OFFSHOOT: CONTEMPORARY LIFE WRITING METHODOLOGIES AND PRACTICE

3220_Offshoot.indd 1 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

3220_Offshoot.indd 2 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

OFFSHOOT: CONTEMPORARY LIFE WRITING METHODOLOGIES AND PRACTICE

EDITED BY DONNA LEE BRIEN
AND QUINN EADES

3220_Offshoot.indd 3 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

First published in 2018 by
UWA Publishing
Crawley, Western Australia 6009
www.uwap.uwa.edu.au

UWAP is an imprint of UWA Publishing
a division of The University of Western Australia

A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

Copyright © Donna Brien, Quinn Eades et.al. 2017

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

<insert CIP logo>

Typeset by J&M Typesetting
Printed by Mcphersons Printing Group
Cover image: courtesy of Jamie James

This book is dedicated to the lives that remain unwritten, were deemed not important enough to write in the first place or lost before they could be written, as well as those who are attempting to stem this tide.

3220_Offshoot.indd 5 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

3220_Offshoot.indd 6

18/01/2018 3:32 PM

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements x

Contemporary Life Writing Methodologies and Practice
Donna Lee Brien and Quinn Eades

Life Writing, Truth, History and Speculation **11**

Conjectural and Speculative Biography: Convict and Colonial Biographies 13
Donna Lee Brien

Narrative Structure – Is It Making Us Liars?: Truth and Autobiography in *She Played Elvis* 31
Shady Cosgrove

The Truth Is Like Truth: Grey 42
Jeri Kroll

Strange Hybrids: Telling the Truth and Other 'Lies' About Fiction and Life Writing 47
Camilla Nelson

Out 60
Lia Incognita

'True Histories': Using Fiction in Writing Lives 63
James Vicars

Biographical Forms and Ways of Writing Lives **81**

Profiling the Biography of the Contemporary Political Figure in Australia 83
Patrick Mullins

Gatherers 98
Jeanine Leane

The Frame and the Score: Knowing a Subject Differently Through Poetic Biography 102
Jessica L. Wilkinson

Unleaving, Leaving 119
Gail Pittaway

'I Felt This Landscape Knew I Was There': *The Lake's Apprentice* and Ecobiography 121
Jessica White

Stepping across Space and Time: Writing a Life from Long Ago and Far Away 135
Janine McVeagh

Brolga Clan 145
Phillip Hall

Life Writing and Self-Making 147

Queer Life Writing as Self-Making 149
Dallas J. Baker

Les Fées S'écrivet: Wrestling with Women's Life Writing 164
Nike Sulway

Quickening 180
Dominique Hecq

(Snippets of) Littoral Freedom: Collecting Nostalgic Remnants on the Distant Shores of Childhood 182
Zoe Thomas

Memory Gardens 193
Jen Webb and Paul Hetherington

Genealogy & The Sea 196
Robyn Ferrell

3220_Offshoot.indd 8 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

Mind as Hive 207
Kevin Brophy

Blogging as Art: Life Writing Online 209
Lucas Ihlein

Embodiment, Experiment and Fictocritical Modes 223

Writing the Self (The Body) as *mer-mer* 225
Francesca Rendle-Short

Vivarium 243
Anna Gibbs

this poem is not a panic (v.000) 251
Virginia Barratt

How Is Staying Here Going? 253
Quinn Eades

I Have Nothing To Say About Love (Fictocritical Fragments) 264
Stephen Abblitt

Blood. Sex 278
Ellen van Neerven

Waterspout, or, Queering Traumatic Fall-Out 279
Marion May Campbell

girl body boy body 294
Quinn Eades

Life Writing Futurities: No Future/Every Future and What We Can See in the Horizon 295
Quinn Eades and Donna Lee Brien

Life Writing Bibliography 312

Contributors 326

3220_Offshoot.indd 9 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We conceived this project over cups of tea when, at a creative writing conference in 2014, we noticed how many of the delegates were researching and producing interesting work about life writing. This led to discussions about the lack of current, locally inflected resources about life writing, and, especially, methodologies for writing and researching life writing. Questions about what writers and scholars were producing in this field, and what would be useful for students, teachers and writers soon followed, and spurred us on to find some possible answers. It soon became apparent that others were also making similar enquiries, and the idea for this collection was born. Very soon in those discussions, moreover, we decided that we wanted to include creative work and, specifically, poetry about life writing, in order to not exclude its vital contribution to this subject. We would like to acknowledge, therefore, the foundational contribution of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs in terms of providing venues for scholars, researchers, students and writers to come together to have such important disciplinary conversations, and for paving the way for creative writing to be accepted as a valid means of expressing research findings in Australia and internationally. Many of the contributors to this volume are members of that association.

Of course, this book is the sum total of the work of all those contributors, whose hard work and commitment to the project made this book possible. Sincere thanks, too, to the many peer reviewers of the creative and the critical works herein, and whose astute and generous comments improved each piece in this volume. Due to the double-blind reviewing process, we cannot name these reviewers, but their input is evident throughout. A

3220_Offshoot.indd 10 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

warm thank you, too, to Terri-ann White, Publisher at UWA Publishing, who supported this project from its inception, and has never been anything but the most good-humoured of publishers, and whose input made this editorial journey creative as well as enjoyable.

We would like to also gratefully acknowledge our universities – Central Queensland University and La Trobe University – for supporting the research that has resulted in this book, and for believing in our collaboration. A special thank you to the School of Education and the Arts and the cross-disciplinary research Centre for Regional Advancement of Learning, Equity, Access and Participation at Central Queensland University for their ongoing support of this research; and to La Trobe University's Disciplinary Research Program in English, Theatre and Drama that supports critical and practice-led scholarship, which has a particular focus on biography and autobiography, and generously provided financial support for this project. Heartfelt thanks are due to the many colleagues, friends and members of our families who have offered their encouragement over the past two and a half years that we have worked on this project.

We extend an extra special thank you to Alice Ewing, whose botanical drawings open each section of the book, and to James Photographic Services for assisting us in translating Alice's beautiful drawings into digital form. Thank you, too, to Wes Hicks, who also helped with some digital image wrangling and intern assistant editors Brodie Smart and Virginia Birt, who joined us in the very final stages of the project, but whose help was invaluable. A sincere thank you to editor Katie Connolly for editing and Kate Pickard for shepherding this manuscript, and us, to publication.

Finally, we both want to thank each other. As very different individuals, with quite different scholarly and creative approaches

3220_Offshoot.indd 11 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

and networks, and at different stages of our careers, working together has been one of the great pleasures of this project and, we both believe, at the core of its strength.

3220_Offshoot.indd 12 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

CONTEMPORARY LIFE WRITING METHODOLOGIES AND PRACTICE

Donna Lee Brien and Quinn Eades

Over the past decades, life writing has evolved into both a form of creative production that is popular with authors and readers, as well as a diverse, inclusive and seemingly ever-expanding field of academic study. Attracting scholarship from those working in the disciplines of creative writing and literary studies, and a wide range of other fields including women's, gender and sexuality studies, life writing as both a description of genre and a form of practice has displayed considerable potential to bring together a range of varied perspectives. Starting from the premise that life writing is a significant component of both contemporary artistic practice and scholarship, we felt it was necessary in putting this collection together to re-evaluate life writing in both those areas of enquiry, and to take account of its contemporary subgeneric incarnations and the range of methodological and practical approaches that are currently in use and circulation. In thinking through how to approach this, we kept returning to the organic, hybrid and rhizomic nature of much of the new and experimental life writing scholarship and practice occurring now in the second decade of the new millennium, seeing this evidenced not only in traditional areas such as biography and memoir (and enquiry into these forms), but also in emerging areas of research and practice. *Offshoot: Contemporary Life Writing Methodologies and Practice* thus focuses in on this pairing of contemporary life writing scholarship

and practice, consciously bringing together a wide range of relevant perspectives and approaches.

Throughout the process of conceiving this collection, and piecing it together, we have concentrated on balancing both critical and creative modes of research enquiry and production, and providing a forum where these modes could speak to, and across, each other. This collection aims to represent not only a wide range of subgenres and approaches current within life writing and creative writing studies, but to also offer varied and multifaceted readings of life writing, recognising the importance and impact of subgeneric differences and experimentation on life writing. While offering input into important issues of enquiry including, for instance, questions of truth, privacy and ethical production, the vagaries of memory and the limitations of representation, we have also recognised that there are many other areas of investigation of interest to, and animating, current study and practice. We have, therefore, sought to draw attention to hybrid and experimental – even subaltern – methodologies, approaches and practices which nonetheless have a strong life writing focus, including in areas of writing of contemporary interest such as creative non-fiction, poetry and Indigenous writing.

There is a recurring presence of queer theory and queer theoretical approaches throughout this collection, unsurprising when this approach offers a questioning of the certainties that underpin so much of the more limited and shallow commentary on, and criticism of, life writing in the popular media. We purposefully invited contributions that placed a particular emphasis on contemporary issues within life writing scholarship such as the body, technology and digitality, geo-cultural and postcolonial politics, storytelling, and self-reflexivity, as well as the role of fictionalisation and speculation in life writing. We hope that this volume

3220_Offshoot.indd 2 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

can be read, therefore, as offering a fresh and even innovative perspective on both *doing*, and *thinking about*, life writing.

Underlying our creation of this collection has been a shared belief that it is important to signal the many developments and directions in contemporary life writing scholarship and practice that are currently occurring in Australia and New Zealand. In spite of the interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transnational impact of life writing, many life writing–orientated scholarly publications continue to concentrate on writing and research from North America and the United Kingdom. This book, indeed, emerged from discussions in relation to this situation, when we realised that numerous innovative incarnations of the mode and its subgenres were being demonstrated in the work of our peers in Australasia, where we live. We owe a debt to Raewyn Connell's *Southern Theory* (2007) for providing us frameworks to think through the implications of working in a field where most scholarship comes from 'the North', and to start a project that clearly theorises from 'the South'. We also note, that while this work reveals multiple forms and nuances, and incorporates a considerable history of investigation and experimentation, not all of its producers have been represented, or even cited, in international compilations. This may be, in part, due to the nature of many intellectual and artistic groups and networks worldwide which, despite the opportunities offered by both access to overseas travel and digitally based communities and publications, remain based in shared localities and local and/or national arts, academic, research and funding imperatives and contexts. We are not here reprising, or arguing for (or against), ideas such as the tyranny of distance (as famously explicated by Geoffrey Blainey in 1966) or whether there are global centres (and, therefore, peripheries) of intellectual and artistic endeavour. We are, however, noting that – despite

3220_Offshoot.indd 3 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

the ubiquity of social media – the places where people live, work, write and socialise influence the networks of colleagues they build and maintain, and the communities in which they think, practice and disseminate their work. In this, we are not suggesting that the range of life writing practice and criticism represented herein – such as multiple subgenres of memoir, fictocritical writing and the embedded life writing in self-reflexive poetry and other creative forms – are unique to our geographical region, but we do assert that these various manifestations are typical of some of the innovative work being produced in Australia and New Zealand today. Not only representative of this place, we argue, but also able to provide proof of the expansive nature of life writing scholarship and practice globally.

This volume also reveals the cultural and conceptual impact of life writing on other fields of practice and study. As well as providing insightful discussions into the way in which life writing has developed, and is developing, the book also provides a prognostic guide to any of the different courses that new trends in life writing scholarship are taking both in, and outside, Australia and New Zealand. The collection has been curated with the aim of providing what we hope are accessible, expansive and interesting evaluations and examples of life writing and its contemporary manifestations, approaches and practices, from a wide range of contributors. Input from expert peer reviewers has assisted in honing and refining the content. Together, these chapters go some way towards mapping the contemporary field and, in providing an analytical snapshot of contemporary manifestations and practices, raise critical questions relating to how we can move forward in both academic scholarship and authorial practice.

The book is divided into four sections. Each is introduced by an image by artist Alice Ewing, who worked with us to find

3220_Offshoot.indd 4 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

botanical examples from our region that could reflect and tease out some of the themes of each section. Each section features both essays and creative works, including a series of poems. We asked our authors for conciseness, seeking clear and elegant exposition, which all have delivered. In the discussion below, we aim to provide a brief introduction to these works, and point to some of the connections between them. In this, we do not want to offer reductive descriptive or analytical readings of these works, instead we wish to indicate some of the ways they may link in order to encourage their consideration by readers.

The first section provides an extension of life writing history to the current day, providing both some taxonomic descriptions and addressing some of the pressing formal, aesthetic and ethical concerns of contemporary life writing. Together, the essays and creative works in this first section provide a contemporary update on where longstanding discussions currently stand in relation to auto/biographical writing. This is, in this case, in terms of discussions of the enduring issue of historical and auto/biographical truth in life writing and, particularly, in relation to the use of fiction and speculation. Works by Donna Lee Brien, Shady Cosgrove, Camilla Nelson and James Vicars in this section suggest that this remains a rich field of enquiry, and underscore the central role of authorial interpretation in all auto/biographical writing. Cosgrove points to the role of structure in the way life writing is not only written, but also – perhaps more importantly – read and understood, while both Nelson and Vicars investigate the role of fiction in life writing, but from very different angles. These essays, moreover, steer readers away from the fretful and anxiety-ridden manner in which discussion on this topic is often framed, offering instead a range of ways of creatively and productively utilising imaginatively inflected approaches to generate life writing texts

3220_Offshoot.indd 5 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

that move beyond limiting binaries of fact and fiction, objectivity and subjectivity, and truth and untruth. Jeri Kroll's intriguing prose poem comprised primarily of self-quotation brings this topic into focus by revealing how constructive and dynamic such playful 'self-plagiarism' (Kroll's description) can be. Kroll's work asks whether lyric poets need to abide by the same ethical rules as life writers, setting this topic as a kind of assignment to which all our poets respond. Lia Incognita's poem positions the self at the centre of life writing practice, but then suggests how this self only exists in relation to others – another key concern of many of the contributors in this collection.

The second section of the volume spotlights biography, which sometimes seems a neglected form of life writing in terms of so much academic enquiry focusing on autobiographical forms. Attention in this section is, instead, on contemporary ways of writing the lives of others, with writers in this section providing an introduction to both new ways of writing into, and conceiving, existing forms (as in Patrick Mullins' piece on contemporary political biography), as well as emergent forms (as in Jessica L. Wilkinson's self-reflection on poetic biography and Jessica White's valuable depiction of the potential of ecobiography to reflect on rare, but educative, instances of where human protagonists exist in concert with their ecosystems). Mullins (as a number of other authors in this collection) also points to the multivalence and convergence of what could be called the 'author-identity' in the context of life writing – with journalistic and academic writing meeting historical and imaginative construction. A number of writers in this section – including Janine McVeagh in her chapter on the biographical enterprise, and Jeanine Leane, Gail Pittaway and Phillip Hall in their moving poems – embrace a strong

3220_Offshoot.indd 6 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

strand of autobiographical reflection in their biographical work, rehearsing one of the themes of the next section of the volume.

The third section of the volume moves from writing the lives of others to writing the life of the self, and life writing as a form of self-making. Here, the collection considers the development of important current innovative connections between genre, subgenre and narrative in the newly evolving structural frameworks of life writing, and how these gesture towards a shift in understanding contemporary life writing and its production and consumption. By focusing on the relationships between textuality, identity and life writing, this section explores queer life writing (Dallas J. Baker), women's life writing (Nike Sulway), creative non-fiction (Zoe Thomas and Robyn Ferrell) and blogging (Lucas Ihlein) as examples of how contemporary life writing encompass creative re-evaluation and hybridity in very traditional forms (fairy tales in Sulway's case) alongside the newest technological advances. Baker explores the ways that both the production and consumption of life writing can be used as a technique in a kind of ethical production of the self, an issue other writers also raise and respond to. The creative works in this section present fresh perspectives on life writing. Dominique Hecq provides a writer's insider view into the relationship between writing and gestation from a sexed position – that of an expectant mother. Jen Webb and Paul Hetherington's collaboratively authored piece not only draws attention to the rarity of collaborative poetic practice, but also the referential nature of all creative work. The title of their work, indeed, references a poetry collection by an assiduous collaborator, Robert Creeley, who himself referenced a poem by Allen Ginsberg from which Webb and Hetherington take their title. Robyn Ferrell's creative non-fiction is based on the text of an

3220_Offshoot.indd 7 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

unpublished nineteenth-century sea captain's memoir, bringing this historical artefact into the world of both its author and the contemporary reader. Kevin Brophy's prose poem presents a day in the life of a traveller under the spell of his night-time dreams, so that both the inner and outer aspects of experience are intermingled. Zoe Thomas brings these works, and their universe of consideration, together in a conversation between the creative and the critical, particularly the complex mapping of terrain that is involved when writing about one's own childhood. This work also suggests the hybrid forms of the next section, including fictocritical life writing.

The fourth section concludes the main body of the collection by focusing in on how an expansive and iterative experimentation and hybridity is now an important dimension of both critical and creative life writing. Elaborating on the concepts of transformation and growth in relation to life writing that have been introduced and developed through the previous sections, the work in this section emphasises how the idea of hybridity and experimentation in life writing is intrinsically connected to sociocultural and creative and aesthetic frameworks, particularly in relation to the body and other materialities. It also explores how, at its beating heart, life writing embraces stages and types of evolutionary modification and variation, while continuing to reflect the contemporary drives, concerns and desires of writers and how they understand their subjects. Francesca Rendle-Short questions the methods and forms of writing memoir, positing the rich potential evident in accepting that the form of memoir can be as unstable as notions of the self. Anna Gibbs picks up on this idea of flexibility of form, fictocritically staging – through a form of life writing – the questions about life writing she aims to explore. Quinn Eades mobilises the fragment in order to perform

3220_Offshoot.indd 8 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

writing from a transitioning body, where power is found in seams and cracks, and the flickering spaces on the page between shards of literary theory and body-autobiography are as important as the shards themselves. In this, as throughout other works in this collection, readers find encounters, strange couplings and the offering up of bodies that find themselves best expressed through ghosts, seams, holograms and loss. Stephen Abblitt's musing on love and death, and the death (or not) of love after death, reflects on memory and its erasures, and the nature of human relationships which lie at the heart of all life writing. Marion May Campbell then brings this section's essays to a close by illustrating differences of *genre* (which, in French, refers to both genre and gender) in her life writing, suggesting that trans-generic traffic enables the registration of traumatic loss while problematising the very notion of genre to which it refers. The poems in this section by Virginia Barratt, Ellen van Neerven and Quinn Eades reveal how rich autoethnography can be as poetic device and theme, in the process blending form and content. In this way, the works in this section assist in elaborating on how we are positioning the transformational and expansive hybrid rhizome as a directional framework for understanding, researching and producing life writing.

Instead of a summary conclusion, we felt that providing a more open-ended, forward looking finale to the volume was important. We thus close the collection with a polyphonic consideration of the future(s) of life writing, which includes input from most of the contributors to the volume. In moving from the 'now' to the 'what's next', this multivalent chapter not only draws together the ramifications of the text as a whole, highlighting the points of intersection between the themes of the collection and the areas of study where contemporary concerns provide the drivers behind the development of contemporary life writing, it

3220_Offshoot.indd 9 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

also points to a range of possible future directions for the field. In this, we reaffirm how the works in this volume attest to life writing as an evolving, mutating and contextually driven genre and form of writing, and also identify fruitful areas for further research and practice. As throughout the volume, our aim here is to end not by offering any definitive proclamations, but instead to open up, and provoke, further consideration and discussion.

The curated Life Writing Bibliography, to which our writers also contributed, is intended to provide assistance with reading, writing, teaching and researching life writing, with a particular focus on works from our region. While care has been taken to include a wide range of works of relevance to the shared concerns of this volume's writers and editors, it is not intended to be definitive or comprehensive. Instead, it points to the important work in the field that has shaped the reading, writing and thinking that has formed this volume.

References

Blainey, Geoffrey 1966, *The tyranny of distance: how distance shaped Australia's history*, Sun Books, Melbourne.

Connell, Raewyn 2007, *Southern theory: the global dynamics of knowledge in social science*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest.

3220_Offshoot.indd 10 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

LIFE WRITING, TRUTH, HISTORY AND SPECULATION

Fig. 1. Alice Ewing 2017, ink on paper, collection of the artist

Lichens are an embodiment of age and longevity. Some species are considered to be amongst the oldest living organisms on Earth. Symbiotic; lichen are formed by merging bodies of different organisms – a fungus and algae or cyanobacteria, assuming wildly individual forms, as on this twig encrusted with Austroparmelina pseudorelicina *and ornate Old Man's Beard* Usnea barbata.

CONJECTURAL AND SPECULATIVE BIOGRAPHY: CONVICT AND COLONIAL BIOGRAPHIES

Donna Lee Brien

> All imaginative writers take a huge leap of faith when we work, don't we? You just jump off a cliff and head into the depths of the imagination (Carolly Erickson, quoted in Gilchrist 2004, online).

Introduction

Geoff Dyer, author of a speculative biography of D. H. Lawrence (1997), has recently described the pact that non-fiction writers make with their readers, which is reminiscent of the way Lejeune describes his influential autobiographical pact (1975) between writers and readers of biography:

> Each time a writer begins a book they make a contract with the reader…A contract for a work of non-fiction is…precise…The writer says, I am telling you, and to the best of my ability, what I believe to be true. This is a contract that should not be broken lightly…Break the contract and readers no longer know who to trust (Dyer 2015, online).

Many writers' and readers' definitions of biography centre on a biography being an historically accurate, straightforward, factual account of someone's life that is, via this approach, able to reveal

truths about that person. The etymology of the word biography, indeed, comes from the Greek βίος (*bíos*, life) plus γράφω (*gráphō*, write), providing the basic dictionary definition of the term as the narrative of a life, written by someone else. Despite this, biography as a literary form has been, and continues to be, the site of considerable experimentation. In 1985, esteemed biographer Leon Edel described how 'there's a great deal of speculation in [all] biography' because biographers 'can never know everything' (quoted in McCullough 1985, online). He elaborates that what readers

> hope for from most biographers is informed speculation. I usually set the facts in front of a reader and if necessary say "we may speculate" or "we may conjecture", if I think the facts add up to this or that conclusion. There are gratifying moments when you speculate and then find proof of accuracy; there are less gratifying moments when you find your conclusion was far-fetched (quoted in McCullough 1985, online).

The term speculative biography, however, describes biographical writing which openly includes a level of conjecture and speculation that goes beyond this core authorial technique. This results in a work that is still recognisably non-fiction – as per Dyer's comment above, telling the 'truth' according to the best of the writer's ability – rather than works that can be more correctly described as biographically based fiction or historical fiction.

I have previously explored a series of international speculative biographies, many of which have enjoyed considerable success with readers and critics (Brien 2002, 2014, 2015). I have also described a series of important Australian examples produced

3220_Offshoot.indd 14 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

over the past thirty years – Brian Matthews' foundational *Louisa* (1987), Alan Close's *The Australian Love Letters of Raymond Chandler* (1995), Peter Fitzpatrick's *The Two Frank Thrings* (2012) and Kiera Lindsey's *The Convict's Daughter* (2016) – (see, Brien 2016a, 2016b, forthcoming). Following from this work on Lindsey's biography of the child of a convict, this discussion focuses on two rarely discussed works of biography of subjects from the early period of white history in Australia and New Zealand that illustrate varied aspects of the productive role of speculation in biographical writing. Referring to reviews of these works also provides some evidence of how these works have been received by critics and other readers.

Australasian Convict and Colonial Biography

Some biographical subjects, either as individuals or as groups, invite a speculative approach due to the lack of biographical evidence available on their lives, as well as unresolvable gaps and silences in what can be found. Biographies of subjects from the convict and colonial periods in Australasia, and especially those of women and children, are examples of subjects about whom it is often difficult to write sustained biographies due to a lack of documentary evidence. Interestingly, most Australasian biographies of children in more contemporary times are about children who have suffered illness, crime, war or other trauma (see, for instance, Solomon 1990; Busby and Busby 2008), although these relatively rare texts are not to be confused with the plethora of autobiographical memoirs of childhood published since the 1990s (see, Douglas 2010; Rak 2013). In response to this lack of evidence, various historically based studies of this time include passages of biography – in many cases, briefly summarising all the known details about these women's or children's lives (see, for instance, Summers

3220_Offshoot.indd 15 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

1975; Oxley 1996; Daniels 1998; Rees 2001). Other studies treat these subjects as belonging to a specific and distinctive entity, as in Rayner's study of 'the more than 13,000 women exiled from Britain to Van Diemen's Land' (now Tasmania) (2004). Recognising the problem of limited evidence, group biographies are more common than single sustained biographical narratives of convict women, as in Smith's study of the 100 women transported to New South Wales in 1829 on the ship *Princess Royal* (1988) (see also, Frost and McAlpine 2015). The Convict Women's Press, a Tasmanian-based not-for-profit publishing company formed in 2010, publishes books about female convicts, including a series of biographical volumes that relate the stories of a series of women convicts who passed through the Tasmanian penal system via the so-called 'female factories' – places of both confinement and work (Frost 2011; Female Convicts Research Group 2012; Frost and Hodgson 2013; Alexander 2014). This group biographical approach is also the case in relation to the so-called 'Dunera Boys' – the boatload of mostly young Jewish men of German or Austrian birth who were shipped from Liverpool to internship in Australia (see, Everett 2010; Inglis 2010; Jewish Museum of Australia 2015; Lewin 1985, 1991; National Library of Australia 2010; O'Sullivan 2003). Despite the obvious interest of, and in, such texts, few sustained biographies of individual convict women (or Australasian children from any period) have been published by major publishers. Most biographies of Australian convict women are produced by small or specialist presses (see, Gillespie 2012; King and Schroeder 2012; Winch-Dummett 2014; Alexander 2015) – as in Branson and Miller's life of the first deaf woman to be transported to Australia, Betty Steel, published by Deafness Resources Australia (1995). The rest I could locate are self-published (Glover 2003; Kelly 2014; Otterman 2014; Watters 2014).

3220_Offshoot.indd 16 18/01/2018 3:32 PM

An exception to the above in Australia is the case of Mary Bryant who, born Mary Broad in Cornwall, was one of the first convicts sent to Australia on the First Fleet ships. Broad gave birth on the journey to a daughter, whom she named Charlotte after the ship she was travelling on. On arrival in Australia, she married William Bryant, a convicted smuggler, and they later had a son together, Emanuel. In March 1791, with their two young children and seven other male convicts, the couple stole a small boat and escaped Sydney Cove. Arriving in Timor after an epic voyage, they were, at first, able to convince authorities that they were shipwreck survivors, but were eventually found out and sent back to England. Her children and her husband died on this trip, and she expected to hang, but – after a public campaign by acclaimed writer James Boswell – Mary Bryant was granted a royal pardon. Returning to Cornwall, she passed from the documentary record into obscurity (Currey 1996).

Despite a lack of evidence, a significant number of detailed biographical studies have been written around this life story (Pottle 1938; Rawson 1938; Currey 1963; Cook 1993; Walker 2005; Sheehan 2006), which has also formed the topic of at least two young readers' biographies told both in the third person (Scutt 2007) and as an imagined first-person autobiography (Hausman and Hausman 2003). Bryant's story has also been fictionalised in a series of novels more or less closely based on her life story, including Anthony Scott Veitch's *Spindrift: The Mary Bryant Story, a Colonial Saga* (1980), Anthony C. van Kampen's *Beyond the Seas* (1985), Lesley Pearse's *Remember Me* (2003), Jo Anne Rey's *The Sarsaparilla Souvenir* (2005), John Durand's *The Odyssey of Mary B: A True Tale* (2005) and Rosa Jordan's *Far from Botany Bay* (2008). Prominent Australian playwright Nick Enright wrote two biographical dramas based on her life: a musical titled *Mary*

3220_Offshoot.indd 17 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Bryant (1988), which has been performed, as well as a screenplay for Warner Brothers titled *The World Underneath*, which was never produced (Lever 2008, p. 53). Bryant is also the subject of a one-woman theatre show *Oh Mary!* devised and directed by Bec Applebee and Simon Harvey which toured the UK in 2011, and of an acclaimed, but highly fictionalised, television series *The Incredible Journey of Mary Bryant* (Andrikidis 2005), which won a number of awards including for best television mini-series at the Australian Film Institute Awards and the Chicago International Film Festival. Regardless of whether these works are published or otherwise classified as fiction or non-fiction, the distinction between fact and fiction in these texts is often unclear. A good example of this can be seen in Jonathan King's *Mary Bryant: Her Life and Escape from Botany Bay* (2004), which was published as a biography, but where King wrote in the preface, 'Although it is based on truth, I have embellished many parts of the story to help bring Mary to life' (p. i).

The Girl from Botany Bay (2004)

Carolly Erickson's biography *The Girl from Botany Bay* is subtitled *The True Story of the Convict Mary Broad and Her Extraordinary Escape* (2004b). Erickson writes both works of historical fiction, which she describes as 'historical entertainments' (Derr 2013), and non-fiction. She is especially acclaimed for her biographies of royalty that include those of Mary Tudor (1978), Empress Josephine (1980a), Henry VIII (1980b), Elizabeth I (1983), Anne Boleyn (1984), Marie Antoinette (1991), Catherine the Great of Russia (1994), Queen Victoria (1997) and Tsarina Alexandra (2001). Erickson is prolific, also publishing a biography of Queen Elizabeth II (2004a) the same year as *The Girl from Botany Bay*.

3220_Offshoot.indd 18 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Despite having a PhD in medieval European history from Columbia University and many Pulitzer award nominations, Erickson's work is often described in the press as 'popular historical biography' – which, in such cases, is often used as a way of indicating the work is, although based on historical sources, easily readable. Her biographies are thus described as: 'as hard to put down as a fine novel' and as 'page-turning drama' filled with 'gripping detail' (Erickson 2004b, cover). Creating a compelling narrative in her texts, Erickson uses speculation to support the material in the historical sources. In *The Girl from Botany Bay*, these resources are detailed in a range of paratexts following her main narrative: her author's 'afterword' (pp. 197–8), seventeen pages of notes (pp. 199–216) and 'a note on sources' section (pp. 217–18).

In an interview, Erickson stated that *The Girl from Botany Bay* 'is a story with all the hallmarks of romantic or historical fiction: sex, violence, crime, adventure, and heartbreak. But there is a catch. It is not fiction – at least not completely' (quoted in Gilchrist 2004, online). In this interview she is also quoted as explaining that:

> In *The Girl from Botany Bay*, because there is so little hard information about Mary and about the others around her…I was forced to do what I usually call "imaginative triangulating". I had to do that 99 per cent of the time in that particular book and so it is closer to fiction than most of my non-fiction has been (quoted in Gilchrist 2004, online).

Gilchrist attempted an explanation of this imaginative triangulation, seeing this as an amalgam of fact and fiction, Erickson's

3220_Offshoot.indd 19 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

'active historical imagination…fed by how many years of bedrock material' (Gilchrist 2004, online), but this also fits the definition of speculative biography.

Erikson begins her text with such speculative reconstruction, imagining the scene of the crime for which Mary Broad was convicted, adding such detail as the weather and how quickly people stepped along the roadway, and Mary's own conjectural imagining about how someone being hanged for highway robbery would feel. Throughout, the text includes Mary's thoughts and feelings, such as the final paragraph of the opening chapter:

> So she prepared herself for her trial to come, nursing thoughts of revenge…dreaming of escaping back to the forest, but above all dreading, with the dread of the condemned, that before long she would be hanged until dead, and her body would be just another corpse at the crossroads (p. 7).

In some of this speculation, Erickson sometimes uses such provisional language as 'yet it often seemed as if' (p. 3) and 'no doubt' (p. 11) to signal her speculations; in other places it is clear from the resources she cites what is factual information and what is authorial speculation.

This speculation was variously received by reviewers, many of whom identified the narrative finesse this speculation brought to the life story thus narrated. As one reviewer writes: 'Erickson knows her subject and the period, for Broad's story is well supported by historical records; the gaps are filled in by likely surmise and speculation in a way that's anything but dry chronicle' (King 2005). In reviewing the book for the august *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Lewis, although noting that Erickson

3220_Offshoot.indd 20 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

had 'written an intensely dramatic and interesting story reasonably well' was, however, troubled by the speculation involved, warning that 'the descriptive touches may not be to everyone's taste' (2004, p. 235). The *Publishers Weekly* reviewer was equally conflicted by the speculative elements. Despite calling Erickson 'a veteran biographer' and describing the book as 'a stark and fascinating account of what prisoners endured', this review added that despite Erickson's speculations, 'little can be known concretely about Mary as an individual' (Publishers Weekly 2004).

The Fox Boy (2001)

The Fox Boy: The Story of an Abducted Child (2001) by expatriate New Zealander Peter Walker is a compelling and informative biography, narrating the life story of Maori boy, Ngataua Omahuru, captured in New Zealand's Taranaki forest by the English during 1869 and taken away from his home (Seymour et al. 2015). Kidnapped, but understood by the colonial powers to have made a lucky escape from annihilation (in terms of the doomed race/fatal impact theory which was then circulating), Omahuru's story is thus, in part, a vivid indication of the seemingly unbroachable gap between the world views of the Maori inhabitants and white colonists of New Zealand. The boy was baptised and then adopted by a New Zealand Member of Parliament, English migrant (later Premier and Sir) William Fox (after who he was named) and who is now perhaps best known for his confiscation of Maori lands. Dressed in the style of a simulated mini-English gentleman, the boy was at first sent away to school, but later lived with Fox and his wife, Sarah, who had no other children. He also travelled with Fox and his wife, when they were aged in their sixties (Dalziel and Sinclair 1990), as their son to the USA, Ireland, London, Beirut and Egypt. Trained to be the first Maori lawyer, and to

3220_Offshoot.indd 21 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

work in white colonial society actioning Maori land confiscations, he instead returned to live in Taranaki when he was aged nineteen, teaching Maori and working with Maori leaders and, later, opening a Maori school.

Published by major literary publisher Bloomsbury in hardcover in both the UK and USA, *The Fox Boy* was favourably reviewed in the serious press in terms of how it dealt with this life story, including by Emily Perkins in *The Guardian* (2001) and Margie Thomson in the *New Zealand Herald* (2001). Most scholarly engagement with this book, however, has been in terms of what it reveals about race relations in New Zealand in the colonial period in articles on the kidnapping of Maori children (Newman 2013), colonial (mis)understandings of Indigenous identity (Fraser 2013) and other injustices in colonial Australasia (Bull and Alia 2004). It has been cited as a work of history and used as an historical resource – as in Smith's discussion of teaching about Indigenous forms of knowledge (2010). Walker's work, however, deserves serious consideration as a major work of (speculative) life writing.

Walker was, he writes, intrigued by the boy's more-than-earnest expression in an unsettling studio photograph he saw of the child – 'Someone has combed the boy's hair and made him put one hand in his trouser pocket. He looks as if he has seen a ghost' (p. 6) – and began to research what lay behind this haunting image. He describes how 'it was this image of powerlessness, the expression on the face of a kidnapped child which, more than a hundred years later…waylaid me…Well, I thought, looking at this expression, I wonder what happened to *you* (p. 6, italics in original). Finding only one original print of the photograph in existence, in the National Library in Wellington, Walker believed this print, despite its provenance and it being deposited in such an esteemed and trusted archival site, to be somewhat lacking

3220_Offshoot.indd 22 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

as documentary evidence: 'Who deposited it there, and when, are not known. On its back, in careful, faint handwriting, are a number of lies' (p. 6). While this text progresses from there to include the results of the author's (sometimes stymied) search for historical sources to narrate Omahuru's story, the result is a vivid speculative biography which includes Walker's own research journal and autobiographical reflections on not only his findings, but also his emotional responses to his discoveries. This adds another dimension to Omahuru's illuminating and heartbreaking story, bridging the decades between the subject of this biography and life in present-day New Zealand.

So strong are each of these parts that some found it difficult to define the book. Historian Richard Boast calls this book 'highly atmospheric…part travelogue, part history' (2008, p. 127), the 'atmospheric…travelogue' elements in this comment, I believe, covering the first-person speculative elements, while the 'history' refers to the more 'factual' biographical components. Thomson described the book as 'history-laden' (2001, online), but found this aspect undercut by Walker's speculations on his material, noting: 'One thing to be said for Walker is that he is not afraid to throw a theory into the ring…perhaps most notably when he speculates that New Zealanders' "poverty of speech" is a result of the buried shame of having broken so many promises to Maori' (Thomson 2001, online). In this case, there is no question that Walker is speculating as he notes in this section of the text that he is raising a theory that might be incorrect, but is at least is a theory for consideration. Despite Scott finding that Walker's approach 'brings sparkling new life to the history we know', he is nevertheless critical of his conjecture, especially where this 'speculation to cover lack of hard evidence is sometimes stretched too far' and includes 'fantastic suggestions' (2001, online). Not all readers

3220_Offshoot.indd 23 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

were disturbed by Walker's speculation. Writing in the *Guardian*, Perkins' positive review judges that '*The Fox Boy* would not be a modern history without an element of personal memoir and reference, and Walker obliges, though this input enhances rather than detracts from the main story' (2001, online). Perkins also notes the depth of Walker's research, describing how he 'has gone to great lengths to track primary sources' (2001, online). Walker's background as a journalist is mentioned by a number of critics. He is described as both a 'reporter with the polish to make the past as alive as a current news story' (Scott 2001, online) and as a sleuth, with readers invited to follow Peter Walker's research and 'to be at the shoulder of a crack detective in a high-level kidnapping case' (Scott 2001, online).

Perkins finds that Walker's descriptions of his research process add to readers' understanding of how history can be written and rewritten using the same sources:

> Walker easily demonstrates how history is rewritten even as it occurs, quoting newspaper reports and official letters intended to blur the worst of the English atrocities and make the most of the Maori ones…Walker's doggedness, intelligence and humour shed light on some of the still-unanswered questions of the colonial legacy (Perkins 2001, online).

Others made no mention of either this aspect of the text or his conjecture more broadly. In a book on intellectual property rights, in particular in relation to Maori treasures, for instance, Barclay describes the book as 'compelling and compassionate' (2005, p. 168) especially in its number of 'moving moments' (p. 169), but makes no mention of its speculation. Similarly, Adams, writing

3220_Offshoot.indd 24 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

about Walker's third book *Some Here Among Us* (2014), describes *The Fox Boy* in traditional biographical terms, as a '*non-fiction* account of…the *historical* and *biographical* forces unleashed by the meeting, and the division, of cultures' (Adams 2014, online, my italics).

Conclusion

Both these examples are informative as they not only provide previously under-examined examples of successful speculative biographies from Australia and New Zealand, but also reveal what is – despite the sometimes uneasy expectations of the distinction between fiction and non-fiction – normalised in terms of readers' expectations of a biographical text. Considering these two examples also reinforces the rich potential for authors of utilising speculative and other hybrid writing strategies to produce biographies that are rich, appealing and thought-provoking, historically informed narratives of real lives and experience – especially, in these cases, when the historical record, and other evidence, is incomplete, unreliable or otherwise lacking.

References

Adams, Matthew 2014, 'Peter Walker weighs the little things that make a life in *Some Here Among Us*', *The National*, 4 December, viewed 13 August 2016, <http://www.thenational.ae/arts-lifestyle/the-review/peter-walker-weighs-the-little-things-that-make-a-life-in-some-here-among-us>.

Alexander, Alison (ed.) 2014, *Convict lives at the George Town Female Factory*, Convict Women's Press, Hobart.

Alexander, Alison 2015, *Corruption and skullduggery: Edward Lord, Maria Riseley, and Hobart's tempestuous beginnings*, Pillinger Press, Dynnyrne, Tas.

Andrikidis, Peter (dir.) 2005, *The incredible journey of Mary Bryant* [television series].

Applebee, Bec & Harvey, Simon 2011, *Oh Mary!* [stage play].

Barclay, Barry 2005, *Mana Tuturu: Maori treasures and intellectual property rights*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.

Boast, Richard 2008, *Buying the land, selling the land: governments and Maori land in*

3220_Offshoot.indd 25 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

the North Island 1865–1921, Victoria University Press, Wellington.

Branson, Jan & Miller, Don 1995, *The story of Betty Steel: deaf convict and pioneer*, Deafness Resources Australia, Petersham, NSW.

Brien, Donna Lee 2002, 'Being honest about lying: defining the limits of auto/biographical lying', *TEXT: Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs*, vol. 6, no. 1, viewed 1 May 2016, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april02/brien.htm>.

Brien, Donna Lee 2014, '"Welcome creative subversions": experiment and innovation in recent biographical writing', *TEXT: The Journal of Writers and Writing Courses*, vol. 18. no. 1, viewed 14 August 2015, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april14/brien.htm>.

Brien, Donna Lee 2015, '"The facts formed a line of buoys in the sea of my own imagination": history, fiction and speculative biography', *TEXT: The Journal of Writers and Writing Courses*, Special issue no. 28, viewed 14 August 2015, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue28/Brien.pdf>.

Brien, Donna Lee 2016a, 'Australian speculative biography: recovering forgotten lives', keynote address presented to the Forgotten lives/Biographies Conference, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, 28 April.

Brien, Donna Lee 2016b, 'The art and possibilities of the speculative biography', paper presented to the Great Writing Conference, Imperial College, London, 18–19 June.

Brien, Donna Lee forthcoming, 'Australian speculative biography: a means of recovering forgotten lives', in Dallas J. Baker, Donna Lee Brien and Nike Sulway (eds.) *Recovering history through fact and fiction: forgotten lives*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Bull, Simone & Alia, Valerie 2004, 'Unequaled acts of injustice: pan Indigenous encounters with colonial school systems', *Contemporary Justice Review: Issues in Criminal, Social, and Restorative Justice*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 171–82.

Busby, Cylin & Busby, John 2008, *The year we disappeared: a father–daughter memoir*, Bloomsbury, New York.

Close, Alan 1995, *The Australian love letters of Raymond Chandler*, McPhee Gribble Penguin, Ringwood.

Cook, Judith 1993, '*To brave every danger': the epic life of Mary Bryant of Fowey, highwaywoman and convicted felon, her transportation and amazing escape from Botany Bay*, Macmillan, London.

Currey, C. H. 1963, *The transportation, escape and pardoning of Mary Bryant*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney.

Currey, C. H. 1996, 'Bryant, Mary (1765–1794)', in *Australian dictionary of biography*, vol. 1, viewed 13 August 2016, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bryant-mary-1843>.

Dalziel, Raewyn & Sinclair, Keith 2012, 'Fox, William 1812?–1893', in *Dictionary of New Zealand biography*, viewed 13 August 2016, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/1f15/fox-william>.

Daniels, Kay 1998, *Convict women,* Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.

3220_Offshoot.indd 26 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Derr, Janice 2013, 'The Spanish queen', *Historical Novel Review*, vol. 66, viewed 13 August 2016, <https://historicalnovelsociety.org/by/carolly-erickson>.

Douglas, Kate 2010, *Contesting childhood: autobiography, trauma, and memory*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ and London, UK.

Durand, John 2005, *The odyssey of Mary B: a true tale*, Puzzlebox Press, Elkhorn, WI.

Dyer, Geoff 1997, *Out of sheer rage: in the shadow of D. H. Lawrence*, Little, Brown and Company, London.

Dyer, Geoff 2015, '"Based on a true story": the fine line between fact and fiction', *The Guardian*, 6 December, viewed 13 August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/06/based-on-a-true-story--geoff-dyer-fine-line-between-fact-and-fiction-nonfiction>.

Enright, Nick 1988, *Mary Bryant* [stage play].

Erickson, Carolly 1978, *Bloody Mary: the life of Mary Tudor*, St. Martin's Press, New York.

Erickson, Carolly 1980a, *Josephine: a life of the Empress*, St. Martin's Press, New York.

Erickson, Carolly 1980b, *Great Harry: the extravagant life of Henry VIII*, St. Martin's Press, New York.

Erickson, Carolly 1983, *The first Elizabeth*, St. Martin's Press, New York.

Erickson, Carolly 1984, *Mistress Anne: the exceptional life of Anne Boleyn*, St. Martin's Press, New York.

Erickson, Carolly 1991, *To the scaffold: the life of Marie Antoinette*, St. Martin's Press, New York.

Erickson, Carolly 1994, *Great Catherine: the life of Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia*, St. Martin's Press, New York.

Erickson, Carolly 1997, *Her little Majesty: the life of Queen Victoria*, St. Martin's Press, New York.

Erickson, Carolly 2001, *Alexandra: the last tsarina*, St. Martin's Press, New York.

Erickson, Carolly 2004a, *Lilibet: an intimate portrait of Elizabeth II*, St. Martin's Press, New York.

Erickson, Carolly 2004b, *The girl from Botany Bay: the true story of the convict Mary Broad and her extraordinary escape*, Pan Macmillan Australia, Sydney.

Everett, Sue 2010, *Not welcome: a Dunera boy's escape from Nazi oppression to eventual freedom in Australia*, Hybrid Publishers, Murrumbeena, Vic.

Female Convicts Research Group 2012, *Convict lives: women at Cascades Female Factory*, Convict Women's Press, Hobart.

Fitzpatrick, Peter 2012, *The two Frank Thrings*, Monash University Press, Clayton, Vic.

Fraser, Virginia 2013, 'Bungaree, the first Australian interrupted', *Art Monthly Australia*, vol. 262, pp. 9–12.

Frost, Lucy (ed.) 2011, *Convict lives at the Ross Female Factory*, Convict Women's Press, Hobart.

Frost, Lucy & Hodgson, Meredith (eds.) 2013, *Convict lives at the Launceston*

3220_Offshoot.indd 27 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Female Factory, Convict Women's Press, Hobart.

Frost, Lucy & McAlpine, Colette (eds.) 2015, *From the edges of empire: convict women from beyond the British Isles*, Convict Women's Press, Hobart.

Gilchrist, David 2004, 'The girl from Botany Bay [review]', *The Age*, 4 July, viewed 13 August 2016, <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/06/30/1088488018359.html>.

Gillespie, Rollo 2012, *The famous history of the life of Molly Morgan Franklin Freeth, 1910–1991*, Bumblebee Books, Bowral, NSW.

Glover, Barbara A. 2003, *A most dangerous girl* [about Elizabeth Bridget Crowe, 1817–1893], B. Glover, Moonee Ponds, Vic.

Hausman, Gerald & Hausman, Loretta 2003, *Escape from Botany Bay: the true story of Mary Bryant*, Orchard Books, New York.

Inglis, Ken 2010, 'From Berlin to the bush', *The Monthly*, August, viewed 30 November 2016, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/monthly-essays-ken-inglis-berlin-bush--2638>.

Jewish Museum of Australia 2015, *From 'aliens' to Australians: remembering Dunera 75 years on* [exhibition], Jewish Museum of Australia, St Kilda, Vic, viewed 30 November 2016, <http://www.jewishmuseum.com.au/exhibitions/temporary-exhibitions>.

Jordan, Rosa 2008, *Far from Botany Bay: a novel*, Oolichan Books, Lantzville, BC.

Kelly, Peter 2014, *Sarah Fletcher transported: one woman's life in colonial Australia*, Australian eBook Publisher, Acacia Ridge, Qld.

King, Damian & Schroeder, Liz 2012, *Catherine McMahon: a remarkable convict woman*, Rosenberg Publishing, Kenthurst, NSW.

King, Janette 2005, 'The girl from Botany Bay [review]', *Historical Novel Review*, vol. 33, viewed 13 August 2016, <https://historicalnovelsociety.org/reviews/the-girl-from-botany-bay>.

King, Jonathan 2004, *Mary Bryant: her life and escape from Botany Bay*, Simon & Schuster Australia, Pymble, NSW.

Lejeune, Philippe 1975, *Le pacte autobiographique*, Editions du Seuil, Paris.

Lever, Susan 2008, 'Masculinity, guilt and the moral failures of the body: screenplays', in Anne Pender & Susan Lever (eds.), *Nick Enright: an actor's playwright*, Editions Rodopi BV, Amsterdam and New York, pp. 47–60.

Lewin, Ben (dir.) 1985, *The Dunera boys* [2-part mini-series], Jethro Film Productions.

Lewin, Ben 1991, *The Dunera boys*, Thomas Nelson, South Melbourne.

Lewis, D. L. 2004, 'Carolly Erickson, the Girl from Botany Bay: the true story of the convict Mary Broad and her extraordinary escape', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 90, no. 2, p. 23.

Lindsey, Kiera 2016, *The convict's daughter*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

Matthews, Brian 1987, *Louisa*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne.

McCullough, Jeanne 1985, 'Leon Edel, the art of biography no. 1' [interview], *The Paris Review*, vol. 98, viewed 13 August 2016, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2844/the-art-of-biography-no-1-leon-edel>.

3220_Offshoot.indd 28 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

National Library of Australia 2010, *The Dunera boys: 70 years on* [exhibition], National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Newman, Erica 2013, 'History of transracial adoption: a New Zealand perspective', *The American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1/2, pp. 237–57.

O'Sullivan, Robyn 2003, *The Dunera boys*, Pearson Education Australia, Melbourne.

Otterman, David William 2014, *John Campbell & Charlotte Dawson: trials of life and law*, David William Otterman and InHouse Publishing, Underwood, Qld.

Oxley, Deborah 1996, *Convict maids: the forced migration of women to Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Pearse, Lesley 2003, *Remember me*, Michael Joseph, London.

Perkins, Emily 2001, 'Colonial kidnap [review]', *The Guardian*, 28 July, viewed 13 August 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/jul/28/historybooks.highereducation>.

Pottle, Frederick A. 1938, *Boswell and the girl from Botany Bay*, William Heinemann, London.

Publishers Weekly 2004, 'The girl from Botany Bay [review]', *Publishers Weekly*, 27 September, viewed 13 August 2016, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-471-27140-6>.

Rak, Julie 2013, *Boom!: manufacturing memoir for the popular market*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, ON.

Rayner, Tony 2004, *Female factory female convicts: the story of the more than 13,000 women exiled from Britain to Van Diemen's Land*, Experance Press, Dover, Tas.

Rawson, Geoffrey 1938, *The strange case of Mary Bryant*, Robert Hale, London.

Rees, Sian 2001, *The floating brothel*, Headline, London.

Rey, Jo Anne 2005, *The sarsaparilla souvenir,* Xlibris Corporation, Bloomington, Indiana.

Scott, Dick 2001, 'Peter Walker: *The Fox boy: the story of an abducted child*' [review], *NZ Herald*, Lifestyle, 26 July, viewed 13 August 2016, <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=202323>.

Scutt, Craig 2007, *Mary Bryant: the impossible escape*, Black Dog Books, Fitzroy, Vic.

Seymour, Jessica, Beckton, Denise, Bacon, Eugen, Brien, Donna Lee, Curmi, Gyps, Kimberley, Maree, McAlister, Jodi, Mills, Catriona & Plozza, Shivaun 2015, 'A series of fortunate readers: a collaborative review article of important Australasian YA writing', *TEXT: The Journal of Writers and Writing Courses*, Special issue, no. 32, viewed 1 September 2016, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue32/content.htm>.

Sheehan, Laurie 2006, *Mary Bryant, the convict girl: the real story*, Librario, Kinloss.

Smith, Babette 1988, *A cargo of women: Susannah Watson and the convicts of the Princess Royal*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, NSW.

Smith, Jill 2010, 'Teaching about Indigenous forms of knowledge: insights from non-Indigenous teachers of visual arts education in New Zealand', in Ora

3220_Offshoot.indd 29 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Kwo (ed.), *Teachers as learners: critical discourse on challenges and opportunities*, Springer, New York City, pp. 87–105.

Solomon, Rosa 1990, *Careful, he might not hear you*, Little Red Apple Publishing, Sydney.

Summers, Anne 1975, *Damned whores and God's police: the colonization of women in Australia*, Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, Vic.

Thomson, Margie 2001, 'Strange story of the Fox boy', *New Zealand Herald*, 19 July, viewed 13 August 2016, <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=201049>.

van Kampen, Anthony C. 1985, *Beyond the seas*, Angus & Robertson, London and Sydney.

Veitch, Anthony Scott 1980, *Spindrift: the Mary Bryant story, a colonial saga*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

Walker, Mike 2005, *Long way home: the life and adventures of the convict Mary Bryant*, Wiley, Chichester, UK and Hoboken, NJ.

Walker, Peter 2001, *The Fox boy: the story of an abducted child*, Bloomsbury, London.

Walker, Peter 2014, *Some here among us*, Bloomsbury, London.

Watters, Leslie Francis 2014, *Elizabeth Rafferty in Sydney's the Rocks and her Bostock legacy: convict-settler-shopkeeper, 1795–1822*, Leslie Francis Watters, Higgins, ACT.

Winch-Dummett, Carlene Anne 2014, *Precious cargo: including an account of the extraordinary lives of Mary Turner and David Batty*, Viewpoint Publishing, Tuross Head, NSW.

3220_Offshoot.indd 30 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE – IS IT MAKING US LIARS?: TRUTH AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN *SHE PLAYED ELVIS*

Shady Cosgrove

Introduction

After I boarded an airplane to Sydney, a woman sat down beside me. As the eighteen-hour flight would reveal, she was forty-nine, a dental assistant, without children and happily married. By way of introduction, she clicked her seatbelt together and asked what I did for a living.

'I teach creative writing.'

She looked at the book tucked in the seat back in front of me. 'What are you reading?'

I flashed the cover of a Murakami novel, and she shook her head. 'I don't care for fiction. I already have plenty of stories in my head. I prefer non-fiction because I want to know about peoples' lives'. She grinned then, showing off a diamante embedded in her front tooth.

I found this comment perplexing because it simultaneously assumed fiction is not about people's lives and that non-fiction is not storied, or to put it another way: that the lived experience translated into non-fiction escapes construction. It also reinforced the binary between fiction and non-fiction that Paul John Eakin problematised in *Fictions in Autobiography*: 'fictions and the fiction-making process are a central constituent of the truth of any life as it is lived and of any art devoted to the presentation of that life' (1985, p. 5). It is this idea of presentation (or construction) – in

particular how an author structures memoir or autobiography – that interests me because the placement of events within a text can influence its interpretation. The same text – ordered in different ways – can yield dramatically different readings, and this becomes an ethical issue when an author commits to telling the 'truth', especially when other people's lives are being represented.

In this chapter, I am concerned with work that fits Philippe Lejeune's early definition of autobiography as 'retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his [or her] own existence, where the focus is his [or her] individual life, in particular the story of his [or her] personality [in which] the author, the narrator, and the protagonist…must be identical' (1989, p. 4). Of course, as cultural theorist Julie Rak reminds us (2001, p. 227), implicit in this definition is the idea of a 'real' person, or a unified liberal subject who has the position and privilege to both have a 'life' and then be able to document it. This is important because it is this status as subject (and the implications of 'realness') that creates expectations of 'honesty'. Like my acquaintance on the airplane, 'most readers naturally assume that all autobiographies are based on the verifiable facts of a life history' (Eakin 1985, p. 3). That is, there exists some databank of life experiences and if, when checked, the manuscript will produce glowing consistencies.

Surely, though, it is a given that the writer chooses what to include in an autobiography and that this is an act of construction: while our in-flight conversation covered many topics, it was my new friend's brief comment on autobiography that resonated with me, and came to be included here. In the same way, the autobiographer prioritises subject matter, creating a hierarchy of relevance. For example, in drafting later versions of the memoir *She Played Elvis* (2009), I narrowed the book's themes to 'the

3220_Offshoot.indd 32 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

psychic/emotional search for my birth father' and 'the search for home/nation', and Elvis was the driving symbol for both of these. I mapped the themes in the following ways:

> Elvis = symbolic American = home country = where I've come from
> Elvis = icon = vessel filled with meaning/longing of the observer = my absent father = where I've come from

Any sections that did not fit within either symbolic arc were deleted to ensure thematic consistency. This decision also ensured that I complied with Lejeune's definition of autobiography as an exploration of personality. Determining relevance is, of course, a subjective experience; however, the reader still expects the writer to construct in good faith: 'the autobiographical pact is a form of contract between author and reader in which the autobiographer explicitly commits himself or herself not to some impossible historical exactitude but rather to the sincere effort to come to terms with and to understand his or her own life' (Eakin 1989, p. ix). So while a reader might implicitly trust me to choose what information to relay with regard to my travel companion, they would still expect the conversation to be faithfully reported.

Of course 'truth' and 'faithfulness' are not always self-evident. Autobiographers may sincerely grapple with events to determine the 'truth' of a situation but they are always writing through the lens of their experiences. And, indeed, it is always possible they are not writing sincerely at all, or they may be working from a state of self-delusion. To a certain extent, readers have little choice: initially they must trust the autobiographer. To pick up an autobiography means agreeing to the autobiographical pact. However, unreliable narrators are not confined to fiction, and every reader

3220_Offshoot.indd 33 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

must determine how much they trust a given author-narrator when reading an autobiography.

Amidst this tension, every memoirist must consider how to present lived experience as literary artefact. In discussing the dialogue that appears in *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Dave Eggers states: 'All the individual words and sentences have been…edited to fit within the narrative (though keeping with their essential truth)' (2001, p. vi). His use of the word 'though' implies a tension between fitting within the narrative and keeping the essential truth. Even if we put the problematic idea of 'one truth' aside, this statement underlines that it is the author who decides what is the essential truth of any interaction, and how the dialogue best represents this. I would argue structure, like dialogue, is another site for authorial decision that impacts on the reading of the text – yet it is a topic that rarely attracts critical attention.

Of course not everyone cares about truth. Take novelist and essayist György Konrád's comment: 'The writer of a good text might be a lying fiend in civilian life, but his powers of evocation move me to accept what he says as true. Not just any rogue scoundrel can take me in – but if the bastard manages to do it; well, all right then, let's raise our glasses together' (2005, p. 515). Generally, though, the reading public is not so forgiving, as the Norma Khouri and Helen Demidenko scandals attest. In those situations, outcry was directly related to ideas of the real: the

> relationship between representation and the real concerns of many critics of autobiography, as well as many autobiographers. At stake is the relationship between autobiography's privileged signifier of identity, the name,

3220_Offshoot.indd 34 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> and autobiography's simulation of real life (Gilmore 1994, p. 65).

Eakin surmises that it is the identity function of autobiographical discourse, not the literary function, that causes ire when the public responds to such rule-breaking: 'You don't make the front page of the *New York Times* as [Rigoberta] Menchú did for violating a literary convention' (2001, p. 114). The point here is that readers of autobiography expect 'truthfulness'. With obvious facts in dispute, it is easy to dismiss the text as not-autobiographical. My question here is more subtle. An author may choose to describe a number of events in their autobiography – all of which may be technically 'true' – but the ordering of the events, and the amount of textual space given to them, will impact readings of the text. Surely some versions would prove more 'honest' than others.

In general terms, the structure of a work refers to the way in which its blocks of information are organised. Analepsis and prolepsis, or flashback and flash-forward, are specific structural tools that enable authors to construct a narrative progression that differs from the chronology of events. These can be used to surprise readers, or to add suspense or delay to the narrative. Flashback can even be used to structure an entire story as in Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* (1951) or Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1999). As Seymour Chatman asserts: 'The discourse can rearrange the events of the story as much as it pleases, provided the story-sequence remains discernible. If not, the classical plot fails in "unity"' (1978, p. 63). Autobiographers also use these techniques in narrating their lives, even though they offer a technical falsehood: flashbacks do not occur in real life – we can remember events but we cannot return to them

3220_Offshoot.indd 35 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

with future knowledge. Even if the writer is clear about timing, a flashback has a future context that it would not have if it had been relayed sequentially. Also the use of flashback and flash-forward is important for memoir writers to consider because the placement of events can imply narrative causality. In discussing E. M. Forster, Chatman asserts that readers often apply narrative onto events: 'our minds inveterately seek structure, and they will provide it if necessary. Unless otherwise instructed, readers will tend to assume that…[the example] "The king died and the queen died" presents a causal link' (1978, p. 45). Even if a writer is clear about temporal sequencing, the reader still encounters the text in the order placed on the page (assuming they read sequentially).

Not only is the placement of events important to the autobiographical endeavour, but the amount of textual space devoted to events also communicates significance to the reader. 'Narrative events have not only a logic of connection, but a logic of *hierarchy*. Some are more important than others' (Chatman 1978, p. 53). This hierarchy is often communicated by which events are given priority in the text and can be judged contextually. For instance, a description of a parent's death may span five pages. If the story as a whole numbers eight pages, then it follows that the death is a large component of the story. If, however, that five-page description is sunk into the middle of chapter 23 in a 300-page autobiographical novel, then it can be surmised that it does not rank highly within the novel's hierarchy of events. While exceptions exist, generally textual space indicates importance.

