The Call of Salt: White Australian Writing and Anxieties of Landscape

The Call of Salt: White Australian Writing and Anxieties of Landscape

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Thesis Abstract

‘The Call of Salt’ offers an account of the tensions of belonging experienced by white Australians. It follows the story of the people of the fictionalised Chesil Island, set off the southern coast of Australia. The novel is written from the perspective of Hannah, a local to the Island. A teacher, Hannah is forced to witness as a young girl in her class falls pregnant and is heralded by the local priest as the Virgin Mary reborn. As the Immaculate Conception, her pregnancy provides an opportunity for religious tourism which is taken up by the locals. Now living in the city, Hannah reflects on the events that followed. Implicated as the silent onlooker, Hannah writes in the attempt to come to terms with Mary’s eventual disappearance; but also with the death of her own mother and the redefinition of self thus provoked. Serving as the centre-point for the narrative, Hannah’s voice moves into and re-imagines multiple other points of view, an act which both appropriates and reconfigures events from the community’s past as central to her own relationship with the island as a place. Creating a disjointed and fragmented narrative, the novel attempts to contrast the anxieties of landscape felt by white Australians to the power of the social structures of rural community, pointing to an ongoing heritage of colonial development.

My writing is deeply concerned with white Australian constructions of landscape and the predominance of the subject-object relationship in representations of land. The exegesis situates this novel against a reading of landscape in contemporary white Australian literature. It asks questions of how as a white Australian author I utilize poetic language to express a connection with landscape, and highlights the philosophy of Etienne Souriau. Souriau’s existential pluralism provides a potential avenue for a writing style which moves outside the subject-object relationship, taking up a non-reductive understanding of the modes of existence present within the creative work. The exegesis picks up on his concept of *instauration* as suggesting the ontological movement into being and therefore describing the creative process. It illustrates the manner in which the writing of ‘The Call of Salt’ has been shaped by this philosophy and draws attention to a strain of Australian cultural studies attempting to move in a similar direction.

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Part One: *The Call of Salt*

"I wish this story were different. I wish it were more civilized. I wish it showed me in a different light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia. I wish it had more shape… I'm sorry there is so much pain in this story. I'm sorry it is in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force.

But there is nothing I can do to change it."

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

Prologue

12th March 1829.

Wind WSW, 77°F
3 seen today by the inland Swamp. The testing has brought nothing, still. We will have to leave soon. Supplies are running short. I don't suppose W. is fool enough to let us starve. We have named it Chesil, for the Isle of ~~Wey~~ Portland, which W. claims it resembles in shape, though it would be impossible to tell, and there is no shingle to join it in any way to the Mainland. […] clay and sand and no good Soil for growing.

As transcribed in Blackman, Robert, *Terra Ignota: Exploration in Australia's South* (Sydney: Maurice Gladwin Press, 2003) p.235

"…Another such example is the diary of John Granville Mulvey, written during his years of military service, from February, 1828 until October, 1829. This was very much a period of exploration along the south coast, as the land of various regions was tested for fertility for the expansion of farming. While not much is known of Mulvey himself – his use of language proves he was well educated, although various entries suggest he was potentially a convict – the explorative party of which he was a member in the latter year of the journal was unique. Led by young Lieutenant James William Wakefield, the party was commissioned by a British noble (possibly Lord William John Cavendish-Scott-Bentinck, Marquess of Titchfield and the 5th Duke of Portland) and organised through the armed forces. Mulvey tells in great detail of various landings all along the south coast, from Albany in Western Australia to what would later become the Portland Bay settlement of the Henty family in Victoria…"

Blackman, Robert, *Terra Ignota: Exploration in Australia's South* (Sydney: Maurice Gladwin Press, 2003) pp.232-3

*

12th March 1829, Mulvey writes. *Three seen today by the inland swamp, they followed us. The testing has brought nothing, still.* They are here to survey – to map and test and mark out arable land. The colony is expanding, Wakefield told them as they set out, and we are to go before it. But it is hopeless, the testing. The first explorers promised natural meadows, fine pastures and clear soil; there has been nothing but swamp and sand. And the days, long and hot, shifting and sampling and getting lost, are all for nothing. You couldn't crop here on the island, any half-wit could see that. *We will have to leave soon. Supplies are running short. I don't suppose W. is fool enough to let us starve.* Someone shuffles outside and he wonders for a moment who has the watch. Fraser? He sighs and rolls over, tries to ignore the tiny wriggling from his bedroll. It is time they were smoked. They have all come out in bites. *We have named it Chesil, for the Isle of Portland, which W. claims it resembles in shape, though it would be impossible to tell, and there is no shingle to join it in any way to the mainland.*

The naming was a strange ceremony. They held it down at the river mouth, the inlet where the estuary meets the sea, not up on the hill where he had assumed it would be. What is the point in a flag no one can see? Not that there is anyone to challenge them here. They stood in two lines as Wakefield addressed them, sweating under their regimental dress. He spoke in an airy way about the King and this noble endeavour. Mulvey stared at the river and tried not to doze. A line of soap scum floated gently down from their camp upstream, sluggish to meet the tide coming in. It was beautiful, in the sunlight – pearlescent silver, purples and golds on the tannin-stained yellow of the water. It had seemed strange at the time that soap scum could be beautiful. Topsy-turvey, like the rest of this place. He thought then: I will write about this later. But now, lying in the gloom, his pallet itching and their cramped little tent hot and rank, he can't picture it, and the words to describe it don't come. Besides, what is the point? Better to write of the natives, better to stick to the facts. Those three today, for example, following always just behind.

Once, he heard, there was a small settlement in the west, where the natives attacked at nightfall and slit the throats of the entire population. There was a camp where whalers and sealers met three natives in a wooden canoe, and offered them flour and sugar. Later that week, the natives returned and robbed the camp of all the flour and sugar they had, leaving them to starve. It was only because the ship returned early that the whalers survived. When they tried to hunt the natives down, they had disappeared. In one place, two men were scalped, spears driven into their chests and great strips of skin torn from

their neck and down their arms. No one could tell why. There are stories of children disappearing, being killed, being eaten, women raped and men murdered. There are stories of homes destroyed with fire, and natives just standing there to watch as brave men and women fought to save them. And then his own experience, the way in which they simply melt into the dark, disappear into the trees, black ghosts that come and go and can never be pinned down. They are not natural, he thinks, just like this place is unnatural. At night, even with a watch, they flicker around the edges of his nightmares.

There was a woman once, a female, quite young. He was working with whalers off the eastern coast. They had carved a watch out, high up on a mountain above the bay. They were clearing. There was a settlement within a day's ride. They had not expected natives. The locals had told them they had hunted them all out. But there was a spring a little way off and the woman appeared, black as the devil. One of the men grabbed her before she could run. He sat on her to hold her down and she bucked and struggled underneath him. A kid brought rope and they tied her to a tree. After the first excitement, they weren't quite sure what to do with her. She just hung there, limp, looking down. She didn't cry out. Mulvey couldn't stop looking at her as they ate. She was naked, with heavy breasts as dark as the rest of her and black nipples that pointed sideways. He wondered vaguely what it would be like. That night he dreamed of warmth and the soft weight he associated with a woman, and of small, dark shapes which he trod at and killed with his feet. Every so often he would wake and hear her screaming as one or another went and visited her tree. That morning she had disappeared and one of the youngsters had a set of deep scratches across his face, which he wore jauntily until they grew swollen and rank. They cleaned them with salted water and ash from the fire. Fought like a wild cat, the boy said, shaking his head, and the men around him chuckled.

Here on the island there could be hundreds, for all he knows. You can't see them or hear them. And even the female was dangerous. The boy had died. They had all listened as he grew silent and feverish, more delirious day by day. They sent him back on the clipper that brought them supplies and he died of fever and blood poisoning, all from some harmless fun. You wouldn't know. You wouldn't know how many there might be or what they might be capable of until it's too late and your body laid out, wrapped in canvas, buried at sea. It frightens him. The stories haunt you at night, meet with the odd rattle of the straggly trees and the night-shrieks of strange animals. There are small bears that roar, grey with two-inch claws and thick, black noses smeared primordial across their faces. And animals as large as men, standing on two legs and a tail. Kangaroos. He has seen them fight, heads raised and ears pinned back, kicking to

rip each other open. Poisonous adders and spiders the size of plates. Everything can kill you here. Those three following them today. They frighten him. The insects scream, a broken, ringing noise. He listens to the snorting and grunting of Fraser on watch and he can't quite let himself relax into sleep.

Day time is better – at least they are visible in the light, and the clear skies remind him why he is here. They are brilliant here, cornflower skies. On fine days the heat is a physical presence, solid, real, more alive than anything of home. It fires him like clay. If he looks up and blocks everything out, he can imagine living here. He doesn't want land, you could have that anywhere. He wants a store. It was obvious with the whalers that a store was where the money was. A store, safe in the grounds of a settlement, with his name over the door. That is why he is here. He wouldn't have a chance in the established settlements, so he has enlisted, come in search of new ground. He lets himself lie there and imagine it. A little weatherboard store, stone once he is turning a profit. Trading off the settlers and the whalers alike. Spirits, maybe, and oil, and grain. This land is useless, but there will be plenty of traffic coming past. And whalers might settle. The sea here is the real wealth – whales, seals and cubs, even fish. Nothing will grow but the whales are there to take. You could post a lookout here on the island. Somewhere up the mountain. They would see whales long before anyone on the mainland. And in his store he would grow fat and rich off trading their oil, far from the grind and the stench of the flensing. It is a pleasant dream.

He is early awake. The little tent is hot, and he crawls out to stretch and breathe the clean air. Fraser is drunk. He is curled asleep in a ball at the foot of his tree. Mulvey looks across his shoulder to the rest of the camp, but it is too late – Wakefield is already emerging, striding over. He goes quiet and stands shuffling as Wakefield kicks the lump awake. Others emerge and join them at the noise.

'Cur,' Wakefield spits. 'Dereliction of duty. Nineteen lashes.' He turns to the man behind him. 'Grant, is it?'

'Yessir.'

'Find a tree in plain sight and build the triangle. You two, run the perimeter. You, load muskets. We're lucky our throats haven't been slit.'

He turns back to his sail-canvas tent and leaves them to it, Fraser still groaning in the dirt at the base of the tree. When they whip him, his eyes bulge in time with each lash, and the blood that runs red down his back is the same colour as the leaves and the soil.

'Melton, is it?' Wakefield asks him, as he finishes.

'Mulvey, sir,' he says.

'Clean him up. Unfortunately, we need the scum.'

Mulvey uses sea water to bathe his back. Fraser whimpers like a child, lying face down on his blanket. When he lies a shirt back over the broken skin, Fraser's whole body goes taught, vibrates like a full sail. Mulvey takes watch that night and right across the camp he can hear the man whimpering and moaning. *This is a Godforsaken, unnatural place*, he writes propped against his tree. *This is a Godforsaken place.*

They go out testing again the next day, in a new direction. The lot of them creep through the trees with all the stealth of lost children. Every so often they stop as Wakefield signals, and the boy runs forward with the shovel to turn a sod. They all crowd around and peer down expectantly. It is clay today, red and heavy and impossible. Each time the circle will sigh and fall back, and they will move on. He keeps his musket up as they walk, keeps his eyes sharp, sees them everywhere. They are being followed, he thinks, as they reach the swamp. Crouched down at the edge of the tree-line, there are shadows, three again, watching hidden in the long grass. Mulvey can just make them out along his barrel. Three or more? It is hard to tell. He stands and turns back to the officer behind him.

'Three, sir.' He fingers his collar, and then points. 'Same as yesterday.'

'Aggressive?'

The question has a dangerous edge. Wakefield, he knows, has high ideals. He looks back at him. His regimentals are buttoned to his neck, and he is sweating gently from under the dirty gold braid.

'Shouldn't think so, sir. Don't appear so.' He squints and finds them again. Three?

'Leave them, then.'

'Sir?'

'Leave them. One shot warning. Fire in the air, soldier.'

He kneels again and fires. The shot echoes eerily in the empty sky. He moves his barrel down and searches the tree line again.

'Gone, sir.'

'Very good,' Wakefield says, almost carelessly. They move on.

They find the cave on the way back in, on the shoreline near the inlet and quite close to their camp upstream. A dripping limestone hole, carved into the side of the hill. It is painted – great shapes, black men and monsters, stretched and elongated into weird patterns across the walls.

'Beautiful,' Wakefield whispers, looking up and tracing a finger along the red and black lines. Mulvey stares at him. A strange sort of shelf runs along one side, and there is a basket with a lid made of bark. Wakefield pulls at it, tugs at the lid, and it flips over onto the floor. It is full of human bones, and they rattle out to join others already on the

floor of the cave. Mulvey jumps back, stares around. They are everywhere, he thinks. Everywhere. He can feel the walls of the cave closing in on him, shrinking, the whole world closing in and his breath coming in tight gasps through the grip of the uniform around his chest. He knows what it is, staring around. It is a graveyard, it is where they come to die. He can imagine them, slinking off into the bush like animals, old or lame or wounded, hiding away here and waiting to die. It stinks of their animal deaths.

Eventually they back out, slowly and cautiously, all of them silent. Wakefield is last of all, still staring backwards into the gloom. He almost walks into them at the mouth of it. They are frozen, muskets raised as the black man in the light outside raises a finger and points at them. Mulvey breathes in carefully and sights the man's chest.

'We claim this site,' Wakefield says, stepping forward, and it holds the ringing quality of a proclamation, 'as the property of the New Colonies, and in the name of our Sovereign, His Majesty George III, and Lord Cavendish, Duke of Portland, our noble patron. It is a wonder of the New World and a token of our dedication.'

The black man says nothing, just stands there.

'We claim this,' Wakefield says again. The black man speaks, incomprehensibly gabbling in a high, whining tone. He is yelling before he finishes, stabbing the air between them with his finger. He is a scrawny specimen, Mulvey thinks, old and wiry. His hair is tangled in a wild mane around his face, Mulvey can see every individual muscle corded along his skinny arms.

Wakefield sighs. 'Someone fire a warning,' he says, and one of the men at the front lifts his musket a little and fires into the air. The black man drops as though he has been hit and someone laughs. Mulvey looks at him in the sand. Grains of it cling to his skin and shine white in comparison. Someone spits and it lands in a gobbet beside him.

'Do you understand?' Wakefield asks. 'We claim this.' The black man raises himself slowly and backs away. As soon as he reaches the trees, he turns and runs.

'Black coward,' the boy laughs, coming forward from behind, and they all walk out into the sunshine. Mulvey walks a full circle, his musket still raised. The dirty soldiers around him blink in the light.

'Relax, man,' Wakefield says and claps him on the shoulder. He turns and strides off towards the camp and they follow slowly in a broken line. Mulvey wonders if he is the only one who can feel the eyes on them as they walk.

They go back that afternoon, just him and Wakefield and Fitzpatrick, a small, dark ex-convict with watery eyes who carries the sledgehammer and mumbles to himself. Wakefield is alight, he springs along, a wide smile smeared across his stubble, transforming his face. He has a flag, a small one for claiming the place. It doesn't

take them long to reach it. He and Fitzpatrick shuffle awkwardly at the entrance while Wakefield pokes around inside. They can hear the murmur of his voice as he talks to himself. He sounds like an excited child. The wind picks up and the dry rattle of the leaves in the trees grows in pitch to match the sound of the waves on the shore. Clouds cross over the sun and dark stripes of shadow spring up all around. Mulvey turns awkwardly in a circle and Fitzpatrick sits down beside him. He stares down at the dirty little man with contempt. They could be anywhere, he thinks, and you wouldn't know. A dry branch cracks and moans in the wind. It strikes him how conspicuous their red coats are in this landscape, brilliant targets, visible for miles.

'Hear that?'

'What?' Fitzpatrick looks up from picking at a fingernail.

'That, there…'

'The wind, fool.'

Mulvey turns again, raises his musket. Fiztpatrick stands.

'Put it down, y'daft bastard.'

'They're here. I heard 'em.'

'Natives? You dreamin', boy?'

'They could be anywhere,' he starts, turning to Fitzpatrick again, but his voice catches in his throat. The spear appears out of nowhere and buries itself in the little man's stomach. Fitzpatrick is yelling, screaming, but sinks to the ground heavy and soft like a pillow. Mulvey spins on the spot, turning, turning, eyes frantic. And then Wakefield is there, pulling, tugging at the spear. It comes free and Fitzpatrick tears open behind it, lying like a baby in the sand, his arms wrapped desperately around the hole in his middle, and God this has happened quickly, he is thinking, how has this happened so quickly? Four of them are there, suddenly, at the tree-line, all with spears raised. Like ghosts, he thinks, they come out of nowhere. He can hear Wakefield behind him saying something but the blood is screaming in his ears and he has fired before he understands. Hold fire? There is one down, a head shot, and he hauls the musket from Fitzpatrick to chase the rest. They aren't ghosts, he realises, passing the dead one. They have blood. It is a boy, hardly grown.

They will go back now, he knows. They have found nothing and lost a man. Wakefield has a beaten, slightly damp look about him. Nothing he says is command anymore. Hold fire! The men would follow me more willingly now, he thinks. With Fitzpatrick gone, he has a tent to himself like a Captain. When he dreams, the first night, he is running after them again, the black shadows in the trees. Looking down he can see the black boy dead at his feet. The boy reaches a hand up to catch hold of his leg as he runs and he is caught, transfixed by the colour of his blood, frozen to watch as

the boy melts to bones and joins the others in the cave. The morning light through the tent's canvas is welcome. He sees Wakefield scrubbing at his coat with salt and sand but the blood is a brown stain across the red and gold that will not come out. They carried Fitzpatrick back to camp, a dead weight slung between them. Only the flag was left. Wakefield walked with his head turned away from the sight of the blood seeping into his tunic. Hold fire! He will never live that down. He writes: *Leaving, thank Christ. This is not a place for Men, but a hell-hole for savages. W. looks younger, now. He is slightly pathetic in just a shirt, a blonde weed of a man. It took Fitzpatrick almost a day to die, and we listened in silence. He will be buried at sea.*

They sail as soon as the wind is right, rowing out to the brig with Fitzpatrick in the bottom wrapped in canvas. Looking back, the island is a shadow across the bay, a line they row out from under and into clear blue. Wakefield sits in the prow without a word. There are whales further out, as they round the point. He can see the spume from their surfacing and smiles to himself. Whalers will come. The money will flow like water from their backs. He will have his chance here, somewhere safe in a township. He leans against the oar and watches the island disappear behind him. He will come back, he thinks, if they settle. The oar is solid, strong in his hands. He could own this place.

Part One

I have never told you about Chesil, have I? I should have. It is hard to know where to begin, though, and what to say. It is all mixed in together, you see. I'm not so sure anyone else will understand.

It is beautiful, Chesil. It is an island, you can see it from the mainland. It looks impossible from there. It floats disembodied on the horizon. You approach it from the west, the nearest town but the furthest land. You chug towards it across the bay and as you get closer it grows into its own reality, a depth and weight and solidity that is almost unexpected. As the ferry churns its way through the cross-current, the point where the waters sweeping around in either direction meet in a chaos of white foam and streaky blue, you sit up. The fine detail starts to unfold. Cliff faces take on shadows, trees emerge on the hill. The beach spreads itself out for your pleasure, almost chintzy in gold and blue. The tourists came for this beach, apparently, once upon a time when Chesil was still shiny and new. When you round the reef, the rail-bridge appears to the east, stretching out towards the empty land of the point, tethering the Island down to the real world. It is like a pendant on a chain. Reaching it becomes a possibility at this point. It sinks in: *I am going home*. The layers of the place begin to unfold – the beach, the village, the vines, the bush. Bands of colour framed by sea and sky. You cannot see my home from the ferry, but I can place it – down from the fire-tower, up from the church and it is there hidden in the fold of the hill. The hill is the only part of the place still dark, still wild, still untouched. In the background. Behind. A pretty weight to counterbalance the garishness in guide-book brochures. The locals ignore it mostly, but it is home, to me. You have to know it to understand it, you have to be able to *feel* it. My hill. My world. That is the land my bones are made of, that is the soil under my fingernails. It would have been all wild once.

You only see the people at the last moment. It is strange the way they appear. There is too much else to look at, maybe – sea, beach, hill, sky. The symmetry is overwhelming, methodical almost. There is a balance to the place which exists entirely beyond the realm of human existence. People are almost a shock, or for me at least. When I came in that last time, the ferry was almost at the dock before I noticed them. Children in the dunes, a man walking down the main street. Darcy there, waiting. He had his hat pulled so far down his brow that I couldn't make out his face. I was expecting my mother. It hadn't occurred to me that he might come.

A homecoming in stories is radiant, glorious, filled with golden sunshine and bird song. People greet you with love and laughter and happiness. It is magical, even. Click your ruby shoes three times, there's no place like home. It doesn't work like that in real

life. In reality a homecoming is like re-reading a book you once knew, even loved, but seeing only verbs and nouns, composition, concrete structures and narrative tricks. The story doesn't work anymore. It doesn't draw you in. You have to build it in your mind, put it back together piece by piece in an act of precise construction. There is something clinical about it. And when you have, you can step back and look but still it won't be the same. A homecoming has no grace in real life.

I am a teacher here in the city. There was a girl in my class today, her eyes were just like Mary's. She sat at the back and said nothing. A new study came out a few days ago. We were sitting around after a staff meeting and someone brought it up, talking about a history of violence, battered kids and bullying. We throw phrases around, our society. We talk about horrible things like abuse and trauma in platitudes and clichés. This whole country has a history of violence. We are built on violence. It has seeped into our soil, it whispers in our water, it comes out in strange and unpredictable ways. We can't deal with it openly. We just pass it on, just as the study says.

I still ride here. I ride dressage, I dance – all the high-school movements, the rigorous training, the history of German warfare and cavalry education. Lateral work is a challenge. It is the shoulder, I think. Every time I feel it move away from me across the arena, some small part of me is instantly back out bush on Chesil, on the bay pony perhaps and galloping like we used to through those winding little trails, following the horse's shoulder, forward out of the saddle and guided by his weight. The reality of this fancy arena with its mirrors and its gallery can't compete. Every time I feel that shoulder move some little part of me leans forward, stands up. It is just the tiniest shift of weight. But instantly the dance is ruined: the horse will fall forward under me or drop his shoulder, all because I cannot get that place out of my mind. My instructor cannot understand it. I am not even aware I am doing it half the time. You wouldn't see it. It is only a tiny thing, a little reflex reaction. Still, it will ruin me as a dressage rider.

Darcy taught us to ride like that, leaning forward. Toes thrust well through the stirrup, heel heavy and stretching down, hands forward, body forward, reins bridged. Go with his shoulder. Go with him, not against him. My straight-laced instructor has no idea.

Chesil would have been sublime once. I can imagine that – the hill and the forest meeting the sandy valley and its native grasslands opening up to the sea. It would have been clean until we came. The colonials. My family, in fact, my ancestor. We tore down trees and muddied clean water. We ripped up grasslands with cattle and sheep. We laid bare the soft soil to the heat of the sun. We swore and we screamed and we sweated. But

we survived to continue on. The study at school talked about suppression and silence, about repetitive behaviour as an outlet for unresolved anxieties. I understood. There are some things you don't, just can't talk about. Mary, for instance.

This is what I need to tell you. This is what you need to understand. It is time for someone to speak out. I still imagine Mary at night when I can't sleep. I don't want to forget her face. The first day in class, or at the church as they brought her forward, her eyes wide. Her mother has disappeared apparently. Not literally, of course – she is still there on the Island. But no one sees her now, no one has heard from her.

Perhaps it will be easier if I just go back in time. I went home to teach at the little school on the esplanade. Or I went for my mother, who was dying. Perhaps the teaching was simply an excuse. I wasn't quite sure why I went, I just did. It was beautiful, the day I went back. I went over on the ferry and chugged in across the bay. I saw the hill, the cliff, the vines, the beach. I saw the people, saw Darcy waiting, and I wanted to burst. He was leant against the side of the old tin shed. I was bouncing up and down as we came in, out on the ferry deck, with the sky bright and clear above us and the water creamed to frothing white beneath.

*

The dark man leans against the shed to watch the ferry come in. There is only one passenger, one car. The car is a garish green, bright and unnatural against the deeper colour of the water. The man waves at a fly and pulls his hat further down over his brow. Behind him the shed door opens and a man wearing the ferry company's t-shirt over a pair of torn jeans wanders out and down the jetty.

'Darcy,' the ferry-man says and nods to him.

'Frank,' Darcy replies. The ferry grinds its way in along the jetty, its engines tearing and grasping backwards at the water with a vague desperation. The passenger is out on the deck, a hand raised to shield her eyes from the brilliance of the day. He stands up straighter, steps forward. He can tell when she see him, she snaps tight, swings her whole body to face him. He grins. Steady child, he thinks. You'll fall in.

She is almost hovering by the time the ramp comes down. Half in, half out of the car, its front door open and her there in between bobbing up and down like a puppet. When the man at the control calls and Frank wanders forward to get the chain, she disappears down into the driver's seat and starts the engine. She goes all the way out past him to the car-park at the top, grinning. Darcy turns and walks up after her. She throws the car into a space on an angle and comes flying out, running back down the jetty towards him. He is grinning now too, so hard his face hurts. He holds his arms open and she hugs him.

'Kiddo,' he says, muffled into her shoulder. She just laughs.

'I thought Mum would come,' she says when she straightens up.

'She's not so good today.'

She starts up towards the car-park and he steps in pace with her. She is staring around, back down the beach, along the dunes and up towards the village, her hands shaking very slightly. She is thinner than he remembers. He climbs into her car and she looks at him in surprise.

'No ute?' she asks.

'Walked down from my new place.'

'Come for lunch,' she says.

He nods. 'Yes, boss.'

She smiles and starts the car. The village is busy, no tourists but the villagers down for mail and milk and gossip. She drives slowly and he watches her from the passenger seat as they pass on through. Up at the church there is a service on, cars parked straight and uniform around the hall and the Father standing on the steps with a few latecomers.

One woman shades her eyes and watches them swirl past, a haze of golden dust along the limestone road as they wind their way up the hill.

Her mother is waiting on the steps at the front of the house when they come up the driveway. The woman looks fragile, standing there with one hand on the railing, bent at the shoulders and hips.

'Hannah!' she calls, as soon as their doors open. The girl grins and clatters up to hug her. Darcy stands at the bottom watching them, unsure of his place there.

'Thanks for meeting her,' the woman calls down, and he smiles and moves forward.

'God, it's been too long since I was home,' Hannah says.

'Don't you take the Lord's name,' her mother growls and there is a pause before they all smile. He can see Hannah watching her mother, registering the stiffness, the waif-like thinness, the pallid skin. Her mind is buzzing, her eyes are wide. Her mother, old. He knows it is a strange feeling. A sort of kaleidoscope, a twisted overlaying of memory and expectation and reality. Past and present. He can read the sensation in her face. Inside, there is lunch laid on the table, cold meat and a salad, boiled eggs in dressing. Darcy sits himself and lets them twitter and flutter around the kitchen. It is nice to have the girl home. He sighs and leans back in the chair, waits for them to finish their noise and join him.

Hannah does the dishes, afterwards. Darcy sits in an armchair in the family room and watches her through the open door. Her mother has fallen asleep, stiff and upright on the couch beside him. He can see Hannah dunking and rinsing plates and bowl, humming to herself and poking her nose into the larder and cupboards, working out where to put things, what has moved since she was last home, what lives where it always has. She finishes and appears with a tea-towel still in her hands.

'Cup of tea, Darce?' she asks. He nods at her mother.

'Come for a look around,' he says. 'We'll have one when we get back.'

She nods and disappears again, tossing the tea-towel down on the kitchen bench. He heaves himself up and pulls his boots back on. He can hear her upstairs and she reappears as he makes it to the back door. She is wearing an old, faded pair of workman's trousers instead of the jeans, boots in hand.

'Feels better,' she says and he grins.

Darcy leads her out towards the shed and she heads straight through to the horse yards. A chaff sack has burst, he notices on the way past. There are mouse droppings mixed in with the golden spill around its base. Out by the yards, two horses snooze in the sunshine – an old grey with one thick foreleg and an ancient-looking black, his coat patchy and dust dappled. Hannah wanders over to meet them, pulling a carrot from her

pocket as she goes. The grey bobs his head and soft lips fumble over her palm as they bicker for the treat. Hannah is whispering to the black horse, running a hand down his neck and over his shoulder, along his back, down one foreleg.

‘He’s in good nick, Darce!’ she calls to him, leaning where he is on the corner post of the first yard.

‘Looking alright,’ he calls back. ‘Not bad for an old man.’

‘Ghost still lame?’

‘Yep.’

She leaves the old horse under his tree and comes back to him.

‘Place looks ok,’ she says, stretching a loose wire with her foot. ‘Considering.’

Darcy raises an eyebrow. ‘Considering,’ he says. The wire beneath her rattles against its strainer and she pulls her foot back.

‘Shall we go in?’ she asks. He nods. She turns her head from the chaff bag on the way back through the shed, he notices. She eyes the dusty saddles, fingering the leather, testing suppleness.

‘Need a clean,’ she mutters.

‘Planning on riding, are you?’ he asks and she grins.

‘Thought the old man might like to stretch his legs.’

She is humming again as they head in for tea. An old tune, he knows it. It’s one her mother used to sing.

*

Father John stands in the sunshine on the steps of the church. Beside him, Mrs. Keillor raises a hand to shield her eyes and watches a small, green car bounce along the limestone road. Harry? She wonders automatically, but it keeps going, away up the hill. The Father turns to her.

'Are we ready?' he asks. The dust from the car drifts up in soft clouds to float away over the summer grass. The last of the latecomers move in to find their places.

'Yes,' she smiles, dropping her hand and facing him. 'All set.'

'Right,' he says, and moves in to the vestry. Mrs. Keillor closes the door behind him, and moves through to take her normal place in the second pew. It is a good group today, half full. Behind her, the Father starts his entrance and they all turn in their seats to watch him walk down the aisle. He moves slowly, gracefully. He is smiling, she can see. She loves these services. No fuss, no frills, just the group of them there and the Father, kind as always, guiding them. It is a good sight, that. It fills you with peace and confidence. She straightens to face the altar. The sunshine outside is hitting the gold cross so that beams of light are shattering around the walls. The yellow of the wattle in the vase on the plinth picks them up and glows gently in the cool. The Father announces the hymn. Mrs. Keillor draws breath and lustily, smiling, she sings.

It is a lovely service. It always is. The Women's' Auxiliary all agree, the Father has always made a lovely sermon. And somehow especially so since his wife died. A little off track, maybe, occasionally, but so much feeling! They stand clustered around after the service with cups and saucers balanced primly, while the husbands shuffle awkwardly by the door. Val Mathers has brought fruitcake. It sits on a lace doily on a pretty little china plate and Mrs. Keillor takes another piece. She never could resist fruitcake. Neither could Harry, she thinks, and wishes again he were here.

'Can't think why he isn't here,' she says, nervously to the woman next to her. Goodness, she thinks, what is her name? Her husband and son are over by the door with the rest of them. 'He must have got caught up with something,' Mrs. Keillor says, and smiles. The woman nods politely, and flicks a glance over to her own men, one eyebrow raised.

'Yes,' she says. 'Of course.'

Mrs. Keillor is on dishes. She waits for the last of them to leave and turns to the cups. She wheels the urn across to the hall and through to the little kitchenette and braces herself with two hands against the sink. There are steps across the veranda, heavy and business-like. She spins and smiles expectantly but it is Val who appears, laden with plates.

‘The gossip this week!’ she twitters. Mrs. Keillor runs the water and pulls the dishcloth from the cupboard beneath the sink. ‘Betty Smith and her daughter-in-law arguing again over that damned recipe, such a silly fight. And Martha’s man Bob has been fighting over the size of a veggie patch, apparently, with that old man who used to live up the hill.’

Mrs. Keillor frowns, tries to guess who she is on about. Val doesn’t notice, keeps on without pause.

‘Apparently he practically ran his rotary hoe right up to their front door… Grouchy old Devil, Martha called him.’

Mrs. Keillor smiles. Darcy, she thinks to herself.

‘Hasn’t tried at all to fit in with anyone in the village. Spends half his time back up the hill, according to Martha.’ Val says.

But they never do fit in, the families up there. She can remember Harry calling it Snob Hill. Old Mulvey… you never saw him down for anything and he never came to church. His own funeral was the first time he stepped through the gate. His son now is exactly the same, living like a lord up there on the hill. The daughter, though, she was always nice enough, despite the scandal of her husband taking off. Very ill now. Her girls were beautiful children.

‘One of the Mulvey girls is back.’ Mrs. Keillor says. ‘Came off the ferry this morning, apparently. You didn’t hear which one? Hannah or Sophie? I used to baby-sit those girls.’

‘No, couldn’t tell you. The news about the grapes is a bit worrying, isn’t it?’ Val replies. ‘Mrs. Allen was saying the botrytis has been bad, rows and rows gone to it…’

Mrs. Keillor sighs and passes her a plate to dry. The Father appears suddenly in the doorway. He has changed out of his robes and is wearing a woollen jumper and trousers. The crease on his trousers runs crookedly off to his ankle on one side and she has to make an effort not to stare. Poor man, she thinks. Poor, dear man. There is an awkward pause.

‘Are you ladies happy to lock up?’ he asks, finally.

‘Of course, Father,’ she says, and lays a hand on his arm. ‘We’re almost finished now, I’ll just do the flowers. You pop on home and have a nice cup of tea, hmm?’

She nods at him, Val behind her smiling, and he nods back.

‘Yes,’ he says. ‘Well. I’ll see you next weekend, then.’

He looks so lost she almost winces. Lonely, she thinks, and tries to think of a way to reach out.

‘Father?’

‘Yes?’ He snaps his head up with such alacrity that she stops, almost stutters.

‘Lovely sermon today,’ she says finally, and he nods, surprised, and walks out. It is

only once he is gone that it occurs to her she should invite him for dinner. She purses her lips. Never mind.

She goes straight to the pub when they have finished. Her ancient little car bounces down the limestone road in a flying haze of dust and loose stones. The urn rattles on the back seat. It needs cleaning, it is a pasty white inside, dirty water from the tank building up in it every time it is boiled. The flowers from the service are wrapped in foil and the leftover cake is in a Tupperware box in the foot well. She swings out onto the main road and makes herself breathe. The pub appears on the corner. He will be there, she knows. And he promised this week, he promised he would come. She pulls into the car park and wrenches the handbrake into place with a crunch. She straightens her blouse as she gets out, smooths her skirt.

The sunshine reflects off the dirty glass, out the front. She pushes through the front door and blinks to accustom herself to the gloom. The carpet is sticky underfoot. They are perched on stools, at the bar, Harry and his friends. Ridiculous, she thinks, at his age. Why not sit in the lounge chairs, at least? Up there they look like guilty children. Harry is staring down into a beer, refusing to look at her.

'Harry?' she asks.

He doesn't reply.

'Mrs. Keillor,' nods Bill, the publican. She flicks him a glance in surprise and gives him a prim little nod in return. Harry still says nothing, but he looks up at her and shakes his head. She looks at them all a moment longer and then turns. There is nothing, she realises, that she can say. She wonders why she came, and even more vaguely when he stopped believing. It is only when she pushes against the door again that she thinks to wonder if he ever did. Was it an act, for her? Is that all that has been lost? The door swings shut behind her and a muffled burst of laughter rings out. She stiffens. They are laughing. At her. She purses her lips and walks on.

She will take the flowers back up to the Father, she decides, sitting in the car once she has had her cry. (Carry on, she tells herself. Not here, not now. Deal with it later, at home – he will always come home, after all.) There is no one on the sick list this week, so why shouldn't she take them to the Father? He looked so alone at the church. A little gesture, she thinks. Yes. She starts the car and reverses out slowly. The rectory is pretty in the sunshine, its bluestone clean and framed by the white of the guttering and the windowsills. She stops for a moment to admire it on her way in. The garden is beginning to look overgrown, she thinks. Perhaps the ladies could organise something? She gets out once more and straightens her skirt. The flowers have left a wet mark on

the front seat but they still smell beautiful. She makes herself smile and checks her reflection in the window.

She can hear laughter for a second time, she realises, when she reaches the front door. She stands awkwardly on the front veranda and almost doesn't go in. But the flowers are dripping in her arm and so she does, pushing the front door open and singing out. It is always unlocked.

'Father John?' she calls. The laughter stops abruptly. 'Father?'

'Out here,' he calls back, and his voice is strangely shaky. She creeps her way through the front rooms and finds him in the kitchen, one hand wrapped in frozen peas. The kettle is in the sink, and the tea pot is half-full of old tea. She looks at him, eyes wide. The flowers drip water on the lino.

'I burnt myself,' he says, smiling. 'The kettle… it overflowed…'

'I – I thought you might like these,' she says eventually.

He smiles. 'Thank you. They are lovely. Too nice to throw out.'

She nods and moves to the sink. The kettle is still hot. She empties it a little and puts it back on the hob. He hovers behind her and she turns to him.

'Sit down,' she says. 'Let me get it, please.'

He sits. 'You see,' he says, 'I'm still getting used to managing.'

She nods again and lights the burner under the kettle. She picks up the flowers and pulls away the foil.

'Have you a vase?'

'In the cupboard there,' he says, and points. She pulls one down and trims the flowers with scissors from the window sill. That laughter, she thinks. There is no one here! It rings through her like alarm bells. Well, she thinks, and peers at him again.

'Your hand, Father,' she says. 'Did you run it under cold water?'

'No,' he says. 'But I have ice.'

She tuts and puts the flowers in their vase down on the table. The kettle whistles and she bustles around, turning off the stove, finding fresh leaf and emptying the pot. He just watches, his hand still there out before him on the table, wrapped in the packet of peas. She doesn't notice he is crying until she turns to him with the tea. Tears, just silently running down his face. And he not even seeming to notice them! Looking past her, as if there is someone else there, as if it is someone else he is looking at. She stares openly, until suddenly he comes to, sits up and wipes them away.

He smiles at her again. 'Never mind me, Mrs. Keillor,' he says. 'Never mind.'

She smiles gently and lets a hand fall to rest on his shoulder.

'Milk and sugar?' she asks.

'Just milk,' he replies.

*

Hannah stands on the steps to wave Darcy off. He has left them, she knows, on purpose. The sun slowly melts down below the brow of the hill and the kookaburras burst out into a jealous laughter. It is strange, watching him drive away. It almost makes her nervous. The dinner is already set out inside. Hannah turns and goes in, washes her hands. She sits across the table when they start and looks at her mother between mouthfuls, almost surreptitiously. It feels like a test, a challenge. She wants to ask: Am I doing this right? Do I pass?

'You know, there is a vacancy coming up at the school down in the village,' her mother says suddenly. 'Old Mrs. Wilson has left and there is no one else. You could live here if you could bear it.'

Hannah looks up from her meat and pauses a moment before answering. Her mother's hands are resting on the table-cloth, either side of her plate. Each knuckle is thick and red and knobbly.

'I know,' Hannah replies, finally. 'That's why I'm home. They offered it to me and I accepted.'

'Oh,' her mother says, deflated, 'I thought you were just here on holiday.'

Hannah looks down. Guilt rises painfully in her stomach.

'That too,' she says. 'I have a few weeks before I start.'

'Will you be home for long, then?' her mother asks. Hannah looks up, looks clearly at her. Her mother is staring down into her plate.

'Yes, a while.'

'Good,' her mother says. 'That's lovely.'

They finish the meal in silence, even the birds outside stay mute.

*

It was strange, returning home. I knew another space and place and time. Memory cheated, pointed out what was different and left me to find what hadn't changed. I was tense, tight-wound. For days, I was running blind.

Animals feel place like that. Harbour seals can 'see' through gloomy waters using their whiskers. Mice, cats, horses, they navigate in the dark using the sensitive nerve endings of their muzzles. The seal is more acute, but many mammals have the capacity. Currents in the air and vibrations are picked up by their whiskers – the proper name is vibrissae – as information, working to form a mental map in combination with the smell or taste of their surrounds. When I teach this in school, I run an experiment. I bring in mice and an obstacle course. One mouse goes, finds its way through the tiny holes and the narrow passages to the cheese. And then we trim the whiskers off the second. Every time it gets me. I feel like a traitor, but there is no such thing as ethics when your subject is too small to have a voice. I have to force myself to watch. The poor mouse is stranded, hovers anxiously in the first chamber, touching its shorn nose to wall after wall looking for the exit. I was like that when I returned. I had to feel my way.

It took me a moment the first morning to remember where I was. I hadn't unpacked; my suitcase was still bulging at the bottom of my bed. The sun was too hot, my curtains were open and I was sweating. I could hear my mother in the kitchen. I had been dreaming of the chestnut horse, Mulvey's, the one that died. I turned my back on the window and tried to close myself off again, seal it all in and sleep. But the light would not leave me alone, it bounced off the glass on my bedside table and glowed yellow behind my closed eyes. There were white specks floating in the water, it looked almost milky. I lay there and watched them. For a little while that morning I was a teenager again. I was a child. The curtains were still decorated with rainbows and hot-air balloons. I remember looking down at my naked body. It was white against the sheets, too big, too blocky. I was a child but I was not a child. It was the strangest feeling.

*

Hannah wakes. Somewhere below her, in the lounge room maybe, her mother is moving about. A door slams and floorboards creak. Magpies outside warble to the dawn. It is her third morning home and still it feels strange. She can hear her mother in the kitchen now, a spoon on a bowl. Everything happens so slowly, she thinks. The sheets are plastered to her, she peels them back and swings her legs over the side of the bed. Downstairs, her mother is sitting upright at the table before a bowl of muesli and a mug of tea. She is staring out the window at the birds in the garden, it takes her a moment to notice Hannah in the doorway. For the first time Hannah can see how twisted her mother's hands have become, how bent she is. It is like looking at a stranger. And then she notices Hannah and stands, and the spell is broken, she is her mother again – older, more worn, but still her mother. She hobbles taking her dishes to the sink. She looks like an old horse.

'Toast or cereal?' she asks.

'Cereal please,' Hannah says. She perches on a stool at the bench, toes tucked in behind the rung. Her mother smiles and produces a bowl already filled with muesli.

'Like always,' she says and Hannah grins. It is peaceful, strangely. The two of them there in the kitchen and the early morning light. Her mother turns back to the sink and rinses her dishes. 'It is going to be beautiful, today.'

'Would you mind if I took the black horse out?'

'I wondered if you would.'

'I thought he might like to stretch his legs.'

Her mother says nothing, but stacks the dishes neatly on the draining board.

Hannah rummages around in the shed. The saddlery is dusty and mouse-eaten. Her saddle is there, but the stuffing has been stolen from one panel and it wouldn't fit the black horse anyway. She looks at it a moment and leaves it. She takes her mother's saddle, a girth and a bridle and carries them all to the back veranda to clean. They look filthy in the sunlight, stiff and awkward. The stirrups she notices have started to rust. The cleaning gear is already laid out: the bowl of warm water, the saddle soap, leather oil in a little dish. The sun is warm on her neck. She sits and hauls the old saddle up into her lap. The cloth clears mahogany circles in the dust, the wet leather shines. There is movement inside and her mother turns on some classical music, opens the door to join her and sits on a folding chair. Hannah smiles and cleans. The concerto finishes and a muffled voice leads into a soothing sonata.

'Debussy?' Hannah asks. Her mother shakes her head. Her eyes are closed and her mouth drawn tight. Hannah turns to face her. 'You ok?'

‘Fetch me down the painkillers, could you?’ she whispers. Her voice is threaded, heavy with the weight of her breath. Hannah stands and dumps the saddle, runs in to the larder. It is a bulk box. The chemical ingredients are long and complicated. She grabs two and a glass of water and takes them out.

‘Thanks,’ her mother says. Hannah sits down, pulls the saddle back towards her. The next time she looks around, her mother is asleep.

It is almost afternoon before her mother wakes again. Tiptoeing around putting out lunch, Hannah glances at her every now and again from the kitchen window. She is still and stiff in the folding chair, the saddle clean and glowing deep brown beside her. It is good for the leather, the sunshine. And she wants her mother to see it when she wakes, smell the leather-oil, appreciate its suppleness. It will do her good, she thinks, to see her old saddle so loved. She is awake suddenly, without Hannah noticing. She simply appears, bent in the doorway and bleary-eyed.

‘Cold meats again ok?’ Hannah asks.

She nods and adds: ‘Sorry. These drugs really knock me around.’

‘The kettle is boiled if you want a cup?’

It isn’t really a question but her mother shakes her head. Hannah stares a moment. Her mother lowers herself slowly to the table and picks up her cutlery.

‘No,’ she says. ‘Water is fine.’

Hannah turns back to the kitchen and fills a jug, tries not to mind. Things will have changed, she tells herself. She brings the water back with ice and two glasses and sits herself down at the table. Once again, she thinks, opposite her mother. Once again, eating in silence, trying not to stare as her mother’s hands tremble and fumble with the heavy cutlery.

She goes out after lunch. Her mother insists on doing the dishes, so she walks out into the clear of the sky and down the paddock to find the black horse. Lizards flee in front of her, tiny dry rustlings in the leaf litter and dead grass. A cockatoo playing sentinel eyes her off from a giant ghost gum at the head of the copse, screeching raucously in warning to his mate. Flies buzz and insects whirr. After the silence of the house, the abundance of life is almost overwhelming. She is smiling by the time she reaches the gate to the bottom paddock. It is wide open, leaning, its head hung at a guilty angle and crooked on its hinge. Beyond, the two horses stand hidden in the shade of an ancient pine, tails swishing occasionally against the flies. Hannah shakes herself and walks forward towards them. They prick their ears as she approaches, snuffle at her pockets for treats. She slips a headstall over the black horse’s nose, buckles it loosely behind his ears. They both wander up after her, Ghost a length behind. The black horse walks so his nose is just touching her back pocket.

Her mother stands out on the veranda to wave as she sets off. Ghost calls from the yard she has left him in, almost comic in his betrayal. She can see her mother smiling. She looks back one more time as she reaches the road at the top of their drive and her mother is still there but bent almost double, one hand braced against the back of a chair, obviously in pain. Hannah stops, the black horse throwing his head up at the suddenness of her hand on his mouth. Silent, still, she watches her mother slowly unfold herself, straighten and breathe a moment before turning and going inside. Hannah purses her lips. Eventually the black horse gets impatient and turns himself to walk out down the road. Hannah simply lets him. Ghost calls again. Hannah swallows and pushes the black horse into a trot, turns her face towards the shade of the forest and goes.

The forest is addictive. The smell of it, the softness of the light, just being there – she can feel it flood through her. A tension she hadn't realised she was holding lets go and releases into the tangle of leaves and trees. You don't forget this, she thinks. It is hardwired into you. Slowly the vision of her mother on the veranda fades and she relaxes into the movement of the horse. He hasn't forgotten the forest. He is keyed up, head raised, carrying his tail. She sits loose-legged and he goes with little hops and steps, spending all his fierceness in blowing and snorting. A soft mouth. She wonders if his fire was always such a bluff. He was always a character, crab-walking and jogging, putting in a buck if he thought he could. He feels stiff with his age, his walk is short and tender-footed, but that attitude is still there. She wonders vaguely how long it has been since he was last ridden.

She takes it gently, lets him set the pace. He swings along at a steady trot, in the end. She can still name all the tracks as they pass: Lookout, Skaer's, Fenceline and the Logger's Track. Barnett's. She turns down a track called Three Tie and cuts back in an easy loop. Just a short ride, her mother's voice tells her deep in the back of her mind. Go easy on the poor man. She lets him walk home and he feels better for it – easier in his stride. Should fix that fence, she thinks, tomorrow. And the gate. It would be good to start giving the horses some hard feed, if she could sort out how. The yards need some sump oil before she should use them too much. The list of chores slowly expands in her mind and the guilt in her feels as warm as the sunshine on her shoulders. Too long, she thinks quietly. She has been away far too long.

They call her sister that night. Hannah clears the table as her mother chats and imagines Sophie in her own kitchen, bright and clean, the phone tucked into her shoulder and her kids somewhere about her legs. She glances at her mother deep in the gloom of the living room and wanders in to turn a light on.

‘Yes, yes,’ her mother is saying. ‘She says she will be here for a few months at least.’

Hannah smiles and turns back to the kitchen to finish with the dishes.

‘Hannah,’ her mother calls, catching her. ‘Sophie wants you.’ She is tired, Hannah realises, as she passes over the phone. Her face is grey.

‘Halfway through dinner,’ Sophie says in her ear. ‘So I’ll have to be quick, sorry. How are you? How’s home?’

‘Good and good,’ Hannah says and pauses. Why didn’t you tell me it was like this? Why didn’t you tell me she was in such a state? She wants to ask, but her mother is just through in the lounge, the door open, sitting on the couch and listening. She swallows. ‘It’s nice,’ she says and stops.

‘What’s up, kiddo?’ Sophie asks, and Hannah can tell she is amused. Her throat tightens.

‘Nothing! It’s nice!’

‘You and Mum been fighting again?’

‘No,’ she says, calm and reasonable, but she is boiling inside. She wants to yell: This is a joke for you, isn’t it? You have been home so much more often than I have – why didn’t you say?

Sophie laughs. ‘Sure, sure. Relax kid, its meant to be a holiday, at least for a while… when do you start?’

‘A few weeks,’ Hannah replies. She can hear a voice in the background, Sophie’s husband. For some reason it makes her wonder if her sister has been drinking. ‘It is good to be here,’ she says. ‘Took the black horse out.’

‘Is Ghosty still looking ok?’

‘Yeah. Still lame though.’

‘I know. He won’t heal,’ she replies. Hannah almost smiles. For a moment Sophie sounded like her sister again.

‘You better go, if you are eating,’ she says, and Sophie agrees. When she hangs up, the room feels empty, quiet. Hannah turns to sit down. Her mother is asleep again, her head lolling against the wing of her upright armchair.

*

I should go back further, perhaps. This is not far enough. Perhaps I should go right back. Unless I go back further, you will never understand, never be able to feel this place. It is something visceral: I can still taste the salt of the water, I feel it calling to my blood. I am a Mulvey, you know. It is my mother's name, she used to say that my father's wasn't worth keeping. So my name is Mulvey. It is an important name on Chesil, there have always been Mulveys on Chesil. There is a property, run by my uncle, and by my grandfather and great-grandfather before him.

It was hot when we first arrived. My ancestor stood on the edge of the Island, sweating in his regimentals, dirty red and gold braid. They were there to test the soil, the story goes. They were commissioned to search for land suitable for farming, doing the dirty work for rich Englishmen hoping to get richer. There is a diary. It is held by the State Library as an important historical object but owned by my uncle. It runs for a year and a half, months and months of sweating, angry men on a leaking ship, months of camping rough and wandering around in the sun. They got to Chesil in March, so it can't have been that hot, in reality, but who ever let reality get in the way of a good story? Or perhaps I am being unkind, perhaps it was hot, or rather they thought it hot. Because, after all, that is what Australia was thought to be. He calls it Hell, my ancestor, in the diary. A place of heat and torture.

I have never seen the diary, not in the flesh. I have seen scanned images of it. I found them over the internet one night not that long ago. It was late afternoon and my apartment here in the city was chilly and dark. The light had gone from the sky outside. I was wrapped up in a blanket against the cold, still wearing my good skirt and blouse from the school day just finished. I have no idea what made me put Chesil in the search-engine. Each page of the diary was browned, fragile, occasionally torn slightly at a corner. It was written in pencil mostly, sometimes ink. It felt furtive, hurried – entries slid sideways off pages or were scrubbed out, erased with dark lines. But even through the computer screen, it smelt like Chesil: soft, clean, with a slightly bitter twist in the back of my mouth. It made me wonder why my mother never mentioned it.

It was strange, that night. I didn't eat, didn't do my work. I sat there huddled at my desk and read each scanned page, slowly and laboriously wading through the cramped handwriting and the archaic words. It was three in the morning when I finished. And the next morning I was exhausted but strangely exhilarated as well. It is hard to explain, but it was something I needed to read. I have researched it since. Read obscure histories

and cultural commentaries which document the diary, talk of its importance. They are all ‘high literature’, these books. Scholarly, full of pomp and ceremony. None of the importance they mention has anything to do with what is *really* important about Chesil. None of them would ever have gone there. But it has helped me understand. Not so much what happened, but why Chesil is there at least. It made me sad for my mother, as well. I still wonder if she ever knew about the diary. She would have appreciated, I think, the reason I needed it. Or maybe this is just wishful thinking, maybe it was all just wishful thinking, maybe none of it meant anything and I am being silly. But I am sitting in the same place now and it is nothing like as powerful as that night was. So yes, I think my mother would have understood.

I still look at it from time to time. In some gentle way, reading that diary makes me want to go back. Or want to be there again, which is different. I know I can’t. There is nothing to gain in going back. I think this is why I am writing.

*

The pairs chatter as they work their ways down the vines. The heads and the hats bob gently in time with the plunk of grapes in the buckets. Mary's hands are sticky and stained with the juice, she can feel her fingers wrinkling as though she has sat too long in the bath. The world is warm, filled with the clear green light of the leaves, and fresh – it smells like the grapes. Picnic is opposite her, the other side of the row. They work like that, either side of the giant frames, moving and chattering automatically, and the leaves brush and rustle beneath their hands. Bucket after bucket fills at her feet and Mary lumps them across to the tractor row. She pauses to stretch her arms in an arch above her head. Picnic grins at her through the vine.

'What, you stuffed already?'

They have been there since 8am.

'Not on your life.'

'Yeah, right. Whatever.'

Mary grabs a couple of buckets, splits them and tosses one through.

'Whatever.'

They are the youngest by far, the only ones still school-age. It is Mary's farm. They know all the pickers, the crew meets and picks out the Island the end of every summer. The sun is warm and the sweat begins to bead across Mary's lower back. Her eyes never leave the grapes, green in the green, search, put a hand to them and cut with the snips. Clack and plunk, and the grapes in the bucket pile up. Frame by frame they work this way, leap-frogging the pairs in front, moving down. The adults gossip. It is not a big crop. The tractor grumbles up the next row, Nugget shirtless behind, emptying bucket after bucket into the bin.

At the end of each row, there is a pause. People straighten up and stretch, backs creaking. Mary's father walks among them, sends them back down here or there, sorts the groups. They wander off again, the pickers calling for buckets.

'Ten!'

'Twelve!'

'Forty-seven, eleven, eighty-two,' Picnic mutters, and Mary grins. 'You comin' to Ben's this weekend? Thomas is,' he says. The four of them make up their year level. Mary peers at him, surprised.

'What's happening?'

'We're goin' down the beach.'

'Prolly not. He never asked me.'

Picnic grunts. 'So?'

‘So he never asked me!’

‘Since when do you wait for an invitation?’

Mary shrugs. ‘Since he didn’t ask me.’

Picnic eyes her curiously, tries to fit the squared shoulders with the quiet girl he knows from school.

‘Why’s it matter?’ he asks.

‘Dunno,’ she says. ‘Just does.’

He snorts. ‘You chicken?’

Mary rolls her eyes and throws a bunch of grapes through the wires at him.

‘Oi!’ It is her father’s voice. ‘None a’that, you little shits! In the bucket, please.’

Mary shrinks slightly under his shadow. He cuffs her gently on the back of her head and she shrugs, ducks. He snorts and moves on down the row, wiping his forehead with a sleeve, nodding and gesturing to the pickers as he goes. Mary watches him and rolls her eyes.

It’s her mother who calls smoke-oh. Mary can see her father shoot her mother a look, but her mother just shakes her head. The pickers stretch with relief and peel the sticky cotton gloves from their stained hands. Mary’s are yellow-brown with the juice, she sniffs at them delicately. Chardonnay, she smells of chardonnay. They hide in the shade of the gum trees by the gate, huddle in around the little gathering of cars and drink milky tea from thermoses. A blue haze of cigarette smoke rises gently up and curls in the gum leaves. Mary leans back in the fold-out picnic chair her mother has brought down and watches Picnic rummage for food through the back of his mother’s beat-up station wagon. Her father chugs in on the tractor and swipes a glance at her on the way past, eyes narrow. The back-hoe trundles out to lift the filled bin from the trailer in an awkward ballet of machinery. Mary’s mother appears around the side of the car and tosses her a piece of Glad-Wrapped hedgehog and a banana. Mary drags tepid cordial from a drink bottle and closes her eyes. The light filters through to leave dappled sunspots on her vision. She could sleep here, she thinks. The world is warm and light and happy with the satisfaction of a gentle weariness.

She does sleep later, in the warmth of a bath, soaking the grime and stickiness from her body. The water leaves a mottled reflection on the pine walls and ceiling, a flickering brightness, tiny lines of light reminding her of the sun through the leaves. Her dream is brief and vivid, she is running after the boys, chasing them, and Thomas especially is always in her view. She is never moving, just running on the spot, and still she never loses them, she is always just behind. When she wakes up, the water is cold and her skin wrinkled. She wonders why she can’t stop thinking about Thomas.

The third day in the vines and Mary is tired of it already: the work, the grape-smut, the inane gossip and the heat of the sun on her neck. Even Picnic seems weary. She glances at him through the vine and wonders if he ever gets sick of it all.

'It's tonight,' he says suddenly.

Mary pauses and drags her mind sluggishly through the conversations of the past two days.

'The beach?'

'Yep. We're gonna light a bonfire, he reckons.'

'You meeting at Ben's place?'

'Yeah. You gonna come? I tol' em you would.'

Mary stiffens. Something runs white-hot through her with each breath and suddenly she is sweating in an entirely different way. He glances at her through the leaves, a tight little grin playing across his face.

'Tommo will be there,' he says.

She says nothing but blushes. Her mind flicks back to her dream. Running, running, never catching. 'I dunno. Maybe.'

'Maybe? C'mon, just come.'

'I dunno,' she says, but the reluctance is slowly and surely bleeding out of her voice. Perhaps, she is thinking, perhaps I could. Picnic smiles at her and they go back to picking in silence.

She sneaks out in the end. It makes it more exciting. The summer evening means it isn't dark but violet with dusk, an electric sort of halfway filled with shadows. She follows her nose down into the village, and it is only when she is down there that she realises she has no idea which house is Ben's. Picnic's, she knows, is back behind the pub. A dog barks. The shadows spill across the street, and she tiptoes through them. The pub is transformed, by night. The daytime greasiness is hidden behind loud voices and the warm glowing light from the windows. It spills in a slick of yellow across the cracked pavement and out onto the bitumen. His house is somewhere back there, somewhere down the road that meanders away from the corner. She stands at the signpost. The bitumen gives out after a hundred metres and a line of grass separates two worn ruts. The houses down there crouch back in their gardens, small and squat, lines of light showing through drawn curtains. Nothing moves. A TV is turned on in the pub and Mary jumps.

'Picnic?' she whispers, and feels foolish. Why would he answer? She is turning to leave when she sees him creeping around the side of a dark house. He sees her and smiles, and the relief that washes through her makes her realise how tightly she has

been holding herself, standing crouched there like an animal beneath the sign. She straightens, squares her shoulders.

‘I didn’t think ya’d come,’ he calls out.

‘I didn’t know where his house is.’

‘What?’ He stops beside her.

‘Ben’s house.

‘Oh. It’s down near the beach.’

Mary blinks. It’s obvious now he says it. Of course Ben lives near the beach. Picnic smiles and leads the way back out into the road. The pub door swings open and one of the pickers comes lurching out. He doesn’t see them but goes stumbling around the corner to urinate against the wall. Mary stops and stares but Picnic walks on, flicking a glance back as he goes. She has to run to catch up.

The boys are waiting when they get there. Ben has a backpack slung over one shoulder. They set off down the track straight away, talking and laughing. Mary trails behind, feeling out of place. A watery echo of her dream flashes into her mind, Thomas’s back ahead of her shakes with laughter and she can’t hear the joke. She stumbles over a tree root and he turns to her, the laughter still on his face. Smile, she tells herself, smile, and so she does. It feels foreign, stiff. She feels completely out of place. She jogs a few steps to catch up.

‘You ok?’ he asks, and she gapes at him open-mouthed.

‘Yeah,’ she says, breathless, and he turns back to the boys.

‘C’mon,’ Ben shouts back at them. He swings around and shines a torch into their faces. ‘We haven’t got all night, slackers!’

The purple of the dusk fades slowly into dark. Mary follows the track of the dunes by the yellow stripe on Thomas’s t-shirt and the glow of the sand.

The fire is piled up high and shoots bursts of orange and white sparks into the black. Mary sits cross-legged and watches the flames change colour with the salt on the wood, blue and purple and white, her cheeks pink and hot. She wants to rotate, warm her back and her legs, but the boys are there and she feels silly. So she sits cross-legged and says nothing, and Picnic looks across at her and winks. She is sitting next to Thomas. Ben is laughing and talking too loudly. Mary swaps her legs and sighs gently. Thomas looks at her and looks away again quickly when their eyes meet. Tension bubbles somewhere in her stomach and she wishes she were brave enough to touch his hand. Ben stretches, pokes at the fire.

‘We should do something,’ he mutters. Thomas eyes him from across the fire.

‘Like what?’

‘I dunno! Just something! Get drunk or something.’

‘Who would you pinch it from?’ Picnic asks, a lopsided sort of grin on his face. Mary stares at them across the fire.

‘I reckon Dad’d give it to me.’

Thomas laughs. ‘Yeah right. He’d belt you for asking. Mine would.’

Mary giggles and Picnic grins.

‘Mum’s got a box of it out the back. Whiskey. Reckon I could pinch some pretty easily without her noticing,’ he says.

Ben snorts. ‘Whatever. We just need to do something, you know?’

‘So?’

‘So get a bottle,’ Thomas says, almost too loudly. He turns to Mary, stares at her a moment. She wonders what it means, stares back and swallows. She can see Picnic’s teeth glowing at her in the fire-light.

‘You picking Monday?’ she asks him, just to say something. It falls limply across the space between them and she feels heat creeping in a flush up her neck.

‘Yeah,’ he says, after a moment, one eyebrow raised. ‘’Course.’ He turns to Ben. ‘So when are we gonna do this?’

She looks away again and says nothing for the rest of the night but stares into the fire, into the dark, up into the sparks in between, anything not to feel useless.

When she gets home, the house is dark. She climbs the stairs to her bedroom without really worrying, cold and stiff and tired. The beach and the fire were strangely anti-climactic after sneaking out. She feels old, ancient, alone in the empty house; except it isn’t empty, her parents are there in their bed, not worried about her in the slightest. She isn’t sure why this bothers her. The sheets on her bed feel clammy and for some reason it is her parents’ fault. It is late. She falls asleep curled tight in the foetal position, shivering with cold and disappointment. The shape of Thomas’s hand follows her into her dreams.

*

Her name is not Mary, of course. I am not going to tell you her real name. You could probably work it out, if you went trawling the databases and newspaper archives. We were famous for a little while. But you won't. It wouldn't help you, anyway, even if you did. That sort of reality does nothing to tell you what it was really like, being there. I have read most of those articles, in the archives. They mention me, occasionally – but when I read them, it doesn't feel like something that happened to me. They are good at distance, those newspaper writers, good at facts and abstract descriptions. Not that they get all the facts right. I'm not even sure that would be possible.

I will make you a promise: I might not tell you everything but I will try my best to show you what it was like. You need that, if you are going to understand. You need to be able to feel it. Chesil isn't like here, in the city, where everything is so neat and ordered. Grass is hemmed in by concrete, the world kept tight and controlled like a dog on a lead. People go running with their dogs here, if they have one – I still can't get used to that. They wear lycra and headphones, and run along specially designed paths. There is one woman near me who has a special harness which attaches her dogs to her waist and leaves her hands free. There were dogs everywhere on Chesil but you never saw them on leads. They exercised themselves and came home at night for dinner. Or they were like my mother's dogs, with a job to do and never far from her side.

There are lots of things like that, little differences. And things that happened: everyday things like the ferry coming in each week with the mail; or big things like the chestnut, Mulvey's, my uncle's, the one that died. That wouldn't happen in the city, nothing like that. I was thirteen, then. Twelve or thirteen. It was just before my birthday, I know. It was raining. Not many of my memories have rain in them. But that day the rain was incessant, the water running in streams and gouging tiny canyons down the limestone of the road.

We stood waiting at the corner of the forest road for the men. The chestnut was missing. My mother was on the black horse, Sophie on Ghost and I on my little bay. My mother was fiddling with the black's mane, staring down at his neck in silence. He was beautiful then, fine boned and slender, true thoroughbred. The stock saddle looked out of place on his back. Sophie's horse was fidgeting, swinging his rump around with each new squall, occasionally lifting a heavy foreleg to paw delicately at the air, a ballerina en pointe. It had been raining for three days. The valley was flooding, the water the

colour of iron, the horizon so closed in that the mainland was hidden in cloud. We were waiting for Darcy.

He was young, the chestnut. Mulvey had bought him for breeding. Sophie and I snuck over, when he arrived. We hid in the woolshed and watched them unload him. Hot and sleek and chrome-coated, we fell in love with him. Our mother didn't know. Watching him then, I remember thinking about Mulvey, his fancy float and all his money. Our mother said he was the reason they called it Snob Hill.

'A week,' my mother said, when she first heard he was missing. 'We'll give it a week.'

'Horse like that?' Sophie had snorted. 'Four days at best.'

Standing there at the corner with the rain, it had been four days. My mother just sat there, fiddling and staring at the black horse, the water eating away at the limestone beneath her feet. The vertigo of the water made me feel a little sick.

We heard them before we saw them. They were trotting, coming up the valley road, hooves ringing hard and hollow in the wet. Their horses were hot, foam laced along their reins and their sides in and out like bellows. Darcy was riding a woolly youngster with a roman nose, sitting loose and easy in the saddle. Mulvey was wearing R.M.'s.

'Edward,' my mother said, and nodded.

'Jane,' Mulvey replied. His mouth was a tight line.

'G'day kiddliwinks,' Darcy said to us and we grinned back. He pulled a hip flask from his belt and unscrewed it. 'Lovely weather for it, eh?'

'Beaut,' my sister replied, and our mother glared at her.

'We found him,' Mulvey said.

'Bastard led us on a hell of a chase,' Darcy added.

'For God's sake, Darcy,' my mother said, her voice low and dangerous. 'Where?'

'He's down near the old woolwash, somewhere,' Mulvey said, turning his horse. Our mother looked across at us and then at Darcy swigging from his flask.

'You girls cut across here,' she said. 'Come down and meet us from the top, stop him heading bush again.' Sophie frowned but our mother raised an eyebrow and neither of us argued. 'Ride safe,' she said, but it was more a command than anything, and they turned and were gone.

Sophie and I moved off at a trot. The road was slippery, Sophie's grey was pigrooting and pulling, reefing at her hands with his mouth open. My little bay was stiff and unwilling, and I had to swivel a hand around and slap him on the bum before he would

canter. He went like a skater on glass. Sophie laughed at me being so slow.

'C'mon Han, hustle him along!' she called, and then laughed as her horse put in a buck, his tail flagged. 'Ha! Check Ghosty-boy!'

Her voiced was high-pitched, excited. She was enjoying this, I realised. The rain closed in again, a heavy grey sheet, stinging on my face.

'We'll take Logger's Track,' Sophie said, when I caught her. I smiled. It wasn't exactly a short cut but it led towards the woolwash and it was our favourite. The rain came in sideways as we turned down it. Even from the top I could hear the frogs, booming and singing in the downpour. They were deafening as we made it down. We loved that track: for the bush, close on each side; for the creek at the bottom with its gravel ford; for the steep drop down into it, and the nice long hill up the other side. It ran straight up, that track. From the peak you could see down as far as the village. It was slippery and dangerous, that day. The horses had to slither their way down, puffing and snorting the rain from their nostrils. I braced myself white knuckled against the pommel and let my little bay pick his own way. He slid on his hocks, his front hooves paddling desperately for purchase as he went. And then we were down and jogging through the hoarse foam of the creek roaring its way over the ford. The horses were dancing, they knew what was coming.

'One,' Sophie said.

'Two,' I replied, trying not to laugh.

'Three!' We shouted together, hurling the horses forward. My little bay flew, his legs like pistons, almost on the spot as he clawed and churned up the hill. Sophie was in front. She always won, her grey horse with his funny gallop had a longer reach than my little bay. It was a mad rush of sweat and rain and straining muscles. We clung to their manes and let them drag us up, reins flapping and us laughing so hard we were almost crying. They stopped at the top of their own accord and Sophie walked forward to look out over the bay.

'You can't see anything,' she called. 'Too much cloud!' I didn't answer but turned back to look down over the gully. And there beneath us was the chestnut, a strange lump bright and wet down in the bottom. He wasn't moving. He was sprawled at an odd angle, legs tangled to one side, dead still.

They were still searching when we finally met them. The rain had thinned out, almost stopped. Sophie just looked at our mother and shook her head. It was enough. I was crying. Mulvey's face went grey.

'You kids sure it's him?' he asked. We didn't bother to answer. My mother rode up alongside me and rested her hand on the back of my neck, her face blank.

'Shit.' Mulvey said, and then screamed it, so it echoed out through the dripping

branches and black trunks. 'FUUUUCK!' There was a moment of silence. And then the clouds broke, and everywhere water picked up the silver light. I imagined the gully, the chestnut shining and sodden, unmoving, caught red-gold in the weak yellow beams peering down through the trees. I saw birds emerging, feathers wet, looking sideways at the strange object landed in their midst and whistling alarms. My mother stared off into the distance, her hand still wet ballast on my neck, and sighed. Not with pity, but irritation. And then, suddenly and furiously, I hated them, I hated them all: Mulvey for losing the horse, Darcy for chasing it, Sophie for taking me there and my mother for not caring. My father for not being there. It burnt in me, built up, made my lips quiver and my cheeks hot. Darcy for drinking. Sophie for loving him and my mother for hating him. Mulvey for dismissing us when we were only trying to help. The wet, and the cold, and the stiff weight of my oilskin. Being poor. Depending on Darcy's help. And my mother, the most, for not loving me, not ever caring, not really being there at all. Perhaps she felt me tense, because she looked down at me and took her hand off my neck. In all the noise of the men shouting and the rage in my head I still heard her whisper. She turned her horse and I stared after her. I looked at Sophie and without a word we followed. Her words rang through me as we cantered home. They took up the three-beat of my horse's stride, echoed out with the ringing of the others' hooves. *To be free*. Everything was calling it. *To be free, to be free, to be free, to be free.* I didn't know what to think.

It didn't rain again, that afternoon. The sky cleared and opened to a fragile, egg-shell blue. My little bay horse rolled when we let them out and all three of us leant on the gate to watch. I can remember that moment, so clearly. It is one of my strongest memories.

