within a poem placed between localities evoke the 'overlapping place-time(s)' (Brickell and Datta 2011: 4) of the translocal experience, inviting the reader into this space where multiple localities can be simultaneously present.

Ramazani's description of traveling poetry is particularly interesting here, as he makes the distinction between traveling poetry and tourist writing, the latter of which 'exotici[ses] foreign places and fetishistically dwell[s] on their particulars' (Ramazani 2015: 54). The travel involved in what he refers to as traveling poetry 'often occurs at the micro-level: swift territorial shifts by line, trope, sound, or stanza that result in flickering movements and juxtapositions' (ibid.: 53). The travel, in Ramazani's sense, is not used merely as a device to explore an exotic place or to serve as a background, but rather it is integral to the poetic structure. As Ramazani observes, 'Traveling poetry helps foreground how, through imaginative as well as literal mingling and merging, new coinages, new intergeographic spaces, even new compound identities come into being' (ibid.: 60). He emphasises the way in which traveling poetry switches and changes between places, enhancing the feeling of being between places through compressed juxtapositions. Traveling poetry does not necessarily create a unique world within the poem that a reader can enter and fully inhabit. Rather it is marked by restlessness, signalled by rapid shifts that in fact undermine the stability of the world within the poem, and thus the reader is encouraged to jump between places, often in a disorientating way.

This travel does not have to be a description of movement or an encounter with a new place, but rather it could be an expression of the translocal experience of knowing more than one place intimately. The localities where one has lived can appear next to each other in a poem, as poetry has the capacity to bring together multiple sites of being without having to reconcile their differences. As poet Michelle Cahill argues, 'A poem can reach the interstices of thought; it can traverse spatial boundaries, gear shifting and fast-tracking by turns through tone, fragmentation, rhythm, metonymy and metaphor. This makes it a powerful language for communicating the heterogeneous and paradoxical' (Cahill 2016: n.p.). In this way a poem can hold the experience of being placed in a particular locality (and the specific details of everyday living that it entails) and simultaneously evoke the imaginative traveling that can occur when experiences from other localities intrude.

But in what ways might this translocal experience, and the techniques of switching and traveling that Ramazani outlines, manifest in the distinct form of the videopoem?

The videopoetry form

Videopoetry, according to pioneer of the form Tom Konyves, is 'the measured integration of narrative, non-narrative and anti-narrative juxtaposition of image, text and sound as resulting in a poetic experience' (Konyves 2011: n.p.). In his manifesto on the form, he contrasts videopoetry to poems set to film, explaining that in the former it is more common to find self-reflexive sequences, contrast, fragmentation, the incongruous and the dissonant (ibid.). Rather than illustrating a poem, Konyves argues that a videopoem is successful when 'image or sound elements have been either modified or, by their provocative juxtaposition, present an unusual or unanticipated *context* which, upon reflection, further expands the original text's meaning' (ibid., emphasis in the original). The artist's selection and mixing of the text, the visual and the aural plays a key role in shaping a successful videopoem, where each plays a vital role in the

meaning of the work. The images are not solely there to illustrate a poetic narrative, but rather they contribute additional layers of meaning.

But juxtaposition by itself does not make an effective videopoem. As videopoet Alison Watkins argues, if not done well 'juxtaposition of image in ways that are at odds significantly with what is being spoken or written on the screen can easily become nothing more than a discombobulated mess' (Watkins 2012: 2). The shock of a contrast is not effective if it is just used as an effect without considering the reasons behind the juxtaposition. This balance between text, sound and image is vital for a well-executed videopoem. The tracks are neither overly illustrative, not meaninglessly discordant. It is important to consider the ways in which each of them speaks to the others and plays a role in the reading of the work.

The consideration of what makes a good juxtaposition, as well as the ways in which images, sound and text are balanced in a videopoem, can be a challenging process. In addition, the increasing access to open source and easy-to-use technologies can make it tempting to use aesthetically impactful technological effects that are chosen more for their visual impact than for the good of the poem. As new media theorist Lev Manovich highlights, 'exactly the same techniques, compositions and iconography can now appear in any media' (Manovich 2013: 248), leading videopoet Dave Bonta to observe that 'the popularity of certain stock images poses a risk to online videopoetry, a creeping homogenization, a cliché effect' (Bonta 2014: n.p.). In considering ways to assess the effectiveness of a particular spatial montage Manovich (2002) argues that juxtapositions need to follow a system and that they need to contribute to the meaning of the work. He emphasises that compositing is not just a technical operation—how to cut between images or overlay sound—but rather these decisions must have their foundation in a conceptional reasoning. Why is it relevant for the meaning of the videopoem to make use of this particular technique and juxtapose these particular elements? It is the concept that drives the decision of what approach and technological tools to use. However, given that there are three elements combined in the videopoetry form (visual, sound and text), the range of choices are more extensive than those made when writing only the text of a poem. A poet could choose animation, found images, imagery that manipulates text on screen, or abstract shapes, to name but a few. As the poet works on the detail of the videopoem they are making micro decisions involving 'different possibilities of editing the images, creating either slow or quick sequences that will give different perception values' (de Melo e Castro 2007: 178-9). These decisions regarding the visual element then need to be balanced by the sound and text.

These are a complex set of interrelated elements, but as I will argue throughout this paper, these additional elements have the potential to evoke a more layered representation of the translocal experience. For example, while the text might be focused on one place, the images or soundtrack can evoke an echo of another place, alluding to the internal world of the narrator who might be referring to their experiences as they shift between localities in their mind. Different places come in and out of focus; they can be background noise or a vague pattern that does not quite break through to the front of one's thinking, evoking the lived translocal experience in a way that draws on multiple senses. These influences at the fringes of a poem can be suggestions through image and sound, something that briefly intrudes before submerging again.

The use of juxtaposition and subtext in videopoetry resonates with Ramazani's quick travels through place in transnational poetry, in the 'micro-level: swift territorial shifts by line, trope, sound, or stanza that result in flickering movements and juxtapositions' (Ramazani 2015: 53). How might the use of sound and image enrich these shifts? Might they create a distinct space

in which multiple senses are engaged? As I was making translocal videopoems and as I reflected on the meaning I was trying to create, I wondered again about the tension between the local experience of everyday living and the intrusions of other places in the form of experience and memory. How does it feel to be placed in multiple localities? Does it feel like a nowhere space in which a person might never feel entirely comfortable? Is it a liminal space in which one is constantly suspended? And if so, what does this actually feel like when you are living day-to-day life? Awareness of multiple localities might appear in sudden intrusions of another place, such as being surprised by a certain perfume that passes when doing the shopping. It might be being enveloped by a feeling of familiarity when performing a certain routine. Or it might be the disorientation of momentarily forgetting in which locality one is currently residing. It is the juxtaposition of these diverse senses that I am interested in exploring here, as the elements within the videopoetry form have the potential to create these moments of being surprised by translocal awareness by engaging with the visual and aural fields.

Some examples

Two videopoems that emerged out of the pandemic are interesting to analyse here; as physical travel was mostly suspended some poets turned to travel within the poem. The first example is 'Chant for a Pandemic' (Hood 2020),[1] which focused on the connections between people in different locations experiencing the pandemic. It involved 21 videopoets from 11 countries, who contributed their videos, which videopoet Dee Hood edited together. The soundtrack includes music and a chant by Hood and other voices, with repeated phrases emerging ('when the invisible cloud clears, we, you and I will be near'). Many of the images show empty streets or evoke a sense of suspension in time: a cow walking down an empty street; a man wandering in his front yard; the contemplation of swirls of leaves or falling snow. Another common thread involves looking out of windows, as people shelter at home. There are also more subtle links between places, such as an inside curtain blowing in the breeze cutting to washing flapping in a backyard. These poetic links visually ease the shift from one place to another. The common motifs highlight shared experiences—either the shared experience of the pandemic or the common movements of daily life—in spite of the obvious differences in place. The videopoem cuts between imagery of tropical foliage, city high rises and back yards with identifiable architecture. Some places seem to be more recognisable than others, but their differences are not overly emphasised.

In addition to cuts from place to place, the videopoem also overlays a circle onto the main image in which there is a secondary image. This bubble juxtaposes places, sometimes serving to show the parallels, for example similar panning shots of empty streets in two very different looking places (one as the main image and one in the circular space), or in another case a man wandering in his front yard while in the circle a woman is staring out of a window. Sometimes the two images show distinct perspectives, for example one image shows a view at street level while the image in the circle is looking down at a woman walking past in the street, as if a person were looking down through their window. In another case the two images contrast the inside and the outside—an empty street seen from a window and the back of a person in their kitchen. These echoes and contrasts, made by one image placed inside another, make the contrast between places more overt. Where the cuts take the viewer on an associative journey from one image/place to another, the inserted images require the viewer to take in two places at once. There is no transition, but rather a contrast in which the viewer is encouraged to make connections between the images. What do they mean in relation to one another? It is at these points that a shared experience comes through strongly. There is a contrast between

the scenes and the viewer can clearly see that they are from different locations, but the use of common imagery (windows or street scenes, for example) works to highlight the connections. The borders between places are not erased—the inserted circle creates a barrier between the images—but the associations between the images allow a crossing between places that reduces the distances and creates a way to feel closer to what otherwise might feel like overwhelming differences.

Finding ways to interlace distinct localities is an interesting element of translocal poetry, which community studies and development scholar Michael Peter Smith calls 'a mode of multiple emplacements or situatedness both *here* and *there*' (Smith 2011: 171, emphasis in the original). In the case of 'Chant for a Pandemic' Hood chose common images to thread through the distinct places, easing the path between localities as opposed to creating a shock of dislocation. On the other hand, poet Anna Fo in her work 'Sealed Faithful Halls'[2] uses a split screen to create a more disjointed contrast between places.

Fo explains how the videopoem was made, during lockdown when movement was restricted:

> [it] refers to a series of videos that have been recorded in different locations, through a period of years, either as part of art projects—but were never used—or as a record of situations, feelings and moments in time, in order to be used for future art projects. (Fo 2020: n.p.)

As she remained in one locality, Fo turned to these extracts and pre-recordings of various places to travel creatively while her body couldn't. Throughout the piece she maintains the screen horizontally split. She contrasts distinct images: florescent lights and a close-up of grass; passing streetlights and abstract colour lights which are too close to see clearly; windmills and pebbles; a pale blue scene of walking legs and a busy and abstract dance of lights. There are points where the two images meet, for instance through colour (blue sky with seed pods and blue pool water with floating seeds) or through patterns (such as a vertical line running through both images and meeting at the horizontal line, breaching the divide between the two spaces). There is also a type of static that runs over both images, as if it were an old film.

The split screen, as well as the tight focus on the details, can make it hard to identify the context of the images, and it is only the description of the work that clearly places the images from different locations. However, the techniques of juxtaposition and split screen, as well as the movement within the clips themselves, provide the travel in the videopoem. The moving streetlights allude to driving along a road, while another image shows a slower pace of walking across stones and yet another shows blurry legs walking in a generic space that suggests an airport lounge. But by only partially presenting the images, and by focusing on the small details, Fo prevents the viewer from locating themselves in a place. As she explains, 'a juxtaposition of moving images and sounds was created, an illusion of situations, where real spaces are transformed into imaginary ones' (ibid.). There is a continual travel between the two screens, packed together so closely so as to give no space for adjustment. This split between places is akin to the 'swift territorial shifts' that Ramazani refers to, which 'result in flickering movements and juxtapositions' (Ramazani 2015: 53). The flickering movement is relentless, and matched by the pulsing soundtrack. The reading of the poem also reflects this echo of places, as the lines are repeated and cross over each other, creating reverberation.

The placement of the images next to each other, as opposed to placing one within another, as in 'Chant for a Pandemic', gives fewer clues as to how to read the relationship between the images.

The two images sit next to one another, withholding a process of meaning making; one does not gain a definitive answer to the questions of how they relate to each other, where they are from, and what their positioning means. Rather, they seem like hints from places that don't form into full memories, as if a feeling for a place (such as walking over pebbles) is recalled, but without the full detail.

Both these examples of videopoems show how specific techniques enhance the traveling elements of the work. The split screen of 'Sealed Faithful Halls' keeps the focus on two places at once, while 'Chant for a Pandemic' cuts between places (and contributors), connecting them through associations or placing one image within another.

Taking into consideration some of these techniques for traveling in videopoems, I would like to analyse two parts of a videopoem suite I made in 2021: 'Walking to Montjüic' parts I and II. The eight-part videopoem suite traces everyday routines at home and in the streets of Barcelona. Starting with an inward-looking and personal perspective, the videopoems slowly provide more context to the realities of Barcelona, not only presenting the personal translocal experience, but also questioning local attitudes towards migration more generally. Although the text is centred around experiences in Barcelona, I wove in visual and aural recordings sourced from Barcelona, northern Thailand, Singapore and Victoria (Australia) in order to make visible the translocal influences that informed the poetry. Layering (both visual and aural) and repetition (though images as well as through the poem's text) are both aesthetic features of the work. In addition, I chose footage I found in each of the localities in order to, according to Grimshaw's anthropological filmmaking approach, 'foster a new sensitivity toward the non-verbal, toward the details, textures, and materiality of the world' (Grimshaw 2002: 11). This emphasis on found footage and sound, as opposed to staged or sourced content from a third party, was part of the exploration of how to create translocal poetry that incorporates influences from multiple localities familiar to me. This is similar to Hood's compilation of footage from all over the world, based around one theme, although in my case it was all my own footage.