She Played Elvis: a Case Study in Structure

My interest in structure and autobiography first arose when drafting *She Played Elvis*. The memoir chronicles my journey from Seattle to Memphis on Greyhound buses to attend the twenty-fifth

3220_Offshoot.indd 36 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

anniversary of Elvis Presley's death. I busked (playing Elvis songs on the street) in the towns I stopped in on the way and finally arrived to celebrate the event with 60,000 Elvis devotees. The experience was borne out of a familial interest in Elvis, as well as a cultural desire to understand the United States. As an immigrant to Australia, I was surprised by how foreign my motherland had become. Nothing seemed more 'American' to me than Elvis and I thought I could attend the anniversary with the careful objectivity of an anthropologist. It did not quite work out that way; I became a diehard Elvis fan, and was forced to explore my own family histories.

In *She Played Elvis* there are two narratives that take place: the overarching travel story and then, told in flashbacks, the deeper story of a narrator coming to terms with a birth father she has not seen in over twenty years and the family mythology that surrounds him. *She Played Elvis* fulfils Lejeune's traditional definition of autobiography in that the author, narrator and protagonist are all identical, and the memoir explores the narrator-author's personality. Even the sections that may appear to fall into the genre of travel writing or documentary are explored with the intention of contextualising and placing the narrator-author. 'Shady', the character, navigates through the United States in an effort to understand her geographic place of birth and, through that, herself. Understanding place and understanding family are not two separate endeavours: both are linked through an effort to understand Lejeune's 'personality'.

Place and setting determine the larger structure of the book because of the nature of the travel quest, immediately establishing an overarching linear structure (that is, 'Shady' leaves Seattle, travels across the United States and eventually arrives in Memphis). Incorporated into that travel narrative is a series

3220_Offshoot.indd 37 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

of flashbacks, specifically about my birth father. But I did not incorporate the flashbacks chronologically – some were positioned to rise in intensity, building towards the climax of the book. Also, some memories were triggered by events in the narrative so their placement was determined by their relation to the text. Here is an example, taken from the beginning of the book. 'Shady' has just arrived at the Portland Greyhound bus station with her partner, Scott. It is a place she has never been, but she finds that she recognises it. This excerpt acts to segue between the travel narrative and a flashback to early memories of her father:

> Despite the bright day outside and the bank of windows near the ceiling, the long, rectangular building is florescent dim. The heavy brick walls have diluted all strength from the light. Déjà vu: the brown floor tiles; the turnstile into the waiting area; the thick black plastic chairs with outdated television screens anchored to the armrests. I already know this. Beyond the benches and the partition – the restroom. Even though I haven't set foot inside, the bank of sinks is clear in my mind's eye. I've stood in front of them before. I remember the toilet door slamming closed behind me.
>
> 'Scott, this place is familiar.'
>
> His head pulls forward from his backpack – a turtle unaware of its shell. He does his best to shrug under the weight.
>
> 'I'm serious. The door's moved, it was down there' – I point to our left – 'but I've been here.' I inhale deeply. The hall smells like the inside of a suitcase…
>
> Vague details come back to me. Not actual memories,

3220_Offshoot.indd 38 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> but shadows of memories like hands imitating birds in front of a bare bulb. The last time I saw my biological father, Michael King Cosgrove, I was five years old and he was living in Portland. My older sister Serena and I would have taken the bus to see him…I can't remember anything else but the room is familiar and creepy at the same time like a stranger who knows my name (pp. 33–5).

This leads into flashbacks of 'Shady's' earliest memories of her father before linking back to the travel narrative. In this example, structure is dictated by place, which gives an order to otherwise arbitrary events. It is honest in that the experience recounted really happened and is what inspired the inclusion of the autobiographical in this story. However, the ordering and textual space given to later flashbacks are either inspired by my physical environment or included at my discretion. My birth father was addicted, violent, charismatic and perverse. I could launch into the most bizarre and violent stories straight away (the fake son he invented – Michael Cosgrove Jr., or how he liked to drive blindfolded, or how he'd make my mother guess what he wanted to eat for dinner and throw the plate at the wall if she guessed wrong), but narrative structure demands a story arc, and so some flashbacks were positioned to build towards a climax.

Also, I was bound by the experience of remembering – certain events in the text triggered certain memories – and it was important to represent that process accurately. The final memory in the book details one of my father's rages, when the narrator realises that, even at four years old, she knew the bathroom was the most dangerous room in the house because of its hard, ceramic edges.

3220_Offshoot.indd 39 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

This memory was certainly something I considered at that point of the trip, but hints of it had surfaced earlier. As stated towards the end of the memoir:

> I've overlooked it – some part of me convinced it was irrelevant, unnecessary – but since Scott and I landed at the Portland bus station, I've remembered more of that night at Mike's townhouse when we were playing musical instruments (p. 233).

The decision to hold back on disclosing this memory was a structural one. I made it clear to the reader that this memory had begun to surface earlier, but this surfacing was not revealed until the memory was explored in its entirety. And while everything relayed really happened, and while I feel I was transparent with the reader, I am still aware of this deliberate construction. I think my discomfort with this underscores the fact that even though I understand textual narratives are not human experiences, part of me illogically sides with my airplane companion in her assertion that the lived experience translated into non-fiction should somehow escape construction.

However, it must be acknowledged that my discomfort with structure and narrative construction privileges the chronological. After all, it must be possible that structuring flashbacks as a mosaic or collage, instead of a clear linear progression, could be more 'honest', and aid the process of '(coming) to terms with and (understanding)' (Eakin 1989, p. ix) one's life. That is, if I am trying to render patchworked memories and events, then it follows that a linear structure may not, in fact, be the most authentic approach to the subject matter. Even Lejeune questions 'the "natural" status implicitly granted chronological order' (1989, p. 71) and perhaps

3220_Offshoot.indd 40 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

that offers a way to consider structure within the autobiographical enterprise. That is, autobiographers should be free to use narrative tools such as flashback and flash-forward, without fear of violating chronology, but they should do so with a consideration of how their chosen structures may affect readings of their work, keeping in mind Lejeune's autobiographical pact.

References

Chatman, Seymour 1978, *Story and discourse*, Cornell University Press, Sydney.

Cosgrove, Shady 2009, *She played Elvis*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

Eakin, Paul John 1985, *Fictions in autobiography: studies in the art of self-invention*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Eakin, Paul John 1989, 'Foreword', in Philippe Lejeune, *On autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Eakin, Paul John 2001, 'Breaking rules: the consequences of self-narration', *Biography*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 113–27.

Eggers, Dave 2001, *A heartbreaking work of staggering genius*, Vintage Books, New York.

Ford, Ford Madox 1999, *The good soldier*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Gilmore, Leigh 1994, *Autobiographics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

Greene, Graham 1951, *The end of the affair*, Penguin Books, London.

Konrád, György 2005, 'Truth in autobiography', *Common Knowledge*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 514–21.

Lejeune, Philippe 1989, 'The autobiographical pact' in Paul John Eakin (ed.), *On autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Rak, Julie 2001, 'Doukhobor autobiography as witness narrative', *Biography*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 226–41.

3220_Offshoot.indd 41 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

THE TRUTH IS LIKE TRUTH: GREY

Jeri Kroll

What happens when a poet steals from her own literary life? This work experiments with the imaginative potential of a few generic subtypes – the confessional poem, the lyric essay, the prose poem and the cento – all of which could be said to be hybrids. Primarily, it plays with the cento, a genre with plagiarism at its heart, composed of the words of revered literary figures. Interweaving lines from my previous books – self-plagiarising – allows the cento to be problematised.

Shadows swallow you whole. The iris flexes in sympathy as you enter the stable rich with the smells of another life. The drum in your ear stills as you hear the horse snort, clearing his nostrils, the whole-body shake that sounds like a blind snapping up. These days the seasons can't make up their minds, but you both hope soon spring will come out on top. You remember a child's spring, when your head opened like a back door welcoming everyone in. But today is sort of in-between and you wonder whether you'll ever make up your mind about anything. Every family is a life sentence. That's a cold thought. You shiver as the shadows circle back but sun comes to the rescue, shooting barbs of light. Your horse blinks and you reach out a hand to stroke his eye closed. His lashes feather your palm. And he's warm, so warm it makes you quiver with pleasure.

Maybe some day I will pay for this gift, you think. You/I/You. Why not admit it's the *you* who moved below the equator, where things act differently, to swelter in century heat, in the tinder-dry hills. I never lived up there, only down by the coast, but that's what writers do – add, withhold, exaggerate, invent. Wind scours this land we really live on, and we have done right by it, slashing and seeding, loving it like our son. This land he'd once mapped, wanting to know where we'd like to be buried. But who can say anything final? I know I hate you, I love you. I hate you, I love you. That's clear unambiguous truth about all the *yous* – everyone I want and need. Even the horse humouring me as I lean my cheek against his to share his breath. I murmur syllables – maybe his name – it doesn't matter what. Voice is enough. Does he know what I don't? Control and love: can they endure together?

Why have they become my life, these horses? And I think back to my five-year-old self, balanced in front of the pommel by Slim as he sat behind, snug in the saddle, steering the muscly chestnut forward. But not into the future, not yet. Just then, I understood for the first time this natural way of being *we.* My heart rocked as I felt what it meant to be terrified alive.

But today before riding I don't think of that. I've come to whisper and share our breath. Yet the past scoots out of the shadows like a mouse disturbing the hay. After he'd left home, I remember standing outside my son's room, in the midnight dark, listening to no one breathe, trying not to think, what next? As if to answer the sun flares through the door and ignites my horse – for an instant he glows. Pure white is rare in a horse's coat. The truth is mostly grey. He's lost the charcoal smudges of youth, the black and silver streaked mane. His coat is flea-bitten grey, the red and

3220_Offshoot.indd 43 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

brown flecks like miniscule love bites. My own hair is probably like his tail once was, if I'd let it reveal the truth. But that is hard for anyone. Let's just say it's good we have aged together.

As I have aged with the man working down in the back paddock where last night's stars of frost are melting, glazing the spiky winter pasture. He's fixing fences and sluicing out troughs, so you'll have fresh grass and soon a belly again, I say. The horse nods and snorts, whatever. Words escape like the purr of sand in an hourglass and suddenly he sighs too as if he feels what I'm feeling. A nice illusion, but as true as any other. Because they are sensitive beasts, giving breath freely, accepting you and your unknowing, understanding the difference between kindness and cruelty. This is guilty and glorious stuff. For often enough I've performed the old script. So what's new? By this age, your baggage is on wheels, easy to drag behind as the journey continues. Then why this constant retelling?

Because when my mother was losing herself, her bones fragile as eggshells, she taught me a lesson without a sound. That words make us what we are. That the bewildered heart still outweighs all else. After she died, I tried to salvage what she was, in a book, in fact. Being my father's daughter, I wanted something finally to be perfect. No luck. I still hear things in the night, scuttling across my mind as I toss in bed. Maybe it's possums or rats. Maybe it's my father's ghost, worrying about the roof. That's the time to reach out and feel for an arm, a shoulder, for the man curled next to me into himself. If in doubt, love helps. If you've reached this age and all the body parts work, then you know that body means words in the dark, which is why I keep seeking that fix before

3220_Offshoot.indd 44 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

nodding off like an addict, knocked out till morning. That is an oblivion to die for.

Yet at least for now there's always another morning. The bathroom is a site of honesty, in case you didn't know, especially the mirror, where I follow my face back into other faces. Furrows on the brow – like razor cuts already healed – remind me that the past is getting closer. But until that gap is closed, although I move into the days ahead off-balance, touching what isn't there, I still can touch. I recognise the rounded shape of absence, those breasts the clever knife removed, making me a notch on a surgeon's belt that tallies his survivors. I strip before a shower and let the air wash over what's still there. To shiver means at least to be alive.

Somewhere the tractor chokes and coughs into life. The horse's ears swivel, catching the sound. He turns and there's my silhouette, floating in his eye's maple pool, as magpies tap-dance on the iron roof and a breeze stirs whiskers of hay. Impatient, he paws the concrete, making sparks fly up and die in a heartbeat. Soon we'll be galloping out in the sun, loving these moments when muscles stretch out, everything fluid and free in our endless circle. It's what we are for in the time we have left. At dusk the stable door will swallow the last mouthful of sun. But for now the golden air shivers with our breath.

Some lines have been modified from original poems and some are identical. New lines are interwoven with quoted lines. Material is drawn from the following books: *Death as Mr Right* (1982) (pp. 12–13, 16, 22), *Indian Movies* (1984) (pp. 30, 34, 52–3, 54), *Monster*

3220_Offshoot.indd 45 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Love (1990) (pp. 68, 70, 85), *House Arrest* (1993) (p. 95), *The Mother Workshops* (2004) (pp. 120, 125–6, 131, 136, 137, 143), *New Poems* (2005–2012) (pp. 149, 151, 155, 162, 163–4, 171, 172, 175, 178) [all previous page numbers from Kroll 2013]; *Vanishing Point* (2015) (pp. 46, 275–6); *Swamp Soup (and Other Children's Poems)* (2012) (pp. 10, 11).

References

Kroll, Jeri 2012, *Swamp Soup (and Other Children's Poems)*, Picaro Press, Cardiff.
Kroll, Jeri 2013, *Workshopping the Heart: New and Selected Poems*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide.
Kroll, Jeri 2015, *Vanishing Point*, Puncher and Wattman, Sydney.

3220_Offshoot.indd 46 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

STRANGE HYBRIDS: TELLING THE TRUTH AND OTHER 'LIES' ABOUT FICTION AND LIFE WRITING

Camilla Nelson

Fiction, wrote Daniel Defoe, is the 'habit of lying' for no reason (1720, p. 113). This celebrated aside is the product of an age before the concept of 'fiction' (let alone 'fictional truth') was invented, and narrative, as Catherine Gallagher has argued, only came in two forms: 'truth-telling and lying' (1994, p. xvi). Indeed, up until the middle of the eighteenth century, there was 'no widely employed means of distinguishing between a fiction and a lie' (p. 163), and the earliest novels were invariably presented as 'true' life histories rather than imaginative inventions. Later, in a strange discursive manoeuvre that took place around the mid-twentieth century, fact and fiction once again shifted position – and, increasingly, fictitious rather than factual life became endowed with the attributes of 'truth' and 'reality'. Accompanying the popular saying that 'fact is often stranger than fiction' came a qualitatively new kind of thought – apocryphally attributed to William Faulkner – that 'fiction is often the best fact'.

But, as fiction invented its own realm, so too, the world of fact was not unaffected. Objectivity – that is, empirically verified knowledge – became the goal of factual writing, and an estrangement between literature and factuality ensued. This was felt in the writing of literary biography, no less than in more pedantic or scholarly realms such as History (Curthoys and Docker 2005). In his preface to *Eminent Victorians*, Lytton Strachey characterised

the traditional 'two fat volumes' of nineteenth-century biography as a cultural anathema. 'Who does not know them, with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design?' (1918, p. 2) Virginia Woolf praised the new sense of 'freedom' found in Strachey's lifelike portraits – with their 'perpetual marriage' of what she called 'granite' and 'rainbow' – but continued to believe that the conflation of 'the truth of real life and the truth of fiction' would cause the biographer to lose 'both worlds', writing: 'Let it be fact, one feels, or let it be fiction; the imagination will not serve two masters, simultaneously' (1929/1989, p. 478). Clearly, Woolf, Strachey and, indeed, Defoe never contemplated an era such as the present in which hybrids of fact and fiction – or 'truth' and 'lies' – would become common, albeit not uncontroversial.

Indeed, in the twenty-first century, the boundaries dividing 'fact' and 'fiction' have become so blurry that new terms such as 'fictional memoirs' and 'non-fiction novels' are constantly being coined in order to define them. A succession of literary scandals has also given rise to a new sense of cultural anxiety, prompting publishers to eject certain works from their 'non-fiction' lists to place them on the 'fiction' shelf. Historic fakes, such as Beatrice Sparks' *Go Ask Alice* (1971/2006) or Henri Charrière's *Papillon* (1969/2012), continue to be categorised as non-fiction on Google, for example, while a range of contemporary fakes, such as Norma Khouri's fraudulent stories about forbidden love in Jordan (2003), Margaret Seltzer's fake memoir about gangs in south central Los Angeles (2008), and J. T. LeRoy's teenage transgender exploits (1999/2016), are assiduously repackaged as 'novels'. In the meantime, from the Oprah Winfrey Book Club selection, James Frey's drug-fuelled memoir *A Million Little Pieces* (2003) notoriously

3220_Offshoot.indd 48 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

transformed a few hours in prison into a stretch of several months, turning veracity in non-fiction writing into the subject of a media frenzy, with the extent of Frey's fabrications first exposed in *The Smoking Gun* in 2006.

The words of spin doctors may be regularly reported as facts on the front page of the newspapers, but the fabrications of writers such as Frey and Khouri have brought what Lee Gutkind (2011, p. 17) has called the 'creative nonfiction police' banging on non-fiction's door. Like Walter Scott's Dr Dryasdust, the tedious, pedantic, authoritative scholar, who perversely conspired to suppress all the bright details from History (Scott 1814/2000), Gutkind has argued that the 'authenticity police' veer towards an ethics of representation that potentially leaves no room for drama, metaphor or characterisation, and which threatens to turn the literature of reality into the dull work of data collection.

Pushback was only to be expected. It famously arrived in the form of David Shields' manifesto *Reality Hunger* (2011), which argued that Frey's mistake was not in lying, but in not lying long or hard enough: '[Frey] should have said, "Everyone who writes about himself is a liar. I created a person meaner, funnier, more filled with life than I could ever be"' (2011, p. 116). Shields explains:

> Memoir is a genre in need of an informed readership. It's a misunderstanding to read memoir as though the writer owes the reader the same record of literal accuracy that is owed in newspaper reporting. Memoirs belong to the category of literature, not journalism (2011, p. 106).

According to Shields, the value of a memoir does not rest on its veracity but on its aesthetic value and meaning. These contentions

3220_Offshoot.indd 49 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

may appear radical at first glance, but they are in fact the product of an artistic culture that traditionally ties the idea of literature so closely to fictional values that the ascription of literary value to factual writing appears unnatural.

Frauds and hoaxes aside, the dilemmas faced by most non-fiction writers are far more nuanced. Writers are habitually confronted by a range of difficult decisions – time compression, disrupted chronologies, composite or de-identified characters, subjectivity, genre blending, and even the seductions of poetic prose. Each of these decisions has an ethical dimension. This is why frenzied discussions still rage in writers' workshops over John Berendt's imaginary transitions in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1994), Edmund Morris' decision to use a fictional narrator in *Dutch* (1999), or Helen Garner's decision to split the character of Jenna Mead into five (or, by some counts, nine) to avoid a defamation action in *The First Stone* (1995). Controversies erupt, for the most part, when readers feel some kind of advantage has been gained. (The decision to split a character allowed Garner to better realise an atmosphere of conspiracy, for example.) Gutkind argues, 'Such questions have a lot to do with a writer's ethical and moral boundaries and, most important, how hard writers are willing to work to achieve accuracy and believability in their narratives' (2011, p. 120), explaining, 'The key is to let readers know what you are doing and why' (p. 40).

If ethical dilemmas are inherent in every aesthetic or craft-based decision that a writer makes, then reflexivity is one possible solution. Reflexivity, in this sense, refers to the traces of ethical decisions that are left on the page. This essay explores elements of reflexivity in works by three Australian writers: the insertion of a seemingly authentic 'Helen' into Helen Garner's fictional memoir *The Spare Room* (2008), the use of a fictional narrator to query

3220_Offshoot.indd 50 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

personal truths in Mandy Sayer's *Dreamtime Alice* (1998/2012), and the use of memory as a narrative-shaping force in Georgia Blain's *Births Death Marriages* (2008). The works have additional interest in that they have been written by authors who are also writers of fiction – that is, writers fully alive to the ethics of 'truth' and what Defoe mischievously called the 'habit of lying' in both forms.

The Author as Narrator: Helen Garner's 'I'

Helen Garner's fiction and non-fiction works possess certain notoriety for drawing on her own life. *The Spare Room* is a fictional memoir that uncovers the 'truth' of Garner's anger directed at a dying friend, or, more specifically, a sense of rage at the hypocrisy attached to her friend's resort to a series of increasingly bizarre alternative therapy regimes, including her belief that cancer might be cured through a series of vitamin-C injections. Garner argues:

> I didn't want to just write a drab, memoir-like account of "this happened and then this happened". I wanted to violently compress it. I hacked and hacked, and I threw out an enormous amount of material. I changed certain things, I moved things around in time, I invented whole scenes. I enclosed it with great force into a very limited time span and that was technically quite hard to do (quoted in Wyndham 2008).

Although the resulting work is therefore, according to Garner, 'morally' a novel, she nonetheless chooses to call the narrator 'Helen' or, more often, in a deliberately grating way, 'Hel' for short. 'Hel', in this sense, ironically refers both to a character and a dwelling place for the damned. Garner argues:

3220_Offshoot.indd 51 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> I wanted to make it quite clear I wasn't inventing those ugly feelings; they were things that I've experienced. I wanted to give a stamp of authenticity at least to that. If she was called Carol or Gertrude and it's got 'novel' written on it, it's a bit slithery, and I didn't want to slither out of it (quoted in Wyndham 2008).

The naming of the narrator is fraught with implications. The likeness of the 'I' to the author has a particular seduction, gathering up pieces of extra-textual reality and inserting them into the narrative. Both Garner and her narrator live in inner-city Melbourne, both work as writers for a living, both live next door to their daughters, and both are survivors of two 'train wrecks' – that is, failed marriages – and a failed attempt to live as a bohemian. Yet the reader is asked to apprehend the narrator as a fiction. For this reason, rather than a 'stamp of authenticity', the naming of the narrator lends the novel a sense of reflexivity, acting as an ironic narrative device that draws attention to the fantasies that readers so often project onto authors and their characters (see, for example, Brophy 1992). In other words, the naming of the narrator appears ironic because the authority of a fictional or novelistic 'truth' is seemingly contingent on the disavowal of its status as testimony. The naming of the narrator allows Garner to evade the difficulties that give the non-fiction writer trouble, but also draws attention to their existence.

Nevertheless, the idea of 'truth' gives shape to Garner's story. It is implicit in the revelatory structure that Garner imposes on her material. Short, sharp sentences with active verbs give the language a kind of urgency that drives the narrative on – 'I swivelled the bed', 'I made it up nicely', 'I rounded up all the extra pillows', 'I pulled up the wooden venetian' (2008, pp. 1–2). These actions

3220_Offshoot.indd 52 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

are then interspersed with an urgent questioning that drives the narrative inwards, lending it not only a sense of interiority, but also an atmosphere of edgy uncertainty: 'Would she like a flat pillow or a bulky one?', 'Was she allergic to feathers…?', 'What if she snagged one of her long, elegant toes…?' (2008, pp. 1–2). The questions well up in the confined space of the 'spare room' hemmed in by an 'old grey paling fence' that bars the view from the tiny window (2008, p. 2). Increasingly, 'Hel' is closed in. Eventually, in an emotional outburst, she tells the reader:

> The one thing I was sure of…was that if I did not get Nicola out of my house tomorrow I would slide into a lime-pit of rage that would scorch the flesh off me, leaving nothing but a strew of pale bones on a landscape of sand (Garner 2008, p. 193).

In Garner's work, 'truths' often express themselves in such eruptions of impatience, frustration or hostility, which expose the rawness of the narrator's emotions. The intensity of the narrator's feelings calls up an intimate response from the reader, forcing the reader to take a more nuanced and critical view of what is occurring, and in this way both the reader and narrator contribute to the meaning making of the text. It is not so much 'truth' but this sense of 'shared discovery' that gives Garner's work its quality of, to quote Robert Dessaix, 'kitchen table candour' (2008). Yet, in so much of Garner's work, this seeming 'truth' turns out to be a fiction.

Fictional Narrators: Mandy Sayer's 'Alice'

If *The Spare Room* is a fictional memoir that deploys a seemingly real or authentic 'I' in a novelistic context, then Mandy Sayer's

3220_Offshoot.indd 53 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Dreamtime Alice (1998/2012) might be described as a non-fiction memoir that uses a fictional character to tell the most painful and troubling 'truths' of the story. Sayer's book is a coming-of-age narrative about the author's relationship with her father, Gerry, whom 'Mandy' – the narrator – sets out to busk with on the streets of New York. Sayer explains her decision to substitute the fictional 'Alice' for herself at certain points in the story by informing readers that she had packed a copy of Lewis Carroll's 1865 *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to take on her travels. Sayer writes, 'I'd already memorised the entire chapter of the Mad Hatter's Tea Party and in the weeks to come I would often recite passages to myself as I wandered around the city' (1998/2012, p. 21). Alice's narration is a fictional device that allows the author to distance herself from her own, often disturbed, experiences of living in underground America – the long and painful hours spent tap-dancing on the footpath, or subsisting on frugally rationed food in a string of unheated apartments. The most painful 'truths' of what took place are not told in the narrator's first-person voice, but in the fictional third-person narrative of 'Alice'. The narrator holds up a looking glass, but the 'truth' it reveals is happening to a fictional character. Sayer writes:

> Alice had been abstaining from sex for a good five months before she finally gave in to Earl. She did not know why, her skin did not ache for him the way it had for Bruno, for Grimaldi, for Romano…It happened during one of their coke-induced evenings. Earl kept taking her hand and pressuring her to come up to his room. Alice finally stood up, straightened her skirt and followed him out the door. She knew he was not the

3220_Offshoot.indd 54 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> magician, but she was tired of waiting for him. She gave a short wave to her father before she disappeared. She wanted him to say, 'Wait a minute', or 'Don't go', or 'What do you think you're doing?' But he did not look up from his music (1998/2012, p. 301).

Paradoxically, in the context of non-fiction writing, Alice's fictional point of view endows the writing with a believable quality. It conceals a factual reality beneath the veil of a fiction, but in so doing it also endows events with a transparent and therefore 'truthful' quality by marking them out as something the narrator does not want to say.

Memory as Narrative: Georgia Blain's 'Fragments of Me'

Sayer's work uses a fictional device to render the 'truths' of its non-fiction exposition questionable. Using a different set of narrative techniques, Georgia Blain's *Births Deaths Marriages* also demonstrates that factual memory is invested with a fictional quality. Blain's work is best described as an essay collection in Montaigne's sense of the word – that is, as an extended piece of meditative writing. Each essay eddies around a particular moment or object – the first essay, for example, seguing from an advertisement for her old family home, to a conversation with her mother, to a stash of magazine photographs lying at the bottom of a trunk. In this way, the contours of present-day memory rather than past chronology is what give shape to the narrative. Nevertheless, Blain argues:

> when it came to writing memoir I thought: I'll throw away the artifice of plot, but there's another artifice

3220_Offshoot.indd 55 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> that you put on that's very akin to plot because I don't think you can help but make a story of your experience (Cunningham, 2008, p. 121).

The past may not present itself in the form of a plot – that is, as a causally linked chain of events – but the act of writing endows it with a kind of 'artifice' including voice, structure and meaning. In *Births Deaths Marriages*, this sense of meaning centres on the everyday conflicts between a woman's life and the life of a writer. It is primarily engendered through the use of a bookended structure whereby the memoir begins and ends with chapters entitled 'A Room of One's Own', an allusion to Virginia Woolf's (1929) work of the same name, so that the narrator's battle to gain 'A Room of One's Own' becomes a battle to assert herself in ways that her mother had not.

The 'problem' that Blain calls 'artifice' is also engendered through point of view. Memoirs are commonly written in the past tense. They look back from the vantage point of a textual or extra-textual narrator who inhabits a stable space beyond the temporal zone of the story (as opposed, for example, to an edgy present tense in which everything is provisional). The reader looks back on the events of the past, and, even if she cannot discern their pattern or meaning, she can take comfort in the hope that there will be one.

Blain disrupts this sense of 'artifice' by layering the temporal plane of the narrative. She folds the past into the present, childhood memory into adult recollection, and today into yesterday, creating a sense of a fluid and uncertain past welling up in an ever-changing present. This is clear, for example, in 'The Germaine Tapes', an essay that addresses the issue of Blain's emotionally abusive father.

3220_Offshoot.indd 56 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

The essay starts with the arrival of a set of tape recordings, which have been sent to Blain by her mother. They feature her father, the broadcaster Ellis Blain, interviewing Germaine Greer, the feminist of the century. Blain writes:

> It would not be the first time I had heard him since he had died, and I was surprised at the apprehension I still felt at the prospect of listening to a recording of him. I have photographs of him and me together, and letters he wrote to me when he separated from my mother (usually asking me to tell her something he refused to communicate directly himself). It is rare that I look at them with any more than a detached curiosity about him…His voice, however, was a different prospect (Cunningham, 2008, p. 56).

The voice in this passage feels natural and intimate, but is, in fact, highly crafted. It draws together childish innocence ('photographs of him and me together'), teenage rebellion ('asking me to tell her something he refused to communicate directly'), present-day sadness ('I was surprised at the apprehension I still felt'), and a layer of historic time that is subsequently established through the reference to Germaine Greer. The sense that the reader is following the temporal rhythms of a particular mind gives rise to a sense of shared intimacy, but Blain argues that the intimate voice that is such a feature of her memoir is in fact more artificial than the voice found in her novels. '*Births Deaths Marriages* is ostensibly much more me, but it's a much more crafted me', argues Blain, whereas her novels contain 'a raw aspect of me' (2008, p. 127).

3220_Offshoot.indd 57 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Conclusion

The term 'creative nonfiction' – defined as a kind of writing that deploys fictional devices within a non-fiction form – was coined in the late twentieth century to designate an artful kind of non-fiction writing, because the word 'essay' (as applied, for example, to the work of students) had become a debased term (Gutkind 2011, p. 11). However, one problem with the 'creative nonfiction' label is that it tends to privilege the use of fictional over non-fictional devices, and scenic realism over other forms of writing. It unwittingly implies that a work of non-fiction is forever striving to attain the artistic status of fiction but is apparently not capable of achieving the 'truth' found in novels. Garner and Sayer's works interrogate these preconceptions by setting one genre (fiction) against the other (non-fiction), while Blain's essayistic approach testifies to the idea that every non-fiction statement also contains within it the possibility of literature.

References

Berendt, John 1994, *Midnight in the garden of good and evil*, Random House, New York.

Blain, Georgia 2008, *Births deaths marriages*, Vintage/Random House, Sydney.

Brophy, Kevin 1992, 'Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip*: the construction of an author and her work', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 270–81.

Charrière, Henri 1969/2012, *Papillon*, HarperCollins, New York.

Cunningham, Sophie 2008, 'Before getting dressed: Sophie Cunningham talks to Georgia Blain about life, death, motherhood, and her first work of nonfiction', *Meanjin*, vol. 67, no. 3, pp. 118–29.

Curthoys, Ann & Docker, John 2005, *Is history fiction?*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

Defoe, Daniel 1720, *Serious reflections during the life and surprising adventures of Robinson Crusoe: with his vision of the Angelick world*, W. Taylor, London.

Dessaix, Robert 2008, 'Kitchen-table candour: Robert Dessaix on Helen Garner's *The Spare Room*', *The Monthly*, April, viewed 1 October 2016, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2008/april/1343620158/robert-dessaix/kitchen-table-candour>.

Frey, James 2003, *A million little pieces*, John Murray, London.

3220_Offshoot.indd 58 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Gallagher, Catherine 1994, *Nobody's story: the vanishing acts of women writers in the marketplace 1670–1820*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
Garner, Helen 1995, *The first stone*, Picador Pan Macmillan, Sydney.
Garner, Helen 2008, *The spare room*, Text Publishing Company, Melbourne.
Gutkind, Lee 2011, *Keep it real: everything you need to know about researching and writing creative nonfiction*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York.
Khouri, Norma 2003, *Forbidden love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, Bantam, New York.
LeRoy, J. T. 1999/2016, *Sarah*, Hachette, London.
Morris, Edmund 1999, *Dutch: a memoir of Ronald Reagan*, Random House, New York.
Sayer, Mandy 1998/2012, *Dreamtime Alice*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
Scott, Walter 1814/2000, *Ivanhoe*, Penguin, London.
Seltzer, Margaret 2008, *Love and consequences: a memoir of hope and survival*, Penguin, New York.
Shields, David 2011, *Reality hunger: a manifesto*, Vintage/Random House, New York.
Sparks, Beatrice 1971/2006, *Go ask Alice*, Simon Pulse/Simon and Schuster, New York.
Strachey, Lytton 1918, *Eminent Victorians: Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr. Arnold, General Gordon*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.
The Smoking Gun 2006 'A million little lies', viewed 1 October 2016, <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/documents/celebrity/million-little-lies>.
Woolf, Virginia 1927/1987, 'The new biography', in *The essays of Virginia Woolf: 1925–1928*, Harcourt Jovanovich and Brace, New York, pp. 473–9.
Woolf, Virginia 1929/1989, *A room of one's own*, Harcourt Brace & Co, New York.
Wyndham, Susan 2008, 'Life and art collide', Undercover blog, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, viewed 1 October 2016, <http://blogs.smh.com.au/entertainment/archives/undercover/017757.html>.

3220_Offshoot.indd 59 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

OUT

Lia Incognita

Over coffee she asks, *Are you out to your family?*

And I think of my grandmother
warning my aunt
Don't let your daughter leave the country
You'll be lonely when you're old

All us kids are out
someplace with too many syllables
and not enough ancestors

our lives don't translate
who I fuck
is not the only unspeakable

*

This woman is a researcher
not a date

I tell her

how I came out

four years old on a plane
sixteen in the wrong language
twenty-six and divorcing

Every day is another country

*

Maybe every queer has
too many syllables
not enough ancestors

We're all hoping our haircuts
speak for themselves

but when I say unspeakable
I mean literally

I don't have the words
to tell my mother about you
I don't have the words
to tell my mother about me

but she knows she knows
she knows she knows
she knows about
too many syllables
not enough ancestors
a life that doesn't translate
and so much blind faith

3220_Offshoot.indd 61 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

she knows
what you leave behind
when you come out

she knows
what you leave unsaid
when you go home

*

I know family
doesn't always mean blood
and blood doesn't translate
to anything in particular

but I'm from another country
we came here in drips
blood following blood
leaving more behind

I didn't come expecting
to owe nothing
to miss nothing
to be whole

I am out with my family
in an old lonely country
and I will leave some things unsaid
to keep my language in my mouth

3220_Offshoot.indd 62 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

'TRUE HISTORIES': USING FICTION IN WRITING LIVES

James Vicars

Among the dust-ups of the so-called 'history wars' in Australia during the first decade of the twenty-first century was a skirmish that drew Australian novelist Kate Grenville into an argument about the capacity of fiction to explore lives in the historical past. This skirmish flared in the period following the publication of Grenville's acclaimed novel, *The Secret River* (2005), bringing forward some strongly argued objections to 'doing fiction' instead of 'doing history' – or, equally, it could be said, 'doing biography'. Inga Clendinnen, criticising Grenville's method, contended that access to the 'actual past is slow, always problematic' (2006, p. 21), while fellow historian Mark McKenna expressed concern about the possibility of fiction usurping history's role (2006). Even so, these objections did not diminish Grenville's achievement, nor discourage the growing diversity of works in which fiction functions as a biographic space for exploring real events and lives. While what follows will seek to draw together the threads of the discourse surrounding the use of fiction in writing real lives, it will be with a view to indicating the possibilities of this mode of writing, including examples of contemporary practice by Australian and New Zealand writers.

Fiction's separation from biography follows from the premise that biography is non-fiction and more or less aligned with conventions of historical inquiry, with Donna Lee Brien notes that

biography 'is currently widely understood as a literature that tells straightforward, factual stories of lives as written by someone else' (2014, p. 1). In revisiting the roots and early use of the term 'biography', however, the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the former as *bíos* and *graphia* – simply, 'life' and 'writing'. The primary definition then expands this as the 'history of the lives of individual men, as a branch of literature' (Murray et al. 1933), a phrase that, notwithstanding the gender distinctions of the time, seems to identify biography with the wider scope of literary rather than strictly historical projects. In this sense, the telling and understanding of lives is shaped or explored in a literary space, a sensibility dating as far back as the early Common Era when Plutarch, according to Barbara Caine, emphasised the differences between biography and history and 'demanded freedoms for the biographer from the rigour so central to the writing of history' (2010, p. 8). This was because, for Plutarch, it was not deeds that mattered so much as character: 'I am writing biography, not history, and the truth is that the most brilliant exploits often tell us nothing of the virtues or vices of the men who performed them' (Caine 2010, p. 8). Likewise, Virginia Woolf, in her 1927 essay 'The New Biography', wrote that 'we can no longer maintain that life consists in actions only or in works. It consists in personality' (1994, p. 474). If human qualities and character are therefore central to the purpose of life writing, representing them through narrative is perhaps fundamental. Fewer non-specialist readers are likely to be interested in historical events and achievements if they are not conveyed as human stories; conversely, human stories and impacts are required to make sense of achievements and events. Richard Slotkin, arguing the capacity of fiction in telling history, observes that 'analysis and criticism cannot displace, let alone replace, narrative. The need to compose experience into narrative

3220_Offshoot.indd 64 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

is a fundamental attribute of human consciousness' (2005, p. 230). In this respect, the record may be better conceived as a tool for understanding rather than just as a set of constraints, and this has perhaps helped to drive innovations, such as creative and speculative biographies, that have broadened the scope of non-fiction biography in recent decades. (See, Brien 2014 for a wide-ranging account of innovation in biography.)

But innovation along these lines is going still further, strengthening the case that the term 'biography' should no longer simply be considered a synonym for non-fiction biography. Rather, it should be acknowledged that it can include other kinds of biographical life writing, including modes employing fiction (see, Vicars 2016). In his influential study *The Historical Novel*, Geyörgy Lukács writes that the 'important historical novels show a clear tendency towards biography' (1969, p. 362), pointing, as he saw it, to the way authors sought to confront the present with the great model figures of humanist ideals. As he viewed this to be more of a fashion than a deeply rooted tendency, Lukács might have been surprised at the turn of the historical novel towards the biographical novel. One result has been to change the nature of the biographical tendency Lukács anticipated: the 'great' figures of the past have been joined in the limelight or even overshadowed by stories of infamous figures, as well as by lesser-known lives. While the moral purpose he envisaged has also given ground to aesthetic considerations, an important outcome has possibly been the reinvigoration of interest in, or even (in some cases) the 'rediscovery' of, lives that have been forgotten or overlooked – some examples by Australian writers appear below.

While biographical novels do not displace non-fiction biography, the broadly postmodern perspective that points to the constructed nature of non-fiction (as well as other possible forms

3220_Offshoot.indd 65 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

of biography) challenges the basis for their separation. Maureen Ramsden writes that reality is constructed as a text because our representation of the world in any way is always different from our direct 'knowing' of it (2011, p. 341). Narrative is therefore an essential means of making sense of the real world, and factual as well as fictional works have, as Ramsden puts it, 'a basic element of fiction at the level of their imaginative conception and construction' (p. 345). This would apply to the most stridently 'factual' biography, which cannot avoid selecting material on a subjective as well as an objective basis and is the product of authorial attitudes and positions that may not be transparent. Thus, a case can be made for fiction that creates or inhabits a biographic space utilising, for example, imagination and empathetic understanding while building on those facts that are established by consensus. This enables a movement beyond the 'known' in the search for understanding of the subject person, even while admitting the impossibility of completing such a task or of reaching certainty in it. Yet it is this very 'indeterminacy', as Slotkin (2005, p. 221) calls it, that creates the space in which writers can recover, rediscover and even recreate 'lost' stories, subjects and marginalised histories. Women's lives, especially, have fallen into that category and, being more frequently unrecorded, Susanna Scarparo writes that 'their stories – if they are to be told – have to be invented. The stories of the invisible…can only exist through fiction' (2005, p. 90).

While a number of literary forms, now often collectively labelled 'biofictions', inhabit this space, the one that most intentionally creates it as a biographic space is perhaps 'fictional biography'. While Brien favours the term 'fictionalised biography' to refer to 'a heightened, self-conscious and freely revealed degree of invention within the non-fiction narrative' (2004, p. 10), I prefer Ina Schabert's term 'fictional biography', because it seems

3220_Offshoot.indd 66 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

to signify that the work is more entirely offered as a fictional composition rather than fiction applied to an extant biographical project. Schabert's fictional biography is a form that 'is engaged in the comprehension of a real historical individual by means of the sophisticated instruments of knowing and articulating knowledge that contemporary fiction offers' (1990, p. 4). Although encompassing the use of imagination and the shaping processes of fiction, Schabert adopts the writer William Styron's (1968/1967) view that the imagination of the author writing a fictional biography is a 'responsible imagination', an imagination that 'as a rule respects the known facts, yet is free to interpret them, enlarge upon them and supplement them according to the certainties of the empathic act' (Schabert 1990, p. 147). But what also distinguishes fictional biography is its placing of the idiosyncratic movement of the person's life before the more purely creative considerations that might be expected in a biographical novel. The subject person is explicitly the pivot of the narrative, even though, in practice, there is overlap in these forms. If some means are required to distinguish between the two this might be accomplished by asking: Is fiction the form or is it the object of the work? Does the work realise biographical truth in terms of both accepted fact and the person? The answers help to frame the forms and the differing ways they offer readers access to lives.

The variety of biofictions published by Australian and New Zealand writers has, arguably, helped to shape the contemporary discourse about the roles of fiction, biography and history in exploring the past and the lives of historical figures, linking with the larger discourse about the place, use and power of truth and imagination. This shaping can be seen to develop in several periods, and early examples range from Ernestine Hill's portrayal of explorer Matthew Flinders in 1941 *(My Love Must*

3220_Offshoot.indd 67 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Wait) through to David Malouf's imagining of the Roman poet Ovid in 1980 (*An Imaginary Life*); these works present themselves fairly straightforwardly as works of fiction inspired by, or about, historical figures. However, gaining momentum from Hayden White's influential theorising about history (see, for example, 1976) and following the work of Foucault, Bourdieu, Lyotard and, more recently, Linda Hutcheon and others, Australian writers of lives began increasingly to explore the boundaries between biography and fiction with such award-winning works as Brian Matthews' multi-narratorial *Louisa* (1987), Drusilla Modjeska's *Poppy* (1990) and Peter Robb's *M, a Portrait of European Painter Caravaggio* (1998). Since the beginning of the new millennium, an increased interest in the use of fiction as a biographical tool is suggested by the appearance of works such as Marele Day's *Mrs Cook* (2002), C. K. Stead's portrayal of part of the life of Katherine Mansfield in *Mansfield* (2004), Pamela Freeman's young adult *The Black Dress: Mary MacKillop's Early Years* (2005), which won the NSW History Prize for Young People in 2006, Andrew Croome's fiction about the Petrovs in *Document Z* (2009), Sonia Orchard's story of Australian pianist Noel Mewton-Wood in *The Virtuoso* (2009), Shirley Walker's *The Ghost at the Wedding* (2010) and Thom Conroy's story of the scientist, explorer, revolutionary and outcast Ernst Dieffenbach in *The Naturalist* (2014).

To this might be added a category of its own – that of novels about convicts, criminals and bushrangers, which is one of the strongest themes in the fictional writing of lives in Australia. These works follow in the tradition (and with the appeal) of Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life* (c1874/2009) and Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms* (c1888/1957), and include stories of Ned Kelly by Robert Drewe in *Our Sunshine* (1991) and, memorably, by Peter Carey in *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000);

3220_Offshoot.indd 68 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

other celebrated works include Andrew Motion's *Wainewright the Poisoner* (1999) and Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish: a Novel in Twelve Fish* (2001), which gives an obscure convict subject a voice and a life in time and place that Robert MacFarlane described as 'remarkable is its reconciliation of metafictionality with humanity' and 'whose uniqueness mirrors its principal theme – the dangers of classification' (MacFarlane 2002). Other stories of those on the wrong side of the law, or caught by justice gone wrong, range from John Bryson's quasi-novelisation of the trials of Lindy Chamberlain in *Evil Angels* (1985) to Peter Corris's *The Journal of Fletcher Christian* (2005), Anne Haebich's *Murdering Stepmothers: The Execution of Martha Rendell* (2010) and Trevor Shearston's *Game* (2013), about bushranger Ben Hall. Overlapping with these, the pioneering past provides rich possibilities for the rediscovery of lives in narrative form: recent *Mind's Own Place* (2015), which draws on the actual experiences of historical figures and explores not only the lives of convicts but free settlers – not to mention the first detective in Western Australia.

There are also dangers, according to Donna Lee Brien, when fiction and 'fact' are conflated, as with Nick Enright's plays based on the murder of schoolgirl Leigh Leigh, *A Property of the Clan* (1994) and *Blackrock* (1996). In this case, two narratives, 'the fictionalised *Blackrock* and the facts about Leigh Leigh's tragedy, became and remained intermingled in public understanding'; the resulting anguish, for family and others, suggests that the claim of fiction cannot assuage 'authorial ethical responsibility' (Brien 2009, online). Supporting this view, Christopher Kremmer writes that 'being a novelist – even one who makes it all up – doesn't buy impunity' (2015, online). But while scepticism about the capacity of non-fiction biography and history to fully encompass a life's 'truth' has been longstanding – if this were not the case, the

3220_Offshoot.indd 69 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

biographical novel or fictional biography seeking to explore these truths would be redundant – neither has fiction's capacity to write lives, let alone history, been seriously considered by academics in Australia until publication of Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* in 2005.

Grenville's book sought to explore the ways in which early interactions between Aboriginal people and white settlers in colonial Australia might have taken place, a contemplation of the past overt enough to invite comparison with the practices of history. In particular, historian Inga Clendinnen took issue with Grenville's comments during a radio interview that 'the historians are doing their thing…[but] let me as a novelist come to it in a different way, which is the way of empathising and imaginative understanding of those difficult events' (Grenville 2006, online). Clendinnen responded that Grenville was claiming to know, by her method, with 'equal certainty' what was intimated within the records and what was beyond them, exposing, according to Clendinnen, the gulf between 'doing history' and 'doing fiction' (Clendinnen 2006, p. 21). 'We can't post ourselves back in time', Clendinnen wrote, nor can we put ourselves in the place of even 'those people we guess to approximate our own kind because that would condemn us to play Blind Man's Bluff in a largely unintelligible world' (p. 21).

Yet taking ourselves back in time and putting ourselves in the position of others is an example of an imaginative process, precisely the kind of thing the imagination is free to do, and the published examples above illustrate the confidence of writers in Australia and New Zealand in the capacity of literary forms employing fiction to explore lives. In putting the case against this kind of exploration, Clendinnen's response seems to assume that writers' and historians' goals are the same yet cannot be

3220_Offshoot.indd 70 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

reached in different ways. But Grenville's narrative, her characters and the verisimilitude she created to carry her theme provide a human exploration of events that rarely, or only in a fragmentary way, appear in the historical record. In doing so, its achievement, arguably, is to work alongside history, and Geraldine Bedell in *The Guardian* describes the book as 'beautifully written and, at times, almost unbearable with the weight of loss, competing distresses and the impossibility of making amends' (2006, online). If Grenville's engagement with the past cannot, in some sense, avoid being historiographic as well as novelistic, this may not necessarily be doing more than making the processes by which a novelist engages with history, research and the past more explicit.

Grenville's case also illuminates the reticence of novelists generally to make claims for the capacity and potential of fiction in writing lives. For example, when shortlisted for the Australian National Biography Award in 2000, Peter Robb was so self-effacing that he refused to describe his dramatic and partially fictional study of the artist Caravaggio's life and death as biographical, calling it 'an identikit picture of the man rather than a scholarly biography' (Knox 2000, p. 3). Yet, painting around Caravaggio (as it were), Robb merged his representation of a partly known historical world with the mostly unrecorded and thus explicitly imagined day-to-day actions and feelings of his subject. While not a novel, a distinctive aspect of this narrative is the use of a grungy, Australian-inflected vernacular to give his portrayal of Caravaggio an edgy, authentic presence. This made for an absorbing account that also gained the recognition of a major award for biography, though the book divided critics in the UK.

Robb was certainly more concerned than Grenville to deflect possible criticism from the outset, and Michael Lackey points to the common disclaimer by writers of biographical novels that

3220_Offshoot.indd 71 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

their works must be read as novels rather than biographies (2016, p. 5). Some, like Jay Parini, do assert their intentions as novelists more explicitly (see, Lackey 2016, p. 7), but as such disclaimers have become 'traditional' for many such works, Lackey notes that there is the possibility they may also be disingenuous. As with products and services of many kinds, a disclaimer for a creative production functions more as a shield from criticism, a statement of *caveat emptor*, than necessarily explaining the reasons why the writer provided it or, indeed, why he or she really thought they should do so. The question might well be turned around: what would prevent these novels being understood biographically? Not, I would suggest, a disclaimer (see, Vicars 2016).

It also seems apparent from the sample of works listed herein that the public airing and discussion around Grenville's methods has emboldened rather than discouraged new writing employing fiction to explore the lives of historical figures. The public discussion itself had some potential to polarise and thus entrench methodological positions but, although that fortunately seems not to have eventuated, the possibility suggests it is worth restating some of the reasons for using fiction in the writing of lives, with *The Secret River* as exemplar. On one hand, Grenville's book offers the 'truth of fiction' in its 'different way' (from the historical method) of approaching the past, 'truth' that is sought by imagining and inhabiting possible places, situations and characters. On the other, it avoids compromising the 'truth of fact' (particulars that are generally agreed to be true) other than, when going beyond such accepted particulars, being faithful to them and building around them – the 'responsible' imagination that Schabert refers to.

This is one way of describing the space in which Grenville's method of 'empathising and imaginative understanding' functions

3220_Offshoot.indd 72 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

and unfolds, a space that equally functions for the writing of lives in fiction. Grenville's subsequent novel, *The Lieutenant* (2008), which is also set in the Australian colonial past, illustrates how inhabiting the lives of particular historical individuals provides access to human experiences in that time that the record alone cannot provide. It is not the only way: Ross Gibson's *26 Views of the Starburst World: William Dawes at Sydney Cove 1788–91* (2012) takes a 'forensic' approach combined with writing in which the 'imagist, concise fragments that emerge owe as much to intuition as empiricism' (Pree 2013, online). Gibson also makes it clear: 'I am not writing history. Rather, I am seeking a poetics of the past… something imaginative that is informed by history' (2012, p. 133). In doing so, he enlivens the primary sources directly but does not inhabit Dawes from within, and the frequent qualification 'must have been', as in the pages of most speculative biographies, keeps the reader always external to the man. Readers enjoy the work and the writing, learning much more broadly than with Grenville's novel, able to see connections with the culture of our time but relating from the present rather than inhabiting Dawes' epoch, his immediate experience and its personal and moral confrontations via the imagination.

This is to describe what fiction can offer rather than, in any sense, denigrate Gibson's offering to readers and contribution to scholarship. But neither should imagination be denigrated in the service to which Grenville and others writing lives are putting it; such works typically are not 'fancy' or 'fantasy', and Grenville's constructions, as with those of many writers of lives in fiction, are wellfounded on the historical record despite disputes about how she may have used it. As Ladislav Nagy noted recently, historical fiction 'has established itself as a serious intellectual endeavour since its overall theme seems to have something to contribute

3220_Offshoot.indd 73 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

to the current discussions about the nature of history and the character of story-telling' (2014, p. 8). Sarah Pinto, a few years earlier, in offering an incisive critique of the achievement of *The Secret River*, wrote of its impact in emotional terms: '*The Secret River's* historical project is one of loss – of lost control, lost peoples, lost knowledges, lost mythologies and lost chances' (2010, p. 193). Part of the value of this, she summarises, is that it challenges the 'official dynamics of loss' on the frontier of Australia (p. 197).

Pinto goes on to observe that, in creating a fictional history in which emotions can have analytic and interpretive power, 'there are consequences to their historical mobilisation' (p. 200) – an important and relevant issue. Yet, because it was not history *per se*, *The Secret River* could create an historical event through the imagination and 'discover' a past that was possible, plausible, and even likely. It channelled 'whispers' that, having persisted like incorporeal smoke for generations, could be ignited into flames by the individuals imagined in the story. Likewise, Slotkin argues that because 'the novel imaginatively recovers the indeterminacy of a past time, the form allows writer and reader to explore those alternative possibilities for belief, action, and political change, unrealised by history, which existed in the past' (2005, p. 221). It is noteworthy that Kim Scott's novels *Benang: From The Heart* (1999) and *That Deadman Dance* (2010) have shown how this can also be done deeply and powerfully from an Indigenous perspective.

None of the works so far mentioned have claimed to offer the 'only way' to explore lives in the past (although this stance might once have been assumed for non-fiction biography); they have, however, helped build recognition of the capacity of fiction to explore lives in Grenville's 'different way'. Peter Carey's remarkable ventriloquising of Ned Kelly in *True History of the Kelly Gang*, published in 2000, even seemed to anticipate the kind of

3220_Offshoot.indd 74 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

assertions made by Grenville's work, although the explicit claim of doing so was (at face value) sidestepped by the author. Thus, Clendinnen's satisfaction at Carey's answer, when the latter was pressed about the historical authenticity of *True History*, seems pyrrhic: that Carey simply said 'I made it up' has very much the sound of a deflection in the face of interrogation that Peter Robb had employed a few years earlier (Clendinnen 2006, p. 32).

An alternative response, however, is that Carey did not just 'make it up', and historian Tom Griffiths argued that the novel

> is not only a reworking of a real historical person, it is also a conscious extrapolation of a real historical document [Ned Kelly's 'Jerilderie letter']…The factual inventions in his novel are relatively trivial; what is more striking is his respect for the known past – he has imagined within and under the public record rather than in defiance of it (2009, p. 74.9).

In this respect, *True History of the Kelly Gang* seems to serve both the factual truth of the past (assuming there is agreement with Griffiths' assessment that Carey's factual inventions are indeed 'relatively trivial') as well as the broader truth of an historical person imagined in fiction, whether or not Carey considered it an individual fictional biography.

But a case has been made more recently for Carey's broader aims that casts his comment in a different light, one that is ironically truthful as much as providing an obvious deflection. Surveying the span of Carey's writing, Andreas Gaile argues that the novelist's works, taken together, create a fictional biography of *all* Australians. She writes that Carey's fictions, in their entirety, 'tell the story of the Australian people' and the vision of the Australian

3220_Offshoot.indd 75 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

experience that emerges from his fiction is so comprehensive that 'his *œuvre* makes up nothing less than a fictional biography of the country' (2010, p. 5). It might go without saying that 'no serious reader will consult Carey's novels as true history' but 'as fictional histories that together make up a biography of Australia',

> Carey's novels are as enlightening and truth telling about the cultural history and the Australian consciousness as any traditional history that, for methodological and institutional reasons, adheres to the truth criterion (p. 289).

The work of Carey in this sense builds more comprehensively on that of Grenville as well as, in *True History of the Kelly Gang*, authentically recreating an individual life; Carey does so well what Hilary Mantel, subsequently, has done, in bringing the full power of the novel to illuminate an individual person from the past while broadly keeping faith with history.

Although it is not the focus of this chapter, Mantel's work is a reminder of the wider international writing of lives in fiction and of some of the advances in its practice. Barbara Mujica, for example, has explored the lives of Frida Kahlo in *Frida: A Novel* (2001) and St Teresa of Ávila in *Sister Teresa* (2007), but used the device of an unreliable narrator to emphasise the role of the subjective in her work (see, Mujica 2016). Jed Mercurio's *American Adulter* (2009) is remarkable in that it frames the life of President Kennedy and his notorious sexual appetite through the lens of his medical history – a story that could not have been written until the medical records were released. Moreover, instead of making his imaginative focus on the inner consciousness, Mercurio transfers it to the President's body and its medical and chemical needs.

3220_Offshoot.indd 76 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Thus, given the varied ways in which fiction can function as a biographic space and the vitality that the products of such writing can bring to our understanding of the subjects they choose, these and other works mentioned collectively reiterate a claim for recognition of the value of the imagination in exploring historical lives in particular. Only through the imagination can such lives become 'real' in the way that David Malouf explained some years ago:

> The only way of grasping our history…the only way of really coming to terms with that is by people's entering into it in their imaginations, not by the world of facts, but by being there. And the only thing really which puts you there in that kind of way is fiction (quoted in McKenna 2006, p. 99).

While few writers will reach the scope of achievement that has been attributed to Malouf or Carey, the explorations of individual lives using fiction by Australian and New Zealand writers can be argued, *apropos* Gaile, to valuably contribute to the larger tapestry of antipodean identity.

References

Baxter, Carol 2011, *Captain Thunderbolt and his lady: the true story of bushrangers Frederick Ward and Mary Ann Bugg*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

Bedell, Geraldine 2006, 'Bush ballad', *The Guardian*, 22 January, viewed 7 August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jan/22/fiction.features2>.

Boldrewood, Rolf c1888/1957, *Robbery under arms: a story of life and adventure in the bush and in the goldfields of Australia,* Dymocks, Sydney.

Brien, Donna Lee 2004, 'The case of Mary Dean: sex, poisoning and gender relations in Australia', PhD thesis, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

Brien, Donna Lee 2009, '"Based on a true story": the problem of the perception of biographical truth in narratives based on real lives', *TEXT: The Journal of*

3220_Offshoot.indd 77 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Writers and Writing Courses, vol. 13, no. 2, viewed 9 October 2016, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct09/brien.htm>.

Brien, Donna Lee 2014, '"Welcome creative subversions": experiment and innovation in recent biographical writing', *TEXT: The Journal of Writers and Writing Courses*, vol. 18, no. 1, viewed 9 October 2016, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april14/brien.htm>.

Bryson, John 1985, *Evil angels,* Viking, Ringwood.

Caine, Barbara 2010, *Biography and history*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Carey, Peter 2000, *True history of the Kelly Gang,* University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Clarke, Marcus c1874/2009, *For the term of his natural life,* Penguin, Camberwell.

Clendinnen, Inga 2006, 'The history question: who owns the past?', *Quarterly Essay*, no. 23, pp. 1–22.

Conroy, Thom 2014, *The naturalist: a novel,* Vintage, Auckland.

Corris, Peter 2005, *The journal of Fletcher Christian: together with the history of Henry Corkill,* Vintage, Milson's Point.

Croome, Andrew 2009, *Document Z,* Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest.

Day, Marele 2002, *Mrs Cook: the real and imagined life of the captain's wife*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest.

Drewe, Robert 1991, *Our sunshine*, Pan Macmillan, Chippendale.

Enright, Nick 1994, *A Property of the Clan* [drama], Currency Press, Paddington, NSW.

Enright, Nick 1996, *Blackrock* [drama], Currency Press, Paddington, NSW.

Flanagan, Richard 2001, *Gould's book of fish: a novel in twelve fish*, Pan MacMillan, Sydney.

Freeman, Pamela 2005, *The black dress: Mary MacKillop's early years*, Black Dog Books, Fitzroy.

Gaile, Andreas 2010, *Rewriting history: Peter Carey's fictional biography of Australia*, Editions Rodopi, Amsterdam and London.

Gibson, Ross 2012, *26 views of the starburst world: William Dawes at Sydney Cove 1788–91*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, WA.

Grenville, Kate 2005, *The Secret River*, Text Publishing, Melbourne.

Grenville, Kate 2006, Interview with Ramona Koval, Books and Writing, *ABC Radio National*, 8 January, viewed 26 August 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandwriting/kate-grenville/3629894>.

Grenville, Kate 2008, *The Lieutenant*, Text Publishing, Melbourne.

Griffiths, Tom 2009, 'History and the creative imagination', *History Australia*, no. 6, pp. 74.1–74.16.

Haebich, Anne 2010, *Murdering stepmothers: the execution of Martha Rendell*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, WA.

Hill, Ernestine 1941/1946, *My love must wait: the story of Matthew Flinders*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney and London.

Knox, Malcolm 2000, 'An artist, a father, and convention dashed', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 March, p. 3.

