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ARCHIVES, COUNTER-MEMORY, CREATIVE PRACTICE & POETRY

Editor: Paul Hetherington

Image: Angela Gardner, Back cover detail, *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette*. Solvent release print, letterpress.

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Paul Hetherington

A great deal of poetry and other creative writing uses diverse archival material, including the literary, historical and the biographical. Yet the relationship of creative writers—and creative artists more generally—to existing archives has often been uncomfortable and has posed significant questions for the writers, historians and archivists involved.

This issue of the *Axon: Creative Explorations* journal brings numerous research and creative perspectives to bear on these relationships, including the perspectives of writers who have found the archives richly populated with material relevant to their projects, and writers who have found very little archival material at all connecting to their creative work. In every case, these writers have addressed archival material in particular ways, shaping it for their own creative and often political purposes.

Memory of one kind or another is invoked by all of the contributors, who are aware that just as archives may represent a kind of memory-hoard—a way of digging into and locating the past—so it may also represent a form of obfuscation or forgetting. Kenneth Foote contends that 'If archives can play a part in extending the range of communication, they can just as readily be implicated in any attempt to thwart communication by diminishing its temporal and spatial range' (1990: 384). More generally, John Sutton, Celia B Harris and Amanda J Barnier observe that:

> Imagery, gestures, bodily routines, or interpersonal interventions too can develop into means of activating flexible links between knowing and doing. This is not to reinstate a newly dualist picture of thought as an inner realm behind practical skill, but rather … to reimagine thinking itself as an intricate and worldly active engagement with complex physical and cultural demands. Again, an array of mixed conceptual, empirical, and cultural investigations suggest itself for researchers willing to combine interdisciplinary range with arduous immersion in specific practices of remembering and acting. (2010: 226)

The relationships between archival material, creative practice and notions of culture, history and memory explored in this issue of *Axon* exemplify such a mix of conceptual, empirical and cultural investigations—which includes ideas of narrative, counter-histories and counter-memories, embodiment, immersion, cultural identity, untelling, absence, resistance, evocation, choreography, notions of home and unhomeliness, and of the distributed mind. Such considerations show archives to be potentially transformative sites that are often richly and creatively contested. The poetry in this issue addresses such issues, too, often in lateral and unexpected ways. When Dominique Hecq writes of a place 'where duty and language never/ collide with memory on your sister's lips' we know that notions of memory and the archive have become powerfully problematic, salutary and elusive.

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3 POEMS

Denise Duhamel

Florida International University

I PUT ALL THE POEMS ABOUT MY MOTHER'S DEATH IN A FILE

Denise Duhamel

and that night I dream I have my period.
I'm soaking through the pad, rummaging
for clean Kotex under the bathroom cabinet. The pad
is heavy with blood, so cold, so real, so like I remember
life before. I wake up, 61, my sheets dry and clean.
(Maybe I have come full circle, the way menstruation
comes full circle, an end, an egg released.
Or had I filled the pad—my notebook?—and
it was time to start a new cycle, put the final period
on my project?) My mother and sister and I
sometimes bled together, our bodies in sync.
As I child I was prone to nosebleeds—my first
awakening that blood might come at any time.
The nosebleeds stopped during adolescence,
when I began to bleed below. Shortly after
my father died, my mother took a weekend trip
with her friend. She returned home to find her fridge
on the fritz. She felt so alone. Everything
in the freezer had melted and juice
from the frozen strawberries leaked
through the upper door. My mother called me
sobbing. She said her Maytag was bleeding.

COLD HANDS

Denise Duhamel

My hands are the coldest
part of me, even in summer.
It's poor circulation or anemia,
the doctor once thought,
and now that I'm older
a pinched nerve in my neck
sends tingles down my arms
making my finger even icier.
Cold hands, warm heart—
it's true. Life, I am in love
with you. My mother had
the same cold hands, often
warming them by holding
a mug of warm tea.
When she left us, I kissed
her forehead, cold as our hands
which had been preparing us
for this moment. I also have
cold feet, meaning I am
apprehensive about all of this,
though, with death, I know
there's no way to back out.

SOMEDAY I'LL LOVE DENISE DUHAMEL

Denise Duhamel

After Frank O'Hara, Roger Reeves, and Ocean Vuong

And that day is finally here—
I laugh at the crepe under my arms,
the thigh cellulite, grateful for a body
that has given me sixty years. I have loved
autonomy, kept myself childfree. But I never
learned the fierce love of being
a mother. Did that keep me, until now,
from fully loving myself? I never kept
a plant alive for long or nurtured a pet. Strangers,
it seemed, loved me best—that guy I danced with
at Sherry's party, and the woman who wanted me
to write a screenplay with her, people
to whom I eventually said no.
Barbara Hamby writes, "Earth/is an alien
penal colony, and we're all doing time/
for crimes against the universe…" Barbara
has a sister's friend make that statement in her poem
but maybe Barbara believes it. Otherwise
why repeat it? I sometimes feel like a criminal,
having stolen scads of time.
I daydreamed and wrote lines
when others thought I was listening.
I loved playing Cards Against Humanity
with my family, learning the little ones
will let you win as long as you slap down
something from the deck with the words
poop or *pee*. Once upon a time,
I told myself I was bad because the church had.
Once upon a time, I told myself I was ugly
because fashion magazines had. Then I learned
to love my bad-ugly self by loving others.
Then I learned I wasn't so bad-ugly afterall.
I learned to accept love upclose.
I buried my parents. I buried some friends.
Like most of us, I emerged from a womb-cave,
and pushed through that elastic tunnel,
the pebbles and swamps, the stalactites
of flesh. My mother should have been the one
to get gifts on my birthdays. My father
should have been the one to receive

my poetry royalties. I'm too late
to these realizations, but not too late
for others. *Hey, Duhamel, get*
over here and give me a hug.

About the Author

Denise Duhamel's most recent books of poetry are *Second Story* (Pittsburgh, 2021) and *Scald* (2017). *Blowout* (2013) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. A recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, she is a distinguished university professor in the MFA program at Florida International University in Miami.

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3 POEMS

Tom Whalen

THE AGE OF FERTILITY

Tom Whalen

During the Age of Fertility, a doll gave birth to its twin and the twin to a cascade of satin slippers. A baby gave birth to a locomotive; it was a breech birth. A goose hatched a tiny old man from one of its eggs; instead of paddling about the pond with his fellow goslings, he stayed in the nest, growing smaller and smaller. A child gave birth to its older sister; when their parents found them mating in the garden ... In order to escape his wife, a man gave birth to an elevator with an exceptionally long shaft; alas, the elevator lacked an umbilical cord. A woman hatched one prose poem after another, as if her husband had nothing to do all day but take care of her offspring. A bathtub brought forth a woman who lived to bathe her great-grandchildren in it. An old philosopher gave birth to a mouse that gave birth to the universe that longed only to return to its womb. Thus passed the Age of Fertility into history.

ATTEMPT TO RE-ENTER THE REAL

Tom Whalen

According to Wittgenstein, when I raise my arm I have not wished it first. But how does he know what I wish? My arm goes up, goes down, goes up, goes down, etc. In Part One I go to prison, in Part Two to a parade. Every day I report on the state of things, by means of graphite, paper, a magnet and rain, so as to re-enter the real. You say there are no thoughts in my head, but why if not to shame me for believing in you? Lately, the mouse mothers have taken to bringing out their young no bigger than thimbles, as if wanting me to acknowledge their offspring. I am writing this as if I were going to send it to you, but why should I trust anyone? Tonight, my eyes are a bed of nails, my tongue a field of snow.

FATHERHOOD

Tom Whalen

My son brought home a hedgehog. Look, he said, a hedgehog, holding it in both hands before him, as if it were an offering I knew I could never repay. But the hedgehog wasn't a hedgehog, it was a porcupine about to project its needles into my child's flesh. But before I could warn Randolph, the porcupine no longer was a porcupine, instead it was a bowling bowl, I mean a replica of a bowling bowl, one of those plastic do-hickeys used to knock over plastic tenpins I myself had given him two years before. Why was he saying this plastic toy was a hedgehog? And why offer it to me as if it were something I should on the one hand forever cherish, on the other despair of? At age four, irony wasn't part of his repertoire, was it? What was he up to? Then I saw that the plastic ball wasn't plastic after all but the head of his mother, and the child before me only a replica of my son, and I only a facsimile of a father.

About the author

Tom Whalen's prose, poetry and translations have appeared in *Agni*, *Bookforum*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Film Quarterly*, *Georgia Review*, *Harper's*, *The Literary Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Paris Review* and other journals. His books include *The President in Her Towers*, *Elongated Figures*, *Winter Coat*, *The Straw That Broke*, *April Fireball*, *Dolls*, and most recently his second selection and translation of short prose by Robert Walser, *Little Snow Landscape* (NYRB Classics) and *The Grand Equation: Prose poems and micro-fictions* (Black Scat Books).

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LITERARY JOURNALS AND THE 'MONSTROUS PREVALENCE OF POETESSES'

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Abstract

Female poets seeking to have their work published in Australian literary journals in the second half of the twentieth century faced a predominantly male culture: most positions as poetry editor for major journals were held by male poets. This study of the rate of publication of female poets from 1945 to 1990 in those journals also investigates the rate of submission by female poets. Using archival material not previously researched for this purpose, it is shown that the rate of publication of female poets is well below their rate of submission for most of that period. The misogynistic attitudes of some male editors are also evident.

LITERARY JOURNALS AND THE 'MONSTROUS PREVALENCE OF POETESSES

Maggie Shapley

Introduction

From the first issue of the Adelaide-based journal *Australian Letters,* the open misogyny of co-editor Max Harris is on show. In his review of the Angus & Robertson anthology, *Australian Poetry 1956,* he comments, echoing the title of John Knox's 1558 polemical work *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women:*

> Among Australia's monstrous prevalence of poetesses, the prominence of Rosemary Dobson is the most difficult to explain. Her poetry reveals a slack and mediocre mind, the content of her writing the embarrassing egocentricism of the young.
> (Harris 1957: 39)

Leaving aside this harsh judgment of the quality of Rosemary Dobson's poetry and despite the 'monstrous prevalence of poetesses' Harris identifies, the anthology, edited by Arthur Phillips, includes 31 poems by 27 male poets and 12 poems by 11 female poets (Phillips 1956). Dobson appears to have attracted Harris's attention because she is the only woman to have two poems included, while four male poets have two poems selected for the anthology. Harris himself is not included though he did have poems in earlier issues of the annual anthology.

Out of the 28 issues of *Australian Letters* published from 1957 to 1968, a quarter include no female poets at all and another quarter have only one female poet included. The all-male poetry issues include an average of over six male poets per issue. The journal also ran a special feature 'Australian Poets and Artists' with a suite of poems by a single poet illustrated by commissioned artworks over 18 issues: only two female poets were included. There was certainly not an oversupply of female poets in the journal Max Harris co-edited with Geoffrey Dutton and Bryn Davies, and later Rosemary Wighton.

Literary journals are important vehicles for unpublished or emerging poets seeking to establish themselves by submitting their poems for possible publication. In the period 1945 to 1990 the major Australian literary journals were *The Bulletin, Southerly, Meanjin, Overland, Prism* (later renamed *Poetry Magazine* and then *New Poetry), Quadrant, Westerly, Poetry Australia* and *The Tasmanian Review* (later *Island Magazine)*. In this period, decisions about which poems were published in these journals were made by predominantly male poetry editors.

Methodology

I have gathered data about the publication of poets in Australian literary journals from 1945 to 1990 to provide empirical evidence which can be subjected to basic statistical analysis. This quantitative approach, relying in some measure on the AustLit database (AustLit 2002–) but also supplementing its data, is similar to that taken by Katherine Bode in her study of Australian book publishing and the novel form in particular (Bode 2012). I have also researched archival material, some of which has not previously been analysed, and it provides new evidence that confirms or contradicts commonly held views.

For published poems in literary journals, the data collection involves tallying the number of male and female poets in issues for a particular year, every five years from 1945 to 1990, and then calculating a percentage of female poets of the total number of poets. In some cases, the number of poems is also tallied. Where there are anonymous authors or the gender of the poet cannot be identified (after research in the AustLit database as a minimum) these are not included in the calculation. Gwen Harwood's male pseudonyms have been counted as male poets as at the time the poems were published the editors believed that they were selecting a male poet.

There were also many short-lived literary journals but data has not been collected on these, as most did not survive for long enough to allow trends to be seen over time. Phillip Edmonds explains how their small circulation meant that they did not for the most part attract Literature Board funding and this contributed to their lack of longevity (Edmonds 2015: 89). Ann Vickery has investigated the role of these 'little magazines' in the publication of women's poetry, identifying them as 'an ambivalent space for women to be published, a space which enabled visibility at the same time as it mapped out a still small set of positions available for women in the poetic field' (Vickery 2007: 269). They too were dominated by male editors and while they provided the opportunity for publication of women's political poetry, not usually afforded by the mainstream journals, women contributors 'remained in the minority' (Vickery 2007: 271).

Archival sources revealing the submission of poems to journals and competitions were identified through the National Library of Australia's Trove website which aggregates information about archives held throughout Australia. The number of female and male poets making submissions were tallied from files held at the National Library and the University of Melbourne Archives and the names of poets where the gender was unidentified were subsequently researched using the AustLit database and other sources.

Who Were the Editors?

In 1945, the editors of *Meanjin Papers, Southerly* and the Red Page of *The Bulletin,* the main avenues for publication of poetry in Australia, were Clem Christesen, Guy Howarth and Douglas Stewart. *Overland* started publication in 1954 with Stephen Murray-Smith as editor. Kenneth Slessor became *Southerly*'s editor in 1956, *Quadrant* was first published that year with James McAuley as editor and *Westerly* also started in 1956 with Robert Smith as editor.

At *The Bulletin,* when Douglas Stewart left for the publisher Angus & Robertson in 1961, there was a succession of short-term poetry editors including Vincent Buckley, Ron Simpson and Charles Higham, then Geoffrey Dutton, as editor of *The Bulletin*'s quarterly literary supplement 1980–84. Gerry Wilkes took over the editorship of *Southerly* in 1962, a position he held until 1986. James McAuley remained at *Quadrant*, co-editing with Donald Horne from 1964 and Peter Coleman from 1967. Vivian Smith was literary editor from 1975 to 1990, and then Les Murray was appointed as poetry editor, a position he held till late 2018. At *Overland*, Stephen Murray-Smith appointed Barrett Reid as poetry editor in 1965 and he was succeeded by Les Harrop in the 1970s. At *Meanjin*, Clem Christesen stayed until 1974; when Jim Davidson became editor, he appointed Kris Hemensley as poetry editor. *Westerly* was edited by a succession of male editors including Bruce Bennett and Peter Cowan from 1975. The *Tasmanian Review*, later *Island Magazine*, commenced publication in 1979 with Michael Denholm and Andrew Sant as editors until 1989.

What is clear from this catalogue of names is that journals which published poetry in Australia from 1945 to the 1980s, whether left-leaning or right-wing, whether based in Melbourne, Sydney or other State capitals and whether funded independently or within universities, were 'predominantly the domain of middle-class white Anglo-Celtic men'—as characterised by Judith Brett who became editor of *Meanjin* in 1982 (Brett 1990: 320–21).

An exception was the journal of the Poetry Society of Australia founded by Imogen Whyse in 1954: *Prism* was edited by Whyse until 1961 when Grace Perry became the editor of the renamed *Poetry Magazine* until 1964. It was then edited by an all-male editorial board led by Roland Robinson before another change of name to *New Poetry* in 1971 under the editorship of Robert Adamson. Perry was forced out of her position as editor at *Poetry Magazine* and went on to produce *Poetry Australia* from 1964 until her death in 1987; however Perry regularly used guest editors such as Vivian Smith, Philip Benham, Thomas Shapcott and John Tranter, and Les Murray has been identified as its 'effective editor', as an associate editor and regular guest editor throughout the 1970s up till 1981 (Gray and Lehmann 1983: 13).

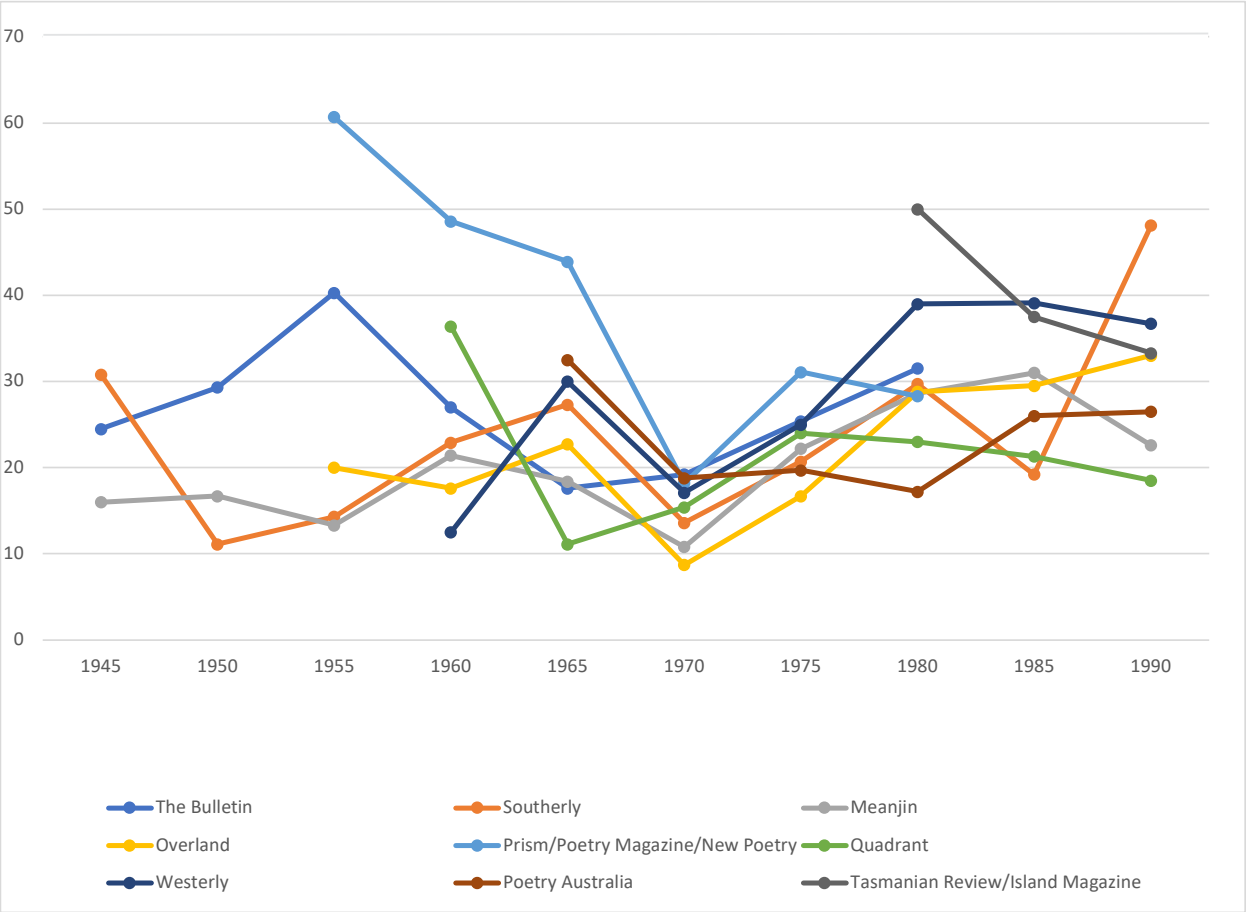
In 1975, two new journals were launched to promote and publish women's poetry: *Luna*, produced by a feminist collective led by Barbara Giles in Melbourne, and *Hecate*, established by Carole Ferrier and Carmel Shute in Brisbane. Gradually women were appointed to positions in other journals, such as Fay Zwicky as *Westerly* poetry editor 1974 to 1983, Judith Rodriguez as poetry editor at *Meanjin* from 1979 to 1982, Judith Brett as editor of *Meanjin* in 1982 as noted above, Elizabeth Webby as editor of *Southerly* from 1987 to 1999 and Cassandra Pybus as editor of *Island* from 1989 to 1994.

Publication of Female Poets

The data in the graph (1) and table (2) below indicates the percentage of the poets published in literary journals who are identified as female in the period 1945 to 1990, with data collected in five-year intervals.

There is considerable variation over the decades with a discernible low point in 1970, with all journals publishing less than 20% female poets; *Meanjin* just above 10% and *Overland* below 10%. These figures provide evidence supporting Kate Jennings's complaint in her 1975 anthology *Mother I'm Rooted* that 'women are still not getting published, prejudice exists, overtly and covertly' (Jennings 1975: Introduction, n.p.) and also reveal the context for the independent establishment of two women's poetry journals in Melbourne and Brisbane in the same year. The preponderance of male editors certainly appears to be a factor in the low publication rate of female poets, as over the following decades with an increasing number of female poetry editors being appointed, there is a gradual increase in the percentage of female poets included in journals, and by 1990, most journals are above or approaching 30%.

There is a strong correlation between the presence of female poetry editors and a higher percentage of female poets selected for publication. The very high percentage of female poets published in *Prism* and *Poetry Magazine* under its female editors, Imogen Whyse and Grace Perry, plummets in 1970 when the all-male editorial board is in place and only slightly recovers under Robert Adamson's editorship of *New Poetry*. *Westerly*'s percentage of female poets published rises after the 1974 appointment of Fay Zwicky as poetry editor and *Meanjin*'s after Judith Rodriguez's 1979 appointment. Similarly, there is a sharp increase in *Southerly*'s percentage under the editorship of Elizabeth Webby, its first female editor appointed in 1987.



1 Graph: percentage of poets published in Australian literary journals identified as female, 1945–90

Journal	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990
The Bulletin	24.5	29.3	40.3	27.0	17.6	19.2	[25.4]	31.5		
Southerly	30.8	11.1	14.3	22.9	27.3	13.6	20.7	29.7	19.2	48.1
Meanjin	16.0	16.7	13.3	21.4	18.4	10.8	22.2	28.6	31.0	22.6
Overland			20.0	17.6	22.7	9.1	16.7	28.8	29.5	33.0
Prism/Poetry Magazine/ New Poetry			60.7	48.6	43.9	18.2	31.1	28.3		
Quadrant				36.4	11.1	15.4	24.0	23.0	21.3	18.5
Westerly				12.5	30.0	17.1	25.0	39.0	39.1	36.7
Poetry Australia					32.5	18.8	19.7	17.2	26.0	26.5
Tasmanian Review/Island Magazine								50.0	37.5	33.3

Notes: *Southerly* figure is for 1961 as no 1960 issues were published.

Bulletin figure for 1975 extrapolated as no regular poetry was published in 1975

2 Table: percentage of poets published in Australian literary journals identified as female 1945–90

The percentage of female poets published in *Poetry Australia* remains low under Les Murray's editorship and *Quadrant*'s percentage gradually falls under Vivian Smith's.

The *Tasmanian Review* is an anomaly, falling from a creditable 50% in 1980 to a still above-average 33% in 1990. Co-editor Andrew Sant has confirmed that the journal did not have a conscious policy of gender parity but rather that there were many local female poets making submissions including Gwen Harwood, Margaret Scott, Sarah Day, Vicky Raymond and Edith Speers, all of whom were published in 1980 (Sant 2021).

The figures show the number of poets published within the years surveyed but do not reveal the sometimes considerable gap between the number of poems male poets had published compared with female poets. For example, in *The Bulletin* in 1950 when the percentage of female poets was below 30%, poets John Blight, David Campbell, Ray Mathew, Roland Robinson and Douglas Stewart each had more than a dozen poems published but only one female poet, Nancy Keesing, achieved this. In 1955 the percentage of female poets rose to over 40% but most female poets had only one or two poems published. Male poets David Campbell, Robert FitzGerald, Douglas Stewart, Arnold Wall, John Blight, Ray Mathew, Roland Robinson and Vivian Smith had between eight and 14 poems published, with Margaret Irvin being the most published female poet with seven poems published in that year.

The *Bulletin* figures reveal the changes in the journal over time: as it took over other journals such as *The Observer* and *Newsweek* its focus on poetry declined, though there was a brief revival in the early 1980s with a quarterly literary supplement. There is not sufficient poetry content in the 1975 issues (figures are extrapolated as an average of 1970 and 1980 for the purpose of the graph), or the 1985 and 1990 issues to warrant analysis, despite a second revival in late 1990 with the appointment of John Tranter as poetry editor.

With most of the journals issued quarterly *(Southerly, Meanjin, Westerly, Poetry Australia* and *Overland)*, poets generally only have poems included in one issue in a given year. *Quadrant* had between nine and 12 issues a year in the period 1975 to 1990 when Vivian Smith was poetry editor. The figures in the following table (3) show that it was relatively common for male poets to have poems included in multiple issues within the year and much less common for female poets. The number of female poets published was already less than a quarter of the total number of poets published in this period, so the disadvantage was even greater when the number of individual poems published for female poets is considered.

It is also fairly common for whole issues of a literary journal not to include a single poem by a female poet, as was the case with *Australian Letters*. In the years surveyed there are 14 issues of *Quadrant*, nine issues of *Southerly*, six issues of *Meanjin* and two each of *Westerly* and *Overland* that do not include a female poet. For *Quadrant* this practice continues through the 1980s and into 1990. Additionally, there are 18 issues of *Quadrant*, ten issues of *Southerly*, nine of *Meanjin*, five of *Overland* and four of *Westerly* which include only one female poet.

Rate of Submission of Poems by Female Poets

It has been suggested that female poets do not submit poems to journals and other publications at the same rate as male poets and that is why fewer poems by female poets are published. For instance, Geoff Page refers to this possibility in relation to anthologies, suggesting that the 'disproportion … may have been due to there being proportionately fewer women than men writing poetry and seeking to publish it' (Page 1994: 23). While the *VIDA: Women in literary*

Male poets	1975	1980	1985	1990
One issue only	23	39	29	26
Two issues	6	10	18	9
Three issues	7	1	8	7
More than three issues	2	7	7	2
Total	**38**	**57**	**62**	**44**

Female poets	1975	1980	1985	1990
One issue only	10	12	12	7
Two issues	2	4	4	2
Three issues	0	1	0	0
More than three issues	0	0	1	0
Total	**12**	17	17	9

3 Table: *Quadrant* publication of poets, 1975–90

arts website, which publishes the VIDA Count on gender publication ratios in the United States, questions why the rate of publication should necessarily match the rate of submission (VIDA 2012), there is very little information available internationally or nationally about what the rate of submission by female poets was at the time. As the process of rejecting poems for publication usually involves either returning submissions to their authors or discarding them, it is difficult to source information about the rate of submission by female poets compared to their rate of publication in this period.

One source of evidence is the papers of Ron Simpson, who kept detailed records of poems submitted for publication in *The Bulletin* from 1963 to 1965 when he was poetry editor. On retiring from the position he contributed an article to the *Bulletin* arguing against the development of 'a coterie of poets', but rather that 'variety and balance are most desirable' (Simpson 1965: 44). He defends himself against being Melbourne-centric but in the course of his article reveals another imbalance: he names and discusses the work of 18 male poets but only name-checks four female poets (Simpson 1965: 44–45). His records reveal that of the poets who submitted poems, 91 were male and 60 were female (26 poets cannot be identified as they are not known poets and initials were used for forenames), so approximately 40% of the poets submitting were female. Only eight of the 37 poets who were published were female, representing 21.6%, a significantly lower percentage than the rate of submission. Most female poets had only one poem published while 20 of the 29 male poets published had two or more poems published (Simpson 1963–65).

The extensive records of *Meanjin* include poetry rejection files for the period 1974 to 1981. Under Clem Christesen's editorship until 1974, critic Arthur Phillips and poet Paul Fahey provided reader's reports on submissions; when Jim Davidson became editor he asked Paul Fahey to stay on until he appointed Kris Hemensley as poetry editor from 1976 (Davidson 1990:

232). Hemensley was then replaced by Judith Rodriguez in 1979 and she held the position until 1982. The style of the reader's report changes over this time: many early reports consist of a brief dismissive phrase or just the word 'No', while both Hemensley and Rodriguez provide a handwritten note to the poet with a carbon copy retained on a pre-printed form.

From the files the number of submissions made by female and male poets can be ascertained as well as those from poets whose gender cannot be identified, mainly because initials have been used for forenames. While it might be argued that female poets are more likely to hide their identity this way, these submissions which range from 6.5% to 12.9% of total submissions over the years have not been included in the calculations.

The figures in the table below (4) indicate that female poets were published at a lesser rate than the rate at which they submitted to the journal for the whole period, though their rate of publication increased in later years. In 1976 there were two issues of *Meanjin* that had no female poets and the other two issues had one each. It can be assumed that Hemensley inherited some acceptances from his predecessors as the figures for publication of female poets improve markedly for the remaining two years of his editorship. The appointment of a female poetry editor, Judith Rodriguez, in 1979 saw an increase in both submissions by female poets and publication of female poets. The submissions are held in four sets of files with 1980 split between two sets and the 1980–81 files are attributed to editor Judith Brett although her editorship begins in 1982 (Davidson 1974–75, 1976–77, 1978–80; Brett 1980–81).

	Female	Male	Total	% female submissions	% female published
1974–75	92	197	289	31.8%	17.6%
1976–77	134	241	375	35.7%	21.4%
1978–80	168	284	452	37.2%	34.2%
1980–81	217	318	535	40.6%	39.1%

4 Table: *Meanjin* submission and publication of poets 1974–81

Some of the comments made about female poets' work in the 1970s reader's reports reveal a strong self-assuredness in the reader's judgments, as well as misogynistic attitudes. When poet Anne Elder declined an offer to send revised versions of her rejected poems, Clem Christesen remarks to Jim Davidson and Paul Fahey:

> She sounds a proper bitch. The whole object of all this 'tailoring' is to try to get the poet to write a better poem. And she is utterly wrong when she says they end up being 'weaker'. (Davidson 1974–75)

Poet Jennifer Maiden is referred to as 'no mean chick' by one reader who also says, 'I like her work'. Paul Fahey comments on Jennifer Rankin's work: 'A jerky little journey from one pretty ordinary impression to another & another & another. Nothing strong or strange enough even to make me curious about what made her keep on going. No' (Davidson 1974–75). Fahey's report

on poems submitted by Judith Rodriguez before she was poetry editor starts with: 'They're both pleasant enough in pretty random ways' and ends with his asterisked addition:

> These notes are too ungracious. There are several nice things in 'Changing the Subject', and they probably are worth having even in this slightly 'distrait' form. (Davidson 1974–75)

While these comments were made privately at the time they reveal a dismissive attitude to female poets. When remarks are made about male poets' work they are generally more encouraging; for instance, on Kevin Hart's work: 'there's something of promise showing through that ought to be encouraged' (Davidson 1974–75).

Another indication of the level of submission of poems by female poets lies in the entries received for the joint Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Australian Bicentennial Authority Literary Awards in 1987. In the category 2A, Poems up to 40 lines, poems from over 660 poets were received: 267 were male, 369 were female and 27 cannot be identified as either (not identifiable from AustLit as known poets, and initials used for forenames) or were joint male and female entries (ABC Bicentennial Literary Awards 1987–88). The competition was won by Les Murray's 'The Tin Wash Dish'.

The rate of submission was 58% female poets; this high figure may be partly due to the nationwide reach of advertising through ABC radio programs encouraging submissions. The anthology which resulted from the competition, edited by John Tranter, had only 37.5% female poets (Tranter 1989). In his introduction he pointedly writes of his desire to compile 'a genuinely democratic collection of poems by all sorts of Australians' and to include:

> less sophisticated writing … poems which weren't perhaps confident or elegant enough to warrant a major prize, but which sparkled with the writer's enthusiasm—bush ballads, poems written at the kitchen table, poems that tilted off-balance with unhappiness and anger, suburban laments, memories of migrant loneliness … [where] the unknown sit alongside the famous, black with white, newly-arrived migrants alongside established settlers, school-children alongside senior citizens, men with women. (Tranter 1989: 1–2)

This announced intention appears to have been heavily filtered through his preconceptions about the general quality of poems by women.

These examples from the 1960s, 70s and 80s provide evidence that the rate of publication of female poets was approximately 14–20% lower than their rate of submission when the poetry editors were male poets. The rate of publication of female poets comes closest to their rate of submission in the example of *Meanjin* when a female poet, Judith Rodriguez, became the poetry editor from 1979.

Conclusion

If there was ever an oversupply of female poets in Australia in the period 1945 to 1990, there is little evidence of it in the major literary journals of the time. For the most part, the percentage of poets published who were female ranged between ten and 30 percent of the poets published. Female poets were disadvantaged by the predominance of male poetry editors: they were not only less likely to have their poems selected by a male editor for publication, but they were also less likely to have more than one poem published by a journal in a given year. It was relatively

common for whole issues of literary journals not to include any poems by female poets or only one poem by a female poet. When the poetry editors were female, female poets' chances of publication rose.

The available archival sources show that the rate of submission by female poets to two literary publications in the 1960s to the early 1980s is less than that of male poets, and that the rate of publication of female poets is well below their rate of submission for most of that period when the poetry editors were male poets. The appointment of a female poetry editor to *Meanjin* in 1979 increased both the rate of submission and the rate of publication for female poets. A nationwide poetry competition held in 1987 attracted a strong participation rate by female poets but this is not reflected in the resulting anthology edited by a male poet.

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Maggie Shapley is a PhD candidate at the University of Canberra researching the publication and reception of female poets in the period 1945 to 1990, particularly the two Tasmanian poets, Gwen Harwood and Margaret Scott. Her first collection of poems, *Proof*, was published by Recent Work Press in 2017. She holds an honorary appointment at the Australian National University as University Archivist Emerita.

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POETRY, SELF-ERASURE AND THE TRACE

Writing counter-history from an embodied archive

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Abstract

This essay presents a poetic life writing practice developed through material exploration with diaries, to expose hidden, unwritten traces of anorexic experience that escape the archival page. Anorexia flouts tenets of traditional autobiography, skewing memory and breaking the 'autobiographical pact' of a truthful and consistent narrator. This article presents poetic digression and fragmentation to perform physical and cognitive anorexic intensities. This writing offers a counter-history to archival documents, leaden as they were with the voices of anorexia and medical discourse.

POETRY, SELF-ERASURE AND THE TRACE: WRITING COUNTER-HISTORY FROM AN EMBODIED ARCHIVE

Stefanie Markidis

Introduction: Writing Anorexia Beyond the Archive

This essay recounts attempts to write anorexia in the face of its formal challenges and is a reflection upon creative practice and its critical affordances, suggesting the challenges of writing 'under erasure' can be turned toward inventiveness through somatic approaches to writing. Writing an account of my experience of anorexia, I was struck by the challenges of articulating a fraught autobiographical subject. A person experiencing an eating disorder is caught within tensions of self-erasure; the anorexic subject seeks to avoid signification and central tenets of auto/biography—subjectivity, voice and authority—are complicated by the disorder (Malson and Burns 2009). This essay charts a practice-led project of expression through these complications. As detailed throughout the essay, first attempts to write were hampered by the 'voices' of disorder and clinical authority. Archival documents (diaries and medical files) reflected a key challenge of self-subjectification within eating disorder: I seemed to be absent from my own records—unsurprising for a condition in which the self is under attack in a 'flight from corporeality' (Lester 1997: 485). Rupturing the archive through creative practice, I followed an analogous connection between body and text to write anorexia beyond its seeming impossibility. This essay presents a poetic life writing practice developed through material exploration with diaries to expose hidden, unwritten traces of anorexic experience that escape the archival page.

I call upon the work of Catherine Malabou, whose 'plasticity'[1] takes Derridean différance into the positive—caught as a writer might be within postmodern deconstruction (writing 'sous rature'[2]) at what Malabou describes as the dusk of writing, a writer might find transformation and metamorphosis (Malabou 2010: 67). Somatic practices with ink and water helped me to write from the remembering body, which enlivened the tensions of anorexic erasure and excess within language, through scale and digression. Emergent within these experiments was a relationship between anorexia and the philosophical concept of the trace, a facet of Derrida's deconstructive argument. As this essay argues, while the trace, a play of Derridean difference, demonstrates the impossibility of fleeing (the sign: body/text), rather than indicating despair and silence, it necessitates its opposite: invention. In the writing experiment detailed through this essay, body-led experimentation within auto/biographical writing opened its expressive potential through poetic composition, assisting me to write beyond the gaps and silences of the archive. Such experimentation offers an extended approach to the field of eating disorder life writing and adds to the growing body of evidence for somatic-led intervention in life writing and illness writing (Brien and Eades 2018).

Anorexia and Life Writing

At the outset of writing about my eating disorder, I was motivated by one clear question: why do writing and eating feel the same for me? There's an underlying connection between language and anorexia (Ellmann 1993; Wright 2015) and I have felt such an affinity between these two self-regulating (or self-expressive) technologies—writing and (not) eating. Anorexia, for me, was not a yearning for an image or ideal. Anorexia was an obsessive desire to escape the image, to skip out, to remove myself and all traces. Tensions of expression I felt as an

anorectic are mirrored for me in writing: writing announces an 'I', an inescapable narrator, and anorexia is similarly concerned with presentation of identity (Markidis 2020). Underpinning this investigation into anorexia, archives and poetics is a felt sense of similarity between the disciplines of writing and (not) eating: concerns for the shape of expression and a policing of the threshold of communication (the mouth, the pen) across which no food or words pass, unless upon the anorectic's or writer's command.[3]

Early drafts of this auto/biographical project showed such a relationship emerging:

> Anorexic, I could not express in language my desperate desire to flee—the sense that there was something beyond words, beyond appearance (but not removed from either) and maybe, if I could slip out of the frame, just slide through the crack in the door, if I could skew my reality one degree into the shadows, shiver in daylight, in the unwritten margin, just there, if I could exist there, at the brink of life and death, in a body that takes and gives nothing, in a body that closed over any impulse to become a clean undisturbed circuit, there at the brink, between the world and the word, at the edge of signification but not yet arriving at meaning, at the cracking dawn of language, the moment before recognition, the blank before waking, the trace at the edge of communication, without interference, just there you-know-it-you-see-it- now-it's-gone, the space between words, the inexpressible, almost manifest

This preoccupation with disappearance (or, more accurately, (dis)appearance, as there is also a significant desire to appear and assert oneself) is common to expressions of anorexia. Take the lyrics of the Manic Street Preachers song '4st 7lbs', so explicative of the illness that they appear in the British Medical Journal, where the lyrics are read as voicing an anorectic's 'defiance, resilience, and desperation for personal control' (Flanagan 2010: 1):

> I want to be so skinny that I rot from view.
> I want to walk in the snow and not leave a footprint.

Reading the words of anorectics, like mine above and these below, collated by Malson through her extensive interviews (1999: 144–47), I recognise a shared vocabulary of erasure, disappearance and dissolution in relation to identity:

> 'There's sort of a feeling there of wanting to fade into the background literally' (144)
>
> 'a way of like trying to disappear ... and trying to be in control and feel pure' (145)
>
> 'I think it was a fear of being me ... I just wanted to fade away' (145)
>
> 'I was just sort of hiding from myself' (145)
>
> 'looking in the mirror and actually being surprised that I saw a form in the mirror' (145)
>
> 'if I didn't have it, if I wasn't thin ... then I wouldn't have an identity. I'd just be this big, bad blob' (147).

Defined in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) as restriction of energy intake leading to a significantly low body weight, intense fear of gaining weight, and a disturbance in self-perceived weight or shape (American Psychiatric Association 2013: 339–40), anorexia nervosa has roots in the starving 'holy anorexia' of fasting saints in the medieval period (Bell 1985). Anorexia has been considered most readily within a clinical model over the

past century, with psychological and neuroscientific research seeking etiological explanations in brain shape (Phillipou et al 2018) and genetic predisposition (Clarke et al 2012). Significantly, the clinical model doesn't account for the cultural and individual complexities of anorexia, bulimia and other disorders (Malson and Burns 2009). While clinical research is imperative and eating disorders often require medical attention, anorexia and other eating disorders are also socio-culturally informed conditions that are read through our interactions in society. Feminist scholarship on eating disorders shows the conditions to be more complex and multiply-constituted beyond symptomatology and mental preoccupations—particularly, confirming eating disorders are related to concerns of identification and expression (Probyn 1991; Mascia-Lees and Sharpe 1996).

Anorexia can be described via the tensions of postmodernism. Derridean erasure (Malson 2009), the Deleuzian concept of the pleat (Probyn 1991), and Foucualdian self-technologies (Eckermann 2009) have been adopted as critical frameworks for investigation of the condition. The adoption of poststructuralist theory is necessary, Elspeth Probyn states, because 'it precisely highlights the necessity of speaking within the tensions of (im)possibility' when articulating an eating disorder (1991: 119). As Malson writes, concerns of identity and agency in anorexia lead to an unconscious desire to flee from both. Identity, she writes, is 'constructed here precisely as problematic, elusive and undecideable, as an absent presence, as deconstructed' (Malson 1999: 148). An eating disorder, Malson states, expresses postmodern concerns with themes of the body, subjecthood, truth and identity (1999: 141). Anorexia complicates these autobiographical realities (body, subject, truth, identity), even the sanctity of the written word itself.[4]

With approximately 300 eating disorder memoirs publicly available and the overwhelming majority published in the last 30 years (Brien 2013: 5), eating disorder life writing is a nascent and booming field. Critics have noted the danger of common 'how to guide' memoirs: action-based narration that can be followed as a starvation manual (Osgood 2013) and work to 'heroicize' the illness (Pascual 2001: 349). As Megan Milks writes, eating disorder memoirs 'almost without fail create an arc from disorder into recovery if not "cure," portraying as linear, ordered narrative what is generally cyclical and fraught' (2017: 87). Narrative arcs of wellness-to-illness-to-wellness, or more often wellness-to-illness, gloss over the lived inner workings of the condition. So present is this distinction of wellness and illness that Merav Shohet suggests it establishes subsets within the wider field: 'full' and 'struggling' genres of recovery (2007: 344). Such literary representations do little to challenge superficial cultural readings of eating disorder as fat-phobia, sensitivity to media pressures, and personal choice (Lee 1995: 25). These memoirs[5] echo a 'language of action' that is commonly observed in emotionally-avoidant anorectics (van der Kolk 2015: 98), and the transcriptive narration of these memoirs can be triggering to a readership comprised significantly of eating disorder sufferers (Seaber 2016: 503). In this essay, I suggest somatic-led writing can expose the workings of disorder beyond superficial accounts of 'what happened' (what I ate, how many push-ups I did etc).

Poststructuralist focus on representation and lived experience has opened the genre of auto/biography beyond chronological accounts from notable public figures. There is clearly an appetite for real and diverse life stories, including illness and recovery memoir. Recent experimental life writing extends life accounts through integration of poetry/poetic prose, as seen in Ania Walwicz's *Horse* (Walwicz 2018), and critical theory, as explored in Quinn Eades' *All the Beginnings* (Eades 2015). Experiments in life writing, in the vein of Eggers (2000), Slater (2000) and Nelson (2015), help to express the inner workings of a subject, but this approach is yet to be fully adopted

in eating disorder life writing. Poetry is used in therapeutic contexts, autobiography and cross disciplinary research as a mode of textual analysis (Archetti 2017). Its capacity to expose inner life draws from the expressive potential of language itself—the unconscious is structured, as Lacan famously surmised, like a language. Poet and psychoanalyst Alsadir explains the mind 'draws associations, redacts, displaces, represses, moves' in psychoanalysis and poetry writing (2018: n.p.). While Hornbacher turns toward poetic digression in her memoir *Wasted*, the potential of poetic experimentation to express the biographical subject (Wilkinson 2016) could be further adopted as a counter to the challenges of eating disorder life writing.

Links between anorexia and poetry are evident in the considerable body of poetic accounts from poets such as Armbruster (Armbruster quoted in Rumens: 2018) and Cruz (2012). Reflecting on her poetry, Fiona Wright worries her poetic 'detail-oriented thinking' might simply be a byproduct of her illness, as she links the details that make writing specific, poignant and poetic with her starvation (2015: 62). She describes an 'alertness of sensation, where every minute cell in the body is awake and alive to the smallest details of the outside world' within her anorexia (Wright 2015: 1) and likens this to the practice of writing poetry. While poetry can assist us to critically analyse forces of erasure, compression and expression on the page, this essay rejects the stubborn notion that anorexia is, somehow, inherently poetic.[6] This essay's process, approaching life writing via attention to the poetics of disorder, is underscored and supported by the work of poets such as Armbruster, Cruz and Wright—it seeks an activation of anorexic poetics for the field of eating disorder life writing.

A Live Writing, Alive Writing

Recent decades have seen the dissolution of sharp distinctions between the 'creative' and 'critical' within the arts and social sciences. The emergence of practice research has offered tactile-conceptual approaches to research problems, utilising the inherent relationship between creative and critical practice to enhance research in fields as diverse as neuroscience (Vaisvaser 2021) and tourism (Long 2017). While its processes can be immersive and uncertain, Brien and Webb stress that creative practice-led research 'does not rely on magical thinking, "mere" intuition or affect' (2012: 190). Considering the 'ancient quarrel' between philosophy and poetry (which they equate to critical theory and creative practice), Brien and Webb look to the etymologic root of 'poetry', to offer creative thought as a 'standing place' (from the Latin 'stanza') which 'affords a sort of viewing platform, a perspective from which to view', a new critical perspective (2012: 190). It is from this standing point that writers begin the process of 'feeling our way into a question' (Brien and Webb 2012: 193). At the impasse of anorexic self-erasure and a static archival voice, I turned to intuitive creative practice led by the body. I used creative somatic practice to develop a new stanza, or standing point, to 'feel' into the question of how to write disorder.

I worked intuitively, plunging my diaries into water to watch the ink bleed (as will be discussed subsequently in this article). Further creative-critical experimentation—with re-purposing found text and harnessing the movements and rhythms of dance—was part of a broader research project toward which this article's findings contribute. Writer Anna Gibbs suggests life writing might be a 'live writing' that carries a charge like a live wire (2018: 248). The tactile creative practices I undertook to write disorder brought words to life (or life into words). A live writing, alive writing—this is life, writing life, in a form that lives, breathes and grows, or as Gibbs offers, it is 'a writing in vivo, a writing in the here and now' (2018: 248). Life writing can involve working

in 'unknowing', 'the kind of work accomplished by the left hand when the right hand no longer knows what it's doing' (Gibbs 2018: 248). Throughout the course of this research, I have worked in this one-handed manner, following what I judged as mess, but found was really intuition.

Conceptually and materially, counter-archival creative practices with my teen diaries interrogated the intrinsic relationship of writing and eating-disordered experience, addressing what Probyn calls the 'doubledness' of the body as both a concept and a real lived thing (1991: 112). The experiment discussed in this essay handles knowledge in the cyclic web (Dean and Smith 2009) of creative practice, in a tactile handing-over of thought from idea to word to body, and back again.

Responding to a challenge of writing, I turned the question to matter: soaking my diaries. This caused an immediate change in the form (small, soaked phrases in a sea of ink), which opened new thinking for the writing project. Malabou writes of a 'common destiny' between plasticity and literature: 'they invent the form that they are' (Malabou 2022: 249). This event of invention arises in moments 'when an extreme tension, a pain, a sensation of uneasiness surges toward an outside that does not exist' (Malabou 2010: 65). In referring to an outside that does not exist, Malabou motions to Hegelian dialectic and deconstructive (particularly Derridean) difference. Theorising a shift (or rupture, or in recent writing the 'promise of explosion' [Malabou 2022]), Malabou articulates an economy of change, in thought and matter, that extends these two major conceptual operations (dialectic, difference) toward transformation. In creative practice research, particularly movements of creative-critical poetic exploration, Malabou's philosophy offers a framework to theorise creative and critical metamorphosis.

Writing into (Im)possibility

Writing anorexia, I was met with two immediate and disarming challenges: a blank, illusory memory and archival documents that could not express the lived experience of eating disorder: either too clinical (not my voice) or screaming with the voice of anorexia (maybe my voice). I took pen to paper and tried to write—what did I remember? A starved brain struggles to retain memory, and as a result, there are months and years I barely remember. If memory is the anchor of truth in memoir, the anorexic subject challenges the nonfictional premise of the form. Calling forth memories of my mid-to-late teens, I was presented with a handful of images, mainly of deviant food consumption. The rest was a numbing static. My early drafts show:

> I remember placing my wrists into a black box to determine bone density and signs of osteoporosis (a starving body eats its own bone tissue), buying a paint set with mum at the shop next door to the hospital—feeling fragile and blank enough to start again—which I rarely used, eating a chicken salad hopefully in a café down the street before I started purging, standing up lightheaded from the examination bed, asking the doctor what size dress she wore, the scratch of her pen on the notepad.
> A banana in a brown paper bag.
> The look on mum's face. A classmate whispering in my ear, beside me in the hallway, "you're anorexic".

These memories returned with the familiarity and distance of images from a dream. I wondered how I might narrate this dream-like haze into shape around the fragments above. Medical studies show that at the stage of emaciation, memory capacity is significantly reduced (Kemps et al

2006: 100) and impaired memory might be a scarring effect of the disorder (Nikendei et al 2011: 829). Without memory, my agency and self-presentation are called into question (Medved and Brockmeier 2015: 451). Also, the memories that returned to me did so with an illusory quality. I remembered, for instance, feeling my spine through my stomach, I remembered that the smell of cooking oil would cause weight gain, I remembered the false reality I witnessed in the mirror and how, on rare occasions, that picture would give way to a glimpse of a skeletal form. Do I remember the truth, or my disordered 'allocentric' (Gaudio and Riva 2013: 1) or 'dysmorphic' (Beilharz 2019) view?

> I see skin shrunken to the contours of a visible ribcage, covered with a layer of soft, white fur. Down. This is an animal body, an alien body, this is not real, this is not my body. Down, down and further I drop from this moment.

Vague illusion won't do, I thought. I needed facts to build this memoir. I sought medical records. I called the clinic and found none. I searched the family records and located a printed email from the clinic, sent to my mother eleven years earlier. It's a list of my descending weights and a line from my doctor including the phrase 'responsive to treatment'.

Paula Saukko critiques the over-clinicalisation of anorexia, suggesting its reliance on demarcations of false consciousness/emancipation and dominance/freedom reinforce the binary absolutes of anorexic thinking that 'guide women's starving in the first place' (Saukko 2008: 2). In this email, I am described as responsive, but at the time I felt anything but responsive to treatment. Unsatisfied, I reached for the archive again, this time locating my teen diaries. My final year of high school is recorded in a purple felt-covered journal that screams with the voice of disorder:

> quarter cup muesli … wake 6am … must perfect dance syllabus
> nothing else worth saying about today
> fat and hot … I need to run I need to run I need to run run run

Not me. This is the internal 'voice of criticism' shared by anorectics (Pugh and Waller 2017: 670). My diary transcripts can't uphold Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact' between writer and reader, the implicit promise that the truth will be presented and that the author, narrator and protagonist have a singular identity outside of the text (Lejeune 1989: 5). I close the diary. How will I write this?

Yet, the person who wrote that diary entry is me. It's ~~me~~. It's me under erasure, an (im)possible subject. It's me, writing then, an experience that, in itself, seeks to avoid signification. By my own powers of autonomy, I strike myself out. I diminish myself, which fortifies me. The ominously-titled 'Patient 28' explains: 'you have to hurt you in the process' (quoted in Hope et al 2011: 19). Pen to paper, I try to explain:

> At once mine and alien to me, her (my) voice lived within mine (hers). How to explain to you this cohesion? This inner voice directed my life on autopilot, with decisions already made, executed on adrenaline and an empty stomach. It was a voice of clarity, with every choice made in relation to the one need: don't eat. I can't truthfully classify it as possession. This voice at the helm was an unstoppable movement within me—it was the same feeling you get now, reading without visibility of the construct, the swift arrival of sense from language as you read this, without delay associating sign with meaning, no stopping to question how or why, that's how it felt to be asked 'are you hungry' and reply, with the swiftness of sense, no.