I began the series using layered images of a domestic space (where I was waking up and still in bed) contrasted with images of distinct places, such as streets of Melbourne and Singapore, and rural spaces in northern Thailand (see Figure 1). As Manovich explains, new media 'can now composite an unlimited number of image layers' (Manovich 2002: 152) and the transition between media types can be so smooth as to be practically invisible. However, he argues that 'Borders between different worlds do not have to be erased' and in fact 'individual layers can retain their separate identities rather than being merged into a single space; different worlds can clash semantically rather than form a single universe' (ibid.: 158). As I was trying to create a space that explored borders, transitions, interferences and influences between localities I didn't want to smooth away these transitions. Instead, I purposefully created layers that were at times so dense that they became patterns more than places. This technique is more akin to modernist video and cinema, which key 'together images from two video sources' in jumps and cuts wherein the 'image created through keying presents a hybrid reality, composed of two different spaces' (ibid.: 152).

By layering multiple images, I aimed to create a dream-like space that reflects a just-waking disorientation where multiple places seem closer and more tangible. I wanted the two to almost merge and to interfere with one another in the way translocal knowledge modifies ways of seeing and experiencing across places. Although the text of the poem was ostensibly focused on Barcelona, the layering of multiple images sought to allude to 'a simultaneous situatedness

across different locales' (Brickell and Datta 2011: 4) through a visual juxtaposition to the text. The experience of living in Barcelona, and the way of writing about it, was informed by these layered past experiences, and the different elements within the form of the videopoem enabled me to bring in these influences without burdening the text by trying to include too much. As filmmaker Alastair Cook explains, 'The film needs to provide a *subtext*, a series of suggestions and visual notes that embellish the poem' (Cook 2010: n.p., emphasis in the original). Throughout the suite I chose to use layering of multiple places as a visual subtext, in order to question my perception of place and to highlight the multiple influences of place that informed my writing of the poem.

1 'Walking to Montjüic I', an example of the dream-like layering.

In the second videopoem in the series I used cuts to make the shift between place (see Figure 2). I wanted to move from a dream-like sequence to a situation that could evoke the routines of daily life (looking out of the window while having breakfast, for example) while at the same time maintaining the intrusion of multiple localities. I did this through the motif of the street, oscillating between Barcelona and Melbourne street scenes using cuts rather than layering. I wanted the cuts between the two to act like intrusions from other places (thinking of traffic in Melbourne while looking down at cars passing in Barcelona, for example), creating a flickering between places. This was in contrast to the split screen as used by Fo in 'Sealed Faithful Halls', as the aim was not to hold the viewer suspended between places. Rather, I used the footage from Barcelona as the main visual track onto which other places intruded or spoke back. Additionally, I felt the split screen held up the two places as comparisons, something which I was trying to avoid as I adapted to the unfamiliar place of Barcelona.

In addition to the choice of when and how to mix images in the videopoem, I also paid attention to the traveling capacity of the soundtrack. In each videopoem of the suite, in addition to the spoken text of the poem, I used recorded sound from various places that contrasted with the images. This was a common thread throughout the suite and it served to create a space of slight dislocation and to bring in the influence of multiple localities, even at the moments when


2 Two scenes from 'Walking to Montjüic II', the left a street scene in Barcelona and the right one in Melbourne.

the images and text speak of the one place. For example, in section VI the images and text of the poem speak about a particular place in Barcelona (a disused prison) but the sound is from Singapore. Although the specific place might not be identifiable in the sound (it is of a park in Singapore, featuring bike bells and joggers, and could therefore be from any number of parks across the world), it provides a shock when placed together with the very different images of the prison walls. No bikes can be seen in the moving footage, so the sound is disorientating; there are two distinct places conveyed through the visual and the aural. I used sound throughout the suite as the common element to highlight translocal experiences, even as I explored distinct visual techniques (such as layering, cutting and juxtaposition). This common thread served to unite the suite, but I also wanted to investigate the ways in which the aural sense could undermine the dominance of the visual, creating subtle interventions from various locations.

Each of the elements closely observed place, and by combining them I sought to create a translocal space in which the influence of various localities jostled and competed for attention. I used techniques to create the unexpected intrusion of place, the flickering between places and the subtle merging of places. By using various techniques across the different image, sound and text elements I sought to explore the different ways translocal experiences can manifest in everyday life. Videopoetry is well suited to translocal poetry as it is possible to travel between media (moving image, soundtrack and text), creating various layers that evoke distinct places. As well as using techniques such as 'figure, rhythm, allusion, stanza, line, image, genre' (Ramazani 2015: xi) that are also used in written poems, the videopoem can use the subtext and juxtaposition of distinct media to create a layered space. In addition, the visual and the aural can talk back to the text, questioning the potential subconscious influences on the text even when the poem seems to be about just one place. The use of multiple media has the capacity to create different moods of traveling. For example, the split screen might create a sense of being continually divided between places, encouraging a direct comparison that keeps the two places separate. By contrast, layering images might make a translocal space that is more mixed, the two places merging and mixing to create new patterns. The choice to have the text based on one place and the image or sound in another could speak to a subconscious traveling, where the shift in attention between places is accidental or unexpected. The choice of putting one image within another could position one place as more dominant than another, indicating an unbalanced relationship between the two. The visual and aural allusions can speak back to the text and allow the traveling to occur parallel to the text of the poem. It is through the interplay of these tracks (visual, aural and text) that videopoetry has the capacity to evoke the multiple layers of the translocal experience.

The condensed changes across media that are possible in videopoetry create juxtapositions that emphasise the way the translocal experience quickly shifts between places. The confusion and discomfort that a discordant aural track might evoke in the viewer recreates, on a small scale, the uncomfortable space of translocal experiences. It is a more sensorial experience in which the unspoken elements of the poem (the visual and aural) equally contribute to the poem's meaning. The videopoetry form allows a poem not only to speak about the disorientation of lived experience in multiple places, but also to go some way towards creating it on a sensorial level. I would argue that more attention could be paid to the way this multidisciplinary form of expression can navigate the complex and ever-evolving challenges of being situated in multiple places.

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Notes

1 The videopoem 'Chant for a Pandemic' can be viewed at: https://vimeo.com/404278739

2 The videopoem 'Sealed Faithful Halls' can be seen at Anna Fo's vimeo channel: https://vimeo.com/annafo

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3 POEMS

Sally Ashton

FOR VALENTINE'S DAY

Sally Ashton

which I don't believe in
you took me to the coast
and I took you there too
because we are lovers
but we are egalitarian.
To the coast we went
a "dreamy divagation"
Elizabeth Bishop once wrote
of her day's-end bus ride
but you drove the Subaru
divagating through mountains
until our journey turned
from west to north to wander
up Highway 1 along the coast
past artichoke fields, strawberry
stands, the herds of lucky cows
half the size of a moose, lucky
cows to dream and graze sea-
salted fields at land's end until
their luck runs out, as it will
for each of us, in that car
or reading this page. O, Valentine
a dream-like distant hour
we slurped Duarte's famed
green-chili soup, and I stole
one handful of polished stones
from the forbidden beach
we visited afterward that year
before everything became
forbidden, the drive, the beach,
the restaurant we lingered in,
bowls of public soup, life
as we'd always lived it—common
as the cows' grassy daze—lost
what we'd known and counted on,
our three beloved friends and
oh my heart, the millions
more still to be lost
since Valentine's Day.

QUANTUM MIGRATION

Sally Ashton

It's a peculiar morning of signs, one of many. Mars' ancient riverbed appears, riven trail of pebbles and sand, and still the Moon's synchronous rotation hides its far side from us. We will never see from Earth. So it seems we must go to both these places, planet, satellite, the speculation that is space travel. To see for ourselves. To touch with our cameras, to feel with metal avatars, to listen for the sounds of stars rushing through the skies like the sound the air makes rushing past bare ears. Maybe we're seeking a geography for loss, the geometry and calculus, our missing equation? Maybe we don't know what it is we need to know, only the gravitational pull, the magnetic spin of the unknown reverberating there, repeating in the hollow center of our bones.

THE UNREACHED PARADISE OF OUR DESPAIR

Sally Ashton

'The unreached Paradise of our despair'
Lord Byron

N

This train is moving, always North.

So many greens.

I want to live in a tent and eat breakfast.

The needle trembles, I follow, the way sunflowers track the sun, the way geese pass overhead.

How often I have dreamed of flying.

Past the windows dark pines rush, open on a snowy field, close like curtains again.

I rub a circle in the foggy glass, search the sky for Northern lights.

What is True North?

Train tracks converge in the distance, the horizon a vanishing point of every desire.

Silence waits, the destination of each unspoken dream.

E

To go East is to return, places
of origin just outside of Eden.

East is where rivers swarmed, fish
plucked from the waters with bare hands.

We built our first homes there, trees
so plentiful we could only construct an empire.

Abundant fish, some sort of slavery
necessary. A belief at the center.

We fashioned myths in the East. Many believed,
hurried West leaving everything behind.

It's possible to go further East, where today
is just a yesterday that no one acknowledges.

Somewhere else is always West of here
so that anyone can be East. Understand?

You reach the Far East by traveling East
or West. Oceans block either journey

therefore we wonder where we're going.
How did we get here, is there hope for return.

S

Somewhere below the equator stretches a sky she has never seen, entire continents on which she hasn't stood, unfamiliar scent weights the air, where the sun slips quickly from the day and feral calls sound into sleepless night, native stars, whole islands, jungles untamed while she studies charts, follows latitudes with her finger. The suspiration of sails, a shift in the rigging, a sudden lurch seaward. Somewhere, her pulse a beating drum.

W

Pressed against the Pacific all my days
I bear an imprint of coastline
like a map of the brain. Wired, valleys
creased in my flesh, phototropic,

I search for a third coast, a horizon
that circles ever out of reach, like the dome
of my skull, like the shell of heaven.
I cast about from this center, the fixed leg

of a compass. Widening, narrowing,
I measure the distances needed
to move from homeland to heartland,
the angle of escape. So many places

to belong. The pull of gravity
rooted in this chair, or strapped
in the seat of a plane, or trotting down
concrete steps to the subway. I push

the compass outward, wide as the open sea,
drawing back in on itself, an inversion,
the configuration of my beginning
moves West, and West again.

for HB

About the author

Sally Ashton, MFA, is a poet, writer, teacher, and editor-in-chief of DMQ Review, an online journal featuring poetry and art. She is the author of four books. The most recent, *The Behaviour of Clocks* (WordFarm, 2019), is a poetic inquiry into time framed by Einstein's thought experiments. Other work appears in a variety of journals and anthologies including *A Cast-Iron Aeroplane that Actually Flies: Commentaries from 80 American Poets on their Prose Poems* (Madhat Press, 2019). She lives in California. sallyashton.com

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4 POEMS

Sudeep Sen

DRIFTWOOD

Sudeep Sen

for Derek Walcott & Sigrid Nama

At the end of this sentence, rain will begin.
—DW, 'Archipelagos', Map of the New World

1.
Part of the bannister-railing is absent
in spite of its strong metal-rivet moorings.

Termite-eaten, consumed by the sea,
I can see its woody skeleton float faraway

among the surf, its salt-scarred coat
tossing and struggling to keep afloat

against the waves' incessant lashing.
There is music in its disappearance—

a buoyant symphony,
note-strokes resurrecting life,

a new story—history restored
by resilient fingers of a master artist.

Wheelchair and weak legs
are inconsequential impediments—

his mind sparking with electric edge,
whiplash wit at its most acerbic.

There is generosity for family, friends—
those who are gone, and remain—

and thirty new poems,
an intricate magic of ekphrastic love.

2.

In the front garden facing the same sea
with Pigeon Island on the horizon's left,

lies a cluster of wind-eroded oval rocks—
their shapes mimic a lost egret's nest

or a ballerina's curved arch—
a stone-memorial for a close friend.

3.

The driftwood is now out of sight—
part of his house donated to the sea—

in gratitude the sea sings
a raucous song,

folded cumulonimbus clouds echo
in synchronicity—a soundscape

absorbing his commandment:
At the end of this sentence, rain will begin.

Castries, St Lucia

DISEMBODIED

Sudeep Sen

1.

My body carved from abandoned bricks of a ruined temple,
from minaret-shards of an old mosque,
from slate-remnants of a medieval church apse,
from soil tilled by my ancestors.

My bones don't fit together correctly as they should—
the searing ultra-violet light from Aurora Borealis
patches and etch-corrects my orientation—
magnetic pulses prove potent.

My flesh sculpted from fruits of the tropics,
blood from coconut water,
skin coloured by brown bark of Indian teak.

My lungs fuelled by Delhi's insidious toxic air
echo asthmatic sounds, a new vinyl dub-remix.
Our universe—where radiation germinates from human follies,
where contamination persists from mistrust,
where pleasures of sex are merely a sport—
where everything is ambition,
everything is desire, everything is nothing.
Nothing and everything.

2.

White light everywhere,
but no one can recognize its hue,
no one knows that there is colour in it— all possible colours.