*

Hannah stares around. The demountable is small and dank, smells of salt and mice and teenage boys. It feels half-naked without its term time debris of posters and school bags. A row of hooks hang empty along one wall, marked by name cards. She wanders over, runs her fingers over one. James has been crossed out and replaced with 'Picnic' in crooked block letters.

'They're in age group,' the woman behind her says. Hannah turns.

'Sorry?'

'The bag hooks. They are grouped by year level.'

Hannah looks again. There are four distinct clusters along the wall.

'Right,' she says, and hopes the faintness doesn't come through in her voice.

'And at your last school?' The woman asks. 'Was it multiple age groups there as well?'

Hannah smiles, thinking of the spacious classrooms and the luxurious, private-school facilities.

'No,' she replies. 'It was quite small groups there. Different situation, though.'

'Yes, of course,' the woman says and smiles back at her. 'We are a bit unique here.'

Hannah takes a final look around the classroom, peers out the dirty windows and across the oval to the dunes and the sea.

'Quite unique, I'd think,' she says, and turns back to the door to leave.

'Well,' the woman says, as they walk back out towards the car park. 'I think that's the lot. We'll open next week for a curriculum meeting on the Wednesday and then school starts the Monday after. If you can make it through this term, we will reorganise next year. You'll have years six to nine. We used to be prep to twelve but we haven't had any senior school students for years. They all either drop out or head over to the mainland at some stage around year nine or ten.'

'Yes,' Hannah replies, 'I know.'

'Of course,' the woman says, looking across at her with a smile. 'I keep forgetting you are one of ours!'

Hannah laughs. 'It's been a while. The place has changed a bit.'

They reach their cars. The woman hands Hannah a sheaf of papers.

'I've printed out the curriculum from last year for you,' she says. 'I'll see you Wednesday.'

Hannah nods.

'See you,' she says, and the woman climbs into her car and drives off. Hannah pauses a moment, her keys loose in her hand. It is strange, being back here. It is easier to

remember being a child than imagine herself the teacher. Under the new paint, despite the new building, the place is the same. It made her smile to see the old school-house still there as an admin building. She remembers the trees, too. Casuarinas and shiny leaf bushes. The straggly gum and the yonnie trees, and the itchy powder tree in the front garden. They used to have battles with the itchy powder tree. Hannah sighs and opens the car. Home, she tells herself, and tries to stop from looking in the rear-view mirror as she drives away.

She can remember the trip over to the mainland to look at the local high school. They went for an orientation day, her mother and her, over on the ferry. Sophie had already gone by that stage – had been sent away to board in the city. It seemed a banishment, being made to leave. The local school was a public school, sprawling and dirty, a maze of buildings swimming in concrete. They were shown around by a co-ordinator, a fat man with grey hair and a scraggly beard, who laughed inordinately at everything her mother said. *Very bright girl, your daughter,* he said as they arrived, and *happy to have her*. She can remember looking at him wondering if he knew anything about her at all or if he just said that to everyone. The classrooms all looked the same. The playground was asphalt and there was graffiti on the walls. The lockers were all together in a giant tin shed, covered in stickers and scrawls of white-out, grey lumps of gum. A janitor stood at the end of one row, scrubbing wearily at a slogan written in permanent marker. It smelt of cigarettes and hospital-grade disinfectant.

They were invited to sit-in on classes. Her mother sat at the back of six or seven different class-rooms as Hannah and a group of strangers all made heat-packs from corduroy cut-offs in a sewing class, read Shakespeare aloud in awkward monotone for English. It was boring, pointless, ridiculous. Her mother stared out the windows with a permanent look of distaste. The day dragged on until finally they were allowed to leave. They walked back to the ferry. The wind felt cool and clean. On the way home her mother had started talking low and urgent about the necessity of a good school and university, the fun of a boarding house. *It isn't worth it*, she had said. *Chesil is beautiful, but it isn't worth your life*. Hannah began to wonder if the whole day had been meant as a lesson. Chesil isn't beautiful, she had wanted to reply. It's just home. She can remember crying that night. Chewing gum from one of the classrooms had stuck to her dress.

Darcy's ute is in the drive when she gets home. She climbs out of the car and gathers up her handbag, her sheaf of papers. She is on the point of trying to juggle them awkwardly in one hand when she remembers that locking the car won't be necessary.

She smiles to herself and climbs the front steps slowly. Darcy is sitting at the little kitchen table, a cup of tea in hand. Her mother is propped against the bench.

‘How’d you go then?’ Darcy asks, grinning.

‘All set,’ she says.

‘Good girl!’ he says, and swings his feet down from the spare chair. Hannah wonders if she imagines her mother’s wince.

‘Just a few months?’ her mother asks.

‘Well, the semester for a start,’ Hannah answers slowly. ‘Probably a year at least though.’

Her mother stays silent, her lips tight.

‘What? Trying to get rid of me already, are you?’ Hannah asks, jokingly.

‘No,’ her mother says, distractedly. ‘No, of course not. Just wondering.’

‘Yeah, yeah,’ Darcy laughs, and stands. ‘I’ll be off,’ he says. ‘Just wanted to hear how you went.’ Her mother shows him to the door, stands sentinel as he trundles his way down the steps. Hannah watches them from the kitchen. Again, her mother’s voice on the ferry reaches up in her memory. *Not worth your life,* she says. Hannah frowns and turns away.

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Mary can see her from the dunes. The woman stands and stares around the tiny classroom, says something to whoever is there with her. The new teacher, she thinks. The village has been talking about her. A Mulvey, the daughter of the old woman on the hill. Mary squints to see through the classroom windows. She looks ok, she thinks. She looks nice. The woman disappears into the shadows by the door and Mary stands, walks back down the dune to join the boys on the beach.

The three of them are talking together quietly as she walks across the sand. They shut up as she comes to them. Picnic stares out to sea and Ben scuffs the sand with one foot. Thomas looks square at her and smiles.

'What's she look like?' he asks.

'Alright,' she says.

They turn down the beach towards the village and start walking. Thomas walks beside her, she can hear Picnic and Ben muttering again behind them.

'What's going on?' she asks quietly.

'Nothing,' he says. 'Just that tonight we're gonna…'

Ben whoops suddenly and goes sprinting past them to swoop on a plastic buoy that has washed up on the beach.

'What?' Mary calls, but all three boys are running now. 'What are you doing?'

Picnic reaches the buoy first and scoops it up. He doubles back, the buoy held out in front of him like a football, and flirts it in front of Thomas. Ben laughs and launches himself into a tackle, dragging Picnic down. The buoy scuttles free and Thomas grabs it and sprints off down the beach, ducking and weaving. Picnic is shouting and Ben is careening after him arms stretched, but Thomas flicks a glance back and sidesteps, steadies and kicks it. The buoy goes sailing up, hits the wind and folds back down onto the sand. Thomas runs a loop in false celebration, crowing.

'Centimetre perfect,' Picnic yells.

Mary trails behind, watches as Ben tackles Thomas and Picnic piles on. She can't help but laugh. They are up again before she gets there, looking back at her every now and again, but they don't wait for her. She makes herself just walk. They turn off down to the village when they reach the path. By the time Mary gets to the road, only Thomas is waiting, dancing up and down on the spot.

'Come tonight,' he says, in a hurry. 'Down to Picnic's.'

She hesitates a moment and nods. He grins.

'See ya,' he says and sprints away down the road after the other two. Mary crosses the road and turns up the paddock.

'See ya!' she calls, but it is taken by the wind.

The vines lead in straight corridors up towards her home. She walks through them with her head down, a sharp eye for snakes, letting them guide her home. She pauses when she reaches her driveway and looks back across the vines to the road and the dunes beyond. She stares for a moment, looking for the boys, but they are gone.

'Mary?' her mother calls. She is standing on the veranda with her eyes shaded, peering short-sighted down the driveway towards her. Mary sighs and turns to walk up. 'Your father is in,' her mother says once she is in easy ear-shot. 'Where have you been?'

'Just down the beach. The new teacher is here.'

'What's she look like?'

'Yeah, ok.'

Her mother marches in to the kitchen. 'I need your help in here,' she says.

'Mmm,' Mary says, wandering upstairs. 'Coming.'

Dinner is uncomfortable, the three of them around the dining room table, the television flickering mute from the lounge. It is her mother who has them in the good room. Once a week, a nice dinner. Mary's father is propped up by one elbow, leaning over his plate, fork in his free hand. He hasn't showered, yet. Mary can tell he would rather be on the couch, in front of the TV.

'Good day today?' her mother asks him. He grunts. 'Don't forget we have church tomorrow,' she adds. Mary looks up.

'Do we have to?'

'Yes!' her mother says.

'I've got to move the cattle tomorrow,' her father says. Her mother just sighs. Mary looks between them and crosses her fingers under the table.

'Mum…' she starts, 'can I go down to Picnic's tonight?'

Her parents exchange a glance across the table, the room goes quiet.

'No,' her father says, brusque.

'Not with church in the morning,' her mother adds. 'You'll yawn all through the service.'

'No,' her father repeats.

They eat in silence, after that. Mary cleans her plate, mops up gravy with a piece of Yorkshire pudding. Underneath the table her legs fizz and jiggle.

Her father leaves them to clear up. They hear the TV burst into voice again as soon as they begin running the water for the dishes. It is warm in the kitchen, calm. Mary washes and her mother dries.

'Sarah at the store tells me that your new teacher has come in from one of the fancy city schools,' she says. Mary doesn't reply, but lets her keep chattering on. 'She's that

old Mulvey woman's daughter, you know – the one up on the hill, Mr. Mulvey's sister. That makes your teacher his niece. Heard they aren't close, though. Mrs. Keillor used to babysit for them, she was saying they didn't get on at all.' Mary drops the cutlery to crash and clatter into the soapy water. 'Careful!' her mother says.

'Sorry,' Mary murmurs.

'You splashed me!'

'She looked nice enough, the new teacher.'

'Sarah said she was very polite. God knows how that old woman was doing without her here.'

'Is Dad going to work for Mr. Mulvey again this year?'

'I expect so.'

They fall quiet. The TV floats through as a muffled buzz from the lounge. An audience, laughing, applauding. Mary washes the final pan and lets the water out.

She goes to bed early. She climbs in still fully dressed, pulls the covers right up over her so her mother won't see. When she hears her parents settle down, she slinks out and creeps downstairs, blinking to let her eyes adjust. She takes a jacket off the peg in the front hall, but sneaks back through towards the kitchen to go out the back. A light flicks on. She freezes. From where she is standing she can see her father slouch through into the kitchen and sit himself at the table. He is a silhouette, back to her. Mary can feel her throat constrict, the back of her neck tingle with adrenaline. Quiet as anything she slinks backwards and hangs up the coat. Almost without breathing, she tip-toes past and makes her way back upstairs to her bedroom. She sits on her bed and hugs her knees to her chest, rocking slightly, trying not to breathe too loudly. Slowly, she calms down. Only then the tears come.

*

It is late. Walking down, Thomas could see the lights across the village were slowly going out. There won't be any left, by now. The wind in the dunes twists the smell of the sea until it is all around them, oppressive, inescapable. It is heavy with salt and fermenting seaweed and the crump and hush of the waves. The bottle of whiskey is half-empty and they feel warm and loud and happy and tingling and drunk. This is the point, Thomas thinks, where it is still ok, where life is good, and the thought spins with the rest of him. They have done this before. He knows vaguely in the sober part of his mind that this point won't last.

Ben stands up, swaying gently in time with the wind and the grass.

'I would like,' he says, and Thomas sits up straight, expecting, God knows why, a toast.

'I would like,' he says again, 'I would like… to get off this shit-heap.' He sits down. It is a moment before they all erupt into laughter. When it stops, when the noise is gone, the night suddenly feels empty. The glow of Picnic's cigarette dances in circles in Thomas' vision.

'I'm good,' Picnic says, suddenly. 'What's wrong with it here?'

'It's alright for you,' Ben mutters darkly. 'You've got a lay! You're fucking Mary!'

Picnic grins and Thomas snorts.

'So what if I do?' he says, and picks up the cigarette packet and twists it over and over.

'Bum a smoke?'

Thomas lies back and closes his eyes. The dunes turn silently beneath him. There is the snick of the lighter and when he looks up there are two glowing spots dancing in his vision. He tries to imagine Mary like that, Mary naked, Mary… he isn't really sure, but it feels warm somewhere below the alcohol in his stomach.

'Tommo?'

'What?'

'You want outta here?'

There is a pause. His voice is quiet.

'Yeah. Yeah, I want outta here.'

When the whisky floats him away, he is still imagining Mary there, beside him, and in his dream they are sneaking off together in the night.

He has a hangover the next morning. It is crusted around his lips and smells of vomit. He doesn't remember vomiting, but he might have. He doesn't remember coming home

either, but he is twisted in a sleeping bag on Picnic's floor. The whiskey bottle has disappeared. He rolls over onto his back. Ben is curled into the foetal position on the couch, clutching at his stomach. The room spins. Thomas swallows carefully. It is very hot. The light blinks in his eyes and beads sweat across his back, down his legs. He lurches up and sheds the sleeping bag like a skin. He makes it to the toilet only just in time.

When he emerges, Ben is awake. He is shuffling around, pulling clothes on.

'Picnic?' Thomas croaks.

'No idea,' says Ben, pulling a jumper over his head. Thomas feels the heat prickle down his neck and wonders how he can. He wipes his face on his t-shirt. Thomas wanders through to Picnic's bedroom. He is sprawled on his back, arms around his face, the doona pulled up to his chin. Ben appears beside him, wielding a black texta and grinning wickedly. They are halfway through the penis before Picnic wakes, splutters and roars them out.

It is early, they realise, when they get outside. The houses along the street are still quiet. The pounding in Thomas's head matches the sound of the surf. Ben still seems drunk.

'Swim?' he asks. Thomas shrugs and they wander down past the pub and into the dunes. They find the whiskey bottle half way down the beach. There is still about a third left, golden-brown beneath the sticky grains of sand.

'Hair of the dog?' Ben asks, unscrewing the top. He waves it invitingly under Thomas's nose. The very smell is enough to make his stomach roll again. He reels away and Ben laughs, screws the top back on.

'We better find somewhere to hide it,' he says. Thomas just grunts.

Picnic appears at the crest of the dunes as they start to strip off. The cooee is caught by the wind and pulled backwards away from them, his hands cupped round his mouth are the only thing that tells them he is yelling. They walk down towards the water. The waves are grey-brown and churning, the foam the colour of butter. When they splash in, the shock of it catches Thomas unawares, holds him, braces him, shakes his head clear. Picnic runs down to meet them whooping and yelling like a child, and then the whole world disappears in beautiful silence as together they plunge under the rolling swell of the unbroken wave. Thomas emerges, stands, shakes himself. Ben appears next to him. Picnic lies floating on his back. None of them say anything, but let the lull drift around them and wait for the next set to come in.

It is midday by the time Thomas gets home. His mother watches him as he rides his bike up the drive.

'About time,' she says as he reaches the house. He hovers in front of her without replying and she sighs. 'Go down and get your dad, will you?' she asks. 'Lunch won't be far off.'

He doesn't argue, he can tell she is angry. He dumps his bike and turns away towards the paddock. He stops for a moment at the fence-line and stares back out across the bay. The spread of bright blue is broken only by the blur of the mainland on the horizon. They can't see the beach from their place, they are too far up the hill, but the blue is always there. It sparkles up at him, hard somehow and bright. He remembers their conversation the night before, and his dream.

'Cooeee!' his father calls, waving. He turns along the fence and down into the vines. The light in the rows is cool and green with the afternoon sun.

'So,' his father says as he reaches him. 'You've decided to grace us with your presence, hey?'

'Just been down at Picnic's,' he says. He wants to grin. If his father was angry he would have sworn by now. 'Mum said to say lunch'll be soon,' he adds. His father straightens, drops the bucket, peels the gloves sticky from his hands and wraps them around his snips.

'Right,' he says. 'I'm guessing you'll be down there again tonight then?'

'If I'm allowed,' Thomas says carefully.

'Don't see why not,' his father replies, and leads the way back up along the row to the fence-line and out through the open paddock to the house.

His mother only works out Thomas is going again when she finds him in his room after lunch. He is stuffing a jumper and a packet of matches into a backpack, with a rolled-up towel, some newspaper and firelighters.

'Don't think I don't know what you are doing down there,' she says quietly from the door way. Thomas looks up and she frowns. He peels his singlet gingerly from the sunburn on his back and pulls a t-shirt on.

'Hang on,' his mother says, and disappears for a moment. He is left standing half-in, half-out of his shirt, but he waits. She reappears with a bottle of aloe and taps him on the back. He bends forward and pulls the t-shirt off again and her hands patter softly across his shoulders.

'For God's sake, don't let your father find out,' she says gently as she works. 'He'd flay you alive. And be careful, please.' She steps back and he straightens, surprised. 'Don't drink too, too much. I'm letting you do this, ok? But be careful.'

He can hear the note of pleading in her voice and can tell how much she hates this.

This is just another way, he realises, a different way of controlling him. She is making it her decision, not his. His throat tightens and he doesn't say anything, doesn't move, doesn't turn. Why? He thinks. Why doesn't she just forbid him? She smiles and pats him on the cheek, turns and leaves him. He grabs the bag and follows her down the hallway to the kitchen. His mother goes through into the lounge room and Thomas waits a moment to rummage around in the bottom of the larder, looking for alcohol. There is a bottle of port dusty and greasy at the back and he draws it out, hides it in the bag with a packet of chips.

'See ya,' he calls, heading out the back door. Their voices come back mingled with the sound of the television.

He can hear Picnic screaming before he gets there, walking down past the pub. The noise is insistent, high-pitched, rising riotously above the lazy afternoon sounds of people in the street, the low whining of a dog.

'C'mon,' Picnic is screaming. 'Get there, faggot!'

It takes Thomas a moment to work out it is the television screaming back. There is the roar of a crowd in the background, he is watching the football. Thomas goes round the back to the open lounge, sticks his head in the door.

'S'up?' Picnic grins from the armchair. The curtains are drawn and he is already slurring. The whiskey bottle lays empty at his feet. He picks up the remote and mutes the screen.

'We winning?' Thomas asks. He flops down on the couch and drags the bottle of port from his backpack. Picnic laughs.

'What the fuck is that?' He lumbers off into the kitchen and reappears with a new bottle of whiskey. 'The old girl's got three cases out there,' he laughs. 'Don't think grog's an issue.'

They wait till dark before they go. Picnic bangs around in the shed at the back of his garden and comes back with the empty whiskey bottle half-filled with petrol. They wander down through the back streets towards the beach and knock on Ben's bedroom window. He is lying face down on his bed, a lamp on, just lying there. He looks up when they knock. They see him strain his eyes out into the night and then grin when he recognises them. He laughs outright when Picnic lofts the whiskey bottle. Thomas makes to go around the front of the house and Ben waves at him frantically. He opens the window as wide as it will go.

Thomas is nervous as they walk. Excited, yes, but nervous too. They are going up to the bridge and he is not entirely sure this is a good idea. It is trespassing, up there. The

wash of the waves beside him sways a gentle rhythm into their steps. The night is clear and the stars bright enough to see by, but still his body is tight with anticipation. He can't back out now.

'What did your old woman say?' he asks Picnic as they walk. Picnic glances at him with something like surprise.

'She's not in. She's picking on the mainland,' he says. 'On a week, off a week.'

Thomas swallows and says nothing. Ben looks at him with a twisted expression it takes Thomas a moment to recognise as envy. Eventually the bridge looms up out of the gloom in front of them. It is taller than he expected, up close. It feels like the ruins of an ancient building. The pylons glow white with the surf hissing and foaming around them. The mainland suddenly seems closer, more achievable somehow. The curl of the cape is a black line against the blue-dappled water. Picnic weaves in between the cross beams and hangs from a rusting metal girder.

'Further up, you reckon?'

'Bit wet here,' Ben snorts. They slither up the looser sand until they are over the dune. The bridge above them sinks slowly to meet the hill. Wattle and dune grass crowds around it. A small ring is cleared beside one pylon, a black pit of ancient ashes and a couple of driftwood logs crouch in its shadow. They spread out and come back with a few sticks each. Picnic finds a weatherboard plank.

'Matches?' Thomas asks.

'Hang on,' says Ben, and twists sheets of newspaper into tight rolls. He piles them up into a tepee, breaks and lays the smaller sticks over them.

'Chuck us the petrol, would ya?'

'Fuck, you serious?'

'Just chuck it over!'

He dribbles a tiny bit out over the centre of the fire. Thomas passes him the matches. When the fire catches, it goes with a whoof. The salt on the wood burns white-hot, each flame with a tiny, violet heart. They rock back on their heels and watch it a moment. Ben takes a swig from the bottle and pulls a face. Picnic laughs.

Thomas has finished the port by the time light shows in the east. It is sweet, sticky, it rolls around in him heavy and thick like oil. His throat feels coated with it. Ben is asleep, Picnic smoking beside him.

'Why'd you drink that shit, man?'

Thomas just shakes his head. It's too hard to explain what it means, why it feels so good. There is a sensation of suffocation lifting slowly from his shoulders. The fire pops gently, the coals a brilliant orange. The bottle of whiskey lolls three-quarters empty in Picnic's hand. They are both lying propped against the logs facing out to sea. The sky in

the east starts to turn grey.

'You really want to get outta here?' Picnic asks. His eyes are slits against the fire light.

'Mmm.'

'Why?'

'I dunno. It just feels small.'

'Mmm.'

'Are you really happy here?'

'I dunno. Yeah, I 'spose I am.'

Thomas giggles. 'What, 'cos Ben's right, and you really are fucking Mary?'

Picnic snorts. 'I wish. She's keen on you.'

Thomas snorts. 'Is not.'

'Is too.'

Thomas snorts again and lets hope curl warm in his chest. 'Serious?'

'Shit yeah, you're all she ever talks about. I pick for her old man.'

'Fuck off,' Thomas says. Ben rolls over, mutters in his sleep. They laugh.

'Soft cock,' says Picnic and swigs again. Thomas closes his eyes. The wash of the water sounds louder when he does that.

'We've been out here all night,' he says. He smiles. 'All night.' The drunken feeling has subsided into a pleasant sleepiness. 'Why'd you ask me about leaving?'

'I dunno.'

'You gonna leave?'

Picnic pauses. Thomas isn't even sure why he asked but somehow it feels important.

'Yeah,' he says eventually. 'Reckon I might.'

The fire crackles again. Picnic stands up.

'What,' Thomas says stupidly. 'You leaving now?'

Picnic just laughs, offers him a hand. Thomas feels his face go red, lets himself be pulled upright. They shake themselves, brush themselves off. The world spins slowly.

'C'mon,' Picnic says eventually. 'Should get shit-face off to bed before daylight.'

They kick Ben awake and shove the bottles and matches back into the bag. Picnic grabs the bottle of petrol from the sand and shakes it as Ben drags himself up. There are a couple of fingers of greasy liquid in the bottom, the cap has disappeared.

'C'mon,' he says again and throws the bottle on the fire. There is a pause, and they all turn and look at it before it explodes.

'Shit, shit, shit,' Ben is screaming, and there is blood, unmistakably blood, running down the side of his face between his fingers. The bang is ringing in Thomas's ears. Picnic has disappeared.

'Shit, shit,' Ben whimpers and he peels his hands away and turns to Thomas with

them held out imploring in front of him. They have blood on them. He makes himself look. It is only a little cut, really. The shard of glass is still stuck there. Thomas looks down at his own hands and shakes a few shattered pieces from a fold in his jumper. He reaches over and grabs Ben's forehead with one hand, pulls the glass from his cheek with the other.

'Shit, shit, shiiiit,' Ben whimpers.

'Shuddup,' he says, roughly. 'It's no big deal.'

Picnic appears from behind one of the logs. 'Fell over it,' he says, almost sheepishly. There is a scratch bleeding sluggishly down one of his legs. He looks over at Ben. 'Shit, what happened to you?'

He flicks his grin between the two of them, eager, standing there as though he missed the punch-line. Thomas looks down at the shard of glass in his fingers and begins to laugh.

*

The violence is coming. It is almost here, now. It is riding on the horizon like a summer storm, with all the world holding its breath in anticipation. I have been putting this off. It is making me tight, making my breath shallow. This is right, you need to hear this.

It seems wrong to be writing about such things here, now. It is a bright, beautiful day, today. I can hear people outside on my neighbour's balcony, chatting in the sunshine. Someone else nearby is making toast, I can smell it. This violence doesn't make sense here. There is nothing in this world which understands it. It's not as simple as city violence, not so gratuitous. We must have known him, you see.

I can imagine him watching her. I wish I couldn't. He would have been watching for a very long time, patiently, quietly. He would have picked her out. Nothing happens quickly on an island.

I can imagine him: *He can see her naked in his mind. Flaxen hair and quiet, shady eyes. A plush of hair still soft and golden down brown legs. He watches her and smiles.*

We never found out who did it. Some of them still don't believe it was rape; there was an article the other day where one of the locals still blamed the boy. We didn't want to know, really. None of us wanted to believe it. The possibility of rape never even occurred. But it happened, it must have. I still wonder sometimes. So many chances for a country kid to be taken in. So many possible ways to hurt her.

*

He called her girl. He screwed the form up and called her girl. This is what is running around Mary's head as she sits in the classroom. Girl. *Too good for us, girl? Local schools not enough for you now?* Mary hears her father again and again and stares out the window and watches the sunshine chase the clouds across the sky. It is a north wind, a hot wind. The light in the classroom flickers in and out of gloom as they go. The windows are open, and the thin pages of their exercise books flutter in time. Miss Mulvey is at the board in front of them, scratching numbers in chalk across its length. The rest of the pupils are scattered in year-groups around the room. Mary drags her eyes back to the board and tries not to yawn.

'Well, Thomas,' Miss Mulvey says. 'What have you got?'

Thomas jumps and looks up. The problem stares meekly at him from the board.

'Twelve?' he asks. It is a guess. Mary can see just looking at it that he has it wrong.

'Mary?'

'Seven,' she says, after a moment. Miss Mulvey smiles.

'Care to explain how you got there?' she asks, and there is just the tiniest stress on 'care'. Mary stands and takes the chalk from her, stretches to write. The chalk squeals as she puts the first numbers in. Mary's teeth clench, her toes curl gently in her shoes.

A handful of parents wait in small groups outside the gate at home time. Mary walks past them with something resembling a nervous sort of pride and follows the three boys down the road towards the village. It is a sticky afternoon, hot. Cars pass them as they walk.

'Store?' Ben says, and Picnic nods.

The door at the store is propped open waiting for them, the plastic streamers of the fly curtain twisting and dancing out from the greying frame as though trying to escape. Everything sweats, dull in the sleepy heat. Mary blinks, lets her eyes adjust to the gloom of the cool room.

'Chocolate?' Picnic asks, and she nods and passes him a handful of change. The boys crowd around the cash register and Mary wanders back to their normal table in the corner. The lady behind the counter smiles and pours milk from the fridge into stainless steel cups.

'Thanks,' she says when they come over to her, the milkshakes in wax paper cups.

'She's a slut,' Ben says suddenly, not bothering to lower his voice. They all stare at him, Mary flicks a glance up to the lady behind the counter, busy cleaning the milkshake machine.

'Sorry?' Thomas asks, quietly.

‘The woman here, she’s a slut. She’s sleeping with Nugget.’

‘What?’ Picnic asks.

Mary rolls her eyes. ‘Seriously?’

‘She is! Dad was talking about it last night.’

‘Shut up,’ Thomas growls and Ben laughs. There is a moment of silence, and Ben slurps at his milkshake. The lady turns from the milkshake machine and disappears out the back of the store.

‘C’mon,’ Thomas says and stands. ‘Let’s go.’

Mary’s father is not there when she gets home. Her mother is waiting with her mouth drawn tight, sitting in the kitchen with a magazine and a cup of tea. The application form is still sitting on the bench, crumpled from their argument that morning.

‘Out doing?’ she asks, looking up as Mary comes in.

‘Nothing. We got milkshakes. Where’s Dad?’

‘Still down with the tractor. Any homework?’

Mary just looks at her. She can’t breathe, suddenly.

‘Why?’ she asks. ‘Does it matter? You won’t let me go to a good school anyway!’

‘Honey,’ her mother calls, as she storms out and up the stairs. ‘Pure and simple, we can’t afford it!’

Mary lets her bedroom door slam behind her.

The form is for the city schools. Miss Mulvey asks them for it the next morning at school. Mary’s stomach clenches, and she feels her hands drawing tight into fists. Thomas is the only one who hands it in. The other two boys just sit there.

‘Mary? Do you have yours?’ The voice is bright and cheerful, confident. Mary bites her lip.

‘Forgot it, Miss Mulvey,’ she mutters.

‘Monday at the latest, then,’ the teacher says and moves on.

‘You going?’ Picnic whispers beside her.

‘No. Dad said…’ She stops. ‘You going?’

‘Nah. No point.’

‘Ben?’

‘Nah, Ben’s dropping out. Just Tommo.’

Mary stares at her desk and then up at Thomas. He is looking straight ahead, up at the board. With his chin stretched forward, Mary can see the pink flush creeping up his neck.

They go down to the beach after school. The day is brighter and clearer than

yesterday, but still as hot, still as sticky. They strip off and swim, kick around in the shallows and flip in the waves. Mary comes out, eventually, lies on her stomach in the dunes and looks back down at the boys. They follow her one by one. Picnic looks around over his shoulders, down the beach either way, and pulls a packet of cigarettes from his schoolbag, tries not to drip on it. Mary wonders where he got them but doesn't say anything. He offers them around and Ben takes one, Thomas waves them away.

'Which school?' Mary asks him, suddenly.

'What?' he asks.

'Which school do you want to go to?'

'Oh. Trinity.'

Mary looks down and draws in the sand between her elbows. 'Why?'

'Dad went there.' She looks up again. Thomas is staring straight ahead again, like in the classroom.

'Rich cunt!' Ben crows, laughing

'What are your folks doing here, then?' Picnic asks.

Thomas shrugs. 'Dad wanted a vineyard.'

No one says anything, they just sit there. Picnic throws his butt out into the dunes and Mary stares after it. They stand up, eventually, and dust themselves off before they leave.

Mary walks home with Thomas. She spends the whole time frozen in silence, she isn't sure why. He only speaks when they get to her gate.

'Why didn't you hand it in?' he asks.

Mary jumps. 'Dad won't let me. Says it's too expensive and a waste of time.' Mary looks down at her feet.

Thomas stares at her a moment. 'What's your Mum reckon?'

She shrugs. Thomas frowns and keeps walking.

'Wanna come to the bridge with me?' he asks.

Mary stops, her cheeks glow. She isn't sure she has understood till he turns around to face her.

'The bridge?' Mary blushes outright. They both know what he means. 'Yeah,' she says finally. 'Ok. When?'

'Tomorrow,' he says and turns to walk away. 'Meet you on the beach.'

Mary has to hug herself to stop from screaming aloud. She runs up the driveway to her house.

Thomas is waiting for her when she gets there the next day. The clouds are back, the sky is close and grey and muggy, though it isn't cold. They walk along the beach as far

as the pylons and then clamber up into the dunes. A fire pit is black and dirty halfway up. Thomas stares at it as they go, but Mary walks straight past. A fence springs up at the point where the train line meets solid ground. They climb through a gap in the wire. Thomas stops a moment and looks at her. She turns and walks down the track and he follows. Slowly the land disappears from under them. The wash of sea between Mary's feet gives her vertigo when she looks down. There are workman's loops on either side, where rusty ladders wander down to tiny wooden platforms. He grabs her hand suddenly and pulls her down to sit in one.

'Show you something?' she asks suddenly.

Thomas looks at her sideways. She pulls the form out folded from her pocket and opens it.

'I forged it. Do you think she'll be able to tell?'

His eyes open wide. 'You forged it?'

She nods, looking down. He laughs. He takes it from her and his hand brushes against hers.

'Nah,' he says, still laughing. 'Looks good to me.' Mary turns away from him. Laughing at her? With her? She bites her lip.

'Hey,' he says, and reaches an arm around her shoulder, pulls her towards him. Slowly she turns back to face him and he leans in and kisses her. She freezes with the shock of it.

'What?' he spits, and he sounds angry all of a sudden. 'I thought that's what we were here for?'

Mary goes numb, she can feel the blush rising from her neck and up her cheeks. Her mouth hangs open and she says nothing. Thomas swears and makes to stand up. She grabs his shoulder.

'Don't go,' she says. It comes out like she is begging. He sits back again and raises his eyebrows. She bites her lip and leans in towards him. This time when he kisses her, she kisses him back. He tastes of corn chips. Their teeth bump together and he pushes his tongue inside her mouth. She wants to laugh out loud. By the time they walk back her lips feel swollen. When he holds her hand she can feel her heartbeat accelerate.

On Monday she sees Thomas again, and they both blush and say nothing. She hands the form in without even thinking about it. The heat is overwhelming outside, the sky grey and intense and heavy. Kids just flop around in the playground, lying under trees and behind concrete walls. Mary can feel sweat prickling down her back. She tells herself it is the heavy intensity of the day. There is a storm coming and she wants to dance. Thomas ignores her but she can see he is wound tight. They are the last ones back inside and get caught in an awkward dance at the doorway. By the time they are

walking home, Mary is buzzing. When they turn off the road from the village, it is just her and him she is so excited her hands are clenched in balls by her sides. There are clouds building up on the horizon, black and brown and wild, and the electricity in them seems to be flooding through her body. Thomas looks back over his shoulder to the village. She giggles and he pulls her sideways off the road, behind a stand of trees. He is kissing her again before she knows what is happening, she is pulled in tight against him and she can feel his hands on her. A little green car whirls past in a cloud of dust and they spring away from each other and freeze. Thomas takes a step forward and peers out from behind their cover.

'The bridge again?' she asks, when he turns back to her.

'Tomorrow,' he says. 'After the others go home.'

Mary smiles and looks back out onto the road. It is empty, the dust settling. She pulls her school dress straight and walks past him and up towards her home.

She is still smiling when she swings in through the back door and into the kitchen. The fly-screen bangs shut behind her and her mother's voice floats through from the good lounge room.

'Mary?' she calls. 'Come here, would you?'

Mary drops her school bag and sticks her head through the doorway. The sky outside has almost closed over, it is dark in the room. It takes Mary a moment to adjust. Her mother is there, perched on the edge of the couch, and her father standing behind. Opposite them is Miss Mulvey, a tea cup balanced in her hand. The application form is open on the coffee table in front of them.

'Did you forge this, Mary?' The teacher asks gently. There is a moment of silence and Mary looks from the form to her father and back again. A scattering of raindrops come loose from the sky and rattle on the tin roof. Mary's father looks up almost involuntarily and like it is a signal Mary steps backwards, darts out the door and runs. Her father roars behind her. He calls her bitch, this time. Miss Mulvey's shocked face is the last thing she sees.

The rain comes down as she runs. Through the paddocks and into the vines, the leaves thrashing in the downpour. She follows one of the rows along towards the village and comes out at the back of the church. Water is streaming down her face, her school dress plastered to her. She slows down as she walks through to the graveyard. The clouds are a black and purple tapestry out over the bay, lightning coming down every now and again in great bursts. The rain is clearing. The sky behind her has lightened to a watery gold in the brief flush of the leftover day. A breeze springs up and she shivers. She sits down behind a giant tombstone and leans her head against her knees. Why? She thinks.

She feels stupid for running. The stone behind her is warm against her back, a vague heat which seeps through her wet dress. The gold in the sky starts to fade, to violet and through to pink. When she cries the tears run down over her chin to melt in with the wet of the rain at the collar of her dress.

She jumps when she hears the car door slam. She wonders vaguely if it is her father and she raises her head but doesn't bother standing up. She presses her cheek against the warm stone and stays where she is, the grit and dirt and moss grainy against her skin. Footsteps come down the gravel. Mary refuses to look around. She closes her eyes and waits.

*

When he sees her in the church yard, the windows of St. Peter and the Madonna stain her gently. Her hair is no longer blonde but dappled with red and green, and somehow, oddly, silver. There is something beautiful about the setting – the sharp and irregular angles of the gravestones, the soft green of the tended lawns, the black of the stone in the rain. So different to the disorderly grey and gold and brown that is everywhere else. Regulated, right. Little posies of colour laid down here and there, and winding paths between split levels. A small neat maze in which to hide. She doesn't turn when he comes down to her. She doesn't scream, but gasps almost silently and fights like a cat. When it is over and he has done, she trips running from the graves. Her knees are skinned. A tiny line of blood runs down her shin. He smiles. He has never felt so free.

Part Two

13th March 1829.

[…] This is a Godforsaken, unnatural place. This is a Godforsaken place.

As transcribed in: Robert Blackman, *Terra Ignota: Exploration in Australia's South* (Sydney: Maurice Gladwin Press, 2003) p.235

"…Wakefield's expedition returned to Albany (then Frederickstown) in September 1829, with sods of earth taken from three likely sites along the coast-line. He has [sic] lost seven men and deemed any further exploration too dangerous. Evidence from the Mulvey diary suggests the traumatic nature of their experience. Having been gone over a year and with only three places of possible settlement to show for it, the expedition was deemed a failure. Wakefield subsequently lost all chance of promotion and disappeared into obscurity."

W.M.T. Gerster, *A History of Albany, 1826-1850* (Albany: Albany Civic Arts Publishing, 1978) p.75

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The woman's voice is simple, homely, worried down the fuzzy line. Father John leans against the door frame and lets her talk. The cord running from the phone to the hand-piece curls lazily as it dangles and he watches each slow rotation. They called the doctor in, at first, she explains. She hates to bother him, she knows he must be a busy man, but will he come and see her daughter? The doctor said to find someone she trusts. She is not even talking, Father, the woman says, and there is a despair in her words that is almost weightless. He stares around his cold, empty kitchen. Yes, yes, he says, he will come. He will see the child. This, he assures her, is the reason he is here.

He lingers over breakfast. There is no hurry. The woman is naive to think him busy, he has nothing to do. There *is* nothing to do, he thinks, sitting there at the kitchen table. He spins the tea cup around and around and around in circles, wears a little yellow ring in the varnish. The dregs in the bottom swill and spin, and drops fly out to spatter across his placemat, his plate and down onto the scuffed lino. He looks up to the kitchen sink to see his wife leaning there like she used to, frowning at him. It has been happening more and more. He knows she isn't there really. He knows it is just a little dream, a little dream-puffed memory, but in a different way it is more real than anything. He would make her laugh if he knew how. She is a gift, leaning there. The sunshine floods through the window, warm on his face, bright and clean. He closes his eyes, feels the warmth and feels her there. When he opens them, she is gone. A gift from God, but still, she is gone. He stands and sighs and looks the other direction as he drops the cup into the water in the sink.

The sun is still warm as he walks through the village. Just gently, when the breeze brings it to him, he can smell the grape vines. They look cool and leafy now, still filled out in their summer green. They will start to change soon and lose their leaves. Walking down the road he can see them flutter and dance up above him on the hill. The place is hidden in among them, a row of giant cyprus leading the way up the drive. A motley little bunch of steers watch him from a bare paddock as he passes. The collection of sheds and machinery scattered around the dark old house look worried, somehow. Furtive. The hulk of an ancient panel van sits rusting propped on bricks. Everything is covered in grime. He almost trips at the top of the driveway. There is a trench cut into the limestone for no apparent reason. Clay shows brilliant red underneath. He pauses breathless on the doorstep and wonders momentarily how on earth they survive.

The woman has been waiting for him. As soon as he knocks, the footsteps hurry through and materialise into a dark shadow he can see through the stained glass. The house is gloomy. She leads him back into a cluttered kitchen with a door frame so low he has to duck. She gestures to the table and he sits. She produces a plate of cake. A kettle starts to whistle. His legs ache. The sweat, greasy under his arms and running down his back, makes him feel old.

'Thank you for coming, Father,' she says, looking down. A gold cross hangs around her neck and she fingers it absentmindedly. He takes a piece of cake. 'We just don't know what to do. The Doctor came over from the mainland. He came yesterday. He said… He said she needed help. He thought… He wanted to take her away, back with him. He did urine tests and touched her, felt her stomach. She almost didn't let him. He took a blood test but we don't know the results yet. He doesn't think she is sick though. He suggested we find someone to talk to her. He thinks it is a… mental problem.'

He nods. She is gushing. He just sits there and nods and eats his cake. Her hands flutter like the leaves on the vines.

'She has just disappeared. There is something wrong. She was all pale the first morning and just didn't say anything, so I kept her home and she went to bed. She wasn't sick, just pale. But then she just slept for a day and a half and didn't get up, and stopped talking altogether. And now it's been almost four weeks and nothing has changed, nothing at all. She just lies there. I've tried everything. Her father… I just don't know what to do, she's never been like this before.'

He pats her gently, vaguely, on the arm. 'We'll see her,' he says, and she smiles gushingly at him. Relief, he thinks. Someone to help. Once upon a time he would have felt something in return. He reaches again for his tea.

Her bedroom is upstairs. It is hot and gloomy, the pink walls seem to lean in oppressively towards him. The child is huddled still asleep under a plain white sheet. She has her back to him. The curls of her hair are dark across the pillow, she is biting her lip. The mother tiptoes over and shakes her gently, and the movement is somehow out of place.

'Mary?' she whispers. The child rubs her eyes, sits up. She is staring at him. She is staring and he finds that he cannot meet her eyes. He looks back for a moment to the mother, who is bustling around and opening the curtains. The sudden light makes the child blink and wriggle, and she throws an arm up to cover her face, pulls the sheet up as if to shield herself. He can see a lace of blue veins down the pale skin inside her elbow. Her hair is more blonde than dark, he notices. It was only the gloom that made it look dark.

'Child,' he says. 'Will you talk to me?'

The girl peers at him from under her hand. The mother nods at her.

'Mary, this is Father John. You know Father John, from church?'

He forces a smile. The girl stares.

'I'm just here to talk to you, Mary,' he says. He glances at the mother, and then back at the girl. 'Perhaps it would be better if we were alone?'

The mother blinks, recoils. The Father nods to her. She looks backwards as she shuffles out.

'Well, Mary?' he asks. 'Is there anything wrong? Anything you want to tell me?'

She is staring at his hands, now. He waits. She opens her mouth and closes it again. Swallows. Blinks. Opens her mouth again but nothing comes out. There is something wrong, he thinks. Her mother is right, there is something wrong here. The girl writhes gently under his gaze. He sighs.

'I will come back tomorrow,' he says. 'Perhaps you would like to talk to me then?'

The girl just looks away and slowly again falls still.

The mother fusses as he leaves, but he has nothing to tell her.

'I'll come back tomorrow,' he repeats. 'She needs to see that she can trust me.'

Eventually she lets him go. Perhaps there is nothing serious, he thinks, walking home again in the bright clear sun. He remembers her curling around under the sheet. Teenage silliness, perhaps. Nothing really wrong but something bothering her. Or teenage trouble… The image of her on the bed stays with him. When the church appears at the bottom of the hill he doesn't go past but lets himself in to hide in the cool for a while. He kneels, he prays, he opens the office and helps himself to the wine. He thinks about the girl. Eventually he goes home.

Nothing is different the second day, and by the third he can tell the mother is disappointed. He doesn't go on the fourth, he stays at home. The sunshine holds, streams into his kitchen and he sits there most of the morning. He waits for his wife to appear but she doesn't come and he can't make himself imagine her. That afternoon he walks, with no purpose, down into the village. She used to encourage him to walk. She used to say he should be visible, approachable, there for his parishioners. He hasn't walked like this for a long time. A man nods at him from across the road. Two young boys stare at him and he wonders if they should be in school. He walks down through the dunes to the beach and sits and watches the waves come in. The mainland is black through the haze. He looks at his watch. He used to walk for hours. The water slowly moves its way up the beach. Eventually he walks home again. He eats baked beans on his own in the kitchen, and watches as the light slowly disappears from the room.

On the fifth day the mother calls him again. She needs to talk, she says, needs to talk to him. He asks her if the girl has spoken at all. No, she says, but there is something else. I have been dreaming. She is almost whispering now. I have been dreaming and today they came true. He almost wants to laugh at this, but he can hear she is on the point of tears. Mary is pregnant, she says. Pregnant. Everything stops and he blinks. It feels like a ridiculous pronouncement to make. It should be ridiculous! He should, he thinks, be reeling. He isn't quite sure why it feels somehow expected. He looks up and suddenly his wife is there beside him. He draws his brows together in mock outrage. Scandalous! She doesn't move, she just stands there, and he wishes she would smile.

'Father?' the woman asks on the phone. He agrees to come and talk to her.

The woman meets him in the church. She wants a confession, he thinks. She wants tears and remorse and the climax of a television show. He stands in the doorway watching her come up the path towards him and he can feel his wife shaking her head behind him. He sighs and stands up straighter. Well then, he thinks. Kindly old priest. I can do that. And he places a gentle hand under her elbow as she greets him, guides her through the door.

'You have been dreaming,' he asks, when they are both sitting in a pew.

'Yes.' She swallows. 'I dreamt that an angel was talking to me. It was like in the story, but it was all confused.'

'The story?' he asks, and a strange feeling creeps up the back of his neck.

'The story. Mary, the Virgin Mary.' She looks down at her feet. She is embarrassed, he thinks, embarrassed and scared. A wave of pity sweeps through him. It makes him draw breath, the feeling is so strong it grips at his stomach. He had forgotten this feeling, this pity. He pats her on the shoulder, he wants to smile.

'The story,' he says. 'You think you have been dreaming of the angel Gabriel?'

'Yes,' she whispers.

'And what did he tell you, in these dreams?'

She looks up at him, her face screwed up tight. 'He told me she was pregnant. That she was going to give birth to the Christ child. And then it all changed, but he told me that first.'

He pauses, inhales. 'I will come to see her again,' he says, and smiles. Kindly old priest. The mother sobs once, and when she speaks it comes out as a great burst of air.

'She didn't do anything! It's not her fault! She's a good girl, really.'

He can feel the tears soak through to his shoulder as he holds her, pats her back.

The girl is asleep again when he walks in. She is small and flat in the bed, tiny, the gloom shows her hair and her eyelashes once more as black against the pale of her face.

It is hard to believe such sin of her. She is a child, the budding breasts look out of place. He sighs.

'Don't wake her,' he whispers. He just stands there and looks. Pregnant. God's way, he thinks automatically, but the irony of it feels awkward even in his mind. The mother is convinced, he realises. The mother is certain. The fervour in her eyes when she told him! And looking at her body, he can understand why. What would a child like this know of the world? What would she be doing? Of course, he knows, children are curious. He can remember the guilt and curiosity of the bent photographs passed between the boys of his school. Of spending afternoons, hidden alone, to imagine and masturbate. But this? This slip of a child, flat bodied and pregnant? And the mother's story, the mother's conviction. No one has been near, she said as they came up the stairs. She hasn't seen anyone, not like that. He looks at Mary again and notices the tears. Asleep, but with tears down her face! She seems almost in a trance, almost saint-like, there in the white bed with the tears. He grunts to himself. He can feel his wife appear beside him, nod her head. She would disappear if he looked up, but he can feel her nod. She always was stronger than him in belief. Perhaps he needs to go and do some reading.

That night, he himself dreams of the child. He wakes and imagines he can feel his wife beside him, her body along his, warm and soft. In his dream, the child was just as he last saw her, except that her face was turned from him so he couldn't see the tears. She did not speak, she did not acknowledge him at all, but then again in the dream he was both there and not there so even his sleeping self was not surprised by that. And before he woke, a dove appeared to hang above her in the air. The brilliance of it made all the rest of the dream dark.

He goes again, early the next day. He makes his way straight upstairs to the child. Her mother waits below. Mary is turned to the door as though she has been expecting him. Her face is calm. She opens her mouth as he walks in and he steps to her, eagerly. She whispers something but he can't hear.

'I'm sorry,' he says, still smiling. 'Say it again!' His voice is over-loud in the close, dim room. He leans in and waits. This is it, he is thinking. This is when she tells me. But Mary simply looks up at him from her bed and then turns away. She seems to quiver. It doesn't matter, he thinks. He leaves her and goes back down to the mother.

His wife is waiting for him when he walks in to the kitchen. The light is gentle, frail through the window. It will be a beautiful day. He looks at her quietly for a moment before taking the Bible from his bag and sitting at the table. The mother sits opposite

him and waits. His wife is watching him again, quietly, intently. Her name is still there on the fly sheet. Underneath it, the coloured plate of the dove and the rainbow has faded into a mild array of yellows and pinks. He touches it gently with a finger and then lets the pages fall open in his hands. The delicate paper flutters down to Ecclesiastes. *Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine. And the sternness of his face is changed*. 8:1. He knows it. He has read it often. But suddenly there with the morning light and the warmth of his wife's presence it means something else again. Truly he feels himself relax, truly he feels the sternness of his face disappear. Who am I, he wonders, to doubt the wisdom of God? What is my wisdom in comparison? He turns the pages to Luke and reads again the words of Gabriel: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called Son of God. For with God nothing will be impossible*. Overshadow. Overshadow you. He remembers again the dream – the dove upon her, her body thrown in to the darkness against its light, *The Holy Spirit will come upon you*… And then the fact of her pregnancy. *For with God, nothing will be impossible*. Could it…? Could it really? *Who knows the interpretation of a thing?* And suddenly, with all the signs he can be sure. His wife, he thinks, would be proud. God, he thinks, forgive me for doubting you! Thank you, Lord! Praise, he thinks, praise to You on high!

We will tell no one, he decides. Through the window, the pines sigh and wave in the breeze. We will wait until it is certain and she is showing, and then have a service. It is a shame Christmas has already come and gone. But still, he can imagine her standing there, pure and simple in a white dress, the beauty of her young body swollen with child. A saviour. She will bring us a saviour. An Island Christ! He wants to laugh with joy. He closes his eyes just for a moment and feels his wife's hand on his shoulder, warm, heavy. She is leaning on him. He opens his eyes and smiles at the waiting woman, staring at him from across the table.

'I believe you,' he says simply. The light of the day is beautiful and precious around him.

*

Mary lies with the thin sheet wrapped around her. It is hard to breathe. Silence, she thinks. There is silence now downstairs. She opens her mouth but says nothing. Closes it again. Open, shut, open, shut. There is no noise. She can control the silence. Something deep within her shifts, steels itself, seals itself off. A tightening in her throat, closing in the deep beating of her heart in her chest. Silence then, she thinks. It is all her own fault, after all.

*

I wanted to laugh when they told me we would witness the birth of an 'Island Christ'. The Father said it with such pomp and ceremony… Perhaps I wasn't the only one wanting to giggle but I didn't dare look up. We were in church. You don't laugh in church. It wasn't all that funny really, anyway.

It has taken me a long time to start writing again. I have spent days, you know, just sitting here at my desk, waiting for the right words to come. It isn't easy writing this. Even now there is a cup of tea going cold beside me as I stare at my screen.

At first I thought I would just tell you about what happened next, just go on. How Mary disappeared, how it all started at the church. But it isn't as simple as all that. I can't really remember to be honest. And everything happened at once, all jumbled up. Sorting it out would be impossible. It doesn't matter. That's what I have realised. I can tell you what happened next and exactly how, or I can tell you what matters.

This is my mother's habit, to sit working with a cup of tea. She used to spend hours – reading accounts or stock prices, sorting bills – and they would go cold as stone untouched at her side. And now I find I am doing it as well. The milk curdles in them, a dirty grey scum which sits like oil on the surface. There are stains in my best tea-cups, rings around their sides. I wonder if that bothered my mother as well? Awful, streaking lines, brown around the delicate china rims. And pointless, needless, because it is my own stupid fault for letting the tea go cold, my fault and no one else's. I find them and it makes me so bitter. Such a little thing, but it makes my insides curl.

*

Thomas walks to the look-out, the second Sunday that Mary is there at the church. He escapes as soon as the service has finished. He can't take it: the coffee and fruitcake, the gossip. It is clear up here, the sun is high and white in the sky. It looks watery, crystalline almost. The few clouds lacing their way slowly across the endless blue are reflected as grey smears on the water. He is alone. He can see the people at the church below, their movements random and meaningless, the vague patterns of ants. He has been up here before, but never like this – never by himself and simply for the sake of walking. Gravel crunches hot and dry under his feet. He swats a fly from his face. A trickle of sweat runs down the back of his neck. He wanders across the car park and props himself against the granite block at the point of the bluff. The stone is warm through his t-shirt, the grass around so long almost hides him from view. There is a plaque on the front marking the point as Whaler's Look-Out. In commemoration, it says, of the brave men and women who sacrificed their lives to building the community on Chesil. An empty coke bottle rattles down towards him, the breeze tugging and dragging it through the dust.

He just sits. He tries not to think. This is his nightmare, it comes back again and again: Mary, standing in the light. She is pale like a ghost. Thomas blinks, but it doesn't change. She is still there, the cross lit golden behind her, the gauzy white of her dress stretched and distorted. There are black shadows under her eyes, great dark rings like bruises. She ripples at the edges. She is there, and she is not there. The Father is still talking, his soft voice raised higher than normal, his head thrown back. Thomas stares at him, drags his eyes from the ghost in the white dress and stares at the balding man with his head thrown back. There is a ringing in his ears. He can hear the sound of his own breathing but not the Father's words. A vein throbs somewhere in his neck. Tiny balls of spittle are flying from the Father's mouth, they catch light of the stained glass window and blaze gold for the tiniest moment before disappearing as they fall. He wakes in a sweat, always at this same point, always caught staring at the Father's mouth.

Every morning, his sheets are wet and it takes him a moment to work out why. Mary and the dream again. At first he wondered if Mary would come back to school. No one sees her. He finds himself at her driveway but doesn't go down it. He can't see her. He goes home. He knows his mother will drag him to church, he knows he will see her then. He pretends to not be interested.

And now, at the lookout, it is too much. She is pregnant, she has slept with someone.

An awkward numbness opens somewhere deep in his stomach and begins to spread up through his chest cavity. Someone, someone here on the Island… And her, like that… A blade of grass tickles the back of his neck. He reaches a hand back over his shoulder and searches with grasping fingers to pluck it with a dry *puck* from its sheath. It is pale gold and rigid, and crackles gently as he winds it around his finger. She slept with someone else. Someone else held her, touched her. She probably laughed at him. She slept with *someone else*. He can see her naked in his mind and feels himself going hard. Heat rises to his cheeks, goes flaming across his face. There is a heavy rustling off to his left, and he looks across in surprise as a blue-tongue comes trundling out of the grass. It freezes when it sees him, beady eyes unblinking, and flicks its tongue out. Thomas blinks, and at no visible sign the lizard flips its little body around and disappears back the way it came. Thomas breathes. He stands, kicks the coke bottle across the gravel and into the long grass and yells, screams it all out into the sky. A group of parrots burst raucous from a tree. He walks back down the hill.

He mutters as he walks, fists tight at his side. Who slept with her? Who slept…? When she first appeared at the church, it was only luck that he was there. He wasn't meant to be, he and Picnic were meant to be fishing. It makes him wonder about God, this. Was he meant to be there? Was he supposed to go? He can feel his body pick up a little, get carried by the gravity of the hill. He is running, now. Close your eyes, he tells himself, and you will get there… Head down, he thinks. Run. He is swinging along faster and faster. Stones rattle away from under his feet and he slips, slides on his heels, keeps running. Go. Go. He knows where Picnic will be. When he comes to the bottom of the hill he lets himself open his eyes and follows the path as it winds back down past the church and towards the village. They look up from their coffee and cake as he runs past. He catches a glimpse of his mother, one hand stretched out. Run. Go.

Picnic is fishing from the breakwater. Thomas is almost blind by the time he gets there with the sweat and the hate and the nausea that has come streaming up inside him. Because it has to have been Picnic who got her pregnant. It isn't a spectacular fight. He swings as soon as he is close enough and it glances off the back of Picnic's head. His chin snaps down into his chest and then back up again in a one-two movement as he wheels around. There is a pause and Picnic shakes himself. Thomas straightens and right away Picnic plants one in his guts. Bent double, Thomas almost smiles to himself. He raises his fists and Picnic darts backwards. Thomas runs at him flailing and lands one on his nose, his eye, something, but Picnic is swinging back and it is messy and glorious, hot and clean. Thomas catches him on the shoulder and for a moment Picnic teeters on the edge, frozen. Good, Thomas is thinking. Fall in, break your neck, you bastard,

and the thought is hard in the front of his mind. Picnic stumbles forward and sends his rod flying across and over the other side. Thomas throws himself at him and they both go over after it. They miss the rocks, fly clear of them, but the cold water sets them reeling and stops them short. Thomas comes up spluttering and choking, and he is yelling before Picnic is clear of the water:

‘Bastard,’ he is yelling. ‘Fucking bastard!’

He is still punching, he can’t help it, it is coming up out of him without any control, and he isn’t sure if Picnic is crying or if it is just water running down his face from his hair.

Picnic swipes a leg around and knocks him off his feet, dunks his head and holds him under till he goes limp. He feels the fight coming away from him, suddenly. He opens his eyes and the world is grey-blue, sand rising in clouds through the water. Picnic lets him up and steps backwards, two or three big steps, quickly. He is shivering. Thomas stands and feels the water pour off him.

‘What the fuck?’ Picnic says. His lips are curled up in an angry sneer, the lower one split and bleeding.

‘Mary,’ Thomas says. ‘You fucked her. You were fucking her all along, weren’t you?’

Picnic looks around, scratches his head and wipes water from his face. ‘No…’ he says. ‘You were.’

There is an odd silence. Picnic wades back over to the rocks and climbs up them onto the solidity of the concrete above. Thomas follows, hauls himself out, and they both just lie there. Neither of them speaks. Clouds swirl blue-grey above them.

‘She’s fucking pregnant,’ Thomas says, eventually. ‘We were just hooking up. I never slept with her.’

Picnic looks away.

‘You owe me a rod, man,’ he says. Thomas looks over at him. ‘Wasn’t me. I swear.’

Thomas says nothing. Picnic shivers again. ‘Bastard,’ he mutters. He stands up and packs up his tackle kit. Thomas just lies there and watches as slowly he limps off back up towards the village.

*

It is the first day back from the holiday, and Hannah stands at the doorway to her classroom watching as the students fight their way in through the wind. One of the younger ones rings the bell enthusiastically from the balcony in front of her. The clamour of it flies backwards, she feels it in her teeth. The kids file in gradually, some tousled, hair mussed by the wind, others skipping from the odd assortment of cars and quad bikes that appear and disappear as 9am approaches. Hannah ticks them off mentally as they appear. Mary is missing. Two mothers gossip at the bottom of the steps and she hears the word 'pregnant' fly up above the wind. She looks around. One of the mothers is laughing, the other shaking her head disbelievingly, her skirt wrapping itself around her legs in the wind. They look up and wave to her before turning and walking back out the front gate. A shadow slips past them. It is Thomas, slinking in.

'That'll do, Jack,' she says to the bell-ringer, as Thomas makes it through the door. 'Tick it off.'

The kid nods seriously and marks his name next to the duty sheet.

'Miss M.,' one of the girls starts, almost conspiratorially. 'Can I be on bell duty next week?'

'Is it your turn?'

The girl says nothing, a sly little smile caught on her face.

'Well, then,' Hannah says and pauses. She can see hope flair in the girl's eyes. 'You'll just have to wait!'

The child howls dramatically and races off, and Hannah has to hold herself from laughing.

'Miss! No running in the classroom!' Jack cries, a little smugly. Hannah lets herself smile, breathes in deeply. Chaos, she thinks.

'In your seats,' she shouts above the noise, and starts the roll-call. She can hear the Year Nines whispering together at the back, heads bowed together, Picnic in Mary's seat. They go quiet when they see her looking. Thomas leans back in his chair, scowls at her. Hannah lets it be and finishes the roll.

It doesn't take long for the day to feel routine again. The wind is still strong at lunchtime. She has to wrap her cardigan around herself as she patrols the school-yard. Most of the children have gone to ground, huddled sheltering behind the tin shed or the trees along the back fence. A group of kids are still swinging and hanging from the monkey-bars, though. The chatter is screamed high-velocity across the force of the weather and Hannah strains her ears to listen in.

'She's gone all fat and they made her stand up,' one kid is yelling.

‘I was there, dumbarse,’ his friend replies, and Hannah loses the rest of it in the wind.

‘Miss?’ It is Jack again, detaching himself from the climbing frame to stand in front of her. ‘Is it true that Mary is having a baby?’

Hannah pauses. ‘What?’ she asks

‘Mary,’ Jack says again, clear and patient, as though she is the child. ‘Is she really going to have a baby?’

Pregnant, Hannah thinks… She freezes for a moment.

‘I don’t know,’ she replies, slowly. ‘I haven’t seen her since the holidays.’

He snorts and turns without saying anything. The other kids all crowd around him as he climbs back up onto the pyramid. Hannah can hear them as she walks away, wanting to know what she said.

And suddenly, the first day back is over. Mary does not come. *Pregnant*. And there are strange rumours about her at the church… Hannah looks around the silent classroom, the school-day mess, and wonders if it is true. She wouldn’t be the first. Pregnant.
The afternoon seemed to slip by, after lunch, without her having any control over it. A shrub in the feeble garden picks up suddenly in the gale and bashes itself against the window. Hannah jumps and spins around. She grimaces when she sees it and makes herself go to the door and stand in the fresh air. From the steps of the demountable she can see the road and the children still waiting. There are only a couple left. One of the girls from her class is lingering by the gate, and a few younger children are running about in the wind, bouncing off the hedge. They yell out but their voices fly away in the other direction, and she can’t hear, only see. She sits. The wood of the steps is grey and weathered and splintered beneath her. It is warm, sheltered from the wind. She looks up and sees the branches of the gums bend and thrash by the old building. The leaves twist in impossible contortions, whip around, pause and then dance again. She watches as they flick and flirt with the windows of the building. Several fly off and float free out into the sky. The wind changes suddenly, buffets around towards her, and her hair flies out in imitation of the leaves. She gathers it back, ties it, and lets the wind kiss her face, wake her, make her feel alive. Above her a single gull wheels up from the beach, hovers momentarily and then dips a wing and slips sideways away again. She smiles. She can hear the waves here. She can see the hill and the bush, and the road up to home. She draws a line mentally from the pinnacle and finds the house. Home. Not that she can see it. From here it is lost in the endless black and green of the forest, above the dark shadow of the orderly vines.

A car pulls in, a dirty yellow station wagon. She watches as the children race towards it, stumbling and laughing and pushing at each other. They pile into the back seat and

a man gets out the front. He walks towards the girl at the gate and gestures with his thumb. The wind swings again and Hannah's hair rips its way free of its ponytail, flies into her face. The man grabs the girl by an arm and she swats at him with a loose hand. Hannah wonders if she is laughing or angry. Together they walk back to the car. The girl gets in the passenger seat, and the man closes the door on her. He walks around the car and opens the driver's side door. He looks up as he gets in, looks across the hedge straight at Hannah. He is smiling. Hannah shivers. She pulls the hair out of her face and goes back inside. From the window she sees the car pull out onto the road and disappear in a whirl of dust. She knows him, she thinks, inside. It is a smile she recognises. Something about it rings somewhere in the back of her mind. She isn't sure why, and by the time she has gathered her books and scurried out to her car she has forgotten all about it.

She wakes up crying in the middle of the night. There are tears coursing down her face and across her nose, her hair and the pillow wet with them. It takes her a moment to calm herself, slow her breathing, stop gulping at air. She can't remember what she has been dreaming of, something about the man who smiled in the car park. She can remember him now – the man is the boy they used to call Nugget. He has changed, of course. His face has shifted, set deeper and on different lines. But that smile was the same. It was his smile she was in love with as a girl. His family were pickers and small-time farmers. She spent a weekend with him out in the forest, showing a team of bushwalkers the trails for cash. And the rest of that summer… Perhaps that was the dream. She sits up and realises she is sweating profusely. Her face is cold where the tears are still wet. She wonders if the kids in the car park are his.

Slowly she unravels herself from the sheets and pads through into the kitchen. The floorboards are cold underfoot, but the kitchen itself is strangely warm. The wind has come up again overnight, the kitchen is full of draughts and tiny flurries. A tree groans somewhere outside and she wonders how many will fall. It is dark out, there is very little moon. She can only just make out the tree line, no sign of the horses. She switches the light on and blinks in the sudden glare. The outside world disappears, the window a black screen. She sighs and tries to imagine the horses tucked away safe into the shelter of the hill. She pours herself a glass of water and leans against the sink. The curtains seem to breathe at the window beside her. The clock chimes three on the mantle. She listens to it with a vague apathy, and tries to wipe the image of Nugget from her mind.

It was strange, that summer. It was the summer that everything began to change. Those days with the walkers especially. They were surveyors or naturalists, looking for

Aboriginal rock art. She can remember Nugget standing in the car park by the lookout where they started, scuffing a toe in the dust. It was windy that weekend too, a hot wind, a north wind. It tasted of dust and smoke and the mainland. She can remember her mother laughing when she heard about the walkers. *As long as they pay you cash*, she had said. They wanted help on the trails, wanted to know which ones were used, which were fire trails, where they all went. Only the major ones were on the map. Hannah can remember they were much more interested in the smaller trails, the ones that led deeper into the forest, further away from human habitation.

And then, when they were miles out there, one of them tried to climb down a crevasse in a stand of rock. It went a long way down and in, dark and full of cobwebs. Even now, leaning at the sink, she can remember that. She stood at the mouth of it and stared as they got him ready, with ropes and a harness. She remembers being tired, having blisters, wishing she had her pony. Drinking water from a beat-up old army-surplus metal flask, watching them lower him in. But then they all started yelling, so that instantly she knew it had gone wrong. And another man went in, and they pulled them both up and out again, the second man holding the first slung over his shoulder like a sack, his body trussed up with ropes. Like a carcass to be bled, that is what she remembers. And sheltered as they were, in behind the rocks and under the canopy of the trees, when the wind blew the two of them twisted and revolved in slow circles from the pulley.

They sent the kids for help. They had brought them because they knew the forest, and now they sent them because they knew the forest. The way they looked at her, Hannah thought perhaps they didn't want her there to see the man die. She spent the whole walk praying that he would hold on, just wait, just hold on. Every now and then, Nugget would look across at her and smile. They ran some. They walked. Once she stumbled and he reached across and held her hand. No one had held her hand before. It was rough and warm and sweaty but strong around hers. The forest felt empty and enormous. Hannah's house was the closest, though it was empty when they got there. Nugget stood just inside the door and fidgeted while she made the calls, following their instructions: a rescue party to bring him down, an ambulance from the mainland, the doctor. Hannah saddled horses and still Nugget stood and fidgeted. When Hannah asked him if it was Burnt Hut track or Williams' they had come down, he said he didn't know, he didn't know the names and he didn't know how to ride anyway. Hannah stood there, the horses behind her shuffling and stamping in the wind, and just stared at him. She can remember that moment quite clearly – the realisation she would have to go back alone, and the thought of his hand around hers.

‘You could try,’ she said. ‘It’s easy.’ But he just looked at her, and then the men arrived. In the hustle and bustle of moving off she didn’t even say goodbye.

‘You right, kiddo?’ Darcy asked her as they trotted up the first track, his eyes creased. She didn’t say anything, just nodded.

And now, thirteen years later, she is barefoot in the kitchen in the middle of the night. The spot he stood by the door is just there, over there, and his smile from the distance has given her bad dreams. It is the smile that is the problem, not him. It makes her feel like an alien. He stayed and she left, and that is what the smile was saying, full of cynicism and judgement. There is a creak from her mother’s bedroom, her rolling over? Hannah wonders how much she has actually been sleeping. She sighs and empties what is left of her water into the sink, turns out the light and sneaks back to her own bedroom as quietly as possible. Her sheets are still damp when she gets back into bed. She forces herself to close her eyes and try and sleep.

Darcy appears the next morning, a chainsaw in hand, offering to fix the fence. There is a gap in it she hasn’t even noticed, a branch down across the wire. She walks down the paddock with him, gumboots over her work-day linen slacks, and silently berates herself for not seeing it.

‘When’d it happen?’ she asks.

‘Yesterday,’ Darcy says. ‘In the wind.’

‘Hmm.’

The branch is big, torn free from an ancient gum, red veins of sap spilling blood down from the wound. Darcy unclips the cover and pulls the chain free of its guard.

‘Nugget, Darce, remember him?’ she asks as he oils it. Darcy snorts and Hannah looks sideways at him. ‘What?’ she asks, half-laughing.

‘He was that kid you were mooning over as a girl, wasn’t he? Had your mother real worried.’ His grin is evil. ‘Good sort, that one.’

‘Whaddaya mean?’

‘Ah, he’s alright. Just got brats coming out his ears, three of ‘em and different mothers to each. He’s got a woman over from the mainland with him now and she’s got one on the way. Works hard though. Your uncle Mulvey’s got him on as a permanent farm-hand. See him at the pub every now and again.’ He smiles and looks at her. ‘Why? He’s not of your ilk, kiddo. Don’t you go getting yourself into trouble, now.’

Hannah gasps indignantly and laughs, but she can feel herself going red.

‘Rich coming from you, Darcy,’ she says, and he laughs. He pushes the starter button and hefts the chainsaw up as it splutters into life.

‘Righto,’ he calls over it. ‘You get yourself off, then.’

She nods. 'Hoo roo,' she shouts back. The phrase feels odd, awkward on her lips. Regressing, she thinks. I'm going backwards. She turns and starts walking up the paddock. 'Hoo roo,' she whispers to herself. The more she says it, the more natural it sounds.

She only sees the horses on the way up. Ghosty is lying down, about twenty metres out into the paddock. His leg is twisted up in a strange angle, caught in loose wire. The black horse is there beside him, just standing there. Shit, she thinks, and yells and waves for Darcy before she starts running. Ghost is trying to stand. He has broken a leg. She can see it as soon as she gets there. The wire has buried its way into his pastern, pulled tight in his struggling. He is bleeding. A sick feeling rises from her gut. She can imagine it happening in the night – the wire on the ground, looping and tightening around the limb. Ghost feeling it and panicking, the wind adding to his fear. He would have galloped away, she thinks. Back towards the shelter of the trees. Nausea rises up in her. The wire would have caught him like a leash and thrown him over. Darcy arrives.

'Shit,' he says, as he sees. 'Easy, mate.'

The horse tosses his head, strains his free leg and tries again to stand up.

'Hey baby,' Hannah whispers. She is crying. 'Hey pretty boy.'

'I'll get the rifle,' Darcy mutters, and leaves her. Hannah crouches at the horses head.

'Steady mate,' she whispers. 'Don't you move.'

She holds him until Darcy returns, holds him and strokes him. They cut him free, first. He feels the pressure slack and struggles again, but can't stand. He stops, after a moment, and lies there exhausted.