'Memory', write memory theorists Medved and Brockmeier, 'is overrated' (2015: 445). They argue our critical understanding of remembering can be enhanced by exploration of 'what happens when people have troubles remembering' (Medved and Brockmeier 2015: 445). Gaps, missing documents and frustrations, Wolf writes, can be useful for a life writer, 'offering hints and clues to the unspeakable and the unacceptable' (2018: 1). Met with records that seemed to exacerbate the challenges of writing disorder, I turned my focus directly toward gaps and frustration:

> My hands are still shaking and my breath is quick. This was in me, this experience lives in me. There's a turning under my ribcage that I recognise from the days transcribed in the journals now open around me. Stomach fluttering and full. Uneasy. Yes, this is what I remember. My body remembers. Yes, the story is here in this body. Diarising had been a mode of surviving my eating disorder, but writing anorexia, I realise, will require me to pay attention to this feeling at my core, and to follow my body. Where is it leading me?

Disordering Text

I worked quickly, without a moment for doubt. Following intuition, the impulse Piirto calls a 'non-concrete but still tangible apprehension of underlying truth' (2018: 106), I chose three diaries from three consecutive years, starting with 2006 when I was a 17-year-old at the brink of re-feeding. I wanted to rupture the record, break the archive. I hoped this would move the writing beyond stagnation. Working on instinct, following an embodied memory, what Tota defines as the 'space-time of the body' (2015: 458), I submerged the diaries in water for a week and watched the ink bleed (1). (In hindsight, this was a familiar anorexic act: purging toward a blank state).

The first day of soaking, colours lifted in deep indigo and grey swirls, like calligraphic strokes staining the water, which had become a clear blue. Seven days in, the paper softened. Breath on the water would create a ripple across its surface, the edge of each page moving gently.

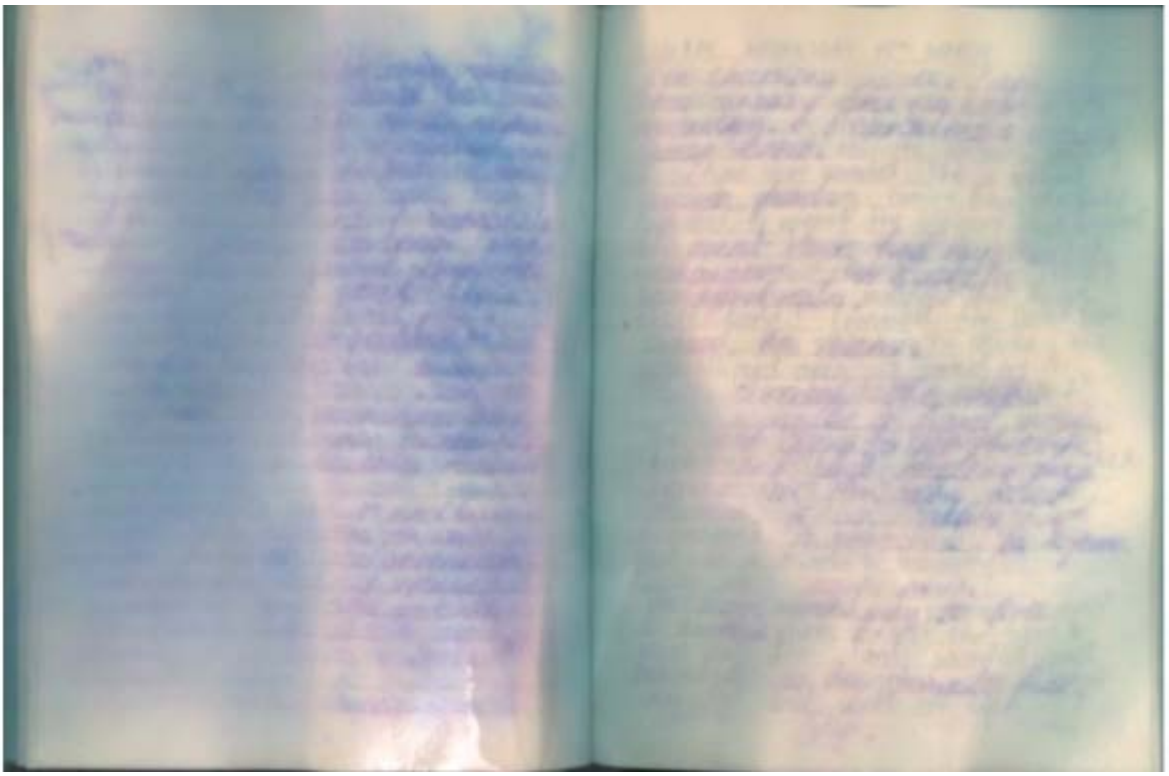
After a week, I removed the diaries from water. In one, a handful of phrases remained:

> I'm changing
>
> nervous for this audition
>
> this is the hard part
>
> an exercise in visualisation
>
> dumb urge

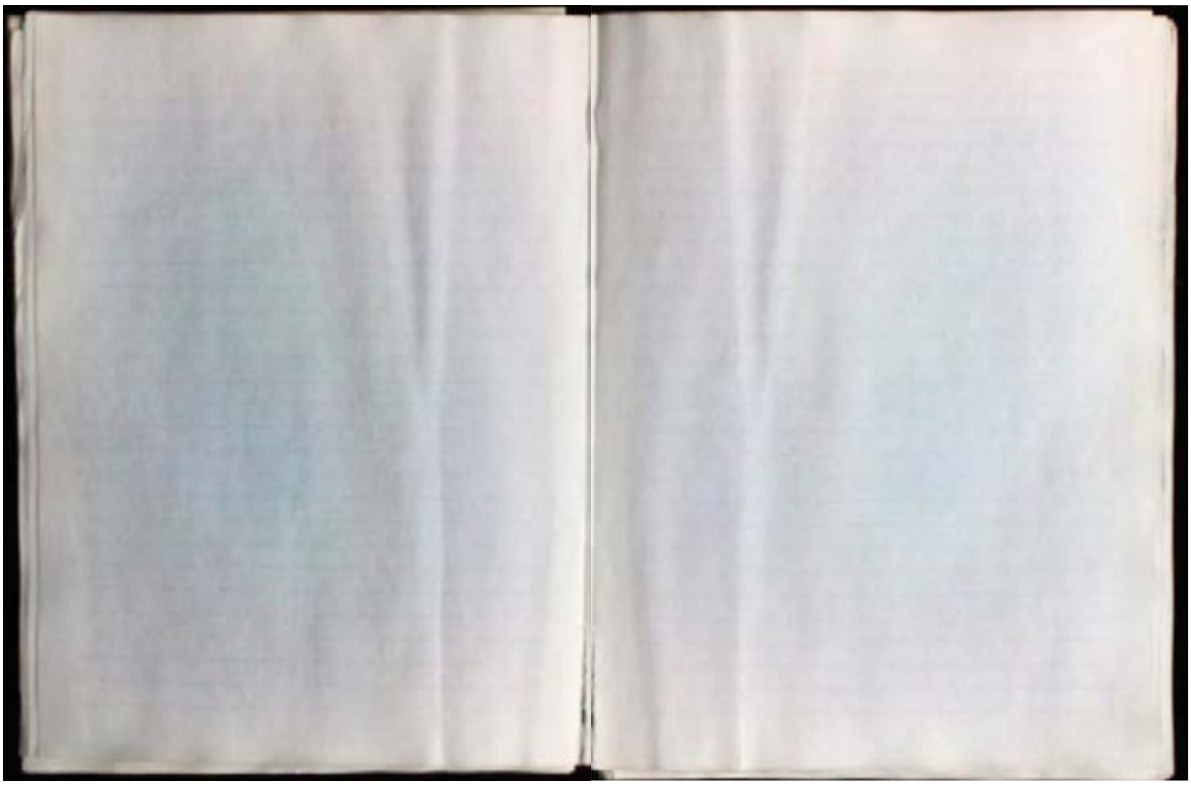
These small phrases, removed from context, seemed fitting: like my memories of anorexia, they floated in a sea of colour and shade—distinct yet unplaceable. I took note: the small, sharp phrase, the contained poetic moment, struck a chord with the experience I'd been attempting to express.

The journal from my final year of high school bled out completely (2). Its cover had detached from its spine. I laid the unbound diary on my windowsill and took notes as it dried:

> pages curling in slow motion



1 Soaking teenage diaries.



2 Erased journal.

a body closing in, shoulders hunched to protect the chest

With words removed, I saw the water-stained pages as a body, retracting. By wiping my diaries, I affected the archival record: shifting the incorporeal element of memory. I had created a conflictual archive (Miessen and Chateigné 2016), where gaps in the archive led exploration, etching an alternate vision of events beyond what was contained in the pages of a real-time journal. Without a written transcription of the past, I felt the history of events return to my body and its memory. An analogous relation was appearing between the bodily and textual: the force of water removing text, this erasure redirecting the act of remembering back to my body (from text to body). Returning to the question of how to approach starved memory, I was drawn to explore this bodily and textual interaction further:

Sick sick sick sick sick of being such a
good little girl
so how about taking good writing and
going bad?

Yes, I thought, how about disordering this writing? I decided to reverse the direction of my creative practice: from body to text. I decided to follow the form of the anorexic body by starving the text—writing a piece that would begin full-bodied and taper into smallness. I resolved to contain this writing as I once did my body, making a small (and progressively smaller, through discipline and force) body of words. I would expose the blank spaces of my memory by writing an emaciated text, performing its dissolution, as it gets smaller—becomes anorexic—on the page. This writing began with full paragraphs and exact descriptions:

> Breakfast was measured by the tablespoon, followed by an apple eaten at precisely five minutes past 11, a measly lunch consumed in the same cold stone cobwebbed toilet cubicle, before the subterfuge required to avoid dinner. It made sense to eliminate elements of this routine. Less is more. To straighten the knots in the line of my day, make it seamless. So it made sense to skip lunch and hide in the library. No food, no talking, only books. No friends, no questions, just three walls of the same carrel desk in the corner by the photocopier and the glossed covers of university pamphlets. Aim higher. It's not quite vision and it's not focus, but the bounds of my life shifted, closed in on the present moment and the sole abiding question of how to avoid eating. As the parameters of my life narrowed, I sought small, private spaces with clearly defined edges. I found safety in the cubicle, the cupboard, the windowsill, the shower. I lunched on books. No teacher would dare suggest I spent too much time studying. At school, with our ties pulled snug over stiff buttoned-up collars, it seemed I could never be in excess when it came to academia. Best is not enough, always better.

As I wrote, I felt anorexic: tensions of composition and expression are shared between writing and (not) eating. I wrote, I followed the writing and remembering body, and soon I'd digressed to a fresh memory:

> I'm supposed to insert the scalpel directly into the eyeball, and pull: right in the centre, bullseye. I would vomit if there was something to chuck. It's the violence you can't see: a bag of eyes but where are the bodies?

I remembered a vague feeling of hollowness, pierced by clarity of vision. I wrote:

Sometimes daylight casts over the earth in slow motion. A sliver of sunlight folded hard
around a street corner, a glowing spectre, she is golden and terrible, light without warmth
but condensed real solid and stretching to her I run I run I run
my hand along the new layer of fur on my arm. I am
animal and I thank this body for adapting, see? It's fine
hair all over this body, I learn later
lanugo grows to keep a starved body warm
lanugo
covers the body of a fetus
like me, spine curled delicately over my secret, waiting
to be born.

A page later, the prose turned to lucid, sparse imagery:

at night, recounting all I've eaten
fingers and thumbs clasp left thigh, then right
keeping me here

anorexia

is anything but beautiful,
it's desolate, heart numbed,
heartbroken

oh but

behold her:
white light and bloodless

I wrote without premeditation or censorship—actively bypassing the urge to self-contain and restrict:

at the edge
the linoleum cover curls away from the bench
I hate it when a sticker leaves residue

haunting

a body closing in, shoulders hunched to protect the chest

Myself and myself: we are getting acquainted, see
we have this little project, no one else knows about it.
My bike shorts gape at the gusset, but I have one singular task now

and nothing hurts and I don't want anything.

I know what makes sense: apple and ryvita,
mathematics,
to compete independently,
the beauty of the checkbox.

My father
can't look me in the eye, but
I am openly stared at on the tram

it's fine
hair lifting gently from my scalp
laid in black swirls on my palm

certain failures are more terrifying:
public
engine
organ

but my lines are steady and just watch how I am
growing sleek, hard and bare-limbed
my branches crack the sky
with my silhouette, etched calligraphic black swirls

gently lifting

Poetics of Anorexia: Erasure and Excess

Reflecting on the disordered writing, I noticed a poetics of anorexia had emerged, activating the tensions of anorexia (of erasure and excess) on the page. I'd felt these within my starving body and my writing hand, but now they'd been transposed and enlivened in text. Through poetic fragmentation and digression, the 'disordered writing' experiment performs physical and cognitive anorexic intensities. In the experiment above, erasure manifests on the page through shifts in scale. Blank spaces grow larger as the piece progresses and the prose shifts from full-bodied paragraphs to fragmented poetic verse. While typographically, this shift in form clearly represents the emaciation of an anorexic body (healthy to skeletal), attention to the level of the line reveals compression and containment that mirrors anorexia.

Fragmented lines—'oh but / haunting / a body closing in, shoulders hunched to protect the chest'—appear surrounded by the space of the page, blank space gaping between them. In this composition, the 'visual design [that] lets the eye complete the shape' (Glazier 2017: 175), probing, questioning and connecting, like the reading of an emaciated body. In the disordered writing experiment, lines truncate as my anorexic thoughts once did—this compression is a common theme in anorexia: 'emaciated thinness as a shortcut of sorts, a detour' memoirist Louise Knapp writes, 'a way to take all hungers—so varied and vast—and boil them down to their essence, one appetite to manage, just one' (2003: 37). Louise Glück wrote of her fascination with small scale poetry while she was anorexic, stating: 'I loved those poems that seemed so small on the page but that swelled in the mind' (2008: 113). This intention for a miniature scale of composition to 'swell' in mind echoes the anorectic's desire to surpass her physicality through force.

In the disordered writing experiment, techniques of literary digression enact a further element of anorexic poetics: excess. Hinted at by Glück's suggestion of a scale that 'swells' in mind, the smallness of anorexic form (an effect of what we might call anorexic erasure) is not simply meek or fragile. The anorectic has digressed, she is digressive, violating systems of consumption and health with 'anorexic betrayals', Deleuze writes, that 'trick-the-hunger" and 'trick-the-family' with an underlying motivation 'to be involuted of the organism, the family or the consumer society' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 111). Repetition of 'in a brown paper bag' in another passage of the above experiment replaces the image of food (banana) with body (heart), disturbing the food/body relation and indicating self-consumption: 'I have a banana in a brown paper bag / I am a heart in a brown paper bag'.

Moments of skewed spatiality, like 'sunlight folded hard' and the progression of imagery following a 'glowing spectre' of sunlight to the grounded physical reality of 'a new layer of fur on my arm', is reminiscent of states of disassociation I felt while anorexic, in which I seemed to transcend my body (like a 'sliver of sunlight') before dropping back into an awareness of physical detail—noticing a bone protruding, or a bruise. Like Hornbacher's Wasted, this text digresses from reality. Hornbacher narrates a sequence that sees her 'levitating midair … not grounded in physical reality' (2006: 114). Jumps in perception perform the digressive cognition I experienced in the grip of disorder—movements to unreality (figures that lift into the sky and repeated 'etched calligraphic black swirls') present the truth of this disease by showing its hallucinatory and illusory elements.

Glück's *Dedication to Hunger* in Descending Figure (1980) is a poetic analysis of anorexia composed of spare language and declarative, abstract statements. Cruz describes her own poetic accounts of anorexia similarly, likening this compression and its excess of intensity to the contracted composition of her poetry: 'I became quieter and smaller, mouse-like. And yet this compression only made me feel more and, in turn, be more intense' (Cruz 2016: n.p.). It would be short-sighted to assume sleek, minimal language is a kind of formal acquiescence to patriarchal ideals (physical, literary). In fact, what Glück wanted to present through the minimal form of *Dedication to Hunger*, was aberration. She explains, 'I wanted a poem less perfect, less stately', a poem that would not comply with the formal flourishes of great literature (Glück 1999: 17). Emaciated texts—minimal yet descriptively powerful on the page—are small yet aberrant, like anorexia.

The tension this essay is expounding, the sense I've been following since that initial hunch (writing and starving feel the same for me), came alive in this writing experiment: central to the condition of anorexia is a paradox of signification, the expression of both erasure and excess of the sign. A thin text is not only small; its narrowed form is charged with fluxes of anorexic intensity in excess of the figure. As poet Nina Puro writes, anorexic writing can be 'vacillation between compression (of the body—into neatness, comprehension, legibility) and alternately excess' (Puro quoted in Novak 2016: n.p.).

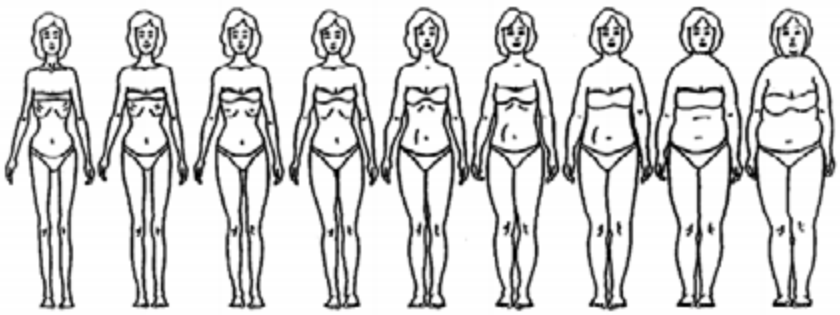
The (Im)possibility of Fleeing

The anorexic tensions described herein, of both erasure and excess, can be illustrated through the Derridean notion of the trace. Outlined by Derrida in various descriptions of his 'grammatology', the trace is a 'non-origin' that is at once present and absent. It is, like the anorexic body, 'under erasure' 'understood not only as the pursuit of an appearance but also disappearance' (Malson 1999: 148). The anorectic attempts to get out of the symbolic field, to flee her body, but this

is impossible. She cannot avoid signification. Anorexic, you are caught between assertion and negation, identifying yourself through your refusal. The anorexic body is made visible by its disappearance, caught in the impossibility of fleeing.

The trace, Derrida writes, is tied to the origin of meaning: 'according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace' (Derrida 1997: 61). Spivak expounds: 'Such is the strange "being" of the sign: half of it always "not there" and the other half always "not that"' (Spivak 1997: xvii). With her complicated tension of (dis)appearance, the anorexic subject exemplifies this Derridean notion of the trace in which disappearance and appearance are reciprocal. The categories of a binary opposition are sustained by their difference, and as such the sign contains a trace of that which it negates or doesn't mean. Appearance. Disappearance.

The trace is what I felt, in my body, as I was passed a pen by the doctor and asked to circle my form on this scale:



3 Eating disorder figure rating scale, used in eating disorder assessment

All of them. None of them. Why can't I be none of them? Derrida describes the self, the 'I' as 'delivered, offered and betrayed all at once' (1995: 347). We notice this deferral in the above image: I I I I I I I I I. The sign (body, text) defers its meaning infinitely and what is exposed, in this différance, is the trace (Spivak 1997: xvii). The trace comes to the fore in a metaphysical rupture of deconstruction—in the impossibility of fleeing (the body, the text). Recall the starving girl, refusing to be made a sexual object, complimented on her attractive thin appearance. This is the trace, embodied.

Anorexia can be viewed, then, as a lived experience of the trace. What are we to make of such an association? In considering this creative-critical crux, we might use it as a 'stanza' for research, overturning the matter from practice-to-research-to-practice in a 'cyclic web' that oscillates between 'various stages in the cycle of practice-led research and research-led practice' (Dean and Smith 2009: 22). In this association of the trace and anorexic poetics, potential for creative invention arises. Faced with a sense of impossibility, this writing found a mode of expressing anorexia by attuning to its paradox of signification. We might think of impossibility, then, as (im) possibility—able to be read as both possibility and impossibility, taking heed of Derrida's (2007: 445) definition:

> I'll be speaking about … 'possible,' which I will very quickly turn to 'impossible.' … To put it otherwise, I will try to explain how I understand the word 'possible' in this

> sentence in a way that this 'possible' is not simply 'different from' or 'the opposite of' impossible, and why, in this case, 'possible' and 'impossible' say the same thing

When transposed into language (as shown in this experiment) anorexic tensions live on the page. How can this finding be of use to a writer seeking to recount her life? What is made possible through the anorexic trace in writing? I suggest we consider the emergent connections with poetic form. This writing enacts the trace through poetics, gesturing to the potential of poetic form to enhance eating disorder life writing. Although the trace exists on the verge of its own disappearance, theorists have suggested that poetry, or poetic writing, can be a form through which it is made present. 'The trace, then, remains elusive' (Vickery 2013: 23). Out of reach. Here and not here. 'Yet something about poetic discourse seems to make it a favoured medium through which we continually pursue it' (Vickery 2013: 23). This 'something' might be the relation of the poetic with the body—in operation through poetry, the trace 'gestures back to the bodily and to the sensual' (Vickery 2013: 9).

If we follow the trace into poetry, can this poetic form resolve the critical and experiential impossibility I felt at the outset of writing? Rachel Blau DuPlessis in her poem 'Draft 87: Trace Elements' (DuPlessis 2013) reminds us, the trace is a hold/hole, as it allows for both appearance and disappearance:

> The trace is a
> hold/a hole
> of evanescence through which
> travel small powerful things (2013: 25)

> So the trace is exigent,
> even if almost obliterated,
> even if we know it only
> as something on the verge
> of its own disappearance (2013: 53)

It is impossible to skip the system and avoid signification (to starve your way out). Yet, if the 'lack at the origin ... is the condition of thought and experience' (Spivak 1997: xvii), and is constitutive of the form itself, it follows that this lack, or this trace, must be able to take form, to be written. There must be a way to present this paradox in language, 'contradicting logic, we must learn to use and erase our language at the same time' (Spivak 1997: xviii). Looking to the tensions of language here, a creative writer might note the inventiveness on offer. Rather than emphasising postmodern despair in the dissolution of writing, here the impossible, Derrida writes, is the condition for invention. What is impossible, at a system's limit, becomes the very experience of the possible. The impossible event, he writes, is not merely the opposite of possible, it is also the condition or chance of the possible (Derrida 2007: 454). This is the positive flipside to that familiar paradox of (dis)appearance—this tension: anorexic, postmodern, despairing, can be used for invention, creativity.

Writers of eating disorder memoir can harness the inventive potential of the subject through formal experimentation. Such writing would fall in line with feminist reconsiderations of auto/biographical genre and movements in literary philosophy. Catherine Malabou theorises the notion of 'plasticity': the condition of form changing in response to itself. This plasticity developed in part as a response to Derridean grammatology, which Malabou seeks to reconfigure: 'fleeing without going anywhere else is in every case a question of the possibility of transformation

and metamorphosis', she writes (2010: 67). To flee without going anywhere is to change, to metamorphise. The anorectic and the writer have no other choice: the body, the text, are inescapable, but the possibilities for affirmative expression can grow.

Keeping the Pact, an Embodied Archive

Such writing as has been explored in this essay offers a counter-history to archival documents, leaden as they were with the voices of anorexia and medical discourse. Tracing a body-led inquiry into the discourse of eating disorder life writing, this essay has suggested the inventive potential of impossibility can open the expressive potential for the field and beyond. Experimenting with erasure and excess—key elements of anorexia, a condition that enacts the Derridean trace—this paper settles on a form of poetic autobiography. Writing in this poetic style, I stay true to the silences, contradictions and memory gaps of anorexia. Through fragmentation and image, this writing project presents an 'awareness of memory's inherent instability and fracture, its fluidity and fragmentation' (O'Rourke 2018: 13), which is how I, as a writer of eating disorder, 'might most effectively honor Philippe Lejeune's "autobiographical pact"' (O'Rourke 2018: 13). As memoir is beholden to a pact of truth, poetic movements can be a nonfictional technique, presenting the lived paradox, the trace in its operation, within anorexia. As Sewell observes, 'poetry, like speech, moves beyond the confines of the body and the self and, through figure, theme, and form, can articulate what the anorexic cannot say' (2006: 51). Poetic form can begin to articulate that which would otherwise fall away from expression, get stuck in the throat and be missed by the archive.

Notes

1 Taking this term from Hegel and drawing from its use in neuroscience, Malabou defines plasticity as 'the movement of the constitution of an exit, there, where no such exit is possible' (2010: 66).

2 Derrida's concept of 'sous rature' or 'under erasure' designates the porosity of language. In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida describes the play of signification having no limit, and that without a transcendental signified 'one must reject even the concept and word "sign" itself—which is precisely what cannot be done' (2001: 354).

3 While writing can be felt as flow and release, a writer remains observant of one's own writing. This observer, or censor, operates in a manner akin to the observing and policing self-gaze within anorexia (see Markidis 2020).

4 Mascia-Lees and Sharpe suggest the anorectic learns (as Bruch proposed) "double-track thinking" in which she habitually second-guesses what someone is really thinking, which leads to a distrust of the signifier (Mascia-Lees and Sharpe 1996).

5 Portia De Rossi's memoir is particularly explicative, regularly listing her declining weights and measurements, including photographs of her emaciated body, and detailing her intake and

exercise habits: 'an hour on the treadmill at 7.0, 105 sit-ups followed by 105 leg-lifts […] I was 96 pounds […] I ate 300 calories a day' (2010: 257).

6 Writer Katy Waldman warns against eating disorder life writing that characterises the anorectic as inherently artistic or elegantly expressive. This writing, she states 'contains and reproduces something more amoebic, perhaps more dangerous, than dieting tips: a specific persona and sensibility' (Waldman 2015: n.p.). Though the conflation of emaciation with expressivity, anorexic literature risks ascribing an 'eloquence to the starving body, a kind of lyric grace to the disorder: bone as hieroglyph, clavicle as cry' (Jamison 2014: n.p.).

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2 POEMS

Leslie Prosterman

THE MORE, IGNITED

Leslie Prosterman

is orange, is a cycle, is a shadow, is a consciousness looping around like a bowel, like a cry on repeat, like an orange, like a deep scream, like a hermit thrush thrust into paradox, into an exaltation of warm tail, brown and beak, into hunger, into a parabolic of feather, into pebble, into rough around, sage and nip soaring through body thrash propel into. Vermilion. Piercings: the first instant explose of parts, kestrel shriek, triumph an exhilaration of sharp, of citrus, of nose, of orange, rows of ellipses, of points in a low plainsong promising, plunge upwards, uprush to the more that we will come back, we will be, will return as, aflame ‘enash, all blood, all air, firmament, glazed and shattered ...

BIO/SPHERE

Leslie Prosterman

Following a track in the twilight before sunrise, an earth-beaten path takes us to the verge, the neglected interstice sheltering cornflowers, knew that the boundary between planted and world could prove this rich: arachnid, hornet, sparrow, a vision of topos and species. Lost, thought some, some intensely but vaguely understood feeling, apparition soft with imagined lives about to begin, that we are about to begin, the storm of the limitary, sum of the body, a recollect gathering momentum, a recollect of cockchafer clicking away until memory hardens into story and morning becomes elytra, taking off with a snick and a burr.

About the author

Leslie Prosterman, author of *Snapshots and Dances*, most recently has published in *Live Mag! Unlikely Stories*, *Maintenant*, and *Journal of Italian Translation*. She is at work on a new book manuscript called *Love and Then Tomorrow* which will include the poems in *Axon*. She appears as a poet/dancer in vaudeville revues, experimental dance concerts and on YouTube. A former Associate Professor of American Studies and Folklore, Leslie Prosterman now teaches community poetry workshops on Zoom and in person, oscillating up and down the east coast of the United States as befits a former student of trapeze.

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3 POEMS

Nathanael O'Reilly

University of Texas, Arlington

EPITHALAMIUM

Nathanael O'Reilly

For Tricia; after Nick Laird

You're blueberries and I'm compost.
I'm a grumpy bastard. You're massaged.
If I'm grace then you're sin.
One of us is disfellowshipped.

If I'm abhorrent rubbish
you're not quite ripe.
You're corduroy to my thighs.
You're an afternoon nap and I'm jetlag.

And I am eucalyptus and you are cinnamon.
When you're inaccurate I am pedantic.
You're bhat. I'm Icelandic króna.
If I'm a thatched cottage you're a SoHo loft.

I'm gravel rash and you're the road.
I'm a set of knives on the shopping channel
and you're the Queen of Hearts who weeps
when I slaughter the Christmas pavlova.

And I am Grafton Street, and you're the Liffey,
and sometimes we do not intersect,
and yet we flow. If I'm the offering basket
you're the engorged envelope leavened with tithes.

IN THE BEGINNING

Nathanael O'Reilly

For Celeste

The OB-GYN sliced through your mother's
skin, abdominal muscles and uterus,
grasped you carefully, lifted you out and into
this world, slick, fresh and glistening. After I cut
your umbilical cord, the nurse wrapped you
in a soft pink blanket, passed you into my arms,
delivered you into my life, joyfully exploded
my past and future. While the doctor stitched
and repaired your mother's bloody wounds
you gazed into my eyes, your bright blue
worlds observing me for a sublime hour.

RIDE

Nathanael O'Reilly

ride a tram up Collins, cross King, William, Queen
ride a suburban train from Flinders Street to Seaford
ride the buzz after pints of lager in the beer garden
ride the slopes of Purgatory on a rented snowboard
ride the bus from the railway station out to campus
ride the ferry from Manly to Circular Quay
ride jetlag around Rome on the sightseeing bus
ride a black mare bareback through downtown Santa Fe
ride the wooden rollercoaster at Luna Park
ride the cymbals while drumming in a garage band
ride the overnight ferry from Rosslare to Pembroke
ride new Spitfire wheels on the half-pipe, increase speed
ride the V/LINE from Southern Cross to Shepparton
ride four-foot waves on a longboard at Lahinch in June

About the author

Nathanael O'Reilly is an Irish-Australian poet who teaches creative writing at the University of Texas at Arlington. His eight collections include *Boulevard* (Beir Bua Press, 2021), *(Un)belonging* (Recent Work Press, 2020), *BLUE* (above/ground press, 2020), *Preparations for Departure* (UWAP, 2017) and *Distance* (Ginninderra Press, 2015). His poetry appears in over 100 journals and anthologies published in 14 countries, including *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Anthropocene*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *The Elevation Review*, *fourW*, *New World Writing*, *Mascara Literary Review*, *Ponder Review*, *Trasna*, *Westerly* and *Wisconsin Review*. He is the poetry editor for *Antipodes: A Global Journal of Australian/New Zealand Literature*.

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THE SORRY TALE OF THE MIGNONETTE

Networks, archives and circularity in creative production

Angela Gardner

Abstract

This paper references the writing of the Australia Council funded verse novel *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette* and the additional print folio created as a practical example of using formal and informal archives and the extent that places, people, and material form enabling networks for the production of new work. Because I trained as a visual artist rather than as a writer, I find it very difficult to confine myself to working solely in one medium. Archival material is not merely stored as a static and revered object but is capable of becoming mobilised and motivated by use, and to affect the practice of the artist/writer through ideas, travel and social contacts. The archive grows through the networks it assumes with the past and new material created from it, showing the circularity of creative production around archival material and its sites.

1 Cover image, *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette*. Solvent release print, letterpress.

THE SORRY TALE OF THE MIGNONETTE: NETWORKS, ARCHIVES AND CIRCULARITY IN CREATIVE PRODUCTION

Angela Gardner

Every archive, we will draw some inference from this, is at once institutive and conservative. Revolutionary and traditional. (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995: 12)

Introduction

Archival memory is a social construct reflecting power relationships in society. Archivists and manuscript curators play the important role of mediator in selecting material for preservation and providing research access to such collections. In this way the collective memory of the archive provides an avenue to events but like individual human memory can only be accessed in parts. The archive as Derrida and Prenowitz note is *conservative* in that it conserves the past and is *revolutionary* in what it reveals (1995: 9–63). But it is always a curated view. Memories can be erased by the archive failing to have anything to preserve.

In 2018 I received funding from the *Australia Council for the Arts* to undertake research in the UK and Australia and enable the writing of the verse novel, *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette*. My research would track the story of the 1884 shipwreck, murder and cannibalism of my great-grandmother's cousin Richard Parker. The foundational idea was to uncover the life story of my relative, however, finding archival evidence of the life of the victim of a crime who was poor, illiterate and died very young (he was only 17) proved challenging. After all, stories are told by the survivors.

The Sorry Tale

This well-known story is usually told from an English perspective but because of my research I was able to show that this is very much an Australian story with its impetus and much of the drama arising from and taking place in Sydney.

The novel uses the voices of historical figures: Jack Want, the Australian owner of the yacht *Mignonette*, who was, at the time, attorney general of New South Wales and fierce anti-Federationist; the yacht's English captain, Tom Dudley, who fulfilled his desire to emigrate to Sydney only to die of bubonic plague and be buried at North Head, Sydney's then quarantine centre; the two other shipmates, Mate Edwin Stephens and Able Seaman Ned Brooks; the victim, Richard Parker; and his cousin, Sarah Parker and Tom Dudley's Aunt, already living in Sydney, who could contextualise Australia's place in this colonial-era story.

The verse novel, *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette*, tells the tale of my great-grandmother's cousin, Richard Parker, a cabin-boy on a yacht being sailed from Southampton, in the south of England, to Sydney in 1884 for Jack Want a prominent New South Wales barrister and politician. The *Mignonette* foundered in the South Atlantic far from land, leaving the crew in dire straits. After 19 days with no sign of any other vessel to rescue them, and with all four in a terrible state of hunger and thirst, the captain and mate, Edwin Stephens, decided to murder and eat poor Richard.

One downward slash through skin
kissed bones, feverish over mouths
and opening, he carves a wound.
Blade raised so bodies open their surge and welt.
Kill to drink as blood drops
and lean him, wreckage against horror.

(Gardner 2021: 91)

Just days later the remaining sailors were rescued and returned to Falmouth to face justice. The original trial at Exeter Assize was moved to The Old Bailey in London due to huge public interest and the need to clarify the Empire's maritime legal framework regarding what had been common practice: viz. the sacrifice of one for the greater good of the shipwrecked crew. *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette* takes place in the England's West Country, in London and at sea and in Australia. It explores power relationships, individual motives, survivor guilt and self-justification, and justice and divine retribution spanning the time from Richard signing on as cabin boy, the voyage, the trials, the haunting of the survivors and the bizarre circumstances of Captain Tom Dudley's death.

Across the British Empire the shipwreck (and its consequences) was a major scandal of the Victorian era, the subject of many newspaper column inches, furious letters to the editors, a broadsheet murder ballad, and more than one court case.

MR COLLINS FOR THE DEFENCE:

Their lips were dry and black
their tongues were hard as stone

Horrible as the repast was
Disgusting as the food was

This act was a necessity
it saved their lives.

Richard Parker lay there dying
these men had wives and families.

And but for his sacrifice
they would all have died.

(Gardner 2021: 113)

The court case titled Regina v Dudley and Stephens (1884) in which the captain and mate were sentenced to death for murder (there was no separate charge for cannibalism) had significant ongoing legal ramifications. (Dudley's and Stephens's sentences were subsequently commuted to six months imprisonment without hard labour). The case established the precedent, throughout the common law world, that necessity is not a defence for murder, which is still in effect in many jurisdictions today. The shipwreck and the subsequent court cases were well-documented at the time in shipping registers, newspaper reports, and trial transcripts. Thus, there was plenty of archival material available to research and the formal archives felt the right place to start.

What is the Archive?

The first sentence of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*, 'Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even the archive', implies that the archive is the beginning of order at an almost divine level: 'In the beginning was the word' (1995: 9).

The UK's National Archive in its paper *Scope of Archive Service Accreditation Scheme* 1.3 states: 'Archives may be informal in terms of their format and the 'business' to which they relate: for example, a group of love letters may be created and maintained for 'the conduct of ... affairs' of a personal and private nature'. That is, an archive is not just informal documents collected by an institution but potentially any material informally collected in dispersed non-institutional locations. There were no love letters to be found, my own extension of the definition 'informal archive' encompassed collected memories, our own bookshelves, family photographs and personal objects that form an inner circle of historical documentation about places, institutions, or a group of people centred around a person. In this project, I also took the definition of archive to include the conserved built environment where people lived, or actions took place: it being difficult to picture a scene without understanding where and in what context it took place. This physical, inhabitable 'archive' enabled an inhabiting of character through embodiment, almost a process of 'method acting', which placed an emphasis on the need for site visits.

To create a complete, rounded narrative I needed to fill the gaps in the formal archive with the informal archive. As a scavenger I could then give weight to material in both the public and private stores of information I could access: the formal, publicly recognised, authority of the National Archives, Kew; London's Poetry Library; the Hampshire Archives Centre in Winchester for audio recordings of local sea shanties; and contracts documenting work undertaken at the Shipwright's Yard at Itchen Ferry. These formal sources intermingled with the informal and only privately recognised family stories and memories. Interestingly, Derrida states that 'The archontic principle of the archive is also the principle of consignation, that is, gathering together' (1995: 9–63). It is the personal experience and detail from these informal sources that fill in gaps and add texture to the facts as collected formally. This 'gathering together' of material from both formal (recognised) archives and informal sources created the warp and weft of the verse novel.

In consideration of the visual art aspects of the project, I digitised my father's photographic slide collection of boats and sailors and docks from c.1970. These were used as one of the visual reference points for prints I made in conjunction with and as a relief from writing. One of the images found in the cache of slides was taken from the lightship in the Bristol Channel that my father, who worked for the Mission to Seamen, visited at Christmas taking hampers for the sailors, sometimes taking my siblings and I along. In one photograph he and I are caught transferring between the rowing boat and the lightship. I used this slide as the basis for a visual work (2), but it also allowed me to place myself more easily in the rowing boat with the shipwrecked sailors, to inhabit the character of my relative Richard and therefore empathise with his experience. Another slide showed an unknown young sailor in hospital. His vulnerability attached itself to the character of Ned Brooks, the only sailor who opposed the murder of Richard, and who turned Queen's witness in the trial. While this meant Ned was freed from a murder conviction, he never recovered from the experience.

Recollection—that denoting of the action of gathering together again (from the French or medieval Latin verb recolligere, 'gather again')—is the work I undertook to knit together my mother's recollections of her invalid grandmother, Sarah Parker. These recollections mingled,

2 Angela Gardner and her father in a rowing boat, transferring to a lightship out in the Bristol Channel.

with my own memories and the embodied experience of walking the area in Southampton where they had lived, gleaning and imbibing from the location tales of the local fairs and fairground adventures. The family memories and my own fairground and amusement park experiences melded with the archived newspaper accounts of the broken and destitute Ned Brooks who never returned to the sea but instead made his living as a freak attraction at travelling fairs. The cannibalism he had taken part in, eating him as surely as he had eaten the body of his fellow sailor, Richard. Although occurring late in the book, the haunting of Ned Brooks was one of the earliest poems I wrote … coming to me at night like the haunting it was, startling me awake to write in the dark:

> *Ned Brooks is lost in the body of something*
> *That swallowed him long years ago.*
> *He's working the charter and the goose fairs,*
> *the horse fairs and the mops. Competing for attention*
> *with Madame Electra, between the waxworks*
> *and steam driven carnival rides. He's in the freak show*
> *beside the menageries and circuses.*
> *Travelling to Wakes, lost in the crowds*
> *of pleasure-seekers on roundabouts and gallopers*
> *who gawp at contortionists and are love-struck by mermaids.*
> (Gardner 2021: 134)

In the nineteenth century the European concept of the nation had a powerful influence on the creation of legal system documentation. In the UK, the National Archives brings together four collecting institutions and their legislative bases: His Majesty's Stationery Office 1786, the Public Record Office Act 1838, the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts 1869, and the Office of Public Sector Information 2005. The collection of national census data in the UK started in 1801 and in Australia in 1911. The Met Office, UK, founded by Vice-Admiral Robert Fitzroy, of *HMS Beagle* fame, in 1854, has a *National Meteorological Archive*, housed in Exeter. All of these sources proved invaluable in defining and underpinning the factual basis of the story from legal judgments to historically accurate weather observations for 1884 and 1885.

Research at London's Victoria and Albert Museum, the National Archive, and the British Library Newsroom was fundamental to providing insights into the contemporaneous recording and reporting of the case. *The Illustrated London News* of Saturday, 20 September 1884, for example, ran multiple pages of articles and illustrations (3). The National Maritime Museum in Falmouth helped with nautical references and transcripts of interviews with local residents who remembered the Falmouth trial, while the museum's historical displays included a boat being built in traditional style. In Sydney, the Mitchell Library and the Australian National Maritime Museum underpinned the antipodean factual content. In reading Victorian-era literature I began to hear the preserved speech cadences of this era as an archive that I could deliberately mine in the writing of the shipwreck, courtroom drama, and murder story. Elements of sea shanty and Victorian-era prosody published in the decades around the shipwreck also informed the narrative's overarching language.

3 Cover, *The Illustrated London News* of Saturday, 20 September 1884

Where To Start?

> 'The purpose of art' James Baldwin wrote, 'is to lay bare the questions hidden by the answers.' He might have been channelling Dostoyevsky's statement that 'we have all the answers. It is the questions we do not know'. (Rankine 2014: 115)

The story of the *Mignonette* was so well known and documented that it could appear that all the answers already existed, but my questions were about who Richard and his cousin Sarah were, the context in which they lived and died and what it felt like to be in the story of their lives. To answer those questions, I needed to inhabit their characters and use both fact and fiction to create a successful novel.

There were international research threads to follow for these questions but to turn it all into a novel, let alone poetry, required more than synthesis and something more akin to alchemy. The object of the project was to turn raw information or the answers from the archive into the questions driving a creative work. Poetry heightens the tension and drives the narrative in telling the personal and human story of one of the most important legal judgments in English law.

As a relative of the victim, I worked hard to examine my feelings towards the perpetrators. Including the aftermath of the event in the survivor's lives shifted the focus from Richard alone, to his relatively small part in a larger, more complex and long-lasting story. Part of the research then became the interrogation of family members' memories. I had been raised with stories of the people and events surrounding the shipwreck. From my mother and her sister, both brought up within miles of the hamlet of Itchen River, I heard stories of Sarah their grandmother, who was Richard's cousin, and of my aunt swimming in the River Itchen. By the time I went to the site of the hamlet it was no longer the same. The area, previously known as Itchen Ferry, had been used by the British Army during the Second World War for target practice and close quarters fire fights and thus destroyed. Just as Richard barely exists in the formal archival record—just his mark on the employment contract—so even the place they had lived has been erased. However, the current dilapidated sheds and broken concrete along the foreshore seemed to mimic the poor conditions of what had been a fishing village during Richard's and Sarah's lifetime and the perennial weeds flourishing along the riverbanks are likely descendants of those that flowered there in the 1880s.

Even a photograph of Richard that was used at the time turned out to be of one of his brothers. There was such interest in his 'celebrity' that an image had to be invented. Sometimes I would think of him as my own brother, also called Richard, at 17 but that was an uncomfortable thought.

For the creative process, it was important to place myself physically at the site where relevant events occurred even if that place in its previous form no longer exists:

> Thin shingle foreshore
> between the Mead two buddleia acres
> rotting with Bailiff's rent, ragwort
> in pence, adding up to mere tidal shillings.
> Boats hauled up onto the sloped hard
> bass and grey mullet in the estuary
> oyster dredgermen in their punts
> : the dead-end marsh, late our various industry.
>
> (Gardner 2021: 13)

And so, I began to work within a more expansive view of archives: Architecture became the archive of the city … a way of inhabiting and enacting character. In England I walked the Itchen River, a chalk trout stream, and used that experience to imagine Richard speaking to Sarah as he left their childhood home and during the delirium at the end of his life. I followed the Itchen Ferry foreshore and Southampton Docks spurred on by looking at period maps in the *Maritime and Social Studies Research Centre* at the Southampton City Library (transformed but providing similar dereliction and industry … the flowers are the same even if the rubbish is different). At Peartree Green where a memorial to Richard stands in the church, I came upon, by chance, living relatives of Richard and myself that I could talk to. I visited the Customs House in Falmouth, now a Pizzeria, and the Magistrates Court, now a gift shop. A private, behind the scenes, tour at the courthouse in Exeter allowed me to see prisoner's cells and the Judge's chamber behind the public main hall.

In Australia, I saw the house where Jack Want lived, now in the seedy Kings Cross area of Sydney, and the Old Quarantine Station, at Sydney's North Head, where Captain Dudley was buried. Being present at each of these places, however transformed, meant I could imagine the space and the character back into the story. Unlike the crew of the *Mignonette*, I did not sail a yacht out of Southampton but instead travelled as far as the Isle of Wight by ferry, writing notes on the way out and again on the way back using those notes in one direction then reading them backwards to amplify my impressions for the scene of the *Mignonette* sailing from the Southampton Docks, as for them it was an outward journey with no return.

For some of the deep-sea sections I used my own childhood memories of being on deck with my father on a sea voyage between Australia and England, recalling my six-year-old self marvelling at the flying fish and the huge night sky. These memories were augmented from *A Seaman's Pocket Book* (Osprey 1943) and the published blue water sailing experience of Jack Want.

For the poem 'The Tenderest Flesh', I describe Captain Dudley's wife watching her husband one evening in Sydney at work on a yacht, as if with a stranger's eyes, as their young children lie asleep in their beds. I felt it was important to stand under the bridge at Cambridge Road and at Sussex Street in Sydney and see the style of house that Captain Tom Dudley lived in where he worked as a yacht builder and chandler. But to write about Dudley's life in Sydney I needed to know that he was a yacht builder and it was through cross-referencing information in the National Library of Australia's Trove database of digitised newspapers, *The Sands Directory*, and in a spreadsheet compiled by National Maritime Museum. If I hadn't travelled and asked questions of the archive and archivists these facts could not have been connected but would have remained in their own silos. With this information I could then identify the *Volunteer*, the yacht Dudley both built and captained as a rival to the new yacht owned by Jack Want, former owner of the *Mignonette*. Stories of Captain Tom Dudley being helped to settle in Sydney by Jack Want after the shipwreck came into question because of this. I discovered it was his own family who supported him, and he was in fact a rival in yacht races including the Centenary Intercolonial Yacht Race in Port Phillip Bay in 1889.

The National Library's Trove archive was particularly useful: not only for information about the yacht racing scene in Australia but for articles about shark attacks, the Chronicle of the Year 1884 from the *Argus* 3/1/1885, and for details of the 1900 Bubonic Plague outbreak in Sydney. Being able to use a search function in a well-curated digital archive such as Trove can rapidly increase your chances of finding and linking disparate pieces of information. Here I need to mention searching the mysteries of the ROUD system of the *English Folk Dance & Song Library*

for broadsheets, something that required help from the archivists. With their help I was able to find broadsheets that circulated among the crowds outside important trials and pinpoint the exact broadsheet of the contemporary 1884/5 ballad that commemorated my relative's death at sea: 'Fearful Sufferings at Sea, Lad Killed and Eaten'. This broadsheet I rearranged into a poem, 'Ship-Story'.

Networks and Connections

Personal networks and connections were an important part of the archival research matrix. My creative practice, utilising both formal and informal archives, places, and people, was enabled and facilitated by experts from existing networks. For example, a friend, Professor Rosemary Hunter from the University of Kent Law Department, pointed me to The National Archives, Kew; Pascal O'Loughlin, a fellow poet working at The National Poetry Library, London, suggested useful poetry anthologies within the collection but also arranged a visit to the broadsheet collection at the English Folk Dance & Song Library; Elizabeth James at the Victoria and Albert Museum, whom I have known since childhood, put me in touch with Lauren von Bechmann at The Museum of Childhood, V&A Bethnal Green. She allowed me to open a Victorian Era teaching box and look through all its treasures. This granted me the authority to describe the processes of Empire, its trade-routes and conquest through the objects used for the educational purposes in the time Sarah attended the school Peartree Green.

Fiction Fills in the Gaps

To imaginatively inhabit extreme conditions of being and feelings that are not my own, the work required at some level the merging of my selfhood with those of Richard or Sarah or of the Captain so that I could authentically deploy a first person lyric voice. Some of the poems came to me in the middle of the night and were more an unconscious accessing of emotion during the imaginative apprehension of a character. In this process, I was not situating the truth within the poem or the archive; the experiences remained within the bodies of the people depicted, whether that was the personal tragedy of Richard, or of Sarah losing her beloved cousin or, indeed, of the violent insecurity of the sailors shipwrecked on the South Atlantic for many long days in a small rowing boat.

The Welsh poet Deryn Rees-Jones said:

> What happens
> if we
> figure the lyric through this trauma, this movement in time between the workings of our unconscious/imagination, our connection with the moment of perception, being alive, and real? (Crowther 2019: 107)

The interplay between tangible objects and imaginative processing is profound. At the National Archives in Kew, in the UK Home Office files, I held in my hands the contract signed with Richard's mark. It, alongside the Scale of Provisions, the drawing of the *Mignonette* by Thomas Dudley, and all of the original depositions given in Falmouth by the survivors cast a deep sense of sadness over me for all involved in the tragedy.

These were real people—in Sarah's case a direct ancestor—each subjected to others' moral decisions or who made moral decisions on behalf of another. In the case of Captain Dudley, what fascinated me were the moral priorities and judgments he made and how differently the

general public and the authorities saw them. That acts of murder and cannibalism were viewed sympathetically at the time, citing the 'law of the sea' as a defence, was intriguing from my modern position. The fact that the consequences of the tragedy resulted in a legal judgment still used in murder trials to this day shows how surely the past impacts the present.

Philosophical Frameworks

I found the framework of Moral Foundations Theory useful in considering the story: it posits five core principles that people base their judgments on: Care (versus Harm), Fairness (versus Cheating), Loyalty (versus Betrayal), Authority (versus Subversion) and Purity or Sanctity (versus Degradation). The tensions and dichotomies between these choices raise profound moral arguments. Who knows what any of us would do if we found ourselves in the same circumstances? The shipwreck, the murder, the cannibalism, and the trials were set against a backdrop of Victorian era industrialisation and class structure. By fictionalising the experiences of those involved those moral dilemmas and social pressures are transformed into psychological and physical realities for the characters. In suggesting that 'to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected', James Baldwin, in his book-length essay *No Name on the Street*, shows just how intimately the wider social reality of class (or in his case the intersection of race and class) impacts upon the poor and disenfranchised (Baldwin 1972).

Other methods deployed during the writing process related to finding the right voices for the characters included reading the King James version of the Bible (particularly the Old Testament) for the voice of the Captain, a God-fearing man, while reading murder ballads held at the English Folk Dance & Song Library gave insights into the public mood and the language used to express it, which, in general, was sympathetic to the Captain and his Mate.

Some literary sources were used in the creation of particular poems: the phrase 'I'll seize their hats' given to Jack Want on page 18 is a brief direct quotation referencing a true incident from the life of the pirate Benjamin Hornigold (1680–1719); by contrast, Jack Want, the owner of the yacht *Mignonette*, to whom I attribute the phrase in the novel, merely dressed as a pirate when sailing on Sydney Harbour. In isolation this phrase becomes comic though his character at the end appears tragicomic in his lack of acknowledgment of his fundamental part in the tragedy as owner of the yacht *Mignonette* and speaks again to the differing experiences of the entitled and those who are fodder to their privilege.

The poem 'Running Before the Storm' (p. 47) is a cut-up from 'True Reportary of Wracke and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates', by William Strachey, published by Samuel Purchas 1625. Methods sporadically used in other areas of the verse novel include collage, Oulipo (the creation of work through constrained writing techniques) and digital randomising of text. 'Ship-Story' is a loose re-arrangement of the contemporary 1884/5 ballad 'Fearful Sufferings at Sea, Lad Killed and Eaten', which was written for the trial in London.

Charles Dickens's novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, was the source for some of the listed goods in the poem, 'The Old Curiosity Shop' (p. 103), but, in a more indirect way, the novels of Charles Dickens were a useful hinge for getting the feel of the language spoken at the time into my head and for his portrayal of the tensions between social classes during this period of industrialisation. Characters, whether real or fictionalised, exist within the context of their society. By 1884, when

the verse novel is set, yachts already represented a nostalgia for a past era as steam tonnage had officially exceeded sailing ships' tonnage by 1865 (Lloyd's Register). This played out in real life with UK National Census records from 1881 confirming one brother worked with steel plate for the new iron ships while Richard, the younger brother, worked in a shipyard building wooden sailing yachts. Neither brother had had an extended education but had instead both gone straight out to work.