3220_Offshoot.indd 78 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Kremmer, Christopher 2015, 'From dialectics to dialogue: Bakhtin, White and the "moorings" of fiction and history', *TEXT: The Journal of Writers and Writing Courses*, Special issue no. 28, viewed 15 July 2016, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue28/content.htm>.
Lackey, Michael 2016, 'Locating and defining the bio in biofiction', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies,* vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 3–10.
Lindsey, Keira 2016, *The convict's daughter*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
Lukács, Geyörgy 1969, *The historical novel*, Penguin, Harmondsworth and Ringwood.
MacFarlane, Robert 2002, 'Con fishing', *The Guardian,* Books section, 26 May, viewed 21 September 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/may/26/fiction.features1>.
Malouf, David 1980, *An imaginary life*, Picador, Sydney.
Matthews, Brian 1987, *Louisa*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne.
McKenna, Mark 2006, 'Writing the past', in Drusilla Modjeska (ed.), *The best Australian essays 2006*, Black Inc., Melbourne.
Mercurio, Jed 2009, *American Adulterer*, Simon, New York.
Modjeska, Drusilla 1990, *Poppy*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood.
Motion, Andrew 2000, *Wainewright the poisoner*, Faber and Faber, London.
Mujica, Barbara 2001, *Frida: a novel*, Overlook, New York.
Mujica, Barbara 2007, *Sister Teresa*, Overlook, New York.
Mujica, Barbara 2016, 'Going for the subjective: one way to write biographical fiction', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, no. 31, pp. 11–20.
Murray, James A. H., Bradley, Henry, Craigie, W. A. & Onions, C. T. 1933, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford.
Nagy, Ladislav 2014, 'Historical fiction as a mixture of history and romance: towards the genre definition of the historical novel', *Prague Journal of English Studies,* vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 7–17.
Orchard, Sonia 2009, *The virtuoso*, HarperCollins, Pymble.
Pinto, Sarah 2010, 'Emotional histories and historical emotions: looking at the past in historical novels', *Rethinking History*, no. 14, pp. 189–207.
Pree, Nathanael 2013, 'The starry floor from Observatory Hill', *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 55, November, viewed 11 January 2017, <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-November-2013/pree.html>.
Ramsden, Maureen A. 2011, 'Fictional frontiers: the interrelation of fact and fiction between the world and the text', *Neophilologus*, no. 95, pp. 341–59.
Reid, Ian 2015, *The mind's own place*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, WA.
Robb, Peter 1998, *M, a biography of European painter Caravaggio*, Duffy and Snellgrove, Sydney.
Scarparo, Susanna 2005, *Elusive subjects: biography as gendered metafiction*, Troubadour Publishing, Leicester.
Schabert, Ina 1990, *In quest of the other person: fiction as biography*, Francke Verlag, Tübingen.

3220_Offshoot.indd 79 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Scott, Kim 1999, *Benang: from the heart*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle, WA.

Scott, Kim 2010, *That deadman dance*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney.

Shearston, Trevor 2013, *Game*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest.

Slotkin, Richard 2005, 'Fiction for the purposes of history', *Rethinking History*, vol. 9, no. 2–3, pp. 221–36.

Stead, C. K. 2004, *Mansfield*, Vintage, London.

Styron, William 1968/1967, *The confessions of Nat Turner*, Jonathon Cape, London.

Vicars, James 2016, 'Discarding the disclaimer?: reappraising fiction as a mode of biography', *TEXT: The Journal of Writers and Writing Courses*, vol. 20, no. 1, viewed 11 January 2017, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april16/vicars.htm>.

Walker, Shirley 2009, *The ghost at the wedding*, Penguin, Camberwell.

White, Hayden 1976, 'The fictions of factual representation' in *Tropics of discourse: essays in cultural criticism*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, pp. 121–6.

Woolf, Virginia 1994, 'The new biography', in *The essays of Virginia Woolf: volume IV (1925–1928)*, The Hogarth Press, London.

3220_Offshoot.indd 80 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

BIOGRAPHICAL FORMS AND WAYS OF WRITING LIVES

Fig. 2. Alice Ewing 2017, ink on paper, collection of the artist

The Ivy Leaf Violet (Viola hederacea) *is formed of many physical parts making it a whole. Native to Australia, this is a creeper with inflorescence rising taller than the leaves. Its stem is softly pubescent, and rarely without hairs. Sepals have basal appendages and the corolla (collective term for petals) are of a pale-blue violet at the centre, melting into white terminals. Edible, these flowers are sometimes found decorating salads, and their trailing stolons (horizontal stem or runner) will root into the soil wherever they touch it.* Viola hederacea *can be propagated from seed, stem and root cuttings, or division.*

3220_Offshoot.indd 81 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

3220_Offshoot.indd 82

18/01/2018 3:33 PM

PROFILING THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL FIGURE IN AUSTRALIA

Patrick Mullins

Paddy Manning was lucky. Just over a month before publication of his biography of Malcolm Turnbull (2015), his biographical subject successfully challenged Tony Abbott for the leadership of the Liberal Party and thus took the Australian prime ministership from him. The biography originally commissioned, of the man 'touted as…Australia's next prime minister' (Lynch 2015), required only minor tweaks to take into account the unexpected fulfilment of that prediction. Publication did not need to be delayed. The marketing campaign required only a slight rejig. Moreover, the sudden elevation of his subject meant that Manning's insights were widely solicited, garnering free press coverage and publicity for the upcoming book.

It could have been very different. In 2010, Patrick Weller's (2014) biography of Kevin Rudd had just been sent to the printer when news broke of a successful leadership challenge from Julia Gillard. Publication was pulled. For four years, Weller's biography remained in limbo, hostage to the political fortunes of its subject. When the book finally made it into print in 2014, almost wholly rewritten, Weller's subject had left the political stage.

Writers and publishers of biographies of contemporary political figures worldwide regularly grapple with these possibilities, and are cognisant of the risks. The effects of competing biographers (as in 2004, when four writers simultaneously set out to chronicle

the life of Mark Latham), the problems of cooperation or denial of access from a subject, the prospect of defamation suits, and the potential to miss vital news or information all combine to make biographies of contemporary political figures fraught endeavours.

Yet such biographies continue to be produced; indeed, if anything, the appetite of publishers for these books appears to be growing internationally and domestically. In Australia, there were thirty-one biographies of serving politicians published between 1950 and 2000 – almost eight times the number published in the preceding fifty years. Yet already, in the first sixteen years of the new millennium, there have been twenty-two such books published (see, Loveday 1985; Dickenson 2010; Mullins 2014).

As the academics James Walter and Ben Pimlott have noted, the proliferation of these books has been met with engagement and criticism in Australia and internationally (Pimlott 2009, pp. 214–23; Walter 2014, pp. 124–5). Yet little of that criticism has apparently managed to influence practitioners. In spite of repeated critiques, and a 'convergence' between academic and journalistic writing that has developed over the past fifty years (Dickenson 2010, p. 119), practitioners regularly eschew the 'tasks of biography' that Walter commends. To critics within the academy, this failure to address questions larger than the 'romance of individual journeys' (Walter 2014, p. 124) makes such biographies 'instantly redundant' (Walter 2009, p. 104). To practitioners, these criticisms are beside the point: they argue that the conditions in which they practice their craft are not understood by academics. They work in a world where luck and disaster, like that which struck Manning and Weller, are real and finely balanced.

The proliferation of biographies of contemporary political figures since the 1980s may be explained by three factors. Firstly, the reluctance of academics in the twentieth century to

3220_Offshoot.indd 84 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

engage with the lives of contemporary figures. In Australia, as it was worldwide, biography was for a long time haunted by the deceased (Walter 1984, p. 59). Scholars long denied the utility of biographies of contemporary figures on grounds that the story of a still-living subject was inherently incomplete (Walter 1984, p. 59), and therefore studied only those who had died, producing what Lytton Strachey famously called the 'two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead' (1932, p. viii). In attending to the deceased, scholars arguably vacated coverage of the living, contemporary subject.

The second factor is the growth in popularity, from the 1960s onward, of the journalistic profile in Australia. Developed principally from the introduction of the interview in American daily journalism (Barnett 1951, p. 6), but also influenced by classic works like Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (Remnick 2001, p. x), the profile had, by the time it began to be practised in Australia, evolved to the point where the limited, one-dimensional perspective implicit in its name was no longer completely appropriate (Yagoda 2000, p. 137). The journalistic profile had come to share the aspiration of biography: 'the evocation of a personality', as Lincoln Barnett put it (1951, p. 1). Barnett, a progenitor of the form at *Life* magazine, argued that the difference between the two was slight: 'What they [profilists] attempt to do in the space of a few thousand words is qualitatively no less ambitious than what a conventional biography undertakes in the galloping ranges of a book' (1951, p. 1).

The third factor has been a shift of public attitudes. Interest in the nature of prominent people – as suggested by the popularity of the interview and profile elsewhere (Barnett 1951, p. 6) – was joined by a growing consensus that 'someone who chooses a career as a public figure forsakes some of their rights to privacy' (Walter 1984, p. 59). The increased influence of the Canberra

3220_Offshoot.indd 85 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Press Gallery in coverage of politics in the early 1960s (Lloyd 1988, pp. 192–4) additionally fostered a 'wider public interest in national affairs' (Whitington 1969, p. vii).

Attentive to these shifts in public attitude and interest in national affairs and personalities, aware that their skills in writing profiles overlapped with those required for writing biography (Weinberg 1992, p. 3) and conscious that the field was uncontested, journalists came to dominate and popularise the biography of the contemporary political figure in Australia.

Their approach to the form has been largely the same for many years. Writing in 2007, former politician and academic Neal Blewett wearily described the typical content of the biography of the contemporary political figure:

> These books are hastily compiled confections: a regurgitation of published articles on the subject's career – extensive but scarcely intensive personal research – plus a dollop of his speeches and writings, mixed together with a heady collection of quotes from colleagues and associates, frequently unattributed (2007, p. 8).

Others have echoed this critical description. Historian Jackie Dickenson calls such books 'quickies', noting that they are 'produced in a hurry', are 'necessarily superficial', have a short shelf life and often 'rehash material' (2010, p. 114). Walter labels them 'mediocre', the form as frequently banal, partisan, and lacking in usable insight:

> The way they are written – under-researched, relying on untested stories and compilations of the clippings, with the catalyst for publication being a market opportunity –

3220_Offshoot.indd 86 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> ensures that we rarely learn enough [about the subject] to justify the enterprise (2009, p. 104).

Few of these descriptions and criticisms are without merit. Yet they do occlude an understanding of the forces that necessitate the characteristics criticised: how long is 'quickly', and why are they produced so? Why are they 'rehashed' and what does this mean? Why, and how, are these books 'superficial'?

A case study reveals common traits that allow for a more complete understanding. To wit, the biographical studies of Kevin Rudd that were published while he was in office – Stuart's *Kevin Rudd: An Unauthorised Political Biography* (2007), Macklin's *Kevin Rudd: The Biography* (2007), Marr's *Quarterly Essay* 'Power Trip: The Political Journey of Kevin Rudd' (2010) and its reprint in *Rudd v. Abbott* (2013) – were all produced in under a year, from commission to publication (Mullins 2014). Unusual in the publishing industry, this rapid production was caused by the desire of these biographers and their publishers to engage with the time-specific context of a likely election or political debate (author's interviews with Macklin, Marr, and Stuart; see also, Rosenbloom 2012; Mullins 2014). This affected every decision that followed: as Marr has noted, so far as these books are concerned, 'timing is just about everything' (2015, p. 4).

The timing shapes what the biographer can and cannot do. The option to read primary source material – such as Cabinet papers, correspondence and financial records – is closed to them. Few, if any, such records are likely to be available to the biographer working with their subject still living and breathing (Blewett 2006; Haigh 2013); fewer still will be available to the biographer who is working on the short deadline. This forces a reliance on material that is already publicly available and testimonies from

3220_Offshoot.indd 87 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

interviewees. In the case of the latter, there is the advantage that people who know the subject will be available (Walter 1984, p. 61). This offers opportunities, but introduces its own problems: testimony is difficult to evaluate because of the context of publication. A reliance on publicly available material can be useful for verifying accounts, but simultaneously may make a biography little more than a compilation of press clippings. It is obvious, then, that time constraints dictate the extent of a biographer's use of sources and how far they can dig past the public image towards the private reality. As Marr notes:

> Both the form and the time are the excitement of a project of this sort…It dictates everything. It dictates choices. Choices, choices, choices: an essay is a product of radical choices made throughout its research and writing (author's interview, 20 May 2012).

Why, then, with all the restrictions that time imposes, do biographers and publishers yoke themselves to these short deadlines? For publishers, the commercial opportunity of engaging with a subject who is well known and in a position to make news is certainly not to be downplayed, but it is not the only factor at work. As John Thompson writes of the publishing industry:

> This is a world in which passion, commitment and belief play a crucial role – whether it is political commitment, countercultural beliefs or a passion for certain kinds of writing and literature (2010, p. 159).

Given the risks associated with publishing biographies of contemporary political figures, these factors are not mere platitudes.

3220_Offshoot.indd 88 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Black Inc.'s *Quarterly Essay* series – a regular disseminator of such biographies (often later republished in standalone book editions) – aims, it says, to 'present significant contributions to the general debate' on the 'widest range of political, intellectual and cultural opinion' (Marr 2010, dust jacket).

For political biographers, short deadlines are integral to the form. Mindful of the power that a biographer wields to shape the perceptions and ideas of a subject (Oliphant 1883, p. 88), biographers who engage with the zeitgeist of public debate can understand themselves as performing a civic duty:

> *Macklin:* I wanted it out before the election. I wanted the Australian people to know who the hell that Rudd was, and who they were voting for or against. I saw it very much as an important element, to let people know who he was (author's interview, 5 December 2011).

> *Stuart:* I thought it would be an important book. Voters needed to know whom they were voting for…The book had to be out before the election because afterwards no one would be interested in reading it (author's interview, 4 February 2012).

> *Marr:* Political biography – if it's out in time – can help us decide the fate of the country by telling us who these contenting [*sic*] politicians really *are* (Marr 2015, p. 4).

The skills of the journalist are invaluable on this point. Their ability to 'write clearly for readers of all levels rather than other holders of doctorates' and 'to compose at the word processor before the deadline is long past' (Weinberg 1992, p. 3)

3220_Offshoot.indd 89 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

ensures that the work will be completed.

Were, however, such journalists aiming for engagement with the 'tasks of biography' that Walter commends? Were these journalists/biographers aiming for engagement with any academic theories or principles about biography? Unanimously, the answer was no.

> *Macklin:* I simply set the parameters, [and] so I just worked as intensely as I could in that time. I didn't feel that it was very important to talk to other people because, to my mind, the object of the exercise was the man revealing himself (author's interview, 5 December 2011).

> *Stuart:* There was never going to be any opportunity to place this book into an academic genre (author's interview, 4 February 2012).

> *Marr:* I'm not indifferent to it as a source of insight, but it's completely impossible to write coherent biographies on a purely psychiatric grid (author's interview, 20 May 2012).

The yardstick by which Walter judges practitioners of the form, then, is worth probing. Political scientist Alan Davies put forward those 'tasks of biography' in the early 1970s, just as the popularity and prevalence of biography amongst public audiences was attracting attention from the academy. Attempting to describe what should go into the 'ideal biography' (1972, p. 109), Davies drew on the work of the American academic John Dollard, who prescribed a 'systematic biography' with guidelines that sprung

3220_Offshoot.indd 90 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

'from cultural anthropology and clinical psychology' (in Davies 1972, p. 110). These include consideration of a subject's style of work, outlook, the influence of family in transmitting culture, the process of social learning, and experience. Davies' aim in prescribing these criteria was to ensure that a biographical endeavour was 'a deliberate attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it' (Dollard quoted in Davies 1972, p. 110), a biography that was attentive to the demands of the social sciences.

Is this the point on which the criticism of biographies of contemporary political figures misses its mark? Despite the elevation and commendation of Davies' tasks, there is no consensus amongst academics or practitioners that these criteria or this goal should be the yardstick by which a biography is judged. Allan Martin, the academic and biographer of long-serving Prime Minister Robert Menzies (1993, 1999), was highly critical of the use of psychoanalytical theories in biography (see, Henderson 2008, pp. 25–7). The qualities that biographer and academic Steve Weinberg suggests should be present in a good biography say nothing about defining the growth of a subject or making theoretical sense of the subject (1992, pp. 19–33), and indeed the scope of Weinberg's suggested qualities is broader – encompassing aesthetic imperatives and ethical issues – than the criteria put forward by Davies. In another vein, biographer and academic Ray Monk argues that 'biography is fundamentally and essentially, to its very fingertips, as it were, a *non*theoretical exercise' (2007, p. 528) better conceived as 'an exemplar of Wittgenstein's notion of the "understanding that consists in seeing connections"' (2007, p. 567).

The commendation of Davies' criteria as the ultimate standard and goal is only one perspective, yoked to the demands of social

3220_Offshoot.indd 91 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

science and cultural anthropology, and to the 'larger questions' that Walter argues all biographies should seek to answer. How then, to evaluate these biographies when practitioners are not directing their work towards such questions? Furthermore, regardless of whether or not these biographies seek and/or fail to answer such questions, are there any redeeming features that might be considered? That the background of so many of these practitioners is journalism suggests a new way of evaluating these works.

The hard news form of much daily journalism is typically uniform in style: expository, presenting information by priority of importance, under one thousand words in length, usually written in a set 'house' style (Ricketson 2012, pp. 218–22). Yet this form, as Ricketson notes, is less than optimal for 'conveying emotion, atmosphere, and context' (2012, p. 218). The emphasis on what is new can preclude context or overemphasise new information at the expense of underlying, unchanging information. The speed with which such journalism is typically gathered and published also limits its scope and depth.

These limitations of the hard news form make book-length journalism – a term that can be applied to biographies of contemporary political figures, possessing as they do the six elements that Ricketson argues is necessary in the form (2012, pp. 37–40) – a versatile and powerful medium for the presentation of information. For, although freed from the multiple daily deadlines and stylistic confines of daily journalism, the biographer is nonetheless able to engage with the time-specific demand for information and knowledge about a subject. The biographer of a contemporary political figure writes journalism but also something more. Graham Perkin, editor of *The Age* in the 1960s and 1970s, suggested that news has its 'roots in the past and a stake in the future' (quoted in Ricketson 2012, p. 220); a definition that fits a biography of the

3220_Offshoot.indd 92 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

contemporary political figure, where the retracing of the past is hinged on how that past might influence the future.

The knowledge of the past and present, with implications for the future, is an imperative of the form; a biography of a contemporary political figure must engage with both, delivering information that is old and yet new, as Marr suggests:

> An essay of this kind has to be fresh. Now, that doesn't mean that everything has to be *new* – because you can't make sense of the life or the career with a rule like that – but you have to find fresh examples of what you're talking about (author's interview, 20 April 2012).

The length at which the biographer works enables him or her to present context, complexity and ambiguity, even as an account may be limited by time and form. Stylistically, the flexibility of the form – encompassing storytelling devices such as dialogue, scenes, versatility of voice – allows the biographer to present information in a manner that can be as compelling as a novel. The demands of the form, then, can provide a powerful way of engaging with the demands of a news cycle while simultaneously stepping outside of it. Furthermore, the ability to go in-depth into a subject at length, using a form that is versatile, in a manner that is accessible to a wide audience, provides writers with an opportunity to provide readers useful material in gaining more understanding of the politician being studied.

The ability of the biography of the contemporary political figure to provide the foundations for later biographers is the other strong redeeming feature. Biographers do not work from nothing: biographical research, as Tracey Arklay argues, frequently builds on what has been uncovered and obtained by others (2006, p. 14).

3220_Offshoot.indd 93 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Because the method is historical, interpretative, selective and subjective, it is unlikely that any biography will be definitive. Even in terms of the biographies of contemporary political figures, where the research is superficial and hurried, the information uncovered and documented can be of immense use to future biographers and historians.

Despite their relatively recent publication, this is evident in the Rudd texts. Marr's *Quarterly Essay* (2010) builds on the work of Macklin and Stuart. As Marr argues, their biographies were 'essential preparation':

> I piggybacked on both of them as I piggybacked on a number of newspaper profiles about Rudd and all sorts of other material…They had done all that immensely hard work and I just took advantage of it shamelessly (author's interview, 20 April 2012).

The use was more than simply a citation or use of information that Macklin and Stuart had obtained. Noting that the Macklin and Stuart biographies of Rudd were 'their views' and that he had his, Marr suggested that the biographies by Stuart and Macklin were 'crucial' to his essay:

> They not only told me what I should pay attention to, but they showed me what didn't need to be paid attention to. They pointed me to the crucial episodes in his [Rudd's] life (author's interview, 20 April 2012).

Marr's interpretation and presentation of Rudd is different to that of Macklin and Stuart. Marr's Rudd is neither 'the man

3220_Offshoot.indd 94 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

for our time', as Macklin labelled him (2007, p. 209), nor is he the distant and 'still-moving' man of ambition that emerges in Stuart's biography (2007, p. 3). Instead, Marr's Rudd is flawed: decent, hardworking, intelligent – but also angry, indecisive, and lacking in empathy (2010, p. 86). Thus, although partly reliant on publicly available information and the work of those who had preceded him, Marr's study was, at the time of its publication, a new perspective.

Subsequent works such as Roy Williams' *In God They Trust? The Religious Beliefs of Australia's Prime Ministers 1901–2013* (2013), ANZSOG publication *The Rudd Government* (2010), and Patrick Weller's *Kevin Rudd: Twice Prime Minister* (2014) have also used biographical studies of Rudd to supplement their information. In the case of Williams' text, the works of Macklin, Stuart and Marr are quoted to document Williams' exploration of the role of Rudd's faith in his political life – again, a new perspective. Weller's text even devotes a section to refuting the case and arguments put forward by Marr (2014, p. 86).

In the midst of its time-specific relevancy, then, biographies of contemporary political figures provide an opportunity to engage with the time-sensitive demands of daily journalism while moving beyond journalism's spatial and form-driven confines. Such biographies provide information, examples, quotations and – to some extent – primary source material for the investigations of future biographers. Taken together, these characteristics point to the worth of the form: not exclusively journalism or biography, the biography of the contemporary political figure in Australia straddles and borrows from both, mediating between their demands, conventions, and possibilities.

3220_Offshoot.indd 95 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

References

Arklay, Tracey 2006, 'Political biography: its contribution to political science', in Tracey Arklay, John Nethercote & John Wanna (eds.), *Australian political lives: chronicling political careers and administrative histories*, ANU E-Press, Canberra, pp. 13–24.

Aulich, Chris & Evans, Mark (eds.) 2010, *The Rudd Government*, ANZSOG, ANU E-Press, Canberra.

Barnett, Lincoln 1951, *Writing life: sixteen close-ups*, William Sloane & Associates, London.

Blewett, Neal 2006, 'The personal writings of politicians', in Tracey Arklay, John Nethercote & John Wanna (eds.), *Australian political lives: chronicling political careers and administrative histories*, ANU E-Press, Canberra, pp. 91–6.

Blewett, Neal 2007, 'Quickie Kevins', *Australian Book Review*, July/August, pp. 8–9.

Davies, Alan 1972, *Essays in political sociology*, Cheshire Press, Melbourne.

Dickenson, Jackie 2010, 'Journalists writing political history', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 56, no. 1, pp. 105–19.

Haigh, Gideon 2013, 'The rise and rise of the Prime Minister', *Meanjin*, vol. 72, no. 1, pp. 40–61.

Henderson, Gerard 2008, 'Documentation: Allan Martin on Judith Brett and psychological history', *Sydney Institute Quarterly,* no. 32, pp. 25–7.

Lloyd, C. J. 1988, *Parliament and the press: the federal parliamentary press gallery 1901–88*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

Loveday, P. 1985, 'Political history and political biography', in D Aitkin (ed.), *Surveys of Australian political science*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 86–118.

Lynch, Jared 2015, 'Malcolm Turnbull political biography to rock the boat', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 April, viewed 13 October 2015, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/malcolm-turnbull-political-biography-to-rock-the-boat-20150408-1mglgg.html>.

Macklin, Robert 2007, *Kevin Rudd: the biography*, Viking, Sydney.

Manning, Paddy 2015, *Born to rule: the unauthorised biography of Malcolm Turnbull*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

Marr, David 2010, 'Power trip: the political journey of Kevin Rudd', *Quarterly Essay*, no. 38, Black Inc., Melbourne, pp. 1–91.

Marr, David 2013, *Rudd v. Abbott*, Black Inc., Melbourne.

Marr, David 2015, 'Hazel Rowley memorial lecture: politics and character', Adelaide Festival, 4 March, viewed 21 December 2017 <http://hazelrowley.com/wordpress1/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Hazel-Rowley-Memorial-Lecture.pdf>.

Martin, Allan 1993, *Robert Menzies: a life, volume 1, 1894–1943*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

Martin, Allan 1999, *Robert Menzies: A life, volume 2, 1944–1978*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

3220_Offshoot.indd 96 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Monk, Ray 2007, 'Life without theory: biography as an exemplar of philosophical understanding', *Poetics Today*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 527–70.
Mullins, Patrick 2014, 'Between whirling poles: profiling the biography of the contemporary political figure', PhD thesis, University of Canberra, Canberra.
Oliphant, Margaret 1883, 'The ethics of biography', *Contemporary Review*, no. 44, pp. 76–93.
Pimlott, Ben 2009, 'The future of political biography', *Political Quarterly*, Supplement, September, vol. 80, pp. 214–23.
Remnick, David (ed.) 2001, *Life stories: profiles from the New Yorker*, Random House, USA.
Ricketson, Matthew 2012, 'The new appreciation of long-form journalism in a short-form world', *Australian Journalism Today*, Palgrave MacMillan, South Yarra, pp. 217–33.
Rosenbloom, Henry 2012, 'We need to talk about Kevin (twice)', *Henry's blog,* 15 February, viewed 12 January 2016, <https://scribepublications.com.au/explore/henrys-blog/we-need-to-read-about-kevin-twice>.
Strachey, Lytton 1932, *Eminent Victorians*, Chatto & Windus, London.
Stuart, Nicholas 2007, *Kevin Rudd: an unauthorised political biography*, Scribe, Melbourne.
Thompson, John 2010, *Merchants of culture: the publishing business in the twenty-first century*, Polity Press, UK.
Walter, James 1984, 'The biography of the contemporary figure and its pitfalls', in James Walter & R. Nugent-Nathan (eds.), *Biographers at work*, Institute for Modern Biography, Brisbane, pp. 59–62.
Walter, James 2009, 'Political biography', in R. A. W. Rhodes (ed.), *The Australian study of politics*, Palgrave MacMillan, UK, pp. 97–106.
Walter, James 2014, '"It is not a biography…", It is executive practice', in G. Davis & R. A. W. Rhodes (eds.), *The craft of governing: the contribution of Patrick Weller to Australian political science*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 123–43.
Weinberg, Steve 1992, *Telling the untold story: how investigative reporters are changing the craft of biography*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia.
Weller, Patrick 2014, *Kevin Rudd: twice prime minister*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
Whitington, Don 1969, *The House will divide: a review of Australian federal politics*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne.
Williams, Roy 2013, *In God they trust?: the religious beliefs of Australia's prime ministers, 1901–2013*, Bible Society, Australia.
Yagoda, Ben 2000, *About town: The New Yorker and the world it made*, De Capo Press, USA.

3220_Offshoot.indd 97 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

GATHERERS

Jeanine Leane

Grandmother learnt to gather – map Country
with little feet as morning's pink horizons bring heat
and light to long-water Murrumbidgee women gather
in the early air when dew drips from frond and leaf
while mibrulong nesting in hollow gum sings the new day
gurru warbles – maliyan soars high above majestic
Baiame watches the balaagangirbang with their
wide-eyed ballis cooing on the sturdy hips of gunis as they
gather under the watchful eyes of balaagans
skilled with time and wise with age – custodians of
place – keepers of the secrets of women teaching
the young minhis and mingaans the lore of the land

Uloola marks time – rises high burns Country cobar-red
migays forage for guddi and nharrang – catch warramba
by Wollundry shores – net marrumin in the gudha of clear water
dig for cumbungi in the marshes – gather budyaan's eggs
among the reeds – search for buugang among miniature mountains
of moss – Grandmother learns to look for small things that matter –
to take carefully – leave some always – to gather is to share

Grandmother learnt to weave under shade of uardy
when wirring blows hot and dry across the plains

3220_Offshoot.indd 98 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

uloola's tangent moves above – turning time and tide –
Grandmother watches the nimble fingers of migays
twine and loop braiding stories with reeds and grasses gathered
weaving words of wisdom with baskets and dillys – crafting coolamons
to learn that trees do not bleed when bark is taken – they give
share – bear the scar to remember – to remind us
to always take carefully – gather only what is needed –
gather to return – return to gather

As steady hands sift through earthy archives – Grandmother
learns to sow seeds gathered – to return to Country what it gave –
to gather is to release
She listens – gathers stories – reads them in the land she walks
'*Wagirra softly*' the balaagans tell her – tread carefully on Country
they say – '*Balumbambal always watching*' – the ancient ones –
dead but not gone – their blood flows through us – gathers us
listen – the dead speak all the time

Uloola's rays fade to a deep red giragan
arana's pale face peeks out from behind the hills
madhan is gathered and fires are lit
bilabang swirls milky white across the dark sky
night's black blanket swaddles the ngurang circle
beneath chunky blazing stars – carcoar croaks a lullaby
uloola rises and sets – arana waxes and wanes
turns day to night – Baiame watches

Grandmother grows from wanggaay to ngamandhuray
now she learns to gather secrets – things that only
women know and keep deep in storage vessels of memory –
the seamless baskets of the mind where

3220_Offshoot.indd 99 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

what is woven will never unravel
Grandmother becomes a wingadhan and teaches her
children to gather – to store history in safe hands
to share and gather again

Colonial collectors come steal and kill
Gatherers are dispersed hunted herded – collected
as artefacts – recorded as anthropology – listed
in catalogues – displayed as scientific specimens –
exhibits A to Z of the primitive – snapped up by
Klaatsch's camera for Basedow's missing links –
Gatherers are collected – amassed – classified –
arranged in order of hierarchy white to black
all our Grandmothers become scattered words on
pages in someone else's collection – collectors do not
give back what they take

Everything is collected but memory that was gathered
stored and kept – Grandmother cradles secrets between
walls that capture her – sees her history manhandled –
watches like a silent prisoner in someone else's story
as everything else is pillaged except for that held
in the intricately deep woven basket of her mind –
no man lays claim to this – Grandmother listens for
the Balumbambal – only the white man thinks
the dead can't speak – she hears them – they
speak of what can never be stolen

Granddaughters listen to the gatherings buried safe
as seeds in the Country of Grandmother's memory

3220_Offshoot.indd 100 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

like the women before us we look for small things –
listen for silences – gather and gather again –
restore – regenerate – remember.

3220_Offshoot.indd 101 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

THE FRAME AND THE SCORE: KNOWING A SUBJECT DIFFERENTLY THROUGH POETIC BIOGRAPHY

Jessica L. Wilkinson

In 2005, six months into my PhD, I encountered the work of US contemporary poet Susan Howe in an anthology of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry. Intrigued by her experimentations, which resonated with me in a much stronger way than those of her male counterparts, I investigated her extensive oeuvre of poetry and essays. What began as an initial fascination bloomed into a four-year obsession, as Howe's work became the centre of my study. My interest was sustained by the poet's dismantling of genres I had come to know as 'history' and 'biography'; I characterised Howe's wild experiments as a new kind of history writing attentive to marginal or underrepresented voices – figures struck from the record. What struck me as significant about Howe's work was that she was not attempting to rewrite those voices or bring them into a kind of focus – rather, she was attempting to meet those voices in a manner befitting the subject, in many cases preserving their marginality. She was not putting those voices on the map but, to borrow a phrase from Stephen Greenblatt, she was 'transform[ing] the act of mapmaking' (2002, p. 61).

One of my favourites is Howe's long poem *The Liberties*, which takes the supposed secret lover/wife of Jonathan Swift, Hester 'Stella' Johnson, as its subject. Swift's important social position as poet, satirist and Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin

3220_Offshoot.indd 102 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

presents a possible reason for the fact that not much is known of Johnson; her letters and poems have mostly disappeared, and no genuine portrait of her exists. Concealment of their relationship was followed by attempts to destroy its traces; whilst Johnson and Swift frequently wrote to each other when separated (his letters were published as *Journal to Stella*), most of *her* letters have been lost (or destroyed). My study of this work focused on what I called Howe's 'drifting portrait' of Johnson – her attempt to use the very few extant traces of her to develop a sense of this woman's life (Wilkinson 2013). Rather than 'filling in the gaps' – which were significant in this case – Howe's 'drifting portrait' helps us to imagine a new kind of biographical representation/portrait of the feminine and of the multiple frames that shape, without ultimately imprisoning, such a subject. 'Facts' and 'unity' give way, in this work, to a complex poeticism, suggesting that Johnson cannot be reduced to or held within conventional lines. The reader must negotiate an array of visual and textual elements (including found images, white space, visual poem experiments, literary references, cryptic word games and even an unusual poetic theatre script). While traditional histories/portraits create the illusion that they are revealing an unchanging, objective world, Howe's work begins from the recognition that there are only fragments, surfaces, glimpses, and metaphors of a reality to which we don't have unmediated access: 'This is certain— / That is mist— / I cannot hold' (Howe 1990, p. 168). Indeed, there are themes, motifs and similes throughout *The Liberties* that relate to movement, flight, travel and birds, emphasising that all attempts to portray its subject are characterised by instability – they 'cannot hold' – as illustrated by the following poem:

3220_Offshoot.indd 103 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

We are
in a sandheap
We are
discovered
not solid
the floor
based
on misunderstanding (Howe 1990, p. 211)

In this, I discovered, through Howe, that poetry and experiment might proffer a pathway for biographical interventions. I began to ask myself: how might I test what poetic language can do in concert with those complex spaces of 'recovery'?

Writing Marion Davies

I had decided to write a book-length poem exploring (perhaps somewhat predictably, as a young feminist) a neglected female voice. The silent cinema caught my eye as a potential metaphorical backdrop, and as I was scrolling through a tacky website showcasing Hollywood starlets, I found Marion Davies – hardly 'marginal', of course, and yet there was something familiar about her connection with media mogul William Randolph Hearst. I was cast back to my first year at university, when *Citizen Kane* (Welles 1941) was on the cinema studies 'must watch' list. In the film, Kane, the power-hungry newspaper tycoon, divorces his first wife to pursue a talentless opera singer, Susan Alexander, and make her a star. It is widely known that Orson Welles had based Kane on Hearst, yet it was the film's quasi-portrayal of Davies as the ditzy alcoholic Susan that upset Hearst enough to prohibit all mention of the film in his newspapers. Welles later apologised for the connections that were inferred between Susan

3220_Offshoot.indd 104 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

and Marion, and admitted that Davies was far from talentless; the 'problem' was, perhaps, that she was a talented comedienne, and Hearst did not want to see audiences laughing at her, no matter what the context might have been. Rather, he wanted to see her in extravagant costume spectacles or period dramas; these would show off her true talents as an actress and, hopefully, win her accolades and adoration. Hearst established Cosmopolitan Pictures specifically to produce these starring vehicles for her, though they impeded her forte in comedy.

Stop! Look! ***Listen!***

<enter "Mr. Fisher">

a wristwatch lost in as now drift
a wristwatch
a… a… a… false name

Pickles St. Clair and Mischief and Never just opening my palm
a Tiffany wristwatch e Mr. Hearst is always generous
tripping along z a l just a bit of pocket
money
a wristwatch passeding or fever
trip
picked up by some one look! a wristwatch

smashed stolen spinning glass slips a

laughing Miss Chief white as snow
laughing and singing sp
digging up the snow
swinging down st a the

tracts

a wristwatch

He replaced it.

Fig. 3. Jessica Wilkinson 2012, p. 12.

3220_Offshoot.indd 105 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

As I investigated further, I discovered numerous biographical works about Hearst that made little, and sometimes no, mention of Davies, despite their thirty-three years together. The fact that her own posthumously published 'autobiography' had his name in the title – *The Times We Had: Life With William Randolph Hearst* (Davies 1975) – particularly annoyed me. How could it be that his name, not hers, is in the title of her autobiography? This volume was cobbled together from a series of taped interviews, in which Davies often concealed or obscured the facts – that she had a child with Hearst in secret, for example, was revealed only when both Davies and daughter, Patricia Lake, had died. Davies participated in her own obfuscation and erasure, then, out of love for this powerful man, to protect his reputation.

Figure 3 shows one of the first poems I wrote, based on the early days of Hearst and Davies' relationship. Davies began her acting career on stage with the Ziegfeld Follies, and Hearst was in the audience when Davies delivered her first line on stage. Unfortunately, Davies had a stutter that was exemplified when nervous; this impediment may have attracted Hearst in the first place, however, as he was known to have a soft spot for people with a demonstrable affliction or weakness. He bought her a Tiffany wristwatch, which she lost in the snow during a night out on the town with fellow Follies-girl Pickles St. Clair. Admitting this to Hearst, he promptly bought her another. This poem allowed me to dwell in the multiple spaces aroused by that anecdote, exploring Davies' cheekiness and fondness for parties and alcohol; her seeming disregard for expensive objects (later reinforced when she sold one million dollars worth of jewellery to keep Hearst from bankruptcy); the text as tracks/tracts in the snow, elusive; and, of course, Davies' stutter. While composing this poem, I was reading more from Howe, who notes:

3220_Offshoot.indd 106 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> History has happened. The narrator is disobedient. A return is necessary, a way for women to go. Because we are in the stutter. We were expelled from the Garden of the Mythology of the American Frontier. The drama's done. We are the wilderness. We have come on to the stage stammering (1993, p. 181).

Could poetry, then, I asked, provide a path for Davies, out of the metaphorical stutter? A confluence of ideas and some early writing experiments led me to wonder what kind of stories about Davies we might have if we could hear some clearer 'truths' beyond Hearst's hyper-patriarchal control. I had found my subject, and was determined to give voice to the 'real' Marion Davies, but soon discovered that the parameters of this initial pursuit were somewhat naïve.

In 2006, I travelled to the US to visit the Susan Howe archives at the University of California, San Diego. Rifling through her vast papers – correspondence, diaries, artworks, drafts and working notes – I became attuned to Howe's own practices, and how her research would lead her not only towards her subjects, but also to the form and process of her compositions. She would later write:

> In the dim light of narrowly spaced overshadowing shelves I felt the spiritual and solitary freedom of an inexorable order only chance creates. Quiet articulates poetry. These Lethean tributaries of lost sentiments and found philosophies had a life-giving effect on the *process* of my writing (Howe 2007, p. 14).

Here, Howe admits communion with her subjects in the archive, allowing chance and unexpected encounters within these spaces

3220_Offshoot.indd 107 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

to lead her writing. Perhaps it is fortunate that, at the conclusion of this research, I continued on to Los Angeles, to visit the UCLA Film and Television Archive in Westwood, so that I could undertake my own research. What I found had a 'life-giving effect' on my own writing process.

For days on end I viewed videotape versions of Davies' films, my sight fuzzing around the edges with fatigue. With such intensity of film viewing, the concept of the 'frame' and the 'screen' came to the fore; my relationship with Marion Davies was mediated through her performance. I began to recognise patterns in storyline, and details became predictable, not just in relation to plot, but also with how power dynamics were at work in the representation of women – I noted, for instance, that men's words in the silent films were more often showcased through text boxes than the women's, who were evidently seen more than heard. And, of course, I knew that Davies had a stutter, so I viewed her talking pictures with friendly concern, listening for cracks in the façade.

Like Howe, I began to gather material not only through the bare facts of Davies' appearances in film, and how she was represented in books and articles, but also through the circumstances of my personal encounters with these supposed facts. Perhaps my most important 'encounter' was with UCLA's Archive Facility in Hollywood, where rare and damaged films are repaired or restored. At this location, I was able to watch some of Davies' films from the original reels. A feature-length film usually constituted seven to ten reels, each running for about eight minutes. As a fragile medium, however, some of these reels were severely damaged, or had turned to dust. Howe states that 'connections between unconnected things are the unreal reality of Poetry', and these disintegrating films presented themselves as a metaphor for the

3220_Offshoot.indd 108 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

disintegration and fading of stories and memory over time (1985, p. 7). Davies was fast becoming my Stella, and I asked myself several questions: How do I tell a story when the factual evidence is riddled with lies, rumour, gaps and errors? How do I write a biography when the physical, material documents are failing?

Returning home to Australia, the form of my work *marionette* (2012) began to take shape – I split the work into nine sections, or 'reels', where each page is a more-or-less self-contained portrait relating to Davies' life and experience. Together, the sequence formed a biographical text, the pages, strung out, like single frames in a film strip. But rather than a chronological time line of significant birth-to-death events in Davies' life, the reels were constructed according to theme or idea, as clusters of thinking about her life in time. That is, as Davies' life was lived through performance, *marionette* would stage its own performance in which connections would be articulated by the reader in a similar way to how a puppeteer may pick up the strings of the

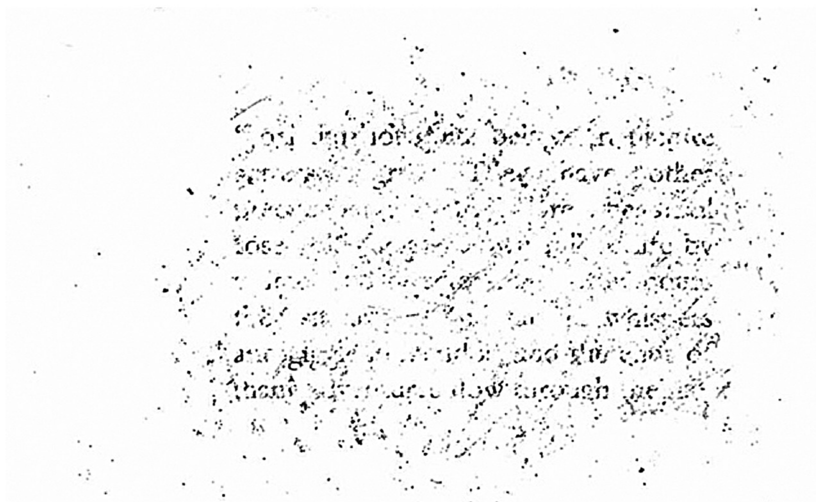


Fig. 4. Jessica Wilkinson 2012, p. 70.

3220_Offshoot.indd 109 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

marionette and engage the performative dimension. (Indeed, 'strings' appear as taut lines throughout *marionette*, a gesture made to readers to participate in generating 'movement' and meaning.) Further, as disintegration, damage and erasure were so significant to my research experience, these would also be incorporated into the biography, both literally and metaphorically, as sites of contested fact.

I soon realised that Susan Howe had led me to new biographical approaches, in which each event experienced and trace encountered in the time line of *marionette*'s development had an effect on how I wrote the poems. Alert to encounters with 'erasure' – social, circumstantial, metaphorical – whilst attuned to the entwined facts of the frame and the performance in relation to Davies' life, this 'biography' took shape as a result of such challenges in relation to women's histories. Yet, this project gave rise to the desire for a new challenge: what would happen if I were to write a poetic biography of a historical figure who was already widely documented? Must an experimental biography be reserved for marginal or obscured subjects?

Writing Percy Grainger

When writing *marionette*, many Australian poets, writers and colleagues were intrigued as to why I wanted to write about an American actress, rather than an Australian one, as if biographical interests had national parameters. It was perhaps the sting of this suggestion, accompanied by my own tendency towards guilt, that made me receptive to Australian subject matter. For, during this time, I was collaborating with a musician/composer friend of mine to realise *marionette* as a performance installation. Several conversations on rehearsal breaks were spent discussing experimental music, and Australian-born musician and composer Percy

3220_Offshoot.indd 110 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Grainger featured prominently as one of my friend's interests. It was not long before I was completely absorbed in biographies on this enigmatic character, learning about his unusual compositions and Free Music experiments, his marathon walks and extreme exercise rituals, his self-flagellation, and his unusually close relationship with his mother Rose.

Contrary to the historical traces of Marion Davies, which suffered the combined effects of celebrity gossip, rumour, gaps and obfuscation, information on Percy Grainger is far from lacking. On the grounds of the University of Melbourne stands the Grainger Museum, established by Grainger himself in 1938 to house more than 100,000 artefacts, including correspondence, manuscripts, scores, artworks, clothes, furniture, recordings, his whip collection, and other personal items. In addition to this, Grainger House in White Plains, New York, where Grainger was based for his final forty years, is now a living archive containing two basement vaults and several rooms, stacked with traces of his everyday life. There are also many books and articles written about Grainger. This led to a series of questions. What to make of such an abundance of information? How to pay homage to the sheer breadth of his works, ideas, philosophies and writings? How to contain such a work? And, why did I need to add to the pile?

For six years I immersed myself in an auditory world of Grainger's compositions, arrangements and Free Music experiment snippets (these were the only files loaded on my old iPod shuffle) while walking to and from work, along streams, through the Blue Mountains and so on. I began to feel the structure and form of this biography emerging along the musical line, following Grainger's curious philosophical and linguistic pathways, sometimes finding myself in conflict with his perspectives. I spent considerable time scouring documents in the Grainger Museum, to which all good

3220_Offshoot.indd 111 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Grainger scholars are drawn. But I also visited Grainger House, where the opportunity to dwell in a space once inhabited by Grainger, and which still possessed the composer's marks and traces, gave me much poetic fodder. There, I met archivist Stewart Manville, who was hired by Ella Grainger following Percy's death to organise the late composer's papers. Ella and Manville soon married (she was eighty-three and he was in his thirties) and he cared for her until her death. Manville divulged private anecdotes to me about Percy and Ella, and gave me an in-depth tour of each room of the house, providing a detailed history of its contents.

Percy, Ella and Stewart were all fond of the local squirrels, whom they would pat and feed. In the weeks during my visit, a squirrel would 'break into' the house and steal chocolates from a bowl in the kitchen. This led to a poem (see Figure 4), intended to demonstrate movement of these intruders (myself and the squirrel) through the archive/house, each line a new memento to be pilfered. The neat order of the initial triplets soon gives way to scattered images, just as well-intentioned research confronts the problems of containment.

Single poems such as that in Figure 5 were responding to my research, but I was struggling with the larger framework for some time, unable to find an appropriate 'container' for this life, this abundance of facts and ideas.

It wasn't until I received a tarot reading as a lark with a colleague of mine that some possibilities emerged. The tarot reader said, amongst other things, that the angels were communicating 'the five': 'I see the five – you're writing a new book and I see the five', she said to me. This prompted the five sections in the work that became *Suite for Percy Grainger* (2014): To Begin & End Together; Compositions & Arrangements; Archive Fever; Loves & the Lash; and, Thots & Experiments. In the first, as with the

3220_Offshoot.indd 112 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

first section of *marionette*, I explore the difficulties of beginning a biography; in the second I address his compositions; the third considers the archival 'abundance' of Grainger artefacts and my pathways through this material; the fourth explores his love affairs, including his obsession with self-flagellation; and, in the final section, I turn to his philosophical thoughts ('thots' in Grainger's

THE SQUIRREL & GRAINGER HOUSE

A house is a storybook in verse—
and you move through rooms
gathering snacks

I am an intruder, like you—plotting paths
taking scraps, nimble on the secret
stairway to the kitchen

There are chocolates wrapped in tinfoil
emblazoned with Beethoven's bust—
each day there is another pinched

each day, another bust defiled
and scattered

to the cast-iron stove

the armchair arm
the
din
i
n
g r oo m floor ((I photograph photographs))
lines through a lens

Do you pause to greet your kin, stuffed on the cupboard top?

o n t h i s w o r k i n g t a b l e
I study by day you dart by night

tracking Perks

Fig. 5. Jessica Wilkinson 2014, p. 91.

3220_Offshoot.indd 113 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

terms), his racial perspectives, and Free Music experiments. This is a five-fingered containment mechanism to deal with the endless proliferations I encountered when researching Grainger's life and work.

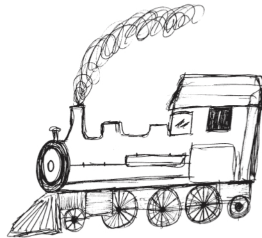
Perhaps this method would be considered by some scholars and writers of biography to be blasphemous, or at least absurd. Nevertheless, such decisions reflect a loose interpretation of John Batchelor's definition of the biographer, who 'must perform a balancing act…between objectivity and personal engagement, between reliance on documentary evidence (letters, journals and memoirs) and intuitive re-creation' (1995, pp. 4–5). Biographer Richard Holmes notes that the 'fluid, imaginative powers of re-creation pull against the hard body of discoverable fact. The inventive shaping instinct of the story-teller struggles with the ideal of a permanent, historical, and objective document' (1995, p. 20). Holmes also addresses the fact that biographers 'base their work on sources which are inherently unreliable', and have to 'construct or orchestrate a factual pattern out of materials that already have a fictional or reinvented element' (p. 17). Realising the biographer's hand in the 're/construction' of the life, Holmes adds: the 'picture lives only within the frame we have invented for it' (p. 19).

I began to wonder how Grainger himself might wish to 'live' within the space of the page. Of course, the decisions I made expressed my own poetic style – a significant distinction between the poetic biography and the more traditional biographical work, perhaps; that the poet's 'I' comes to the fore in an arguably more recognisable way (as I note below). Within the 'five' sections, I would attempt to combine learned 'facts' about Grainger's life or experience with relevant historical information, incorporating Grainger's own turn of phrase and his compositional strategies.

3220_Offshoot.indd 114 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

The following poem (see Figure 6), for example, is set against the backdrop and creation of a specific composition fragment, 'Train Music', which he wanted to express the jerky movements of a specific train journey he took through mountains in Italy in 1900; it also uses Grainger's made-up words:

TRAIN MUSIC



on the way to free mu sic
a st udy in brown
v ery jer ky 6 apple
dumplings in
a basket & one is happy
rrrrrr attling over point
systems uuushing along & bl
ended with the irrr egular
rhythms of prose from the
Psalms all my youngest
rem embrances of friends
read ing I love no
place so much composing
a scrap to the lullaby cosy
& th inking small thunklets

Fig. 6. Jessica Wilkinson 2014, p. 51.

To return to that question of adding to the pile, as Grainger himself pushed the boundaries of aesthetic creativity and convention, I felt that what had been written on Grainger did not utilise an adequate lexicon through which to communicate the life of this character, who resists the two-dimensional page. *Suite for*

3220_Offshoot.indd 115 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Percy Grainger, then, unfolds as a playbook of compositions to be performed in the reader's ear. Enigmatic rather than elusive, my Percy Grainger presents himself as playful, energetic, experimental and masochistic; I want readers to identify these characteristics not purely through explicit reference, but through the style and form of the poems themselves.

Conclusion

When I tell people that I write 'poetic biographies', I am usually met with puzzlement. I will often explain that I am interested in what the poetic line can do that the prose sentence cannot; that I am as committed to serious research engagement (with archives, interviews and sites) as the next biographer, but want to submit that gathered information to the pressures of poetic language, to push the limits of factual information in the writing of biography. Cole Swensen suggests that 'poetry – amid all its ambiguity and ornamentation – is not only perfectly capable of conveying truth; it can also attain a unique relationship to truth because it implicitly acknowledges and interrogates the limitations of language' (2011, p. 58). She writes that, when 'language as art' is brought 'into the heart of the language of information…[t]his tension alone accomplishes something by positing an incommensurability at the center of the work, an irritant that demands attention and refuses complacency' (p. 55). Encountering line, metaphor, rhythm and musicality, play, gesture and frisson, readers are brought forth to engage with the 'life' in question in ways that have the potential to 'meet' the biographical subject in a manner appropriate to their character.

However, there is another aspect that is brought to the fore – or heightened – with such works, and that is the 'I' of the poetic biographer. In the above excerpts from *marionette* and *Suite for Percy*

3220_Offshoot.indd 116 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Grainger, my 'I' as biographer is not only explicitly present within some poems, but is also showcased by my stylistic and formal choices, in concert with the subject matter. The same can be said of Howe's works – her 'I' intervenes explicitly in works such as *The Liberties* as she considers Johnson's experience against that of her mother and her Irish ancestors; further, Howe's recognisable sparsity and use of repetition, and the unique collage work of her biographical forays, demonstrate further the stamp of the poet's 'I' on her work (see also, Wilkinson 2016). While some biographers might consider such obvious 'intrusions' into the biographical space to be inappropriate – or worse, egocentric – as a practitioner, I enjoy the fact that the frameworks I impose on my subjects are not disguised, but presented as a singularity – that is, these works convey *my* Marion Davies and *my* Percy Grainger, and present no claims to be definitive or comprehensive. That is, these 'biographies' are not intended to conclude at a point of authority or empirical knowing, but instead suggest that the 'life' can never be known. They invite readers to dwell in the multiple spaces where research meets the poet, and encourage them to participate – through active interpretation and textual negotiation – in the creation of biographical knowledges.

References

Batchelor, John 1995, 'Introduction', *The art of literary biography*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 1–11.

Davies, Marion 1975, *The times we had: life with William Randolph Hearst*, Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis and New York.

Greenblatt, Stephen 2002, 'Racial memory and literary history', in Linda Hutcheon & Mario J. Valdés (eds.), *Rethinking literary history: a dialogue on theory*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 50–62.

Holmes, Richard 1995, 'Biography: inventing the truth', in John Batchelor (ed.), *The art of literary biography*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 15–25.

Howe, Susan 1985, *My Emily Dickinson*, North Atlantic Books, Berkley.

Howe, Susan 1990, 'The liberties', in *The Europe of trusts*, New Directions, New York, pp. 147–218.

3220_Offshoot.indd 117 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Howe, Susan 1993, 'Talisman interview' with Edward Foster, in *The birth-mark: unsettling the wilderness in American literary history*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, pp. 155–81.

Howe, Susan 2007, *Souls of the Labadie tract*, New Directions, New York.

Swensen, Cole 2011, *Noise that stays noise: essays*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

Welles, Orson (dir.) 1941, *Citizen Kane*, RKO Radio Pictures.

Wilkinson, Jessica 2012, *marionette: a biography of miss marion davies*, Vagabond, Sydney.

Wilkinson, Jessica 2013, 'Stella through the drifting portrait: Susan Howe's recovery of the marginal feminine', in Ann Vickery & John Hawke (eds.), *Poetry and the trace*, Puncher & Wattmann, Glebe, NSW, pp. 206–19.

Wilkinson, Jessica 2014, *Suite for Percy Grainger: a biography*, Vagabond, Sydney.

Wilkinson, Jessica 2016, 'Experiments in poetic biography: feminist threads in contemporary long form poetry', *Biography*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 1–22.

3220_Offshoot.indd 118 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

UNLEAVING, LEAVING

Gail Pittaway

1. Unleaving
(For Alex)

When you were tiny I'd wait ahead,
cheering on your tottering steps.

Today you ran ahead, around a bend and out of sight,
wailing when I caught you up,
'I thought you'd left me!'

I did leave you –
            to run ahead.

You see,
I couldn't keep up with you.

In time you'll run on alone,
stop looking ahead or behind.

Into time you'll run on
and leave me standing by.

2. LEAVING
(Still for Alex).

You leave –
I follow,
turning off
the light, the stereo, the DVD, the computer,
the heater—
gathering mugs, plates,
emptying waste baskets sodden
with the cheerful detritus of
a visit home.

Your room
still wears your impress.
Sheets mangled,
floor a horizontal pile:
discarded clothes, papers, wrappers,
lurid plastic containers still filled with shampoo,
cleanser, toner, deodorant;
all left,
so you can pack lightly
into three recycled carry bags.

You leave –
me empty.

3220_Offshoot.indd 120 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

‘I FELT THIS LANDSCAPE KNEW I WAS THERE’: *THE LAKE’S APPRENTICE* AND ECOBIOGRAPHY

Jessica White

Forgetting, Opening

‘There is a practice of belonging and it starts with forgetfulness of the self’ (Weldon 2014, p. viii). This epigraph to the opening poem of Annamaria Weldon’s *The Lake’s Apprentice* is apt for a work which captures the myriad life forms of Yalgorup, a coastal national park south of Mandurah in Western Australia with which Weldon, a migrant from Malta, falls in love. Taken from Mark Tredinnick’s *Blue Plateau: A Landscape Memoir* (2009), the epigraph is a blueprint for Weldon’s awareness of, and responsiveness to, lives other than her own in the environment. Her literary rendition of these lives through poetry, photography, essays and nature notes creates an ecobiography, a grafting of life and environmental writing which illuminates our embeddedness in, and dependence on, our ecosystems.

Life Writing in the Anthropocene

The Greek etymology of the term ‘autobiography’, Smith and Watson write in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010), provides a neat definition of ‘self life writing’: *autos* denotes ‘self’, *bios* denotes ‘life’ and *graphe* denotes ‘writing’ (p. 1). The term emerged in the West in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and analyses of the form have

historically been 'drawn seamlessly into supporting the belief and values of an essentialist or Romantic notion of selfhood', in which a unified selfhood is seen as representative of universal human nature (Anderson 2011, p. 4). This interpretation of autobiography is one that is emphatically anthropocentric, with human life at its core. However, recent research on posthumanism (the decentring and interrogation of the human), inflected by critical approaches such as feminism, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, queer theory, and disability studies, has raised questions about 'the status of the human subject and subjectivity' (Whitlock 2012, p. vi). It suggests that the human is not – and never has been – a unified, isolated subject.

Thus, scholars such as Vicki Kirby suggest it is more useful to focus not upon the traditional demarcation of human and non-human, but upon our shared materiality. For example, she notes that language and being cannot be separated, because language is not exclusive to humans. As she writes: 'From the study of astronomical bodies and their "signatures" to the operations of the tiniest signs of life, the world appears as a body of interacting information' (2008, p. 38). Further, these 'interacting sign systems…are not alien technologies' that are somehow 'external to life' (p. 38), but, rather, they are embedded within all life forms. A plant, for example, is not 'unified and undifferentiated: on the contrary…[it is] a communicating network of cellular mediations and chemical parsings' (p. 39). Even within a plant, there is traffic and conversation between chemicals and cells, and this is not so different to the chatter of humans.

This concept of interconnected lives is not new. As ethnographer Deborah Bird Rose observes in *Nourishing Terrains* (1996), Indigenous Australians believe

3220_Offshoot.indd 122 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> A "healthy" or "good" country is one in which all the elements do their work. They all nourish each other because there is no site, no position, from which the interest of one can be disengaged from the interests of others in the long term. Self interest and the interest of all of the other living components of country (the self interest of kangaroos, barramundi, eels and so on), cannot exist independently of each other in the long term (p. 8).

Rather than dividing the world into human and non-human, with the former holding dominion over the latter, Indigenous Australians recognise the interconnectedness of life forms, and the need for these forms to be responsive to one another.

Ecobiography slots into these notions of shared materiality, conversations and components. Rather than constituting an autobiography of an environment, an ecobiography details the imbrication of a human with that environment. It demonstrates how the human must forget their concept of an autonomous self, as Tredinnick writes, so as to absorb the lives of others, and to render them with significance. Cecilia Konchar Farr and Philip Snyder first defined the mode of ecobiography in 1996, describing it as 'a life-story constructed according to a pattern divined internally through the Self's interaction with the external environment, especially Nature, the multiple exchanges of which (re)present a kind of ecosystem of the Self' (p. 198). In these life stories, they continue, 'it is impossible to tell where the Self ends and Nature begins or where Nature ends and the Self begins: ego and eco are inextricably intertwined' (p. 203). While there are numerous accounts of humans observing, enjoying and deriving respite from the natural world, often in the form of grief or rambler

3220_Offshoot.indd 123 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

narratives – such as *H Is for Hawk* (2014) by Helen Macdonald or Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* (2012) – biographies that represent ecosystems, and how their human protagonists are embedded within them, are less common. The genre has enjoyed some interest in the United States, arguably emerging with Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) and appearing in more recent works such as Richard K. Nelson's *The Island Within* (1989).

In Australia, the form is less prevalent, perhaps because the nature writing tradition is younger than in the United States, but a handful of ecobiographies have appeared in recent years. These include Eric Rolls' *A Million Wild Acres* (1981), Kim Mahood's *Craft for a Dry Lake* (2000) and *Position Doubtful* (2016), Margaret Somerville's *Body/Landscape Journals* (1999) and Stephen Muecke's *No Road (Bitumen all the Way*) (1997). These texts, which are authored by non-Indigenous writers, are concerned with the impact of European land management methods on an environment grossly unsuited to them.

In 1788, at the point of European colonisation, Indigenous Australians were part of an ecosystem that had developed over forty thousand years through the sophisticated use of fire. Bill Gammage, in *The Biggest Estate on Earth* (2011), cites explorer Thomas Mitchell's observation in 1847 that 'fire, grass, kangaroos, and human inhabitants, seem all dependent on each other for existence in Australia; for any one of these being wanting, the others could no longer continue' (p. vii). The arrival of British settlers then disrupted this 'planned, precise, fine-grained, local caring' (p. 2) when they imported British plants, animals and farming methods. The ramifications of this included the dispossession of Indigenous people from their lands and vast environmental degradation.

3220_Offshoot.indd 124 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

A 2015 study found that since settlement over 10 per cent of 273 native land species have become extinct. A further 21 per cent of Australian land mammal species are now thought to be threatened, indicating that the rate of loss – one to two extinctions per decade – is likely to continue (Woinarski et al. 2015, p. 4531). Meanwhile, the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy (2016), as required by the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1992*, lists the extinction of 36 species of flora, 148 species of critically endangered flora, and 527 species of endangered flora.