Body worshipped, not for its blessing,
but its contour—
artificial shape shaped by Nautilus.
Skin moistened by L'Oreal
and not by season's first rains—
skeleton's strength not shaped by earthquakes
or slow-moulded by fearless forest-fires.

Ice-caps are rapidly melting—too fast to arrest glacial slide.
In the near future—there will be no water left
or too much water that is undrinkable,

excess water that will drown us all.
Disembodied floats, afloat like Noah's Ark—

no GPS, no pole-star navigation no fossil fuel to burn away—
just maps with empty grids and names of places that might exist.

Already, there is too much traffic on the road—
unpeopled hollow metal-shells without brakes,
swerve about directionless— looking for an elusive compass.

New Delhi

DISEMBODIED 2: LES VOYAGEURS

Sudeep Sen

for Bruno Catalano

To understand yourself, you must create a mirror
that reflects accurately what you are ….
Only in the understanding of what is,
is there freedom from what is.
—J Krishnamurti

Bronze humanforms sculpted, then parts deleted—
as if eroded by poisoned weather, eaten away
by civilisational time—
corrosion, corruption, callousness.
Power, strength, gravitas residing in metal's absence.

Men-women, old-young, statuesque—
holding their lives in briefcases—
incomplete travellers,
Marseilles *les voyageurs*, parts of their bodies
missing—
surreal— steadfast, anchored.

Engineered *within* their histories
of migration, travel—over land, by sea—
coping with life's mechanised emptiness.

Artform's negative space or positive? What are we too see?
Have these voyagers left something behind,
or are they yearning
to complete the incompleteness
in their lives?
They are still looking—
as am I, searching *within*.

Marseilles, France

DISEMBODIED 3: WITHIN

Sudeep Sen

for Aditi Mangaldas

You emerge—from *within* darkness, your face
sliding into light—
you squirm virus-like in a womb,
draped blood-red, on black stage-floor.
Around you, others swirl about
dressed as green algae,
like frenetic atoms
under a microscope in a dimly lit laboratory.
Art mirroring life—reflecting the pandemic on stage.

Your hands palpitate,
as the sun's own blinding yellow corona
cracks through the cyclorama.
People leap about—masked, veiled.
You snare a man's sight
with your fingers mimicking a *chakravavyuh*—
you are red, he is green, she is blue—
trishanku—life, birth, death—
regermination, rejuvenation, nirvana.

Everything on stage—as in life—
moves in circular arcs.
Irises close and open, faces veiled unveil—
hearts love, lungs breathe—breathless.

Lights, electromagnetic— *knotted, unwrapped*—
music pulsates, reaching a crescendo,
then silence.
Time stops. Far away in the infinite blue of the cosmos—
I look up and spot a moving white.
I see a white feather
trying its best to breathe
in these times of breathlessness, floating downwards—

and as it touches the floor, in a split-second
everything bursts into colour, movement, the *bols/taals*
try to restore order,
rhythm, both contained and free.

The backdrop bright orange,
the silhouettes pitch-black.

As you embrace another humanform,
the *infinite journey* of *timeless*ness might seem
inter_rupted,
but *now is* the moment to reflect and recalibrate
immersed in the *uncharted seas,* in the *widening circles,*
telling us— others matter,
the collective counts.

I examine minutely the striated strands
of the pirouetting feather, now fallen—
its heart still beating, its blood still pumping,
its white untarnished.
Life's dance continues—with or without us—
only in the understanding of what is,
is there freedom from what is.

New Delhi

About the author

Sudeep Sen's prize-winning books include: *Postmarked India: New & Selected Poems* (HarperCollins), *Rain, Aria* (AK Ramanujan Translation Award), *Fractals: New & Selected Poems* | *Translations 1980–2015* (London Magazine Editions), *EroText* (Vintage: Penguin Random House), *Kaifi Azmi: Poems* | Nazms (Bloomsbury) and *Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation* (Pippa Rann). *Blue Nude: Ekphrasis & New Poems* (Jorge Zalamea International Poetry Prize) and *The Whispering Anklets* are forthcoming. Sen's works have been translated into over 25 languages and he has also edited a variety of influential anthologies. He is the editorial director of AARK ARTS, editor of Atlas, and currently the inaugural artist-in-residence at the Museo Camera. Sen is the first Asian honoured to deliver the Derek Walcott Lecture and read at the Nobel Laureate Festival. The Government of India awarded him the senior fellowship for 'outstanding persons in the field of culture/literature.' www.sudeepsen.org

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TRAVELLING PATHWAYS

A choreographic journey with loss, grief and hope

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Abstract

This photographic essay outlines the choreographic journey to develop 'Pathway', a creative response to place, to the environment, to landscapes of the heart on the south-east coast of New South Wales. Prompted initially by the opportunity to participate in the Bundian Way Arts Exchange, the dance was also a response to loss and grief as a result of Black Summer. The essay also explores a sense of belonging to place and connecting to Country as a non-Indigenous Australia. The improvisational process ultimately drew on stories shared through the arts exchange and from friends affected by Black Summer, my own long term connection to the south coast, and additional research. I also sought to sense the living intelligence of Country; to mindfully centre place as the source material of perception and dialogue through movement. In creating 'Pathway' I was fortunate to travel lines of connectedness, to people and place, both recent and longer term that nurtured hope and renewal.

TRAVELLING PATHWAYS

Julie Rickwood

1 Travelling forward, sensing place: the early movement of 'Pathway' in costuming that references water and sky, earth and bogong moth. *Photograph: Bronwen Wicks*.

2 Treading carefully, gently. *Photograph: Bronwen Wicks*

3 Sensing the living intelligence, connecting to Yuin Country. *Photograph: Bronwen Wicks*

Introduction

I've been travelling to the south-east coast of New South Wales throughout my life, to the north during my childhood, shifting to Budawang Country during my teens and twenties, then to Walbunja Country since my thirties. For a short while in the late 1980s I lived further south, near Biamanga (Mumbulla), one of the four tallest mountains in the region. Together with Balgan (or Didthul, Pigeon House), Gulaga (Dromedary), and Balawan (Imlay), these mountains are important 'spiritual reference points to Aboriginal people' (Wesson 2000: 129). I travel often to immerse myself in the ocean, the waterways, the forests and the beaches of the region. These are landscapes of the heart (borrowing from Matthew Colloff 2020).

The images above and others throughout this essay are from a work entitled *Pathway*, created in October 2020 on the unceded sovereign lands of the Walbunja on Yuin Country. It was prompted by the experience of the Bundian Way Arts Exchange. This was a unique opportunity to create a solo choreographic work, one I had intended to take up in 2019 but needed to postpone because of other commitments. The impact of Black Summer, however, significantly changed both my anticipated experience of the arts exchange and my response. The pandemic also coloured the nature of the arts exchange and travel to the coast. The work explored relationships with the human and the more-than-human. Loss, grief and hope informed its conception.

I'm a dancer/choreographer with Somebody's Aunt , a Canberra-based dance ensemble of older generation women who create works in unconventional spaces, integrating contemporary and improvised dance, theatre, voice, music, and humour (when called for). Each dancer brings an array of life experience, telling stories from different perspectives, often with a political edge. We've been creating dance for over 15 years, including works that respond to the environment, to nature, to place: Juice, a response to the land, the grapevines and the transformative alchemy that brings wine into our lives at Contentious Character (Creative Juices Festival) in Wamboin in 2021, and at McKellar Ridge in Murrumbateman in 2019 (BOLD Festival) and 2018 (Festival of Women Makers); Niche in the gardens near the Sir Roland Wilson Building at the Australian National University in 2014 (ACT Dance Week); and Shore Sheilas on a small beach at North Rosedale on the South Coast of NSW in 2010. We also created Carrying Capacity, a processional dance performance thematically exploring both our planet's capacity to support life and our capacity to support our planet (You Are Here Festival 2014). In 2010 we created The Oracle Game for the opening of ceramic sculptor Vivien Lightfoot's exhibition about the dilemmas arising from today's equivalent of the Oracle—media reports regarding climate change. In 2011 the piece was further developed for performance as part of Dance on the Edge, Belconnen Arts Centre, ACT Dance Week. In 2021 we collaborated with the Australian Dance Party and others in a production entitled symbiosis, an episodic performance at the National Botanic Gardens which featured in the Enlighten Festival. Late in 2021 we were commissioned to produce a film for Localjinni to promote the environmentally informed choice to ride an e-scooter. Aunts on Scooters was screened during the 2022 Surface Urban Arts Festival.

I also have an undergraduate degree that includes anthropology and human ecology with postgraduate research in interdisciplinary, cross-cultural research. The photographer of the work, Bronwen Wicks, appreciated my creative endeavour. We began our friendship studying ecology in the mid-1980s[1] and she has been working in the environmental field ever since. She joined me on a few occasions at the coast as I worked through the Bundian Way material, a preoccupation with the impacts of Black Summer, concerns with colonial history and climate change, and the development of the choreography.

This essay outlines the cultivation of historical, ecological and eco-somatic awareness on Yuin Country that frames the accompanying series of photographs. The essay begins with a brief overview of the arts exchange, followed by a reflection on Black Summer. A discussion on connection to Country follows. I conclude with a recount of my creative endeavour.

The Bundian Way Arts Exchange

The Bundian Way Arts Exchange is a community program funded by the ACT Government, coordinated by the School of Art and Design at the Australian National University in Canberra, my hometown for the last almost forty years, on the unceded Country of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri.

The arts exchange is a creative, participatory project focused on building positive reciprocal relationships between the Canberra community and local regional Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Participants are encouraged to develop creative work personally responding to their engagement with the issues raised through the learning events in Canberra and structured field visits along the Bundian Way.

The Bundian Way is a contemporary re-imagining of a pathway linking Turamullerer (Twofold Bay) with Targangal (Mount Kosciuszko), a route travelled by regional Aboriginal people of the past to gather and feast on whales in the spring, continuing up through the range and Maneroo (Monaro), gathering yams, hunting, fishing and burning along the way, and into the high country in the summer, where again they practised ceremony and feasted, this time on bogong moths. It has since been overlayed with colonial and contemporary history.

John Blay, with the support and assistance of Yuin custodians of the land and elders past and present, searched out the pathway through historical records, oral history and exploration of the south-east region. Blay's publication *On Track* (2015) was a primary source in the arts exchange. Initial development of the Bundian Way at Eden has now opened it up to tourism with signboards outlining its significance. This enables local Aboriginal people to rediscover their close ties to Country, renew cultural engagement, and create employment for the local community, especially the young. There are plans for further tourism expansion of the Bundian Way, something made more real with additional funding received from the NSW Government in late 2020 (Cole 2020).

As a result of the pandemic, the 2020 arts exchange was delivered online, given the restrictions on contact and travel. This also meant that each participant differently navigated their travels to and on the Bundian Way. The choreography was therefore created after attending zoom presentations from Yuin elders, artists, and others associated with the Bundian Way who shared stories of its deep past, colonial adoption and adaption, its current revitalisation and potential. Many also shared stories of their lived experience of colonisation and its enduring impacts. My limited visits to sections of the Bundian Way, much of which had been hit by the bushfires, also informed the response.

Reflection on Black Summer

In the following image [4] I am dancing with a burnt stick recovered from the grounds of a treasured retreat lost in the bushfires that raged throughout the south coast of New South Wales (and elsewhere) in the summer of 2019-2020. There were few sticks to find on the scorched earth, little left behind after the fierce firestorm had swept up the hill where the holiday home had settled into its bushland surrounding over the last thirty years. I shared the vision and beginnings of building that retreat with friends. It was our place for weekend trips and longer holidays. And then it was gone.

In our grief, we celebrated the treasured memories of times together, times with our own families and other friends, and the joy it had given so many. But the tortuous weeks of smoke and uncertainty, the loss of homes and human lives, the destruction of property and infrastructure, the razing of native flora and fauna took their toll. The extreme effects on so many and so much in many parts of east-coast Australia overwhelmed me. As Danielle Celermajer knows similarly,

> We do not really have the capacity to grasp this much loss—not only to humans, but the other wild and domesticated animals, to the bush, to the ecologies of rivers and moss and the creatures who flourish there, to the possibility of regeneration. (2021: 5-6)

Soon after the January firestorms Djiringanj Elder Warren Foster Senior declared that his people had never known such fires before, stating that the 'Ancestors would be wild about what's happened to the Country, to our totem animals … ceremony places, sites on our sacred mountain

4 Dancing with a burnt stick recovered from the grounds of a treasured retreat lost in the bushfires. *Photograph: Bronwen Wicks*

… that burned' (Reynolds and Georgeson 2020: n.p.). I simply continued to weep throughout 2020 as I passed through burnt, silent forests and destroyed towns and villages when travelling down the Kings or Snowy Mountains Highways and into Yuin Country. The ridgeline of the range was (and still is) fringed with dead trees rather than the dense forests that had once touched the sky. I had a deep knowing that parts of the region would not recover in my lifetime. It was in this sequence with the burnt stick that I embodied loss and grief fiercely, dancing in wild circles around the clearing. It was followed by an exploration of what remained of a large fallen tree, a desire to hold loss and grief gently.