'Stand clear,' Darcy says, 'but talk to him.'

He levels the gun at the horse's head. There is a crack before Hannah can even say anything and Ghost is still. The black horse shies away, propping, eyes wide. They stand there a moment. Darcy puts a hand on her shoulder. 'Not your fault,' he says. 'I'll get Mulvey to send someone up with the bobcat to bury him.'

'Thanks,' Hannah whispers.

It is a strange day after that. The wind drops, but high up the clouds still scud across the sky as though they are racing. The sun is strong, too. Hannah finds herself walking around and around the classroom, without knowing why.

'Miss,' one of the younger ones calls out halfway through her maths lesson. 'How did Mary get pregnant?'

The whole room goes quiet. She stares around at them and can see Thomas looking down fixedly at his work, the colour gone from his face. She swallows.

'Who told you that?' she asks, to buy herself time.

‘Father John told us,’ he answers. ‘And she’s gone all big like Marnie, and like our bitch Kelly.’

Hannah blinks.

‘Kelly’s our Dad’s kelpie, Miss,’ one of the older girls says. ‘Shut up, Sam.’

‘No,’ Hannah says. ‘It’s alright, he can ask. What else did Father John tell you, Sam?’

‘He said she was pregnant because she was going to give us a Jesus baby and because God loves her and loves us. Is that for real?’

‘Well,’ she says, breathing deep. ‘Father John thinks it is.’

‘But Marnie said we shouldn’t believe Father John because he is old an’ crazy.’

‘Well, I’m sure that’s what she believes. But you can believe whatever you want, Sam.’

‘Marnie says you can’t believe everything people *say*,’ the older girl jumps in, squirming in her seat.

‘But I wanna believe we’re lucky!’ Sam says, and everyone is staring at them now, Thomas included.

‘You can believe that, if you want,’ Hannah says carefully. There is a bang at the back of the room and Thomas is standing, his chair turned over beside him, eyes blazing, staring her down.

‘Bitch,’ he chokes, voice strangled. Hannah steps back in shock. ‘Bitch,’ he says again, and turns and runs from the classroom. The door bounces off its frame behind him, swings stupidly out into the day. The rest of the class gasp and jump up, run over to the windows to watch him running down towards the beach, the dust rising in puffs with each footfall.

‘Quiet down,’ Hannah says, without moving. ‘Back in your chairs, back to work.’ And by the time she has closed the door, they are back at their places, heads bent down intently over the worksheets, pretending furiously to work. Only Thomas’ chair is still out of place.

She waits in the classroom for him after home time. His bag is still there, solitary on its peg. Two of the other boys look at it as they leave, but she raises an eyebrow and they leave it be. She sits at her desk and tries to be calm. Everything is wrong. Thomas. Mary. Ghost. She doesn’t want to go home, doesn’t want to face her mother or tell Sophie. She can hear the cacophony of parents and children at the gates outside. She tries to resist the temptation to get up and look for Nugget and hates herself for it. When she does give in, all the kids have already gone. The school is quiet, still. Her cheeks start to burn. Her mother’s voice sings out. *Well, what did you expect?* She sighs and gathers her work to take home. She glances again at the bag on the way out. *Bitch*, the room whispers to her. So much anger! So much pride. You learn pride living here, she

thinks. It is an island thing. You learn pride at your mother's breast, a necessary lesson, the only thing between staying on and leaving. She feels tears spring up again, burning down her cheeks. Her eyes wander out the window to the shadow of the hill. She turns off the light and closes and locks the door behind her.

*

The church became a centre. Geographically it always had been, between the hill and the village and in among the vines. Now we all turned in towards it. Things happened at the church. It began to replace the store and the pub. Eventually, the children made me curious and so I went. It sounded more innocent, coming from them. It sounded sweeter. There was less greed in it or perhaps just more belief. It was hard to tell sometimes with the adults of the village. Their faith was complex, a thing of need and advantage.

Perhaps I am being unfair. It is easy to feel the weight of impending time in a place like Chesil. We needed to believe in something, all of us. And now we had a new direction. 'Our Saviour', Father John called her. On Sunday mornings we all flowed in together. People talked about spreading the word, as though it was a movement we had started. Letters were written, journalists called.

And slowly, so slowly I almost didn't notice, everything built up. People came from the mainland to see her. The pub filled up. The Islanders opened their homes. Rooms were made available, bed and breakfast offered. Sarah at the store started meals. Mass became a twice-weekly event. The man from the ferry began running tours and extra services.

I went to church. I couldn't help myself. I sat each week beside Darcy and carried the gossip home to my mother like a spy coming in to report.

*

Bill stands behind the bar and looks out across the bistro floor. The pub is full, people in for lunch. A group of trim little old ladies and two dry-looking men sit in the corner, sipping sherries and trying not to lean on the table. They ordered sandwiches and only ate half. Church tourists. There are more, day by day. The next table are too, he thinks, a man and two girls in tight jeans, not saying much. Two local men sit at the bar beside him, the last of his regulars: Harry Keillor and Darcy from up the hill. Drinking is not so popular now the Island has found Christ. They are the only ones in the room who have had more than a single glass.

'So who'd you reckon it is, then?' Darcy is saying. 'Our mystery father.'

They have had this conversation before. Harry laughs. 'She had a boyfriend! Not much of a mystery. Christ,' he adds, 'don't let the wife catch me saying that.'

Darcy snorts.

'Wasn't him,' Bill says slowly as he comes around the corner. He slouches on the stool set front of them. 'One of the fishermen told me he beat that Williams' kid half to a pulp, shouting out about it. They had it out on the breakwater. Ended up in the drink.'

'Him then?' Harry says.

'My bloke said they kissed and made up, claimed it wasn't him either.'

'Seriously?'

'Said he watched the whole damn thing from his dinghy.'

Harry frowns. 'That kid was picking at my place all summer. Wouldn't have thought it. He's a good kid. Hope for his sake it wasn't him.'

'Good kids can still get into trouble,' Darcy says, and pushes his glass forward. 'Fill me up?'

Bill pours the beer and passes it over.

The man from the table in middle of the room stands and wanders over, empty glass in his hand. He is wearing expensive jeans, a woollen jumper.

'So it's a set-up, then?' he asks. They look at him, blank. 'I couldn't help but overhear,' he says and smiles apologetically.

'Then you would have heard that we can't explain it,' Harry says, mouth a little tight. Darcy stares at the wall.

'But you don't believe it.' The stranger pushes.

'Don't know what to think.' Darcy mutters. There is something gritty in his voice.

'Sure,' the stranger says, and his face has gone cold. 'I'm from the paper. Can't tell me anything?'

Bill chuckles. 'Might be that the Father up at the church has it right. Anything's possible.'

The journalist shakes his head, a dirty sneer across his face. 'That girl slept with one of those young bastards and no one is going to come clean about it. See, I've been doing some research. Statistically teen pregnancy has been higher here than anywhere else in the state. You've got a bunch of workers getting paid bugger all to pick grapes and young kids basically living alone while their parents do shift work on the mainland to make ends meet. They're running wild and you're all sitting here pretending you're squeaky clean, that nothing's wrong. The whole thing's a bloody joke.'

None of them say anything, sit at the bar staring at him like stunned mullets. He sighs.

'Another pot, if you would.'

He doesn't wait but wanders back to his table. Harry raises his eyebrows. Bill pulls the beer and takes it over. The man glances up at him but doesn't say anything. One of the girls pulls a bulky bag, a camera bag, in under the table to give him room. The strap is padded and curved, and reaches out from under her chair like a child's elbow, a child playing hide-and-seek.

'He's right,' Darcy is mumbling, as Bill gets back to the bar. 'We've fucked up here.'

'Christ,' Harry says. 'What are you talking about?'

'He's right,' Bill replies simply.

They leave soon after that. Bill hovers behind the bar, empties the beer trays and wipes the top down. The floor is crowded but there is no one left he recognises. It's a strange feeling, he should know everyone here. Darcy's words roll around the back of his mind. Being stupid, he tells himself. The business up at the church is saving them. The place has never been busier. A woman signals to him from the table in the corner. The whole group is staring around at him expectantly.

'Can I get you anything?' he asks as he reaches them.

'We were told the service started at 11am?' asks the woman closest to him, straight backed in a dove-grey pant suit. The men are in suits as well.

'Up at the church?

'Yes.' She smiles up at him. 'There was no one there.'

'They changed it for the afternoon ferry. Let people come in from the mainland.'

One of the younger ones smiles into her hanky. The man beside her purses his lips slightly and stares out the window.

'When is it, then, please?' asks little dove-grey, and he turns back to her. He pauses for a moment. Kind eyes, he thinks.

'Half past two.'

'Ah,' she says. 'Thank you.' A few of them look at watches and there is a little ruffle of alarm go through them all. They stand up, straighten jackets and begin to bustle out.

‘Thank you,’ the woman says again. She hands him her glass. ‘You are blessed here, you know,’ she says. ‘This place is beautiful.’

‘Any time,’ he smiles and she turns to hurry after the others. ‘It’s alright,’ he calls, as she opens the door. ‘You won’t miss it.’ She smiles again and walks out. He stands there and watches them all go past the window, dark shadows in the dirty glass. The room empties quite quickly after that. The customers gather bags and leave in time for the service, the noise simmers and falls silent. He stares across the room and out the window. The phone rings and he ignores it. Outside, the sky is grey. Condensation drips in trails down the glass, lines like tears across the blurred shapes of the road, the houses and the hill behind.

*

Mrs. Keillor stands in her kitchen, the potatoes in the oven and the roast resting on the stove top. Harry is late, coming in. The meat will be spoiled. The vegetables are already over-cooked. She takes her time laying the table and then just waits. He is loud, when he comes.

'Hello, hello!' he calls, and she waits for him to appear. He is smiling and she forces herself to smile back. 'Smells lovely!'

'On the table in two minutes,' she says, and he disappears again. When he comes back she is already seated, the meal going cold before her. He sits and folds his palms.

'For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful.'

'Amen,' Mrs. Keillor intones and picks up her cutlery.

'I've been thinking…' he begins, as they start eating.

'Yes?'

'We should open the house as a bed and breakfast,' he says, and she freezes, one hand halfway to her mouth. 'It's a good opportunity, love, tourists coming in. We've got all this room, and we could use the money for the garden. It shouldn't be too much work, really.'

She says nothing. Her head begins slowly to spin. There is a moment of silence and Harry reaches for the salt. He looks at her but she can't say anything.

'If we took in six people,' he begins again, but she cuts him off.

'You want me to cook and clean for six?'

'We could fit the study out, and the second lounge. The spare bedroom will be alright.'

'Six people! Day and night in this house!'

'Well? We could do it.'

'But why?' she whispers.

'Why?' he repeats, his surprise almost brash. 'Because we can. Because the money would be good! Think of what we could do with the garden.'

'Is it right, though?' she asks, looking down at the plate of food before her. 'To profit from the birth of Christ?'

He turns and stares at her. 'The birth of Christ…?'

'And it would be so much work, so much more than you think – cooking, cleaning and washing for six people!'

He pauses. 'Well, if you think it's too much…'

'It would be,' she says definitively. 'It would be too much.'

He grunts and lets it go, turns his attention to the meat. It is tough, it was in the oven for too long.

It takes her a long time to sleep that night. She is exhausted, but even so she lies in the dark for a long time. Harry snores beside her. The darkness is thick and heavy, a solid weight across her chest.

*

There is a face in the tree, a dead leaf face, and it looks like an old man staring crookedly down. It is strange to see dead leaves in a gum tree, but the limb is hanging bent and awkward and broken, and the face is most certainly there. Sam has to crane his neck back to see it. He looks back down at the man lying in the dirt beside him.

'There's a face, Nugs. See it?' The boy swallows. 'A face, Nugs.'

But the other doesn't reply, his lips stay resolutely pinned, tight and grey against his pain. The sun is relentless overhead, and the boy shifts sideways a little to ensure his shadow falls more squarely over the grimy face in front of him. He has given up on trying to shade the man's body. Back turned to the tractor, he keeps his eyes on the man's head, looks up and out to the horizon for the rescue team which should be coming – soon, he promises himself secretly, they'll havta be comin' soon – to the paddock and the trees and returns to the man's head, but never looks at his body. The face in the tree winks at him. He can't make himself look at the body, he won't. The blood frightens him, welling up black and thick from somewhere deep and wrong.

Marnie will be cross. They weren't meant to be out there. Nugs promised them a ride though, and Marnie was at church, and the kids were just there, the three of them with nothing to do. So Nugget took them. It wasn't his fault. It was the tractor that did it. It went sideways, the ground greasy after yesterday's rain. He was laughing when it first tipped, they all were. They spilled to the ground like coins from a bag. And they bounced, too, like coins, him 'n Jadey 'n Pet. Pet jumped, even, but Nugget didn't – he stayed pinned there under the sharp end of the gear stick, the stupid knob come off. When they tugged and pulled and finally shifted it he still didn't move, not at first. And then his blood came welling slowly out from the black hole in his stomach. Then he moved, he moved like a broken man and shoved his hands in there, curled himself sideways like a fist and wailed in a voice that stopped suddenly like it was cut off.

He hasn't spoken since and his eyes are closed, but he's awake, Sam knows. He groans occasionally. There is a sheen of sweat across his forehead and the boy swats industriously at the opportunistic flies that land there. He can hear more behind him but he turns his back and focuses on the man's face, tries not to let the tears come. When a crow caws bleakly from the stand of gums, the ones with the face, he jumps up, but he has no idea what to do. He stares up at it.

'You won't have 'im, ya black bastard!' he calls, but it wavers slightly and his eyes are frantic. The man groans.

'Nugs, Nugs, hang on, OK?' he calls back, and desperately kicks around on the

ground for leafy branches, because it has just occurred to him what he needs to do. He has seen a movie where an Indian man laid leaves on a wound. And gum branches will keep the flies off, he thinks, plenty of 'em laid on. So he scuffs around in the fallen leaves at the base of the closest tree. There aren't any 'cept a tiny one all dusty and dirty and dry. He needs green leaves and so he walks around them all, quicker and more desperate as he goes. So many trees and no low branches! He jumps and pulls at the lowest one on a young tree, holds on as it bounces and swings, bearing his weight. The sound that comes oozing out between his teeth is pure frustration. He runs back to the man and sits again at his head, brushes at the flies.

'You 'K, Nugget?' he asks, but the man is silent. 'I'm gonna get some shade branches, OK?' He stands again and stares around for more trees, but wavers, bouncing from one leg to the other, and eventually sits. There are none close enough. A minute ticks past. He calms slightly. He has a graze on his elbow and he contemplates it, crooking his arm and cupping it in his other hand. More flies settle and he waves them off. Water, he thinks, and stands again. The tractor is still flipped sideways, ticking occasionally in the sun. It smells of dirt and engine oil, smells the boy once thought of as good. A cloud of flies have settled on the gear stick. When the others left, it was still providing shade, but the sun is too high now, crawling along directly above them, clear and white in the stark blue sky. The water is in the drum attached to the left wheel, the one sticking awkwardly up in the air. It is bashed in on one corner and it takes a couple of big tugs for him to get it free of its metal basket. When it does come it thumps awkwardly to the ground, missing his foot by inches, so that he hears the water sloshing in it as something ominous, the sound of a close-run-thing. He drags it the few metres to the man and untwists the cap. The water comes spilling out in a great gush the first time he tips it, hitting the cap that he is holding out and flooding over to pool in the red dust at the man's shoulder.

'Shit, shit, shit,' the boy whispers, then: 'Sorry, Nugget.'

He tries again, pouring slowly, carefully, and fills the cap. He takes a deep breath and lifts the man's head gently. The eyes spring open and the boy staring into them almost forgets what he is doing. The cap wavers dangerously before he remembers and raises it to the pursed lips. They open a little and he tips it, the man swallows.

'Sammy,' he groans.

''Salright, Nugget, they'll be back soon, promise.' The eyes close again and the boy lowers the head gently once more to the ground.

The sun grinds on across the sky. The boy can feel his arms and neck burning. He drinks the water slowly, swills it around his mouth, lets it dribble down the back of

his throat before he swallows. Mustn't waste water, he hears Marnie say. He wakes suddenly to find himself propped against the front tyre and discovers that he has fallen asleep. He waves the flies from the man's face and leans back again. What else can he do? Nugget isn't making any noise now and his eyes don't open when Sam lifts his head to offer him a drink. He is afraid the man is dead but he doesn't know how to check, so he pretends he isn't, talks to him and pretends the man is talking back. The crow in the gum tree is joined by a second. Together they shuffle uncomfortably and settle down to wait.

'Heeaaaarrrrt,' the first calls, and the boy can see the second cock his head. 'Heeeaaaarrrtt,' it says again, and the boy grits his teeth. They do battle against the crows, him and Nugget. Nugget has a shot gun and the boy a pea-shooter that he loads with stones. It is smaller than a real gun but it makes a satisfying crack when he fires it. He'll get a .22 for his 14th birthday, Nugget says. They only shoot crows and foxes. Foxes steal and the crows take the lambs, take their eyes out and then slowly pick at them until the poor little buggers die of shock and pain and exhaustion. The ewes do nothing, Nugget says, 'cos Merinos are bitch mothers and they'd be better with part-breds. He doesn't get to choose, though, 'cos it isn't their farm, he just does the work. They don't hate the crows. Nugget told him once that they were the most respectful of God's good creatures 'cos they never wasted a scrap of anything, and they never ate their own kind. The boy thought about it then and pointed out that humans never eat their own kind either, and Nugget said yeah but look at all we waste. The boy didn't quite get that but he got that they didn't hate the crows. Still, you can't have 'em, he thinks, and watches the two in the tree almost as carefully as he watches the face of the man curled in the dirt at his feet.

The boy rolls stray little balls of sheep crap between his fingers. It is everywhere. Usually you can't see it for the grass, but the sheep must camp here so there is no grass. That's why the tractor slipped, he thinks to himself, and when he looks up now it is half for the sheep as well as for the rescuers. It is hard to see across the paddocks and for a moment he worries they won't be able to find him. He'll hear them cooee, though, he thinks, and looks up and out once more. A third crow appears. He knows they are drawn by the smell of the blood. He can smell it himself, and something sharper that he doesn't know how to name. He ignores both smells and brushes the flies away once more, his hand skating across the forehead that is no longer sweaty but papery dry. When he looks up again, grey blobs move across the paddock towards him. It's only when he hears the calling that he realises it isn't the sheep. Rescue, he thinks, and wants to sink down again in relief but forces himself up, forces himself to jump and wave and call back. He sees them turn then, towards him, and come bumping across the paddock. The ute and

two men and Jadey. He does sink down when he sees that, their faces peering through the dusty windscreen; he feels himself sinking softly until his rump thuds abruptly down in the dirt. Rescue. Home. He sits in the front when they go. The men say he has done enough, and he climbs into the greasy seat without arguing. It is cool in the cab. Jim drives and Bob stays in the back with Nugget, his twisted body spread awkwardly on the canvas stretcher, Jadey perched on her heels beside him, eyes huge. She looks sick, her face is the wrong colour, almost blue-green. Like the little Buddha, he thinks, the one that sits on Mrs. Mulvey's side-table in the good lounge.

'OK, easy goes,' Bob calls, and Jim starts the ute. He swings it round slowly, under the gum trees, and the boy looks up one last time as they go. The face is still there. It peers down crookedly at him, brown through the olive grey of the feathery leaves. Jim presses his foot down a little further, and bumping gently they gather speed.

The ambos let them all come across to the mainland, him, Jadey, Pet 'n Marnie all sitting side by side in the little plastic cabin of the ferry. Marnie stretches her feet out and rubs both hands at her back and her rounded belly. Jadey curls up sideways, knees to her chest. Nugget is stretched out on the floor in front of them, and the paramedics are leaning and whispering over him like large blue monkeys. He is laying out straight now, not all curled like he was, stripped and bandaged and all wrapped up. There are plastic tubes coming out his arm, and a mask on his face. Pet has fallen asleep and his head nods against his mother, in time with the rise and fall of the waves. Outside, the sky is growing dark. They can hear Mr. Mulvey standing out on the deck. He and Marnie were waiting when they got Nugget back. Now he is talking to someone, waving his free arm about so that it looks as though he is about to fight the ambulance. Its red and white bulk takes up almost the whole space. Usually you can fit two cars. It almost looks sorry, he thinks, embarrassed even. Mr. Mulvey waves and shouts and it sits there quietly waiting for him to finish.

'Yeah, stupid bugger flipped it. Nah… nah, he had his bloody kids on the back. The girl dragged the little one all the way back to our place to get help. He pinned himself beneath the gear stick and the kids bloody well pulled him free… Yeah, yeah. You wouldn't know, eh?'

They hit a swell and the ferry rocks up and down again and Nugget groans. One of the paramedics wipes his face and makes shooshing sounds, like Marnie to Pet. Jadey makes a clicking noise of disgust somewhere deep down in her throat. Pet yawns and rubs at his eyes.

'Ten minutes,' the ferry-man calls from up front. Marnie yawns and pulls Pet onto her lap, awkwardly, his limbs arranged around the bulk of her baby.

Mr. Mulvey opens the cabin door.

‘D’you call ten minutes?’ he asks.

‘We’re just coming in now.’

‘We’ll be docking in ten,’ he says, back into the phone. ‘I appreciate this.’ He glances up at everyone listening. Marnie looks away, mouth pursed.

‘Righto. Well, I’ll see you then. Hoo roo, then… yep, hoo roo.’ He hangs up and walks past them, around Nugget, to sit up the front next to the ferry man. The ferry man shuffles and looks back over his shoulder at them.

‘Not long, kids,’ he says. ‘Almost there.’

Soon they are slowing down. The churning sound of the water grows louder and they can hear the motor whine. Sam stands and goes to look out the window. The dark water is lit with silver streaks of foam and pale yellow lights from the pier. The paramedics stand and stretch, and the smaller one starts to bustle around gathering up pieces of equipment, bandages, plastic gloves and two clear bags of liquid which swing gently from a coat-hanger on a pole. When finally they feel the nudge and bump of the boat against the tyres, the tall one goes outside. The other leans down over Nugget and tucks in the edges of the blanket. He moves around to pull out two orange handles on each side of the stretcher.

‘Gurney’s on the car deck,’ says the tall one, leaning in the door, and the boy looks around automatically.

‘Ready when you are,’ the small one calls back.

They stand over Nugget and with a nod lift him together between them. Everyone in the cabin steps back, clears the way, and they carry him out over the door stop to the trolley and wheel him away.

‘Can we ride in the amb’lance?’ Pet asks Marnie. The boy can hear the click-clunk of them loading Nugget into it. Marnie doesn’t answer but grabs a bag.

‘Jadey, Sam, grab those others, will you?’ she says, and swings Pet onto her hip. Mr. Mulvey and the ferry man shake hands, and Mr. Mulvey pushes past them out into the cold air. There is an awkward pause and the ferry man turns to them.

‘Alright, love?’ he asks. The boy isn’t sure if he is talking to Jade or to Marnie. He smiles weakly and picks up one of the bags. ‘He’ll be right, love. They’ll fix him up there.’ Marnie stares at him a moment and sits down again, her head buried in Pet’s chest. Pet croons softly and strokes her hair.

‘Um-ma,’ he whispers. ‘It’s ok.’

Sam can see rather than hear her sobbing. The ferry man’s face crinkles gently. He turns and guides the boy and the girl outside.

‘Go talk to the ambos for a moment,’ he says. ‘Your Mum’ll be out in a tick.’

‘She isn’t our Mum,’ the boy says and the ferry man looks at him in surprise.

‘She’s Pet’s Mum,’ Jadey mutters. ‘Not ours. He’s our Dad.’

The ferry man chuckles. ‘Yeah, I know that, mate. She’ll be out, anyway. Go talk to them, eh?’

‘C’mon,’ Jadey says, and they creep around the edge of the ambulance to the drivers’ side, where the small one is sitting with the door open.

‘You kids going to meet us in there?’ he asks cheerfully, looking down. Neither of them answer. ‘Haven’t got room for the lot of youse.’

The ferry man appears again.

‘Ready?’ he sings out, and presses a yellow button on the wall near the ramp. It goes grinding down slowly. As it sinks, Sam can see the pier and the docks all flood-lit an eerie orange-white. He feels a hand on his shoulder and looks around. Marnie is there behind him, Pet still perched on her hip and Jadey beside her laden with all the bags.

‘C’mon,’ she says, and they step back for the ambulance to start up and trundle down the ramp. Once it is off, the ferry man beckons them forward and they follow.

‘Look at the lights, Pet,’ Jade says, and they all look up. The ambulance is wandering slowly along the pier and the whole of the docks flash with the red and blue from its roof. Sam looks down. The water flickers with it, black-red-blue, dappled with the white and orange from the flood lights and dirty yellow foam from the churning engine of the ferry behind them.

‘Check out the water,’ he says, and they all look. Marnie smiles.

‘C’mon, you lot. The nice man from the ferry’s called us a cab.’ They traipse their way the length of the pier and through the abandoned terminal. There is a car waiting out in the car-park, and Mr. Mulvey is talking to the driver through the window. He straightens up and turns to them.

‘I’m off. I’ll call in tomorrow morning and see how you’re getting on, OK?’

‘Thanks for your help,’ Marnie calls back. He waves and gets into the car.

‘Bastard,’ Jade mutters, and Sam giggles. Marnie looks down at her with an eyebrow raised. ‘Well,’ she says, ‘he is.’

Marnie just smiles. They sit on the bags and wait. Eventually the cab slinks into the car park and pulls up in front of them. The driver is a fat man with a dirty shirt.

‘Where to, love?’ he asks, and pops the boot. Marnie ignores him and starts piling the bags in.

‘The hospital,’ she says eventually, easing her giant belly into the front seat. She turns around to look at the three of them together in the back. The boy smiles at her and she smiles tiredly back. ‘There’s been a bit of an accident.’

*

Hannah stares at the boy in front of her. There was an accident, he is telling her, and his Dad is in hospital on the mainland. Nugget? She looks at the boy again.

'I hadta stay with him,' he says. 'At the tractor. And now Jadey's home with Pet 'cos Marnie's still over there.' Yes, she thinks. He is Nugget's. She blinks again, long blinks, and tries to move the information past the hollow space in her chest.

'That must have been scary, Sam.'

He shrugs. 'I drank all the water. It got a bit hot.'

Hannah nods. The children around her watch her silently.

'Can we go out yet, Miss?' another boy asks. His head is cocked sideways as though the question is just habit and his real purpose there is to read her, pull her secrets from her mind. She shakes her head.

'No,' she says. 'Not yet. Everyone back to your seats, please.' She turns back to her desk, shuffles her papers, and lets the wash of classroom noise sooth her. Breathe, she says to herself. Just another day. She inhales and turns to them.

'Right. Who has finished their sheet?' she asks, and a forest of arms reach up.

Once when they were young, Nugget took her to the lookout.

'See?' he said. 'Whales.'

They were shadows in the water, tiny black shapes marked by the occasional spray of exhaled breath, the white flash of a fluke. He had dragged her up there, practically. She was still puffing from the climb, hands on hips and face turned into the wind. There was a stone raised with a plaque on it and he flopped down into the shade behind it. She remembers hovering, slightly, and he looked up at her and patted the ground beside him. She sat eventually, and could feel the warmth of his arm burning across the tiny inch-wide gap she hadn't dared cross. The patch was bare, a small circle in the grass as though people had always sat there or as though it was made for it.

'It's why they built Chesil, y'know,' he said. She turned to him and he laughed at the look on her face. ''Cosa the whales. They hunted 'em. Dragged 'em up onta the beach behind bloody rowboats and flensed 'em.'

'What's flensed?' she asked.

'That's when they get all the blubber off 'em.'

'Oh.' She looks out at the little pod. She can count six lithe shapes. 'They go pretty quick,' she said. 'How'd they catch 'em?'

'I dunno,' he said. He was looking at her in a strange sort of way, as though there was something wrong with the question. She remembers blushing. 'They did though. They

caught hundreds. I seen some of the bones.'

'Where?'

'On the mainland. Me mum took me.'

'Oh. Not here.'

'Nah.' There is a pause. 'You wanna write your name?'

It took her a minute to work out what he meant. She turned and looked. The stone behind them was covered in faded names, scratched and drawn, linked together and dated. *Bill 4 Sal, 1966. Tommo. Kelly is a slut*. There was something dirty about it, the official history on one side of the stone and the sex and blood and tears on the other. It felt messy. She preferred the neat order of the bronze, the raised names and dates. She ran a finger across the deeper of the marks. He found a sharp chip of stone. It crumbled as he dug it in, but it worked. Little white lines appeared. He scratched his name and looked at her a second. Then he picked up the stone again and carved hers, the space between them empty. She stared at him, eyes wide. Perhaps she held her breath. He finished her name and looked at her again. He bounced it gently in his palm. For a horrible moment she thought he would just toss it away, out into the long, waving sea of dry grass. But he held it up again and when he took it down the number '4' had appeared. She stared at it, at him, and when he kissed her she kept her mouth closed and held her breath. She remembers that. She remembers that he smelt of hay and tasted of salt and cigarettes.

She can hear the kids outside laughing and looks at the clock. It is past time and no one has appeared to ring the bell. Two girls tear across the yard and an older boy follows. She purses her lips and rings it herself. The clanging vibrates through her teeth, picks up the sound of running feet as the kids all come streaming across the yard. Nugget turned up once in the school-yard. He waited for her, waited for school to finish, so that when they all trooped out he was there. Waiting for her! The girls giggled and nudged each other as they walked past him. He was two years older and had left school. They giggled and whispered and one of them wolf-whistled under her breath. Hannah just stood there and watched him. He looked down at his feet when she didn't come over straight away. He didn't seem to like being the focus of all their attention. He scuffed one toe in the dirt and only looked up again when the school yard was empty and she was standing there in front of him.

'Comin'?' he asked. She just grinned. He held her hand and they walked down across the oval to the back fence towards the beach. They walked down through the dunes. When they got to the shoreline the wind was up, taking her hair and sending it flying. She laughed then, she couldn't help it. She ran down into the wind, down towards the

water. She stopped eventually, came back to hovering awkwardly beside him. A man appeared in the distance, wandering along the water's edge.

'Aw, shit,' Nugget said when he saw him. 'C'mon. Let's go.'

They walked back up towards the school again, only when they got to the road he pulled her sideways along the kids' track to the back fence and the school yard. She looked at him surprised, but he just towed her along. He didn't say anything, just walked, so she just followed. He stopped at one of the casuarina trees, brushed in under its canopy. It was big, and the feathery leaves closed them in. It had a crooked branch that wandered out sideways like a seat.

'D'ya wanna…' he started, and she looked at him sideways. She sat on the branch and he stood in front of her. She smiled. He kissed her. It made her hot, made heat prickle up the back of her neck. He tasted of chewing gum this time and she liked it. He stopped and looked at her.

'D'you like me?' he asked. She stared at him a moment, mutely surprised.

'Yes,' she whispered.

'Really? Like, really like me?'

'Yes,' she said again, and he kissed her for that. This time she let him push her mouth open, let his tongue in. The shock of it made her stiffen and she remembers that this is when he stopped.

'C'n I touch you?' he asked.

She didn't know what to do. How could she have? He looked down at the branch and his hands either side of her legs. He was close enough that her legs were spread open either side of him. When she didn't speak, he kissed her again. This time his hands worked their way from her knees up to her thighs. One slipped under her school dress and she was a statue then, a statue on the branch, hot and sweating, and he stopped.

'S'ok,' he said and smiled at her. The other hand appeared at the back of her neck and pulled her in to kiss him again. She tried to stop, she remembers. She tried to pull away, pushing her hands into the branch and leaning back, but his hand was there at her neck, and he just leaned with her, leaned over her, so that his whole weight was over hers and she was only just holding herself up. When he put his fingers inside her, her only thought was that they must be dirty. He stopped and stood up, he started undoing his pants.

'No,' she said, but it came out as a whisper, shaky, cracked.

'S'ok,' he said again. 'Promise.' He smiled at her and stroked her leg, gently, softly, until she relaxed.

'Ok,' she whispered. She closed her eyes when he pulled her underwear down but she didn't say anything.

Nugget walked her home that afternoon, the two of them all the way up the hill together. By the time they reached her place all the awkwardness was gone and she thought she was in love. It felt strange but it didn't hurt anymore. And he held her hand. Her mother was there when they got to the gate. She remembers being nervous. Nugget didn't let go. He just held his other hand up to shade his eyes and looked her mother straight in the face.

'G'day, Mrs. Mulvey,' he said.

The déja vu only hits her later, while the children work. They chatter and she lets them, and it is this that makes her see it. Here. This is her school. Mrs. Wilson with her iron-coloured hair in a loose bun. The desks in rows, not the groups she has now. Nostalgia sends her rocking, reeling back on her heels. She remembers sitting up the back that summer – year eight, her last year on Chesil. She stares at the carpet. It is new, of course. The classroom is a new demountable, not the stuffy brick room that used to be there. She flicks a glance out the window, towards the dunes. The view has not changed. She remembers it too well.

Slowly, the day ends. She feels like crying when finally they have all left, with relief more than anything. She stands at the windows and once more looks out. That tree, she thinks. There. The tree waves gently in the breeze and a cloud slides away from the sun, stealing all the softness from the light. She turns away, grabs her bags and locks the door. Her car is waiting, out in the dusty car-park. Home, she thinks. She only looks back once, but the spectre of a sixteen year old boy follows as she winds her way up the hill.

*

It is strange remembering so much about Chesil. What goes, what stays. The way my mother stood in the kitchen when I told her about the accident. She had a plastic bag in one hand, full of home-grown potatoes Darcy had given us. She clutched it in a strangle-grip and it hung from her hand like a corpse, swinging slightly as she wavered. These details feel more real sometimes than my actual life, they makes the colours of the city seem dull and muted. I have spent so long trying to stop it, trying to forget, that it is almost a relief now to know I can still remember.

Once when we were children, Sophie and I watched a butterfly emerge from its cocoon. You can imagine the two of us: squatting on our heels, mouths open as slowly its wings unfurled. They were still clammy from the sack. It waved them open and shut, open and shut in silent self-applause.

I suppose it is hard to forget a place you love. Events, people, moments in time, they are less reliable. But Chesil itself? Impossible not to recognise its smell, its taste. Salt on the wind. Eucalypt. Red dust and tea tree, the musky undertone of wattle.

I went for a walk late last night, after the people and the traffic had mostly disappeared, and tried to enjoy just being outside. It was too light, though. That was what bothered me the most. The other things, the concrete and the rubbish, the petrol fumes and the noise, I can almost ignore them now. But it was late and everything was still light. Street lights and lounge rooms, flickering TVs. But more than that – a general lightness too. A strange purple. It was as though the city was stuck in a perpetual dusk, never moving forward into the deep, soothing calm of night. It frightened me. I'm not sure why. I ran home almost silently. I bounced along rubber-soled on my toes. Like a cat I stuck to the shadows and dark patches, avoided the street lights. By the time I got home I was sweating. It was beaded on my forehead, but it felt cool and clean and somehow it was everything the night was not.

*

Thomas is in the store, hiding up the back with a milkshake and a chocolate bar when Mary comes in with her mother. They don't see him. He moves a little to stand behind one of the veggie racks as they make their way up to the counter. Mary is looking down. She looks half-asleep.

'Mary,' he hisses. She doesn't hear him. Her mother and the woman Sarah are talking over the counter. Occasionally they stop to stare at Mary, who stares at the floor. Mrs. Keillor appears at the door and pushes her way in. The bell clangs, the fly-streamers billow inwards like a cape. She joins the other two women at the counter. Thomas pushes himself further behind the vegetables and tries to think small. Mary disappears.

'Sit down,' he hears Mary's mother say. 'Just stay here.' It is like she is talking to a small child or a dog. Thomas sticks his head around the side of a vegetable basket. Mary isn't on the chair but at the door, slipping out. The women at the counter are too busy chatting to notice. There are two old ladies outside and Mary pushes past them. Thomas looks back at the counter before slinking out from behind his cover and following. The ladies outside let him pass before going in.

'Sorry,' he can hear one of them say, 'but was that the Virgin…?'

The door swings shut. Thomas runs after Mary.

She is heading down towards the beach, walking quickly with her head down. Her dress catches the wind and fills like a sail. Thomas calls her name but the wind takes it from his mouth and she doesn't hear. A kid on a bike comes flying up from the jetty and has to swerve to miss her. She doesn't seem to notice. Thomas puts his head down and sprints.

'Mary,' he says as he reaches her and puts out a hand to her shoulder. 'I've been trying to find you!'

She screams the moment he touches her. Not a loud scream, not a movie scream, but a harsh, guttural cry that comes up from somewhere deep in her and is utter, blind panic. She swipes a hand around at his face, fingers bared like claws to scratch him.

'Mary, Mary, it's me!' he says, and tries to grab her arm but she is pulling free from him, tearing herself away. She runs like a mad woman down towards the beach. Thomas is left standing there, watching her go. He holds a hand to his cheek, she has raised two lines down his face. They sting. Somebody calls her name from behind him and instinctively he runs, one hand still up to cover the scratches.

*

Mary walks down through the dunes. She is panting, she can't run anymore. The wind buffets her. The dune grass bends sideways, flattens as though afraid. The gusts first pin her, hold her in place, and then lift her, carry her on light feet down to the beach. Sand whips up, she can feel it sting her calves. And the wind rips at her, screams through her hair and her clothes. She starts to laugh. The tears on her cheeks are blown away. She isn't quite sure if she is afraid, a wind-torn, forlorn little child or lifted by it, fearsome and free for the first time in months. The wind swings again, carries her forward. Mary laughs.

On the beach, the day is as hard and bright as glass, swept clean by the wind. She is alone. Sea foam hisses and evaporates, the gulls wheel and hang silent, swoop and tumble on each gust. The rumble and roar that is a muted undertone from the village seems to shatter here, deafening, and then pause, gather and shatter again. She stops at the bridge to look up for a moment. It calls to her. She tries to imagine walking up beside it, up to the fence, climbing through… It doesn't work without Thomas. She needs him there. She turns instead and just keeps walking on down the beach. It is quieter once she is around the point. The weight of the bush shelters her. It reaches down to kiss the dunes until there is only sea, sand, forest and sky wrapping her in their arms. She is free – out of sight, past reach. She takes her sandals off and leaves them in the shelter of a dune. She has never been this far and somehow the feel of the sand under her feet makes her think she is going backwards. Backwards! Strange. But it does feel that way, dream-like almost, her feet slipping, the warmth of the sand rising up through her. Backwards, onwards, out of sight, free.

She is paler than she was. She feels feather-light, and here on the beach it is a good feeling. At home, the cool atmosphere of the house feels liquid, somehow. It is quiet, dark, suffocating. She has been living in water. Hard, clean air is a relief, and she opens her arms to it, flings her face back to it. Her stomach is growing. In darker moments she feels as though she is carrying a black hole, an endless pit which drags all the colour and life from her, draws the eyes of all those around her, draws everything. A black hole there inside her. She sleeps with her arms wrapped tight around it, daring it to suck her in, and wakes stiff-armed and worn. It is harder to believe in black holes out here, in the wind and the sunlight.

A dead gull rots in a pile of seaweed and a cloud of blowflies rise up, buzz frantically and settle again as she passes. The seaweed ferments in great drifts, occasionally lifting

fingers to drift in a wave as the tide slowly crawls its way up the sand. A few blue-bottles lay sprawled on the water line, their brilliant blue tendrils streaming out behind them. She steps around them gingerly, wary of the stingers. The foam curls and turns to lace in a yellow line along the tide-mark and then disappears as the next wave creeps in. It is beautiful, really. The beach stretches on endlessly, white sand, blue-white sky, a shimmer of heat and sunlight. The land changes as she walks. The shelter of the dunes gives way to the bulk of the hill. The beach moves in to it, nestles against it. Rocks and boulders mark the edge of the scrub and the beach is white and flat and perfect against it. The little river surprises her when she finds it. No one comes round this side of the Island. It is low tide and the inlet is cut off from the sea by the expanse of the beach. But the water is moving. Even just standing there, she can see that. She wonders if that happens every day, with every tide. She tucks herself into the edge of the dunes, piles the warm sand over her bare legs and watches. Slowly, gradually, the sea moves up and the river swells into a warm, brown pool, the surface of the water tight with reaching towards the ocean. It makes her smile, watching that. When finally it does break, and a little rivulet goes spinning down the wet sand to the waves, she feels the tension snap inside her, too – the whole world breathes out, releases, goes loose and floppy with the relief of it.

Her mother told her to stay put in the store, like a child. To stay quiet, to be careful.

'She still hasn't spoken,' her mother whispered. Sarah leaned toward her and Mary just stared down. There was a moment of quiet before bell above the door clattered tunelessly and all three of them jumped. Mrs. Keillor pushed her way in, clutching one hand to her hat.

'Sit down,' her mother had said, forcing her onto a little seat in the corner. 'Just stay here. You mustn't do too much.'

It wasn't conscious, walking out. She simply stood and went as though under command – but her own command, this time, her body's command. There were strangers just outside the door, two women, and they turned to her surprised as she appeared.

'Why…' one started and trailed off. There was an audible click of saliva as she closed her open mouth. She reached forward, her hand a powdery white spider, and gently ran her fingers down the length of Mary's arm. The other woman leant forwards and stroked her hair.

'Lord be praised,' the first woman whispered and Mary moved back a step. They both smiled at her, one reached out a beckoning hand. Mary pushed through them and walked down past the village towards the sea. A hand grabbed her shoulder as she reached the foreshore. It was too much, that, the fingers grabbing at her, their strength. She snapped. When she couldn't run anymore, she kept walking, she just walked.

She paddles in the little river. The water is shallow, warm except for where it has met the tide. One trench in the very middle is deeper and cold, water coming down. It follows the beach along for a stretch and then turns up towards the reach of the hill. There are no dunes here, not big ones. There is just the expanse of the beach and then dune grass in a feathery fringe, the scrub and the hill. Giant boulders rest tucked into the rising ground, great stands of coloured rock. They are brilliant in the sunlight, red and yellow and almost metallic. Minnows dart and flicker around her feet. She remembers chasing minnows in the shallows of the village beach as a child. Herding them, screaming and squealing with all the others, all the children there running and wheeling and chasing the tiny fish. It is a very distinct memory. She remembers her mother in bathers and eating jam sandwiches. Here the water paints her feet the colour of weak tea. On impulse she walks up further, starts to follow the little river up through the dune-grass up towards the bush.

It is warm here, protected from the wind. The cold of the water is not necessarily unpleasant. Slowly as she walks the footing changes, sand becomes weed and rocks clutch at her ankles. She realises she cannot see her feet. The water is deeper here. It is darker, too, bright with reflections of the sky. The shadow of the hill looms before her. Mary pauses and looks back over her shoulder. The blue-white blaze of the sky is there, opening outwards. Ahead, the trees thicken, the river makes a tiny hole, brown and shadowy, an open mouth in the bush. She hesitates a moment, stares into it. Ghosts, she thinks. This is a place for ghosts. There is a cave hidden off to the left, with a shallow little opening set in a crumbling stand of rock. The floor is almost completely covered in sand. She peers in. The walls are the red-gold of set limestone. Water drips somewhere further in, a harsh little plip-plip to echo and bounce through and out to the light. Mary steps in, crouches and runs a finger along the wall. Drawings. There are drawings, faint black and red lines, weird shapes, gaunt figures. She twists her head, moves closer. No, just veins in the rock, streaks of colour, surely. But there? There? No. Just the rock. There is a pile of bones further in, higher up where the sand gives way to rock and shale. She peers at them. They are strangely shaped, could almost be human. She laughs at herself and jumps as an echo comes twittering back. A shiver runs through her. It is cold in there, out of the sun.

Moving back to the entrance she looks one last time and the shock of it almost sends her to her knees. They *are* drawings. Huge, enormous, everywhere. They are etched across the roof and all the way down, a snake and strangely-shaped men, running, and an animal she does not recognise. She stares. It makes her dizzy, all this. It is not hard, suddenly to imagine them – the aboriginals. Everything seems to swing gently. The cave

swells and expands in her mind, draws her in until suddenly it seems to go on and down forever, a honeycomb of caves, Chesil not real but hollow, empty, riddled with these caves and these drawings and all this underneath. Shadows and ghosts, and the thought of it rises up in her until she is spinning with it, dizzy, sick, the black hole in her belly is back and seems to ache with it, yearn for it. She has to clasp her arms around herself just to hold together. She closes her eyes, breathes. Opens them and blinks. Solidity restores itself. Chesil reforms around her and she turns again and walks out to the sky and the open heat of the sea. She feels nauseous. Breathe, she thinks. Calm. She looks down at her feet and walks.

The foam hisses up the beach as she walks back, and shimmers in the sunlight. A gull hovers silently above her. She hurries, and as she goes tries to ignore the whispering in the dune-grass, the almost liquid weight that comes washing back to rest across her shoulders. Her sandals are gone, she can't find them. Her legs hurt where they are wet, they sting in the wind. People are calling for her when she gets to the village. They are all searching. They crowd around her when they see her, hold her shoulders, her hands. She lets them, lets them half-carry her back up to the house and hates herself for it.

Her mother is waiting for her, pacing backwards and forwards on the veranda. When she sees Mary, she half-collapses into a wicker chair, watches her progress up the drive. When they get close enough, she opens her mouth to call out, but there are no words. A little shadow child, she thinks. That is what my daughter has become. A faerie child. And her swollen stomach magical, a miracle, a blessing, but frightening on the little shadow child being borne up the dusty driveway.

'Mary,' she says, finally, breathlessly. 'Thank God!'

Mary stands in front of her, head bent down, silent as her mother patters hands down her arms and across her belly. The return of normality is comforting, almost.

'Thank you,' her mother is saying again and again, to the people around her. 'Thank you. Thank you so much! Thank God!'

Eventually, Mary follows her mother inside and upstairs. Behind them a silvery trail of sandy footprints cling to the heavy wool of the carpet and glow gently in the afternoon light.

There isn't a word for it, she thinks later, lying supine in the bath. It wasn't quite freedom. It felt like it was stolen, something that shouldn't have happened. She lies there and clings to the memory of running with hands that tighten into claws. She hears when her father comes home.

'Found her?' he calls. His voice is muffled, strange. She can't hear her mother's

response. When she creeps downstairs, her father has his feet up sprawled on the couch and the TV is flickering in front of him. From where she stands, she can see the bald patch on his head shining with sweat and his shoulders peeling with sunburn beneath the faded singlet. She can smell him, too. Sweat and dirt and cigarettes. It is not a bad smell.

'Bring us a beer, love? I'm bushed.'

Mary leans back into the wall.

'Coming,' her mother calls back from the kitchen. The TV flickers again, a tourism commercial. Aboriginals dance, their black bodies painted ghost-white before an audience of fat, white middle-aged tourists and a token camp-fire. Her mother appears, moves across in front of the television to the couch.

'Thanks,' he says. 'Where is she?'

Her mother purses her lips. 'Upstairs in the bath. The Father says we have to be patient, that the Lord will guide her. He says even the Virgin Mary struggled at first.'

Her father snorts and says nothing. She hears the crack and hiss of the beer can. He doesn't believe, she thinks, and the thought lights her up. He doesn't believe it! Suddenly the breath is caught in her and there is a smile stretching her face painfully tight. Love rises up in her. Her father! Her mother shuffles back into the kitchen and Mary can hear pots being clattered on the stove. She slumps backwards against the wall, the crazy smile still frozen in place, eyes closed, face screwed up to keep from laughing.

'Love…' he calls. 'Send 'er in when she comes down.' He reaches for the can and pours it into a glass. Beer slops a little over one edge and trickles down the rim.

'Stupid little slut,' he mutters.

Mary opens her eyes.

*

It isn’t easy to write this. I don’t want to tell this story anymore.

15th March, 1829

Leaving, thank Christ. This […] place for Men, but a hell-hole for savages. W. looks younger… He […] pathetic […] a blond weed of a man. […] Fitzpatrick almost a day to die, and we listened in silence. He will be buried at sea.
[…]

"The trauma of the experience is made clear – not so much in what is said, but in what has been rendered unintelligible…"

Robert Blackman, *Terra Ignota: Exploration in Australia's South* (Sydney: Maurice Gladwin Press, 2003) p.236

*

The overseer takes him on for the ring-barking, the dark kid with the broken nose. He says he wants to be a boxer but he's handy with a horse and he swings the axe like he has something to prove. Good-looking, dark skinned. Fit and strong enough. Getting them out to the Island is so hard that he wouldn't be picky anyway. Old Mulvey, the boss, eyes him off from a distance on the second day, the young bloke in a bluey with sweat crawling wide stripes down his sides and back, his mouth pulled tight as he swings and swings and swings. The crock-thock of the axes echoes rhythmically between the ghostly shapes of the dying trees.

'Running from something?' he asks. His son beside him laughs.

The overseer turns to him, grunts. 'He's right.' As if he'd know.

'I'm not sheltering anything. I won't have it. We're not that desperate.' He flicks a glance back towards his daughter, sitting sideways with her feet hanging out the open door of the car. The overseer doesn't reply.

'What's his name?'

'Darcy. Jim Darcy.'

Old Mulvey frowns. He scuffs a glossy boot in the rutted track and turns to leave. 'Let him go, if he's trouble. I won't have it.' The car door closes heavy behind him and the car slips and slides as he three-point-turns his way slowly around and out. A few of them look up as he goes. The new kid stands and watches. One of the chippers spits loudly to one side.

Smoke-oh is called and the men down tools, collapse into the shelter of the trees. A box of slice is passed around, made by somebody's wife, accompanied by a tin of tobacco. Lying back, looking up, a blue haze fills the clearing and filters up between the leaves.

'Seems a shame to be killin' 'em all,' one man says, and a couple of them chuckle. The overseer glances over. The bloke is leant against a giant gum, wrapped in a picnic rug and a beanie. The new kid is crouching next to him, bare shouldered still, smoking and staring at his feet.

'You're gonna get cold,' he says. The new kid says nothing but looks up surprised. The overseer grunts. 'Spare oilskin in the back of the Toyota. Help yourself.' The kid's eyes are dark, suspicious, but he gets up and comes back wrapped in the coat. The wind shifts uneasily and a light drizzle swings in.

'Cheers,' he says quietly, and sits down again to roll himself another.

'Don't mention it,' the overseer replies, almost to himself. He is watching the kid's hands flashing deftly over the cigarette.

They finish early that night. The clouds close in, wrap the Island in soft, grey arms. He finds himself outside after dark. He can hear the men behind him, laughing and shouting at each other. The shearing shed smells already, stale beer and sweat, mud and piss. It'll stink by the time they're finished, he thinks. He wonders briefly if there'd be any point in asking Mulvey to get it cleaned. He closes his eyes a moment and thinks of his own little house, his wife waiting with the dinner hot on the table. And him stuck here. He opens his eyes and finds they have adjusted and the world is alive with light. Water is sheeted, dappled everywhere, puddles meet pug-holes and form lakes, the ditches run like streams. The moon must be full somewhere up above all that cloud. Every little drop glows pale blue.

The door cracks behind him and the men's voices swell out into the night and then fade again as it slams shut. It's the new kid. He comes racing out and vomits projectile into the ditch. The overseer smiles. He gives the boy a moment to steady himself, bent over, hands on knees, before he speaks up.

'Jim, is it?'

The kid looks around. 'Darcy, sir. Even me mother calls me Darcy.'

There is an awkward pause before the overseer sticks his hand out.

'Geoff Barnes.'

'Yessir,' the kid says, and shakes it. They stand there on the gravel, silent a moment. The kid is swaying a little. 'Who was the swank today? The bloke in the rover?'

The overseer grins, looks him over in the gloom. Everything about him is dark out here, a silky brown almost like velvet. Only the whites of his eyes and his teeth show, pick up the light from the water. 'That was Mr. Mulvey. Your employer.'

The kid laughs. 'Right. That'd be right.'

'Know him?'

'No.'

They stand a moment more.

'Where're you from, originally?'

'Cattle station, Mt. Isa.'

'Up there!' The overseer rolls a cigarette deftly with one hand, licks and lights it. 'Went up there myself when I was your age. Worked on Kallala.' The kid stays dumb and he inhales, lets the light of the cigarette's tip illuminate the boy's face. He can remember it. Hot, dry plains and saltbush, horses standing with their heads in the shade, tails swishing slowly and rhythmically against the flies. A world away from the rain and the fog and the Island. He looks down at the kid again. He isn't all black. He'd have a grandmother or something, a big old woman in a floral dress. Giant boobs, the women

all had giant boobs. He would have spent his childhood running barefoot across some no-man's-land with a bunch of skinny, half-naked cousins burnt black as ebony.

'So what're you doing down here?' he asks eventually.

The kid turns, looks him straight on. 'Just looking for work, sir,' he says. It is cautious, careful, even through the thickness of the booze.

The door bangs open somewhere above them. One of the others, a regular from the mainland, comes bumbling out around the side of the shed, leans one hand against it and relieves himself against the wall. Wilson, someone-or-other Wilson. He doesn't see them. They just stand there, watch him, listen to the men swearing inside about the draft. He finishes and sighs, stands there a moment still leant half sideways up against the wall. They both look away awkwardly. Something about his relaxation makes it dirty. The kid shifts and Wilson looks up, catches sight of them and stumbles over. His breath is wet with beer, a stubby still hangs loose from one hand.

'Boss,' he says, and the overseer nods. He turns to the kid. 'Thinkin' of goin' bush?' he slurs, and cackles at his own humour. 'Fuckin' smokey.'

Neither of them says anything but watch him quietly. The overseer can feel the kid beside him tense up.

'Having a good night, Wilson?' he asks quietly.

'Fuckin' 'ay!' He's still laughing as he goes up the steps. He stumbles slightly and struggles closing the door. The kid watches him, his hands tight in fists at his side. The smell of the man's urine drifts across in his wake.

'Bastard,' the kid says quietly. The overseer claps him on the shoulder and follows Wilson in.

He is out early the next morning, outside in the cold to wake up, clear his head of the fug of men in the shed. A door bangs up at the big house. He squints across the paddock to see Mulvey's daughter silhouetted in the light. She's just standing there watching the morning. A voice calls out from somewhere in the house. It floats across to him, a muted, bumbling sound. He hears her reply but can't make out what she says and suddenly she is gone, the door closed behind her. A cow bellows, waiting to be milked. There is movement in the shed behind him, people starting to stir, grumble. A kettle whistles and someone takes it off the hob. He rubs a hand across his face and sighs. A new day.

Out in the bush, the light is watery, damp. The day is going to be grey and dismal. He leaves the men to unpack the gear and starts marking trees, every third one. He scuffs a toe at the undergrowth. Bracken and acacia, decades of blackberry in places. Prickly

tea-tree. Cutter grass, introduced crap. He looks back. The trees rise out of the scrub, their newly-cut collars aching at their necks. They will back burn, he thinks. They'll have to. The ring-barking won't be enough, burning'll be the only thing that'll even start to clear it. And hell, won't that be a fun job. He grimaces slightly, imagining petrol fumes and fires that won't do anything but smoke. The axes start up behind him and he looks around. The new kid is there, swinging and swinging, chips flying in a circle from his chosen tree. The overseer turns back to the trees, lets the sound of the axes make a rhythm for his steps as he moves, looks, marks and moves again.

He sits at lunch time and checks their progress. The men are huddled in cars and under tarpaulins around him. Smoke wafts out of every crack and crevice, bright blue in the grey light. It is freezing, his fingers are numb. He fumbles trying to unwrap his sandwich. He calls them all together after the break and gives the order for half of them to work backwards clearing scrub. Just the heavy stuff, he says, and a few of them chuckle wryly. It is all heavy, they are thinking. This is a goddamn waste of time. He sighs and splits them. The new kid is looking at him, eyes wide.

'Darcy, with us,' he says without thinking. He hadn't intended to. He can see Wilson in the clearing group sneering in disbelief. Too late now. There are murmurs and grumbling all over as the men break up, swap axe for adze, fan out and head backwards, back towards the farm. He watches as they get started. Wads of clay fly up in orange lumps, a young bloke in gloves lumps it all into a central pile. The overseer nods. They'll be right.

'Boss, we're outta trees,' a voice comes behind him. He shakes himself out of his thoughts.

'Righto,' he calls back. 'Take that gum to the left. I'm on it.'

It takes them two weeks to finish clearing the scrub. The clay and the rain leave them gaunt, mud-spattered, exhausted at the end of each day. The ground slowly swells, becomes heavy and spongy underfoot. They slip and slide across it. An old bloke breaks an ankle. Mulvey drives up to see them once or twice, says nothing and drives away again. They stop talking. The only sound is the rain on the leaves and the irregular thud-thud of axe and adze as they go. They all start to look the same. At nights, the shed is sombre, the men who drink sit together in the corner and talk with low voices. Most of them just sleep. A few slink off every now and again. The new kid is one. The overseer wonders where they go, but it isn't his business and they are all back by the morning. The pub, probably, down in the village. He watches them carefully, but they give no sign, no clue, and in the end he decides it doesn't matter as long as they work. Nothing matters much. Only the long slog of the scrub and the clay and the rain, and his

exhaustion dragging him down at the end of each day. He goes home a few times. It is more depressing than when he stays.

The final day, Mulvey comes up to inspect. His son is there with him, boots shining polished in the wet. The piles of cleared scrub smoke furiously at intervals across the hill. The overseer stays at the one closest to the farm, and every now and then drives up to the lookout to check on the rest from a distance. He can see the men at some of them. Kicking around, laughing from the looks. Relief, he realises, and wonders why he can't feel it himself. The smokes drifts heavily up in columns, dark smears across the lighter grey of the clouds.

'It's looking good,' Mulvey tells him, smiling, and claps him on the shoulder. 'You've done well.'

'Not sure how grass will go,' he says quietly.

'Oh, it'll grow. We'll back burn through the spring. It'll come up green. You can learn a bit from the Aboriginals. They used fire all the time.'

The overseer just nods and leaves Mulvey to pass on, nod to the men, shake their hands. The son hangs back, brushes clay off one sleeve. The overseer watches him, tries to stop his lips from pulling back in a sneer. He will retire, he thinks. Old Mulvey has been alright but he won't work for the son. He shakes his hand as they leave and it is limp, a wet fish.

The men all drink that night. The shed feels larger than normal, lit up and loud. A group of the women come up from the village to celebrate the end of the job, though the overseer's wife stays at home. Mulvey puts on a spit-roast for them all, his wife and daughter wander down from the big house with bowls of coleslaw and baked potatoes. Mulvey appears with a slab balanced over one shoulder and is greeted with a roar. He loves it, smiling and laughing, he doesn't catch the condescending edge to the men's words as they thank him. The overseer washes the tough meat down with beer after beer and finds himself half-giddy. They are laughing. Everyone is laughing. His legs start to feel warm, it spreads up through him and he starts to laugh. He begins to wish his wife was there. The relief he was missing that morning comes through in waves with each drink.

The party goes on. Mulvey sits slung back in one of the fold-out chairs they have been living with for the last fortnight. His wife and daughter disappear, as do some of the village wives. Men trickle away, led off by their women, and eventually only a handful of them are left – the old timers, the young single men and Mulvey. The overseer looks around him, the light glowing with a certain warmth through the haze

of the booze. They are onto whiskey now, good stuff, and suddenly he finds himself thinking of the new kid again, thinking he should try a dram. Damn sight better than the petrol he'd have been drinking up north. It takes him a few goes to work out the kid isn't there. He should be. No wife or girl to take him off. No reason for him to head down to the village with free booze on offer here. The room shifts around him, slowly, insistently. He sways when he stands up and a few of the men laugh at him.

'Water,' he mumbles, and staggers his way across the shed and out into the night. As the door swings closed behind him, he can hear them laugh again.

The cool air wakes him up a little. The ground is moving in front of him, but everything feels crisper, clearer out of the fug of the shed. He lets his feet lead him up the track towards the house. There is a light on up there, the kitchen. One of the dogs barks – once, twice, then silent. The overseer pauses, sways and wanders on. He is thirsty now. Water would be good. It is cold. The world begins to come to. He pulls his jacket tighter about himself and puts his head down. The light when he gets there glows out across the gravel of the driveway and the pot plants around the back door. There are people inside, he can see them through the window. The kelpie is standing rock solid in his run, fixated on the door, quivering almost. A quiet growl ripples through him, he has the intent look he wears around the sheep. The overseer stares at him a moment, and then opens the cage and takes the dog by his collar. Bent over and half stumbling, he makes his way to the back door. Something's up for the dog to be like this, but he can't make himself think it through. The door is half-open. He lets the dog go and it slips inside silently, darts through towards to the kitchen and disappears. He follows it. He sees the dog before the people. It is standing fixated like it was in the kennel, little growls rippling through it, its body foursquare and sturdy, planted feet solid on the lino.

'Boss,' a voice comes, and it is the new kid. He has Mulvey's daughter behind him, one arm out to protect her and the other arm extended out towards the dog. The overseer stops dead, blinks. *Shit*, he is thinking, *shit shit shit*, and in a smaller voice, somewhere further back in his mind, *what the hell?* He feels himself start to sway and puts a hand out to the wall.

'Please, boss,' the kid says again. 'Grab 'im off?'

The overseer moves forward and grabs the kelpie's collar. Mulvey's daughter half collapses behind the kid and he swings around to catch her, holds her up, murmurs softly into her neck. The overseer drags the dog away, shoves it back in its run. Dangerous bastard. He goes back inside. The light of the kitchen seem otherworldly. The new kid is still holding Mulvey's girl, kissing her, stroking her face.

'Out,' the overseer says, one word, short and sharp. His voice surprises him. There is anger in it. The kid's head snaps up, eyes wide, like he has been shot.

‘Darcy,’ the girl whispers, and the kid looks down at her as he lets her go.
‘Out,’ the overseer says again, this time quietly, and the new kid nods as he goes past.
‘I’m goin’,’ he mumbles, and it is laced with venom and pain.

They don’t say anything in the morning. The overseer wakes still in his clothes, his tongue swollen and dry in his mouth, the hangover beating at his temples. He decides not to tell Mulvey. No harm done, not really. He smiles at the kid over breakfast, shakes his head slightly, tries to convey to him that it is alright. The kid just stares back at him, eyes narrow, and looks away. Job finished, the men break up, head back down to the village. Their pay packets are thick in their pockets. The overseer gives a couple of them a lift down the hill. The kid is walking, he notices. He too has a pay packet, hidden somewhere. They both see each other, eyes meeting through the windscreen, but there is no wave, no greeting. He makes it to the village and the men jump out, swing swags and duffel bags from the tray of the ute and call out thanks. The overseer waves, nods. Those from the mainland congregate at the ferry dock, he heads by to thank them and see them off. The others disappear home. By the time he makes it back to his place, he is exhausted. The headache has not died down. His wife is out. Leaning against the kitchen table, he looks out the window and up the hill. There is a lone figure coming down the road into the village, tiny in the distance. The overseer sighs, rubs one hand across his face, and turns away.

Part Three

*

Cold wind and tin-roof rattle, and the smell of rain. Hannah stands at the door to Darcy's shed, the warmth of the little pot-belly sending steam in tendrils from the shoulders of her wet oilskin. Darcy is bent over the bay pony's bridle, tacking it together with a needle and thread where it has come apart.

'Leg through his reins?' he asks, and Hannah nods. 'Should know better than that, kiddo,' he says, but not unkindly.

'Sorry,' she mumbles and he smiles.

'Fix it in a jiff,' he says. 'Your Mum'll never know.'

It has been raining for three days straight. The whole of the weekend stretches out before her, locked in a swathe of clouds. Nugget is going to meet her, she is going to go to his place… She looks up and he is there, suddenly, instead of Darcy.

'Your Mum'll never know,' he says.

Hannah wakes up. It is an old dream, one that never finishes. The image she is left with is the same as always: Nugget in Darcy's chair, bent over and plying the thread to the broken bridle. It isn't a bad dream, just strange. She forces herself out of bed. Her mother is already in the kitchen when she gets there, pouring water from the kettle into the pot. She is using both hands on the handle, she cannot hold the weight with just one. A pile of marking from the classroom sits on the kitchen table, a copy of the roll is loose on top. Hannah runs a finger down it, traces the names. Mary is three names down.

'Cup of tea?' her mother asks. Hannah looks up.

'Yes, thanks,' she says, and tucks the list of names in under the rest of the bundle. She forces herself to smile. 'I think I will tackle that scrub-cutting today.'

Her mother nods. 'Past time,' she says. 'It should have been done before the summer.'

Hannah says nothing but watches her mother's hands shake as she pours the tea.

She ignores the saddles in the shed as she walks through. The day is clear and bright, it would be beautiful in the forest. She picks up the brush-cutter instead and makes herself march on. Walking down, the bare mound where Ghost is buried looks raw and painful in the sunlight. The black horse follows her. He leaves tracks in the dew through the long grass, grazes in her company once she starts. The brush-cutter won't start when she first tries. It ticks once, splutters and dies. She fiddles with it, opens the choke and tries again. Petrol fumes come blasting out the back and the two-stroke kicks over. She smiles. It is immensely satisfying cutting the first swathe. It chews and grinds its way through the acacia with an angry buzzing. She moves along the paddock in rows, making her way across each bad patch with steady progress. When the brush-cutter

dies she picks up gloves and the rake. She is sweating by the time she has finished, and her back aching. A blister has started on one hand but half a paddock of acacia is piled ready to burn. A sharp stubble is left in patches across the ground. She fingers it gingerly before walking away.

She lights the fires that evening with petrol from the ancient jerry that still lives in the shed. Standing around, tending them, she remembers a night when they were kids with scrub piles to burn. She and Sophie had spent the whole day raking, the burning was their reward. Darcy turned up to help them, a fire pack full of water on his back. At the time she thought it was too heavy for him, he stumbled and tripped and laughed so much. Looking back now it is obvious he was drunk. He tried to set a firework in one of the piles. She remembers her mother swooping in, pulling it out and pushing the girls back from the flames. She told Darcy off, Hannah remembers, but they were used to that. Always her mother and Darcy like that. She and Sophie would run away with him, out into the forest, escaping home. Chasing his cattle or cutting kindling – Darcy on the chainsaw, her and Sophie taking turns with the axe. Swimming in the sheep dip in summer. Darcy would stand above them, laughing and threatening with the plastic drum of chemicals. He used to slap them on the bum as they were climbing out. And her mother would be waiting for them every time, standing on the veranda with her lips pursed, silent as Darcy brought them back.

Somewhere through the smoke a cow bellows, an awkward rasping call. There is silence for a moment, a pause before it tries again. Hannah looks around herself at the glowing piles. She always loved the burning, especially at night. Colours and heat in the dark, all the wildlife out, the possums and gliders and wallabies, and the horses wandering over to investigate the smell of the smoke. The fires pop and glow, the smoke drifts away down towards the village. Nothing moves in the darkness. She is completely alone.

*

I am not proud of this part of the story. I couldn't stop what happened with Mary. I tried, I swear, but I didn't know how. I spoke to people, I tried to show them the evils of what they were doing. I talked to the teachers I worked with, Mrs. Kelly and Mrs. Dean, but they didn't listen. I found out later that they both had rooms with 'guests'. And there was no one else I could think to go to. There is no higher authority on an island. No police, no politicians.

Eventually I found a number for child services and sat in front of a telephone for an hour, trying so hard to work out what to say. How do you explain a religious movement? How do you explain why you have done nothing before now? Why didn't I do anything then? It was cowardice, of course. I am responsible for what happened to Mary.

Sophie called last night. She doesn't say much these days. I don't think she understands why I haven't done anything since I left Chesil. She wanted to know if I would be coming over to see them any time soon. I made my excuses, and didn't say much. She sounded cross. I probably deserve it. I haven't been a very good sister, or a good aunt. But it made me miss her.

*

Mrs. Keillor thinks of the parade as her greatest victory. A pilgrimage, is the idea. Jesus coming into their lives in triumph, just as he entered Jerusalem. Starting down on the jetty and then right up to the church. She is the one who has organised it all. She has even arranged for a television station to come and cover the event. It is a good turnout, people over from the mainland, as well as most of the village. The Father is there. Someone is selling ice-creams and sausages in the car park. The school children are treating it like a holiday, running around yelling. They have put on a nativity scene on the back of the Mulvey's flat-bed truck. The rain is unfortunate but not that bad. The Father reads at the jetty from the New Testament. Quite right, she thinks, to remind us all of the real purpose of the day and the Saviour to come. He leads once he has finished: up along the esplanade to the main street where others are waiting, families, more tourists even. An odd little group huddling under the veranda of the general store. The Father speaks there too, standing on the steps of the pub. And then they all walk together up to the church. They carry the girl on a wicker chair out in front of the crowd, her hair wreathed with woven palm, a simple white dress and a blue shawl. She looks beautiful up there, serene. *Mary*. It is fitting, it feels *right*. Mrs. Keillor smiles to see it. She follows directly behind the Father. Behind them, she can hear the whole village chattering and gossiping, laughing, happy. Following. Just as she planned.

Harry is walking beside her, holding an umbrella. That makes her more happy than anything. He has not mentioned guest rooms again, and he is there. God's grace will see him forgiven. He even smiles as they make their way up through the vines. When they finally arrive, it seems as though the whole village is in the church. People are standing, filling the church with a gentle fug of smell and noise and body heat. She can feel the pride of it welling up in her chest. All of us, together! She looks around once more. The girl sits off to one side, the font pushed back to the wall to make room for her. The energy in the church seems to centre on her – people nudging each other, staring, whispering. It is an excited sound, a happy sound. It reminds her of a wedding. Beside her, Harry sits starch-stiff in his best suit. It is a celebration. Of course, she thinks, the victory is just in having them all here, feeling them all once more joined in faith. It is beautiful, that. They need the church, not that they seem to know it. The church can save them, keep them together. A child murmurs and giggles somewhere behind her. She smiles. This is what it should be like. The church feels light, happy, bathed in warmth – not sunshine, it is a shame about the weather, really. But warmth: real, human warmth. She smiles so much her cheeks hurt.

The Father takes a moment at the altar to look around. She can see him breathing, see him taking it all in. She caught him praying as they were leaving, praying to his wife. Over the murmuring voices she can hear the rain, gently insistent on the stained-glass windows. It runs down the Christ figure in technicoloured tears, painting the Father in stripes of light. He clears his throat.

'Hymn 127, 'To the Name of Our Salvation'.' He speaks quietly but the whole church listens. Books rustle. Ted at the organ lurches into the first bars. The Father looks down at his wife's empty space in the front pew and waits. The whole church sings, Mrs. Keillor as loud as she can. Harry stands beside her and she takes his hand and squeezes it. And when the hymn has finished, and the prayers, the readings and the psalm, the Father stands for the sermon.