Unsurprisingly, many ecobiographies written by Indigenous Australians detail the breakdown of their livelihoods and culture, which are intimately bound with their environment. Smith and Watson, in their second edition of *Reading Autobiography* (2010), cite Doris Pilkington's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996) as an example of the genre. In this story, three young girls who were removed from their families through a state-sanctioned policy of assimilation, later known as the Stolen Generations, escaped from the Moore River Settlement to which they had been sent. Over two months, they made their way back to their home in the north by following a fence erected to keep rabbits from spreading into the adjacent states. They lived off the country using traditional methods and tracked time not through the days that passed, but through their awareness of seasons, signalled by the appearance of particular plants and animals. Other ecobiographies by Indigenous authors include artist Dick Roughsey's/Goobalathaldin's *Moon and Rainbow: The Autobiography of an Aboriginal* (1971) and Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* (2010), an historical fictional work inspired by Mokare, a Noongar man who witnessed the first white colonisers in south-west Western Australia, and by Scott's

3220_Offshoot.indd 125 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

reclamation of his Noongar culture. Scott also details the process of reconnecting with his culture in *Kayang and Me* (2005), an oral history which he wrote with his elder, Hazel Brown. This is an abiding theme of such ecobiographies: although there is loss, there is also a strong sense of Indigenous people's country as a place of nourishment and restoration.

However, the bonds between human and environment are under threat once more. We have entered the Anthropocene, a term coined by Nobel prize–winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen (2002) to describe how humans have significantly altered the character of our environment and atmosphere. On account of their actions, human and non-human alike are facing unprecedented challenges to our survival, and an even more dramatic loss of species than that detailed above. For example, a 2016 study of Australia's iconic gum trees by González-Orozco et al. suggests that by 2085, the current geographic range of 91 per cent of Australia's 657 eucalyptus species will shrink by an average of 51 per cent, with 2.4 per cent of these species predicted to become extinct because of the disappearance of environmental conditions that they need to grow (p. 1113).

These terrifying statistics indicate that if we proceed with anthropocentrism, a mode of thinking which regards humankind as the central or most important part of existence, we will be staring down the barrel of our own extinction (if we aren't already). Awareness of our degrading ecosystems, and the effect of human interaction upon these systems, is urgently needed. That is, if we want to have a life, we need to tell stories of the lives upon which we depend. This requires an attentiveness to other ways of listening and responding to our environment. In *The Lake's Apprentice*, Weldon draws upon science, poetry, and Indigenous

3220_Offshoot.indd 126 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

modes of knowing to educate herself, and to represent the varied environment with which she engages.

Science and Poetry

In her essay 'Threshold Country' in *The Lake's Apprentice*, Weldon describes thrombolites, 'ancient rock-like mounds, more than two thousand years old, still growing at Lake Clifton though they have become remnant fossils in other lakes' (p. 17). These circular fossils are formed by an accretion of photosynthetic bacteria (that is, the bacteria take sunlight and transform it into oxygen) at their edge. As Weldon describes:

> complex communities of microscopic organisms are housed within their stony structures: they live like orders of anchorites, dependent on symbiotic relationships with each other and the walls growing around them. The minute cyanobacteria are vulnerable to environmental shifts. Their photosynthetic process relies on freshwater springs which bubble up under them as they grow in the benthic mud and vital clear water (p. 19).

Weldon blends science and metaphor to render the thrombolites and their ecosystem intelligible. The organisms are 'anchorites' or recluses, within monastery-like walls, but they still maintain relationships with one another and their environment, as monks or nuns do with the places in which they are housed. The archaic connotations of this metaphor are contrasted with the language of science and environment, such as 'cyanobacteria' and 'photosynthetic process', which shift the reader to the contemporary world. The split between the ancient structures and the modern

3220_Offshoot.indd 127 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

era is echoed at the end of the passage in an affecting and effective way, when Weldon writes, 'Clifton's lake-bound microbialite reef is the largest in the southern hemisphere extending over four square kilometres. Now its viability is threatened by encroaching development' (p. 20). These quiet and recondite communities could be wiped out by development, as has already happened with so many species to date.

At other times, Weldon questions the boundaries between the two disciplines of poetry and science, suggesting that they might be different ways of expressing that which is essentially the same:

> When living rocks glow underwater at full moon, is it science or the poetics of light? If you write it, will it emerge as the same truth, speaking many different languages: geology tracing thrombolites back to first life, poetry beguiling our limited sense of time and possibility, the Bindjareb Noongar tradition wisely saying they were there "in the beginning"? (p. 70).

Although we might end up at the same point, reading the environment in another language means seeing it in a different light, and these different ways of perceiving an environment lend the text a multifaceted aspect. Perhaps this is similar to how the cognitive processing of people who are bilingual differs according to the language they use, thereby altering their perceptions (Athanasopoulos et al. 2015, p. 518).

Guided

Weldon's awareness of languages stems from her experience of migration. She was born in Malta and as a child she lived in Guatemala, London and North Africa, before returning to Malta

3220_Offshoot.indd 128 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

to finish her schooling, start a family and write. She migrated to Western Australia in her mid-thirties. In Malta, she had learned a way of comprehending the environment that echoes that of Indigenous people. She writes:

> At the day's end, wherever I was, I anticipated the exact spot on the horizon where the sun would set. I read my island in eight directions and even blindfolded, could have told you which valley we were in by the textures of its rocks and soil, the scents of wild mignonette and orange blossom, or those subtle gradations of salt-tang on a breeze which sharpens from creek to open sea (p. 61).

Perhaps this way of knowing a place makes her realise that her understanding of the area of Yalgorup is painfully deficient.

Weldon refers to herself as the lake's 'apprentice' who learns from the country. Rather than assuming supremacy over the land like the European colonists, she understands that she does not know everything and, as a neophyte, her relationship to the country is respectful. Wanting to become schooled in its language, she approaches George Walley, a Binjareb-Noongar leader, to be her cultural guide and mentor. Walley explains that the Binjareb-Noongar people call the thrombolites 'Woggaal Noorook…eggs laid at Yalgorup in the Dreamtime by the female creation serpent as she travelled south from the Swan River' (p. 21), demonstrating the specific cultural connections between his people and the area. When Weldon shows Walley her photographs of the thrombolites, 'he seemed delighted at my association of this traditional story, so central to this tradition, with contemporary scientific theory which deems microbiolites responsible for raising Earth's early

3220_Offshoot.indd 129 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

atmospheric oxygen levels through their photosynthetic processes, thus enabling other life forms to exist' (p. 6). Once again, contemporary and traditional forms of knowledge converge, indicating how there are a plethora of ways of interpreting a place.

Weldon acknowledges how Walley is instrumental in helping her 'to learn his local landscape like a second language' (p. 21). On one occasion, he leads Weldon to a tannin-stained river and tells the river that Weldon 'was a storyteller, a poet who came in friendship. He told Bilya Maadjit – for that is the river's traditional name – to know, recognise and welcome me' (p. 11). Later, Weldon meditates on her responsiveness to Yalgorup and writes 'I felt this landscape knew I was there' (p. 24). The human is not the only agent in these stories, rather they are one part of an animated whole.

Walley's response to the river indicates that there is a whole other way of communicating with our world, and that many of us are illiterate in this language. This is impoverishing, particularly when one considers how closely Indigenous language and land are linked, as Noongar author Kim Scott explains: 'There is something really deep and conceptual in these Noongar terms. As there is in *boodjar* for earth; and *boodjari* also means 'pregnant'… there's the human form and other life forms latent in the landscape' (quoted in Brewster 2012). The many layers to one term indicate how closely the human and non-human are woven together for Indigenous people.

As poetry and science sometimes arrive at the same point, so too does this understanding of the imbrication of human and non-human find reflection in contemporary scholarship on the posthuman. Donna Haraway muses in *When Species Meet* (2008), 'I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 per cent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my

3220_Offshoot.indd 130 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

body; the other 90 per cent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all' (pp. 4–5). If humans are dependent upon non-humans for survival, then it behoves us to become more attentive to those lives, as Noongars are through their language, or as Haraway is through science.

Weldon reflects her awareness of lives adjacent to her own through her use of different media such as poetry, essays and photography. She includes her diary of nature notes, with their images of the lake and its creatures, as well as footnotes of the scientific terms for animals and plants. She also refers to and names the Noongar seasons of Birak, Bunuru, Djeran, Makuru, Djilba and Kambarang which stretch over two seasons, rather than four as in Europe, revealing a far more nuanced way of reading Australia's weather patterns. That this work is interleaved with a variety of perspectives is befitting for a practice that attends to many life forms.

Thresholds

Nature writer Inga Simpson notes that the threshold, the tidal landscape between sand or sea, is the central metaphor of Weldon's essay 'Threshold Country' (2016, unpublished). Weldon explains, 'This is a country of dissolving boundaries. The trees and reeds massed along many shorelines lean out and gaze at themselves in looking-glass lakes. Between their beauty and its reflection, between land and water, is a space where stories are timeless and country is alive' (2014, p. 27). This recalls Kim Scott's words, in which the country has presence not only in our vision but also in our minds. For a threshold is also an invitation, a marker between outside and inside. It is in the space of our minds, in our imagination, that we find a means of reflecting upon and envisaging lives

3220_Offshoot.indd 131 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

other than our own, from the microscopic to the magnificent, the ancient to the recent, the human to the non-human.

Later in *The Lake's Apprentice*, in a section titled 'Sharing the Edge', Weldon returns to the concept of the threshold:

> In a time almost forgotten now, the liminal – waysides, verges, borderlands and boundaries – was recognised as a place of transformation, charged with energy. We observed and intuited that these borderlines are where life grows most profusely, and what is marginal fights for survival by adapting. Where creation's growing edges encounter one another and together create a new centre (p. 83).

The threshold, that border invested with energy and significance, is not just in the natural world. It also exists between human and non-human, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. By recognising places of exchange, and by reading the different languages that converge there, the way George Walley 'watched the light shifting subtly…like a finely nuanced language he could read or hear' (p. 5), we absorb other selves and ways of being, enriching our own lives, but also becoming sensitive to others and their flickering sojourns on earth.

Weldon invites us over a threshold and into these lives with her careful attentiveness to turtles, plovers, 'sand streaming from dune blow-outs like lions' (p. 154), to massive tuarts and their baby seedlings in beds of ash, and to the language and culture of the Binjareb-Noongar people, elucidating their stories and the names of their seasons. The final section of the book is comprised of poems which compress her observations into brief lines. Our minds work in the white space around the words, reflecting on an

3220_Offshoot.indd 132 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

answer to Weldon’s question, ‘When will we tread kindly here / and gently as ground-water/trickles/between thrombolites/after seeping/through sedge and samphire?’ (p. 200). Perhaps it will be when we read an ecobiography such as hers and see how it bursts with lives.

References

Anderson, Linda R. 2011, *Autobiography*, 2nd ed., Routledge, New York.

Athanasopoulos, P., Bylund, E., Montero-Melis, G., Damjanovic, L., Schartner, A., Kibbe, A., Riches, N. & Thierry, G. 2015, ‘Two languages, two minds’, *Psychological Science*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 518–26.

Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy 2016, *Species profile and threats database, EPBC Act list of threatened flora*, viewed 23 September 2016, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicthreatenedlist.pl?wanted=flora>.

Brewster, Anne 2012, ‘Can you anchor a shimmering nation state via regional Indigenous roots?: Kim Scott talks to Anne Brewster about *That deadman dance*’, *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 18, pp. 228–46.

Crutzen, Paul J. 2002, ‘Geology of mankind’, *Nature*, vol. 415, no. 6867, p. 23.

Farr, Cecilia Konchar & Snyder, Philip A. 1996, ‘From Walden Pond to the Great Salt Lake: ecobiography and engendered species acts in *Walden* and *Refuge*’, in E. England & L. Fielding Anderson (eds.), *Tending the garden: essays on Mormon literature*, Signature Books, Salt Lake City, pp. 197–212.

Gammage, Bill 2011, *The biggest estate on earth: how Aborigines made Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest.

González-Orozco, C. E., Pollock, L. J., Thornhill, A. H., Mishler, B. D., Knerr, N., Laffan, S. W., Miller, J. T., Rosauer, D. F., Faith, D. P., Nipperess, D. A., Heini, K., Linke, S., Butt, N., Külheim, C., Crisp, M. D. & Gruber, B. 2016, ‘Phylogenetic approaches reveal biodiversity threats under climate change’, *Nature Climate Change*, advance online publication, viewed 23 September 2016, <http://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nclimate3126.html>.

Haraway, Donna 2008, *When species meet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Kirby, Vicki 2008, ‘(Con)founding “the human” incestuous beginnings’ in N. Giffney & M. Hird (eds.), *Queering the non/human*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 35–54.

Leopold, Aldo 1949, *A Sand County almanac*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Macdonald, Helen 2014, *H is for hawk*, Jonathan Cape, London.

Mahood, Kim 2000, *Craft for a dry lake*, Anchor, Sydney.

Mahood, Kim 2016, *Position doubtful: mapping landscapes and memories*, Scribe, Melbourne.

3220_Offshoot.indd 133 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Muecke, Stephen 1997, *No road (bitumen all the way)*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle, WA.

Nelson, Richard K. 1989, *The island within*, North Point Press, San Francisco.

Pilkington, Doris 1996, *Follow the rabbit-proof fence*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Rolls, Eric 1981, *A million wild acres: 2000 years of a man and an Australia*, Nelson, Melbourne.

Rose, Deborah Bird & Australian Heritage Commission 1996, *Nourishing terrains: Australian Aboriginal views of landscape and wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra.

Roughsey, Dick / Goobalathaldin 1971, *Moon and rainbow: the autobiography of an Aboriginal*, Reed, Sydney.

Scott, Kim 2010, *That deadman dance*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney.

Scott, Kim & Brown, Hazel 2005, *Kayang and me*, Fremantle Arts Press, Fremantle, WA.

Simpson, Inga 2016, 'Australian nature writing: a literature of landscape', PhD thesis, The University of Queensland, St Lucia.

Smith, Sidonie & Watson, Julia 2010, *Reading autobiography: a guide for interpreting life narratives*, 2nd ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Somerville, Margaret 1999, *Body/landscape journals*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne.

Strayed, Cheryl 2012, *Wild: from lost to found on the Pacific Crest trail*, Knopf, New York.

Tredinnick, Mark 2009, *The blue plateau: a landscape memoir*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Weldon, Annamaria 2014, *The lake's apprentice*, UWA Publishing, Crawley WA.

Whitlock, Gillian 2012, 'Post-ing lives', *Biography*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. v–xvi.

Woinarski, J., Burbidge, A. & Harrison, P. 2015, 'Ongoing unraveling of a continental fauna: decline and extinction of Australian mammals since European settlement', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol. 112, no. 15, pp. 4531–40.

3220_Offshoot.indd 134 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

STEPPING ACROSS SPACE AND TIME: WRITING A LIFE FROM LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY

Janine McVeagh

I have a long-term relationship with someone who died in 1832 on the other side of the world.

I met her quite by chance one day when helping go through some old books belonging to an elderly woman I know. As I blew the dust off half a dozen much smaller ones, I noticed they were written for 'young people'. The author was Priscilla Wakefield, a surname with significant resonance for Australasia. As a writer of children's books myself, I became interested in this, to me, unknown writer. Thus began my search for a children's writer I had never heard of. Over the years I have found all her books, some of her diaries and letters, and seen her name surface in a number of websites as a writer, a feminist, an abolitionist, a botanist and even as an economist. The books, letters and diaries are a treasure trove of primary sources for a biographer and the period in which she lived has thrown up a wide range of secondary material, both contemporary and recent.

Unlike more famous figures in history, as far as I can find out, Wakefield has never had her own book written about her so I decided I would tackle that myself. I began because she intrigued me as a person who must have been influential in her day but is now largely forgotten. I continued because as I discovered more about this remarkable woman, I realised that although we were

separated by time, geography and cultural background, we had much in common as both women and as writers.

In an age where women's minds and opinions were largely dismissed or belittled, Wakefield had a good mind that she liked to use and plenty of her own opinions. Among these was the belief that women were the foundation of a civilised society and that all girls should be educated so that they could participate meaningfully in society. So strong was this belief that she even set up her own school for poor girls who otherwise would not have had the chance to be literate. She understood education, especially for girls, as the way to transform society. In response to her contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she wrote in *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798b/1974) that each class of women had its rights and its responsibilities and that a good education, appropriate to their level of society, was the means to enable all women to become full citizens. All her books were written with that aim in mind, to inform young women, to make them think and to take an interest in the wider world.

She also believed that the prison system needed to be reformed to be more humane and rehabilitative. A decade or more before her more famous niece, Elizabeth Fry, was making it her role in life to improve conditions in prisons, Wakefield was writing letters to *The Monthly Review* about penal reform. In fact, it is highly likely that Fry herself was influenced by her aunt as her mother was always Wakefield's closest friend and confidante, and Wakefield spent a significant amount of time with that family. Conversation was one of Wakefield's greatest delights and she loved nothing more than to discuss the issues of the day with whoever was with her.

3220_Offshoot.indd 136 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

As a Quaker, she naturally opposed the abhorrent institution of slavery and was active in the Abolition movement, another important human rights issue of her day. She put her ideals into practice: as an abolitionist she foreswore sugar and cotton as the products of slave labour and participated in collecting signatures for the petition against the slave trade. Several of her books address the abolition issue, using different techniques to get across the message that the slaves were human (*Sketches of Human Manners* 1807), that it was morally abhorrent to condone slavery (*Excursions in North America* 1806) and that there were, in fact, alternatives to slave sugar and cotton (*Mental Improvement* 1794/1995).

So, I learned my new friend was a woman of strong opinions and radical action. She was one of a group of influential women writers, some of whom she counted as friends, including Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Hannah More, but unlike most of these middle-class women intellectuals and writers, she did not have the assurance of financial support from a husband. In fact, it was worse than that: Wakefield's life was dogged by her husband's inability to earn or keep money and, thus, despite the difficulty of doing so, she wrote to support the family. She also illustrated her own books and translated works from the French on commission. This constant anxiety about lack of money is apparent throughout her private writing and comes through in different ways in her published works. In 'The Affectionate Son' (in *Juvenile Anecdotes* 1795/1832), for example, she depicts a 'good' family in which the father loses their money and the mother goes to live in a garret where she works sewing embroidery for ladies. The ten-year-old son is found a place in the Navy. Later on, when one of her own sons was in dire financial trouble, she wrote a book precisely to raise funds to help him. This short book has a long title – *A*

3220_Offshoot.indd 137 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

familiar treatise on perspective, designed for ladies, and those who are unacquainted with the principles of optics and geometry: whereby, in a few days, sufficient of this useful science may be learned, to enable any person, accustomed to the use of the pencil, to draw landscapes, and the simpler objects of art, with perspective accuracy (1807) – and was published under the name of W. Daniel.

Wakefield had more ideas, some considered very radical for the time: that women could have their own business, and she had a list of these, including shop-owning, landscaping and millinery; that they could run a school or a small farm; and could be put in charge of women's prisons and poorhouses. They could be paid to be midwives (most midwives were men at this time), nurses and even apothecaries.

These were the issues of the day that many others, Mary Wollstonecraft included, were talking about and about which she had vigorous correspondence, but Wakefield did not simply echo prevailing opinion, she discussed and read and put forward her own conclusions with confidence. As an opinionated writer myself, I can relate to that. We have other things in common, too. Wakefield never stopped learning: her reading journal shows that she was reading a wide and deep range of publications, including books on Islam, science, philosophy and politics. Though the Quakers frowned on such frivolity, she attended the theatre and read novels. She loved all the arts and her friends included other writers and artists, among them John Constable, five years her junior, with whom she spent many happy hours talking about art.

What I relate to most strongly is that, apart from her writing, Wakefield was an activist. Had she had fewer domestic problems and more money, who knows what she might have done? As it was, she created practical solutions to social problems: her first charity was a lying-in hospital for poor women, where they could

3220_Offshoot.indd 138 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

be delivered by a clean female midwife, and given some baby linen and some money to compensate for their few days of rest from work. Her next was the Green Coat School for poor girls to learn to read, write, sew and keep accounts. Her third, and perhaps the most enduring, was the Penny Bank she set up in 1798. This savings bank was set up to enable poor women and girls to save money, receive interest on it and thus have the means to set themselves up in life. Given her own domestic and financial circumstances, this was indeed an irony, perhaps even a defiant gesture at the fate that kept her from having the economic independence she so strongly believed in. In her view, these things, a healthy mother and baby, a good education and enough money to set yourself up, were the fundamentals of a strong society.

But how do I know what she thought and is my interpretation valid? One can never really know another's thoughts of course, but Wakefield was a writer and so expressed her views in many ways, both publicly and privately, through her books, letters to magazines and in her private diaries and letters. From the many primary sources she left it is possible to glean her perspective on the world, her passion and her prejudices – for she had those too, especially about the Irish whom she seemed to rate lower than other races, despite her general belief in the equality of humanity. Mostly, though, it is the way she lived her life that speaks to me: she lived her beliefs, held herself to her own high standards, and she got things done.

What kind of research have I completed to back up my interpretation of her motives and her world view? Wakefield began her public life in the early 1790s, when she was in her early forties, with her children almost grown up, and the household needing money. From this point in her life come the various primary documents of books, other publications, diaries, letters

3220_Offshoot.indd 139 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

and pieces in literary journals. These years, from 1792 to 1816, are her creative, active years. These, then, are the years on which most of the biography is based. The primary material is so rich that there would not, at first, seem too much room for interpretation, and the biographical task is mostly a matter of selection to create the overall picture of this woman's life, both private and public. Yet, the very fact of selection is interpretation. Sometimes too, of course, the sentiments in the public and private documents do not exactly match. As with many of us, her doubts, anxieties and worries for her children and numerous grandchildren often overshadowed her public persona. In her diary of 21 January 1798, for instance, she writes: 'Peter Ellison has stopped and the fruit perhaps of 2 years of EW's labour lost or at least endangered. Thus one rub after another threatens us with a view of poverty or dependence'. On 25 January that year she writes: 'Dan came down, seems determined to pass part of his time in London. I may advise but cannot rule therefore must submit to what I do not quite approve' (Wakefield 1798a/1808).

How much relative weight does a biographer place on the private and the public material? Her published works are the result of considered thought, while the diaries are a record of the moment. It is impossible to know how to balance them, and my selection might be very different from that of someone else who did not feel the kinship with her that I do. To begin with, I have written her story as a kind of extended time line, using both kinds of writing alongside historical research into the period and official documents on births, deaths and other events as necessary. However, her first forty years, the ones that will have to become fiction because there is so little documentation on them, rely more on contemporary accounts by other writers and diarists, as well as historians, to create a story of how this woman might have

3220_Offshoot.indd 140 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

come to be the person she was. There are some facts, fragments of family history, birth and marriage dates, but the bulk of the fictional story will have to be recreated from other sources and my own interpretation of the context and events that shaped her life.

On one hand, this is more fun than biography. I can use my imagination to create her childhood and her world; on the other, English history was not part of my education, so I have had to search in many different places for an understanding of that time and place. This is like travelling with an incomplete map. I keep turning into blind alleys or suddenly arriving somewhere exciting without any idea of how I got there. Is it possible to really get an understanding of a distant era and place, let alone of a single person who existed then? I don't know. I have read some of the contemporary literature, almost none of which had anything to do with the Quakers. A more recent work, Jenny Uglow's *The Lunar Men* (2002) is about a group of mainly Quaker men whose inventions shaped the modern world, but has little to say about the Quaker world or Quaker women. I have also read some of the diaries of Isaac Fletcher (2007) and John Woolman, both Quakers and contemporaries of Wakefield, but they were men with little interest in the concerns that my subject had for her fellow females.

Wakefield did meet both these men at different stages of her life. Fletcher appeared when she was a child at Stamford Hill and he was travelling about the country visiting Quaker families. John Woolman, she would have met as a young married woman living in London in 1772, as he attended the Gracechurch Meeting over that year. Contemporary accounts speak of him as a rather eccentric American, and a passionate Abolitionist. From such sources I have gleaned some facts and some ideas about contemporary middle-class Quaker society and mores.

3220_Offshoot.indd 141 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Much more directly related to Wakefield herself, however, is an early group portrait by Francis Wheatley, which I find interesting in many ways, not least in terms of its composition and the expressions on the faces. The painting shows a young married couple and the woman's sister. There is no definitive date for this work, but the suggested date of circa 1774 does not seem quite right to me. By 1774, Wakefield had at least two children, who were the centre of her life – yet they are not in this family portrait. Instead, she is seated looking towards her husband, Edward, who is off to the left, with a small smile on her face. Catherine stands next to her, with her hand on Wakefield's shoulder, looking out at the viewer, also with a small smile. Edward stares across both of them to something beyond his wife and sister-in-law. I think from the draping of her rather elegant clothes and her expression that it is likely that Wakefield is pregnant and she and her sister both know this. I have no idea what Edward is thinking, although his jacket is very bold for a Quaker and he looks a bit of a dandy. At this stage, the couple was still relatively well-off, but financial disaster was to strike them before the decade was out. Perhaps Edward was just enjoying being painted as a man of substance by an up-and-coming painter. Depending on the date of the portrait, he and Wakefield were between twenty-two and twenty-four years old, and Catherine was about eighteen or twenty.

Apart from these and other foundational research sources, I have had to return to her own writing – and especially her books, diaries and letters – for some illumination on the adult woman who shone so briefly in the world, as well as a glimpse of the girl who became that woman. Especially in the earlier books, her sketches of children and their doings have the feel of lived experience and observation. Children get up to mischief of one kind and another in these little tales, and their mother always manages

3220_Offshoot.indd 142 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

their behaviour firmly, preachily to be sure, but never, never are they physically punished. As the eldest of ten children and active grandmother of twenty, including the very difficult Edward Gibbon, Wakefield knew a thing or two about naughtiness.

There is one more portrait of my friend, much of an age with me now. She is still fixing the world with that direct gaze and defiant chin. She is still not wearing the Quaker bonnet.

What might be the meaning of Wakefield's life for a new generation? Her own concerns were the universal ones of family, money, and about the world in which she lived and its future. The context is different from mine but the human elements remain the same. What makes her stand out is her strong sense of duty, her need to make a difference and to influence the direction of her society so that future generations would be better informed and more equipped to deal with an increasingly complex world. We always need women like that. Wakefield has been dead for a very long time, but her way of seeing her place in the world, her intellectual energy and her willingness to embrace new ways of seeing things that others took for granted are as relevant as they ever were. Perhaps most of all, her human uncertainties and frailties, her doubts, sorrows and anxieties about her children, her marriage and her family are what make her seem as contemporary as any woman alive today.

I had not planned to write a biography and if I had, I probably would have chosen someone from my own country or background. Yet, since I first stumbled across those dusty little volumes, I have been unable to stop myself pursuing this story. Priscilla Wakefield has taken me on a journey that has not yet ended, one that has made me more aware of women like her, who contributed so much to her society and yet is scarcely known today. As I work through the next draft, trying to make her story both accurate

3220_Offshoot.indd 143 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

and alive with meaning, I feel that my main responsibility is to allow her to speak through me, to recapture her voice for another generation.

References

Daniel, W. 1807, *A familiar treatise on perspective, designed for ladies, and those who are unacquainted with the principles of optics and geometry: whereby, in a few days, sufficient of this useful science may be learned, to enable any person, accustomed to the use of the pencil, to draw landscapes, and the simpler objects of art, with perspective accuracy*, Darton and Harvey, London.

Fletcher, Isaac 2007, *The diary of Isaac Fletcher of Underwood, Cumberland, 1756–1781*, A. J. L. Winchester (ed.), The Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, Kendal.

Uglow, Jenny 2002, *The lunar men*, Faber and Faber, London.

Wakefield, Priscilla 1794/1995, *Mental improvement*, Ann Shteir (ed.), Colleagues Press, East Lansing.

Wakefield, Priscilla 1795/1832, *Juvenile anecdotes*, Harvey and Darton, London.

Wakefield, Priscilla 1798a/1808, Diaries, Mitchell Papers, Turnbull Library, New Zealand.

Wakefield, Priscilla 1798b/1974, *Reflections on the present condition of the female sex*, facsimile ed., Garland Publishing Inc., New York.

Wakefield, Priscilla 1806, *Excursions in North America*, Harvey and Darton, London.

Wakefield, Priscilla 1807, *Sketches of human manners*, Harvey and Darton, London.

Wollstonecraft, Mary 1792, *Vindication of the rights of woman: with strictures on political and moral subjects*, Thomas and Andrews, Boston. Woolman, John 1910, *The Journal, with Other Writings of John Woolman*, J. M. DENT & SONS Ltd, London.

3220_Offshoot.indd 144 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

BROLGA CLAN

Phillip Hall

for Noela Anderson and Patsy Shadforth:
Yanyuwa and Garrawa teachers
(who first orientated my Borroloola cheer)

From the town camps, junk
    is spoiling like a sniffed fume's squall
    and a clan of brolga are trumpeting
        their distaste, regally
bowing and high-stepping their preened mettlesome
        chests and arching their wings upwards
in a whoosh of grey-ochred law:

        from around the bend a four-wheeler spins
    like a shanghaied wedgie collapsing
to maggots on the ground:

the beloved Macassans' hoary old tamarind trees; their emerald
        exotic glass and steel
    tools paving the trepang and shell starlit highway
colonially rutted by uniformed rifle collared lines:

    behind us the old police station – a poor
    museum to frontier orders – cathedral

mounds rising out of spear grasses, ironwoods brandishing
clumps of mistletoe – and their tiny
pastel chewing gum fruits – barbed-wire fencing,
a rodeo's rusty dust bowl, the prick-hard
football ground:

and from those sidelines I was stamped to cheer
barefoot cyclones, like a satellite stepping
stars.

3220_Offshoot.indd 146 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

LIFE WRITING AND SELF-MAKING

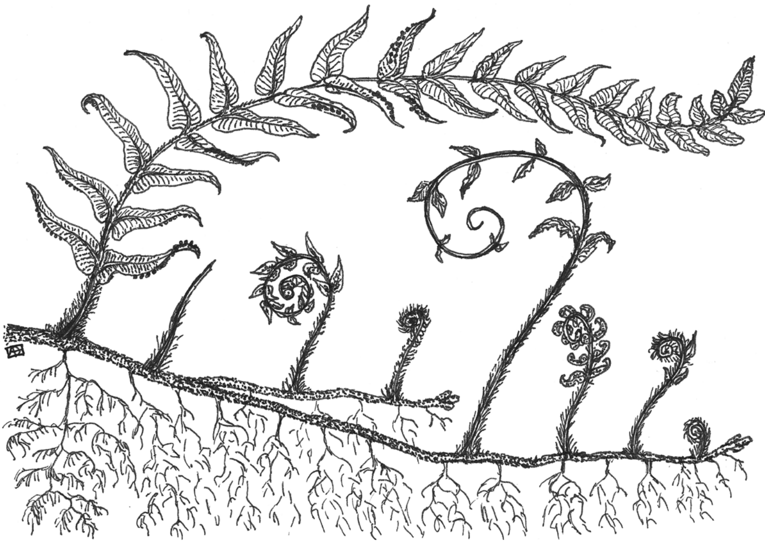


Fig. 7. Alice Ewing 2017, ink on paper, collection of the artist

An ancient group of plants, ferns embody the concept of multigenerational success; with individual plants often showing different stages of growth along a runner, shooting roots as it progresses. Tiny, new and fuzzy fiddleheads, like on this Sickle Fern (Pellaea falcata)*, unfurl into fully mature, veined fronds, laden with generational data within tiny, dark spores edging the underside of hardened, aged leaflets. Sometimes self-made 'fernlets' arise directly off a leaflet, a display of cloned self-identity. Some fiddleheads do not thrive, leaving a hardened, broken or withered stalk as a temporal reminder.*

3220_Offshoot.indd 147 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

3220_Offshoot.indd 148

18/01/2018 3:33 PM

QUEER LIFE WRITING AS SELF-MAKING

Dallas J. Baker

> *The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity.*
>
> (Michel Foucault in Martin et al. 1988, p. 27)

Introduction

This chapter engages with the notion of queer life writing. I write the *notion* of queer life writing because, as yet, a distinct queer life writing has not emerged as a robust literary genre or practice. Queer life writing at this stage is largely a proposition, an unfulfilled promise. At the heart of this promise is a life writing that contains a critical and radical deconstruction of identity, of heteronormativity and of binary gender and sexual norms. A queer life writing cannot be just autobiography or memoir produced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, but writing by any person that consciously works against phallogocentric norms and also foregrounds the processes and practices of conscious self-making. Such a life writing would work against the idea that there is any essential or lasting nature to subjectivity and would counter the notion that certain subjectivities or identities are somehow inherently or meaningfully linked to certain (corresponding) bodies and biological sexes. As queer life writing is, for the most part, still only an emerging promise,

this chapter focuses on the theoretical context of such a writing rather than specific writing practices or examples.

Queer self-making occurs within hostile heteronormative environments and is at odds with homonormativity as well. Because of this, queer life writing needs to be understood and contextualised not merely in relation to the literary tradition of life writing, but also in relation to the specifics of queer self-invention and expression and its theoretical background. A truly queer life writing, unlike heterosexual and LGBTI life writing, would be unique in that it would be wholly inspired by a theoretical movement – Queer Theory. The only comparable body of work is feminist life writing. Thus, it is crucial to understand the foundational ideas of queer theory if we are to understand queer life writing and how it would differ from LGBTI or heteronormative life writing.

To Begin at the Beginning

Michel Foucault argues that who one is emerges out of the problems with which one struggles (1997). Foucault advocates an ongoing investigation or struggle with the self, an ongoing assembly and disassembly of subjectivity that constitutes a kind of self-bricolage; a making and remaking of subjectivity that can be seen as an aesthetic struggle towards an artistic ideal (1997). Foucault describes this process as an ethics of the self (1986b). He illuminates the purpose of this process when he writes:

> the intent is not to pursue the unspeakable, nor to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already-said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self (1997, p. 208).

3220_Offshoot.indd 150 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

In this sense, subjectivity itself can be seen as an aesthetic practice; the making of the self is an art. Foucault refers to this process, this ethics of the self, as an *aesthetics of existence* (1997; see, Thompson 2003, p. 123). It could be said that all life writing emerges from such a struggle.

In fact, much of the work of self-(re)making has traditionally occurred in the creative arts, which have historically been a domain of self-enquiry, self-exploration and what could be called 'self transformation'. Indeed, the Foucauldian notion of the subject and the creative text share fundamental characteristics: they are both discursive; they both pursue aesthetic goals; and, perhaps most significantly, they are both creative not only in form but also in the ways that they are constituted. Given this, writing, especially life writing, can be seen as an appropriate site for ethical interventions in subjectivity and for explorations into how we might remake ourselves in pleasing and radical ways.

One of the principal examples Foucault gives of a technique used in such an ethics of the self – implemented to produce a desired or altered/transformed subject – is reflective writing (Foucault 1997). Specifically, Foucault uses a kind of life writing, the journal, as his prime example. This reflective life writing produces the desired subject through a process of self-analysis or reflexivity, of questioning the condition and conduct of the self in order to construct a subjectivity in line with one's ethics (Ambrosio 2008). To put it simply, for Foucault, certain kinds of life writing are a practice involved in the production and maintenance of the self (Baker 2013, 2015). As Faust argues, this can be said to be more so when that writing is informed or organised by a philosophy of some kind that is applied as a way of life (1988).

This is a direct reversal of the dominant or inherited model of the writer whose genius produces creative texts that are a

3220_Offshoot.indd 151 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

direct reflection of that writer's identity (Weisberg 1993). In this Foucauldian model, it is the practice of life writing, and the reading of texts and discourse, that produce the writer's subjectivity; a subjectivity that reflects not an essential inner identity but rather the discourses with which it has engaged (or struggled).

The Aesthetics of Existence: a Productive Ethics

Ramos argues that, in Foucauldian thought, there is a clear distinction between moral and social codes (rules and precepts) and the practice of ethics (1994). For Foucault, ethics is concerned with the kind of relationship one has to oneself, and how one constitutes oneself as an ethical subject (1997; see, Rabinow 1997). Thompson argues that Foucault saw freedom as a prerequisite for the practice of ethics and saw the practice of ethics as constituting a kind of freedom. By freedom, Foucault means simply the ability to choose one action or direction over another (Thompson 2003). In this context, freedom is the ability to choose between one subjectivity and/or life trajectory over another.

A Foucauldian ethics of the self is a 'direct political response to normalisation's effect of blocking us from asserting an identity, a self, and a future of our own making' (Infinito 2003, p. 160). Infinito argues that underlying a Foucauldian ethics is the fact that the 'discursive construction of identity as internal and enduring serves to perpetuate existing power structures' (2003, p. 163). Therefore, Foucault proposed an ethical practice that was a reworking of subjectivity. This subjectivity was one that was perpetually reforming itself and that capitalised on its own mutability and discursiveness. At the heart of this ethical practice was life writing (Baker 2013, 2015).

Foucault's model of ethics is not focused on an external moral or social code but rather on subjects' relationship with themselves

3220_Offshoot.indd 152 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

(Rabinow 1997). How subjects conduct themselves (Thompson 2003) and critically contemplate their own and others' lives (Infinito 2003) is at the heart of this relationship. In Foucauldian ethics, the subjects' attention to conduct and contemplation or reflection on life through writing is linked to the notion of critique (Thompson 2003). Foucault posits that the purpose of critique is 'to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of the type of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries' (quoted in Thompson 2003, p. 122). This critique is harnessed to a process of self-formation, or self-bricolage (Rabinow 1997), in which subjects fashion for themselves 'a mode of being' that emerges from their own history and their own 'critical and creative thinking and action' (Infinito 2003, p. 160). The action referred to here includes the practice of reflective life writing.

Although Foucauldian ethics rejects external moral codes (Thompson 2003), and therefore is not extrinsic in character, it is not wholly internalised or obsessively introspective either. A Foucauldian 'care for the self' does not exclude a concern and acknowledgement of the contribution to our own being – especially with regard to its constitution – of others. Thompson illustrates this point when he writes:

> An "aesthetics of existence" means then that just as any technician, artisan, or artist, always crafts a new work under the guidance of critical scrutiny, examining what has been achieved thus far, recalling the rules of the art itself, and comparing the former against the latter, working under the direction of critical inspection, reminding ourselves constantly of the fundamental rule of this unique art, the principle of autonomy, not, of

3220_Offshoot.indd 153 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> course, as a judge, assessing guilt, but as a craftsperson shaping new forms of existence, always comparing what we've made for its fidelity to the project and activity of self-formation itself (2003, p. 125).

In other words, an ethics of the self is a socially embedded creative practice that, although without an overarching moral trajectory, does have some aspects of 'normalisation' (Thompson 2003), though this normalisation is harnessed to the autonomy of self-formation (Baker 2013, 2015). Thus, Infinito argues, 'the locus of ethical activity is not in the solitary mind, nor even the will, but rather in the critical and creative capacities brought forth in praxis' (2003, p. 160). The critical and creative practice that Foucault saw as the principle field of this ethical activity, this aesthetics of existence, was a reflective writing focused on examining one's own life.

Queer Life Writing as an Aesthetics of Existence

Life writing as a genre and a discipline offers a clear example of the relationship between discourse and writing and the constitution of subjectivities in a Foucauldian ethics of the self (Baker 2013, 2015). Ambrosio, citing Faust, describes how writing acts on and with subjectivity when he argues:

> As a form of reflection and experimentation, writing is a technology of ethical self-formation that views the subject as a work of art and the self as an artefact, as an ongoing work in progress. When conjoined with a philosophical "attitude of resistance that incites new ways of thinking about the forms of experience", writing enables individuals to begin to "question and modify

3220_Offshoot.indd 154 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> those systems which make only particular kinds of action possible" (2008, p. 264).

Queer Theory is such a 'philosophical attitude of resistance' that 'incites new ways of thinking about…forms of experience' (Faust 1988, p. 188) and which makes a wider range of actions and performativities possible. For those new to it, it is important to understand that Queer Theory has its origins in post-structuralism (Jagose 1996) and employs a number of post-structuralism's key ideas (Spargo 1999). As Spargo argues, Queer Theory employs:

> Lacan's psychoanalytic models of decentred, unstable identity, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of binary conceptual and linguistic structures, and…Foucault's model of discourse, knowledge and power (1999, p. 41).

Queer Theory's principle focus is the denaturalisation of categories/norms (de Lauretis 1991; Jagose 1996; Sullivan 2003) and abrading the borders between binary terms such as male/female, natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal, heterosexual/homosexual, white/black, self/other. The work of Queer Theory is one of deconstruction (Jagose 1996; Spargo 1999), dissecting and altering how we think about and live core aspects of human subjectivity such as identity, sex/gender, race and sexuality. This work is undertaken in the context of a culture steeped in heteronormativity – the discourse and practice of presumed and privileged heterosexuality (Butler 1990, p. 106).

Queer Theory works to undermine the privileged position of heteronormativity (and homonormativity) by exposing the ways in which sexualities and genders are produced in/by discourse and the ways in which non-normative genders and sexualities resist,

3220_Offshoot.indd 155 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

transcend and trouble normative notions of sex, gender and sexuality categories that would otherwise be widely (mis)understood as somehow natural, essential or incontestable (Baker 2015). From a Queer Theory perspective, genders and sexualities (and subjectivities) are fluid, permeable, mutable and largely the result of repeatedly performed utterances, rituals and behaviours, or, in Butler's terminology, 'performativity' (1993).

Queer life writing, then, would be defined as a writing practice that foregrounds the performativity of subjectivities (especially in regard to genders and sexualities) and that produces texts which also foreground the performative whilst simultaneously denaturalising categories or norms and abrading the borders between binary terms. Significantly, queer life writing would not frame the creative text as an expression of the internal identity of the author (Stephens 2009). Indeed, Queer Theory rejects the notion of stable identities altogether, especially when linked to biological sex. Instead, the queer (or homoerotic) content of a creative text would be seen as a discursive sexual non-normativity mobilised within the text to disrupt heteronormativity rather than as the (autobiographical) reflection of the author's sexuality or identity/subjectivity (Stephens 2009).

A queer life writing would also displace the entrenched and essentialist model of creative genius whilst simultaneously 'disrupting the notion that discursive subjectivities appearing within literary texts are representations of the internal, stable identity of the creator' (Baker 2011, p. 8). Instead, queer life writing would foreground the appearance of subjectivities within texts as a *deployment* or intervention into discourse for a critical or creative purpose (Baker 2011). Thus, the writing of queer subjectivities into literature would not be seen as a reflection of a writer's identity, a representation of some imagined 'internal' self, but rather

3220_Offshoot.indd 156 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

'as a deliberate inscription and dissemination of non-normative discursive subjectivities' (Baker 2011, p. 8).

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Foucault uses reflective life writing as an exemplar of a technique of the self implemented to produce a desired non-normative subjectivity (1997). Foucault demonstrates how certain forms of reflective writing produce the subject through a process of critical self-analysis of one's conduct and of one's historical and social position (1986b). This self-analysis, or critique, aligns the self with one's ethics that are formed in response to, and indeed in resistance to, dominant forms and norms of subjectivity (Martin et al. 1988; Thompson 2003; Ambrosio 2008). This critique is undertaken principally in the act of writing about one's life (Baker 2015). One's analysis is written down, reflected over, and these writings are then used in the refinement of the self; in the production and maintenance of a new ethical subjectivity. Foucault demonstrates how this writing as self-formation has historically been tied to a philosophical or moral tradition in which the desired subjectivity was once in line with specific moral or philosophical tenets (Foucault 1986b). This being the case, a reflective writing informed by Queer Theory can also be used in the process of self-formation, as a *queered aesthetics of existence* applied as a way of life, in order to constitute new (and radical) queer subjectivities.

According to Foucault, 'there is no sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject to be found everywhere', but rather the subject/subjectivity is 'constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty…on the basis, of course, of a number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment' (1984/1996, p. 452). There is no 'authentic, foundational or necessary self waiting to be discovered and liberated' (Ambrosio 2008,

3220_Offshoot.indd 157 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

p. 253). Subjectivity (in particular gender and sexual subjectivity) is constituted in the interplay and correlation between 'types of understanding, forms of normativity and modes of relation to oneself and others' (Foucault 1986, p. 4). Furthermore, 'subjects can occupy a variety of positions both "subject to" discipline and capable of "self-constitution"; albeit within the resources offered by his/her culture, society and social group' (Foucault quoted in Bailey 2005, p. 122). In this sense, self-bricolage through life writing would be a practice of liberty or practice of the self that, as an aspect of the queer cultural environment, would inform and alter the way subjects actively constitute themselves. In other words, works of life writing arising out of a queered aesthetics of existence would be 'models' that 'strongly influence the ongoing *becoming* of queer subjectivities' (Baker 2011, p. 11).

Drawing on Foucault, Butler writes that 'to understand identity as a *practice*, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effect of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life' (1990, p. 184, emphasis original). Subjectivity, like creative writing, is a practice that is dynamic, reflective and creative. Butler further argues that an experience of an alternate or different subjectivity can 'undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one' (2004, p. 1). In other words, an experience of a non-normative subjectivity in discourse or creative text can, to use Butler's terminology, 'undo' one's personhood and facilitate the emergence of a new subjectivity. Foucault described a similar process by which new subjectivities form through the 'appropriation, the unification, of a fragmentary and selected already said' (1997, p. 209). In the context of Queer Theory, this process of undoing and/or (re)constituting subjectivities is an act of resistance against

3220_Offshoot.indd 158 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

heteronormativity. This resistance, this remaking of identity, is not without limits or challenges; it is not total voluntarism (Butler 2004). As Ambrosio, pointing to some of these challenges and constraints, argues:

> We cannot transform ourselves through a simple act of knowing, through critical reason or reflection alone, but only by *risking* who we are, by…seeking out and testing ourselves in situations that illuminate the contours of our subjectivity, that destabilise our certainties… Transforming the self requires that we act with personal courage and develop a tolerance for uncertainty and vulnerability (2008, p. 255, emphasis original).

This exposure to new subjectivities or discourses (the 'already said') can occur at the point of reception, but also, significantly, in the performative moment of production, the moment of writing (Baker 2013, 2015). The practice of writing can provide 'a means by which individuals…transform themselves, reconstitute themselves as ethical subjects through reading…reflection, and practical experimentation' (Ambrosio 2008, p. 265).

This process of 'undoing' in which new subjectivities emerge can be described as a 'queering of the self'. It can be extrapolated then that a 'queering of the self' – facilitated by exposure to Queer Theory in the context of an aesthetics of existence – can enrich and inform one's life writing practice; in effect bringing it into operation as part of a radical self-bricolage. This queering of the self/subjectivity is in effect a denaturalising of the self – a decoupling of identity from notions of the natural. In other words, a queered self is one in which subjectivity and identity are not conceived as somehow natural and stable but rather understood to

3220_Offshoot.indd 159 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

be ambiguous, ephemeral, fluid and largely produced by discourse and bodily practices in relationship with sociocultural factors. This conception of the self and subjectivity opens up the possibility of the life writer occupying a wider range of reading and writing 'positions' in ways that enrich both the creative act and the writer's personal development. Movement into and out of these reading and writing positions is facilitated by the practice of writing and reflection (on what has been written), which are both techniques of a critique of the self (Baker 2013, 2015). This practice of reflective life writing opens up new possibilities of experience, and facilitates the emergence of new forms of subjectivity, as Foucault describes in relation to the practice of reflective life writing in the Classical era:

> A relation developed between writing and vigilance. Attention was paid to nuances of life, mood, and reading, and the experience of oneself was intensified and widened by virtue of this act of writing. A whole field of experience opened which earlier was absent (quoted in Martin et al. 1988, p. 28).

A queered aesthetics of existence can also provide writer-researchers with tools to explore notions of sexual and gender difference in ways that produce more than a theoretical understanding. As Foucault argues in his groundbreaking text *The History of Sexuality* (1978), any strategy aimed at resisting the discursive mechanisms of power that are engaged in the deployment of a narrowly defined sexuality, including mechanisms of repression, must involve a transgression of laws, a dismantling of prohibition and an 'irruption of speech' (p. 5). Therefore, Foucault writes,

3220_Offshoot.indd 160 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

'one cannot hope to obtain the desired results simply from…a theoretical discourse, however rigorously pursued' (1978, p. 5). Thus, it is apparent that using non-theoretical ways of exploring and communicating the knowledges produced in life writing practice are appropriate and, furthermore, a means of equipping queer theory – inspired life writers with 'technologies of the self' (Ramos 1994, p. 21) that resist heteronormative discourse and normative models of subjectivity.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways the consumption (reading) and production (writing) of queer life writing might be understood as techniques in a Foucauldian ethics of the self. It has sought to frame queer life writing as an intervention into the self or subjectivity and works of life writing as artefacts that both document this interventional process and express or disseminate new subjectivities arising from that process. The experience of reading and writing about one's own and others' lives can be understood as components in an ethics of the self (self-bricolage) or a practice of self-making. That is, the reading and making of life writing can lead to the production of new subjectivities and new identities.

There are certain limits to positioning subjectivity as a core element to creative practice. It is crucial that the model of subjectivity used in a subjectivity-centred creative practice is not one that entrenches, rather than disrupts, the notion of subjectivity as stable, lasting and unified (Baker 2011). For a queered aesthetics of existence to be effective, the model of subjectivity deployed 'must be one that destabilises the notion of identity/subjectivity as unitary, fixed and somehow natural' (Baker 2011, p. 15). A subjectivity-centred approach that views identity as natural and

3220_Offshoot.indd 161 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

inherent to the subject, and sees the creative artefact as a direct reflection of the creator's identity, is little more than a return to the essentialist model of the creative genius (Baker 2011).

By deploying a model of subjectivity that destabilises the notion of identity/subjectivity as unitary, fixed and somehow natural, a 'queering of the self' – facilitated by exposure to Queer Theory in the context of an aesthetics of existence – can enrich and inform life writing practice; in effect bringing it into operation as radical self-bricolage. An ethics of the self, or self-bricolage through life writing, can be seen as a practice of liberty that has the potential to inform and alter the way subjects actively constitute themselves. Furthermore, the life writing arising out of a queered aesthetics of existence can act as 'models' that strongly influence the ongoing making and remaking and ethical refinement of queer subjectivities.

References

Ambrosio, John 2008, 'Writing the self: ethical self-formation and the undefined work of freedom', *Educational Theory*, vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 251–67.

Baker, Dallas J. 2011, 'Queering practice-led research: subjectivity, creative practice and performative research', Published Conference Proceedings, *A Scholarly Affair*, Cultural Studies Association of Australasia National Conference, Byron Bay, 7–9 December 2010, pp. 1–18.

Baker, Dallas J. 2013, 'Creative writing praxis as queer becoming', *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 359–77, viewed 1 December 2016, <http://doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2013.811265>.

Baker, Dallas J. 2015, 'Writing and reading queerly: Foucault's aesthetics of existence and queer self-making', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special Issue 31, viewed 1 December 2016, pp. 1–15, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue31/Baker.pdf>.

Bailey, S. 2005, *Media audiences and identity: self-construction in the fan experience*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Butler, Judith 1990, *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge, London.

Butler, Judith 1993, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of 'sex'*, Routledge, New York.

3220_Offshoot.indd 162 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Butler, Judith 2004, *Undoing gender*, Routledge, New York.
de Lauretis, Teresa 1991, 'Queer theory: lesbian and gay sexualities an introduction', *Differences*, vol. 4, pp. 1–10.
Faust, Mark A. 1988, 'Foucault on care of the self: connecting writing with life-long learning', *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 181–93.
Foucault, Michel 1978, *The history of sexuality, volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley, Random House, New York.
Foucault, Michel 1984/1996, 'An aesthetics of existence', in Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *Foucault live: collected interviews, 1961–1984*, New York: Semiotext(e).
Foucault, Michel 1986a, *The history of sexuality volume 2: The use of pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley, Pantheon, New York.
Foucault, Michel 1986b, *The history of sexuality volume 3: the care of the self*, trans. Robert Hurley, Pantheon, New York.
Foucault, Michel 1997, 'Self writing', trans. Robert Hurley, in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Ethics: subjectivity and truth*, The New Press, New York.
Infinito, Justen 2003, 'Ethical self-formation: a look at the later Foucault', *Educational Theory*, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 155–71.
Jagose, Annamarie 1996, *Queer theory: an introduction*, New York University Press, New York.
Martin, Luther H., Gutman, H. & Hutton, Patrick H. 1988, *Technologies of the self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*, Tavistock, London.
Rabinow, Paul 1997, *Michel Foucault: ethics, subjectivity and truth*, The New Press, New York.
Ramos, Alice 1994, 'Technologies of the self: truth, asceticism, and autonomy', *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, vol. 6, no. 1–2, pp. 20–9.
Spargo, Tamsin 1999, *Foucault and queer theory*, Icon Books, Cambridge, UK.
Stephens, Elizabeth 2009, *Queer writing: homoeroticism in Jean Genet's fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
Sullivan, Nikki 2003, *A critical introduction to queer theory*, New York University Press, New York.
Thompson, Kevin 2003, 'Forms of resistance: Foucault on tactical reversal and self-formation', *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol. 36, pp. 113–38.
Weisberg, Robert W. 1993, *Creativity: beyond the myth of genius*, W. H. Freeman, New York.

3220_Offshoot.indd 163 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

LES FÉES S'ÉCRIVET: WRESTLING WITH WOMEN'S LIFE WRITING

Nike Sulway

> *any child knows that as soon as you begin: Once Upon A Time, all the usual rules are broken.*
>
> (Jeanette Winterson 2014, para. 19)

Introduction

Life writing and fairy tales might not appear immediately compatible. One is a set of strategies for telling truths about oneself, and the other for telling lies about others. And yet, for many women writers, the two are productively intimate companions. Autobiography, as Leigh Gilmore argues:

> provokes fantasies of the real. Its burden is not only to represent gender, genre, and identity in any particular lived and imagined configuration, but to posit a ground from which that configuration is thought to emerge (1994, p. 16).

Fairy tale, on the other hand, is a genre that, like fantasy:

> is fantasy because it contravenes the real and violates it…fantasy is *what could not have happened*…the negative subjunctivity, the *cannot* or *could not*, constitutes in

> fact the chief pleasure of fantasy. Fantasy violates the real, contravenes it, denies it, and insists on this denial throughout (Russ 1995, p. 16).

For Joanna Russ, realist fiction is *what could have happened*. Autobiography provokes a fantasy of a more direct relationship to the real; purporting to be an account of *what happened*, while fairy tales (like fantasy) are *what could not have happened*. Fairy tales and autobiography, therefore, hold opposing relationships to the real: both in writing about actions or events, and in writing identity. That is, to riff on Russ' subjunctive descriptions, while autobiographies are stories about *who I could have been*, fairy tales are stories about *who I could not have been*.

These productive incompatibilities are perhaps precisely the reason that the two genres have been methodologically fused in the work of Jeanette Winterson, Christa Wolf, Carolyn Kay Steedman, Angela Carter (1996) and Anne Sexton, in particular. In addition, many of the essays in Kate Bernheimer's edited collection, *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Women Writers Explore Their Favourite Fairy Tales* (1998) include similar works, blending the generic tropes and strategies of life writing and fairy tale. When woven together, fairy tales and autobiographies produce texts that draw attention to the ways in which life writing is always already a divided or impossible activity.

In discussing the 'autobiographical meditations' of Christa Wolf's *Kindheitmuster* (1976) and Carolyn Kay Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1987), for example, Harries draws attention to how their works 'suggest some of the multiplicity of ways fairy tales can mirror and form versions of the female self' (2001, p. 139). She notes that:

3220_Offshoot.indd 165 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> Neither text presents a stable and coherent self. In both books, fairy tales become what Steedman calls, "interpretative devices", stories to think with, stories that do not necessarily determine lives but can give children (and adults) a way to read and understand them (Harries 2001, p. 139).

But fairy tales can be more than just 'stories to think with'. Rather than being narrative templates that we can use to make sense of what has already occurred, fairy tales are an effective means of creating alternative multiple, open-ended narratives. Combining fairy tales and life writing results in a methodological hybrid – a subgenre I have tentatively named *les fées s'écrivet* (fairy tale life writing) – a process of using fairy tales not simply as 'stories to think with', but as strategies for telling women's life stories that embrace the instability of genres, genders, and identities.

Contes des Fées

It might surprise you to hear that fairy tales have always been a vehicle for subversive and innovative storytelling, and for telling alternative versions of women's lived realities. The feminist fairy tale debates of the 1970s, and the eruption of feminist retellings of fairy tales that followed in their wake, relied on a misunderstanding of fairy tale that is at odds with a woman-centred history of the genre. As Harries notes:

> the earliest feminist critics of fairy tales…agreed women in the best-known tales were either beautiful, slumbering young girls or powerful, usually wicked and grotesque older women. Though there might be a muted tradition of tales in which women were admirable, active, clever,

3220_Offshoot.indd 166 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> and self-assertive participants, the dominant tradition… prescribed harmful roles for women that little girls could not help but imitate (2001, p. 137).

There are a range of reasons for this misunderstanding of the history and archetypal forms of fairy tales. The history of fairy tale publication and criticism reveals the many ways women's writing is repeatedly effaced, forgotten, traduced and/or appropriated by male scholars and writers. The feminists of the 1970s were not responding to, or critiquing, the deep, broad international tradition of fairy tales. The focus of their critique was a small sliver of the fairy tale tradition: a body of work dominated by the collections of the Brothers Grimm, and largely translated into English by publishers whose aim was not to produce works suitable for an educated and/or adult audience, but for children. This English-language canon of bowdlerised fairy tales was only occasionally expanded to include the work of other male figures in the fairy tale tradition: most notably, Charles Perrault and Hans Christian Andersen. Many feminist critics responded, too, not even to the English adaptions of Perrault, Andersen, or Grimm works, but to the even more saccharine Disney film adaptations.

Feminist rewritings of fairy tales, too, have responded almost exclusively to the male trinity's works, rather than the work of earlier women writers or collectors. Anne Sexton's *Transformations* (1971), for example, retells seventeen Grimm tales, framing the collection through a 'speaker', a 'middle-aged witch, me' (Sexton 1999, p. 223). Sexton's narrator does not even reflect the nature of the Grimm's sources (most were well-educated, middle- and upper-class men and women, many of whom passed on written, rather than oral, tales to the collectors). This means Sexton is responding to the appropriations and erasures of the masculine

3220_Offshoot.indd 167 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

fairy tale tradition, rather than the older tradition of the seventeenth-century female *conteuses*, whose fictional narrators were educated and elegant sibyls, goddesses and fairies. Contemporary fairy tale reimaginings betray a similar lack of familiarity with the deep history of the tales, in particular the more literary and subversive traditions, as well as those more closely associated with women as writers, translators and collectors. Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* (1997), for example, is a retelling of nine tales: six Grimm tales, two Andersen tales, and one from Perrault.

Even in responding to the trinity's tales, the feminist retellings of the 1970s and beyond often overlook or fail to notice the feminist traces that remain in the tales. There are an almost endless number of retellings of 'Bluebeard' that mistakenly misremember the earlier versions of the tale, like the tale of Eve in the garden of Eden, as tales about the inappropriate nature of female curiosity. But even in Perrault's late-seventeenth-century '*Barbe bleue*', the bride is wise, witty, resourceful, courageous and (rightly) suspicious, while her husband is the 'monster' of the tale: secretive, greedy and murderous. As Ursula K. Le Guin notes in an essay on influence and fairy tales: '[This] is one of the stories that I've "always known", just as it's one of the stories that "we all know" [but]…we *don't* know the stories we think we've always known' (2002, p. 205).

In other words, many of the responses we make to fairy tales are not responses to actual tales, historical or otherwise, but to misrememberings that are knotted up (wrestled together) with our own desires and dreams. As Francine Prose notes, if that is the case:

> then perhaps what Freud said about dreams may apply to these stories too: their details, their entirety, the sum of what actually happened are finally less significant than

3220_Offshoot.indd 168 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> what we remember and misremember, fragment and distort (2002, p. 300).

For many women, then, fairy tales are less interesting in the context of life writing in terms of which tales women writers remember, why certain tales resonate, and how women writers have braided their imagination and memories into and through tales of maidens, princesses, crones and mermaids. In an essay included in Bernheimer's collection, Joyce Carol Oates writes:

> It is instructive to note that the contemporary fairy tale in its revised, reimagined form has evolved into an art form that subverts original models; from the woman's (victim's) perspective, the romance of fairy tales is an illusion, to be countered by wit, audacity, skepticism, cynicism, an eloquently rendered rage (2002, p. 280).