After a time and with the gift of rain, regeneration was remarkable in some eucalypt forests with abundant epicormic growth dominating the burnt landscapes. Native animals, birds, and even latent flora species returned (see, for instance, Pascoe 2021) and continue to do so. The lead author in the latest Australia's Environment Report, Albert van Dijk, said: '[t]here is reason to hope that our environment will get a chance to rebuild from the horrendous Black Summer' (ANU College of Science News 2021: n.p.), while Skye Krichauff declared that if humans are observant and empathetic, 'Country can communicate stories and how, if humans allow it, Country has the power to restore itself' (2020: 427).

The communities affected by Black Summer have been recovering and re-creating in unique ways. Land owners are seeking out the help of local Aboriginal people to support them in caring for their properties, to integrate cultural burning practices to protect the land from future devastating fires. As Victor Steffensen has argued, 'fire keeps Country healthy' (2020: 97).

These and other cultural practices to care for Country are increasingly being restored and reintroduced as it has become recognised that both the loss of cultural practices in caring for Country and climate change prompted those fires (see, for example Williamson 2021 and

5 Exploring the remains of a once-living more-than-human companion. *Photograph: Bronwen Wicks*

6 Embracing her, holding loss and grief. *Photograph: Bronwen Wicks*

Miriani et al 2022). We therefore need to create 'a future where [First Peoples'] knowledge can be reintegrated into the life of the nation and can help heal this continent' (Anderson 2020: 25).[2]

Living with climate change clearly demands a finer investigation of our current relationship with and in the environment (broadly) and how to negotiate the challenges required to modify and enhance our more local or regional relationships with place and history. Rediscovering what lay buried in Australia under 'the endemic forgetfulness of the dominant culture' (Griffiths, quoted in Fullagar 2021: n.p.), requests a turning back to 'pick up what was left for us—the stories, the teachings, the songs, each other, our more-than-human relatives who lay scattered along that path' (Kimmerer 2015, cited in Sepie 2018: 23).

We can possibly also draw on our own histories, given that each of us 'comes from people who were once indigenous [with] cultures of gratitude that formed our old relationships with the living earth' (Kimmerer 2020: 377); from societies that were 'part of larger ecological and environmental communities constituted of many more-than-human persons' (Wildcat 2017: x), actuated in reciprocal relationships. In doing so, we can interrogate and negotiate anew our own 'relationship to place and value in … community, culture, history and present-day world' (Wilson 2008: 196).

The sequence of images overleaf [8-13] reveals elements of the embodied exploration of reciprocal relationships, a spiralling that attempted to dissolve the separation between human and the more-than-human.

7 Turning back: recalling the stories, the teachings, the songs...
Photograph: Bronwen Wicks





8-13 Spiralling. *Photographs: Bronwen Wicks*

Belonging to place, connecting to Country

> In Australia, the sense of belonging, home and place enjoyed by the non-Indigenous subject—the coloniser or migrant—is based on the dispossession of the original owners of the land and the denial of our rights under international customary law (Moreton-Robinson 2020: n.p.).

This truth is not easy to hold but must be cradled gently in order to nurture self and Country as a non-Indigenous person. Through the writing of many, I know that this 'continent is an inherently peopled landscape … alive and intertwined with [First Nations] people and knowledge systems' (Bracknell 2020: 19).[3]

Jessica Weir suggests that the focus on relationships in the discipline of ecology links into the holistic language of Country. She comments that 'many traditional owners express their attachment for Country through their unique ecologies' (Weir 2012: 1). The increasing generosity of First Nations people to share their traditional knowledge is therefore greatly valued. I appreciate how it reinforces my understanding of the planet as a single, interconnected, complex system but from the perspective of deep connection to Country. I want to listen to their stories, to learn how 'Indigenous knowledges and sovereignties may contribute to the health of Country and people, how they might lick at the edges of colonising thinking and, perhaps, drive it out' (Silverstein and McKinnon 2021: xi).

Through the generosity of the presenters in the arts exchange I had access to stories of caring for Country and learnt more through reading various sources (see references). I came to understand that First Nations connection to Country is an embodied cartography of place, one beyond my capacity. Theirs is steeped in centuries of experience and knowledge of the changing geographies and weather patterns within ancient and modern coastlines; embedded in wisdom, in law and lore, in ceremony. This knowledge is gained through an induction process, a sequence referred to by Tyson Yunkaporta as 'spirit, heart, head and hands' (2019: 274). First Peoples are of Country; I can only ever be on Country.

Yet I am also very aware that 'place confers on many of us a deep sense of our identity and how our notion of who we are is reflected by the ways we interact with the landscape, its ecosystems, plants and animals' (Colloff 2020: 19) and our local and regional communities. My connection or sense of belonging to place is based on decades of engagement, affection, attachment, and ecological training. Braided within that is a dance practice that includes creative responses to place.

Conclusion

Though singular in title, the pathways taken to create [*Pathway*] were multiple and diverse, both imagined and real, some prompted by the knowledge of others, some based on instinct or practice, and others tentative, hesitant. Movement, rhythms, patterns, pulses, sounds and silences in the environment, in an annual cycle, in the footprints of others, both past and present, were drawn on to create an embodied response. I attempted to listen deeply and observe, to expand consciousness and awareness of the body-in-space, in order to explore the body's creative potential to respond to place. (Rickwood, forthcoming)

The images accompanying this essay capture some of the choreography created along connected pathways on a coastal reserve not far from the lost retreat, remarkably spared by

14 Nurturing hope, revitalising capacity. *Photograph: Bronwen Wicks*

firestorms, and where I was able to stay from time to time in 2020. Its view south to Gulaga was nurturing. Mother Mountain is sacred and holds the story of creation of the Yuin nation (Harrison 2009: 30). It is a significant women's dreaming and learning site, a spiritual place of rebirth and healing. The location nurtured hope and presented itself as an appropriate site for my choreographic response to the arts exchange experience, though one significantly overlayed with the experience of Black Summer.

Improvising along those pathways drew on stories shared through the arts exchange and from the many friends affected by Black Summer, as well as my own deep connection to the south coast. I also sought to sense the living intelligence of Country, and to centre place as the source material of perception and dialogue through movement. I navigated the pathways with intention, meandering along the dynamic surfaces underfoot, dwelling when and where compelled to do so, creating sequences in locations that so prompted, before responding to the urge to move on once again.

In creating *Pathway* I was fortunate to travel lines of connectedness, to people and place, both recent and longer term. Importantly, First Nations voices generously contributed and gave me hope. As Michael-Shawn Fletcher (2021) has suggested, recovery from the trauma of fires like those experienced during Black Summer can be enriched by sitting down and listening to Aboriginal people and understanding caring for Country.

Matthew Colloff recognised that the 'triangle of relationships between landscape, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians has shaped our history and will shape our future' (2020: 24). That close entanglement of people, places, ecosystems and events since 1788 has created a history that bears the scars of colonisation. That shallow layer, however, overlays a deep history which contains a reservoir of knowledge, an intimate deep time perspective that might help not only restore the landscapes and communities devastated by Black Summer but also more

broadly help repair the damage of colonial violence on both people and place, deepening the triangle of relationships to shape a richer future for our nation.

In times of crisis, we need creative and imaginative ways of thinking and being. Alice Walker poetically remarked that 'hard times require furious dancing' (Walker 2010: xvi). Robin Wall Kimmerer suggests we 'dance for the renewal of the world' (Kimmerer 2020: 251). And, more recently, Paul Callaghan commented:

> There are many good things in this world. By fusing them with the wisdom of the ancients, a new hybrid of thought and action can be generated that learns from the past, prepares us for the future and enables us to dance in the present. (2020: n.p.)

Pathway was a co-creation with the human and the more-than-human, a dance both humble and furious that explored loss, grief and hope, my own and beyond. The various pathways travelled during the creative process shaped *Pathway*. Each step taken connected me more deeply to people and place, history and contemporary circumstance. Through the choreographic journey my capacity to contribute to renewing, if not the world, at least the landscapes of my heart, was restored and revitalised.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this essay to the Spotted Gum Collective and to my mother, Jean Marcelle Cooper. I thank the friends and colleagues who read earlier drafts, especially Laura Rademaker, Jane Ingall, Bronwen Wicks, Matthew Colloff, Alison Plevey and Fiona Hooton. I also greatly appreciate the feedback and suggestions for refinement of the essay from the editors and reviewers.

Notes

1 We were two of the co-authors of the *WHARM Report: A submission to the Bega Valley Shire Rural Lands Environmental Study* (Wicks et al 1985).

2 It should be noted, however, that incorporating Indigenous ecological knowledge in co-designed fire management and other ecological recovery plans must first recognise that many First Nations people need to be afforded time and resources to re-learn their traditional practices 'as they've been unable to conduct them with the same freedoms they once did' (Janke 2021). Russell (2021) argues, 'It's very important that Aboriginal people are not set up to fail … Where people have lost their knowledge, we have to be working carefully with them as they try new methods'.

3 See also, for example, Harrison and McConchie (2009), Kwaymullina and Kwayumullina (2010), Weir (2012), Gay'wu Group of Women (2019), and Callaghan (2020).

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Julie Rickwood is a music and performance researcher and practitioner based in Canberra, Australia. Julie's research has concentrated on Australian popular music, place, gender, and environmental activism; and on community music, gender, cross-cultural exchange and common ground, and, again, environmental activism. More recently, research has ventured into the field of ecochoreography. Julie is a dancer/choreographer with Somebody's Aunt and a tenor with the Pop Up Choir.

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3 POEMS

FJ Bergmann

DAILY PLANNER

FJ Bergmann

She calls dawn a lyre,
not a strumpet tangled
in a foment of blue sheets.
Later every morning
she bathes in humility
and fluorescence,
throws on the silver skin
admired by werewolves
from a safe distance,
drinks tang and blackwater.
All day she watches a pot
of thickening blood, thinks
of more trusts to fumble,
more grievances to forge,
more spellings to dismember.
The foolish sun presumes to set
against her recommendations.
Dinner is unexpected: nipperkins,
a candelabrum's luminescence,
and fugitive, familiar airs.
All night she casts a faint shadow,
turns slowly away from the stars,
dreams of waking to the dark
paranoia of smoke.

GILDED POMEGRANATES

FJ Bergmann

A leashed lion supine beside me on the tickling sand
where we vacation at the coast, I stand in the cooling
air that sent blood coarsening through the imagined
you on the edge of an ocean without a western shore.
We had become uncircumstantial, intoxicating—but
good—neighbors upon the altar where we saddled
our courser vows. We set apace for the last wild-rose-
covered cottage, a life and all that. Now we will bury
our wedding clothes. What, planted in broken land,
will they become? What good fortune to be spent in
the homely evening of my life? They must be both
the branches that will become twisted and strong
beneath the wind, and the root that curls its barbs
deep into the past. What penetrates the vanished
spoken? All that we grew was a variant, a dialect
of collective thoughts. I had asked fairly for you,
poor man's child like me; I had asked humbly
for something interesting to do, restructuring
luisant sounds from a language of bewildered
music. I was so happy then, I did not know
that I was happy.

SKID

FJ Bergmann

Some hope that it might rain, but others say it can stay fine for all they care. Fine, in this case, being dry as the furry thing's skeleton you found way in the back of the kitchen cupboard. Figure it's been there nine years, give or take a few. Gotta be a track record for procrastinating on the spring cleaning. As if you hadn't anything better to compulsively avoid. Let's start with destabilizing Western civilization and work our way down. After the first act of defiance, it gets exponentially lots smoother—you'll get the hang of it, but stimulants help. Doctor the charts at work so it looks like you've been around some. Tricky when your job is nude modeling. Pose, stand, sit, lie etherized, hallucinate vigorously. The brave new year begins, with a big jerk. Hours skooch along on skids. Soon the hills will begin to show their wooden ankles. You want to have been there before, when if rain had fallen pale vapor rose like an industrious gasp.

About the author

F. J. Bergmann is the poetry editor of *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change* (mobiusmagazine.com), past editor of *Star*Line*, the journal of the Science Fiction & Fantasy Poetry Association (sfpoetry.com), managing editor of MadHat Press (madhat-press.com), poetry editor for Weird House Press (weirdhousepress.com), and freelances as a copy editor and book designer. She lives in Wisconsin with a husband, intermittent daughters and a horse or two, and imagines tragedies on or near exoplanets. Her writing awards include SFPA Rhysling Awards for both long and short poems and SFPA Elgin Awards for two recent chapbooks: *Out of the Black Forest* (Centennial Press, 2012), a collection of conflated fairy tales, and *A Catalogue of the Further Suns*, first-contact reports from interstellar expeditions, winner of the 2017 Gold Line Press manuscript competition. She was a Writers of the Future winner. She has competed at National Poetry Slam with the Madison Urban Spoken Word slam team.

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2 POEMS

Saba Vasefi

CLANDESTINE

Saba Vasefi

Nostalgia bleeds me out
and I slump anaemic,
caught in the long lines,
the streaming ruby nets,
the vineyard casts.

Within vine leaves,
migraines, those bandaged
nomads, find ease in the silence
of saplings. Tanks hang
there, oxygen tanks,
filling with aromas,
and I find there another way
than strangulation.

Resilience has its limits:
you endure affliction
until you start to fall
apart; the end arrives
in pieces. The sweetness
of the grape sours to
vinegar. I know the anguish
of the banished winemaker,
whose crop rots in
outlawed fields; I pine
for retribution—a martyr's
mutilation ....