'We are here today to give witness to this miracle. God has descended to the earth,' he starts gently, building from his normal tone. 'The blessed Virgin lives again. I have dreamt of the Lord and he has told me that this girl is indeed the Virgin reborn. That the Child she carries will be our saviour. He has promised this second coming and now it is happening.'

He pauses to breathe, smile. Yes, Mrs. Keillor is thinking, yes!

'The Bible says: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called Son of God. For with God nothing will be impossible*. And in my dreams the Lord has appeared over this child, throwing her into shadow and leaving shining in light that which I too thought impossible.'

'I have dreamed as well!' It is the mother, standing now in the front row. Father John nods and smiles, encouraging. 'The angel came to me and told me that I should not be afraid, that my daughter is safe in the hands of God and that she will give birth to a baby son and He is the Lord's Son, He is Christ again.'

There is a pause. They are silent, all of them. It should be 'the Lord Son', not 'Lord's son', Mrs. Keillor thinks. They went over that last night. But it doesn't matter, the whole church is listening.

'My children,' the Father says, softly again now. 'My children, listen. Did Joseph believe at first? No, it was the angel who made him believe. Listen so your eyes will be opened in true faith.' He pauses. 'Blessed is the Lord…' he starts hopefully. They stay silent, they wait. He continues with the response. 'Listen. Blessed is the Lord, for He has heard the voice of our prayer. Do you think what that means every time you say it? He has heard the voice of our prayer! He has sent us salvation! It is the truth, my children. This girl is indeed the Virgin Mary and her baby will be the Lord Christ

reborn, if only you would believe it!' His voice is earnest and filled with love. He looks around them and smiles. When he has finished, he bows his head and starts the prayers.

The whole time, the whole service, Mrs. Keillor can feel it inside her: the faith and the love and the grace. With the rest of them, she says the prayers, follows in the confessional, but her heart is singing. Lord, she wants to call out, this is your doing! You have filled us with faith. There is so much to be thankful for, so many little things – Harry, for one. Christ, she thinks, is not the only one reborn, and for a beautiful, silent moment, it is more real than ever. We are reborn, we are all of us reborn together. Mrs. Keillor feels it rise up in her, a wave, uncontrollable, lifting her and sweeping her away. The light that is holding her is warm and golden. God, she thinks. God is lifting us up! She can feel Harry's bulk beside her, straight-backed and strong. Surely he is feeling this, she thinks. Surely he can feel it! It is so powerful! She smiles. She has not felt so close to him in years. Everything is going to be alright, she thinks. Everything will all be alright!

*

Thomas sits in the church eyeing off the men around him, staring at Mary. He can't help it – wondering constantly if it was one of them. None of them are drooling, none lusting. It hurts almost, to be this close to Mary. He can feel the scratches she raised on his cheek. He watches her. Half the church is gazing at her. And she is shivering, sitting there. Her hands are clenched tight around fistfuls of the robe they have draped her in. She looks tiny, ridiculous. She looks as though he could pick her up with one arm. They carried her up on a chair, the whole village following behind. Thomas walked between his parents: his mother on one side, eyes down, smiling to herself, his father on the other, laughing and chatting. His father was excited. Thomas watched Mary from behind. He didn't go close. He thought of her running from him and hung back. The chair lurched and swayed. He could see her hands, clinging to each arm.

There are tourists in the church. They sit at the back and no one is really sure if they are believers or just here for the spectacle. Walking up, the villagers all looked over them as they would a mob of cattle, sizing them up for profits and costs. Someone down on the jetty was handing out bed and breakfast flyers. Picnic was working in a food tent, an older man beside him, selling sausages in bread and cheap icy-poles. They were offering fishing trips, local tours to all the strange faces. Thomas watched him from a distance but didn't go over. It felt dirty, guilty. Tourists deserve to be milked, he told himself. He tried to make himself breathe normally, but he couldn't remember what normal felt like.

The sermon is awkward and stage-managed, with Mary's mother standing up and reeling off her story half-way through. The Father drones on after his proclamation. The Lord's joyous gift, the Lord's love… Thomas can't listen, goes back instead to watching Mary, watching the men. It drags. He bounces one leg and his mother reaches a hand over to still him. His father looks across at him and frowns. When finally it is finished, they wheel Mary out like a stage prop and place her front and centre in the hall for the people to admire. Thomas stands at the wall across from her. She refuses to look up and meet his gaze. Instead, she stares at the floor, silently. He watches her. The dress is sheer across her breasts. What sort of an animal is he, to want her now? He feels sick. Women bustle around her. Her skin looks like wax in the dull light.

'Did you know her?' Thomas' father asks. 'Before?'

Thomas doesn't answer. He can't tell if the heat in his throat is anger or longing or simply bile. His mother looks across at him.

'Darling…' she says, and it is a soft voice, a comforting voice. Thomas looks away.

It is a slow affair, endless chatter and rattling tea-cups and platters of fruit cake and cream sponge. Gradually, though, they all trickle away. Mary disappears – one moment she is there, the next she is gone. The old ladies leave with fanfare, collecting plates and calling out, hands fluttering in the air. Mrs. Keillor is the last to leave. Thomas' mother offers to finish up with the dishes. Thomas realises as she does just how much time his mother has been spending here. The question rises up murkily: does she believe? He feels drunk. They have only just started when a woman cries out, almost screams in the church. Thomas flips around instinctively, his father jumps. Together, they turn from the sink and step out onto the hall's veranda. Mary's mother is standing outside, her hands up around her face, pulling at her own hair.

'Not again, not again,' she is saying, but it is coming out as one long string of syllables rather than distinct words. Mrs. Keillor is there beside her.

'Ellen, Ellen,' she is saying. 'It's ok, she won't have gone far.'

Thomas' mother strides over the damp grass towards them. Her hands are down straight by her side, her business walk. Thomas stays where he is and waits.

'Mary,' his mother says when she returns a moment later. 'She's gone.'

'Gone home?' his father asks.

'She doesn't think so.'

Thomas' parents exchanged puzzled, worried looks. Thomas tries to breathe, bites his tongue. The bridge, he is thinking. School. The lookout. Anywhere.

'Why not home?' his father asks slowly, cautiously.

'Ellen said she wouldn't have, because her…' Thomas' mother stumbles, pauses. 'Her father is home. They don't get along.'

Thomas' father frowns. 'Spread out, then,' he says. 'She can't have gone far.'

Thomas inhales slowly and begins to turn. The bridge first, he thinks.

'Thomas,' his father says. 'With me, mate.'

Thomas sighs.

It is raining again by the time Thomas makes it back to the church. They haven't found her, his father is still looking. Thomas said nothing when his father asked him again and again about her favourite places. *You sure, nowhere you can think of?* He gave up asking eventually and sent Thomas back to check for news instead. There is no one there. They have all moved on or are still out looking. He hangs around under the veranda of the hall for a moment, undecided. The church is still open. He sticks his head in just to check, but it is empty. Without really knowing why he walks up the aisle and sits on a pew. The colours of the lead-light are quiet, muted. The eastern side is dull, the western just picking up the red and gold undertones of the sun as it peeps momentarily

out from the watery clouds. He considers going to the bridge but it's too late. She won't be there. The light outside disappears as the clouds shift. It gets dark very quickly in the church. It is easier to think in the dark. His breathing returns to normal, the panicked feeling in his chest slowly fades. She won't be at the bridge, why would she be? She was frightened of him. She ran from him. He loves her and she hates him. He holds his head in his hands and tries to work out what to do.

Soon, the sun outside is low enough, dim enough that the light in the church fades to the mere impression of red and green. He stares at the pictures, tries to make them out, work out which is which. St. Francis of Assisi, the Madonna, St. Christopher for the soldiers in the war. They are familiar, they have always been here. He is safe here, he thinks.

We saw that, out there, says St. Christopher, and he freezes in place. The lamb at St. Francis' feet stands, shakes itself. *We know what happened.*

The Madonna turns to him. *You didn't see,* she whispers. *You weren't here. You left her alone.*

'No', he says, and it trembles in echoes through the little church. 'I didn't know. She disappeared. It wasn't me.' He is mumbling now, and the voice in the back of his head tells him he is going mad. I wasn't here, he thinks back. I don't know.

Do you know where he raped her? Did you know it was here? They ask. The Jesus in the picture above the alter holds out his hands, they drip blood.

Thomas freezes and the world clicks into place. Rape…

We saw. It is kind now. *We saw*. *See? We know*. *Save her, and tell them.*

'Yes,' Thomas says, 'but how?'

Don't leave her alone, they whisper. And the lunacy of the dream – because this must be a dream, he thinks – the lunacy of it is suddenly funny. He imagines the pictures trooping out of the windows. Following him, protesting, waving placards and banners, all red and green light, all blue, all fading in the dark. Not so funny, he thinks. I can't do this. He stands, jumps up almost, and the church is silent. He hurries walking home. There are coloured lights following him and he can only see them out of the corner of his eyes.

*

Darcy has Mary on his back veranda when Hannah gets there. She is perched on a chair, hunched almost protectively over her stomach. Her eyes, round and black and half-empty, are perhaps the most frightening thing Hannah has ever seen.

'Mary,' she says, and it comes gasping out as a whisper of surprise. Both of them turn to face her as she speaks, the girl with the quick, sharp movements of a small bird. 'Mary…' she says again, but the girl flees, slips from the chair and runs awkwardly out across the paddock away in the direction of her parent's place. Hannah looks at Darcy. He stares after her, shaking his head.

'What was she…?' Hannah starts, but he is already standing, moving inside.

'Cuppa, love?' he asks, and lumbers through to the kitchen. The screen door wheezes and clatters shut in her face. Hannah blinks.

They have been to the parade. It felt like everyone was there, like something from her childhood – it was slightly surreal. A bunch of the littlies wore sheets draped as robes, towel turbans wound round their head. At one point they came flying over, clamouring for her attention, until the Joseph tripped standing on the back of his sheet and they all ran away laughing at him. There was an angel wearing tinsel wings and glasses, and another child with face-paint she didn't recognise. A country film crew from the mainland hovered on the edges. She could see Father John in the centre of it all, turning and pointing and shouting directions. And the crowd – it was a crowd, somehow – all followed, all did his bidding. The realisation was slow but inexorable and accompanied by a strange sense of vertigo. Tourists. There are tourists here, on Chesil. It was at that point that the grey sky gave way to rain and the whole lot of them, locals and tourists alike, ran shrieking and laughing into the church for cover.

And now to find Mary here, on Darcy's back veranda… Darcy opens the screen door again and peers out at her, a laugh caught between his teeth.

'Comin' in? Or you just gonna sit out there all day?'

He disappears again. She shakes herself off and follows him in.

'Cold, love?' he asks when he sees her. 'I can find you a pullover if you want?'

'Mum said to say g'day,' she says in answer, even though it's untrue. 'Cuppa'd be nice.'

'Comin' up.'

Hannah sits at the table, traces a finger along the burns and scars in the wood. Her mother was a blank canvas when she left this morning, staring at the wall, living out

some lost loop in time. She refused breakfast, wouldn't talk. Her mouth was a grey line of pain. There is a bang as Darcy shakes the tea up in its tin, whacking it against the bench, and Hannah jumps. She looks up at the familiar back, bent slightly but still strong. Why have you not changed, she wants to ask him, when she has so much? She is getting thinner. The doctor has noticed it too. Darcy turns from the stove and looks down at her.

'That kid, eh?'

'Mary?'

'Yeah…' He trails off. Something uneasy moves in the back of Hannah's mind.

'What about her, Darce?'

'Just a bit crazy, all that. Feel a bit sorry for the kid.' He chuckles, shakes his head. It is a dry sound, his laugh. Almost disbelieving.

'Yeah,' she says. 'Sure do.'

'You can't do something, can you?' he asks, and turns to face her. 'As her teacher?'

He puts a mug down on the table. Hannah stares into it and tries to breathe.

'What?' she asks. 'What can I do?'

Darcy says nothing but looks at her.

'Black horse is off his feed,' she says, to change the topic.

'Well?' her mother asks, later that night. 'How was your parade, then?' She is tucked deep into her armchair, her meagre plate of dinner spread untouched on a tray at her side. Hannah turns to her from her place at the table. She is still wearing jodhpurs from her ride.

'What do you mean?' she asks, to buy time more than anything.

'How did it go? What was it like?'

'There were tourists…'

'No?'

'Yes. It was quite large. Everyone was there.'

'Darcy?'

'Yes.'

Her mother says nothing but looks down at her hands. There is a gentle silence. 'What about the girl?' she asks eventually.

'Mary?'

'Is it a set-up?' It is a stark question, put like that. Sharp-edged.

'I don't know,' Hannah says. 'There's something about her, something…' She stops. Her mother is staring at her intently, head crooked to one side.

'Yes?'

‘Something different. There are times when it doesn’t feel like she is part of the world, she’s almost absent.’ Hannah falls silent. The words have surprised her but they are right.

‘You don’t mean you believe it?’ her mother asks. Her voice is almost terse.

‘No,’ Hannah says, shaking her head. ‘Of course I don’t. She had a boyfriend, I think.’

Her mother nods and coughs, long, drawn-out, racking coughs that send spasms through her slight frame. Hannah turns away.

*

I didn't know at the time that they had been searching for Mary that afternoon. I went home and escaped out into the bush. I took an oilskin for the rain and carrots for the black horse. He nickered when he saw me. He had mud up his elbows and under his girth. He nodded his head as I dragged the brush over him, flared his top lip and nibbled at mid-air, enjoying it. And I just stood there a moment, rested my head against his neck to inhale his sweet smell. Everything about a horse is rich – his movement, his life, his smell. The deeper richness of eucalypt and clay rose up through his coat. It felt right to be out there that afternoon. The sensations of the day faded against the rain, the bracken and leaf-mould, leather and horse. Mary, Darcy, my mother, they all washed away. The black horse shook his head, going out. I let him out when we got to the first hill on the home trail. He flew. The rush of the wind, sharp in my face, and the heaviness of the clay underfoot matched with the shoof-hoof of his breathing and carried me away.

In the forest, everything was still. The rain fell straight down like a blessing to touch droplets on my face. The black horse didn't like it, kept flicking his ears. Somewhere behind us a kookaburra began a muted chuckle, its voice caught in its throat. I remember I looked for it, waited for the full burst of laughter to come. It was sitting on a low branch, feathers ruffled in the wet, eyeing me off. It made me smile. It couldn't laugh – an enormous worm was hanging from its beak like a drooping moustache. It just chuckled, beak clamped on its prize and stared at me haughtily as I rode past.

Nothing does that for me, anymore. Nothing takes me out of myself like being out there did.

*

It is time, Hannah decides the next day, for the whole class to come together. They need to understand what the Island is doing. It is easy to be engaged, she thinks, with your own life. She makes the year nines research Bernadette of Lourdes and write essays on what happened to her. She asks the younger ones to research pilgrimages. They will make posters, she decides – three giant ones with everything on them, all the research, the essays, pictures by the littlies from the other classes. Anything to make them think about it.

'Miss M., what's ven-er-ated?' a boy asks, reading from a printout down the front. He says it in three pieces and she has to stop to smile.

'It's what they are doing to Mary,' his partner says, from the computers. 'Where we have to pray to her and touch her and make a wish.'

'Nah, we don't make a wish. She is special, that's all.'

'She's not just special, she's going to have the baby Jesus!'

'Yeah, so she's special!' They are all calling out all across the classroom. 'We do so make a wish! My dad said!'

'She's not just special! She's a saint…' There is a pause, the word takes effect and the whole classroom waits. 'Like here: "The Mother of God and the Mother of Jesus and the greatest of all Christian Saints."'

'Bernadette of Lourdes was attacked by a mob of people,' Thomas says suddenly, from the back. 'They all wanted her to touch them.'

Hannah stands from beside a child's table and looks at him across the room. He ducks his head back down to the ancient encyclopaedia in front of him.

'Yes, Clare,' Hannah says. 'Father John believes Mary is a saint.' They all turn to her. 'Can anyone tell me what reincarnate means?'

There is a rush and the clattering of a keyboard and the girl at the computer reads aloud.

'"To cause to be reborn in another body, to incarnate again, to cause to appear in a new form." What does that mean?'

'That means that some people believe that you can be born again, after you are dead, as someone new. Father John believes that our Mary is actually the real Virgin Mary, born again.'

There is a short silence as they take this in.

Another girl reads: '"Reincarnation describes the concept where the soul or spirit, after the death of the body, is believed to return to live in a new body."' She pauses. 'Does this mean Mary is possessed?'

They turn to Hannah again, eyes wide. She smiles. 'No. Father John believes Mary *is*

the Virgin Mary, that they are the same person. That is what he was saying at the parade. But religion is a choice. You don't have to believe. No one can make you.'

The entire class is listening now, hanging off her words.

'Do you believe?' Thomas asks.

Hannah pauses, swallows. 'We all have to decide for ourselves,' she says. She turns away from him to the younger children, but not before she sees his face crease with a strange mix of confusion and something approaching hope.

She hangs around after they have all gone for the day. She sorts the essays into piles, tidies away the debris left on the desks. And eventually she just sits at her desk, her head rested in her arms. The options are running through her mind. She should go to the mainland and talk to the police. But the child is safe with her parents, no crime has been done. They would say she is entering into it willingly. There would be nothing they could do, their hands would be tied. Would a politician care? The Archbishop of the Church? She wonders if he has already been informed. So, she thinks. Social services. It is all that is left. But how do you explain it to them? What are you meant to say? Nothing has actually been done. She hasn't been abused, she isn't being forced. She could speak out. Hannah fingers the papers before her, finds a pen and pad and moves across to one of the computers. It is slow to boot up, it takes an age for the home screen to load. And by the time it does, Hannah is undecided once more. It takes her a few minutes to find a number. She writes it on her pad and just stares at it.

Driving home, she finds herself at the church. The ground is mud-trodden, little bits of paper and scraps of picnic make tiny points of colour in the broken grass. It looks almost forlorn after the excitement of the parade. A piece of ribbon flutters in the breeze, caught in the door. Darcy's place is just down the road. She sees him on the way past, stacking wood out the front – a freeze-frame of him, axe raised over his head, back arched, body strung out wiry and lean at the moment before it comes swinging down. She doesn't stop, she just watches him in her mirror. He turns to see her go. The rotting, hand-painted sign on his boundary fence rattles and bangs as she passes. *Redgum, yellow box $102/m^2$*. A voice echoes, reaches out to her. *Can you do something?* I don't know, she replies, I don't know. What am I meant to do? Tell me! What am I meant to do? She needs to speak out, she knows it. She doesn't know how.

*

At what point do you decide to act? The mothers of anorexic girls will often let their child lose almost a third of their body weight before taking them to a doctor. To them, what is happening becomes normalised. Things change slowly, almost beyond your perception. And then suddenly it is too late. I told myself I would call. I would wait for a direct contravention of the girl's rights and I would call social services. I couldn't intervene until that point. I knew something was wrong, but I told myself I couldn't do anything until I was sure.

And then I forgot about all that. It is strange how little else in your life seems real when your mother is dying. Everything happens in bright colours, swirls of action and movement. I denied reality for as long as I could. I decided she needed the connection with the outside world, brought her reports of the horses, and the smell of hay and wood smoke. She went downhill very quickly. And when it became obvious that something had to change, I was a coward and let the doctor tell her. I came in afterwards to see how she had taken it. She was in pain. She couldn't put up the fight she would have otherwise. But she didn't talk to me all night.

There are stains on the carpet in my little apartment here in the city. It is a disgusting old thing, worn almost thread-bare in places and marked with grease and god knows what else. I have been trying to clean it. I decided this afternoon that I should, that it would make me feel better to have the whole house clean and fresh. But they won't come out. I have been scrubbing for hours now, it won't come clean. No matter what I do, the marks are still there, and I am beginning to wear away the fabric itself. It is making me hate this place. Myself, too. My mother would be so disappointed in me.

*

It is the mainland doctor who makes the call, in the end. He comes out of her bedroom, and Hannah knows before he says it exactly what is going to happen.

'She won't like it,' she says eventually.

'No,' he says, shaking his head. 'I got that impression. But I can't keep treating her here.'

Hannah says nothing. From the bedroom her mother coughs and the sound of it rattles through to the living room and scrapes like a nail against her bones.

'I'll organise the transfer for Tuesday,' the doctor says. 'I'll send an ambulance over Monday night to take her back.'

Hannah nods.

She calls Sophie that evening and tells her the news.

'Can you come down?' she asks eventually.

Sophie hesitates. One of the kids calls out in the background and Hannah smiles wryly. Of course she can't.

'I'm a bit caught here, Han.' There is another silence. Hannah hears Sophie's husband in the background. Finally Sophie sighs. 'Yes… yes, of course, I can. Where has he sent her?'

'The Base Hospital.'

They pause awkwardly. Hannah purses her lips, tries to stop the anger from welling up in her.

'You'll come over with her?' Sophie asks finally.

'Yes.'

'Well, I'll see you then, hey? Tuesday? The morning boat?'

'Yes,' Hannah says and it has a strange finality to it. 'I'll have to catch the evening boat back.'

'Right,' Sophie says. 'And we'll be waiting for you once you have everything settled. I'll look after her, kiddo.'

Hannah says nothing. The epithet rings half-empty down the phone-line.

Her mother is silent when the ambulance arrives. The morning light is cool and clear. Darcy appears. He nods to the ambos and puts a hand on Hannah's shoulder. Hannah fights back the urge to cry, to let him hold her like a child. She wonders how he found out and imagines him at the pub, a beer over the counter with the ambos. It is good of him to come. He holds her mother's hand as the trolley is lifted down the front steps. Strapped in, wrapped in cotton blankets and with her face obscured by the cheap blue of

the oxygen mask, her mother looks small and fragile.

'Hannah,' she croaks, as they lift her into the ambulance, and it says everything.

'I'll bring you home,' Hannah whispers back. Her mother sighs, almost relaxes. Hannah reaches for her but the door has already closed.

She follows her mother down in her car. Darcy's ute fills her rear vision mirror all the way down the hill, honks as it turns off at the village. She doesn't wave but watches it go and tries to push down the feeling of helplessness that rises in its place. She blinks and forces herself to focus on following the ambulance down to the ferry dock. They leave her mother in the ambulance for the crossing. She is asleep by the time they arrive. The morphine has kicked in. Hannah spends the trip drifting from the cabin to the deck and back again, an endless loop with no purpose. Sophie is waiting when they get in, the kids in the back seat. She greets Hannah with a smile and open arms, holds her tight and rests her chin on Hannah's shoulder.

'Poor kid,' she whispers eventually. Hannah smiles. She was made to be a mother, her sister.

'I'm ok,' she says back. 'She wants to die at home, though.'

'She can't.' It is blunt and uncompromising. 'What about the pain? And who is going to care for her?'

'We could get a nurse…'

'Let's just get her into hospital and see how she goes, shall we?'

Hannah sighs. It won't happen, not now. 'I promised her.'

'I know, honey. You said what you had to.'

Hannah shakes her head. 'No, I promised.'

Sophie purses her lips. 'We'll see.'

The hospital is bright and smells of antiseptic. Hannah feels a wave of misgiving rise up in her as she walks in. It isn't home, she thinks, and feels her hands shaking. Her mother is propped up in a bed, the oxygen mask still attached, a heart-rate monitor dangling from one finger. She is asleep again. She stirs fitfully as Hannah kisses her forehead but doesn't wake. She looks like a child, too small, too delicate. The roles have been reversed. She doesn't say anything but leaves quietly. The nurse watches with her head cocked to one side as she walks out.

It is late by the time she gets home. She can see the black horse in her headlights as she pulls in, but he has disappeared by the time she gets out there to feed him. She considers going after him but the dark and the cold and her feet bare in the gumboots

make it seem pointless. He will turn up. The house is quiet without her mother's restless noise. She eats dinner in silence, beans straight from the can, and sets her alarm for school in the morning. A rabbit squeals as she is turning out the lights, again and again, a high-pitched piercing noise that cuts through the dark to stab at her, make her jump. The final squeal is cut short and she sighs. A fox, she thinks, and part of her is almost thankful.

The kids are quiet the next few days. They have been told that her mother is dying. A group of the younger girls present her with a brightly coloured get-well card, as though it is her who is sick, and she has to stop herself from crying. It is lovely of them. It's just that she simply shouldn't be here, someone else should be filling in – she shouldn't be stuck waiting for a substitute from the mainland. She is a zombie, drifting around the classroom while the kids work. The pad with the number for social services sits on a pile of paper on her desk. Every time she sees it she pushes it to the bottom. In the afternoons she drives at half-speed up the hill, lets her feet drag up the steps, holds her breath as she presses play on the answer machine. Sophie's voice is always waiting, always comforting. *She's ok, nothing much to report here. The doctors let her eat solids today. Give me a call when you get in.* She only ever realises how tense she has been in expectation when the news comes through and she lets herself relax.

By Friday, it is a routine – get home, call Sophie. The mainland is crackly and distant through the poor connection.

'How is she, really?' she asks.

'It's hard to say. She's no worse, at least.'

'Depressed?'

'Sort of angry, more.'

Hannah smiles quietly to herself. It would be like her mother to fight now, when everyone else has given up. It would be like her mother to come home.

'Honey, don't start hoping,' Sophie's voice comes and Hannah laughs. 'She isn't getting better, not now.'

'It's ok, I know,' Hannah says back.

'I don't think she'll make it home,' the voice comes again, and it is careful, quiet.

'I know,' Hannah says again, but the laughter has gone. 'I'll be over tomorrow to give you a break and I'll come take over permanently as soon as they find a fill-in for me at the school.'

'Don't worry,' Sophie says. 'I'm not going anywhere. And there's still time. I'll let you know if anything changes. Have you started telling people yet?'

'Just the school, and I think Darcy's told some.'

'Have you told Mulvey?' she asks. 'He is her brother, Han. He ought to know.'

'No,' Hannah says. Telling people. It seems too soon. Sophie says nothing, lets it go.

She takes the black horse out, after. His ribs are showing, she realises, as she brings him up the paddock. His coat is dull, too. She checks his feed bin, and once again half his dinner is still there in the bottom.

'C'mon, old boy,' she says, and brushes him with a strange fervour. 'This'll wake you up a bit.'

He is slower than usual. Quieter, less arrogant. He tosses his head fitfully as they wander out down the road and she runs a soothing hand down his neck. Poor old kid. His ears prick when they reach the forest and she smiles.

'Good boy,' she whispers. 'I was starting to get worried.'

He snorts and she feels her spirits pick up again. He pulls a little when they get to the next hill, and it feels like a good sign. It's possible, she lets herself think. She could still come home. She closes her eyes and builds images of her mother one by one in her mind. Her mother on the back veranda. Her mother in jodhpurs. Her mother with a pair of pliers between her teeth, dragging a roll of wire the length of the fence-line. Her mother on a horse. Her mother on the black horse. She smiles to herself and pats his neck again. She could come home yet.

She spends the weekend shuttling herself between Sophie's hotel and the hospital. Each time there is no change, no calamity. Her mother sleeps well, better than she did at home. And she eats, little bits. Hannah tells herself to stay calm. She can feel Sophie watching her – Sophie with her waiting face, drawn and tired. Sophie isn't hoping, she tells herself. A tiny voice whispers that she should be. What sort of a daughter gives up hope? She holds her mother's hand and smiles. When her mother whispers to her she nods and pretends she can hear what she has said. When she leaves, the Sunday night, it doesn't feel quite as much like an abandonment.

There are three messages on the Monday afternoon. The first is Sophie, as always. *All is well, call when you get in. Miss you.* It sends a little tremor through her, that last. It is hard to think of her sister ever needing her. The second message makes her smile openly. It is about the substitute teacher, she will be there in the morning. It will be ok, then. She is free. The third message is newer, only half an hour old. It is Sophie again, but it is different this time. Sophie's voice is weak, high-pitched. *You better come, catch the evening boat if you can. I'll meet you at the dock.* There is noise in the background – an intercom and something beeping. A child. The hospital. Hannah checks her watch.

She can't breathe. Her ribs are steel bands across her chest. She has three hours. She moves like a zombie into her bedroom, stripping her work day clothes as she goes. She finds tracksuit pants and one of her mother's old woollen jumpers. Everything begins to ache, fall apart, she gulps a breath down. She lets the back door slam behind her and runs.

Out in the forest she wants to walk into the air as though it is solid. Like a bird does – just step into the weight of it and let it bear her up. The only way out is to move somehow above. She follows the home trail to the top of the hill. The village looks dirty from up there. Back yards rust-wired and shredded with long grass, resting hulks of dead cars, shell-shocked parts and dismembered engines. The body of a horse is stretched flat in a bare paddock and she can imagine its ribs cathedral-like, spread and splayed beneath mouse-eaten skin. It is a pale bay, its yellow-red coat dull with dust. Its eyes must be closed, enjoying the remnants of afternoon sun. From there, it could be dead.

'We call it the forest,' she says to Sophie when she phones to let her know she is on her way. 'They all call it 'up bush'. Why is that?'

There is a pause, Sophie says nothing. It sits between them, lungs filled with air.

'Mum,' Sophie says eventually. 'Because of Mum.'

'The black horse is off his feed,' she says, in reply. 'Don't tell Mum.'

'No. Get Darcy up to him?'

'Maybe. Meet me at the dock? It doesn't leave till half past six so I won't be in till after dinner.'

'Yes. Of course.'

They don't say much after that. The trees outside are quiet when she hangs up, the evening calm. The light has a certain softness through the kitchen windows. A currawong starts up somewhere, others join it. Rain on the way, her mother's voice whispers. Hannah sits at the bench, her bag beside her, ready to let herself cry.

*

They bring the coffin back on the ferry. It lies in state in the hearse, taking up two places on the car deck. The funeral director from the mainland has an agreement with the man from the pub to keep it in his cool room until the funeral. Hannah sits with Sophie in the cabin. No one talks to them. The driver, the assistant, the funeral man. They all nod and smile, but none of them will say a thing.

There are others in the cabin. Children – Jade and Sam from her class, and a little one she doesn't know. Nugget sits hunched over in the corner, one arm in plaster and held in a sling, his face still bruised. Hannah can't make herself look at him. Shame makes her nauseous. There is a woman beside him, heavily pregnant. They spend the whole journey refusing to acknowledge each other. Hannah stares at the carpet. Just occasionally, Sophie strokes her arm or squeezes her hand. Hannah tries so hard to keep breathing, to stop from choking, and to ignore the weight of the wooden box on the platform outside. No one speaks, not even the children.

The driver breaks the silence first, with the ten minute call. The pregnant woman stands up, starts to gather their belongings. The girl Jade unfolds herself and picks up a bag. They all stand by the door, and Sophie stands and joins them. Only Nugget remains where he is. He stands as they touch in to the jetty. The children open the cabin door and rush through.

'Sorry to hear about your Mum,' he says. His voice is low, like she remembers it. 'Marnie and me, we're real sorry.'

Hannah can't answer. Everything in her starts to vibrate and the memories come back. What is that meant to mean, she wants to ask him. What the hell are you on about? She looks down. Is it not enough, she wants to say, that I have lost my mother? Can't you leave me in peace? But she doesn't, she doesn't say any of it. He steps back. The woman is waiting at the door for him, Sophie just beyond her. Hannah stands.

'Thanks,' she says, and walks past them both and out.

*

It is warm at the funeral. Hannah sits in the blue light of one of the windows and tries to ignore the sweat at her underarms and neck. Her dress itches. The wattle in the flowers sends spores across the church and makes Darcy sneeze. Father John's hands shake as he leads the prayer. He looks almost confused, as though he can't quite remember what to say. These are the things she knows she will remember. The service is short, quiet. Not many attend. Mulvey comes, and Darcy of course. A few of the village women too, perhaps out of a sense of duty. And Nugget is there, still in his sling. But that is all aside from her, Sophie and Sophie's family. Sophie's children cry, more because they are overwhelmed than anything. Sophie doesn't. She looks quite calm, staring straight ahead, despite the way her hands are wound together in her lap. Her voice is steady when she reads the psalm. Hannah looks down at her own hands and finds them similarly wound, lying in her lap like so much tangled string. She looks up again and catches Sophie's eye. Her sister pauses, teeters a moment between words. Hannah blinks. Not calm, then. Just a bit lost, just like her. Sophie takes a breath and keeps on reading.

They carry the coffin to the graveside. Hannah's stockings catch and ladder on the gate post as they go through. The cemetery is too uneven for a trolley, though the funeral directors from the mainland have one waiting at the ready. The coffin slides sideways on it as they wheel it down. At the grave, it is lowered in on a green velvet sling, the cloth covering the sides of the hole. A fat man in a funeral suit winds the crank to lower it. The sun burns unseasonably on her back. The dirt sounds hollow on the lid of the coffin as they throw their handfuls in. The company offered them the option of petals to throw instead, and listening to the handfuls of dirt she begins to understand why. It is harsh, an empty noise. It rattles through Hannah as though she is empty too. Petals seemed wrong, at the time. Dirt seemed more like her mother.

Afterwards, after they have finished at the graveside, there are sandwiches, cake and sherry in the old Sunday School hall, laid out on a rickety trestle table. Hannah stands in a corner and watches as Sophie makes polite small-talk. Mulvey talks with her husband. Nugget has disappeared. The children follow each other around, trying hard to be grown-up. It makes her smile to see them, reminds her of her own childhood following Sophie, copying her walk, her smile, trying so hard to fit in with the adults. It is still dusty in the hall. They spent the morning cleaning it, sweeping and sneezing. The trestle needed nailing together before it would stand. Sophie had laughed at her, sticking the nails between her teeth like their mother as she banged at it again and again. Seeing

Sophie dressed in a man's shirt and jodhpurs for the first time in years, Hannah was reminded of their mother herself.

Now, with the awkward chat and the stiff politeness of the village ladies, the hall is more depressing. Sophie smiles and nods diplomatically, thanks them and accepts their condolences with grace. Hannah watches her across the room, tries to work out how she can do it. My mother is dead, she feels like telling them all. You can't really say sorry for that. There isn't anything you can say for that. It doesn't take long for them all to leave, really. They are all a little awkward. Mulvey goes first. Sophie's husband takes the kids home once the village ladies leave. Hannah starts gathering the leftovers as the last of them disappear. She listens to Sophie outside, thanking them again and again, and wonders if she is the only one who can hear the weariness in her sister's voice.

Darcy shuffles forward awkwardly, holding out a pile of empty plates and a sherry glass.

'Did well, kiddo,' he says, his voice gentle. She looks up, tries to smile. It gets caught, and she feels the weight of the day pull at her neck and shoulders.

'I let her down,' she whispers. Darcy looks at her, his eyes crinkled. 'She didn't want to die there.'

They stand in silence a moment. A car starts outside and doors slam closed.

'Not your fault,' he says eventually. For a moment Hannah is carried back, back to Ghost lying caught in the wire and Darcy saying the same thing.

'I let them take her,' she replies. Darcy puts a hand down on the table and leans on it gently. She looks down at the wattled skin. He is getting old, she thinks. He is older than her mother was.

'I let her down, too,' he croaks. Hannah looks up in surprise. He is staring down, staring at the table. 'When your father left her, I thought…'

He starts to laugh. It is a horrible, broken sound. Hannah waits in confusion. 'We all let her down, honey,' he says. 'No one ever met your mother's standards.'

It is true, Hannah thinks. None of us did. They stand there a moment, both of them waiting for the other to speak. Darcy wobbles slightly and Hannah wonders momentarily how much he has had to drink.

'How's the black horse?' Darcy asks at last.

'You wanna come have a look at him?' she replies.

They drive in convoy up the hill. Darcy's ute wheezes blue fumes in her windscreen. Sophie stares sideways out the window, absolutely silent the whole way. Her husband is waiting for them when they get in, a cup of tea ready in the pot. The four of them sit

around the kitchen table and listen to the children playing in the lounge. It is peaceful, for a moment. When Sophie starts crying, her husband pulls her into his chest and just holds her. Darcy looks at Hannah and they stand automatically, back off and head outside. The black horse is waiting for them at the gate, snoozing in the sunshine, his bottom lip drooping and his eyes closed. Hannah pulls his rug off and scratches his withers. He has dropped in condition. His coat is old-horse-shaggy and his ribs show through above his pot belly.

'He's right,' Darcy says, squinting. 'Dropped a bit, but.'

'Dropped a bundle,' Hannah replies. 'And he's losing muscle.'

Darcy just grunts. 'Gettin' old, now.'

Hannah puts his rug back on and leaves him to enjoy the sun.

'He's not eating,' she says as they head back in.

'I'll rasp his teeth if you reckon he needs it?'

'Nah, I felt 'em. They aren't too bad – not sharp, at least. He's just not interested.'

Darcy says nothing but she knows what he is thinking. Not much you can do for old age.

They drink that night after the kids are in bed. Darcy joins them and they sit around the kitchen table finishing bottle after bottle of red wine. They talk and they laugh. Sophie is quiet. She watches her drink, sipping regularly and saying little in between. It is Darcy who talks the most. Hannah is happy to let him. The noise is welcome. The house feels warmer, more alive with Darcy there.

'You gonna stay?' he asks her eventually. She looks across at Sophie and her husband, holding hands under the table.

'Yes,' she whispers. Sophie's face spreads open as she smiles.

'Can't come away, hey?' she asks. It doesn't need an answer. Darcy says nothing but pours another glass and Hannah knows he is pleased. It is late before they finish. Darcy is slurring. Sophie forces him to stay, makes him a bed up on the couch in the lounge. They all pause awkwardly as she comes out with the blankets and Hannah catches her glance towards the door to their mother's room. Its bed is empty, still made up. Darcy doesn't notice, but kisses them and drops down onto the couch like a stone.

'I've got a new horse you might like, kiddo,' he says as Hannah turns off the lights. 'Bay fella. Reminds me of your old chap.'

Hannah smiles. Her throat tightens in a painful lump.

'Night, Darce,' she whispers, and closes the door.

*

It was Darcy who always bought them for us, our horses. Every time we would go down and watch them arrive. The black horse came special delivery in a fancy horse-transport. He was a present, that horse. The day my little bay came, it was so hot the ferry was invisible in the heat-haze coming over. They were a job lot from the saleyards. Two ferals, one a rangy grey, the other bay, slightly smaller and stockier, peering from the slat-board sides of Darcy's rusting, old float. Darcy broke them in himself and we spent our childhoods following him around the forest. The summer screams of the village kids at the beach would rise on a hot day all the way up the hill with the sound of the waves, and we would turn away. My little bay horse was the making of me. He put me together and taught me to sit straight, hold on. Life's easy, he taught me, if you can only find the point of balance. He lied, of course, but it was a pleasant lie while it lasted.

I forgot about the world when my mother died. I forgot about Mary, about everything. I ran away and hid in the forest with the black horse, spent whole days simply wandering. *To be free, to be free, to be free*. There were moments when I could be still – quiet moments, soft moments, filled with an indescribable luminescence that had nothing at all to do with the world outside. It put me back together and gave me strength. Sophie came, once or twice, but she had to leave eventually. And then it was just me, the black horse and the forest, and slowly it was ok.

So I wasn't there when Father John left. I only heard about it after it had happened. I can't say it didn't make me glad.

*

The dream is the normal one. The Father is on the ferry and his wife is there, shivering on the chair beside him, her hands shaking with the effort of each breath. The ambulance is waiting for them at the other end but there is no time. The Ventolin is empty. He is shaking it and shaking it and it is empty, no matter what he does. Her lips are turning blue. She looks at him with eyes wide. She is whispering but he can't hear, and he leans in closer and feels her cold against his cheek. She is dead, already. She is looking at him with eyes wide and she is dead.

The Father wakes, sweating. The room is silent, lit by the moon through the curtains. The whisper bothers him. His wife said nothing, when she died. She couldn't speak, she couldn't breathe. It was Mary who whispered, the first day he believed. He didn't hear Mary either. He shivers. He thought for a moment that in the dream he did understand. Didn't hear her, as such, but knew what she was saying all the same. An owl calls somewhere outside, softly, with a deep and gentle richness. Breathe, he tells himself. The dream is not true. He lies there listening for a long time before he finds sleep.

The challenge, he realises the next morning, is going forward. The kettle whistles on the hob and he reaches for the cloth, lifts it clear. The teapot is laid out ready and the toaster pops. He sits down with his tea and butters his toast. The dream could possibly be a metaphor. A description of helplessness, the fear of having no control. Over what? For just an instant he imagines Mary as Leda: *the great wings beating still, above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed...* Mary has always been a character in the Bible he has had sympathy for. But his fear is more for the future. He wonders if the girl is as worried about the birth as he is. He wishes he could share with her his feeling of belief – none of them have experienced it, he thinks, the way he has. That gentle lift, that warm trust and certitude. It is beautiful. He smiles again, this time for the warmth that moves through him with these thoughts, and raises his head to see his wife beside him smiling too, his faith mirrored perfectly on her beautiful face. Her presence is a sign. Her belief was always so much more stable than his. Less dramatic. Pure. He is learning, he thinks, and forces himself to look away. This is his chance to prove his faith.

He has the dream again that night. This time it shifts and he is in the church. His wife dies there in his arms in the front pew. A man appears, leading a donkey down the aisle. *This is the donkey Christ rode*, he says. *He will judge you now.* The donkey walks through the church and the whole congregation waits, holding their breath. Mrs. Keillor is beside him and clutches his arm with her hand tight like a claw. His wife has

disappeared. The donkey makes it to the front and come to a stop before him. It raises one leg. *You are unworthy*, the man says. Father John wakes up once more with sweat beading on his forehead.

It is Sunday. The Father follows his normal ritual. He arrives at the church early and spends half an hour on his knees at the altar before he goes to prepare. Mrs. Keillor arrives early as well and gossips away as he dresses. He watches as they all come in. The congregation is large – the word is spreading, their pilgrimage and its publicity has done its work. Mary arrives with her mother and they seat themselves in the front pew. A boy approaches her just as they are beginning to be ready. He stands in front of her and opens his mouth but doesn't say anything. A young man really, probably Mary's own age. Mary looks at him and waits. The Father watches silently but the boy doesn't speak. He looks nervous, unsure. Mary's mother stands eventually and he backs away quickly. The music for the processional starts from the organ. The Father walks forward, makes his way down the aisle. He kneels at the altar and then turns to the people.

'The Lord bless and keep you,' he says, and they respond. He can hear Mary's voice through the drone. The Father catches her eye, smiles gently. She reminds him of his wife as a younger woman.

He starts the service. The day is warm, the congregation seems almost sleepy. Only the boy seems awake. He is watching the stained glass windows as though they are alive, eyes searching their faces as though in silent conversation. He is not listening, not singing with the rest. The Father looks again at Mary, sitting in the front pew. Her face is blank. A cloud passes over the sun outside and for a moment the church is gloomy. Mrs. Keillor falters in the reading. The Father lets his eyes wander further, up the windows to the ceiling, up to God. The weight of the bare beams in the roof above seems dangerous, for a moment. And then the sun re-emerges and the light is golden with a thousand motes of dust. The boy is staring at him. His eyes are the same dark colour as the raw wood.

It is Communion when it happens. The boy is knelt at the rail to receive but the Father can see as he proffers forward the challis that the boy is only watching Mary. She is following, bearing the wafers of bread as per normal. The people like to have her there with them, to have her bless them. It was Mrs. Keillor's idea and the Father can see it was a good one. The boy stares at her as he accepts the wafer and his hands are trembling. Mary is not looking at him, the Father notices. Good, he thinks. That is right. The Father lowers the wine to the woman in front of him and then sneaks another look back. The boy is staring and staring but Mary moves on. The boy almost shudders. The

Father can see it happen – the whisper bursts out of the boy as though he can't control it.

'I can take you away,' he hisses. 'I can save you!'

It sounds clear in the silence of the ceremony. The whole row of kneeling people snap around to stare at him. Mary jumps, turns and looks slowly. The Father swallows.

'Tom?' A woman asks quietly next to him, his mother. The boy lowers his head, says nothing. The Father looks up from him and out to the people. He can feel his heart beating. The congregation is alive with little movements. They are like a flock of birds, he thinks. Their feathers ruffled, they perch forward in the pews anxiously, murmuring and staring around at each other with sharp, worried little gestures. There are more whispers now, people asking and answering and echoing the words of the boy.

'Please,' he says, trying to make his voice firm. 'This is a house of God.'

They fall silent and he is almost surprised. It is Mary who saves him. She moves forward calmly and decisively. All the congregation are watching as she proffers the wafer of bread to the upturned face before her. The Father smiles and follows her example. She is leading them, she is the vessel of their saving grace indeed!

'The blood of Christ,' he says, louder than usual. The man before him leans forward and almost gulps from the challis. The mother takes the boy by the shoulders and drags him back to their pew. The congregation calms, they settle back in their seats.

He calls for the final prayers, gesturing for Mary to stand as normal. At the altar, in front of them and leading them all, her figure alone is an inspiration. She is their hope. She glows with the golden light. We should get a window made, he thinks. Front and centre above the altar, perhaps. A collection could be taken. The congregation drones on. Resolutely, Mary looks ahead. Her face is lit with the colours of the windows as though she is part of the church already. Warm, filled with a deep sense of peace and righteousness, the Father is suddenly perfectly sure. He can feel all his fears slide away from his body like discarded clothes. Not real, not a part of him, but worn, soiled, taken up in a moment of weakness. Faith, he thinks, and is filled with a gentle hope. It is like a well sunk deep in your soul, full of crystal waters. His wife would have liked that thought. She understood faith. For her it was a beauty she never realised she had.

At the sending-off, the Father stands at the altar and looks down at them all. He opens his mouth to speak and then falters. His wife is there where she always used to be, in her normal spot. She is looking at him, straight at him, but this time her blue eyes are alight with anger. She is there! Not a memory, but real! Solid! He takes a step forward and she looks down, picks up her pew sheet and bible, and stands. Before them all, there for them all to see, she turns her back on him and walks down the aisle. He is smiling, he realises, despite her anger – he can feel it, his cheeks are aching with it. I will hold her,

he thinks. He steps out from behind the lectern and moves to follow her. People start twittering again. He ignores them.

‘Please,’ he whispers. The congregation is standing now. They are turned towards him. He follows his wife down between the pews. She turns her head just for a moment and smiles with pity. Her face is lit up, there is a golden light glowing out from inside her.

‘No,’ he says, and again she smiles. She reaches the doorway, steps out into the daylight and is gone. The Father freezes, one hand still stretched out. He looks back to the people behind him. ‘No,’ he says, quite simply. And he walks out down the road after his wife.

*

We never saw Father John again. I was told he caught the ferry and left. We drifted for a couple of weeks, not quite sure of what to do. Eventually a deacon arrived and moved into his house. There were no available priests, apparently. He was young and eager and strangely cheerful. We all held our breath and waited for his first service.

Looking back, it was obvious that something was going to happen. The whole Island was on edge and more people kept pouring in. The press had taken up the story of Father John leaving, it only added to the mysteriousness of it all. Perhaps if we had thought about it, we would have been able to prevent what happened. But we were caught up in it too much. We didn't notice, we didn't understand. We just held ourselves at the ready.

They say that by the time you feel the effects of an earthquake, it has already happened. The tremors and damage all happen well after the event. Deep below, the fact of it has already passed: the plates of the earth have shifted, giving way to some deep, internal pressure, and settled again. But up above on the surface, you are only just beginning to notice. It is too late, of course. There is nothing that can be done. And as it progresses, you might watch whole towns, whole mountains crumble and slide into the sea.

*

Thomas decides to wait until the service. It will be better then, he tells himself. She is sure to be there. It is because he is a coward, really. He is too scared to go and find her. He can make her listen in the church. She can't run away from him there. She looked at him, when he said it at the last service. Just for a moment, like she used to. So this time, he tells himself, he will be ready to try again. He will save her.

It is bright on the Sunday. Clear skies and sunshine, it is beginning to feel like a new season. The church is full, there are people everywhere. He doesn't try to go to Mary before the service. Too many people. He looks for Ben and Picnic instead. Their parents are there, but they aren't. The pregnant woman is back, with the man who had the accident, Jade's father. The Keillors' are there and the woman from the store. A stranger sits up the front near Mary and her mother and the woman sits beside him. There is a new priest leading them. A younger man, whose voice quavers ever so slightly the first time he speaks. It is weird not to have Father John. The new priest feels dangerous, simply because he is unfamiliar.

The service goes as normal. Thomas tries to hold himself patiently but his mother turns to him frowning and he knows he is fidgeting. His father is not with them, and his mother is cross already because of it. They come to communion, and Thomas can feel the world slowing down. The priest offers the challis to Mrs. Keillor and steps aside to allow her to join him at the altar. She pauses for a moment, confused, and it is Mary who steps forward. Mrs. Keillor nods and kneels at the rail. The new man looks surprised, standing there, but he allows it. Thomas watches. Mary looks beautiful.

'Tom,' his mother whispers as they stand. 'You ok?'

He nods, wavers slightly. 'Feel dizzy,' he says, and she looks at him with anxious eyes, runs a hand along his shoulder and down his arm. 'S'ok,' he mutters, and she lets him walk forward. Miss Mulvey is there in line, two people in front of him. She pauses to greet Mrs. Keillor and ends up next to him at the rail. She smiles as he kneels down and he makes himself smile back. He leans forward and closes his hands around the smooth, polished wood of the uprights. Please, he is thinking. Please, please, please. It is a prayer, he realises suddenly, but he doesn't know what for or to whom. It seems impossible, knelt there, for anything to happen. It takes them so long to get to him. The new priest is slow, pausing at each person. The line wavers behind them. But then he is there and Thomas is leaning forward to sip from the challis. The wine is like vinegar. The priest is murmuring but Thomas can't hear. He is looking at Mary. His palms

are sweating and he doesn't know what to say. He is going to sit there silently, he is useless. He won't save her. The windows with their colours are leaning in on him. She is standing in front of him now. She bends to give him the wafer. Thomas is holding his breath. He can smell her. She looks at him and everything about him is frozen still. She is looking at him.

'At the bridge,' she whispers, and her voice is harsh, dry. 'Like before. I'll run.'

And she turns away and is gone. No one hears, no one has noticed. Mary has moved on and his mother is guiding him back to their seats and Thomas still can't breathe, almost can't believe it. She spoke to him. She said the bridge. She'll run.

The service finishes and Thomas wants to go but his mother has him by the arm. He can see Mary, anyway. He won't leave until she does. She is looking at him now, every so often. Little glances. He can feel her like a heat, he always knows where she is. He ticks off in his mind all the things he will need. Home for food and clothes and money, and then he will run. He won't stop until he gets there. His mother drags him towards the hall. There are people everywhere, none of them seem to know what to do. He realises there was no mention all service of Mary as the Virgin. The stranger from the church stands at the door of the hall and Mrs. Keillor hovers beside him. Thomas's mother stops on the veranda to gossip with Miss Mulvey and the woman from the store. Thomas stands beside her. The stranger looks at him and then at Mary. He has a camera in a bag. He motions to them and Mrs. Keillor leads him over.

'Christian is writing a book about us,' she says.

'How interesting,' says his mother. 'Hey, Tom?'

Thomas just nods. They keep talking, the man joking and smiling. It is hard to concentrate. Miss Mulvey moves away. His mother goes for a cup of tea and suddenly it is just him and the man. He is staring at Thomas with a strange look on his face. Thomas feels the world snap back, can hear suddenly, and focus. Thomas prickles.

'I saw you talking to her,' the man says, 'to Mary.' He is standing too close now. Fear curls along the back of Thomas' neck. 'What'd she say? Are you friends, you two?'

Thomas shakes his head, stays silent. The man smiles. Behind him, Thomas can see his mother at the door of the hall.

'It's you, isn't it?' he says quietly. It isn't really a question. 'They say you were her boyfriend. You're the one.'

'One what?' Thomas asks. His voice breaks as he says it. The man leans in towards him. His eyes are narrow.

'You're the father.'

Thomas freezes. The man is grinning again, but this close Thomas can see it isn't friendly.

'You slept with her.'

'No,' Thomas whispers.

'Yes,' the man says. 'I've been watching you.'

'No,' Thomas whispers again, and a prickle of anger rises up.

'Yes. And now she's lying about it. And I am writing the book.'

Thomas stares at him. He can feel his body tighten. He doesn't realise he is doing anything until his fist sails through the space between them to crunch into the man's face.

'Bastard,' he finds himself yelling. 'Fucking arsehole!'

The man goes down. Thomas puts the boot in. One of the women behind him faints.

It takes two men to hold him. He can see his mother behind, crying. And across the lawn he can see them with Mary, the new priest there, talking into a mobile. They are putting her into a car, and she looks at him and he realises – she can't run, not if they take her. He is screaming, he can hear himself, Mary's name and everything else, struggling and wrestling the men, trying to swing punches, and it all comes out.

'He raped her,' he yells, gesturing down at the man on the ground. They are staring at him, everyone. Mary is still there, he can see her. 'HE RAPED HER! MARY!'

Everyone listening now, looking at him as though he is mad. They have him pinned. The man is watching him with cold eyes, still down, one hand wiping the blood form his face. The woman from the store is knelt over him, but stares in shock up at Thomas. Mary is behind, standing alone now, watching too.

'HE RAPED HER!' he screams again, and the men pick him up, hold his arms and his legs. Through them he can see Mary stepping away from the car towards the graveyard. He can see her disappear.

They lock him in the hall. He runs because he doesn't know what else to do, from one end to the other, around the trestles and the fruitcake, the coffee cups and the urn. He can hear them outside, there are screams when they notice Mary is gone. He smiles at that but he doesn't stop running. It is hard to see through the windows. They have old-style pains of mottled glass like for a bathroom, in rows which can open as shutters. He tries to break one. The glass cracks but the iron mechanism is too solid. He goes back to running and he can hear his mother's voice outside the door now but he doesn't stop. She is calling, crying, pleading.

'You can't do this,' she is saying. 'He's my son, you can't lock him in there!'

It quietens down eventually. Thomas stops running, sits with his back to the door.

He hears his father arrive. The two of them, his parents, sit outside opposite him. Occasionally one of them will say something, but he doesn't answer. He can almost feel their bodies through the wood. He closes his eyes and tries to imagine Mary: free, safe. Walking across the bridge and away.

*

I believed Thomas at the church that day. Not about the stranger, but about the rape. It was how he said it. It hurt him, saying that. It was physically painful. And still, I did nothing. I could tell this differently. I could pretend I heard what she said at communion. I could pretend I let him out and that together we found Mary. I'm sorry. I wish I had. I am so sorry.

I didn't. This is why I don't want to tell this story.

*

It is strange, out looking for Mary. The warmth should be beautiful, and the clarity of the sky. They fanned out from the hall to start, people going in all directions. Hannah could hear the footsteps of Thomas, still ceaseless, insistent, inside. But then panic faded and people become less frantic. Things were organised methodically. She was sent with a group towards the village. She walked quickly to begin with, almost excitedly. Because this wasn't serious – it couldn't be, none of it. She expected to see the girl at any moment, sitting somewhere or walking back. They are fanned out in a line, in case she has fallen somewhere. In case she is unconscious. People are headed towards the closest houses, people up into the vines. Others, the non-churchgoers, have been roped in. Nobody talks. Occasionally someone will call her name, but mostly there is silence. Mary has just disappeared.

She thinks about Thomas as she walks. Rape? All along the line she can hear people muttering as they go. No one says the word, but they are all thinking about it. Hannah remembers kneeling next to him at the communion rail, his distraction as she greeted him. He never answered when she said hello. He has been worried about this, she realises. They reach a fence and all group together in the centre to help each other through. They spread out again as soon as they are all on the other side. Hannah walks to the far right and lets her mind wander again. Rape? Everything is shifting, everything dissolving and coming undone. There is darkness underneath. By the time they reach the main road, the line is beginning to seem pointless. It is not as though they are searching for a child. But she holds her quiet and keeps going. It is starting to be warm. Hannah wishes she had some water. The woman next to her is vaguely familiar. She swats continuously at flies which aren't there and Hannah begins to feel sick.

No one is there, at the village.

'All searching,' a woman says, and Hannah tries desperately to remember her name. Sammy? Mannie? Nugget's wife. She is pregnant, she looks exhausted. They all hover there until the man leading them makes a move.

'Split up,' he says. His tone reminds Hannah of Mulvey, she wonders if he works for him. 'We'll go further on, down to the beach, and I need some of you to go back up to the church.' He pauses a moment. 'Marnie?'

The pregnant woman turns to him. 'Yes?'

'Can you stay here in case others come through?'

'Sure,' she says, and eases herself down on to the steps. Hannah can tell she is relieved.

'Ok,' the man says. 'Let's go.'

And so they keep walking down the main street, towards the ferry dock. The ferry isn't there. When they hit the water, they split again. Half of them go back towards the school and half further on towards the bridge. Hannah can't decide, for a moment, which group to follow. She knows the school, knows its little places. It is her school, and Mary's – she might be there. But she turns in the end and walks on through the dunes towards the shadowy line of the bridge.

The breeze coming up off the ocean smells almost overbearingly of salt and seaweed. Rotting things. It sets her on edge. Her blood comes alive, her eyes sting. They have spread out through the dunes. She follows a little rabbit path winding this way and that on the crest of the dune, looking down the beach. There is debris, bits of frayed rope and foam buoys. The occasional beer can. She can see people around her but not hear them. There is nothing, no sign. She can feel the energy in the group changing, the fear setting in. They keep walking. It is bizarre, impossible. She must have been found. They hit the bridge and cross under it. The pylons are crusted with salt and a strange, green algae. The waves lap around them, low down at the shore, leaving the higher ones dry but for the marks of the receding tide. Hannah licks her lips and they too taste of salt. It should be beautiful. The sun is starting to lower, the afternoon grinding on. The sky is soft and still warm. And the sea is turquoise, so calm it looks friendly. Hannah wants to smile, but she can't. She heads back up into the dunes. They keep walking and she realises she is sweating. They walk and the sun moves. They reach a little inlet and finally they stop. There doesn't seem much point in going on. It is as though they have been waiting for a signal, and this is it. Flat sands and a little brown stream.

The man who was leading in the village waves them all over.

'We'll head back,' he says. 'See if there is any update. They probably have her, you know. We wouldn't hear them ring the bell from here.'

They all murmur agreement and turn. They walk back down the beach as a group. It feels strange to be surrounded now. Hannah finds herself floating on the periphery, almost mounting the dune. The afternoon fades as they walk, simply falls away. The warmth of the day disappears. Hannah can see a couple of people start to shiver as the breeze takes on an edge. The sun starts to set, gloriously orange and red. It makes a silhouette of the hill. Tiny shards of shattered light reflect from tin rooves and window panes. Hannah wonders which house is hers. By the time they can see the bridge, it is very nearly dark. The pylons are indistinct, just a dark shadow across their way. Hannah stares out across the water, watches the last of the colours flickering there. For just the briefest second a light appears over the water, halfway out across the bridge. It bobbles,

wavers, and she stops and stares. A reflection? She is on the point of calling to the rest of the group when it disappears. She closes her mouth. She could have imagined it, she thinks, but she doubts it. There was a light there. There was someone on the bridge.

The group is ahead of her now, weaving in between the bridge's pylons. Hannah looks again but there is nothing, no light to show them. She hesitates and then hurries forward. Out the other side, she looks up the dunes to the fence-line. It is tall, barbed wire, taut. Maybe she did imagine the light. She looks one last time out to sea and there is nothing. No light, no movement. They have probably found her already, anyway. Biting her lip, Hannah turns and walks back up into the village with the rest of them, out of the wind, away from the dark water.

*

Through the dark, Mary floats. The water is cold deep in her bones and for the first time she worries about the baby inside her. She can feel it moving, as though in protest. Mary shivers. The water is carrying her away.

Her legs trail like seaweed. The dress billows out and down beneath her. It is heavy across her thighs but she doesn't mind. She can see it glowing white through the water. There isn't much else she can see. It has grown dark very quickly. Out beyond the current there are lights on the shore. Waves show up as dappled silver through the gloom. She is almost tired. It is ok, though. The water will take her. She stares out towards the lights and watches as they drift away.

*

Mary simply disappeared. Vanished. We never found her, she never came back, never appeared on the mainland. And that is all, that is what happened. The police were called in to join the search. They combed the Island, sent teams out into the bush. The villagers were exhausted by then. They put divers in the bay – pointlessly, given the current. They investigated, too. But no one was charged. There was never any verdict. She was just gone.

She jumped, I think. From the bridge. She would have been carried out to sea. They would never have found a body.

I left Chesil not long after. Packed the house up and came to the city. Many people did. It was hard to stay after everything that had happened. The church closed. Darcy is still there, and some of the old folk. Mrs. Keillor is, I think, though apparently her husband has died. I don't know about many of the others.

That's all, that's the end.

*

The black horse died, a while ago. Darcy called to tell me. It was Sophie who found him – they went over there for a holiday and there he was lying on his side in the paddock as though he was simply enjoying the sun. Darcy had fed him that morning, so he hadn't been there for long. They got Mulvey in with a back-hoe to dig the hole, like for Ghost. Our mother would have been outraged. Dig a hole by hand, she always taught us. Give them the honour they deserve, give them your sweat and your care. I thanked them all the same when Darcy called.

*

It isn't all bad. I am remembering good things now as well. Sophie and I as children building a course of jumps in the paddock and 'riding' over them. Just once our mother came cantering across the paddock to jump them herself. And the forest, I miss the forest, I miss riding out there.

I remember one afternoon sitting in the sunshine on a fallen log in the middle of a clearing. We ate scrumpie out of a zip-lock bag. While the horses grazed behind us, our mother pointed out fourteen different types of wildflower, each one hidden and more surprising than the last. Tiny, fragile jewels lost in a tangle of grey…

I am beginning to feel all that again, and even a gentle and abstract sort of joy. I have been trying too hard to forget. It is a dangerous business, forgetting. How can we ever know who we are, if we don't let ourselves remember the places we are from?

*

I think I am going to go to Chesil. I have been thinking about it a lot. It occurred to me this morning that Mary should be found, I should go and try and find her. She deserves that, we owe her that at least. I could follow her steps. I think I need to. I saw her that night, on the bridge. I know I did.

I have written a letter to Sophie. It doesn't say much really, but I think she will understand. I am putting all this in with it too. I will mail it from the Island, so it has the postmark. She will like that, she will like to think that I have gone home. I thought I was writing this to tell the world, but now it is finished I'm not so sure. I think I might be writing to myself.

*

I am here now. The house was locked up. I had to break in, I forgot to bring the keys. I climbed in through the laundry window, where the flyscreen is out. It was awkward, I ended up in the sink. It is strangest feeling, being here. Everything has been suspended in time.

Tomorrow I am going to find Mary. I am going to follow where she went, from the church down the hill, across to the beach, out onto the bridge. We must have been close, when we were searching. I am going to go and find her. I saw her light, I saw it disappear. The only thing I can think to do is to follow. I will drop this in the mail on the way down.

The house is draughty but I am quite snug. I have lit candles and pulled the drapes off the furniture. It would be nice to light a fire but there isn't any wood. I'm not too cold, at least. It would just be nice. I can hear the forest outside. I am eating canned tuna for dinner. Ancient, dusty tins – it must have been me who bought them. I am just using a fork and eating it straight.

There was a horse in the top paddock when I arrived. He is grazing up near the fence now, I can hear him. A bay, not so big, a handy size. I noticed him as I came in, he reminds me of my old fellow. It looks right having a horse in the paddock. I might make friends before I go tomorrow. I'll go down at least and check he is ok. He must be one of Darcy's. It would be nice to ride again, to go out in the forest. Perhaps I will make friends.

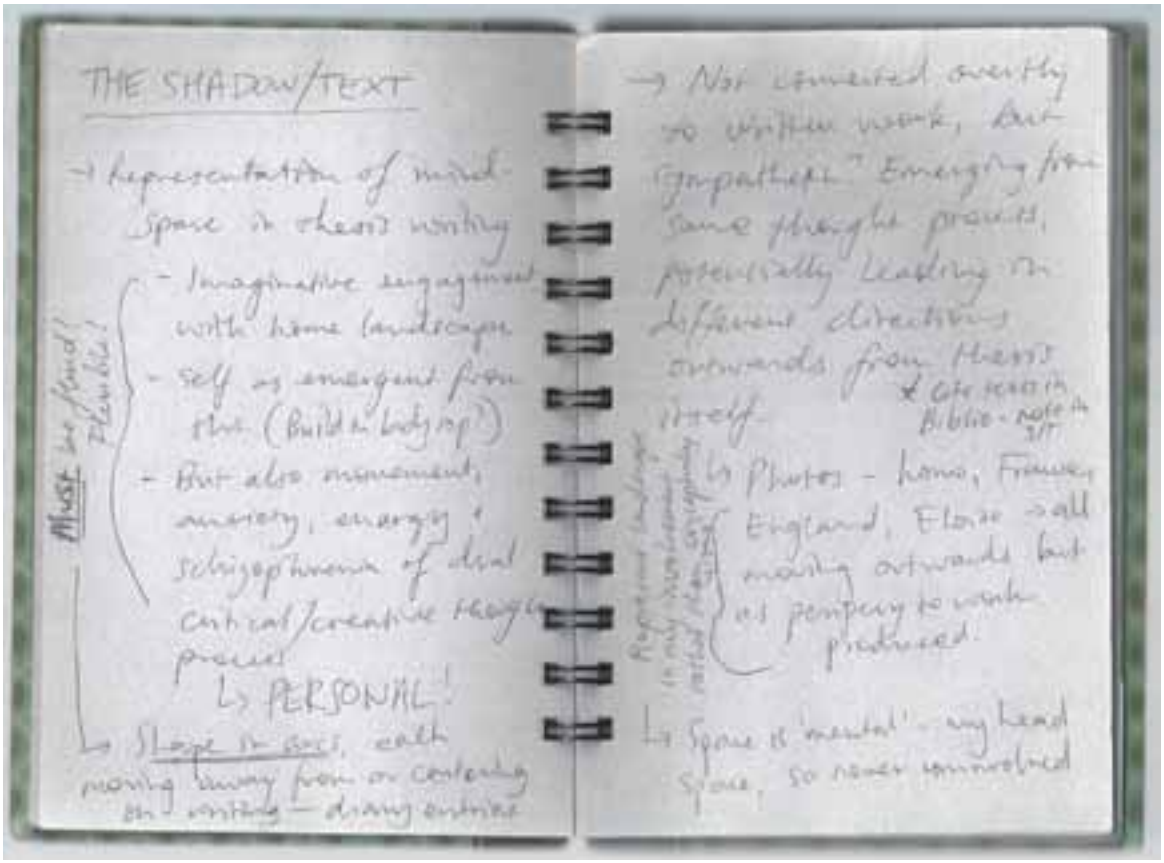
Part Two: *White Australian Writing and Anxieties of Landscape*

A Note on Translation

All translations of the writings of Etienne Souriau, along with those pertaining to *La pensée cosmologique d'Etienne Souriau* by Luce de Vitry Maubrey and the article 'Les voies de l'instauration: Souriau chez les contemporaines' by Frédéric Fruteau de Laclos, are my own, unless otherwise referenced.

A concerted effort has been made in translation to preserve meaning over the elegance of the beautiful prose each of these authors put forth. While a full translation of *Les différents modes d'existence* has not as yet been published, fragments exist in translation by Luce de Vitry Maubrey and Stephen Muecke. I have in places preferred these translations to my own. In all such cases the quote is referenced through the publication in which it was previously cited, rather than in the original.

Translation has been a lengthy process throughout my thesis writing. The publication in French of Bruno Latour's latest book, *Enquête sur les modes d'existence* (2012), fell beyond my ability to translate in time for submission. Its later publication in translated form (September 2013) came too late. There is, therefore, still much work to be carried out in this area in relation to my project.



THE SHADOW/TEXT

→ Representation of mind-space in thesis writing

- Imaginative engagement with home landscape
- Self as emergent from this (Build in body rap?)
- But also movement, anxiety, energy & schizophrenia of dual critical/creative thought process

↳ PERSONAL!

Must be fluid! Flexible!

↳ Shape in arcs, each moving away from or centering on writing — diary entries

→ Not connected overtly to written work, but 'sympathetic'. Emerging from same thought process, potentially leading in different directions outwards from thesis itself.

* Cite texts in Biblio - note in 3/T

↳ Photos - home, Frawes, England, Eloise → all moving outwards but as periphery to work produced.

↳ Space is 'mental' - my head space, so never unmoulded

A Note on *Shadow/Text*

The alternate pages of the exegetical section of this thesis are an open space, or even 'scape'. I have filled this space with images collated from my research process. These images constitute a third text within my thesis, designed both to speak to my central question and simultaneously of the position I take up before it. A flexible text, moving under the influence of two opposing prepositions and in two different directions. A text composed throughout the course of my research, influenced by my reading and writing. A text which is independent: not an illustration of the exegesis but existing in counter-point and conjunction.

The images of which it is comprised are selected from material I have been collecting since I began. Some of these are excerpts from written diaries, which have been kept on an informal basis as an aide to the writing of my creative piece. Some are works by artists, who have been kind enough to lend me the permission to reproduce their work – thank you, Judy Schrever and Julie Montgarret! Some are photos and footage I have taken or images from my family's archive which I have manipulated. All of these images hold significance for me in reference to the research questions I am considering. They are designed to point to the mind-space in which my thesis has been produced. The physical text I have produced here is accompanied by an online version, www.shadowtext.weebly.com.