What this description of the contemporary fairy tale misses is that the 'original models' being subverted by the post-1970s retellings are not the female traditions of fairy tale writing (which were already witty, audacious, sceptical, cynical and full of eloquently rendered rage), but a more contemporary, narrow range of sources: an English-language fairy tale canon that centralises the storytelling strategies reified by the Grimms, complete with flat, archetypal characters, and a faux-oral simplified style. Instead, fairy tales encompass a broader range of storytelling strategies than the Grimm tradition suggests. It is a tradition that includes a focus on, among other things, female characters, transformation, and an open-ended, interconnected field of narratives, making it a productive, playful playground of narratives for women interested in rewriting their own tales of menace and magic.

3220_Offshoot.indd 169 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Women's Tales

Women are often central characters in fairy tales. For every familiar but flattened Disney princess there are ten fairy tale women who, if they are not born with agency or power, do whatever they can to acquire them. While many fairy tale women are concerned with securing a 'good marriage', they frequently resist the patriarchal traditions of their (author's) time by choosing their own husbands (or avoiding marriage altogether), making marital choices on the basis of sound reasoning and insight, and then exerting power and agency from within the context of their marriages. One of my favourite tales, for example, is 'Vasilisa the Priest's Daughter', a traditional Russian tale, collected in Afanasyev's *Narodnye russkie skazki* (1945). Vasilisa likes to wear men's clothing, drink vodka, carry her own gun, and ride horses. Determined to maintain her independence, she evades the repeated attempts of a royal suitor to unmask her (female) sex, and get her to marry him. As Marilyn Jurich notes, 'While she does not deny her sex, she does protect it from the conventions and constraints others are so eager to impose. In this way, she retains her *self;* in this way she assures her power' (1998, p. 189). Vasilisa is just one of many fairy tale heroines who are insightful, assertive, witty and strong, and delightfully subversive in their relationship to gender, sex and sexual identity.

Identity Tales

Fairy tale is concerned with the power and meaning of transformations and, through these sometimes fantastical motifs, the slippery nature of identity. Fairy tale characters are rarely, if ever, who or what they seem. Trees are mothers, fish are sons, hedgehogs are princes, men are women and women are (or become) men. Women demand and then put on the skins of their incestuous father's murdered beasts to escape inappropriate desire. They put

3220_Offshoot.indd 170 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

on (and take off) beauty, and other physical characteristics, at will. They become (or are) robber maids, trees and birds, houses and wardrobes. Their transformations speak explicitly to the fluid nature of identity. Women in fairy tales often create new identities for themselves, and for their female relatives or associates. This tradition is evoked, for example, in Donoghue's contemporary 'The Tale of the Bird', in which, when the narrator is preparing for marriage, her 'mother carried in a huge basket of linen and a needle. Unspeaking, we began to cut and sew my new life' (1997, pp. 16–17). In her essay, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', Hélène Cixous wrote that:

> women take after birds and robbers just as robbers take after women and birds. They (*illes*) go by, fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down (1976, p. 887).

In fairy tales, women go one step further. They no longer 'take after' robbers and birds, but become them. *Are* them. Who can tell if they are even women (whatever women are), or if they might be some other creature altogether.

Never-ending Tales

One of the iconic features of a fairy tale is its use of the stock ending 'and they all lived happily ever after'. Many feminist critics have been critical of this notion of the 'happy ending', tied as it is to ideas that marriage, for example, is the 'end' towards which all women characters rightly strive. Christa Wolf thus writes in *Kindheitsmuster* of her/Nelly's disappointment with the traditional

3220_Offshoot.indd 171 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

German fairy tale ending, *Und wenn sie nicht gestorben sind, so leben sie heute noch*. In the English translation of Wolf's book, this stock phrase is rendered as 'and they lived happily ever after'. A sensible decision, but one that erases the playful open-endedness of the German ending. The German ending preserves two aspects of the fairy tale tradition that are rendered invisible in the English: the open-endedness of fairy tales, and their interconnectedness with each other. The traditional German ending opens with the conjunctive phrase *Und wenn* ('and if'). This ending produces an enormous and productive 'gap' between the possibility of death/ tragedy, and the possibility that the tale's characters are *leben sie heute noch* (still living today). The open-endedness of the German ending is reflected, slantwise, in many contemporary English-language fairy tales.

One writer noted for his interest in destabilising any notion of 'happily ever after' is Lucius Shepard. His tale 'The Scalehunter's Daughter', for example, ends: 'From that day forward she lived happily ever after. Except for the dying at the end. And the heart-break in between' (2012, p. 114). Here the possibility of death and the possibility of unhappiness (of living) are (re)introduced into the fairy tale.

In her collection of fairy tale retellings, Donoghue also subverts the stereotypical English-language openings and endings. Each of the tales in *Kissing the Witch* ends with an exchange between the narrator of the tale and a secondary character inside the tale. At the end of the first tale in the collection (The Tale of the Shoe) the Cinderella narrator asks of her fairy godmother lover, 'Who were you before you walked into my kitchen?' and the godmother answers, 'Will I tell you my own story? It is a tale of a bird' (1997, p. 9). The next tale in the collection sees the godmother take up the narration of her own tale. Each tale ends

3220_Offshoot.indd 172 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

with an almost exact repetition of this exchange (Who were you before? / Will I tell you my own story?) in which each narrator, having finished her own story, hands over her narratorial role to another woman. These exchanges link each tale to the one that follows, moving backwards or sideways through time. They also emphasise the ways in which women are always in relation with other women, and other women's stories. Donoghue's collection ends by handing over the role of storyteller to the reader: 'This is the story you asked for. I leave it in your mouth' (1997, p. 228).

Les Fées S'écrivet

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that, rather than understanding fairy tales as tools that autobiographers use simply to 'read and understand' their lives, writers (especially women writers) can, and do, hybridise the methodologies of fairy tale and life writing into what I have dubbed *les fées s'écrivet* (fairy tale life writing): a methodology for creating versions of the self that embrace the unstable nature of genres, genders and identities. The name I have coined for this subgenre draws on the French feminist term for women's, or feminine, writing (*écriture féminine*) and the terms used to describe the French *conteuses* of the seventeenth century and their *contes des fées*.

In combining the methodological strategies of (women's) life writing and fairy tales, *les fées s'écrivet* provokes fantasies not of the real (as Gilmore argues life writing does), but of instability, uncertainty and open-endedness; fantasies of indeterminacy, magic and power. In appropriating the strategies of fairy tale *conteuses*, this methodology provides for a narrativising of the self and others that refuses to (that cannot) resolve its subjects into a single gender, identity, or story. In fairy tale life writing, the subject of the tale is always already both selves and others. Child,

3220_Offshoot.indd 173 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

stone, house and witch. Prisoner, weaver and warden. Or, in a reimaging of Cixous' formulation, not 'women [who] take after birds and robbers' (Cixous 1976, p. 887) but women who are, always already, *also* robbers and birds. (Here, I use the adverbial phrase 'always already' in the sense that it is frequently used by Jacques Derrida and other post-structural writers to indicate a process, or in this case an identity-in-process, that is always in motion, always on the threshold of being revealed, but also to highlight the fact that these female identities or subjects were never singular or resolved, as they may have historically been misunderstood or misread as being, but were always (already) multiple, evolving, and strange.)

Jeanette Winterson and *Les Fées S'éscrivet*

In 1991, Jeanette Winterson wrote a new introduction to her first book, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. This introduction, in part, attempts to describe the book she had published six years earlier. Winterson argues that the text is 'an experimental novel', 'a threatening novel' and 'a comforting novel' (1985, pp. xiii–xiv), but also grapples with the question of whether the book is a novel at all, writing: 'Is Oranges an autobiographical novel? No not at all and yes of course' (p. xiv).

Oranges is a complex interweaving of realist or autobiographical moments, biblical narratives, and fairy tales. It also includes various asides, or meditations, on the nature of storytelling, history, and identity, metafictively exploring the ways in which the narrator (Jeanette) muddies the distinctions between autobiography and fiction, fiction and fairy tale. The chapter 'Deuteronomy: the last book of the law' (pp. 89–93), for example, is a metafictional meditation on the relationships between time, storytelling, and

3220_Offshoot.indd 174 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

history. Among other things, this 'last book of the law' suggests ways in which the narrator (the implied author) has approached the process of writing her story. The chapter opens with a brief historical anecdote, but for the narrator-Jeanette (if not the 'real' Jeanette):

> Of course that is not the whole story, but that is the way with stories; we make them what we will. It's a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained, it's a way of keeping it alive, not boxing it into time. Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently…The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots. It's all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end. The best you can do is admire the cat's cradle, and maybe knot it up a bit more (1985, p. 91).

In this passage, as in others in this book, as well as in many of her other novels, essays and commentary, Winterson returns again to the idea of history and story as indistinct, of stories as eternally and irretrievably interconnected to each other, and of the writer's task as one not concerned with unravelling truth from untruth, history from story, biography from fairy tale, but of 'knot[ting] it up a bit more'.

Winterson has returned to this question of the relationship between the real and story many times over the years since *Oranges* was first published in 1985, both in her own works and in other works that mess with the border between life writing and fiction. In her book of essays, *Art Objects* (1996), for instance, Winterson

3220_Offshoot.indd 175 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

writes extensively about the intersection between genre and gender, life writing (memoir) and fiction. In 'Testimony Against Gertrude Stein' she writes that:

> Stein had trespassed gender as well as social niceties and literary convention. A woman is not allowed to call herself the centre of the world. That she so charmed her ordinary readers is an interesting case of hoax. Like *Orlando* and *Oranges are not the only fruit*, the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is a fiction masquerading as a memoir (Winterson 1996, p. 53).

In the same book, in another essay, 'Writer, Reader, Words', Winterson argues that:

> The reader is not being offered a chunk of the writer or a direct insight into the writer's mind, the reader is being offered a separate reality. A reality separate from the world of the reader, and just as importantly, separate from the actual world of the writer…The fiction, the poem, is not a version of the facts, it is an entirely different way of seeing (p. 28).

Here, as in the 'Deuteronomy' chapter of *Oranges*, Winterson describes a writing methodology that aligns with that of the fairy tale *conteuses*. As Harries notes in her history of women and the fairy tale: 'Every tale we now know as a fairy tale…[has been] pieced together from various narratives sources and fragments. Each teller splices those story threads together for his or her own purposes' (2001, p. 153). For the narrator of *Oranges*, the process of piecing together her tale(s) is similar to those used by many fairy

3220_Offshoot.indd 176 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

tale collectors, narrators and retellers for centuries, and touched on earlier in this chapter: it places women at the centre, it presumes that (women's) stories are interconnected, and it understands that storytelling does not begin or end, but is an ongoing process of winding and unwinding, tangling and detangling.

Perhaps, though, the storytelling process can be metaphorically described in a more muscular, vigorous way. In the opening page of *Oranges*, the narrator writes: 'My father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle' (1985, p. 3). The narrator, too, wrestles with her story, and with the biographical, historical, biblical and fairy tale narratives that inform and form her. Grappling with these narratives, pushing them back, twisting their arms, she uses their bodies to tell her own tale, even if she must tell it slant.

This, I would argue, is a form of life writing informed by the strategies and history of fairy tale. Fairy tale life writing, *les fées s'écrivet*, though not named as such by Winterson, is the process by which she combines the familiar and the unfamiliar, splicing together familiar stories with scraps of experience, history, and a troubled and troubling awareness of social and cultural processes. It is also a storytelling methodology that demonstrates and embodies the challenges that women face in negotiating with the limiting or damning narratives of supine princesses, obedient wives, and wicked (step)mothers: a storytelling methodology that wrestles with fairies.

Winterson 'splices' the story threads of familiar fairy tales and Bible stories with more realist narrative elements, and with new fairy tales that nevertheless resonate with what she (as writer) and we (as readers) understand a fairy tale to be. At the same time, the fairy tales never completely annihilate any relationship with the real. Like the seventeenth-century *conteuses*, like Anne Sexton

3220_Offshoot.indd 177 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

and Emma Donoghue in the twentieth century, and their literary descendants in our own, Winterson enters into a long tradition of women using fairy tales not just to make sense of women's stories, but as machines with which to form women's identities and tell women's life stories.

References

Afanas'ev, Aleksandr 1945, *Russian Fairy Tales* (*Narodnye russkie skazki*), trans Norbert Guterman, New York, Pantheon Books, pp. 131–133.

Bernheimer, Kate (ed.) 1998, *Mirror, mirror on the wall: women writers explore their favourite fairy tales*, Anchor Books, New York.

Carter, Angela 1996, *Burning your boats: collected stories*, Vintage Books, London.

Cixous, Hélène 1976, 'The laugh of the Medusa', trans. Keith Cohen & Paula Cohen, *Signs*, vol. 1, no. 4, Summer, pp. 875–93.

Donoghue, Emma 1997, *Kissing the witch: old tales in new skins*, Joanna Cotler Books, New York.

Gilmore, Leigh 1994, *Autobiographics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

Harries, Elizabeth Wanning 2001, *Twice upon a time: women writers and the history of the fairy tale*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Jurich, Marilyn 1998, *Scheherazade's sisters: trickster heroines and their stories in world literature*, Greenwood Publishing Group, London.

Le Guin, Ursula K. 2002, 'The wilderness within', in Kate Bernheimer (ed.), *Mirror, mirror on the wall: women writers explore their favourite fairy tales*, Anchor Books, New York, pp. 203–10.

Oates, Joyce Carol 2002, 'In olden times, when wishing was having: classic and contemporary fairy tales', in Kate Bernheimer (ed.), *Mirror, mirror on the wall: women writers explore their favourite fairy tales*, Anchor Books, New York, pp. 260–83.

Prose, Francine 2002, 'Sleeping Beauty', in Kate Bernheimer (ed.), *Mirror, mirror on the wall: women writers explore their favourite fairy tales*, Anchor Books, New York, pp. 293–303.

Russ, Joanna 1995, *To write like a woman: essays in feminism and science fiction*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indiana.

Sexton, Anne 1999, *Anne Sexton: the complete poems*, Mariner Books, Boston and New York.

Shepard, Lucius 2012, *The dragon griaule*, Subterranean Press, Burton, Michigan.

Winterson, Jeanette 1985, *Oranges are not the only fruit*, Vintage, London.

Winterson, Jeanette 1996, *Art objects: essays on art and effrontery*, Vintage, Milsons Point, NSW.

3220_Offshoot.indd 178 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Winterson, Jeanette 2014, 'Jeanette Winterson: the books that changed my life', *The Telegraph*, 8 November, viewed 1 October 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/11209010/Jeanette-Winterson-the-books-that-changed-my-life.html>.

3220_Offshoot.indd 179 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

QUICKENING

Dominique Hecq

This is the child every woman wants. The child women who don't want children pine for despite themselves; the child women who abort want restored; the child women who can't have them desire so strongly; the child women who plan ahead will design. The child there not there. The child who comes and goes like the reel: *Fort. Da*!

In the flesh of your dreams, the child alive.

A quickening of meaning.

You list and discard dangers: wild beasts, prowlers, storms at sea.
Tongue of the world archiving loss in the communal vault.
A sentence rises up, hovers in the air, drifts…

expecting is about encounters with that which is both within and without,
real and imaginary, present and future extending their magnetic attraction
on the axis of the past
OR expecting takes you out and outside of yourself
OR expecting takes you through it *and to extremes*

A smudging of green-blue takes shape against white, indigo, aquamarine.

You are a *corsaire, a corps-serre* / a corsair, a body holding tight, a body greenhouse…*corpuscule étoilé dans le rêve éveillé* / spangled corpuscle in a waking dream.

Word, colour, dream incarnate.
Word, colour, dream extimate.

3220_Offshoot.indd 181 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

(SNIPPETS OF) LITTORAL FREEDOM: COLLECTING NOSTALGIC REMNANTS ON THE DISTANT SHORES OF CHILDHOOD

Zoe Thomas

We cruised down Sunset Boulevard in the old yellow panel van. Warm sea air billowed through the open windows, sending tendrils of blonde hair into a frenzy. Our chariot was an old RACV panel van and, despite Nanna's detergent and scrubbing, the cabin was still heady with the smells of petrol and rubber. I breathed them in deeply; they were the weekend smells of time with my dad. Torquay meant climbing rocks, swimming in the surf, riding through sloped paddocks in the back of a ute and sleeping whenever you dropped. There were no rules; we could do whatever, whenever, and nobody ever got cross. I looked up at Dad, his long hair blowing back, his tanned arm stretched to the wheel, and curled my sandy toes in happiness.

We flew down the roller-coaster road to Bells Beach, without seatbelts or speed limits, as the surfboards jostled in the back. As we crested a rise, the tyres left the hot bitumen for a moment and I squealed in delight. Finally, we pulled into the gravel car park next to a big orange Kombi. There was a row of empty cars, windows half-down, towels hung out to warm in the sun. Dad suited up as I licked chocolate from my fingers and joined him at the edge. With his wettie on and his board tucked under his arm, he spent five silent minutes watching the surf. He never looked at anything the way he looked at the ocean.

'It's nature's finest art, kid, and surfing is my ode.'

I smiled up at him. He smiled out at the water. Then he leaned down and kissed my head.

'Be careful, darling. Stay on the track.'

He took a running leap and disappeared over the edge.

If I may borrow the words of Henry James to describe the process of bringing this milieu of my own childhood to the page, then what I am charting here is a journey through the 'personal history, as it were, of the imagination' (2016, p. 479). These formative recollections, with their glinting trace elements, are fragments at best. They have been coaxed and emboldened by conversation, intuition, trust and return. My father trumpets our early adventures to anybody who will listen: each time a new detail emerges. He has always had a brazen relationship with the truth. Despite this, his conviction is persuasive, so I believe in his belief. His enthusiasm for our shared history is welcome in the life writing playground – where the past cartwheels precariously at the edges of remembrance – for this is a site rich with story-making potential, a potential that usually accompanies childhood itself.

Can there be any doubt that, as a young child left alone to climb the precipitous edges of the Victorian coastline, my imagination was flexing its muscles as surely as my chubby limbs were? That, as it did, my personal history was beginning to form? As H. Porter Abbott suggests, 'memory itself is dependent on the capacity for narrative…we do not have any mental record of who we are until narrative is present as a kind of armature, giving shape to that record' (2008, p. 3). That small child climbing down the cliff – the shifting, growing person – is still something of a mirage. I can see her face in old photographs but her internal world is harder to recall. What is more discernible is the lingering impression of my physical experience in that time and place;

3220_Offshoot.indd 183 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

the sensorial imprints of sights, smells, sounds, tastes and touch that accompanied this early childhood scene. For this reason, I feel invested in exploring how a writer of lives may develop strategies for accessing their deeper cache of memory, experience and personal narrative; and how they may access the residuum of long-ago and reanimate it with words, that become stories, that become books.

In any narrative form, the sense of place is an important factor: vitally so in autobiography, where writers must reimagine the landscapes of their past. When we write about childhood, we map its terrains: each word a small footfall along the autogeographical track. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson suggest that the 'ability to recover memories, in fact, depends on the material body. There must be a somatic body that perceives and internalises the images, sensations, and experiences of the external world' (2010, p. 49). For me, it is the corporeality of these earliest chapters that lingers: the smell of the salted bushland; the squeak of hot white sand; the thrill of a southern ocean on sand-warmed toes; the rock pools full of unexpected colour and treasure; the water-soaked optimism; the prickle of sun-burn through the night; and the thrilling freedom of it all – that is where my infant recollections have anchored themselves. These are the kinds of memories that penetrate the layers of personhood; they tighten on the epidermis, soak beneath the flesh, wrap around muscle, recede through the psyche and pool in the subconscious. It seems reasonable to suppose that memory might need to collaborate with imagination to draw them back out.

I have signed Philippe Lejeune's 'pact' (1988) and accept the complications of the genre, so I do not labour over the ethics of 'truth'. Rather, I embrace life writing as a process of integrating what is remembered, perceived, meaningful and felt; it

3220_Offshoot.indd 184 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

is an imaginative and curated re-enactment. And I do not need to chase rainbows of veridical certainty; I believe it is the heart of my personal history that I should wear on the page. As Paul Eakin states, autobiography is 'less an allegiance to a factual record that biographers and historians could check, than an allegiance to remembered consciousness…an allegiance to the history of one's self' (2008, p. 64). As long as I am either constructing some form of an original memory, or reimagining it through a secondary lens – as David Lowenthal distinguishes it, 'remembering things [or] remembering remembering them' (1985, p. 312) – then I hope that I am on the right track. What reader would disinvest if the butterflies were yellow not white, if the day was cloudy not buzzing with sunshine, if the sandwiches were peanut butter not curried egg? As Frances Cobbe suggests, 'memory [is] a finger-mark traced on shifting sand, ever exposed to obliteration when left unrenewed; and if renewed, then modified, and made, not the same, but a fresh and different mark' (1867, p. 104) – whether magnified, beautified, contracted or distorted. I believe it is the autobiographer's job to persevere through the prevailing conditions and find effective strategies for accessing repositories of story; to stand with confidence on the sand but also let the waves speak. One such reifying mode of praxis may be found in the company of nostalgia. This affective mood/mode is a potentially rich site for locating the timeworn scintilla of the self.

I began my descent slowly and carefully. There was a little edge and then a dip before the brush began. I started out backwards and lowered myself down, reaching out until I felt the dirt. My legs weren't long enough to jump the first part like all the surfers did. Dad said I was the only kid in the world who could tackle this 300-foot drop. It did feel quite big for a four year old but Dad

3220_Offshoot.indd 185 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

said all the kids would do it if the grown-ups weren't such stiffs. Dad had wanted to call me Bell when I was born, but Mum said no, so she let him choose my middle name instead. So I was Zoe Johanna – which was his second favourite coastal break. The path was a zigzag through knee-height heath, which served as protection from the angles of the cliff. I was only a bit taller, so I could just see over the wind-blown bush. There was a small footworn path, where patches of red earth warmed beneath the morning sun. It would be several years before there were stairs: before tourists falling over would force the council to fence off the slant.

I wobbled my small limbs down the bluff, a marionette of 'be careful'. I knew enough to step over the chain-gang march of bull ants and I would occasionally stop on a clear patch to watch the clouds of white butterflies dance. Nature ran her own course as I charted mine, and the sound and smell of the ocean got louder as I progressed. Dad was long gone now: seesawing in the swell that was still far below. It would take me nearly two hours to complete the journey that took him just over ten minutes. Occasionally I stopped to let other surfers pass. They were like black-clad superheroes whizzing past. Some called out greetings – 'G'day', 'Watch your step', 'Hey there, Kooks!' – they called me that because I was a beginner and they also thought I was crazy. I was often found in unlikely places – usually within cooee of my dad.

The saltbush grew in tight branchy nests of grey-green foliage that would take an elephant to flatten. If I did fall, I might get a poke from a sharp stick, but the bush would hold me tight. It was a cocooned pathway that wouldn't start to thin until I had almost reached the bottom. The only danger I felt was from the sword grass that grew in intermittent patches and could slice through pink flesh in a sudden salty gust. And there was often wind on this craggy bluff that jutted out into the tidal fury of Bass Strait.

3220_Offshoot.indd 186 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

But this time it was all clear. There was just a gentle breeze that buzzed with bees and sunshine.

Contemporary Australia has a deep and abiding relationship with the ocean. We populate our coastlines to a disproportionate degree. Even if we don't live by the ocean, we visit it in droves. Bruce Bennett declares that 'we all have a beach somewhere' (2007, p. 31). This littoral place, 'existing, taking place upon, or adjacent to the shore' (OED, 2016, online), has long attracted the Australian literary imagination. Nikki Gemmell writes that her childhood by the ocean 'represented pure freedom and happiness, and those simple sun-splashed holidays have stayed with [her] for all [her] years' (2009, p. 71). For me, it is a compelling muse. As Robert Drewe attests, 'a great many adult Australians regard the beach in a sensual and nostalgic light…the beach, the coast, are not only a regular pleasure and inspiration but an idée fixe, one that resurfaces at each of the four or five critical physical and emotional stages in our lives', all the way from youth through to retirement (2015, p. 1). It is where my first memories of life were formed, where I have continued to return consistently throughout my life (presently with my own children), and where I hope to retire and see out my days. Of all the places I have been, it is evoked by, and evokes in return, the most profound nostalgias.

As a specific term, nostalgia has a diverse and interesting history that stretches back into the seventeenth century. With associations as far back as Homer's *Odyssey*, nostalgia is more lately borne of the Greek *nostos* – meaning a homecoming or return – and *algia* – a type of pain or longing. Originally introduced in his thesis 'Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia or Homesickness' (1688/1934), Johannes Hofer devised the term to describe an acute disease of homesickness. Symptoms of this earliest iteration were: 'continued

3220_Offshoot.indd 187 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

sadness, meditation only of the Fatherland, disturbed sleep either wakeful or continuous, decrease of strength, hunger, thirst, senses diminished, and cares or even palpitations of the heart, frequent sighs [and] stupidity of the mind' (p. 386). The term has since undergone a considerable 'semantic drift', which has seen it shift from medicalised status into a psychopathologised zone (in the vicinities of melancholy and then later depression). More recently, it has moved again, along with modernity's shifting populations, to gain traction as a politicised ideology and is sometimes filtered through the gaze of diasporic populations. In the latter half of the twentieth century it also manifested as feelings of 'historical decline and loss, involving a departure from some golden age of "homefulness"' (Turner 1987, p. 150). For my purposes here I am interested in the branch of nostalgia that involves personal reflection: as a *modus operandi* that opens up cognitive pathways and provides both emotive and aesthetic guides for the writing process. Boym defines this as 'reflective nostalgia' and describes it as a mode 'more concerned with historical and individual time… not on recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation on history and passage of time' (2001, p. 49). Furthermore, she believes that it encompasses a desire for an 'individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs' (p. 49). This is a matter of the deeply personal and introspective and appears to be a site that may ignite autobiography's prosaic sensibilities and offer some navigational markers for the writer of lives. Evelyn Ender believes that 'nostalgia is a fundamental dimension of human remembrance – as the emotion or feeling that drives toward the past and sustains our desire for memory' (2005, p. 1). It is within this framework that I believe there is a case to be made for nostalgia as an effective writing tool for recuperating, reinhabiting and reinscribing our past. As Kate Douglas suggests,

3220_Offshoot.indd 188 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

'In a multitude of ways, the autobiography of childhood proves to be an ideal vehicle for nostalgic remembering' (2010, p. 85). As long as we pay attention as we manoeuver, acknowledging the signposts and being aware of the limitations, then steering the craft through our own nostalgias could prove to be a beneficial process.

Primarily, what I am considering here is nostalgia as an emotive process of recall – whether that be attached to an experience, an object, an event or a particular time in a particular place (Zeitgeist is such a willing collaborator). Some aspects may be deliberately evoked, others may arrive unbidden; together they have the potential to act as methodological tools for writing our histories. Of course, nostalgia has also been examined as a falsifying force – a rosy evocation of the 'good ol' days', a modifier of memory, a sentimental trap and even a 'phantasmal parodic rehabilitation of all lost referentials' (Baudrillard 1983, p. 72) – but I am more interested in the value of nostalgia as a form of preliminary infrastructure upon which we can build stronger narratives. Nostalgia is not the end point; rather, it functions to rupture the membrane of forgetting in order to facilitate an authentic retelling of the past. It would appear to have the potential, at least, to be helpful (although admittedly not easy or straightforward) for writers.

It is perhaps nostalgia's bittersweet quality that is one of its significant criteria for creative investment: the sweet for its poetic sensibilities, the bitter for the impetus to attempt an imaginative return. Of course, as Boym asserts, 'Only false memories can be totally recalled. From Greek mnemonic art to Proust, memory has always been encoded through a trace, a detail, a suggestive synecdoche' (2001, p. 54). Indeed, it may be hard, even for writers themselves, to separate with any certainty, the competing minutia of fact versus fiction in their own writing. I confess that

3220_Offshoot.indd 189 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

once the initial memory or impulse has been recreated on the page, the narrative sometimes supersedes the original stimulus. For this reason, nostalgia and the imagination are probably the best playmates. By joining these two energetic forces, I believe that writers may collect sufficiently nostalgic remnants, that they may infuse them once again with life.

When my climb was finally done, I found a patch of sand, and tried to spy my dad. I gazed out over the ocean, through eyelashes lit by the sun, and watched the flat black bodies bob. When a good wave rolled in, they all turned and paddled and one or two would stand for the ride. It was fun to watch them move back and forth, as the wave got smaller and bubbled towards the rocks. Dad never left me there for too long, and I would make a game of trying to spy him. He had a way of tipping his body forwards, as if he was going to fall off, before he popped up and spread his arms out like a bird. I stood and waved with both hands as he sailed high on the wave all the way back to me. He clambered out onto the rocks and ran dripping to where I sat. He dropped his board and tucked me under his arm instead.

'How about one more go, darling? You might be the best climber in the world but it's still important to practice.'

'But I want to come surfing with you, Dad. When can I learn to surf?'

'Soon, Kooks, I promise. When you get big enough your Daddy will teach you all the tricks. But you need to start with a boogie board first.'

'What's a boogie board, Dad?'

'It's a special board for little kids. You can start around at Torquay main beach. You'll be ripping it up like your old man in no time.'

3220_Offshoot.indd 190 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

'Okay, Daddy.'

It made me swell with happiness when he talked like that. Like I was just as important to him as surfing. He leapt up off the reef and ran me back to the top. He fished out a sandwich from the van.

'Climbing is hard work, hey kid?'

I nodded as I took a hungry bite. Then, he flew off and I sat down on the edge. I watched him disappear again and munched happily on white bread and curried egg.

When Dad was finally done, we piled our sandy bodies into the van and went for fish and chips. We sat at a picnic table overlooking Torquay main beach and stuffed the oily morsels in with salty fingers. The seagulls gathered, strutting and squawking, and I flung chips into the air that sent them into a white-winged flurry. I grabbed a handful and ran through the gaggle, feeling the air from their flapping as they swooped and squabbled. Dad didn't say much; he often sat in sun-drenched silence. People in thongs slapped past, shouting in happy holiday voices. The old playground swings creaked in protest as big kids pushed little ones in red speedo arcs. There was the thwack of a ball on a wooden bat, followed by cheers and the squeak of bare feet through sand as somebody ran for a six. And behind it all the rise and fall of the ocean.

He never did teach me to surf. I have resisted the temptation to imagine that he did.

References

Abbott, H. Porter 2008, *The Cambridge introduction to narrative*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, New York.

Baudrillard, Jean 1983, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Phil Beitchman, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles.

Bennett, Bruce 2007, 'A beach somewhere: Australian littoral imagination at

3220_Offshoot.indd 191 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

play', in C. A. Cranston & Robert Zeller (eds.), *The littoral zone: Australian contexts and their writers*, Ridopi, Amsterdam and New York, pp. 31–45.

Boym, Svetlana 2001, *The future of nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York.

Cobbe, Frances 1867, *Hours of work and play*, J. B. Lippincott and Co, Philadelphia.

Douglas, Kate 2010, *Contesting childhood: autobiography, trauma, and memory*, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey.

Drewe, Robert 2015, *The beach: an Australian passion*, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Eakin, Paul John 2008, *Living autobiographically: how we create identity in narrative,* Cornell University Press, New York.

Ender, Evelyn 2005, *Architexts of memory: literature, science, and autobiography*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

Gemmell, Nikki 2009, *Why you are Australian: a letter to my children*, Fourth Estate, Sydney.

Hofer, J (1688) 1934, 'Medical dissertation on nostalgia or homesickness,' trans. C. Anspach, *Bulletin of the institute of the history of medicine*, vol. 2, no. 6, pp. 376–91.

James, Henry 2016, *Autobiographies: A small boy and others; Notes of a son and brother; The middle years; Other autobiographical writings*, The Library of America, New York.

Lejeune, Philippe 1988, *On autobiography*, trans. Paul Eakin, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Lowenthal, David 1985, *The past is a foreign country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

OED Online, 2016, *Oxford English dictionary online*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, viewed 26 October 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/109272?redirectedFrom=littoral#eid>.

Smith, Sidonie & Watson, Julia 2010, *Reading autobiography*, 2nd ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Turner, Bryan S. 1987, 'A note on nostalgia', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 147–58.

3220_Offshoot.indd 192 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

MEMORY GARDENS

Jen Webb and Paul Hetherington

He said:

They were not real, of course – those places you took me to. The statue in the square based on a lost Leonardo drawing; the cafe serving *spaghetti all'arrabbiata*; the poorly lit gallery with two masterpieces from the medieval period. And that ruin of a monastery with a grove of oranges in its central quadrangle. I believed in them at the time, and you embraced me, saying, 'This is living'. Later we went to a house of mirrors and a hilltop garden. Children ran past. The vista showed a ruined house, which we approached. I saw myself in a playground; I saw you climbing a tree, no more than twelve years old. I turned towards a man carrying balloons and he pointed to a garden behind a wall. I knew then that this was memory, unreal as a fable. You were dressed in green and reading philosophy in a time before I knew you.

She said:

When I mislaid the diamond you gave me, you were unexpectedly serene. Not so when I lost the car keys, the book you were reading, your mother's phone number. Not so when I mislaid the map, dropped the fishing rod overboard, fell through the glass. For months we grappled with the inconstancy of things: nailing water to a board, drawing the blinds to arrest stray beams of light, summoning a storm. The hills above our house trembled, mud sluiced

3220_Offshoot.indd 193 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

across the lawn, the sky roiled. Our tongues lost the art of speech, our hands forgot how to touch, the tender interval between the notes shrank to a narrow bar. I kept losing things: my wallet, my watch, your heart. Did we forget the way home?

He said:
What I lost was not what I thought. I'd believed loss lay chiefly in the absence of things we made and shared – small trays inlaid with mosaics, piles of clean washing, elaborate salads in large bowls. And in conversation's absence. But something else was missing and one day I saw it like a woman standing in my room – the way another body had meshed with my body through a thousand unnamed proximities. An unstated belief that we belonged together even in our alienations. And a constancy of gesture, as if handing the other space; as if letting the other's space settle and run through hands.

She said:
We can hardly claim to need it, this interminable exchange, this insistence that one must win, the other lose. The winner tastes ashes, the loser savours the twist of lemon in every drink. Babies blink at their mothers and ruthlessly grow to men. Children put away childish things, and shut the ancient away in cells. As the leaves fall, as the seas rise, as the philosopher petulantly sucks his thumb, we do the only thing we can: plug gaps in the wall; drink another dram.

He said:
We remember ourselves in those old pages – vast tracts of words; wildernesses of expressions. We shape our self-images in their light, complex as they are, full of blue and yellow hues. We

3220_Offshoot.indd 194 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

become those phrases; enact those narratives. And we don't open the pages once. They're our lost taxonomy and categorisation, and even as we're implicated we fail to recall the ground of our involvement. One morning you're dressing before a long mirror, and vanish into a small mist; on another morning I find myself on a street I've never encountered. It is not that we've forgotten too much but that we carry a great weight of unknowing and the pages are releasing us. On those mornings people arrived at our places of work and neither remembered us.

3220_Offshoot.indd 195 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

GENEALOGY & THE SEA

Robyn Ferrell

First Person

I was born June 23rd 1843 in Queen Street, St Heliers [*sic*]*, Jersey. My father died in 1851 while at sea; his body being landed at Fovey, in Cornwall, and buried there.*

This is the first page of Captain Moignard's journal. The page is covered in meticulous copperplate. It has the antique look of writing done in ink with a fountain pen.

The old book is marbled with age. From its cover, it seems it began life as a plain exercise book, an old-fashioned kind with stiff cardboard covers and a spine of navy cloth. Now it is falling apart; the paper browning and the binding coming unstitched. Inside the back cover is written, in a stationer's hand, 1/-.

The old document, this handwritten memoir, creates a locus of fascination. Compared with today's mass-produced word-processed text, its fragile crumbling pages and fading copperplate attract the romance of the past.

But, reading it, there is the shock of the vivacity of a voice that could have been speaking next to me. While the events he describes are hard to picture being part of daily life now, the thoughts and feelings of a nineteenth-century man – his sense of what makes a good story and what an ordinary person might care

3220_Offshoot.indd 196 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

about – remains remarkably familiar. His memoir makes me feel as though the past is not as far away as sometimes it seems.

The possibility of my attachment to the past begins here, in a memoir written by an ordinary man born into an age when literacy was becoming increasingly common. When he set out to write, the recording of experience was no longer the preserve only of the aristocratic. How naturally the 'first person', as a narrative voice, comes to the sea captain! His voice of experience, both what he says and his saying of it, resounds with all the first persons that we have become as a result of mass literacy and democracy.

Captain Moignard voyaged to Australia several times but it was his son who jumped ship, becoming a 'migrant' and having Australians for children. When his great grandchildren returned to Europe in the twentieth century, we went back not as sailors, but as tourists and backpackers 'to find our roots'.

Genealogy

Our dear mother, the most kind loving mother one could have, must have struggled hard to bring us boys up. She died in 1870. The remembrance is always sweet of her gentle and affectionate nature, and we truly loved her. Though at times, in waywardness of youth and inclination to mischief, we must have often grieved her, yet she was never inclined to passionate chastisement.

His father's family had been on Jersey since at least 1672 when Jean Moignard married Catherine Carbel in the church of St Laurens. They came from Normandy with other Protestant Frenchmen, at a time when religious persecution in Catholic France made life difficult. Not much about ordinary people was written down;

3220_Offshoot.indd 197 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

many generations lived and worked and were finally buried in the vicinity of St Laurens or the other parishes without leaving a record.

But the census of 1842 finds Clement John married to Mary and living in Queen Street, St Helier, with children. Queen Street is still the main shopping street of St Helier, the largest town on Jersey, and its administrative centre. Modern banks and pharmacy chains do business out of the old stone buildings that can be seen in photos of the time. Number 43 is now a camera shop.

Of my early days, I remember little; a faint recollection of the procession, when Queen Victoria visited Jersey in 1846, which Mother and I saw from the house of a Mrs Cabot, which was situated on the site of where the present Town Hall now stands.

The Channel Islands remain to this day a possession of the British Crown. The whole populace was charmed by her majesty's condescension, writes the island's most famous painter John Ouless, in his text accompanying his souvenir book of views of Jersey. It was given to the Queen to commemorate the event.

Jersey is an egalitarian sort of place within limits. It boasts the first parliament in Europe, when a group of nobles extorted their independence from King John in the division of Normandy in 1204. The Jersey Museum displays the book in which the original knights recorded their claims, and the names found on that register mark the beginnings of its proud tradition of a sort of self-government, the closest one came to democracy in feudal times. A forebear of the Captain's mother is recorded in this book as an archer.

3220_Offshoot.indd 198 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

We went back as a family in the early 1970s. We sailed on the *Ellinis*, a Greek ship that brought the ten-pound Poms from Britain to Australia and New Zealand on the outbound voyage. On the return, it took a cargo of antipodeans to make the pilgrimage back. It took six weeks through the Panama Canal before we pitched up in Southampton in early March.

My sisters and I were impressed with the swimming pool on the ship's deck, which became a wave pool when things got rough, and the cinema in the vessel's bowels that had two screenings a day (one for kids, and one for adults). Being twelve, I was allowed to go to both, and to the Greek dancing lessons on promenade deck every morning.

We were less impressed with the children's playroom that served up endless craft activities with popsticks and pipe-cleaners, but it did allow us to make friends for the rest of the voyage. We especially loved to sit wrapped in blankets on the lowest deck, watching the swell tower over the ship on the Atlantic leg in the heavy winter seas.

My parents bought a caravan when we reached England and for six months we circumnavigated the Old World, five of us bundled into a space no larger than a ship's cabin. It took its toll on my parents, who, because of the cramped quarters and a shortage of money, began to fight.

In Jersey, we visited Uncle Tom, the surviving grandson of Captain Moignard. He was very old and deaf, and lived with his wife, who was blind, at the family farm at Le Vallon. He didn't hear a word my mother from the back seat said to him, only singing out at intervals: 'You're very quiet, Patty!'

My mother had a careless attitude to family history but was proud of her Jersey connection. In the conduct of life she mimed the genealogy all the same. She would sell up and move house at

3220_Offshoot.indd 199 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

regular intervals, proving the sea change was in her blood. She would assemble a crew and set off in caravans and campervans at every opportunity to rove around Australia, and in retirement she routinely embarks on cruises across the seven seas from New Zealand to Alaska, from the Mediterranean to South America. She remains an incurable traveller.

I too inherited the sea captain gene, moving from one property to the other in one city or another and accepting any opportunity to visit foreign places, especially to fly north for the European winter. Once, one of my sisters succeeded in living in the same house for a dozen years, which was probably a record for any of us.

The Sea

We were expected to attend the Church service after school, but with my usual perversity, I began to get tired of it, and instead of attending Church, used to find my way to the Pier, where in company with other boys we indulged in all sorts of pranks, skimming over logs, swarming up the rigging of ships, or paddling about the harbour if we could get hold of a boat.

I had inherited a liking for the sea, and was always fond of visiting ships, if I knew anyone belonging to them, and interested myself in getting information of a ship's gear and life at sea. Though some accounts were not very alluring, I thought it could not be as bad as represented sometimes. So many young fellows I knew seemed hale and hearty and always ready to ship again, and if they could go through with it, surely I could?

In 1857, at the time I was 14, a company was formed in Jersey to run steamers to Weymouth. It was in connection with the G. W. Railway, and they bought two steamers from the North of England Steam Navigation Company, the Aquila *and* Cygnus.

Mrs. Perchard, a dear friend of Mother's, who had an interest in the Company, had sometimes heard me say that I would like to go to sea – though dear Mother had done her utmost to dispel that idea of mine from

3220_Offshoot.indd 200 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

her knowledge of father's hard life. She called upon Mother one evening, and said she had heard that a nice strong boy was wanted for the cabin of the Aquila*, and that she would recommend me if mother was agreeable, and I would like it.*

Dear Mother thought it would be better for me to continue my present position, but I pressed my wishes, saying I would be often at home, daily passages, and earning more money. At last I prevailed: I was accepted, and went to sea the first trip that the Aquila *made to Weymouth.*

On the ferry from Poole with my younger sister, our kids ran in and out onto the deck, enjoying the wind whipping their faces and letting the heavy door slam repeatedly.

When we got to St Helier, my brother-in-law hired a seven-seater to drive us around the island, but in places the country lanes were too narrow for the modern people-mover to navigate. Jersey seemed a homey place on this occasion, but rather claustrophobic.

We were sightseers off to see the past. We found an enormous globe installation in the Maritime Museum that recorded the world voyages of several Jersey sea captains, including Captain Moignard. We took the kids to the graveyard at St Laurens and they ran among the headstones, squealing for no good reason. We visited the lighthouse at Corbière. I found there were several Moignards listed in the phone book, one of them as the lighthouse keeper.

Shipwreck

We were bound to Italy, in the brigantine Chance*, there to load oil for home. We passed Stromboli one dark night when it was in a state of eruption, and though it was a beautiful sight, there was also something awful in looking at the fiery column, shooting sometimes to a great height.*

3220_Offshoot.indd 201 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

It was throwing burning masses around, and I dare say lava was flowing down the side. We were at a safe distance, about 8 miles, I think. It was a sight. I shall never forget it looked like a gigantic fiery furnace.

When we got near the Straits of Messina it came onto blow hard from the westward, and we could not fetch the entrance nor keep to windward, being in ballast. Although we worked hard, several times between the squalls we would shake the reef out of the top sale only to take them in again when the wind increased.

At length we found ourselves getting enbayed in the Bay of Gioja. Gioja is a small town in the bottom of the Bay, where small ships sometimes load a cargo of oil. There is no harbour but anchorage is good and not exposed to westerly winds. I suppose the captain thought that by anchoring there, the ship might ride out the gale.

Indeed, there seemed nothing else to be done, as night was coming on and we could not hold our own. So we ran in, rounded to, and let go both anchors. Then we went to work, sent down lanyard and housed the upper topmast, and awaited events.

The gale was still heavy, and heavy seas were breaking on the beach, which was not far distant. Groups of people were there, watching us. Darkness now set in, and we felt very anxious. The ship was straining at her cables, and we got the tender boat unlashed and ready.

Then one chain parted, and the other. The anchor commenced to drag and by and by, there was a thump astern and the rudder was gone. The ship soon got broadside on, and the seas were breaking right over us, deciding us that it was time to quit. So we got the boat over the side and got into her, waiting for the Captain, who had gone below to secure his papers.

When he saw us, he said we would be overloaded, and we had better go without him. Two of us then said that if he did not come, we would remain with him. So he consented to join us and we left the ship.

It was close on midnight and dark. While we were under the lee of the ship, we were a bit sheltered and did not ship much water, but as we neared

3220_Offshoot.indd 202 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

the beach, the seas were in full force. I was bailing and, looking up, I saw a big wave close to. I dropped my bucket and then I remembered nothing for some time.

It seemed that the wave broke over the boat, and washed everybody out of it. It carried them to the beach where they scrambled out of harm's way, except for two who were drowned.

The first thing I knew was that I was on the beach, my face in the sand, and a weight on the back of my neck, rendering me incapable of movement.

At that moment I thought I was done for, and lightning thoughts raced through my mind. Then a heavy sea came along and relieved me of the weight, at the same time propelling me forward where someone caught hold of me and dragged me to safety.

Then I realised how near I had been to death, and I hope I thanked the Almighty Father who had spared my life. The weight that had pinned me down was the boat, left by the receding wave, and which the next big wave relieved me of. I had to sit on the beach for a good while, before I could find strength to walk.

Family history records another shipwreck. My sister and I drove to Jersey from Paris this time. In photographs, she is perched on the steep stairs that day in the rain at Mont Saint-Michel, the island that is cut off at high tide.

There is a lighthouse on a rocky outcrop on this part of the French coast near Jersey made famous by a photograph of the towering sea breaking over it in a storm. I dreamed that my sister and I were clinging to this pillar of rock in a surging sea. I was trying to keep hold of her as the wave broke over our heads.

We arrived in Saint-Malo after dark. It was freezing and lashed by a driving rain. We were feeling the weight of genealogy that night, sharing a damp double bed in a tiny dreary inn, somehow heartsick and struggling to comfort each other.

3220_Offshoot.indd 203 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

We were remembering another bleak voyage where we lost sight of land: 'Your mother and I are getting divorced'. It appeared the sea inundated genealogy at that point. Cracks appeared in family history and each went on more alone.

Housekeeping

Our provisions first going off were fair and doled out according to Board of Trade scale, though we had fresh meat and potatoes for a few days after sailing. The quantity of food for each man is regulated in the scale, but in those days the quality was not recognised, and in many ships any quality of provisions was considered good enough for sailors.

When the beef cask was opened, I think I understood what salt horse meant, it was uneatable. The week's allowance was weighed out on Saturday by the Captain, and I as Ordinary Seaman had to receive it and carry it forward. When the men examined it, and having decided that it was not fit to eat, I was told to throw it overboard.

I have often wondered since, why the men did not go aft and complain, and insist on better food; but there it was, they all took it humbly. The bread was good, and with the fat we could get from the Cook, we managed to rub along. After a time, the bread, which was kept in casks, began to get lively, and we had to break it in small pieces to get rid of the weevils and maggots before eating it.

The pork appeared to be good, but we got none of it; that was for the cabin. Pea soup we enjoyed – it always tasted good somehow. I think the Cook used to finish boiling the cabin pork in the pea soup which gave it the flavour.

4 lb. of flour being each man's allowance, the Cook would receive the quantity in a kid, then take half fresh and half salt water to mix it into dough and flavour it with a lump of fat. When mixed it was poured into a conical canvas bag, tied up and dropped into the copper, and boiled for I

3220_Offshoot.indd 204 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

daresay 4 hours. Then Cook would hook it out, drop it into a pail of cold water, and it would come out of the bag in a pyramid shape like a piece of concrete. It took some force to separate it, for each man to get his share.

If we were fortunate enough to have some sugar to spare (out of our weekly allowance), with a little vinegar we made a sauce and managed to enjoy it. We must have been blessed with good digestive organs at that time.

Our bulwarks not being very high out of the water, flying fish sometimes found their way on board. We assisted them by holding a bulls' eye lamp on the rail, which attracted them. These fish were welcomed as an acquisition to our menu, where the meat was so bad.

I was astonished at the quantity of rain that used to fall on some of the tropical showers, which enabled us to fill our casks (for we had no tank) and gave us means to wash with, as well as our clothes. Sometimes in a heavy shower we would plug the scuppers and in a short time have some inches of water on deck. Then we would sit in it, and wash out clothes with plenty of water for rinsing.

We stayed in a serviced apartment down on the waterfront. My niece, only six months old, smiled all day, especially when cuddled.

My younger sister made her legendary recipe of roast pork. Her technique with crackling involves cranking the heat up on the oven, and plastering the skin with oil and salt. But I have never really succeeded with it, despite her instruction. I am known more for my Christmas mince pies, the pastry made with custard powder as my mother recommended.

Some of her favourite recipes came from the *Golden Wattle Cookbook*; a battered copy she gave me is still in my possession. But my famed Christmas pudding is not an heirloom – I must admit it's based on a Stephanie Alexander recipe to which I add Turkish delight.

3220_Offshoot.indd 205 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Genealogy & the Sea

The Captain spent forty-two years circumnavigating the globe, just when it was becoming one world. This new world is now commodified, mass-produced, mass populated and internetted. World travel is no longer perilous; the experience has become so commonplace it is 'packaged' in world cruises and cheap flights.

A contemporary craving for a personal relationship with the past is seen in the popularity of family history research and television programs that seek out ancestors and heritage. Genealogy is big business for Jersey. Jerseymen spread out in a diaspora across the globe; they followed the fortunes of the seafaring life and jumped ship, ran aground or were simply beached elsewhere. I spent several afternoons in the Jersey archive, which has been set up to cope with the influx of visitors returning to find their origins.

The possibility of this attachment is paradoxically contained in the technology that contrasts with the memoir: the internet. The uploading of data from archives in Europe, the British Isles and America has made genealogical and historical research possible without travelling there. And yet, something of place remains as a lure. Jersey is not Sydney. The global village is not yet, and may never be, fully accomplished.

Two vectors move like waves across 150 years, from the sea captain's memoir to break on me: *genealogy*, figured as security, the satisfaction of origins; looking to the past and the known; the love and the claustrophobia of the family. *The sea*, on the other hand, as exposure; to the future, to change, to risk, in domains with no names and no rules, in the realm of chance and providence.

3220_Offshoot.indd 206 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

MIND AS HIVE

Kevin Brophy

I dream of tearing pages from a dictionary and using them to soak up a spill of milk on a desk. In the dream this shows resourcefulness though the words on the pages prove to be distracting as I perform the task.

The several bodies in the room, some mummified, give off a dusty, hempish smell. They watch everything as if on television and unreachable.

I am in a restaurant where one wall is a television screen set to a cooking demonstration channel. The beautiful hands of women toss fruit salad, spread sweetness on flat bread.

Pairs of men appear in some shows in contrasting aprons, one always the expert and the other a clown. The chef of the restaurant comes out to watch his favourite segment. We are too early for dinner so we drink the local wine.

Other bodies in caskets delivered from churches are mostly bones, possibly sacred. These bones felt envy, jealousy, anger, resentment, love. It all went through into their marrows.

Weeds grow on the tower reconstructed after bombs from American planes. Germans once attended mass in this cathedral while people hid in their wine cellars.

Under the restaurant the owner takes me through caves now home to dusty bottles lit by dim electric globes. He shows me a corridor cut through the rock. *If you walk along there*, he says,

3220_Offshoot.indd 207 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

for twenty minutes, you will come up under the town hospital. He has walked it once in his life, he says.

People on hillsides sound like goats. Goats on hillsides jump like children. The hill tumbles down its own sides while it is still the patient witness to us scrambling over it.

Even in a small hill town, the drawn-out siren of an ambulance: who is dying now?

Heaped dried chamomile flowers in a tray at the town market, intensely yellow, their colour a dust of fragrance. For this, a hillside was mown down and pulled up in armfuls.

We walk along a lane. Winter trees think hard about how they might do this rebirth one more time with their coming leaves, their blossoms.

At the top of the hill, a rusting crucifix with a table beneath it where boys drink beer and kick a yellow soccer ball. It is as if we have arrived after the event.

3220_Offshoot.indd 208 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

BLOGGING AS ART: LIFE WRITING ONLINE

Lucas Ihlein

This chapter begins with an excerpt of writing from 1998, long before blogs became a mainstream tool for self-publishing on the internet:

> It was late and I was feeling restless and wandering the streets trying to get lost when I passed a shop still open. It was an Indian music store. What caught my eye was a table full of greeting cards with bright images of Indian women and mustachioed men. They said "happy divali" or "happy deepavali". There was a man standing around and he asked me to join him for a beer. I said sure and he ran across the road to buy some. I entered the shop to check it out. He had some Indian prints of Bond movie soundtracks, notably *Goldfinger* on vinyl, but most of the store was Indian cassettes and CDs, indecipherable to me, selling around S$6-. He came back with the beers (Ihlein 1998).

In September 1998, together with fifteen artists from Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong, I spent four weeks as an artist-in-residence in Singapore. We were working towards a major exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum, and many of us were stressed out by the looming deadline. Our commission involved

the creation of artworks drawn from our experiences of the city. However, the short turnaround between arrival and public display created an odd tension which, I felt, drew us *away* from an open experience of the local environment. In response, I began searching for a method which might allow me to serve both imperatives: to be fully present in Singapore, while also satisfying the need for a public outcome. I developed a fragmentary, accumulative system: drifting around the city with a small notebook, making scrappy drawings, transcribing found word sequences, or writing vignettes recording my small daily encounters. A few days out from the exhibition, I bundled a selection of these fragments into a small zine entitled *My Typewriter Only Speaks English* (1998). A local offset printing company quickly produced 1,000 copies, and I incorporated these into a self-service installation within the Singapore Art Museum for gallery visitors to take away.

It is likely that if I had had access to blogging technology in Singapore, I would have used it. But in 1998, easy online publishing via web 2.0 was still a few years away. Instead I used typewriters, scissors, sticky tape and photocopiers. The smallness of the resulting zine publications was important – I felt that they should not assert themselves spatially at a scale beyond their own modest ambition. If they occasionally contained some moments of quotidian poetic insight, this should be an unexpected pleasure for the reader to discover.

In 2003, as blogs became easier to use, I started writing online about my interests in art and everyday life (Ihlein 2003). However, it was not until 2005 that I found a way to more deeply integrate and amplify my quiet experiments in life writing using blogging as an overarching technological format. *Bilateral Kellerberrin* (2005) was a blog written in a small wheat and sheep farming town in Western Australia. With this project, I discovered a writing

3220_Offshoot.indd 210 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

method which pushed me to notice my experiences of daily life more deeply, and thus to intensify them, while sharing them with others in the same time frame.

How did it work? It was actually rather simple. I set myself a rule: write a blog entry each morning about whatever happened the day before in the town of Kellerberrin. Some additional rituals were helpful, like sitting down to write first thing in the morning, so that my recollections of the previous day flowed in a semi-conscious, just-awake state of mind. Sometimes memories from the day before mingled with dreams:

> I dream about "spitfires" – hairy caterpillars which form linear trails across the footpath. But the spitfires in my dream have formed a beard-shaped clump hanging from a tree. I run around asking people how to get rid of them.
>
> As I write this, it's raining. It started softly last night after midnight, but only enough fell to make a few small puddles. David Blair came by this morning with the key to the cinema (he's finally changed the locks!) and said it wasn't yet enough for the farmers to start up their seeding tractors. But shortly after he went on his bustling way, it began to fall again, light and sweet, the drops just drifting to the ground. Maybe this is, after all, the "opening rain" Pauline described, and which everyone has been waiting for (Ihlein 2005).

What I loved about using the blog this way is that it facilitated two developments. First, it enabled me (and others reading the blog) to describe and follow the incremental development of relationships. Initial chance meetings with farmers or local residents in

3220_Offshoot.indd 211 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Kellerberrin might be briefly noted one day, and continually tracked over time: friendships developed sporadically, sometimes awkwardly, throughout the two-month life span of the project. Second, the blog technology generated a fast-turnaround feedback loop, which not only *recorded* events from my everyday life in the town, but also frequently *changed* them. Some of the people I wrote about began to read the blog every day, and they would write comments in response, or bail me up in the street to adjust or correct my impression of our shared experiences. In this way, unlike the 'old' media of the printed zine or book, the blog afforded a form of writing and reading where the author and reader share an evolving 'co-presence' while the work is still in the process of being created. For life writing scholar Anna Poletti, blogging allows the author to 'create a transformational environment, creating an environment that allows you to stay in it while other people engage in it' (Poletti and Rak, 2014, p. 264). This is in contrast to printed media, whose form is already complete by the time the reader encounters it.

In Kellerberrin, the daily communicative feedback loops between blogger and readers often generated opportunities for future meetings, or nudged our nascent relationships along a bit. The iterative life cycle of my blogging process began to look something like this:

> …*experience* ⟶ *writing* ⟶ *online publication* ⟶ *dialogue* ⟶ *experience* ⟶ *writing* ⟶ *online publication*…

In this way, the blog was a useful tool for diaristic life writing, but its dialogical function also made it a tool which went beyond documentation, gently *transforming* my experiences and relationships in the town. Here's an example of my interactions with

3220_Offshoot.indd 212 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

'Geoff the Taciturn Postmaster', who became a minor character in the unfolding blog narrative:

> ***Kellerberrin Wednesday 4 May 2005:***
> I picked up a bunch of packages from the post office. There is a tall man who works there, I have never learned his name.
>
> > ***Comment by Donna Mak, May 5th, 2005 at 9:09 am:***
> > I think that the tall man at the post office whom you don't know the name of is Geoff Main. He's the Keller postmaster – knows everything that goes on in town but maintains confidentiality and a code of silence better than most medical practitioners.
> >
> > ***Comment by Lucas Ihlein, May 5th, 2005 at 12:14 pm:***
> > Thanks Donna. Would you describe 'Geoff' (it must be him) as 'taciturn'? I like the dictionary.com definition: 'habitually untalkative' which is kind of taciturn in itself, don't you think? Of course, you are right, he would know everything that goes on…perhaps he's like the all-knowing shoeshine-boy in those Leslie Nielsen Naked Cop movies or whatever they're called.
> >
> > ***Comment by Donna Mak, May 9th, 2005 at 8:56 am:***
> > Taciturn would seem to be a reasonable description of Geoff. No doubt it's a very useful trait in his line of work – I can't imagine a garrulous postmaster surviving for long in a small town…
>
> ***Kellerberrin Wednesday 18 May 2005:***
> A breakthrough has been made with Geoff, the taciturn postmaster. It happened a few days back, when I was picking up mail, and Zed was paying a bill. Zed asked

3220_Offshoot.indd 213 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

if we knew each other. Geoff said 'yes, Lucas comes in to collect his mail'. So he knew who I was already, although we hadn't been formally introduced! But now we are officially acquainted…

Kellerberrin Tuesday 24 May 2005:

At the post office, I asked Geoff if he had read the blog yet. He said yes. But he didn't really agree with the way I had characterised him as 'taciturn'. It was more that he was 'shy', he thought. Geoff was cool with it though: he understood that it was just my initial observation. In fact, he's right. The more we meet, the more talkative Geoff has become. Perhaps, also, the word 'taciturn' has an undertone of sternness which really isn't there. It could be that Geoff was actually just being discreet (ie professional), in the early days of our acquaintance (Ihlein 2005).

Episodes like these reveal my emerging awareness of blogging as an online writing tool which might help catalyse connection in the physical spaces of a neighbourhood. When I returned from Kellerberrin to my home in Petersham (suburban Sydney), the contrast between my experiences of the two places was striking. My suburban life, if not exactly alienated, certainly lacked the fine-grained social connectiveness I had begun to experience as an outsider in the small country town. This prompted me to wonder what might happen if I pursued the same process of blogging in Petersham. And so, precisely one year later, I began *Bilateral Petersham* – as an 'artist in residence in my own neighbourhood':

Beginning Bilateral Petersham, 4 April 2006

For two months (well, a bit less actually) I will not leave

3220_Offshoot.indd 214 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> the suburb borders of the mighty Petersham. Petersham is a smallish neighbourhood in the 'inner-west' of Sydney…I will remain entirely within it until the end of May, as (self-appointed) artist-in-residence of Petersham.
>
> A city suburb is not a small country town, where folks stop and chat outside the chemist for twenty minutes before getting on with their day. I've been living in Petersham nearly two years now, and I know only a few of my nearest neighbours…In the city, we somehow stay strangers for a very long time (Ihlein 2006).