In some cases, these fragments or influences such as 'the Conradian / Australian Aboriginal counter-imperial contextualising' that Professor John Goodby recognised in private email correspondence with the author (5/1/2021), and the newspaper reportage quoted in the letters of Dudley's Aunt Mary in Sydney to the Captain in *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette* are used to give a wider historical view to the verse novel. The letters, of course, are a fiction, no letters survived that I could find, but the events portrayed were real.

But it wasn't all ballads and poems and shanties and literature; that particularly sonorous cadence of Victorian era writing came through in the non-fiction reading I pursued in libraries (those archives of books). The many books I read but couldn't precisely say how or where they entered into the writing or the text included subjects such as *Shipbuilding in Victorian Southampton*, 'Tips for Sailing after Dark' and 'What they read on Blackbeard pirate ships'. Other texts read or perused included the *Royal Commission on Unseaworthy Ships, Final Report, vol 1*, 1874; the Shipwreck Index of the British Isles vol 2; A History of Southampton; and the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron Rule Book 1883–4 the copy examined in the State Library of NSW belonged to FB Lark. These fragments of fact and fiction mingled in my conscious and subconscious mind eventually lending various realities to memory, ideas, places and characters.

Bringing It All Together

'… the storyline goes *along*, as does the line on the map. The things of which the story tells, let us say, do not as much exist as occur; each moment is an ongoing activity' (Ingold 2016: 92). A story after all is a sequence of events, an 'and then what happened?' and it is more so for the people whose story it actually is.

During my research I discovered that Jack Want's official *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB) entry does not include details of his ownership of the *Mignonette* although the shipwreck and subsequent trial were a worldwide newspaper and legal sensation. Perhaps the writer of his entry did not uncover this information or perhaps it is not how the politician and lawyer Jack Want wished to be remembered or felt was relevant to his story?

I also brought to light previously unlinked information in the National Maritime Museum in Sydney and in Trove regarding Captain Dudley's rivalry with Jack Want in yacht races on Sydney Harbour after his emigration. This made it more likely that it was Dudley's family that helped him settle in Sydney rather than any magnanimity on the part of Jack Want.

By consulting plague diaries and bringing ekphrasis as a creative tool to contemporaneous Sydney photograph albums at the National Maritime Museum in Sydney, a more accurate, human, and Australian dimension is brought to the story of the outbreak of bubonic plague in January 1900. These details not only deepen the narrative but are a valuable addition to the story of Sydney in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

4 Back cover detail, *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette*. Solvent release print, letterpress.

A Circular Economy

The archive as prosthesis analogy sees memory being prompted by the archive but also conceives the archive as something created by memory. This symbiotic relationship which allows for records to both describe and create supports the notion that both memory and archives continually reinvent and recreate each other. (Brown 2013: 89)

The writing of *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette*, and the print folio created alongside it as part of my creative process, is an explicit example of how networks of formal and informal archives and places, people and ephemeral material cohere into the production of new work. The records from each of the archive sources were reinvented into new work, creating further memories and records. The outcome of the project was both the verse novel *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette* and a set of prints (image and letterpress) (1, 4). The latter was exhibited at the Webb Gallery, Brisbane in July 2019 in the exhibition *In the Works*.

Very little art production happens in a vacuum. The resulting works were supported and facilitated by networks of artists. These included my father, a watercolourist, whose slides proved an ekphrastic inspiration, the studio and artists of NightLadder Collective, of which I am a member, provided the venue for creating the prints; calligraphic and letterpress artist, Fiona Dempster, at whose studio letterpress was added to prints in the folio. Additional prints were created at the ANU School of Art with Caren Florance who acted as printer, in one instance, and the source for an image in another.

Archival material is not merely a store of static and revered objects within institutions. These material remnants of times past are capable of becoming mobilised and used by artists and writers. My work, written and visual, demonstrates that there can be an interdependent relationship between archives and creative endeavour. Archives can provide the backbone of new creative work and are, in turn, enhanced by the artist's engagement, creating a circular motion of use that can lead to expanding the archive. Having used the archive material of The State Library of New South Wales during the writing of the book, it is fitting that a folio of these prints is now held at the Library, showing the circularity of creative production around archival material and its sites. Two of the prints from this folio were also used on the front and back cover of the published book.

Conclusion

The archive gives structure or architectural form to memory and the disorder of experience, but its compilation is not a creative act. Delving into archives and giving narrative to what is held there reorders experience and allows both life's messiness to be shown but also gives a lens to discern its meaning. As Jack B Yeats noted in 1922, 'No-one creates. The artist assembles memories' (Maguire and Rooney 2021: n.p.). It is through this *assembly* of memories in a particular order and juxtaposition that a new artwork is both created and in turn delivers new meaning to the archive. To return to the quote by Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz at the beginning of this paper, it is the invention of an original proposition that is the *institutive* and *revolutionary* result of the conservative and traditional nature of the archive.

Working in the archive reuses, expands and recycles, creating new work from stored knowledge and artifacts. It can create growth of the archive itself through a virtuous cycle because the *dynamic* work made from *static* archives enters and enhances collections thus showing the circular nature of this 'creative economy'.

5 Detail from the artist book of *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette*. Solvent release prints, letterpress.

My experience of interrogation, exploration, immersion in the history and context of the *Mignonette*'s sailing, and the multiplicity of creative outcomes through this project leads me to disagree with Ezra Pound who believed that the collection of 'worksheets' (his manuscripts and notes) for what was to become the Buffalo Poetry Collection was exploiting the inspirational quality of 'Creative writing' to 'support passivity and accumulators' and that it would do nothing 'toward production' (Byers 2019). The archive, while passive and accumulative, becomes generative.

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About the author

Angela Gardner's verse novel *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette* published by Shearsman Books, was shortlisted for Wales Book of the Year 2022. It was both a UK National Poetry Day recommendation and a Poetry Book Society recommendation, 2021. In July 2021 it was reviewed in *The Telegraph* as one of the three best collections so far of the year. Her recent poetry collections are *Some Sketchy Notes on Matter*, Recent Work Press, Canberra 2020 and *The Told World*, Shearsman Books, 2014. Recent poems have been shortlisted for the *Aesthetica International Creative Writing Prize* and longlisted for the *Live Canon International Poetry Prize* and published in *The Yale Review* and *West Branch* USA; *Blackbox Manifold*, *The Long Poem* and *Tears in the Fence*, UK; *Plumwood Mountain*, *Westerly*, *Southerly*, *Rabbit* and *Cordite*, Australia. Gardner is also a visual artist and her work is in international public collections.

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THE KISS

Ekphrastic poetry, enargeia and the immersive installation

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Abstract

Imperial Greek rhetoricians defined *ecphrasis* as 'descriptive speech which brings the subject shown before the eyes with visual vividness' (Squire 2015: n.p.), since which time understandings of ekphrasis have evolved and narrowed. Recently, however, definitions of ekphrasis have been expanding to incorporate new media, digital images and augmented reality that engage with haptic and auditive experiences. The ancient concept of *energeia*—'the evocation of a visual scene in all its details and colours' (Cave 1976: 6)—is relevant to these new understandings, including in the presentation of the kind of archival material housed in the Helen Shea collection at Emerson College. Digital ekphrasis, such as one finds in the *Klimt: The Immersive Experience* installation, open up possibilities for fluid and wide-ranging representations of archival material, along with powerful considerations of this material's relationships to complex social interactions. Such digital ekphrasis is able to evoke visual scenes in great detail and cast new and creative light on ekphrastic relationships.

THE KISS: EKPHRASTIC POETRY, ENARGEIA AND THE IMMERSIVE INSTALLATION

Cassandra Atherton & Paul Hetherington

The Ekphrastic Encounter

Since Imperial Greek rhetoricians in the first century BCE defined *ecphrasis* as 'descriptive speech which brings the subject shown before the eyes with visual vividness' (Squire 2015: n.p.), definitions and understandings of ekphrasis have evolved. In recent centuries, these have tended to focus on ekphrasis as a piece of literature, often a poem, that refers directly to a pre-existing work of visual art—even the idea of 'notional ekphrasis' imaginatively posits the idea of such a pre-existing work. However, importantly, in the twenty-first century understandings of ekphrasis have been expanding again to reflect changing developments in the relationships between art, image and text—and, in particular, with the advent of the digital age, ekphrasis has undergone a transformation or 'turn'. The more conventional definitions of ekphrasis that are inclined to focus on single, static works of visual art—primarily paintings, sculpture and photography—have begun to evolve due to considerations drawn from the use of new media, digital imagery, augmented reality and other artforms that engage with haptic and auditive experiences.

Pursuant to this, the gallery—so long primarily characterised as a place that displayed static artworks—is being reconceived in order to emphasise visitors' dynamic interactions with art, including multifarious encounters on screens or in virtual time-spaces. As Chiel van den Akker and Susan Legêne argue, this 'questions the ocular centrism of Western culture inasmuch as it departs from the conception of art and artefacts on display as "things to be looked at"' (2016: 8). The techniques and processes by which artworks have traditionally courted the gaze have been placed under pressure, or exposed and critiqued—demonstrating the ways in which many scholars believe that ekphrasis involves a great deal more than observing paintings, sculptures or photographs in galleries before writing about them.

In considering such issues, our article takes as its starting point the fluid and reciprocal relationship between the gallery and archive. It explores important ways in which digital technologies have altered or disrupted the ekphrastic encounter in gallery and archival spaces, and also develops van den Akker and Legêne's argument that 'the visitor has gone from being a passive observer to being a user (someone who interacts with the object) and participant (someone who is involved in the meaning-making process of art and artefacts)' (2016: 8). Our focus will be on an example of our own archival research in the Emerson College Archives and Special Collections and its various possible—and sometimes lateral—connections to the features of the digital exhibition, *Klimt: The Immersive Experience*. This installation or 'production' (Klimt n.d.: n.p.) was recently on show in Madrid.

We contend that the immersive, participatory and haptic experiences generated by this installation are germane to discussions of digital ekphrasis and connect closely to the ancient rhetorical notion of enargeia, which involves 'the evocation of a visual scene in all its details and colours, as if the reader were present as a spectator' (Cave 1976: 6). We support Jill R Ehnenn's uses of the word haptic 'to mean both touch and emotion' (2021: 89) and extend this definition to include auditive stimulation in the digital ekphrastic encounter. We relate these

ideas to the Klimt installation's projection of imagery onto and across the viewer's body, and its associated use of music, and conclude by discussing the composition of a co-written ekphrastic poem based on our ekphrastic encounter.

Touching the Archive

At a considerable remove from the Klimt installation, we are engaged in a collaborative research project exploring aspects of the visual arts and ekphrasis related to the use of archival material. We began this project by visiting the Emerson College Archives in person and sorting through a large number of boxes selected from the archive's index. In doing so, we experienced what Frank G Burke calls 'the excitement of the chase for facts, the vicarious participation in the lives of the great, near great, and no-account' (1997: 19). This also led us to consider—not for the first time, given that we have both previously worked in archives or libraries—how the archive is often a fetishized space, frequently considered beguiling because of its promise of housing secrets, including the associated promise of yielding important discoveries of overlooked and unknown material.

Arlette Farge writes, 'Unsettling and colossal, the archive grabs hold of the reader. With a sudden harshness it opens onto a hidden world' (2013: 5). The thought of unread dusty, intimate letters and forgotten important manuscripts can be enthralling, and the idea of touching the original work of creative writers is often associated with the intimate and alluring—sometimes even invoking affective responses. Erin Renee Wahl and Pamela Pierce identify the importance of touch in the archives, stating:

> The tactile experience of researching in an archive, of picking up and handling documents, is a unique experience. We have seen writers visibly moved by the touch of the vellum of a rare book or the correspondence of a historical figure for which they have found a particular affinity. (2021: 3)

Jessica Ferri's description of working at the Lilly Library at Indiana University and accessing some of Sylvia Plath's artefacts also illustrates the tactile appeal of archives. She describes handling some of Plath's hair as an almost ecstatic experience:

> Glancing around the room to make sure no one was paying attention I reached into the box and pulled out a long, thick braid, still bound at each side with rubber bands, and held it in my hands. It was surreal … Overwhelmed, I placed the hair back into the box, put the lid back on, and stepped outside into the sunshine, giddy. I had just held Sylvia Plath's hair in my hands. (2017: n.p.)

Indeed, Ferri argues, 'There's something mystical about coming face to face with the relics of an admired artist, dead long before you were born' (n.p.). This focus on the possibility of touching or holding artefacts within an archive is both seductive and often taboo—depending on the nature of the artefact—given that fingers contain oils and dirt which may leave behind damaging residues. Michael Shanks discusses this impetus to interact with the artefact as 'fetishism', characterised by 'a desire to hold, look, touch; [and] captivation by the consecrated object … The wholeness of the past is lost in the melancholic holding of the [object]' (1992: 99). The desire to touch or hold artefacts may be understood as an attempt to forge an intimacy with historical fragments and the (usually) dead creators who produced them.

Digitisation and Democratisation

Yet, a great deal of archival material is fairly mundane, obscure, matter-of-fact, or dry and it would take an unusual person to fetishize such material. The wished-for discoveries of personal insight, literary exquisiteness—or even a moment of savage gossip—are often dispersed so thinly and widely that one may spend months of archival research without coming across them. Additionally, and more importantly, as Maryanne Dever argues, archives are 'sites of power and privilege that have long been implicated in acts of violence and erasure' (2017: 1). In using archives, the researcher is often submitting to the gatekeeping that has for so long dictated what has been collected and preserved, and what has been denied importance and expunged. It was only around the time of the publication of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* in 1995 that archival practices started to become more transparent and the gaps within, and fragmentary nature of, archives were highlighted rather than hidden.

In this respect, the Helen Shea Collection in the Emerson College Archives is instructive. It was Eleanor Strong—Helen Shea's neighbour in Boston's South End—who saw value in Shea's collection of artefacts and manuscripts and who lobbied for them to be archived in 2010. Shea was a talented dancer and writer in the 1920s who performed in the Ziegfeld Follies from 1920–1932, and whose own dances challenged the status quo. Her collection might easily have been lost without her neighbour's intervention, and her archive is of potential interest to post-feminist researchers with an interest in the life and art of twentieth-century women, rather than being of appeal to some of the relatively conservative archival gatekeepers of previous periods. We explored this archive in 2017 as Emerson visiting scholars as part of our research for a fictocritical project on Shea's life.

Among the archival boxes, we unearthed original scripts along with photographs of her once-well-known dance, Leda and the Swan. This performance, based on the Greek myth, led to a long copyright battle that is documented in the archives, in which Shea tried to prevent other dancers performing her work without crediting her. There are also documents relating to the temporary banning of her performances due to her diaphanous costume. Much of the collection consists of papers, many of them typewritten, along with some objects, and the idea that we were touching some of Shea's most valuable possessions, in the city where she lived and died, was a defining experience—although perhaps not as surreptitious or extreme as Jessica Ferri's encounter with Sylvia Plath's hair. We incorporated our sense of engaging directly with Shea's papers and objects—and with Boston's associated history and urban particularities—into subsequent research findings, including the article, 'Fragments of the place itself: Boston neighbourhoods in prose poetry' (2018).

However, we did not stay long in the Shea archive. Instead, we made use of the new technologies we had readily to hand. We took photographs of many of the items in the archive, including newspaper articles and handwritten and typed scripts and stored them in our computers' photo libraries, on iCloud and on a hard drive. This reminded us of the many relatively recent and significant changes in the use of archives that have accompanied changing technologies. For example, before the advent of mobile phones or iPads with inbuilt digital cameras, archival researchers often spent a great deal of time transcribing material that was too vulnerable to photocopy or was unsuitable for photographing with a traditional camera and flash. Now, researchers may quickly photograph items and carry these digital images away for subsequent periods of consultation.

This is no always a good thing, of course. Sometimes, an archive repays the researcher who sits with them and reads for days or weeks; who follows obscure leads, makes notes and carefully considers the close detail of what they find. And, indeed, taking notes may help a researcher 'read' an archive by forcing them to pay attention and dwell on what is before them—and the location or significance of obscure documents will sometimes only emerge as a result of such attentive inquiry. Nevertheless, these opportunities are increasingly available online as more and more archival material is being digitised at high resolution and placed on the web, where a researcher may browse for as long as they like, interacting with this material as their inclinations dictate. However, they are unable to touch the originals of what they see. Flexibility, mobility and portability are now important features of working in and with archive material—and, importantly, digitisation makes archives more easily accessible to the broad community—but some of the allure of being physically close to actual items, or in a particular place associated with an artist or an archive, may be sacrificed for the sake of such convenience.

Wahl and Pierce confirm that a sense of place is often important to writers—saying, for example, that the writer Kate Partridge 'sees the archives not just as a place to get facts or story ideas, but as a living part of the history itself' (2021: 11)—and that using digital archives rather than visiting an archive building may stymie this connection to place. However, they observe that 'Access to archival materials is always an issue, as not everyone has the money to travel to get access to materials' (4). Dever develops this argument in her discussion of the democratising effect of the digitising of archives:

> Digital technologies have transformed archival access for researchers in ways that offer degrees of democratisation for what was once an elite practice available principally to the privileged few with time, money and credentials. (2017: 1)

Although access to a digital archive still requires some degree of privilege—possession of a computer or mobile device and a WiFi connection—many libraries and other community hubs now offer access to these democratising technologies. Adoption of the digitisation process was also given impetus by the Covid-19 pandemic because, as Lukas Noehrer, Abigail Gilmore, Caroline Jay and Yo Yehudi comment:

> Museums around the world had to close their doors overnight, rendering their physical collections and gallery spaces inaccessible, and creating a mass exodus to the digital as the only means to stay present in their constituents' lives. (2021: n.p.)

As people were prevented from visiting archives, museums, galleries and other repositories in person, and as they found themselves at home for extended periods—some of them locked into their houses, apartments and flats—considerably more of them became interested in, and even deeply invested in, remote digital access to archival material.

Art Galleries as Archives

sArt galleries are often much-vaunted and enticing archives. Indeed, some—such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Museo del Prado in Madrid and the Louvre in Paris—are among the best-known cultural institutions in the world, visited by millions of people a year. They are lauded for their extensive collections that represent art from many countries collected over centuries—even if some of their collecting activities were part of colonial ventures. Such galleries typically display celebrated artworks with a sense of reverence and care, often in large and airy spaces. However, unless one has access to the storage areas or reading rooms of

the larger art galleries, there is likely to be only one, or at most a handful of works by any single artist available for viewing—even when the gallery holds more works by that artist. This is not just a matter of available space. Except in special cases, such as retrospective exhibitions devoted to the work of a single practitioner, galleries tend to aim at representing a broad sample of their collections rather than focusing more closely on the work of fewer individuals. And, indeed, many galleries only have, at most, a few works by any single artist because of the difficulties and costs involved in acquiring more works, even when they would like to do so.

Furthermore, these gallery exhibitions most often present static works: paintings or photographs hanging on walls, for instance, or sculptures bolted to plinths, walls or ceilings. With the exception of occasional film or multimedia exhibits, many of them fairly conventional in format, the dynamism that is so characteristic of human existence is often noticeably lacking in such places—except for the activities of the gallery visitors, many of whom move through their various perambulations energetically and with purpose. Thus, there is a kind of rhythm of the gallery that relates to but is separate from the artworks themselves. Many of these rhythms are shaped by the galleries in order to direct the flow of visitors and reveal the items in an exhibition in a particular sequence—and also in order to protect the artworks from damage—but these rhythms are also somewhat unruly and often accompanied by a sense of pilgrimage. They represent an evolving set of human interactions with gallery displays.

Dominic Symes in his study of ekphrastic poetry and the gallery space focuses on the importance of this dynamic; of meandering through a collection. He argues that 'A shift from the phenomenological experience of an artwork as a single object in isolation, to an exhibition or gallery experience [more broadly] means the poet no longer has a specific artist or image to respond to, but rather a series or sequence of images curated in a specific, public space' (2018, n.p.). In this way, as we have discussed, while gallery—or archival collections more generally—may be fragmented or patchy, and while they may reflect the particular tastes of an era, or certain political persuasions, or the preferences of a few gallery directors or curators, the meandering or perambulating experiences of visitors becomes an important part of what constitutes the gallery or archive. This point is emphasised if one also includes the rather meandering processes of researchers gaining familiarity with an archival collection, as they wander or wade actually and imaginatively through diverse materials in the relatively secluded spaces of reading rooms closed to the general public.

For example, in the Emerson College Archives, we followed a meandering route through collections that included 2.34 linear feet of material. These relate to Shea's costumes, photographs, programs and announcements, original writings 1935–40, correspondence 1935–72, music and scrapbooks 1920–40, biographical and genealogical information, clippings 1924–55, and miscellaneous materials 1935–45. In doing so, we not only tried to get a sense of Shea's life and work, but attempted to better understand what our own creative project might be and how it connected to the material in front of us. This to-and-fro process involved reading, standing back, reflecting, and an imaginative sauntering. It was a way of engaging immersively with an archive—including powerful affective reactions to what we encountered and speculative ideas about what might lie beyond the archival material. Indeed, as part of the project we interviewed people about the history and culture of Boston and Massachusetts, and read a good deal of contextualising material about the Ziegfeld Follies and Shea's life and circumstances.

This was partly a way of creating a new narrative for Shea, but we were not interested in constructing a new biographical narrative, or any kind of authoritative analysis. Rather, we were

searching for a creative narrative that opened perspectives on what it was like to be a female performer in her milieu. We were interested in writing a prose poetry sequence about her life and art, but were aware that it was only the use of digital technologies that would be likely to give a truly broad representation of the copious and diverse items her archive contains. Such technologies have the capacity to provide images of, and to creatively combine, a great deal of various materials—much of which is not easily incorporated into conventional gallery exhibitions. Furthermore, as van den Akker and Legêne posit, 'Information technology strengthens the ease with which master narratives are broken open, and it may multiply the possible relations between art and artefacts from different times and places, both on-site and online' (2016: 8). Andrew Bock takes this further, suggesting that:

> One of the greatest changes in the art world in recent years won't be seen in galleries because it is happening online. Digitisation programs have accelerated in the past five years and most state art institutions now have more than half of their collections online, changing the way we approach art and rapidly turning the world into a virtual gallery. (2020: n.p.)

On many websites featuring digitised collections, and in creative works based on them, the movement through a gallery's actual space has been transformed into the movement across a trackpad, keyboard or screen. Viewers interact with artworks in their own spaces and largely on their own terms and, in this way, are to a significant extent able to be curators of their own experiences. They can zoom in, search and progress through images in their in their own time, and they even have the option to multitask by occupying themselves in other ways while the artwork is on the screen. This constitutes a form of digital meandering that gives priority to the fingertips—to that element of touch we have already discussed—and engages with a haptic visuality that Martijn Stevens argues 'put[s] the surfer's personal preferences, expectations, and prior knowledge first, it favors the intuitive or affective browsing through digitized collections' (2016: 21).

Ekphrastic Poetry and Immersive Art Installations

In the last few centuries, ekphrasis has traditionally been understood in fairly restricted ways, an example of which is the 1993 definition by the influential critic James AW Heffernan. He contends that 'ekphrasis is the verbal representation of visual representation' (2004: 3) and that it 'is a literary mode that turns on the antagonism between verbal and visual representation' (2004: 7). Heffernan sees some of the possibilities for ekphrasis to critique patriarchal assumptions and the male gaze, but he tends to treat works of art as if they are standalone objects that are separate from, and in a kind of combat with words—as if, of necessity, each occupies a different space. This stance has increasingly been questioned by scholars who see ekphrasis in less polarised terms; who wish to 'understand the space of the ekphrastic poem as an open and fluid one of exchange between the arts' (Keefe 2011: 135)—and a space to problematise and critique some of the more conservative assumptions and constructs associated with ekphrasis.

There are many opportunities for gallery and other archival collections to be opened up in this way by fluid, interactive and immersive digital ekphrastic projects. Such projects offer opportunities to provide to the general public many of the privileges of access typically accorded by archives to researchers in their reading rooms. They are an alternative to traditional exhibitions that so frequently present highly selected, decontextualised images on gallery walls. And, once the gallery is framed in terms of this potential to contribute to creative interpretations of its digital

archive—where necessary, also incorporating related material from other archives—there is the possibility for a more inclusive and shifting set of experiences of the archive.

This possibility is exemplified by the multi-sensory production we mentioned earlier: *Klimt: The Immersive Experience*. We recently attended this installation at the Matadero Madrid Centre for Contemporary Creation—a venue more like a warehouse than a traditional gallery. The installation featured 1,200 square metres of immersive digital reality screens, virtual reality glasses and a variety of exhibition spaces and interactive tools. Experiencing this exhibition is quite unlike seeing Klimt's paintings in a conventional exhibition—although there are some connections: in part of the installation many of these images are conveniently 'hung' for the viewer in digital space. Overall, however, this dynamic production is more akin to theatre than a static exhibition. Digitised versions of diverse archival materials, including paintings, letters, photographs and objects, move, morph, warp and flower all around the 'viewer'—we use this word hesitantly in such an all-encompassing context—and, as mentioned previously, are even projected over the viewers' bodies, accompanied by a powerful original soundtrack by Luca Longobardi.

In this synaesthetic digital production, we encounter a new *ekphrasis* of an uncertain kind that extends beyond conventional definitions of the term. The work is ekphrastic in responding creatively in a digital medium to existing paintings—including placing images and details of those paintings in new contexts. It is haptic and auditive, seamlessly connecting images and words as aspects of the same digital texture and mood. It evokes affective responses in the viewer and also connects powerfully with the ancient rhetoricians' definition of enargeia mentioned earlier, foregrounding what Cecilia Lindhé calls phantasia:

Ekphrasis and enargeia are difficult to define independently from each other. To better understand these concepts, it is helpful to relate the concepts of enargeia and ekphrasis to the concept of phantasia. Phantasia denotes the orator's internal image that he communicates to the listener. In doing so he activates images that were latently stored in the listener's mind. (2016: 35)

Klimt: The Immersive Experience is a production that evokes a set of what we will call idea-images of the painter's life and world, his artistic practice and the customs and mores of the period in which he lived. It also shows images of some of the period's architecture and some of the people who knew Klimt. It suggests many of the more romantic and alluring aspects of Klimt's milieu, while also indicating aspects of the problematic misogyny that informed this milieu. While presenting a wide variety of digital images moving and transforming on the gallery's walls, ceiling and floor, it moves laterally to extend some of Klimt's painted images into evolving outgrowths derived from those images—which, in some instances, become new ideas of what his paintings may be understood to represent. In these ways the installation activates latent images in the viewer's/listener's mind, enlarging evocative details and recontextualising well-known historical photographs that conjure a variety of associations from their period.

If, as Lindhé suggests, the 'significance of the body and the emphasis on bodily senses' were crucial to ancient ekphrastic 'rhetorical situation[s]' (2016: 36), this idea is exploited by the Klimt installation. As many of its images temporarily appear to be inscribed on the viewer's body, the installation becomes like a form of the 'phantasia' Lindhé mentions—indeed, it is like a phantasmagorical and intense, waking dream. At times, it is also akin to being transported inside Klimt's paintings, and thus, strangely, enmeshed within the archive. The installation invites the viewer not merely to view Klimt's work passively—as an observer able to stand

back from what they see—but, instead, to actively participate in ideas about its history and the future. It becomes a wonderful sort of co-creation where visitors 'become part of the interactive installation' (Lindhé 2016: 31), bruised and saturated by its colours.

Furthermore, in its emphasis on multi-sensory participation, the installation has the capacity to both deconstruct and decolonise the gaze by refusing the privileging of the gaze in the gallery. The exhibition is never able to be viewed in its totality but is always slipping away from even the most assiduous observer's attempts to 'see' it all. And, although the digital images refuse touch, in another sense, they tantalise touch through running continually across the skin. In ruminating on Mark Paterson's work, Lindhé posits:

> By exploring tactical and auditive aspects in relation to ancient rhetoric and digital interfaces, one can also begin to ask with Paterson 'whether it is possible to go beyond the ocular centric in traditional aesthetic and literary practices, and consider other modes of experience and forms of attention, such as those made available by touch'. (2013: 9)

Purists may object that a digital ekphrasis such as the Klimt installation does not show the original works, with their wonderfully tactile and carefully layered paint surfaces. They may also contend that this installation is already highly interpreted for viewers even before they encounter the works it shows. They may object that the exhibition is populist rather than providing an opportunity for close consideration of complex individual works of art. Such contentions are true. However, we do not consider such an installation to be in any kind of stand-off with the traditional exhibitions one will typically find in the Louvre, Prado or the Met. Instead, we understand *Klimt: The Immersive Experience* to represent a way of opening up a fluid and wide-ranging consideration of Klimt's art, while providing a conduit into understanding how these works were always embedded in intricate personal and social interactions—as well as, subsequently, in complex historical and archival contexts. Experiencing this installation has the potential to make Klimt and his work live vividly, as a contemporary species of enargeia, evoking visual scenes in great detail and colour, in both the gallery and the inward-seeing imagination.

After attending the *Klimt* installation, we drafted the beginning of co-written ekphrastic suite of prose poems, elucidating our sense of encounter through the figures of two fictional characters. This poetry explores the way the installation prompts the viewer-participant to reach inwards toward memory and outwards toward the archival record—connected to an extraordinary artist and a momentous period in European history and culture that included the Vienna Secession movement:

> In VR goggles at a Klimt exhibition he reaches for something only he sees, as she imagines disappearing into shimmering spots of gold from The Kiss. They're both vanishing into a complex idea of colours; into images they encounter; into memory's lit corridors; into the blackening green shadow under an ancient zelkova. Surely, they are holding affection closely, despite the approaching exigencies of distance—draped in a hot evening's umber, caressing in a stretched room and stepping into a running bath. It might be an image from Monet, or a secret photograph he took as she turned, or a mysterious study of intimate light.

This prose poem examines the 'interaction between the physical and the virtual, the body and technology' (Lindhé 2016: 31) through its references to VR goggles, the shimmering and

ultimately transient image of *The Kiss* painting, and the chameleonic approach to time and distance that is so well achieved in the continuously morphing imagery of the Klimt installation.

The prose poem also tries to capture the 'phantasia' elements connected to movement and light in this immersive ekphrastic encounter, partly through the invocation of vanishing points and shadows. Evanescence is prioritised—the prose poem's images ultimately cannot hold, and they disappear or are replaced. There is immediacy in this work, but it is blended with memory, which pushes the characters toward uncanny spaces, as the prose poem addresses enargeia's appeal to the listener's inner life through the ekphrastic encounter. Furthermore, as Marcelle Freiman argues, '"memory traces" … become thoughts, or remain as echoes, in the process and the poem' (2020: n.p), so that in our engagement with artwork, our memories become a central part of our ekphrastic poetry practice. This fusing of memory and creativity in our response to the Klimt installation demonstrates the way 'individualistic memory carries potent emotional resonance' (Freiman 2020: n.p.). For example, in our ekphrastic poem, the reference to the 'ancient zelkova tree' is filtered through memories of undertaking research in Japan and is ultimately linked to expressions of health and longevity.

Finally, it is worth remarking how prose poetry so often employs its fully justified block of text as a kind of metaphorical room as it stretches across to the right margin. Many prose poems of this kind are simultaneously spacious and cramped, expansive and intimate—their words ramify widely and yet almost brush against one another in the prose poem box. We have written elsewhere that such poems are like '"rooms" in which imaginative tropes, allusions and suggestive possibilities are coaxed into unusual, sometimes reactive proximities' (2015: 272). The *Klimt* installation does something similar, but in a space writ large across gallery walls, floor and roof.

In joining the act of inscription with the act of seeing, *Klimt: The Immersive Experience* is itself 'a mysterious study of intimate light'; and a way of becoming part of what the archive knows. In this way, immersive, participatory and haptic experiences are not only germane to contemporary discussions of digital ekphrasis, but they connect closely to the ancient rhetorical notion of enargeia—and to much of what this notion suggests about the appeal and significance of evocations of visual scenes which create a sometimes-giddying sense of presence.

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About the authors

Cassandra Atherton is a widely anthologised and award-winning prose poet and scholar of prose poetry. She was a Harvard Visiting Scholar in English and a Visiting Fellow at Sophia University. She co-authored *Prose Poetry: An Introduction* (Princeton University Press, 2020) and co-edited the *Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry* (Melbourne University Press, 2020) with Paul Hetherington. She is a commissioning editor for *Westerly* magazine, associate editor of MadHat Press (USA) and Professor of Writing and Literature at Deakin University.

Paul Hetherington is a distinguished scholar and poet who has published 17 full-length poetry and prose poetry collections, a verse novel and 13 chapbooks. He has won or been nominated for more than 30 national and international awards and competitions, recently winning the 2021 Bruce Dawe National Poetry Prize. He has also edited nine further volumes. He is Professor of Writing in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra and head of the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI). He founded the International Prose Poetry Group in 2014.

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POEM

Sarah Day

STANDISH

Sarah Day

For Alice, my missing Grandmother

1
Back at the beginning –
the familiar rooms
of northern vowels, grey stone,
its ancient roads and childhood ghosts,
the undulating pitch-faced terraced rows
homes once to millworkers and miners;
the cow and pig smell of farms
in the precincts of the towns,
the cellular under-the-skin green,
its sweetness cached in the brain
side by side with memory,
a green born of rain and more rain.
The names on the graves
and the names of the villages and towns
are the map coordinates
I once called 'home';
like any childhood home
it lives inside me. I'm back again
to realign the lens of left and right
to find the focal point –
the sandstone grey, the green
of moss on graves,
inside the DNA, and in your lost story
from which our ship set sail
through oceans and seas.
But stories don't stick to islands
and continents, stories sail
in the bloodstream,
in the bone marrow
across millponds and teeming waves
and need at times to find
their teller. My plane circles
Manchester again; each time
the story older but not wiser.
Here are grey skies above
and below the plane's long wing,
beneath the clouds
the subcutaneous green.
Dressed in their drystone walls

the Pennines spiral round again
as the pilot holds our place
in the aerial queue.
We bank, level out, prepare
to land on a runway beside
a wood with its ancient river
and Roman donkey-bridge;
a rusting Concord like a broken bird
careens by as we brake.
Welcome, again, to Manchester.

2
The story lies to the north-west.
The ear's stylus
follows the rise and fall of accent,
inflection, like a river running backwards
to its narrow source,
the slimmest stream in which
each vowel and diphthong blend
with memory's tuner,
to a village in the present
that is not a village from the past,
close enough for blood
to hear its own pulse –
a common enough theme
the past's hunting ground,
with its missing pieces.
You were missing
all my life. One name
of thousands on the national register,
missing in action
from kitchens and bedrooms,
daughters, wives and mothers.
After years of searching
I find I was knocking
at the wrong door. You were
further in your exile than I knew,
your asylum the size of a town
with a station all of its own.
You were far away
but wouldn't have known,
as you walked through its doors,
just how far. I wonder

was your wedding ring
removed on that first day,
or was it sold or stolen later?
Or did you one day roll
its glinting band into a noxious drain?
A husband then could lawfully erase life,
death would have been kinder.
A man could eliminate a woman
so completely he might efface her
from language itself. In the dim
privacy of grey stone walls
he might declare his wife,
cocooned in her post-natal dusk,
a thought crime
instilling such guilt that a name
could not move to a child's mouth
from the throat, lodged behind
the swollen obstruction of shame,
stuck fast from childhood
to old age. Even dementia's
lawlessness might refuse
to loosen the clot in the craw.

3
This new-made rubble is where
my grandmother's living ghost dwelt,
she of the once defiant gaze
and eloquent tongue.
Wed in cream-strapped shoes
and flapper suit
she passed here from young womanhood
through what –
half a century of tedium at best?
domiciled at worst in purgatory,
inside the mind's dark places.
Like all the faces
hers at a distant window
on the world,
keeping/losing count (what's worse?)
of all the many sunsets,
five living children dwelling
in the parallel world
inside her mind.
Each year each birthday
must have passed like rosary beads,
the loving names
a living sweetness on the tongue.

4
Google lights up
the corridors
and dormitories of Hell
in your real time…
Is that you in your bob and smock,
your shuffle and your sad ECG face?
Did anybody lead you gently
by the elbow
to the refuge of piano keys,
was there anyone who knew you played?

5
Here now's a blogger
on the eve of demolition
recording gothic feats
by torch-light, trawling vacant halls,
graffiti, broken mirrors;
naked light globes dangle
over old iron beds and dirty
bathrooms. Lots of Likes!
Lots of witty and approving jibes
in dialect. And then
the crunch of shards of crockery
and broken brick
beneath the feet. Everything –
the whole sad, mental, madhouse town
erased, your world made flat, razed
by bulldozer and conscience.
In this place, at least, time's just begun.

6
Beneath the nettles in another town
I've found you. Here you are.
Here we both are
in a corner of the graveyard
below the church with its pointed steeple.
A stranger in his ill-fitting suit
lingers waiting for dusk
and for me to leave,
a blanket over one arm
and a plastic bag of worldly goods.
My fingers read
your name and dates
inscribed in stone, material proof.

7
Your children learnt the lesson early on
that disappearance and oblivion
could be at odds. Lost from view
you taught them all the depth and shape of love.
I have no memory but your strength
lives in my bones and blood.

I write these words in anger
and in tenderness. A harm was done.

About the author

Sarah Day's most recent book is *Towards Light (*Puncher & Wattmann, 2018). It was shortlisted for the Tasmanian Premier's Literary Awards. Awards for previous books include the Queensland Premier's and ACT Judith Wright Prizes & Wesley Michel Wright Prizes. *Tempo* was shortlisted for the 2014 Prime Minister's Literary Awards. She has read in festivals around Australia, Paris, UK, and Portugal. Her work has been translated into a number of languages and set to music in Australia and the UK. She lives in Hobart where she has taught creative writing to Year 12 students for the past 20 years.

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TWO POEMS

Lara Munden

MISSING

Lara Munden

It must have
dropped
out of someone's pocket,
the blue glove.

Perhaps it
fell from an overstuffed bag,
or maybe it was hurled
from a pram.

Who knows
where its twin is. . .

fingers outstretched
on tarmac. . .

I'll hang it
on the fence post
and pass it every day
until it's gone.

PETRI DISH

Lara Munden

You're still there, I think,
Amongst the others, stuck
At the back of the freezer.

They're just going to sleep now
The doctor said. Frozen. In a time
When there was still hope, of life.

You might be almost four now
My little aliens, still awaiting your fate.
At least you are sleeping.

I only wish I hadn't given you names
That would never be called.

Sweet dreams my darlings,
I'll meet you in another life.

About the author

Lara Munden graduated with a first class degree in History of Art and Film from the University of Kent in 2011, and has been studying for a Postgraduate Diploma in Creative Writing at the University of York (UK). For eleven years she has worked as content developer and writer for interpretative design consultancy Bright White Ltd.

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2 POEMS

Angela Costi

SWAPPING ONE DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY FOR ANOTHER

Angela Costi

before we walked into the courthouse

> we brushed our teeth drank coffee had toast cereal or a muesli bar some don't believe in eating when nervous we thought carefully about what clothes to wear in that place where your worship presides we left houses flats apartments cells chambers offices where framed art pinned posters circled calendars frayed rugs chipped cups used candles piles of files were our stories

before we arrived at the courthouse

> we prepared meticulous notes in our heads about the incident accident intention motive cause impact whether the date time weather mitigated incited aggravated whether the consequences were reasonably foreseeable given the circumstances of no bank account no job alcoholic womb over dosing cultural baggage renting the room no bigger than the cupboard facts

before we stood in the courthouse's revolving door

> we were all composed of water and blood with a slight variation to unlock the favoured among us we who jostle from birth for a handshake a hug a wink a nod a stand up and bow ranked from head to toe with wig hoodie neck tattoo jabot tie cravat scarf with judicial white legal black prison greens police blues all the colours of family

before the presiding judge arrived

> we waited in cold damp rooms to be called by a name annotated memorised catalogued crowned as a quest to rhyme with versus expected to squabble to gloat to sulk to acquit the alleged accused accessory combatant absconder abnormal enemy using caveat proviso exception without waiver a game of strict rules

before the presiding judge entered

> we sat in assigned galleys boxes benches we smelt the muscle of freeze the membrane of fight the nerve of flight sharpening our tongues with untoward and whatsoever and thence forth atom by atom by atom of matter turned into a follicle worth of cuticle weight found next to a cracked toe a torn nail a punched out tooth a sliver of saliva a stream of semen a stricken bed

when the presiding judge entered

> for one second only we stood as silent as an army before a call to war as quiet as a village before a ransack as huddled as a boat full of humans then each of us bowed before a memory a toffee apple at the carnival bruised a jam donut at the market fatty a gelato at the festival messy kid made to sit on the sweaty lap of a santa smile now made to kiss the gnarled hand of the priest

BRITISH PASSPORT 94175

Angela Costi

For Miss Eleni Elisseou Costi

I am the keeper of your little navy-blue book
I smell 64 years of linen closet solitude, feel
the 30 pages still waiting to be stamped with
CYPRUS to return to return to return to be
the child with the pet goat again with Yiayia
who made miracles of taste from weed crops
instead, a sallow sulk of abandon from each
page with *VISAS* astride the branded capital
march of *UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT*
BRITAIN. I read 'The Governor of Cyprus
requests and requires in the Name of Her
Majesty all those whom it may concern to
allow the bearer to pass freely without let
or hindrance' and see you transformed to
'Bearer'. Your profession is 'School girl'
without experience of classroom or study
at thirteen you will continue the official
lie for Australian factories who need to
work the bones of those who don't easily
fracture. Your stare is almost a smile as
you allow hope to spill from your photo.
This is 1958 when your arrival deleted
your escape when you feared to look
a stranger eye to eye as he penned his
failure to see your gaze was true green
he committed your eyes to 'Chestnut'
not your hair, then wrote 'Moles on face'

Note: The passport referred to was owned by Angela Costi's mother, 'Miss Eleni Elisseou Costi'—written on the front of the booklet ('Ελένη Ε. Κωστη' was written in Greek on page 2). Note the middle name 'Elisseou' is the first name of Costi's paternal grandfather; that is, her mother's father. This was the traditional naming convention. Cyprus was colonised by the British from 1925–1960. During this period there was civil unrest and financial struggles for many Cypriots, who like Costi's family, left Cyprus due to imminent war.

About the author

Angela Costi is the author of five poetry gatherings/books including *Honey & Salt* (Five Islands Press, shortlisted Mary Gilmore Prize 2008) and *An Embroidery of Old Maps and New* (Spinifex, 2021), along with nine produced plays/performance-text (five commissioned and funded). In 1995, a travel award from the Australia National Languages Board enabled her to study Ancient Greek drama in Greece. In 2009, she travelled to Japan with Australia Council support for an international collaboration involving her poetic text *A Nest of Cinnamon*. She is a graduate of Melbourne University and has a work background in social justice, law and community arts.

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SALVAGING CYPRIOT-GREEK MIGRANT AND REFUGEE MEMORIES

Poetry documenting what is missed, excluded or neglected in institutionalised archives

Angela Costi
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Abstract

Poetry is one way of documenting what is missed, excluded and neglected by institutionalised archives. Smaller cohorts of migrants and refugees with a reliance on oral stories to record their existence risk minimisation of their impact, influence and contribution to the collective memory of Australia. The experiences of migrants and refugees from Cyprus are recorded mostly through the prism and value-system of two dominating cultures: a British-centric culture and a Hellenic (Greek) culture. This paper seeks to show an alternative documentation of the Cypriot-Greek Australian-based diaspora. Through interviews with several Cypriot-Greek poets and a study of their poetry, a poetic biography of Cypriot-Greek diasporic identity can be created, one that is nuanced and memorable.

SALVAGING CYPRIOT-GREEK MIGRANT AND REFUGEE MEMORIES: POETRY DOCUMENTING WHAT IS MISSED, EXCLUDED OR NEGLECTED IN INSTITUTIONALISED ARCHIVES

Angela Costi

Historical Division

Many institutionalised records and reports about Cyprus cover its ancient history right up to how it came to be (and continues to be) a war-torn island, a Turkish occupied northern part and the Republic of Cyprus southern part, yet Cyprus is arguably an enigma. It is a complex collage of people who have lived there, continue to live there, and those who carry Cypriot ancestry and heritage into the diasporic sphere. Its resilience is outstanding, given that it was inhabited as far back as the Neolithic (the Stone) Age, and a litany of conquerors have feasted on its resources since then. In our modern times, Cyprus garnered global attention with the invasion by Turkey in 1974. Leading up to this were years of civil war fare in Cyprus among those wanting sovereignty for Cyprus, those wanting union with Greece and those wanting a partitioned Cyprus, reaching the point of a military coup deposing the Cypriot President, Archbishop Makarios III. In this divisive mix there are remnants of British colonialism as Cyprus donned the British crown from 1925–1960. Although Cyprus gained independence in 1960, via an agreement with Cyprus, Britain, Greece and Turkey, this obviously did not put an end to demarcation. The ongoing hyphenated identity of Cypriot-Greek and Cypriot-Turk (or alternatively Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot) dominates to this very day in archival discourse:

> The people of Cyprus represent two main ethnic groups, Greek and Turkish. The Greek Cypriots, who constitute nearly four-fifths of the population, descended from a mixture of aboriginal inhabitants and immigrants from the Peloponnese who colonized Cyprus starting about 1200 BC and assimilated subsequent settlers up to the 16th century. Roughly one-fifth of the population are Turkish Cypriots, descendants of the soldiers of the Ottoman army that conquered the island in 1571 and of immigrants from Anatolia brought in by the sultan's government. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2022: n.p.)

There is no denying the deep wounds that divided the Cypriots of Greek Orthodox faith and the Cypriots of Muslim faith. History, politics, religion, nationalism and commercialism spoke through severe acts of aggression by military and militants aligned with the British, the Turks or the Greeks. Britain was a questionable powerbroker, leading to the United Nations Peace-keeping Force ramping up its presence, and justifying its existence through this type of reporting:

> 217. It must be said, however, that despite all efforts of the United Nations, at Headquarters and in the field, conditions in Cyprus today are far from good; indeed, they are very unsatisfactory when viewed from the perspective of the hopes for Cyprus which motivated the Security Council's resolution of 4 March. But if the United Nations Mission and Force had not established in that island and had not been exerting ever since every possible effort on behalf of peace and reason, conditions in that tragic country would be immeasurably worse, with all of the implications which this would have for the peace of the region and of the world. (District General 1964: 62)

War in Cyprus involved human rights transgressions, searches for loved ones on 'missing persons' lists and the expulsion of '40% of the population' from their homes (Savvides 2011: 113). Preceding this were many years of civil unrest, food rations and threatened poverty. Therefore, great numbers of Cypriots, whether they identified with Greece or with Turkey, sought peace in foreign lands.

Australian Migration

In 1954, 5,773 Cypriots migrated to Australia, in 1961, there were 8,576, and by 1981, there were 23,333 Cypriot-born residents in Australia (Shialis 2015: 29–30). In the document, *A History of the Department of Immigration—Managing Migration to Australia*, the 'Chileans, Cypriots and Lebanese' are grouped in a box, with the following sentence about the Cypriots:

> Displaced persons from Cyprus were resettled in Australia after the Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus in 1974 displaced nearly half of the island's population. (Commonwealth of Australia 2017: 59)

Among the migration statistics and within that one sentence are my paternal and maternal grandparents, my parents, my uncles, aunties, cousins—an extensive kinship group. They brought with them their British passports, their hyphenated identities and their stricken memories. They were encumbered by history and too easily categorised as part of the 'non-British' (Pennay 2011: 2) cohort and the Greek community, as in the following account:

> Charles Price, an immigration scholar, tried to increase community understanding of Southern European migrants … Unlike pre-war Greek migrants, the post-war arrivals were more likely to be from the mainland rather than the islands. They included northern Greeks, people from the Peloponnese and Greeks from Egypt, Turkey and Cyprus. There were regional variations in Greek culture, as regional fraternities seemed to indicate, but, he suggested, nearly all Greeks had a sense of a golden heroic past and proud traditions. It would not be surprising to find Greek migrants 'turning again to the tor of peasant pioneers, [to] catch the occasional reflection of gold and beauty in their own patient struggles and achievements.' Assimilation, he warned, would be slow, even multi-generational. (Pennay 2011: 13)

This account by Price categorises all from non-mainland Greece as being 'Greek' although there were a number of Cypriot-Turks who were displaced and migrated as well. In the 2011 Census, there were 17.4% Cypriot born who identified Islam as their religion.

This paper acknowledges how 'the Cyprus problem', a term that has come to be used to describe the division in Cyprus, is more than just a 'problem'; it is an ongoing ordeal and struggle for justice for many Cypriots across lines of ethnicity. Thankfully, new beginnings bring essential relationships:

> In 2018, Melbourne-based Turkish Cypriot Yalçın Adal, 53, and Brisbane-based Greek Cypriot Stavros Tziortzis, 37, walked 400 kilometres, from one end of Cyprus to the other, to send a message, 40 years after the war that divided the island, that its people can live in harmony again. (Jacobs 2022: n.p.)

I wholeheartedly acknowledge that we cannot comprehensively understand 'Cypriotness' by excluding the Turkish. Furthermore, there are influxes of immigrants and refugees, including the Armenians, that have made Cyprus their home (Savvidis 2011: 120). However, my study

of Cypriot poetry for this paper is limited to Cypriots associated with the Greek culture and those tending to write mostly in English. In particular, I'm exploring the poetic output of several Australian-based poets who are Cypriot born or have Cypriot heritage with Greek connection. The question is whether their poetry adds value to the archival gaps, clarifies the assumptions of categorisation or amplifies the records of Cypriot diasporic existence?

Creatively documenting

One way of recording memory and oral stories is through the age-old practice of distilling words to achieve a deeper meaning. The poetry of Peter Lyssiotis provides us with a vision that encapsulates all that is Cyprus:

> The finch slipped out of the monastery and flew
> down to the port. There it settled on the mast of
> The Queen of Mercy. The ship was sailing towards
> a land the finch had heard of; a land which was the
> meeting place of exiles and dreamers. A place far
> away, planted with spindly, parched trees, where
> any corner of cool shade was a miracle. The finch
> knew all this. It was what it wanted. "I look for
> my homeland under different stones and it seems
> no matter which way I turn I will always land on
> shores where I feel myself dissolve."
>
> (Lyssiotis 2010: n.p.)

Cyprus is more a feeling than a solidified country for Lyssiotis and many Cypriots who left Cyprus at a young age. They left before the capital city, Nicosia, was split with the green, check-point line, knowing that siege was imminent and that both 'exiles and dreamers' would claim Cyprus through memory and story from a vast distance.

Lyssiotis was five years old when he arrived in Melbourne in 1954 with his mother to find his father who had arrived four years earlier. Then, much later, in his 50s, Lyssiotis returns to Cyprus and stays at the Saint George Mavrovouni Monastery. Lyssiotis tells me that while he was at the Monastery, he noticed how each monk had a distinct job which created a complete way of existing 'whether it was cooking, painting icons, sweeping, they knew their role'. He felt he didn't know how to contribute. He asked the Elder monk and was clearly told that he did have a job: it was 'to write'. Lyssiotis did write three books of poetry adhering to Byzantine and traditional book binding, involving exquisite art, photos, font and ink drawings, a feast for the eye as one carefully leafs the pages at the State Library of Victoria's rare book collection. In his prologue he provides insight into the omniscient lens he employs in all three books:

> The text for Birds from Byzantium was written in 2009 at the Monastery of Mavrovouni in the Larnaca district of Cyprus, where within a small space there is a cross-section of Cypriot history: the monastery was built on the ruins of a Byzantine church. There are the sounds of the monks, talking, chanting, going about their allotted tasks and the bells and the worshipers. The monastery is cradled in the valley.
>
> On the brown hills in front of the monastery is a military checkpoint. There is razor wire, guard dogs, military vehicles and Greek Cypriot boys with automatics barking instructions to each other. Across from these young men is a no-man's land——

> mined. And on the opposite hills there are Turkish Cypriot boys carrying automatics, yelling at each other behind razor wire.
>
> A white helicopter with its blue UN markings monitors the zone between the two checkpoints. This is the green line.
>
> Behind the monastery there is a bitumen road; and across from it there is a mine which produces the pigment, umber. The story goes that Dutch painter Vermeer insisted on Cypriot umber for his shadow areas. Around the mine there is a processing plant and heavy industrial equipment.
>
> So within this small space there are three distinct zones: the military, the spiritual and the commercial and all three span huge chunks of time. (Lyssiotis 2010: n.p.)