As a text, it reaches simultaneously towards the notion of the 'third space' coined by Homi Bhabha[1] in postcolonial studies. It is Robert Young's appreciation of the third space which to my mind is the most eloquent:

> The third space is not a space, nor is it a place. If anything, it is a site … a site of production, the production of anxiety, an untimely place of loss, of fading, of appearance and disappearance.
>
> …The third space, above all, is the site of enunciation, the instance of every utterance, and, at the point of the tongue, the fall into language. …a void (*vide*), into which the speaker or

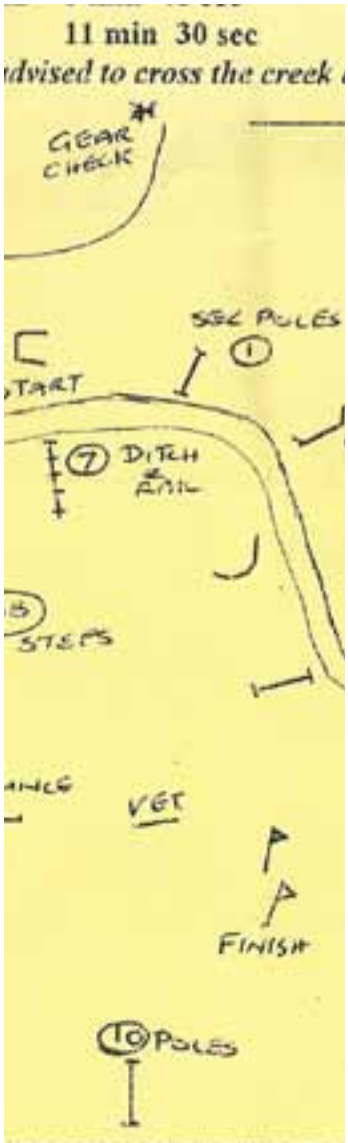
[1] See: Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994)

> addressee find themselves dropping but an emptiness which at the same time enables the articulation and assertion of their own subjectivity.[2]

The Shadow/Text is in a way intended to speak to the anxieties of language I have felt in writing. In accompanying the exegetical text, it speaks to a second way of knowing things, a site of multimodality as per the philosophy of Etienne Souriau. It holds empty spaces as well, quiet stretches of untouched land, "a silence or gap which must be allowed to remain, the silence into which things must fall, the places of unknowability."[3] It seeks to asks if that which is 'unknowable' in critical language – inexpressible, untranslatable? – might still be felt in another mode…

[2] Robert Young, 'The Void of Misgiving', in *Communicating in the Third Space,* ed. Karen Ikas, Gerhard Wagner (New York, Routledge, 2008), 81-83

[3] Alison Ravenscroft, *The Postcolonial Eye: White Australian Desire and the Visual Field of Race* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 18



Left: Edgell/Miller/Noske family tree;
Middle: 'Grampians National Park Map', *State Digital Mapbase*, (The State of Victoria/ Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2012). Image in the Public Domain;
Right: 'Hamilton PC Cross Country Map', (Hamilton Pony Club, 2004), ©Hamilton Pony Club.

Introduction: A Need for New Reading

"How did our representations of the world become hard and dry?"
Paul Carter, *Dark Writing*, 8

I see lines. This is your great-grandfather, my grandmother says, spreading the family tree in front of us. The names unfurl from top to bottom – Edgell, Miller, Noske – and there I am inserted in the final row… Make a timeline, my mother suggests, standing above me as I sit on the floor, my project spread before us. Start to finish, with all of the different events coming off it. Here the discovery of gold, there the stockade… Draw a 'mind map', a primary school teacher tells us, holding up the book. He shows us, stretching an arm up to rattle-scratch chalk across the blackboard and a word in a circle sits suddenly in the middle of a web of lines. Connect all the characters, he says. Diligent students, we label names and lines in a flurry of pencils across paper… This action, this representation of connection in a straight, decisive line – whether it be in the shaky hand of a primary school student or the official print of an ordinance survey map – is endemic within our society. Reasoning based within post-Enlightenment rationality holds a linear trajectory as demonstrative of secure fact, sees linearity in design as secure, distinct. Lines are borders, lines contain, lines control. Lines provide definition.

When I began writing the creative section of this thesis, it was with the idea of exploring or feeling out a representation of my relationship with the landscape in which I grew up. The stories of Hannah and Mary were less politically or culturally informed, in that sense, than allegorical. And yet, my relationship with that landscape felt tenuous, dangerous, in that it lacked this decisive line of connection. There was no single line I could draw, no possible way the line could in this instance be representative. I realised gradually that this was a site of anxiety for me, that I was uneasy in my relationship to the landscape *because* I failed in representing it thus. But the concept that any relationship to landscape is fixed or cohesive is, I believe, a dangerous one. The multitudinous emotions which open up within my narrative point to a variety of sensations within my contact with the land. My perspective socially and politically certainly contributes here. The colonial history of the country holds both

The woman has been waiting for him, he realises at the door. As soon as he knocks, the footsteps hurry through and materialise into a dark shadow he can see through the stained glass. The house is gloomy, cold and she leads him back into a cluttered kitchen with a door frame so low he has to duck. When she gestures to the table he sits, and she ~~suddenly takes a~~ plate of cake. A kettle starts to whistle. His legs ache. The sweat, greasy under his arms and running down his back, makes him feel old.

'Thank you for coming, Father,' she says, looking down. A teaper appears and is filled. He takes a piece of cake. 'We just don't know what to do. The Doctor has been, from the mainland. He came yesterday. He said… He said she needed help. He thought… He wanted to take her away, back with him. He did urine tests, and touched her, felt her stomach. He took a blood test, but we don't know the results yet. He doesn't think she is sick though. He suggested we find someone to talk to her.'

He nods. She is gushing. He just sits there and nods and eats his cake. Her hands flutter like leaves.

'She has just disappeared. There is something wrong. She was all pale the first morning, and just didn't say anything, so I kept her home, and she went to bed. She wasn't sick, just pale. But then she just slept for a day and a half, and didn't get up, and stopped talking altogether. And now it's been almost four weeks, and nothing has changed, nothing at all. She just lies there. I've tried everything. Her father… I just don't know what to do, she's never been like this before.'

He pats her gently, vaguely, on the arm. 'We'll see her,' he says, and she smiles gushingly at him. Relief, he thinks. Someone to help. Once upon a time he would have felt something in return. He reaches again for his tea.

Her bedroom is upstairs. It is hot and gloomy, the pink walls seem to lean in oppressively towards him. The child is curled still asleep under a plain white sheet. She has her back to him. The curls of her hair are dark across the pillow, she is biting her lip ~~in her sleep~~. The mother tiptoes over and shakes her gently, and the movement is somehow out of place.

'Mary?' She whispers. The child rubs her eyes, sits up. She is staring at him. She is staring and he finds that he cannot meet her eyes. He looks back for a moment to the mother, who is bustling around, picking up clothes and opening the curtains. The sudden light makes the child blink and wriggle, and she throws an arm up to cover her face, pulling the sheets up as if to

positive and negative sensations for a white Australian – the latter being a term I use deliberately, as opposed to 'European Australian', in reflecting the complexity of my subjective position before the land, as well as an emphasis in self-definition on being first and foremost Australian. I felt that enormous variety of sensations framing my engagement with the space in writing, constantly shifting and inverting my subjective position. Such sensations moved beyond a social and political engagement to a conflict that was more deeply personal. In this sense, positive and negative began to take on new meaning, hinting at the photographic notion: an inversion of colour and form, two states of a single frame. My conceptualisation of myself was made fluid by the shifting landscape. In writing, I was demanding the impossible of myself: there is no way in which connection to landscape could be so simply represented as placing self and space in direct, linear relationship. That relation is too complex, too mutable to be rendered down to a single image or sentence, a single line.

This thesis represents the attempt to move towards a writing which allows for such movement in landscape. The question my exegetical efforts have turned to is how exactly I might frame my connection to landscape within a poetic language. As a critical endeavour, a certain definition of landscape is implicated. Landscape here is conceptual: an individual's socially-informed interpretation of physical land. We must be careful to remember this, because the distinction can become blurred. As Stephen Muecke points out, "Land is not landscape, but the concept of representation allows us the illusion."[1] There is a strong argument originating in anthropology highlighting this difference, describing landscape as never anything other than an interpretation. Mathew Trinca, Andrea Gaynor and Anna Haebitch open their collection of Western Australian writing on landscape with the qualification that "we inscribe [the land] with qualities and characteristics, using language to transform *spaces* into *places*."[2] Barbara Bender remarks that in "the contemporary Western world we 'perceive' landscapes, we are the point from which the 'seeing' occurs. It is thus an ego-centred landscape, a perspectival landscape, a landscape of views and vistas."[3] Landscape depends on subjective relation to land, it emerges *from* this relation. This argument, common to many discussions of landscape, is echoed in Australian cultural studies. Bill Ashcroft, Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCredden conceptualise place in Saussurian terms as "the equivalent of *parole* – utterance itself – rather than the potentiality of utterance that is space. Place,

1. Stephen Muecke, *Ancient and Modern: time, culture and indigenous philosophy* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2004), 76

2. Mathew Trinca, Andrea Gaynor, Anna Haebitch, eds., *Country: Visions of Land and People in Western Australia* (Perth: Western Australian Museum, 2002), 1

3. Barbara Bender, *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 1

bit of the North Island [illegible]
lay ~~M~~ morning and travelled up to Lak
of the lake are the three big
should know the ones I mean, I can't
we made a detour around these
has just erupted and ~~pat~~ it was
alot when we saw them. We
what is called the desert road
east side of the three mou
up in the direction of Taupo. W
able to get a much ~~near~~ close
ntains than previously but they
thick ~~door~~ cloud all the way.
worth going up the desert road
ally go~~ll~~ through desert country (
e in winter!)
We stopped at Lake Taupo for

we might say, is uttered into being and maintained by narrative and image."[4] From a similar perspective, Ross Gibson discusses geography – a term itself etymologically *gê* 'earth' and *graphíā* 'description', from the earlier *gráphein* 'write', 'draw' or 'carve'[5]. He suggests that as soon as land is viewed in these terms, it is:

> …represented and dramatized within images, sounds, and stories, it is no longer land. Rather, it is landscape; it has been translated …There is no such thing as a pristine landscape. There may be an *image* of pristinity (or of beauty, or of innocence, etc.), but such a thing cannot *mean* anything outside cultural systems.[6]

Landscape thus is the product of an interpretive reading of physical space informed by perspective. My writing, as an utterance which brings a landscape into being, represents the subjective translation of a specific space or land.

My thesis therefore explores not so much a conflict between two concepts of landscape as between *two ways of reading*. It is the process by which the subject constructs landscape which must be questioned. Theories of reading come into relevance in this context. In *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*[7], Louise Rosenblatt sees reading as a temporal process, involving the reader as one who "brings to the text his past experience and present personality"[8]. But then she makes a careful distinction, between 'the text' as "a set or series of signs interpretable as linguistic symbols"[9], and 'the poem' as "an event in time"[10]. The poem "is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text."[11] It is a site, therefore, of subjectivity and subjective involvement, a site of meaning. There is an ontological argument to be made here, in that it might too be a process which constructs the subjective – this is something I will return to. Rosenblatt configures the reading process as characterised by its temporality – a "live circuit"[12] – and thus by its mutability as well. "The relation between reader and text," she suggests, "is *not*

4. Bill Ashcroft, Frances Devlin-Glass, Lyn McCredden, *Intimate Horizons: The Postcolonial Sacred in Australian Literature* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2009), 324

5. *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1988) s.v. 'geography'

6. Ross Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 75

7. Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, 2nd ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994)

8. Ibid., 12

9. Ibid., 12

10. Ibid., 12

11. Ibid., 12

12. Ibid., 14

linear."[13] It is instead something that "happens"[14]; it is fluid, involved in movement and change. "Each of these phrasings, ['the reader acts on the text' vs. 'the text acts on the reader'], because it implies a single line of action by one separate element on another separate element, distorts the actual reading process."[15] This reading can be seen to inform the notion of landscape as a perspectival construction. The process it describes before the text mirrors my own shifting subjective position before the land I am attempting to write.

My original 'linear' constructions of landscape overlooked this fluidity and movement in poetic representation. Rosenblatt highlights the influence of the aesthetic in reading, the manner in which the reader's attention comes to be "*centred directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text*."[16] She reaches here towards an empiricism which might be applied in considering landscape, in that the experience of land or space can be understood as constructive of our interpretation of it as place and thus meaningful: Yi-Fu Tuan describes place as "a center of meaning constructed by experience."[17] The act of construction and conceptualisation highlighted in anthropological discourse is arguably commensurable to the readerly act described by Rosenblatt. We can apply similarly her insistence on reading as a non-linear relation. By these terms, a construction of landscape which denies the element of fluidity in reading, picked out in such detail by Rosenblatt, must be challenged. In asking how connection to landscape might be framed within poetic language, I am not only exploring my relationship to the land(scape) in which I grew up and now write about, I am also attempting to move towards a writing practice which incorporates this fluid reading process with regards to landscape, rendering place as 'live' within the work produced. The nature of this land as marked by a long history of colonial occupation only increases my desire to avoid fixed, linear narratives in representing it.

It is crucial that I am and continue to be conscious of the specific parameter of the perspective from which I am writing. When I consider writing or expressing connection to landscape, I am moving from a subjective bias. The positions taken up within this thesis are similarly implicated. When I say 'I' or 'we', I do so from the specificity of a subjective engagement. My writing is configured by gender, by race, by social and

13. Ibid., 16 (emphasis mine)
14. Ibid., 12
15. Ibid., 16
16. Ibid., 25 (emphasis hers)
17. Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Place: An Experiential Perspective', *The Geographical Review*, 65.2 (1975): 152; see also: Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977)

economic position, by political status. For example, while the gendered aspects of my position are not of direct concern within my argument, they are part of what defines the peculiarities of my poetic engagement with the world. I recognise this in using the female pronoun in general applications where either male or female might be used. Alison Ravenscroft points out that: "There is no position in which one can stand and see all; there is no position from which one can know all. Likewise, there is no reading practice that enables one to see all there is to see in a text."[18] From these limitations in reading, my writing emerges. There is a danger here with regards to recognising race, which Ravenscroft also highlights: "white writers will use 'we' and 'us' in ways that suggest there is no one else in the conversation; an assumed 'we' talking about 'them'. At the very moment that whiteness is critiqued, it is newly centralised and naturalised."[19] Anne Brewster is similarly made uneasy in suggesting that it is possible to feel that the particularisation of whiteness functions to transcend it.[20] It is necessary to remember that simply being aware of my own position is not enough, does not remove the capacity of this position to appropriate or subjugate that of a minority, racial or otherwise. I must, as Brewster does, "insist that this process of 'coming to consciousness' about one's whiteness is not the same as 'transforming it'"[21]. I must make myself constantly aware of the situation of power in which I find myself and my work.

And yet, this recognition of perspective does have a certain potential. It allows me to question an aspect of disassociation within the critical perspective which is uncomfortable. I am forced to take responsibility for the assumptions made by my work, as well as the positions it takes up. Ravenscroft suggests a similar potential in pronouns: "it is crucial that white writers like myself find ways to install ourselves in our critique of whiteness, using the first person pronouns 'we' and 'us' now to implicate ourselves in the critique rather than always locating whiteness in others."[22] This might also be a strength of the exegesis as a form. I am writing into self-reflection, from an authorial position wherein my own involvement is expected. This capacity within the form allows me to move towards a more complex discussion of selfhood, particularly in relation to landscape or the land as a text. But it also ensures that I am obliged to take upon myself the actions and movements of my thought, and the consequences of the position(s) from

18. Ravenscroft, *Postcolonial Eye,* 45
19. Ibid., 45
20. Anne Brewster, 'Writing Whiteness: the Personal Turn', *Australian Humanities Review* 35 (June 2005): n.p., URL: http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-June-2005/brewster.html
21. Ibid., n.p.
22. Ravenscroft, *Postcolonial Eye*, 45

which I write. In this sense, I am more interested within this thesis in examining my own practices and assumptions than any pertaining to critical practice more generally.

It is worth considering the effects on my writing produced by this emphasis on perspective. As Brewster would have it, I am entering a "discursive 'dialogue' enacted through the speech acts of writing [which] is virtual and belated."[23] Belated in that the power of the position of from which I 'speak' here is partially due to the limitation of the reply it allows. My creative work similarly represents a 'dialogue' that is eminently one-sided, at least until a second act of writing is constructed in response. But Brewster here is discussing the writing of whiteness, and thus my "self-naming"[24] is in dialogue as well. In exploring landscape and the actions of my reading implied within each representation, I am exploring my own subjective relation with the world. As Ravenscroft says, "This postcolonial eye is my own after all; its vision and its blindness are my own."[25] This is not necessarily a thesis outcome which I can share. This particularisation of self is enmeshed in my practice, a "live circuit"[26] in Rosenblatt's terms. The trajectory of such learning is inherently and decisively personal. But it is also represented in my creative work, the writing of which has been undertaken in the context of this introspective dialogue.

From this perspective, I can make an argument of my practice. And this is the point at which my exegesis might expand outwards, towards the wider school of thought from which I as a writer have emerged. I am not alone in struggling with the representation of landscape in writing, nor in reaching towards non-linear constructions of it. Paul Carter is one who has discussed lines and landscapes. "Our world is composed of the traces of movement, but our representations conceal this… In fact, we seem to think as we draw, in straight lines and flat planes."[27] His theory of 'Dark Writing' is a revolt against that which he sees as a repression: "No expression of linear reason [is] neutral with regard to its human or natural environment. The advancement of reading was always a design on the world."[28] This is based in a writing practice which attempts to reinvigorate our thinking in construction of place. He achieves this not in undoing the constructions which exist, but in moving within them: "…a new thinking (and drawing) practice [which] does not abandon the line but goes inside it. The line is always a trace

23. Brewster, 'Writing Whiteness', n.p.
24. Ibid., n.p.
25. Ravenscroft, *Postcolonial Eye*, 3
26. Rosenblatt, *Reader, Text, Poem*, 14
27. Paul Carter, *Dark Writing: geography, performance, design* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 5
28. Ibid., 53

of earlier lines. However perfectly it copies what went before, the very act of retracing it represents a new departure."[29] Even while he rejects fixed conceptualisations of place, Carter is aware of the power of these conceptualisations as generative. As Ian Chambers describes, for Carter, "terrain is not merely an object or context to be appropriated, but is rather the limited historical form, in which time and being occur."[30] He requires of the reader a greater awareness of what is being constructed within existing discourses of place, and in particular of the rhythmic, physical passage of being. "Dark writing …is a method, a poetic praxis that works outward from a perceived anomaly, absence or oversight towards its marking."[31] In this sense, Carter explodes as much as explores current practices of design.

Alison Ravenscroft similarly calls for a new practice of reading Australian literature, albeit in a slightly different way. While Carter marks absence in order to elucidate that which is missing, Ravenscroft is concerned with reading for the "aporias"[32] in texts. She picks up on narratives of violence wherein the "fragmentation, gaps and silences *are* the story"[33]. Examining postcolonial Australian reading practices, she is "interested in places where interpretation and the imaginative act fail."[34] This failing is a space of possibility, questioning our personal and social constructions: "This is reading as a process through which we bring *ourselves* into uncertainty, through which we cause doubt to fall on our perceptions."[35] This is, therefore, very much a debate which enters into questions of racial subjectivity – the 'seeing subject' is deconstructed as Ravenscroft examines her own white Australian desire in the interpretive act. Her ultimate goal is to make us aware of the nature of our own reading practices. Ravenscroft desires interpretations or readings of landscape which move through polysemy, rather than a reading which simply suppresses that which is opaque to a white Australian understanding, or worse one which writes over it – negotiates and colonises it like a foreign terrain, shapes it and thus subverts it. She suggests that readings of Australian literature would benefit from the process of decentralising realism as the dominant reading practice[36]. She is unique in calling for an awareness of polysemy in place without demanding a subjective understanding of the multiple meanings present – on the contrary, it is in this opacity that her landscape is allowed to expand.

29. Ibid., 9
30. Ian Chambers, 'The Stones in Language', *Southerly*, 66.2 (2006): 61
31. Carter, *Dark Writing*, 228
32. Ravenscroft, *Postcolonial Eye*, 2
33. Ibid., 13
34. Ibid., 19
35. Ibid., 19
36. Ibid., 63

The anxiety of my initial reaction in writing landscape through a linear relation to the land, can be understood as typical of both the linear reasoning which Carter sees and challenges and the positivist reading practice that Ravenscroft seeks to undermine. Carter calls for 'new' designs: "our designs on the world need to make room for things to happen. They should be scores that mediate between the abstract and the actual, encouraging improvisation. This is not only a technical challenge. It is a social and ethical one"[37]. This exegesis presents one such possibility – a new non-realist approach which would see the subjective mode placed under pressure as the sole generative power in any construction or reading of space. I am following Stephen Muecke down a path of continental Vitalist philosophy in putting forward the philosophy of Etienne Souriau as a potentially fertile ground for considering and understanding the white Australian relationship to landscape. Based in Souriau's existential pluralism, this is not a move away from the recognition of perspective I have just made, but an attempt to see the subjective as Ravenscroft does: one actor within a wide universe of forces.[38]

Muecke has long engaged with alternate reading and writing practices. His discussions in *No Road: bitumen all the way* (1997)[39] and *Textual Spaces* (2005)[40] are symptomatic of this – creative and anecdotal writing sits hand in hand with critical insight. But one of his more recent articles, 'Motorcycles, Snails, Latour: Criticism without Judgement'[41], attempts a new way of thinking about writing. Muecke suggests that the dichotomous relation of subject and object dominates our current reading and writing practices. In reaction, he focuses on the work of Bruno Latour, picking up on a philosophical strain of French Vitalism which builds on a concept of the equilateral agency of all things as existing within a multimodal network of existence. "With the help of Bruno Latour," Muecke says, "I want to think about objects like motorcycles (or humans or snails) as *animated* in their multiple connections, carefully forged and nurtured, rather than following the materialist orthodoxy"[42]. He makes, therefore, an effort to move away from the subjective, towards a writing which adopts

37. Carter, *Dark Writing*, 15

38. See the chapter 'Coming to Matter', which recognises that outside the white subjectivity "There is a force bearing upon the other [Indigenous] man's body, there is 'plenty of power' here, something '*pushes*' and yet the white man is unable to feel it." (Ravenscroft, *Postcolonial Eye*, 37) The emphasis here on race as the distinguishing factor in relation to space is something I find potentially problematic, (something I will later return to); but the manner in which Ravenscroft decentralises the white subject here is key to the manner in which she questions her own perpective.

39. Stephen Muecke, *No Road: bitumen all the way* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997)

40. Stephen Muecke, *Textual Spaces*, 2nd ed. (Perth: API Network, 2005)

41. Stephen Muecke, 'Motorcycles, Snails, Latour: Criticism Without Judgement', *Critical Studies Review* 18.1 (March 2012): 40-58

42. Ibid., 48 (emphasis his)

Latour's suspicion of this bifurcation, taking up "a slogan like *respect the signature of the thing*."[43] While he claims that "the experimental writing I envisage is not about breaking free of convention"[44], (a claim we might be forgiven for holding with some suspicion, given his use of the appellation 'experimental'), he actively follows Latour in attempting to go beyond a traditional realist reading practice. Both engage with "different registers of reality, because 'the world' is not seen as bifurcated, with the 'text' mediating the 'subject' and the 'object', as in older communication models."[45] But this philosophy, coming down to him via Latour, originates in large part with French philosopher Etienne Souriau[46].

Souriau's thought does not diminish subjective difference, positions of race and gender. Nor does it deny the awareness of my position as subjective. The subjective as a mode is key to Souriau's discussion of moving between modes. The emphasis is more on challenging the relation which presides within the dichotomy of subject and object. In questioning the writing of whiteness, Brewster similarly takes issue with the positioning of white subjectivities in relational emphasis. "Whiteness, in contemporary theory, might be described, to paraphrase Wiegmann, not as 'hyperconscious of itself' (or, indeed, hyperconscious – ie fetishizing – of the *other*), so much as hyperconscious of its *relationship* with the other, that is, of the relationality of self and other…"[47] This seems to be akin to what Ravenscroft is rejecting in contemporary reading practices – the creation of relation through interpretation. "Of course, all texts and all readings must inscribe gaps, holes – places where meaning cannot be made… Generally, in reading we try to cover over these gaps, bridge them in some way."[48] This positivism leads the white Australian reader, Ravenscroft suggests, to an appropriative act of construction when faced with an Indigenous-signed text. In contrast, Souriau's philosophy with its insistence on the multimodal places the relationship between subject and object (or self and other, the two are disturbingly similar as forms of relation) in the context of an infinite number of other relations, and in doing so removes it from the centre of our construction of the world. The subjective is not diminished but made equal, understood as one single, existential tenor among many.

43. Ibid., 48

44. Ibid., 42

45. Ibid., 42

46. I am greatly indebted to Stephen Muecke for first pointing me towards his translation of Latour's article 'Reflections on Etienne Souriau's *Les différents modes d'existence*', and thus to Souriau and his study of modes more generally.

47. Brewster, 'Writing Whiteness', n.p.

48. Ravenscroft , *Postcolonial Eye*, 45

This exegesis will move through an examination of Souriau's thought, and will argue that within it are the grounds for new reading and writing practices. While Muecke makes use of Souriau's philosophy, in particular referencing his concept of instauration, he does not directly explore his writings or engage with his thought as a framework. I will do both, and in doing so attempt to illustrate alongside Muecke the manner in which such thought might be applied within critical studies. Specifically, I will be suggesting the manner in which my construction of landscape has been transformed by Souriau. As such, my enquiry will be from within the context of Australian literature. This is a study which has grounds for further development, as signalled by Muecke, Ravenscroft and Carter. But at the same time, it is speculative in nature – I am feeling my way through the possibilities in this area. I am not, it must be clear, offering Souriau's thought as an outright solution to the tensions I see in white Australian landscape writing. Nor, I suspect, is any single philosophical answer possible here. But Souriau's thought has potential within this context and fits in with the general aims of a wider critical movement. As such I am joining in an effort to continue questioning current practices and seek out new directions in thought.

Underlying my research is the manner in which Souriau's philosophy is interested in the movement into being, and in creation (in the broadest sense) as a process of existence. This contextualises my attempt to explore my own writing practice – its weaknesses as well as its strengths, its grounding in the realist tradition I am attempting to turn from, but also the nature of the text I have produced and its agency over me. As such, exegetically, my three chapters each hold an individual goal. My first represents an outline of Souriau's thought, constructing key elements of Souriau's philosophy in a framework for critical discussion. Much more work must necessarily follow in this area for such a framework to become definitive as a basis for analysis, but for the purposes of this exegesis I work through the main tenets of Souriau's seminal *Les différents modes d'existence*[49]. My second chapter offers the application of such thought to the context of Australian literature, investigating both critical and creative texts which have been influential to my creative writing. Examples are taken from the late 19th century (Barbara Baynton and Henry Lawson) and from the contemporary era (the short stories of David Malouf). It focuses on the white Australian experience of connection to landscape which sparked my inquiry, and traces the manner in which I have unquestioningly read this literature as expressive of emotional conflict. In applying Souriau's philosophy, this chapter entertains a possible reading of Australian literature

49. Etienne Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence; suivi de De l'œuvre à faire,* eds. Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 2009)

Ann Miller, *Mt. Clay*, 2010
©Ann Miller

based in an openness to multimodality, and questions how this might be generative of further debate.

The final chapter of this exegesis moves into a more direct consideration of my own writing experience. It centres on the shadow as a mode, attempts to define such existence according to Souriau's principles, and makes a reading of my own practice based on this understanding. The shadow offers a multimodal representation of the relationship between self and text, and leads to a new voice and approach in writing. This chapter moves from the general application of Souriau's thought to a more detailed and specific interrogation of his philosophy. It feels out one possibility in practice, an effort towards a writing and reading that is situated within the multimodal. Because, in essence, my exploration of Souriau's theory is rooted in the anxiety with which I opened this introduction: that great inadequacy, the impossibility of drawing out my sensation of connection to the landscape with only the line between subject and object as a tool. The flip-side of anxiety is desire: I have been yearning for an expression of connection that is all-inclusive rather than selective, that refuses to eliminate sensations based on the nature of their experience. In the instaurative philosophy of Souriau lies a representation of existence which I feel comes closest to answering these demands.

In going forward, and as a final word, it should be clear that what I am doing is about existences and the expression of existence. This exegesis forms a mapping out of the progression of my relationship with place – specifically, the place in which I grew up, in rural south-west Victoria. It is responding to the movements I made within my creative process, even if these movements are not referred to explicitly. I am 'reading the country', but not in the same way Krim Bentarrak, Muecke and Paddy Roe set out to do in their text of that title. This is not "an attempt to construct a theory of place"[50], even if it might at times seem to lean in this direction. It might be possible to read my creative constructions of landscape "in terms of their cultural and historical determinations"[51], but to do so would be counter to my aims and miss the essence of my critical endeavour. This isn't a historical or cultural project – it is a creative one. As an exegesis, my focus here is more specifically on my own acts of reading, my individual experience of self and place. My effort is directed towards constructing a basis for expression of place within that experience. I wonder if the concept of 'a' theory of place is not doomed from the outset, and whether or not the suggestion that there might be one theory of place

50. Stephen Muecke, 'Reading this Book', in *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology*, ed. Krim Bentarrak, Stephen Muecke, Paddy Roe (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1984), 12

51. Bentarrak, Muecke, Roe, *Reading the Country*, 13

applicable to all situations is misleading. My suspicion would be that there should be as many theories of place as possible. What I am doing is attempting to find a *way* of thinking and writing about place – a road, a pathway, an avenue through which I might pass, a style of thinking which will allow connection, movement and fluidity.

Judy Schrever, ‘Wye Forest’, 2011, oil on canvas.
Photo credit: Steve Murray, ©Judy Schrever

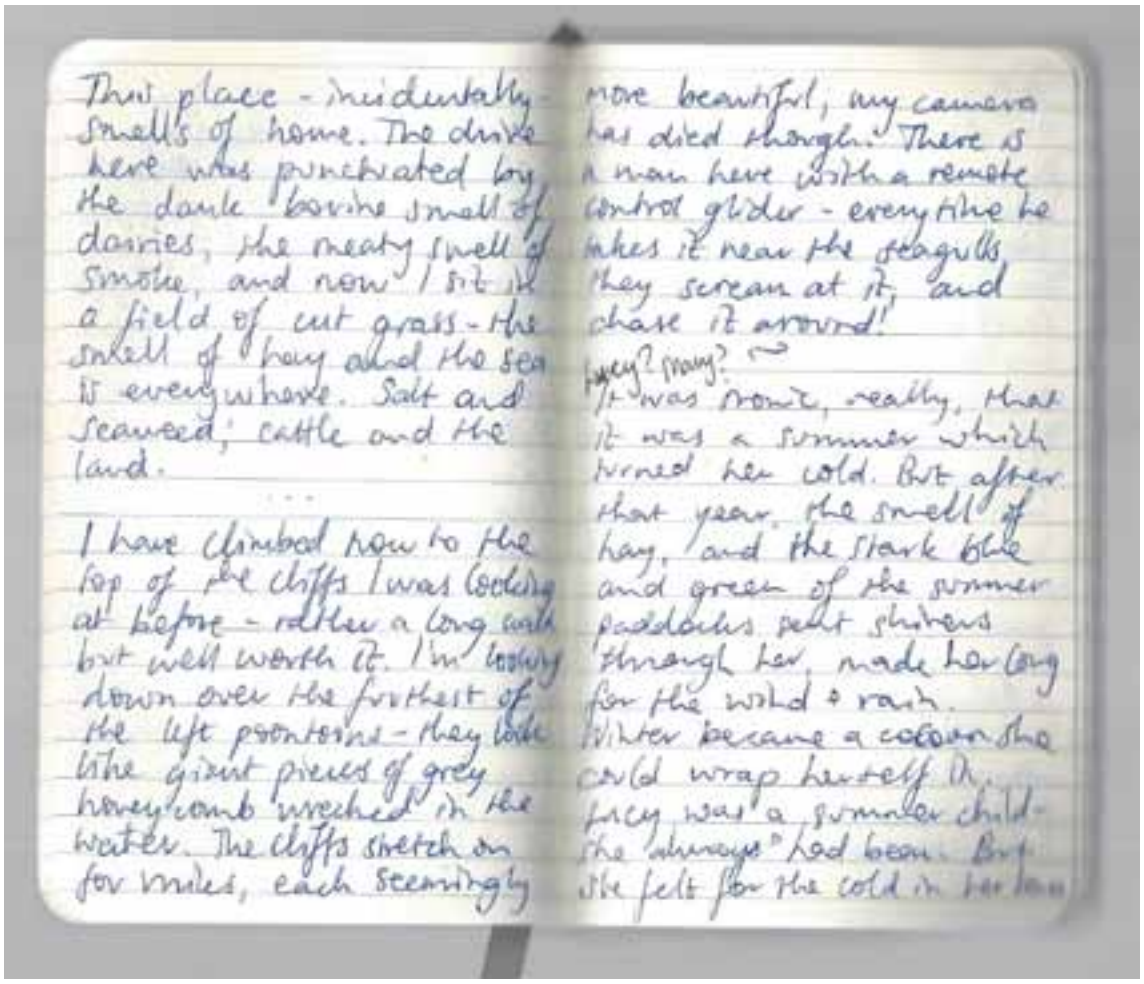
Instaurations: Etienne Souriau and *Les différents modes d'existence*

« Exister pleinement, intensément, absolument, quel idéal ! Sortir de cette incertitude de soi-même où l'on se cherche en vain dans une brouillade d'irréalité, aux rives du néant ! Siéger, en tout arroi de l'acte d'être ! Quel idéal ; mais aussi, comme tout idéal, peut-être quelle rêverie ! Peut-être quelle absurdité ! Est-il vrai qu'on peut n'exister qu'à moitié ? Toutes choses, aussi bien cette pierre que cette âme, dès qu'elles existent, ne sont-elles pas égales dans l'existence ? »

"To exist wholly, intensely, absolutely, what an ideal! To escape this incertitude of one's self, searching constantly in vain for certainty in the fogs of unreality, on the very edge of nothingness! To reign, in all the pomp and ceremony of the act of being! What an ideal; and yet, like all ideals, perhaps also what a dream?! Perhaps what absurdity! Is it true that one can only exist in half-measures? That all things, a stone as much as a soul, are equal in their existence from the moment they enter it?"

Etienne Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*, 89

I am fascinated by written landscape. It is a source of inspiration time and time again, a centre on which my thought turns. This fascination provides the drive to my enquiry here, not only within my critical work but as a force essential to my creative writing. The seed from which 'The Call of Salt' grew was the view from a cliff-top over a beach in France, one which reminded me of the landscape of my home – dry grass around me and salt-water below. It may seem strange to be centring my exegesis on the thought of Etienne Souriau. His work is entirely unrelated to landscape and Australian literature. What can be hoped for in reading a little-known French philosopher, beyond that incidental connection of place with its strange sense of nostalgia for that trip, that cliff-top? How is an abstract conceptualisation of existence constructive to the expression of a relationship with landscape? The premise from which this study emerges is that linear expressions of relationship fail with regards to the representation of landscape. This failure is not limited to the context of white Australian writing, but is made



This place - incidentally - smells of home. The drive here was punctuated by the dank bovine smell of dairies, the meaty smell of smoke, and now I sit in a field of cut grass - the smell of hay and the sea is everywhere. Salt and seaweed; cattle and the land.

...

I have climbed now to the top of the cliffs I was looking at before - rather a long walk but well worth it. I'm looking down over the furthest of the left prontoons - they look like giant pieces of grey honeycomb wrecked in the water. The cliffs stretch on for miles, each seemingly more beautiful, my camera has died though. There is a man here with a remote control glider - every time he takes it near the seagulls, they scream at it, and chase it around!

Lucy? Stacy? ~

It was ironic, really, that it was a summer which turned her cold. But after that year, the smell of hay, and the stark blue and green of the summer paddocks sent shivers through her, made her long for the wind + rain. Winter became a cocoon she could wrap herself in. Lucy was a summer child - she always had been. But she felt for the cold in her [illegible]

particularly complex by the postcolonial situation we write in. What might be hoped for in this enquiry is a new way of understanding relation. The philosophy of Souriau, in challenging the linear forms of expression which have proved problematic for me, is one such possibility. It points towards an approach to writing practice and thus falls into step with a more general call for something new within literary scholarship. The work of Stephen Muecke in response to Souriau, particularly in reference to Bruno Latour's engagement with Souriau's major texts, is indicative of the manner in which an exploration of Souriau's philosophy is relevant to Australian criticism. Different approaches come from Paul Carter, Alison Ravenscroft, Ross Gibson, Emily Potter and Lyn McCredden, each reaching out towards new avenues in Australian cultural and literary studies and offering theories I will return to. What we can hope for is the possibility of opening up new trajectories in thought from a broader perspective.

Standing before any great vista – say, on a cliff looking down at a sea – one is made intensely aware of landscape as an existence. Our construction of the space in its specificity, our perspective rendered as a view, holds as much power over us as its physical elements do. It holds a certain agency in pushing me to write. But this does not answer how I might express my relation to it or the connection I feel to the landscape of my home any more easily. The opening sentences to the second chapter of Souriau's dramatic philosophical tract *Les différents modes d'existence*[1], translated above, quietly reveal the underpinnings of his wider philosophy. They reveal his insistence on questioning the nature of existence and the history of ontology in philosophy. The use of the word 'ideal', with all its connotations of the unachievable, suggests his suspicion of traditional notions of existence – as indeed does 'absurdity' and 'dream'. More importantly, these lines close with an idea central to Souriau's thought: the concept that all forms of existence are equal in their creation, their autonomy, their agency and their vitality – their capacity to produce. Noting the energy of these lines, one feels the strength of Souriau's passion in teasing out these questions and bringing forth his own notions of ontology in our world. *Les modes* posits, as the title suggests, that there are multiple, interrelated modes of existence. Souriau suggests that we can trace the evolution of certain modes through their *instauration*, their movement into being. In this way, he ties ontology as a study to notions of language, but at all times with the ultimate goal of moving outside fixed subjective forms of viewing the world which he sees as having heretofore dominated philosophical and critical thinking.

But the first question with which a study of Souriau might well be met is that which I have already raised, and perhaps the most simple: Why him? What is it about

1. Text referred to from here as *Les modes.*

Souriau, his writings and his thought that is relevant to a project in Creative Writing and Australian Literature? It is not, perhaps, an obvious choice in philosophical context, neither is it a straightforward pathway. Souriau wrote as a philosopher more than a literary theorist, primarily as a Professor of Aesthetics at the Sorbonne during the turbulence of the era surrounding World War II. The text in which I have greatest interest, *Les modes*, was first published in 1943. Perhaps it is the momentousness of this era which has rendered Souriau obscure and almost forgotten, or perhaps other reasons, such as the difficulty of classifying his work or the opposition he met with from the philosophers of his day[2]. Luce de Vitry Maubrey suggests that "Souriau has always been a lonely thinker"[3], and that "contemporary French philosophers are [or were, at least, given that Vitry Maubrey is writing in 1985] far too taken up with decentralisation, deconstruction and the ontic nihilism of post-structuralist game playing… to find time to look into Souriau's seemingly 'quaint' undertaking"[4]. Regardless of the reason, he has become subject to an obscurity that Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour lament and label "radical"[5] in the introduction of their edition of *Les modes* (2009), describing *Les modes* as the "forgotten text of a forgotten philosopher"[6]. Furthermore, the majority of his work has not been translated into English. The French language texts cited within this exegesis are quoted in my own translation[7]. Souriau's language is ornate and complex, his texts intense and challenging, prone to detours of thought. Even Stengers and Latour see him thus in their introduction: "*Les différents modes d'existence* is a constricted book, concentrated, almost jumbled together, in which it is easy to lose oneself, so dense are the movements of thought and the vertiginous perspectives which ceaselessly threaten to derail a reader."[8] None of this lends itself to a study of his thought.

But Souriau's work is also elegant and insightful. Furthermore, his work is beginning to experience an upsurge of critical attention. Since the release of Stengers' and Latour's edition of *Les modes*, awareness of Souriau's impact on philosophy has been growing[9]

2. Isabelle Stengers, Bruno Latour, 'La Sphinx de l'œuvre', in Souriau, *Les modes*, 2

3. Luce de Vitry Maubrey, 'Etienne Souriau's Cosmic Vision and the Coming-Into-Its-Own of the Platonic Other', *Man and World* 18 (1985): 325

4. de Vitry Maubrey, 'Cosmic Vision', 325

5. Stengers, Latour, 'La Sphinx', 2

6. Ibid., 1; « Voici le livre oublié d'un philosophe oublié. »

7. See: Note on Translation. Translations are accompanied by the original French, as a point of clarification and expansion.

8. Ibid., 4; « *Les différents modes d'existence* est un livre serré, concentré, presque bousculé, où il est facile de se perdre tant sont denses les événements de pensée, les perspectives vertigineuses qui, sans cesse, risquent de mettre le lecteur en déroute. »

9. Very little had been written on Souriau prior to Luce de Vitry Maubrey first taking up his cause in 1974. With the release of Stengers' and Latour's 2009 edition of *Les modes*, attention has been modest but

and new applications of his thought are being developed. This, in part, is my aim here. Specifically, one justification which might be offered for a study of Souriau in a Creative Writing thesis is the focus in his writing on the 'l'oeuvre à faire', or « l'oeuvre en train de se faire », 'the work in the process of making itself'[10] – the progression of the work of art into being. The relevance for an exegetical discussion in this light is perhaps obvious, but can in fact be taken to expand past a discussion of methodology into a consideration of ontology. The work of art is throughout *Les modes* a metaphor for Souriau in exploring the nature and emergence of existence. It offers a site of complexity, in that the work requires the agency of an artist and yet simultaneously demonstrates an agency of its own. Vitry Maubrey points to Souriau's position in 'Art et Philosophe': "Let's not forget that art is a true ontological experience: an exploration of paths which lead to a cosmos, from nothingness to an accomplishment in patuity"[11]. This metaphor (or indeed metonym) for the movement into existence is the scene for Souriau's development of the notion of instauration; a notion Vitry Maubrey defines as "the dialectical process through which a work of art captures spiritual value and manifests it to us [which] is to be taken as a paradigm for the constructive process of ontological thought."[12] Instauration is on its highest level an act of creative becoming[13]. In discussing this, Souriau describes an approach to creative practice which might be adopted in writing. A reader's entry to a text can also be framed as an active engagement in re-creation, adding to the life of the text in continuing its instauration. These are ideas I will explore in more detail as I come to explore the notion of instauration itself. On

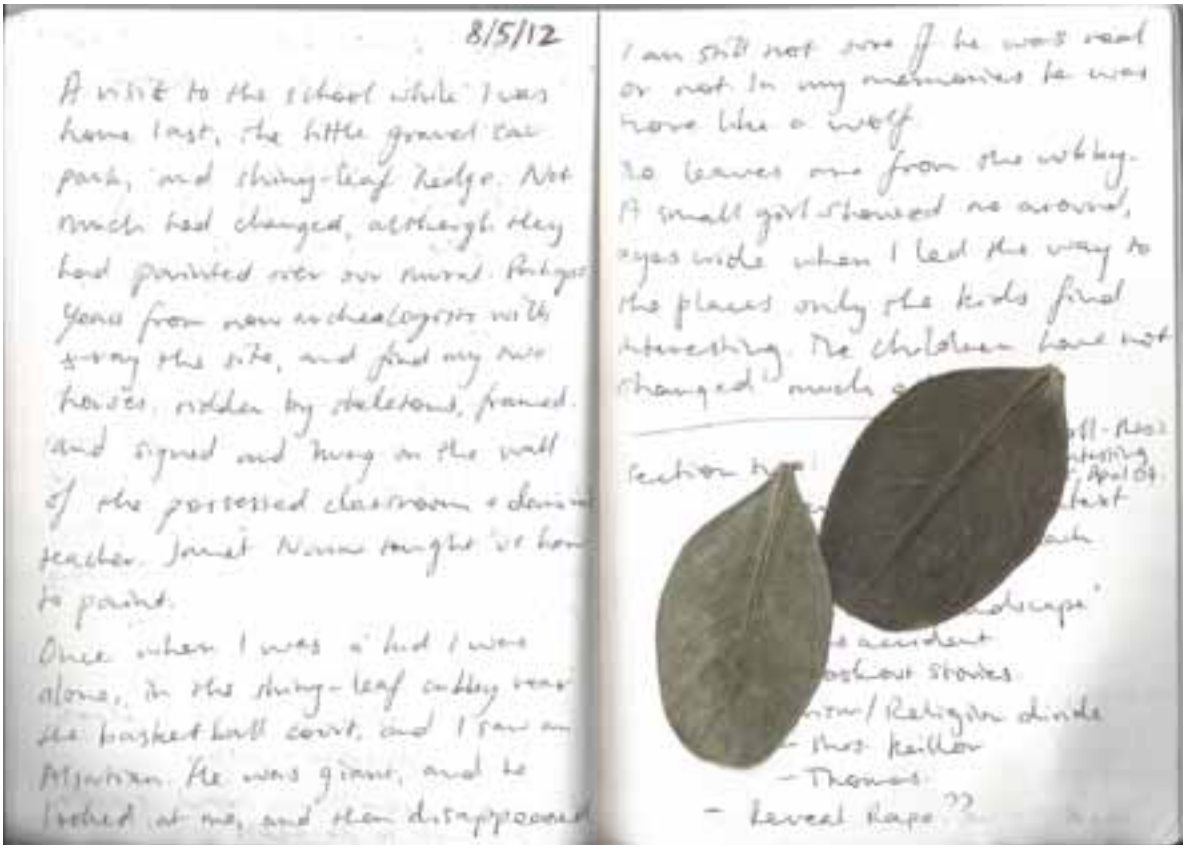
varied, including scholarly articles, {see Frédéric Fruteau de Laclos, 'Les voies de l'instauration: Souriau chez les contemporaines', *Critique*, 775 (2011/12): 931-948); book chapters – specifically that again written by Latour (see Bruno Latour, 'Reflections on Etienne Souriau's *Les différents modes d'existence*', trans. Stephen Muecke, in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism,* ed. Graham Harman, Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, 304-333, (Melbourne, re.press, 2011)); and blog entries, (see *Speculum Criticum*, 'Etienne Souriau', blog entry by 'skholiast', Wednesday, February 2, 2011, URL: http://speculumcriticum.blogspot.com.au/2011/02/etienne-souriau.html). Latour's most recent work, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, also moves off *Les modes*. Latour uses Souriau's ontological pluralism and concept of instauration to reapproach existence within modernity. See: Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013)

10. Stengers, Latour , 'La Sphinx', 4

11. Etienne Souriau, 'Art et Philosophe', in *Revue Philosophique* 1 (1954), 172 ; cited in de Vitry Maubrey, 'Cosmic Vision', 336; her translation.

12. de Vitry Maubrey, 'Cosmic Vision', 325-6

13. It is necessary to recognise that Souriau's conceptualisation of instauration is based within the French language. The meaning of the word differs markedly from that accepted within English. Usage in English is rare, and suggestive primarily of "institution" (in a legal sense), "establishment" or "restoring or repairing"; as typified in Francis Bacon's title 'The Great Instauration' (1620). (See: *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, (6th ed.) s.v. 'instauration'). In French, the word is much more common, and carries broader connotations of creation: "établir pour la première fois, fonder, inaugrer". In this, it has shifted slightly from its Latin root, and holds too the possibility of reflexivity in designating the movement into being: "Une ère nouvelle s'instaure." (See: *Le Robert Quotidien: Dictionnaire Pratique de la Langue Française*, s.vv. 'instauration', 'instaurer')



8/5/12

A visit to the school while I was home last, the little gravel car park, and shiny-leaf hedge. Not much had changed, although they had painted over our mural. Perhaps years from now archaeologists will x-ray the site, and find my two horses, ridden by skeletons, framed and signed and hung on the wall of the possessed classroom a dominant teacher. Janet Nunn taught us how to paint.

Once when I was a kid I was alone, in the shiny-leaf cubby near the basketball court, and I saw an Alsatian. He was giant, and he looked at me, and then disappeared.

I am still not sure if he was real or not. In my memories he was more like a wolf.

No leaves are from the cubby. A small girl showed me around, eyes wide when I led the way to the places only the kids find interesting. The children have not changed much a

Section two

- Thomas
- Reveal Rape??

a more general level, these ideas coupled with Souriau's notion of the art work both inform and allow for the use of his philosophy within the realm of literary criticism.

A second justification might be found in the manner in which the ontological aspects of Souriau's thought can be related to Australian literary criticism. The work of Stephen Muecke in Australian cultural studies picks up on Souriau's thought in a literary context. Muecke's engagement with Souriau illustrates the adaptability of his philosophical thought. Beyond questions of creative practice, the application I will follow in this thesis concerns, as I have suggested already, tension in literary representations of Australian landscape by white authors. Contemporary literary representations of landscape can be read as marked by conflicting emotions, understandings, modes of being. As I will demonstrate in the second chapter of this exegesis, they have regularly been examined in contemporary criticism in terms of trauma and violence, sociological and ecological damage, the sacred and the profane, guilt and repression, and politics. All of these contexts, it is true, have offered insightful readings. Debate in general has led towards a discourse of the difficulty (or even impossibility[14]) of white Australian 'belonging' within landscape. But the danger of these interpretations in general is that they tend to be predicated on the centralisation of the subject as a lens for viewing and reading landscape – on a single line of relation. They utilise structures of opposition. Souriau's theories, in contrast, are based on a concerted effort to move away from the traditionally held subject-object dichotomy. In offering a philosophy of multi-modalism, he offers a pathway into the complexity of conflicting emotions which diminishes the fixed subjective position and does not demand the conflict be maintained between opposed states. In fact, it suggests the possibility of existing *across* modes. It is this which makes a study of Souriau in the context of contemporary Australian literature both fascinating and rich with possibility.

It is necessary to outline the essentials of Souriau's thought in order to develop a study through his philosophy. Twice since his death in 1979, critics have attempted to draw attention to his work. Vitry Maubrey, writing in 1985, (and having released her *La pensée cosmologique d'Etienne Souriau* a decade earlier in 1974), called for a revival of critical interest in Souriau's philosophies, admonishing the tradition which had thus far overlooked his writings and his project of "the rehabilitation of a knowledge rooted in being."[15] Vitry Maubrey concludes that: "Whatever the reasons… it is time for this passing over to cease. Not for Souriau's sake, but for our own, for the sake of the

14. See: Sheila Collingwood-Whittick, ed., *The Pain of Unbelonging: Alienation and Identity in Australian Literature*, (*Cross/Cultures 91*) (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007): xxvii-xxviii, xl.

15. de Vitry Maubrey, 'Cosmic Vision', 325

new direction his cosmological vision offers"[16]. Vitry Maubrey saw Souriau's project as radical not only in its reconfiguration of Kant and Descartes but in its application within contemporary philosophical studies. For her, Souriau offers a new way of understanding the world: "The point of departure for Souriau's thought is not that of a theory of knowledge which attempts to prove its speculations well-founded, but sooner a comprehensive world vision…"[17] Stengers and Latour, in contrast, see Souriau as more highly critically acclaimed at the time of his major works (around the era of the Second World War) than Vitry Maubrey recognises him to be, but agree wholeheartedly in the notion that he has since been forgotten. In their 2009 edition of Souriau's text[18], Stengers and Latour suggest that their purpose in re-publishing and including the text of 'Du mode d'existence de l'oeuvre à faire'[19], a conference paper given in 1956, was "in the gamble that Souriau could recover all the audacity for which he was previously known"[20]. They too see Souriau as holding currency with a contemporary audience.

Half a century after its original release, *Les modes* holds various philosophical positions which might be seen as radical. Vitry Maubrey describes him as "carrying on his own brand of decentering"[21], particularly in his rationalisation of existence as multimodal. "One can see… what a profound distance there is between an ontic pluralism (posing the multiplicity of beings) and an existential pluralism (posing the multiplicity of modes of existence)"[22]. She sees much of Souriau's philosophy as bound in a reconfiguration of thought as a phenomenon, one running against traditional schools of philosophy in "searching for ways to disentangle the phenomenon of thought from the logocentric and anthropomorphic assumptions which have traditionally either bound it into subservience to the *thinking* subject or exalted it into an ultimate equation with Being."[23] Souriau's work emerges from a radicalisation of the Kantian reversal, going beyond the notion that thought is a strictly earthly phenomenon to suggest that it is "a phenomenon *sui generis* (of which man is only the occasional cause) which draws both

16. Ibid., 326

17. Luce de Vitry-Maubrey, *La pensée cosmologique d'Etienne Souriau* (Paris: Klinsieck, 1974), 34; « Le point de départ de la pensée sourialienne n'est pas celui d'une théorie de la connaissance qui essayerait de prouver le bien-fondé de ses spéculations, mais plutôt une vision globale… »

18. Souriau, *Les modes*

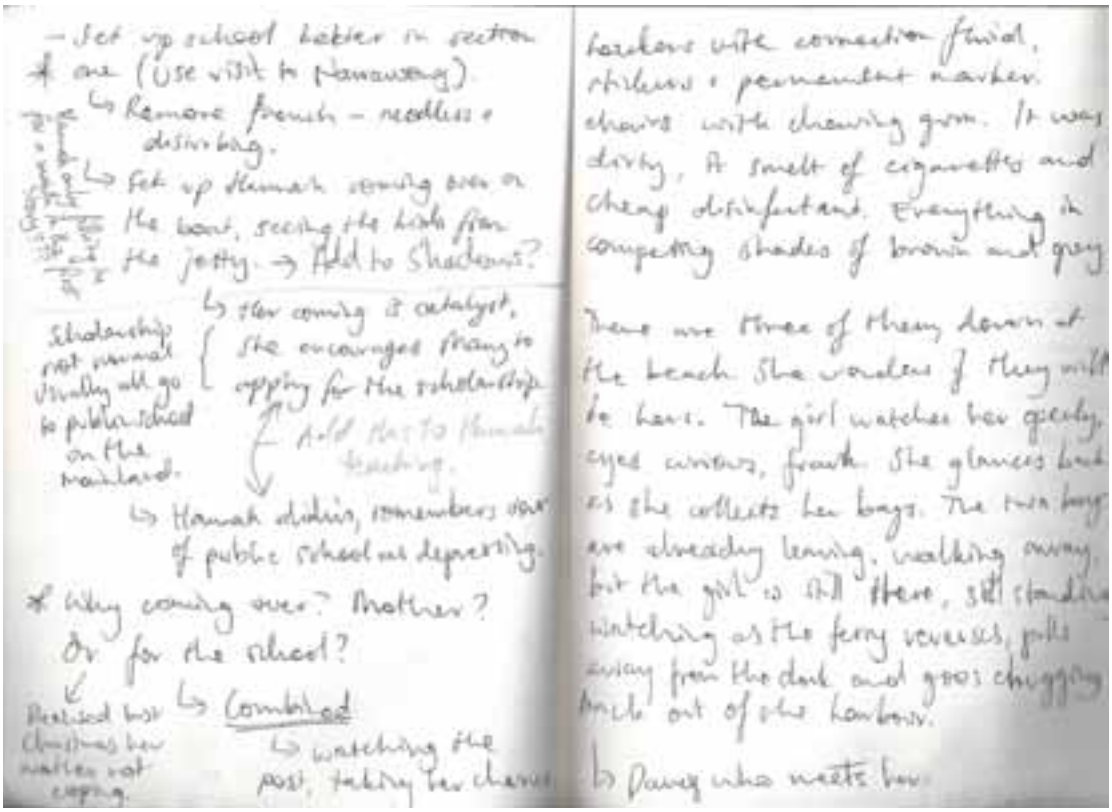
19. Etienne Souriau, 'Du mode d'existence de l'œuvre à faire', in *Les modes*, 195-217

20. Stengers, Latour , 'La Sphinx', 3 ; « …c'est faire le pari que Souriau peut retrouver toute l'audace qu'il avait alors. »

21. de Vitry Maubrey, 'Cosmic Vision', 327

22. Souriau, *Les modes*, 81; « On voit donc quelle profonde différence il y a entre un pluralisme ontique (posant la multiplicité des êtres) et un pluralisme existentiel (posant la multiplicité des modes d'existence). »

23. de Vitry Maubrey, 'Cosmic Vision', 327



– Set up school letter in section
* one (use visit to Narrawong)
↳ Remove French – needless & disturbing.
↳ Set up Hannah coming over on the boat, seeing the kids from the jetty. → Add to Shadows?
↳ Her coming is catalyst, she encourages many to apply for the scholarship
Scholarship not normal usually all go to public school on the mainland.
Add this to Hannah teaching.
↳ Hannah didn't, remembers view of public school as depressing.
* Why coming over? Mother? Or for the school?
Realised last Christmas her mother not coping.
↳ Combined
↳ watching the post, taking her chance

hackers with correction fluid, stickers & permanent marker. chairs with chewing gum. It was dirty, it smelt of cigarettes and cheap disinfectant. Everything in competing shades of brown and grey.

There are three of them down at the beach. She wonders if they will be here. The girl watches her openly, eyes curious, frank. She glances back as she collects her bags. The two boys are already leaving, walking away, but the girl is still there, still standing watching as the ferry reverses, pulls away from the dock and goes chugging back out of the harbour.

↳ Davey who meets her

its form and its content from the existential complex from which it emanates"[24]. This leads into a reconfiguration of the subject, refuting Descartes' 'I think, therefore I am' as too heavily centred on the self. "According to Souriau, Descartes should not have taken for granted that existence posits the I as common subject of the *I think* and the *I am*, because it implies looking at evidence from the viewpoint of a historicised Ego"[25]. For Souriau, thought no longer signals the existence of the 'I', but holds an existence in its own right.

Vitry Maubrey cites another Souriau text, *L'Ombre de Dieu*[26], in questioning this idea: "…there is thought, therefore something exists. *Nunc cogitature, ergo quid est*. But it is doubtful if even the *cogitatur* can be accepted as truly expressing the directness, intimacy and immediacy of the experience which is already betrayed by the word thought. One should not say *cogitatur* but *patefit* (it is manifest)."[27] The cognitive process is for Souriau liberated from the subject-object dichotomy and reconfigured instead as manifesting a patuity that signals its independent existence ("itself for what it is"[28]) – patuity being a term used widely by Souriau to infer the manifest presence of any phenomenon. It might then enter into relation with the subject; contrary to Descartes, Souriau would argue for a "plurality of ontological acts which posit and concretize the individual existence"[29]. This is the foundation for Souriau's discourse of multimodality, but it leads us also to appreciate the radical empiricism at play within his work. The patuity which Souriau sees as signalling existence is necessarily based within experience, as a manifestation within a certain moment in time. Vitry Maubrey, in somewhat grandiose terms, supports this notion. The "experience of the *patefit*"[30] is "empirically grounded… This lived instant, in its actuality of 'instant-that-is', Souriau perceives as the cosmic opening where the 'noumenal' makes its 'phenomenal' entrance"[31].

Latour similarly enters Souriau's work from a position of radical empiricism. He explores Souriau's notion of prepositions via Whitehead and James, as central to the concept of modal existence. The opening sections of Latour's 'Reflections on Etienne

24. Ibid., 328
25. Ibid., 331
26. Etienne Souriau, *L'Ombre de Dieu* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1955). Title translates as 'The Shadow of God'.
27. de Vitry Maubrey, 'Cosmic Vision', 331
28. de Vitry Maubrey, *Pensée cosmologique*, 220
29. de Vitry Maubrey, 'Cosmic Vision', 330
30. Ibid., 331
31. Ibid., 331-2

Souriau's *Les différents modes d'existence*' [32] refer to the *Principles of Psychology*[33] to support the weight of prepositions in the radical empiricist version of experience. Latour cites James: "the relations are numberless, and no existing language is capable of doing justice to all their shades. We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue*, a feeling of *cold*."[34] These relations assert that which normative empiricism has overlooked: in taking into account only elementary sensory data, normative empiricism gives rise to "a 'bifurcated' nature"[35] insisting on the "strict separation of subjectivity and objectivity"[36]. Latour describes this as a "huge *reduction* on what is accessible to experience"[37], scathingly describing subject and object as "the two hooks used to suspend a hammock destined for philosophical snoozing"[38]. The attraction to him of a philosophy which is actively trying to move beyond such a reduction of experience is thus obvious: Latour sees in Souriau a philosophy of prepositions constituting an alternative to traditional empiricism.

This philosophy is based around the relativity expressed in the preposition. Rather than taking the preposition as an indication of that patuity which he sees as signaling existence, Souriau suggests its capacity to point *towards* the 'patefit'. Souriau illustrates the preposition as indicative of the mode of that which is in relation to it: "the preposition does not indicate an ontological domain, nor a region, a territory, a sphere or a material. The if or the and has no region. But, as its name perfectly indicates, the preposition prepares the position that has to be given to what follows, giving the search for meaning a definite inflection, which will allow one to judge its direction or its vector."[39] This, it can be assumed, is born of his "respect for experience as given *through prepositions*"[40]. In aligning himself to James' representation of relation, Souriau suggests the potential of prepositions to provide a 'grammar of existence' to be decoded in approaching modality. This is an important distinction. Souriau sees agency within prepositions, allowing them "true existences"[41], but their agency is held in their power to infer or lead towards the appreciation of a mode of existence in that which the

32. Latour, 'Reflections', 304-333
33. William James, *Principles of Psychology,* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1890)
34. James, *Principles*; cited in Latour, 'Reflections', 306
35. Ibid., 305
36. Ibid., 305
37. Ibid., 306
38. Ibid., 307
39. Ibid., 308-9
40. Ibid., 308, (emphasis mine)
41. Ibid., 308

preposition modifies. The radically empirical "feeling of *by*"[42] that James highlights is not lost but seen in its potential for multimodal relation to the experience which follows. Latour aims to question whether one can "carry out serious research on relations"[43]. He asks: "if relations, and in particular prepositions, are given to us in experience, *where then* are they leading us?"[44] For Latour, Souriau's understanding of prepositions paves the way for further developments in radical empiricism at the same time as it leads into an appreciation of multimodalism.

As per my own intentions, Latour's movement from *Les modes* is in this way outwards, embracing and applying Souriau's basic principles. It is this emphasis on the philosophical potentialities of a wider comprehension of experience that Latour sees in Souriau as particularly relevant to contemporary criticism. There is a capacity here to question prepositional relations "without requiring them immediately to align themselves in one and only one direction leading either towards the object (away from the subject) or towards the subject (away from the object)"[45]. This in itself suggests the relevance of Souriau to a study of landscape in white Australian literature, in that it highlights the potential for a discourse of existence as multimodal and characterised by complex relations of mode to be taken from his work. In moving beyond the subject as comprehending the entire frame of experience, we can see the possibility of more flexible readings of landscape than critical practices based in linear relation can offer. The written landscape itself, most normally objectified, can be reconfigured instead as holding a patuity of its own as an autonomous being, agential, complex and a site of multimodal existence. Fleshing out the consequences of such thinking will constitute part of the work of my second and third chapters, but requires here first an understanding of the manner in which Souriau aligns language with ontological being through his concept of instauration.

Instauration is at its most basic level the movement into existence. Vitry Maubrey defines it as the "ensemble of processes which lead to the moment wherein the presence, assurance and autonomy of existence conferred upon a certain being are incontestable."[46] It can be employed, she suggests, in place of words such as invention

42. James, *Principles*, in ibid., 308
43. Ibid., 309
44. Ibid., 306
45. Ibid., 309
46. de Vitry Maubrey, *Pensée cosmologique*, 219; « C'est l'ensemble des processus qui aboutissent à poser un être dont soient incontestables la présence, la fermeté et l'autonomie d'existence. » It is worth noting here that Frédéric Fruteau de Laclos inadvertently paraphrases this quote from de Vitry Maubrey in discussing a comparison between Latour's concept of 'faitiche' and Souriau's instauration. 'Faitiche',

and creation. "But creation," she notes, "if one uses it in the strictest sense, indicates the act of drawing a being from nothing, an act which can only be understood in reference to a divine power."[47] Instauration is a movement into being which has the advantage of signifying an autonomous progress. Frédéric Fruteau de Laclos, a contemporary 'disciple' of Souriau's[48], describes it as all-encompassing: "…neither the subject nor the object, neither the form of the thought nor the worked material, pre-exist the act of instauration. The subject is no more assumed than the object is pre-determined."[49] Latour calls it Souriau's most important innovation in philosophy, in that Souriau has in this concept connected "questions of language to the question of being"[50]. Instauration creates a discourse which allows us to explore modes of existing without ever feeling we are restricted to an objectifying language. Being is not subjectively constructed. As Latour suggests, "we are usually in the habit of either asking questions about language or about ontology, a habit which is obviously the consequence of that bifurcation we want to bring to an end"[51]. Instauration does not demand a subjective and objective position, but instead emerges as the product of agency. Latour explains:

> Instauration and construction are clearly synonyms, but instauration has the distinct advantage of *not* dragging along with it all the metaphorical baggage of constructivism – which would in any case be an easy and almost automatic usage in the case of the work so obviously 'constructed' by the artist. To speak of 'instauration' is to prepare the mind to engage with the question of modality in quite the opposite way from constructivism. To say, for example, that a fact is 'constructed' is inevitably (and

« inventé par Latour pour qualifier le caractère de nos objets », is a composition of the 'supposedly primitive belief of pre-moderns' in fetishes and the 'robust' knowledge of moderns constructed as facts (in French, « faits »). Fruteau de Laclos continues to expand his discussion out towards the Frankfurt school of critical theory, a movement that de Vitry Maubrey does not make, but which bears an interesting discussion of criticism in modern philosophy. He questions the position of Stengers and Latour as 'haunted by the notion of purity', and compromised in their qualifications of instaured existences. See: Fruteau de Laclos, 'Les voies', 931-948

47. de Vitry Maubrey, *Pensée cosmologique*, 219; « Mais création, si on l'emploie strictement, indique l'acte de tirer du néant un être, acte qui ne peut s'entendre que d'un pouvoir divin. »

48. Fruteau de Laclos, 'Les voies', 939. He uses the same word in describing de Vitry Maubrey, and laments that her work was not taken up by Stengers and Latour more seriously.

49. Ibid., 934 ; « Or, le philosophe de l'instauration ne peut se rallier ni à l'existentialisme nu au matérialisme, dans le mesure où ni le sujet ni l'objet, ni la forme des pensées ni la matière ouvrée, ne préexistent à l'acte d'instauration. Pas plus que le sujet n'est présupposé, l'objet n'est prédonné. L'un et l'autre co-naissent de l'acte même. » Note the formulation of 'co-naissent' (vb. naître, to be born). This usage might be understood to suggest that subject and object are born, according to Fruteau de Laclos, not simply of the same action, but literally (coterminously) of the same birth.

50. Latour, 'Reflections', 309

51. Ibid., 309

> they paid me good money to know this) to designate the knowing subject as the origin of the vector, as in the example of God the potter. But the opposite, to say of a work of art that it is the result of an instauration, is to get oneself ready to see the potter as the one who welcomes, gathers, prepares, explores and invents the form of the work, as one discovers or 'invents' a treasure.[52]

Souriau uses a description of the work of the potter in explaining this process – returning once more to the work of art as a metaphor – and suggests not only the power of the potter over the clay, but the power of the clay over the potter. The relationship between both agential forces is equal: "if there is an *instauration* by the scholar or artist, then facts as much as works come together, resist, oblige – and their authors, the humans, have to be devoted to them, which of course doesn't mean they act as simple catalysts for them."[53] Instauration requires involvement, but does not demand that the existence which emerges be defined in relation to this involvement.

Instauration is met by Souriau's understanding of the plurality of modes. Without suggesting a relationship of power – i.e. stronger or weaker forms – Souriau does differentiate between two different "genres"[54] of existence, that of aseity and that of abaleity. This difference is in *how* the being comes into existence: "With aseity, one speaks of existence in and of itself, independent, absolute in its mode; with abaleity, referential existence"[55]. But the two function interactively: "In the relationship of one to the other, that can be discerned in all beings and which I can discern in myself, the existential responsibility can be carried by either …changing the balance of the being"[56]. We can understand our own human existence as aseitic, biologically independent, in responding to our empirical experience of reality. But these experiences and the world around us have their own abaleitic existence, which supports our aseitic existence in relation. We can see then just how abaleitic existence holds agency and the power to instaure. This is what Fruteau de Laclos refers to as the 'co-birth' of subject and object through instauration[57]. The multiple modes, whether abaleitic or aseitic, function in

52. Ibid., 310-311; the verb for the discovery of a treasure is in French 'inventer', meaning literally 'to invent', signalling interesting associations of creation in the process of discovery.

53. Ibid., 311

54. Souriau, *Les modes*, 103

55. Ibid., 103; « Avec l'aséité, il s'agit d'existence propre, indépendante, absolue en son mode ; avec l'abaliétié, d'existence référée. »

56. Ibid., 103; « Dans ce rapport du même et de l'autre, qu'on peut discerner en tout être et que je peux discerner en moi-même, la responsabilité existentielle peut être portée soit par l'un soit par l'autre, et se reporter toute d'un côté ou de l'autre, changeant l'équilibre de l'être. »

57. Fruteau de Laclos, 'Les voies', 934 ; « Pas plus que le sujet n'est présupposé, l'objet n'est prédonné.

cohesion, rather than comparatively to each other. Souriau further emphasises that these two genres are equal in that "all beings find themselves initially in a given situation, which they do not have a choice of refusing or accepting. This is what constitutes existence."[58] Each and every mode of existence thus "has the same dignity as all the others."[59] Because, as Souriau so eloquently puts forward, without this equality across modes, without taking each mode in its own right, there could be no existence, "no more than there would be Art pure without the statues, the paintings, the symphonies, the poems. Because Art, that is all the arts. And existence, that is each of the modes of existence."[60]

This notion of instauration across equal modes reconfigures the concept predominant in literary criticism of existence as determined by the subject. In choosing to consider existence as instaured, the alternate possibility that it must proceed *from* something or someone is undermined. What falls away, Latour suggests, is "the idea, which in the end is pretty preposterous, of a spirit at the origin of the action and whose consistency is then carried by ricochet onto a material which has no other maintenance, no other ontological dignity, other than that which one would condescend to give it."[61] In contrast, instauration suggests the movement into being of "an existence considered in and of itself"[62]. Further, as a non-isolated process of being, instauration is universal, constantly ongoing and interminable. For Souriau, as Fruteau de Laclos suggests, "The world was not there before instauration, it [the world] is produced by it [instauration]"[63]. Everything is being instaured and forming new instaurations in turn – even the consideration of a certain mode or form of existence, for example, is a collusion within the instauration of it, participating not physically but existentially in its being. Existence thus functions within a 'network' of ongoing relations and interrelations, each of which "come together"[64] to continually produce and redefine modal forms – a network predicated on the equality of different modes, each of which are independently instaured. This network leads us to Souriau's notion of multimodalism.