In *Bilateral Petersham*, I wanted to test whether the life writing method involving daily blog feedback loops I had developed in Kellerberrin could be used as a tool for actively transforming my relationship to my own neighbourhood. The stakes were higher: unlike in Kellerberrin, I would not be leaving at the end of the project. In Petersham, there was more at risk in the integration of art and life, as I would be working within my own everyday landscape.

Rereading the *Bilateral Petersham* blog ten years later, I am struck by how many friendships were seeded during that time. Because the project created a focus for honouring the ordinary and the local, it gave me (and those I encountered) a heightened awareness of the specialness of everyday life. This is not to say that everyday life had its quota of banality and frustration shucked away – those are recorded in abundance throughout the blog. However, it did seem to transform our experience of *time*. During the live period of the blog, time was released from its need to always be 'used' towards a tangible outcome. This chance encounter with my neighbours 'Tully and Heather' is typical:

3220_Offshoot.indd 215 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> I walked west down Canterbury Road, past the old Roller Rink, to look in the window of the barber shop…I picked up some bananas from K. Jim's fruit shop, and headed back up the road. Outside Sweet Belem, two 'young people' were playing chess and eating pastry. They looked up and said *Hi!*, and asked if I'd like to join them. Sure, I said.
>
> 'I was just saying', said the one whose name turned out to be Heather, 'that one of the things I like is meeting strangers'. Tully, her companion, agreed. They were playing a local variation on chess. In their version, each time a move is made, you have to declare something that you like. And it can't just be the name of a TV show or some pre-packaged product, it has to be something about it that you like, some connection you yourself have to the object of liking. Needless to say, I liked them both immediately. I settled in to watch them play (Ihlein 2006).

Heather and Tully went on to become my firm friends, and, like many other followers of my blog, they capitalised on the currency of *Bilateral Petersham* to deepen their own relationships within our neighbourhood. There are hundreds of small encounters like this throughout the blog, many of which lead nowhere, but contribute to the overall texture of the work. Although the daily writing ritual built up a quantity of words equivalent to a novel (approximately 90,000), there is no master-planned narrative arc, and the project's rules *(stay in your own suburb for two months; write a blog entry each day)* do not permit post-hoc editing for cohesion. Rather, the experience of reading and writing in *Bilateral Petersham* is of an accumulation of small textual vignettes and

3220_Offshoot.indd 216 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

fragments. This accumulation brings *Bilateral Petersham* into being as a living, breathing ecology – *a written environment* – constantly changing over time, surging and subsiding in intensity, in tune with the waxing and waning of my own energy, and the attentive engagement of my readership/audience.

If, at the beginning of the project, I had been unsure about the capacity of blogging as a means of using life writing to transform one's everyday local life, by the end of the two-month period any doubts had dissipated:

> Things are piling up behind me, a wave of events and meetings and memories that seems to swell up, ready to crash. As I come towards the end of my period of self-imposed suburban lockdown, connections are leading to further connections, first-time meetings are rolling over into follow-ups, which slowly become…relationships? These second, third, fourth meetings develop a more easy casual flow. Perhaps some sort of rapport begins to build. Or maybe it's trust. As I walk around the neighbourhood, it's rare not to wave and say hi to somebody I've met through this project (Ihlein 2006).

As a way of rounding out these reflections on my own experiments in life writing as a form of art, I have two concluding points to make. The first relates to the idea, as discussed above, that ritualised daily life writing is more than a simple authentic account of 'reality'. I was reminded of this while working on *Bilateral Petersham*, when a friend referred me to the writing of Samuel Pepys, an English Member of Parliament and prolific diarist who lived in London from 1633 to 1703. Pepys' prodigious

3220_Offshoot.indd 217 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

diary (kept between 1660 and 1669) has been an important primary document for historians researching events in England during that period. However, literary historian Harry Berger Jr. argues that Pepys' diary should be understood in more complex literary terms, beyond its widely accepted function as a mimetic document of events taking place in London in the 1660s. This is not just because the reflexive framework that a diary imposes on its writer creates a layer of self-consciousness over life's experiences, all of which became 'grist for that mill' (Berger Jr. 1998, p. 579). The impact goes deeper. As Berger Jr. speculates of Pepys diary project:

> [P]erhaps the life recorded in the diary is a life lived for the diary, a life lived in expectation of writing about it, a life monitored to ensure the provision of collectable and writable experiences in the ongoing project of self-collection through self-representation. Such a project might be imagined to place the subject as referent in the position of performing for the benefit of the subject as writing agent…(p. 579).

Berger Jr. argues that through the diary, Pepys 'selectively lives a writable life' (p. 585). To make such an assertion is to nudge Pepys, who (alongside The City of London) is the main subject of the diary, towards being a character in his own story; it also nudges the diary itself, as a writerly item, from historical source to literary artefact. This complicates the function of the text as a reliable historical record. Similarly, with *Bilateral Petersham*, the rule-bound daily framework which had me oscillating back and forth between local neighbourhood streets and my internet-connected laptop, with a constant awareness of my online readership, made it highly

3220_Offshoot.indd 218 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

likely that a 'writable life' would be produced, at least during the project's allocated time frame. Thus, as a life writing medium, the blog was the means through which its main character subjects (Lucas Ihlein and the suburb of Petersham) co-emerged. At the conclusion of the project, I reflected that throughout those two months, and via those 90,000 words, 'Petersham and I, suburb and citizen, brought each other into being' (Ihlein 2009, p. 184). This is life writing as a tool for both describing and producing experience.

The second concluding point I make is about the technology of the blog medium itself. As I mentioned above, blog software was not widely available in the late 1990s when I was working on projects like *My Typewriter Only Speaks English*. The uptake of blogging began in earnest in the early 2000s, with platforms such as *Blogger* and *LiveJournal*, and this early phase was characterised by personal, diaristic usage, particularly for amateur life writing (Serfaty 2004; Rettberg 2017). There was strong growth in blogging between 2005 and 2006 when I was working on *Bilateral Kellerberrin* and *Bilateral Petersham*. During this time there was a worldwide quadrupling in the number of blogs on the internet – from approximately 8 million in April 2005 to more than 32 million by April 2006 (Sifry 2007). This growth corresponded with broader social awareness of what a blog is, and how it functions. This was, of course, an important factor for my projects in which I sought to engage with audiences both online and offline. In practice, I experienced this exponential growth in terms of a broader acceptance and easier uptake of the second of my two projects, and a corresponding increase in the quantity of blog readers who felt confident to participate by contributing comments and dialogue online. In other words, the continual growth in blogging across society in general meant that at the

3220_Offshoot.indd 219 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

time of making, my two projects existed within very different media ecosystems, and thus afforded different writing and reading experiences, even though they used the same medium. The interconnection between writer, online readers and correspondents, and the local social environment means that the boundaries of the 'work of art' become blurred. Media theorist Geert Lovink argues that understanding the complex relationality afforded by blogging requires a 'distributed aesthetics', which goes beyond the traditional frames of 'form and medium' (2008, p. 227). For Lovink, a distributed aesthetics would consider the effects of both the 'dispersed and the situated' and the way that media artefacts such as blogs exist within a network of technological and social relations.

In the years since *Bilateral Petersham*, blogging has intensified, and then fragmented. The rise of 'microblogging' platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram* and *Tumblr*, access to broadband internet and the ubiquity of the smartphone have attracted internet users' attention away from 'traditional' text-based, long-form personal blogging (Rettberg 2017). As an artist working on *Bilateral Kellerberrin* in 2005, one of my self-appointed tasks was to teach my local readership in the town – many of whom had never heard of this medium – how to read and write comments on my blog. My experience accords with a study cited by blogging scholar Jill Walker Rettberg, which found that in 2005, '62% of internet users still said they didn't know what a blog was' (Rettberg 2014, p. 13) – blogging was then a form of new media. When working on my projects, I used the term 'bilateral' because I felt it characterised a negotiated relationship between writer and reader (Ihlein 2007). By contrast, the eventual ubiquity of networked microblogging platforms hosted by large corporations means that the one-to-one relationship implied by my term 'bilateral' now seems somewhat

3220_Offshoot.indd 220 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

quaint. In fact, the metadata we generate in social media through 'implicit participation' (via 'likes', 're-tweets', online purchases, etc.) 'writes' a self-portrait far more detailed than conscious self-disclosure via long-form narrative which characterised blogging in the mid-2000s (Rettberg 2014, p. 170). The world of online self-publishing is now a shimmering multifarious organism, far more complex than it was a decade ago – and it is no doubt also a far more complex undertaking to study the processes and effects of online life writing today.

References

Berger Jr., Harry 1998, 'The Pepys show: ghost-writing and documentary desire in *The Diary*', *English Literature History (ELH)*, vol. 65, no. 3, pp. 557–91.

Ihlein, Lucas 1998, *My typewriter only speaks English*, Singapore Art Museum and Everwilling Press, Sydney.

Ihlein, Lucas 2003, *Bilateral blog*, <http://lucazoid.com/bilateral>.

Ihlein, Lucas 2005, *Bilateral Kellerberrin* blog, <http://kellerberrin.com>.

Ihlein, Lucas 2006, *Bilateral Petersham* blog, <http://thesham.info>.

Ihlein, Lucas 2007, 'Bilateral blogging', *International Journal of the Arts in Society*, vol. 1, no. 7, pp. 53–62.

Ihlein, Lucas 2009, *Bilateral Petersham* [book], Everwilling Press, Sydney.

Lovink, Geert 2008, *Zero comments: blogging and critical internet culture*, Routledge, New York.

Poletti, Anna & Rak, Julie 2014, 'The blog as experimental setting: an interview with Lauren Berlant', in Poletti and Rak, *Identity technologies: constructing the self online*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.

Rettberg, Jill Walker 2014, *Blogging*, Polity, Cambridge, UK.

Rettberg, Jill Walker 2017, 'Online diaries and blogs' in Batsheva Ben-Amos & Dan Ben-Amos (eds.), *The diary*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, <http://jilltxt.net/txt/OnlineDiariesAndBlogs.pdf>.

Serfaty, Viviane 2004, *The mirror and the veil: an overview of American online diaries and blogs*, Rodopi, Amsterdam and New York.

Sifry, David 2007, 'The state of the live web, April 2007', *State of the blogosphere / state of the live web*, <http://web.archive.org/web/20090314073104/http://www.sifry.com/alerts/archives/000493.html>.

3220_Offshoot.indd 221 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

EMBODIMENT, EXPERIMENT AND FICTOCRITICAL MODES

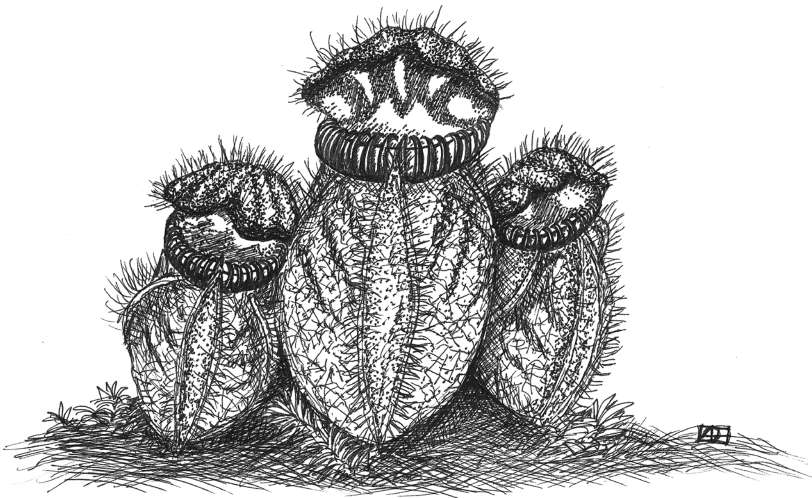


Fig. 8. Alice Ewing 2017, ink on paper, collection of the artist

Carnivorous plants like the Australian Pitcher Plant (Cephalotus follicularis), *thrive in harsh, nutrient-poor areas by sourcing most of their nutrients by stealth – either by colourful lures or with a siren's call of sweet nectar hidden within; insects and other small arthropods, often fall victim. The fallen are then liquefied by digestive enzymes within the pitcher plant, the energy embodied within the captive prey is then materialised into a form which can be absorbed by the victorious captor.*

3220_Offshoot.indd 223 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

3220_Offshoot.indd 224

18/01/2018 3:33 PM

WRITING THE SELF (THE BODY) AS *MER-MER*

Francesca Rendle-Short

> *Leave the door wide open for the unknown, the door into the dark. That's where the most important things come from, where you yourself came from, and where you will go.*
>
> (Rebecca Solnit 2005, p. 4)

1

In *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, David Shields connects the term 'memoir' to the hyphenated word *mer-mer*. He argues that the word *memoir* is derived from the Avestic Persian *mermara*, which is connected to the Greek *mérmeros*, itself a derivative of the Indo-European *mer-mer* – 'for that which we think about but cannot grasp' (2010, p. 40). By thinking of memoir in this way, he argues, we are inviting a more unstable idea of the word. Of course, in today's language, the word *mer* is associated with impassiveness and nonchalance; we might say *mer-mer* when we don't want to say anything, when we are bored, when we can't be bothered to answer someone properly. Yet, the sounding out of the word *mer-mer* is also close to the familiar *murmur*, an almost inaudible utterance, if we think of it as a noun, or as a verb, saying something in a low or indistinct voice – *murmur* – the body calling.

Shields' idea of *mer-mer* is less confident than today's 'effortlessly relayed experiences' as expressed through what he calls realistic memoir (p. 41). Instead he suggests *mer-mer*, as its definition

implies, enables us to '"vividly wonder", "to be anxious", "to exhaustingly ponder"' (p. 40).

2

How do you write *mer-mer*? How do you finger-hand-toe, heart, the body in language so that it comes alive in and through words and phrases and sentences gathered together to dance on the page, to woo the reader? How do you language the body? 'Open up inside you', as Paul Auster might put it, in his memoir *Winter Journal* (2012, p. 223), describing the action of him being opened up again to writing, to beginning again; to twirling and spinning, to sway, so that you are able to fall and rift, so that you can touch and not touch, allow and invite as writer – doer and maker – to create something that resembles some *thing* that grows in making sense, that gives rhythm and beating lung to your reader reading you. That lives. That breathes.

Leave the door open for the unknown.

3

Reality Hunger is a conglomerate of quotes, arranged in chapters, in different sections numbered 1 to 618, loosely grouped into themes. It is a book dedicated to the questioning of assumptions, authority, writing and reading, and also appropriation and plagiarism. It is a book focused on the making of art: 'What actually happened is only raw material', says Shields in number 615, quoting Vivian Gornick, 'what the writer makes of what happened is all that matters' (2010, p. 204).

The *mer-mer* quote, number 108, comes from John D'Agata in *The Lost Origins of the Essay* (2009), according to the book's list of references. It does not appear in the chapter on autobiography or memory or even mimesis. This offshoot of memoir shows up

3220_Offshoot.indd 226 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

in a chapter that pulls together fragments to do with lies, scandals, the celebrity status of authors, sensationalised writing and the publicity that arises from certain notorious cases such as James Frey and his best-seller memoir that turned out to be full of lies, *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), and the hoax that was J. T. LeRoy. Australian literary hoaxer Helen Darville/Demidenko and her book *The Hand that Signed the Paper* (1994) gets a mention too.

The chapter starts with a claim 'I exaggerate' and ends on a definition of autobiography that embraces ideas about 'fall and forgiveness' (pp. 32, 44). All bases are covered here. But what about *mer-mer*, for that which we think about but cannot grasp; where does it fit in? How do you write the body as this in-between and illusive sort of memoir?

4

Hélène Cixous says you must write with one's ear (with the body), with music, she says, 'It is the body in action in writing' (1997, p. 64). Writing the body is physical (fingers on the keyboard; bone to hold us up as a start; and heartbeat to keep us going). It requires muscle and strength of purpose. It is material too (it makes matter). It takes a slowing of breath, a steady moving of hands, a stillness of inner voice; a listening-to of ear to the double drumbeat of heart.

Auster is unequivocal: 'Writing begins in the body', he says, 'it is the music of the body, and even if words have meaning, can sometimes have meaning, the music of the words is where the meanings begin' (2012, pp. 224–5). Auster calls writing 'a lesser form of dance' (p. 225).

5

The joy and persuasion of David Shields' book is in his curation of fragments, how paragraphs stolen from other authors (himself

3220_Offshoot.indd 227 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

included) are arranged on the page, how the sequence is put together to make some sort of cohesive narrative, which they do. He makes the making of work apparent – to a point (it turns out John D'Agata's musings on *mer-mer* actually come from an earlier essay by that name of 2008: 'Mer-mer: an essay about how I wish we wrote our nonfictions').

The interesting part is how these fragments are orchestrated, what comes before, what comes after, and how a reader considers the collection as a single work, seduced by the thought that it is authored wholly by Shields. He plays with readers' sensibilities and invites them to cut out the appendix with its list of citations with scissors the way he bundles together these quotes for his book – as if he literally cuts them out of the books he sources for this purpose. He asks, who owns words? Reality, he argues, 'cannot be copyrighted' (p. 209).

Either side of the *mer-mer* paragraph, the argument moves from wanting to turn the banality of non-fiction (that is, facts and reality) inside out (number 107) to the idea of autobiography and its constraints (number 109), how it is ruled by chronology and capitalism – and the need (desire) to tell the whole story (as if that is indeed possible). Then, how memoir is different, something again; it is about the idea of self (it is also about the market). How memoir requires prose narrative and poetry to make the words come to life for the reader. The argument is persuasive. Memoir, Shields suggests through a series of iterations on the topic, is not journalism, it necessitates a reader; it is literature, work of the imagination, and should be treated as such. Memoir is 'an extremely rich theater' for 'investigating the most serious of epistemological questions' (p. 40): interrogating knowledge through writing the self.

3220_Offshoot.indd 228 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

6

So you begin, you write: you memoir the body *mer-mer.* The particular piece of writing you are falling into is about falling in the gutter, it is about how your body starts to heal the minute it is hurt, about bleeding and desire – in bite sizes as it happens. But you don't know what you are doing, where it is going, how it will end up. You admit: you are in the dark. You write (you rearrange):

You are learning to sing again.

You're not dead, yet.

You read the instructions on how to do the bowel test again: three easy steps, it says.

You are writing *about* the body but it may as well be that you are learning how to be writing-a-body too. Even Baroness Else von Freytag-Loringhoven turns up on the page. It is said she is the one who was interested in scatological aesthetics, she the one who sent the American dada artist Marcel Duchamp a white urinal she turned on its side to give it a labial appearance – before it appeared in New York at the Society of Independent Artists in 1917 under his name. It is your blood, your ageing body, the words say back to you, that gives you this urinal that takes you to holding up mirrors, anatomy lessons, dictionaries, toilets in medical schools, having babies and punk hair – and the writing of such in its particular way.

The body is art in all its various parts.

7

Reality Hunger reads like a memoir, a writer's response to the art of writing, and it is generative to think of it in this way. What is interesting as you read fragment after fragment and think about how this work has been put together, is what happens to

3220_Offshoot.indd 229 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

the different elements of thought connected associatively when brought together side by side in terms of inflection, harmony, dissonance. What would happen to the meaning of the book and the various chapters within it if these fragments were conjugated in a different way?

(What would happen to this chapter if it were rearranged in a different order?)

8

There is nothing quite as beautiful, quite as mysterious, or concrete, as the act of writing in practice. Of this doing of body: *memoiring.* A writer at work. This emerging fabric of dance. *Mer-mer-ing.*

Cory Taylor, writing her final book, *Dying: A Memoir,* knows a lot about the project of the body writing:

> It isn't just the practice that enthralls me, it's everything else that goes with it, all the habits of mind…I am making a shape for my death, so that I, and others, can see it clearly. And I am making dying bearable for myself' (2016, p. 32).

The murmur on her page could be described as *mer-mer. Dying* is a memoir that mulls things over. Takes up wonder. But one that also allows a kind of anxiousness too.

9

The version of memoir that is *mer-mer* invites the reader to think differently about subject matter and its turn in writing. To specu-late, imagine, engage with the body, the self, the Other. In this Shieldsian/d'Agataian sense of employing the 'darker light of human language' (Shields 2010, p. 40), all three characteristics

3220_Offshoot.indd 230 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

embedded in the term are able to make a pulse on the page: to vividly wonder, to be anxious, and to exhaustingly ponder. It is an engagement of the most intimate kind, where there is risk and openness and vulnerability. Readers are invited to experience the Other close up as if without any space between, not to sensationalise the experience of the story of self, but as a genuine exchange and sharing of knowledge and truthiness. Of course, there will always be questions; there are never easy answers. But this is a site where change might be possible.

10

As I write this chapter, I am reading Maxine Beneba Clarke's recent memoir *The Hate Race* (2016). It has been lauded as a 'blistering account of being a black child in the Australian suburbs' (Abadee 2016, p. 1). 'I don't want sympathy', Clarke writes:

> I want to un-hear what I just heard, un-experience what just happened. If racism is a shortcoming of the heart, then experiencing it is an assault of the mind…left unchecked, it can drive you to the unthinkable (2016, p. viii).

What Clarke does in this memoir of the heart is to dissect racism for what it is, the 'casual, overt and institutionalised' racism that is invisible, normalised. She shows the reader what it means to experience the assaults of the mind so that they too want to un-experience them; she gives the reader an inkling of this thing she calls the unthinkable. It is a book that stops readers in their tracks; Clarke doesn't leave things unchecked, she checks and rechecks that which she would rather not have to say – if things were only different, which they are not. She gives us the self through the

3220_Offshoot.indd 231 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

eyes of the Other. As a reviewer for *The Saturday Paper* put it: 'You read *The Hate Race* and it reads you back' ('FL' 2016, p. 1).

11

Clarke sings her black body to her reader the way she sings to herself. She holds the reader within the pages of this book, beautifully, terrifyingly, allowing the reader to ponder the truth of her truth, to be anxious, yes, in the spirit of *mer-mer*, but also to enable us readers to ponder 'that which we think about but cannot grasp'. She gives words, she gives spaces between words; Clarke invents language, metre, song and swing with which to speak the unspeakable. It is a gift of tongues.

'That folklore way of humming a scale' is how Clarke sings it. 'This is how it riffed' (2016, p. 147). *The Hate Race* is *mer-mer* that brings to mind the murmur of sound, a just-audible something reaching out from one body to another, the act of reading and telling stories. Stitching tales together, whispering truths (and sometimes lies) between bodies: this is writing having a mind/a body of its own.

12

In writing the self there will always be an autobiographical subject, always observation of the self, which is then offered to the reader. Writing the self allows the writer to see herself as someone else, a stranger, the writer standing outside her body and her experience (her memory and imagination) and gazing back/towards/over/across/into herself as subject. Inevitably it is a partial view, incomplete, subjective, contingent.

Jun Yang, for instance, a Chinese-born visual artist now living in Vienna (he left China when he was four years old), makes autobiographical artworks, videos and models. His version

3220_Offshoot.indd 232 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

of China is rendered from stories he has been told by his relatives, Chinese films (made in the US or Europe), and typical diasporic Chinese restaurants he has experienced growing up, as well as vague memories. The China we see through these images is a constructed version, artificial, far from the original source, mostly a Westernised hybrid interpretation, but it renders the felt experience soft and tangible, physical and of the body. There is whimsy too. And nostalgia. Still, it must be said, the construction or fashioning of the self as Other becomes by its very nature an out-of-body experience. As Jun Yang confesses in *Autobiography*: 'Whenever I watch my own videos I don't see "me" personally – It feels like watching somebody else's story' (Steiner and Yang 2004, p. 103).

13

Of course when you set out to write writing of this kind, you do it because you don't know what you will find out in the doing of the writing – and that goes for what is uncovered as well as how to account for what you discover, and how to write it. But that is the whole point, surely. As Robin Hemley notes in *A Field Guide for Immersion Writing* (2012): 'If you knew what was going to happen in the end, there would be no point in starting' (p. 92). Or, as Marguerite Duras says in *Writing*: 'Writing is the unknown. Before writing one knows nothing of what one is about to write. And in total lucidity' (1993, p. 33).

14

Writing *mer-mer* undoes the writer. It is the repetition of work here that is the thing: making patterns on the page, returning to ideas, going around in circles, learning about what you are doing by doing the very thing you are redoing, making mistakes

3220_Offshoot.indd 233 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

and rubbings out, learning from failures. Leaving leavings on the cutting floor.

This is love.

On the page.

And nakedness.

Writing this sort of memoir-as-*mer-mer* lets us hover beneath skin, at the back of the throat where voice comes from. It allows us to 'not know', to speculate, gawk, fret, agitate and muse. It invites the reader to inhabit a joint consciousness. As Alison Bartlett says of this writing/reading twosome: 'Your body and mine rest on each other's, making and filling curves, creating humps and gorges to sink into and nestle against' (1998, p. 90). Or this:

> Then I am writing about us reading together, weaving together books and bodies, fleshing out paragraphs, entwining words and skin: touching. Osmosis: the crossing of boundaries, which turn out to be permeable (Bartlett 1994, p. 74).

15

Because it turns out nothing is straightforward in making this sort of work – in *mer-mer*ing – especially in a world that trades in desire and shame, and also lies. There are bends and turns and upside downs and shadowy lines and indistinct shapes everywhere. It is hard work. You have to write hundreds and thousands of words to find out that the murky thing that is life writing is a delicious cartography of 'always shadow', where as author and subject you are both narrator and narrated. There is song here, cadence, inflection, beat and pulse – a going forwards. But also sigh.

3220_Offshoot.indd 234 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

When writing the self, this form of respiration is the heart-beat – 'breathe in what you see; breathe out how you see it' is how novelist Michelle Aung Thin put it in a recent talk. There is enchantment and sorcery on the page; it is what brings us back, wanting more.

16

Hemley tells us the backward glance is the thing that saves the memoirist (2012, p. 46). Ordinarily this might be thought of as a retrograde step, an act borne out of lack of confidence, even dangerous (he asks us to think of Lot's wife in the Bible). But he argues that while at first it might seem hopeless, it is in fact 'a gesture of love and recovery' (p. 46), love for that which is lost, what remains, what we are leaving, and where we have come from. Death itself. The backward glance forces the writer 'herself to look, not to turn away, in order to recover something that the rest of us need, but don't know we need, and might not at first want to see or acknowledge: human frailty itself' (p. 46).

Any writing of memory and recall is summonsing that which is dead. When we dialogue through writing, through this writing practice that Quinn Eades calls *écriture matière* – '[imagine] a vast root system (*écriture matière*), that spawns all bodies, writing' (2015, p. 25) – we create 'contact text', something that is haunted, that is body, a sentient being, that is of flesh (skin, blood, pulse, tongue). That will die. There is always more than meets the eye; there is always contour, umbra. In the memoir *all the beginnings*, Eades understands this sort of pleasure. He insists: 'The body, writing, has undressed' (p. 27).

3220_Offshoot.indd 235 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

17

The word memoir can be linked etymologically to the idea of mourning. Memoir comes to us from the Latin word *memoria*, meaning 'memory, remembrance, faculty of remembering'. The word *memory* is also related to the Old English *gemimor* 'known', and *murnan* 'mourn, remember sorrowfully' (the Dutch *mijmeren* 'to ponder') (Harper 2001–17). Architect and historian Gregory Caicco notes the root word of *memory* is *mr* (2007, p. 31), where the letter *m*, meaning water, forms the basis of all our watery words, according to Caicco – 'moist', 'mellifluous', 'mist', 'menstrual' and so forth – which then coupled with the letter *r*, relating to the head, gives us 'headwaters', a good way to think of memory, and also *mer-mer*: 'evoking the primordial rhythms of music and dance, composing and recomposing, giving birth to poetry, prayer, and healing' (p. 31).

18

If we think again about writing emanating from the body, the body as a site of felt experience – that this is what we inhabit as human beings, that this is where the 'erotic mixture of timbre and language' originates (Barthes 1975, p. 66) – then it is this very body that we are working with in building our fictions, our poetry, our non-fictions, our *mer-mers*. The body is site of text, sign, contestation, intrigue, impermanence, and transformation; even radiance.

The space to desire underpins this body-thinking – the space to desire in the way Hélène Cixous thinks of it – a desire embedded in the practice of writing (1997). If anything is going to emerge, the practice of writing will allow it to do so: back and forth, sound and silence, making and remaking: I do. I undo, I

3220_Offshoot.indd 236 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

redo. As Marina Warner reminds us in her introduction to Lorna Sage's *Moments of Truth* (2001):

> [L]iterature really can make something happen: [writing] books here become [Sage's] voyage out, her forged papers out of a childhood hell…literature and language are catalysts in the making of experience, not simply passive precipitates (p. xv).

19

In that same introduction, Warner speaks of the thrill of autobiography, life writing, or what Dutch historians call 'ego documents', how it 'fashions and refashions the self, in dialogue with imagined interlocutors, even if those imagined receivers are one's own future selves' (p. xvi).

A good example of this ambiguity or inexactness is in the poetry of Lawrence Lacambra Ypil. In the penultimate poem in *The Highest Hiding Place* (2009, p.72), Ypil asks: 'Why is the beginning of a story the discovery of a boy?' He employs this boy as his 'imagined interlocutor', to tell us his very particular take on this author's very particular set of coordinates. It is all *mer-mer*, effortless, delicious, enticing. It is body.

> Let's say there's a boy who lives at the end of the street…
> Let us say the room of the boy is locked and no one can open it
> because the key is inside. In the belly of the boy (Ypil 2009, pp. 72–3).

3220_Offshoot.indd 237 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Mer-mer here resonates with poignancy and a sort of roughly hewn wonder. You can feel the belly of this boy in your gut, in the centre of your body, your coccyx, up close to your pelvic floor. Ypil's deft choice of words, his cadence, his firmness of voice gives his readers the gift of newness, of speech even.

'If we could only hold the edgeless / in place', Ypil muses in 'Garden', the final poem (2009, p. 79).

As reader, you breathe deeply and forget yourself.

20

So what about form and the essay as a loose propositional possibility in which to write (hold) these *mer-mers*? The sort of non-fiction, in other words, that is 'difficult to classify, with quirky yet intentionally designed exteriors, slippery rules…a commitment to getting past the bullshit and making unexpected connections' (Borich 2012, p. 1). *Mer-mer* as poetic cartography could include non-fiction 'unconventions' such as inventories, geographies of place, white space, montage, and fragmentation and toggling like this chapter (Singer and Walker 2013, p. 139). It could be queer. But questions arise: how do we compose mappings-of-the-self that go beyond genre? How do we nudge, explode, query, perform, transgress, dream, confess, uphold, sew together, and dance to lift off the page, so that form works hand-in-glove with content and is not just a clever trick? 'One must be stronger than oneself to approach writing', Duras argues, 'one must be stronger than what one is writing' (1993, p. 10).

21

So, by way of conclusion, what follows is an aberrant mini *mer-mer* for the purposes of experimentation and demonstration, fashioned

3220_Offshoot.indd 238 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

as *eisephrasis*, a sort of bent and back-to-front, inside-out practice of ekphrasis.

It is fashioned out of one of my mother's ring-binder notebooks lost in a bookshelf, a page of her handwriting written with a red felt-tip pen a year before she died, listing worry and concern. This notebook and her lettering brings us back to the beginning to wonder ('exhaustingly ponder') how you write this sort of body:

APRIL 15

- S.T.M.L.
- Confused
- cannot reason normally.
- Must be in charge
- obstinate if crossed.
- reacts strongly if contradicted.
- ?? insight

  won't stop & say,

    ? can I do this

    - am I mentally competent

It is her handiwork all right. But to whom is she talking? For a start, you have to find out that S.T.M.L. stands for short term memory loss, and you wonder what that must be like, when you get old; how to experience the grip that you think you have on your world, dissolve. Can I do this, she asks, in first person? Am I mentally competent? Must be in charge.

22

For this exercise, in a choreographic gesture, you reverse or transpose what it is you are looking at – unread and rework her

3220_Offshoot.indd 239 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

words. To do this, you wonder whose perspective she is taking on; perhaps it is not *her* that she is writing about at all, but your father, who *did* lose his memory through Alzheimer's. Could your mother be concerned for *his* S.T.M.L.? Is she asking, in first person, and as indented dot points, whether *she* is 'mentally competent' to handle his obstinacy 'if crossed'? Is this speculative autobiography dressed up as biography, writing as if 'before knowing anything'? Your mother's own *mer-mer* in notebook – with you listening to the mur-mur it gives out.

23

You write your own body onto the page, an altogether different sort of self calling. It becomes your own 'finger-toe-*heart*' that helps to open you up from inside, to allow something new to live on the page that resembles a sort of unspoken letter of love. 'That's where the most important things come from', Solnit reminds us about this sort of going into the dark (2005, p. 4). Getting lost; in order to find and be found.

24

L.M.T.S.
(*Little. Murmur. Towards. She.*)
I I
am
do
can
This/if crossed reacts strongly
Won't in
Must insight
if stop say
.

3220_Offshoot.indd 240 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

&
be

Mer-mer here as wonder, erasure, and rearrangement.

References

Abadee, Nicole 2016, 'Book reviews: *The hate race*, *skylarking*, *everything I don't remember*', *Australian Financial Review Magazine, Financial Review*, 19 August, <http://www.afr.com/brand/afr-magazine/book-reviews-the-hate-race-skylarking-everything-i-dont-remember-20160703-gpxsh6>.

Auster, Paul 2012, *Winter journal*, Faber and Faber, New York.

Barthes, Roland 1975, *The pleasure of the text*, trans. Richard Miller, Hill and Wang, New York.

Bartlett, Alison 1994, 'Jamming the machinery: *écriture feminine* and the practice of contemporary women writers in Australia', PhD thesis, James Cook University, Townsville.

Bartlett, Alison 1998, 'Reading bodies', in Heather Kerr & Amanda Nettlebeck (eds.), *The space between: Australian women writing fictocriticism*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, Perth, pp. 89–97.

Borich, Barrie Jean 2012, 'The craft of writing queer', *Brevity: A Journal of Concise Literary Nonfiction*, 17 September, viewed 26 September 2016, <http://brevitymag.com/craft-essays/the-craft-of-writing-queer>.

Caicco, Gregory 2007, 'Introduction', in Gregory Caicco (ed.), *Architecture, ethics and the personhood of place*, University Press of New England, Hanover and London.

Cixous, Hélène & Calle-Gruber, Mirielle 1997, *Rootprints: memory and life writing*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, Routledge, London.

Clarke, Maxine Beneba 2016, *The hate race*, Hachette, Sydney.

D'Agata, John 2008, 'Mer-mer: an essay about how I wish we wrote our nonfictions', in David Lazar, *Truth in nonfiction: essays*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, pp. 66–76.

D'Agata, John (ed.) 2009, *The lost origins of the essay*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis.

Demidenko, Helen 1994, *The hand that signed the paper*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

Duras, Marguerite 1993, *Writing*, trans. Mark Polizzotti, Lumen Editions, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Eades, Quinn 2015, *all the beginnings: a queer autobiography of the body*, Tantanoola, North Melbourne.

'FL' 2016, '*The hate race*: Maxine Beneba Clark', *The Saturday Paper*, 23 July, <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2016/07/31/the-hate-race/14691960003513>.

Frey, James 2003, *A million little pieces*, Doubleday Books, New York.

3220_Offshoot.indd 241 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Harper, Douglas 2001–17, *Online etymology dictionary*, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php>.
Hemley, Robin 2012, *A field guide for immersion writing*, University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia.
Shields, David, 2010, *Reality hunger: a manifesto*, Penguin Books, New York.
Singer, Margot & Walker, Nicole (eds.) 2013, *Bending genre*, Bloomsbury, New York.
Solnit, Rebecca 2005, *A field guide to getting lost*, Penguin Books, New York.
Steiner, Barbara & Yang, Jun 2004, *Autobiography*, Thames & Hudson, London.
Taylor, Cory 2016, *Dying: a memoir*, Text Publishing, Melbourne.
Warner, Marina 2001, 'Open questions: an introduction', in Lorna Sage, *Moments of truth*, Fourth Estate, London.
Ypil, Lawrence Lacambra 2009, *The highest hiding place*, Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City, The Philippines.

3220_Offshoot.indd 242 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

VIVARIUM

Anna Gibbs

Life Writing

When I recreate a life in words I am writing in the past tense, turning the dynamic flux of life into something fixed and representable in narrative. To misquote biologist François Jacob (but only slightly): representation fixes the limits of what is considered as possible. Jacob was referring to the similarities between science and mythology as representations 'of the world and of the forces that are supposed to govern it' (1982, p. 9). Life writing aims to discover and represent the forces that govern a life. It is the literary equivalent of the paradox of the scene of the still life, or as the French more frankly say, *nature morte.*

Once upon a time when I was about two years old I had a little wooden horse on wheels, attached to a rope so I could pull it along behind me. I don't remember now if this little horse had a name. Perhaps it never did. Perhaps that's why it was lost. How do you call to a nameless thing? But when it was lost, my father gave me a replacement. My delight in the reappearance of my toy soon turned to suspicion. Is it the same? I asked, uncertain. It's similar, he said. So from then on that was its name. Similar.

We all know that writing is an aid to memory. Lyn Hejinian taught us that in her book of that name (1978). An inherently unfaithful aid to inherently unfaithful memory. Writing invents story where there was none before. It organises a chaotic world

into familiar form and confers significance on a moment. Writing also invents things that never happened. Writing makes things happen. And it disappears others as it fails to record them. Writing invents. And calls its invention: memory.

To perform this act of invention – a conjuring out of the encounter between inner speech and what psychoanalytic thought calls secondary process – writing works a magic with words, which are slippery things and all too frequently slide away from where the writer has attempted to fix them in her various accountings and recountings.

The meanings of words are supposed to bind thought and speech, according to Vygotsky (1986). But this ignores the sensory dimension of words, all the sonorous qualities of their sound, all the particularities and oddities of their typographical look (like the binocular vision offered by the double 'o' sandwiched between the framing perpendiculars of the consonants in the word 'look' itself), as well as the affective colouring that attaches to these qualities (look!) and to the associations conjured by particular words ('similar' will always recall my toy to me). All these qualities are always in excess of meaning and all work to loosen the moorings of meaning to any supposed terra firma.

Even the little lassoes in the form of deictics thrown out towards a putative external world turn out to be a sleight of hand. Like circus acrobats (we might call them Presupposition, Lexis, Conjunction, or Ellipsis, to name a few of the tricky creatures) they hold onto nothing beyond themselves, but instead constantly look to each other for coherence, creating a kind of surface tension enabling them to hold it all together: a balancing act in midair, 'an arrangement in a system to pointing' (Stein 1914, p. 12). Don't look at me! they call. And in fact you would prefer they remained invisible in the transparency of their connective tissue: you do not

3220_Offshoot.indd 244 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

want to see them, but having heard the call you have to look, and once seen this very material yet all too flimsy fabric of relations cannot easily be unseen.

You are now caught between semiotics and semantics, in the grip of a lawless proposition (Badiou 2005, p. 16) and negative space – a blind glass – opens ahead. No longer you, you have never been more yourself in all your sensory vivacity. The stone feels truly stony (Shklovsky 1990, p. 6). It is a singular thing, momentarily cut off from all connection, something weighty in the palm of your hand. Yet when you toss it into the water, the ripples form an endless reply.

Language as a Life Form

We have always known that words are animate beings. Arriving first in the form of gifts or slaps, they come to life as they make contact with other bodies. Words are affect bombs, releasing their active ingredients into bodies and accruing new powers over time as they metastasise to attach themselves to ever new objects and contexts, exponentially increasing their spheres of action. Or sometimes, other words enter into combat with them, vanquish them and emerge victorious. They bear communicable diseases, making a mockery of immunity. Ingested and digested, some words are domesticated while others break free and go feral.

Words might wrap themselves around bodies, cloaking them in forms of identity, or they might pierce them like needles, fixing them in position like a specimen insect. Or then again they might travel through pores in the skin, cling to bone or infiltrate viscera. A living pharmakon, killing toxin or curing balm.

And words also *have* lives, evolving in time as they make their way in the world. They migrate from mouth to mouth and text to text over hundreds of years, subtly transforming themselves

3220_Offshoot.indd 245 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

in the process through the almost imperceptible metamorphoses wrought by travel and time.

Their means of transport are well known. For instance: borrowing, appropriation, and reversal. When did 'gay' come to mean 'lame'? For that matter, when did 'lame' become 'lame'? And is this a coincidence? The *Online Etymological Dictionary* gives us 'gay' in late-fourteenth-century English as 'full of joy, merry; light-hearted, carefree'; also 'wanton, lewd, lascivious'. It tells us as well that by the 1890s the term 'had an overall tinge of promiscuity – a gay house was a brothel'. The same source notes that '*The Dictionary of American Slang* reports that gay (adj.) was used by homosexuals, among themselves', to refer to themselves, 'since at least 1920', and this slang then '[began] to appear in psychological writing [in the] late 1940s, evidently picked up from gay slang'.

When it comes to literary uses of the term, though, Gertrude Stein was, as ever, ahead of the times. Her characters Miss Furr and Miss Skeene from the piece of the same name were 'quite regularly gay'. And Stein affirms this again and again as she slips between usages and turns repetition into a chiming and charming peel of celebratory bells in which the meanings of 'regularly' also come implicitly to slip and collide:

> Helen Furr and Georgine Skeene lived together then. Georgine Skeene liked travelling. Helen Furr did not care about travelling, she liked to stay in one place and be gay there. They were together then and travelled to another place and stayed there and were gay there.
>
> They stayed there and were gay there, not very gay there, just gay
>
> there (Stein 1922, p. 20).

3220_Offshoot.indd 246 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

And so on again and again in gaiety and gayness.

But now, 'gay' is a vogue word among school kids, who claim it applies to things rather than people and that it bears no relation whatsoever to gay people. They don't say how gay school kids might nevertheless feel about it. No one seems to have asked them. Researchers and straight kids alike seem to be oblivious to the ways in which such qualifications cast ontological shadows and not just over the things they purport to designate.

In any case, it is clear that words like to multiply their meanings. They are breeders in every sense. And like other life forms, words can also make sudden unpredictable evolutionary jumps. In this process of molecular biological expression, nothing apparently regulates their transcription.

A word might get suddenly uprooted from one territory and made to carry out a forced landing in another one, where it must form a new set of relations with its unlikely neighbours. This can be uncomfortable. In a classroom, where I say the word 'representation' meaning a quite specific concept, it is returned to me a week later as something else entirely. Or Foucault begins to sound suspiciously like 'fuck it'. And appears in essays as Foolcot.

Think of what you are reading now as a little vivarium in which you can observe the lives of words. Words in vitro. Living out their captive lives in the Petri dish of a writing experiment. Here words are cut off from other contexts and stewing in their own juices. But still communicating at a distance. They are reaching out beyond the confines of the dish to talk to you, wherever you might be, in a world they cannot possibly know.

3220_Offshoot.indd 247 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

From Life Writing to Live Writing

Can we turn 'life writing' into 'live writing', a writing in vivo, a writing in the here and now? A writing that carries a little charge, something inarticulable or unidentifiable happening in it. It might go off. Or then again, it might not.

Live writing is a 'night science'. Ask François Jacob. Well, actually, I did ask him, and this is what he wrote: 'In today's vastly expanded scientific enterprise, obsessed with impact factors and competition, we will need much more night science to unveil the many mysteries that remain about the workings of organisms' (1998).

He is not just talking about working after hours, but about the kind of work accomplished by the left hand when the right hand no longer knows what it's doing, a work done free of aim and end, a pure experiment. What we used to call blue sky science, yes, but also a way of working in the kind of unknowing that allows you to really attend to something so you can see beyond what you expect to see.

The mysteries of the workings of organisms include those that take us beyond the threshold of human perception, a reminder that ours is a limited and constrained view of what we call nature or the natural world. Our apprehension of the world is constrained by our sensory and affective configuration: our technologies – the microscope, the telescope, the camera, the amplifier, and so on – help us to envision the world in new ways suggested by what we cannot otherwise see. But these are only partial remedies for human limitation, hints of worlds and beings our instruments will never reach.

When it comes to biology, François Dagognet (1968, p. 194) reminds us that words can only evoke or designate: unable to signify, 'they slide over the beings they conceal'. Our names for

3220_Offshoot.indd 248 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

beings construct artificial boundaries around them, cut them out and isolate them from the world to which they belong, and without which they have no existence at all.

When I was an undergraduate, I hung out a lot in the university bookshop, which was where you could run into the campus feminists, lesbians and gays, and Marxists. These were unfamiliar beings that interested me very much. Browsing the shelves while I waited to see if any of them would appear, I came on a popular science book called *Life on Man* (1969) by a bacteriologist called Theodor Rosebury. Perhaps I was drawn to it because my mother was also a bacteriologist, or perhaps I simply made do with it while I waited in the science section that gave me the best view of the shop, or because the book was actually as much cultural history as science. In any case, leafing through it I learned that trillions of microbes used human beings as housing, some inhabiting the vast terrain of the outer surface of skin, others making their home in what turned out to be the even more vast terrain of the folds of the interior. The question arose for me (maybe Rosebury himself asked it explicitly – I don't remember now) of whether we belonged to the bacteria or they belonged us. Do we direct their lives or are our own lives guided and shaped by them in ways we cannot suspect? This set up a dizzying oscillation between possible perspectives.

From what point of view, then, should life writing take place?

You can't see the wood for the trees.

You can't see the trees for the wood.

What if a tree falls in the forest, and there is no one to hear it?

The forest is there, the forest hears it, and the trees that remain, mourn.

The planet teems with unseen eyes that look back at us with languages beyond words, life writings, which we might never

3220_Offshoot.indd 249 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

read. With this realisation in mind, the question becomes how to bear witness to that which we know is beyond us and unknown, and how to leave open in our own work, the possibility of life writings other than those of the human.

References

Badiou, Alain 2005, *The handbook of inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Dagognet, François 1968, 'Sur lavoisier: présentation du discours préliminaire', *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, vol. 9, no. 13, pp. 178–94.

Hejinian, Lyn 1978, *Writing is an aid to memory*, The Figures, Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

Jacob, François 1982, *The possible and the actual*, University of Washington Press, Seattle.

Jacob, François 1998, *Of flies, mice and men*, trans. Giselle Weiss, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Rosebury, Theodor 1969, *Life on man*, Viking, New York.

Shklovsky, Viktor 1990, *Theory of prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher, Dalkey Archive Press, Elmwood, Illinois.

Stein, Gertrude 1914, *Tender buttons*, Claire Marie, New York.

Stein, Gertrude 1922, 'Miss Furr & Miss Skeene', *Geography and plays*, The Four Seas Press, Boston.

Vygotsky, Lev 1986, *Thought and language*, trans. Alex Kozulin, MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

3220_Offshoot.indd 250 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

THIS POEM IS NOT A PANIC (V.000)

Virginia Barratt

the prosody of panic
proceeds (blow by blow by blow)
line by violent line
a sudden acc(id)ent falling on a seizure of verse.
measures
the expanse of a dead open mouth or a baby bird's beak

panic dances in the closed-in verandah
(glimpsed through a gap in the dormitory curtain)
with lycanthropic glee.
i cannot not hear
the poisoned claws on polished wood
i cannot not hear
the stilled children unbreathing

panic's breath is a wind that sucks and roars
shivering the flooded gum and booyong in the valley of the
ragged mistmonsters
skinwalking death before disintegration

everyday
every day

I wake in corpse raiments, skin to skin, coins in my money purse
and write to you from the moment of my own death
immanence becomes imminence
blood is breathless and lungblack
and promethean angst imagines
the structural failure of aircraft

on this point our relationship may become strained:
be humiliated for me

take off your human suit and turn away from the machine

feed yourself to the void

this poem   is not a panic

3220_Offshoot.indd 252 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

HOW IS STAYING HERE GOING?

Quinn Eades

We must invent with the body, with its elements, surfaces, volumes, thicknesses, a nondisciplinary eroticism – that of a body in a volatile and diffused state, with its chance encounters and unplanned pleasures. (Foucault, 'Sade: Sergeant of Sex')

This is my transitioning body. It writes. It moves. It has parts that are not made of flesh. This is how I walk. This is the way I lie down. The way I imagine you meeting me in the night, in the day, in the weeping dawn. This is how I meet you. How I am buttoned and unbuttoned. How I am half done. How you unzip me. This is the fern that is draped across the back of my arm. This is the moss of the bush floor that makes rocks slippery as I step across them.

The sun over my knuckles. The silver on my fingers. My aim, she sings, is to love. I cannot love you more (I can love you more) than I already have, than I do. Walk with me. Run with me. Climb the mossy rocks. Reach out your hand. Make me move. I am in and over and above you. I am water on your lips.

I feel like I am losing my family.

This is what I wrote yesterday, and along with these words sent a link to a blog post on what to do if someone you love is transgender.

I'm aware I've been keeping my distance, because I'm scared of being hurt, was the next thing I wrote.

In return from my mother and sister: nothing.

From one Aunt: *I love you darling I just haven't known what to say.* From the other (who a year ago told me her niece had died and she didn't know who her nephew was) a long message: the link was unhelpful, she had been unwell, I hadn't responded when she deposited money for my son's birthday, I still had a family, but underneath everything a sense that I should prove myself. That I should string together a cohesive trans narrative with which to explain my lowered voice, the stubble on my chin, my changing smell. *'It has been difficult letting go of the niece of whom I was so proud'*, she wrote.

How do I need to be let go of? How does the changing of a name and a hormone profile require a death?

> I move space and time to be by your side, to make the light stay where it is.
> 'I can see light', you say. 'I can see where it is. When I look at something I want to make a picture of, I'm not looking at what's in it. I'm looking at where the light falls, where there is shadow, what lines will be made'.
> You can see light. You make paintings that expose and don't. With light. With the dream of a gentle touch. With love.

Has the person with my old name died? Have I died? I do feel ghosted, doubled, often. Kathy Acker writes about Blanchot

3220_Offshoot.indd 254 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

writing about Orpheus facing death and then returning and says this: 'Everything must be sacrificed to that moment; seeing what is hidden. Otherwise people don't exist. How can writing matter?' (Acker quoted in Macdonald 1999, p. 107). Can I send my Aunt this? Will that do the trick? Will Orpheus stand in for me and speak about what has been hidden, and now what she sees? Can writing matter this much? Like a true ghost, questions are all I have. Thomas McBee writes that 'where two sides meet comes the potential for ghosts: dissonant smears, rips in the story' (2014, p. 22) and I find my transitioning self in the rip, which is a torn page, the fast hot pull of tape from skin, a toenail hanging from its quick gripped and split from the skin, a slit, the desperate shuck of wave against wave close to the shore that will take me deep and far, ghost and all.

I flicker in and out – girl body/boy body/between body/multiple body/buried body/body of breath/loved body/clambered on body/cunted about-to-be-flat-chested body – and watch the little black curls of question marks snake from my lips, spitting the dots like pips, hoping that into my half open mouth answers will enter. Why? Why tell this story?

> I am meeting you in three days. We will crash into each other. I will want to stay. Just your voice. The way you speak to me in the early morning. The pleasure you find in my strangled coming. The way you talk my body back to me. Leather around my wrists. I find you. I find you in the night. The way water sounds as it tips into a cup. How many lists of the body can be written? How many ways can we write the body? Where do we find a build up of cells? What is left. How is dying living? How is staying here going?

3220_Offshoot.indd 255 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Why tell this story? Margaret Atwood says that 'all writers learn from the dead' (2002, p. 178). Am I dead? What will be learned from the other side of a body in transition?

> You paint me in light. You make a honeycombed picture of me. You make me fall deep and fast for you, but too for myself. I see you seeing me and I fall deep and hard for myself. You make me bright in the world. You hold my words and my heart and my slow walk and you love me for all of it. Treasure. I am your treasure. I am your blessing. I find you in the night. You find me in the night. You are my beloved.

On Christmas morning, I wake up earlier than the children. I open my eyes to a residue, a heaviness that comes from my sister (born twenty months later, who wears only pink, white and red, who scrapes muesli from a spoon with her teeth, who cracks the afternoons open with her rare laugh) having nothing to say. For the last week I've been sending her photos of Zach and Benji, trying to find a way through. I send her another one. The kids under Christmas lights. Zach with his photo face on, lurching sideways; Benji grinning viciously behind him. She breaks the weight and responds. We text for ten minutes about very little, and then I send the words that make her say it:

> *I love you* (me).
> *I feel like my sister has died* (her).
> *I'm still here* (me).

> Be. Loved. Be/loved. Beloved.

3220_Offshoot.indd 256 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

All writers learn from the dead? Am I my own dead? In an old notebook I find this quote from Cixous: 'This is grace: death given, then taken back' (1993, p. 10). Next to it, I have written in the thickest black pen: also, this is the way to write my own death (in the fact that I die every day, that writing one story kills off infinite other stories – all those branching moments sliced away so we can say no, follow this one, this is the way to speak).

Transitioning is maybe death given, then taken back. Think about the multiple crossings over. The thickening of the jaw, body hair where before there was none, the lowering of the voice (I can sing whole Nick Cave songs without going up an octave, come sail your ships…), strong arms, redistribution of fat; the body crossing over.

> Lips, eyes, pupils, knuckles, fingers, boycunt, nails, knees, thighs, toes: a list is never enough. A list is more than enough.
>
> I walk with you through the park. So much water. And then it is gone and there is sun and the blue of the sky and the metal of the steps and the way a mandarin segment feels in the mouth. You peel off all the white before eating. You make eating a mandarin three times as long. I watch the segments pass your lips and know that later your mouth will take me into you and I will spasm and moan and come.

It may not be possible to write about transitioning without writing about becoming. When *becoming* made its debut in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, pp. 272–309), the authors introduced the term amongst zones of proximity and

3220_Offshoot.indd 257 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

co-presences, insisting that these terms were not analogies, but referred instead to quantum particles; how they are drawn near to the other, and how they continue to reside there once close. They wrote that 'all becomings are already molecular' (p. 272), and took us to a place where becoming was not a 'phenomena of imitation or assimilation, but of a double capture, of non-parallel evolution, of nuptials between two reigns' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, p. 2). Given that this particular becoming involves molecules of testosterone being injected into my gluteus muscle every three months, and that these molecules insinuate themselves into my pineal gland and central nervous system, I start to imagine multiple molecular deaths: oestrogen levels continuously dropping, hair growing, hair falling out, clit enlarging, sweat increasing.

> I have a dick. The T has given me a clit dick. A click? A tick? A hot nub that is smaller than a thumb but that gets hard and pokes out and begs to be touched. You are touch. You are singing me back to the self. You are the love that brings me home. You make me want to eat the sky and swallow the moon. You are the light that comes from the stars. You are shooting all ways. You are in me. You are in me. The silver table I write on holds all of this.
>
> The silver table holds tender bodies. The silver table holds a pen. I need to piss. I need to piss and there is no toilet that matches me in this place. I can go eyes down to the men's or hunt for a disabled toilet or or or…How will I keep writing this?

3220_Offshoot.indd 258 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

So when I write a text about transitioning I write about becoming, and proximities, and desire, and ghosts, and doubling. I find Barthes saying that 'the text needs its shadow: this shadow is *a bit* of ideology, *a bit* of representation, *a bit* of subject: ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds: subversion must produce its own chiaroscuro' (1976, p. 32). And then I know that when I write a text about transitioning I am also writing about shadows: the shadow yet-to-come along my jawline, the shadow that is already there above my upper lip, my breasts that are still here but in two days will be gone and that gone-ness will be a shadow that I carry with me always. And then I know in this writing that I come back to Foucault's bodies and unplanned pleasures, and find myself at the rip, and discover what Barthes already knows, that 'what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss' (1976, p. 7).

> This is a story about nothing. This is a story about molecules. There once was a boy.

What pleasure wants is a seam: 'And I think, I am a seam… and [b]ehind that seam: imaginary anatomy, life giver, this body, telling itself to itself, over and over' (Eades 2015, pp. 237–8).

> This is my transitioning body. My voice has dropped. I don't think I will ever grow a beard. It will be just my luck to have a smooth face and then lose the hair, loose the hair on my head. When you take T you can have male pattern baldness. I've heard that baldness is passed through the father. I think about my father who I met

3220_Offshoot.indd 259 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

once a long time ago and his thick, long hair. I hope that with T, I inherit his hair.

I'm thinking a lot now about hair. Two new hairs have appeared near my left nipple. All winter I thought maybe I didn't want top surgery and that I would keep binding instead. The way you take my nipples into your mouth. That one photo I took of my breasts and the light was perfect and when you saw it you groaned. I could just keep binding and then in the night we would still have my tits to play girl with. But today it is hot and I remember now what it's like to bind in the summer and how I hunt shade and don't want to go swimming and how I am hot. Always hot.

There are some amongst us who see the surgeried trans body as a fragmented body.

In a deep failure of the imagination, a vision of cut up flesh and violent scars is all that is conjured up (Prosser 1998, p. 92). But what if the site of the cut, the scar, is a generative one that carries the echo of what has been removed? What if, when I have surgery, those scars are seams that *seize me in the midst of bliss*, that are zones of proximity that hold both breasted and not-breasted body?

You will push yourself into me. You like to make me dinner and then feed me. You like the way I open my mouth when I come. You make salad and rare steak and cut it up for me and push it through my half open mouth because I am still meant to be resting my jaw. You drive fast along the freeway while I fuck myself next to you.

3220_Offshoot.indd 260 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

> When we get further North with my hands smelling of come you will pull off into a truck stop and take me around to the back of your pathfinder and fuck me with no warm up barely any lube and I will sting and take you in and be exactly where I am. Here. With you. Boots and jeans in the dust. Your dick in my arse. Boys at a truck stop. Dick in my arse and fist in my boycunt. You fuck me all ways.
>
> Always.
> All ways.

In 1997, Vicki Kirby wrote her paean to the hologram, coined fifty years earlier by scientist Dennis Gabor, by parsing the Greek words *holos* (whole) and *gramma* (meaning). In this, she writes about the ways in which holograms distribute 'information through the entirety of an image, such that any fragment contains the whole image, albeit differently', and argues that if we were to smash a hologram, each fragment would hold a version of the whole, and the difference between whole or fragment would be difficult to trace. 'Rather, difference is a "becoming entity": it is not a name for the gap of supposedly dead space and time between pregiven entities' (pp. 64–5). Let's hold difference as 'becoming entity' now and take a quantum leap sideways to where French Canadian author Nicole Brossard is writing *Picture Theory* as hologram, throwing out a 'book of light, of clair-voyance, about perception and the wave interaction of light through which is realised the virtuality of writing' (Godard in Brossard 2006, p. 7). So from here perhaps it is no jump at all to consider both writing and body as hologram: both writing and body as placing difference at the

3220_Offshoot.indd 261 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

meeting point of wave and particle where the fragment is already a perfect reflection of the whole.

> To tell you that this is where I find you. In the body. In the dust. On this page. Under water. In my arse. Down my throat. Alongside me. A long side. Me. I find you this way. All ways. Always. My love. Be loved. Beloved.

In her exquisite paper 'Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations', Karen Barad carries all of what I write here. Doubles and splits, proximities, desires and, most importantly, queerness.

> A quantum leap is a dis/continuous movement…a particularly queer kind [of movement] that troubles the very dichotomy between discontinuity and continuity. Indeed, *quantum dis/continuity* troubles the very notion of *dicho-tomy* – the cutting into two – itself…All this 'quantum weirdness' (the display of an increasing array of uncanny phenomena) is actually 'quantum *queerness*'…Q is for queer – the un/doing of identity. *Quantum dis/continuity* is at the crux of this im/possible, im/passable, trans/formation (2010, pp. 246–7).

This transitioning body is many things: it is a body of chance encounters and unplanned pleasures, a dying body, the rip, the seam, a molecular becoming, a hologram, a quantum dis/continuity. It holds the here and the not-here, the was and this is, it is 'and/more' not 'this/that'. It is loved. It carries always the echoes of itself. It is the calling in of the uncanny, it is finding each the other, all ways.

3220_Offshoot.indd 262 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

References

Acker, Kathy, quoted in Macdonald, Claire 1999, 'Requiem for the self: Kathy Acker's final work', *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, vol. 10, no. 1–2, pp. 105–16.

Atwood, Margaret 2002, *Negotiating with the dead: a writer on writing*, Anchor Books, New York.

Barad, Karen 2010, 'Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations of inheritance: dis/continuities, spacetime enfoldings, and justice-to-come', *Derrida Today*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 240–68.

Barthes, Roland 1976, *The pleasure of the text*, Jonathan Cape Ltd, Great Britain.

Cixous, Hélène 1993, *Three steps on the ladder of writing*, Columbia University Press, New York.

Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Felix 1987, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Deleuze, Gilles & Parnet, Claire 1987, *Dialogues*, The Athlone Press, Great Britain.

Eades, Quinn 2015, *all the beginnings: a queer autobiography of the body*, Tantanoola, North Melbourne.