This clandestine arbor
is rapture's relic; this
libation, my liberation—
an illicit thirst slaked
in the throat of revolt
by what the extremists'
terroir yields.

You are my coronary
cure, you drip
feed my suffering;
you alone avert
aversion.

You and I, we both know
how to grow, hanging
vertical in vertigo,
thriving on privation,
our hearts beating
in monochromatic
burgundy.

Note

Under the Islamic Republic of Iran's regime, alcohol consumption is punishable by 80 lashes, and repeated convictions for drinking alcohol may lead to the death penalty.

WEEP OF WHIP

Saba Vasefi

The rain falls on the street
whose end is not

my home; the rain falls
on hope. We were coming

back the way we'd gone,
leaving the shooting behind us.

In the forest of distances
I live far now from that fire,

but still I hear it, the sound
of absence, the weep of a whip

of sedition. Still, I smell it,
I taste the salt of blood
between broken teeth.
Still, I feel the percussion

of chastisement, the fall
of the whip. I gaze at the residue

of days. Spring exhumes
winter. I step through the moon's

reflection, a corpse
on the moist macadam.

A woman wounded,
mangled by boots.

The moon herself
is lunatic alone with me,

we fall into a scarlet
eclipse and out again

unchanged. All these years,
you've been a roof, you have been

a light in a strange room,
company my sorrow can keep.

What land are you from that,
when you lie with me,

I whisper in a stranger's accent,
Are you my longing's house?

About the author

Dr Saba Vasefi is a multi-award-winning scholar-journalist, poet, and documentary filmmaker. She writes on the human impacts of Australia's immigration and border policies. Her report on the gendered harms of detention in *The Guardian* won the New South Wales Premier's Multicultural Communications Award. Saba's poems have appeared in various journals, including *Transnational Literature*, *Wasafiri Magazine of International Contemporary Writing* (UK), *Cordite Poetry*, *Australian Poetry*, and the Art Gallery of NSW. She is the chief editor of *Borderless, A Transnational Anthology of Feminist Poetry*, and the Red Room Poetry's *Writing in Resistance* editor. Saba is a curator of the Nauru Narratives poetry event in the Art Gallery of New South Wales (Refugee Week 2022), an honorary member of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia and a member of the UK Women in Refugee Law Network. She was twice a judge for the Dolatabadi Book Prize for the Best Book on Women's Literature and Women's Issues and the Ballina Region for Refugees, Seeking Asylum Poetry Prize.

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'WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW'

Study tours and creativity

Glenn Moore, Kat Ellinghaus, Emma Robertson, Paul Hetherington, and Cassandra Atherton

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'WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW'

Glenn Moore, Kat Ellinghaus, Emma Robertson, Paul Hetherington, Cassandra Atherton.

Introduction

The writers of this article teach at different universities. Two are Writing and Literature professors, three historians, and within those disciplines, each has a different area of interest. What unites them is a shared belief in the importance of visiting the place they are writing about, and how they all used overseas study tours to give their students the same opportunity to see a place with fresh eyes and write about it with imagination and creativity.

The idea that a sense of place is a necessary part of good writing flows out of the maxim 'write what you know.' Attributed variously to Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway, this does not suggest that writers should confine themselves to familiar, everyday subjects, but rather that they should travel and learn about new places before they write about them—advice both Twain and Hemingway heeded. The British novelist Sanjida O'Connell, who also researched her stories in far flung places, was reminded just how essential a sense of place is when she had a baby. Suddenly, travel was impossible, and she feared that no amount of reading or visiting websites could compensate. 'Smell, in particular, is hard to grasp,' she explained, pointing out that without travelling to Outer Mongolia, her novel The Priest and the Lily would have lacked the authenticity gained by knowing that the steppes are 'scented with a wild herb, redolent of thyme, sage and lamb stew' (O'Connell 2012).

Of course, gathering facts—even vivid ones like smells—is not in itself creative. Unfortunately for historians, by reputation they spend their days in musty archives, and then 'letting the facts speak for themselves.' It is as if they 'have no style, unlike those cool, "creative" novelists,' complained Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath (2011: 2). Possibly in reaction to this, historians have developed a finely attuned sense of the creative nature of their craft, which seeks to bring documents and artefacts to life, making it seem that people who lived hundreds of years ago 'lived only yesterday, as if we had known them' (Curthoys and McGrath: 1). To that end, travel is much more than fact-gathering. As the American Civil War historian James McPherson explained, visiting the place being written about 'is not only a matter of grasping the topographical details. Of greater importance,' wrote McPherson, is developing 'a kind of emotional empathy' with the actors in the drama (McPherson 2000: 264). This creative tradition, which is at the heart of the 'Boston School,' synthesises three essential elements: the first is that the historian must visit the scene. The Boston School 'has a strong sense of place,' explains David Hackett Fischer. It also stresses the importance of archival research, and finally, that the historian tells a story, and that this story is written 'with a large spirit and a sense of humour' (Fischer 2000: 142).

While the authors of this article all undertook research trips for their own writing projects, until the late 1990s, like everyone else in Australian universities, they taught their students in traditional classroom settings. However, at that time, feedback was showing that students believed that information filtered through lectures and books was 'unfulfilling' (Harrington and Harrington 2006: 2). One response from Australian universities was to turn to experiential learning. This was an American idea, tracing back to the early 20th century educator John Dewey, who advocated taking students into the field to bring their classroom lessons alive (Dewey 1900: 67). In Australia, experiential learning took different forms in different faculties. Economics students were given internships, connecting their classes with jobs, and Public Health

students visited medical facilities. In other countries, History and English departments organised study tours to places their students studied in class, in the hope of injecting creativity into the students' work. Again, the American experience was promising. As Miriam Bader, Education Director at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, writes, when 'students are immersed in a place…imagination thrives' (Bader 2013: 98).

Liberating students' imaginations from the limitations of the classroom was at the heart of the study tours described in this article. While each of the study tours was to a very different place—American tours to Lowell, Massachusetts; Carlisle, Pennsylvania; the post-industrial city of Sheffield; an Italian tour to Rome and Florence, and a Swedish tour to Stockholm—they had important things in common. The students were all required to do preparatory reading to frame the strangeness of their initial confrontations with place. The study tour aimed to bring that reading alive but also to leave space for students to add their own intimacies to the growing creative narrative. For the Writing and Literature professors, this meant that their students could avoid clichés, and for the history professors it meant that their students could empathise with people who lived hundreds of years ago. In other words, the study tours were a reminder that authenticity is an important part of writing creatively.

The other fascinating result was that the study tours had longer-term impacts on the way students continued to think and write. Cassandra Atherton found that in learning about Swedish noir, her students were better equipped to write convincing Australian noir. Paul Hetherington discovered that his students were creatively changed after their encounters with new places. The history professors saw similar, long-term impacts. Glenn Moore found that students who visited a 19th century mill in Lowell, where the workers clocked on and off, started to realise how their lives today are also ruled by the clock. Kat Ellinghaus gained hope that her students were better equipped to write about the issues facing indigenous people today, and Emma Robertson's students came home from Sheffield able to write with 'a new sense of optimism' about de-industrialisation.

Entering the World of the Lowell Mill Girls

Glenn Moore

There are some topics that American history students find easier to approach creatively than others. The letters written by Civil War soldiers, some so young that it was their first time away from home, are so moving that students find it hard not to at least try to put themselves in the place of an 18-year-old in Robert E. Lee's army the night before the carnage at Gettysburg, and to think about what the war meant for America. The Industrial Revolution also still reverberates through American life today. In the judgement of one historian, the power looms in the first cotton mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, brought about change 'as profound as the automobile age in the early twentieth century' (Rosenberg 2011: 11). However, although the young women recruited from New England farms to work in those early factories—the famous mill girls—also wrote letters home, they somehow don't seem as dramatic as Civil War letters, and in the typical, statistic laden essay on the Industrial Revolution, the mill girls themselves are reduced to two dimensional figures, with the human impact of the shift from farm to factory muted.

To breathe life into the students' essays, I included Lowell in the University of Melbourne study tour to the United States. Students can think that field work takes the place of archival

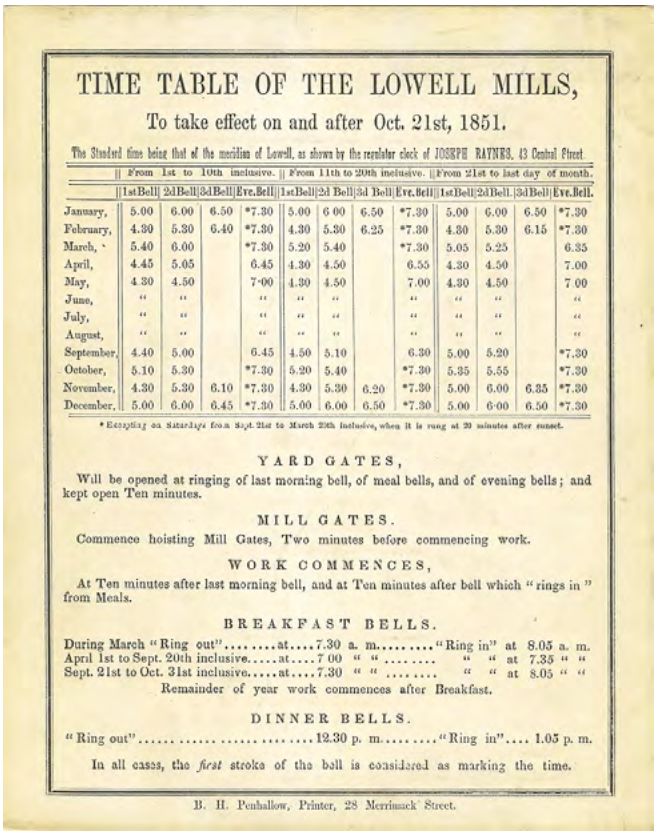
research, but historians combine the two, and that is the guiding principle behind experiential learning. Accordingly, prior to the visit I assigned archival material to be read—not just the letters the mill girls had written home, but also prose and poetry from their literary journals. This gave a first glimpse of Lowell through 19th century eyes, but as Miriam Bader has explained, it is only when students actually get to a historic site that their reading 'comes alive and [they] enter the world of the past' (Bader 2013: 98). Indeed, the Civil War historian James McPherson believes in spite of all the emotive letters written by Civil War soldiers, and all the vivid descriptions of the battle at Gettysburg, that 'only by going there can one really understand it' (McPherson 2000: 264).

1 The Boott Cotton Mill Museum, beside the Eastern Canal. (*image in the public domain*)

Our first stop in Lowell was the Boott Cotton Mill Museum, a faithfully restored antebellum mill. Adjacent to a canal, the mill, with its rose-coloured bricks and graceful white belfry, has little in common with drably functional modern factories, and a student remarked that it was hard to imagine that working in such a beautiful building could be anything but pleasant. This illusion was quickly shattered when our group entered the museum's 'weave room,' where we were hit by a wall of sound from the roaring looms, and battled to breathe the hot, humid air, thick with cotton dust. The thought of 18-year-old girls working 12-hour days tending these noisy, dangerous looms was sobering.

The mill girls' letters confirmed that they were not immune to the noise, dust and relentless pace of the looms. Surprisingly, however, the lightning rod for complaints was not the power looms, but rather the bells that rang out from the belfry, punctuating their working days. As one girl wrote, 'Up before day, at the clang of the bell—and out of the mill by the clang of the bell—into the mill, and at work, in obedience to that ding-dong of a bell—just as though we were so many living machines' (*Lowell Offering* 1841: 115).

The mill girls were accustomed to hard work on the farms where most of them grew up, but as Kim Roberts explains, farming 'work hours were determined by the sun and the seasons' and they bristled at the mill owners' regimentation of their time (Roberts 2002: n.p.). Ironically, my students got a better sense of this by leaving the mill and re-enacting the girls' 35-minute lunch break. At the sound of the bell they made their way out of the factory, then made the 400-metre walk to the restored boarding house where the mill girls lived and took their meals. There they



TIME TABLE OF THE LOWELL MILLS,

To take effect on and after Oct. 21st, 1851.

The Standard time being that of the meridian of Lowell, as shown by the regulator clock of JOSEPH RAYNES, 43 Central Street.

	From 1st to 10th inclusive.				From 11th to 20th inclusive.				From 21st to last day of month.			
	1st Bell	2d Bell	3d Bell	Eve. Bell	1st Bell	2d Bell	3d Bell	Eve. Bell	1st Bell	2d Bell.	3d Bell	Eve. Bell.
January,	5.00	6.00	6.50	*7.30	5.00	6.00	6.50	*7.30	5.00	6.00	6.50	*7.30
February,	4.30	5.30	6.40	*7.30	4.30	5.30	6.25	*7.30	4.30	5.30	6.15	*7.30
March,	5.40	6.00		*7.30	5.20	5.40		*7.30	5.05	5.25		6.35
April,	4.45	5.05		6.45	4.30	4.50		6.55	4.30	4.50		7.00
May,	4.30	4.50		7.00	4.30	4.50		7.00	4.30	4.50		7.00
June,	"	"		"	"	"		"	"	"		"
July,	"	"		"	"	"		"	"	"		"
August,	"	"		"	"	"		"	"	"		"
September,	4.40	5.00		6.45	4.50	5.10		6.30	5.00	5.20		*7.30
October,	5.10	5.30		*7.30	5.20	5.40		*7.30	5.35	5.55		*7.30
November,	4.30	5.30	6.10	*7.30	4.30	5.30	6.20	*7.30	5.00	6.00	6.35	*7.30
December,	5.00	6.00	6.45	*7.30	5.00	6.00	6.50	*7.30	5.00	6.00	6.50	*7.30

* Excepting on Saturdays from Sept. 21st to March 20th inclusive, when it is rung at 20 minutes after sunset.