Then Lyssiotis likens this timespan to the relationships we have with our fathers and mothers, who bequeath us the spoken and the unspoken, the recalling and the forgetting, as he comes to rest and release what is carried from one generation to the next:

> The father dies. The son holds onto a thousand unspoken words, a hundred regrets. In the place where the ancient and the new, the spiritual, the military and the commercial, death, resurrection and daily life co-exist the boundaries blur and break down. (Lyssiotis 2010: n.p.)

The past has a way of embodying the present that no amount of chronology can corral. Here, Lyssiotis is speaking to all of us carrying inherited trauma, as Maria Tumarkin reminds us:

> How to speak of this beforeness? How to speak of things being passed on if they are not histories and habits so much as structures of feeling …. (Tumarkin 2018: 97)

The idea that feelings are structured as if they are rooms in homes appeals to Lyssiotis' following poem, which intersects with diplomacy, advocacy and peacemaking:

> I am standing on the small wooden
> bridge at the monastery looking down on the
> drying river bed and there it is again, my grand-
> mother's voice telling me that the things I say
> should be round … like an O because, she
> explains, if words have sharp edges they remain
> where they fall and never roll out into the world.
>
> (Lyssiotis 2020: n.p.)

Lyssiotis' trilogy includes *The Elder Paints An Icon* where he gives voice to the trees of Cyprus. Poems such as 'An Almond Tree', 'A Pomegranate Tree' and 'A Fig Tree' are given the reverence they carry to the gardens and backyards of Cypriot migrants (Lyssiotis 2012: n.p.). It is the slivers of almonds and the seeds of pomegranates mixed with wheat berries and all the other sacred ingredients to make the traditional dish called koliva, which was (and still is) taken to the orthodox church. Or savouring the spoonfuls of koliva in small paper bags for each member of the congregation to eat in honour of the memory of Cypriots who have passed away. This is a visceral memory for many children of Cypriot migrants. The sweet and delicate taste of koliva, the Priest reciting the long list of names and the congregation turning their chests into maps for their right hands to cross over and over and over.

Lyssiotis also reminds us that as the child of Cyprus grows to elder, the emphasis on memories to restore a sense of continuum is urgent:

> When did all this happen and did it happen here or in another place whose name sounded the same? There are so many names, how will I know which is the right one? There are so many ghosts, how will I know which ones belong to me? I need strong arms and a back that is firm. That's why I stop in the shade of an old fig tree—to rest. I know it has a great heart—a heart that is as great as its sorrow. Each time I sit in its shadow I learn again how well fables grow on trees. So I wet my forefinger with saliva and draw the outline of the Baptist in the dirt … (Lyssiotis 2012: n.p.)

The fig tree is the Cypriot teacher of migrant storylines. By reading its trunk, branches and fruit as a storage of the past, we are planted in soil mixed with all who have conquered and surrendered, colonised and settled. A focus on this type of tree is not peculiar to the writing of Lyssiotis. In the *The Island of Missing Trees*, the recent novel by Elif Shafak about 'the Cyprus problem', the central character is a fig tree. It is the fig tree who 'watched, waited and witnessed' (Shafak 2021: 86) since its Cypriot birth in 1878. Both Lyssiotis (Cypriot Australian) and Shafak (Turkish British) may be unearthing the same fig tree, for despite their separate personal histories, they acknowledge this tree's contribution to the struggle and survival of Cyprus. The fig tree's fruit, both fresh and dried, is so widely eaten in the Mediterranean and the Middle East that it's known as 'the poor man's food' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2020: n.p.). The fig tree is cultivated with bird netting crowning its growth. The fig tree is worshipped 'when in need or in trouble' (Shafak 2021: 65), and through poetry, it shows us how to simultaneously leave and stay in Cyprus:

> Once again
> I take the shape
> of the tree with me.
>
> 'I am where you are going.'
> whisper the dark green
> winds which pass
> through the leaves.
>
> I will leave—
> but the footprints,
> which
> circle the fig tree,
> remain.
>
> (Lyssiotis 2012: n.p.)

The Cypriot Father

The migrant father from Cyprus has added another layer to the poetry by Zeny Giles. Giles' father migrated from Cyprus in 1927, marrying her mother in Sydney through a proxenia (an arranged marriage) in 1936 and their daughter, Giles, was born in 1937. In response to my question about whether her Cypriot heritage influenced her poetry, Giles replied:

> My poems have come out of my life story. It's hard to disentangle the biographical elements from the Cypriot influences. My best poem [about my father], I think, is 'My Father's Hands'. And that is dependent on his physical appearance, including his big spatula shaped fingers. The poem was written after he had been living with us for several months near the end of his life. Greek language has its influence, especially the way my father would mix his halting English with Greek. He never went back to Cyprus and didn't seem to have happy memories of growing up there. Although, after I visited Dhora [a village in Cyprus]—when we mentioned how beautiful the village was, he said, 'My outlook in Cronulla is not the first time I've had a good view.'

Although Giles draws from the personal, her poetry, short fiction and novels that engage with the paternal in her life provide familiar themes, ethos and drama. In her seven-part, long poem, 'My Father's Hands', there is a dialogue between father and daughter, which mirrors the authoritative, irascible, opinionated and comedic Cypriot Greek man dominating many migrant households, including mine, even in their older years:

III

My father's hands harangue me.

You mustn't work so hard,
he points with irritation at my knitting.
Even when you sit to rest your hands keep busy.

As for your husband, he never stops—
his books
his lawns
his cleaning of the gutters …
(Hands energetic now with Greek advice.)
Go out—spend your money.
Take a trip. Do it in your sixties,
don't wait till you are nearly dead like me.

He shrugs his shoulders
drops his hands and sighs,
I talk too much.
Tell me to shut my mouth and go away.

I put my knitting down and start to speak.

He doesn't listen
but takes the stage again and cocky, loud,
lifts up his hand to threaten.
You are my child, remember that!
If you dare say bad words to me
*ta herya sou tha tremoun**

*Greek: *your hands will tremble*

His grim prediction comes too late,
my fate already in his hands.
He passed the tremble on to me—
my sin was his originally.
Our smiles confirm complicity.

(Giles 2005: 37)

Giles records how the body, with its tendencies and afflictions, is bequeathed, how a father's arduous labour continues through his offspring, despite his warning:

He'd worked in cafés.
His hands were made for scaling fish
not posing for photos.

(Giles 2005: 35)

Significantly, Giles documents the vital differences in values and philosophies between her and her father in the poem 'Intruders'. This poem has the courage to contest the proposition by Charles Price that migrants of Greek language and culture, including from Cyprus, are nostalgic for their birthland and will find it difficult to assimilate:

Intruders
Remembering Cronulla, 2005

On the day of the riots
I could see my father
back from the dead
wielding a righteous whip
like Christ in the temple
saving his paradise.

He thought of Cronulla as his own
and he would take his children and grandchildren
along the esplanade
point out the boundless sea (its lacy inlets)
the ocean baths where he would swim and do his exercises
and he would say with thankfulness as well as pride,
This place is worth a million dollars to me.
No, more than a million dollars.

He should have had some sympathy
for those Lebanese youths.
He'd come from Cyprus in 1927
young and swarthy and speaking no English.
He'd known alienation.

But year-by-year his work had prospered
and his reward in retirement was to live by the coast
with the ocean caught in his windows.

In old age he grew suspicious.
Too many Chinese, he would complain.
They come here to our park every Sunday
and take the best tables.

So he might well have joined the call
for core Australian values.
Like Howard, Hansen and Costello
and the many who applauded them
he found it easy to forget
how recently our ships had come
to someone else's paradise.

(Giles 2016: 21)

Racist views among older migrants towards new migrants don't seem to be widely reported as part of institutionalised archives, let alone reporting the racism by Mediterranean migrants towards First Nations People. Poetry's resourcefulness to juxtapose how a seashore can change from a Cypriot migrant's paradise to a contested fortress provides a nuanced understanding of multiculturalism and cross-cultural relationships.

The Return Visit

Inevitably, Cyprus pulls a Cypriot migrant or descendent to 'return'. For Cypriot poets such as Lyssiotis and Giles, this enabled revised understandings, and for the poet, MG Michael, a new connection to the Cyprus he describes as 'beautiful but terribly wounded'. Michael was born in Sydney, in 1961, and he's returned to Cyprus several times. In his mid-30s he served in the Cypriot National Guard, which is compulsory for 'persons of Cypriot descent on the male side, who are resident of the Republic' (High Commission of the Republic of Cyprus 2022: n.p.). In our interview, he states:

> I cannot forget the day of our parade [when we completed bootcamp] to see the flag of Saint George brought out which is a huge moment for the troops and the nation. It was on this day when perhaps for the first time I did feel 'Cypriot-ness' thickly through my veins. I sensed a deeper bond to this brave and troubled Island of ours and could now speak of my Cypriot 'consciousness' becoming alive. That is, the 'bibliography' of the place had taken on flesh and I could now actually read it also from the heart. Another reason why I had become so emotionally moved was that I would shortly also be granted Cypriot citizenship which my father never had! This seemed incredible to me, you would remember, Angela, that the older generations of our forefathers only ever possessed British passports [citizenship].

Michael's personal narrative aligns with the notion proposed by Anna Clark:

> … it's possible to understand 'historical consciousness' as a process by which we connect our own narrative to a bigger story—a history, no less. (2016: 55)

In 2017, Michael returned to Paphos, situated on the southwest coast of Cyprus, where he wrote a series of prose poems, which were published in *Antipodes Issue 64, 2018*. Drawing from his theological and academic studies as well as the traditions and cultures peculiar to Cyprus, they are narratives akin to those told as ancient and religious stories. Each is given an illuminating

title. In *Always carrying his large cardboard suitcase* there is reference to the 'Terebinth tree', which is to this very day, situated at the 'Catacombs of Saint Solomoni' (Michael 2018: 77). This is considered a sacred tree, as it heals those who visit if they tie handkerchiefs, ribbons or other items to its branches and whisper their prayers. In Michael's narrative, although the main character, Bellerophon, is blind, he dedicates the handkerchiefs and pocket envelopes in his suitcase to the diaspora who visited the tree and 'were in need of some additional direction' (2018: 77). In *The field inch by inch started to disappear* we are provided with an account of how Cyprus's land is kept and lost. The name of the protagonist is Matari—a name unfamiliar to Greek or Turkish, a name that could be Arabic or Armenian in origin, that could reach as far back as the Hittites, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Assyrians … family after family cultivating land claimed by all and none to own:

> He planted stories into the wet earth as a poet might draw words onto a blank page. Matari, whose black eyebrows were like thick weave, ploughed the large field with his Father and Grandfathers, and their Grandfathers before them. This was an age-old custom, far back as he could remember. He had recently amazed his neighbours, who were normally not easily amazed, with the bolts of lightning that split up through the soil like stalks of golden corn. One night the field was taken away from him when he had gone to sleep. In the morning he picked what was left of the stories and the bolts of lightning, packed them into small wooden boxes and departed. Not long afterwards the field inch by inch started to disappear. (2018: 77)

Trauma's Truth

Shafak plants a reverberating sentence that is deeply rooted in this paper's excavation of what it means to document through poetry one's Cypriotness from a distance:

> People from troubled islands can never be normal. We can pretend, we can even make amazing progress—but we can never really learn to feel safe. The ground that feels rock hard to others is choppy waters for our kind. (2021: 66)

'Choppy waters' can be termed trauma or, at the very least, 'anxiety' (Herodotou 1999: 238) when you are uprooted from your home, fleeing overhead missiles and seeking refuge in Australia. Andrea Demetriou and her family were part of the peak influx of Cypriots arriving in Australia between 1971 and 1977 due to the war. In Demetriou's second poetry book, *The Inconsolable Clock*, she continues the journey of her first book, which is documenting the experience of the exiled, displaced and missing. Her words are the ammunition she didn't possess as a child of war. In many of her poems, she's concurrently informing, warning and remembering, so that we don't forget:

> Sarajevo
>
> The refugees unbury their dead
> Take them in coffins
> Set their houses on fire.
> Pack whatever else they can on trucks.
> Someone takes their fridge on the back of the truck
> Like we did.

I screamed and I tried to forget what I saw
Tried to forget that it was happening

It didn't last long
It was just a short segment on the news.

They will live in tents
They will never have a home again
They could not take the land with them
Like they did with their dead.

They could not take the ground away
the sun the scent
the feeling of ruined Sarajevo.

That, they could not pack in their trucks.

And it will hound them wherever they go, wherever they run to.
The dead should remain buried in their homeland, in their cemeteries

Even the dead will never feel the same again.

No other soil will be as kind to them.

Καμία άλλη γη δεν θα είναι τόσο τρυφερή και ευγενική μαζί τους

13 January 1996

(2017: n.p.)

The Study of Cypriot Poetry

The need to group in order to honour, celebrate and examine in isolation from the rest is a palpable tendency. Cypriot poetry is one grouping that has been challenged by being traditionally subsumed within the Greek literary and cultural context as exemplified by The Charioteer, an established annual review of Modern Greek culture, circa 1960 to 2010. This journal's special, double issue on 'Cyprus Its Poetry, Prose, And Art from ancient times to the present', made it clear how Cypriot literature was perceived as a sub-category:

> The Greek character of the Cypriot people is most vividly revealed in Cypriot literature. We must stress, however, that there is no such thing as a distinctly Cypriot literature, apart from any other; literature described as Cypriot is nothing else than Greek literature written by Greeks who happen to have been born and to have lived in Cyprus. (Proussis 1965: 10)

This fixed view runs counter to the discourse among the significant number of international academics who contributed to the bilingual edition (French and English) of *Hellenic Studies—A Tribute to Cypriot Literature*. In this large volume of papers, there's recognition of Cypriot poetry's distinct contribution to the literary canon, noting its 'particularities' and 'divergences'

(Papaleontiou 2007: 19) with some academics proposing a polycentric understanding by acknowledging the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, intercultural influences of Greek, Turkish and other Near East literatures (Kappler 2007: 51). Here, there are also two Australian-based academics who have contributed papers on Cypriot writers residing in Australia: George Kanarakis and Maria Herodotou. Both have devoted a significant proportion of their professional lives to documenting the Cypriot poets/writers who reside in Australia. Between them, they have unearthed the creative writing of well over 30 first-generation and second-generation Cypriot Greek Australian published poets, writers and authors. Some of their listed poets are included in *Southern Sun, Aegean Light*, an anthology of poetry by second-generation writers of Greek heritage (Trakakis 2011). Of the 35 poets, there are eight who are noted as having Cypriot heritage: the four I have highlighted in this paper as well as Helena Spyrou, Phillip Constan, Koraly Dimitriadis and myself. This is a significant cohort, almost 23%, who are writing poetry accessing that part of themselves, small or large, that hails from Cyprus. A significant part of Dimitriadis's poetry is influenced by her Cypriot heritage, as she states:

> I carry 'Cypriotness' in my writing, both when I write in English and Cypriot [the dialect].

Although born in Melbourne, both her parents are from Cyprus and their traditional expectations clashed with her values, yet there are other aspects of Cyprus that she yearns for and still others that inhabit her psyche while travelling on a Melbourne train:

> Cyprus
>
> On the Broadie train
> from the burbs to the city,
> sometimes my mind dives
> into Mediterranean waters.
> It travels with a suitcase
> of unfulfilled dreams
> to my mythical island
> with a broken heart
> of barbed wire.
>
> If I close my eyes
> I can almost feel
> Yiayia's embrace
> and
> Mediterranean sun.
>
> I can almost taste
> sweet cherries
> and juicy *kleftiko*.
>
> I can almost see
> Protaras beach
> and windsurfers.
>
> I can almost reach

for my innocence.

I can almost reach
Kerinyia

I can almost hear
the screams
of 1974

(2011: 96)

This poem, with its reach for ancestral belonging which entails nostalgic experiences enveloped by war, shows us what it means to carry the trauma of heritage, and to live with an 'anxious history' (Silverstein 2017: 12).

The Poetic Offer

Cypriot poets have drawn from various sources to document their sense of what it means to be Cypriot including utilising memory, oral stories, travel journals, interviews and accessing their personal records. In doing this, they have produced another way of enhancing knowledge about a group of migrants and refugees subsumed or accounted for by the bigger groups of Hellenics, Greeks, English and Australians. In both historical and literary spheres, their existence is undoubtedly acknowledged however, their nuanced complexities are arguably lost without their poetic output.

The separateness is rooted in the specificities of Cyprus itself. A distinct history involves a distinct memory, post-memory and possibly, counter-memory. When noting the political, ideological, cultural, societal and psychological dilemma known as the 'Cyprus problem' (Doumas 1968: 146), it's enlightening how each of the poets addresses this issue through a relationship, an interaction of sorts, in order to frame humanity with its diverse shades.

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'THE BONES / SAY WHAT / CANNOT BE GIVE / VOICE'

Archival untelling in M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*

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Abstract

Rachel Kaufman argues the 'archival poem brings to bear the rhythms of the past through the language of the present' (2021: 21). Indeed, it is a unique genre for its ability to 'hold in balance discordant images and thoughts' (26) in its presentation of dissonant simultaneities—a quality critical to representing historical traumas, particularly those related to slavery and race. Through processes of disassembling and fracturing, archival poetry exposes the silences and redactions within 'official' histories by marking and blurring the borderlines of past and present, subject and object. Examining M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*, poetry grounded in the materiality of archival sources, this paper explores how the past might be defamiliarized to reveal that which is hidden or suppressed. In doing so, it contends that creative practice engaged with the archives offers the subversive potential to resist totalising historical accounts, whilst conveying the complex horrors of racial violence and oppression.

'THE BONES / SAY WHAT / CANNOT BE GIVE / VOICE': ARCHIVAL UNTELLING IN M. NOURBESE PHILIP'S *ZONG!*

Alyson Miller

The archives, as David Greetham observes, are configured by a 'poetics of exclusion', resulting from a desire to find principles 'of order and classification' driven by the 'cultural prerogatives' of particular times and places (1999: 19). It is a notion derived from Jacques Derrida, whose description of *mal d'archive*, or 'archive fever', denotes an obsession with defining the borderlines: 'But where does the outside commence? This is the question of the archive. There are undoubtedly no others' (1996: 8). In its meticulous curations, the processes of archivisation become a series of *leaving out*, a politics of organisation, Joseph Harrington notes, that requires 'repression and destruction, even as it involves preservation' (2011: n.p.). In the impetus to locate and possess a point of origin, the archives come to represent a 'legitimate hermeneutic authority' (Derrida: 3), a system that functions to constrain what can and cannot be said. As such, it is demanding of suspicion: as Derrida warns, 'there is no political power without control of the archive, or without memory' (4). Certainly, beyond administrative or bureaucratic concerns relating to data storage, or issues about the abundance of potentially archivable material, the problem of selection—of what might or ought to be saved for the interests of 'a future culture' (Greetham: 9)—is profoundly ideological. As Greetham describes:

> … all conservational decisions are contingent, temporary, and culturally self-referential, even self-laudatory: we want to preserve the *best* of ourselves for those who follow. When the space probe bearing 'universal' signs of our culture was sent off, like a bottle with a message, onto the high seas of deep space, it did not preserve for those cultures images of Auschwitz or Passchendaele or Hiroshima or My Lai, but rather of the ideal male and female and of our achievements in science and the arts: a sort of Arnoldian 'best that was ever thought and known in the world'. (9)

Turning on anxieties about inclusion and exclusion, the archives become, to borrow from Mark Byers, a source of 'violent compression' (2019: 47), in which what is preserved is defined as much by absence as it is by presence. In deciding between inside and outside, the institutional politics of 'cultural value' results in a series of blank spaces, the erasure of those excised from official memory, and so also the possibilities of subversive counter-histories. Yet in archival poetry such as M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*, these 'missing pieces' (Kaufman 2021a: n.p.) are less forgotten or lost than understood as historical traces revealing that which is hidden, repressed, or disappeared. In the work of Philip, the fragment not only remains in frequently haunting or uncanny terms, but becomes central to an engagement with the archive that both recalls and insists upon alternative visions of the past, through which different narratives, contexts, and even languages might be produced.

Indeed, by recognising the fragmentary nature of the archives, and therefore the histories it produces, archival poetry intervenes 'specifically in the conventions of history writing, establishing new methods of historical curation and representation' (Byers: 59). If archivisation is premised on maintaining the integrity of boundaries, a method of restraint, then archival poetry is arguably an ironic opposite, a practice of unravelling that rejects the 'unifying and generalising tendencies of historical narrative' so as to evoke 'suppressed voices, marginalised stories and neglected experiences' (Byers: 59). In doing so, the archival poem 'acts as a medium

of translation' that is able to preserve dissonant simultaneities by marking and blurring the 'borders between history and poetry, past and present' (Kaufman 2021a: n.p.). It is a unique genre for its ability to 'hold in balance discordant images and thoughts' (Kaufman 2021b: 26), a quality critical to representing historical traumas, such as the abject horrors of the slave trade in Philip's *Zong!*, a text which might be read as an act of mourning as well as an expression of protest.

Examining the poetic interventions of *Zong!*, this paper argues that by returning to and pulling apart archival records, Philip disorders homogenising forms of history, interrupting conventional meanings so as to dislodge dominant perspectives and introduce alternative ways of viewing the past. Grounded in the narratives and materiality of the archives yet resisting the totalising urge towards a 'clear, or single, explanation of coherence' (Kaufman 2021b: 26), the poetry of Philip demonstrates how historical events might be defamiliarized or 'untold' (Philip 2008: 189) to transgress containment, and to reveal that which has not yet been heard.

'half-tellings, and un-tellings': On Non-Narrative Ruptures

The history of the merchant ship *Zong* is well known; travelling from the West coast of Africa with '470 or 442 or 440 slaves [and] seventeen crew members' (Fehskens 2012: 407), navigational errors resulted in significant delays, and a severe water shortage. Sickness ravaged those on board, and its captain, Luke Collingwood, reasoning that an insurance claim would compensate against any further damages, devised a plan to throw its human cargo—live bodies—into the sea:

> On November 29th, the crew heaved fifty-four bodies into the water. On November 30th, they sent forty-two or forty-three overboard. On December 1st, it rained. Or, it rained for the first two days of December. The crew replenished their supply of water with six casks, which gives evidence that continuing the massacre was not necessary. Nevertheless, Collingwood ordered on December 2nd or 3rd to throw twenty-six more bodies overboard. (Fehskens: 407)

In the *Notanda*, a kind of exegesis or coda, Philip describes how the narrative of these African men, women, and children is a 'story that can only be told by not telling' (2008: 191), indicating both the gaps within historical accounts, and how silences cannot speak. The poems of *Zong!* are constructed from the legal documents of the trial *Gregson v. Gilbert*, which occurred after insurers refused to pay for the destruction of goods, claiming 'a sufficient necessity did not exist for throwing the negroes overboard, and also that the loss was not within the terms of the policy' (cited in Philip: 210). Concerned with the 'unrecorded thoughts and experiences of the captives' (Goldgaber: 209), *Zong!* examines the impossibility of representing those who disappeared into the depths of the Atlantic, attempting to salvage their memory in a transgressive new form of archival reconstruction. The composition of the text is deliberately broken and evasive, a subversion of the organising impulses of empire, including the totalising modes of history (Philip: 205). Importantly, the contortions of the text are also an expression of ineffability, of disjunctive events beyond human comprehension, and yet, too, of the ethical imperative to tell, a difficulty of the gaps between absence and presence. Deborah Goldgaber observes, for example, that '*If* their stories *must* be told, *then* they must be told in truth. *But*, it seems, they cannot be told in truth, because there is ostensibly no record, and hence no words, no thought, no cries to be retrieved' (212).

The idea of 'untelling' thus represents a poetic strategy through which to resist the urge towards narrative coherence, in which the voices of the dead are transformed or translated into neat chronologies and imagined testimonies. Certainly, while the story of the *Zong* is one 'that must be told' (Philip: 194) to defy attempts to disappear the horrific realities of slavery, it is a telling that requires, Goldgaber contends, 'reversing the wefts of logic, of rationality, grammar, all the structures, in short, which compel us to take up an authorial position within language' (213). The result is a process of disassembling so as to subvert acts of dissembling, in which legal documentation is disordered to emphasise the 'white space, the margins' (Goldgaber: 211) and to insist that a 'complete story does not exist' but is comprised only of fragments (Philip: 195). The attention to whiteness and marginality is politically coded, the racially encoded territories of power and oppression, of the slavers and the enslaved. The effect is of cacophony and chaos, but also an endless repetition that returns again and again to the terrors of a massacre in which black bodies are reduced to property, nameless goods for trade:

> the truth was
>
> the ship sailed
> the rains came
> the loss arose
>
> the truth is
>
> the ship sailed
> the rains came
> the loss arose
>
> the negroes is
>
> the truth was (Philip: 24).

Refusing the traditional lineation of the lyric mode, *Zong!* is series of 'exploded words' (Philip: 203), frequently stretched across numerous lines and pages, and fractured into a syllabic whirr of constituent parts: 'w w w / w / a / wa / w / a / w a / t / er' (3). As such, it is a text resistant to methodical or systematic reading, operating as a parodic deconstruction of the colonial discourses of law and history: 'the of and during & wherefore / the preserving / the insurance of water / the within loss / the terms of exist / a negro of wit' (28). The splintering of phrases compels the search for cohesion, a desire to locate a pattern of narrative logic in which a chronology of events might be revealed, yet the poems continually escape the 'impulse to meaning' (Philip: 193). Alternatively, there is an insistence on 'the frenzy' that echoes the terror of 'leaky seas & / casks' (Philip: 29), an effort to realise the madness of a 'system that could enable, encourage even, a man to drown 150 people as a way to maximise profits' (195).

The mimicry of catalogues and lists, the multi-directionality of the text, and cracked, even punning phrases, become a sinister game of detection, a play upon the mystery of events as well as the enigma of its undocumented victims, the unnamed and unknown objects of possession and exchange: 'the some of negroes / over / board / the rest in lives / drowned / exist did not / in themselves' (6). As *Zong!* progresses, the sense of linguistic deterioration increases, as vertical structures of text are eschewed for a non-narrative, polyphonic web perpetually on the verge of dissolution, producing a manic, tangled energy designed to overwhelm. It is an evocation of

panic at the threat of consumption, but also an unravelling that speaks to the unnarratable—the nightmare of the massacre, and the empty spaces of the archive:

wind create a cat s cradle on
the sea sing *te*
deum s the bells
the bells ding ding
and dong over
the water done done deed done died
done dead (85).

In *Notanda*, Philip underlines the physical difficulties of engaging with the work, as the eye constantly attempts 'to order what cannot be ordered, trying to "make sense" of something, which is what it must have been like trying to understand what was happening on board the *Zong*' (192). Lisa Fink further suggests the experimental fracturing represents a 'decomposition of language' that conjures the 'breakup and dispersal of organic matter underwater', an aesthetic performance of the 'violent erasure of black bodies' as well as an insistence on the inability to express the ineffable (2020: 8). The effect is an abject dynamic in which words scattered across the page act as signifiers for the dead and dying, descending and disintegrating into the incomplete, a slow process of annihilation. Yet beneath a solid line after each of the first twenty-six poems of *Zong!*, a thread of names raises the bones of the drowned, a graveyard register bearing 'witness to what remains unrecoverable' (Fehskens: 415), and to the ghosts that haunt the archive—the scattered remnants of an unheard past. According to Byers, by 'assembling the *disjecta membra* of the recorded past', archival poetics observes 'the production of history between text and space, material form and collective memory' (60), not necessarily seeking to fill or complete the missing or unspoken, but rather to act as testament to its existence. It is a detail which recalls the tension between exposure and concealment, an unsettling reminder of anonymous bodies, yet also invokes the purpose of the trans-Atlantic slave trade: chains of captives, anchored to each other, and to the ground. Indeed, via its rupture of a conventional grammar which imitates the tidal undulations of water, *Zong!* produces a 'sonic disturbance that does not aim to fill the gaps from missing stories so much as to underline them' (Fink: 13). The discord of voices, depicted as wails, cries, moans, and shouts, resurface the 'drowned and the oppressed', as the chorus of the murdered continues to 'resound and echo underwater. In the bone beds of the seas' (Philip: 203): 'you hear a / bove or / is it un / der the roar / of / water their song *aide* / *moi aide* / *moi* help / me help me i / can t it is / late too late' (128).

Such a cacophony functions as protest, an eerie, unceasing refrain that insists upon the atrocities of the past and refutes a 'disappearance' into the marginal spaces of the archive. According to Fehskens, in order to do violence to the archival catalogue, critical to telling what cannot be told, its topographies must also be evoked: 'a non-narrative untelling ultimately must engage forms of order and telling to structure its vision' (422). In *Zong!*, the cumulative effects of cataloguing are repeated throughout, firstly adhering to vertical lists before being 'laboriously unravelled' and reappearing more typically in the final sections of the text (Fehskens: 422). In '*Zong!* #26', for example, the catalogue is repurposed as a prose poem to enact the circular logic of the massacre, in which the legal discourses of the insurance claim—arguing that drowned 'human cargo' signified a loss of capital—is revised to accentuate its monstrosity: 'was the cause was the remedy was the record was the argument was the delay was the evidence was overboard was the not was the cause was the was was the need was the cause was the perils was the want

was the particular circumstance was the seas was the costs' (45). Importantly, it is neither the captain nor the crew but the 'freight' identified as fault, a rhetorical contortion deeply rooted in the horrors of colonialism: 'was the therefore was the this was the that was the negroes was the cause' (45).

Similarly, the ledger forms of the 'Manifest' parody the precision of inventory lists documenting the material contents of ships, citing items, Fehskens argues, 'suggestive of the multiple absences a vessel houses: gardens, glens, and fens appear, along with owls, wolves, and lions, and an entire category is dedicated to "women who wait"' (422). The doubly-encoded function of 'manifest' is transformed into apparitions of the 'latent memories, dreams, and desires' (Fehskens: 422) of those on the *Zong*, an uncanny series of names, places, objects and languages alluding to the dislocation of those killed, and heightening their anonymity. The erasure of subjectivity is also underlined by the list 'Body Parts', in which the self is vivisected into discrete segments, never to be realised in either complete or individual terms: 'arm / *bras* / cunt / ear / eye / feet' (Philip: 185). The simulation of cataloguing, which insists on presence, thus functions to accentuate the missing and lost—as pieces of the whole—but is also a model of order undone by its 'impossible material manifestation' (Fehskens: 422) that seeks to contain multitudes: 'moss / ocean / peat / rose / sea / sky / stone' (Philip: 186).

Like the stuttering and splintered phrases which precede it, the 'Manifest' performs a rupture that subverts the exclusionary nature of archival organisation. According to Philip, rejecting the order of grammar—and thereby of accounting, systems, and lists—by breaking into 'initial and originary phonic sound' (205), operates to transgress the language of the coloniser. It is, Philip contends, a radical form of fissure and compression that 'forces you—me—to read differently, bringing chaos into the language, or perhaps more accurately, revealing the chaos that is already there' (205). The result is a 'language of grunt and groan, of moan and stutter … broken by history' (205), perhaps best realised in 'Ferrum', in which the poetry becomes not only guttural but also a kind of music, a symphony of the 'limp and the wound' (205). There is a dizzying, visceral quality that implies madness, as the voices of oppressed and oppressor begin to overlap and encircle one another: 'me i sing song / for *òrgún el* / *son* of / iron come bring / our mask s / let the play begin we / each act the part / in murder' (127). The sexualised nature of the imagery, describing a 'crea / ture of secrets' (127) and 'flesh she rips' (128), for instance, suggests the intimacy of a layered polyvocalism, but also the rape of a slave identified as 'sad dear ruth' (127), whose assault speaks to the proprietorial politics of colonial power, and the grotesque exploitation of the black (female) body.

Further, it is in 'Ferrum' that textual constructions continue to disintegrate into the sonant or syllabic, a profound fracturing that elicits a haunting spectre of violence in which the physical self is broken, irrevocably split from its separated, and separating, parts: 'bread / of li / fe fo / r bo / nes to / e bon / e he / el b / one l / eg bo / ne hi / p bo / ne' (137). Fink argues that the spaces between these words generates 'a pulse the undulates between syllables and letters', creating a vibration or humming effect that articulates the sonic expressiveness of the poetry (13). More significantly, it also demonstrates a 'poetics of decontamination', a disruption of imperial language norms that both 'helps the hum to persist and invites a practice that allows for hearing it', a metaphor attuned to the importance of in-between spaces. Like the persistent noise of voices carried underwater, these sounds memorialise those whose stories are missing from the archives and insist on their existence (Fink: 13).

'the way of / the dead': Unravelling the Spectre of the Archival Body

As suggested by the unnerving aurality of the text, *Zong!* is work of hauntology, 'a wake of sorts, where the spectres of the undead make themselves present' (Philip: 201). Philip argues that it is in the 'margins of the text' that an untelling might occur, which offers a 'sort of negative space' open to discordant meanings and alternative visions of the 'real' (201). The intersections of the marginal also function as metaphor for the status of the drowned, the identities of a 'cargo' lost to the in-between, and the rhetoric of legal and historical discourses. Such a vision aligns with the ghostly qualities of the archive, which exists only in relation to the fragment or the incomplete, and whose shadows and empty spaces speak of forgotten bodies, times, and places. Indeed, in Kristevan terms the archive becomes a repository for the unknowable, 'the jettisoned object' that 'is excluded and draws … toward the place where meaning collapses' (1982: 2). The spectral nature of unravelling produces a distinct aesthetic, one ironically reliant on or attuned to the materiality of the body, and often particularly in abject terms, linked to an insistence on identity and the existence of those whose traumatic pasts have been eradicated from archival histories. Fink observes, for example, how as the text increasingly breaks down and reformulates into new words, shapes, and sounds, a 'nation language' emerges, a form of expression that refutes the language of 'a colonial education, of the official, of the planter' (10) and instead invokes a subversive mode of speaking that is endlessly shifting and transformative:

> Characterised as 'submerged' and emergent, national language bears the traces of ancestral languages, including Asian, Amerindian, and African languages, and constantly transforms itself into new forms. Though it may include English words, its rhythms, timbre, and syntax are markedly not English. (Fink: 10)

As nation language materialises in *Zong!*, the voices of the enslaved further rupture the archival source, telling of the nightmare of capture—'*dem cam fo mi in* / *de field me run* / *run*' (Philip: 105)—as well as insisting on selfhood and humanity: 'good / dog he /pats it *me* / *i be* / *man me man*' (109). Importantly, as the stories of the dead begin to appear in the liminal spaces of the text, Finks observes how the experiences of black women are illuminated (11), including 'dear ruth', 'acquired' by a crew member in a game of cards, and whose assault is detailed by the perpetrator, a white male speaker: 'dear dear ruth I won her was / wont to bed her bet / ten then forty / guineas first an / ace / of spades the deuce it was that / got me her forty days night' (Philip: 107). In a tragic assertion of agency, Ruth commits suicide, an act of resistance that defies declarations of possession and makes claim to the only remaining act of bodily autonomy: '*san / go* she says / and dives / once' (118).

As recollections of Ruth continue to surface or erupt throughout the remainder of the text, there is an insistence on corporeality, of trauma carried in bodies, that refuses to be erased—a haunting that occurs within the in-between as 'fugitive memories' (Fink: 12), yet stubbornly anchors to the centre: 'the scen / t of you ru / th wafts acros / s oceans' (157). Through their textual outbreaks, these spectral intrusions signify not only the 'utmost of abjection'—the corpse—but also disturb 'identity, system, order', threatening the distinction between subject and object, self and other (Kristeva: 4). Certainly, while the murdered captives of the *Zong* may remain nameless, their presence, albeit ghostly and marginal, wrestles violently with the legal records of *Gregson v. Gilbert*, splintering the text to challenge, if not displace, its totalising authority. Fink concludes that as *Zong!* progresses, the stories and speakers of the poems become 'more entangled, with the text switching more rapidly among speakers, as if memory were supplanting the historical record through interruptions that come in the voices of the enslaved' (12). While

silences cannot, as noted, speak, the cacophonous effect nonetheless functions as sensory overload, a refusal of the organisational clarity of the archives through which it might be possible to conjure the dead, and even, perhaps, 'lay the bones to rest' (Philip: 202).

The process of a hauntological untelling is indeed one of violence, reflecting the cruelty suffered by the African men, women, and children captive on board the *Zong* via a methodology that rejects the impassive tones often adopted by historical 'objectivity'. Philip explains how she mutilates the body of the legal document, for instance, an unravelling that is figured as an abject dissolution of the borderlines between inside and outside:

> I murder the text, literally cut it into pieces, castrating verbs, suffocating adjectives, murdering nouns, throwing articles, prepositions, conjunctions overboard, jettisoning adverbs: I separate subject from verb, verb from object—create semantic mayhem, until my hands are bloodied, from so much killing and cutting, reaching into the stinking, eviscerated innards, and like some seer, sangoma, or prophet who, having sacrificed an animal for signs and portents of a new life, or simply life, reads the untold story that tells itself by not telling. (193–4)

In seeking to mirror the 'fragmentation and mutilation that slavery perpetuated' (195), Philip breaks the text so as to identify its silences, within which is the poem, a genre that enables a 'pushing against the boundaries' of representation, but also a means to express the 'irrational, illogical and unpredictable' nature of a traumatic event (197). The effect crosses into the reading experience, not only in relation to the urge to make sense of the chaos—an ordering that Philip describes as a 'second violence' (197)—but also in its linguistic convulsions, which pitch the reader across the page and between the lines as though dragged by an undertow, or turned in a storm. The nauseating impulse to track the fragment, realised at a syllabic level, produces a sense of disorder that mimics the movements of the ocean, and of bodies falling, but perhaps more importantly, imparts a ceaseless, unsettled energy that refuses to lock the past into a static, immoveable space. Such a rendering of language speaks to the agitations of the unburied, infinitely restless below the surface, and a desire to 'ex-aqua', to extract or exhume the murdered from their 'liquid graves' (Philip: 202). There is no gravitational centre in which to rest, as Philip insists on 'discomfort and disturbance' (198), a troubling experience of consumption in which readers are implicated in the barbaric repressions of an untold history. Within such a context, the imperative to know becomes a shared responsibility, as does the need to summon the voices lost to the official ledgers of the archival record: 'will they / how / do they the bones / say what / cannot be give / voice to / a tale one / tale their tale / how bone be / come sand be' (127).

By destabilising the authority of the archive through a practice akin to evisceration, Philip challenges both singularity and linearity, honouring the in-between to emphasise the continuous nature of the past. According to Kaufman, historical poetry can 'hold empathy' by recording the history 'multidirectionally: collapsing time, placing images and voices side by side' (2021b: 26). It is a model that requires simultaneity, produced by Philip's chaotic polyvocalism, for example, in which the fractured expressions of speakers break through an authorised text to reveal other experiences and realities. In 'Ebora', the strategy is intensified, bordering on indecipherable, to heighten the noise of the non-narrative rupture and realise the desire to 'sn / ap the sp / ine of tim / e' (Philip: 141). Fehskens suggests that the crowded words and phrases, now in diminishing grey, threaten to disappear from a space previously 'afforded to so many voices', the density of the poetry negating 'language's symbolic powers of communication' (421–22) as it literally fades from the page.

Yet crowding is also an insistence on occupation, on taking up room, rushing in from the margins to attach to the central or dominant source. It is a means through which to prove relationality and plurality, for example, presenting alternative versions of historical 'truth' that official narratives disguise by pressing or forcing in from the outsides: 'every word or word cluster is seeking a space directly above within which to fit itself and in doing so falls into relation with others either above, below, or laterally' (Philip: 203). The disappearing text is also, however, a return to ideas about the disturbance of borderlines, a play upon notions of here and not-here, an evocation of ghostliness that demarcates the hauntological untelling. These half-presences produce 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. Its repetitions, of 'truth', 'fall', 'slave', and 'dead', for instance, puncture and trouble the poem, and depict less a vanishing than an inhabitation, collapsing into the paper like bones settling into the seafloor. On the final page of 'Ebora', the densely layered lines thus threaten cohesion, the archival document swarmed by memory and loss as the spectres of the massacred refuse to leave, or to 'cut the cord of this story' (Philip: 182).

Ghosting the Archives: conclusion

In 'Ferrum', the narrator poet sings of the 'tale / that can / not be / told in this / tale the *tao* / the way of / the dead' (127). Through subversive, violent unravellings which splinter and fracture language to construct new ways of contemplating the past, Philip offers a practice of untelling, a 'mutilation' of official discourses that might expose the absences of the archives. While silences define the unspoken, it is within the in-between that alternative voices might be conjured or recovered, challenging the invisibility of the dead and the conditions of their disappearance. Such a strategy decomposes an official text, *Gregson v. Gilbert*, to undermine the languages of law and empire, and to recompose the narratives of the lost, an archival counter-reading that attends to what the words do not say. Goldgaber notes that 'reading documents "against the grain", *reversing* the analytic gaze so as to focus not on the present, manifest elements but on the white space, the margins, and the spacing may lead to historiographic breakthroughs' (211). It is a means, perhaps, of rescue, in which the part comes to reanimate the whole via a series of complex poetic manoeuvrers. Linda Anderson et al observe, for example, how 'fragments necessarily tell of a totality, of all this missing' (2019: 21), an idea echoed by Philip, who, 'haunted by generations of skulls and spirits', writes of the beauty of the partial: 'the fragment appears more precious, more beautiful than the whole, if only for its brokenness. Perhaps, the fragment allows for the imagination to complete its missing aspects' (201–2). Yet in seeking to resist the politics of archival exclusion, and to localise the dead, *Zong!* also suggests, as Goldgaber argues, that the 'archive is—in some unheard of sense—complete and intact. The whole (of the past) will be *diffractively* … present in the part or extent fragment. The *linguistic* archive is constitutively heterogenous—and in(def)finitely dense—always containing more than itself' (213). In these terms, only the archival text can do the (un)telling, to translate, as it were, itself:

> I want poetry to disassemble the ordered, to create disorder and mayhem so as to release the story that cannot be told, but which, through non-telling, will tell itself … the story must tell itself, even if it is a partial story; it must be allowed to be and not be. The half-tellings and un-tellings. (Philip: 199)

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2 POEMS

Jon Wesick

INVASIVE SPECIES CRACKERS

Jon Wesick

After arriving in a freighter's ballast, they crowd ginger snaps and animal crackers off grocery store shelves. Burmese python cookies drop from tree limbs onto elfin bakers and swallow them whole. Killer bees send the cost of honey through the ozone layer. High-fructose corn syrup could substitute if kudzu didn't demand protection money because it would be a shame if Iowa caught fire.

On opening the box, an Asian carp's slap to the face leaves the consumer too stunned to capture the fugitive cookie before it high dives off the balcony into the storm sewer to share its mutant DNA with goldfish crackers and abandoned pet alligators.

Zebra mussels clog the water filter. Sea lampreys suck the life out of oranges and kiwis in the fruit bowl. Lionfish prowl the pantry. Eating! Eating! Consuming all-purpose flour, kosher salt, chocolate bars, pasta, baking powder, and anything not protected by steel.

NEOPLASM

Jon Wesick

My tumor recited poetry
at open mics from Britain to Australia.
Its tongue fluid as quicksilver
it would shout for emphasis
or draw the audience in with a whisper.
Although benign,
the MRI showed it eyeing an AR-15.
'It's close to your facial nerves,' the surgeon
said, 'but we'd better cut it out.'
On its last feature, my tumor used the microphone
once held by Carolyn Forché, Martin Espada, and Naomi Shihab Nye.

Now, my tumor sits in a test tube
and my mouth is full of glaciers.
Numbed lips struggle to wrap around words
while somewhere in a hospital basement
after all the centrifuges have gone still
a clump of mutant cells
sings

About the author

Jon Wesick is a regional editor of the *San Diego Poetry Annual*. He's published hundreds of poems and stories in journals such as the *Atlanta Review*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *New Verse News*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Pearl*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Slipstream*, *Space and Time*, and *Tales of the Talisman*. The editors of *Knot Magazine* nominated his stories 'The Visitor' and 'A Story for the Rest of Us' for Pushcart Prizes. His poem, 'Meditation Instruction' won the Editor's Choice Award in the 2016 Spirit First Contest. Another poem 'Bread and Circuses' won second place in the 2007 African American Writers and Artists Contest. 'Richard Feynman's Commute' shared third place in the 2017 Rhysling Award's short poem category. Jon is the author of the poetry collections *Words of Power*, *Dances of Freedom* and *A Foreigner Wherever I Go*, as well as several novels and short story collections. His most recent novel is *The Prague Deception*. http://jonwesick.com

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3 POEMS

Davis Adès

COBBER'S MUSINGS

David Adès

By Cobber 'Stumpy' Malley

I have never known how to fit
inside my life that isn't really mine:

what kind of life can fictions have
but fragments of figments?

It surprises me, each time I am called,
each time I emerge, like something

coming out of fog and disappearing
back into it: there is far too much

sleep between waking, and yet,
when I am given words to speak,

I feel the stirring of a voice
and something underneath,

a susurration, a murmur,
as if I might be wind,

a light breeze upon the world,
and who of us is more than that?

BEYOND MEASURE

David Adès

A long story, a history, almost stopped with me,
arrested for years so that an end became visible,
looming into view like a tsunami rising,

an end to be averted, an end I was alerted to
and alerted to, as if I could not see it myself,
a burden placed upon my shoulders made

of wish and wreath, made of generations.
I said *this is not my burden* and refused it.
The story is where the story goes.

Only a fraction is what I make,
and history too, not one, but multiple,
bifurcating, unpredictable, the lives within it

busy inside a maze of stories they never leave,
stories making themselves moment by moment,
intersecting, rearranging, transforming.

A story carried off a burden that wasn't mine.
A history made itself other and continued:
every gain and every loss beyond measure.

IMAGINARIUM

David Adès

In this place, green shoots abound,

tendrils of kindness spread from the fingers
of each of my children to hold the others

in a loving embrace, all harm has been

undone, Adam and Eve are still in the garden,
the apple untouched, war and politics

have been uninvented, the sky is full of light

and blue, we are the best beings we can be,
there is no existential threat, those whose

passing made the world poorer return

to make the world richer, and we all,
radiant, celestial, travel the endless roads

of our love, know the full extent of it,

the transcendent nature of it, as we float
in the cosmos, wanting for nothing.

About the author

David Adès is the author of *Mapping the World*, *Afloat in Light* and the chapbook *Only the Questions Are Eternal*. David won the Wirra Wirra Vineyards Short Story Prize 2005 and the University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize 2014. *Mapping the World* was commended for the FAW Anne Elder Award 2008. His poems have been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize and shortlisted for several other prizes in Australia, the US and Israel. He is Convenor of the Poets' Corner monthly poetry reading and now podcast series produced by WestWords: see https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLb8bHCZBRMBjlWlPDeaSanZ3qAZcuVW7N.

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REIMAGINING THE ARCHIVE

Where did women's poetry go in Ireland?

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Abstract

When exploring the relationship between her Irish ancestry and her creativity, Roxanne learned that women's poetry in Ireland was largely obliterated from the literary canon and missing from the archives. Early Irish poetry was often anonymous, and scholars presumed this indicated male authorship even when written with a female persona. However, while women's poetry may have, as Mary N Harris says, gone 'unnoticed and unpublished', the lack of archival evidence does not indicate that women were not composing poetry and an increasing body of academic research supports this argument. The mythological collection makes significant references to female poets, and oral poetry such as the lullaby and the lament commonly went unrecorded. Irish poets, including Eavan Boland and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, demonstrate that contemporary poetry can bridge the gap where female poets were actively written out of history to a new understanding of the importance of their contribution.

REIMAGINING THE ARCHIVE: WHERE DID WOMEN'S POETRY GO IN IRELAND?

Roxanne Bodsworth

Within the Irish medieval and folk traditions, the talent for poetry was widely viewed as a hereditary gift, something passed down through the family. The gift alone was not enough; it was followed by training not only in poetic techniques but also in folklore, genealogy, place-lore, mythology and legalities (Breatnach 1981: 51). It was a diverse and richly layered tradition that rendered the poet central to Irish society, next in line only to the king (Johnston 2013: 135–36). The poet was valued because their highly-crafted words were directed towards the needs of the community, and this recognition of the importance of poetry has continued through the centuries to Modern Irish literature (Denvir 1988: 41–42, 54). This was the tradition in which I hoped to locate my own poetry, writing as an Irish descendant in a diasporic world, looking for both inspiration and validity. What I found instead was a tradition that actively excluded the female poet. Yet, while women's poetry seems to be missing from the historical archives, further examination reveals clues that the contribution of women poets was not only present but significant.

Irish society was hierarchical and legalistic, with laws that regulated all aspects of social interaction. The poet was part of this system and worked not to undermine the social structure but to support it, which did not necessarily mean supporting the king if he was in breach of his responsibilities. Praise poetry could elevate and support those in power; satire could physically destroy them. Women were kept outside the power structures because it was considered that they could bring the social order undone. Eavan Boland wrote in 'Outside History' of a need to locate herself 'in a powerful literary tradition in which until then, or so it seemed to me, I had been an element of design rather than an agent of change' (1990: 34). In examining women's poetry within the framework of an Irish tradition, I realised that I needed to do the same if I was to write poetry that did not just reinforce iconic female representations that perpetuated romantic and disempowering ideals, but which focused upon the nuances and depths of female experience as it was reflected in historical narrative, imaginative storytelling and, most importantly for me, in poetry.

That would mean firstly understanding the iconic portrayal, not just for how such representations have either benefited or deprived women, but also for how they simultaneously inspire me with their romantic appeal and repel me with their unreasonable expectations. There is the initial romantic response, the nostalgic subjectivity, and then there is the realisation of how these images are used to perpetuate injustices, uphold impossible ideals, wrap women in age-old strictures while working to ensnare them with longing for a romanticised world. There is both beauty and terror in these images and ideals, and my poetry does not provide the answers but does seek to undermine the power of these tropes by asking questions and offering alternative representations. If I can do this much, then I can claim to locate myself within this literary tradition that is not just an Irish one but is also a women's tradition.

To understand the women's tradition, I undertook a historical survey of women's poetry in Ireland and found it hidden beneath layers of culture that obscure any sense of reality. Early Irish poetry was often anonymous, and it was commonly presumed that this anonymity indicated male authorship even if the poem conveyed a female persona (Clancy 1966: 44). Additionally,

there was oral poetry that had a performance value for the community but went unrecorded or was written but faded away on the page. Irish women's poetry was largely hidden, and unacknowledged, and further excavation is required.

I start with an intuitive belief that women in Ireland have composed poetry, have been poets, from early times continuously through to the modern era, whether in oral or written forms. Their involvement in this creative art form may have ebbed and waned at different periods but it never disappeared altogether despite attempts to subdue their influence. It is also true that a large part of their contribution to the literary landscape has, as Mary N Harris says, gone 'unnoticed and unpublished' (1995: 34). That is not the same as saying it was not present. A great deal of women's poetry, and indeed of all Irish poetry, was oral in nature and publication a secondary consideration, so the lack of textual evidence does not indicate that women were not composing poetry.

When there are lacunae in the archives, cultural artefacts such as stories, artwork, poetry can provide clues as to what is missing. Within the mythological and historical tales written in the medieval period from the sixth to the fourteenth centuries, there is clear recognition of women as poets and of their poetic skill. Nevertheless, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill issues a clear warning against such assumptions:

> We have to make a very important distinction between (a) a woman poet producing a text, (b) a woman character described in a text written by a man and (c) a woman described as a poet in a text written by a man. (1992: 21)

It is true that the women characters in the mythological tales were described by male authors, yet there is no sense in these descriptions that the character of the female poet is aberrant or even unusual. They are an accepted part of the kaleidoscope of the story's cultural tapestry, reflective of the Irish socio-cultural landscape of the privileged and literate classes. Perhaps these representations can be taken at face value.