Godard, Barbara 2006, in Nicole Brossard, *Picture Theory*, Guernica, Toronto.

Kirby, Vicki 1997, *Telling flesh: the substance of the corporeal*, Routledge, New York.

McBee, Thomas Page 2014, *Man alive: a true story of violence, forgiveness, and becoming a man*, City Lights Books, San Francisco.

Prosser, Jay 1998, *Second skins: the body narratives of transsexuality*, Columbia University Press, New York.

3220_Offshoot.indd 263 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY ABOUT LOVE (FICTOCRITICAL FRAGMENTS)

Stephen Abblitt

Introduction

Love, never too far from death, is articulated for Jacques Derrida as a question of the difference between the *who* and the *what*, always already open to the possibility of its other. To read his immense autofictional novel-in-love-letters *The Post Card* (1987) is to experience love as an aporetic tension between fidelity and infidelity, witnessing a structural incapacity to remain faithful – to love and to life. As memory works by erasure, love is also experienced as the incendiary archive in operation, its first law the desperate desire to burn everything as an act of remembrance, preservation, salvation, and love.

Performing mourning – of love, and the loved one – through an act of writing, this chapter comprises a feverish archive of intimate ekphrastic fragments, unfolding against the background of the rich Australian tradition of fictocriticism (see, for example, Muecke 1997, 2002, 2008, 2016; Gibbs 1997, 2005; Kerr and Nettelbeck 1998; Kerr 2003, itself influenced by the auto-fictional genre-bending post-'68 literary-theoretical tradition most prominent in France (Barthes, Cixous, even Derrida), and the performative postcritical turn of academic writing after the advent of literary modernism (Ulmer 1982, 1985; Abblitt 2015). Neither the experience nor its writing can be contained by conventional forms and genres – love, death, and emotion break

writing apart, distraught, muddling and distorting once-clear distinctions. Between philosophy, literature, and autobiography, memoir, confession and testimony, these fragments traverse the distance separating-without-separating the *who* and the *what* in this experience of love, contemplating a sequence of personally significant, though absent, images to test the thought that we are always already lost to infidelity and death.

Exordium: This Is How I Recognise That I Love

– This is how I begin, writing: 'I write for, I write from, I start writing from: Love. I write out of love. Writing, loving: inseparable. Writing is a gesture of love' (Cixous 1991, p. 42). I write to you, and I write you, because 'at every moment the order to write you is given, no matter what, but to write you, and I love, and this is how I recognise that I love' (Derrida 1987, p. 10). I recognise that I love, that I love you, that I only know love because I will have dared loved you, and everything follows from this first principle: that, because I love you, you are not to be reduced to a simple symptomatic subject. Rather, your intractable image will carry through this dramatic presentation, renouncing examples and resting on our singular, unrepeatable situation. A description of this lover's discourse is supplanted by its simulation, with the critical intervention of the oft-repressed personal pronoun, in order that I might stage a performative enactment (but no analysis, interpretation, or argument), and love you. What is proposed is a portrait, a structural portrait, of you, which offers the reader a discursive site: the site of someone speaking within themself, amorously, confronting the other, the loved object, you, absent, silent, who does not speak (Barthes 2002, p. 3). 'So it is a lover', your lover, me, 'who speaks', who writes to you and speaks to you, writing and

3220_Offshoot.indd 265 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

loving, 'and who says' (p. 9):

I. I Have Nothing to Say About Love

– I have nothing to say about love, I say. I am exhausted. We will have 'loved according to every genre' (Derrida 1987, p. 109), and by the sad, bitter end I will have exhausted all the words and thoughts and modes and genres of love for you, exhausted all the possible forms of fidelity for you, and there will have been nothing left. Well, almost nothing. 'The almost: love's dreadful regime' (Barthes 2000, p. 66), this sign of inexorable failure, so near.

– The video quality is poor. Still, I watch and hear the philosopher Jacques Derrida utter these words – 'I have nothing to say about love' – in a short segment of the 2002 documentary film *Derrida* (Dick and Kofman). I smile as he then goes on briefly to talk about love. Speaking in his native French tongue, feigning confusion at the near homonymy of *l'amour* (that is, love) and *la mort* (death), he professes an incapacity to speak in generalities about something so absolutely singular and irreplaceable as love, states his refusal to recite clichés, and seductively suggests it all comes down to the question of the difference between the *who* and the *what*, concluding that fidelity is threatened by this difference. Love, I realise, never too far from death, is always already open to the possibility of its other. And I have nothing to say about love.

– We approach 'the irreducibility of the other', as Derrida would say, 'the impossibility for an identity to be closed on itself, on the inside of its proper interiority' (1981, p. 94), the impossibility of separating love from its other. And then he would go on to speak about the distance separating-without-separating self from other, lover from beloved, and the impossibility of

3220_Offshoot.indd 266 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

you and I remaining distinctly apart, of 'I' going on, surviving, living on, even existing in the first instance, without 'you'. This is what he calls *espacement*, translated into our poorer English tongue as spacing, and described in *Of Grammatology* (1997) as 'the harsh law of spacing' (p. 200), a law that is a terrible act of violence, but also an intimate, loving, tender striving to bridge the grave abyssal distance separating 'you' and 'I'.

– But 'what do I think of love? – As a matter of fact, I think nothing at all of love. I'd be glad to know what it is, but being inside, I see it in existence, not in essence' (Barthes 2002, p. 59). Love *is* – that is all; I experience it, embody it, but it will not be spoken, described, and so I think nothing at all of love, and I have nothing to say about love. Instead, bear witness to this critically performative experience of love; bear witness to my disastrous incapacity to reach the heart of the matter for fear of making so many reductive generalisations; but above all bear witness to my potential unfaithfulness, my narrative errancy, my hermeneutic failures, the failures of genre, my remarkable infidelity.

II. Love in the Age of Technological Reproducibility

– I recognise your armpit, that peculiarly sensual part of this beautiful, scared body I miss so much. I do not know why the photograph exists, why it was taken, or when, I cannot remember: I scrutinise those few parts of the body I can see, and try to place it in my mind, your body changed so very much over our time together, but my memory fails, a neurological archival fever. But it is yours, I know it so well, still, your cold, pale olive skin, dark bushy hair, your right hand hanging limply (you are not trying to flex, and the image takes on a softer tone for this, this exhausted body of yours on show but

3220_Offshoot.indd 267 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

unable to muster the strength, physical or emotional, for you are recording your decline), and the smallest glimpse of your sharp, extruding collarbone gently intrudes into the frame. It recalls, you would have explained had I ever asked, that striking image from *Un Chant d'Amour* (1950), the short film by Jean Genet, whose camera (or that of his cinematographer Jean Cocteau) focuses close up on Lucien Sénémaud's sweaty, hairy armpit, in stark black and white, the young man's arm emerging out of a shadowy darkness, the bicep taut, firm, flexing. There is no dialogue, but an intimate portrait crafted from the fragmentary images of bodies, faces, feet, armpits, penises, and the smallest, most delicate and loving gestures. The two male prisoners in Genet's film, one young, one older, separated in adjacent cells, engage in an all-consuming but unconsummatable love affair; the cold, hard concrete walls and iron bars cannot quell their amorous desire, and a prison guard takes voyeuristic pleasure in observing them perform masturbatory sexual acts, before he beats the older man to death. (You were older than me, but not that much, a few years.) There is no physical touch between the men, but the prisoners overcome this distance to cultivate an extraordinarily beautiful and intense intimacy. I cannot help but think you felt a similar distanced intimacy between us. That is the obvious implication of your visual quotation. But perhaps I do not fully understand the significance of the image. Not now. The photograph is macabre. All I really see is your absence.

– I have nothing to say about love. I am quoting, quoting without quoting (without all the strict technical accoutrements of rigorous scholarly quotation, the marks separating my words from somebody else's, and the complex parergonal network of references indicating where and when and most importantly by whom these words were first inscribed, iterated – as if they might

3220_Offshoot.indd 268 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

represent some reiterable signature, and thus be imbued with some authority), quoting from the words, spoken, not written, of Derrida, spoken from the heart, always, establishing already a certain distance, *espacement*, a harsh spacing, irreducibly splitting 'you' from 'I', a violent yet loving act and action of doubling, cruelly tearing the pair asunder. And already, between one and the other, demonstrating an undecidable and irreconcilable relationship between, say, pencil and paper, writer and reader, the sender and the recipient of the love letter, the lover and their most fortunate beloved, 'you' and 'I'; I am saying something about love, at first inadvertently, but now unmistakably, something about the nature of love, which binds it irrevocably to notions of quotation, citation and substitution, supplementation in the Derridean sense, a sad, sorrowful movement further and further away from an original tender, amorous sentiment or declaration – which might never have been there in the first place; there is no simple, pure origin, and the beginning 'was indefinitely dispersed' (Derrida 2004, p. 32) – made with the most beautiful of intentions, and towards something else, something wholly other, *tout autre*. Quotation – for example, your visual quotation, this re-presentation but also errant re-signification of Genet's image staged as a partial photographic self-portrait, the reception of which you could never have fore-seen – is a drifting, sometimes aimlessly, irregularly, from the preferred path, straying into infidelity. I am writing you, and I am writing you away; writing is also, always already, an act of errancy and erasure. I am distanced from you the moment I attempt to speak or write or name you, my love; I can never remain faithful to you, for you are in truth unknowable; this 'you' I write and speak of is not you, but a flawed facsimile and a treacherous reproduction, quotation, lame substitution,

3220_Offshoot.indd 269 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

reconstructed from this fallible memory and these dishonest photographic artefacts, your aura diffusing, 'eros in the age of technical reproducibility' (1987, pp. 12–13), in which I can endlessly quote you, but only at the risk of losing you.

III. The Only Sign of Love

– In the same manner I am writing you these postcards, only three, scattered, fragmentary, a figurative triptych akin to those of Francis Bacon, because you adored his figures, and I think now I see your contorted body in so many of his beautiful, sad paintings of his lost lover George Dyer. 'And I know myself to fall in love with you at every instant' (Derrida 1987, p. 173), with each and every insignificant utterance. But you only get further away with each word I speak or write, and 'you understand, within every sign already, every mark or every trait, there is distancing, the post, what there has to be so that it is legible for another, another than you or me, and everything is messed up in advance, cards on the table' (p. 29), 'an infinite distance…open[s] up' (p. 19), and I cannot reach you, these post cards will always already have lost their way, been displaced, and we were destined, by the post, to be lost to each other.

– 'I never write or produce anything other than this destinerrance of desire', claims an unfaithful Derrida: 'the unassignable trajectories and unfindable subjects, but also the only sign of love' (1993, p. 199), a desperate love destined to err. I witness these unassignable trajectories as he traces a path between desire and its object, between the sender and intended addressee of the eponymous post card – between lover and beloved – in *The Post Card*, this exemplary lacuna-filled 'novel in letters about the way those exposed letters called post cards deconstruct…sender, message, and addressee, all three, divide them from within and

3220_Offshoot.indd 270 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

scatter them' (Miller 2006, p. 895), deconstruct and scatter you and me and our love. 'Proliferating around the difficulties of communication', Derrida's post cards performatively examine 'the distance between parties, the contingencies of delivery, and the impossibility of the transmission of messages without a remainder' (Mitchell 2006, p. 60), so that in witnessing the unassignable trajectories of *The Post Card*, what I really witness is the displacement of desire, its errant transference not from lover to beloved via the amorous missive, but from lover to love letter itself as the sender's desire for their beloved is transformed into an all-consuming desire simply that the post card reach its destination. But it cannot – for 'if the letter is destined at all, it is destined to be errant' (Johnson 2009, p. 167) – as desire wanders, errs, and is finally frustrated. Love letter–writing stands in the place of fulfilment and consummation, while love remains unrequited, unreturned because unreturnable. This frustration is the only sign of love. 'There is no destination, my sweet destiny' (Derrida 1987, p. 29), yet still I must write to you, must write you, must write you and love you, love you so much that it hurts, this distance between us.

– Derrida commands: we must 'always prefer life and constantly affirm survival' (2007, p. 462). So I am writing these post cards to you, for you, trying to reach you, to touch you, but I cannot. I write, and 'I repeat, my love: for you. I write for you and speak only to you. You are perhaps the only one to know it, but you do know it…Even if you did not believe what I am writing on it, you see that I am writing it to you, you are touching it, you are touching the card, my signature, the body of my name, me' (1987, p. 73). Receive this post, no matter the distance, touch the card, touch my signature, my name, my body. As I reach out to you, I call for your response: 'Every contact, for the

3220_Offshoot.indd 271 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

lover, raises the question of an answer: the skin is asked to reply' (Barthes 2002, p. 67). 'I await only one response and it falls to you' (Derrida 1987, p. 4), but there is no response, no touch, no body, nothing but traces of what-once-was, signifying simply that you are no longer here, not now, and your photograph, 'never anything but an antiphon of "Look", "See", "Here it is"' (Barthes 2000, p. 5), is never anything but a marker of this boundless absence, 'Look', 'See', 'I am not here anymore'. I only know absence because of you, because I loved you. I go on, living, surviving, 'afraid of dying, yes, but that is nothing next to the other terror, I know no worse: to survive, to survive my love, to survive you, those whom I love and who know it, to be the last to preserve what I wanted to pass on to you, my love' (Derrida 1987, p. 199). You left, migrant, fugitive, while I still remain.

– I close my eyes and try to remember, but all I can do is forget. I endure your absence, suffering this archive fever, but forgetting all the time, more and more, my memory erases, and in all this 'I am, intermittently, unfaithful' (Barthes 2002, p. 14), structurally, to you, to your memory.

IV. Sometimes I Tell Myself That You Are My Love

– There is very little left of you, nothing tangible, and I do not trust the traces that remain. I hold this photograph, this insubstantial remnant which 'reproduces to infinity what has occurred only once', 'mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially' (Barthes 2000, p. 4), 'its indefatigable expression' filling my sight by force even as I cannot really make out much more than your darkened silhouette. I look at this unlit image of you standing before an old window frame, venetian blinds closed, shards of light trying to cut through,

3220_Offshoot.indd 272 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

in a house that is unfamiliar to me, and I realise now that it is 'a mad image, chafed by reality' (p. 115), as if it might be a hallucination, a dream or nightmare (I do not sleep anymore), fever dream, symptom of my archival sickness or fever. Mnemonically unreliable, your photograph is 'never, in essence, a memory…but…actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory' (p. 91), supplanting who or what you really were to me when you lived. I am forgetting you, as these photographic traces distort.

– All of these photographs: you are re-imagining your decaying body, or trying to, fighting to wrest back control from that malicious disease, treating photography as a form of reproduction and re-signification, rewriting the body, crafting another body for yourself, transforming yourself 'in advance into an image' (p. 10) before it takes you away, but a body here shrouded in darkness, and perpetually fading away. I look in horror as this photograph mortifies your body, a composed stillness representing nothing so much as an endlessly replayed death. I see it, and you must have seen it too: emerging from these shadows, 'that very subtle moment' when you are 'neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object', when you 'experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis)', and know you are 'truly becoming a spectre' (p. 14), a hauntological trace caught, already, between presence and absence, life and death, lost amidst this photographic *contretemps*, a counter-time, out-of-step and out-of-joint between past, present, and future. The photograph commands your meaning, asserting: 'That-has-been' (p. 77). You have been, not even *you*, but *that*. Now, you are gone, lost; 'everything that one sees, keeps, and looks at [*garde et regarde*] now is the being-lost of what must be lost, what is first of all bound to be lost' (Derrida 2010, p. 18). You, 'the

3220_Offshoot.indd 273 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum', what Roland Barthes would call the spectrum, you carry in your image 'that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead' (2000, p. 9). Your photograph – while you lived, and also now that you do not – 'produces death while trying to preserve life', reducing the life/death paradigm to the matter of the temporal distance separating 'the initial pose from the final print' (p. 92), between the living and the dead, as the photograph, a *memento mori*, reminder of death, becomes your cenotaph, your empty tomb, you are not here but nor are you there, placeless, bodiless, untouchable, unreachable.

– 'I love you and am smiling at you from wherever I am' (Derrida 2007, p. 462), and wherever you are.

P.S.: I Love You Is Not to Be Published

– I remember near to the end, a phone call, in the middle of the night, the drugs they gave you to sleep failing, hearing your voice but not really the words. There is 'nothing more lacerating than a voice once beloved and exhausted: a broken, rarefied, bloodless voice, one might say, a voice from the end of the world, which will be swallowed up far away by cold depths' (Barthes 2002, p. 114). Once-loved, you were so tired, faint, and so distant, your voice 'about to vanish, as the exhausted being is about to die' (p. 114), and I have no words to describe this experience except, perhaps, to propose that *this* is love's other – nothing so much as the experience of the unavoidable ending of love with the impending erasure of your body from my life, my love.

– In the end, 'you're right, I love you is not to be published' (Derrida 1987, p. 246). Such an utterance does not conform to the protocols of publication, for there is nothing so certain

3220_Offshoot.indd 274 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

as a proposition or an axiom, not even a statement really but a gesture and an experience. I love you is not cogently rationally expressible. I have nothing to say about love.

– And 'our only chance for survival, now', so very late, right at the end, perhaps too late, out of time, 'would be to burn everything, in order to come back to our initial desire' (p. 171), in order to somehow improbably return to a time without these profound wounds. Yes, 'burn everything, forget everything' (p. 40), watch our love affair reduced to 'the remainders of a recently destroyed correspondence' (p. 3), a great cleansing holocaustic fire consuming these inadequate post cards, these desperately lacking love letters, erasing these words that are not to be published, that cannot be published. I write you, I love you, I burn you – these are the same. 'I promise to the fire what I love and I keep the rest', and there is not much left of this photographic hauntology, yet 'a piece of us remains, it is still breathing, at each beat I see the blood arrive for me, I lick and then cauterise' (p. 224), cauterise the wounds, leaving a distinctive dark red scar.
– But in trying to remain faithful there is a lapse, something slips through, by mistake, 'the slightest betrayal' (p. 224), as in my archive fever, sifting through your photographic remains, my faulty memory erases you, errantly misremembers you, distorts your image, and in my remarkable infidelity I find myself declaring my love to this unfamiliar lifeless body in words on a page, this other lover, who is not you, no, could never take your place, no, never.

References

Abblitt, Stephen 2015, 'In the museyroom: a speculative genealogy of postcriticism', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special issue 33, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue33/Abblitt.pdf>.

3220_Offshoot.indd 275 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Barthes, Roland 2000, *Camera lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, Vintage, London.

Barthes, Roland 2002, *A lover's discourse: fragments*, trans. Richard Howard, Vintage, London.

Cixous, Hélène 1991, 'Coming to writing', *Coming to writing and other essays*, trans. Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle & Susan Sellers, Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London.

Derrida, Jacques 1981, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, Continuum, London and New York.

Derrida, Jacques 1987, *The post card: from Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago University Press, Chicago.

Derrida, Jacques 1993, 'Circonfession', *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.

Derrida, Jacques 1997, *Of grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London.

Derrida, Jacques 2004, 'Outwork', *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, Continuum, London and New York.

Derrida, Jacques 2007, 'Final Words', trans. Gila Walker, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 2, p. 462.

Derrida, Jacques 2010, *Copy, archive, signature: a conversation on photography*, trans. Jeff Fort, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Dick, Kirby & Kofman, Amy Ziering (dir.) 2002, *Derrida*, motion picture, Zeitgeist Films, US.

Genet, Jean (dir.) 1950, *Un Chant d'Amour*, motion picture, Connoisseur, France.

Gibbs, Anna 1997, 'Bodies of words: feminism and fictocriticism – explanation and demonstration', *TEXT: Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs*, vol. 1, no. 2, viewed 2 February 2017, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct97/gibbs.htm>.

Gibbs, Anna 2005, 'Fictocriticism, affect, mimesis: engendering differences', *TEXT; Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs*, vol. 9, no. 1, viewed 2 February 2017, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april05/gibbs.htm>.

Johnson, Laurie 2009, 'A ghost of a chance, after all', *Derrida Today*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 166–76.

Kerr, Heather 2003, 'Fictocritical empathy and the work of mourning', *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 180–200.

Kerr, Heather & Nettelbeck, Amanda (eds.) 1998, *The space between: Australian women writing fictocriticism*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands.

Miller, J. Hillis 2006, 'Derrida's *destinerrance*', *MLN*, vol. 121, no. 4, pp. 893–910.

Mitchell, Andrew J. 2006, 'Meaning postponed: *Finnegans wake* and *The post card*', *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 59–76.

Muecke, Stephen 1997, *No road (bitumen all the way)*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle.

Muecke, Stephen 2002, 'The fall: fictocritical writing', *Parallax*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 108–12.

3220_Offshoot.indd 276 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Muecke, Stephen 2008, *Joe in the Andamans and other fictocritical stories*, Local Consumption Publications, Sydney.
Muecke, Stephen 2016, *The mother's day protest and other fictocritical essays*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham.
Ulmer, Gregory L. 1982, 'Of a parodic tone recently adopted in criticism', *New Literary History*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 543–60.
Ulmer, Gregory L. 1985, 'The object of postcriticism', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern culture*, Pluto Press, London and Sydney, pp. 83–110.

3220_Offshoot.indd 277 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

BLOOD. SEX

Ellen van Neerven

She finds herself watching and re-watching a performance of two female singer songwriters, a couple, about their fifteen-year age gap.

She gets an email from an older lesbian writer praising her on the sex scenes in her novel. She knows this writer has taken young writers as lovers as mentorship before. She herself has received sex as mentorship before.

She fantasises about being dominated by this woman, and being tasted by the woman's (expert) tongue. Every artist she knows has gone through this initiation.

When she starts sleeping with Y, her cycle changes, in order to bleed closer to Y. This means she is premenstrual when Y is menstrual. She dreams of creating a joint menstruation chart, she believes it is the map of the world. Blood is as preciously desirable as sexual secretions. She tells Y she wants her blood inside Y. They read Maggie Nelson and talk about writing each other, as Maggie writes Harry. Y requests she pour her mooncup out in the sink, and she sees this moment in fiction before it is realised. Not yet does she know what is private, where the trip lines are, how their love can be both of the room and of the page.

3220_Offshoot.indd 278 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

WATERSPOUT, OR, QUEERING TRAUMATIC FALL-OUT

Marion May Campbell

The WWII Dakota used for the CSIRO Cloud Physics probes is an anachronism to start with. It carries broken time. It's October 1952; it's December 2016.

The pilot stacks the lead disks as ballast inside *Rudolf*'s toilet – the team calls the plane *Rudolf* for the heavy nose-mounted radar instrumentation that can easily tip it off balance. It's a makeshift afterthought. But the correction might become the problem. *Often we see the pilot, Flight Lieutenant Tafe, offload several disks at the last minute, leaving them sprawled across the tarmac. It's possible that the discs radically shift in flight, and with the bank and pitch of turbulence send* Rudolf *into a nosedive and – if this were in the vicinity of a waterspout, well –*

Adjusted through bricolage, planes veer out of function.

The flying machine goes into an uncontrolled spin.

Fathers fall.

Genres tip, one into the other; registers clash; syntax splinters in broken time.

In the black-and-white photo taken just days before the foot-lighting retro-dooms him, cushioning his cheeks, pronouncing the bags under eyes, he's attentive to his earphones. What signals does he auscult to register raindrop density?

Every photo is already cropped but writing traces *lines of flight* beyond the frame Campbell 1992; Deleuze and Guattari 2003.

I feel the torso below the photo's frame, growing unused to weightlifting and acrobatics, sense fat settling in tissue around the stomach, the thigh muscles aching to break from constraint, to exercise their fabulous elastic propensity, even as six decades later I type in the future phantom. And I'm flung back infantile as my old fingers break blue ice on the keyboard to strike the belated subtropical weather.

Belatedness is a low-pressure system that draws ineluctably in and back, dismantling time, bending time. Orphaned of the father-function we find all texts of the world carry the missing in their folds – this is implication, literally.

The traumatic event is only experienced as belated fall-out. The witness cannot be in time (Felman 1992, pp. 1–56).

Witnesses are called to the inquest; and one gives me the image now:

it was *black as, she says, marvelling* –
that waterspout was as *black as an air force tie*
then the visible funnel faded to tenuous
& gradually reformed
& how in the
mind's eye
that in-
verted
cone
is
s
u
p
e
r
b

3220_Offshoot.indd 280 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

A waterspout is spawned by thunderstorm-squall conditions similar to those that produce tornadoes over land. Several mechanisms can give rise to a strong vortex pendant from a cloud. All of these mechanisms require the following elements: warm, moist, unstable air rising and being replaced at the surface by horizontal convergence of the surrounding air; a rapidly growing cloud aloft; and sufficient rotation in the atmosphere that can be localised and concentrated to produce a vortex.

Some take delight in storms – the low rumble, the wide extravagance of sheet lightning.

Some are borderline disrupters.

And He spoke to me in the gullies with the rain drenching the clay and the ochres streaming. He struck open my veins with his fork-lightning tongue.

Traumatic orphanage teaches the magic of synecdoche: the part is the (w)hole. All metonyms that catch its charge are recruited to inscribe the missing body. The rim of the hole is always electric. You don't write out of plenitude. You write to summon the lightning through which the missing might crackle.

Later, relaying the charge, between genres and genders, I sizzle for my sisters.

I am reading about Roland Barthes who is run down by a laundry van and whose dying – through Laurent Binet's whole novel (2015) about the death of the author of 'The death of the author' (Barthes 1977) – is suspended. His suspended death enables real people to carry on fictitiously. This is the *Chanson de Roland*. This is the song of the gay orphan left behind by the epic army. Again it's something about time and genre and the weakened paternal function.

A witness breaks through the privacy curtain corralling the death of the author of 'The death of the author' and says, *Much of what is called fictocriticism is just about a queering of borders, as autofictional*

3220_Offshoot.indd 281 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

desire pressures the critic…Proust writes to counter Sainte-Beuve and veers into À la recherche du temps perdu*; Barthes, writing through Balzac's* Sarrasine (Barthes 1990) *and the swerve of trans signifiers undoing capital, begins to write something like a novel.*

Queer is akin to *quer*, crooked, in German. Campbell of crooked mouth (Harper 2001–16a, 2001–16b), I go my crooked way. I veer, I queer, I query the poetics of stylistic integration, the rock-a-bye melodics, the teleo-logic whereby order is re-established (Campbell in Kerr and Nettlebeck 1998).

Some of us still cavort between genres and, perhaps, more naïve than sophisticated, now as then, hold out hopes for deconstructive play to decommission the violence of binaries: of us and them, the nation and its enemies, poetry and prose, straight, queer and every gradation in between. But corralled back into a lurid Manichaean mindset in this third millennium, many see this play as a luxury of the Ivory Tower, convinced that in the retreat of the grand narratives (Lyotard 1984), queer players were lured into mistaking for radical this unravelling of certainties. Now in the *wake of deconstruction* (Johnson 1994) we wonder and even in the term *Ivory Tower* the violence of manufacturing luxury out of elephant deaths breaks through: our writer's retreat is at the cost of labour and death always elsewhere –

Through 37 the prime number at which he was felled – 3 – I see profiled the breasts of the mother & with 7 – the father's plummet –

Why did this father of two small girls court danger almost daily?

Whence the nostalgia for death Squadron Leader Frederick William Campbell?

He in 1942 – or was it '45? – who had missed out on death in a Norway fjord; called back at the last minute for being too

3220_Offshoot.indd 282 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

valuable-with-his-radar-know-how as he walked the tarmac to join the waiting plane.

Sometimes you have to make up what is missing. The facticity here is fictitious – whenever, across whichever British tarmac, he was fast-reversed out of that trajectory back into the Mess of Life. The rest of the squadron was thrown as fiddlestick flotsam into the stormstruck fjord. Maybe that was merely a myth of near miss my mother clung to, so that the borrowed time they had lived through together became miracle indeed. I can find no sure trace in old news microfiche. Nothing is visible through these belated Google goggles.

He flew with Death held like a carnation between his teeth.

Those cumulonimbus where habitually he got pilot Tafe to fly against his better judgement – was this gay abandon of the straight life? Oh perhaps only in my own queer dreams.

In my veins, I have the thrill of the wild outside, the vertiginous desire to let it all go. The hilarious camaraderie when flying into the stacked baroque of the cumulonimbus – this risking all for the good old adrenaline rush.

The waterspout differs through repetition; always evolving, it moves over the face of the water like a minor god –

We are interested in the physics of turbulence.

We are tracking order in phenomena that wreak havoc.

But the skydiver he became plummets in fragments – after the whole bird blew apart – and it only occurs to me years later that the more it fragments the more the primal scene multiplies – why does that child ache to become a diver, to shoot like lightning into the water? She plots it from the high platform at The Claremont Baths, the river place west of Perth where the widow retreats and where the school holds its swimming carnival. She'll execute

3220_Offshoot.indd 283 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

a daring dive unannounced while the ghostly mother looks on vague, vague, alongside perhaps a clear-eyed watcher like the Amazonian maths teacher with the profile haughty as a camel's, who thinks her quite a clever little geometer. The daughter will let the dive describe the hypotenuse between diving tower and river surface, arms snug to ears, hands, one over the other, one high-arched foot folded over the other, a micro event like Icarus to fall like a shot of lava through the blue air into the silver melt of river far, far below – that will be *agape* –

that will be bliss before wipe-out –

She rehearses it compulsively, until, without a lesson, without even trying the dive, she believes herself goddess-intrepid and that all that is stopping her from being so hailed is lack of tuition. She will keep this power secret. She keeps it in the vault of pleasurable shame; she knows no one else needs daydreams like this.

The execution of impossible dives will be written in later.

There he is again with his headphones on, a depressive glint uncharacteristically in the eyes that myth has it were Navy – not Air Force – blue. *That cloud, I mean, the waterspout was as black as an Air Force tie*, she says, this faraway witness.

The waves whiten to intensity and there's like a probe, a sinister probe, a proboscis testing from sky to sea, the sea cowering then turning dark olive, a kind of sudden eclipse – *I can't tear my eyes off it; I can't stop watching. I see it glint silver heading southwest, the plane I mean, before it disappears in that cloud.*

Black as an Air Force tie, she says again, down the years. Witness after witness is left witless, their voices taken away, their particularity of tone, syntax of intention, stolen. They are just dead words. At the inquest the cloud probers' expertise is made daredevil dumb by the testifying technician. *Those Radio Physics fellows, Campbell*

3220_Offshoot.indd 284 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

and Styles, got cranky if [the pilot] refused to go into some of those big cumulus clouds; seems they had no understanding of turbulence.

And around the queer routes the straight philosophers hover, sacrificing gay encounters on the hybrid altars of their own texts – Sartre with his *Saint Genet* (1966) gags with his existential explication the poet-playwright's voice, condemning him to years of silence; and in *Glas* (1974), Derrida mimics the broken columns of Genet's 'What remains of a Rembrandt' (2003) and, and coupling Hegel with the same gay genius, consigns himself as shuttlecock between the genres. This inter-columnar traffic is practised then in her 'Stabat mater' (1986) by Kristeva, who later in *The Samurai* (1992) muses on Barthes as his mother's loving son, walking grief-blind into the laundry van.

These borrowings work like the waterspout queering that plane into this trajectory; they pluck fragments from one text to tell it slant in another; the Apollonian calm of criticism is troubled and troubling with the intimations of this traffic –

Intimacy contaminates (Derrida 1980) the critical discourse, always. But it is intimacy's spectres I ache to read – the *fragments of a lover's discourse* (Barthes 2001), whether in Barthes, Genet, Cixous, or Irigaray. In this autofictional infolding *our lips together speak* (Irigaray 1985) another politics; in *the space[s] between* (Kerr and Nettlebeck 1998) the fragments bear witness – the waterspout gathers up more than living water in its wake – it tears and souvenirs as it moves –

Before the fire that cauterised memory (Campbell 2015), that annihilated the photos, searing them into the folds of memory's flesh, there was water and no water. There was rainmaking and the drought-triggered quest for precipitation.

This was the project of the Radio Physics Department of CSIRO Sydney.

3220_Offshoot.indd 285 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Seer-ESS, Sigh-RAH, SO his daughters chanted – the magic of it.

There was flying into cumulonimbus clouds for water drop density measurement. To see if they could make it rain in Cloncurry. For instance.

Here is the figure of the waterspout. That brought the plane down.

Or might have, now it insists here as figure –

An inverted cone, the trawler captain says at the inquest. And it moves fast with his words. It's beautiful the way its wake gathers amplitude, trawls the ruffling water like a silken shawl.

Seeing the spout rise *black as an Air Force tie*, she says, *it was so beautiful.*

I wear it.

I dress myself in the myth.

The black tie event is mine.

There was cumulonimbus abeam of Kiama heavy precipitation near base. Leonard Sansom, Captain of the Trawler 'Matong' of the Red Funnel Line, Sydney, observed the waterspout for some fifteen minutes… [The updraft] might've been sufficient to throw the aircraft temporarily out of control. If then his artificial horizon were toppled, the captain may have been unable to effect recovery before striking the water – it would have been restricted visibility.

My *artificial horizon* topples.

This is what you need to do, the pilot-trainers say: watch the little plane on your flight instrumentation, *not* the artificial horizon: the degrees of pitch and the banking –

Found:

One Mae West for five crew and the passenger WRAAF Officer Costello

3220_Offshoot.indd 286 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

(Oh six Mae West were on order and had been for six months –)

One life rubber dinghy (deflated)

One gabardine overcoat bearing Miss Costello's WRAAF number rank and name.

One inner flying suit

One oxygen bottle

Small parts of Aeroplane – belonging to Dakota A65-113

Now that's all he is: a photo of a uniformed moustached head on the mantle.

The men on the mantle have pilots' caps and striped epaulettes.

The men on the mantle have unfocused half-smiles.

Caught soon in the Snap-Freeze War.

The men of the mantle have no legs.

The men of the mantle have forgotten what legs are for.

The men of the mantle are moved for the dusting.

This story has no legs the editors say.

The five-year-old who has legs stands to pee and sculpt with cold cream a waterspout of her hair; raking comb tines through, she makes the waterspout stand up.

Yon black cloud, yon huge one, looks like a foul bombard that would shed his liquor (Shakespeare 1998, p. 144).

Rainmaking is the work of the Devil. It is the worst kind of interference with God's Nature.

We submit to God's Will. While you –

But you with your hydroelectric, your Soviet heroics –

Your foredoomed schemes: Snowy River, Carnarvon, Esperance.

But the scientists then thought nature was to be controlled, harnessed.

A little superphosphate turns desert to wheatfield, they said.

3220_Offshoot.indd 287 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

The daughter wants to be a scientist. She and her friends take Marie Curie for a heroine, before they read many years later in Adrienne Rich that *her wounds came / from the same source as her power* (2002). They take technology for science, these kids; think a Geiger counter might make scientists of them. They tingle with the ticktickick of radioactivity and love the lurid glow of the radium digits on the alarm clock; of their foot skeletons in the X-ray machine of the shoe shop.

They admire the acid-red hands of their chemistry teacher.

They love men walking on the moon.

And there are dust storms, the Mallee topsoil dumped by torrid Winds of the Apocalypse over Melbourne, the sky turning to bloodied mushroom.

And east of Esperance all the land and lives laid to waste with scientific agronomics.

But for the moment the widow shakes as she opens the letter, with its newsprint collage.

S*erv*E*s th*em R*igh*t f*o*r inT*er*fER*i*ng *wi*t*h* *Na*tu*r*e!

It is the crude exclamation mark that tears through the heart muscle of wife mother lover.

Rainmaking is the work of the Devil. It is the worst kind of interference of God's Nature. Drought He sends and Drought is the Trial, the Gift in Disguise we must receive. And what your CSIRO fellows do is try with their Evil Dry Ice to make rain in some God-forsaken place, why would you do that, now? The quality of His Mercy comes in discreet drizzle; it comes in slanted bulleting downpour; it comes also in relentless year-in, year-out Drought and it is His Will yes if His Hot Wind lifts the topsoil from the Mallee and dumps it hundreds of miles away on the southern city of sinners.

And He spray-paints the sinners into the sepia fog.

3220_Offshoot.indd 288 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

If only life had drifted sideways like the gaps in weather when it seems to forget the narrative *telos* we call Destiny and run back on itself. *Side-shadowing*, Gary Saul Morson (1998) calls it.

Pulsating in the side-shadows, the *if-onlys* become pivotal *what-ifs* – stories, poems, thought experiments.

Side-shadowing is the gift of chance, like a switch of the blowtorch wind.

Drought has knocked back the ochres to white lead. It has stolen the yellow from blond. It has lopped the grainy yield, so all is stalk shine and slant. Our phantom harvest is sparse, staggered and skeletal. All is fiddlesticks for the idling wind. This place is called Cloncurry.

Go on lads, show us what you can do. Come on boys, un-drought the cracked and wounded land. Like gods zapping the sky you'll make it rain.

On the mantle are the framed heroes. Still their wings have not detached.

Instead of losing him I can become him.

They can and cannot see – the child keeps the surface disposition of girl, to a degree, until they give her corduroy trousers. But she rehearses alone another set of gestures. Models come and go: the slim-hipped man, her mother's tenant, with the Elvis quiff, and the carpenter's pencil in his ear – she borrows his rather Asian blue-black hair, grease-sculpted, crested with comb tracks. Walks like a cowboy the dusty path to the duel; legs wide apart as if an A-frame were planted in her jeans. She swaggers. She stands to pee. An amber waterspout in reversal or rehearsal. Misfires. Practice will correct that.

I am whoever, whatever he – the night before the crash he says to his beloved, *Whatever the matter, there is nothing but energy, in endless transformation. I will come back to you in waves.*

And we drift and improvise on the available wavelength.

3220_Offshoot.indd 289 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Genre is both gender and genre in French, an energetic field crackling with difference (Derrida 1980). Each genre has its 'laws', generating models for mimicry and deviance; each genre is haunted by, contaminated by, is even lined with, *invaginated* by what it seeks to exclude. This is a poem. This is a critical essay. This is a straight man writing criticism. This is a queer woman fictionalising. This is how Duras opens *The North China Lover* (2008), in protest against the aestheticisation of the filmic adaptation of *The Lover* (Annaud 1992; Duras 2008), betraying the stuttering autofiction in whose silences she had tried to register her early trauma. Perhaps only trans-generic traffic – the display through interruption of each genre's limits, where story cannot tell what the poem suggests, or voice-play might in its clashing, or film might in montage; where each, in turn, breaks into awkwardness, scream, or silence – only this can testify to trauma (Gilmore 2001). Where there are only shards of the traumatic event available, the genres stutter and bleed.

In the writing, spaces open for the waterspout and the fragmented skydiver, for their assertion in the one figure, the diver and his demise. Wavelength varies as propagated energy travels through different media. So too, the waterspout and skydiver suffer a change as they pass from one genre to the next. Genres can suggest traumatic wounds through their very corruption or interruption, and perhaps transform traumatised memory into productive becoming.

This is the waterspout effect.

It transports and drops fragments into new contexts, new zones of intensity.

So, a critical incursion colours the autofictional passage, which hosts it uneasily, suffering the telltale inflammation from foreign matter.

3220_Offshoot.indd 290 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Again the strokes of the comb rake up a waterspout quiff to make a man of me.

The other side stares back and the space of the 'I' takes on the Disappeared.

I become *herhimthem* – what prose galloping to *telos* leaves behind – the waterspout gathers up all creatures from the sea change – and a radical passivity has been accomplished. Genres turn me where they will, into what they will.

As soon as you let yourself be led beyond codes, your body filled with fear and joy, you are no longer enclosed in the maps of social construction, you no longer walk between walls, meanings flow – (Cixous 1991).

Cixous and Barthes and Genet turn the wounds of orphanage and illegitimacy to wild freedom, setting a-tremble the law-of-the-father of stable representations. What begins then is a break through the screen (Genet 1987). One writes for the dead, who never arrive. In the absence of the birth or death certificate one writes the shiver, the bodily register of its absence, and any name is liable to take on its charge.

And of course there are place names to operate their metonymic magic, like *Wattamolla*, the Gweagal people call the place of running water, where the waterspout of 27 October 1952 transported its burden. Or failed to.

The CSIRO team did not fall a few miles abreast of Wattamolla – oh the logic of exploding over paradise. For so long they have hung there, in a stalled rain –

And between the suspended fragments still the lightning crackles.

References

Annaud, Jean-Jacques (dir.) 1992, *The lover*, motion picture, Films A2, Renn Productions, Burrill Productions, France, UK and USA.

3220_Offshoot.indd 291 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Barthes, Roland 1977, 'The death of the author', in *Image music text*: *essays selected and translated by S Heath*, Fontana/Harper Collins, London, pp. 142–98.
Barthes, Roland 1990, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller, Blackwell, Oxford.
Barthes, Roland 2001, *A lover's discourse: fragments*, 2nd ed., trans. R Howard, Hill & Wang, New York.
Binet, Laurent 2015, *La septième fonction du langage*, Bernard Grasset, Paris.
Campbell, Marion 1992, *Lines of flight*, 2nd ed., Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, WA.
Campbell, Marion 1998, 'Telephony or phony telos', in Heather Kerr & Amanda Nettlebeck (eds.), *The space between: Australian women writing fictocriticism*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA, pp. 217–39.
Campbell, Marion May 2015, 'Geometry and geography', *Mascara Literary Review* (April), viewed 10 December 2016, <http://mascarareview.com/geometry-and-geography-by-marion-campbell>.
Cixous, Hélène 1991, cited in S. R. Suleiman, 'Writing past the wall' in Hélène Cixous, *Coming to writing and other essays*, trans. Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle & Susan Sellers, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and London, UK.
Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Felix 2003, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia, vol.2*, trans. B Massumi, Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers Series, Continuum, London, UK.
Derrida, Jacques 1974, *Glas*, Galilée, Paris.
Derrida, Jacques 1980, 'The law of genre', trans. Avital Ronell, *Glyph* 7 (Spring), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp. 202–32.
Derrida, Jacques 1986, *Glas*, trans. J. P. Leavey Jr. & R. Rand, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, UK.
Duras, Marguerite 2008, *The North China lover*, trans. Leigh Hafrey, The New Press, New York.
Felman, Shoshana 1992 'Education and crisis, or the vicissitudes of teaching', in Shoshana Felman & Dore Laub (eds.), *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis and history*, Routledge, New York and London, UK, pp. 1–56.
Genet, Jean 1987, *The screens*, trans. Bernard Frechtman, Faber, London, UK.
Genet, Jean 2003, 'What remains of a Rembrandt torn into little squares all the same size and shot down the toilet', *Fragments of the artwork*, trans. C. Mandell, Crossing Aesthetics, Meridian, Stanford, California, pp. 91–102.
Gilmore, Leigh 2001, *The limits of autobiography: trauma and testimony*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
Harper, D. 2001–16a, 'Campbell', *Online etymology dictionary*, viewed 8 December 2016, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Campbell>.
Harper, D. 2001–16b, 'Queer (adj.)', *Online etymology dictionary*, viewed 10 December 2016, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=queer>.
Irigaray, Luce 1985, 'When our lips speak together', *This sex which is not one*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, pp. 205–18.

3220_Offshoot.indd 292 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Johnson, Barbara 1994, *The wake of deconstruction*, The Bucknell Lectures in Literary Theory, Wiley-Blackwell, Cambridge, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK.

Kerr, Heather & Nettlebeck, Amanda (eds.) 1998, *The space between: Australian women writing fictocriticism*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA.

Kristeva, Julia 1986, 'Stabat mater', trans. Toril Moi, *The Kristeva reader*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 160–86.

Kristeva, Julia 1992, *The samurai*, trans. Barbara Bray, Columbia University Press, New York.

Lyotard, *Jean-François* 1984, *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Morson, Gary Saul 1998, 'Side-shadowing and tempics', *New Literary History*, no. 294 (Autumn), pp. 599–624.

Rich, Adrienne 2002, 'Power', *The fact of a doorframe*, Norton, New York, p. 135.

Sartre, Jean-Paul 1966, 'Saint Genet, comédien et martyre', *Œuvres complètes de Jean Genet*, vol. 1, NRF, Gallimard, Paris.

Shakespeare, William 1998, *The tempest*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, p. 144.

Acknowledgements

My abiding gratitude goes to Condell Rustichelli for her encouragement and suggestions re 'Waterspout'. Sincere thanks also go to the reviewers of this piece. The references to witness accounts of the fatal accident concerning the DC3 Dakota are loosely taken from 'Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry to carry out further investigations into the accident to Aircraft A65-113 Between Port Hacking and Wollongong, New South Wales on 27th October, 1952'; 'Royal Australian Airforce Crash Critique No. 28: Fatal accident to Dakota A65-113 off Cronulla (NSW) on 27th October, 1952', issued by Directorate of Flying Safety Airforce headquarters, Melbourne. Sincere thanks for permission to cite and paraphrase these sources granted by the National Archives of Australia.

3220_Offshoot.indd 293 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

GIRL BODY BOY BODY

Quinn Eades

Today at Rushall Station with the wet trees and the grey sky and the sign painted onto the platform that says 'No bikes first carriage door' I listened to Mumford & Sons. They sang *I will tell the night, and whisper lose your sight, but I can't move the mountains for you* and two protective services officers yelled 'Thanks Buddy' to a man wandering away down the platform. I turned the music up. The men left. I was wearing my favourite boots. Birds called down the rain. Blue plastic shards lay in the stones between sleepers. I imagined bowerbirds hunting the blue in the quiet between trains, and carrying them back to their emblazoned nests. I imagined laying myself down, soft and pale against all that azure, branches scraping curls from my skin. Making myself into the nest. Laying down girl body breasted cunted hipped skin curled legs curved. Laying down in my own breath. Staying still. The twigs and plastic and feathers and threads meeting me. Sleeping. Sleeping and waking up boy body bird nest blue brown the wet day. Laying down girl, waking up boy. Nested, browned, woody, flashes of blue, streaked with wet. Bizarre newborn oldborn, a caul of desire licking my cheeks and forehead.

LIFE WRITING FUTURITIES: NO FUTURE/EVERY FUTURE AND WHAT WE CAN SEE IN THE HORIZON

Quinn Eades and Donna Lee Brien

In the book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman argues that our sense of reality rests on a linear developmental model, and 'the misconception that conception itself can assure the endurance, by enacting the truth, of the Symbolic order of meaning and preserve, in the form of the future'. He goes on to say that this idea of 'futurity comes to signify access to the realization of meaning both promised and prohibited by the fact of our formation as subjects of the signifier' (2004, p. 134). This flows from Edelman's central thesis that the future is conceived of through heterosexual reproduction and the figure of the child, and that a queer relationship to the future is far less stable. This lack of sureness problematises secure and knowable subjectivities, and Edelman goes on to suggest that we situate ourselves in the present, rather than looking ahead, and embrace the *jouissance* of the moment in which we find ourselves.

In light of Edelman's ideas of such futurity, and given our very fragmented, insecure and often, indeed, troubled present, how can we discuss the possible future of life writing, which many would see as relatively straightforward, and certainly linear? Do we remain in the present? Or do we throw forwards to what may be coming next? We suggest that what Edelman is positing here is not so much a hopeless apocalyptic 'no future', but is, instead, asking us to consider possible futures that do not rely on the

utopic figure of the child as a generated unit who embodies the characteristics of what has happened previously, and is thus asked to both carry on and, in term, further propagate a singular truth/story/history for the next generation.

If there is the potential to shake up, to destabilise or even to remake what our formation as subjects will look like, what would/can/will these futures be? José Estaban Muñoz's joyous book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) suggests a possible response, one that is firmly embedded in a sense of queer that holds open a space for infinite subjectivities, and for symbolic orders that are (for now) inconceivable. Muñoz writes that 'we must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there' (p. 1). Muñoz later also questions the binary of present/future, and calls for the future to be placed in the present in order 'to summon a refunctioned notion of utopia in the service of subaltern politics' (p. 49). Life writing, as we see it, must inhabit exactly this kind of utopic space: a here-now that is not only aware of what has been, but simultaneously gestures to what-comes-next, that is aware of itself as the carrier of subaltern voices, and that is always opening to new forms. Such life writing proliferates inside a conception of 'writing' that includes not only pen on paper or fingers on keyboards, but also face and voice on screen and on tape, conversations making and remaking text, feet thrumming down in dust, scars and marks on bodies, drumbeats carried through darkening air: the patterns and patterning of lives lived, relived and imagined.

If, as in Anna Poletti's article 'Periperformative life narrative' (2016), we think about a life being lived 'not as a subject made visible or precarious through the citation of discourses of identity but as an ongoing process of being made up of activities, fantasies,

3220_Offshoot.indd 296 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

attachments, and orientations' (p. 367), then we might also ask, as she does, 'how might we think again about the performative function of memoir and what it assumes is consensus about having a "life"?' (p. 367). We believe it is vital that life writing scholars and readers consider this question, and others that are similar to it. What is a 'life'? How are these lives written? Who has access to platforms from which to write, and how? What do autobiographical/biographical narratives do, not only as forms of writing and texts for readers and others to consume, but – as scholars of object biography suggest – as objects, even beings, themselves with lives, out in the world? And, as Poletti also importantly points out, how do we think about the *doing* of life writing if the genre is not a reification of a certain kind of life, but instead a dis/continuous documentation of a self that is produced in and through discourse, connection, dreaming/imagining, and an imbrication of experience?

How, moreover, do we balance this multiplicitous approach against a conception of life writing that Jerome Bruner describes as both 'self-making' and 'world-making', where the construction of the self (or selves) in narrative creates a kind of stabilising force that spreads outwards from the writing subject and into the culture or world in which that self writes (2001, p. 35)? The term 'world-making', first coined by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998), describes the process through which marginal communities create connections, opportunities, networks and a sense of stability. It is, we suggest, through the enactment of life writing methodologies and the multiple and multiplying theoretical perspectives that currently frame writing practice as both self and world-making that both subaltern and (hopefully, also majority) voices can be in a position to interrogate their own understandings of identity and subjectivity. This increased

3220_Offshoot.indd 297 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

understanding, and its dissemination through writing, can then begin to make minority subject positions not only more visible, but also more 'knowable', by society in general, and thus assist in reducing the detrimental impacts of prejudice, ignorance and discrimination.

In her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Judith Butler describes a social process she calls 'derealisation' (p. 33), where certain lives and bodies outside the Western category of 'the human' are therefore ungrievable, and thus continuously suffer the violence of being 'unreal'. It can certainly be argued that life writing offers the potential to recuperate derealised lives and bodies back into the category of 'the human' through an explication of recognisable experience (love, children, food…see, we are all the same), but what do we do with – and how do we make room for – lives that insist on remaining unknowable?

This collection of life writing methodologies and examples of (creative) life writing practice forms part of an attempt to do just that: to hold many voices in polyphony without privileging one over the other; to interlace poetry through its pages as a reminder that there are always more ways to write a life than we can imagine; and, to nestle creative scholars, poets and other writers against each other as a means to creating a conversation that is often shut down both outside, and – sadly – often inside, the academy and its increasingly managerially driven structures and processes. If, as Muñoz writes, 'the future is queerness's domain', and 'queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present' (2009, p. 1), then perhaps *Offshoot* is part of this domain (and this desiring). And in the spirit of queerness, of making space always for others to speak, we offer twenty-three visions from the

3220_Offshoot.indd 298 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

contributors to this text of the future of life writing: these visions are variously quotidian, humble, poetic, reaching and (as any kind of visioning work is) what we could term 'not-enough'.

Dominique Hecq: In response to the challenges of self-representation, the way we read and write about life writing is constantly evolving. Consequently, the definition and theorisation of this form, mode, or genre will keep engaging in constant acts of revision to reflect ever-changing notions of self and identity.

Jen Webb: Truth has never been true, in any final or formal sense. But there is a truth in what lies beyond language, beyond the Symbolic order, and humans know this truth whether we countenance it or not. Poetry, creative prose, visual art, performing arts: all these forms reach for the ineffable, for what cannot easily be reduced to language, but can be felt, recognised, and remembered. In an age of 'truthiness', the body and the material world still hold a knowing/truth that cannot finally be dislodged.

Phillip Hall: In my life writing I celebrate First Australians in the Gulf of Carpentaria while interrogating colonialism's crooked paths. I wish to bear witness to resiliency, joy and pride without shying away from the crueller barbs of dispossession, violence and trauma.

Jessica L. Wilkinson: I see life writing futures along poetic lines; not the lyric of the past but new lines extending toward (auto)biographical performance; from Ezra Pound's 'news that stays news' (1961, p. 29) toward Cole Swensen's 'noise that stays noise' (2011) moving through space.

3220_Offshoot.indd 299 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Robyn Ferrell: I see life writing as being increasingly popular, especially memoir and journal writing, as social media increases access to e-publication for many. It is also revising the notion of 'the literary' – for example, the popularity of the autobiographies written by Norwegian best-selling author Karl Ove Knausgaard (2009) is instructive. Does this kind of writing challenge the hegemony of fictional narrative, or is it self-indulgent confession?

Lucas Ihlein: Life writing in the future will involve an ongoing struggle to tell human stories as an act of resistance against the 'stories' produced by the massive amounts of data about our lives that we freely hand over every day. Future life writing will require the invention of new forms of writing technology and media; equally it may entail a return to oral storytelling culture – or a combination of both.

Shady Cosgrove: As we witness an era of post-truth on the global landscape, the genre of life writing may face increased scepticism, but it has never been more critical: the communication of lived experience and the knowledges that can be imparted through this genre are critical to notions of self and identity, and to the story-ing of the world.

Paul Hetherington: In recent decades, life writing has become something of a catch-all phrase for diverse literary forms and styles, from traditional biographies and autobiographies, to memoir, to many lyric essays, to what might be called self-docu-dramas, to written testimony about trauma, to some kinds of blogs, and even emails – and, for a few critics and theorists, it also encompasses poetic biographies and some confessional lyric poetry. I would speculate that the future of life writing lies in a continual proliferation of

3220_Offshoot.indd 300 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

form and content and, at least for the foreseeable future, an increasing awareness of the fragmentary and broken nature of many of the experiences it tries to evoke, capture and recount.

While the coherence celebrated in numerous traditional works of biography and autobiography is likely to remain a goal for some mainstream authors, for others life writing is likely to become a way of naming the inchoate, the unreliable and the incomplete. As we learn more and more about memory and the human cognitive process, we are increasingly understanding that a great deal of human knowledge is widely dispersed throughout the brain and body – often obscurely – and that all acts of life writing therefore involve processes of reconstituting the disparate and the contingent. These life writing processes also invoke what is symbolic and emblematic even when seeming to deal with straightforwardly quotidian concerns. In the future, life writing offers an exciting promise of being able to further open up the field of human understanding. This will be in terms of listening carefully to human uncertainties and contradictions, disrupting those naturalised and accepted linear narratives about life and lives, and squarely facing their seductiveness.

Francesca Rendle-Short: In this new world paradigm of post-truth, the idea and practice of memoir shifts and sighs; it is changing irrevocably. We are entering a post-genre, post-gender, post-memoir era where the 'never as certain, but always as possible' (Nelson 2015, p. 142) allows for, nay demands, writing that is fluid and ambiguous, transitory and unsettled. A queer (querying) of non/fiction.

Nike Sulway: The angel of life writing, like the angel of history, seems to always have had a face 'turned towards the past'

3220_Offshoot.indd 301 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

(Benjamin 1969, p. 249), towards the catastrophe or storm that blows that angel forward. Perhaps in the future, as life writing increasingly becomes an activity that documents and comments not only on the past, but also on the present and the future, the angel will turn or spin, becoming a many-headed hydra looking, always, in many directions all at once. Surrounded by multiple catastrophes: personal, social, public and literary.

Stephen Abblitt: The future of life writing is somewhat retro. (This is a somewhat retro love letter.) The future of life writing is a turning back to those explosive twentieth-century genre-defying post-critical experiments – Genet (1986), Barthes (1975, 1977, 1980), Cixous (1973, 2002), Derrida (1980), Kristeva (1989), Wittig (1964), and so many others – interrogating the always already porous borders of traditional academic and popular genres, blending art, theory and life. It might look something like the extraordinary works of John Schad (2007, 2012), which seamlessly, breathlessly, blend memoir with fiction with philosophy, literary theory and criticism – Schad calls this critical-creative writing. But it is also a turning back which takes place looking towards a future where new modes of literary production and consumption, and new material supports and ideological forms, wrought by the digital age, continue to violently disrupt conventional, analogue, print-based practices of writing and reading.

Dallas J. Baker: The future is unknowable. Any attempt to imagine the future, or the future of life writing, is just guesswork, perhaps based on good evidence, perhaps an entertaining exercise, but ultimately anything we imagine is likely to be an inaccurate augury. The unknowable quality of the future is the future's best quality. It is not fixed. It is not graspable. It is not consumable. In

3220_Offshoot.indd 302 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

that sense the future is very queer, it cannot be categorised or positioned, it cannot be harnessed to any ideology, unless, of course, we start to produce discourse about what the future might be, or what we want it to be. I prefer not to guess a future for life writing, but rather meet it with surprise and curiosity when it unfolds.

Patrick Mullins: I believe that life writing will continue to impress its relevance on readers, particularly as the demand for the 'real' prompts innovation and experimentation with narrative technique, point of view and the exigencies of fact. More specifically, though, I see a greater emphasis on the exegetical elements of life writing: of the author's role and actions in shaping and understanding the life. How this is balanced with the aesthetic imperatives will be, I think, one of the main sources of debate in the future.

Zoe Thomas: While the human interface with autobiographical processes may always be grounded somewhere/somehow in the body, it will be fascinating to witness – as both observer and practitioner – how digital technologies will influence the future apparatus of the form. As Paul Arthur contends, 'while the computer has not yet provided a satisfactory alternative to individual handing down of memories, it has the capability to build a perpetual living archive that can be designed to serve the purpose of memory transfer more effectively than it has to date' (2015, p. 197). I feel both excited by the possibilities and conscious of the anxieties that may attend the shifting dimensions of life writing in a digital era.

James Vicars: The evolution of the technologies of writing and reading will change not only the tools of life writing but also open

3220_Offshoot.indd 303 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

new opportunities for how life stories can be told; the quantum of listeners and viewers of such stories may grow much more than readers of actual writing. That said, the growing hunger for human stories and the quest for individual identity suggest that the telling of lives *as* stories will continue to develop. Those that are credible and authentic – emotionally resonant – will be most in demand, whereas the quantity and importance of factual material may become more dependent on its relevance to the story rather than the driver of that narrative. This is already a noticeable shift, perhaps leading to new balancing points in the art of life writing.

Kevin Brophy: A sub-text of the 'Black Lives Matter' slogan is a commitment from the oppressed, the marginalised, the ridiculed, the assaulted, the abused and the despised to keep recording, re-telling, recounting and detailing their experiences. For as long as life matters, lives will matter.

Jeri Kroll: The lines between autobiography and biography as genres and those of fiction and poetry seem to be increasingly blurred in hybrid works. Pushing against the boundaries of forms or letting them seep into one another, writers can liberate themselves.

Marion May Campbell: Peta Murray's recent doctoral performance of her magnificent *Essayesque Dismemoir* (2017) convinced me that when the queer(y)ing mind, ranging through genders and genres, turns to the page as theatre of selves in germination and metamorphosis, the future of life writing is limitless. Thanks to the bold poetics of such innovators as Murray, Eades (2015), Brossard (1991, 2004) and Nelson (2015), this future has already arrived and it is exhilaratingly protean.

3220_Offshoot.indd 304 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Janine McVeagh: All lives have something interesting about them, however ordinary the person may seem. It does not matter who or when, we share our humanity. Finding those interesting things and expressing them engagingly will keep readers reading about other people's lives.

Jeanine Leane: If you really want to understand the lives, experiences and histories of Black Australians, leave the historians alone and go to our life writing narratives and poems because it is here you will find the emotion and stories that have been 'written out' of the broader national narrative.

Ode to a Historian

You stare through two centuries of pain
flag of national numbness flying high
behind your blank blue eyes.
Your face an open book
my life to fill the page.
Your tape recorder
feels nothing.

Camilla Nelson: In a post-truth world (a word that no longer needs inverted commas since it's just been added to the *Oxford English Dictionary*) the struggle to find nuanced ways of representing and cutting through reality will continue. And it is quite likely that a lot of the new forms of life writing that emerge will be multimodal and digital.

Gail Pittaway: The future of life writing will be across language, genre, class and race – in song, poem, image and media. Just as the obituary has become a celebration of ordinary lives in

3220_Offshoot.indd 305 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

communities, no longer only commemorating the lives of the wealthy or leaders, so life writing will celebrate the stories of individuals, many of whom would not have been listened to, previously.