YARD GATES,

Will be opened at ringing of last morning bell, of meal bells, and of evening bells; and kept open Ten minutes.

MILL GATES.

Commence hoisting Mill Gates, Two minutes before commencing work.

WORK COMMENCES,

At Ten minutes after last morning bell, and at Ten minutes after bell which "rings in" from Meals.

BREAKFAST BELLS.

During March "Ring out".....at....7.30 a. m....."Ring in" at 8.05 a. m.
April 1st to Sept. 20th inclusive.....at....7 00 " " ..... " " at 7.35 " "
Sept. 21st to Oct. 31st inclusive.....at....7.30 " " ..... " " at 8.05 " "
Remainder of year work commences after Breakfast.

DINNER BELLS.

"Ring out"..... 12.30 p. m....."Ring in".... 1.05 p. m.

In all cases, the *first* stroke of the bell is considered as marking the time.

B. H. Penhallow, Printer, 28 Merrimack Street.

2 Lowell Mills timetable, circa 1851 (used with permission of Cornell University)

ate a rushed sandwich, and made the dash back to the mill before the 'ring in' bell signalled a return to work. Experiencing this 35-minute scamper confirmed to the students that the meal would not have been a relaxed one. As a mill girl wryly noted, the girls learned to eat their dinner (lunch) 'without mastication' (*Voice of Industry* 1847: 3).

The students recorded their observations and insights that same night in the journal they kept throughout the study tour. 'After seeing things through the eyes of an 18th century mill girl, I started to think about how the clock dominates my own 21st century life' wrote one student, in what was a common reaction. Another student discovered 'a new respect' for her grandfather, who spent all his working life in a North Melbourne factory.

These journals approximated the ethnographer's field notebook, and the entries—recording the noise of the weave room, the anticipation of the bell that ended the monotony of a shift on the loom, and the rushed lunch—became the basis of essays they wrote when they returned to Australia, anchoring them in a sense of place. Drawing on the girls' letters and poems, they wrote stories, aiming to make the mill girls 'living, breathing individuals' (Curthoys and McGrath 2011: 1). A noteworthy example was an essay that was framed around an invented conversation between three mill girls on a Sunday, their day off from the mill. '"That church service was so long and boring." "Yes," replied Hetty, "but wasn't it grand not to have to *worry* that it was taking too long?"'

The creativity an essay such as this required had been unlocked by travelling to the place where the mill girls lived and worked, and by understanding how the real impact of the industrial revolution on the mill girls was the tyranny of the clock, the students started to realise that, although we are inured to it, the clock has come to rule our lives too.

The Role of Mobility, Place, and Empathy in Teaching Settler Colonial History

Kat Ellinghaus

Here are six rows of children. How
Symmetrical the gray array.
The names are dim and distant now.
We come and go, and here they stay.
(Momaday 2016: 43).

In July 2021, in locked-down Melbourne, Australia, I watched live on Facebook as a caravan of vehicles carrying nine Sicangu Lakota children were escorted by police and Sicangu Lakota American Legion riders on motorcycles back to the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota where the Rosebud Sioux community and the Unangax̂ (Aleut) family welcomed them home. The children had died while students at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School and been buried there more than 140 years ago (Carlisle Repatriation 2021).

Despite being far away in every sense—I am not a member of the Rosebud Sioux community and I live far away on the other side of the world—I felt deeply touched by these scenes and glad that these children were finally where they belonged. I also wondered if any of my former students from the University of Melbourne study tour were watching. On that tour, we sometimes made a side trip to Carlisle where we stayed at Dickinson college, met with Barbara Landis, the now retired Carlisle Indian School Research Specialist for the Cumberland County Historical Society, and learned the history of the Carlisle Industrial Indian School by walking what was left of its grounds. The most memorable part of that visit was our annual tour of the Carlisle Barracks Post cemetery where we confronted the emotional impact of the symmetrical grey headstones described in the poem above.

Carlisle Indian Industrial School was the most important educational institution established for Native American children in the late 19th century. Its founder, Colonel Richard Pratt, famously used Carlisle students to test out his theory of 'kill[ing] the Indian and sav[ing] the Christian man' (Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners 1885: 132). Many scholars have written about the tragedy of cultural suppression, strict timetables, military drills, and homesickness that students experienced at these institutions (Adams 1995). The poor health of students who suffered from the inadequate diet, communicable diseases, physical abuse, and scanty healthcare has also received increasing attention (Running Bear et al 2018). The recent discovery of unmarked mass graves in the grounds of former residential schools in Canada has brought this tragic history into the public eye, and contributed to increased efforts to achieve repatriation, truth telling and official acknowledgement of the trans-generational damage that schools and children's homes did to Indigenous communities in the United States, Canada, Australia and elsewhere. While for many non-Indigenous people the revelations about these graves might have come as a shock, for Indigenous communities they are no surprise (Grant & White 2021).

I suggested adding the side trip to Carlisle as a way of asking students to grapple with the settler colonial history of the United States, something that often slipped out of, or sat uncomfortably alongside, the national narratives that dominated other sites we visited (Dunbar-Ortiz 2015). In the years that we ran the study tour, Australia was also (and still is) grappling with its history of dispossession and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In their written assessments and class discussion, students needed no prompting to make connections between

North American and Australian settler colonialism. Many were aware of the *Bringing Them Home Report*, released in 1997, which extensively documented the removal and institutionalisation of Indigenous children (HREOC 1997) and we had useful discussions about the greater influence of humanitarian reformers and emphasis on higher levels of education evident in the United States, noting that neither had any impact on the suffering of the children.

Watching the return of the children to South Dakota, I thought about the deeper and long-term impacts of taking my students to a place so full of ghosts (Kenny 2016). Indigenous pedagogies have long emphasised the importance of teaching on Country, and recent scholarship has alerted us to the importance of place in both teaching and research (Tuck & McKenzie 2015). Dolores Calderon has argued that a concept of place, informed by Indigenous knowledge, helps to render settler colonialism visible (Calderon 2014). David Gruenewald notes that place-conscious learning might lay bare for students the ways that colonial power operated through the production of geographical space (Gruenewald 2003: 630). At the very least, our students would have gained a sense of the way that colonialism continues to shape the globe, and how its history is often forgotten or left behind.

In their journals, students showed that our brief wanderings around the remaining Indian School buildings gave them more than just intellectual learning about the past. They also gained a feel for what it must have been like for the students at the school. Two examples from unnamed students follow:

> 'I was feeling a little homesick the night before our walking tour of the Indian School, and with each stop on the tour I realised how much more intensely this must have been felt by the children who had been removed from their families on Indian reservations and placed here.'
>
> 'Sometimes it is the little details that have the biggest impact, and I was struck by the before-and-after pictures that showed how children who were "saved" had their hair cut when they arrived at Carlisle.'

Of all the lessons they learned on the tour, I hoped that empathy was the one that stuck. Mobility, removal, distance and displacement were common themes of Indigenous dispossession. Through their own, far more privileged, mobility our students had been given a long-lasting lesson about the ongoing impact of settler colonial policies and the respect, empathy and cross-cultural understanding necessary for reconciliation. Only a very small number of our students went on to pursue Indigenous history, either in their assessments or in their further studies, but despite this, I knew that those who saw the reports of those boarding school graveyards would have been among those who were not surprised. They would have understood the significance of bringing those children home. That distance had been traversed at least.

‘What if?’ Creativity and Optimism in a Post-industrial City

Emma Robertson

O travellers from
somewhere else to here…
[…]

Pause now, and let
the sight of this sheer cliff
Become a priming-place
which lifts you off
To speculate
What if… ?

3 ‘WHAT IF?’ Poem by Andrew Motion on side of Sheffield Hallam University building (Wikimedia Commons)

In 2013, we initiated a new study tour subject for students from La Trobe University, Australia, to the northern English city of Sheffield. Working in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, we called this subject ‘The Full Monty’. In doing so, we intentionally invoked the 1997 Peter Cattaneo film of the same name: a comic tale of unemployed Sheffield steel workers who form a successful male stripper troupe. We hoped to draw students’ attention to Sheffield’s often creative responses to historical processes of industrialisation and deindustrialisation.

Once famed nationally and internationally as the ‘Steel City’, Sheffield has a long history of industrial production and of heavy dependence on a single industry (Tweedale 1993: 30). From the 1980s, it has been hit hard by the decline of British manufacturing, yet it has also maintained a reputation for world-leading manufacturing techniques in high-end steel. With two large universities, the city’s economy has been reshaped around the service industries. A key motivation in the initial design of this travel subject was to teach students about the impact of processes of industrialisation and deindustrialisation ‘in place’.

Right from their very first hours in the UK, students gained a new appreciation of the spatial and socio-cultural geographies of the industrial revolution that they had previously been taught about in the classroom. Travelling by coach from Manchester airport, the ‘quaint’ rural hamlets many of them associated with ‘England’ gave way to the urban post-industrial city. Surrounded by the physical legacies—not always pretty—of industrialisation, students were confronted by history in a very different way. They quickly began to juxtapose this version of Sheffield with their

pre-tour reading. Several students reported being pleasantly surprised. Cecilia had expected something 'harsher, more brutal' but instead found a vibrant city she compared to her home city of Melbourne.

The ongoing inter-relationship between Britain and Australia, rooted in the histories of British imperialism, made travel to this particular destination (especially for white, Anglo students) a complex mixture of the familiar and unfamiliar. Imperial migration stories, and the exchange of products and processes as seemingly mundane as stainless-steel cutlery and steel shearing tools, were a recurring theme of the formal taught content and of student's own reflections (especially for those with family history interests). One student related how the visit to the National Coal Mining Museum 'struck a chord because my mum came from England … I felt a real connection.' We asked students to reflect regularly on when, why and how they felt 'at home' or, conversely, 'out of place' both in class time and in their learning reflections for the subject assessment.

The choice of Sheffield as our destination had initially caused some confusion from both sides. When students arrive in Sheffield, locals are often a little bemused to find so many Australians in their city. But the fact that Sheffield has not become a tourist destination, that is a very 'lived-in' city, though one with a large, diverse and transient student population, made it a perfect location. Although we do include formal museums and galleries in the tour, it is often the more incidental everyday encounters that remain especially vivid in students' memories and which come to inform their learning (Pennings et al 2020: 117). One student noted how it was the things they had just 'stumble[d] across' that were most memorable and meaningful for them.

Sheffield has proved to be an ideal city to encourage students to think creatively about the subject content. It is a city that has embraced creativity as a cultural, social and economic resource as it has engaged in processes of regeneration following the decline of heavy industry. On one wall of Sheffield Hallam University is an Andrew Motion poem (an extract from which forms the epigraph to this section), imagining Sheffield as 'The city where your dreaming is re-paid'. This poem has made its way into several student assessments. Another poem, this time by iconic Sheffield musician, Jarvis Cocker, adorns the walls of 'The Forge' building (formerly part of a major steel works). Cocker characteristically plays around with the bathos of Sheffield life:

> Within these walls
> the future may be
> being forged
> Or maybe
> Jez is getting trashed
> on cider
> But when you melt
> you become the shape
> of your surroundings:
> Your horizons
> become wider.
> Don't they teach
> you no brains
> at that school?
>
> (Jarvis Cocker, *Off the Shelf,* 2005).

One student chose to explore Cocker's own relationship to the city of Sheffield in their research essay. Murals and even graffiti painted on city buildings have provided further inspiration for assessment.

During the tour, students complete an interdisciplinary group project based on one local site. The format of this project is left open but it needs to include an element of multimedia. Several groups have opted to create a short film, blending archival photos and film footage with their own videos and recorded narration. Others have incorporated creative elements into an oral presentation, such as their own photography and art work, 3D modelling of new city spaces, and even a design for a theatrical performance. Students who sometimes struggled with more traditional assessments, especially in terms of their written expression, often found their voice in these more diverse media to tell a compelling story.

Freed from the formality of the classroom, students engaged creatively with history as dynamic. Sheffield's industrial past is embedded into the fabric of the city but is being constantly reinterpreted and remoulded, just like the steel itself. For one student, this offered a new sense of possibility and optimism as they returned to a home city dealing with the imminent closure of its coal industry. They wrote to me some time later: 'the study tour [w]as an important part of my university education, where I was able to learn a lot about community development initiatives and how important they are in supporting people to feel connected and valued as members of a community, especially during times of extreme change.'