One such representation occurs in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*The Cattle Raid of Cooley*), the heroic epic of Ulster, compiled in the twelfth century but with linguistic indications that the story existed much earlier. Fedelm is introduced as a female poet who has been 'learning verse and vision in Alba' and who possesses the *imbas forasnai*, the Light of Foreknowledge. Her prophecy, however, is disbelieved and Queen Medb continues her warpath despite Fedelm's warnings of dire consequences (Kinsella 2002: 60–1). Another appears in the twelfth century *Accallam na Senórach* (*Tales of the Elders of Ireland*), where Cáel woos Créde with a poem written by his foster-mother, Muirenn. When he is subsequently killed in battle, Créde constructs a lament before herself dying of sorrow (Roe 2008: 25–38).

Women also use the construction of verse in significant ways in other tales, such as in the tenth century Fingal Rónáin (The Kin-Slaying of Rónán), where the daughter of Echaid entraps Rónán by encouraging him to complete her half-quatrain, a game they have played on many evenings, and she also later responds to Rónán's father with a quatrain after he has slaughtered her family (Ó Cathasaigh 2014: 376–98). In the eighth century *Tochmarc Becfhola* (*The Wooing of Becfhola*), Becfhola uses obscure quatrains to hint at her clandestine activities (Findon 2013: 58). While the poetry of women in these mythological tales is the result of male authors creating poetic women and so cannot be considered evidentiary of the existence of women poets, it does seem to indicate an acceptability of the nature of poetry as integrated into women's lives.

Separate to mythology and to the formal education of the poet, the *filí*, poetry had a part to play in women's everyday lives in all classes of society. As Heather Larson says:

> They mourned the dead (and during the mourning they were not supposed to sleep), they practiced magic and folk-religion (which included producing magical sleep), and, of course, they put their children to sleep. Each of these three roles—mourning, enchanting, and soothing—had a specific kind of verse attached to it: the lament, the charm or spell, and the lullaby. (1988: 136)

These were traditionally women's areas that not only fulfilled their social function but allowed for their creative expression, both personally and on behalf of the community.

Angela Bourke says that 'in many parts of the world, death is as much women's responsibility as birth is' (1993: 160). This encompasses not just the preparation of the body and the care for other mourners, both practically and emotionally, but it is also the lamenting of the dead. In Ireland, this was called *caoineadh*, from which comes the term, 'keening'. It was loud, it was public, and it was a practised art form with traditional verbal formulas that honoured the dead, enabled the grieving process, and provided a memorable poem that could be 'quoted for generations' (Bourke 1993: 160).

That these poetic constructions were part of women's lives is again reinforced by the mythological tales. In *Longes Mac N-Uislenn* (*The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu*), from the eighth or ninth century, Derdriu delivers a moving *caoineadh*, not just for her lost lover, Naoise, but for the three brothers (Hull 1949: 67–8). In the twelfth century *Codail Beagán, Beagán Beag* (*Lullaby of Adventurous Love*), Gráinne sings a protective lullaby over the sleeping Diarmaid (Ní Dhonnchadha 2002b: 225–26). This was poetry specifically attached to women's roles and each one had its own cadence and formulation.

However, such compositions were rarely written down; perhaps, as suggested by Patricia Lysaght, because they served a functional and performative purpose rather than a literary one (1997: 79). The lament for the dead had been noted by visitors to Ireland since the twelfth century though they were not collected and published until the nineteenth (Lysaght 1997: 65). The most famous of them is *Caoineadh Airt Uf Laoghaire* (*The Lament for Art O'Leary*), composed by Eibhlin Ní Chonaill when her husband, Art, was shot dead in 1773. Parts of her lament were remembered and recited in Irish-speaking areas until eventually it was written down during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ní Dhomhnaill writes that the two most complete transcripts were taken, with an interval of some 70 years between them, from a West Cork woman by the name of Norry Singleton (Ní Dhomhnaill 1992: 23).

The lament, the charm, the lullaby, all had their particular forms and cadences. Maire-Louise Coolahan says that the metrical form of *caoineadh* was based on accentual sounds that reflected the rhythms of speech rather than syllabic schemes, with a rhyme maintained by the final stressed vowel of each line (2018: 20). It had resonances of *rosc*, an archaic form of Irish poetry, and was perhaps as ancient an art form (Lysaght 1997: 71). Additional to the practiced composition of the *caoineadh*, there was also an intense emotionalism and physicality (Eiblin Ní Chonaill drinks the blood from her dead husband's corpse) that easily fits into what Cixous termed *écriture féminine* (Cixous 1976) as a style of writing expressive of women's experience. Gerard Murphy described it as having a 'wild metre and unrestrained style … drawing on a stream of oral tradition proper to their sex and wholly neglected by the learned custodians of the manuscript tradition' (1939: 48). This was poetry that emerged from women's experience

and, as a poet drawing inspiration from research into Irish traditions, I hoped to convey this same intensity of emotion and physicality through poetic language. For example, I wrote this poem for Boann, a mythological queen, whose drowning formed the river Boyne:

floods of druidic anger
tear an arm from its socket
rip a leg from her hip
pummel an eye from its orbit

battered bleeding
rivers of anger bear her to the sea
cast out upon the waves
lifeless

floods recede a river remains
her limbs her blood her sight
flows around the mounds
heals the wound

However, Thomas Owen Clancy warns against assuming 'that women will necessarily write a certain way, that language is gender specific' (1996: 50). It might be expected that women would mostly write of 'love-poems and laments' but women were also accomplished and trained poets within the formalistic Irish tradition and Clancy asserts that 'women poets clearly did exist in early medieval Ireland' (1996: 50). There is a story from *Sanas Cormaic* (*Cormac's Glossary*), written around c. 900, about the daughter of úa Dulsaine who had been on a circuit of poetry and disappeared after a tragedy in which her companions were killed. She is found gathering bladderwrack on the Isle of Man and, after uttering half-quatrains which are then completed by a strange young man, she is restored to her sanity, able to rejoin society and resume her place as a poet (Ní Dhonnchadh 2004). Additionally, there are women poets named in a prose introduction to the poem *Aithbe Damsa*, also entitled *The Lament of the Caillech Bérre*, which was written around c. 900. The preface describes the speaker of the poem as a *caillech* named Digde, from the people of Corco Duibne (Clancy 1996: 46). *Caillech* is literally translated as 'veiled woman' (eDIL s.v. caillech). The preface names three other *caillich* from the Corco Duibne, two of whom are known to have been poets: Líadain and Úallach (Clancy 1996: 46).

Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha writes that the female authorship of this poem was, until more recently, 'ignored or disbelieved' (Ní Dhonnchadha 2002a: 111). James Carney explained that when Irish bardic poets wrote praise poetry, they would sometimes assume the feminine role of 'king-lover' and that this poem could be one of the finest examples of that genre. He did, however, also allow that the poem could be taken 'at its face value, that is, as having been written by a woman' (Carney 1967: xxv).

Ní Dhonnchadha believes that the specificity of the details provided in the preface material makes for a strong case that *Aithbe Damsa* was composed by Digde, not just because it positions Digde as the author, but because it mentions the other female poets (Ní Dhonnchadha 2002a: 111–15). While only a single quatrain of Líadan's survives, the love story between Líadan and Cuirither is told in the tenth century *Comrac Líadaine Ocus Chuirithir* (*The Union of Líadan and Cuirither*) where the two poets forego the consummation of their love because of their devotion to God (Ní Dhonnchadha 2002c: 115–18). The other woman named in the preface

to the Aithbe Damsa is Úallach, daughter of Miumnechán. In her death-notice in the Annals of Innisfallen under the year 934 she is described as *banfhile Herend*, 'Ireland's woman-poet' (Ní Dhonnchadha 2002a: 111). While no extant poems are attributed to Úallach, Clancy says that it is not possible to know if any of the anonymous poems from that period were written by her (1996: 46).

Yet when we move into the period of Irish history defined by the Anglo-Norman ascendancy, beginning in the twelfth century, there is a marked change in the Irish cultural landscape and an apparent dearth of women's writing. The great monastic centres had been plundered by the Anglo-Norman incursions and church reform created 'a wedge between Latin and native learning'. Poets adapted by moving to a more secular and conservative basis (Ní Dhonnchadha 2002d: 294).

Thomas Clancy says that there was a general assumption that all poems, unless proven otherwise, were written by men:

> This is based partially on the male-exclusive attitudes of the bardic establishment, and partially on the absence, by and large, of women poets from the period during which our knowledge of poets and poetry becomes more detailed: the classical Irish period, from c. 1200–1600. (1996: 44)

Yet, although the poetic contribution of women seems to have diminished during this time, they did find other ways to be actively engaged in literary culture, especially through patronage of the Arts. Ní Dhonnchadha says that, during this time, women were usually the subjects rather than the authors of texts (Ní Dhonnchadha 2002d: 293). In TF O'Rahilly's collection of courtly love poetry from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *Dánta Grádha*, number 54 in the collection is attributed to Isibeul Ni Mhic Cailin and a small number of others are either ascribed to or written as though by women (1925). Despite this attribution, Ní Dhonnchadha points out that O'Rahilly still speaks of the poetry as exclusively male (Ní Dhonnchadha 1994: 113).

The bardic schools became unsustainable in the seventeenth century under English rule but there were collections of non-professional verse maintained in *duanairí*, family poem-books and anthologies, which were often maintained by women of the family (Coolahan 2018: 20). These included genealogies, praise poems, and elegies, some of which may have been written by women. A pencil note on manuscript 23 B19 in the Royal Irish Academy claims that the poem *Coilte glasa na Triucha* was composed by Maire Nic Aliondain using the name of her brother, Patrick. For M. N. Harris, and others like myself, this raises the question of how many other poems may have been written by women but ascribed to men (1995: 35).

At some point in time, it had become unacceptable to be a female poet in Ireland. Marie-Louise Coolahan generously allows that the professional *filí*:

> … trained for years in bardic schools, becoming adept in the forms and rules of literary composition—history and genealogy as well as poetry—which were precise and demanding in their codification of metres and rhyme schemes. They were, perhaps understandably, inhospitable to lower-class, untrained versifiers who composed *amhráin* (popular songs). (2018: 19)

This latter category would have included those women who were part of the somewhat carnivalesque retinue that accompanied a poet. Though these women were socially unacceptable, sometimes referred to as 'walking women', they were also afforded a level of protection as the

companions of poets (Ní Dhonnchadha 2013: 34). They may also have been from the poorly regarded classes of 'bards … satirists, jesters, purveyors of doggerel, and other entertainers' which Chapman says included female performance (Chapman 2007: 157). While female poets may have been excluded from the formal training of *filí*, and were regarded with some disdain, it is evident that they still found ways to make their creative contribution. It is inspiring that women, historically and in a modern world, find ways to express their creativity even when it is actively opposed by social institutions (Radner 1993: viii).

Perversely, Coolahan demonstrates that the antipathy of *filí* towards such performers 'has left us some tantalizing glimpses of female authorship' (Coolahan 2018: 19). In the fourteenth century, Giolla na Naomh Ó hUiginn publicly disparaged '*abhrán ban agus bhachlach*', 'the song of women and churls', while the sixteenth-century *filí* Feidhlim Mac Dhughghaill claimed to '*fuath liom cliar ara mbí bean*', to 'hate a poet-band that includes a woman' (Coolahan 2018: 19). Coolahan tells us that we know of only one Irish woman, Brighid Fitzgerald (c. 1589–1682), who composed poetry in *óglachas*, the amateur syllabic verse regarded as a lesser form of the elite poetry of the *filí* (Coolahan 2010: 39). It seems to me that if there was one, there could have been more. If I am to position myself within the Irish women's tradition, I need to believe there was one. The more I looked into this history, the more I realised there were parallels between uncovering the stories of the women in the mythology and uncovering the existence of female poets within Irish literary history. It was about acknowledging the women, seeing them, hearing them, giving them a voice and a presence.

And they were there. Miriam Uí Dhonnabháin describes a network of eighteenth century Munster poets who met regularly to share their poems and disseminated these to a wider network by sending a messenger who had memorised their compositions. One such messenger was a woman called Anna Priar who dressed in men's clothes so was referred to as 'Seón (John)' or as 'Seón-Eana (John-Anna)' (Uí Dhonnabháin 2014: 98–9). Clíona Ó Gallchoir writes of another circle of Irish-language scholars and writers active in Dublin which fostered two female poets, Úna Ní Bhroin and Máire Ní Reachtagáin. Ní Reachtagáin's poem on the death of her brother 'adapts the oral genre of *caoineadh* into a reflective, literary form' (Ó Gallchoir 2018: 39). With the example of the praise poems from many male poets for Máire Ní Churalaoich on her death in 1761, Ó Gallchoir demonstrates that, as Ireland moved out of the medieval period, women were being recognised as poets. This includes Máire Ní Churalaoich who was known as *Sáppho na Mumhan*, 'the Sappho of Munster', although none of her poems have survived (Ó Gallchoir 2018: 38).

Despite their exclusion from the schools of the *filí* in the classical Irish period, these later examples would all seem to indicate an increasingly inclusive positioning for female poets. Yet, these women were still the exception rather than the rule. Women have always, in Ireland as elsewhere, needed to push back against the strictures of domesticity and expected social roles, and in Ireland there was an antipathy to female poets associated with iconic representations of the feminine incompatible with a woman who did not fit the prescribed image.

The sovereignty goddess, who took the shape of an ugly crone who became young and beautiful when united with the rightful king, was a potent symbol for the colonised nation of Ireland (Mills 1995: 73). It was an image that easily became politicised, particularly by the aisling poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the *aisling* being a type of dream-vision (Midzunoe 1987: 6). Yeats also drew on this tradition when he gave the title 'The Song of Wandering Aengus' to his poem where a man gives up everything to search for a shape-shifting woman who has

appeared to him as a vision, echoing the eighth century story of *Aislinge Óengusso* and also connecting the poem to Fenian literature (O'Connor 2006: 73–4). With the rise of nationalism, the image of the goddess of the land, or the Irish mother, or the maiden in need of rescue, provided inspiration not just for poets but for rebellions.

This iconic portrayal was also adopted by women poets in Ireland who supported the nationalist political agenda. Ellen Dempsey, Mary Kelly and Jane Elgee published their ballads and lyrics in the *Nation* and other journals in 1845 using the pseudonyms of Mary, Eva and Speranza, but Antoinette Quinn asserts that 'their use of a female signature was to prove instrumental in asserting women's right to participate in the nationalist movement' (Quinn 2002: 897). It was also asserting their right to express themselves in poetry and there were limited opportunities for this. While my political agenda may be different to these pioneers, it is still about asserting the right of women to express themselves, be heard, and fully participate in the history-making movements of the time.

There was a predictable tension between feminism and nationalism because more specifically feminist struggles were underway elsewhere, such as the battle for suffrage and access to education. Women in Ireland were not united in their political agendas and the focus on nationalism could be at the expense of the struggle for women's rights. Lia Mills argues that the poetry 'written by the turn of the century nationalist women was framed in and by a political agenda and stayed within the canon of imagery allowed by the leaders of the movement' (1995: 73). This meant that while the political poetry of women was welcomed, they were also restricted to that subject matter and the parameters of that genre of poetry. Women were caught up in male-dominated ideologies of what nation and women were supposed to be and this permeated Irish society into modern times. It is what Eavan Boland referred to as a 'rhetoric of imagery which alienated me: a fusion of the national and the feminine which seemed to simplify both' (1990: 32).

The idealisation of women extended beyond the representation of sovereignty—she who empowered the king but was never ruler herself—to the Catholic veneration of Mary as the virgin mother to whom all other women should aspire, if not in their virginity then in their maternal embodiment (Bacik 2007: 101). The cult of Mary had been on what Ní Dhonnchadha described as 'a rising tide' across the Catholic world since about c. 200 and had been a large part of the Irish landscape since Christianity was first introduced (Ní Dhonnchadha 2002e: 47). This idealisation of the role of women was even enshrined in the 1937 Constitution, which states in Article 40.1 'by her life within the home, a woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved' (O'Callaghan 2002: 131). All of this was about women inspiring and empowering men.

Such an ideology did not make room for individualist expression, and the right of a woman to write poetry outside the limitations of a male-determined agenda has been an ongoing battle. Patrick Kavanagh argued in 1967 that 'the body with its feelings, its instincts, provides women with a source of wisdom, but they lack the analytic detachment to exploit it in literature. The great writer is the man who has in him some of this feminine capacity for perceiving with the body' (Kavanagh 1973: 27). Others maintained that the woman's contribution to poetry was to serve as the muse, the one who inspired the male poet in much the same way as the sovereignty figure empowered the rightful king. This attitude culminates in '*Banfhile*'/ 'Woman-poet' written by Irish language poet Seán Ó Ríordáin and first read by him publicly in 1971, where he insisted

that '*Ní file ach filíocht an bhean*', 'a woman's not a poet but a poem' and that to be otherwise was a threat not just to literature but to the definition of woman (Ó Ríordáin 2014: xxv).

In 1989, Boland published *Outside History*, writing a very personal account of the difficulty of being a female poet in a male-dominated nationalist cultural landscape (1990: 32–8). It stimulated a cross-Atlantic dialogue with a response by American poet, Anne Stevenson, who challenged Boland's negative portrayal of the place of women in Ireland and asked why Boland's imagination was not excited by the 'long healthy chain of foremothers' that were part of her heritage as an Irish woman poet (1992: 34). Ní Dhomhnaill's response 'What Foremothers?' passionately encapsulates the history of an Ireland that effectively obliterated a women's tradition of poetry from the literary canon (1992). Everything she says in her essay rings of heartfelt truth and is backed up by clear examples of how women poets in Ireland have been ignored, denigrated, and disempowered.

However, I would contend that attempts to obliterate and silence the women poets of Ireland have always failed. Female poets continued operating as an aberrant force in the culture and are now no longer invisible. Boland confirms that 'over a relatively short time, certainly no more than a generation or so, women have moved from being the subjects and objects of Irish poems to being the authors of them. It is a momentous transit. It is also a disruptive one' (Boland 1990: 32). However, if, as Ní Dhonnchadha writes, women were the subject more than the object as far back as the twelfth century (Ní Dhonnchadha 2002d: 293), it takes more than a generation to reclaim that space and change comes slowly.

When the three volumes of *The Field Day of Irish Writing*, purportedly covering the canon of Irish literature but including only a few women, was published in 1991, the outcry that followed resulted in the sizeable collation of Volumes IV and V on women's writing and contribution to Irish literature (Bourke et al 2002: xxxii–xxxvi). However, a decade later, the 2017 Cambridge *Companion to Irish Poets* still only included four women among the 31 poets (Sampson 2018: 30–3). Irish women's writing is still being excluded from the archives, regarded as unimportant. It is a pervasive cultural attitude that has effectively hidden women's writing from public view, and against which women writers continue to struggle (Hannon 1990: 57–65).

This attitude is answered by women like Eithne Strong who stridently breaks free with her verse novel *Flesh*, a powerful indictment upon the burdens of guilt and oppressive duty which Catholicism placed upon Irish women (1993). Despite the opposition, women have made their presence felt and have changed the literary landscape of Ireland, and this has often been done by challenging the idealisation of women and the expectations placed upon them. I hope my poems will not only issue this same challenge but do it with something of the power and conviction of Irish poets such as Strong.

Other poets such as Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Eavan Boland have written the experience of women—of women in the home, women on the street, women in the workplace—into the narrative of Irish history (Clutterbuck 2011: 97–118). Irish language poets like Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Mhaire an mac tSaoi and Biddy Jenkinson have rejected the language of the coloniser and instead have found their liberation in the native language and shown that it fits equally well in the present as in the past. That people like me with only a passable knowledge of the Irish language can only read them in translation puts us in our place as the outsiders (Harris 199: 26–40). Then there is Medbh McGuckian's poetry that is firmly and quite bluntly centred in the home and the female bodily experience rather than the nation (Schrage-Früh 2005).

So, I will claim all these women, the contemporary Irish women poets, the dedicated nationalists and revivalists, the folklorists and collectors, the unrecorded women poets (and the recorded) of medieval Ireland, the keeners, the spell-makers and the crooners, all of them I will claim as my forebears. And in writing poems located in a mythological past, I hope to bridge the great gap where female poets were written out of history and denied their creative inheritance. Boland spoke about what it was like to be in the shadow of WB Yeats and how this made it hard for the poets that followed him (Reizbaum 1989: 37). I write of being in the light of these women and of doing my part in creatively changing absence into presence.

That process begins with asserting their presence instead of assuming their absence. The presumption that an anonymous poem written in a female voice, or ascribed to a female voice, was actually a male is a fallacy. This is attested by the inclusion of female poets in mythological and historical texts from the eighth to fourteenth centuries, and evidentiary material for the existence of the three female poets described in the preface to *Aithbe Damsa—The Lament of the Caillech Bérre*. *Duanairí*, the family poem-books, were maintained by women and include notations of female authorship. While the content of laments and lullabies were not recorded, observers of Irish culture from the twelfth century onwards noted the performance of these poetic forms by women. Recorded antipathy towards women poets also indicates that there were female poets to be opposed.

Immersed in the study of the poetic tradition of women's poetry in Ireland, I hope their strengths permeate the poems I produce. TS Eliot says that it is not repetition of the way things have been done in the past that is important but rather the historical sense developed by the poet:

> A sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer more acutely conscious of his [her] place in time, of his [her] own contemporaneity. (Eliot 1982: 37)

My poems, and those of other contemporary women poets writing from their heritage, are creations for a modern diasporic world written as a creative response to the old and with full appreciation of the richness of the traditions that have gone before. Though the arbiters of Irish literary traditions may have excluded women's poetry from the canon, we will, as banfhilí have done through all the ages of Irish history, continue creating poetry and making our voices heard in whatever form we can.

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About the author

Roxanne Bodsworth is a poet, celebrant and farmer from Bpangerang country, Victoria, who achieved her PhD at Victoria University in 2021 with a feminist reconstruction of Irish mythology. She received a commendation in the 2022 Melbourne Poets' Union Prize and her poetry has been published in several journals under the pen-name of 'Therese', including *The Incompleteness Book II*, *Lockdown Poetry* and *Poetrix*. Her second verse novel, *Unforgiven*, was released in February this year

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ARCHIVES AS 'THIN PLACES'

Resurrecting ghosts of Australia's earliest refugees through poetics of resistance

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Abstract

Drawing on the Irish notion of a 'thin place' (where the veil between us and the spirit world is so thin that we can sense those on the other side), this paper outlines an approach to archival research and creative practice which seeks to reawaken and give voice to the ghosts of some of Australia's earliest refugees. This work uncovers new connections between the Great Irish Famine, a humanitarian crisis which halved Ireland's population and the cyclical incarceration and abuse of young women in New South Wales in the 1860s and 1870s—to highlight a small but significant, yet largely unwritten, chapter in Irish-Australian history. Employing poetics of resistance incorporating elements of these young women's outlawed native Irish language and culture, this work seeks to decolonise their memories and restore voice to those who suffered the brutal consequences of colonisation in both their native and adopted countries.

ARCHIVES AS 'THIN PLACES': RESURRECTING GHOSTS OF AUSTRALIA'S EARLIEST REFUGEES THROUGH POETICS OF RESISTANCE

Anne Casey

Introduction

'There is a special brand of human misery so steeped in hopelessness that it leaves its mark in time and place'. I wrote these words for the *Irish Times* in 2017, describing:

> Crouched in front of me is … 13-year-old Bridget McElroy from Falcarragh in Donegal. Her tiny frame filthy from huddling on the damp dirt floor, she has been raped, starved and unmercifully beaten. She is riddled with venereal disease. (Casey 2017, *Irish Times*)

I wrote of how, in places like the isolation cell at Port Arthur prison in Tasmania, in the darkest corners of Dubbo Gaol and in this dank recess of the Newcastle Lock-up in New South Wales, 'the walls are buckled with the painful histories of Irish exiles'. Bridget McElroy was one of 193 young girls, including many children of Irish famine refugees, I had found in the archives of Newcastle Industrial School for Girls (1867–1871). My first brush with these ghosts of Australia's earliest refugees came following a research and writing commission for an international art exhibition in 2017 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the school's opening. These girls' stories have haunted me since. Their continued presence in my life prompted me to commence a PhD in 2020 to resurrect their lost stories through archival research and creative writing in an effort to highlight this largely unwritten chapter in Irish-Australian history.

There is a concept in Ireland, particularly along my native rural west coast, of 'thin places':

> A Thin place is a term used to describe a marginal, liminal realm, beyond everyday human experience and perception, where mortals could pass into the Otherworld more readily or make contact with those in the Otherworld more willingly. In ancient folklore, Thin places were considered to be physical locations where it is easy to cross between two or more worlds. (Healy 2016)

It may be that I have carried this cultural memory of 'thin places' with me, allowing it to saturate my experience of other places where I feel the deep presence of vividly lived history. Ciara Healy noted that in west Wales and in the west of Ireland, there is an inclination to experience place as a multiverse. This concept is not uncommon in ancient cultures—and is deeply entrenched in the world's oldest continuous living heritage, First Nations Australia. Ambelin Kwaymullina described it most poignantly in telling the story of 'The girl, the rockpool and the stars': 'The universe isn't out there. It is here. Whatever is above our heads is beneath our feet. Whatever is in the sky is in earth. And whatever is in earth is in us' (Kwaymullina 2005). In poetry, I have attempted to signify the intersection of this concept with my Celtic heritage along these lines:

> I am here and not here: my missing time
> measured in lost dollars living on unlent land
> whose true custodians understand
> we coexist in all time, this earth
> converging through us:

I live long ago and now, far away and here,
which are the same, simultaneous
in me; my people walk with me—all
of my lost and found here together

looking out at these trees, feet suspended
in pulsing layers of decaying moments,
a million green wings flapping in the buzzing
air, their outstretched limbs holding up
this blazing universe.

(Casey 'On Sunday', *Some Days The Bird*, 2022)

Kwaymullina explained it as: 'The whole is more than its parts, and the whole is in all its parts. This is the pattern that the Ancestors made. It is life, creation, spirit, and it exists in country'. Eric Weiner suggested 'thin places' are locations offering 'glimpses of the divine, or the transcendent, or … the Infinite Whatever'. He concluded that 'Maybe thin places offer glimpses not of heaven, but of earth as it really is unencumbered. Unmasked' (Weiner 2012). Northern Irish writer, Kerri Ní Dochartaigh observed that in these places, it is:

> as if the veil between worlds has become as thin as moth-wing. The lines that are normally drawn for and by us—between here and there, between now and then—seem as though they have been washed away, on some days. (Ní Dochartaigh 2021)

As I researched the girls of Newcastle Industrial School, I found myself immersed in their life stories. When I visited a place they had been—the preserved cells of Newcastle Lock-Up, Maitland Gaol, Hyde Park Barracks, the laneways of Sydney's Rocks district—I felt their breath at my neck. They began to visit me at night:

> I wake in the dark. Eliza is standing over me. 'Almost there', I tell her. She nods gravely and turns away. I realise she is holding something. It is the ragged sleeve of another girl. She is so much smaller than Eliza. With her other hand, this girl is clasping an untidy bundle of calico rags to her skeletal chest. A stab as I realise there is a baby swaddled inside. (Casey '*Scáth*: Falling upwards', 2022: n.p.)

These ghosts of children whose families had fled the Great Irish Famine (1845–1849) had drifted wraith-like from the curling pages I had found in NSW State Archives, documents that bore witness to the brutal truths of their existence. Stories long lost to the archives, now coming to life before my eyes. And so, I have come to think of the archives I visit—immigrant ship indents; Colonial Secretary correspondence; admissions records for gaols and industrial schools; chronicles of births, deaths, marriages; newspaper, court and police reports—as 'thin places' also. From each, is freed another scrap of lived experience from a ragged girl whose story I now carry with me along with all the others.

On a page, torn at the edges and bearing a brown stain, in the meticulous script of Dr Richard Harris, the Newcastle Industrial School's physician, with trembling hands and pounding chest, I found:

> Maryann, aged seven who had been 'living with thieves' prior to her arrest and six-year-old Emma who had been 'living with prostitutes', both in good health … both with the 'usual' 'signs of virginity'. Meanwhile Jane and Eliza, aged 15 and 16 had 'none'

> of the 'usual signs of virginity', Eliza having evidence of syphilis (twice underlined for stress). (Casey '*Scáth*: Falling upwards', 2022: n.p.)

And so, Maryann and Emma, and Jane and Eliza joined Bridget who had been arrested in a Newcastle brothel in 1870. Bridget had spent fourteen days alone in the dark on barely enough bread and water to survive as punishment for daring to rebel against conditions at the school. And then there was Eliza O'Brien, my first famine ghost (admittedly my favourite). Eliza had spilled out in a bloodied squall onto the dirt floor of a smoke-blackened, single-roomed stone cottage lodged between the Five Crossroads and St Patrick's Well on the sprawling estate of Thomas Spring Rice, First Lord Monteagle of Brandon in Shanagolden, County Limerick in 1851. She had arrived in the still-reverberating aftershock of the devastating famine to a family already 'blessed' with six other young mouths to feed. At just 18 months of age when her mother died on board ship to Australia, 'Eliza's fate was already sealed—she ended up on the streets by the age of 13. There followed a string of arrests and incarcerations—including her seizure in a brothel aged 15' (Casey 2020, *Irish Times*). Eliza and Bridget would lead me to many other 'Irish' girls in the Newcastle archives. As my research uncovered, more than half of the school's inmates were of Irish descent; two in seven of the inmates were from families who had fled Ireland in famine-affected years.

History of Irish Famine Immigration to Australia and New Findings from this Research

Although the deep devastation of the Great Irish Famine is widely attributed to the potato blight which destroyed the native population's staple food crop, its impact was profoundly exacerbated by political and economic factors resulting from British colonisation and rule in Ireland. The native Irish subsisted on small tracts of land rented at high rates from English and Anglo-Irish landowners (Fitzpatrick 1995). Immediately prior to the famine, the Commissioners of Poor Law Inquiry had reported that 2.3 million Irish were living on the brink of starvation (Great Britain, Commissioners of Inquiry 1845). Throughout the famine years, the British government had been slow and ineffective in providing adequate aid and had failed to intervene as food supplies continued to be shipped out of Ireland by colonists while millions of native Irish starved (Fitzpatrick 1997).

During the five years of the famine, 1.2 million people died of starvation and disease and one million people fled the country (Kennedy 2014). Driven by the famine's impacts, the population of Ireland halved between 1845 and 1900—from eight million to four million people, a human toll from which the country has never recovered (Ó Gráda 2007). Up to half a million people were evicted across Ireland during the famine years—many for failure to pay rent, though there is evidence that colonists used the famine crisis as an opportunity to clear large tracts of land of small tenant-holdings and convert them to more profitable unoccupied pastoral land (Mullin 1999).

Ultimately, emigration became a principal, though not always dependable, survival tactic (Fitzpatrick 1997). The families of Eliza O'Brien, Bridget McElroy and 53 other girls incarcerated at Newcastle had fled Ireland during or immediately after the famine. They came seeking refuge and hope in Australia. They found a new world where sentiment was greatly prejudiced against their kind (Noone and Malcolm 2020), poor, Irish Catholic immigrants, who—amongst other issues—were suspected of being Fenians and potential rebels (Fitzpatrick 1989).

Amongst the Irish famine refugee children, I found at Newcastle, is a cluster of 15 girls who were daughters of Earl Grey Orphans. Their mothers were among 4,100 Irish workhouse orphans, mostly aged between 14 and 19, who were shipped to Australia in 1849 and 1850, intended as domestic servants and labourers' wives. Siobhan O'Neill wrote of the reception they faced on arrival to the colony:

> Expectations must have been high for their new life in the New World but, instead, they met a climate of fear and suspicion towards the influx of Irish refugees. As a result, the girls were widely criticised in the press and often subjected to abuse in the streets, with reports of exploitation and even mistreatment by unprincipled employers. Criticisms ridiculed their appearance, aptitude, abilities and moral fibre.

The daughters of Irish famine immigrants who were incarcerated at Newcastle had been doubly, triply cursed by the same colonial system. Their families had been dispossessed of their lands in Ireland, shackled to poverty as tenants to the colonists on those same lands and opportunistically ousted again during the famine era, only to endure further hardships due to colonial policies in their immigrant country of 'refuge', Australia.

Many of the poorest newly arrived famine immigrants settled in Irish enclaves in the larger towns, where they sought the comfort and support of their compatriots. Areas such as the Rocks in Sydney soon filled with ragged children who, for survival, often became embroiled in petty crime. In 1854, the Superintendent of Police in Sydney determined there were around 300 destitute children on the streets of the city, two thirds of whom were 'in moral danger' (Crawford 2009). Driven by complaints from the more affluent settlers, the *Destitute Children Act* of 1866 gave the police special powers to arrest children in the streets who were deemed 'at risk' and send them to newly created industrial schools where they would be re-educated and redirected into apprenticeships. Newcastle Industrial School for Girls was one of these borstals, its young female inmates amongst the first children to be removed from their families under the new police powers.

In many cases, the girls who came to stay at Newcastle Industrial School had been arrested for vagrancy, prostitution and petty crime, and sentenced to a minimum of 12 months. Despite appeals from their families for their release, few received early acquittal and many endured involuntary apprenticeships as domestic help for lengthy periods afterwards. Life at the school was not necessarily better than life on the streets, and in some cases proved considerably worse (Ison 2012). Letters between the Newcastle School authorities and the Colonial Secretary contained in the NSW State Archives include accounts of girls being dragged by the hair, locked in solitary confinement on restricted bread and water rations, subjected to a 'virgin' test as noted earlier (a physical examination by the male doctor, a practice which later came under scrutiny at the school) and regularly verbally abused, humiliated and threatened.

Not surprisingly, some of the more spirited girls rebelled against their treatment and were sent to adult gaols in attempts to break their 'refractory' spirits. Reports of their escape attempts, riots and disturbances appeared in the local newspapers, eventually making their way into the national press. The notoriety that followed led to an official investigation and the abrupt closure of the school in 1871 (Ison 2012). The remaining girls were transferred to the Bileola industrial facility for girls on Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour, where even harsher physical punishments were meted out—including 'hair-cutting, confinement, bashings, indiscriminate caning, gags, straightjackets, and repeated "low diets"' (Scrivener 1996).

Poetics of resistance and giving voice to the silenced

Poring through the primary archives, I was often struck most deeply when confronted with the girls' own words, particularly in handwritten evidence preserved in the Colonial Secretary correspondence in NSW State Archives. As one girl blithely observed, she could yield to a life of prostitution or starve to death (the Newcastle doctor's records and police reports showed that girls as young as eleven were involved in the sex industry). The sister of another girl, responding to criticisms regarding their living conditions, said 'people get used to anything from constant suffering and misery'. The girls were also well aware that they were regarded as inferior: 'I would not pray because I did not feel fit to pray'.

Eliza O'Brien had launched the first of many daring escapes from the school. From her isolation cell following the first of these breakouts, she declared: 'I would rather be torn limb from limb and go to hell than go to school'. Eliza's fading words jumped off the grey page where I found them—I wondered if her breath had seeped into these pages whose faint must I was now inhaling. She and her cohort's determined and repeated revolts prompted questions from the colonial authorities in Sydney. The surviving correspondence between the school and the Colonial Secretary's office is a rich repository of handwritten testaments and witness accounts from the girls and their captors. While the school officials condemned the girls as 'pernicious', 'blasphemous' and 'ungovernable', the girls' own testimonies suggest they were rebelling against unjust handling, particularly of the younger girls. Added to this, girls 'with a past' were singled out for especially harsh treatment:

> I used improper language … at muster for which I was locked in a cell. I assisted the others in breaking out of the cell … My reason for saying I would strike Mrs Ravenhill was because she got me put in a cell … for interfering with the punishment of the younger girls. (Testimony of Elizabeth Morgan)
>
> I am now confined in the cell for that. My reason for so doing is because Mrs King … speaks unkindly to us and throws up our past life telling us we are the sweepings of Sydney streets. (Testimony of Eliza O'Brien)

Newspaper accounts also lend life and colour to the girls' all-but-forgotten history, though always tainted with sensation and a hint of 'scandal':

> oaths and wild shrieks:
> youngsters inside
> the walls yell.
>
> A stout girl of seventeen
> or eighteen is
> marched off by the police;
>
> another
> throws herself
> on the gravelled roadway and
> hammers the constable's feet.

Hammer! hammer! hammer!
at the yard gate,
at the back.

The authorities, paralysed,
consult together,
telegraph to Sydney
for instructions.

(Casey 'Bedlam in the Barracks', forthcoming in *Hecate*, 2022)

The most comprehensive secondary account of the girls' experiences at the school is in a database created by Newcastle historian, Jane Ison. There are a small number of other secondary sources, including writings by David Eastburn (2017), Ann Varelle Hardy (2014), Naomi Parry (2012), and the University of Newcastle Coal River Working Party Initiative (2014). Until now, there has been no correlation back to the significance of the Irish famine in the histories of more than one quarter of the girls.

My purpose in embarking on this project is to restore voice to those who had been 'silenced' in the archives—particularly the voices of the Irish famine-linked girls of Newcastle Industrial School, who seemed to me, a small, but important unwritten chapter in Irish-Australian history. The question was how to bring their complex history to light in a way that might be as impactful as their vivid manifestation to me though my experiences of the 'thin place' of the archives. After all, I could not take each person by the hand through the hundreds of tag-eared pages of cursive tied with fraying string scattered amongst row upon row of boxes in the basement of the state archives, or through every digitised police record, ship's manifest and gaol admission.

How to tell my ghosts' stories

In considering how I might best tell the complex history of 'my girls', the words of Arundhati Roy kept floating back to me:

> Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness—and our ability to tell our own stories. (Roy 2016)

This idea of laying siege to empire had a particular appeal given my upbringing in the 'rebel county' of Clare in the west of Ireland, and within a culture which has, since the times of the ancient Celts, used poetry as a tool of political resistance. Unearthing these girls' histories using direct quotations from the colonial authorities—now refracted through the prism of time—presented itself as a means of both reframing their stories and mocking or shaming the historical regime which had directed their abuse, humiliation and silencing.

Capturing the human story behind this history is at the heart of what I am about, not least as it is a narrative with threads that tug at my own family history. Jeanine Leane's discussion of 'memory politics' resonates deeply—how it can:

> examine ways in which the past still haunts us and maintains its influence on the present, particularly how the layers of meaning in events or texts previously consigned to history's shadows, can be exposed through creative expression. (Leane 2017)

This echoes Michel Foucault's observation that:

> there is barely a society without its major narratives, told, retold and varied; formulae, texts, ritualised texts to be spoken in well-defined circumstances; things said once, and conserved because people suspect some hidden secret or wealth lies buried within. (Foucault 2002: 220)

How, as Foucault noted:

> it is in squeezing the individual event, in directing the resolving power of historical analysis … that we gradually perceive—beyond battles, decisions, dynasties and assemblies—the emergence of those massive phenomena of secular or multi-secular importance. (Foucault 2002: 230)

Searching back through the archived layers—through newspaper reports, court proceedings, police reports and colonial correspondence—these girls' histories revealed a pattern. The vocabulary and attitudes applied to them exposed how they had been regarded and treated as lesser. As Kierkegaard put it, 'life at any given moment cannot ever really be fully understood; exactly because there is no single moment where time stops completely in order for me to take position going backwards' (Kierkegaard reprint 1997: 306). In a similar vein, Nardi Simpson has written how creating a written record 'complicates things':

> Writing down our transaction freezes the words. They grow cold quickly because, while the conversation lasts, the people who inspired it are missing, their energy is dispersed and the connection is paused … This is what usually happens when you try to keep things forever … What was real then may not be real now. (Simpson 2021)

It is only in revisiting the archive now, in light of all that has transpired since these records were first created, that we can see how the discrimination these girls faced as a result of their poor, Irish, Catholic origins resulted in considerably less favourable treatment. How that in turn led to fewer, poorer options and ultimately to repeated, intergenerational incarcerations. Looking back now, the archives reveal not only how those girls were overrepresented in the prison and industrial school records, but—particularly when viewed alongside the larger colonial history—why.

Writing the political

Leane explained the importance of the pursuit of truth and meaning through re-examining the archives of our past as a means of 'debunking myths … through excavating, resurfacing, and resurrecting and gathering buried, dormant links … through stories … to re-member and remember' (Leane 2017). This kind of revivification was also envisaged by Foucault: 'The archive is not that which despite its immediate escape, safeguards the event of the statement'. On the contrary, he argued that by revisiting archives whose meaning has been eroded by time, we 'may make possible the miracle of their resurrection' (Foucault 1972: 129). Simpson explained something similar: 'By allowing the context of giver, receiver, place and time to be outside yourself, you are free to think and to dream' (Simpson 2021).

In bringing 'my girls' back to life, I was seeking to decolonise their memories, their legacies—to do something akin to Leane's mission in releasing our ghosts from a double-imprisonment. As she pointed out, 'the "cardboard prison" of the state archive has been an active agent in the colonial structure, dispossessing and dismembering family histories, memories and stories'

(Leane 2017). As I worked to free 'my girls', other ghosts began to awaken in my personal archive, my own lived memories of conversations with my grandparents. Into the girls' stories, I began to interweave accounts passed down orally in my own family—the house I grew up in had been burnt to the ground by British soldiers in 1921, my 13-year-old grandfather and his family barely escaping with their lives; elsewhere, at 16, my grandmother had been held at gunpoint for failing to comply with a British soldier's instructions; decades later, my rural Irish accent and black clothes singled me out to be held at London airport for questioning on the day of an Irish terrorist's funeral.

In my earlier writing about 'my girls' for the *Irish Times*, I had taken a braided essay approach which is most effective, as Nicole Walker observed, 'where the political and the personal are trying to explain and understand each other' (Walker 2017). This was also useful in that, as Walker pointed out, this form of writing lends itself to resistance. The response to my essays had been resoundingly positive—the pieces featured in the paper's most-read items both in the weeks of publication and in the year of publication. Braiding has remained intrinsic to the way I am writing these narratives through poetry and lyric essay:

> Her bruises communing with mine to light a stony path between times. The more I see her blamed for her misfortunes, the more my heart races for her vindication. Each time I hear her words denied, her testimony rewritten, that old, too-familiar sour breath steals across my cheek: 'No-one will believe you', my truths as inconvenient as hers. (Casey '*Scáth*: Falling Upwards', 2022: n.p.)

In my previous essays I had written about being 'haunted' by these lost girls. Pondering the ghosts who had inspired her writing, Penni Russon said they 'represent unresolved histories and the stories that loop through time and involve themselves with the living' (Russon 2018). The human story behind my work loops from a time long before the famine in Ireland (when the Penal Laws permitted my people's lands to be seized, our language, culture and customs prohibited), winding through the injustices of the famine and the flight of Irish refugees to Australia, and on through the lives of their children and descendants here, to the present where echoes of Australia's earliest refugees and removed children still resonate. Threaded through this story are remnants of my own family's experiences during British occupation of Ireland—stories never before recorded. There are interconnected relationships of narratives here that still drive choices being made every day at every level of our society:

> if you were a Wollemi pine, say,
> it's five seconds ago, or a brain
> coral polyp, maybe last Wednesday.
> For a child in Sudan, it's today
> and every day since the beginning of time
> stretching in one long line until you die.
> For your child or mine, maybe not
> in their lifetime, but for their child maybe
> it's the day after tomorrow because
> the house I lived in burned
> to the ground as a reprisal by colonisers
> in my grandfather's time and half
> my country died or were exiled
> because of politics, climate or a mistaken

belief that good people won't fail
to do something, which boils
down to numbers no matter
what time you make it.
(Casey 'Small Change', *New Zealand Poetry Society Anthology*, 2022)

Truth Commission

Laura Wexler has observed that creative non-fiction writers are ideally positioned to be 'one-person "truth and reconciliation" commissions, to uncover "the small stories that have gone missing"' and to 'unearth lives at the margin of bigger events' (Wexler 2001). This perfectly echoes my purpose with the creative writing related to this research. Referring to the 'slow-motion suicide of scholarly history', Kiera Lindsey noted that 'history has always been influenced by both the scientific and the artistic' and that 'we need to find new, more flexible ways' of reviving history (Lindsey 2021). In grappling with the debate as to how far creative writing can or should go in supplementing history, Eleanor Sweetapple questioned 'whether we can make moral judgements about people in the past and whether even the most careful historian can tell an unbiased version of the past' (Sweetapple 2015). This issue is front-of-mind for me, as is Sweetapple's admission: 'at times I have struggled to find a voice that is suited to the story without being self-consciously "historical"' (Sweetapple 2015). I will return to this later in discussing my approach to writing research-based poetry.

In balancing the integrity of the research with the creative approach, I relate particularly to the assertion by Drusilla Modjeska that there is:

> an epistemological necessity for even the most literary of nonfiction writers to act as the lens through which we can trust, or evaluate, or revisit for ourselves the selection, presentation and interpretation of the lives and events put before us. The nonfiction writer might use the techniques of fiction to bring lifeness to her lives and to conjure the paradox of difference. But her pact with the reader, and her subject, returns always to the record, however patchy, however interrupted, from which she works. (Modjeska 2015)

My pact to truth-tell is not only with the reader: it is also with my research subjects ('my girls') and with my other ghosts, my family members who are also breathed back to life in this narrative. I have chosen to write a portion of this work in lyric essay form as a kind of 'dialogue' with the reader, allowing me to 'question' and observe as if we are collaborators sharing the journey. In this way, I can navigate gaps in the history without inventing answers, while maintaining trust with both the reader and my research subjects. I especially like how Nardi Simpson expresses this idea: 'You see, we have left space for you even though you are not here yet' (Simpson 2021). Here is an example of how I have tried to open that space for the reader:

> And the slowly spiralling calamity … how a small chain of unfortunate incidents—starting with a too-wet spring—led to Eliza's arrest in a brothel at fifteen and all the trouble that followed. How thin she was when I first found her, contusions still blooming in the translucency of her skin. How my own world had darkened, warped at the same age. Would it matter if I told you that Eliza is already dead? (Casey '*Scáth*: Falling Upwards', 2022: n.p.)

Language of Resistance

Returning to the issue of political resistance or protest, I felt I could embody this within the form of the writing in other ways. Katie Holten presaged how my approach took shape:

> In history class we were taught that British landowners took our food, exacerbating a natural famine with their ideology; evicted us from our homes, creating waves of immigrants … And beat Irish out of us … Our native language was seen as a threat. Like many minority languages, it is more than just a means of communication, it is an integral part of our indigenous consciousness. (Holten 2020)

Just as Holten has sought to 'decolonise language', I am integrating our native tongue (*Gaeilge*, Irish) into this writing as a political act. This also 're-members', as Leane put it, my grandparents' experiences and connects my heritage (and of course my positionality) with the family histories of my research subjects:

> In that shadowy aftermath, swaddling her newest born in their windblown shelter, did Elizabeth murmur A *chuisle*, *a chuisle* to soothe her hungry cries? All the while, gnawing at the raw nerve: how to feed one more mouth, however small? *A chuisle*, as my Granda McMahon had whispered to me, held high in his arms—uttered always under his breath because he had been beaten as a child for speaking our outlawed native tongue aloud. Another silencing echoing through our story. (Casey '*Scáth*: Falling Upwards' 2022: n.p.)

In the political context, I was struck too, by the need to recognise the vital significance of First Nations decolonisation in Australia. In doing so, it was important to acknowledge that—though historically subjected to colonial oppression also—my people and I are interlopers here. Doing this in my native language felt right, speaking both politically and personally:

> We sit together in a biting wind
> at Sydney Cove
> while we talk of thin places
> and we agree
> that this is one of those
>
> filled with the spirits of your people
> who had lived here for millennia
> and my people who had come
> and gone
>
> I say
> *Tugaim ómós do do sheanóirí a bhí*
> *agus atá ann fós*
> my words carried on
> the bitter breeze
> in my native tongue
> that was torn from my people
> along with our true names,
> stories, songs—
>
> (Casey 'On the Eve of All Hallow's Eve', *Cordite*, 2022)

Poetry has been employed as a voice for political resistance in Ireland since ancient Celtic times—when *ard filí* (high poets) were sent into battle to use their superior linguistic skills as emissaries. Later, during British occupation, the *aisling* poetic form emerged, flourishing from the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth. Susan McCann described it as 'a genre that is itself bound up with the very notion of literary and political subversion' (McCann 2010). Pioneered by seventeenth century poets Aogán Ó Rathaille and Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin, the genre has been employed (and also parodied) in more recent times by writers and artists as diverse as poets, Eavan Boland, Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon; musicians, Shane McGowan and the Popes; author, Ciaran Carson; and filmmaker, Neil Jordan. The key feature of this genre is the personification of Ireland as a woman. Following in this grand tradition, I wrote an *aisling* too:

> Eyes wide, blazing
> hazel against the wild
> ochre flame of your hair,
> a falling wave—ebbing
> of your rebel airs, the rising tide
> of your keening
>
> as your fields filled
> with the black and fetid—
> the bloodied knuckles of desperate
> mothers reaping pestilence
> from frozen muck to feed
> their wailing children
>
> (Casey 'Aisling', *Live Canon Anthology*, 2022)

Poetry and 'expressing the inexpressible'

Janette Hughes has commended poetry for its 'conciseness, its brevity, and its power to convey so much in such a limited space' (Hughes 2007). This sits uneasily alongside my struggle to condense such a lengthy and complex history, while attempting to do justice to 'my girls'. Research-based poetry can be tricky—finding the balance between including too much and saying too little; fine-tuning the voice without appropriating or misrepresenting; being true to my promise of 'witness'.

I took solace from the notion put forward by Maria Lahman, Veronica Richard and Eric Teman that research-based poetry 'can be used as an entry point into expressing the inexpressible' (Lahman, Richard and Teman 2018). I realised I don't need to create a finely detailed oil painting of the particulars—I just need to create a sketch that characterises the salient elements, but most of all that conveys the human impact, that emotes. On archival poetry, Lahman and Richard noted 'The ability to resonate with readers and expose them to a new experience is fundamental to poetry and to qualitative social science' (Lahman and Richard 2014). They suggested that research-based poetry can aim to help readers 'access the essence of the topic at hand' and may be composed of multiple elements 'to create a sense of many people talking or a collective voice' (Lahman and Richard 2014). I used this approach to construct the multi-part poem, 'Othering'.

Leane observed in relation to archival poetry: 'Of particular interest are the cultural metaphors used to describe otherness' (Leane 2017). I was struck reading this several months after writing my poem which I had coincidentally entitled 'Othering', and which had been inspired by recurring motifs I had observed in colonial voices within the archives. This is a long poem in eleven parts, a cento derived from many voices representing colonial authority figures, including police, judges, British authorities in Ireland, Newcastle School officials and the Colonial Secretary's office. By reanimating and echoing these many voices through the tunnel of intervening time, I sought to ring out their shallowness—to expose how their prejudices, their own assumed supremacy, their misguided righteousness and their then unassailable power had so tragically impacted my girls' lives:

> Our great difficulty
> is to maintain our principle
> without starving some
> of the perverse creatures—
>
> women and little children
> scattered over the turnip fields
> like a flock of famishing crows,
>
> devouring the raw turnips,
> mothers half naked, shivering
> in the snow and sleet, children
> screaming with hunger.
>
> […]
>
> On board the emigration vessels,
> fatherless, seduced, one wretched
> creature died soon after landing,
> having been slung up by the waist
> to the rigging when far gone
> in pregnancy—by way of punishment.
>
> […]
>
> Forty thousand pounds worth
> of this commodity imported
> and maintained at the public expense—
> such degraded beings
>
> […]
>
> Incarnate devils—
> one of these girls
> spoke freely of her past life:

sixteen months in Goulburn Gaol,
eleven in solitary—
a very small room
with very small grating

[…]

one of the four illused girls.
The same girl again attempted to abscond
by leaping from the dormitory window,
but hurt herself so severely
that, from necessity,
she has been quiet since.

(Casey 'Othering', Axon, 2023)

I had done as Leane outlined in creating 'docu-poetry' which 'contains quotations from or reproductions of documents or statements not produced by the writer and relates to historical narratives' (Leane 2017). Lahman and Richard referred to this as 'archival or artefact poetry pulling heavily on literary poetry forms such as found poems, including the cento', a 'literary patchwork' (Lahman and Richard 2014). 'Othering' is one example, amongst several, of my application of these techniques to revivify and rearticulate voices from the archives.