L'un et l'autre co-naissent de l'acte même. »

58. Souriau, *Les modes*, 110; « …tout être se trouve initialement dans une situation donnée, qu'il ne dépend pas de lui de refuser ou d'accepter. Cela est constitutif de l'existence. »

59. Latour, 'Reflections', 332

60. Souriau, *Les modes*, 110-111; « …pas plus qu'il n'y aurait d'Art pur sans les statues, les tableaux, les symphonies les poèmes. Car l'Art, c'est tous les arts. Et l'existence, c'est chacun des modes d'existence. »

61. Latour, 'Reflections', 311

62. Souriau, *Les modes*, 98; « une existence considérée en elle-même »

63. Fruteau de Laclos, 'Les voies', 934-5; « Le monde n'est pas là avant l'instauration, il est produit par elle, il résulte de son trajet. »

64. Latour, 'Reflections', 311

Multimodalism is a state of existing across several modes coterminously. Latour describes it quite poetically as the difference between taking "modes of existence one by one to modes of existence that are enchained with several modes – it is a bit like moving from a piano tuner who tries the notes one by one to the piano player who makes them all resonate in a melody."[65] It is a state of relation, as preconfigured in Souriau's notion of the preposition. The autonomy of each mode is not compromised but reconfirmed, in that it is the relations between modes which sustain multimodal existence. As such, it offers Souriau the grounds to argue against philosophers who insist on a single mode as dominant – "who continually exaggerate their preferred mode of existence"[66]. Based in relations, the multimodal is open and fluid. There is no fixed structure of existences. Rather, the multimodal is continually making new relations or re-creating old ones through instauration as an ongoing process. As Souriau describes, "One could flatter oneself on having outlined a complete tableau of the modes of existence … [but note] this essential fact, precisely that the tableau is open. …The structure obtained [in outlining such a tableau] depends above all on the order adopted for this research, this course of action"[67]. It is necessary for me to remember that I am implicated in my research in the same way, ordering and shaping it. But this does not deny the potential of Souriau's thought to challenge my reliance on the subjective mode. In accepting an ontology of different modes of existence, I am opening to a manner of understanding which allows each existence present its own reality and agency. In thinking *through* multimodality, the concept of my own involvement within this existential plurality sees each mode in mutable relation, and the subjective beginning to be decentred.

As a philosophical position, Souriau's reworking of traditionally accepted notions of existence is a lot to take in. As a framework for criticism, however, it provides much for consideration. To adopt this vision is to go against "the standard post-Kantian philosophical position of saying 'the world exists (only) for me' or that it comes into being as my consciousness opens up to it"[68]. The multimodal is constantly productive of instauration through the constantly shifting relations it comprises. We come to be involved in this. It is infinite, delicate but also powerful in the manner in which it cannot be contained. There is a fluidity to the relations comprised within, they are mutable and ceaselessly busy. You do not control it: each mode exists in autonomy, holds its own

65. Ibid., 330

66. Ibid., 330

67. Souriau, *Les modes*, 160; « …on pourrait se flatter d'avoir structuré le tableau complet des modes d'existence… ce fait essentiel, que justement le tableau est ouvert. …Enfin, la structure obtenue dépend surtout de l'ordre adopté pour cette recherche, pour ce parcours… »

68. Stephen Muecke, 'Australian Indigenous Philosophy', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.2 (2011): n.p., URL: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss2/3

Her father leaves them to clear and clean up. They can hear the TV come to life as soon as they begin running the water for the dishes. It is warm in the kitchen, calm. Mary washes and her mother dries.

'Sarah at the store tells me that your new teacher has come in from one of the fancy city schools,' she says. Mary doesn't reply, but lets her keep chattering on. 'She's that old woman's daughter, you know – the one up on the hill. Mrs. Mulvey, she's Mr. Mulvey's sister. That makes your teacher his niece. Heard they aren't close, though. Mrs. Keillor used to babysit for them, she way saying they didn't get on at all.' Mary drops the cutlery to crash and clatter into the soapy water. 'Careful!' Her mother says.

'Sorry,' Mary murmurs.

'You splashed me!'

'She looked nice enough, the new teacher woman.'

'Yes, Sarah said she was very polite, has been coming in to get mail and bread and veggies, apparently. God knows how that old woman was doing without her here, if that's the case.'

'Is Dad going to work for Mr. Mulvey again this year?'

'I expect so.'

The fall quiet. The TV floats through as a muffled buzz from the lounge. An audience, laughing, applauding. Mary washes the final pan and lets the water out.

She goes to bed early, that night. She climbs into bed still fully dressed, pulls the covers right up over her so her mother won't see. When she hears her parents settle down, she slinks out, blinking to let her eyes adjust, and creeps downstairs. She takes a jacket off the peg in the front hall, but sneaks back through to the kitchen to go out the back. A light flicks on. She freezes. From where she is standing she can see her father slouch through into the kitchen and sit himself at the table. He is a silhouette, back to her. Mary can feel her throat constrict, the back of her neck tingle with adrenaline. Quiet as anything she slinks backwards and hangs up the coat. Almost without breathing, she tip-toes past and makes her way back upstairs to her bedroom. She sits on her bed and hugs her knees to her chest, rocking slightly, trying not to breathe too loudly. Slowly she calms down, slows down. Only then, the tears come.

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agency. But we cannot help but be involved. Souriau's multimodalism encompasses everything, everywhere. It is a form of relation too which exists temporally, something Souriau evokes rather beautifully: "Do we say the pale [or weak] existence of a pink cloud; or the existence of a pale pink cloud? In the first case, we are in the domain of referred, comparative existence. We typically evoke the richness, solid and illuminated, of the superb and perfect cloud, glory in the beautiful evening, and here we compare… In the other case, one speaks of that which is, and not of an idealistic and representative archetype."[69] Entering into multimodal relation would be to 'speak' of both – each mode of existence functioning in relation within the moment.

Souriau's theories can be seen to implicate landscape in this way. It is possible to understand landscape as the product of an instauration at any given, unique site of multimodal relations. I would argue that this is the manner in which our subjective constructions of landscape come to reach conceptualisation, drawing in the multiple other existences which are related. The physical land it is derived from, known social concepts of that land as a space, the phenomenon of the viewing, the perspective, the moment in time and even the weather can be seen as unique modes of existence influential to the landscape as it emerges through the instaurative process. This would see any given landscape as existing in autonomy, influencing the subject as much as the subject influences it – an idea which appeals to me in regards to explaining the power an image of landscape has in my writing. This notion points to further ramifications of Souriau's philosophy. We might thus similarly understand *ourselves* as subjects of instauration, enmeshed within our own multimodal networks. Doing so could reposition criticism as implicated within its own subject – criticism that would "participate in the event"[70] as Stephen Muecke has put it. The notion of multimodalism is one I will continue to develop in the second and third chapters of this exegesis. This concept of modes which are equal and yet function in relation, which are capable of complex interaction without diminishing the autonomy of any involved, informs my critical reading of texts from here onwards.

To understand multimodalism, however, we must be capable of moving towards individual modes – particularly given that delineating a mode forms an essential part of the writing practice outlined in my third chapter. This effort is distinct from the

69. Souriau, *Les modes*, 106; « Existence faible d'un nuage rosé, disions-nous; ou existence d'un nuage faiblement rosé ? Dans le premier cas, nous sommes dans le domaine de l'existence référée, comparée. Nous évoquons typiquement la plénitude solide et illuminée d'un nuage superbe et parfait, gloire d'un beau soir, et nous y comparons… Dans l'autre cas, il s'agit bien de ce qui est, et non d'un archétype idéal et représentatif. »

70. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 42

understanding of a mode as a 'category', it requires an appreciation of the agency of autonomous existence. Souriau maps out various modes within his text, moving into each, understanding its complexities and peculiar agency, taking it on its own terms. The movement towards a mode is characterised by what Latour refers to as Souriau's intent focus on "obtaining being *by way of the other*"[71]. As Souriau describes, one must "depart from a given ontology that is as restrained as possible, and seek out by what shifts and what links (representative of new modes of existence) one might pass into otherness"[72]. In this sense, passing into otherness is meeting with a new mode. Latour describes each mode as existing within a set of individual constraints, an ontic "pattern"[73] which can be felt out in granting each mode "the capacity to produce in its own way the assemblage of ontological categories which are its very own"[74]. Souriau's process here demonstrates his continued movement away from the confines of the subject-object relationship. His entry into a discussion of the phenomenon is an example of this, exemplifying Souriau's 'othering' of the subjective position.

Both Vitry Maubrey and Latour comment in detail on Souriau's description of the phenomenon as a mode as essential to understanding his concept of modal being. To examine the phenomenon is to move towards that patuity that he earlier indicated as essential to defining existence, in that the phenomenon in Souriau's philosophy *is* patuity, to a greater or lesser extent. The phenomenon is thus heavily implicated within the multimodal: "can one conceive of beings that have no relation with the phenomenon?"[75] Furthermore, Latour sees this mode as important in reconfirming the non-subjective status in Souriau's thinking in general. But these questions come after a thorough examination of the phenomenon in its own right, detached from other modes. Latour therefore also differentiates Souriau's approach from traditional phenomenology:

> Let us recall that Souriau, like James, like Whitehead, is not moving in a bifurcated nature. What he calls the phenomenon has nothing to do with matter, with the plain empty object, used as a picture hook for the sickly subjectivity of the modernists. No, he

71. Latour, 'Reflections', 316

72. Souriau, *Les modes*, 88; « …partir d'une donnée ontique aussi restreint que possible, et chercher par quels glissements, par quelles liaisons (représentant des modes nouveaux d'existence) on peut passer du même à l'autre. »

73. Latour, 'Reflections', 316

74. Ibid., 316

75. Souriau, *Les modes*, 119-120; « Maintenant, que devient-il [le phénomène] lorsqu'il est mis en relation avec d'autres modes ? …Peut-on concevoir des êtres qui n'aient aucune relation avec le phénomène ? »

> just wants to capture the phenomenon *independently* of the badly-formulated notion of matter, and without immediately engaging it in the eternal question of how much of it belongs to the object and how much to the subject.[76]

As an introduction to modality, the phenomenon once more returns us to Souriau's central position of multiplicity in existence, at the same time as it exemplifies Souriau's process in moving towards an individual mode.

Souriau's enquiry of the phenomenon is based in a supposition of its independence in modal agency. "What is important for the moment is to reform our errors in momentarily suspending habit. To grasp the phenomenological existence, it is necessary to avoid at all costs conceiving of the phenomenon as a phenomenon *of* something or *for* someone."[77] In this sense, in order to understand the mode on its own terms, Souriau is interested in asking how the mode is instaured and how it instaures itself. He describes the phenomenon as, "of all the different statuses of existence, the most obvious, the most manifest."[78] It is manifest "in its existence as much as in its essence (which are inseparable), it is perhaps manifestation itself. It is presence, éclat, a non-refutable given. It is, and it itself speaks for what it is."[79] It is, as Souriau points out in beginning, a very 'generous' mode in attaching itself to other things, beings, arts, and lending them its "indubitable patuity"[80]. But Souriau attempts to separate the phenomenon from these other modes and examine it alone. "One can insist upon the phenomenological existence, it is the existence in patuity, existence in the state of lucidity, splendid or manifest."[81] The phenomenon cannot necessarily be conveyed in language, and yet by these terms it can be found within its agency – its affect as signalling its modal existence. Passing into otherness through this process, learning to appreciate the agency of other modes, could help decentralise the subjective position within writing practice. But the difficulty lies in respecting each mode in and of itself.

76. Latour, 'Reflections', 316

77. Souriau, *Les modes*, 119; « Ce qui importe surtout pour l'instant, c'est d'avoir réformé des erreurs en suspendant momentanément des habitudes. Pour saisir l'existence phénoménique, il faut éviter avant tout, redisons-le, de concevoir le phénomène comme phénomène *de* quelque chose ou *pour* quelqu'un. »

78. Ibid., 113; « Le statut phénoménique est sans doute, de tous les statuts existentiels, le plus obvie, le plus manifeste. »

79. Ibid., 113; « Manifeste aussi bien en son existence qu'en son essence (qui sont inséparables) il est, peut-être, le manifeste en soi. Il est présence, éclat, donnée non repoussable. Il est, et il se dit pour ce qu'il est. »

80. Ibid., 114; « …il a d'indubitable patuité. »

81. Ibid., 114; « On peut soutenir que l'existence phénoménique, c'est l'existence en patuité, l'existence à l'état lucide, splendide ou manifeste. »

This is a difficulty which Souriau both admits and addresses. He questions the phenomenon in particular: "Is it isolatable? Does it not implicate other things; and not only the substance… but also the intentionality, the essence on one side; and the subjectivity of the witnessing 'I' on the other?"[82] Souriau replies to these difficulties in situating them as symptomatic of the phenomenological reductionism he has already condemned earlier in his work, a reductionism which "puts the phenomenon itself in parenthesis"[83], rather than focusing on it in its own right. This is "a bastardised form of thinking, where one looks for the phenomenon at the same time as leaving it behind. It supposes the phenomenon dissected. Drained of its blood, and surrounded by its organs. To take it in living form, the phenomenon posits in its phenomenal state its intentions and other factors of its reality."[84] In this sense, he argues, traditional phenomenology is the last place one will find the phenomenon itself: "*The darkest place is under the lamp*"[85]. His project in response is once more to focus on the phenomenon as agential. "One can inversely centre all this ["the existential shifts and morphemic attachments which drive, from the pure phenomenon, towards other realities in other modes"[86]] systematically on the pure phenomenon, and install it at the centre in order to feel it support and respond to the rest"[87]. This is the way in which "one might pass into otherness"[88] that Souriau calls on us to attempt: the situation of a mode other than our own primary subjectivity as centred in mapping that same mode's existential tenor. Rather than a questioning based on our own possible implications in the mode, he would see us start from a position which assumes that mode's implication within the multimodal, assumes its agency, aims to understand how that mode may have effect. Doing so represents a subtle shift away from the objectification of existence, denying the subject its previous centrality.

The phenomenon for Souriau is felt only "when one feels it as supporting and upholding in itself that which leans on and consolidates itself in it, with it and through

82. Ibid., 115; « Est-il isolable ? N'implique-t-il pas autre chose que lui ; en non seulement la substance ou le suppôt, selon la tradition ionienne ; mais encore l'intentionnalité, l'essence, d'une part ; d'autre part la subjectivité, le Je témoin ? »

83. Ibid., 116; « …la dialectique phénoménologique met entre parenthèse le phénomène lui-même, dans sa présence réelle et son immédiateté »

84. Ibid., 116; « …c'est là l'effet d'une pensée bâtarde, où l'on cherche le phénomène tout en en sortant indûment. On suppose le phénomène anatomisé. Exsangue, on l'entoure de ses organes. Pour qui le prend dans sa vie, le phénomène pose à l'état phénoménal ses intentions et autres facteurs de réalité. »

85. Ibid., 116 ; quotation in English

86. Ibid., 116; « …des glissements existentielles et des attaches morphématiques conduisent, du phénomène pur, vers d'autres réalités en d'autres modes… »

87. Ibid., 116; « On peut inversement centrer toute cette systématiquement sur le phénomène pur, et s'installer à ce centre pour le sentir support et répondant du reste… »

88. Ibid., 88; « …on peut passer du même à l'autre. »

it."[89] As Latour puts it, "here then is the phenomenon well and truly freed of its Procrustean bed; it can reply to its own terms of reference, it can finally lead to relations one could call *lateral* as opposed to only transversal relations."[90] Souriau suggests that the phenomenon in this way "appears as a model and benchmark for existence."[91] This movement into the mode is indicative of the multimodal – both in the secondary modes implicated in examining the phenomenon in this light and in the manner in which this enquiry teaches us how to conduct ourselves towards other modes of existence. Souriau "quite simply asks that we respect the particular path that phenomena take. For him this is the best way to respect what is most particular about a second mode of existence"[92]. Souriau follows the patuity of the phenomenon through to discussing a range of other existential modes, including the thing, the body, the fictional being – phantoms, chimeras, imaginary friends or fictional characters, virtual existence, even the soul[93]. Simultaneously, of course, he is leading into an appreciation of the interaction of modes, positing their self-sufficiency as grounds for relation in the capacity it endows for agency in connection. This with the caveat of ensuring that the bifurcation of the subject-object point of view is thoroughly overcome, that it is more natural to understand each of these modes from the position of their own power than from a distance of critical judgement. This is not a categorisation but a movement from one to the other and through all of them.

This movement into the mode forms a framework for my inquiry in my third chapter. It provides both the parameters of engagement with a mode and suggests the manner in which an understanding of a mode might be achieved. It also suggests an application of Souriau's thought based in process rather than in philosophical principle. The ideal which I have maintained of examining and writing landscape outside the subject-object relationship is more feasible when we understand Souriau's 'othering'. The movement through the mode towards the multimodal suggests the manner in which a study might be made from a position of such otherness. Each literary text might plausibly be viewed as a multimodal network contained within the phenomenon of the writing. The study of modal elements within a written landscape – both within and beyond the writing as a phenomenon, a *patefit* reality – must therefore constitute an attempt simultaneously to move within the network of the text. This is not to say this network is contained

89. Ibid., 119; « On ne conçoit bien dans sa teneur proprement existentielle, que lorsqu'on le sent comme soutenant et posant à soi seul ce qui peut s'appuyer et se consolider en lui, avec lui et par lui. »

90. Latour, 'Reflections', 317

91. Souriau, *Les modes*, 119; « …c'est à ce titre qu'il apparaît comme un modèle et un étalon d'existence. »

92. Latour, 'Reflections, 318

93. For a full discussion of these modes, see: Souriau, *Les modes*, 113-164; and the related consideration in Latour, 'Reflections', 316-330

Ann Miller, *Loch Ard Gorge*, 2011
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or restricted in any way by its status as a text, but that it functions within the wider network of the world as a set of interrelated modes. This is, necessarily, an experimental process. No result can be guaranteed, because to do so would be to remain within fixed relation, merely creating the desired object. I want rather to go forward with the hope of seeing what happens, what can be instaured. This exploration is an attempt to answer to those calls made for a new way of reading Australian literature.

This is not, however, the first critical work to take up a philosophy like Souriau's within the context of Australian studies. Various critical theorists support the validity of a philosophical approach akin to Souriau's, either in exploring his ideas directly or in seeking out alternate possibilities within criticism which move away from "phenomenological orthodoxy… co-relating self and other"[94]. As I have suggested, Stephen Muecke in particular takes issue with the prevalence of the subject-object relationship in criticism as decisive or definitive. His writing instead embraces multiplicity in connection. But his work can be seen as part of a wider discourse which has developed within Australian cultural criticism calling for new directions in white Australian reading and writing practices. Alison Ravenscroft has recently been part of this with *The Postcolonial Eye*[95], along with critics such as Lyn McCredden, Emily Potter, Paul Carter and Ross Gibson. Such thinking questions dominant critical positions, seeks to "re-imagine and re-write what are often oppressive and exclusionary national discourses"[96]. There is an emphasis on fluidity in interpretation and awareness of the diverse potentialities of the text within Australian culture, the attempt to "adopt a mobile, multiple point of view, rather than a unique vision."[97] But as Ian Chambers describes, such theorising is also regularly connected to poetics, representing the attempt to reach towards a "poetic configuration that releases the past into the present, flowing along the paths of a multilateral constellation"[98]. In this sense, this criticism trends more overtly towards Latour's position of radical empiricism than traditional realist practices in Australian criticism, often allowing for the possibility of multiple interpretations within a single reading regardless of type or genre, without attempting to reconcile or reconstitute opposition. This criticism moves through such points of difference to recognise a very 'Souriau-esque' equality across different modes of understanding.

94. Muecke, 'Australian Indigenous Philosophy', n.p.
95. See 'A Note on the *Shadow/Text*', n.3
96. Lyn McCredden, '(Un)Belonging in Australia: Poetry and Nation', *Southerly* 73.1 (2013): 40
97. Chambers, 'Stones of Language', 62
98. Ibid., 62

There is an extreme difference between Ravenscroft's and Muecke's approaches within this discourse. Ravenscroft remains heavily focused on the subject-object relationship. Ravenscroft's investigation of the 'aporias' in a white Australian reading of Indigenous texts is in reaction to the prevalence of (magic) realism as the dominant critical position in white constructions of narratives which lie outside European traditions – "a positivism … which will insist on telling what an Indigenous-signed text is about"[99]. She appreciates simultaneously the space opened by Indigenous-signed texts in openly addressing the trauma and consequences of colonisation more regularly than white Australian narratives, showing "a willingness to work with ideas of radical and irrecoverable loss, and to do this work at the level of form"[100]. Ravenscroft represents this trauma as beyond the comprehension of a white Australian reader and suggests positivist reading practices make "stitches"[101] to "cover over"[102] these gaps in representation. Emphasising race as an act of visual construction, both in reading and more generally, she outlines the dangers of "collapsing differences between white cultures and Indigenous ones"[103]. She refuses, for example, to demand understanding of a text, saying specifically of Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise*[104]: "As white readers we can no longer hope that if we are careful enough, the story will fall into view. It quite precisely moves out of view, its new arrangement revealing places of opacity, vanishing points."[105] Rather than challenging the predominance of the subject-object relation, she calls for a new practice which confronts discourses fixed in a single subjective mode.

In a manner akin to Souriau, Ravenscroft highlights an act of reading which reconfirms the autonomy and independence of Indigenous modes of reading and writing as alternate to white Australian modes. This leads her towards a very interesting discussion of the manner in which each mode is uniquely productive of subjectivity in the physical sense:

99. Ravenscroft, *Postcolonial Eye*, 47; see also: Alison Ravenscroft, 'Dreaming of Others: *Carpentaria* and its Critics', *Cultural Studies Review* 16.2 (2010): 194-6

100. Ibid., 155

101. Ibid., 8

102. Ibid., 9

103. Ibid., 47

104. Alexis Wright, *Plains of Promise* (St. Lucia: Queensland University Press, 1997)

105. Ravenscroft, *Postcolonial Eye*, 56; Muecke would disagree with Ravenscroft's position here. "If there is to be a criticism without judgement, then it should avoid that transcendentalism that insists on the incompleteness of the text, its paradoxes and ambivalences so that only in the transcendental move …can an elusive infinite unity be glimpsed for a brief rewarding moment." (Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 55) Ravenscroft does not insist on the incompleteness of the text in itself, but from the subjective perspective; hence a discussion between them might perhaps be very interesting. Even while I see them both as part of a single movement in Australian criticism, the contrast in their viewpoints is extreme.

> Might it not be that body and country are different things in the Walpiri context, for instance, than they are in the settler one? This is to say something other than that this thing called the body for instance takes different meanings unto itself depending on its habits and habitus. …It is instead to say that the very substance of bodies is not universal but made differently in different places, and that country, too, is made differently in relation to different bodies. Country and body might be consubstantialising such that one does not 'have' the same body if one lives in one country rather than another. …Walpiri live in another country to the one in which I live, even if they and I abide in the same coordinates of latitude and longitude…[106]

Ravenscroft seems to be picking up on ideas related to Souriau's appreciation of each mode as equal, autonomous and capable of creating productive relations with other modes – here in the physical relation between body and land – even while she works within a dichotomy of race based on a discussion of subject and other.

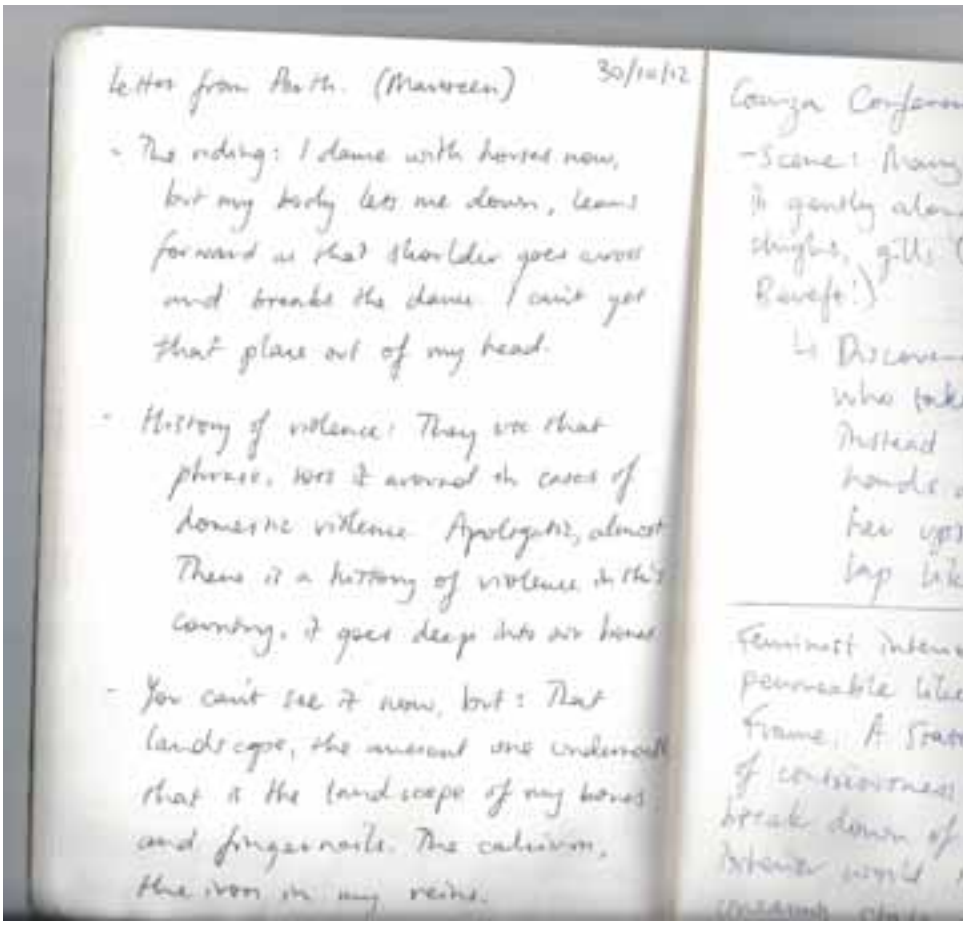
But this combination is problematic. Ravenscroft's approach is predicated on a theory of radical difference, "sovereignty or incommensurability"[107] which insists on the incapacity of the white subject to 'know' and 'see' what an Indigenous one does. Even while she recognises autonomy across different modes of being, she reduces them into a single relation determined by the subjective position. This relation is productive of subjectivity as well. "Australian white subjectivity is formed in proximity to blackness which it desires *and* refuses, irreducibly."[108] She leaves little room in this way for individuals as unique in their body/matter and modal relation to the world. Ravenscroft does highlight race as a social ideal and thus performative[109], moving from this position to challenge white subjectivities based in race: "Out of this othering the white subject will fashion an image of herself. But this image doesn't hold. It flips into its negative –

106. Ibid., 39

107. Ravenscroft, *Postcolonial Eye*, 2

108. Ibid., 131

109. Ravenscroft suggests that race is a position *before* a text taken up by the reader in a construction of self: "A white subject then is a subject who can make him or herself intelligible as white" (*Postcolonial Eye*, 25). It is constructed through reading – not simply the book as text, but "sometimes a photographic image, sometimes art on canvas, sometimes art made on bodies, strokes made with paint or ochre; the text might also be bodies in movement, in dance or ceremony." (*Postcolonial Eye*, 25) See also: Alison Ravenscroft, 'Another Way of Reading *The Postcolonial Eye*', *Journal for the Association of the Study of Australian Literature* 12.3 (2012): 3, URL: http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal/article/view/2963/3425



Letter from Perth. (Maureen) 30/10/12

- The riding: I dance with horses now, but my body lets me down, leans forward as that shoulder goes across and breaks the dance. I can't get that place out of my head.

- History of violence: They use that phrase, toss it around in cases of domestic violence. Apologetic, almost. There is a history of violence in this country, it goes deep into our bones.

- You can't see it now, but: That landscape, the ancient one underneath that is the landscape of my bones and fingernails. The calcium, the iron in my veins.

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the white 'I' collapses into her image of her other."[110] In doing so, she speaks eloquently to the anxiety of such a subject and questions her own subjective position in provoking ways. But the distinction is maintained across the binary of self and other. Anne Maxwell and Odette Kelada highlight such concerns in their highly critical review of the book, suggesting that it "falls into the ways that white women have theorized for, and about, the social location of Indigenous people and their experiences."[111] They suggest that her positioning of radical difference "often creates an exclusive 'us' and 'them' binary, speaking as it does consistently to a white readership and 'eye'."[112] While I do not agree with the entirety of Maxwell and Kelada's criticism, their perception of binary within Ravenscroft's work points to the fixed modal relation which dominates.

Regardless, there is evidence in Ravenscroft's work of an "appetite… for creating new discourses"[113]. Emily Potter similarly questions contemporary critical practices in their representations of Australian landscape. Potter is anxious of "one-dimensional"[114] and "self-fulfilling"[115] designs on contemporary Australian landscape, and calls for a poetics of place-making which embraces connection and nuance within constructions of space. In example, she cites the design practice of Paul Carter, highlighting his awareness of the subtleties of connectivity; in particular "the phenomenological, ambiguous and highly interdependent 'thisness of things' that cannot be apprehended by linear reason."[116] This is part of Carter's theory of 'Dark Writing', a subversive form of place-making which plays with narrative practices of constructing landscape in a non-temporal and non-linearist context[117]. Carter's 'Dark Writing' is an evocation of what is absent as much as what is present in our constructions of land and country. This is, Potter suggests, a mode of 'place-making' which is more discursively productive. "This mode of place-making is poetically derived and highly performative. It seeks to conjure up and enter into the material 'matrix of multiplicity'… a non-linearist concept

110. Ravenscroft, *Postcolonial Eye*, 131

111. Anne Maxwell, Odette Kelada 'Whiteness, Appropriation and the Complicities of Desire in *The Postcolonial Eye*', *Journal for the Association of the Study of Australian Literature* 12.3 (2012): 4, URL: http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal/article/view/2502/3335

112. Ibid., 5

113. McCredden, '(Un)Belonging', 40

114. Emily Potter, 'The Ethics of Rural Place-Making: Public Space, Poetics and the Ontology of Design', *Cultural Studies Review* 16:1 (March 2010), 16

115. Ibid., 16

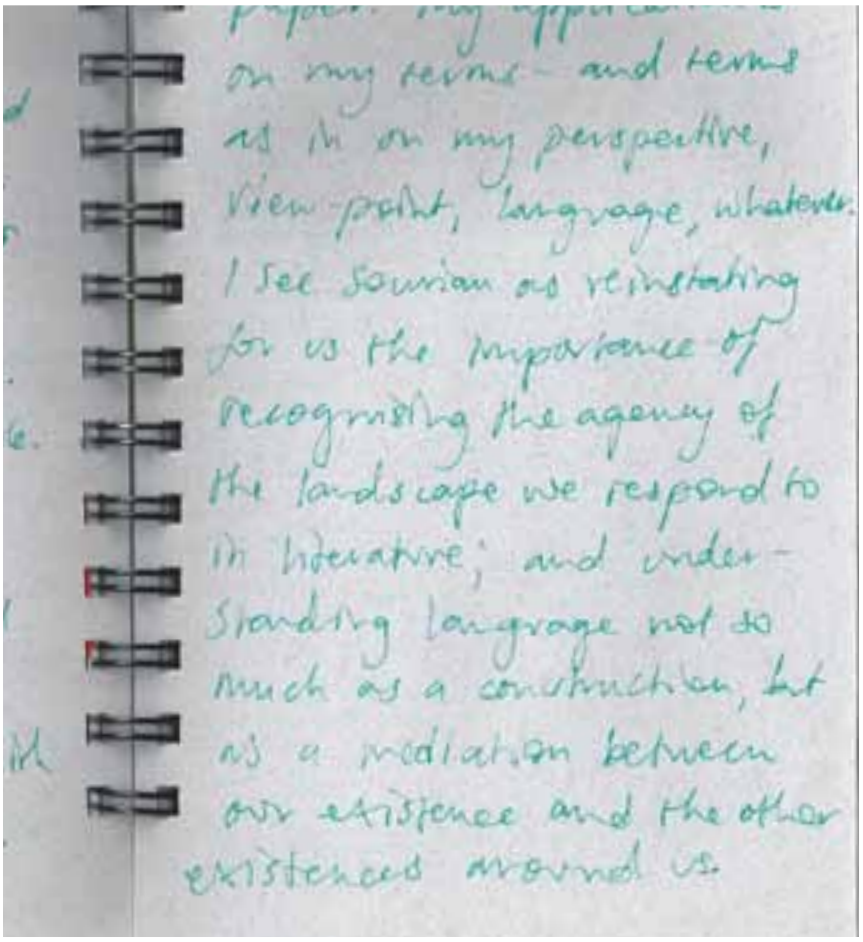
116. Paul Carter, *Dark Writing: Geography, Performance, Design* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 2; cited in Potter, 'Ethics of Rural Place-Making', 21

117. See Carter's design of *Nearamnew*, the artwork which forms Federation Square in Melbourne. The design follows the topographical lines of the Mallee region and overlays cultural and social landscapes with a more fluid conception of physical ground.

of place"[118]. Carter's work is suggestive of a desire for more flexible forms of creative or poetic interaction with landscape, just as Potter's adoption of his ideas illustrates the desire for a similar position to be taken up in criticism.

Ross Gibson's discussion in *South of the West* provides a context to this desire. He relies on the theories of Hegel to negotiate a terrain marked by delicate balance along the nature/culture divide. He highlights the "paradoxical"[119] nature of our attitudes towards Australian landscapes, suggesting it offers a screen against which we paint tensions of nationhood and identity, the "structural centre of the nation's myths of belonging."[120] Gibson moves then towards a means of understanding our relation to the landscape which both frames the land as "a developing social creation"[121] and simultaneously illustrates society as "a 'natural' out-growth of the habitat."[122] His theories look for a position wherein paradox can be embraced as a complex state of fluid and ongoing relation. This is something he builds upon in later essays, particularly in his conceptualization of spaces as 'Changescapes': highly mutable systems, "dynamic, tendency-governed, ever reactive"[123], based on a fluid point of balance found when "several simultaneous modes of action, information, remembrance and alteration are moderating each other for the purpose of its survival within the host environment… a system becomes a changescape when all this is marshalled by human care for aesthetic as well as pragmatic ends."[124] What Gibson represents is a version of being both *in* and *within* a specific landscape simultaneously. Gibson's desire is for "movement"[125], both hermeneutically and temporally. He describes the need "to be able to zoom back and forth instantaneously connecting the past with the present, connecting received momentum with whatever is immanent so that one can perceive historical continuities operating in concert with chance and change."[126] This is the attraction of the ever-shifting changescape: it is a system in "slippery balance with mutability."[127] His thought creates a sense of 'spatial identity' – the identity constructed for a space via human involvement – as a complex system, one which is "not constituted merely by the sum of

118. Potter, 'Ethics of Rural Place-Making', 22
119. Gibson, *South of the West*, 67
120. Ibid., 67
121. Ibid., 68
122. Ibid., 68
123. Ross Gibson, 'Changescapes', in *Halfway House: The Poetics of Australian Spaces,* ed. Jennifer Rutherford, Barbara Holloway (Crawley, WA: UWA Publishing, 2010), 24
124. Gibson, 'Changescapes', 26
125. Gibson, *South of the West*, 66
126. Gibson, 'Changescapes', 32
127. Ibid., 26



on my terms – and terms
as in on my perspective,
view-point, language, whatever.
I see Sourian as reinstating
for us the importance of
recognising the agency of
the landscape we respond to
in literature; and under-
standing language not so
much as a construction, but
as a mediation between
our existence and the other
existences around us.

its components, but also by the intricate *relationships* between those components."[128]

Without suggesting an awareness of Souriau's thought in his text, Gibson demonstrates his capacity to shift away from the subjective position in centring notions landscape and place within his discussion. His latest work, *26 Views of the Starburst World*, takes up this notion of the world as "always ready to alter, to recalibrate, depending on how the elements are assembled, relative to one another, in any specific place at any particular moment."[129] Gibson allows this thought to contextualise his reading of the journal of William Dawes and thus understand his entry into the landscape of Sydney Cove. He relates it to the philosophy of the Eora, the Indigenous owners of the land, describing an "ever-altering network of relationships amongst beings and things that are always ready to combine in spirit, matter, space and time"[130]. Citing Richard Hamblyn, Gibson highlights the manner in which Dawes began "to understand that the 'universe will never cease its dance of change and mutability'"[131]. Dawes' approach in his journals to both the language of the Eora and to the place itself leads Gibson to a specific "mode of writing – roundabout, relational, a tad restless and unruly – that can bring us toward some more 'dispersed' or 'distributed' versions of consciousness …beyond the bounds of single, sovereign subjects"[132]. He approaches the journals from twenty-six 'views', each interrelating in various, shifting ways to coalesce into a narrative.

Such thought, while significantly different in perspective to that of Souriau, demonstrates the attractiveness of new and more flexible critical perspectives in Australian studies. Muecke's scholarship differs only in that he makes a direct approach to Souriau's thought in taking on the problem. Muecke understands Souriau as part of a wider 'Vitalist' school, one which "emerges from its roots in Spinoza, Bergson and Diderot, continues via Deleuze and Guattari, then William James and A.N. Whitehead" [133]. While Muecke is not reading directly through a framework of Souriau, (he predominantly references Latour, who in turn references Souriau), his use of such thought in general is ground-breaking in its application. He puts forward

128. Ibid., 29

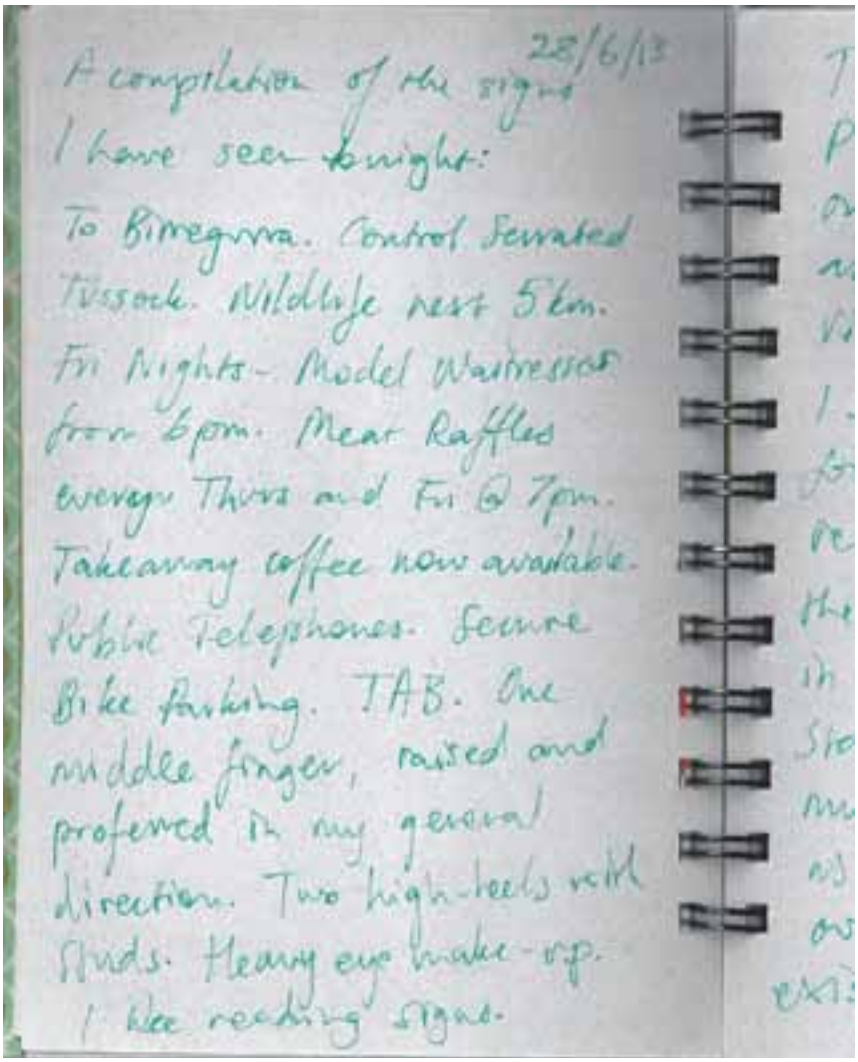
129. Ross Gibson, *26 Views of the Starburst World: William Dawes at Sydney Cove 1788-91* (Crawley, WA, UWA Publishing, 2012), 92

130. Ibid., 102

131. Richard Hamblyn, *The Invention of Clouds: How an amateur meteorologist forged the language of the skies* (London: Picador, 2001), 10; cited in ibid., 57

132. Ibid., 18. A similar practice is used in his earlier text *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*, see Ross Gibson, *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002.)

133. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 42



28/6/13

A compilation of the signs
I have seen tonight:
To Birregurra. Control Serrated
Tussock. Wildlife rest 5km.
Fri Nights - Model Waitresses
from 6pm. Meat Raffles
every Thurs and Fri @ 7pm.
Takeaway coffee now available.
Public Telephones. Secure
Bike Parking. TAB. One
middle finger, raised and
proferred in my general
direction. Two high-heels with
studs. Heavy eye make-up.
I like reading signs.

an experimental criticism, taking up Vitalism as "an alternative thread in continental philosophy which seeks to provide (hopefully) a more realistic vision of collective assemblages of life-forms, where the human (paradoxically for the humanities) finds itself less centred."[134] He picks up on the equality of modes Souriau insists on, recognising that "things can exist without being a function of the way humans look at the world, as if everything hung off that relationship."[135] This experimental criticism is matched by a writing practice which follows suit: the attempt to reach towards a writing which is "actively engaged in creating assemblages or compositions as it goes along"[136]. Muecke thus seeks out "unique pathways in and among the multiply-real"[137]. Muecke too, like Gibson, has combined this with an interest in Indigenous Studies, a blend which describes the peculiarly Australian bent of his engagement with these French philosophers. This combination picks up on the manner in which Indigenous thinking "allow[s] for non-human modes as of [sic] existence and radical transformations from the human to the non-human, and vice-versa"[138]. Like Souriau and Latour, he suggests thus that "it is in the compositions, not the entities, that the power lies."[139] In illustrating one possible application of Vitalist thought, Muecke offers an example of the manner such philosophy more generally allows for movement away from set subject-object relations.

This is the point at which Muecke's scholarship comes to be of direct interest to my practice as a creative writer. His work indicates the manner in which Souriau's multimodalism offers various possibilities in the context of Australian culture and criticism. Similarly, in earlier work he discusses landscape specifically as a 'medium of exchange', seeing "things and people as mutually transformative"[140]. He resents the manner in which Australian political and cultural landscape aesthetics "work towards the intensification of relationships between subject and object"[141]. In working with Souriau's philosophy, with its emphasis on exploring modes and their relations 'in and of themselves'[142], Muecke puts forward an appreciation of the world wherein the abstract and the concrete touch, make friends, hold hands. Denying the singularity of the subject-object relationship, he celebrates "a feeling of the immanence of life in and

134. Ibid., 41-2
135. Ibid., 46
136. Ibid., 42
137. Ibid., 45
138. Muecke, 'Australian Indigenous Philosophy', n.p.
139. Ibid., n.p.
140. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 78
141. Stephen Muecke, 'A Landscape of Variability', *The Kenyon Review* 25:3/4 (Summer-Autumn, 2003): 283
142. Souriau, *Les modes*, 103; « propre, indépendante, absolue en son mode »

through worlds that fold in and through each other again and across time, life being movement and growth"[143]. This immanence, this insistence on movement and fluidity can potentially instruct a creative practice. An exploration of Muecke's position offers the final word in my next chapter, contrasted with a study of reading practices before the representation of landscape, and my own tendency to read through structures of opposition set forth by the subject-object binary. In doing so, it moves me towards my own attempt at constructing an experimental writing practice from the context of Souriau's thought.

143. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 4

Judy Schrever, ‘Wye Forest 2’, 2011, oil on canvas.
Photo credit: Steve Murray, ©Judy Schrever

Anxious Landscapes: A Shift in Reading

Country

After dark in the dark
of our heads we shape it,
with thumb, spade-work, number.

Learn how a door swings open
where timber
creaks, off in the forest,

how pitchforks extend an arm.

David Malouf, 'The Long View', *Typewriter Music*, 37

'I will never be lost, I am a seed of this land.
(E kore au e ngaro, he kākano i ruia ki tēnei whenua.)'
Blood Earth Fire/Whāngai Whenua Ahi Kā,
Te Papa Museum, Wellington N.Z., 25/1/2013

As expressions of connection, the two quotations above illustrate very different attitudes to land. The point of contrast is in the positioning of subjectivity in each: one relationship is 'natural', the other learnt or manufactured, and both thus define the subject. In David Malouf's poem, written as a white Australian, the narrator-subject constructs the land as country through contact with it: "in the dark/ of our heads we

shape it"[1]. The subjective position is one of agential domination over the landscape as a construct. Simultaneously, this contact breeds familiarity and ease. Tools take on natural meaning: the door expands metonymically to converge with the sound of the tree "out in the forest"[2]; the pitchfork, interestingly plural, becomes part of the human body. But the subject still dominates an objectified country – the pitchfork is after all a tool for shaping the land. The inference is that the white Australian subject constructs the landscape but responds to it in doing so and is ultimately influenced by this act of shaping. Conversely, and more simply, in the Māori proverb the subject is constructed by the land and thus a natural part of it. The relationship is straight-forward, the subject is passive and the land is allowed agency over her, defining the subject both spiritually and physically. 'I will never be lost' can be read two ways: I can never physically lose myself within this space and/or the notion of 'I' can never be damaged, undone, destroyed in this relationship. Temporally, the use of 'will' signifies this relation as unending. This dual construction is echoed in the notion of '*tangata whenua*', a Māori term for Indigenous people, "people belonging to any particular place"[3], and meaning literally 'people of the land'.[4] H.W. Williams', in his definitive *Dictionary of the Māori Language*, suggests that a second possible meaning of '*whenua*' is placenta[5]. In brief, the difference in these two excerpts suggests a racial binary common to representations of postcolonial landscape: it suggests that a white Australian subject can never be truly connected to the land on a spiritual level, while an Indigenous subject can never be other than spiritually born of it.

Putting aside the critical issues involved in expanding this comparison out towards a general argument – and there are many, including the difference of perspective across nations – the binary suggested in this difference is most disturbing in the manner in which it is somewhat expected or commonplace from my white Australian point of view. Over the course of my study I found it to be an almost instinctive positioning within my writing. Stephen Muecke also intimates that we read this binary into constructions of landscape. Muecke sees the contemporary Australian cultural politics of space as marked by the conditions of colonisation. He suggests that: "Present-day non-Indigenous Australians still do not know the extent to which they have been

1. David Malouf, 'The Long View', *Typewriter Music* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 37

2. Ibid., 37

3. H.W. Williams, *Dictionary of the Māori Language*, 7th ed. (Wellington: GP Publications Limited, 1971), s.v. 'tangata whenua'

4. P.M. Ryan, *A Dictionary of Modern Māori* (Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books, 1971) s.v. 'tangata whenua'

5. Williams, *Māori Language*, s.v. 'whenua'

formed by Aboriginal discourses"[6]. Muecke theorises Indigenous and white Australian colonial discourses of cross-cultural communication as "texts 'built' within different social systems"[7], along a frontier based upon language, but fighting ultimately over the land. An awareness of Indigenous presence within the landscape destabilises white Australian narratives and leads to a subjective anxiety: blink and the country becomes "an historically contested and fraught entity whose whitefella identity shimmers over it like a thin layer"[8]. In response, Muecke embarks on an effort of Aboriginal cultural reconstruction[9] as a movement to centre and highlight these still-competing discourses. He sees here the potential of Indigenous creative work in carrying "a series of implications for the practice of perceiving the land"[10], and contributing simultaneously to the "broad task of the decolonisation of Australian mythologies"[11]. These mythologies include racial binaries: stereotypical assertions of Indigenous spirituality, like "the myth that Aboriginality can never be allowed to have anything to do with making money"[12] and the contrasting assumption that white Australians can never be in a position of 'true' spiritual connection with the land. This is an effort he has continued across various publications[13].

I have pointed already to the work of Muecke and others in putting forward theories which subvert traditional reading practices in conceptualising the Australian landscape, a potential I see in Souriau's philosophy as well. The aim of this chapter is to explore some of the discourses surrounding readings of Australian landscape, and understand through them the reason these new practices are being called for. I do so with the intention of questioning my own reading and writing practices. I highlighted in my introduction the anxiety with which I approached the expression of my sensation of connection to landscape. This anxiety has fundamentally informed my work, pushing me towards representations of landscape which are configured by motifs of both possession and alienation. This can be felt in 'The Call of Salt' – in the wilderness of the forest as a space, and in the insistence on registering the demarcation of land, describing fences and roads, even monuments. I have been complicit in reading through structures of opposition as suggested above. Tension with regards to such binaries lies not so much

6. Muecke, *Textual Spaces*, 3
7. Ibid., 4
8. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 67
9. Muecke, *Textual Spaces*, 10
10. Ibid., 10
11. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 143
12. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 143
13. See in particular: Stephen Muecke, 'Can You Argue with the Honeysuckle?', in *Halfway House: The Poetics of Australian Spaces*, eds. Jennifer Rutherford, Barbara Holloway (Crawley, WA: UWA Publishing, 2010), 34-42

in the emotions they invoke, but in the manner in which they encourage a discourse that is fixed in extremes and closed to alternatives in relation. My practice before the text must therefore be placed under pressure. This chapter thus examines the manoeuvres of my approach to Australian literature, as well as the context of criticism from which this approach has emerged. It begins by exploring my response to the Gothic sensations within elements of colonial literature, noting it as an area of direct influence on my writing. I move then towards a discussion of more contemporary writing and the manner in which my actions in reading carry over a heightened sense of the uncanny. These readings constitute the background from which my writing has developed, reacting to the sensations of anxiety I have felt in my relationship to landscape. Finally, I turn to a more detailed discussion of Muecke's work, and ask how I might alter both my reading and writing practices through Souriau's philosophy.

This discussion in general turns on the notion previously considered of landscape as constructed. On the most basic level, it is possible to read the land. Small things signal layers of meaning and significance. At home, a flat, reflective streak in the water of the bay flags a rip and an undertow. Dark clouds from the west mean rain, dark clouds from the south a storm. A north wind is hot and dry and will bring the snakes out. In summer it will carry a fire kilometres in a heartbeat. Certain grasses indicate a nearby swamp, certain trees a dam or billabong. Wildflowers will follow the sun from east to west. Farmers can read a history of the weather in the colour of a crop, or look at a field and tell you where the wheat will thrive and where it will fail. These things are based in a narrative of knowledge, learnt through personal experience of the social discourse that supports them, but they come to represent also a very personal, intimate interaction with space. There is a higher level of reading involved in this act – at the point these features of the land are assembled to constitute a landscape with its own domain of social significance. This is the point at which we "transform *spaces* into *places*"[14], the point where descriptions of land gain symbolic or metonymic inference in cohesive structure.

But this reading works on us, as well. Ross Gibson points to the word 'tract' in describing land: "A tract, of course, is something you can read. But let's not ignore the nuances…"[15] These nuances place "a region or area of indefinite extent"[16] beside "an anatomical term for a system of organs"[17], a combination of associations Gibson sees in the word 'colony' as well. "This etymology suggests there is some sense in thinking

14. Trinca, Gaynor, Haebitch, *Country*, 1; see 'Introduction', n.2
15. Ross Gibson, 'Enchanted Country', *World Literature Today* 67.3 (Summer, 1993): 472
16. Ibid., 472
17. Ibid., 472

about tracts of colonial land in bodily terms."[18] Reading in this way offers a construction of subjectivity through relation to land. The nuances behind the word tract embody us as much as they create or construct a 'body' of landscape. This sensation of having a bodily involvement in the construction of landscape offers the possibility of connection to space through this act of reading, to borrow Gibson's words, "in much the same way that one can know the overall cohesion (or soul?) of one's own body precisely because one is immersed in it."[19] We immerse ourselves in a new body, read ourselves into it. This is not necessarily always a positive experience – this new body we have entered may not always be friendly towards us or we to it. (We can damage or feel betrayed by our own bodies as well.) But thinking of body in this way does express that connection that comes from reading land – reading in the sense of becoming 'mentally complicit' with the space. This is in part the context from which my own reading and writing of landscape emerges.

The flip side of this embodiment is the manner in which the subjectivity inherent to the reading of land is definitive. You shape the land according to your own perspective, and the wider contexts surrounding it. This is how Muecke can say "the readings of any place are not infinite. They are perhaps theoretically infinite, but in practice, through history, certain readings appear, proliferate, then fade away when history no longer provides for them."[20] In *Ancient and Modern*, Muecke holds landscape as related to culture: "Let us say that the cultural representation of country is discussed as landscape."[21] Landscape thus has a force, represents a politically charged entry into cultural debate. In the same discussion, Muecke invokes Gibson's portrayal of the act of representing landscape as involving a "stitching in"[22] of "the viewing subject"[23], and W.J.T. Mitchell's notion of landscape as a 'social hieroglyph'[24], "an emblem of the social relations it conceals"[25]. Landscape is bias, "not 'a given', not neutral."[26] It is suggestive of self, and reading or writing it an act which is performative simultaneously of possession and connection, cultural tension and attachment. This may be linked to the concept that landscape is a performatively imaginative engagement with space:

18. Ibid., 473
19. Ibid., 473
20. Stephen Muecke, 'Reading this Book', in Bentarrak, Muecke, Roe, *Reading the Country*, 12
21. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 71; this statement appeared slightly differently in an earlier version of the same work: "For the sake of argument", he says, "I will call the cultural representation of country *landscape*." See: Muecke, 'A Landscape of Variability', 282
22. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 77
23. Gibson, 'Enchanted Country', 476
24. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 77
25. W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 15
26. Barbara Bender, 'Time and Landscape', *Current Anthropology* 43 (Aug-Oct 2002): S104

anthropologically, landscape is representative of the 'creative' ways in which individuals place themselves within their environment. We might remember here Barbara Bender's suggestion of landscape as "ego-centred, …perspectival"[27], emerging not only from the subject but from the act of seeing. Bender discusses landscape in conjunction with time, insinuating that just as each interaction with landscape is implicated within a certain time, complete with its own social and historical particularity, so too "landscapes, like time, never stand still."[28] It is thus "polysemic… not so much artefact as in a process of construction and reconstruction"[29], continually reconfigured by the subjective position and movement in vision.

This polysemy has been a site of anxiety in various critical studies of the white Australian representations of landscape. My own constructions of landscape highlight the land as offering contrasting sensations from moment to moment. It is similarly possible critically to read representations of the Australian landscape as informed in construction by alternating emotions[30]. The work of Judith Wright takes up this stance in the opening pages of her seminal *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*[31]. Wright describes what she sees as Australia's "double aspect"[32], defining two competing discourses, "two strains of feeling"[33] in her history of Australian literature: "the sense of exile… [and] the sense of liberty, of a new chance"[34]. Wright suggests that these two strains compete within the literature of her study. "She [Australia] seemed either a prison, a land to be escaped from as soon as possible or to be endured till death, or to the few who saw Utopia in her, a new country, a country of hope and faith."[35] This reading insinuates that the various configurations of landscape fix 'in place' points of subjective relation to space. The sense in which anthropologically landscape is seen as mutable is overwhelmed by an idea of the conflicting sensations to which it gives rise, reduced into a binary of 'two strains'.

27. Bender, *Landscape*, 1; see 'Introduction', n.3
28. Bender, 'Time and Landscape', S103
29. Bender, *Landscape*, 3
30. Such alternation is not necessarily negative. It can perhaps be opposed to a tradition of 'nature writing', as John Hawke suggests, wherein the work is reduced to its "face value" (160), the writers "concerned primarily with the depiction of Australian fauna and flora… judged according to the accuracy of their figuration of local scenes." (160) Hawke differs between this tradition and Wright's perceptions of place. See: John Hawke, 'The Moving Image: Judith Wright's Symbolist Language', *Southerly* 61.1 (Spring 2001): 160-178.
31. Judith Wright, *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965)
32. Ibid., xii
33. Ibid., xii
34. Ibid., xii
35. Ibid., xii

This notion is in evidence as Wright examines the shifting attitudes of Marcus Clarke's preface to *Poems of the Late Adam Lindsay Gordon*[36]. Citing the well-known passage describing the 'Weird Melancholy' of Australia, Wright suggests that Clarke "speaks as an alien – as one of those for whom Australia was a land of exile and terror."[37] But Wright goes on to quote his appreciation of "the other side of the picture"[38]: "But the dweller in the wilderness …becomes familiar with the beauty of loneliness …learns the language of the barren and uncouth, and can read the hieroglyphs of haggard gum trees"[39]. Wright describes this as the "violent reaction of European consciousness against what it saw in this new country"[40] attempting to reach a "point of equilibrium at which we ['European Australians'] can feel that this country is truly ours"[41]. But she does so without noting the manner in which this represents the application of a language and its connected cultural constructs to the land. The trees no longer hold meaning as trees, but as 'hieroglyphs' – symbols redefining that signified within. The land in this sense becomes palimpsestual as the European consciousness reconstructs objects within the physical terrain as key in a 'language' of (largely negative) emotion. It rejects the possibility of meaning outside the European discourse the subject is familiar with. Bill Ashcroft, Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCredden highlight a similar "doubleness – praise and dis-ease, celebration and fear"[42] as setting up "a strange, mixed apprehension of the Australian bush"[43] in Wright's own work. The landscape comes to be framed as holding only two possible meanings – two sides to a picture – and privileges a single subjective position as definitive.

Wright was thus participating within structures of opposition in the construction of landscape as well as simply appreciating their influence. My own reading and writing has made similar movements from the perception of opposition to the confirmation of it in practice. In her own poetry, Wright questions and even moves through these sensations[44] – and hence there is the possibility that I might as well. But in Australian literary criticism, the anthropological notion of landscape as fluid and constantly shifting has arguably been undermined by discourses which are based in structures of

36. Marcus Clarke, 'Preface' to *Poems of the Late Adam Lindsay Gordon*, ed. Robert A. Thompson (Melbourne: A.H. Massina, 1880); cited in Wright, *Preoccupations*, xiii-xiv

37. Ibid., xiii

38. Ibid., xiii

39. Clarke, 'Preface'; cited in Wright, *Preoccupations*, xiii-xiv

40. Ibid., xiv

41. Ibid., xviii

42. Ashcroft, Devlin-Glass, McCredden, *Intimate Horizons*, 145

43. Ibid., 145

44. See, for example: Judith Wright, *The Moving Image* (Melbourne: The Meanjin Press, 1946). This is something I will return to.

opposition such as Wright's 'double aspect'. In the place of fluidity, I would suggest, there has evolved a tendency to construct landscapes across fixed extremes and therefore to see them as unstable. Such landscapes are confronting not in nature but in the manner in which our capacity to 'understand' them is challenged by this perceived opposition. This anxiety can be seen as meeting wider anxieties of nationhood and, more subjectively, selfhood *within* the nation: Gibson, for example, in discussing Australian landscapes, highlights alienation and the fragility of our historicization as evidence of "a sublime structuring void organizing all Australian culture"[45].Wright also seems to connect the two in pointing to the development of "the 'Australian legend'"[46] as pivotal in our writing of landscape. This can be felt in her opening: "Before one's country can become an accepted background against which the poet's and novelist's imagination can move unhindered, it must first be observed, understood, described and as it were absorbed."[47] It is the landscape here which must be brought into meaning, and fixed within representation, rather than the subject which must open to the possibility of meaning in landscape as infinite, mutable, and unfixed.

This is the anxiety I have experienced in writing. Questioning my own practice in relation to implicated aspects of Australian literary tradition may thus illustrate the tensions I am reacting to in seeking new forms of expression. While readings of the Australian landscape through the lens of the Gothic have contributed much to literary discourse, studies of Gothic literature tend to place emphasis on landscape as conflicted, under the notion of the land as an 'uncanny' space, a space of paradox. Colonial literature in particular made use of this trope, but it can be in recent releases as well, as Jane Gleeson-White demonstrates in her survey of a range of new works[48]. Freud's definition of the uncanny explains the German roots of the word, in order to illustrate how that which is *unheimlich* insists as a state on the (subverted) presence and agency of the known, the familiar, the homely[49]. It is the recognition of that which should be strange. The uncanny therefore approaches self-contradiction, meeting definitions of the paradox which highlight the incredible or absurd, in particular as a "phenomenon that exhibits some contradiction or conflict with preconceived notions of what is

45. Gibson, *South of the West* , 65

46. Wright, *Preoccupations*, xxi

47. Ibid., xi

48. Jane Gleeson-White, 'Haunted Tales: [Recent Australian Fiction]', *Overland* 201 (Summer, 2010): 38-41; see also: Chris Womersley, *Bereft* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2010); Rosalie Ham, *The Dressmaker* (Pott's Point, NSW: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2000); Chris Silvey, *Jasper Jones* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2010); Tim Winton, *The Turning* (Sydney: Picador, 2004).

49. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock, Penguin Classics ed. (London: Penguin, 2003), 123-162

reasonable or possible"[50]. It holds emphasis on unease in paradox, belonging as Freud tells us "to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread."[51] The known is invariably transformed, becoming frightening, even while it is necessarily recognisable. Connotations of the strange and the twisted are strengthened in recognition rather than allayed. In this manner, the uncanny engenders a response which is based more firmly in the emotional than the rational, creating a contradiction or conflict. In depending on the concept of the known, however, the uncanny is fixed within a pre-conceived subjective position – one which in an Australian context has again been aligned with European discourses of meaning.

The fear that Freud outlines so evocatively, (which in European writing was strongly associated with Gothic architecture, a symbol of romanticised decay and horror[52]), has been taken up in an Australian context to be held in the 'empty' vessel of the landscape. Gerry Turcotte perhaps expresses this most succinctly:

> All migrations represent a dislocation of sorts, but Australia posed particularly vexing questions for its European immigrants. Nature, it seemed to many, was out of kilter. To cite the familiar clichés: its trees shed their bark, swans were black rather than white, and the seasons were reversed. And while these features represented a physical perversion, it was widely considered to be metonymic of an attendant spiritual dis/ease. This sense of spiritual malaise is often communicated through the Gothic mode, that is, through a literary form which emphasises the horror, uncertainty and desperation of the human experience, often representing the solitariness of that experience through characters trapped in a hostile environment, or pursued by an unspecified or unidentifiable danger. From its inception the Gothic has dealt with fears and themes which are endemic in the colonial experience: isolation, entrapment, fear of pursuit and fear of the unknown.[53]

Gothic fear for Turcotte is either born of physical deprivations and difficulties such as the dangers of isolation, (and in the "uncertainty and desperation"[54] of the colonial

50. *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, 6th ed., s.v. "Paradox"

51. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 123

52. David Punter, Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 177-8

53. G. Turcotte, 'Australian Gothic', in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. M. Mulvey Roberts (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 10-11

54. Ibid., 11

CHESIL

experience we feel the reality of these dangers), or of an associated spiritual unease identified in part as the fear of the unknown. He is careful to note, moreover, that the latter grows out of the former, so that the landscape actively takes on and even embodies fears which were ultimately based in the perspective held by the confronted colonials. This perspective insinuates the recognition or familiarity Freud illustrates as essential to the uncanny. Colonials experienced both connection and disconnection simultaneously. The notion of nature as "out of kilter"[55] suggests that recognizable elements of the European landscape were, in colonial eyes, perverted or bastardised, made unknown.

Such sensations are strongly suggested in descriptions of the landscape in both colonial diaries and literature. Writings fluctuate between tragedy, fear and disillusionment, excitement and hope for future prosperity. Uncanny recognition is clear. Joan Kerr and James Broadbent highlight Lieutenant Daniel Southwell's description of the cliffs of Sydney Cove as resembling "superb buildings and the grand ruins of stately edifices"[56] on his arrival with the first fleet. Seeing or reconstructing the familiar within the new and foreign landscape became a coping mechanism for the overwhelmed colonials, a "convenient way of re-erecting the Old World in the New"[57]. The journal of George Bouchier Worgan, a surgeon to the First Fleet writing in 1788, describes a landscape of extremes, varying from images of "a romantic rocky, craggy precipice over which, a little purling stream makes a Cascade"[58] and "a soft vivid-green, shady Lawn attracts your Eye"[59]; to "a sandy, or a Swampy Surface… almost impenetrable"[60]. Weather is abnormal: "Thunder and Lightning are astonishingly awful here… we have experienced its fatal effects… one Night 6 sheep 1 lamb, & 2 pigs that were lying under a tree, were all killed and the Tree violently riven."[61] Each image here is an instance of reading based on his own context and prior experience of the world. Worgan's diary provided a context for the construction of the ancestor Mulvey's diary and character in my own writing. As a voice of the "European consciousness"[62] that Wright pointed to, Worgan's diary illustrates very clearly the application of a foreign discourse to the reading of what must have been a confronting landscape. Ironically, as Freud's

55. Turcotte, 'Australian Gothic', 10

56. Joan Kerr, James Broadbent, *Gothick Taste in the Colony of New South Wales* (Adelaide: David Ell Press, 1980), 93

57. G. Turcotte, 'The Kangaroo Gargoyles: Footnotes to an Australian Gothic Script', in *Reading down under: Australian literary studies*, eds. A Sarwal, R. Sarwal (New Delhi: SSS Publications, 2009), 355

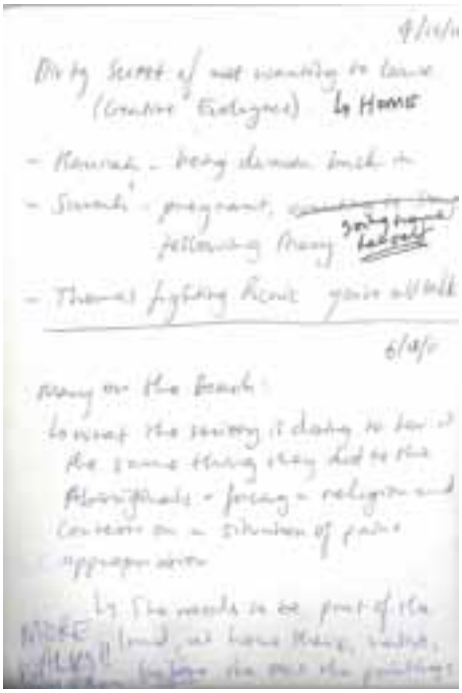
58. George B. Worgan, *Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon* (Sydney: The Library Council of New South Wales/Library of Australian History, 1978), 9

59. Ibid., 9

60. Ibid., 9

61. Ibid., 22

62. Wright, *Preoccupations*, xiv



9/11/1

Dirty Secret of not wanting to leave
(Creative Ecologies) to HOME

- Rowan - being abused back to
- Sarah - pregnant, [illegible]
following Mary [illegible]
- Thomas fighting Rowe gave all bell

6/11/

Mary on the beach:
to wear the sorrow it clothing to her is
the same thing they did to the
Aboriginals - forcing - religion and
Converts on - situation of pain
appropriation

by the words to be part of the
MORE [illegible] we have Mary, [illegible],
(ALL)!! [illegible] the [illegible] the paintings

interpretation of the uncanny suggests, this reconstruction of the familiar within the unfamiliar only heightens the pertaining sensations of uneasiness and fear.

In contrast, Grace Karskens' *The Colony* asserts the opportunities the settlers saw in the 'new world', thus illustrating the second of Wright's dual aspects. Karskens shows the settler response to the land as "complex, encompassing delight and wonder as well as bewilderment and disappointment"[63]. Gibson similarly highlights that the perversion of the familiar within the landscape could also offer hope – it reconfirmed at every moment the fresh prospects of the land. "On the upside-down face of the world, perversity could be perceived to be the rule."[64] A poor man could become rich, a convict could earn freedom. From a European point of view, there was space in the 'new country' for fresh narratives to be developed. The concept of *terra nullius* constructed the landscape as uninhabited and allowed for the appropriation and colonisation of the land. This included the narrativisation of the space as a place. As Margaret Henderson and Leigh Dale point out, while the land challenged subjective European 'knowledges', thus diminishing authority and provoking unease, the supposed emptiness in the land was just as often a source of hope[65]. The familiarity found or constructed in certain elements of landscape signals not only nostalgia but also the willingness of the colonials to reconstruct a home in the foreign space. Henderson and Dale underline the idea that *terra nullius* provided a gap in cultural narrative which allowed "free rei(g)n in the ways in which it may be known, and in the types of knowledges that can become authoritative."[66] Such forms of knowledge did not signal the end of Indigenous narratives but relegated them by force to an existence "'between' the lines of the Europeans' cadastral grids and boundaries"[67]. European culture could and did 're-write' the landscape, the settlers palimpsestually layering new stories over older ways of knowing: "true stories of their own, stories about the new country, its capriciousness, its wonderful healthfulness, its sheer beauty"[68]. Literature was one way of doing this.

This complex production of place can arguably be witnessed in the writing of Barbara Baynton and Henry Lawson. Wright suggests there emerged in such texts "the germ of the 'something new' that we now feel to be in some sense our own"[69]. This is writing

63. Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2009), 4

64. Gibson, *South of the West,* 10

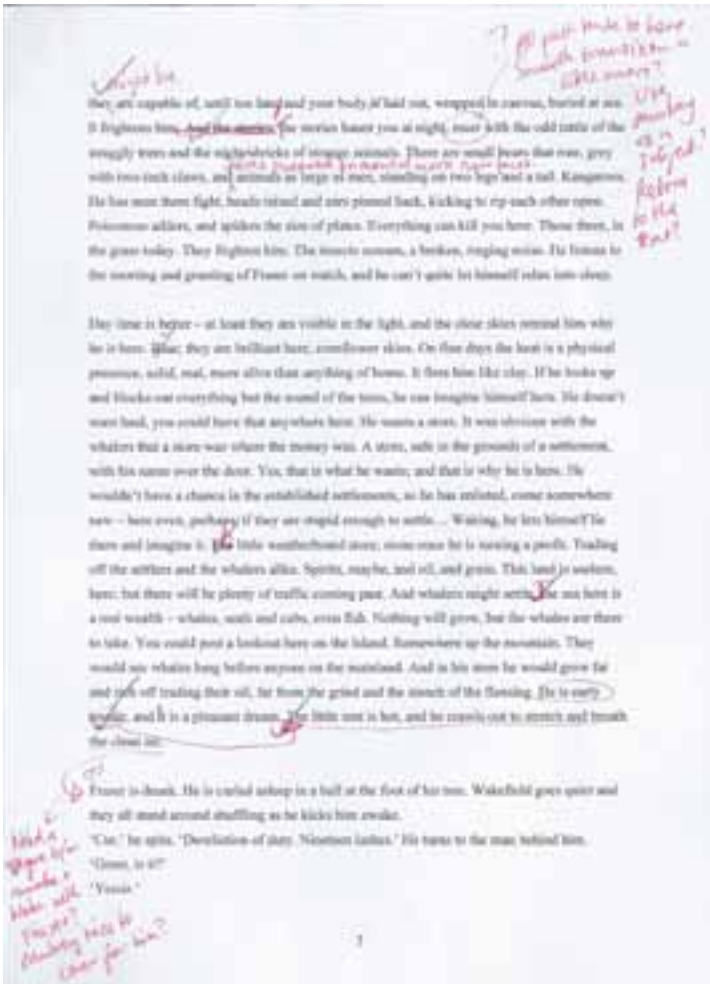
65. Margaret Henderson, Leigh Dale, 'The Terra of Recognition', *Journal of Australian Studies*, Special Issue: *Terra Incognita* 86 (2006), 1

66. Ibid., 1

67. Karskens, *The Colony*, 5

68. Ibid., 7

69. Wright, *Preoccupations*, xx



they are capable of, until too late and your body is laid out, wrapped in canvas, buried at sea. It frightens him. And the stories. The stories haunt you at night, rouse with the odd tattle of the struggly trees and the nightstricks of strange animals. There are small bears that roar, grey with two-inch claws, and animals as large as men, standing on two legs and a tail. Kangaroos. He has seen them fight, heads tilted and ears pinned back, kicking to rip each other open. Poisonous adders, and spiders the size of plates. Everything can kill you here. Those three, in the grass today. They frightens him. The insects scream, a broken, ringing noise. He listens to the snorting and grunting of Fraser on watch, and he can't quite let himself relax into sleep.