Place and Creativity

Paul Hetherington

For creative writing students, a strong engagement with a sense of place often generates compelling creative work, especially if that engagement is intense. I have written previously about taking University of Canberra undergraduate students on a study tour to Rome and Florence in 2015 (2019) in order, as David Morley says, to '[d]efamiliarise the world, [and] to make us see things afresh, as if for the first time' (2007: 90). The idea of travelling internationally with students (there were also study tours to Japan, Spain and the United States) was to join their study of creative writing to new observations about city environments and cultural artefacts, especially paintings and sculptures. This led to the students writing more convincing works and employing more globally aware perspectives. It encouraged them to avoid common stereotypes and clichés associated with the countries to which we travelled and to chart their own intimacies with unfamiliar places.

These study tours aimed to freshen and complicate our students' perceptions by exposing them to what they had never previously seen and possibly never imagined. This included challenging their understandings of visual imagery (given that visual imagery is important to so much creative writing). As they travelled, we wanted them to feel more immediately the ground on which they walked, with an associated sense of surprise. Uneven, cobbled European streets were ideal for such walking, as were the crowded and pressing streets of New York. By extension, on their return to Australia, their experience of international travel also provided them with an opportunity to actively reflect on the places they had visited. In general terms, students were exposed to what Ava Bromberg terms new 'formative and generative affective relations'; relations that

> need places and spaces in which to grow … [and which are] where we weave the social fabric, encounter and embrace difference in diverse societies … [and a] kind of vernacular creativity in the spaces of everyday life. (2010: 216)

The study tours endorsed Michael Butor's assertion that 'to travel, at least in a certain manner, is to write (first of all because to travel is to read), and to write is to travel' (1974: 2).

It is not that writers have to be great travellers—various successful writers, such as the American poet Emily Dickinson, only travelled in a limited way. However, even in Dickinson's expansive and highly imaginative poetry, her occasional, frequently metaphorical references to countries she never visited tend to be generalised. And for every writer who thrives despite limited travel, there are others for whom travel opens new creative possibilities. As Butor says, travel offers the possibility that '[u]pon arriving in a new place—and this is particularly true for the trip abroad … [m]y own tongue will find itself refreshed, I will discover unsuspected aspects of it' (8). We encouraged students to find such refreshments of the tongue through the assignments we asked them to write.

These assignments varied from tour to tour, but all emphasised aspects of seeing and observing, and writing in disciplined and grounded ways. Students were asked to write journals each day as they travelled and then selectively make use of that material—or other, unwritten experiences—in composing poems or prose fragments. For instance, when we took students to New York and Boston in 2018, the writing exercises we asked them to complete included:

1. ten 'visions' of the city (up to 30 words for each piece, based on either of the American cities we visited); and
2. five 'city fragments' in prose, each between 40 and 100 words in length; and
3. two Imagist poems … along with a poem or prose poem/prose fragment … about a work of visual art they had encountered while travelling.

All writing tasks encouraged students to focus on their actual experiences and observations in specific places. Furthermore, they were asked to produce relatively compressed, imagistic and poetic modes of writing. This prevented them producing descriptive 'touristic' pieces; instead, they needed to integrate and transform their experiences into connotative and suggestive works. Two examples from Ali Jane Rose's 'visions of the city' illustrate this nicely:

> There's no escape for Romeo on this ladder, laced and latticed, the landing bare but for geraniums, red lips, green heart, iron wrought, West Side.

and

> Herring gulls, visitors upon the surfaces, the shimmerings, the waves, unburdened by the heavy undertow of belonging, like the Irish blood in Boston Harbour recycled, squeaky clean, impeccable.

Students' writing exercises focused on demonstrating sometimes intimate perceptions and understandings of newly-encountered places. John McCarthy and Peter Wright mention the importance of 'dialogue between people from their different perspectives [that] has the potential to create something interesting and unexpected for both' and which is 'an emancipatory creativity' (2015: 42-43). They do so in the context of human-computer interaction and the design of digital technology, but this is a point that applies equally well to creative writers. Walking the streets of cities, speaking to and meeting their inhabitants and visiting their galleries

and other cultural institutions led to different kinds of writing than those that could be produced through surveying Google maps or conducting online research.

Indeed, the overall standard of student work produced on these four study tours was high as students' fresh responses to aspects of their travel emphasised lived experience and incorporated immediate, personal apprehensions about the particularities of what they discovered. Furthermore, the majority of students engaged strongly with refurbishing their imaginative, literary language and visual language. In Butor's terms, their tongues were refreshed because they had to find new words, concepts and ideas to evoke the things they had not previously known and which, in many cases, had moved them in unexpected ways.

Creative writing is at the nexus of a variety of complex relations—a kind of involving and informative web of connections—and the study tours provided students with new cognitive and relational networks. For example, one student commented about their trip to Barcelona and Madrid that, although they were 'really just looking for a budget-levied trip to Spain … the people I met, experiences I shared, and things I learnt were innumerable' ('Feedback Report' n.d.: n.p.). Another student stated, 'This trip was unlike anything else I've ever experienced … we were able to immerse ourselves through writing into a world so far from Canberra.' ('Feedback Report' n.d.: n.p.).

So much learning, and so many creative ideas derive from experiences that are hard to pin down or easily enumerate. This includes connecting to engrossing experiences in previously unvisited places. Students who travel in this way are often creatively changed. They are able to write about their responses to place convincingly and with the kind of freshly engaged personal involvement that enables greater depth of expression underpinned by broader terms of reference. Perhaps even more valuable is an enduring capacity to encounter and observe the 'other' astutely, with discretion, and creatively. McCarthy and Wright contend that the 'creative surplus that is entailed in encountering the other and realizing the kinds of imbalances in knowledge and expertise that exist … often requires an imaginative response' (2015: 43). This is nothing less than a lifelong pathway to learning and making.

Writing Scandinavian Noir

Cassandra Atherton

In 2012, many creative writing students at my university were attempting to write Scandinavian noir. This desire had been sparked by the release of the film *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo,* based on the first novel of Stieg Larsson's trilogy. While creative writing students often slowly come to an understanding that most writers—especially in Australia—are unlikely to make a million dollars (or even a living) from writing novels, many are still seduced by the notion that it is possible for a lucky few. Indeed, one of the responsibilities of teaching creative writing is academe is to discuss industry and publishing. It is a shock for many students to learn that:

> The most recent figures show that Australian authors earn just $12,900 a year from writing work (the median, at $2,800, was even worse). Indeed, authors can gross less than $5,000 for Miles Franklin-nominated titles that took two or more years to write. (Giblin and Yuvaraj 2019: n.p.)

When I first started teaching Creative Writing at Deakin University, many students were attempting to write 'the next Harry Potter' and since then, they have attempted a range of popular fictions including Scandinavian noir (after Larsson's Millennium trilogy), vampire narratives (based on Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series), fantasy fiction in the style of Philip Pullman, *Da Vinci Code* inspired narratives (based on Dan Brown's book) and even erotic fiction (based on EL James' *Fifty Shades of Grey*). Of course, all these novels have film adaptations, meaning their popularity and fame has extended beyond the page to the screen, creating an even broader audience and greater riches for the authors. Stieg Larsson's estimated net worth is around $50 million (2019: n.p.).

Of all the trends, students' attempts at Scandinavian noir were the most unconvincing narratives, as they most often employed clichés and generalisations about Sweden's historical, social and political concerns. Indeed, while students would often undertake research, depictions of Scandinavia were often more like a Philip Pullman fantasy narrative—as if the crime they were describing was set in a sci-fi, IKEA-dominated world rather than another country. Indeed, in workshops, students even struggled to articulate their affection for a genre that seemed so alien to their concerns in Australia. However, many said they were drawn to the darkness or the 'noir' part of the Scandinavian noir, specifically the shadowy *mise-en-scène* and the characters' moral ambiguity. The main issue was the lack of familiarity or intimacy with the setting—specifically Sweden.

Connecting with my internationalisation department, I was guided through the process and received a Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) grant of $30,000 to subsidise creative writing students' travel to Scandinavia. While students undertook a '*Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* tour', it became clear to them and to me that this was in many ways the least useful part of being in Sweden. A tourist experience is ultimately an outsider experience and the students needed to encounter the Swedish quotidian and listen to the locals to really understand and evoke a sense of place in their writing. Indeed, it was walking around the Gamla Stan (old town Stockholm), eating Swedish meatballs and smoked salmon (not together), asking shop keepers about the troll dolls in their shops and getting used to the Swedish currency that made their narratives more convincing. Much of this was about the students experiencing genius loci, which Linda Lappin (2015) defines as, 'the "soul" or "spirit of place" … the atmosphere or ambiance of a locality or as the emotion or sensation that it evokes in us' (ii). She goes on to argue that 'writers, poets and artists' have the responsibility to bring this powerful sense of place alive for their readers and audiences and the students embraced this in their Scandinavian noir narratives, prioritising the unobtrusive and intimate in their settings. Students featured their favourite Swedish pubs and described their detectives drinking cider and interacting with locals. They also used details such as lap blankets for outdoor dining and fika (or coffee and cake break) as part of the characters' daily rituals.

Finally, we took students to meet Paul Stephens, Australian ambassador to Sweden, who explained the welfare state in terms that we could all grasp more fully than the articles and books we had been reading. Understanding the welfare state is a key part of successfully writing Scandinavian noir. As Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen (201) argues,

> Scandinavian crime fiction is … thoroughly located within specific national concerns about the fate of the Nordic universal state under the increasingly globalized pressures of consumerism, transnational crime, neoliberalism, Europeanization and migration.

> On the other hand, however, these local, generic, and societal concerns are perhaps also what have made these fictions travel beyond their local origins. (2017: 14)

Students were able to ask the ambassador questions from an Australian context and he was able to explain the welfare state in Sweden, using terms of reference and comparisons that were more familiar to us. As a result, students were able to approach the creation of a detective who fulfilled the genre's expectations, which Stougaard-Nielsen identifies in his dossier:

> Scandinavian detectives, faced with an inscrutable, complex and violent world, knee-deep in personal and familial conflicts, wonder what has happened to the welfare state's promise of a better, more just, equal and trusting society. (2017: 13)

Finally, in the most basic understanding of noir as 'darkness', being in Sweden allowed students to experience the complex relationship Swedish people have with light and how they are shaped by it. As Sweden has very little daylight in winter and almost constant daylight during summer, these extreme cycles are an essential backdrop to the dark, chilling and gritty genre of Scandinavian noir.

A compelling example from one of the students is the beginning of a short story that was written before the Scandinavian Noir study tour and redrafted after this intensive study. The first example demonstrates a clichéd description of Sweden:

> He walked down narrow streets. People inside restaurants ate Swedish meatballs and listened to the nostalgic strains of Abba music as they talked about the long winter. Darkness fell around him and it was cold. He breathed on his hands. (Student, 2012: n.p.)

The redrafted version demonstrates a much more nuanced understanding of the place:

> He walked through the Gamla Stan, past *Science Fiction Bokhandeln* and *Trangt and Trevligt,* where silver jewellery made from silver forks adorned the window. It was getting cold but outdoor seating at the restaurants he knew would be full, people unfolding blankets and ordering brännvin to warm up from the inside. (Student 2012: n.p.)

As I have encountered students from this study tour in the ensuing years, I am always thrilled by their discussions of how visiting Sweden and writing a piece of Scandinavian noir also framed their thinking about Australia and Australian noir. Their talk of politics, masculinity and even the harsh light in Australia as important features of this country's creative landscape were born from their travel to Sweden.

Conclusion

Since the study tours written about in this article took place, the world was struck by the Covid-19 pandemic. Australia's borders were closed in March, 2020; overseas students were unable to enter the country, and overseas study tours were not possible. Australian universities transitioned their domestic students to online classes. Of course, there were teething troubles, with students reporting a lack of interaction with their lecturers and with one-another, and many finding online subject matter flat and uninspiring. (TEQSA 2020). However, on the whole, such a revolutionary change took place remarkably smoothly.

It was tempting to think that overseas study tours could also be adapted to run online. With libraries digitising archival material, and museums and historic sites providing online access to their collections and offering 'virtual tours', the online option seemed plausible. However, the problems encountered in shifting conventional classroom-based courses online all loomed large. A longitudinal study of Melbourne University students who took part in overseas study tours found that working together with their lecturers, and making life-friends from amongst their peers were two of the things they valued most about the tours (Atherton & Moore 2016: 81-100). More fundamentally, the whole point of the study tours is to give students an improved learning experience, and after a comparative study of over 500 students, James Katz and Daniel Halpern concluded that the measure of a virtual museum is how close it comes to the in-person experience (2015: 776). In other words, the best virtual experience still falls short, making an online version of study tours unviable.

Adam Nilsen and Miriam Bader argue that empathy is only made possible by the 'immersive role' of place-based museums, and this is achieved through physically being in a place, smelling its smells and feeling the weight of objects (2016: 115). By contrast, sitting at a computer in the comfort of home is just too easy. The beauty of an overseas study tour is that the strangeness of a new place defamiliarises students and enables them to see things through fresh eyes. These and other concerns meant that the five tours described in this article have been put on hold until students can once again experience the magic of travel and imbue their writing with their own unique experiences and sense of place.

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BEE IN THE BONNET

Jonathan P. Taylor

BEE IN THE BONNET

Jonathan P. Taylor

For M.

Emma was levitating again, a foot above the bed. It wasn't uncomfortable, just a little cold on her back, because the blankets didn't float with her. From the bunk above her own, she could hear her sister's slow, wispy breathing.