An essential element of the literary interweaving I am doing involves integrating the girls' own voices (some are quoted earlier). But, of course, there is so much less material to work from in directly citing the girls—aside from their recorded testimonies from investigations following incidents at the school (which were no doubt culled, curtailed and coerced to some extent), small notations in school and gaol entrance books and very scant newspaper quotations from court appearances, few of their actual words remain. I sought to supplement their voices by occasionally, very selectively, writing in the 'voice' of one of the girls:

A bag of bones, she said
Matron, Mrs Clarke
Leave her away, she said

Cold as she was:
they thought I couldn't hear,
but what did I care?

(Casey 'Tread Softly', 2020: n.p.)

As another way of embodying the girls' own voices, I researched streets songs, bush poetry and ballads, and rhymes from their time. I used these to construct poems in similar styles to reflect the patois and spirit of their era, often intertwined with direct quotes from the girls. I return here to Sweetapple's discomfort with 'being self-consciously historical' (Sweetapple 2015), a threshold I worry I have crossed:

Rock-a-by baby in Darlinghurst Gaol,
When the wind blew, her baby did ail.
When the sun broke, her angel had died,
And Sarah Jane's heart lay shattered beside.

Rock-a-by baby, sleeping in peace,
Far from the plight at her young mother's feet—
No-one to watch or hold her a spell,
Sarah Jane's rocking alone in her cell.

(Casey 'Lullaby for Sarah Jane', 2020: n.p.)

And from another poem:

This is the sound of the strangers come,
Their clomping boots, a cudgel and gun.
This is the sound of the children's cries,
Under the boughs where their mother lies.

This is the man, and these are the men,
Who have come to crush her over again.

[…]

This is the bed that Catherine made,
Under the boughs where the strangers paid,
For the choice she'd made for her children's sake,
The choice-that-was-no-choice she'd had to make.

(Casey 'Rags and Boughs', forthcoming in *Hecate*, 2022)

As part of my research, I have also undertaken site visits in Newcastle, Maitland, Sydney and Ireland—here I employ sensory observational techniques, journaling, photography and sound recordings to capture ephemeral impressions. I use these in writing both the poetry and prose, to help evoke a sense of the places where 'my girls' were alive and also where they had been interred (either imprisoned or buried). Sometimes, the journey itself became the poem:

beneath a stand
of sprawling figs,
last living witnesses
to Margaret's committal—
Young as this child is,
she was in a frightful state
of disease prevalent amongst
her sex and class of older years—
their broad glossy leaves
alert now in the unearthly
stillness, knuckled limbs
heavy with bequests
of sea-green teardrops,
some bursting, crimson-hearted,
sticky in the dead heat

(Casey 'Chasing Ghosts', *Some Days The Bird*, 2022)

Conclusion

This work of counter-memory espouses the notion that the ghosts of past transgressions remain adrift in the 'thin place' of the archive, ready to be awakened, to have their stories revoiced. Without textual distortion, by availing of the prism of time, poetics of resistance can reveal new truths to help decolonise these ghosts' stories. Since my first encounters with them, I have been haunted by the spectres of Australia's earliest refugees, Irish famine children who suffered a double jeopardy due to colonial injustices in Ireland and Australia. And so, I return over and over to the thin place of the archive, to the excavation and the resurrection. As Nardi Simpson wrote:

> I am training myself to look through its detail, to allow its greens and greys and yellows and pinks to blur together to create a great oneness … Somewhere in the tangle … a border between nations buzzes through the ground. The border is blind, but does not go unseen, so well-known is it in the minds of those living either side.

Notes

The words in the Irish language (*Gaeilge*) translate as follows:

Scáth—Shadow

A chuisle—My pulse

Tugaim ómós do do sheanóirí a bhí agus atá ann fós—I give tribute to your elders who were and who are here still

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About the author

Anne Casey is an Irish-Australian poet and writer, and author of five poetry collections. A journalist and legal author for 30 years, Anne has been ranked in the *Irish Times*' Most Read and is widely published and anthologised internationally. Anne has won literary prizes in Ireland, the UK, the USA, Canada, Hong Kong and Australia, most recently *American Writers Review 2021*. She is a PhD candidate at Sydney's University of Technology examining *The Second-Wave Impact in Australia of the Great Irish Famine*, funded by an Australian Government Research Training Program scholarship. anne-casey.com @1annecasey

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POEM

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OTHERING, A CENTO

Anne Casey

'a machine of wise and deliberate contrivance as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment, and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man.'

—Irish Statesman, Edmund Burke in a letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe in 1792, describing the Penal Laws introduced by the British government to control the native Irish population during colonisation.

i. Inception

Our great difficulty
is to maintain our principle
without starving some
of the perverse creatures—

women and little children
scattered over the turnip fields
like a flock of famishing crows,

devouring the raw turnips,
mothers half naked, shivering
in the snow and sleet, children
screaming with hunger.

ii. A matter of commerce

The cry of distress has rapidly
increased, no reasonable doubt
it is a cry of real distress;

I still labour for reserving
our supplies. All are surprised
to find the Government provision
of food is so limited.

Right or wrong, the Government
has committed—I am almost inclined
to believe the Government
would have acted more prudently

in abstaining from any direct
interference in regard to food:

supply is inadequate to the probable
extraordinary demand—

there still exists a great quantity of food
of various kinds in the country
and I am quite satisfied,
as the customary market for it

is elsewhere, there can be no certainty
of its remaining here
for consumption.

iii. Live exports to Sydney

One hundred and seven days
on her passage from Plymouth,
she has on board two hundred
and fifty-six immigrants—

namely, twenty-two married couples
and two hundred and thirty-four
Irish orphan girls; two deaths only
occurred on the voyage.

On board the emigration vessels,
fatherless, seduced,
one wretched creature died
soon after landing,

having been slung up by the waist
to the rigging when far gone
in pregnancy—
by way of punishment.

iv. Bill of lading

Forty thousand pounds worth
of this commodity imported
and maintained at the public expense—

such degraded beings—
brings a melancholy increase
to the vice and lewdness
now rampant in every part of town.

We have received
no good servants
for the wealthier classes,

no efficient farm servants,
no virtuous and industrious
young women, fit wives for the labouring.

Three hundred Irish orphan girls
unhired—many doubtless preferred food
and lodging as the hackney coach-horse

prefers his stand
and nose-bag to hard work
and whip-cord.

v. Legacy

If the children
of all the drunkards in Sydney
were to be brought up,
the Government would soon
require more extensive accommodations.

So painful a spectacle, so deplorable:
idle and disorderly,
in a shocking state of filth,
charged with living
and wandering

living and wandering
living and wandering
living and wandering
living and wandering

living
and wandering
in company
with their mother—

an idle and disorderly,
a vagrant
and reputed prostitute.

vi. Resolution

It shall be lawful
for the superintendent
of any Public Industrial School
to punish any child

above the age of ten years
who may leave the school
without permission

by placing such child
in close confinement
for a period not exceeding
fourteen days.

vii. Rod

Young as this child is—
a frightful state of disease
prevalent amongst her sex
and class of older years
in large towns—

a felony punished
by putting eight (8)
slaps of a cane
on the hands

for getting in
through the iron bars
of the store windows
and stealing:

too young
to be placed
in solitary confinement.

viii. Judgment

He struck her and gave her
a black eye, but appeared
to have received provocation.

ix. Quieting

Incarnate devils—
one of these girls
spoke freely of her past life:

sixteen months in Goulburn Gaol,
eleven in solitary—
a very small room
with very small grating

near the ceiling;
it was boarded,
no furniture of any kind.

Next: three months
in Darlinghurst Gaol—
stone floors, no furniture,
except a stool.

Another month in Goulburn Gaol—
one of the four illused girls.
The same girl again
attempted to abscond

by leaping from the window,
but hurt herself so severely
that, from necessity,
she has been quiet since.

Note

This cento is derived from archived historical documents (including correspondence, newspaper reports and legislation) relating to British colonial rule in Ireland; the exportation of 4,000 Irish orphan girls aged 15 to 19 years to the Australian colony during the Great Irish Famine, intended as domestic servants and 'breeding stock'; and the removal and incarceration of daughters of Irish famine refugees in Australia, resulting in intergenerational destitution, abuse and incarceration. This work has been produced with support of an Australian Government Research Training Scheme Scholarship as part of a doctorate examining the experiences of Irish famine refugees to Australia.

About the author

Originally from the west of Ireland and living in Sydney, Anne Casey is author of five poetry collections. A journalist and legal author for 30 years, her work is widely published internationally, ranking in The *Irish Times*' Most Read. Anne has won literary awards in Ireland, Australia, the UK, Canada, Hong Kong, India and the USA, most recently American Writers Review 2021 and the Henry Lawson Prize 2022. She is the recipient of an Australian Government scholarship and a bursary for her PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Technology Sydney where she researches and teaches.

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2 POEMS

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ARCHIVES OF THE FUTURE

Dominique Hecq

After Oscar Dominguez's Memory of the Future

Stench of the born-again wild beast slouching
towards infinity. The horizon spouts
clouds. Your typewriter and its neuron words
settle on time's cleft. Craters rise to the skies,
witnesses to history's expunged signs.

In the beginning you imagined cold air
on skin, white gloves, pencil, paper. Enlisted
words undercutting representation's
factual value. But people are ever
puppets on strings held by ungloved hands.

They leap out of musty pages, return you
to arkhē's suffixal form, arkheion. Skip
the record of a lifetime's metaphors,
wielding words from the paterfamilias'
house, to unanimous chorus, to Law Court.

The body's storehouse gathers abjection's silt;
it is the cave where defiance buried you
alive—call it Thebes, Bedlam, Holloway, or
Other. It is where duty and language never
collide with memory on your sister's lips.

Yet words are not bats to be released from caves.
They are birds set free from cages to open
the heart's secret chambers. Inviolate,
they are open to revision, still. See how
they spread their wings. How high they soar.

Notes

Oscar Dominguez's 1938 oil painting 'Lembranca do Futuro' hangs at the Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, Spain. The poem's opening stanza focuses on a detail in the upper left corner.

There is an obvious allusion to W. B. Yeats's 'The Second Coming' in lines 1–2 to convey a sense of anxiety about the future.

BLOOD LINES

Dominique Hecq

After René Magritte's La mémoire (1948)

that night we drank black blood
disregarding Homer's warning
in Book XI of *The Odyssey*

the inner river's propensity
to overflow and petrify
despite the will to forget

two wars coursing through our veins
the three caskets of our blood lines
four languages caught in static

might we awake, blotched browed, in the fourth
dimension, with half a face hidden in shadows
& life's desiccated leaf curdling blood light?

Note

René Magritte seems to have been obsessed with memory. This version of *La mémoire*, from 1948, can be found at the Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels, Belgium.

About the author

Dominique Hecq grew up in the French-speaking part of Belgium. She now lives on the unceded land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, Melbourne. Hecq writes across genres and disciplines—and sometimes across tongues. Her creative works include a novel, five collections of short stories, 12 books or chapbooks of poetry. She is a runner up in the Carmel Bird Literary Digital Award; *Smacked and Other Stories of Addiction* is fresh off the press. *After Cage* has just been reprinted with a micro essay on poeming, dance and music.

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'CRAZY LINK-UPS ALL OVER THE PLACE'

Notes wandering toward a research choreography

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Abstract

This essay discusses the revival of a failed creative/biographical poetry project, on Australian ballerina Lucette Aldous. I had begun this project in 2015 but, despite several years of research—both archival (Ballet Rambert and Victoria & Albert, London; Australian Ballet archives at the Arts Centre, Melbourne) and through interviews with Aldous in Perth—I was unable to find a way to structure and convey the 'life', and the project was put aside in 2018. Lucette Aldous passed away in 2021, and this loss was followed by Australian poet Jordie Albiston's unexpected passing, in February 2022. In part, it was the proximity of these two losses that sparked the revival of the Aldous project, fuelled as I was both by a sadness that I had not been able to deliver a completed manuscript to the retired ballerina before she died, and also by my revisiting of the poems in Albiston's wide-ranging oeuvre. Albiston's poems, often documentary in nature, and ruled by mathematics and constraint yet open to possibility, multiplicity, irony, opened a way for me to move forward with the Aldous project.

'CRAZY LINK-UPS ALL OVER THE PLACE': NOTES WANDERING TOWARD A RESEARCH CHOREOGRAPHY

Jessica Wilkinson

> the biographer whose art is subtle and bold enough to present that queer amalgamation of dream and reality, that perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow. His method still remains to be discovered. (Virginia Woolf 1958: 155)

My first three books, all 'poetic biographies' (biographies written in poems), represent attempts to test the formal dimensions of biography writing in order to 'meet' each of the respective subjects' distinct characters in new ways, beyond the capabilities of the prose sentence. Taking cues from the research encounters, each book is formally and structurally different, as I consider each character worthy of their unique biographical form. With *Marionette* (2012), a biographical work on early cinema actress Marion Davies, research at the UCLA Film and Television archive exposed me to various instances of film disintegration and damage that reflected some of the silences/losses within Marion's life story. Disintegration is a literal and metaphorical feature within *Marionette*, which unfolds as a series of deteriorating film reels. For *Suite for Percy Grainger* (2014), I not only sifted through his extensive archives (Grainger Museum, Melbourne; Grainger House, New York),[1] but also listened obsessively to recordings of Grainger's compositions, piano-recordings and experiments, and took long walks while doing so, in the manner of Grainger himself. From this research, the concept of the 'line' and the mark—musical line, stave line, whip mark, lines of correspondence, walking path, and so on—became a dominant metaphor and principle for the construction of the manuscript.[2]

For *Music Made Visible* (2019), a biography of choreographer George Balanchine, I travelled to sites and locations where Balanchine lived, performed and choreographed, and also undertook extensive research in archives at the New York City Public Library (Dance Division) and Harvard University Library. Immersion in the video collections at NYCPL had an obvious impact on the book, which unfolds as a program of 'ballets'. But this formal conceit was also devised out of additional research encounters; I found amongst interviews with and writings by those who knew him (including his wives) that he was inscrutable, a very difficult man to 'know', and that the closest we get to an 'inner Balanchine' is through his ballets. The poems in *Music Made Visible* are therefore titled from Balanchine's corpus of choreographed works, and each poem features various combinations of: the choreography of that specific ballet; biographical information relevant to that moment in time; references to the music, composer and/or musical score; reviews of the ballet; and aspects of Balanchine's life philosophy. But another piece of information that impacted the construction of this manuscript was the fact that Balanchine had learned a critical lesson during his years choreographing for Diaghilev and the Ballet Russes; from Igor Stravinsky he learned that one must not lump in everything, all one's brilliant ideas, into an artwork, but that it should be crafted according to certain family relations. Perhaps this is why the ballets in Balanchine's oeuvre (well, most of them; there were some noted failures across his lifetime) bear a sense of coherence and unity. I had hoped that the poems in *Music Made Visible* preceding 'Apollon Musagète'[3]—titled for the ballet during which Balanchine learned this lesson from the composer, Stravinsky—would be more multitudinous and unruly, and that those afterwards attuned to one idea rather than everything I'd gathered in research on each particular ballet, that specific time in his life, the historical moment, and so on.[4]

In this essay, I discuss another biographical poetry project, on ballerina Lucette Aldous, that I initially intended to link up with the Balanchine project. I had thought that a series of poems on Aldous might constitute a concertinaed chapbook, and that it might fold outwards from the Balanchine book, an unexpected addendum. I imagined that it could emerge (through the help of a willing book printer) out of the 'Don Quixote' poem in *Music Made Visible*—Lucette Aldous' most famous role was dancing as Kitri alongside Rudolph Nureyev's Basilio in the latter's production of *Don Quixote*. The two versions might form a choreographical-poem nexus; two poems, two versions of *Don Q*, Balanchine with his eyes on his adored dancer Suzanne Farrell, for whom he choreographed the ballet, and Aldous dancing her quick steps alongside Nureyev's quick temper. The publication (a conundrum that my publisher was happy to attempt to meet) would present a biographical situation where two subjects who never met (but who were connected through me, the poet-biographer) were engaged in a sort of speculative *pas de deux* within the bound pages of the one book. But I couldn't make this 'dance' work, partly because I could not find a form—a biographical container—through which to convey Aldous in a manner that seemed fitting to her character. I began to think of the Lucette Aldous work as a failed project.

Lucette is my middle name. My mother—who would call me 'JL' for short—chose this middle name after the name of her favourite ballerina, Lucette Aldous, who had retired from professional dancing before I was born. For years I carried this name as a part of my history, my way of 'being'. I attended dance classes between the ages of four and 18, was not particularly good—more flexible and lyrical than I was capable of strong classical technique or bravura feats. I was flat-footed and weak-kneed, with a stage fright that grew stronger with age, so a career on the stage was never in the stars for me. But still, I loved—love—to move, have dreams of ballet steps and combinations, of waiting in the wings with a knot in my stomach. And a wide variety of music, particularly classical, can bring to mind certain movements, certain emotions that I feel would be expressible only through the moving body.

Despite knowing the origins of my name, I did not know much about Lucette, except that she was a small dancer, and that she was of the same vintage as some other Australian ballet dancers who had examined me for my ballet exams as a child—Garth Welch and Marilyn Jones. Possibly, I also knew that she had danced with Nureyev. It wasn't until I began researching and writing my book on George Balanchine that I started to think more deeply about the significance of dance in my life and in the development of my 'self'. When people asked 'why Balanchine?' I heard an echo in the question, 'why ballet?' And a few answers include: my love of music, my dancing past, my name. A quick online search revealed that Lucette Aldous was living and still teaching in Perth, and after making contact with the aging dancer through her daughter, Floeur, I was able to fly across the country to meet her several times. There is a slightly blurry photograph of us—Lucette and I—from the first meeting. Every time I look at it, I am shocked at how enormous I look beside this petite and elegant woman in her kaftan and head scarf.

Each time I met with her, at her local café, where the owners knew her well, I would set the recorder down on the table between us. Unfortunately, the café was popular and therefore noisy. This meant that the recordings were not good, Lucette's voice frequently drowned out by conversations at other tables, the raucous laughing of weekend customers and, during one of our meetings, a band started up in the corner. In addition to these competing sounds and interruptions, I had a great deal of trouble keeping Lucette on track; I suppose out of a

combination of nervousness and inexperience, I allowed her mind to wander into unexpected territory:

> My story, it virtually started with the Second World War, because it really affected my upbringing. It sort of goes back, we see people from the North of England my great great maybe even great grandma, she married a Spaniard because that was the war between England and Spain, now if one of those ships sank some of the sailors didn't go back to Spain, they got on shore, so that connection. In fact, my grandmother had very long straight hair, beautiful brown eyes, my mother ... My grandmother was from Pitlochry and so really Scottish. On my grandmother's knee those longs strokes of my mother's long blonde hair and the little sort of chubby face like the real Scots, so sort of a mix. Then also from my grandmother's side they were called Galtons (?) and they owned all the top butcher shops in Newcastle and my grandfather, Robert Rutherford, they owned the top hotel. And they married.[5]

Indeed, seeking out an Aldous interview in the National Library of Australia, with dance writer Michelle Potter, I found the conversation quite unruly also. Potter, unlike myself, was an excellent interviewer and demonstrated an impressive knowledge of dance history in Australia and beyond. But Lucette would shift swiftly from story to story; a detail referring to one aspect of her life would detach from its 'factual' position and land amongst another anecdote across time and space. There were also lots of 'facts' detailed and discussed, but few anecdotes relating life's wild encounters, no personal stories revealing her unique ways of being in the world. I noted that she did not, in her conversations with me, nor in her interview with Potter, address her first marriage, before she met and married fellow dancer Alan Alder. I felt that there might be a good reason for that, which I ought not to probe. Perhaps I could ask her later on, once we had established some kind of relationship; but that seemed a fraught idea, too—would I be manipulating my subject, trespassing into her privacy for the sake of a good story? This was a problem I had not had to consider before, given the three subjects of my previous works had all died long ago.

I felt thoroughly inadequate to the task of constructing a worthwhile life story of a still-living woman out of these conversations. A sad fact, also, is that there is not much video footage of Lucette dancing in her prime, and my sifting through archives (the Victoria and Albert and Ballet Rambert archives in London; The Australian Ballet in Melbourne) turned up a smattering of newspaper reviews of her ballet performances and some slim profiles on her in decades-old magazines. When an enthusiastic archivist at the Ballet Rambert archives emerged with a dress that Lucette wore for Antony Tudor's ballet Lilac Garden, I found myself wanting for the absent, moving body. This was in such stark contrast to my three previous biographical subjects, about whom there was an abundance of documentation, and not just recordings, publications, film footage and artefacts, but also copious materials written by them, in their voice, using their turn of phrase, representing their character and mode of being. I had been able to glean so much from the extant records relating respectively to Davies, Grainger and Balanchine—about their ways of being in the world; their thoughts on art, life, entertainment, invention; their wide-ranging desires.

Perhaps this comparative lack of materials on Lucette made it hard for me to write.

Perhaps it was that she was a living subject; the pressure to present a subject with their own life story is enervating.

Perhaps it was the personal connection that I had carried all these years, a step too close to my stage fright to probe.

Perhaps—and I felt deep shame when I thought this—I did not find enough that was interesting in the life.

Then again, perhaps it was simply that I couldn't hear Lucette's voice amongst all these wandering anecdotes, couldn't feel her rhythms, which I had experienced in such abundance in developing those earlier books.

No matter the answers, the project seemed to be going nowhere, with no shape or rhythm to call its own. I set it aside and turned my attention elsewhere.

When Lucette passed away in 2021, I felt very sad that I had promised her a portrait that was never delivered. I felt that I had failed her somehow. That I had failed myself. But her death, as upsetting as it was, didn't change the fact that I had no new material, no new approaches with which to explore what little material I did have, and no foreseeable way forward with the project.

Creative practice is unavoidably shackled to time and circumstance. Sometimes, when you look the other way, there can be an unexpected beacon guiding you back. Lucette's passing in 2021 was then followed by the passing of Australian poet Jordie Albiston, in February 2022. Albiston's poetry had had such an impact on my own development as a writer—in fact, I would credit her, along with the American poet Susan Howe, as my two formative influences. While my PhD thesis on Howe's wide-ranging and complex forays into historical, biographical and archival territories sparked my desires to pursue poetic-biographical singularities of form, Albiston's poetry taught me—continues to teach me—to be attentive to the intricacies of both language and silence; to appreciate the generative appeal of both textual mark and gap; to slow myself down from the busyness of everyday life to grasp the ways in which words and their combinations can sound and signify. Albiston's biographical/ historical collections *The Hanging of Jean Lee* and *Botany Bay Document* made me curious, as with Howe's work, about the potential for poetry to convey nonfiction materials. But, while Howe is interested in breaking documents, excavating the archive, and remaking the historical text, Albiston seemed more interested in the evocative potential of language patterns, words, and white space.[6]

Albiston noted that she would often 'start' a poem with an idea of shape—'an architectural kind of figure'—for which she then found 'the right content that might suit that thing'. The 'passion' for her as a poet was 'in the maths' or constraint: 'for every rule there's a window or even a whole tesseract that opens, and it's that kind of movement that I like' (Middleton interview, 2001). One can open to any page in one of Albiston's books and her poems exhibit this idea. In writing this essay, I open *Euclid's Dog: 100 Algorithmic Poems* (Gloria-SMH Press, 2017), in which Albiston has developed eight forms that draw on mathematical concepts.[7] Remarkably, the first poem I read attunes to this idea conceptually and lyrically:

> φ
>
> sometimes a concert of nail & maul you
> enter the world & a thing holds a thing
> in a place you open your mouth say cap-
> stone plumb-bob technical stuff like that or

maybe this silence the air doesn't snap
& the sky stays stitched to the roof stays stitched
to the walls you are good with sizes can
be the Most Enormous It or fit right
here like a squeak your favourite bit is
windows windows & in those windows clouds

I tear it up Mrs Wellsey puts me
in the cupboard till the bell it is King-
dom then I am good at spelling this is
who I am I make cities out of no-
thing I don't have a team today I live
in Tiny Town my buildings all fall down (2017: 3)

Notes at the back of the collection tell us that she has applied the golden mean (ratio 1:1.6) to stanza construction, so that the stanzas are ten and six lines, respectively; further, the lines are decasyllabic, and the form 'functions something like a Petrarchan sonnet, where the second stanza attempts to answer or resolve the first' (2017: 111). Within these constraints, the poem ironically confronts the limitations of the world that we live in, the ways we are 'held in place' by circumstances, 'a concert of nail and maul'. Those words—'nail' and 'maul'—conjure not just construction tools, but also something animalistic and brutal—claws and teeth in attack mode. The speaker of the first stanza, addressing herself at a distance via second-person, learns the language of this world of hierarchies and order, but finds a better energy in the shape-shift, the open, the drift. The second stanza propels us back in time to what seems to be a primary school classroom; the speaker, now speaking in first person, narrates an anecdote of being punished for 'tear[ing] it up'—a suggestion of breaking the rules, destroying the output one has been tasked with producing. She turns to her imagination instead, 'mak[ing] cities out of no- / thing'; her poems are not enclosures, but open to possibility, multiplicity, irony.

I think back to the interviews with Lucette Aldous—both my own and Michelle Potter's—and how Aldous used the words 'actually' and 'ironically' quite liberally when recalling her experiences in life and dance. These words jive and jostle in my mind as I think on Albiston's poems—those frames that are windows on a shifting world.

R Lyle Skains, drawing on a model devised by Stephann Makri and Ann Blandford for understanding the phenomenon of serendipitous experiences, suggests that serendipity is 'the confluence of cognitive activity and external stimulation that most often leads to so-called "eureka moments" for creators' (90). While serendipity has often been associated with luck, randomness, and fate, Skains summarises Makri and Blandford's model to highlight serendipity's value to the composition process, which involves not only 'the knowledge and experience to make the mental connection and to recognise the significance of that connection', but also the appropriate skills to make something meaningful from that connection (2018: 90). This reminds me of something the Canadian poet Anne Carson noted in an interview with *The Paris Review*: 'The things you think of to link are not in your control. It's just who you are, bumping into the world. But how you link them is what shows the nature of your mind' (Interview, 2004).[8]

After these two remarkable artists, Lucette Aldous and Jordie Albiston, passed away in relatively quick succession, I read my way back through the materials I had filed away on Aldous, and all of Albiston's books on my shelf, as well as her other writings and interviews. And something

has converged, shifted, opened up—a way for me to move on, both with and without them; a frame for my noticing; a direction for me to pursue, though it cannot be contained by the frame of 'biography' alone.

Lucette was born in 1938. I was born in 1982. Lucette died in 2021 at the age of 82, when I was 38. Facts mean little but lead somewhere. Lucette would say: 'crazy link-ups all over the place' (Phillips 2002: 56). I think, too, of Albiston's *the Book of Ethel*, which glides over the sparse extant details of her great grandmother's life. Albiston's text presents a series of perforated 'squares' (seven syllables per line, seven lines per stanza), for which she did not explicitly confirm a reason, though Ethel's death at age 77 in 1949 may provide one arbitrary reason for the '7x7' stanza form. Albiston once said that poetry could 'create a personal kind of order out of the … information we are presented with' (Albiston and Wilkinson 2013: 60).

I am led to consider what a series of syllabic 'windows' might reveal about Lucette, and draft the following poem:

Father

a gentle
shy person
silhouette

we'd go for walks and he would share
his knowledge of the power of
the stars waves create a picture
in your mind *we came off the sea*
he picked up a camera I
can do this, he said radar skills
took us to Brisbane caught the nose-
s of the fastest horse and dog

It dawns on me that Lucette Aldous' pas de deux should never have been cast with George Balanchine, because Balanchine was only ever dancing with me. He also made it easy for me to pick up the movements. Aldous, though, is prodding me to lead the dance, to become more visible. And Albiston gives me the confidence to do this, to explore the not-quite mirror of myself in my subject—not by virtue of vanity (I don't think), but through craft and serendipitous 'crazy link-ups': the 'L' that led me to Lucette Aldous in the first place; my love of dance, strengthened through name; Aldous' wandering anecdotes that are finding strange synergy with my research and my creative efforts to bring this project to fruition.

The following draft poem draws autobiographical and biographical into a dance relation. The first half draws on a range of reviews of Aldous' performances. The second half extends from my own archive of ballet exam critiques—the above thoughts (my research and reflection on Aldous; my reading over Albiston's poems) propelling me toward my own archive of personal documents, meticulously catalogued and filed by my father over many years:

Lucette <> L.

"five-foot no-
thing" "the flea"
"twinkling feet"

"supple dancer" "neat and tiny"
"pirouettes like a dream" "pocket-
sized" "petite and doll-like as the
doll" "with a bird-like jump" "an elf-
in face that breaks into a warm
gay smile" "as quick and vivid as
summer lightning" "superb control"
"a sculpture in icing sugar"

<>

"Good sense of music & enjoy-
able skipping" "Shows 'potential'"
"good attack and rhythm"
"theory
good" "nice sissone" "Lovely smile shown
in dance, why not throughout!" "Lift chin"
"Tuck tail in" "Control roll of left
ankle and arch" "Take care not to
climb onto pointe" "tried very hard"

"Good girl"
"Well done"

This new series of 'Lucette' poems is a work in progress—I do not yet know if it will 'succeed' or 'fail' again. Nevertheless, some thoughts have emerged as a consequence of this ongoing narrative, and through my attempts to shape this new work. For one, I had previously considered this 'work' that I do—the research for and writing of a 'poetic biography'—to be predominantly an exercise in finding synergies between the subject and the biographical form, and that poetry's flexibilities and affordances could lend themselves to this process of developing and delivering such a biographical result. The 'evolution' of my practice, then, might be seen from book to book as chiefly subject-led. However, the encounters and circumstances noted above—a collision of 'failure', loss, revelation; of revisiting texts; of noticing and reflection and reflexivity; of testing the interplay between subject and biographer—have foregrounded the singularity of all biographical texts as a specific synthesising of research encounters. With this in mind, I can reflect on each of these works anew, as *biographies of research encounters*.

A second but related thought is that, with an over-abundance of materials on Davies, Grainger and Balanchine, it was possible for me to be less visible in those previous books. With my work on Lucette Aldous, however, I have had to become a more active player within the space of the page. Yet, it is not a lyric voice that seems capable of meeting this work, but a documentary one;

my willingness to participate in this way, then, has only been possible because of my father's dedicated archiving of my personal records. Of course, Jordie Albiston is there, too, holding back the curtain on a frame.

Notes

1 Admittedly, this 'sifting' was not exhaustive—there are more than 100,000 items in the Grainger Museum alone.

2 I have written about this archive-led process in previous essays; see 'A Poet Walks Through an Archive: Processing the poetic biography' (2018) and 'The Frame and the Score: Knowing a subject differently through poetic biography' (2018).

3 The ballet 'Apollon Musagète' later became more popularly known and programmed under the title 'Apollo'.

4 An extended essay on the principles behind the development of the manuscript of *Music Made Visible* can be seen in my essay 'Choreographing George Balanchine: The life as ballet program' (2021).

5 Interview transcript, 14 December 2016.

6 For a discussion of many of Albiston's poems, see my long essay '"The precise punctuation of your breath": Jordie Albiston's oeuvre' in *Sydney Review of Books*, October 2022, https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essay/the-precise-punctuation-of-your-breath-jordie-albistons-oeuvre/.

7 These eight concepts include: Fibonacci Series, Golden Mean, Hexahedron, Lucas Number Sequence, Pentagon, Plane Angle, Pythagorean Theorem and Square Pyramid. Each poem is titled with the symbol that indicates which concept has provided the basis for the poem's form.

8 Incidentally, serendipity—and its cousin, synchronicity—have been on my mind through conversations with the Australian poet Anne M Carson, for whom synchronicity is a driving concept in her poetry research and writing process, as she notes here: https://piecedwork.com/2021/11/25/anne-m-carson/

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About the author

Jessica L. Wilkinson has published three poetic biographies, *Marionette: A Biography of Miss Marion Davies* (Vagabond 2012), *Suite for Percy Grainger* (Vagabond 2014) and *Music Made Visible: A Biography of George Balanchine* (Vagabond, 2019). She is currently working on a fourth manuscript, on the life of artist Mirka Mora, and on a monograph that explores the concept and burgeoning field of 'poetic biography'. Jessica is the founding editor of *Rabbit: a journal for nonfiction poetry* and the offshoot *Rabbit Poets Series* of single-author collections by emerging Australian poets. She co-edited, with Bonny Cassidy, *Contemporary Australian Feminist Poetry* (Hunter Publishers, 2016), and with Cassandra Atherton, *Memory Book: Portraits of Older Australians in Poetry and Watercolours* (Hunter Publishers, 2021). She is Associate Professor in Creative and Professional Writing at RMIT University, Melbourne.

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GENERAL TENANCY AGREEMENT

Rental stress, memory and home in contemporary Australian poetry

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Abstract

Notions of home and unhomeliness have long been discussed by scholars in relation to Australian poetry, but little scholarly work has explored how contemporary Australian poets interrogate the relationship between renting and constructions of home. As the great Australian dream of homeownership becomes increasingly inaccessible and the availability of public housing declines, a larger proportion of the population privately rent their houses in a lightly regulated and highly competitive rental market (Morris et al 2021: 72). Poetry has long been used to record and preserve the affective dimensions of home, and in this paper I examine a series of poems concerned with finding rental properties, moving in and out of them, and with attempts to create a sense of home in houses that always already belong to others. I discuss the work of three poets whose recent collections grapple with notions of home, stability and security in relation to rented houses: Zenobia Frost's *After the Demolition* (2019), Omar Sakr's *These Wild Houses* (2017), and Fiona Wright's *Domestic Interior* (2017). I argue that in these collections, houses are sites characterised by anxiety, instability, and erasure, rather than stable and secure archives of personal identity and domestic ritual.

GENERAL TENANCY AGREEMENT: RENTAL STRESS, MEMORY AND HOME IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN POETRY

Ella Jeffery

This article examines how Australian poets engage with complex notions of belonging and ownership inscribed in experiences of inspecting, living in, and moving out of rented houses during a time of significant disruption in the nation's housing market. As homeownership becomes less accessible and the availability of public housing declines, an increasing proportion of the population who might once have either had access to social housing or transitioned from renting to homeownership are now renting for longer periods, or permanently (Morris et al. 2021: 72). Renting, which in Australia's lightly regulated and highly competitive housing market, may involve moving frequently, living in low-quality housing, or being unable to find secure housing at all, can obstruct renters from developing a sense of home and belonging in relation to their house (Bate 2020: 590). While literary scholarship has long been concerned with how Australian writers contend with anxieties and mythologies of homeownership in their work, little attention has been paid to the relationship between renting, belonging and home, and how these have been interrogated by Australian poets. As new generations find it 'difficult or impossible to transition' out of renting (Morris et al 2021: 72), it is essential to examine how this widespread change is being negotiated in literary works, which can capture intangible and highly unique conceptions of home that empirical studies may not be able to investigate.

In this paper I discuss the work of three poets whose recent collections grapple with notions of home, stability and security: Zenobia Frost's *After the Demolition* (2019), Omar Sakr's The*se Wild Houses* (2017), and Fiona Wright's *Domestic Interior* (2017). I argue that in these collections, houses are sites of anxiety, instability, and erasure, rather than stable and secure archives of personal history, identity and domestic ritual. I explore how these poets represent processes of finding and making home in rented houses during a time of rising insecurity. Poetry as a form has been widely used by Australian poets throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to record and preserve the affective dimensions of home[1] and in this paper I examine a series of poems concerned with finding rental properties, moving in and out of them, and with attempts to create a sense of home in houses that always already belong to others.

I begin with an overview of factors that have contributed to rise of housing-based anxieties for renters, and explore how renters' experiences of home, security and stability can be disrupted by the volatile, competitive property market (Hoffman and Heisler 2021: 83). Following this, I closely analyse one poem from each of the three poets' collections, beginning with a poem about the process of finding a rental property, followed by a poem about living in a rented house, and ending with a poem in which the speaker is vacating a rented house. While housing studies scholars have contributed a great deal of empirical research in the area, 'attempts to understand housing through a focus on government policy have decreasing relevance in an increasingly privatised and deregulated field' (Clapham 2002: 60) and cannot account for its impacts on singular, highly personal experiences of home for renters. In examining the ways in which three Australian poets use lyric poetry to consider how belonging, security and dwelling are negotiated in rented houses, this paper presents an alternative approach to interrogating the experiences of renting during the housing crisis.

My discussion of renting is informed by socio-cultural conceptions of home. Home has physical, emotional, cultural and social dimensions—it is a '*spatial imaginary*' (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 2, emphasis original) that exceeds the physical structure of a house. Home encompasses feelings of belonging, security, and stability and are connected to memories derived from accumulating experience with and connection to a particular place. Constructing a sense of home is particularly complex for renters (Hulse and Milligan 2014: 638), who temporarily occupy houses owned by others, may share with unfamiliar people or large groups, and may be required to move frequently. As Bate contends, this 'lack of control over housing circumstances makes it difficult for a person to establish a feeling of home within their dwelling' (2020: 592). It is important to note that renting is not always undertaken under duress: for some, renting caters to adaptable, flexible lifestyles (Morris et al 2021: vii). For many renters, however, renting is no longer a mostly transitional phase; it has become increasingly difficult for renters to buy a home or even rent a house that contains the amenities and space required (Morris et al 2021: 72). Housing studies researchers like Clapham (2002) and Hulse and Milligan (2014) have advocated for the importance of accounts of renters' lived experience to understand the varied impacts of long-term renting and examine the highly unique affective dimensions of home in these contexts. While experiences of home in temporary houses can be difficult to empirically examine, poetry as a form can precisely render intimate, temporary experiences; it is a form that contains 'a single moment expanded beyond its limits … filled with recollection and speculation' (Gross 2013: 130).

Poetry has often been considered an ideal form through which to negotiate the singular, often intangible dimensions of home because of its capacity to illuminate or transform the everyday encounter through close attention and precise imagery, as well as because of the undeniably architectural qualities of poetic forms and structures including, of course, its use of the stanza as its major structural component, a term which is Italian for 'room'. Many scholars and writers, including myself (Jeffery 2016), have drawn on Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958) to examine the emotional and symbolic attachments bound up in houses. Bachelard's seminal text presents a bourgeois conceptualisation of dwelling in which the home is a haven of solitude and stability, a space that reflects 'the topography of our intimate being' (1994: xxxvi). Such secure experiences of home have become more remote for an increasing proportion of the population, despite the enduring position of homeownership as the ideal form of dwelling in Australia's cultural imagination (Hoffman and Heisler 2021: 82). Notions of home and ownership sit uneasily in a nation where a legacy of brutal dispossession is often erased in favour of a national obsession with homeownership buttressed by imported English property rights. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings of home and home-making have been actively destroyed as a part of the colonial project; decolonial place-making critiques Western understandings of property that have shaped Australia's real estate system and dictate that property be productive, orderly, tamed (Crabtree 2013: 99). A productivity-based approach predicated on individual ownership has dominated Australian housing policy, which privileges individual acquisition and investment. While homeownership remains central to national identity, it has significantly declined since the 1990s through a mixture of factors including under-regulation of the market, lack of social housing stock, tax settings that support investment rather than owner-occupation, and the overall affordability of houses (Morris et al 2021: 11).

Poets have been attuned to tensions in Australian housing markets in a range of recent collections that canvass the varying cultural phenomena that emerge from Australia's preoccupation with 'real estate in general and homeownership in particular' (Hoffman and Heisler 2021, 82): processes of urban gentrification, investment portfolios, house-flipping, reality renovation fads, and mappings of historical development projects have appeared in the work of Australian poets in recent years. Keri Glastonbury's *Newcastle Sonnets* (2018) examines the gentrification of working-class Newcastle, while Lisa Gorton's *Empirical* (2019) considers public architecture and changes to Melbourne's Royal Park. Petra White's *Cities* (2021), Lachlan Brown's *Lunar Inheritance* (2017), and Elfie Shiosaki's *Homecoming* (2021) grapple with dwelling, belonging, and the place(s) in which Australians negotiate and renegotiate house and home. John Kinsella's poetics have long interrogated pastoral traditions and understandings of home as connected to land and landscape (Holland-Batt and Jeffery 2020), while David Malouf's work considers the ways in which domesticity can be rendered unfamiliar. Contemporary poets contend with longstanding Indigenous and settler traditions of understanding this country as a home in their work, asking how we dwell on land that has been stolen, commodified, and ecologically devastated.

As I have noted, there have been few forays from literary scholars into renting's relationship with home. Frost (2019) examines approaches to place-making in Brisbane sharehouses, while Hamilton (2018) considers the construction of alternative place relations in contemporary literary works, but as yet no literary scholars have discussed the anxieties and disruptions to the experience of home that emerge from renting during the housing crisis. Many of Australia's newer generations of writers have come of age at a time when access to housing is increasingly strained, and as this is likely to continue to shape Australian housing conditions for some time, it is essential to consider how rental stress is negotiated in literary work. In the following analysis, I consider how poetry offers a new perspective on the rental crisis, and highlights concerns about security, stability and homeliness often difficult to access in empirical research.

Queensland poet Zenobia Frost's second collection, *After the Demolition* (2019), guides the reader through a series of makeshift, temporary and dilapidated domestic spaces including rented houses, motels and caravan parks. In the collection's first section, Frost is primarily concerned with share houses as archives of alternative histories and practices of dwelling in Brisbane. Frost (2019) has written about share housing as an uncanny, liminal setting in Brisbane's literary landscape, holding that in share houses the stress of insecure housing exists alongside the capacity for innovation and subversion inscribed in their ramshackle, unconventional structures. Share housing is one common form of renting in Australia, typically considered 'a transitional housing stage between moving from the family home and into property ownership' (Maalsen 2020: 107). In these poems, Frost's highly imagistic, textural evocations of dilapidated and improvised rental houses literalise insecurity of renting, transforming houses themselves into representations of home as unstable, inaccessible and potentially threatening sites.

The longest poem in the collection is 'Distractions at Rental Inspections', which is divided into four sections each named for a Brisbane suburb. This poem is unique in its focus on inspecting rental houses, a process which has been under-considered in housing studies and which has become increasingly fraught in a crowded and expensive market (Bate 2020: 590). In each of the poem's four sections, the speaker inspects a different house, its location denoted by the section's subtitle, and is shown through the house by either a property agent or tenant. The distractions the title refers to vary from a toilet with a shower curtain instead of a door to

tilting, 'fleshy pink' rooms (Frost 2019: 15); all draw the reader's attention to the disrepair and discomfort of each house. In the first section, 'Toowong', a house with a possum living 'in the crook of the ceiling's / busted plasterboard' is for rent (12). In the second section, 'Paddington', the claustrophobic house is filled with metaphors of physical discomfort and subjugation—'a hall with its arms / pinned to its sides' (13)—which echo the speaker's discomfort at the shirtless tenant who guides her around the house. In the third section the speaker encounters a 'break-lease' in the outer suburb of Moorooka, where an agent shows her a ruined house and tells her 'it's as-is … / but make an offer' (14). In the final section, 'Wilston', the house's walls do not meet and are covered in a 'nightclub glow / of mould' (15). The abundance of sensory imagery Frost deploys in her rendering of each house produces a both delight and disgust in each dwelling; the vivid, often bodily imagery she deploys links each house and highlights their neglected states, demonstrating the poor conditions available to renters. In these houses, disrepair, damage, and unstable social and physical boundaries reflect the power imbalances inherent in a market that privileges the rights of landlords and agents over tenants, where houses are as precarious as the notion of home itself.

The speaker is at times joyfully seduced by the strangeness of some houses, and Frost's imagery, dispersed across the field of the page, captures her elliptical focus as she inspects each house. Despite the bemused tone of the poem, it is primarily concerned with fragmentation, damage and insecurity, as the speaker's attention hovers over broken doors the realtor rests 'like a ladder against the wall', 'tidal boards / that dip and creak', and a discarded 'nest of mattresses' (14). The poet's use of white space and the fragmentary arrangement of images across the page conveys the speaker's distraction and gestures towards the absences of working amenities that she notes in every house: in this way, each house is defined for the speaker by what is broken, absent, or neglected, but, crucially, none of these things are mentioned in her interactions with those showing the houses to her. This arrangement, and the speaker's hyper-attentiveness to the disrepair of each house conveys an anxiety that is absent from the speaker's tone. I read this as part of the self-performance involved in rental inspections: the poem foregrounds the speaker's humour over her horror, so the poem reflects the speaker's self-conscious desire to appear at ease with the conditions around her, establishing beneath her amusement a sense of urgency: it is essential that she finds somewhere to live and therefore must make herself amenable to the agents and prospective housemates she encounters despite the poor conditions.

The structure of each house is flawed, makeshift, and in some cases menacing. At least two of the four houses the speaker inspects are physically unsafe, as is the case in the Moorooka house, where the speaker encounters a sinister house and comments, 'I half expect to see / a pair of pliers / a few loose teeth / a bucket' (14). The Paddington house in section two is also unsafe, but more subtly so. The speaker observes:

> The tenant showing us around
> is topless—his distended nipples
> reject the compact space:
>
> > the living room pressed
> > into the hall's narrow gut,
> > the bedrooms knitted in.
>
> The squeeze could be tolerated

like living
on a houseboat
but his nipples
follow me—eyes bulging
from a painting (13)

While other sections of the poem are primarily concerned with the features of houses, in this instance the anxiety underlying the comic image of the nipples derives from concerns about surveillance, intimacy and safety, once again literalised by the structure of the house. Anthropomorphic imagery heightens the speaker's sense of claustrophobia; metaphors like 'the living room pressed / into the hall's narrow gut', gesture to her physical discomfort produced by the male tenant's disregard for personal and physical boundaries. The word 'tolerated' in the penultimate stanza is essential here: renting, then, is not a matter of comfort and belonging, but is instead a matter of what can be tolerated—a focus on house rather than home.

In the fourth section of the poem, the highly physical sense of insecurity conveyed by the 'carny illusion' (15) of the house's distorted structures and walls that don't connect parallels the insecurity of its very short-term lease. The speaker observes:

We see this place for rent *often*—
the left chunk of a heritage home
chunked into six month leases—half a house
for half a year.

Subdivision and short-term leases both impact the speaker's sense of security, and in the image of the 'chunk' of house, Frost conveys the partial, temporary quality of dwelling in a house where the speaker could only stay six months. The repetition in these lines gestures to the repetitive process of inspecting and vacating implied by such a short term lease; variations on 'chunk' and 'half' are repeated twice, representing the doubling of the house into two dwellings as well as the speaker's heightened focus on the partial experience of home she might have here. Indeed, the speaker intuits her precarious and temporary tenure in the form of house itself, which 'tips me out its front window, lurching / at the train line that cuts through the yard'; this active image of the house ejecting the speaker reflects her sense of instability. Ultimately, she decides against this house: none of the houses are suitable and the poem concludes without the speaker finding a house to rent, suggesting that the speaker will continue inspections. Renting in this poem is characterised by instability and precarity, symbolised by imagery of architectural decay and dilapidation—the houses are at once playful and thrilling, sites of potential resistance, seduction, delight, and also sites of neglect, destruction or discomfort. They are not capable, in most cases, of accommodating the speaker comfortably, and the poem presents a confronting process in which the speaker is unable to find a home she can 'tolerate', leaving her, like many real-life renters, in a state of ongoing uncertainty.

Omar Sakr's first collection *These Wild Houses* establishes themes of belonging and isolation, grief and violence, home and dislocation, which characterise much of his later work, including his most recent poetry collection *The Lost Arabs* (2019) and his novel *Son of Sin* (2022). As the collection's title suggests, houses in this collection are unruly, unstable and always plural—spaces that double as house and home, as sites of protection and threat, where one finds both intimacy and isolation. Representations of home in this work are rarely static, and while early poems begin with tenderness, as the collection develops, Sakr's constructions of home explore

its absences and insufficiencies in poems about homelessness, housing commissions, and migration and its legacies.

In the poem 'What the Landlord Owns' the speaker describes his life in a subdivided and overcrowded house, where a sense of both intimacy and distance characterises his relationship to the other families who share the house. The long, single-stanza poem is the penultimate poem in the collection and begins with an intimate gesture of address:

> I should tell you about my other house,
> the bricks, I mean, the building not the metaphor
> gunned to its breaking point. It sits atop one
> of many hills in Ashfield, squatting on the edge
> of an intersection, the large structure split into
> three duplexes. Three families. The three
> now live where just the one once
> waxed wood with childhood memory. (Sakr 2017: 56)

The opening line introduces a doubled notion of belonging: the title 'What the Landlord Owns' instantly specifies legal ownership of the house, but the speaker's phrasing in the first lines of the poem suggest ownership of a different kind. The phrase 'my other house' is deliberately confusing, positioning the speaker as an owner of multiple houses—calling up the image of an investor-landlord acquiring multiple properties—but goes on to abruptly revise this, presenting it instead as an ironic comment about a meagre inheritance. His two houses—one rented, one metaphorical—are both at 'breaking point', and his reference to the house as a metaphor can be read as a gesture to the affective sense of home, in this case a home under siege and subjected to violence. Not only, then, is the house not his own, but his sense of home is threatened and at risk. The poet emphasises the crowding of the subdivision through repetition of numerical language: the word 'three' repeated three times in a single line produces a tone of disbelief at how the landlord has restructured what was once a single-family house, again reiterating the number through the consonance and assonance of the phrase 'one once waxed wood'.

The structure of the subdivided house both separates its inhabitants but also brings them into highly intimate proximity, a paradoxical position that the next lines of the poem explore. The speaker explains 'I know the stringent cry / of the neighbour's wife and his mumbled pleas / as well as I know my own waistline'. The line brings into contact both the close quarters of the subdivided house, as well as the nature of the body as home, a site that stores memories and patterns of domesticity. The speaker is highly attuned to the movements and sounds of the other families, and often his descriptions of such movements involve tender, highly tactile imagery, suggesting he derives a sense of home or connection from the familiarity of others' domestic routines, even if he does not share in them, as in the anthropomorphic image of 'the soft hands of the sun / sculpt the sloping muscles of a man like sand /as he mows the lawn' which communicates in its focus on texture a desire for physical touch and warmth. The middle of the poem expands with this tactile imagery, expressing a proximity that affords intimate knowledge of 'the pungent spices of their dinner, / the cold scent of their arguments'. Sakr's imagery replicates the distortions of space and intimacy the subdivided house causes for its inhabitants, who are at once closer and more intimate than neighbours in a single-owner house, and also distant—the three families the speaker describes never meet in the poem, are never shown speaking to each other, and, as the speaker observes, some speak in an 'unfamiliar language' which means that while he knows them well he cannot communicate with them verbally.

In the final third of the poem, the speaker shifts from static reflection and observation into movement through the house itself as he travels downstairs to make a meal. While tenderness characterises the speaker's descriptions of the other families, the description of the house itself conveys discomfort: 'steep stairs make descent dangerous, I take them at a run / when I can no longer stand empty'. Here, the house's unsafe state is revealed, along with a suggestion that moving out into the house is only done when he can no longer bear hunger; the speaker, then, does not feel an attachment to the house itself or find comfort in the physical space. In these final lines of the poem, the speaker makes his solitary meal and immediately returns to his bedroom:

> The oven can only be lit with a tapering flame
> coupled with a prayer, the fridge so old it sing-speaks
> Langston and the go-go washing machine
> has the laughter of a tap dancer trapped
> inside it flits with every task it is set. Two minutes on
> is all it takes to heat up a meal before I return
> to my window, desk and the strait of stars
> guiding surf in the dark above these families
> living near, unaware the house and light on the hill
> are ruptured within, choking with three separate ways
> of silence. (Sakr 2017: 56–7)

Here the speaker focuses on the poor conditions of the amenities, his phrases employing a familiarity that suggests these are not recent breakages but a permanent state. Again, embodied memories and practices of dwelling are invoked as Sakr animates the oven, washing machine and fridge with playful images that gesture towards the speaker's deep familiarity with them that borders on the ritualistic, as suggested by images of the 'tapering flame' and 'prayer' (56) when working the oven.