Day time is better – at least they are visible in the light, and the close skies remind him why he is here. Blue; they are brilliant here, cornflower skies. On fine days the heat is a physical pressure, solid, real, more alive than anything of home. It flees him like clay. If he looks up and blocks out everything but the sound of the trees, he can imagine himself here. He doesn't want land, you could have that anywhere here. He wants a store. It was obvious with the whalers that a store was where the money was. A store, safe in the grounds of a settlement, with his name over the door. Yes, that is what he wants; and that is why he is here. He wouldn't have a chance in the established settlements, so he has enlisted, come somewhere new – here even, perhaps, if they are stupid enough to settle... Waking, he lets himself lie there and imagine it. The little weatherboard store; some once he is turning a profit. Trading off the settlers and the whalers alike. Spirits, maybe, and oil, and grain. This land is useless, here; but there will be plenty of traffic coming past. And whalers might settle. The sea here is a real wealth – whales, seals and cubs, even fish. Nothing will grow, but the whales are there to take. You could post a lookout here on the island. Somewhere up the mountain. They would see whales long before anyone on the mainland. And in his store he would grow fat and rich off trading their oil, far from the grind and the stench of the flensing. He is early awake, and it is a pleasant dream. The little tent is hot, and he crawls out to stretch and breath the clean air.

Fraser is drunk. He is curled asleep in a ball at the foot of his tree. Wakefield goes quiet and they all stand around shuffling as he kicks him awake.

'Cut,' he spits. 'Desolation of duty. Nineteen lashes.' He turns to the man behind him.

'Grass, is it?'

'Yessis.'

1

which for Wright leads towards the opportunity "to make our loss [of European culture, European meaning] into a gain, to turn Australia into a reality, to become something new in the world"[70]. While Baynton's writing incorporates the same subjective positioning as the European-born settlers, it is predicated on a shift in subjective definition – Baynton was Australian-born, and configured herself as an Australian authoress, writing of Australian life[71]. It expresses a fraught relationship with landscape. But in putting forward narratives of struggle and hardship, and illuminating within them human qualities which suggest an "equality of a kind that transcends the necessary difference of circumstance"[72], such writing for Wright constitutes the essence of the 'Australian legend' and forms thus "the basis of such real Australianity as we have."[73] This critical tradition leads me to reading Baynton's stories in a specific way. 'The Dreamer' offers a particularly potent depiction of bush landscape[74]. A young woman, arriving at the station of her birth-place, must walk home alone through a storm to reach her mother's house. The landscape through which she travels is characterised by a violence and malignancy. As Kathleen Steele points out: "Her isolation is intense… The 'three bush miles' to her mother's house, which 'she knew every inch of the way', … become a walk of uncertain landmarks, ghosts and death: a walk in which the temporary nature of her presence in the bush, and her uneasy relationship with the land, are fully developed."[75] The Gothic fears which Turcotte underlines – "isolation, entrapment, fear of pursuit and fear of the unknown"[76] – are made more definitively uncanny by the warm and sentimental feelings the woman experiences towards the landscape which inspires them. Steele connects the dualism of these sensations with a colonial history of discomfort in the landscape and the "attempt to reclaim a personal history from, and secure a positive future within, the bounds of a bush-space that rejects her."[77]

It is possible to read the sensation of fear and alienation connected to the landscape as a physical representation of the woman's conflicted internal state[78]. Lucy Frost suggests that "the physical world is shaped by a dreamer's fears, not by the laws of nature…

70. Ibid., xix

71. Elizabeth Webby, 'Introduction' to *Bush Studies*, Barbara Baynton, Imprint Classics ed. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1993), 2-3

72. Wright, *Preoccupations*, xxi

73. Ibid., xxi

74. Barbara Baynton, *Bush Studies*, Imprint Classics ed. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1993), 45-53

75. Kathleen Steele, 'Fear and Loathing in the Australian Bush: Gothic Landscapes in *Bush Studies* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*', *Colloquy* (Dec, 2010): 40

76. Turcotte, 'Australian Gothic', 11

77. Steele, 'Fear and Loathing', 41

78. Leigh Dale, 'Rereading Barbara Baynton's *Bush Studies*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 53.4 (Winter 2011): 379-380

For the dreaming mind… such animation is the arena of psychological truth."[79] But as the woman's mental state changes, so too does my conceptualisation of the landscape. In the final scenes, contrary to all previous, it reflects her comfort and ease in the land, associated with a perception of home:

> Then a sweet dream-voice whispered "Little woman!"
>
> Soft, strong arms carried her on. Weakness aroused the melting idea that all had been a mistake, and she had been fighting with friends, The wind even crooned a lullaby. Above the angry waters her face rose untroubled.[80]

Interestingly, this reverses once again in the final paragraphs of Baynton's story: the woman becomes alienated on her arrival home as strangers inform her of her mother's death. The story is one of alternating sensations as the character moves between connectedness and alienation, familiarity and fear, and even her self-definition as daughter, mother and wife. Rather than producing a fluid representation of the space, though, this movement informs the central tension of the story as the protagonist attempts to reconcile these opposed positions. The landscape she interacts with takes on these competing elements, as her emotional ties to the land come to be represented in diametrically opposed versions of place.

Baynton's story was first published in London in 1902[81]. Baynton as an author is arguably participating in the same binary that Worgan's journal illustrated over a century earlier, portraying the landscape as offering hope and prosperity at the same time as it suggests alienation and fear. But 'A Dreamer' works to inscribe that narrative over the landscape as an inhabited place, one with an overt future in the woman's unborn child. As Steele describes, it represents "European attempts to force a history of their own upon [the] country"[82]. Henry Lawson's prose writing functions in a similar way in presenting a realist vision of rural landscape which attempts to define a national space. Lawson's early work was marked by a distinct Republicanism, shaped against the narratives of Imperial colonialism. Mandy Sayer makes a strong link between Lawson's prose works and national identity.[83] "By the 1890's," she argues, "the national character was beginning to be defined: we were a *country of underdogs* rejected from

79. Lucy Frost, 'Barbara Bayton: An Affinity with Pain', in *Who is She? Images of Women in Australian Fiction*, ed. Shirley Walker (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 60

80. Baynton, *Bush Studies*, 50-1

81. Barbara Baynton, *Bush Studies* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Company Ltd., 1902)

82. Steele, 'Fear and Loathing', 41

83. Mandy Sayer, 'The Drovers' Wives', *Southerly* 68:2 (Summer 2008): 193-4 (emphasis hers)

the motherland – but we were resourceful misfits and survivors. Lawson's yarns were considered 'real' Australian stories"[84]. Christopher Lee similarly positions Lawson as belonging to "a new nationalistic school of Australian writing."[85] Lawson early stories hold a vein of sentimentality that falls into this nationalistic posturing. 'His Father's Mate' offers a somewhat romantic and even quixotic picture of the gold diggings and the shining character of the men surviving there. But his first collection of short stories, *While the Billy Boils*, published almost a decade later in 1896, moves towards a darker, more deeply layered representation. Including stories such as 'The Union Buries Its Dead', 'The Bush Undertaker' and 'The Drover's Wife', the picture it paints is no longer sentimental, but sharp, dark, and often holding a bitterness bordering on nihilism, even while the caricatures presented paradoxically continue to lean on the idealistic colonial narratives he disputes.

His writing of this anthology followed a journey taken out into drought-stricken rural New South Wales. Lawson "walked the 230 kilometres from Bourke to Hungerford, experienced the full horror of the 'great grey plain' in drought, and eventually returned to Sydney to write."[86] Bruce Elder suggests that, "With sparse adjectives and honed-to-the-bone description, Lawson created a style and defined Australians: dryly laconic, passionately egalitarian, and deeply humane."[87] Lawson's writing was held as fervently realist. This is important – the picture Lawson was creating was in no way intended as an exaggerated hyper-reality, it was not fictional in the sense of fantasy. It was intended as a quasi-political statement about the realities of Australian life and the identity of the people. As Mandy Sayer suggests, even the tallest of his tales were intended as extensions of the truth – "Improbable stories, laden with irony, became a way of coping with the strangeness of the outback… critics interpreted Lawson's bush literature as true slices of life"[88]. Exaggeration and realism sat hand in hand for a purpose. Lee argues "Lawson believed that writers needed to abandon popular romantic representations of rural experience so that urban Australians and their political representatives could understand the needs of the bush."[89] This political aim still had roots in nationalism, in that "there was in Australia a long-running debate over the importance of realism in,

84. Ibid., 194

85. Christopher Lee, 'An Uncultured Rhymer and his Cultural Critics: Henry Lawson, Class Politics and Colonial Literature', *Victorian Poetry* 40:1 (2002): 89

86. Bruce Elder, 'In Lawson's Tracks', *The Griffith Review* 19 (Autumn 2008): 113

87. Ibid., 113

88. Sayer, 'Drovers' Wives', 194

89. Lee, 'Uncultured Rhymer', 92

and the unsuitability of romance to, the colony's literature."[90] For Lawson, as Turcotte suggests, "since Australia had no history to speak of… the basis for a truly important national literature could emerge only through the celebration – not an exoticising – of the local: dialect, experience, space."[91]

Lawson's realism signals a conscious struggle with representing landscape. Like Baynton's, his depictions of place suggest many of the uncanny sensations of the Gothic form. The elements of the Gothic found – fears, spectres and hauntings, darkness and squalor – are made more disturbing by their supposed reality. The uncanny is present simply in the fact that it should not be. What should be fiction, what seems heightened and exaggerated, is apparently real. Turcotte supports this notion: "though [Lawson's] *oeuvre* is not Gothic *per se*, those stories which contain the greatest sense of dread sketch the terrible loneliness and poverty of life in the Australian bush"[92]. This is exacerbated when reading from a modern perspective, in that the privations of Lawson's era seem especially dark; but reviews of Lawson's work suggest the sensation was not missed by his contemporaries. A review in Brisbane newspaper *The Worker* describes Lawson as writing "wonderfully realistic"[93] prose in which one can "feel the wild weirdness of the western plains."[94] The article goes on to quote from Lawson's short story 'The Drover's Wife' in illustration, choosing to take an excerpt from the wife's vigil as demonstrative of Lawson's 'sympathy' as an author and suggesting that "doubtless this is largely due to the fact that he knows what he writes about, that he is intimately acquainted with everything pertaining to the bush"[95]. Realism and horror sit hand in hand in a Gothicism that functions to define a national space.[96]

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90. Turcotte, 'Australian Gothic', 11

91. Ibid., 11

92. Turcotte, 'Australian Gothic', 15

93. 'Prometheus', 'Books for the People: Henry Lawson's Book', *The Worker* (26th Jan., 1895): 3, URL: http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/70863500

94. Ibid., 3

95. Ibid., 3

96. Christopher Lee makes a thorough survey of such reactions. He notes in A.G. Stephen's famous review in the *Bulletin* of Lawson's first poetry collection *In the Days When the World Was Wide*: "Lawson's shortcomings are obvious enough. His mental scope is narrow; he is comparatively uncultured; he iterates the same notes, and rarely improves his thoughts by elaboration; he wants harmony and variety of metre; his work is burdened with many weak lines and careless tags. But how graphic, how natural, how true, how strong! How he feels and makes his readers feel!" (cited in Christopher Lee, *City Bushman: Henry Lawson and the Australian Imagination* (Fremantle: Curtin University Books, 2004), 31). Similarly, academic John Le Gay Brereton wrote in Sydney University magazine *Hermes* "He may not have the galloping rush that marks the most spirited of Gordon's verses, nor the calm aesthetic meditation of Kendall's melancholy songs, but he has… an intense power of sympathy that forces him to realise the struggling efforts of human nature upwards, the various hopes and fears of his fellow men." (cited in Lee, 'Uncultured Rhymer', 93) What impressed even Lawson's critics, what is common to their remarks, is the notion of feeling; the idea that Lawson was privy to the 'hopes and fears' of the everyday Australian. Lawson represents, as such, a heightened image of the realities of life in (particularly rural) Australia.

Nobody can get inside my mind. You are just watching through the window of my words.
You may read it through – any way you want. I give you permission. Actually, I can't stop you, really

Strange tension in my thought, b/w Mary's insistence on her un-understandable existence; and Muecke's privileging of other existences, and our capacity to 'think our way into' them.

Lawson's writing in this vein is typified by the grim imagery of the sketch 'In a Dry Season':

> I notice that when a bushman puts crape round his hat he generally leaves it there till the hat wears out, or another friend dies. In the latter case, he buys a new piece of crape. This outward sign of bereavement usually has a jolly red face beneath it. Death is about the only cheerful thing in the bush.
>
> We crossed the Macquarie – a narrow, muddy gutter with a dog swimming across, and three goats interested.
>
> …Somebody said to me, "Yer wanter go out back, young man, if yer wanter see the country. Yer wanter get away from the line." I don't wanter; I've been there.
>
> …At 5.30 we saw a long line of camels moving out across the sunset. There's something snaky about camels. They remind me of turtles and goannas.
>
> Somebody said, "Here's Bourke."[97]

This sketch is a description of travel, an illustration that is almost journal-like of the sights seen in passing "all along the New South Wales western line from Bathurst on."[98] The narrator's observations are short, sharp and markedly transitory; the characters he draws are outlined and then abandoned. The movement is incessant, almost desperate – the narrator seems to describe each new sight as a marker of movement, a sort of calm and qualified fleeing-of-the-scene. The doom of the railway towns constantly threatens, hinted in the image of the 'third building' of such towns: "a small, oblong weather-board building – unpainted, and generally leaning in one of the eight possible directions, and perhaps with a twist in another …the shutters are up and the place empty."[99] And even this depressing picture is not the true 'out back' – it is on "the line"[100] and thus connected, in opposition to that suggested by the nameless somebody as the 'real' country. The spectre of an even more desperate situation is suggested in the narrator's

97. Henry Lawson, *Prose Works of Henry Lawson* (Sydney: Halstead Press, 1948), 50-51
98. Ibid., 49
99. Ibid., 49
100. Ibid., 51

determination not to go. Desolation is laced with the threat of greater desolation and the reader feels something akin to an uncanny sensation of vertigo: the hopelessness is unending, it simply goes on further and further into the distance. The threat is made more powerful in the narrative movement away, the narrator is running back towards civilisation. But while Bourke as a larger town does ultimately represent civilisation compared to the railway towns of his journey, it too is compromised. The sensation of "something snaky"[101] leaves the reader with an uneasy feeling that there is no rest or respite from the overwhelming presence of the country here or anywhere.

It is impossible not to feel the touch of Gothic fear that moves under the surface as relative to this experience of the landscape. The land is overwhelming and characterised by mixed imagery which heightens the uncanny. The image of the camels, for example, strung out in a line across the sunset, would be idyllic if not immediately undermined by the narrator's following comments. Such duality of description is repeated again and again in Lawson's stories. It appears in the irony of the final lines of 'The Bush Undertaker', where "the sun sank again on the grand Australian bush – the nurse and tutor of eccentric minds, the home of the weird."[102] It is present too in the description of the gully in 'The Selector's Daughter', as Mary runs half-mad to her death. Here, the bush landscape is beautiful and even homely when 'tamed' by masculine force – "Bob stood with his back to the fire, his pipe in his mouth, his hands clasped behind him …From among the trees came the pleasant jingle of hobble-chains, the slow tread of hoofs, and the 'crunch, crunch' at the grass, as the horses moved about and grazed, now in the moonlight, now in the soft shadows."[103] But it becomes eerie in the girl's appearance: "'She's mad, sure enough,' he thought to himself; 'I thought it was a ghost.'"[104] Almost all Lawson's women meet a fate of degradation or madness. Mary chooses suicide, jumping from a cliff. Female subjectivity, the stories suggest, cannot survive the land, and any sensation of comfort is made uncanny in that it is thus an illusion. Instead it is the land which takes on the feminine role, a monstrous bride to the masculine occupant who desires "to conquer and possess the land, to be at one with it."[105] Beauty in the landscape is undercut in this way. The landscape is safe and comfortable when tamed, but it is never *really* tamed. The potential for eeriness always exists, despite being temporarily subdued.

101. Ibid., 51
102. Ibid., 120
103. Ibid., 309
104. Ibid., 310
105. Sayer, 'Drovers' Wives', 195

Readings of Lawson along these lines are widespread[106]. As a field, critical engagement with Lawson's writing holds a trend towards analysis that confirms a reading of his landscapes as constructed under the influence of the same set range of emotional responses put forward by Turcotte and Wright – Lindsay Barrett describes him as mining a vein of "contradictory emotions and nationalist feeling in his depictions"[107]. In consistently pitting his characters in direct conflict with the landscape, Lawson taps into colonial narratives of struggle and domination. As in Baynton's 'A Dreamer', the landscape takes on an agency of its own. The threat is to subjectivity within the landscape, a concern Turcotte identifies at the roots of the Gothic more generally in Australian literature. "The gothic …frequently projects its protagonist into an alien place where the character is tried and tested… The colonist is uprooted, estranged, terrified, on alien territory, and pursued (if sometimes only in the imagination) by a daunting predator: which in Australia was alternatively perceived as the Bush, the convict past, bush rangers or the Aboriginal population."[108] The predators Turcotte underlines are perceived, constructed within and thus against the psyche. They are all moreover performatively 'other' to the colonial Australian. As such, it is not only his person that the colonialist must fear for, it is his sense of self that is threatened. David Punter and Elizabeth Bronfen also highlight the subsumption of subjectivity as a peculiarly Gothic form of violence. They use the theories of Jean Laplanche,

106. Sayer in particular expands on feminine and masculine subjectivities in Lawson's work. (Sayer, 'Drovers' Wives', 194-5). But many more make note of the duality of emotion in the description of landscape. Specifically, see: Colin Roderick, *Henry Lawson: A Life* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1999): "What, then, did he take from these months in and around Bourke? He certainly had no love for the country or the way of life of its people. ...His ideal country, that country of the mind in which there would not be less, but more, humanity than pride, had to have firm outlines… The seeds of this vision were sown in his mind during the starry nights of his tramps west of Bourke." (98-9). This emotional dualism, attributed to Lawson's life as well as his work, is picked up in Geoffrey Blainey's work: "In his disposition was a thick strand of melancholy which was not entirely out of place in this district [Mudgee] during a lean year. And yet he was usually optimistic about human nature; and his moving story of that heat-smitten Sunday and the congregation of what could almost be called 'poor whites', ends in spiritual triumph and a tearful state of deep happiness." (Geoffrey Blainey, 'A Genius to the Fingertips', in *Henry Lawson*, ed. Geoffrey Blainey (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2002), xvi) Similarly, Adrian Mitchell, discussing 'The Drover's Wife' among other stories, suggests that "This is a narrative landscape without connections, a country of disconnections and discontinuities. …[But the Drover's Wife] is, Lawson is careful to point out, an Australian… Lawson himself was an ardent nationalist, and in this brief detail he indicates the emotional attachment of his characters to their country." (Adrian Mitchell, *The Short Stories of Henry Lawson* (Melbourne: Sydney University Press/Oxford University Press Australia, 1995), 8-10) See also: Lindsay Barrett, 'The Painters of Modern Life: Stephen Crane, Edward Garnett and Henry Lawson', *Journal for the Association of the Study of Australian Literature*, Special Issue: *Australian Literature in a Global World* (2009): 1-9, URL: http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/article/view/868/1716; Elder, 'Lawson's Tracks'; Lee, 'Uncultured Rhymer'; Lee, 'Land of Wine and Honey'; José Maria Tejedor, 'Henry Lawson's Nihilism in 'The Union Buries Its Dead'', *Atlantis* 27.2 (Dec. 2005):87-100.

107. Barrett, 'Painters of Modern Life', 3

108. Turcotte, 'Kangaroo Gargoyles', 355

particularly his *Essays on Otherness*[109]. "Laplanche argues from the position that the discovery of the decentredness of the human subject is itself a type of narcissistic wound, involving the traumatic recognition that man is not 'the measure of all things', not the central reference point from which all the world can be mapped out."[110] This notion configures the loss of subjectivity as a trauma, something to fear. Lawson's stories repeatedly construct fear in these terms – selfhood is threatened by the force of the landscape.

In this light, the drama of Lawson's writing can be read not only as self against landscape, but as the subject against the construction of that which positions him/her *as* a subject. Laplanche associates this sensation of decentredness with recognition of the presence of the subconscious as "the irreducibly other thing in us, an unassimilated foreign body that marks the limits of our attempts at self-coherence."[111] The Gothic for Punter and Bronfen is marked by dual pressures – the desire for self-centredness in the world, and the recuperative task of self-assimilation, both of which are made impossible by an admission of the 'subconscious as other'. This admission, however, is most normally repressed, as is the realisation of our own decentredness; hence a sensation of unease and the uncanny centred *within* the self when it is forced upon us as fact. Ultimately, for Punter and Bronfen, when we acknowledge the subconscious – as one does in the Gothic – we embark upon the struggle of "a recuperative quest"[112]:

> …In other words, the uncanny, the disorder, the alien-ness that the Gothic appears to express might be better seen as evidence of what the genre is seeking to control; but again, that movement to control is always doomed to failure, which might suggest that in reading we might be wanting to look for a reduplicated uncanny; the uncanny that is lodged in the text by the pressure towards coherence, and the further, deeper uncanny that results from the inevitable fracturing of the edifice of compromise.
>
> …Violence here, the actual violence that has been culturally tied to the contemporary Gothic, would be inseparable from the violation of the subject.[113]

109. Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1998)

110. David Punter, Elizabeth Bronfen, 'Gothic: Violence, Trauma and the Ethical', in *Essays and Studies: The Gothic* (2001), 7, URL: http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A90534153&source=gale&srcprod=AONE&userGroupName=monash&version=1.0

111. Ibid., 8

112. Ibid., 8

113. Ibid., 8, 16

This anxiety simmering in Lawson's writing is not specific to one character or another but is centred on Australian subjectivity in general. Such uncertainties within the subjective position can be read as the underside to the nationalism for which Lawson was so noted.

My own reading of Lawson has joined these uneasy constructions of subjectivity in relation to landscape. In doing so, I am entering into a tradition which proscribes a certain relation to landscape as central within its narratology. The narratives put forward by Lawson and Baynton are arguably still ongoing within the Australian conceptualisation of nation. Christopher Lee suggests that the "Lawson legend remains an important part of the national imagery"[114]. Remnants and echoes of his characterisations can arguably still be felt in contemporary literature and social discourse. The ideal of the 'Aussie battler', for example, invoked everywhere from popular fiction to political speech to sports commentary, can be seen as rising from colonial narratives such as Lawson's, idealising the type of white Australian man who proudly succeeded in the fight against a new climate and hostile environment. Such characterisations position the subject directly in opposition to landscape as a space. This tradition contributes to the anxiety I feel in attempting to describe connection to landscape through poetic language. Punter and Bronfen describe the Gothic as entertaining a "ghost that never dies"[115], a ghost that terrifies us and ultimately resides within: "wherever one digs one will come across the bones of the dead… [and] instead of such excavations providing a new historical security, a new sense of order and origin, they will merely produce an 'overhang', an increasingly unstable superstructure as the foundations are progressively exposed."[116] The Gothic is thus a "cleared and overwritten site"[117] containing a continual cycle of repression. Self-theorisation in this context becomes a "sequence of attempts to form an identity… from shards of conflicting evidence"[118]. The tensions we see within Lawson's work are by-product to the continual struggle of forming a cohesive identity, as a nation and as an individual. This same struggle, they suggest, exists within repression as a function of postcolonial writing[119].

114. Christopher Lee, 'Settling in the Land of Wine and Honey: Cultural Tourism, Local History and Some Australian Legends', *Journal of Australian Studies* 86 (2006): 48, URL: http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=171050083363441

115. Punter, Bronfen, 'Gothic', 15

116. Ibid., 16

117. Ibid., 12

118. Ibid., 12

119. Ibid., 12

Julie Montgarret, *Bridget (Edwards) Montgarret's Sketchbook*, 'Navigating Tensions: Fraught Fictions and Fragile Facts', (2012) p.69; photo credit: Chris Orchard.
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Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs illustrate the notion that such tensions are ongoing within contemporary white Australian thought, part of a relation to the landscape which is troubled by continuing conflicts of unsettled emotions and realities. In *Uncanny Australia*, they articulate a peculiarly postcolonial paradox of place. They underline "a modern Australian condition"[120] where:

> …what is 'ours' may also be 'theirs', and vice versa; where difference and 'reconciliation' coexist uneasily. In an uncanny Australia, one's place is always already another's place and the issue of possession is never complete, never entirely settled …one can never be completely in possession of place, one is always (dis)possessed, in the sense that neither possession nor dispossession is a fully realisable category.[121]

The phrase 'uncanny Australia' is notable – the country itself is the uncanny site, narratives of national place-making are implicated. Similarly, Alison Rudd argues for a 'Postcolonial Gothic'[122]. She delineates a specific sub-genre of contemporary works which re-invoke Gothic tropes in commenting on modern postcolonial situations. Rudd makes the point that the non-human power of the Gothic – a power situated within the landscape, with the capacity to overwhelm the civilised human – upset fixed European conceptualisations of the relation between self and landscape and hence represents tensions and anxieties from within contemporary thought as national identity continues to evolve. Applied by Rudd, the uncanny emerges as a disruption to a familiar or accepted premise as well as a familiar place, object or situation[123]. Unease emerges in binaries of thought which have broken down and come into an impossible opposition. Rudd emphasises the "reduplicated uncanny"[124] that Punter and Bronfen suggest, the uncanny which functions on multiple, equally disturbing levels. Rudd suggests that the opposition accepted in colonial thought of 'civilised' Europeans as human to 'uncivilised' Indigenous people as non- or sub-human still paradoxically exists within the white Australian psyche, albeit with the contemporary awareness of its

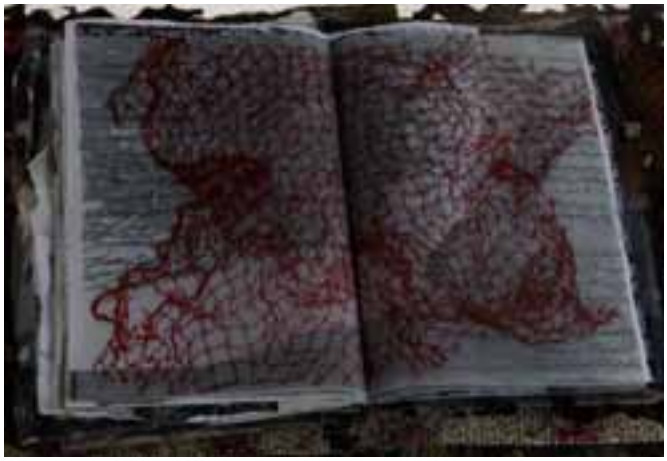
120. Ken Gelder, Jane Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Carlton: University of Melbourne Press, 1998), 137

121. Ibid., 137

122. Alison Rudd, *Postcolonial Gothic Fictions: From the Carribean, Canada, Australia and New Zealand* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010); Rudd explores the manner in which the Gothic as a genre arose as the dark underside to Enlightenment thinking, part of the shift from the 'knowing subject' to the 'understanding subject'. This shift corresponded with "a conceptualisation of the human [which] was dependent on the structuring of humanity into a series of binary oppositions in which the subjectivity of the civilised human was reliant upon the alterity of the uncivilised non-human and contributed toward the construction of racial hierarchies that came to underpin the colonial project." (8)

123. Ibid., 9

124. Punter, Bronfen, 'Gothic', 9



Julie Montgarret, *Bridget (Edwards) Montgarret's Sketchbook*, 'Navigating Tensions: Fraught Fictions and Fragile Facts', (2012) p.70; photo credit: Chris Orchard.
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dysfunction[125]. It exists as a hidden binary, a broken binary, but a binary nonetheless: as a major tenant to *colonial* thought, we are aware of it in *postcolonial* thought. The uncanny emerges in that this thought is wrong, archaic and yet somehow continuing. It is reduplicated in that it cannot possibly be both broken and still function.

This indicates just how Ross Gibson can describe Australia as a nation "under-endowed with myths of 'belonging'"[126]. National narratives have carried anxiety and unease from colonial thought into contemporary representations of landscape. But concurrently, the sensation of belonging *has* developed. Even while such belonging is made unstable by arguments like Rudd's, there is a danger in critical discourses which underrate the power of such sensations. Discussions predicated on the impossibility of white Australian 'belonging', such as that put forward by Shelia Collingwood-Whittick[127], limit the relationship which can be subjectively experienced with the landscape. They are performative in the sense that they construct the very relation they are describing. As Germaine Greer states so decisively, "As an Australian of European descent, I can claim no identification with the place I was born."[128] This declaration is preface to Collingwood-Whittick's *The Pain of Unbelonging: Alienation and Identity in Australasian Literature*. White Australians are seen as utterly disconnected from the landscape and uncomfortable within it. This unease is explained variously as subconscious and conscious, illustrated in attempts to either withdraw from or reconfigure that which confronts us. David Tacey suggests that "Australians can huddle in enormous coastal cities and pretend the vast landscape is not there. Or we can impose human images and values upon the land ...a temporary construct of the political imagination."[129] No other option of relation is allowed. According to Collingwood-Whittick, "more than two hundred years after the process of colonisation began in Australasia, the pain of unbelonging remains an endemic existential pathology in the contemporary (post)colonial nation…"[130] In Greer's statement, the impossibility of "identification"[131] suggests a sensation of alienation and disconnection that overrides any of the connection present in her self-definition as socio-politically Australian.

125. Rudd, 'Postcolonial Gothic, 8-9
126. Gibson, *South of the West*, 64
127. Collingwood-Whittick, *Pain of Unbelonging*, xiii-xliii; see Chapter One, n.14.
128. Germaine Greer, 'Preface' to *The Pain of Unbelonging: Alienation and Identity in Australian Literature*, ed. Sheila Collingwood-Whittick (*Cross/Cultures 91*) (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), x
129. David Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 1995), 7
130. Collingwood-Whittick, *Pain of Unbelonging*, xl
131. Greer, 'Preface', x

Julie Montgarret, *Bridget (Edwards) Montgarret's Sketchbook*, 'Navigating Tensions: Fraught Fictions and Fragile Facts', (2012) p.71; photo credit: Chris Orchard.
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"White Australians" she says, "are tourists in their own birthplace, dashing from funny-shaped rock to funny-shaped rock, with only the vaguest idea of what might lie between."[132]

As a term, 'unbelonging' restricts white Australians to a negative relation with the land. In centralising one specific engagement with space, such discourse ultimately refuses to acknowledge that such sensations are experienced on a personal and individual level. There is potential for notions of possession introduced with colonisation to represent the only avenue of white Australian connection. This offers a strangled representation of contemporary white Australian connection as something insincere, based within possession and capitalist gain. But perhaps the greater danger to this discourse of white Australian "unbelonging"[133] is that it has the potential to encourage in comparison a stereotype of Indigenous connection to the land which represents a simplification, universalising an exotic other. This not only degrades but trivialises the complexity of Indigenous spirituality. David Tacey underlines what he describes as the growing contemporary "mythic apperception of Aboriginal people"[134] as "messengers of the sacred"[135], which he argues to be symptomatic of the desire for a sensation of unity with a national landscape that has always been positioned as the other. The projection of this desire onto the figure of Indigenous peoples is frightening on two levels: the first being that it actively constructs its opposing, desired other and thus reconfirms the original anxieties of colonial opposition; and the second that the desire can potentially be acted out as a consumption or appropriation, which is in effect a re-enactment of colonial wrongs.

Similar desires can be read in(to) literature. David Crouch, writing of 'haunting' history and the Australian ghost story, describes the "bifurcated tension in the postcolonial condition"[136] as adding a second layer to Australian ghost stories, seeing them "rehearse crucial anxieties within the Australian psyche, to tap a sense of 'haunted country'…traces of historical traumas, fears which are often exposed in expressions of apprehensive (un)settlement."[137] Crouch expresses the delineation between past and present as breaking down, leaving the unique anxiety that paradoxically we are in

132. Ibid., xi

133. Collingwood-Whittick, *Pain of Unbeloning*, xl

134. Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred*, 129

135. Ibid., 129

136. David Crouch, 'National Hauntings: The Architecture of Australian Ghost Stories', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, Special Issue: *Spectres, Screens, Shadows, Mirrors* (2007): 94

137. Ibid., 94

two places at once. My own approach to the work of David Malouf moves in a similar fashion. The ghost story 'Blacksoil Country' from the collection *Dream Stuff* uses a settler narrative to comment on postcolonial attitudes to both the land and its original inhabitants. The opening lines situate the reader in direct relation to the landscape, reconfirming the colonial *terra nullius* myth and through it simultaneously infusing unease: "This is blacksoil country. Open, empty, crowded with ghosts"[138]. They are outsiders. The boy narrator, Jordan, moves to the selection in 'blacksoil' country and develops an affinity for the land. "I loved it. This is my sort of country, I thought, the minute I first laid eyes on it. And the more I explored out into it, the more I felt it was made for me and just set there, waiting."[139] The irony of this declaration given Jordan's 'strangeness' is made overt in his father's murder of an Aboriginal messenger in the mistake of his approach as a threat. The willingness to read danger into the landscape betokens a deeper unease, making them "the most strangers [sic] of all"[140]. It also introduces the concept of law into the narrative. It "removed us from protection. He had put us outside the rules, which all along, though he didn't see it that way, had been their [the aboriginals'] rules."[141] Jordan is himself murdered and his death at an unnamed hand feels in one sense like the restoration of a natural balance. But as his killer is unidentified, the reader is forced to question who exactly did kill him – an Aboriginal, or his father? If the latter, symbolically or literally? In the subsequent man-hunt, any natural balance is subsumed by white 'justice', and Indigenous law rendered invisible in appropriation: "that there might be rules and laws hidden away in what was just makeshift savagery… would have seemed ridiculous to him."[142] Aboriginal subjectivity is utterly overlooked by the white family. And yet all the while the connection the boy feels to the land is present and emphasised as the approach to a natural (even 'aboriginal') state. He is out exploring it and passing knowledge of it on to his younger brother when he is killed. In his death, connection is not nullified but heightened; he becomes, even colours, the land he loves. "And me all that while lying quiet in the heart of the country, slowly sinking into the ancientness of it, making it mine, grain by grain blending my white grains with its many black ones."[143] His love for the landscape has by the final paragraphs taken on a sort of inevitability of desire; white and black are reconstructed in an opposition which is based on a white craving to both be and, in a sense, *consume* the other.

138. Ibid., 146
139. Ibid., 153
140. Ibid., 161
141. Ibid., 161
142. Ibid., 160
143. Ibid., 164

This reading practice returns once more to the sensations of the Gothic, in that connection and alienation are intertwined in relation to landscape. Adair, the policeman in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, offer the experience of a similar mix of emotion:

> He felt lightfooted, clear-headed, abounding in health, aware with a new keenness as he looked about and stepped into it of the beauty of the scene. Under the effect of the moonlight, or perhaps it had only been because of his tiredness, it had struck him last night bleak and denuded, wind-swept high plains country. Now it had a kind of grandeur. All its bunched foliage fluttered and blazed out with a sap whose stickiness he could feel without even having to touch it. Birds were chittering and peeping. Wrens. Little flocks of them dipped low over the ground, then wheeled, rose in bunches. They were intent on the serious business, he knew, of feeding, but it had the look of play.[144]

Malouf offers here a complex manifestation of opposing sensations. Adair is both capable of appreciating the beauty and life of the scene, but not without awareness of his previous impressions of it as 'bleak', 'denuded'. His appreciation is born simultaneously from pre-conceived notion (note the colonial associations of health and freshness which run through the imagery) and genuine connection. Further, what he 'knows' of the place and its functions – the birds as feeding – and what he 'sees' are two different things; he is connected to the superficial rather than a deep understanding of the place and its narratives. His reactions thus might be taken as a metaphor for contemporary white Australians faced with constructing landscape. Malouf does not configure Adair's connection to what he sees as impossible, or even improbable, but he draws into it subtle reminders of the discourses that shape Adair's understanding of the land around him.

Read in reference to the critical tradition I have been discussing, both these texts point towards the influence of Gothic sensibilities and the continuation of colonial and European values within the white Australian psyche. Even while the possibility of a white Australian sense of connection is left open rather than denied outright, the relation allowed for the white Australian with the landscape is limited. The story 'Jacko's Reach'[145] is replete with eerie, fear-laden images and concurrently an overwhelming

144. David Malouf, *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (London: Vintage, 1997), 194
145. David Malouf, *Dream Stuff* (London: Vintage), 118-126

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Helga Ramsey-Kurz on Malouf

"he uses literary language ~~[illegible]~~ to articulate his appreciation for that which lies outside the declared domain of literary and in doing so confronts the literary mind with its own limitations."

"[None of Malouf's characters] are, in spite of their subaltern status, neither inaudible nor inarticulate."

sense of belonging to the land. Set in the modern era, it tells of a "last pocket of scrub"[146] in a suburban environment, earmarked for development. The narrator asserts the manner in which the essence of the place can never be destroyed, in which it forms a part of memory, identity and even psyche – both his and the local community's. But this sense of connection with the land is undercut constantly by anecdotes and images of the darker side of the space, the stories of brutal bashings, suicide, murder and the disappearance of a young girl. These opposing sensations come to a head in Malouf's final paragraph, leaving the reader with a vivid impression: "If there is one wild acre somewhere, we will make that the place. If they take it away we will preserve it in our head. If there is no such place we will invent it. That's the way we are."[147] Despite Gothic undertones of suppression and darkness, these final lines ring out with the power of a sworn oath, and the connotations of loyalty and fidelity to the land are not lost. Alienation sits side-by-side with connection, and the two grow together to form a confronting image of white Australian identity as deeply and eerily conflicted.

This notion is emphasised in the narrator's own experience of the 'Reach' as a space is associated with the intimacy of personal development. Childhood games such as Cops and Robbers (again a motif with a lurking sense of violence) lead into sexual awakening and the formation of self. "Jacko's became a code-word for something as secret as what you had in your pants: which was familiar and close, yet forbidden, and put you in touch with all other mysteries"[148]. All of these images are tied ultimately to that deeper sense of connection that the narrator derives from the space. He describes an affinity to place which goes beyond the physical space, expanding outward to the community, the nation, and at a more complex level to the wider natural world. "Just crossing it… gave you some idea, at the back of your knees, of the three hundred million square miles and of Burke and Wills"[149]. But 'Jacko's' is set as part of the narrator's identity, even to the point of becoming metaphoric for the subconscious. The very first description we are given highlights "the wilderness that by fits and starts, in patches here and great swathes of darkness there, still lies like a shadow over even the most settled land, a pocket of the dark unmanageable …a point of re-entry to memories they have no more use for – to unruly and unsettling dreams"[150]. And this notion is picked up again at the close: "So it will be gone and it won't be. Like everything else. Under. Where its darkness will never quite be dispelled."[151] The movement here from 'over' to 'under', connected through the

146. Ibid., 118
147. Ibid., 126
148. Ibid., 121
149. Ibid., 121
150. Ibid., 118-9
151. Ibid., 126

St. Stephen's — Portland

THIS WEEK IN ST. STEPHEN'S

Sunday, 7th July: 8.00 a.m. — Fr. Martin, Fr. Martin; 10.00 a.m. — Fr. Martin, Fr. Martin, Fr. Martin, J. Mulvey

Sunday, 14th July: Fr. Fairclough, Fr. Fairclough; Fr. Stockdale, Fr. Sherwood, Fr. Miller

MORNING PRAYER: Daily at 9.00 a.m.

EVENING PRAYER: Daily at 5.00 p.m.

HOLY COMMUNION:

Tuesday 10.00 a.m. Lady Chapel
Thursday 10.00 a.m. Lady Chapel
Friday 7.30 p.m. Lady Chapel

THANK OFFERINGS FOR THE WORK OF GOD'S HOLY CHURCH:

WEEK ENDING 10th June:

Fr. Martin's Gift £ 130.00
Donations 27.00
Stockbank £ 215.00
Lions £ 117.00
Ecclesiastes £ 179.00
£1158.00

VACANCY REGISTER: The register of Organists at St. Stephen's Church is always welcoming new enrolment of Mrs. Smiles.

Applications for the position can be left with Fr. Martin or the Wardens.

DATES: The next Vestry meeting will be held on THURSDAY, 7th JULY at 7.30 p.m. in the Vestries.

READERS: 11th July J. Lewis/ E. Ross; 18th July P. Martin; 25th July R. Sherwood

FLOWERS: 11th July Carol Hunt; 18th July Rachel Reynolds; 25th July Ann Mulvey

MEN'S GUILD: The next monthly meeting of the Mothers' Union will be held on THURSDAY, 7th JULY. This will be the Annual Meeting to which all members please make a special to attend.

reference to darkness, is suggestive of a shift in the narrator's psyche; the space is no longer a superficial referent of identity but repressed within the subconscious and thus of far deeper influence. Where 'Blacksoil Country' is an expansive metaphor for the paradoxical sensations of the postcolonial nation, 'Jacko's Reach' offers a snapshot of the power of landscape within the individual psyche.

Connection to the landscape is in this way described in terms of belonging, but is continually undercut with anxiety and alienation. The tensions Malouf picks up on in 'Jacko's Reach' are conflated to the indefinable darkness at the centre of the place. As a manifestation of the narrator's subconscious, they undermine any affirmation of spiritual connection. This is made particularly complex in 'Blacksoil Country' with allusions to the evicted Aboriginal occupants of the space. Jordan is aligned with and comes to a deeper understanding of the Aboriginal characters present in the landscape, but makes manifest his own way of knowing and connecting to the land. Malouf suggests the complexity of the ongoing network of narratives active within Australian landscapes. Jordan's 'exploring' is an act of construction, he builds a landscape in creating knowledge of it. But he moves past stereotypical representations of race in doing so, and opens up the possibility of a connection to the landscape existing within future generations. The irony is that Malouf's suggestion of the father's pending revenge returns us as readers to the history of colonial violence as similarly powerful, similarly ongoing. While Malouf appears to move past the closed relation of 'unbelonging', this reading sees him participates in discourses and narratives which are arguably self-perpetuating in the same way. This is the point at which I arrive at the desire for new possibilities in practice for both reading and writing landscape.

Lyn McCredden voices a similar desire in several of her works[152]. Her article 'Haunted Identities and the Possible Futures of 'Aust. Lit.'' discusses the nature of white Australian identity as "riven, needing to be understood always in relation to what [it is] not"[153], illustrating a reading akin to the practice I have employed here in reference to Malouf. But she does so in order to understand and face the larger question of "what future-oriented discourses might be possible in this haunted context"[154]. The emphasis in her article here is not on what these theories of white Australian anxiety suggest in relation to literature but how we might move forward through them,

152. See: McCredden, '(Un)Belonging', 40; Lyn McCredden, 'Counter-Poetics', *Australian Literary Studies* 26.2 (2011); Lyn McCredden, 'Haunted Identities and the Possible Futures of "Aust. Lit."', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, Special Issue: *Spectres, Screens, Shadows, Mirrors* (2007)

153. McCredden, 'Haunted Identites', 13

154. Ibid., 13

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH in THE LOWER GLENELG.
The Diocese of Ballarat.
St George's, St James, St John's, St Philips, St Stephen's

God Focused—Jesus Modelled—Spirit led.

Locum Fr. Peter Mather 55217 938 Deacon: Br Alan Ford: PH: 5523 4226

Parish Mobile Phone: 0458 399 679 Email: ststephens@westnet.com.au
Mission Prayer: Heavenly Father, as Disciples of your son Jesus Christ, You have given us the Gospel of love, as our mission to the world. Inspire Bishop Garry and all faithful people in our Diocese to a renewed vision of what it means to be your Church. Strengthened by your Spirit, may we fulfill all that you demand of us through Jesus Christ our Lord . Amen

" Easter Day "

"This Sunday: 31-03-2013."
Portland: 9.30am.
Heywood: 11.15am
Tyrendarra 11.15am

"2nd Sunday of Easter."

"Next Sunday: 7-04-2013."
Portland: 9.30am.
Heywood: 11.15am.
Tyrendarra 11.15 am.

Hymns: Open: 280. Gradual: 277. Offert: 289. Comm: 451. Recess: 303.

Opening Collect: God of glory, fill your Church with the power that flows from Christ's resurrection, that, in the midst of this sinful world it may signal the beginning of a renewed humanity, raised to new life with Christ, who lives and reigns with you and The Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Intercessions: ***The Anglican Communion:*** Jesus is risen today. Alleluia!
The National Church: All theological colleges and theological faculties in Australian universities.
Diocese of Ballarat. Trinity College: Andrew McGowan
Alpo Range: Balob Teachers College
Community: *All volunteers*
Remembering Those Whose Years Mind Occurs This Coming Week.
John Keble, Dietrich, Frederick Cook, Richard Lakey, Cyril Buttomley, William Wooley
R.I.P ... *Rest Eternal Grant Unto Them O Lord and Let Light Perpetual Shine Upon Them.*

outlining "developments in Australian literary critical debate that seek to negotiate and think through this rivenness, not to cure or placate it, but to discourse it towards the future. 'Future' here is meant to imply, amongst many things, individual and communal identity, new ontological and social possibilities."[155] McCredden highlights such potential in poetic discourse. In '(Un)Belonging in Australia: Poetry and Nation', she asks "whether poetry can make anything happen; whether it can … *re-imagine and re-write* the nation in ways that offer vital alternatives"[156]. Pointing to Bill Ashcroft's notion of 'transnation', she sees in poetry the potentiality for "an entrancing, transfiguring and hopeful maker of the new."[157]

McCredden is not alone in emphasising the potential of poetics within national narratives. Emily Potter worries fiercely about the "non-dynamic, non-discursive and seeming irrevocable designs"[158] at play in modern Australian landscapes. Such designs, she suggests, are "one-dimensional"[159] and suppressive; they position the landscape's "original inhabitants chronologically… outside the future"[160] and construct an "inheritance [which] is self-fulfilling"[161]. Potter develops her theory of the potential of poetics as opening new discursive avenues in Australian studies from this background. Veronica Brady likewise explores what she terms as the 'ontopoetics' of Judith Wright as potentially offering a form of "wisdom... not so much a matter of intellectual understanding as an existential position."[162] This wisdom is a subjective position, a state of "being open to what may still be revealed and probably cannot be put into words."[163] Brady positions Wright's poetry as answering to the conundrum she raises in *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* of white Australians coming to terms with sensations of alienation and "making this "our spiritual home""[164]. This reading of Wright's work is based in a poetics in which the subject is involved ontologically in creation of the world, and thus in a subjective "openness to uncertainty … implicated in the flux of the world."[165] Brady represents a desire to reconsider current reading practices, rejecting the inflexibility of their implied subject: "The literal and instrumental language of our present culture is intent on *building*, on dominating and

155. Ibid., 17
156. McCredden, '(Un)Belonging', 42; see also McCredden, 'Counter-Poetics', 106-108
157. Ibid., 55
158. Potter, 'Ethics of Rural Place-Making', 21
159. Ibid., 21
160. Ibid., 21
161. Ibid., 21
162. Veronica Brady, 'The Ontopoetics of Judith Wright: Illumination for a Dark Time?', *PAN: Philosophy, Activism, Nature* 6 (2009): 61
163. Ibid., 61
164. Wright, *Preoccupations*, xvii; cited in Brady, 'Ontopoetics', 64
165. Brady, 'Ontopoetics', 61

exploiting the natural world for our own ends, rather than learning to *dwell* in it…"[166] European discourses of colonisation, she suggests, set self against nature, rather than implicating self "as part of the life of creation as a whole"[167], and thus are ultimately doomed to stalemate.

Wright herself used her poetry (or poetic language) to work through some of the anxieties she felt with regards to land and country. As she suggested in an interview with John Thompson, ""My real interest, I think, is the question of man in nature – man as part of nature.""[168] Brady, John Hawke[169] and Shirley Walker[170] all agree that engagement with landscape was a central and recurring theme for her work. Her writing in *The Moving Image* is suggestive of her struggle in her relationship to the land she grew up in[171]. The very title of this collection suggests a certain uneasiness, but also a recognition of fluidity in this relationship. John Hawke suggests the manner in which Wright's work can conceivably be seen as her symbolist interaction with the world – a process of both questioning and bringing into meaning that which she has examined critically. He cites her interest in Christopher Brennan as symptomatic. "Wright sees a complex interrelationship between the poet and a vital nature in Brennan's work – one which correlates with a similar impulse in her own: 'Nature,' she writes, 'is not by any means to be thought of as wholly passive…'"[172] This notion suggests that this vitality in nature is an essential part of Wright's answer to the tensions she felt in the 'double aspect' she outlined in *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*. Discussing 'At Cooloolah', Ashcroft, Devlin-Glass and McCredden confirm the "guilt and fear"[173] which marks Wright's writing. But they suggest that "it is towards a living, ethical, sacred and breathing world that Wright's poem turns, finally, in order to understand and to act."[174] Applied to landscape writing, an appreciation of vitality could be part of a creative response to the poetics Potter calls for. This notion could answer in two ways – in the fluidity of conceptualisation entailed, and in the vital creative act by which Wright moved forwards. This gives me hope for my own writing.

166. Ibid., 62

167. Ibid., 63

168. Hawke, 'The Moving Image', 160

169. Ibid., 160-178

170. Shirley Walker, *Flame and Shadow: A Study of Judith Wright's Poetry* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1991)

171. Cf. 'South of My Days', in Wright, *The Moving Image*, 28-9

172. Judith Wright, *Because I Was Invited* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975); cited in Hawke, 'The Moving Image', 162

173. Ashcroft, Devlin-Glass, McCredden, *Intimate Horizons*, 162; see 'Introduction', n.4

174. Ibid., 162-163

A critical repositioning through Souriau's philosophy, based around the concept of instauration as a vital force configuring creative practice, could potentially lead away from the practice of reading landscape through structures of opposition. If we take McCredden's, Brady's and Potter's use of the term, we can understand poetic expression as offering a dynamic and discursive state of relation which implicates the subject in its performativity. Poetic discourse in this sense meets Souriau's concept of instauration as an ongoing process opening the subject to relations with other modes. Muecke applies Vitalist philosophy linked to Souriau's in discussing landscape as a site of exchange. He enters into this 'poetic' understanding of subjectivity – "an awareness," as Brady puts it, "that the self is not apart from the world, that it cannot stand back from the world and know the world as a finished totality, but is rather always embedded in the world, always implicated in the flux of the world."[175] Muecke experiments with new understandings of the subject in relation to that which is other. He directly re-envisages landscape as holding a potential for transformation: "place changes according to who comes to occupy it and what they do there; the people change as a consequence of the place"[176]. This leads to the possibility of a "new 'logic' for the relations between things which is not based, for example, on linear cause and effect, or on dialectical conflict."[177] Muecke's landscape is still perspectival. It picks up on the notion of place as "uttered into being and maintained by narrative and image"[178] as Ashcroft, Devlin-Glass and McCredden describe. But it goes beyond this as well, in that the utterance of place is continual, it cannot exist in stasis.

Landscape is defined in such thinking as a site of "circularity and movement, folds and returns"[179]. We are made open to the "multiplicity of layers folding over each other in a heterotopic and variable space."[180] Muecke's landscapes are replete with conjoining and contrasting points of conscious relation: they are scapes of the "multiply-real"[181]. This is, one suspects, partly a consequence his knowledge of Souriau's philosophy of the multimodal, but also represents an awareness of Indigenous narratives as powerful in their invocation space. Karl-Erik Sveilby and Tex Skuthorpe's exploration of Indigenous narrative describes it as holding power in an ontological (or perhaps ontopoetical) sense. Narratives continue the creational act of the Ancestors' shaping of the land, impregnating it with meaning through stories.

175. Brady, 'Ontopoetics', 61
176. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 78
177. Ibid., 81
178. Ashcroft, Devlin-Glass, McCredden, *Intimate Horizons*, 324
179. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 81
180. Ibid., 92
181. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 45

They document the Nhunggabarra as believing that "every rock and every land form, every plant and every animal had its own consciousness, just as people did. Everything was 'alive'."[182] Muecke makes his clear awareness of such thought in *Ancient and Modern*[183] and *Textual Spaces*[184]. *No Road*, too, is in part testament to this, albeit in a slightly different way: stories and knowledge are constantly and intimately tied to place, seen as "different aspects of the same phenomenon"[185], in what might be understood as an adaptation of Indigenous forms of thought[186]. But in 'Can You Argue with the Honeysuckle?'[187], Muecke brings an awareness of this multiplicity of narrative within space to the fore and allows it to co-exist with European/white Australian ways of knowing place.

Muecke's use of Indigenous thought as a philosophical framework is not something I am always comfortable with. There is a potential for such application to be – or to invite a reading – which is presumptive or appropriative in recontextualising a tradition across cultures. In review of *Ancient and Modern*, Ken Gelder highlights a concern that Muecke "mostly carves out a space for Aboriginal people that …is almost entirely cultural – we might even say entirely *literary* – in its conception."[188] Gelder thus reads Muecke as proscribing a certain Aboriginality which is restrictive – from his perspective, the book's "account of Aboriginal vitalism is itself a romantic one."[189] But even while Muecke's use of Indigenous thought might make me uneasy, the fluid and dynamic notion of relation between self and space that he picks up can help address the tensions I have been documenting in my reading practices[190]. Muecke underlines a mode of being which is sustained not in the dialectic but in poetic connection. The 'Honeysuckle' place "does not produce an argument about

182. Karl-Erik Sveilby, Tex Skuthorpe, *Treading Lightly: The Hidden Wisdom of the World's Oldest People* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2006), 4

183. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 59-60, 67-68

184. Muecke, *Textual Spaces*, 45-47

185. Alan Robins, 'A Spiral Bridge', *TEXT* 14 (October 2010): n.p.

186. Muecke, *No Road*, 69-70

187. Muecke, 'Can You Argue', 34-42

188. Ken Gelder, 'Reading Stephen Muecke's *Ancient and Modern: Time, Culture and Indigenous Philosophy*', *Australian Humanities Review* 36 (July 2005): n.p., URL: http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-July-2005/Gelder.html

189. Gelder, 'Reading Stephen Muecke', n.p.; Muecke responds to this review, taking up many of the points Gelder raises. See: Stephen Muecke, 'A Response to Ken Gelder's review "Reading Stephen Muecke's *Ancient and Modern: Time, Culture and Indigenous Philosophy*"', *Australian Humanities Review* 36 (July 2005): n.p., URL: http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-July-2005/mueckeresponse.html

190. This is something Gibson recognises as well. His conceptualisation of Eora ways of thinking in *26 Views of the Starburst World* similarly highlights a "*relational* intelligence" (102, emphasis his), "this big Eora idea: knowledge distributed and remembered in an ever-altering network of relationships amongst beings and things that are always ready to combine in spirit, matter, space and time." (102)

something"[191] but flows incessantly and produces as well as sustains life. In this, he approaches the anthropological insistence on landscape as fluid from a different direction. He emphasises a construction of landscape which is non-linear: an "atemporal 'space'"[192] wherein existence is based in a poetics of doing. "Ultinteraka is working away continually… *Instead of being*, he does. *In the place of his existence*, an event is always happening."[193] For Muecke, this way of seeing the world "works because of a connectivity that releases a possibility."[194] He is taking up, in his words, the manner in which "Aboriginal cosmologies incorporate a non-human-being-centred view of the world, which also tends to be an ecological one. 'Man' is just one living being among plants, animals, even the inanimate environment… whose encounters create surprising relationships full of potentiality."[195] Landscape in this sense is highly sensitive, mutable and reactive: "not closed in on itself (as if self-possessed)"[196], but expansive, capable of extension. This is a familiar sensation, as Muecke points out. Landscapes as mundane as the family home can be read through this same openness of connection: "At my place, no doubt at yours too, everything is an assemblage of heterogeneous beings and things …characterised by a constantly changing set of alliances among these beings and things, and these relations are charged with energy."[197] No instance of connection is outlawed, made 'invalid', just as no tension need exclude the possibility of an opposing connection – as a site of being and doing, Muecke's landscapes constantly hold the potential to expand, move outwards, make new alliances and change old ones.

Muecke points to Souriau's thought as undermining fixed positionings of subject and object, but it can also be brought to bear on the fluid landscapes Muecke explores. In 'Can You Argue with the Honeysuckle?', Muecke points to a configuration of landscape which is constantly in action, predicated on a poetics of *faire*. I use the French word here in that its double meaning (doing-making) is essential to understanding this creation of place as an act. The landscape Muecke describes is in a constant, overt process of being instaured. *Nous faisons*, we are constantly 'doing-making' landscape. Instauration as an ongoing process gives rise to multiple modes of existence. These modes coexist, so that any one object or subject can and must be inhabiting (or rather

191. Muecke, 'Can You Argue', 41
192. Ibid., 38
193. Ibid., 40
194. Muecke, 'Landscape of Variability', 288
195. Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 70
196. Muecke, 'Can You Argue', 42
197. Stephen Muecke, 'Public Thinking, Public Feeling: Research Tools for Creative Writing', *TEXT* 14 (April, 2010), n.p.

living through) several modes of existence at once. "The modes of existence… must be understood, Souriau has taught us, as 'elements', in the manner of the arbitrary range of coloured soils from which primitive paintings are composed"[198]. Each instauration of landscape can be seen in this way as a site of multimodalism. These are ideas I have played with in my own writing, as I shall describe further in the next chapter. They also contextualise the tension of the reading practices I have been participating in. Readings of landscape which depend on a single, fixed line of relation between subject and object, constructed in opposition, become anxious in that the multiple other modes present in the instauration of the landscape must be suppressed or denied. Furthermore, the two extremes allowed within the structure are forced into a relationship where each plays off against the other. And yet the concept that landscape has a unified reality in existence is emphasised, even leant upon as a source of national identity. These practices deny a landscape the multiplicity that marks its entry into being. By its very nature, it becomes a site of conflict.

Muecke's desire for an experimental writing emerges from such tensions. He calls it "'*object-oriented writing*'"[199], not so much 'writing as other' but writing in an awareness of relation – writing from within a multimodal network. This is part of what Muecke is doing in 'Can You Argue with the Honeysuckle?', in that he is exploring European and Indigenous Australian discourses or constructions of place and configuring a notion of landscape as based upon a multimodal relationship between the two. To begin with, the difference he highlights between the two discourses is "not about temporal priority …it seems rather to be about practices of responsibility and ethics of engagement." [200] Muecke follows Bruno Latour[201] to endorse an '*amodernity*'[202] or atemporality which emphasises agency in space as definitive. "The crucial or non-negotiable identity [is centred] in action… only in movement."[203] Hence his poetics of doing – his focus "leads us away from causes passing from subject to object to the idea of a subject working away at something."[204] Difference in discourse is outlined as two modes of understanding place. But it is outlined only to be overridden. The two modes both can be understood through a poetics of movement. This is perhaps the sense of his title: a

198. Stengers, Latour, 'La Sphinx', 65; « Les modes d'existence … doivent être compris, nous a appris Souriau, comme des « éléments », à la manière de la gamme arbitraire des terres colorées avec laquelle faisait œuvre le peinture primitif… »

199. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 47

200. Muecke, 'Can You Argue', 37

201. See: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993)

202. Muecke, 'Can You Argue', 37

203. Ibid., 38

204. Ibid., 39

question as to whether white Australians have the language or capacity in meaning to argue with the Indigenous construction of space and vice versa. These two modes, two 'arguments', come into a multimodal relation through this emphasis on *doing*. We are led towards answering the question his title proposes – *can't argue with that!* – making it rhetorical and suggesting you cannot deny the honeysuckle its meaning or agency in creating place.

What Muecke refers to as "honeysuckle law"[205] is an acknowledgement of the power of this redefinition. The implication of constant movement once again approaches Souriau's instauration. The honeysuckle place is alive because it is continuously being instaured, sustained as Muecke says by the mutable poetic connections inherent to that movement. This instauration has the capacity to embrace multiple modes in constant relation. The honeysuckle place is described across six modes, "sustained… by words, by song melody and rhythm, by the impact of dancing feet, by the flow of human blood in the ceremonies that pass responsibility for the place to the next generation."[206] It has the capacity too for making new relations, "a life force, going out and increasing, and not closed in on itself."[207] Ian Chambers finds a similar poetics in landscape within Carter's work: "Despite its obvious, blunt materiality, it is a territory that migrates … relayed in multiple languages that invest and renew the ground again and again."[208] He takes up, Chambers suggests, a "persistent poetics of always becoming."[209] We are returned to one of Souriau's key tenets – everything exists via a process of instauration – and suddenly it is not far-fetched to imagine this life force as instaurative. This is the understanding of place I have come to. This is landscape: "an unstoppable flood"[210], a powerful site of multimodal connection, mutable, fluid, with its own existence in its movement, its poetics of doing, the constantly shifting relations it opens to and forms.

An understanding of Souriau's work is, I feel, highly complementary to these movements in the conceptualisation of landscape in Australian literature. As I suggested earlier in Chapter One, Souriau by no means offers a philosophy for direct application to this context. Neither does his thought constitute a 'solution' to the issues I have highlighted, if indeed such a thing is possible. But his philosophy does offer us the chance to move further in this task of understanding landscape in a more flexible way, overcoming the structures of opposition of the tradition I have been reading

205. Muecke, 'Can You Argue', 41
206. Muecke, 'Can You Argue', 41
207. Ibid., 41-2
208. Chambers, 'Stones in Language', 60
209. Ibid., 64
210. Ibid., 42

in, structures which have appeared again and again in critical studies of Australian literature as a genre. In emphasising relation and multimodality, he can lead us towards a concept of landscape that is not fixed but dependant on constantly shifting relations through the continual process of instauration. More importantly, from my perspective, he offers me the possibility of moving towards a new expression of my relationship to the landscape in which I grew up. He invokes a 'way' of thinking, and as such allows me to feel out a 'way' of writing. The logical question from this point is, therefore, how are we to move from an awareness of this possibility to an application of it in reading and writing? This is the work of my next chapter. In following the shadow as a single mode, not only in the unique reality and existence that it represents, but as above in its *relation* to the multimodal network from which it proceeds, the last chapter of this exegesis represents an experiment in utilising Souriau's thought. It explores instauration as applied to writing and the self, and offers a reading of Tim Winton's *The Turning* to highlight a practice formed in contrast to that applied to David Malouf in this chapter. This is an attempt to move in the direction of Muecke's experimental writing, to take up the challenge put forward by Brady, Potter and McCredden to "*intervene*"[211] through the poetic mode, and above all to explore the poetic engagement with landscape present in my own work.

211. McCredden, 'Counter-Poetics', 97

Judy Schrever, ‘Shadows and Tracks’, 2010, collograph print.
Photo credit: Steve Murray, ©Judy Schrever

When I was little, a child, I had a trick of blowing air into my shadow, to make myself invisible. It would dissolve, slowly, unravel as a million gossamer threads – tiny, silken strands of darkness, which would float free into the world when they were all gone, so was I. The central aim of this thesis is, in some strange way, to understand the threads that make up an 'I'. It asks how selfhood functions, how identity is created; particularly in the context of an isolated, rural Australian setting. To that

Shadows on the Page: Selfhood in Reading and Writing

When I was a child, I had a trick of blowing air into my shadow to make myself invisible. It would dissolve, slowly unravelling as a million gossamer threads, tiny silken strands of darkness which would float free into the world. When they were all gone, so was I. The aim of this thesis, in some strange way, is to understand the threads of which I am made up. I have thought a lot about lines – lines of connection and their failings, lines written on the page. But I have not yet openly approached the question with which I began: how might I frame the connection I feel to the land within a poetic language? This is not only a process of writing landscape, it is a process of writing self *into* landscape. The landscape I am attempting to reach towards is not hypothetical but something of great meaning and also a physical reality for me. And I myself exist in relation to that space – I respond to it. My concept of self is made fluid under the effect (or perhaps affect) of the shifting nature of my reaction to it. This question of how to write connection is therefore also one of how to write self, or rather how the self is written inadvertently in writing landscape. This effort is exegetical. How can I write my own connection to landscape? How am I writing myself in doing so?

Shadows and the shadow mode – I distinguish here between being and existence – offer interesting possibilities with regards to the notion of self in writing. Stretching away from us, they shift and blur, yet they also define and represent. They suggest a mutability in relation which runs counter to the fixed relationship of self to space inherent within the constructions of opposition that I highlighted in the previous chapter. My subjective position, and the manner in which I read through it directly towards the objective, must be challenged. This chapter represents the attempt to find a new way of writing landscape through the application of Souriau's philosophical thought and a study of the shadow as a mode. The first half will be concerned with tracing my own involvement in my reading and writing practice, in the hope of better understanding the manner in which I make relations and connections through writing. The second half of the chapter will carry this through to the question of landscape and more specifically that of expressing connection. As I have already suggested, new practices in reading are being called for within Australian critical studies, new possibilities desired. This chapter explores a practice of reading and writing derived from Souriau's philosophy. This is not something that can necessarily 'succeed' definitively. But it represents a personal

endeavour: an attempt to read and write differently. I am considering my position before the text in a self-examination of what writing can and does offer me, how I am 'made up' in relation. In doing so, I am returning to Rosenblatt's definition of reading in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*. Emphasising the temporal nature of the act, Rosenblatt highlights its fluidity as a practice. She points as well to the agency of the text within the relationship: in the 'evocation' or reading of a text "the aim is to clarify … the work-as-evoked, to sense its movement and pace and structure, to register the personalities encountered or empathised with, to hold onto the special quality and texture of the experience."[1] This notion of the 'work-as-evoked' within a temporally-located and specific experience points to a mutable balance between the text and the reader or writer. These features of reading as an act can come to be denied within constructions of texts which are based on the subject-object relationship.

Souriau responds directly in his thought to the notion that we tend to place emphasis predominantly on the subjective position. He points to a tradition in philosophy wherein even if multiple forms of existence are recognised, they are reduced into a single genre. There are "philosophers who, far from positing a unification of being, recognise a multitude of beings as substantially real. …And yet, despite their apparent richness and complexity, the innumerable assembly of these beings can in the end bear witness for only one genre of existence"[2]. This is something Muecke picks up on: we "don't even need the fingers of one hand to be able to count the number of possible ways of 'being in the world'."[3] The appeal of the subject-object dichotomy perhaps lies in this simplicity – it reduces existence to something manageable, easily defined. But in doing so, we are limiting the possibility of understanding or creating multiple relations across modes. "The human reality too [like that of other modes] will be made richer in the implication of other genres of existence."[4] Souriau encourages us to place our subjective existence in relation to all the other existences around us, to begin to understand all the modes of existence as equal and autonomous and simultaneously to relinquish our power to define other existences. To do this, Souriau moves towards the multimodal, entering into it in the attempt to engage with other modes. This presents the possibility

1. Rosenblatt, *Reader, Text, Poem*, 134 ; see 'Introduction', n.7

2. Souriau, *Les modes*, 80; « Il est… des philosophes qui, loin de poser l'unicité de l'être, reconnaissent une multitude d'êtres réellement substantiels. …Et, malgré son apparente richesse et sa complexité, l'assemblée innombrable de ces êtres ne témoigne enfin que pour un seul genre d'existence, dont on peut pré senter comme type unique un seul atome. » See also: Latour, 'Reflections', 314. Latour discusses this passage of Souriau's work (translated slightly differently) as illustrating Souriau's distrust of "multiplicity for its own sake" (314), reconfirming his central position as one which would pay each mode respect. To fail to do so "would run the risk of coming back to the same thing: the undifferentiated." (314)

3. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 45

4. Souriau, *Les modes*, 83; « …la réalité humaine aussi deviendra bien riche, s'il apparaît qu'elle implique plusieurs genres d'existence… »

of decentralising the subjective position. It represents simultaneously an instauration, a movement into being as new relations are formed. What Souriau is deconstructing is not the subjective mode itself, but the manner in which the subjective is predominantly allowed relation only to the objective.

Reading and writing can be seen equally as processes of instauration, holding this potential of decentralising the subject. Both activities offer an ongoing process of creation. Barthes points to reading as "the true place of the writing"[5], signalling the element of creation as analogous. Muecke quotes Tony Bennet's suggestion that "so far as literary texts are concerned, their production is never completed. They are endlessly *re-produced*, endlessly remade"[6]. Muecke uses Bennet's work to contextualise his understanding of literature as existing in instauration[7]. Rosenblatt describes a reading as something that "comes into being in the live circuit set up between the reader and the 'text'"[8]. This is an idea that can be applied to writing just as easily – indeed, Rosenblatt considers both practices simultaneously in 'The Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing'[9]. Transactional theory signifies writing as a continued "event in time"[10]: "as we are generating the work of art, we are reacting to it."[11] Both reader and writer thus participate in a form of "literary creativity"[12] – "there is an element of creativity even in the simplest reading act"[13]. The difference in the two acts is the unique position occupied before the text as it is perceived[14]. But from either perspective, the transactional "paradigm requires a break with entrenched habits of thinking. The old

5. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 147. Another demonstration of this notion might be found in the manner in which creative writing is coming to be understood as valid research output. The Australian Research Council's (ARC) inclusion of creative writing as a discipline for consideration under the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) standards in 2009 demonstrates the possibility of including a practice of writing within a critical domain more normally keyed towards reading as an act. Eva Sallis suggests that this may be due to the idea that: "…the critical and the creative are so often united in the one person… Whatever it is that is happening right now between the academy and writers, between criticism and creativity, is new and startling. They are not one and the same, but they are inseparable." See: Eva Sallis, 'Research Fiction', *TEXT* 3.2 (1999): n.p.