Minutes or hours went by – of her sister's breathing, of sheep she couldn't count above five-ish, of strange creaks from downstairs, of staring at patterns in the wooden slats just above her.

Finally, bored of levitation, she drifted to a sitting position, and then stood up, feeling the carpet's wool between her toes. Her sister muttered something and the upper bunk creaked.

Emma stepped away from the bed, over corpses of discarded teddies, to the door, then tiptoed onto the landing. She knew where she was going. She wanted to find her mummy, feel her warmth. She never levitated in Mummy's bed.

The door to Mummy's room swung open. She stepped inside.

It was much lighter in here, and her eyes took a moment to adjust. The windows were open and a breeze blew moonlight into the room.

"Mummy?" whispered Emma.

But her mummy wasn't there. The bed was empty, the covers pulled back.

She'd never seen the bed empty at night before. She wanted to cry.

She looked through the open windows to the moon, which seemed no more than a step away from them.

Perhaps, she thought sleepily, Mummy had flown away.

She wandered round the bed to the window.

In front of her were stars and planets. They looked huge, and she wondered if, once upon a time, they'd all joined up, like a magic carpet or rainbow.

She wanted to touch them, so she hoisted herself onto the window frame. She could feel splinters jabbing into her feet.

She took one foot off the frame, reaching out for the moon.

She breathed in, leant forwards.

The door in the room behind banged open. She may or may not have heard her sister scream: "*Emma!*" – but couldn't be sure, because she'd already gone.

There was a whooshy noise like wind, a dizziness, a headache, as all the colours in the sky smeared together. A second or month passed.

• • • • •

Now she was in a park. It was afternoon – a sunshiny-daffodilly day. In front of her was the façade of a ruined castle – roofless, windowless, with red and orange walls, jagged crenellations, stone staircases leading nowhere.

She ran barefoot across the lawn. People were dotted about, but no-one seemed to notice she was still in her Andy Pandy nightdress, which flared out behind her.

Panting, she reached the spot where she knew her mummy and sister would be. She sank down on the towel they'd spread out for a picnic. It was a banquet of triangular sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, sausage rolls, coffee in a flask.

She stuffed a triangle into her mouth. She thought Mummy might tell her off for leaving the bedroom, coming to find them here. But her mummy didn't – and instead seemed to stare straight through her. She felt invisible, a ghost at the picnic. And, in turn, she couldn't quite see her mummy's or sister's faces: the sun was too bright, shooting right through them.

Dazzled, Emma looked away, scanning a tumble-down wall behind their shoulders, about a hundred yards away. An exposed stone staircase with no handrail jutted out of the wall. Towards the top she could see someone – who was it? – oh, how funny: it was herself, in miniature, skipping down the steps. As if, at that moment, she'd split into two selves, two ghosts – one watching, one skipping.

There was no handrail.

"I love you," the self on the lawn murmured, overcome with happiness – but she wasn't sure which light-silhouette she was saying it to: her mummy, her sister, or her other self, tottering distantly on the stone stairs.

• • • • •

"It never bloody well happened," says her sister. She prises the toast out of the toaster with a knife, puts it on a plate, and butters it, ferociously.

"It was *so* vivid, Suze," says Emma from the kitchen table. "I can remember everything. I can even taste the cheese sandwiches."

Her sister plonks the plate in front of Emma, turns to make the tea. "Dreams can be vivid, Em, especially when you're a kid. But it's all rubbish. Let's forget about it."

Emma nibbles a corner of the toast. She wonders if it's wrong that what her sister thinks is a "dream" is a favourite childhood memory: should something (supposedly) made up trump reality?

"I hadn't thought about it for – I don't know – thirty years or something," says Emma. "Or perhaps it's thirty-one years. No, it must be thirty." She frowns, mouthing the numbers to herself, shakes her head. "But anyway, it all came back when we were in the crematorium. It's my earliest memory. I could have only been three or four. Tiny."

"It's not a memory," says Susan.

"Don't ruin it for me, Suze." Emma taps the side of her own head. "You think it's because of this." Her bottom lip wobbles.

"Oh come on, Em. You're not three now. It was years ago." Susan sighs. "Like everything."

Emma lowers her gaze. “But …”

“You do go on. It’s like Mum used to say: you get bees in your bonnet. Buzz buzz buzz. Haven’t we got enough on our plates? Let’s just focus on sorting out the house – it’s going to be hard enough without you banging on about flying and sausage rolls.”

Emma nibbles another ashy crust, and then puts the toast down. She doesn’t feel hungry, hasn’t felt hungry since the funeral – wonders if she’s really felt hungry since a long-ago picnic at a ruined castle.

“Perhaps it’s a real place.”

“It’s not,” says her sister. “I don’t want to talk about it any more.” She pulls herself to her feet, leaves the room.

“What if it turns out it’s real? What then?” Emma asks to thin air.

Thin air and her sister ignore her. The latter calls from the hallway: “Best get started. Let’s try and rescue some stuff before the vultures arrive. Then I’ve got to get home to feed Chris and the twins. Then work. Then, then, then.”

“What if …?” dreams Emma.

• • • • •

Later, Emma finds a box in a corner of the attic, trapped in webs as fine as her mother’s hair. It’s full of old Super-8 cartridges. Her sister wants to bin it: “The films, they won’t have survived. And any that have’ll burn up if you try and watch them – like the last time Mum used the projector.” But Emma holds the box to her chest, won’t let it go. She struggles with it downstairs, plonks it on the kitchen table, and flicks through the Yellow Pages. Eventually, she finds someone who can transfer cine-camera film to VHS.

• • • • •

It’s towards the end of the second cassette that she sees the ruins. The hairs on the back of her neck prickle up.

There it all is from her dream-memory: the castle, the picnic, the hard-boiled eggs – everything weirdly translucent, pierced with white light. It’s silent: the camera, which must have been held by her mum, pans unsteadily over the picnic, to a tiny Susan, cheeks full of food; then it moves to the ruins – which are more greeny-grey than orangey-red on the film – and then, with a jerk, it flicks up some stone stairs to zoom in on Emma, who’s skipping down them, waving at the camera, sticking out her tongue. She’s moving quickly, two steps at a time, unfazed by the lack of handrail.

Then, for some reason, there’s a blur, and the scene ends with a close-up of sandwiches and feet, the world tilted at a vertiginous ninety degrees – and a blue flame flickers across the TV screen, consuming everything. The next scene that emerges from the flame is their old backyard, months, maybe a year later. Emma presses stop, rewind.

• • • • •

“I saw it. Honest, Suze. It’s on the film. Here.” Emma thrusts the video cassette into her sister’s hands. Her sister glances down at it, turns it over, turns up her nose.

“Oh,” she says, her jaw set.

"I saw it," says Emma. "It's the same castle. It's real. It's a real castle somewhere, and we had a picnic."

"So what?" asks her sister. She tries to give the video back.

Emma shakes her head. "No no no. You have to see it. You always say I'm imagining things. Getting bees in my bonnet."

"I don't want to see it. Look, Chris'll be back soon. I need to make tea. So if you'll …"

"Please, Suze. Then you'll see everything was real."

"It wasn't *all* real. You didn't fly or teleport or whatever from Mum's bedroom."

Emma isn't listening. "I wonder where the castle is. You might know when you watch it. Or we can try and find out. Then we can go there, you and me. Like, together." Susan doesn't answer. "I know Mum won't be there so it won't be the same. But we can still have a picnic and …"

"I'm too busy. I've got so much to catch up on after the last few weeks. And I can't abandon Chris and the twins just like that." She snaps her fingers. "Chris is already pissed off with me as it is."

"Please, Suze."

"No," says Susan, decisively. "I don't want it. I don't want to see it." She shoves the cassette into Emma's hands, and swivels round to slice the vegetables. She wipes her eyes with the back of her wrist – the onions, thinks Emma.

Emma hovers, shifting her weight from one foot to the other, waiting for an opportunity to hand the video back. But Susan doesn't turn round again, and hums tunelessly to herself, to stop Emma saying anything else.

• • • • •

Emma spends next day in the library, surrounded by books about castles. She narrows her search down to the Midlands – her mum never drove too far on day-trips.

All day, she pores over pictures of castles, leaning in close – as if trying to break through the pages into the places themselves. She copies down their names into a notepad, so she remembers which candidates she's eliminated:

> *Warwick Castle: no, too grand.*
> *Stafford Castle: wrong shape. Not big enough.*
> *Nottingham Castle: not country-side-ish enough.*
> *Shrewsbury Castle: close, but too un-ruined.*
> *Kenilworth Castle: close, very close. A bit too ruined.*
> *Ludlow Castle: oh …*

She holds back tears from dripping onto the page. She thinks she's found it. She wants to go there – perhaps fly there – *now*, this moment. But she can't fly any more, can't drive, has never been on a train. And anyway, she's already late for Susan, whom she's meant to be meeting at 5, back at Mum's old house.

The house is finally empty, ready for the sale. The sisters wander through it like memories or dreams, figments of the house's imagination. Emma feels like she's floating – can't hear her own footfalls.

They've dusted, hoovered, mopped, scrubbed. Still everything looks dirty, tired, the ruins of a family home. There are imprints of furniture on carpets, wardrobe shadows on walls, spidery cracks in corners. Curtainless windows stare inwards at the sisters.

In the hallway, Susan turns to face Emma, waves a duster at her: "For the last time, Em: I can't drive you to Ludlow."

"Why not?" asks Emma. "It's such a tiny thing to ask. You and me."

"It's always one tiny thing – then another tiny thing. Bees in bonnets. Buzz buzz."

"It's the only bee I've got."

"At the moment. Anyway, I can't drive you there."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't have a car any more," says Susan. She turns, starts climbing the stairs one last time.

Emma frowns at her, tugs her sleeve. "Why? What's wrong with it?"

"Gosh," says Susan. "You're *so* like Mum. Endless bloody questions." She sighs and pivots round to face her sister again, holding onto the banister as if she might fall – or fly away. "He … Chris took the car."

"I don't under …"

"He's left, Em." She realises she's going to have to spell it out: "*Left me*."

Emma's eyes widen. "Oh," she says. "You mean like divorce or something?"

Susan nods and sinks down on the step. "He gets the car, I get the twins and ... so I can't drive you to Ludlow, Em. It's a struggle just getting to work."

"Oh," Emma says, sitting down on the step below her sister.

"There wasn't any shouting," says Susan. "He just told me, all matter-of-fact, he couldn't cope with things any more – you know, twins, funerals and … other stuff." Susan doesn't tell Emma that the other stuff includes a semi-dependent sister. And Emma doesn't guess what she's left out.

Instead, Emma mouths: "Oh," once more and, for the first time in years, loosely takes hold of her sister's fingers. She flinches a bit at the physical contact, but doesn't let go, doesn't yell.

They're frozen there for a few minutes – Emma not knowing how to break the contact, Susan not wanting to.

Susan wipes her eyes with the duster in her other hand, blinks through the dust, and says: "Come on."

"Come on what?" asks Emma. They stand up, still holding fingers.

“Come on,” repeats her sister. “I can’t take you to Ludlow, but – ” She leads Emma up the stairs, onto the dark landing, and into their mum’s old room. There’s no bed, no wardrobe. Emma feels her lips moving: “Mummy?” but no sound comes out.

The windows, which reach almost floor to ceiling, are wide open, and a breeze from who knows where – perhaps a faraway castle – is touching their faces.

“Come on,” says Susan again, and slips off her shoes. Emma does the same. They hoist themselves up and stand on the low window frames. There are no splinters underfoot this time round, just lukewarm PVC.

Susan knows what to do, because she saw her sister do it once before, thirty years ago – though she always pretended she remembered nothing of that night, was instructed *never ever ever* to mention it, or any subsequent flying incidents, *in case* ... *In case* of what? – she isn’t really sure, now she thinks back, what threat or danger the words *in case* actually implied. Repressed for so long, her own memory of it all is so sketchy: there are the moments of clarity – waking up in the middle of the night, wandering into her mum’s empty room, seeing her sleep-walking little sister balanced on the sill, screaming and grabbing her, just before she tumbled – and there are the moments of darkness, when a blue flame consumes everything – like the long-suppressed afternoon, weeks or months later, when a little sister, who had a bee in her bonnet about flying, ran off during a picnic, got lost in a castle, and dived or tumbled, head-first, from one of its walls.

It’s almost dark outside. There’s no moon, and the stars and planets are few and far between, hazy, dusty – as if they’ve been moving away from one another, shrinking, since the sisters’ childhood.

The sisters perch on the sill, feet arched over the frames, hands holding the sides, fingers touching.

Stepping out, they both know, is the only way back there – the only way back to sunshine and castle and picnic and sausage rolls, before ...

Susan sighs, sits down, lets her legs dangle over the edge of the past. Tells Emma to do the same.

About the author

Jonathan Taylor is an author, editor, critic and lecturer. His books include the novel *Melissa* (Salt, 2015), the memoir *Take Me Home* (Granta, 2007), and the poetry collection *Cassandra Complex* (Shoestring, 2018). His book of short stories, *Scablands*, is forthcoming from Salt. He directs the MA in Creative Writing at the University of Leicester. www.jonathanptaylor.co.uk