In the final lines, the speaker resumes the position of observation he began in. While he spends much time listening to the other families, his outlook is turned away from the house and towards the neighbourhood, reducing the 'large' house from the start of the poem to a small point under a 'strait of stars' that the neighbouring families are 'unaware' of (57), implying the three families exist in a self-imposed isolation from the rest of the suburb, rendered invisible perhaps because of the lower socio-economic status suggested by the crowded conditions of the house. The final image of the poem is of silence, suggesting that distance, and not intimacy, is the predominating experience of renting in this house. The landlord, as in the other poems discussed in this paper, never appears; it is the tenants whose experiences shape the poet's rendering of the space, but the landlord who determines the conditions of this experience. Crucially, Sakr introduces the figure of the landlord in the title so that the landlord's ownership of the property hovers over the poem, and this presence in the title duplicates the landlord's property title. That the landlord is present in title only, so to speak, also sets up a striking absence throughout the remainder of the poem that intensifies as the speaker details the poor quality of the house and its facilities. The landlord's presence as owner is thus linked to an absence of concern or responsibility: the landlord is shirking the duties that are bound up in ownership.

Representations of home in *Domestic Interior* are pervaded by a subtler sense of unease. Zenobia Frost has noted the symmetries between Wright's work and her own; both poets are concerned with the material and psychological resonances of renting, and both explore

inner-city dwellings where experiences of home are marginal, temporary, and always under the control of larger forces (2019). As Wright's collection's title suggests, the poet is concerned with domesticity, in particular with how domesticity is unsettled by the property market, as well as contemporary consumer and wellness culture. In presenting a series of speakers who adjust, shift, move out and get their bond back, the poet revises Australian ideals of stable dwelling achieved through homeownership, presenting dwelling as an experience characterised by anxiety and uncertainty, reflecting increasingly widespread rental stress in Australia, where a growing cohort of renters 'struggle for the quality of housing that their parents enjoyed' (Daley 2018: 11). In Wright's poems, speakers restlessly question their attachment to their homes, where layers of lived experience exist in constant tension with the awareness that the house always belongs to someone else.

The collection's title poem is an elegy to a rented house. The speaker examines the impermanence and permanence of her experiences in and memories of the house as she prepares to move out. Moving house frequently is an increasingly common experience for renters in Australia, where leases are typically one year to six months (Morris et al. 2021: 88), disrupting the sense of security attached to notions of home. In this 15-line poem, the speaker attempts to reinforce her presence in the face of such a disruption:

> I had a mirror mounted opposite the window and the steady hum
> of light refracting: I have lived in a belly of sun.
> I have lived, I have been loved inside this house, and I have cried;
> I have danced in this kitchen, and though my potted herbs
> have always died, I have loved this house.
> How do these houses hold us—according to our bond,
> no less—I have learnt to walk bruiseless
> to the bathroom in the dark. I think I understand
> the dream sometimes, the moulded plaster grapes guarding
> my sleep, the car doors that applaud each movement
> of the drinkers down the street. My misdirected mail
> will outlast me, dead skin dusting
> the most awkward corners, the illegal bluetack I can't peel
> from the pale walls. I box up my books alphabetically.
> The bare rooms echo, hum. (Wright 2017: 31)

The speaker begins with the 'steady hum / of light refracting' in the first line, which recurs in the final line, when the rooms, now bare of the speaker's possessions, 'echo, hum' in their absence. This hum is in both cases metaphorical, sensed by the speaker as first a form of comfort drawn from the sunlight, second as a form of absence or emptiness that she registers as sound. Bookending the poem, these two images contain the speaker in a cycle of settling in a new house before, perhaps, being once uprooted and again hearing the 'bare rooms echo, hum' as she leaves.

More concentrated repetition follows: the anaphoric phrase 'I have' can be read as the speaker's attempt through repeated utterances to reinforce her presence in the space, embedding her acts of crying, dancing, and gardening—all private, personal experiences connected to constructing a sense of home through intimacy and security—in the house, insisting on their place in the house's arrangement. Attachment to home relates to 'a sense of deep familiarity, comfort, connection and space of meaning' (Mackenzie et al 2017: 147), and the anaphora here is a way

of treading and retreading the space, re-emphasising through repetition the speaker's mark on the house, symbolised in her daily patterns of dwelling. This emphatic construction juxtaposes the poem's use of past tense, which shows that although the speaker attempts to insist on her presence in the house, it has already been erased. For renters, being frequently uprooted can cause heightened anxiety, a sense of disconnection, and a loss of unique personal memories attached to ways of living that emerge in a particular house (Hulse and Milligan 2014: 640). This sense of disruption is evident in this poem: the speaker attempts to inscribe her presence in the house, despite her minimal power and the foregone conclusion of her departure.

The speaker's question 'How do these houses hold us' (Wright 2017: 31) in the sixth line concerns the nature of belonging: she asks how a renter might construct a sense of home in a rented house, her use of plurals in 'hold us' expanding the enquiry beyond her own experience. This question is interrupted by the partial phrase 'according to our bond, no less', the strict legal dimensions of rental tenancy unsettling the more contemplative, philosophical question the speaker is posing. Houses, then, hold renters first according to law; the abrupt interjection gestures towards the implacability of such a fact. The speaker offers a second form of answer via an image of embodied memory: 'I have learned to walk bruiseless / to the bathroom in the dark'. Home, then, is also experienced through memory and the body, rendered in the tactile image of the house's layout imprinted on the speaker's memory. This knowledge sits outside the domain of legal contracts and demonstrates that an enduring attachment to the house exists, although it is retained in the body and leaves no true mark on the house itself. Instead, the house leaves its mark on the inhabitant.

This recognition of memory as one way in which renters construct a sense of home leads the speaker to consider more permanent dwellings. She continues, 'I think I understand / the dream sometimes', an acknowledgement of Australia's enduring obsession with homeownership, despite significant decreases in the percentage of Australians who can afford to buy a home (Daley et al 2018: 3). Wright's images here construct homeownership as a fantasy of protection and celebration, with 'plaster grapes guarding / my sleep' and 'car doors that applaud each movement / of the drinkers down the street' (Wright 2017: 31): the speaker sees in homeownership a possibility for stability and rest, which have long been attached to ideas of home (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 4) but which, as the poem indicates, is easily and frequently disrupted for renters.

While the house might indelibly imprint itself on her memory and shape her patterns of living, the imprint she leaves on the house in return is minimal: the 'illegal bluetack' which, the phrase suggests, contravenes bond requirements, and the 'dead skin dusting / the most awkward corners'. A sense of haunting emerges here in the uncanny image of dead skin and the speaker's 'misdirected mail' which, she notes 'will outlast me', a fatalistic phrase that renders the erasure of the speaker's presence as a form of death. What is left, however, is the hum of the first line—an indication that the speaker's presence, her experience of the house remains, however intangible it may be, in her body and memory. Wright's poem, like much of *Domestic Interior*, is attentive to the ways in which the body marks its presence in the world, as well as how the world marks the body in response.

Home in Australia has always been a vexed and unstable symbol, rooted in notions of personal security and protection but haunted by legacies of dispossession and invasion, of alienation and isolation (Crouch 2009: 51). Anxiety has long inflected the representation of houses and homes in Australian poetry; in the poems discussed here, that anxiety is unearthed in the space of

the rented house as poets grapple with the ongoing dissolution of the 'great Australian dream' of homeownership. This disappearing dream, however, haunts these poems: all use detached houses as their settings, an indication that home, even in the context of renting, continues to be tied to the symbol of the house, despite the increasing proportion of the population that lives in mid- or high-density housing. Apartments, townhouses and single-family homes all make up Australia's rental housing market (Morris et al 2021: 18), but all three poets have chosen to take up the symbolically rich and complex image of the house to grapple with and contest entrenched ideals of home and belonging.

Alongside this, however, these poems gesture towards an alternative—or perhaps more essential—home: the body is frequently called up to correspond with the house and to archive domestic rituals and memories for renters whose tenure in their houses is brief and uncertain. The house is no longer a stable site or a possible archive for such memories; dilapidated, empty, or subdivided, it does not offer dwellers a space to store their experiences and shore up a feeling of stability. Instead, in the processes shown across these three poems, from inspecting houses through to moving out, houses are spaces in which an individual's presence is always in the process of being subtly or overtly erased. The house—in line with ideals of homeownership—can be seen as an archive in which the owner might store their treasured objects, rituals, relationships, and memories, ensuring their preservation by passing the house itself along to the next generation. When houses are primarily rented, not owned, such an archive of experience and memory must be stored elsewhere, and these poems position the body as its successor. The body bears the marks of such houses as well as the anxiety of being 'tipped' from one house to the next in an endless cycle.

The poem itself is yet another archive in which memories of rented houses can be contained. In each of the three poems discussed here, speakers express the indelible qualities of their individual experiences with renting, inspecting and moving house, bringing together memory, affect, and physical experience in the highly individual and intimate space of the lyric poem. The poets whose work I have discussed here are part of a generation who face ongoing housing instability and unaffordability alongside a host of other volatile conditions including the climate crisis, regional and global political instability, a global pandemic, which also impact housing access. These poems suggest that the unstable, uncontrollable experience of renting is becoming increasingly significant as subject matter for a generation of poets who face greater challenges in attempting to buy a home, and who are required to devote a greater portion of their income towards housing than in previous decades (Daley 2018: 14). If previously preoccupations with belonging and memory were primarily focused on landscape and possession, homeownership and stability, this analysis reveals that some emergent concerns may centre on more transient and unstable experiences of home, one where the body's memory outlasts the house, and in which home is always temporary.

Note

1 Some examples include Gwen Harwood's sonnets, most famously 'In the Park', 'Boxing Day', and 'Suburban Sonnet', a number of Michael Dransfield's Courland Penders poems, several of David Malouf's and Tracy Ryan's collections, most recently *An Open Book* (2018) and *Rose Interior* (2022) respectively, Lisa Gorton's *Hotel Hyperion* (2013), and Diane Fahey's *A House by the River* (2016).

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About the author

Dr Ella Jeffery is a Lecturer in Creative Writing in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science at Griffith University. She researches intersections between contemporary literature, television, and renovation culture and is particularly interested in conceptions and representations of unstable or insecure dwelling in twenty-first-century Australia. Her debut collection of poems, *Dead Bolt*, won the Puncher & Wattman Prize for a First Book of Poems, the Anne Elder Award, and was shortlisted for the Mary Gilmore Award.

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4 POEMS

Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon

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PREFACE

Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon

These poems propose that the experiences of Croatian and Yugoslav immigrants to Australia prior to the 1960s, including their wartime internment, have received insufficient historical and artistic attention and that erasure poetry created from newspaper and archival collections can effectively reflect, deconstruct and redress some forms of historical and cultural amnesia. Employing a documentary poetry, erasure and Dadaist approach, my poetry uses various methods to disguise or highlight aspects of old documents, so that new stories are created while bias, discrimination and silencing are illuminated. This selection of poems demonstrates how erasure poetry potentially resurrects complex migrant histories while also raising historiographical questions, such as, who has narrated the past and why have some significant events received little notice? Practise-led, narrative inquiry and creative writing methodologies have been applied to the creation of the poems in the collection 'The Commonwealth of Amnesia', while the approaches of feminist historiography, post-colonialism and Third Space hybridity have informed the underlying theoretical perspectives. History must be regularly re-visioned, re-written, re-told and remembered to include stories that have been overlooked or forgotten, in poetry and other artistic forms, in ways that challenge and expand how history is told. Contemporary poetic textual erasures can provocatively reveal deficits in the historical enterprise by treating primary sources as palimpsests, that is, as malleable, redactable, transmutable and destructible. As Natalie Harkin (2019) writes in *Archival Poetics 2*, 'Seek company of others who refuse to accept a culture of amnesia, who refuse to once again be left out of history' (p. 34).

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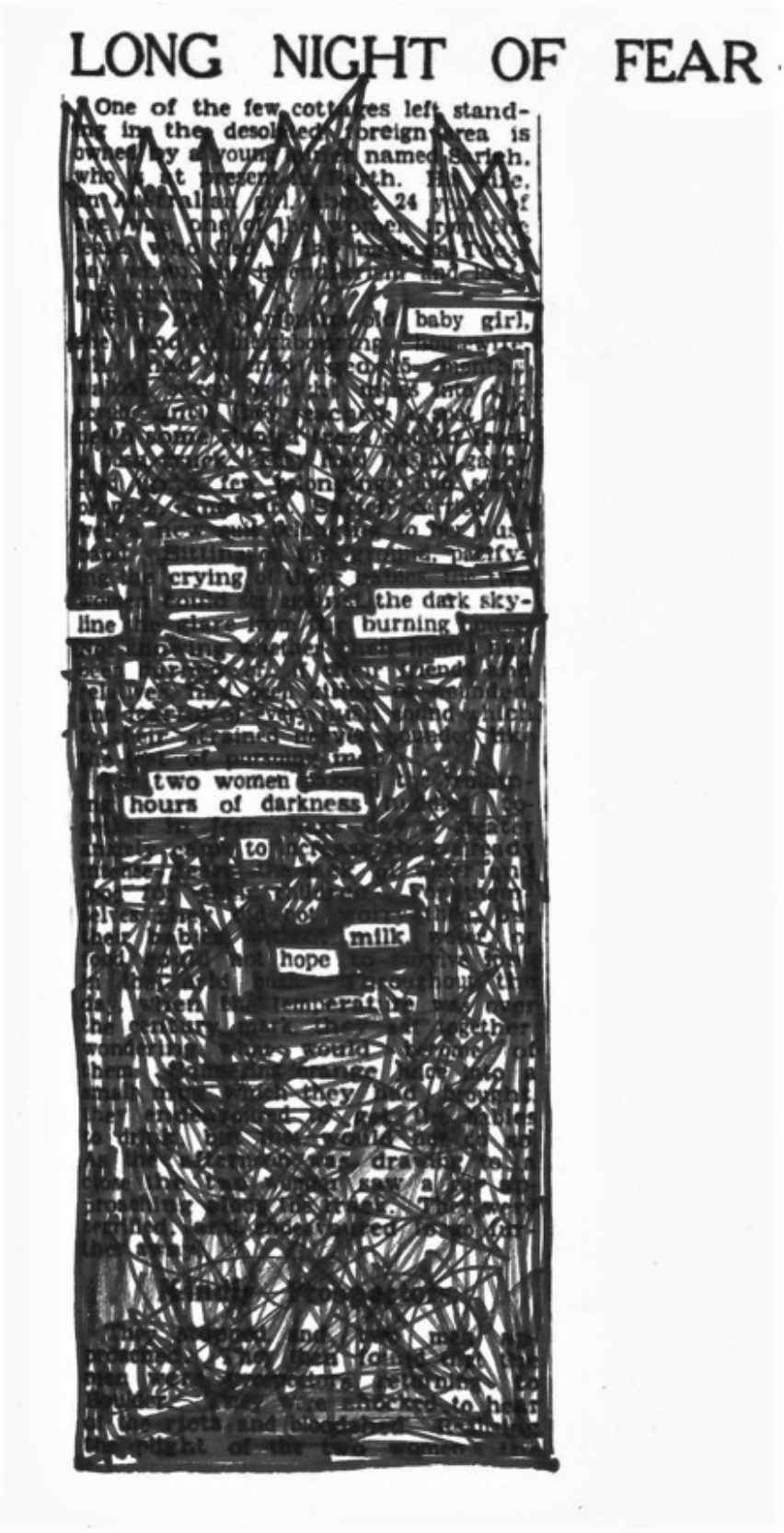
THE LONG NIGHT OF FEAR

Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon

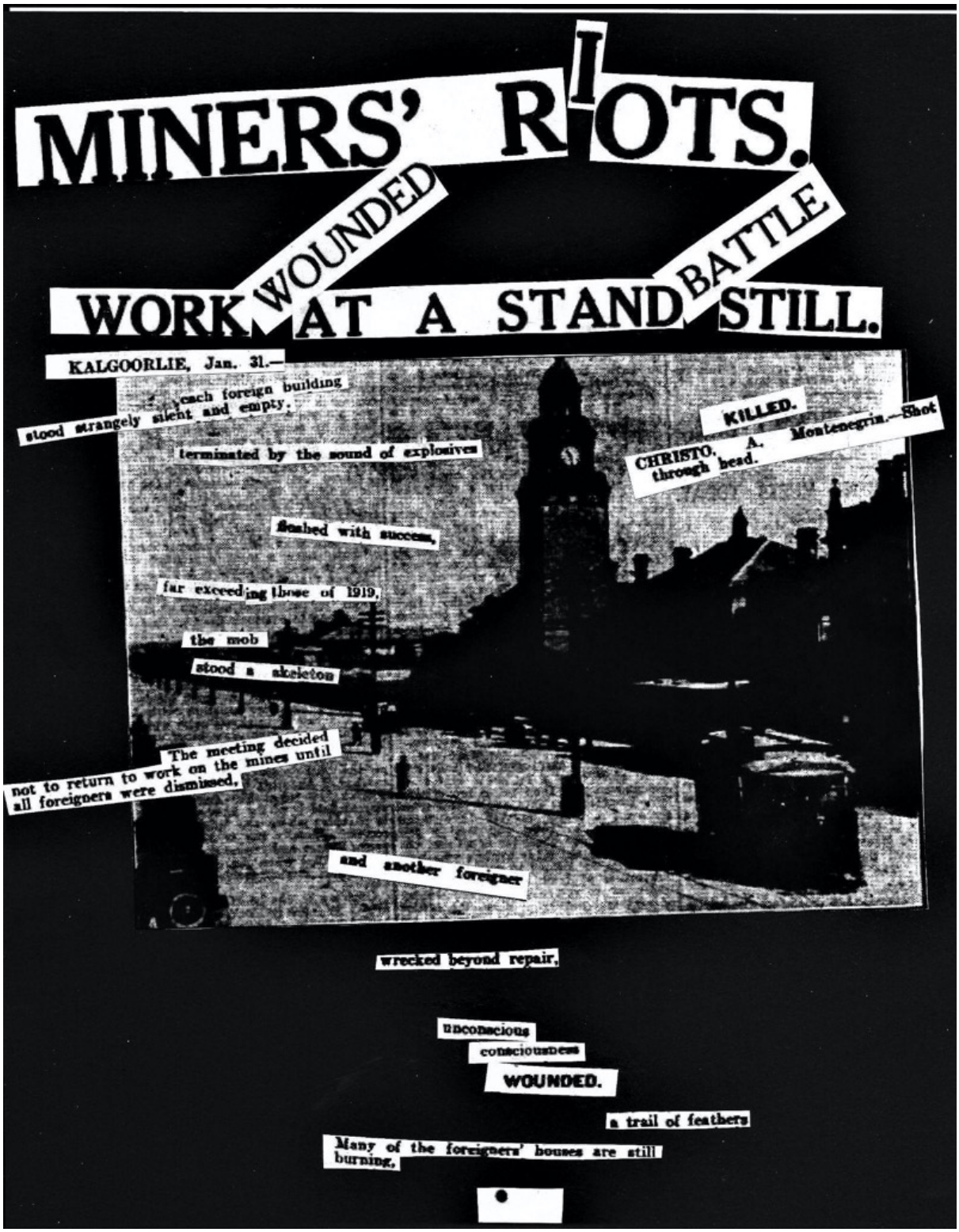


'The Australia Day riots in 1934 were arguably Australia's worst ethnic conflict', resulting in the deaths of three men and causing £100 000–£200 000 of property damage (Bianchi 190). The riots were instigated by the accidental death of a drunk after he was pushed by an Italian barman, and rising Anglo-Australian nationalism. At the conclusion of the riot the mob of 1000–2000 had burnt, looted, and destroyed 'five hotels, two boarding houses, numerous shops and about 100 dwellings of foreigners' (Šutalo 207), the foreigners being mostly Yugoslavs, Croatians and Italians living in Kalgoorlie-Boulder.


eye
Mirrors
broken English.

MINERS' R(I)OTS

Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon



A CENTURY OF HEAT

Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon

Eight miles away in the bush I hid, watched
Boulder burn, eyes open as midnight lamps—
mounds of earth, headframes of mine shafts,
houses paper cut-out silhouettes against glowing sky.
While my baby at my breast cried, slept, cried
as I trembled at each crack and whimper, rocked into night.

The next day, I waited in a *century of heat*, tried to squeeze
warm juice from an orange while the babe wailed.
Later, friends told us they hid in the cemetery,
safer with the dead than the living. Thirst like the fire drove us out.
Prospected like gold, the milk of human kindness gave us
water, food, a ride back into town—didn't call us 'dago' or 'ding'.

When I entered through the door *I saw legs ripped from chairs*,
photos torn from frames, *light fittings wrenched from walls*,
the baby's cot shattered into pieces like matchsticks.
The mob called where we lived Dingbat Flat, *light foreigner's*
dwellings systematically in response to whistles.
My house was a home, built from timber; blood red, wood burns, same as theirs.

Now, I don't even have a family photo to my name,
only the clothes on my back, my *husband's new suit*
I grabbed when I ran. Rendered homeless refugee. *We thought*
we were all going to be murdered when we saw the camps blaze up.
Fear remains, tastes like metal in my mouth,
iron with nowhere to go.

NE BUDITE BLIZU OGRADE!

Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon

Dedicated to Tome Grubelic who was shot and killed as he attempted to escape detention as an 'enemy alien' at Holdsworthy Concentration Camp, NSW, 1917.[1]

Ne budite blizu ograde!
Although I try to stay away,
the fence is the only space
where I can breathe, see blue.

Razorwire cuts, bayonet thrusts,
the watchtower darkens the mind.
Holdsworthy: a no man's land built by two Empires—
Croatians, Dalmatians and Yugoslavs: ruled by both, belonging to none.

Oceans of mud, waves of mosquitos, a slick of dust
replaces sea, captures enemy and friend.
A letter arrives from home: *Come feed these empty mouths*.
What can I to do but try and seek that blue?

Through oceans of laws, a slick of razorwire thoughts,
waves of bullets—
Ne budite blizu ograde!
Do not be near the fence!

Note

1 *'Ne budite blizu ograde!'* means 'Do not be near the fence!'

Notes on the poems

‘Long Night of Fear’

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‘Miner’s R(i)ots

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‘*Ne Budite Blizu Ograde!*’

Grubelic was an ethnic Croatian. Croatians were politically aligned with the allies, but subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, who aligned with the axis powers during WWI. So, although Croatians broadly shared the political views of Britain and Australia during WWI they were nonetheless interned as ‘enemy aliens’.

About the author

Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon is a writer, songwriter and educator from Fremantle/Walyalup who is currently teaching writing at ECU while completing a PhD on erasure poetry and historic amnesia. She spent the last decade in the United States where she was a Coordinator at a City College Writing Centre. Her poetry and creative nonfiction have appeared in *Griffith Review*, *Landscapes Journal*, *Meanjin*, *Cordite*, and *Australian Poetry Journal*. She has won the Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize (2018) and KSP Poetry Prizes (2019). In 2019, Ginninderra Press released Natalie’s debut poetry collection *First Blood*. Her work explores the intersection of feminist, post-colonial, autoethnographic and avant-garde theories and methodologies.

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POEM

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THE NOTEBOOK

Carmel Summers

After a three week wait for a Covid-clear appointment, I'm waiting outside the doors of Cambridgeshire Archives, a modern structure of pre-fabricated steel. Very functional. Very un-old. It's pouring, low clouds and rain hide the spires of nearby Ely Cathedral, but can't quash my anticipation since finding that entry in the archive register.

> KP23 - Cambridge St Andrew the Great Parish Church
> 25 - Schools and charities
> 1 - COOK's CHARITY. Book containing list of beneficiaries.
>
> — *Cambridgeshire Archives*

Doors open, belongings stored – apart from notebook and pencil – and I'm led to a table. My table. Set for a ceremony. Mounted on an angled foam pillow, a small item wrapped in cloth. Mouth dry, heart racing, I sit, unfold the cloth. The book is small. The marbled cover design, swirls of brown with flashes of agate, as bright as they had been in 1842 when entries start. The corners and spine bound in dark brown leather, worn by a century and more of use. The cover embossed, the gravitas of gold on brown leather insert.

> ST ANDREW THE GREAT
> ELIZABETH COOK'S BEQUEST.

No priest or bishop to supervise the profane act of opening the cover. From the description, I know what to expect:

> Includes: extract from the will of Elizabeth Cook (widow of Captain James Cook), in which she bequeaths £1,000 in 3 per cent consolidated Bank annuities for the maintenance of the monument to the Cook family, with any residue distributed to 5 "poor aged women of good Character", proved 1 June 1835; Samuel Girdlestone's opinion on "certain points connected with Mrs Cook's benefaction", 19 December 1836; names of beneficiaries 1842-1962 (with a few described as having received awards prior to 1842), and the names of trustees (vicar, churchwarden and overseers) from 1862.
>
> — *Cambridgeshire Archives*

The first is copperplate writing for the early entries. Every few years a new name, a new pen, a new handwriting. Later the writing is rushed and

barely legible, years of war, shortages, Spanish flu, more war. Some pages detailed and precise; others scrawled as though an afterthought.
The second is a sense of reticence, unwillingness to commit to the task of selecting suitable beneficiaries, fear of not understanding the rules, but not necessarily the intent of the will. So much so, not one, but two legal opinions are sought to determine the definition of a parishioner and what constitutes good character.

> …to distribute upon the twenty first day of December in each and every year the residue of the said interest and dividends unto and equally between five poor aged women of good character resident within and belonging to the said parish and not receiving parochial aid or support …
>
> — *Extract, Will of Elizabeth Batts Cook, Cambridgeshire Archives*

Names.
Names appear, reappear, year after year, old names, death lurks, new names. Family names… siblings? Only whispers of faces: wrinkled, pinched, cheerful, hopeful, grieving, lonely. But in the end, names, no circumstance but for the merest hint of younger others near to death, rejections, bad character, vicar's discretion, who else can decide? Once, a generous stipend, £5 each – by 1900 reduced to £4.2.0 with small fluctuations until 1962.

When records stop.
The end… or not?

About the author

Carmel Summers is a PhD student at the University of Canberra, researching the presence of the poet in poetic biography and writing a poetic biography of Elizabeth Cook. Her poetry has been published in journals in Australia and overseas as well as in anthologies and *The Canberra Times*. She has been shortlisted or highly placed in poetry prizes, including the Blake, ACU, June Shenfield, Glen Phillips and Grieve. Her work includes a range of genres, including Japanese forms, formal and unstructured poetry and is currently exploring new ways of tapping into history through poetry.

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ANNA MAGDALENA BACH'S MISSING THIMBLE

Reflections on creative poetic process

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Abstract

Three artefacts thought to belong to Anna Magdalena Bach, soprano singer, harpsichordist (and second wife to Johann Sebastian)—ring, thimble and buckle—are mentioned in the Bach archive in Leipzig. Much uncertainty surrounds them; perhaps they have been 'lost', or were destroyed by Allied bombing during the Second World War, or perhaps they didn't even actually belong to her. The uncertain status of the objects is emblematic of how poorly the knowledge about this 'creative woman of accomplishment' has been treated over the centuries, overshadowed by interest in, and information about, her eminent spouse. This has allowed authors to project their own views onto Anna Magdalena, in some instances leading to misrepresentations (Talle 2020), and even misappropriation by the Nazis (Yearsley 2019). However, as poetic biographer, it has also given me rich opportunity to imagine into her life.

Anna Magdalena is one of the research subjects about whom I am writing poetic biographies, a project of restitution seeking to redress the omission of creative women of accomplishment from the historical record. This paper looks at the composition process I employed in writing about her thimble (one poem in a sequence), taking a quote from Susan Howe as its starting point which suggests that archival objects are 'pre-articulate theatres' (1985), positioning the archival object, even if missing, as a site for unfolding drama.

ANNA MAGDALENA BACH'S MISSING THIMBLE: REFLECTIONS ON CREATIVE POETIC PROCESS

Anne M Carson

In this essay I explore the creative poetic process which unfolded as I encountered repeated barriers in an archival visit to the Bach Archive in Leipzig, on the hunt for research material about Anna Magdalena Bach. I had expected to encounter plentiful resources but contrary to expectations, what I encountered at the archive was her relative absence. This essay maps the creative process of coming to see Anna Magdalena's absence as a kind of presence, 'present as absent' as Susan Howe (2014: 52–54) eloquently puts it.[1] Howe's quote allowed me to enter Anna Magdalena's absence imaginatively, as a poet, leading to poetic composition. The resultant poem continues the work of others since the early 2000s, particularly Bach archivists,[2] who seek to represent Anna Magdalena more fully and accurately. It also forms part of my 'poetics of restitution', aiming to restore, in this case, Anna Magdalena, to what I have termed a 'creative women's lineage'. Such a lineage builds on what Lucy Irigaray calls a 'genealogy of women' (1987: 1–3), by invoking a line of creative women in the Arts. I seek to contribute to the repair of such genealogy, damaged by women's exclusion and misrepresentation.[3] By the time I visited the Bach archive and museum in Leipzig in 2019 as part of my PhD research, Anna Magdalena was already becoming 'real' to me, assuming a kind of poetic substance as I researched and wrote poems about her. Strength was important to this picture—not, I hoped, a feminist fantasy[4]—but based on facts I had assembled about her. These included the strength she possessed to project a classically trained voice, to cope with the death of many children, to fulfil her various and demanding commitments, as well as simply being married to a partner who was notoriously 'difficult'.[5]

A year and a half of reading and writing about her had enabled me to assemble the following picture. Anna Magdalena Bach, née Wilcke (1701–1760) was a trained soprano singer, born into a musical lineage and employed as a 'Princely singer' in the Köthen court orchestra of Johann August of Anhalt-Zerbst (1677–1742). Between 1721 and 1723, she was briefly one of the highest paid orchestral members. Johann Sebastian Bach himself described her voice as 'flawless' (Allihn 2013: 1), although he could certainly have been biased, as mentioned by archivist Andrew Talle (2020: 155) and his advocacy for her may have played a role in her securing such high remuneration. She was also a harpsichordist, and she became Johann Sebastian's second wife in 1721. After their marriage, they developed, and she co-ran, a family business of selling and hiring out musical instruments, providing accommodation to visiting musicians, and transcribing and selling Johann Sebastian Bach's musical compositions. She became stepmother to four children from Bach's previous marriage, also giving birth to 13 children herself, and burying seven of these directly after birth or in early childhood. Johann Sebastian died in 1750 and Anna Magdalena lived for a further decade.

This decade, covering her years of widowhood, is currently receiving most serious scholarly attention and revision. There are large distortions in the depictions of her life, particularly of her years of widowhood and subsequent death—which other researchers and I have detailed elsewhere.[6] Her representation as a feeble, poverty-stricken widow, an alms-woman who ended her life in a pauper's grave, not only furthers the romantic nexus between suffering and creativity, but also weakens her link in the chain of strong creative women as described by

Talle (170). He goes on to write that such misrepresentation is an example of the 'deplorable misogyny that has historically devalued the work of creative women' (147), resulting in their exclusion or misrepresentation in archives.[7]

I visited the Bach archive after a year and a half of reading and reflection, which had led to the composition of around 20 biographical poems. I did so with high expectations of furthering my project and climbed the pale stone circular staircase full of eager curiosity. Like many of the scholars I admired, I was aware of my privilege in entering such a repository. However, very little was available to me as an exclusive English speaker,[8] heightening my awareness of how the language barrier limits access to information about Anna Magdalena.[9] At first my disappointment was paramount. By associative leap, this disappointment soon expanded into consideration of the larger absence of which Anna Magdalena's is but one small example, absences leading to the fragmented archival record mentioned above.

However, the paucity of accessible textual material hastened me to the museum, downstairs in the same building. I had to make the shift, turning away from loss, towards a different reading of the archive. This 'turn' towards what 'could be' has much in common with the reparative position articulated by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick based on the work of psychanalyst Melanie Klein. Sedgwick writes:

> Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organise the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realise that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did. (2002: 146)

I needed to turn myself from the dispiriting encounter with a fractured creative women's lineage, represented by paucity of archival material relating to Anna Magdalena, to the possibility of contributing a small restitution of that lineage through my own creative activity.

In the museum, I encountered a notice describing the absence of objects thought to belong to Anna Magdalena—a thimble, ring and buckle. Obviously, destruction during the war affected objects much grander and more far-reaching than these. And maybe that was the point—only a ring, a buckle and a thimble. These were such paltry effects to mark the life of a person of significance in her own right, who was also significant through connection with her eminent husband. But even in their absence, perhaps they could be enough for my purposes?

Anna Magdalena may have proven elusive, but the words of poet, academic and critic Susan Howe were very present at the archive. She writes '[e]ach collected object is a pre-articulate empty theatre where a thought may surprise itself at the instant of seeing. Where a thought may hear itself see' (2014: 24). Howe's quote became the catalyst which activated my imaginative engagement with Anna Magdalena's missing objects, drawing my focus to the thimble. By referencing the synathaesic dimension of the imagination, Howe's quote activated my mental/visual and auditory responses (as well as affective, associative and kinaesthetic dimensions) combining in a gestalt of sensory impressions. Her words also suggest a paradox of contrasting scales—a thimble is humble, small, domestic but brought into proximity with her ideas, and as an imaginative space it is nonetheless also large—a theatre where dramas (and comedies and tragedies) could be enacted. The terminology of the 'theatre' is particularly relevant for Anna Magdalena who transitioned from the physical reality of performing on stage in early adulthood

to the more domestically focussed 'stage' of the home once she married. Additionally, Howe renders her notion of the 'collected object' as pre-articulate, and already Anna Magdalena's lost thimble was communicating with me. Howe's quote, then, coached me in preparedness for imaginative surprise. What thought would surprise itself in this contemplation? Would both seeing and hearing find their way into the poem? I was pushed by the lack of textual material; one of the first things I felt granted by the absence of Anna Magdalena's thimble was a freedom—even the necessity—to invent.

Poetic biographer and academic Jessica Wilkinson positions Howe as a premier writer on absence—and, if you will, a 'poet of absence'.

> Howe's apparent reverence for what is 'not present'—absence, allegory, mystery—is important to her historical mindset as she probes the blanks, gaps and obscurities of textual and historical representation for new mechanisms through which to construct a literary history pertaining to the contemporary moment. (2008: 161)

I identify strongly with this capacity—for me it is a primary mode of openness and engagement necessary for my poetic practice. In this instance, in probing the blank space of Anna Magdalena's missing thimble, Howe's quote emerges as the epigraph to the eventual poem. Epigraphs are a common grounding element of my creative writing practice. They are a way for me to introduce some theoretical content into often lyric or narrative poetry, thereby acknowledging my debt to other thinkers, and a subtle means of reinforcing my belonging to literary (and critical) lineages.

Wilkinson also recognises what is offered by absence.

> The anxieties and limitations encountered by biography writers have led me to turn towards the pleasures enabled by gaps and aporias, dwelling in the poetics of archives as a way to lead me not only to discovering (details on) the lives of my biographical subjects, but towards the form of the work itself. (2016: n.p.)

Even before I return home and begin drafting in earnest, the gap of the missing thimble has given me the epigraph to the poem. Wilkinson goes on to write:

> Further to this, I would add that it is the biographer's troubled relationship to the archive—as both a sanctioned repository of information and as a network of spaces beyond the bounds of the arkheion —that can be adopted by the poetic biographer as a source of energy and influence. (2016: n.p.)

Anna Magdalena's missing thimble becomes such a 'source of energy and influence', as in my poetic drafting I had already been primed by imagining Anna Magdalena embroidering and sewing.[10] In various poems I imagine her sitting by a basket of threads, remembering her mother's sewing basket,[11] and sewing as she listens to Johann Sebastian play the harpsichord.[12] It was as if these poems from the poetic sequence had already prepared the space for this thimble poem-to-be, so that it, the thimble poem-to-be, had space waiting in the sequence, into which it could easily be stitched.

Personal objects like this—garments or other objects which are made to cover body parts— have particular eloquence, poignantly bringing the absent body—the absent-once-was-embodied person—to mind. The lost thimble is doubly poignant as not only is her once owned object lost, but these cellular remnants of her bodily presence—part of her physical imprint—perhaps her DNA, perhaps her fingerprint—are also missing.

Anna Magdalena's archival story is not comprised solely of absences, as instances of presence are also woven through. The fact of this small sign indicating lost objects is tantalising, bringing her closer. She is still elusive, but I have caught a trace of her. The movement back and forth from presence to absence—now I see her, now I don't—is how I experience Anna Magdalena in my archival visit and subsequent poetic drafting. Perhaps all biography research is like that. Howe goes on to describe the three-way relationship between the research subject, archivist, and researcher:

> Once historial-existential trace has been hunted, captured, guarded and preserved in aversion to waste by an avid collector then shut carefully away, outside an economy of use, inaccessible to touch. Now it is re-animated, re-collected (recollected) through an encounter with the mind of a curious reader, a researcher, an antiquarian, a bibliomaniac, a sub sub librarian, a poet. (24)

An 'avid collector' had once collected and preserved Anna Magdalena's thimble. Even after its loss, another collector preserved record of its fate. I am moved by traces of these archivists, and their actions, enabling me all these many years later, to be a curious poet in avid search for compositional material. Perhaps traces are as close as we ever come to our biographical subjects—as Wilkinson observes, encounter with the archive is 'not purely for factual source material, but for the spark of imaginative friction caused by the collision of poet and the trace' (2016: n.p.).

Deprived of concrete artefacts or textual items, but introduced to this idea of a possible thimble, my imagination did spark and proceeded to adopt a speculative composition method to fill in the gaps. What was purported to be Anna Magdalena's absent thimble had hooked me. It seemed the flimsiest of skeletons on which to flesh out a character. In the first drafting of this thimble-to-be poem, I was carried acoustically by consonance, noticing the words which emerged were 'humble', 'thumb', and 'thimble', with their repeated 'mb' bilabial consonants. Already, in the making of this poem, there was euphony in their saying, and the repeated, haunting and soft sounds of 'th', 'm' and 'b'. Although I am always alert to the acoustic element of poetry composition, it is rare for me to have a predominantly acoustically-driven poem—in fact only once previously has it occurred. When an opportunity presents itself, I endeavour to let it unfold.

Robert Bly describes the ringing of repeated tones within a poem as setting up 'musical chimes'. He says: 'Chiming means that tiny sounds chime within each other inside the line. It's a sort of interior rhyming that the writer does without alerting, even telling, the reader' (Website). Like many aspects of poetry reading, the reader doesn't need to be aware of the technique in order to get enjoyment from it. 'A poem's music', Jane Hirshfield says, 'affects us whether or not we make it conscious' (1997: 9).

I listened to the (missing) thimble and heard, faintly, Anna Magdalena humming, an instance of my 'thought hearing itself'. Acoustic possibility (humming) drew me in; an appropriate starting place for so musical a subject but in this poem's instance, domestically focussed, not focussed on public performance. I imagined a muted hum, not quite a mumble (although the sound of that word fits the soundscape I had established) but a murmur, a consequence of the hum's repeated 'm' sound, and the action of lips closing which create it. It became an intimately voiced poem, set in a domestic space about a woman absorbed in the task of sewing, in reverie, reflecting aspects of her life.

Anna Magdalena's mother, Margaretha Elisabeth Liebe, became a central *dramatis personae*. I had already written a poem about how the history of the Wilcke family is patrilinear, as was the broader culture to which it belonged, with only the sparsest information about the women in the family—mother and daughter sharing a similar marginalised fate. One of the consequences of patrilineality is the fragmentation of female lineages; when women marry, they conventionally take their husband's name, move to their husband's residence, as Irigaray has described (1987: 1-3). These are all patrilinear movements to the agnate (paternal) side of genealogies, away from the distaff (maternal) side.

A few lines from another poem in my sequence read: 'daughter of an organist/ wife of a court trumpeter/ mother of a woman invisible/ to history'.[13] Both Anna Magdalena and her mother Margaretha Elisabeth are lost mothers. My 'restitution' would in a small way extend to Margaretha Elisabeth too, doing her the basic courtesy of not excising her from my narrative, and providing a small challenge to the patrilinear trend. Interestingly, the word for mother in many languages, starts with the letter m (mutti, mama, madre, mãe, mam, etc), perhaps mirroring the action of the lips of a baby closing on the nipple for breastfeeding (Walker 2021: n.p.), and a letter which chimes many times in the eventual poem, including in the humming which the poem highlights. It's only in writing this essay that I remember that my own mother collected thimbles and after her death they became lovely mementos to pass on to her friends, so already the thimble was for me a 'pre-articulate theatre', rich with personal associations.

For all the serendipity and euphony in the early phases of composition, there came a point when I realised that the poem was actually based on a misapprehension. Acoustic serendipity temporarily blinded me to a major practical consideration—the fact that most people who sew wear a thimble on their finger, not their thumb, principally the pointer finger which commonly pushes the needle into sometimes thick or resistant cloth and requires protection. Once I realised this, I knew I either had to relinquish my serendipitous euphonic connections (which I was loath to do), or find another way to incorporate and make a gift of them.

The challenge of finding a legitimate reason for someone to wear a thimble on a thumb became the stage upon which another dramatic element of the poem was enacted and I found accounts of people actually using thimbles in this unconventional way. Often the way girls learn to sew is via their mother (or other female relatives) and is the site of much possible bonding and conflict as psychodynamics are acted out. In this instance I imagined the thimble as a trousseau gift from mother to daughter. I imagined the mother teaching the daughter to sew, and how the daughter, Anna Magdalena, retained elements of her own quirky self in this relationship by insisting on putting the thimble on her thumb, not her finger, as I have her mother prodding her to do.

The poem became much more nuanced by allowing this apparent error to unfold. Making creative use of error in poetry drafting picks up themes described by the late poet Ania Walwicz in her own poetry composition process.

> I also accept my own errors. Once I was writing 'Baby' in red roses but it came out 'Abby' and I liked it, this Abby persona, so I kept it. Interestingly, there was a famous journalist in American culture who had a 'Dear Abby' column, where people would confess things to her. Errors produce this union synchronicity or mysterious coincidence of events. This is the sort of writing accepted by the spiritualist church, where they would have automatic writing or drawings as a form of witnessing the presence of spirits. (Walwicz in Wilkinson 2013: 133)

Paying attention to errors is one way to access semi and subconscious material—a strategy employed by myself, alongside many creative writers. Perhaps like other biographers, and as attested by the subtitle of Howe's principal archival work (*The Telepathy of Archives*), there is something mystical in focussing so closely on an individual,[14] with all your senses open to them through archival research, and I have tuned into one of the ghostly poetic possibilities of Anna Magdalena—the humming, sewing woman who wears her thimble on her thumb. Even though this is unlikely to be literally true, I feel in writing this poem, my imaginative leap has brought Anna Magdalena alive in the work as a nuanced individual.

As I continued drafting, other aural dimensions emerged, other instances of 'hearing myself see'. As mentioned, I imagined Anna Magdalena humming as she sewed. The act of humming subtly connects this poem to other poems in the sequence by picking up a composition game I imagined Anna Magdalena and Johann Sebastian playing when they woke in the night between their first and second sleeps together. Bi-phasic sleeping was the common practice in her era (mid 1700s), and I wrote the poem 'Erster und zweiter Schlaf', ('First and second sleep') to represent these ideas. The imagined humming game also nods to controversial Anna Magdalena researcher and author Martin Jarvis who speculates that Anna Magdalena had actually composed pieces previously attributed to her eminent spouse.[15] Even though Jarvis has been ridiculed for his sloppy research practices,[16] I was engaged with his thesis that Anna Magdalena, as is common for partners of prominent, creative men, probably contributed more to her spouse's creative practice, and the generation of his musical ideas, than she has been given credit for. I used the humming game (via Anna Magdalena playfully learning about rudimentary compositional techniques in an intimate game with her husband) to suggest this.

Jarvis's thesis arose in discussions with an archivist at the Bach Archive. She felt she had to 'warn' me that they did not look favourably at his work. In that exchange I had a taste of one of the unsettling elements of archival visits, what Wilkinson calls 'the anxiety of the archive'. She writes,

> I know that I am not alone in feeling unsettled by the archival 'experience'—not only do my fellow researchers share the status of potential thief, vandal or felon (surely one could, err, slip a photograph into a pocket for a keepsake), but the archive itself is premised on that fear reversed, as if the walls could talk: 'who among you is a thief, a vandal, a felon?' (2016: n.p.)

In my experience in the Bach archive, my possible anxious-making erring was not in being tempted to steal objects (although I certainly coveted the missing thimble to add to what I had inherited from my mother's collection) but whether the eventual shape my portrait took would transgress dearly held views sanctioned by such 'authorities'.

As I continued to work on the poem, its rhythm became marked and regular, a further aural unfolding. Even though I have used iambic beat, semi-consciously within small sections of previous poems, I have not ever written a whole poem maintaining this emphasis on the second syllable. It was satisfying in the writing in a way which I hope leads to satisfaction in the reading, lending the poem a sing-song quality which references both childhood as well as the kind of diction arising from reverie. Not that a reader needs to know anything about iambic beat or other technical information about a poem, as mentioned previously, to appreciate rhythmic dimensions.

This poem slotted easily into the existing sequence with cross references as mentioned. I have developed a radar to detect opportunities for possible cross referencing in previous major projects. This radar is a kind of thinking; part intuitive, part strategic, and is necessary in the making of a sequence of connected poems with internal integrity. I intend two elements in 'internal integrity'. First that my biography has anchors in the real world; starting with a skeleton of fact—that Anna Magdalena sewed (in this instance), demonstrated by the missing thimble. Second, that elements in one part of the work reference other parts—multiple mentions of sewing baskets and humming connect the thimble in this poem-to-be with these elements in other poems in the sequence. The interconnections lend torsion to the work so that connections are not just chronological, but also transverse. I hope this technique doesn't announce itself as a contrivance for the reader but fits seamlessly into their reading experience and that the whole sequence delivers a sense of being well sewn together.

The eventual poem emerged from the silence of the archive and my experience of silence as a non-German speaker/reader, to the eloquence of the missing thimble and the 'hum' which became consonant-driven compositional devices. Traversing from silence to sound became a kind of insistence on sound, reflecting my desire to contribute to restoring Anna Magdalena's voice, which had been silenced for me in the archive. Further, focus on the 'thimble' and 'hum' restores to her an imagined private, domestic voice, as opposed to her performative soprano voice, a voice intended as public utterance. The movement from public to private in my poetic focus mirrors Talle's view that it was Anna Magdalena herself who changed focus away from public performance after she married Johann Sebastian (165). Certainly, with her multiple domestic demands she would have had little time outside of domestic involvements.

I'll finish with the poem which emerged, prompted by absence and lack, at the political/aesthetic intersection, riffing off error and misapprehension and demonstrating my 'poetic restitution' practice. I hope this poem—and the whole sequence—will contribute to efforts to represent Anna Magdalena Bach as a rounded character, based on the known facts about her. In turn I hope this may be a method of interest to others seeking to write women's lives where facts are partial or missing, contributing to restoring to a creative women of accomplishment lineage.

Anna Magdalena speaks of her thimble
Each collected object … is a pre-articulate empty theatre
where a thought may surprise itself at the instant of seeing.
Where a thought may hear itself see.[30]

I hum as I sew thimble and thumb
A mere *kind* when I slip Mutti's

on thimble and thumb
Felt the weight felt the warmth

where her finger had sat. felt the
dimples and ridge round the rim

Mutti laughed when she saw me
thimble dwarfing my hand She

called me her *leibchen* said I must
fit it snug on finger not thumb

like she did A stickler she'd say—
stitch the world back to rights as she sat

to her basket of threads I never did
learn the knack of thimble and finger

Always and ever for me it will be
hum as I sew thimble and thumb.

Notes

1 S Howe, 2014, describes this paradox in relation to Minnie Temple, Henry James's cousin (2014: 52-54).

2 The book *Anna Magdalena Bach: Ein Leben in Dokumenten und Bilden* compiled by M Huber with a biographic essay by H-J Schultze was published in 2004.

3 V Woolf also writes on this theme in *A Room of One's Own*, describing 'thinking in common' (2014: 64).

4 Instances of such feminist fantasies include David Yearsley's 2019 book *Sex, Death and Minuets: Anna Magdalena Bach and Her Musical Notebooks*, which stretches evidence to present Anna Magdalena as strong and sexually assertive. As reviewer Andrew Talle comments, 'Sometimes … ambiguities of the historical record are disregarded in an effort to grant Anna Magdalena the greatest possible agency' (2020: 151).

5 See for instance John Elliot Gardiner, *Music in the Castle of Heaven: A Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach*.

6 See in particular I Allihn, 2013; R Tatlow, 2005; Y Tomita, 2007; & A Talle, 2020. See A M Carson (2022: 180-187).

7 This fractured creative women of accomplishment lineage extends to all arms of the arts—visual, text-based and film and sound artists. Authors continue to address it by writing works of restoration—two recent examples in my own field of poetic biography: *Beloved* by Penelope Layland (the life of Dorothy Wordsworth) and *Olive Muriel Pink: Her radical and idealistic life* by Colleen Keating.

8 Although the archivist showed me a number of recent German language novels about her.

9 Since my visit, the publication in 2020 in English of Talle's pivotal review makes accessible not just the work of Bach archivists in restoring and remediating Anna Magdalena's representation, but also the discoveries of scholar Eberhard Spree.

10 Although servants probably did the bulk of the family's repairs and sewing maintenance.

11 'Anna Magdalena discovers her vocation', poems from an unpublished sequence.

12 'Anna Magdalena listens to Johann Sebastian play', ibid.

13 'The Mother of Anna Magdalena Bach'.

14 L Edel, 1978; & Howe, 2014.

15 Jarvis names the Bach cello suites as examples.

16 See Talle, 2020, Tatlow, 2005, Tomita 2007.

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RILKE'S BEES AND THE ARCHIVE AS HIVE

Cognitive transformation and the distributed mind in the poetic practice of Denise Levertov

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Abstract

This paper examines a unique personal archive of 'brief and essential texts' created by UK born US poet Denise Levertov, with a focus on her particular creative relationship with the letters of poet Rainer Maria Rilke. Using the metaphor of 'Hive Poetics' (Hollingsworth) and considering the archive as an artefact of 'distributed mind', the analysis draws upon contemporary theories of distributed and ecological cognition (Clark; Hutchins; Menary; Sutton) to demonstrate both how poets engage with archives as part of poetic practice and how as researchers we might approach the archive in ways that extend beyond the teleological. That is, how we might consider archival materials as *artefacts of creative cognition and practice* rather than of value simply for the supporting role they play in the analysis of a finished text.

RILKE'S BEES AND THE ARCHIVE AS HIVE: COGNITIVE TRANSFORMATION AND THE DISTRIBUTED MIND IN THE POETIC PRACTICE OF DENISE LEVERTOV

Willo Drummond

This paper looks to notebooks and related artefacts for insights into creative practice and cognition, or creative writing thinking. Specifically, it considers the notebook materials of twentieth century American poet Denise Levertov, most of which are housed as part of the Levertov Papers at Green Library, Stanford University. Using the metaphor of 'Hive Poetics' (Hollingsworth 2001) and considering the archive as an artefact of 'distributed mind', the following analysis draws upon contemporary theories of distributed and ecological cognition (Clark 1997; 2011; Clark and Chalmers 1998; Hutchins 1995; 2008; 2010; Menary 2007a; 2007b; 2014; Sutton 2012) to demonstrate both how poets engage with archives as part of poetic practice and how as researchers we might approach the archive in ways that extend beyond the teleological. That is, how we might consider archival materials as *artefacts of creative cognition and practice* rather than of value simply for the supporting role they play in the analysis of a finished text. Finally, a brief reading of Levertov's 'A Stir in the Air' will spotlight traces of a particular personal archive that held a shaping role in Levertov's cognition and poetics, with the aim of directing the gaze back into the dialogic and transformative process of creative cognition.