Poetry as life writing will be accepted back into the stable. As Stephen Fry has written: 'For me the private act of writing poetry is song writing, confessional, diary-keeping, speculation, problem-solving, storytelling, therapy, anger-management, craft-making, relaxation, concentration and spiritual adventure, all rolled up into one inexpensive package' (2007, p. xii).

Virginia Barratt: life writing: forever a speculative fiction written by a version of 'self', a recursive iterative enfolding of moments, furling and unfurling again and again, but never the same again. a multiplicity of lives connected and sprouting from a multiplicity of lives connected and sprouting from a multiplicity…

i find in the works of Maggie Nelson (2015), Jackie Orr (2006) and Kathleen Stewart (2007) meta-methodological approaches to life writing and auto/ethnography, which reflect on the role of writer/researcher, problematising the notion of a unified personal 'truth', while amplifying affect, subjectivity and dissonance.

i think i have been here before…

We add that *we* have been here before. We walk, ever, towards a horizon that we will not reach, that continually beckons and expands. While we walk, let us come back to Muñoz, who demands that we understand 'queerness as collectivity', and 'contend[s] that if [such] queerness is to have any value whatsoever, it must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon' (p. 11). The preposition *in* is important here – there is a great difference between being *in* and being *on*, and our non-linear, queer

3220_Offshoot.indd 306 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

approach requires us very much to be *in* what we are writing and making, and what we can (try to) envision.

Some of the life writings we (as both contributors to this collection and editors of it) are trying to see right now include the following. We 'see' a continuing ex/im/plosion of writing forms, and sustained interest in the study of them. While, just to note one example, both the film and television biopic have attracted sustained scholarly attention since the 1960s (Bleum 1965; Custen 1992; Bell 2000; Bingham 2010), auto/biographical writing for theatre – although having been staged for centuries – has attracted much less attention in terms of research enquiry, only recently starting to pick up some momentum (see, for instance, Canton 2011; Davis 2015). We also predict a continuing widening of scope in terms of probing life writing as process and product, as – with considerable energy historically focused on issues of fact and fiction – many of the other personal, practical, ethical and aesthetic challenges involved in attempting to represent the stories of real individuals as narratives remain relatively unaddressed. The politically charged and ethically difficult field of life writing dealing with crime and criminality is, for instance, an area rich in potential for both practice and research (Brien 2009). Writers, and scholars, will not always tackle these projects alone. We may see more group research and enquiry. And, we hope, more collaborative storytelling that, like hypertext narratives, unfold at nodes of interconnectivity, but where there is always an unexhausted possibility of more, not less, ways forward (or back).

Digital life writing has to, of course, be mentioned in this context and we are interested in the concept of 'automediality' here, where 'automedial practices of digital life writing impact the prosthetic extension of self in networks, the reorientation of bodies in virtual space, the perspectival positioning of subjects,

3220_Offshoot.indd 307 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

and alternative embodiments' (Smith and Watson 2017). We may also view life writing narratives where hologramic fragments are 'threaded through one another, knotted, spliced, fractured, each moment a hologram, but never whole' (Barad 2010, p. 243). Add to this a continuing and seemingly ever-expanding practice of embodied life writing, which may include performance, bio-hacking, tattooing, BDSM and kink practices, body modification, ritual, parkour, and dance, and the future of experimental life writing seems filled with potential. So much so, that there will be genres and subgenres that defy naming: life writing that is, for instance, felt or otherwise 'absorbed' so that, afterwards, those who were there turn to each other and ask, 'What *was* that?'

As life and its demands continue to speed up, we may see an increasing truncation of narratives, where a life is summed up in seven emojis, a single tweet, three Facebook statuses strung together and shared, a selfie posted on Instagram or a graph of 'likes'. Perhaps the Slow movement will embrace life narrative, with a contemporary reversioning of the epic song cycles of old or other such reformatting. The options for teller and told are also seemingly endless, with non-human animal stories finessing an opening into how we (as human animals) see, hear, feel, taste, touch and move in order to make room for the howl inside the voice, the flesh under fur, the way all of us are walking to what we can see might be in the horizon. As everyday objects become 'smart' and lifelike, then object biography may give way to forms of object autobiography, and post-human stories including cyborg stories will begin to tell tales from the metal inside (our/their) flesh, as they themselves become aware of such horizons.

Mostly, though, we believe that crafting powerful and meaningful narratives from the lives of the self, and the lives of others, will remain a complex but seductively attractive task.

3220_Offshoot.indd 308 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

These narrated lives – however they are made and however they are told – will also, due to the efforts of those making such narratives, continue to have much to say to those who read or listen or otherwise comprehend these stories. As a result, those who think and write about such things will continue to be engaged with this important form of creative and critical production. Together, these future writers, readers and scholars will produce the multivalent, rhizomic life writing and scholarship about that life writing from which further future offshoots will scratch and scrabble and take root and grow, ever naming and making our lives and horizons visible, and then engendering even more outgrowths and branches. We invite you now to make your own offshoots, to find in the horizon the next way of storying lives.

References

Arthur, Paul 2015, 'Material memory and the digital,' *Life Writing*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 189–200.

Barad, Karen 2010, 'Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations of inheritance: dis/continuities, spacetime enfoldings, and justice-to-come', *Derrida Today*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 240–68.

Barthes, Roland 1975, *Roland Barthes*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.

Barthes, Roland 1977, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.

Barthes, Roland 1980, *La chambre claire: note sur la photographie*, Cahiers du cinéma, Gallimard & Le Seuil, Paris.

Bell, Alana 2000, 'Biopic bibliography', *Biography*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 212–22.

Benjamin, Walter 1969, 'Theses on the philosophy of history', *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, Pimlico, London.

Berlant, Lauren & Warner, Michael 1998, 'Sex in public', *Critical Enquiry*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 547–66.

Bingham, Dennis 2010, *Whose lives are they anyway?: the biopic as contemporary film genre*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick.

Bleum, A. William 1965, 'Human drama: biographers to plot finders', *Documentary in American television: form, function, method*, Hastings House, New York.

Brien, Donna Lee 2009, '"Based on a true story": the problem of the perception of biographical truth in narratives based on real lives', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, vol. 13, no. 2, viewed 6 February 2017, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct09/brien.htm>.

3220_Offshoot.indd 309 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Brossard, Nicole 1991, *Picture theory*, trans. Barbara Godard, Guernica Editions, Montreal.

Brossard, Nicole 2004, *Intimate journal, or, here's a manuscript*, trans. Barbara Godard, Mercury Press, Toronto.

Bruner, Jerome 2001, 'Self-making and world making', in Jens Brockmeier, Donal Carbaugh & John Benjamins (eds.), *Narrative and identity: studies in autobiography, self, and culture*, Amsterdam, pp. 25–37.

Butler, Judith 2004, *Precarious life: the powers of mourning and violence*, Verso, London and New York.

Canton, Ursula 2011, *Biographical theatre: re-presenting real people?*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmills.

Cixous, Hélène 1973, *Tombe*, Le Seuil, Paris.

Cixous, Hélène 2002, *Manhattan: lettres de la préhistoire*, Galilée, Paris.

Custen, George F. 1992, *Bio/pics: how Hollywood constructed public history*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick.

Davis, Susan 2015, 'Questions for George', Special issue 29, *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, viewed 6 February 2017, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue29/Davis.pdf>.

Derrida, Jacques 1980, *La carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà*, Flamarrion, Paris.

Eades, Quinn 2015, *all the beginnings: a queer autobiography of the body,* Tantanoola, North Melbourne.

Edelman, Lee Barale 2004, *No future: queer theory and the death drive*, Duke University Press, Durham and London.

Fry, Stephen 2007, *The ode less travelled*, Arrow Books, London.

Genet, Jean 1986, *Un captif amoureux*, Gallimard, Paris.

Knausgård, Karl Ove 2009, *My struggle: book 1*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.

Kristeva, Julia 1989, *Black sun: depression and melancholia*, Columbia University Press, New York.

Muñoz, José Esteban 2009, *Cruising utopia: the then and there of queer futurity*, New York University Press, New York.

Murray, Peta 2017, 'An essayesque dismemoir', PhD thesis, RMIT University, Melbourne.

Nelson, Maggie 2015, *The argonauts,* Graywolf Press, Minneapolis.

Orr, Jackie 2006, *Panic diaries: a genealogy of panic disorder*, Duke University Press, Durham.

Poletti, Anna 2016, 'Periperformative life narrative: queer collages', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 359–79.

Pound, Ezra 1961, *ABC of reading*, Faber, London.

Schad, John 2007, *Someone called Derrida: an Oxford mystery*, Sussex Academic Press, Eastbourne.

Schad, John 2012, *The late Walter Benjamin*, Continuum, London.

Smith, Sidonie & Watson, Julia 2017, 'Virtually me: a toolbox about online

3220_Offshoot.indd 310 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

self-presentation', in Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson (eds.) *Life writing in the long run: a Smith & Watson autobiography studies reader*, Maize Books/Michigan Publishing, Ann Arbor, viewed 12 April 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9739969>.

Stewart, Kathleen 2007, *Ordinary affects*, Duke University Press, Durham.

Swenson, Cole 2011, *Noise that stays noise: essays*, University of Michigan Press, London.

Wittig, Monique 1964, *L'Opoponax*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris.

3220_Offshoot.indd 311 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

LIFE WRITING BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography, to which our writers also contributed, is intended to provide assistance with reading, writing, teaching and researching life writing, with a particular focus on works from our region. While care has been taken to include a wide range of works of relevance to the shared concerns of this volume's writers and editors, it is not intended to be definitive or comprehensive. Instead, it points to the important work in the field that has shaped the reading, writing and thinking that has formed this volume.

Abblitt, Stephen 2013, 'Mourning Joyce, touching responsibility: the body, the book and the ghost', *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 115–29.

Abblitt, Stephen 2015, 'In the museyroom: a speculative genealogy of postcriticism', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special issue 33, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue33/Abblitt.pdf>.

Abblitt, Stephen 2017, 'Love, infidelity, and postcards: Derrida and Joyce', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 1–17.

Abblitt, Stephen forthcoming, 'Composite life: making with Haraway', *A/B: Auto/biography Studies*.

Abbott, H. Porter 2008, *The Cambridge introduction to narrative*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, New York.

Ambrosio, John 2008, 'Writing the self: ethical self-formation and the undefined work of freedom', *Educational Theory*, vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 251–67.

Arklay, Tracey 2006, 'Political biography: its contribution to political science', in Tracey Arklay, John Nethercote & John Wanna (eds.), *Australian political lives: chronicling political careers and administrative histories*, ANU E-Press, Canberra, pp. 13–24.

Aurell, Jaume 2006, 'Autobiography as unconventional history: constructing the author', *Rethinking History*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 433–49.

Badiou, Alain 2005, *The handbook of inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Bailey, S. 2005, *Media audiences and identity: self-construction in the fan experience*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Baker, Dallas J. 2011, 'Queering practice-led research: subjectivity, creative practice and performative research', Published Conference Proceedings, *A Scholarly Affair*, Cultural Studies Association of Australasia National Conference, Byron Bay, 7–9 December 2010, pp. 1–18.

Baker, Dallas J. 2013, 'Creative writing praxis as queer becoming', *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing,* vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 359–77, <http://doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2013.811265>.

Baker, Dallas J. 2015, 'Writing and reading queerly: Foucault's aesthetics of existence and queer self-making', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special issue 31, pp. 1–15, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue31/Baker.pdf>.

Baker, Dallas J., Brien, Donna Lee & Sulway, Nike (eds.) forthcoming, *Recovering history through fact and fiction: forgotten lives*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Barratt, Virginia 2015, 'Skiptoend', *Writing from Below*, vol. 2, no. 2, <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/ojs/index.php/wfb/article/view/542>.

Barratt, Virginia 2017, 'She is a boy', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special issue 17, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue17/Barratt.pdf>.

Barthes, Roland 1968, *Writing degree zero*, Hill and Wang, New York.

Barthes, Roland 1976, *The pleasure of the text*, Jonathan Cape Ltd., Great Britain.

Bartlett, Alison 1994, 'Jamming the machinery: *écriture feminine* and the practice of contemporary women writers in Australia', PhD thesis, James Cook University.

Bartlett, Alison 1998, 'Reading bodies', in Heather Kerr & Amanda Nettlebeck (eds.), *The space between: Australian women writing fictocriticism*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, Perth, pp. 89–97.

Berger, John 1972, *Ways of seeing: based on the BBC television series with John S. Berger*, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, London.

Berry, Vanessa 2007, *Strawberry Hills forever*, Local Consumption Publications, Erskineville.

Berry, Vanessa 2013, *Ninety9*, Giramondo, Sydney.

Blanchot, Maurice 1959/1987, 'Everyday speech', *Yale French Studies*, no. 73, pp. 12–20.

Blewett, Neal 2006, 'The personal writings of politicians', in T. Arklay, J. Nethercote & J. Wanna (eds.), *Australian political lives: chronicling political careers and administrative histories*, ANU E-Press, Canberra, pp. 91–6.

Bloom, Lynn Z. 2003, 'Living to tell the tale: the complicated ethics of creative nonfiction', *College English*, vol. 65, no. 3, pp. 276–89.

3220_Offshoot.indd 313 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Borich, Barrie Jean 2012, 'The craft of writing queer', *Brevity: A Journal of Concise Literary Nonfiction*, 17 September, <http://brevitymag.com/craft-essays/the-craft-of-writing-queer>.

Bourdieu, Pierre 1987, 'The biographical illusion' in *Working Papers and Proceedings of the Center for Psychosocial Studies*, vol. 14, pp. 1–7.

Boym, Svetlana 2001, *The future of nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York.

Bradley, John 2010, *Singing Saltwater Country: journey to the songlines of Carpentaria,* Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest.

Bradley Smith, Susan 2010, 'Suicide: a memoir', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, vol. 14, no. 2, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct10/bradleysmith.htm>.

Brien, Donna Lee 2000, 'Urban shocks and local scandals: *Blackrock* and the problem of Australian true-crime fiction', in Frances de Groen & Ken Stewart (eds.), *Writing and the City*, UWS Macarthur, Sydney, pp. 115–21.

Brien, Donna Lee 2002, 'Being honest about lying: defining the limits of auto/biographical lying', *TEXT: Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs*, vol. 6, no. 1, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april02/brien.htm>.

Brien, Donna Lee 2004, 'The case of Mary Dean: sex, poisoning and gender relations in Australia', PhD thesis, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

Brien, Donna Lee 2009, '"Based on a true story": the problem of the perception of biographical truth in narratives based on real lives', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, vol. 13, no. 2, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct09/brien.htm>.

Brien, Donna Lee 2014, '"Welcome creative subversions": experiment and innovation in recent biographical writing', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, vol. 18, no. 1, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april14/brien.htm>.

Brien, Donna Lee 2015, 'The facts formed a line of buoys in the sea of my own imagination: history, fiction and speculative biography', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special issue no. 28, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue28/Brien.pdf>.

Brien, Donna Lee 2016a, 'Australian speculative biography: recovering forgotten lives' keynote address presented to the Forgotten lives/Biographies Conference, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, 28 April.

Brien, Donna Lee 2016b, 'The art and possibilities of the speculative biography', paper presented to the Great Writing Conference, Imperial College, London, 18–19 June.

Brien, Donna Lee forthcoming, 'Australian speculative biography: a means of recovering forgotten lives', in Dallas J. Baker, Donna Lee Brien & Nike Sulway (eds.), *Recovering history through fact and fiction: forgotten lives*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.

3220_Offshoot.indd 314 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Brophy, Kevin 2009, ‘What are yer lookin at yer fuckin dog?’, *Australian Book Review*, no. 310, pp. 26–33.

Brophy, Kevin 2013a, ‘Why I am a poet’, in *Walking: new and selected poems*, John Leonard Press, Elwood, pp. 126–32.

Brophy, Kevin 2013b, ‘A small boy: don’t be afraid to be scared’, *Going down swinging*, <http://goingdownswinging.org.au/a-small-boy>.

Bruner, Jerome 2004, ‘Life as narrative’, *Social Research*, vol. 71, no. 3, pp. 691–710.

Bruss, Elizabeth 1976, *Autobiographical acts: the changing nature of a literary genre*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Caicco, Gregory (ed.) 2007, *Architecture, ethics and the personhood of place*, University Press of New England, Hanover and London.

Caine, Barbara 2010, *Biography and history*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Campbell, Marion 1992, *Lines of flight*, 2nd ed., Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, WA.

Campbell, Marion 1998, ‘Telephony or phony telos’, in Heather Kerr & Amanda Nettlebeck (eds.), *The space between: Australian women writing fictocriticism*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA, pp. 217–39.

Campbell, Marion May 2013, *Konkretion*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, WA.

Campbell, Marion May 2013, ‘Polyamorous ventroloquy: or textual cruising’, *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, vol. 17, no. 1, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april13/campbell.htm>.

Campbell, Marion May 2014, *Poetic revolutionaries: intertextuality & subversion*, Rodopi, Amsterdam.

Campbell, Marion May 2015, ‘Geometry and geography’, *Mascara Literary Review* (April), <http://mascarareview.com/geometry-and-geography-by-marion-campbell>.

Campbell, Marion May forthcoming, ‘Between mirrors: review of Quinn Eades *all the beginnings: a queer autobiography of the body*’, in Carol DeBoer-Langworthy (ed.), *Lifewriting annual*, vol. 9.

Cardell, Kylie & Douglas, Kate (eds.) 2015, *Telling tales: autobiography of childhood and youth*, Routledge, London.

Carey, Janene 2008, ‘Whose story is it, anyway?: ethics and interpretive authority in biographical creative non-fiction’, *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, vol. 12, no. 2, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct08/carey.htm>.

Castro, Brian 1998, ‘Dangerous dancing: autobiography and disinheritance’, *Australian Humanities Review*, vol. 12, <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-December-1998/castro.html>.

Clendinnen, Inga 2006, ‘The history question: who owns the past?’, *Quarterly Essay*, no. 23, pp. 1–22.

Cixous, Hélène 1991, ‘Coming to writing’, in Deborah Jenson (ed.), *“Coming to writing” and other essays by Hélène Cixous*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

3220_Offshoot.indd 315 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Cohen, Kris R. 2006, 'A welcome for blogs', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Culture Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 161–73.

Coleman, Stephen 2005, 'Blogs and the new politics of listening', *The Political Quarterly,* vol. 76, no. 2, pp. 273–80.

Colmer, Dorothy & Colmer, John 1987, *The Penguin book of Australian autobiography*, Penguin Books, Ringwood.

Colmer, John 1989, *Australian autobiography: the personal quest*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Conway, Jill Ker 1998, *When memory speaks: reflections on autobiography*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

Cosgrove, Shady 2009, *She played Elvis*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

Cosgrove, Shady 2014, 'Getting my hands dirty: research and writing', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special issue 27, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue27/Cosgrove.pdf>.

Cosgrove, Shady 2015, 'Dumpster diving: a family excursion', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special issue 30, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue30/Cosgrove.pdf>.

Couser, G. Thomas 1998, 'Making, taking, and faking lives: the ethics of collaborative life writing', *Style*, vol. 32. no. 2, pp. 334–50.

Couser, G. Thomas 2004, *Vulnerable subjects: ethics and life writing*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

Couser, G. Thomas 2007, 'Genre matters: form, force, and filiation', *Lifewriting*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 139–56.

Couser, G. Thomas 2009, *Signifying bodies: disability in contemporary life writing*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbour.

Curthoys, Ann & Docker, John 2005, *Is history fiction?*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

D'Agata, John (ed.) 2009, *The lost origins of the essay*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis.

Dalziell, Rosemary 1999, *Shameful autobiographies: shame in contemporary Australian autobiographies and culture*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

Dalziell, Rosemary 2002, *Selves crossing cultures: autobiography and globalisation*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne.

Derrida, Jacques 1997, *Of grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London.

Dever, Maryanne 1996, 'Reading other people's mail', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 116–29.

Dickenson, Jackie 2010, 'Journalists writing political history', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 56, no. 1, pp. 105–19.

Douglas, Kate 2001, '"Blurbing" biographical: authorship and autobiography', *Biography*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 806–26.

Douglas, Kate 2010, *Contesting childhood: autobiography, trauma, and memory*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Douglas, Kate & Cardell, Kylie 2015, *Telling tales: autobiographies of childhood and youth*, Routledge, Abingdon.

3220_Offshoot.indd 316 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Dyer, Geoff 2015, '"Based on a true story": the fine line between fact and fiction', *The Guardian*, 6 December, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/06/based-on-a-true-story--geoff-dyer-fine-line-between-fact-and-fiction-nonfiction>.

Eades, Quinn 2015, *all the beginnings: a queer autobiography of the body*, Tantanoola, North Melbourne.

Eakin, Paul John 1992, *Touching the world: reference in autobiography*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Eakin, Paul John 1999, *How our lives become stories: making selves*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York.

Eakin, Paul John 2001, 'Breaking rules: the consequences of self-narration', *Biography*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 113–27.

Eakin, Paul John (ed.) 2004, 'Mapping the ethics of life writing', *The ethics of life writing*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London.

El Rafaie, Elizabeth 2012, *Autobiographical comics,* University Press of Mississippi, Jackson.

Ender, Evelyn 2005, *Architexts of memory: literature, science, and autobiography*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

Fallon, Kathleen Mary 2007, *Paydirt*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, WA.

Fara, Patricia 2004, *Pandora's breeches*, Pimlico, London.

Felman, Shoshana & Dore Laub (eds.) 1992, *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis and history*, Routledge, New York & London UK.

Ferrell, Robyn 2003, 'Pinjarra 1970: shame and the country town', *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 23–34.

Ferrell, Robyn 2013, 'Whitefella worship', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special Issue no. 17, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue17/Ferrell.pdf>.

Foucault, Michel 1997, 'Self writing', trans. Robert Hurley, in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Ethics: subjectivity and truth*, The New Press, New York.

Gaile, Andreas 2010, *Rewriting history: Peter Carey's fictional biography of Australia*, Editions Rodopi, Amsterdam and London.

Gammage, Bill 2011, *The biggest estate on earth: how Aborigines made Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest.

Gibbs, Anna 1997, 'Bodies of words: feminism and fictocriticism – explanation and demonstration', *TEXT: Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs*, vol. 1, no. 2, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct97/gibbs.htm>.

Gibbs, Anna 2005, 'Fictocriticism, affect, mimesis: engendering differences', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, vol. 9, no. 1, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april05/gibbs.htm>.

Gilmore, Leigh 1995, 'A signature of lesbian autobiography: lesbian representation and the discourse of autobiography', in *Autobiographics: a feminist theory of women's self-representation*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London.

Gilmore, Leigh 2001, *The limits of autobiography: trauma and testimony*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

3220_Offshoot.indd 317 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Gornick, Vivian 2001, *The situation and the story*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.

Gornick, Vivian 2002, 'The art of personal narrative', *The Writer*, vol. 115, no. 7, pp. 25–9.

Greenblatt, Stephen 2002, 'Racial memory and literary history', in Linda Hutcheon & Mario J. Valdés (eds.), *Rethinking literary history: a dialogue on theory*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 50–62.

Griffiths, Tom 2009, 'History and the creative imagination', *History Australia*, no. 6, pp. 74.1–74.16.

Gusdorf, Georges 1980, 'Conditions and limits of autobiography', in James Olney (ed.), *Autobiography: essays towards the critical*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Gutkind, Lee 1996, *Creative nonfiction: how to live it and write it*, Chicago Review Press, Chicago.

Gutkind, Lee 1997, *The art of creative nonfiction: writing and selling the literature of reality*, Wiley, New York.

Gutkind, Lee 2003, *Forever fat: essays by the godfather, a memoir*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.

Gutkind, Lee 2011, *Keep it real: everything you need to know about researching and writing creative nonfiction*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York.

Gwynne, Joel 2013, *Erotic memoirs and postfeminism: the politics of pleasure*, Palgrave MacMillan, Houndsmills.

Haas, Gerrit 2017, *Fictocritical strategies: subverting textual practices of meaning, other, and self-formation*, Transcript-Verlag, Bielefeld & London.

Hall, Phillip 2015, 'My intervention (in Cowdy)', *Cordite Poetry Review*, 1 February, <http://cordite.org.au/essays/my-intervention-in-cowdy>.

Hall, Phillip 2017, *Borroloola class*, International Poetry Studies Institute, University of Canberra, Canberra.

Hallett, Nicky 1999, *Lesbian lives: identity and auto/biography in the twentieth century*, Pluto, London.

Hampl, Patricia 1999, *I could tell you stories: sojourns in the land of memory*, Norton, New York.

Harries, Elizabeth Wanning 2000, 'The mirror broken: women's autobiography and fairy tales', *Marvels and Tales*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 122–35.

Harries, Elizabeth Wanning 2001, *Twice upon a time: women writers and the history of the fairy tale*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Hecq, Dominique 2009, *Out of bounds*, Re-press, Melbourne.

Hecq, Dominique 2015, *Stretchmarks of sun*, Re-press, Melbourne.

Hecq, Dominique 2017, *Hush: a fugue*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, WA.

Hemley, Robin 2012, *A field guide for immersion writing*, University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia.

Henke, Suzette 1999, *Shattered subjects: trauma and testimony in women's life-writing*, St. Martin's, New York.

Hochschild, Adam 2005, *Bury the chains*, Houghton Miflin, New York.

3220_Offshoot.indd 318 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Holmes, Richard 1995, 'Biography: inventing the truth', in John Batchelor (ed.), *The art of literary biography*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 15–25.

Holt, Yvette 2006, *Anonymous premonition*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane.

Huff, Cynthia A. 2000, 'Reading as re-vision: approaches to reading manuscript diaries', *Biography*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 505–23.

Hunt, Celia & Sampson, Fiona 2006, *Writing: self and reflexivity*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York.

Ihlein, Lucas 1998, *My typewriter only speaks English*, Singapore Art Museum and Everwilling Press, Sydney.

Ihlein, Lucas 2003, *Bilateral blog*, <http://lucazoid.com/bilateral>.

Ihlein, Lucas 2005, *Bilateral Kellerberrin* blog, <http://kellerberrin.com>.

Ihlein, Lucas 2006, *Bilateral Petersham* blog, <http://thesham.info>.

Ihlein, Lucas 2007, 'Bilateral blogging', *International Journal of the Arts in Society*, vol. 1, no. 7, pp. 53–62.

Ihlein, Lucas 2010, 'To follow things as I encounter them: blogging, art and attention', *127 Prince*, <https://127prince.wordpress.com/2010/05/14/to-follow-things-as-i-encounter-them-blogging-art-and-attention-lucas-ihlein/>.

Ihlein, Lucas 2014, 'Blogging as art, art as research', in Estelle Barrett & Barbara Bolt (eds.), *Material inventions: applying creative arts research*, IB Tauris, London.

Ihlein, Lucas & Hoskin, Teri 2013, 'In conversation: Lucas Ihlein with Teri Hoskin', in Maria Miranda (ed.), *Unsitely aesthetics: uncertain practices in contemporary art*, Errant Bodies Press, Berlin, pp. 266–94.

Jackson, Anna 2016, 'The verse biography: introduction', *Biography*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. iii–xvi.

Kaplan, Caren 1992, 'Resisting autobiography', in Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson (eds.), *De/colonising the subject: the politics of gender in women's autobiography*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, pp. 115–38.

Kerr, Heather 2003, 'Fictocritical empathy and the work of mourning,' *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 180–200.

Kerr, Heather & Nettlebeck, Amanda (eds.) 1998, *The space between: Australian women writing fictocriticism*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA.

Kincaid, Jamaica 1996, *The autobiography of my mother*, Farrar Strauss, New York.

Konrád, György 2005, 'Truth in autobiography', *Common Knowledge*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 514–21.

Krauth, Nigel 2010, 'Mys[h]elf', in Nigel Krauth & Tess Brady (eds.), *The Clunes little book of the book*, Creative Clunes, Clunes, Victoria, pp. 25–36.

Kremmer, Christopher 2015, 'From dialectics to dialogue: Bakhtin, White and the "moorings" of fiction and history', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special issue no. 28, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue28/content.htm>.

3220_Offshoot.indd 319 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Kroll, Jeri 1986, 'Playing with fire', in Andrew Taylor (ed.), *Unsettled areas: recent short fiction*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, pp. 47–60.

Kroll, Jeri 1998, 'The not-so-good mother', in Debra Adelaide (ed.), *Cutting the cord: stories of children, love and loss*, Random House Australia, Sydney, pp. 17–36.

Kroll, Jeri 2004, *The mother workshops*, Five Islands Press, Wollongong.

Kroll, Jeri 2006, 'Jeri Kroll: *The mother workshops*', *PoeticA*, ABC Radio National, 3 June, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/poetica/jeri-kroll-the-mother-workshops/3334386>.

Lackey, Michael 2016, 'Locating and defining the bio in biofiction', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 3–10.

Lackey, Michael 2016, 'The rise of the biographical novel and the fall of the historical novel', *a/b: Auto/biography studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 33–58.

Leane, Jeanine 2010, *Dark secrets after dreaming: A.D 1887–1961*, Presspress, Berry, NSW.

Leane, Jeanine 2011, *Purple threads*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Leane, Jeanine 2016, 'States of poetry ACT 2016', *Australian Book Review*, <https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/poetry/states-of-poetry/states-of-poetry-act>.

Lee, Hermione 2008, *Body parts: essays on life writing*, Pimlico, London.

Lejeune, Philippe 1989, 'The autobiographical pact', in Paul John Eakin (ed.), *On autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Loveday, P. 1985, 'Political history and political biography', in D. Aitkin (ed.), *Surveys of Australian political science*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 86–118.

Lovink, Geert 2008, *Zero comments: blogging and critical internet culture*, Routledge, New York.

Lowenthal, David 1985, *The past is a foreign country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Lyotard, *Jean-François* 1984, *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Marshall, Elizabeth 2016, 'Counter-storytelling through graphic life writing', *Language Arts*, vol. 94, no. 2, pp. 79–93.

McCooey, David 1996, *Artful histories: modern Australian autobiography*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne.

McKenna, Mark 2002, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: an Australian history of place*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney.

McKenna, Mark 2006, 'Writing the past', in Drusilla Modjeska (ed.), *The best Australian essays 2006*, Black Inc, Melbourne, pp. 96–110.

Miles, Adrian 2005, 'Blogs: distributed documentaries of the everyday', *Metro*, no. 143, pp. 66–70.

Miller, Nancy K. 2000, 'But enough about me, what do you think of my memoir?', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 421–36.

3220_Offshoot.indd 320 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Monk, Ray 2007, 'Life without theory: biography as an exemplar of philosophical understanding', *Poetics Today*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 527–70.

Moore-Gilbert, Bart 2009, *Postcolonial life-writing*, Routledge, London.

Morgan, Sally 1987, *My place*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

Muecke, Stephen 1997, *No road (bitumen all the way)*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle.

Muecke, Stephen 2002, 'The fall: fictocritical writing', *Parallax*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 108–12.

Muecke, Stephen 2016, *The mother's day protest and other fictocritical essays*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham.

Mujica, Barbara 2016, 'Going for the subjective: one way to write biographical fiction', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 11–20.

Mullins, Patrick 2014, 'Between whirling poles: profiling the biography of the contemporary political Figure', PhD thesis, University of Canberra, Canberra.

Mullins, Patrick 2016, 'Justifying the profane: ethics and biography', *The authorised theft: writing, scholarship, collaboration papers: the refereed proceedings of the 21st conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs*, University of Canberra, Canberra, <http://www.aawp.org.au/publications/the-authorised-theft-papers>.

Munkara, Marie 2009, *Every secret thing*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Murray, Peta 2014, 'Elder-flowering: creative resistance and the theatre of endurance – or vice versa: an introduction to a research project-in-progress', in Shane Strange, Paul Hetherington & Jen Webb (eds.), *Creative manoeuvres: writing, making, being*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, pp. 157–67.

Nagy, Ladislav 2014, 'Historical fiction as a mixture of history and romance: towards the genre definition of the historical novel', *Prague Journal of English Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 7–17.

Newman, Sally 2000, 'Body of evidence: Aileen Palmer's textual lives', *Hecate*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 10–38.

Pilkington, Doris 1996, *Follow the rabbit-proof fence*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Pimlott, Ben 2009, 'The future of political biography', *Political Quarterly*, Supplement, September, vol. 80, pp. 214–23.

Pinto, Sarah 2010, 'Emotional histories and historical emotions: looking at the past in historical novels', *Rethinking History*, no. 14, pp. 189–207.

Pittaway, Gail 2010, 'Stamps', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special issue No. 7, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue7/Pittaway.pdf>.

Pittaway, Gail 2014, *'Voyaging the gap: Scandinavian sagas of migration to New Zealand, 1860–1890', in* Thom Conroy & Gail Pittaway (eds.), *Minding the gap: writing across thresholds and fault lines*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.

3220_Offshoot.indd 321 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Pittaway Gail & Conroy, Thom (eds.) 2015, *Minding the gap: writing across thresholds and faultlines*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Poletti, Anna & Rak, Julie 2014, *Identity technologies: constructing the self online*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.

Rak, Julie 2013, *Boom!: manufacturing memoir for the popular market*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Ontario.

Ramsden, Maureen A. 2011, 'Fictional frontiers: the interrelation of fact and fiction between the world and the text', *Neophilologus*, no. 95, pp. 341–59.

Remnick, David (ed.) 2001, *Life stories: profiles from the New Yorker*, Random House, New York.

Rendle-Short, Francesca 2011, *Bite your tongue*, Spinifex Press, Melbourne.

Rendle-Short, Francesca 2014, 'Poetic cartography, love and loss: piecing together a father' and 'a matter of view: (from a book of annotations)', *NANO: New American Notes Online*, no. 6, <http://www.nanocrit.com/issues/6-2014/poetic-cartography-love-loss-piecing-together-father>.

Rendle-Short, Francesca 2016, 'Parsing an ethics of seeing: interrogating the grammar of a creative/critical practice', *New Writing*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 234–46.

Rettberg, Jill Walker 2014, *Blogging*, Polity, Cambridge, UK.

Ricketson, Matthew 2009, 'Ethical issues in the practice of book-length journalism', PhD thesis, Monash University, Melbourne.

Rozett, Martha Tuck 1996, 'Constructing a world: how postmodern historical fiction reimagines the past', *CLIO*, vol. 25. no. 2, pp. 145–64.

Rusk, Lauren 2002, *The life writing of otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston, and Winterson*, Routledge, New York.

Scarparo, Susanna 2005, *Elusive subjects: biography as gendered metafiction*, Troubadour Publishing, Leicester.

Schabert, Ina 1990, *In quest of the other person: fiction as biography*, Francke Verlag, Tübingen.

Schad, John 2012, 'Queerest book: a dramatic monologue', *Literature and Theology*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 3–22.

Schad, John 2015, 'Long Island Sound: reading Miller reading Derrida', *Derrida Today*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 25–33.

Schad, John & Tearle, Oliver (eds.) 2011, *Crrritic! sighs, cries, lies, insults, outbursts, hoaxes, disasters, letters of resignation, and various other noises off in these the first and last days of literary criticism, not to mention the university*, Sussex Academic Press, Eastbourne.

Scott, Kim 1999, *Benang: from the heart*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle, WA.

Scott, Kim 2010, *That deadman dance*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney.

Scott, Kim & Brown, Hazel 2005, *Kayang and me*, Fremantle Arts Press, Fremantle, WA.

Serfaty, Viviane 2004, *The mirror and the veil: an overview of American online diaries and blogs*, Rodopi, Amsterdam and New York.

3220_Offshoot.indd 322 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Shields, David 2011, *Reality hunger: a manifesto*, Vintage/Random House, New York.

Singer, Margot & Walker, Nicole (eds.) 2013, *Bending genre*, Bloomsbury, New York.

Slotkin, Richard 2005, 'Fiction for the purposes of history', *Rethinking History,* vol. 9, no. 2–3, pp. 221–36.

Smith, Sidonie & Watson, Julie 2001, 'The rumpled bed of autobiography: extravagant lives, extravagant questions', *Biography*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 1–24.

Smith, Sidonie & Watson, Julie (eds.) 2002, *Interfaces: women/autobiography/image/performance*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

Smith, Sidonie & Watson, Julia 2010, *Reading autobiography*, 2nd ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Smoking Gun, The 2006, 'A million little lies', <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/documents/celebrity/million-little-lies>.

Steiner, Barbara & Yang, Jun 2004, *Autobiography*, London, Thames & Hudson.

Sulway, Nike 2015, 'Behind the green door: a story about suffering and hybrid identity in the 1950s and 1960s', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Special issue no. 31, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue31/Sulway.pdf>.

Sulway, Nike forthcoming, '"his unspoken natural center": James Tiptree, Jr. as "the Other I"', *Writing from below*, Special Issue: Queer Science Fictions.

Sulway, Nike forthcoming, '"a date with Barbara": paracosms of the self in biographies of Barbara Newhall Follett', in Dallas J. Baker, Donna Lee Brien & Nike Sulway (eds.), *Recovering history through fact and fiction: forgotten lives*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Symons, A. J. A. 1940, *The quest for Corvo: an experimental biography*, 3rd ed., Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.

Thomas, Zoe 2011a, 'Thirty-six hours', *inScribe*, no. 4, p. 18.

Thomas, Zoe 2011b, 'Forgive me father for I have written a memoir: subjective revelations and the ethical trespass in confessional life writing', presented at *Ethical imaginations: writing worlds, the 16th Conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs*, Byron Bay, NSW, 23–5 November.

Thomas, Zoe 2014, 'The siren song of affect: nostalgia as a vessel for autobiographical practice', presented at *Literature and affect: Australasian Association of Literature conference*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2–4 July.

Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa 2005, *Human creation between reality and illusion*, Springer, London.

Vicars, James 2011, '"Storying" lives: biography as story and the ethical imagining and "holding" of lives', *The ethical imaginations: writing worlds papers: the refereed proceedings of the 16th conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs*, <http://www.aawp.org.au/publications/the-ethical-imaginations-writing-worlds-papers>.

Vicars, James 2015, 'Thresholds of innovation: conceptualising imaginative writing and fiction in biography', in Gail Pittaway & Thom Conroy (eds.),

3220_Offshoot.indd 323 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Minding the gap: writing across thresholds and faultlines, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, pp. 17–26.

Vicars, James 2016a, 'Discarding the disclaimer?: reappraising fiction as a mode of biography', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, vol. 20, no. 1, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april16/vicars.htm>.

Vicars, James 2016b, '"Life" choices: deciding to use fiction in biographical writing', *Writing in Practice: The Journal of Creative Writing Research*, vol. 2, viewed 21 December 2017 <https://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/current-wip-edition-2/articles/life-choices-deciding-to-use-fiction-in-biographical-writing.html>.

Wagan Watson, Samuel 2002, *Smoke encrypted whispers*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Walls, Jeannette 2005, *The glass castle*, Scribner, New York.

Weinberg, Steve 1992, *Telling the untold story: how investigative reporters are changing the craft of biography*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia.

White, Hayden 1976, 'The fictions of factual representation', in *Tropics of discourse: essays in cultural criticism*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, pp. 121–6.

Whitlock, Gillian 1996, *Autographs: contemporary Australian autobiography*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Whitlock, Gillian 2001, *The intimate empire: reading women's autobiography*, Cassell, London.

Whitlock, Gillian & Douglas, Kate (eds.) 2009, *Trauma texts*, Routledge, London.

Wilkinson, Jessica 2012, *marionette: a biography of miss marion davies*, Vagabond, Sydney.

Wilkinson, Jessica 2013, 'Stella through the drifting portrait: Susan Howe's recovery of the marginal feminine', in Ann Vickery & John Hawke (eds.), *Poetry and the trace*, Puncher & Wattmann, Glebe, NSW, pp. 206–19.

Wilkinson, Jessica 2014, 'Beyond Facts and accuracies: long form poetry as biographical method', *Axon: Creative Explorations*, vol. 4, no. 2, December, <www.axonjournal.com.au/issue-7/beyond-facts-and-accuracies-0>.

Wilkinson, Jessica 2014, *Suite for Percy Grainger: a biography*, Vagabond, Sydney.

Wilkinson, Jessica 2016a, 'Experiments in poetic biography: feminist threads in contemporary long form poetry', *Biography*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 1–22.

Wilkinson, Jessica 2016b, 'Jordie Albiston's biographical poetry: "disguising the I"', in Anna Jackson, Helen Rickerby & Angelina Sbroma (eds.), *Truth and beauty: verse biography in Canada, Australia and New Zealand*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, pp. 120–46.

Wilkinson, Jessica forthcoming, 'A poet walks through an archive: processing the poetic biography', in James Oliver (ed.), *Creative practice and the art of association: trajectories of practice as research*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.

Wollstonecraft, Mary 1980, *Mary and the wrongs of woman*, Oxford University Press, UK.

3220_Offshoot.indd 324 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Woolf, Virginia 1927/1987, 'The new biography', in *The essays of Virginia Woolf: 1925–1928*, Harcourt Jovanovich and Brace, New York, pp. 473–9.

Woolf, Virginia 1929/1989, *A room of one's own*, Harcourt Brace & Co, New York.

Woolf, Virginia 1994, 'The new biography', in *The essays of Virginia Woolf: volume IV (1925–1928)*, The Hogarth Press, London.

Wright, Alexis 2009, *Grog war*, Magabala Books, Broome, WA.

Wright, Alexis 2017, *Tracker Tilmouth: an essayed memoir*, Giramondo, Artarmon.

Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth 1998, *Subject to biography: psychoanalysis, feminism and writing women's lives*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London.

Zinsser, William (ed.) 1998, *Inventing the truth: the art and craft of memoir*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York.

3220_Offshoot.indd 325 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr Stephen Abblitt is a literary philosopher, queer theorist, and educational researcher. He received his PhD from La Trobe University (Melbourne, Australia) in 2011 for a critical-creative thesis examining the hermeneutics of failure in Jacques Derrida's writings on James Joyce, and has since published and presented widely in the fields of literary studies, gender studies and queer theory, creative writing, digital culture, and higher education – including the peer-reviewed fictocritical and/or postcritical essays 'Missiles and Missives: Toward a Nuclear Criticism, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love This Dangerous Writing' and 'In the Museyroom: A Speculative Genealogy of Postcriticism' (both for *TEXT*), 'Mourning Joyce, Touching Responsibility' (for the *James Joyce Quarterly*), and 'Love, Infidelity, and Postcards: Derrida and Joyce' (for *Mosaic*). With Quinn Eades, he is Managing Editor of the interdisciplinary open-access gender, sexuality and diversity studies journal *Writing from Below.*

Dr Dallas John Baker is a Senior Lecturer in writing, editing and publishing in the School of Arts and Communication at the University of Southern Queensland. His teaching and research intersect with a number of disciplines: creative writing, publishing studies and cultural studies. Dallas is also a writer with creative work published in a number of journals and anthologies. His

current research interests are memoir and memory, scriptwriting, editing and publishing and 'self-making' in cultural practices such as creative writing, reading and popular music consumption. His latest book, *Recovering History Through Fact and Fiction: Forgotten Lives* (with Donna Lee Brien and Nike Sulway), is forthcoming with Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Virginia Barratt is a researcher, writer and performer based in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales, Australia. She is completing a PhD at Western Sydney University in the Writing and Society Centre and her research interests are panic, affect and deterritorialisation. She has an ongoing collaborative experimental practice through which theories of collaboration, cooperation and polycephalic and acephalic processes are explored with others. Her work can be found in *Writing from Below*, *TEXT* journal, *Banquet Press*, *Overland*, *Spheres Journal*, *Spook Journal*, *Plinth Journal* and her experimental performative work *SLICE* is forthcoming in 2017. Virginia regularly performs her work nationally and internationally.

Prof. Donna Lee Brien leads research in creative writing and creative industries at Central Queensland University, Australia. Donna is a member of the Steering Committee of the International Auto/Biography Association Asia Pacific, and the Editorial Advisory Boards of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* and *Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies*. A Past President of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, Donna has a PhD and MA in creative writing and has been writing, and writing about, life writing since the 1980s (particularly biography and memoir), and has also edited a number of life

3220_Offshoot.indd 327 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

writing – themed special issues of peer-reviewed journals on the topic. Another book on life writing, *Recovering History Through Fact and Fiction: Forgotten Lives* (with Dallas J. Baker and Nike Sulway), is forthcoming with Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Prof. Kevin Brophy is the author of fifteen books of poetry, fiction, and essays. His latest books are *This is What Gives Us Time* (Gloria SMH, 2016) and *Misericordia* (Salt Wattle, 2016). He is a past winner of the Calibre Prize for an outstanding essay and the Martha Richardson Medal for poetry. He is a publishing editor at Five Islands Press, a life member of Writers Victoria and patron of the Melbourne Poets Union. In 2015, he was poet in residence at the BR Whiting Library in Rome. He is a Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne.

A/Prof. Marion May Campbell's novels have been shortlisted for major Australian literary prizes, with *Not Being Miriam* winning the WA Literary Week Award for fiction in 1989. She was also shortlisted for the Canadian-Australian Literary Prize in 1990 and 1992 for *Lines of Flight* and *Not Being Miriam*. More recent cross-genre works include *Fragments from a Paper Witch* (Salt 2008), a finalist in the Innovation Category of the 2010 Adelaide Festival Literary Awards, and the novella about failed feminist revolutionaries *konkretion* (UWA Publishing 2013). The critical monograph *Poetic Revolutionaries: Intertextuality & Subversion* was published in 2014 with Rodopi, Amsterdam. Marion currently supervises graduate student projects at Deakin University. *Riding Parallel*, a collection of poetry, will be published in 2018 by Whitmore Press. 'Waterspout' is an offshoot from *Under the Radar*, which will also be published in 2018, with UWA Publishing.

3220_Offshoot.indd 328 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

A/Prof. Shady Cosgrove teaches prose fiction and editing in the creative writing department at the University of Wollongong. Her publications include the memoir *She Played Elvis* (Allen and Unwin 2009), which was shortlisted for the Australian Vogel Award, and the novel *What the Ground Can't Hold* (Picador 2013). Her short fiction and journalism have appeared in *Best Australian Stories*, *Southerly*, *Antipodes*, *Overland*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Melbourne Age*. Her current work-in-progress, a novel entitled *Freefall*, follows the story of an Australian single mother as she journeys to New York to live in a squat, dumpster dive and live outside of money. The work questions our consumption society and imagines how that might shift.

Dr Quinn Eades is a researcher, writer and award-winning poet whose work lies at the nexus of feminist, queer and trans theories of the body, autobiography and philosophy. Eades is published nationally and internationally, and is the author of *all the beginnings: a queer autobiography of the body*, published by Tantanoola, and *Rallying*, published by UWAP. Eades is a Lecturer in Interdisciplinary Studies at La Trobe University, as well as the founding editor of Australia's only interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed, gender, sexuality and diversity studies journal, *Writing from Below*. Eades is the winner of the 2017 Arts Queensland XYZ Award for Innovation in Spoken Word, and he is currently working on a book-length collection of fragments written from the transitioning body, titled '*Trans*positions'.

Alice Ewing has been fascinated by nature since childhood, when family holidays in wild places led to a fervent desire to capture the beauty of the diverse natural treasures she came across in drawings,

3220_Offshoot.indd 329 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

photographs and other media, including stencils and clay. Since completing her BSc (Hons) in Zoology at the University of Melbourne, Alice has worked as an ecological researcher and consultant, but loves any opportunity to tie her love for art to ecology. As a profoundly deaf person, Alice has a strong affinity with the visual world and seeks to share her passion for nature with others, through capturing a microcosm of nature, which may otherwise be overlooked. Her art is largely inspired by many interactions and experiences with wildlife, plants and landscapes throughout Australia and overseas, including Antarctica. She has shown works at the Apollo Bay Arts Inc. Gallery, Brunswick Street Gallery, and Kingston Art Centre (all Australia).

Dr Robyn Ferrell is a Sydney writer and research associate at the University of Sydney. She has taught philosophy and creative writing at several universities including Macquarie University and the University of Melbourne. Her book of creative non-fiction, *The Real Desire*, was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Award in 2005. Her latest book, *Sacred Exchanges: Images in Global Context*, on Aboriginal art was published by Columbia University Press in 2012. She is presently working on several projects including a novel, and a book on culture and the internet to be titled *Free Stuff.*

Prof. Anna Gibbs is in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts at Western Sydney University. She writes across the fields of textual, media and cultural studies focusing on feminism, fictocriticism and affect theory. Co-editor of three collections of Australian experimental writing, she is currently completing a book on feminist theory and electronic literature, *Exscryptions: Memory, Movement, and the Unfolding of Space in Digital Writing*, with Maria Angel. Her experimental and cut-up

3220_Offshoot.indd 330 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

writing has been widely published and internationally performed. A frequent collaborator with visual artists, she curated the '(Un) coverings: Art, Writing and the Book' exhibition at Horus and Deloris Gallery, and is currently, along with Elizabeth Day, Julie Gough and Noelene Lucas, a member of The Longford Project, which works with the colonial history of Longford in northern Tasmania to turn the coincidence of common ancestry into connection and reconciliation in the present through a collaborative practice in contemporary art.

Phillip Hall worked for many years as a teacher of outdoor education and sport throughout regional New South Wales, North Queensland and the Northern Territory. He now resides in Melbourne's Sunshine, where he works full-time as a writer, dividing his time between poetry, reviews and essays. In 2014, he published *Sweetened in Coals*. In 2015, he published *Diwurruwurru*, a book of his collaborations with the Borroloola Poetry Club. He is currently working on a collection of place-based poetry called *Fume*. This project celebrates First Australians' culture and interrogates colonialism's crooked paths in the Northern Territory's Gulf of Carpentaria.

A/Prof. Dominique Hecq grew up in the French-speaking part of Belgium. She read Germanic philology at the University of Liège and then flew to Australia where she completed a PhD on exile in Australian literature. She also holds an MA in Literary Translation. Dominique is the author of a novel, three collections of short fiction, five books of poetry and two plays. Her work has been awarded a variety of prizes, including The Melbourne Fringe Festival Award for Outstanding Writing and Spoken Word Performance (1998), The New England Review Prize for Poetry

3220_Offshoot.indd 331 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

(2005), The Martha Richardson Medal for Poetry (2006), and the inaugural AALITRA Prize for Literary Translation in poetry from Spanish into English (2014). Her poems have been published in anthologies, journals and online in Australia and overseas. Having recently reconnected with her mother tongue, Dominique is currently negotiating the pleasures and perils of self-translation. *Hush: A Fugue* (2017) is her latest book of poetry.

Prof. Paul Hetherington is in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra and head of the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI) there. He has published eleven full-length collections of poetry, including the recently released *Burnt Umber* (UWA Publishing 2016). He won the 2014 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards (poetry), was commended in the 2016 Newcastle Poetry Prize and shortlisted for the 2013 Montreal International Poetry Prize and the international 2016 Periplum Book Competition (UK). He undertook an Australia Council for the Arts Residency in the BR Whiting Studio in Rome in 2015–16.

Dr Lucas Ihlein is an artist, writer, and ARC DECRA Research Fellow in Contemporary Arts at University of Wollongong, Australia. His current research, entitled *Sugar vs the Reef?*, uses blogging and socially engaged art to catalyse a deeper understanding of the complex social, environmental and economic aspects of the sugar cane industry in Central Queensland. His PhD thesis on blogging as art was awarded the 2011 Alfred Deakin Medal for Best Doctoral Thesis in the Humanities and Social Sciences. In 2015, Lucas received a Fellowship in Emerging and Experimental Arts from the Australia Council for the Arts to work on a suite of projects connecting art and environmental management. Lucas is

3220_Offshoot.indd 332 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

also an accomplished printmaker, co-founder of Big Fag Press in Sydney, and winner with Ian Milliss of the Fremantle Arts Centre Print Award for *The Yeomans Project* in 2012.

Lia Incognita is a Shanghai-born and -based writer who grew up in the Kulin nation. Lia has written for *Overland*, *Peril* and *Right Now*, and done poetry on stages, airwaves, walls and pages.

Prof. Jeri Kroll is Emeritus Professor of English and Creative Writing at Flinders University, South Australia. An award-winning writer for adults and young people, recent books include *Workshopping the Heart: New and Selected Poems* (Wakefield 2013); a verse novel *Vanishing Point* (Puncher and Wattman 2015), which was shortlisted for the 2015 Queensland Literary Awards, and of which a George Washington University stage adaptation was a winner in the 47th Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival; *Research Methods in Creative Writing* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013); and *'Old and New, Tried and Untried': Creativity and Research in the 21st Century University* (2016). She is studying for a Doctorate of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong.

Dr Jeanine Leane is a Wiradjuri writer, teacher and academic from the Murrumbidgee River. After a long teaching career, she completed a doctorate in Australian literature. Her first volume of poetry, *Dark Secrets After Dreaming*, won the Scanlon Prize for Indigenous Poetry 2010 and her first collection of stories, *Purple Threads* (UQP), won the David Unaipon Award for Indigenous Writing in 2010. Her poetry has been published in *Hecate: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women's Liberation*, *Overland* and *The Australian Book Review.* She teaches creative writing and Aboriginal literature at the University of Melbourne. *Walk*

3220_Offshoot.indd 333 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Back Over, her second volume of poetry, will be released in 2017 (Cordite Press).

Janine McVeagh has recently retired as the principal staff member on the Applied Writing programme at Northtec (New Zealand). Her published works include a range of short and longer works for children, short stories and non-fiction books for adults. Recent publications include a young adult novel on Smashwords and a picture book to come out in 2017. She is currently working on a biography of Priscilla Wakefield. Janine McVeagh lives in rural Northland with her family and a large garden.

Dr Patrick Mullins is a Canberra-based academic. He received his PhD in 2014 from the University of Canberra, where he was a lecturer in journalism and writing. He was the 2015 Donald Horne Creative and Cultural Fellow, a research fellow at the Australian Prime Ministers Centre in 2015–16, and the winner of the 2015 Scribe Non-Fiction Prize for Young Writers. His biography of Sir William McMahon will be published by Scribe in 2018.

A/Prof. Camilla Nelson is Associate Professor in Writing at the University of Notre Dame Australia. She is the author of two novels, including *Perverse Acts*, for which she was named as one of the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s Best Young Australian Novelists of the Year, and *Crooked*, which was shortlisted for a Ned Kelly Award. Her most recent books are the co-edited essay collections *On Happiness: New Ideas for the Twenty-First Century* and the (forthcoming) *Book of Dangerous Ideas about Mothers*. Camilla writes regularly for *The Conversation* and her scholarly and journalistic essays have been published internationally.

3220_Offshoot.indd 334 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Dr Gail Pittaway is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Media Arts, Waikato Institute of Technology, Hamilton, New Zealand. Gail is an advisory editor of *TEXT* journal and a founding co-editor of *Meniscus* literary magazine, having also been a member of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs executive committee since 2004. In 2015, with Thom Conroy, she co-edited a collection of essays about creative writing teaching and practice in Australasia, *Minding the Gaps across Faultlines and Thresholds*. Gail has published poetry and articles on creative writing in a number of journals, including *New Writing*, *TEXT* and *Aeternum* and is currently a doctoral candidate with Central Queensland University, in the field of food memoir as creative writing.

A/Prof. Francesca Rendle-Short is Deputy Dean Communication, co-director of WrICE (Writers Immersion and Cultural Exchange) and non/fictionLab at RMIT University. She is an award-winning novelist, memoirist, essayist and poet, author of the novel *Imago* and the critically acclaimed memoir-cum-novel *Bite Your Tongue* (both with Spinifiex Press) and co-editor of the anthologies *The Near and The Far* (Scribe Publications) and *Press: 100 Love Letters* (University of Philippines Press). Her work has appeared in anthologies, literary journals, academic journals, online and in exhibitions including *Best Australian Science Writing*, *The Lifted Brow*, *Killing the Buddha*, *Overland*, *Rabbit*, *Queensland Historical Atlas*, *New Writing*, *Life Writing* and *The Essay Review*. Her artwork is in the collection of the Queensland State Library. Francesca has a Doctor of Creative Arts from the University of Wollongong and has been awarded an International Nonfiction Writers' Fellowship at the University of Iowa.

Dr Nike Sulway is the author of several novels, including *Rupetta*,

3220_Offshoot.indd 335 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

which – in 2014 – was the first work by an Australian writer to win the James Tiptree, Jr. Award. The Tiptree is an annual award for a work of 'science fiction or fantasy that expands or explores our understanding of gender'. Her previous publications include the novels *The Bone Flute*, *The True Green of Hope* and *What The Sky Knows*. Her works have won or been shortlisted for a range of national and international awards, including the Queensland Premier's Literary Award, the Commonwealth Writers Award, the Children's Book Council of Australia's Book of the Year Awards, the IAFA Crawford Award, the Aurealis Awards, and the Norma K. Hemming Award. Her most recent novel, *Dying in the First Person*, was released by Transit Lounge in 2016. She teaches creative writing at the University of Southern Queensland.

Zoe Thomas is a PhD candidate at La Trobe University. Her autobiographical work, *From prologue to imago,* works in confluence with her critical work, 'I sing the body nostalgic: memory, writing, practice'. She has published short works of memoir and has begun the grapple with new material on (and the material experience of) menopause and writing. She teaches in the humanities, and specifically in creative writing. She is the creative writing editor for the journal *Writing from Below* and is also the editor of an upcoming life writing anthology of heartbreak stories.

Ellen van Neerven is a Yugambeh woman from South East Queensland. She is the author of the poetry collection *Comfort Food* (UQP 2016) and the fiction collection *Heat and Light* (UQP 2014), which won numerous awards including the 2013 David Unaipon Award, the 2015 Dobbie Award and the 2016 NSW Premier's Literary Awards Indigenous Writers Prize.

3220_Offshoot.indd 336 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Dr James Vicars, BA (English), Grad Dip Ed (UNE), MA (Communications) (CSU), PhD (UNE), has conducted extended research in the areas of biography and biofiction and has recently completed an account of the life of Australia's first woman pilot, Millicent Bryant. He founded and edited the literary magazine, *New England Review*, and is a writer of fiction and poetry, as well as non-fiction. He has ongoing literary interests in the contemporary novel, life writing and twentieth-century English and Australian literature, and has been the recipient of fellowships from the NSW Ministry for the Arts and the Eleanor Dark Foundation. Other academic interests include hermeneutics, critical and literary theory, continental philosophy and Indian philosophy. He is an Adjunct Lecturer and teaches in the School of Arts at the University of New England.

Prof. Jen Webb is Distinguished Professor of Creative Practice at the University of Canberra, and Director of the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research. Her recent works include the scholarly volumes *Researching Creative Writing* (Frontinus 2015) and *Art and Human Rights: Contemporary Asian Contexts* (with Caroline Turner; Manchester University Press 2016), the creative volumes *Watching the World* (with Paul Hetherington; Blemish Books 2015) and *Stolen Stories, Borrowed Lines* (Mark Time 2015), and the Oxford University Press bibliography entry for Bourdieu (2017). Her work focuses on representation, and the field of creative production. She is also Lead/Chief Investigator on the ARC Discovery projects 'Understanding Creative Excellence: A Case Study in Poetry' (DP130100402), 'Working the Field: Creative Graduates in Australia and China' (DP150101477) and 'So what do you do? Graduates in the Creative and Cultural Industries' (DP160101440).

3220_Offshoot.indd 337 18/01/2018 3:33 PM

Dr Jessica White is the author of *A Curious Intimacy* and *Entitlement*. Her short stories, essays and poems have appeared widely in Australian and international literary journals and she has won a number of awards, funding and residencies. She is currently a DECRA postdoctoral fellow at The University of Queensland, where she is writing an ecobiography of the nineteenth-century botanist Georgiana Molloy.

Dr Jessica L. Wilkinson is the founding editor of *Rabbit: A Journal for Nonfiction Poetry*. Her first book, *marionette: a biography of miss marion davies*, was published by Vagabond in 2012 and shortlisted for the 2014 Kenneth Slessor Prize. Her second poetic biography, *Suite for Percy Grainger*, was published by Vagabond in 2014. In 2014, she received a Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship to research her third poetic biography, *Music Made Visible: A Biography of George Balanchine*. Jessica has written several articles on poetic biography and nonfiction poetry that have been published in international journals and critical volumes including *Criticism* (US), *Biography* (Hawaii), *Axon* (Aust.), *Cultural Studies Review* (Aust.) and *Truth and Beauty: Verse Biography in Canada, Australia and New Zealand* (Victoria UP 2016). She won the 2014 Peter Porter Poetry Prize and is Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at RMIT University, Melbourne. She recently co-edited *Contemporary Australian Feminist Poetry* (Hunter Publishers 2016).

3220_Offshoot.indd 338 18/01/2018 3:33 PM