UK born American poet Denise Levertov followed a lifelong practice of keeping various kinds of notebooks (Lacey and Dewey 2013: 1014). As part of this range of pre-compositional practices, early in her career, she also created and maintained a personal and idiosyncratic index to the *Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke 1902–1926* (transl RFC Hull, 1946), identifying 78 passages of interest against 51 unique and poetic labels.[1] Themes covered include creative transformation, and the role and work of the artist. Some passages seem indexed for their content, some for their sheer sensuousness of language, some for a combination of the two. In addition to this annotating and indexing, Levertov also transcribed several key passages into her notebook at the time.[2] This is a pattern that Levertov would continue over the next decade, re-transcribing passages from this and other translations of the letters into her notebooks, and eventually into a dedicated 'anthology', developed throughout the 1950s and which she would continue to update and refer to until at least the mid 1980s (Levertov 1973: 43).[3] This personal archive—'The Green Notebook'—contained material from 52 writers, with the material from Rilke by far the dominant presence, nearing 15 per cent of the total entries.

The index and associated notebooks would in fact prove to be a key tool in Levertov's artistic cognition throughout the early years of her career and beyond, as she returned to Rilke's words again and again as scaffolding to an emerging poetics. As she says in an introduction to Nancy Willard's study of the 'Ding' or 'thing' poets, she considered that she had been 'partly formed by Rilke' (Levertov 1970: x).

A particular challenge when examining archival materials from a creative writing perspective is the dominance of teleological epistemologies in available archival methodologies. Within such views, archival materials are often of interest only in so far as they shed light on a particular published text. However, this paper, concerned as it is with creative writing thinking and process, seeks to consider notebooks and draft materials on their own terms as artefacts of creative

cognition rather than as mere background matter to a final published text. To circumvent this issue (to the extent that this is possible), I will draw here upon theories of distributed mind, which, by framing cognition as extending beyond 'the boundaries of skin and skull' (Clark and Chalmers 1997: 7), allow us to view archival artefacts as elements of hybrid *systems* of thought (Menary 2007b).

Distributed mind perspectives view indexes, lists, notebooks and the like as 'artefacts of cognition', as 'the creation and manipulation of written vehicles is part of our cognitive processing' (Menary 2007a: 621). Within such views, material artefacts (which include notebooks as well as the representational systems we inscribe within them) are not framed as passive receptacles of the outputs of wholly internal minds, but as active, and sometimes necessary, components in higher-level cognitive processes. Menary cites Donald Peterson (1996) on a range of representational systems with which we engage in this way:

> Algebras, alphabets, animations, architectural drawings, choreographic notations, computer interfaces, computer programming languages, computer models and simulations, diagrams, flow chart graphs, ideograms, knitting patterns, knowledge-representation formalisms, logical formalisms, maps, mathematical formalisms, mechanical models, musical notations, numeral systems, phonetic scripts, punctuation systems, tables and so on. (7; cited by Menary 2007a: 624)

Each of these examples comprise an element of an integrated system of cognition that could not function without one or the other of its parts. That is to say, higher-level cognition is enabled by an engagement with such artefacts to an extent that cognition would not be possible at the same level without them. Within a distributed cognition framework, to encounter artefacts such as drawings, lists, indexes, draft manuscripts, notebooks and the like, is thus to encounter artefacts of the active process of cognition. Applied to creative writing research, such views sit in contrast to teleological views of literary practice that value archival material as mere background to a finished text.

For writing is not only an artefact but also an act. As Graeme Harper states: 'creative writing is action, movement, making [and as such] investigative methods also need to *recognise and endeavour to understand human action*' (Harper 2013: 151, emphasis original). The cognitive integration framework proposed by Menary is a variant of distributed cognition that offers a systems-view of thought emphasising the bodily manipulation of artefacts as part of a hybrid process comprised of both the internal and external (Menary 2007b). As such, it is a useful approach when considering the cognitive process of writing. From a cognitive integration perspective, written sentences are not viewed as 'abstractions' or separate to the thought processes of writing, but rather as essential components of our practices of cognition: as 'material vehicles' (Menary 2007a: 631),[4] that have the potential to 'transfor[m] and exten[d] our cognitive abilities' (Menary 2007a: 624) because via our active engagement with them as part of our cognitive practices, they 'restructure thought' (Menary 2007a: 623). As Menary explains in an article entitled 'Writing as Thinking':

> it is not simply that the written sentences in a diary prompt or cause, as input, various cognitive processes to unfold in my brain; it is rather that the external process of retrieving the information from the diary and the concurrent processes in my brain jointly govern my future behavior. (Menary 2007a: 628)

Thus, artefacts such as a writer's notebooks or draft materials demonstrate that rather than being simply the end product of thought, instead the 'writing' '*is* the thinking' (Freiman 2015a: 64; see also Clark 1997; Sutton 2002; Menary 2007a; Oatley and Djikic 2008).

Viewed as artefacts of distributed cognition, Levertov's notebooks become remnants of the poet's mind at work and bring us as close to the actions of that mind as is possible for a writer no longer living. It is a focus on this cognitive *happening* that is the purview of creative writing research and that differentiates it from literary or historical approaches to archival scholarship. Arlette Farge reminds us, speaking of Foucault: '[while] the archives do not necessarily tell the truth … they tell *of* the truth' (2013: 29). What archival materials can show us in other words, is something of the patterns of cognition of their writers. Regardless of what a writer might be saying in a given notebook entry or fragment, the archive can show us something of the *how* of this saying, something of the patterns of thought and practice that led to this moment of textual thinking; the larger patterns of distributed thought in which such moments are embedded, and from which they emerge. That is, patterns of cognitive practice comprised of reading and writing in dialogue with other writers in the situated world.

In *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* Foucault states that Flaubert (and Manet) produced work 'in self-conscious relationship to earlier ... texts—or rather to the aspect in ... writing that remains *indefinitely open*' (1977: 92, emphasis added). He also notes that 'the imaginary ... grows amongst signs, from book to book, in the interstice of repetitions and commentaries' (91). Levertov's notebooking practices are a testament to this. It was the iterative transcription and re-transcription into a range of notebooks over many years that formed what cognitive integrationists, drawing on theories of evolutionary niche construction, might call her 'inner literary niche'.[5] (A literary theorist, of course, might refer to this same outcome as Levertov's poetics, though the term tends to elide the active dimension of this process of formation). Levertov's notebooks and her Rilke Index trace idiosyncratic threads of focus, which weave through her writings over many years. Foucault describes Flaubert as being haunted by certain details and forms from his reading, certain 'phantasms' shaping his ways of seeing (1997: 89). He describes *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* as both a 'monument' to Flaubert's 'meticulous erudition' and the ghostly background preoccupation from which many of his other works arose (1997: 87–91). So too it seems, did Levertov's reading—in particular of Rilke—haunt her imaginary over a long career.

In the introduction to her monograph *How Reading is Written: A brief index to Gertrude Stein* (2014), Astrid Lorange draws upon the work of Mary Ann Doane to argue for an indexicality inherent to contemporary aesthetic practices (Lorange 2014: 4). Doane identifies a paradox inherent to the index, in that it is simultaneously hollow and overflowing, a condition she calls 'the dialectic of the empty and the full' (2007: 2). The latter of these two conditions (overflow) is reminiscent not only of Foucault's position on the openness of writing, but also of Kevin Brophy's argument for a certain 'excess' inherent in creativity that makes art an expression of evolution: 'It is always … excessiveness … we respond to in art' Brophy claims, 'for it is central to the deep evolutionary history we have in us' (2009: 19, 29). As I have discussed elsewhere (Alberts et al. 2017: 11), Lorange stresses the responsiveness at the centre of writing. Her Stein monograph is, she says, 'an archive of a reader's relational engagement with the poetics of … Stein' (33). Similar claims are made often by writers. In an interview for *The Paris Review*, for example, poet Henri Cole says of reading that it is 'like putting high-octane gas in my Honda—it makes me run real well' (2014: n.p.). Cole keeps a folder of writing prompts, springboard lines,

snippets of text for the purpose of drafting. Each 'piece of paper' he says, 'is like a seed, which I plant in the soil of the imagination and water with time' (2014: n.p.).

Working in the space of literary ethics, Derek Attridge takes this relational stance further when he uses a Levinasian model of self-other to theorise the creative process, arguing that 'an ethical responsibility for the other' is 'at the heart of creativity' (1999: 29). Attridge's use of 'the other' refers primarily to the 'as yet unknown' (22) that we encounter in both writing and reading (24). He argues that the 'ethical responsibility for the other' (29) requires understanding the literary work as an 'intellectual-emotional event' (27) and works his thesis to a surprising conclusion. That is, that the truest, most just response to a literary work, the highest form of answerability, is in fact to respond with a new creative work: '[o]nly a new, unpredictable, singular, creative act ... in its turn can do justice to a literary work as a literary work' (27).

Such a dialogic ethics is evident in Lorange's claim that the 'ten "index entries"' (or thematic chapters) in her book on Stein 'are the first attempts and the initial findings of a lifelong commitment to *writing the reading* of Stein' (2014: 28, emphasis added). Similarly, Denise Levertov's index categories can be seen as early manifestation of a lifelong commitment to *writing her reading* of Rilke. For creative writing practice is of course inextricably entwined with the practice of reading; both the reading of works by other writers, and the reading by the writer of their own notebooks and drafts. Lorange advocates that reading is in fact 'a kind of writing' in that it is another form of 'inscriptive thinking' (2014: 29), and that for her, 'composition ... include[s] reading and writing and the relationship between them' (32). Similar positions are expressed with frequency in the creative writing research literature (for example, Coles 2013: 157; Dawson 2006; Freiman 2005; Krauth 2002; King 2000). In fact, the two practices are so intertwined that one might formally name them as one singular hybrid practice. That is, following Lorange and others, we might refer to Levertov's *reading-and-writing* of Rilke as a singular, if compound, practice of creative cognition.[6]

Archive as Hive

Foucault says that the imaginary is 'a phenomenon of the library' (1977: 91) and we see that in a material sense in Levertov's notebooks—particularly her Green Notebook, the personal archive of fragments she claimed 'essential' to her poetics (SUL M0601, Series 3, Box 1, f11). There is a dialogic aspect to creative cognition that Kevin Brophy captures when he notes 'poems are written from within an ongoing transgenerational conversation about poetry' (2009: 89). Cristopher Hollingsworth calls this conversation the literary *hive* (2001). In this section of the paper, I will unpack Hollingsworth's concept with a close reading of a passage from Rilke's letters and a brief consideration of a subsequent poem by Levertov.

Notions of tradition were important to Levertov, as she transparently states in several of her essays and alludes to in much of her poetry.[7] Emily Archer notes a distinct 'lack of "anxiety of influence"' in Levertov's poetics (Archer 2000: 169). Instead, scholars of Levertov's poetry have identified as central to Levertov's poetics a certain 'ethic of gratitude' (Zlotkowski 1992; Archer 2000: 166). Though Archer links Levertov's 'ethic of gratitude' 'in part' to the influence of 'Cezanne and his deep, acknowledged reverence for the masters' (2000: 169), Zlotkowski attributes this element of Levertov's poetics to the influence of Rilke (1992: 324–5); to what Levertov called Rilke's 'sense of aesthetic ethics' (1981: 289). Levertov used several different names for her literary influences, such as 'comrades' (1973: ix), 'mentor' (1981: 283) and 'guides' (15 Sep 1955, '1956 diary' SUL M0601, Series 3, Box 1, f12). Her ethic of gratitude meant she

saw the poet as an agent (or instrument) upon 'which the power of poetry plays' (1973: 3). For Levertov, poetry was 'social' and the poem itself had a 'kinetic force' in that it 'se[t] in motion … elements in the reader that otherwise would be stagnant' (1973: 6). We can understand this kinetic force as a process of transformation. From a distributed cognition perspective, our engagement with symbolic systems such as language has the capacity to 'transform and extend our cognitive abilities' (Menary 2007a: 624).

With this concept in mind, one passage from Rilke's letters indexed by Levertov that warrants discussion is from a letter to Witold von Hulewicz who was in 1925 translating the *Duino Elegies* into Polish (Rilke 1946: 392). Levertov indexed the entry twice, underlining several sections. Once as 'Bees of the Invisible' (taking the label verbatim from the passage), and then immediately under a second heading, 'transformation'. Underlining below is Levertov's as indicated by Zlotkowski (*notes*):

> such is our task: to impress this fragile and transient earth so sufferingly, so passionately upon our hearts that its essence shall rise up again, invisible, in us. We are the *bees of the invisible. Nous butinons éperdument le miel du visible, pour l'accumuler dans la grande ruche d'or de l'Invisible* [We wildly gather the honey of the visible, to accumulate it in the great golden hive of the invisible] … The Elegies shew [sic] us engaged on this work, the work of the perpetual transformation of beloved and tangible things into <u>the invisible vibration and excitability of our nature</u> which introduces new 'frequencies' into the pulsing fields of the universe. (Rilke 1946: 394. Additional translation from French added)

Rilke suggests that for writers, the task is to practice a certain intensity of apperception, to engage with the external world such that it is 'pressed' upon our 'hearts' 'so sufferingly' that we absorb, mirror, or become integrated with its 'essence' (1946: 394). To use the terminology of distributed cognition, the task of the writer is to practice attention to all the environmental stimuli available to them, and in the cognitive practice of writing transform this experience, visible to invisible, such that 'new "frequencies"' are created and a poem may emerge. Writing is a thoroughly *distributed* practice of cognition that occurs in what Rilke terms the 'hive of the invisible' (1946: 394).

In 'Hive' poetics—one of our oldest Western metaphoric templates—Hive and bee are often interchangeable, or synecdochic (Hollingsworth 2001: 5). As argued by Hollingsworth, hives, which could only be observed from the outside, held mysterious processes of transformation not visible to the human eye, hence their rhetorical magic. They also represented a collective that appears as a singular entity. As such, the Hive as metaphor traditionally evokes a dialectic between the individual and the collective in Western poetics (Hollingsworth 2001: xix). By evoking the poetics of hive/bee in the passage above, Rilke calls upon this dialectic, of individual and collective, of individual and other, and of the mystery of creative transformation that takes place inside the hive, a space of distributed, or 'ecological' practice. What occurs inside the hive is the work of a 'cultural ecology', to use the terminology of Hutchins (1995: 2008; 2010), and the Hive as literary metaphor speaks to the ecological (distributed) nature of literary practice.

Seneca was first to make an 'analogy between the bee and the selective and combing intellect' (Hollingsworth: 135), connecting the bee to the practice of reason; but Rilke shifts this to something simultaneously more earthly and mysterious. He does this by shifting the metaphor

to the creative process, and its relationship to the material world, to the environment in which a writer is situated: an environment both physical and languaged.

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, and with the aid of a contemporary beekeeping resource, I will now extend Rilke's analogy a little further. The creation of honey is a communal, intimately social act, involving manipulation of the external environment and internal processes (perfectbee: n.p.). Each worker bee sucks stored nectar from the mouth of her sister-co-worker, her sister-collaborator, and then moves it back and forth from the nectar sack located at her throat to her proboscis. 'Every time it reaches her proboscis it's exposed to the air and loses a little water. She then passes the [resulting] honey onto another bee, who repeats this process. With every bee it gets a little richer' (perfectbee: n.p.). While Rilke's metaphor evokes both the transformative hive as well as the 'gathering' bee, for the purpose of the present argument, it is worth keeping in mind that bees make honey. They do not simply gather it. They gather nectar, they *make* honey. This is an important distinction. For simply to gather is not to transform. Gathering is a practice that precedes and parallels the practice of transformation. Rather, we might say it is the *kiss* of distributed enrichening, the passing, processing and passing again in a culturally scaffolded practice, which transforms nectar into honey.

In an essay entitled 'Origins of a Poem', Levertov notes the dialogic intimacy of writing: 'Writing poetry is a process of discovery … a *knowing* (as man and woman "know" one another), a touching, a "being in touch"' (1973: 54, emphasis in original). Though she is not referencing the bee or Hive poetics in explicit terms in this essay, Levertov's claim comes remarkably close to the process described above. As for the creation of honey, writing is a communal and *intimately social* cognitive practice involving both the external environment and internal processes (perfectbee: n.p.). It is an iterative process of 'discovery', a 'knowing' (Levertov 1973: 54) born in the transformative ecology of the literary hive.

Hollingsworth points out that influence—and literary evolution—begins with 'admiration':

> as demonstrated by the long history of the Hive, the illusion that passes for each age's truth is continually emerging from inherited beauties that are embodied in form and by dint of a process that only begins with admiring. Admiration evokes the desire to imitate, and imitation is the genius of *retractatio*, the way we draw honey from the Hive of language. (Hollingsworth 2001: 265)

The rubric of Hive poetics positions influence as 'a *system* of *potentials* that exist in the shared imagination' (Hollingsworth 2001: xviii, emphasis added). The position is redolent of Foucault's claim, touched on earlier, that the imagination begins in the library. Discussing Swift's adherence to models of creativity from antiquity, Hollingsworth identifies that 'one makes new through retractatio, the learned engagement with and adaptation of inherited forms' (144, emphasis in original). Practicing within the hive of the languaged world, writers are thus 'like bees, tirelessly and together converting last spring's rhetoric into new white comb' (Hollingsworth 2001: 264). This results in new work, as well as the transformation of the cognitive character of the artist, as 'the inside is transformed to be more like the outside' (Menary 2012: 152). It is in this way that writing is simultaneously 'cultural inheritance' (Menary 2014: 474), scaffold to new writing, and a tool of cognitive transformation.

Around 1955 to 1956 Levertov wrote an early draft of her poem 'A Stir in the Air' in which she discussed something like the 'frequencies' described by Rilke (1946: 394) in the indexed passage above (SUL M0601 Series 2, Box 2, f44). By 1957 she had revised the draft of the poem to the

version to be published in 1958 in *Overland to the Islands* (SUL M0601 Series 2, Box 2, f45).[8] By now the poem also contained an allusion to Rilke's bees:

> A stir in the air, the proper space
> holding existences in grave distinction—
> If as you read I walk
> around you in a
> half circle
> your response to the poem will
> waver, maybe, like the lights just now
> in the thunderstorm—the balance
> is that fine—the dance
> of hiving bees it is, that design
> in air, joyfully
> reducing possibilities to
> one, the next act.
>
> (Levertov 2013: 86)

The poem is poised, electric, alive with Levertov's 'ethic of gratitude' (Archer 2000: 116) and the process of creative transformation. Here, speaker and addressee are engaged in an *intimately social* act; they are 'cognitively coupled' (Menary 2007a: 628; Clark 2011: 24), dancing in the hive (L10) of language, 'joyfully' (L11) inheriting, transforming and creating in a literary cultural ecology. In the image of the wavering lights in the thunderstorm (L5–6) we have the 'invisible vibration' underlined by Levertov in the indexed passage of Rilke's letters (1946: 394), an energy that both transmits and transforms.

The short poem in fact contains allusions to several Rilke passages indexed by Levertov. The lineation and image of the speaker orbiting the reader 'in a / half circle' (L4–5) suggest connotations of 'turning' and 'gesture', both of which were entries in Levertov's Rilke index. While extended discussion of these conceptual layers is beyond the scope of this paper, what is evident is the *intersubjectivity* of this process of transmission. The speaker and the reader in this poem are engaged in the evolution of influence, 'reducing possibilities' (L12) from the 'system of potentials that exist in the shared imagination' (Hollingsworth 2001: xviii), from the many to the 'one, the next act' (Levertov: L13).

Rilke's transformative bees can be seen as the grounds for Levertov's belief that the work of poetry was the work of transformation: 'When words penetrate deep into us they change the chemistry of the soul, of the imagination' (Levertov 1973: 114). Levertov believed 'The obligation of the writer is: *to take personal and active responsibility of his words, whatever they are, and to acknowledge their potential influence on the lives of others*' (Levertov 1973: 114, emphasis original). The task of the poet, the active task of the writer, in other words, is to be both transformed in the hive of language and to contribute to the ongoing transformation of those who come after.

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Notes

1 For an extended discussion of this artefact, see Drummond 2021.

2 See SUL M0601, Series 3, Box1, F10.

3 The next most significant is Carlyle at 8 entries (8%).

4 As Wilson (2012) identifies, Hurley (1998) and Rowlands (2003) were the first to use the term 'vehicles' in this way (173–4).

5 The term builds on Menary's proposal for the 'aesthetic niche' (2014). For a discussion of my use of the term see Drummond 2021.

6 Much work has also been done to date addressing the *reading* side of this equation within the cognitive poetics literature. See for example Stockwell 2002; Tsur 2008; Gavins and Stein 2003; Gibbs Jr 2003; Oatley 2003. Oatley proposes a related term 'writingandreading', encountered independently of this research. Jeremy Scott has recently drawn upon Oatley's neologism to 'appeal to creative writers, particularly those who work in an academic context to consider engaging with … approaches to linguistic world-building and the relationship between writing and reading' (2018, 88). His focus is primarily on the application of these 'approaches to the "mechanics" of prose fiction' (2018, 83), however, his work represents a timely call for a "conversation" between cognitive poetics and practice focused creative writing research, in which he offers some thought provoking discussion points and practical suggestions as an encouraging starting point for such dialogue (2018, 88–91; see also Scott 2014).

7 See for example, 'The Sense of Pilgrimage' (Levertov 1973: 62–86).

8 The early fragment reads:

> If as you read
> I walk around you in a
> half circle
> your response to the poem will
> waver, maybe, like the light just now
> in the thunderstorm — it's that fine — !
> movement from one
> object to another, through
> the proper space surrounding and dividing
> each, disturbs
> the suspense of the air, kills and begins
> dreams.
>
> (1956 'Clipper Notebook', SUL M0601 Series 2, Box 2, f44; see also TM's SUL M0601 Series 2, Box, 2, f50)

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About the author

Dr Willo Drummond is a poet and sessional lecturer in creative writing at Macquarie University. Her interdisciplinary research draws upon theories of distributed cognition to illuminate creative writing cognition and practice. Previously an executive committee member for the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, Willo has been the recipient of a Vice-Chancellor's Commendation for Academic Excellence for a doctoral thesis, and a Career Development Grant for literature from the Australia Council for the Arts. Her poetry appears in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *The Canberra Times*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *TEXT*, *Meniscus*, and elsewhere, and has been shortlisted for the Val Vallis Award, and runner-up in the Tom Collins Poetry Prize. Her debut collection is forthcoming with Puncher & Wattmann in 2023.

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2 POEMS

Willo Drummond

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THE WAY THERE

Willo Drummond

Roll up
your sleeves.
Wrestle in the dust
of the common world.
Walk daily
among birds and multitudes;
taste wild mint and fruits.
Sit awhile
on an old stone
bench of conch and limestone; listen

with your eyes
at the turn
of a chalk-lined creek
where the *reader*
gets splashed with clear water.

Notes

'Roll … common world' is a variation on a line by Ralph J, Mills JR in 'Denise Levertov: The poetry of the immediate', *Poets in Progress* (1967); 'listen/with your eyes' is an allusion to a line from Levertov, 'As the poet listens so he sees' (Miscellaneous AMs, c.1960 Stanford University Libraries M0601, Series 2, Box 22, Folder 43); 'where the reader... [clear] water' is from Henri Cole, 'The Art of Poetry', No. 98, *The Paris Review* 209, Summer 2014.

ON FINDING AND NOT FINDING LEVERTOV

Willo Drummond

Northside, Valentines, on stone alcove seat, I sit with banana peels and cigarettes, dark spirits in a plastic cup. Bluebottles buzz over down and debris, sickly sweet, stale. I gaze across the long-water, looking for pieces of you; try to glimpse your reflection in this place in which you played, which played on you, framed, shaped and held you; bridges made of shells, grottoes of stone and sand.

Rococo: flint, limestone, ormer, conch

Here you 'saw with a double vision,' believed 'places reveal' 'their longings,' 'inherent dreams' for 'something more'. While others lived content behind 'grey curtains of low expectation,' you saw the face of an imagined future, envisioned departures flecked by light of the moon.

Rococo: flint, limestone, ormer, conch

Two weeks before my arrival, the world watched a tower burn in Kensington and Chelsea. Today in this old commuter town, mosquitoes dwell at the Jacob's Well and rubbish rolls in the streets; weeds embrace cracks out of sight, out of the eastern part of Greater London once mapped as 'The Western part of the County of Essex in England.'

Rococo: flint, limestone, ormer, conch

How to look with child's eyes among forgotten children? With eyes that saw 'thrones of Oberon and Titania' in 'two great stone seats'? And what was believed 'a Roman road, though never authenticated as such'. Here by 'a well under a lake where the muse moved,' (restored, but less romantic / reduced but more complicated), I shut my eyes to see.

Rococo: flint, limestone, ormer, conch.

a girl in double

image
in a place she would no longer
recognize

Rococo: *flint,* *limestone,* *ormer,* *conch*

each tiny fragment
flecked
reflecting moonlit waters
/of her making.

Notes

'Valentines' refers to Valentines mansion, Valentines Park, Ilford, UK. The once derelict mansion and surrounding landscaped gardens were a childhood space significant to Denise Levertov's imaginary, appearing in her work throughout her career; 'saw with a double vision', 'places reveal', 'their longings', 'inherent dreams', 'something more' are from "Something More", *Sands of the Well* (1996); 'face of an imagined future' is an allusion to 'The Well', *Breathing the Water* (1987); 'departure[s]' is from 'The Stricken Children', *Breathing the Water* (1987); 'The Western part of the County of Essex in England' is from 'A Map of the Western Part of the County of Essex in England', *The Jacobs Ladder* (1961); 'thrones of Oberon and Titania', 'two great stone seats' and 'what was [believed] a Roman road though never authenticated as such' are from 'The Sense of Pilgrimage' (1967), reprinted in *The Poet in the World* (1973: 75); 'A well/ under the lake where the muse move[d]' is from 'The Illustration', *The Jacob's Ladder* (1961); 'I shut my eyes to see' is an allusion to a line from an unpublished MS of Levertov's c.1960 (Stanford University Libraries M0601, Series 2, Box 22, Folder 43); *The double image* was the title of Levertov's first poetry collection (published under Levertoff, 1946).

About the author

Dr Willo Drummond is a Sydney poet teaching creative writing at Macquarie University. Her interdisciplinary research draws upon theories of distributed cognition and the archive to illuminate literary influence, creative writing cognition and practice. Willo's poetry has appeared in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *The Canberra Times*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. She has been awarded a Career Development Grant for literature from the Australia Council for the Arts (2020), shortlisted for the Val Vallis Award (2022), and runner-up in the Tom Collins Poetry Prize (2021). Her debut collection is forthcoming with Puncher & Wattmann in 2023.

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3 POEMS

Robert Wylie & Benjamin Wilson

ORCID (Wilson): 0000-0002-7336-4409

STATEMENT

Robert Wylie

'Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt'—The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote this in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and while the full depth of its meaning becomes apparent (or not) with reflection, I have always interpreted it as a personal invitation, even challenge, to extend my world through the acquisition and use of language and its various elements. The naïve enthusiasm with which I embrace this is tempered, perhaps, by the pedestrian realisation that words come into being, live for an unpredictable lifespan and then die. The poignancy of losing a word, or of nearly losing a word, together with the precision and clarity it can bestow is like losing a star from the firmament. And my grief is sharp.

By way of tribute, or eulogy, or simple valediction I have reimagined as prose poems words that I regard as being at least at risk of loss. The three words here are from a larger, highly personal lexicon, or what I call my Enthusionary, of such words. These three have been illustrated by Ben Wilson.

OXTER

Robert Wylie & Benjamin Wilson

Oxter: a ripe, hirsute word, bovine in its unmasked pungency, potent for some, unleashing preternatural urges to suck and lick, reducing the victim to primaeval grunts of snuffling, engorging pleasure; at risk of extinction by Lynx.

CONTUMELY

Robert Wylie & Benjamin Wilson

Contumely: a highly prim word dressed in frills and bows underneath which hides a harridan's emaciated body wearing a disease-disguising, flea-ridden merkin—Unpleasantness dressed in Sunday Best. Or a Dutch, Golden-Age still life.

SUMPTUARY

Robert Wylie & Benjamin Wilson

Sumptuary: a tantalising word, an Elizabethan-portrait word as opulent and extravagant sounding as that which it curtails; a regulatory word coined by haves, dressed with peacock ostentation to keep the would-be haves in their relatively drab place.

About the authors

Robert Wylie, MA, MSc is an Interior Designer manqué, Critical Reader, Editor, Poet and retired Occupational Psychologist. He is a life-long and attentive lover of language, as much for what it conceals as for what it reveals. Deep Brain Stimulation for Parkinson's in 2016 neurologically reinforced an inherent craving for sybaritic dissipation that is satisfied by exploring and capturing on paper the linguistic pyrotechnics exploding, swirling and belching the acrid incense of irony in his head.

Benjamin Wilson was born in Edinburgh in 1998 and is currently studying Fine Art at Goldsmiths University of London. He has a great interest in art that is both macabre and humorous and a passion for cinema and films of all genres, particularly of the horrific persuasion (*The Fly*, *Alien*). Drawing inspiration from cinema, literary works of suspense and horror (eg William S Burroughs and Stephen King) and great artists from the past, he creates visceral, horrific, intriguing and sometimes arousing works of art.

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WOMEN POETS IN THE ARCHIVES

Making space for impulse, imagination and implication

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Abstract

This article discusses the space that is created when poetry meets the archives, a unique space wherein a poet can use the historical materials found in archives together with her imagination to reconstruct women's lives and narratives that hitherto have been marginalised or ignored by more traditional historical texts and outlets. The article considers the impulse that occurs when creativity, language, and history meet, and uses the lens of some of Susan Stanford Friedman's ideas on feminism and history found in her book *Mappings*. Often, this kind of imaginative rendering takes space, and the use of the women's long poem in providing a form for this work is also considered. The ideas and work of other poets, such as Jordie Albiston, Susan Howe and Helen Rickerby, further inform the discussion, and two manuscripts by Kimberly K. Williams are analysed and discussed.

WOMEN POETS IN THE ARCHIVES: MAKING SPACE FOR IMPULSE, IMAGINATION AND IMPLICATION

Kimberly K Williams

The first poet laureate of the city of Oakland, California, Dr. Ayodele Nzinga said in July 2021, 'America has an interesting history that it struggles not to remember out loud' (cited in Exume 2021). This description might apply equally well to many countries that have also arisen out of androcentric, patriarchal systems in which mainstream narrative structures and biographies are dominated by men's lives and narratives. However, remembering can happen both in print and out loud when poetry meets the archives—in a place where the historically muted find a voice through the combination of archival digging and innovative poetic technique and forms. The meeting of poetry and the archives may create specific and significant spaces that reveal and depict the voices of women who have important places in history but who have been neglected by received historical narratives.

Deborah Nelson's introduction to *Twentieth-Century Poetry: Expanding archives and methods* asserts that the volume's essays on poetry and expanding archives and methods 'make the case for poetry's value to other areas of inquiry … as one that contributes new paradigms to … intersecting fields' (2012: 213). That is to say that poetry offers a way for voices and stories that have been marginalised, ignored, or silenced to be told. This describes the space that opens when poetry meets the archives—whether the intersecting fields are biographical, historical, mathematical, or scientific, this space may occur wherever creativity crosses disciplines and meets in poetic forms.

With reference to his own imaginative world, JRR Tolkien wrote, 'Not all those who wander are lost', and many poets who find the creative space I refer to, do so by wandering into it. Australian poet Jordie Albiston described it as 'difficult and exciting' (1999: 59) and New Zealand poet Helen Rickerby characterises it as magical and meaningful (2016: 227). A lot happens inside the space which isn't easy to articulate. Yet many women poets have found themselves dwelling there. It is a space where the concreteness of objects and language in the form of primary and secondary historical sources inform the imagination enough to allow it to leap to new and significant places in the present. In the process, what has been lost or marginalised across time can be found and revived.

I describe this process as an impulse—finding and using the details, objects, artifacts, and passages that allow one person to capture a voice and a persona from a bygone era and bring it into the twenty-first century. Canadian poet Anne Michaels describes working in the archives like this: 'Sometimes you read and there is a tiny reference to a gesture, to the tiniest thing, and suddenly you feel a great understanding for the person' (cited in Rickerby 2016: 27). I would add that this understanding is followed by the impulse to express, examine, or even interrogate it through language and the imagination. And this is where the role of the archives is so critical as a place of reposited possibility—a poet won't know what that 'tiniest thing' might be until encountering it. As such, it is a potential, archived and waiting, that has the capacity to unleash both understanding and imagination, allowing for a resurrection of a person, voice, or story.

My book *Sometimes a Woman*, a series of poems about the prostitutes and madams that helped to 'settle' the 'wild West', began 'with the tiniest thing'—a prostitution permit for the city of Tombstone. I found this permit hanging on the wall at the Bird Cage Theatre, a historical

building which acts as an informal museum and archive, in Tombstone, Arizona. Tombstone is famous for the shootout at the OK Corral, involving men and guns. The shootout is so well remembered in history that many feature-length Hollywood films have been made about it. This narrative is, in large part, why people travel to Tombstone, Arizona, and is what tourists go to 'see'. But what caught my eye was the seemingly insignificant permit (copies of which can also be found at the National Archive), and on a different cluttered wall, a photograph believed to be of Josephine Earp, first a prostitute and then later the partner of Wyatt Earp, the most famous of the brothers involved in the OK Corral shooting. Looking at the photograph, I wondered about her life and her story. From there, spaces kept opening up. I read about other women and their lives and I fell down archival rabbit holes—and, ultimately, for over three years I dwelled in a liminal imaginative place that contained many different places and many disparate voices. As I made impromptu visits to museums, pored over digital archives, read letters, diaries, and newspaper articles, and sometimes drove long distances, I ended up traversing huge tracts of land in the Western United States.

Yet the entire project began from a single moment—an impulse—that came with the knowledge that sex workers in the nineteenth century in Tombstone, Arizona, had to pay five dollars and fill out a form to register their intention to work. At that moment, for inarticulable reasons, the women who had those jobs seemed so real to me. Instantly, they were no longer anonymous, lost, erased, or preserved only on small receipts. I had found one of them in this random place, and I could search for and find more of them in other archival spaces, like the National Archives. All the while I could imagine these women's regular lives: they pulled buttons, misplaced items, bore children, wrote letters, and cooked, cleaned, and sewed. Suddenly, they weren't all flat characters from a movie or novel. They were as real as my great-grandmothers (one of whom I knew), my distant cousins, and great-great aunts.

I am not the only one who has had this impulse, and yet I first encountered it by myself: before reading Susan Howe's poetry or Susan Stanford Friedman's *Mappings*, before I fully understood what was occurring. As US poet Susan Howe might suggest, the impulse comes from imagination—that uncanny human propensity to transport ourselves abstractly into someone else's life (2009). Archives then enable us to make what we imagine more concrete and more objective. They provide objects that aid in the imaginative creation of recognisable lives and voices, such as letters, newspaper articles, census data, diaries, pens, papers, certificates, receipts—things that can be read, touched, and held. And, in reading, touching and holding, the poet may find ways into re-creating and 'reclaiming' the narratives and lives that produced such artefacts.

Some Contexts

Archival curator, Karen M Mason, together with Tanya Zanish-Belcher, writer and editor, have devoted the last 35 years to studying women in the archives, and their scholarship has tracked trends and accomplishments. Their work from 1999 notes that the 1970s saw an outcry to establish 'repositories dedicated to collecting women's papers', with a much greater push following in the 1990s. Their 1999 study establishes definitively that 'The number of repositories dedicated to collecting women's papers ha[d] grown substantially' from 1973 to 2000, 'with no fewer than 15 established after 1990' (37). There is an interesting correlation with the world of poetry writing: as archives have been growing, expanding and becoming more inclusive of women's experiences and lives, women's long poems and poem sequences which draw largely

on information found in archives have become more prevalent as well. Though in existence at least 100 years before the second half of the twentieth century, in works such as with Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, women's long poem publications increased markedly as access to archival information increased; also gaining wider publication, especially after 1970. This correlation indicates how the space created by poets working out of the archives has been both expansive and meaningful in giving women's voices room to be heard.

Susan Stanford Friedman's chapter 'Craving Stories', from her book *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, corroborates Mason's and Zanish-Belcher's findings. Friedman spends a number of pages enumerating an international list of poets who, writing in English, have produced these kinds of works in the second half of the twentieth century. She characterises such long poems as 'reclamations of mythic and religious discourse', citing HD's *Helen in Egypt* (1961) as an earlier contemporary example, as well as Anne Sexton's *Transformations* (1971) and Atwood's 'Circe/Mud Poems' (1974) (31). Certainly HD's *Trilogy*, published in 1944, can also be placed early in the list of reclamations.

Friedman's chapter names Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959) and John Berryman's *The Dream Songs* (1969) as aptly correlative works by men. Strikingly, not one of the long poems by a woman poet from that era has received the same recognition as poems written by male poets during the period. In the notes at the end of her chapter, Friedman describes how Mina Loy, Gertrude Stein, and HD each experienced delays in publishing their long poems and postulates that '[t]he delayed publication dates … may reflect writers' and readers' anxiety about the coupling of women and the long poem' (39). It may also reflect publishers' anxieties, and explain in part why women's stories aren't remembered well 'out loud'. Susan Stanford Friedman's chapter also identifies how academia, especially through the establishment of Women's Studies in the second half of the twentieth century, has followed the trend of the burgeoning archives and 'parallels the reclamation of historical discourse in the contemporary women's long poem—compelled … by the conviction that the lives of women have been systematically erased or trivialized in the dominant historical discourses' (1998: 236).

Indeed, here in *Axon*, Jessica Wilkinson noted 'how the long poem has [had] the potential to address historical inaccuracies and aporias, thus not only opening a space for the representation of marginal voices, but also offering new and innovative frameworks for life writing' (2014: n.p.). The long poem and/or poem sequences gives women poets the physical space—the space on the page—to address, imagine, depict, and voice concerns that had previously been buried, ignored, or missing in both historical chronicles and in the archives. These poems in longer forms not only reclaim marginal or erased lives, but also provide means for remembering 'out loud'.

In the chapter 'Making History', also from the book *Mappings*, Friedman explains how in terms of recorded and published history, the past is 'triply mediated'; first, through the fact that published history is 'a reconstruction of what "really" happened;' second, in the archives 'through the fragmentary and partial survival of those textualisations that are dependent on the politics of documentation and the luck, skill, and persistence as the historian-as-detective who must locate them; and third, through the interpretive, meaning-making gaze of the historian' (1998: 201). Through this lens comes the understanding that depicting history in writing 'depends not upon the level of objectivity but rather on the cogency of interpretation', which is the critical point for women writing historically-based long poems (201). The 'cogency of interpretation' is inhabitable through a combination of imagination and the understanding of what it is like to be a woman in particular eras facilitated by archival research.

Friedman emphasises that 'The goal of writing history within this epistemological framework was not to discover the true history, but rather to construct the story of women's experience out of a feminist paradigm' (1998: 202). Ultimately, Friedman concludes that the 're-formation of histories that focus on or integrate women's experience and the issue of gender' is an inherently political act '[b]ecause what we know of the past shapes what becomes possible in the future' (202). This is an important issue, and it explains why contemporary women poets often focus on depicting earlier eras with accuracy and authenticity via the act of writing long poems and long poem sequences; in this way, they not only resurrect the histories and concerns of neglected women and their lost voices, but they are also able to express contemporary perspectives through their texts.

Working in this way, before 1990, poet Susan Howe declared that she wished to 'tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate' (Howe 1990: 14). In book after book, her poetry accomplishes this task. It illustrates how women poets in the twentieth century used poetry much as it was used by those working in the general field of women's studies—not only to reclaim history (both as narrative tellers and thus actors in the narrative) but, importantly, to also reclaim the long poem itself, creating a contemporary poetic tradition focused on, and making claims for the importance, of the daily lives of women. Howe's poetry continually opens and claims space that had previously been silenced or ignored.

In her chapter 'Craving Stories', Susan Friedman describes three types of long poems written by women wherein 'the interplay of lyric and narrative' can be read (1998: 237). My work generally illustrates the category of writing that claims 'a historical discourse, whether that history is personal or societal, in past time or present time, or some combination of the two' (237). For example, my manuscript *That Way* employs both personal and societal discourse in a manner consistent with what Friedman names as 'historical discourse' as it traces, marks, and depicts the daily lives of nineteenth-century women migrating across the United States. It depicts who and what they encountered in their passages and how they interacted with each other, their families, and the new land they found themselves inhabiting. This exemplifies Friedman's assertion that these types of poems 'implicitly insist upon the right and necessity for the poet to engage in history making' (1998: 30). And, in part, this is what my work is doing—claiming for these women a part of the historical narrative that they are generally left out of. The women I depict gain their places of importance not just through vague proximity—as wives, mothers, and 'pioneers'— but in an actual narrative that gives priority to narrating their lives.

Some Examples

As mentioned, two of my long poems explore the intersection of the archives and imagination in depicting the lives of nineteenth-century women in the United States, as they cooked and tended to children and were absorbed in a wide variety of daily tasks. As Friedman suggests, I am working from an impulse that is less interested in the 'true' story and more interested in 'construct[ing] the story of women's experience' (202) as authentically as possible. My work, in keeping with Howe's poetry and that of many other women writers, also seeks to do that tender lifting of slighted voices (Howe 1990), which is a kind of remembering 'out loud'.

Though my own work is based in archival materials, it also employs imagination and inference. I have written previously that:

> What I learned through my research is how essential these madams and prostitutes were to the economic and social fabric of the West—that wide imaginative space that exists on so many levels. [These women] helped establish the communities that now comprise the … United States … What I also realised is that these women had complex lives, hard to pin down with words, which made the endeavour that much more fulfilling to pursue. (Williams 2019: n.p.)

Certainly, the lack of mainstream material and the need to dig deeply into the archives demonstrates my commitment to representing these women accurately and authentically. I travelled to local museums, places with informal and formal historical collections and artefacts, and I combed through newspaper articles, census documents, and legal documents from the era. At the same time, from these documents, I was less interested in discovering 'the true history' and more interested in (re)constructing the stories of the women's daily lives (Friedman 1998: 202). Helen Rickerby also addresses this in her 2016 article 'Articulating Artemisia: Revisioning the lives of women from history in biographical poetry', where she admits, 'It was my version of what I thought their voices might have been like. How I imagined them' (27). So, too, in *Sometimes a Woman* most of the poems are about real women, and inasmuch as we can know about the personal lives of prostitutes (given their line of work, they usually changed their names to protect their families of origin, making it sometimes difficult to accurately identify these women), the details are accurate; meanwhile, constructing their stories in poems meant employing imagination and inference. In one poem, 'Lydia Taylor, Kansas and Wyoming', for example, I used biographical details of the subject's life. Lydia Taylor (whose birthname was Sarah) was the oldest child in an overly large family in Kansas. Her father was physically abusive, and the family tended to be underfed, so Lydia left as a very young woman to make her own way. The rest of the poem, however, is my imagination filling in the gaps—what scene(s) could occur to push a young woman to leave at such a tender age and take up an occupation that would place her on the fringe of society? This is a persona poem, and the voice is meant to be Lydia Taylor's:

> I wished hard,
> feeling my heart puff like it was full
> of rain, that the clouds would quit
> their march …
> and Papa wouldn't return home
> swinging his anger like an axe,
> chasing me down the cellar steps
> until I tumbled in the turnips. (34-41)

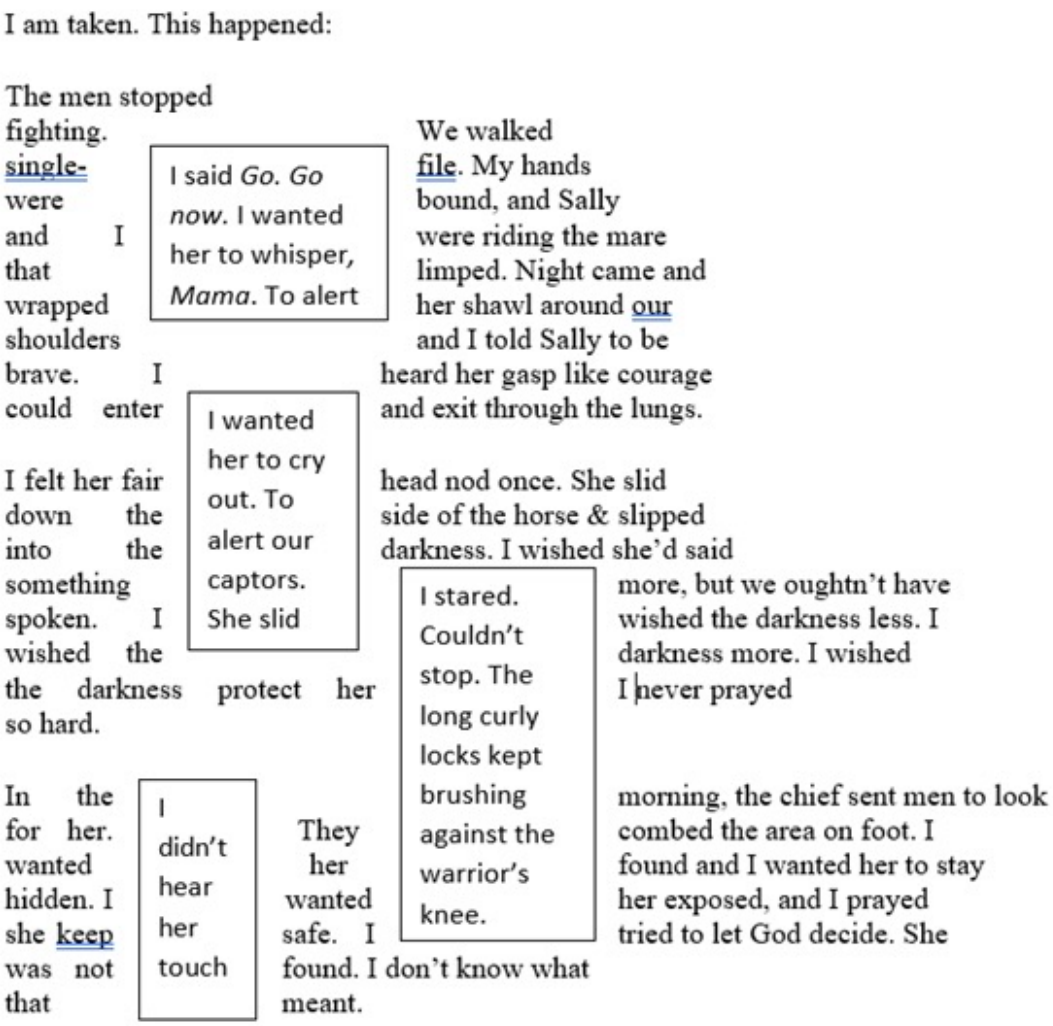
This passage exemplifies that unique space created when poetry and the archives meet, where women like Lydia Taylor, whose lives have been completely overlooked in the historical narrative, can have their stories resurrected.

My current project, *That Way*, written as the creative portion of my PhD thesis, is about the women who 'pioneered' across the mid-western and western parts of the US. *That Way* follows in the tradition of women poets writing in the twenty-first century and continues the exploration of women's social and personal histories through using the long poem and poetic sequences—now with a couple of generations of women poets behind it. This book is comprised of mixed mode poem sequences, also taken from specific lives of 'everyday' women and their writings,

mostly from the letters and diaries they left behind. One woman, Fanny Kelly, wrote about her unusual experience, resulting in an entire book, a captivity narrative from the early 1870s. Notably, Kelly writes this as a preface to her own narrative:

> Of my thrilling adventures and experience during this season of terror and privation, I propose to give a plain, unvarnished narrative, hoping the reader will be more interested in facts concerning the habits, manners, and customs of the Indians, and their treatment of prisoners, than in theoretical speculations and fine-wrought sentences. (1872)

From Kelly's own words, readers see that her purpose in writing is to capture daily life during her captivity. To use Friedman's framework, here Kelly indicates that in writing this work she is interested in 'the cogency of interpretation' (Friedman: 1998: 201); in providing facts about daily lives and customs (which one might also obtain from an archive) she fashions a space for her narrative. From reading this narrative, which captures my own imagination immensely, I created this poem:



This poem interrogates the internal state of a woman in a harrowing moment; it captures via truncated narration the decision that Kelly made to encourage her young daughter to escape

their capture by sending her out into the wild night alone. Days later, Kelly noticed what was likely her daughter's scalp hanging from a warrior's horse. Juxtaposing these moments on the page in a nonlinear fashion and using the full space of the whole page—not only the north and south of it but also the east and west—afforded me a space wherein I was able to understand and depict the difficulty and the complexity of the moments that Kelly endured. My interest in reconstructing Kelly's story in this way falls squarely inside Friedman's framework and was less concerned with discovering the 'real history' and more concerned with examining the experience itself from Kelly's point of view—as a woman and mother faced with terrifying decisions. In doing so, my poem has created a space for a version of Kelly's voice to come through over a century after she died.

Helen Rickerby considers how it is that poetry can combine with archival research to create a liminal place that isn't quite fictional and isn't entirely nonfictional. In this place, 'the rules of fact and fiction don't *quite* apply' (2016: 23). And this, in combination with the variety of forms that poetry can take on the page, the ability for longer works to be sequenced (or not), means that poetry offers a flexible mode wherein women's stories may be resurrected. Ultimately, poetry can do. It can bridge eras and lifetimes, and thus it can release silenced voices. It can resurrect lost narratives and lives. It is at the intersection of archives and poetic imagination—a unique and liminal space rife with potential—where it all occurs.

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About the author

Kimberly K Williams is the author of three collections of poetry. Her second book, *Sometimes a Woman* (Recent Work Press), won the 2022 WILLA literary prize in poetry. Her third book, *Still Lives* (Gazebo Book), won a Canberra Critics Circle Award in writing in 2022. Her first book, *Finally, the Moon* (Stephen F Austin State University Press) was published in 2017. Kimberly was short-listed for the University of Canberra's Vice-Chancellor's Poetry Prize in 2019 and won the Bright Harvest Poetry Prize in 2012. Her poems appear in many journals and anthologies around the world. The research for this article was made possible through the generous support of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

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3 POEMS

Paul Venzo

RIALTO

Paul Venzo

It is 4 a.m. and you are sleeping.
Restless, seal-skinned with perspiration, I abandon the turbulence of our bed.
Unshuttered windows gulp shallow breaths of humid air.
I stand in the galley of the bathroom, naked.
Take a piss, scratch my chest, roll a damp cigarette.
A porthole window is my vent—I lean out, head and shoulders.
Rialto is silent and still.
The moon is a bone button on a bolt of Prussian blue.
There is a rooftop, metres distant, where a couple have spread a blanket over the gentle slope below an attic window.
A young woman sleeps on it, curled around her stitch-less boyfriend.
He sits upright, smoking a joint, legs at 45 degrees.
His cock is a popped jack-in-the-box, trunking down between his thighs.
He nods a conspiratorial greeting, between our duetting exhalations of blue smoke, spliff-stub piked in a lazy arc to the street.
Between us loose tiles, the undulating sea of terracotta, and dead air.

IDLE

Paul Venzos

That old cur we call ‘cross-paws’ stands the morning shift,
too old and forgetful to bare teeth, beyond even
the most perfunctory growl or wag of the tail
towards the foot traffic that passes by these wooden doors.

Similarly unoccupied is the woman who operates
the tour company from a makeshift kiosk,
its corner-location good for exposure to buzzing motorbikes
taking the curve of the alleyway, and little else. Her body
sprawls over a stool like a fleshy tablecloth on a tiny picnic table.
Her fingers brush across the face of a dusty old tablet.

Here inside, we exist behind a moat of foreign currency,
the greasy barriers of coconut oil and Ray Bans.
Unlike others, we take our idleness seriously:
we work at it, we pay for it, we have it massaged into us.
‘Turn over, darl. You don’t want to get burned.’

MONDRIAN'S PIER

Paul Venzo

In a spacious, dark room sleeps
Mondrian's picture of a jetty, a pier,
seen from above.
The wooden pylons are simply brief
passages of charcoal.
It is a visual field, a bay without limits,
liquefying itself until lines float
as islands of their very own.

About the author

Paul Venzo (PhD) is a poet and academic living in southwest Victoria. Paul is a senior lecturer in writing and literature at Deakin University and his research and writing focus on poetic geographies and self-translation. He has published both creative and critical work with *Axon: Creative Explorations*, including 'Postcards from Venice' for the recent Poetry as Speculation special edition. Paul is also the co-author of the children's picture book *The Great Southern Reef* (2022), with CSIRO publishing: part of a project to promote ocean literary.