6. Bennet, Tony (1979) *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Methuen), 136; in Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 50-51

7. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 52

8. Rosenblatt, *Reader, Text, Poem*, 14

9. Lousie M. Rosenblatt, 'The Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing', in *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, 5th ed., eds. Robert B. Ruddell, Norman J. Unrau, 1363-1398 (Danvers: International Reading Association, 2004)

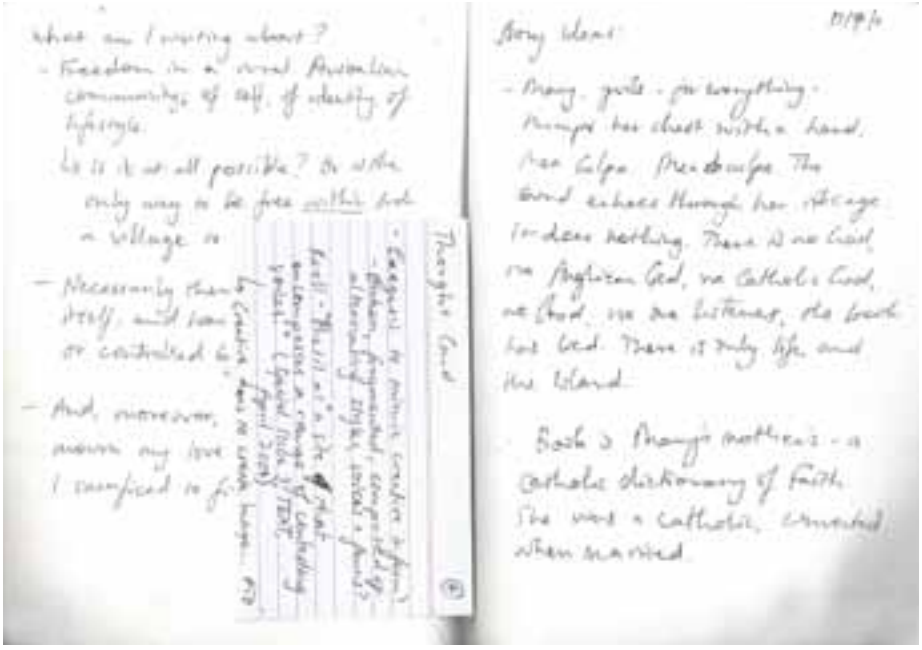
10. Ibid., 1379

11. Rosenblatt, *Reader, Text, Poem*, 48

12. Ibid., 50

13. Ibid., 51

14. Ibid., 50



What am I writing about?
- Freedom in a rural Australian community, of self, of identity, of lifestyle.
Is it at all possible? Or is the only way to be free within such a village is
- Necessarily then itself, and how or controlled by
- And, moreover, mourn my love I sacrificed to fi

Thought Card

Story Ideas

- Many, girls - for everything - thumps her chest with a hand. Mea Culpa. Mea culpa. The sound echoes through her village. Indeed nothing. There is no God, no Anglican God, no Catholic God, no God, no the listener, the book has bed. There is only life and the Island.

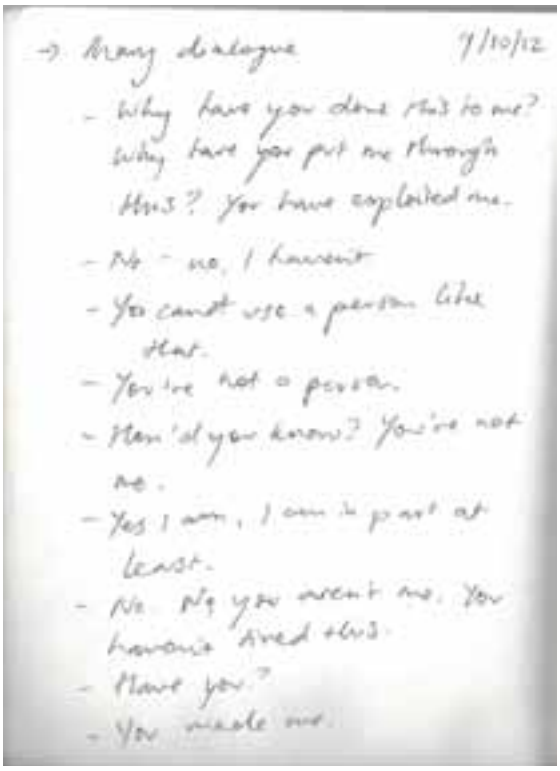
Book is Mary's mother's - a Catholic dictionary of faith. She was a Catholic, converted when married.

stimulus-response, subject-object, individual-social dualisms give way to recognition of transactional relationships."[15] These transactions are ongoing and dynamic, to be thought of "in terms of reverberations, rapid oscillations, blendings and mutual conditionings."[16] Rosenblatt thus describes a relationship similar to that of the pot and the potter Souriau uses to demonstrate instauration in *Les modes*. Things are "*animated* in their multiple connections"[17]. From either perspective, writing and reading become dynamic sites of multimodal potentiality.

The involvement of the subject in either practice – my own subjective involvement – must be reconfigured by this conceptualisation. I might ask how I *participate* in the instaurative act. The question of expressing connection to landscape through writing with which I began makes one crucial assumption. It is predicated on the notion that I myself am implicated in the writing I produce, beyond the overt involvement of physically typing or scrawling words on a page. This feels natural, both in general and as a theoretical position. "The observer is part of the observation"[18], language as a system incorporates the subject. I am also integral to the existence of the text I produce: as Souriau says, and he specifically includes 'les poèmes' in this category, "there are certain things… which do not possess in their own right access to existence. Man must devote himself to give them life."[19] This devotion assumes a mental or emotional involvement within the text as well. It is only through implication in the existence of the text that the writing can offer a vehicle for expression. But it is easy to forget in this assumption that I am thus actively 'writing' myself in producing text, that "language is always internalised by a human being transacting with a particular environment."[20] I have unashamedly used the symbol 'I' throughout this thesis, referring to myself in relation to the text. It implies authorship. But from my position it implies selfhood as well – I am an independent being *because* I can say 'I'. The instauration of a writing act thus impacts upon me as subject-participant. In writing, in expressing myself and what I feel, I am reconfirming my own conception of self.

Writing the 'I' symbol is thus a self-instauration. I am reconfirming self in rendering its symbol meaningful within a structure which can exist externally to me. This suggestion of being through language is what Latour recognises as essential to

15. Rosenblatt, 'Transactional Theory', 1364-5
16. Ibid., 1368
17. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 48
18. Rosenblatt, 'Transactional Theory', 1364
19. Souriau, *Les modes*, 110; « Il est certaines choses – poèmes, symphonies ou patries – qui ne possèdent pas par elles-mêmes l'accès à l'existence. Il faut que l'homme se dévoue pour qu'elles soient. »
20. Rosenblatt, 'Transactional Theory', 1366



→ Many dialogue 7/10/12

- Why have you done this to me? Why have you put me through this? You have exploited me.
- No - no, I haven't
- You cannot use a person like that.
- You're not a person.
- How'd you know? You're not me.
- Yes I am, I am in part at least.
- No. No you aren't me. You haven't lived this.
- Have you?
- You made me.

Souriau's instauration and describes as his "most important innovation"[21]. The text functions almost as my shadow in this way. It offers me a self-reference, both in the act of writing and in the solidification of the 'I' symbol as a physical manifestation – a moment of 'actualisation'[22]. It brings into being a specificity as well, in that the 'I' which is manifested pertains to me alone, it takes up the integrity of my unique existence. It holds social positions, including race and gender: as Irigaray says, "I am a woman, I write with who I am."[23] Reconfirming self through the 'I' symbol is not general of selfhood but relates to a specific subjective existence. Linguistics recognises the pronoun as a site of subjectivity. Emile Benveniste specifically notes the "fall into language"[24] as constructively conjoining "*langue* and *parole*"[25]. This is potentially empowering[26], but it is not necessarily without its dangers. Robert Young approaches the pronoun in relation to its function as a 'third space' within language, a site of both creative potentiality and anxiety[27]. "Until the moment of speech, the pronoun remains empty: a void (*vide*), into which the speaker or addressee find themselves dropping into but an emptiness which at the same time enables the articulation and assertion of their own subjectivity."[28] Young follows Benveniste in tracing the effects of this articulation, highlighting both the splitting off of each subjective construction in language and conversely also the creative potential of the space offered in the void. As anxious as the space might be, Young concludes, there is a power which emerges from it, partly in the actualisation it offers: "turning wound and fracture [that splitting of subjectivity] into the emergence of being, anxieties of enunciatory ambivalence into inventive productivity"[29].

There are various arguments which support this articulation of self in language as part of an ongoing ontological construction. Douglas Hofstadter, for example, picks

21. Latour, 'Reflections' 309

22. Young, 'Void of Misgiving', 83; see 'A Note on the *Shadow/Text*', n.2. Robert Young examines in detail the nature of this actualisation and Emile Benveniste's response. He highlights the pronoun for Benveniste as a linguistic anomaly, neither word nor concept, and with a shifting designation.

23. Luce Irigaray, *Je, Te, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, Routledge Classic ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 47

24. Young, 'Void of Misgiving', 82

25. Ibid., 82

26. Robert Young, in: Catherine Noske, 'A Postcolonial Aesthetic? An Interview with Robert Young', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (Nov. 2013): 4, URL: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17449855.2013.851107#.Uo7zL53ZW70 Young in interview discussed in detail the strength of creative intervention in the world, both in regards to political struggle in postcolonial societies and in regards to the construction of self through subjectivity.

27. Young, 'Void of Misgiving', 82

28. Ibid., 82-3

29. Ibid., 94

up on Mind/Brain theory[30] to describe selfhood as a "kind of mirage"[31]. The self is a neurological symbol: "We are powerfully driven to create a term that summarises the presumed unity, internal coherence, and temporal stability of all the hopes and beliefs and desires that are found inside our own cranium – and that term, as we all learn very early on, is 'I' …this high abstraction behind the scenes comes to feel like the maximally real entity in the universe."[32] This symbol is developed through what he describes as a 'Strange Loop', "a majestic, wraparound self-referential structure"[33]. Writing participates in this loop of representation and thus within our mutable neurological construction of self. Hofstadter's work holds ties to narrative theories of selfhood and thus emerges from a wide field of study. This field supports my approach to writing self. The work of Paul Ricoeur[34] and Jerome Bruner[35], that of Daniel Dennett[36], and more recently Dan McAdams[37] and Kate McLean[38] could be taken as central to the discipline. Such works incorporate narrative in a variety of ways as key to the development of a conscious self.

The main tenet of narrative selfhood is the conceptualisation of the self as abstract. A wide range of approaches are discussed. Bruner and Dennett differ significantly in outlook: Dennett like Hofstadter tends towards Mind/Brain theory, whereas Bruner enters the field from a sociological position. Dennett's 'Multiple Drafts' theory suggests that the multiple instances of sensory perception function as narrative 'drafts' which in their totality constitute the experience of consciousness. The self is "an abstract

30. For a detailed and precise account of the critical development of Mind/Brain theory, see: Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011), 91-3

31. Douglas Hofstadter, *I am a Strange Loop* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), xii

32. Ibid., 179

33. Ibid., xiii

34. See: Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984); Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005)

35. See: Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Jerome Bruner, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Inquiry* 18.1 (Autumn 1991): 1-21; Jerome Bruner, 'The "remembered" self', in *The Remembering Self: Construction and accuracy in the self-narrative*, ed. Ulrich Neisser, Robyn Fivush, 41-54 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

36. See: Daniel Dennett, Douglas Hofstadter, eds., *The Mind's I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul* (Toronto: Basic Books, 1982); Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991); Daniel Dennett, 'The Self as a Centre of Narrative Gravity', in *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, eds. F. Kessel, P. Cole, D. Johnson, 103-116 (Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1992)

37. See: Dan McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997); Dan McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, Amia Lieblich, eds., *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative* (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2006)

38. See: Kate C. McLean, Monisha Pasupathi, Jennifer L. Pals, 'Selves Creating Stories Creating Selves: A Process Model of Self-Development', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 11.3 (Aug. 2007): 262-278

object, a theorist's fiction"[39] born of sensory response, but it is not consolidated. Narrative is a metaphor for understanding how this abstractum might be developed over time, rather than suggesting a cohesive stream-of-consciousness. Dennett's self has no 'final' or 'published' draft[40]: "The natural but naïve question to ask is: Where does it all come together? The answer is: Nowhere."[41] Bruner, conversely, considers the narrative properties of autobiography. He approaches narrative as a cultural form which influences our conceptualisation both of self and of reality: "cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems, mediate thought and place their stamp on our representations of reality."[42] Narrative is no longer a metaphor but an active force in the development of self, the form in which we comprehend and contain our experiential relation with the world. His version of the narrative self therefore knits together more cohesively, even while various narratological properties offer flexibility and the potential for complex movements[43]. Subsequently, the versions of selfhood to emerge from these applications differ significantly: Dennett's is neurological, Bruner's a social phenomenon.

From this field, two comparatively minor works particularly appeal to me: Owen Flanagan's *Self Expressions* and an article from Lisa Och and Eleanor Capps. They take up an understanding of narrative as fluid in reference to a construction of self. They also move outside a purely subjective viewpoint – narrative involves a process of 'feedback', interactions with other modes of existence. The appeal of these works is the manner in which each incorporates a version of narrative constructed of contrasting acts – writing and reading, telling and retelling – rather than continuing to lean on the concept of a single 'story-line' as an overreaching metaphor for the consciousness which emerges. This to me answers more directly to Rosenblatt's notion of narrative meaning as emerging in an event. Flanagan's theory of 'Multiplex Identity'[44] highlights the different 'social selves' every person gives out as united by a "self-represented identity"[45] which like Dennett (albeit in a different context) he suggests forms "the centre of narrative gravity"[46] for a conscious being. For Flanagan, the narrative does not depend on the

39. Dennett, 'Self as a Centre', 104
40. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 113
41. Ibid., 135
42. Bruner, 'Narrative Construction', 3
43. Ibid., 6-20; Bruner lists ten properties taken from narratology that can be applied within narrative theories of world-making and self-construction.
44. Owen Flanagan, *Self Expressions: Mind, Morals and the Meaning of Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 65
45. Ibid., 70
46. Ibid., 70; Dennett 'Self as a Centre', 104

resolution of these selves, but functions in integration[47]. "Multiplex selves in complex environments display different parts of their narrative to different audiences… to me, in the first person, my different selves are part of an integrated and unified narrative that contains, as proper part, the different selves that I sometimes display in isolation"[48]. In highlighting the multiplicity of narrative positions taken up by a single self, Flanagan challenges the notion of narrative as dependent on a singular trajectory.

Ochs and Capps pick up on similar ideas in their article 'Narrating the Self'[49]. They refer to 'personal narrative' as a socio-cultural structure, suggesting its empirical power in that it is "born out of experience and gives shape to experience."[50] They are "partial representations and evocations of the world"[51]. Listing various examples of personal narrative across "a range of genres from story to novel, diaries and letters to memoirs, gossip to legal testimony, boast to eulogy… etching to palimpsest, and mime to dance"[52], they suggest such narrative emerges through communication and thus exists within the social domain. Each act of personal narrative "provides narrators and listener/readers with an opportunity for fragmented self-understanding."[53] But each act is simultaneously, as Rosenblatt similarly underlines, "situated in time and space"[54] and limited to the apprehension of specific or fragmented experiences. Personal narrative has the potential to "generate a *multiplicity* of partial selves"[55] which have the capacity to function in relation, and which "may construe new narrative readings, which in turn alter one's sense of being-in-the-world."[56] The concept of self to emerge from both these applications of narrative is one which is cohesive as a position to be taken up sociologically, but which incorporates a sense of fluidity in its capacity to construct reality. These theories combined imply that the act of creative writing is also an exploration of selfhood, specifying an understanding of narrative as potentially comprised of multiple acts. Writing physically doubles over the representations of self, allowing the writer to both occupy and examine self simultaneously. In this sense it is inevitably and always a site of self-instauration.

47. Dan McAdams makes a similar approach, in discussing what he refers to as 'personal myth'. The loaded qualities of this phrase, however, make his work of less appeal to me than Flanagan's, even while they both explore similar questions of 'meaning' in life. See: McAdams, *The Stories We Live By*, 11-12
48. Flanagan, *Self Expressions*, 70-71
49. Elinor Ochs, Lisa Capps, 'Narrating the Self', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996):19-43
50. Ibid., 20
51. Ibid., 21
52. Ibid., 19
53. Ibid., 22
54. Ibid., 21-2
55. Ibid., 22
56. Ibid., 23

When I write narrative I am simultaneously contributing to my own instauration. It is, to return to Fruteau de Laclos' terminology, an instaurative 'co-birth'[57]. Similarities in the instauration of the text and the self are demonstrated powerfully in Nicola Boyd's adaptation of Hofstadter's theory to create a methodology for creative writing, one which incorporates a process of recognition and reading as a basis for re-writing[58]. Boyd's instinctive association between the manner in which Hofstadter represents the self as emerging neurologically and her own comprehension of the sensations of writing speaks to the potentiality for the instaurative processes present to converge within a single event. The fluidity of reading which Rosenblatt stresses in presenting the 'poem' as an event, temporally located, meets with the descriptions of narrative selfhood put forward by Flanagan and Och and Capps[59]. Selfhood, as Och and Capps make clear, is an ongoing process. It is broadly understood to be an unfolding reflective awareness of 'being-in-the-world'[60]. Rosenblatt's version of the text relies on an ongoing instauration as its existence passes from writing to reading, one continued with each re-reading. The event of reading here equates to the temporally-located experience of being. Self and text mirror each other in their continued instauration. As I produce text, the text produces me – or rather, as I contribute to the text's existence, it contributes to mine. This is a state of subjective participation.

It is plausible to understand the text as a shadow. This is to suggest a possibility for the manner in which the relationship between self and text might be characterised, not to diminish the existential status of the text as autonomous. The shadow mimics and thus supports the physical existence of the self. It depends (abaleitically, Souriau might say) on the body for its emergence. But it holds a reality and a power of its own. It contributes to our existence in exerting this power. It is connected directly to the actual body – both literally and cognitively. We smile in *Peter Pan*, for example, to watch Peter desperately attempt to re-attach his shadow[61], but we understand the significance of the moment and the attendant anxiety: "If he thought at all…it was

57. Fruteau de Laclos, 'Les voies', 934; « Pas plus que le sujet n'est présupposé, l'objet n'est prédonné. L'un et l'autre co-naissent de l'acte même. »

58. Nicola Boyd, 'A Creative Writing Research Methodology: New Directions, Strange Loops and Tornados', in *Margins and Mainstreams: Refereed Conference Papers of the 14th Annual AAWP Conference*, ed. Donna Lee Brien, Marcell Freiman, (Australasian Association of Writing Programs, 2009), 1-12. URL: http://aawp.org.au/margins-and-mainstreams-papers; see also: Nicola Boyd, 'Strange Loops and Confessions: In Search of a Creative Writing Methodology, and AI PI: A Novel', (PhD Thesis, Griffith University, 2010). URL: https://www120.secure.griffith.edu.au/rch/items/70aec848-918a-ada8-e550-ab33837028d3/1/.

59. Rosenblatt, *Reader, Text, Poem*, 48

60. Ochs, Capps, 'Narrating the Self', 23

61. J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*, Harper Collins Classics ed. (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 27

that he and his shadow, when brought near each other, would join like drops of water; and when they did not he was appalled. …A shudder passed through Peter, and he sat on the floor and cried."[62] The shadow along these lines can be seen as a moment in self-realisation similar to the experience of language as an enunciation of self. It is a physical enunciation, corporeality signified, as opposed to the verbal marker of language. It contributes to our comprehension of self. But it is dangerous as well: even as it emerges from us, it stretches away from us and thus has the power to distort or shift in this representation. In the same way, the text demands the production of the author to come into physical reality. But it holds an autonomous existence which influences and contributes to the author's. Similarly, in the relationships it configures, it demands the emergence of a specific subjectivity, just as a shadow describes a specific bodily form. It too can distort and threaten this representation of self, particularly in the anxieties of language discussed above[63]. As Barthes describes, every movement made by the text demonstrates its power as something which is "plural… not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination."[64] His examination of "how it explodes, disseminates – by what coded paths it *goes off*"[65] holds the text as alive, as demonstrating autonomy and agency within the world. In Souriau's terms, it is abaleitic in its existence – a status of referentiality which does not equate to passivity.

The text's autonomy within the instaurative process re-emphasises the notion that we might move away from the dominance of the subject-object relationship. Self and text participate in a mutual instauration, supported by both reading and writing as practices of labour. This process implicates a vast number of modes through endless, fluctuating relations. Self and text meet with the concepts which inform the reading or writing: the phenomenon of the event; the physical existence of the text, and that of the body; even the characters and places of the text, given that Souriau dedicates a section of his third chapter to the unique mode of existence carried by fictional entities. To reduce this relation of multiple modes down to a single point – subject to object – would be to undermine the instauration, including the instauration of self. This perhaps explains the threat to subjective existence perceived within the Gothic. In contrast, entering into a practice of writing or reading through an understanding of its instaurative potential in this way can allow us to reconfigure self in relation to other existences, other modes. I am writing self, and in doing so I am writing self *in relation*. This practice could

62. Ibid., 27
63. See: Young, 'Void', 82-3
64. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 159
65. Ibid., 127

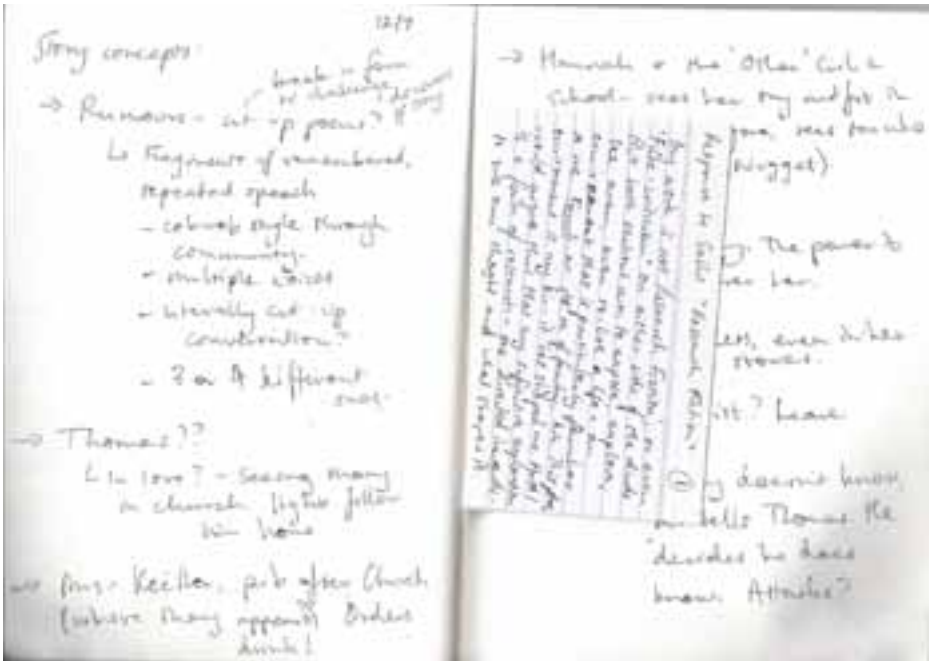
function with regards to writing landscape: writing as instauring self in relation to a specific space or place. This does not diminish the problems I have had in expressing the nature of the connection I feel, or the multiple sensations implicated within. But it does attest to the impossibility of *not* being connected with a landscape in writing it, a notion which similarly arises from the anthropological definitions of landscape as perspectival and inscribed.

In writing, I am positioned before the landscape in a certain way. I am 'placing' myself. But moving through Souriau's philosophy presents this most basic level of connection as dynamic and mutable. There is no point of subjective dominance within the relationship, text and self come together within a much wider multimodality. Tim Winton seems to understand this positioning in the writing of landscape. His descriptions of landscape carry power and a sense of agency within his stories. Sahlia Ben-Messahel points this out in noting that "for Winton, place determines personal and national history"[66], not the other way around. The land, she insists, "is a protagonist; it is a signifier prevailing only through its necessary and absolute relation with the signified."[67] While this last notion of absolute relation is questionable, Ben-Messahel does seem to be responding to a certain autonomy and agency in the landscapes Winton offers within his writing. As he himself describes in an interview with Ben-Messahel, Winton allows landscape agency:

> The great Aboriginal tenet is that the land does not belong to you but that you belong to the land. For that reason they believe that there are dire consequences from always doing things to the land, and that is exactly what we Europeans do. We do things to objects, mould them into our image. We do not allow ourselves to be done by.[68]

While Winton's construction of this agency is through reference to Indigenous philosophy, as Muecke's is, it illustrates his awareness of modes outside the subjective as holding power within the world. The 'we' – addressed to white Australians as Europeans[69] – characterises not only a racial distinction but a broader difference in outlook: "we do things to objects"[70]. 'We' signifies a position of materialism, of centralised subjectivity. His subsequent rejection of a bifurcated construction of

66. Sahlia Ben-Messahel, *Mind the Country: Tim Winton's Fiction* (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2006), 98
67. Ibid., 108
68. Ibid., 104
69. Ibid., 104
70. Ibid., 104



12/9

Story concepts:

→ Rumours – cut-up poems? break in form to challenge, discovery of story

↳ Fragments of remembered, repeated speech

– cobweb style through community

– multiple voices

– literally cut up conversation?

– ? or A different sort

→ Thomas??

↳ In love? – Seeing many in church. Lights follow him home

→ Mrs. Keeller, pub after Church (where many appear?) Orders drink!

→ Hannah & the 'Other' Girl in School – sees her my and fit in

[illegible] (Nugget)

[illegible] The power to [illegible] her

[illegible] even in her stories.

[illegible] Leave

[illegible] doesn't know, [illegible] tells Thomas. He decides he does know. Attacks?

reality represents a manner of thinking related to Souriau's philosophy, and suggests simultaneously the potential for understanding writing in the context of multimodality. Winton's protagonist landscapes are an instauration of the land which is 'doing', while the characters in relation are being 'done by'. In this sense, written landscapes are no longer simply a representation of the physical land, but manifestations of land, the result of the land's agential power over Winton. The writing is a (multi)modal existence, but one which is only part of the wider multimodal relation between the author and the land.

Possibilities for the expression of connection lie in the continuation of these relationships – the ongoing instauration of the text, and with it the relation of self to landscape. There are a few difficulties here, though. For one, I have not addressed the question of how this sense of connection might be approached in poetic language, stylistically and structurally. A connection made tangible for the author in the act of writing is very different to the emotional expression of connection *within* a text. Secondly, understanding the text and the landscape through the characterisation of a shadow is limited. It prefers a reading of the shadow utilised comparatively or figuratively (the text *is like* a shadow because…) over the involvement of the shadow in its autonomous existence, as productive and influential. This is to return, in a way, to a stance of fixed objectification. Doing so simultaneously diminishes the sense of both text and landscape as agential within this relationship and undermines entirely the multimodal network of Souriau's thought. The authorial position is once again definitive and all-powerful. A distinction could be made, however, between the shadow as a metaphor and the shadow as a mode of existence implicated within the multimodal network surrounding the text. This latter would allow the shadow agency. Different modes, moreover, may offer different voices and different possibilities within poetic language. Defining the shadow as a mode implicated within the relationship between text and self might lead towards new practices of reading and writing. How does a shadow speak, or how might I speak through the voice of a shadow? And would doing so give me the capacity to express connection?

Souriau outlines his approach for the definition of a mode through the example of those he himself defines. As I suggested earlier, it is essential to understand that there can be nothing "systematic or a priori"[71] about the exploration of a mode. Souriau makes it clear that a full analysis of all the modes would be impossible[72]. To do so would be to subvert the autonomy, equality and agency of each. Instead, he attempts to decentralise

71. Latour, 'Reflections', 314
72. Souriau, *Les modes*, 156; « Inutile d'insister, davantage, d'inventorier d'autres espèces. »

the subjective position through a project of 'othering' – a "difficult reversal"[73]. What Souriau demands is more subtle than simply relinquishing the subjective viewpoint – an impossibility, in any case. Using the phenomenon as an example, he requires us to firstly understand the agency of the mode through its "existential shifts and morphemic attachments which drive from the pure phenomenon towards other realities in other modes"[74], and then secondly "centre all this systematically on the pure phenomenon, and install it at the centre in order to feel it support and respond to the rest."[75] This movement diminishes the subject only in the sense that it is no longer the only source of ontological meaning. I must relinquish that assertive power. Allowing another mode power over you is not a comfortable sensation, as Souriau himself acknowledges. To maintain the subjective position is to control reality: a "man might impose, in imagination or through perception, the ontological décor of his life …he is a demiurge, and the creator or support for a certain genre of reality."[76] But in moving away from the subjective position as central, "it is necessary to sacrifice (and this is an enormous sacrifice, as well as a frightening one) this entire solid and stable ontology of self and even of the world, which from the alternate point of view appears to be archetypally substantial."[77] For Souriau, this sacrifice holds the reward of "participation au réel"[78], participation in a form of existence which is based within this multimodal network of relations and interactions, rather than predicated on a process of judgement from a 'critical distance'.

Muecke also rejects the notion of critical distance. There is very little room within critical language to allow for the centralisation of another existence. Muecke describes criticism as "a writing constituted as a report on realities seen from the other side of an illusory gap of representation."[79] This might be understood as the same distance we open between subject and object. Prefaced to his article 'Motorcycles, Snails, Latour: Criticism without Judgement' is a quotation from Foucault, offering a "dream"[80] of

73. Ibid., 116; « …opérer effectivement cette réduction existentielle, antithèse exacte de la réduction phénoménologique, et qui exige, nous l'avons vue un difficile renversement.»

74. Ibid., 116; « …des glissements existentiels et des attaches morphématiques conduisent, du phénomène pur, vers d'autres réalités en d'autres modes… »

75. Ibid., 116; « On peut… centrer tout toute cette systématique sur le phénomène pur, et s'installer à ce centre pour le sentir support et répondant du reste : c'est là se mettre au point de vue de phénomène. »

76. Ibid., 157; « Un home peut poser, par l'imagination ou par la perception, le décor ontique de sa vie. … il sera démiurge, et créateur ou soutien d'un genre de reality. »

77. Ibid., 157; « …il faudra sacrifier (sacrifice énorme, effrayant) toute cette ontique solide et stable de soi-même et même du monde, qui de l'autre point de vue paraissait typiquement substantielle. »

78. Ibid., 157; « Récompense? Uniquement cet enfoncement dans un genre d'existence qui offre alors à soi seul, non sans vertige, la participation au réel… »

79. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 42

80. Michel Foucault, 'The Masked Philosopher', in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984*, Vol. 1, ed. J. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (Harmondsworth: Penguin,

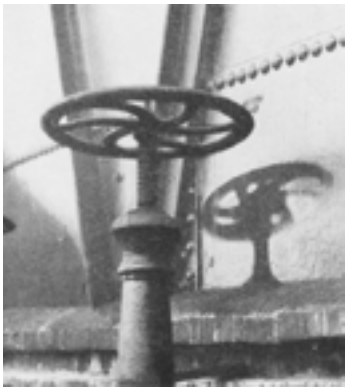
Lawrence Durrell
Balthazar
Ms Kate Noske
Main St
Brandon
Coventry
Warwickshire
U.K.
BETBQ
Love you
Mom

a practice of criticism which "would multiply not judgements but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep."[81] Foucault's gift to us, Muecke suggests, is this vision of a movement away from judgement as a definitive position, of "some other activity for criticism"[82]. It is the desire to follow in this direction which leads Muecke towards a consideration of Latour, the multimodal philosophy of Souriau and his "experimental writing"[83]. Muecke synthesises this into an approach he describes as "object-oriented writing"[84], not in the sense that it represents a writing of objectification, but in comparison to the common approach of allowing the subjective self to stand as the centre from which everything else is described. Part of what he is attempting is the formation of a practice which allows for the agency and evolution of modes other than the self, and overcomes the distance of critical judgement. This returns us once again to the notion of participation – not far from that process Souriau puts forward for the exploration of a mode as I discussed in the first chapter. The concept that we might understand a mode through its "existential shifts and morphemic attachments"[85] depends on our participation in the mode's existence and our perception of its agency.

So how can I apply this to the shadow as a mode? How can I "install it at the centre"[86], appreciate the shadow in its own existential significance[87]? ("What a challenge!"[88] Muecke cries, responding to Foucault.) The first step would be to understand its effects and thus the shadow's agency in my relation to it. As Souriau says, "start with an ordinary, unique ontological existence and feel out, from there, by what attachments it modulates (in the sense of musicians) towards other existential tonalities."[89] This is not to define it according to my position. The shadow 'modulates' me – like Winton, I must allow myself "to be done by."[90] Latour describes it as allowing "positive modes of existence, coming to meet us with their palm fronds, to greet our hopes and aspirations, or our problematic speculations, in order to gather them in"[91],

1997), 321-8; in Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 40

81. Foucault, 'Masked Philosopher', 321-8; in Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 40
82. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 40
83. Ibid., 47
84. Ibid., 47
85. Souriau, *Les modes*, 116; « …des glissements existentiels et des attaches morphématiques… »
86. Ibid., 116; « …s'installer à ce centre… » (See full quote n.47)
87. Ibid., 119; « …sa teneur proprement existentielle… »
88. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 40
89. Souriau, *Les modes*, 157; « …partir d'une ontique quelconque, unique et chercher par quelles attaches, de là, on « module » (au sens des musiciens) vers d'autres tonalités existentielles. »
90. Ben-Messahel, *Mind the Country*, 104
91. Latour. 'Reflections', 315



Top: '*AtomicEffects-p26b'*, United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *The Effects of Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1946), p.26. URL: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AtomicEffects-p26b.jpg. Image in the Public Domain.
Bottom: *'The patient's skin is burned in a pattern corresponding to the dark portions of a kimono worn at the time of the explosion. Japan, circa 1945.'*, War Department Office of the Chief of Engineers (US National Archives and Record Administration, 1948). URL: www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/photos/images/ww2-164.jpg. Image in the Public Domain.

a research which depends on 'fieldwork'[92]. The positive aspects of the shadow as we know it are in its obvious characteristics, the effect it creates within the physical world. We know the shadow corporeally in its appearance, its sensation: a shift in light or in heat, a tactile, physical reality. At its most essential, however, the shadow is characterised by an absence rather than a presence. According to physics, it is the absence of light. This absence is occasioned by the presence of a casting object. Its form is therefore relative and its existence is thus referential or abaleitic. Shadow is present in different forms depending on degrees or specificities of absence. Physicists delineate between 'deep shadow' or 'umbra' and partial shadow or 'penumbra'[93]. Essentially, though, it exists in the notion that absence is a presence: the presence *of* an absence. The shadow in this is a contradictory state. Absence and presence are intricately intertwined, even come to meet.

But the shadow as a mode must exist in absences in general, it is not specific to the absence of light. The various possible uses of the word shadow hint at its flexibility, its capacity to make multiple relations: we see things foreshadowed, cast a long shadow, enter shadow-lands, hold a shadow of a doubt, stick to the shadows, have shadow ministers, shadow masters, shadow men. We talk too of rain shadows, of shadows in scans or x-rays, of shadows as representative of premonitions or consequences, shadows as shades. Images of the aftermath of Hiroshima show 'heat shadows'[94], and witnesses could perhaps talk of other, deeper, more personal shadows left behind. The shadow carries moreover various common symbolic associations: shadows are seen as dangerous or murky, frightening or spooky in opposition to the purity and clarity of light. Philosophically we speak of Jung's archetypal shadow and Plato's shadows on the cave wall. Foucault describes his reflection in the mirror as "a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself"[95]. None of these characterise the shadow as an independent existence, but they are each effects of its agency. These versions of the shadow speak to its innate multiplicity of form, which centres into a singularity. Light splits shadows and resolves them. Stand under multiple lights and shadows appear and stretch themselves all around – and yet they are the same shadow, the same presence of the same absence. Move and they will join, touch, resolve. This multiplicity functions as much on the level

92. Ibid., 315

93. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 6th ed., Vol.2, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), s.v. 'umbra', 'penumbra'

94. See images: *AtomicEffects-p26b*; *"The patient's skin is burned in a pattern corresponding to the dark portions of a kimono worn at the time of the explosion"*

95. Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16.1 (Spring 1986): 24

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of the shadow manifest as a concept as it does in the physical manifestation of light. Multifarious notions of shadow are all part of that single independent existence of the shadow as a mode.

Furthermore, each of these associations functions within a specific schemata of meaning or network of modal relations. They point to the characteristic of the shadow to be read or felt as significant, connected to a certain uneasy emotional state. This emotional relation with the shadow touches on the manner in which the shadow can again be understood as representative of presence rather than absence. This is the function of shadow puppets, although here the shadow is read as something playful, capricious, even exciting. As puppets, the shadow becomes a presence of the other, takes on its own solidity as independent of the body or object which casts it. The roles are reversed – shadow-presence is primary, the casting-presence exists in absence. Subjective relation with the shadow illustrates it as a signifying presence, one we can understand in association with or as part of our own physical presence in the world. The shadow along these lines can be seen as offering self-realisation, similar to the experience of language as an enunciation of self. It is a physical enunciation as opposed to the verbal/auditory marker of language. It is corporeality signified. It contributes to our existence and our comprehension of self, as Foucault seems to feel. But it stretches away from us, has the power to distort or shift in this representation. Whether in confirming our existence or challenging and unsettling it through distortion, the shadow functions abaleitically to sustain our physical presence, just as our presence sustains it.

The shadow as a mode exists in this agency. Its 'voice' is the language of these effects: the intertwining of presence and absence; a multiplicity of form, with the power to resolve into cohesion; and the connection to the being which casts it, defining and distorting that connected existence. I have already suggested how we might metaphorically understand the text as a shadow of the self, but does it by these terms take on the existence of the shadow as a mode? This is a question which can perhaps only be answered in each individual instauration, as every text brought into being (through either reading or writing) will be implicated within a unique multimodal network. For me, the shadow was involved in the writing of 'The Call of Salt' most overtly in the manner in which the text takes on and re-imagines many of my own childhood experiences. Self-definition and distortion are central. The physical space of the island is a distorted version of my home, Narrawong. It takes on the geographical markers of Narrawong and transplants them to an island, a re-imagined version of Lady Julia Percy Island, which I could see every day off the coast from my home. I stare out from my home on the hill at an island, while Hannah in her home on a hill on an island

stares back at me. But this shadowing also allows me to question my own specific presence and absence in that space – both spaces, in fact. I have been feeling, therefore, the agency of the shadow within my writing process. Is it possible to speak through this existence? Can the shadow as a mode of "being-in-the-world"[96] offer a language to write to the connection I feel to that landscape? What can the shadow-mode contribute to the instauration of a landscape?

This latter question might be answered in reference to the practice of reading as well as writing. Examining the interactions between shadow and text in this way is a manner of responding to the shadow's agency, coming to hear its voice. It is also a response to the text as an autonomous existence: we can, as Muecke suggests, "attempt to flesh out the multimodal or multirealist networks that intersect in a writing or reading event in order to ask how the literary text is keeping itself alive"[97]. A reading of Tim Winton's *The Turning*[98] offers much scope for the shadow as a mode. The stories in the collection hold various intense descriptions of landscape, often inviting a reading shaped along postcolonial paradigms. It is quite easy to return to a practice before the text similar to that applied to Malouf's writing in the previous chapter. For example, the depiction of the swamp in the story 'Aquifer', akin to Malouf's 'Jacko's Reach', is a wild place, out of bounds for a child protagonist entering adolescence, and the scene of a rite of passage which climaxes in the witnessing of a death – the drowning of his neighbour, Alan Mannering. This is a landscape which is marked by trauma and fear. But it is also a site of freedom, and offers a definition of self for the protagonist as independent from the context of his family. This is suggested first in the imagery of time Winton incorporates. The controlled, ordered time of the suburban home symbolised by the 1194 man "with the BBC voice"[99] is contrasted to the boundless, unmeasured time of the swamp. The boy understands the water as pre-dating civilisation and as connected to a much deeper spiritual current of life and death: "All the dead alive in the land, all the lost who bank up, mounting in layers of silt and humans, all the creatures and plants… I felt them in the lake and on the breeze. I have, boy and man, felt the dead in my very water."[100] The shift here from water as external to the body to internal – "my water"[101] – is notable. But this form of spiritual connection with the place is learnt, rather than natural. Originally this notion frightens the boy, he obsesses over it until it is "no longer terrifying"[102] and

96. Ochs, Capps, 'Narrating the Self', 23
97. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 51
98. Tim Winton, *The Turning* (Sydney: Picador, 2004)
99. Ibid., 43
100. Ibid., 50
101. Ibid., 50
102. Ibid., 50

still only "strangely comforting"[103]. The boy's movement from one version of time to another reflects a shift in self-definition emerging from his relationship with the two spaces.

In this reading, I am returning to my initial position of subjective authority before the text, constructing structures of opposition from the conflicting emotions experienced. It is inviting to do so in reference to the imagery of shadow as well. Primarily, shadow is referred to in the description of the swamp, tying in connotations of darkness and danger. There is underlying an unvoiced reference to Indigenous occupation of the land, constructed in reference to the white child's 'illegal' entry: Ben-Messahel describes the presence of Indigenous characters in Winton's work as "the guardian of the sacred land, as the silenced other and the *absent presence*"[104], a reading which falls into an unquestioned association of Indigeneity with a desired sacred. Ben-Messahel makes a detailed and complex analysis of Winton's work which can plausibly be understood as participating in structures of opposition. She describes Winton's landscapes as exploring the "cultural identity of the postcolonial country"[105], and suggests that they speak to the way in which "White settlement and penal colonies placed an opposition between the culture of the European settler and a nature designated as hostile, which included the Indigenous population."[106] The binary Ben-Messahel is confirming is structured along distinctions of race as well as emotional anxieties in the white Australian relationship to the landscape. For her, Winton's "space reflects the disorder of the country and mind"[107]. 'Aquifer' culminates in the assertion that "the past is in us, and not behind us. Things are never over."[108] This is thus a story which can support a reading heavily invested in an awareness of Australia as a postcolonial space.

As I found with Malouf, such readings have the potential to be productive. But so too might a different practice, one which attempts to participate in an open instauration with the text. What might be achieved in reading through the shadow? Winton's contemplation of time offers the first potential entry to the shadow mode, in the manner in which the narrator's adult perspective becomes reduplicated through the child-protagonist. Time folds constantly inwards as both lived and remembered, "comes and goes… falls back on itself."[109] A different understanding of the final sentence

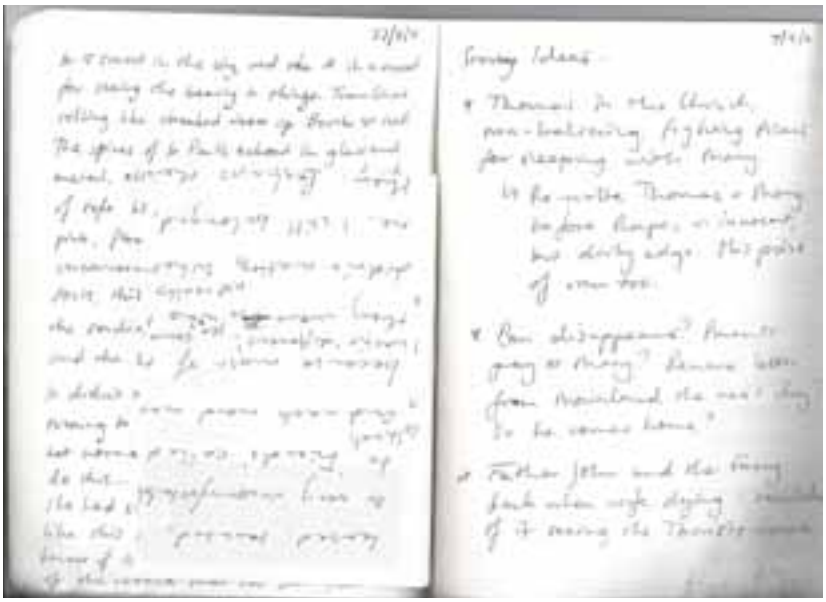
103. Ibid., 50
104. Ben-Messahel, *Mind the Country*, 213; emphasis mine
105. Ibid., 101
106. Ibid., 106-7
107. Ibid., 110
108. Winton, *The Turning*, 53
109. Ibid., 52

emerges here, illustrating the boys' experiences in the landscape as ongoing within his conceptualisation of self. The 'past' referred to is in this as much personal as symbolic. Memory becomes a shadow of lived experience, both connecting and leading the narrative to build a notion of fluidity in time, emphasised in the flexibility of Winton's usage of the past tense. Central to both perspectives, the landscape of the swamp reaches across time. The narrator comes to be defined in relation to the place, the "trains of black shadow"[110] which describe the swamp stretch onwards to offer a construction of his ongoing struggle with his past. This is not an exclusive reading. The symbolism which emerges in reading of postcolonial binaries as present in the piece is not undone or even disturbed by this alternate practice. But a reading based in the shadow as a mode can exist alongside, and offer a contrasting understanding of the narrator's relation to the landscape which enacts the possibility of connection.

This form of reading becomes more rewarding in considering the collection as a whole. The stories revolve around the fictional town of Angelus with complex interrelation. Various stories foreshadow the events or narrative of others through both references and allusion. Gail Lang's narration in 'Damaged Goods' literally foretells the stories 'Long, Clear View' and 'Immunity', describing events which are later directly narrated. But it also figuratively foretells the final story 'Defender' in presaging the conflict and confrontation in her marriage to Vic. This foreshadowing reaches towards the shadow as a mode in the same way that the fluidity of time marks 'Aquifer'. The stories split apart, distort and resolve into a single narrative. Vic Lang as a character provides a structure of time for the entire collection, as stories are narrated across the course of his life. But this time structure is fragmented and subtextual. It is presented to the reader out of order and from multiple perspectives. Even Ben-Messahel enters unconsciously into an appreciation of the shadow's sensations at this point: "Vic Lang emerges as a main character in overlapping narratives and demonstrates that things are never over, that *The Turning* is a vast space cleft into individual pieces; an imaginary territory for shifting characters, who constantly approach the border that separates the Self and the Other."[111] The layering between stories goes further than offering a presentiment of events to come. Through the repetition and mimicry of form and narrative, each story takes on the position of shadow to the next. Time in the collection again comes to be challenged as multiple shadows are cast into both the past and the future.

110. Ibid., 43

111. Ben-Messahel, *Mind the Country*, 242-243



There is an element of physical representation to the shadow-mode in *The Turning* as well. Each story in the collection offers a physical replication of those around it, a shadow in form. Further, the blank pages between stories embody an absence of text in the same way a physical shadow is the absence of light. These spaces are strongly felt within many of Winton's texts. He suggests in an interview with Ben-Messahel: "I deliberately choose to have large spaces at the beginning of my chapters, they are similar to the open landscape."[112] Ben-Messahel suggests in the same way that the "organisation of the page recalls the configuration of the country and its empty spaces. The textual divisions into separate chapters, sections and subsections, of various sizes, provide the text with a plural aspect and highlight the movement of the plot."[113] For both Winton and Ben-Messahel, the space of the page is a shadow of space in the physical world. This space between stories takes on an even greater significance and weight as the narratives of the collection develop, given the continual gaps in the reader's knowledge, and related construction of the town Angelus as marked by secret or covert relationships in the drug dealing. The reader must piece the narrative together. Bob Lang (Vic's father) occupies a similar position as the only police officer not in the know. Through his stories and those related – 'Fog', 'Long, Clear View', 'Commission' and 'Boner McPharlin's Moll' – we as readers find a replication of our own attempts to understand. The space between stories marks what is unsaid, and gives room for the reader's reflection and construction. At the same time, it characterises Bob Lang's struggle. In this way, physical and conceptual existences of the shadow as a mode come to conflate, so that the physical experience of the shadow as a space in the text, between each story, each page, even each line, comes to register an emotional effect. It overrides the sensations described in the words and imparts something deeper, something perhaps beyond the possibility of comprehension and expression, about the spaces and places that Winton has created.

This is a highly specific reading of Winton's text. It demonstrates an attempt to read according to my relation with a specific mode, in that the impressions I take from the text are shaped directly by the influence of another existence. The shadow reconfigures my conceptualisation of the manner in which the landscape is represented in the text, and that in which the characters are defined in relation. Time folds inwards both in and between stories, so that each character comes to be reduplicated before a centred and ongoing setting. But this setting shifts and distorts, moves according to the individual entering it. 'Aquifer' in this sense comes to suggest a pattern which is repeated in large scale. The fluidity with which Vic's life takes narrative form meets the shifting

112. Ibid., 140
113. Ibid., 140

description of space, so that each comes to shape the other and subject and landscape exist intertwined. My own interaction with the text is constructed in the same way: I join in being influenced, as Vic is, by the consolidation of place. Reading like this is an attempt to de-throne my own subjectivity as wholly productive of sensation. It may not be entirely successful, but represents an experiment in reconceptualising my position before the text, and understanding how *it* constructs *me*. In an unexpected way, this is akin to Ravenscroft's project of centralising her subjective limitations in reading, her 'aporias'[114]. Ravenscroft reconfirms her subjective position out of respect to the potentiality of the text's autonomous power, its capacity to generate other relations.

My reading looks to find a way in which I might earn "the right to participate in the event"[115], whether that event be the instauration of a text, a landscape or a specific place. Rather than dominating or defining, Muecke suggests we might "'let the object talk to the writing'"[116]. It is necessary to recognise that "this move in the experiment is heuristic – it is about respecting the strangeness"[117], respecting other existences. It is possible that Muecke would disagree with Ravenscroft's position before the text: on the principle of relation and reproduction as a driving force in criticism and composition, he condemns "that transcendentalism that insists on the incompleteness of the text, its paradoxes and ambivalences so that only in the transcendental move (demonstrated as an intellectual striving by the student) can an elusive infinite unity be glimpsed for a brief rewarding moment."[118] But perhaps we might take Ravenscroft's notion of aporia back to its Greek roots, and pick up on the connotations attached of wonder, perplexity and fascination[119]. A respect exists here, too, and a willingness to come into relation. Perhaps this might be a word with the capacity, as Muecke puts it, "to create pathways among different kinds of reality"[120], to move us from a critical distance to an involvement, a relation which exists on an entirely different level.

This might be a concept to carry towards a discussion of writing practices. Can I take up the voice of another mode as a poetic language in my writing? Can I come into a state of relation which allows me to talk through the shadow, or at least allows it to speak for me? Experimenting with writing practices which aim to such a relation has

114. Ravenscroft, *Postcolonial Eye*, 2
115. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 42
116. Ibid., 47
117. Ibid., 47
118. Ibid., 55
119. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 6th ed., Vol.2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), s.v. 'aporia'; *Collins English Dictionary*, 10th ed. (London: Harper Collins, 2009), s.v. 'aporia'
120. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 45

been part of my work in writing the creative component of this thesis, part of an effort to express a wider and more fluid connection to landscape. *Express*. This word is key – I am concerned not so much with interrogating the experience of connection as with voicing it. In this sense, I am approaching Muecke's experimental writing which, as he describes, "is actively engaged in creating assemblages or compositions as it goes along."[121] Isabelle Stengers participates in a similarly experimental practice. She speaks of writing that "has to produce new connections with what we know, or a change in the mode of connection."[122] Her critical practice focuses on what she calls the 'meso' level, as opposed to micro or macro, and is marked by an interest in creation again inspired in part by Souriau: "The questions that must be asked are utterly specific. Questions which bring characters into existence… questions which demand the invention of beings."[123] Such practices open up possibilities within the multimodal. "This engagement may be with different registers of reality, because 'the world' is not seen as bifurcated, with the 'text' mediating the 'subject' and the 'object', as in older communication models."[124] The register of reality which modulates my voice has once again been the shadow, speaking to contradictory emotions and mutability of form. For Muecke, and for me, "it is taking up a multirealist embrace that is the issue here."[125] This doesn't mean employing the shadow as an image or motif, using its connotations to infer various emotions subtextually. It means allowing the shadow existence within my writing, coming into relation with it as a way of being, accepting it as a 'partner for productive purposes'[126].

Muecke asks the obvious question. "So what is the consequence of this animist attitude that runs the risk of sounding New Age-ish?"[127] Muecke's answer is made by his approach, but feels just as cautiously hopeful as my own: "It makes me write differently for a start. I approach the machine bearing the name of god [his motorcycle] with trepidation and with affection."[128] I also write differently. For me, the consequence is a writing which no longer takes for granted my authorial perspective as solely definitive

121. Ibid., 42

122. Erin Manning, Brian Massumi, Isabelle Stengers, 'History through the Middle: Between Macro and Mesopolitics, Inteview with Isabelle Stengers, 25th November 2008', trans. Brian Massumi, *Inflexions* 3 (Oct. 2009), n.p., URL: http://www.senselab.ca/inflexions/volume_3/node_i3/stengers_en_inflexions_vol03.html

123. Ibid., n.p.

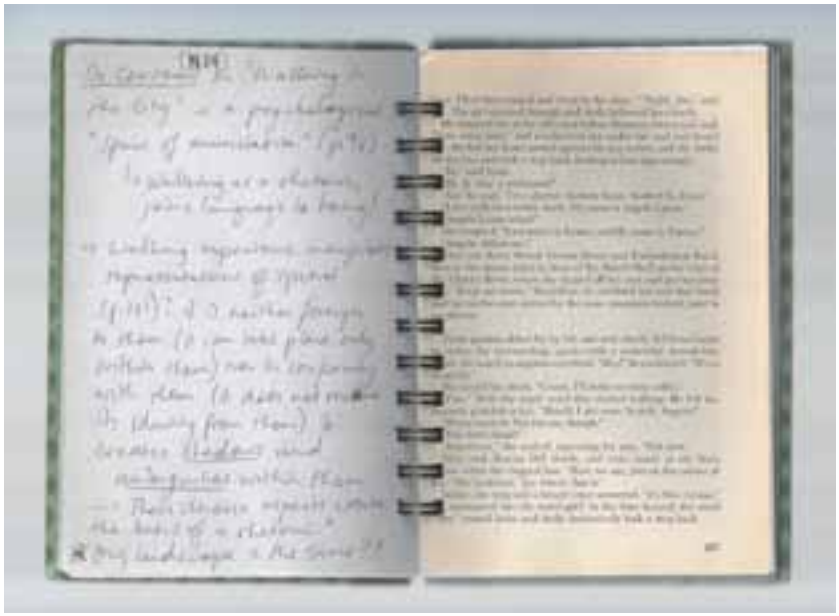
124. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 42

125. Ibid., 50

126. See: Ibid., 54; Muecke might say 'reproductive'. He explores the manner in which the text is 'keeping itself alive' in its relationship with "partners for reproductive purposes" (54). The text's capacity to make relations is part of its autonomous existence.

127. Ibid., 49

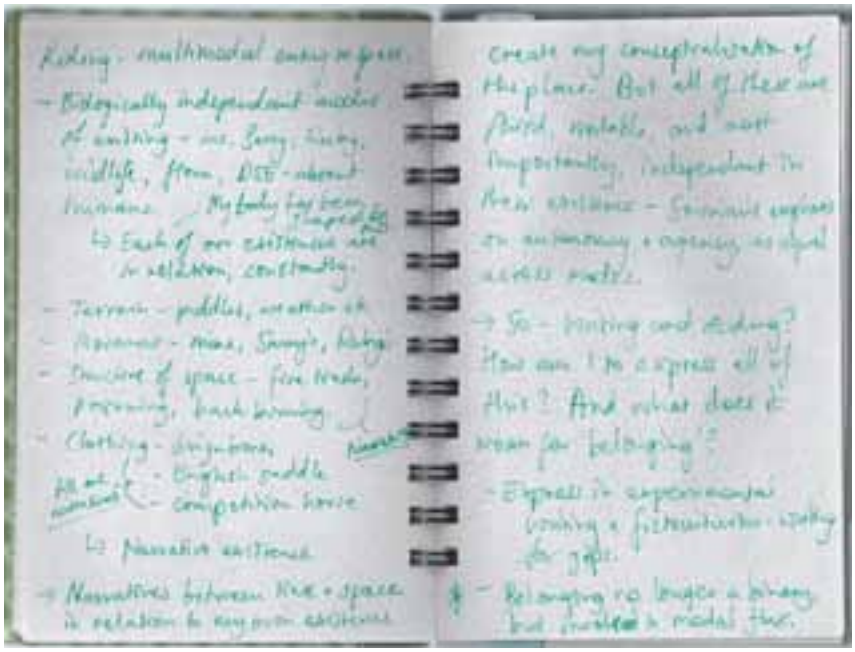
128. Ibid., 49



of the work. My practice has instead been to open myself to relations which might help carry the instauration on – both in the shape of my practice across time, returning home again and again to enter into fresh relation with the landscape as a physical space, and within the writing. The shadow has offered many of the structures and movements of my text: an uncertain narrative position, split across multiple versions of Hannah's self, and a fragmentation and multiplicity that resolves into the centrality of Hannah's imaginative reconstruction of the events of her last visit to Chesil. This element of the text – the metafictional awareness that the story as told is constructed by Hannah, part remembered, part imagined, and therefore 'unreliable' – is a relation with the shadow as it exists in metaphor, the shadow as something murky, indefinite, difficult to 'see'. There has similarly appeared a certain darkness under the influence of the symbolic and connotative properties that the shadow registers, along with a propensity for blurred lines. The ending, in this sense, is deliberately ambiguous in the resolution it offers. My writing also took on an inclination towards mimicry in the repetition of forms, images, even full sentences. But each repeated phrase was not felt to offer opposition so much as an active reconfirmation. A literary device that I have always heavily used thus took on a different meaning for me. The mimicry of the shadow spoke to a structure of connection and self-recognition, while literary repetition had previously only ever been used in order to differentiate each phrasing from the next. A structure of opposition became one of connection under the influence of the shadow speaking through my writing.

I began to utilise movement much more emphatically in my writing, partly in the attempt to reach towards the mutability of the shadow-mode. Research was conducted in writing my own movement through the landscape of my home, experiments supported by film taken while riding in the bush[129]. Walking, running, riding, driving, even sailing all came to be important in reaching towards a sensation of connection which was never in stasis. As a physical force, such movement contributed to a materialisation of self within space, one which set the body as participating in relation with the landscape. This drew from a deeper vein of writing which attempted to constitute the body in terms of the landscape. The title is derived from a line wherein Hannah describes the salt water of the island as 'calling' to the blood in her veins. Movement in writing provided me with a manner of constructing body in open relation which expanded this physical representation. It also demanded the constant re-evaluation of the preposition in power within the phrase, and consequently the position to be taken up by the subject. Offset by moments of stillness, this movement was an effort to both invoke and question the

129. Footage is available at: http://shadowtext.weebly.com



Riding - multimodal entry to space.

- Biologically independent modes of existing - ins. Sarry, Lucky, wildlife, flora, DSE - absent humans. My body has been shaped by
  ↳ Each of our existences are in relation, constantly.
- Terrain - puddles, weather etc.
- Movement - mine, Sarry's, Riding
- Structure of space - fire trails, pastoring, back burning
- Clothing - drizzlebone,
  - English saddle
  - competition horse
  ↳ Narrative existence
- Narratives between time + space in relation to my own existence

Create my conceptualization of the place. But all of these are fluid, mutable, and most importantly, independent in their existence - Seismic engines on autonomy + agency as equal across media.

→ So - writing and riding? How can I to express all of this? And what does it mean for belonging?

- Express in experimental writing a fictionturbo - writing for gaps.
- Belonging no longer a binary but involved in medial flux.

subject-object relationship in the representation of space. The landscape within the text is also moving, an ongoing instauration driven by the new points of relation each act of movement gave rise too. The shadow is fluid, but it is also constantly remaking itself.

More specifically, the manner in which I approached the descriptive writing of landscape was significantly altered in my deference to the existence of the shadow. The use of detail, emerging from an intimate knowledge of the physical spaces to which my written landscapes were related, became a form of mimicry that was reproduced in the structural repetitions in phrasing. The connection expressed to the landscape here was two-fold; it existed in my relationship to the physical land which held sway over the text, and also in the reduplication of physical form which the text offered that space. The landscape existed on the page in the images the words gave rise to, and, as Winton has also described, in the physical space opened and dedicated to it. I was bringing into being a shadow of place. But that existence was marked as any shadow by the presence of absence: absence of lands, absence of physical space. It was a landscape which came to be untethered, detached from the 'real world'. It questioned thus my own reality as untethered, and my status before the physical spaces from which this landscape emerged. I was connected to my landscape, rather than the land itself. This was the voice in my practice that spoke most eloquently to the sensations of connection I feel as a white Australian to the place in which I grew up. Through the shadow-mode, it combined my involvement in the place and my ongoing instauration of it, but also refused me possession. This is not to return to a discourse of the impossibility of white Australian connection; far from it. Let me be unequivocal on this point: I experience the landscape which has emerged within my text as an instance of powerful relation with the place I call home, one that still continues as an existence and I feel is potent in its capacity to instaure. But the instauration implicated draws in sensations of disconnection as a form of relation just as readily as it does sensations of connection. The difference for me in this writing practice was that the two were no longer opposed. They functioned themselves in relation, were productive of a specific existence in the space.

It was the shadow that did all of this. In allowing it to shape my writing experience, I questioned the assumption that I had previously held: that my writing emerged from myself alone. My subjective perspective no longer defined the text as object but existed alongside it. I moved, in my writing, in equal relation to it and to the other existences implicated in the instauration. This is perhaps what some authors mean when they refer to 'organic writing', to writing which guides itself, or to a character which comes to life – none of which are unfamiliar sensations to me. There is another existence present

Ann Miller, *Mt. Clay*, 2010
©Ann Miller

and implicated within the writing, fighting to be felt. We might also find here a way to reconfigure the notion of inspiration, to see it no longer as a muse or guiding power to the author but as a sign of the agency and the influence of other modes present in the instauration. The point at which the author is 'inspired' is the moment when a different existence participating in the instauration of the text enforces its agency, guides the process in a certain direction. The author is no longer a conduit to a muse or mystical higher force, but is in an equal relationship with other participants. Allowing this agency is allowing oneself to be 'done by'[130], writing according to the influence of other modes. It is participating equally in the instauration rather than attempting to dominate it. The instaurative process here is defined as moving outside the discourse of "the old conflict between determination and freedom."[131] It does not suggest an ideal existence towards which a specific or predefined process must lead. As Latour clearly states, "we would misinterpret Souriau if we took [instauration] to be a description of the movement between form and matter, with the ideal of the form moving progressively into reality."[132] Similarly, this is "by no means a return to the Ideal of Beauty for which the work would be a crucible"[133]. Instead, it is "a discovery, a total invention"[134]. There is no end-point in sight. Souriau insists on the activity involved, the energy which must be lent to the instauration in order for it to succeed, but this is not with a specific direction. It is participation, *in* and *with*, in its purest form. Those prepositions signify the relational nature of the existence.

This is a difference in both approach and outlook from my previous writing practices. It is, to a certain extent, personal and private; by which I mean that it depends entirely on each individual's engagement, and the multiple modes of existence she brings to the instauration. It cannot, as such, be proscribed as a literary style. Even as a framework for critical engagement, it depends on the unique relations born of each specific interaction. (This is why I would hesitate to 'name' the manner of writing which developed in interaction with the shadow or offer it in template as a practice.) Furthermore, as a project, my thesis is framed by the moment of its existence – and not just in the literary conventions taken up. This instauration has been marked by and emerged from the context of my engagement with it: the specificity of my struggle to give voice to the sensations I feel, the specificity of my status as postgraduate student,

130. Ben-Messahel, *Mind the Country*, 104

131. Manning, Massumi, Stengers, 'History through the Middle', n.p.; also cited in Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 53

132. Ibid., 310

133. Ibid., 311

134. Latour, 'Reflections', 310

the resources available to me, the society I am part of. This temporal location offers its own kind of patuité, its own phenomenal and existential tenor. Souriau describes temporal existence through the notion of the event:

> That which gives rise to the grandeur of the event is not the manner in which is it transitive and dynamic, nor even that it is singular and *hic et nunc*; it's the fact of it… I take up a glass, I drop it, and it breaks. Certainly one might with a pen reduce this indubitable fact to the consideration of an essence: the entity of that which is broken, with all that is implied of a fragile existence, twice constituted, once according to the idea of a whole glass, and again after the glass in pieces. But none of that makes a step towards taking hold of the fact itself: here, in this moment, *there is* the break.[135]

His metaphor speaks to the point of entry into being. This is the same as my thesis coming into independence, in that I have to break myself from it. For me this work is constituted twice-over, once in the conglomerated history of the work which has brought it into being, and again as a thing, a file or document. But that doesn't relate to the fact of the thesis itself, its temporal existence as an event. My writing has its own existence in this way, a notion which once again has shaped my practice. As an approach, writing through the shadow, through Souriau's philosophy and in the direction pointed by Muecke, Ravenscroft and the various others, has been about respect more than anything. Respect for the other existences which fill my world, and in meeting them, wonder, perplexity and fascination.

Stengers, in her interview with Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, suggested that "Man does not have ideas, he is sensitive to them."[136] This is a notion she has taken from Whitehead and Souriau, one that emphasises assemblage, composition and relation over judgement and "end-all definition"[137]. Ideas have their own existence, they "do not belong to us"[138], but we can enter relationships with them. And these relationships might be productive, (Muecke would say "reproductive"[139]), or they might not – this

135. Souriau, *Les modes*, 152-3; « Ce qui fait la grandeur de l'événement, ce n'est pas qu'il soit transitif ou dynamique, ni même qu'il soit singulier et *hic et nunc*, c'est qu'il est le fait c'est qu'il est ce qui a lieu. …Je tenais ce verre, le l'ai lâché, et il se brise. Certes on peut par la plume réduire cet indubitable du fait à la considération d'une essence : l'entité de se-briser, avec ce qu'elle implique d'une ontique fragile, deux fois constituée, l'une selon l'idée du verre entier, l'autre selon l'idée du verre en morceaux. Mais tout cela ne fait pas un pas vers la saisie de ce donné lui-même : ici, en ce moment, *il y a* le se-briser. »

136. Manning, Massumi, Stengers, 'History through the Middle', n.p.

137. Ibid., n.p.

138. Ibid., n.p.

139. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 53

is the instauration that has succeeded or failed in bringing into being an existence. My relation with the shadow as a mode has worked like this. It has given rise to the existence of my creative piece, not in the sense that it wouldn't have existed otherwise, but rather in that it would be a different kind of piece/existence without the shadow's input. There are most certainly simultaneously other ways in which my relation with the shadow has failed to produce, and other ways in which it continue from this point to keep producing. This gets to the essence of the instaurative process I have participated in here. There was no end-point and still isn't. The instauration of the text will continue. It has succeeded in travelling a trajectory, as Souriau demands of us in entering into an instaurative effort. I could not call my thesis a possession, nor a specific position, but have followed its demands as a pathway. There is no end to this path, these shadows stretch onwards out of sight. But something, and it is for you to tell what, has already entered into being. Here, in this moment, is the break.

Judy Schrever, ‘Mt. Gipps Station’, 2010, oil on canvas.
Photo credit: Steve Murray, ©Judy Schrever

Paths behind and ahead

The notion of concluding makes me somewhat uncomfortable – and not simply because I am aware of the manner in which my research might continue onwards from this juncture. The connotations carried by the term, closure and finality, or even the determination of a verdict, rub uncomfortably with the appreciation I have developed through Souriau of my research as an instauration. His metaphor of the potter takes up this idea, to produce a work "is to bring to bloom a thousand ideas… It's also to choose, try, and throw away."[1] It is in one sense finished when the existence can maintain itself; but in another sense, it is ultimately ceaseless. So perhaps I might suggest a term other than conclusion to represent the dynamics of this 'end-point'. The notion of 'response' is more fitting, suggesting as it does some level of ongoing participation or even conversation, a discussion to be continued.

I am acknowledging here both elements of my work, creative and critical. Different forms of knowledge are at play in this thesis – or perhaps more accurately, different modes of existence, each with their own knowledge, their "own manner of 'making/doing reality'"[2]. Part of the role of the *Shadow/Text* has been to remind me of this. The space it occupies counter to the exegesis suggests different hemispheres of thought, alternate ways of knowing. It hints at the manner in which one form of knowledge can be met by another and that the two may coexist, even that the relation between them holds an instaurative potential of its own. Becoming aware of different modalities is part of the transformation Souriau has affected on my thought. My comprehension of the manner in which I participate in existence has been fundamentally altered. At its most simple level, Souriau's vision creates contingencies within fixed relations. In outlining a cosmos populated with different modes of existing rather than different existences, he provides for and points to a much wider array of possibilities within any given interaction, and the manner in which each leads onwards. The modes act to expand the possibilities in the relations between beings, including my relationship with the landscape and my relationship with the text.

1. Souriau, *Les modes*, 108; « c'est faire éclore mille idées... C'est aussi choisir, trier, jeter au panier. »
2. Stengers, Latour, 'La Sphinx', 33; « sa propre manière de « faire réalité »... »

In writing 'The Call of Salt', I have sought to "earn the right to participate"[3] in, rather than dominate subjectively, the continued instauration of the landscape of my home. To follow Souriau's philosophy, earning the right to participate comes from respect shown to the existence(s) with which you are engaging and the multitude of relations which are formed. For Muecke, participation lies in "'keeping things alive'"[4], entering into and supporting the instauration present by "speculat[ing] with new relations between things"[5]. I have speculated, in particular with the shadow as a mode. The new relations which have arisen in this speculation have offered possibilities in expression which might not have otherwise occurred. Muecke links this respect and participation to a form of experimental writing. It might be that in earning the right to participate, we simultaneously earn the right to communicate, or enter into a language which gives wider possibilities in expression. This is using "writing to trace pathways among multiple realities that affirm their own separate, but mutually sustaining, existences."[6] It is also to respect that writing as an instauration is generative of being, that all writing holds a multimodal existence. From this point of view, the three subjects of my research question – myself, the landscape and the text as a vessel of poetic language, each unique in tenor – come into fluid relation, lend support and are supported in turn. The points where I feel I have succeeded are the moments in the text wherein the relationship between self and place goes beyond the opposition of sensations I have marked in Australian literary tradition, Wright's "double aspect"[7] of hope and fear.

There are various elements of this work which remain to be taken up in research – pathways or trajectories still to follow. Souriau's philosophy would merit further attention. More could be done in connecting his philosophy directly to creative practice, moving beyond my application and its specificities. Generally, interest in Souriau's thought is increasing. Latour in his most recent publication, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*[8], develops the concept of instauration in the attempt to confront Modernism. This text is part of a wider project – of the same title and referred to as 'AIME' – which is supported by a grant from the European Research Council. It has garnered attention in Europe: Latour has recently been awarded the Holburg Memorial International Prize (2013) in recognition of the significance of his work. He terms his project as an inquiry due in part to its nature as ongoing: it involves an online presence - http://www.

3. Muecke, 'Motorcycles', 42
4. Ibid., 42
5. Ibid., 56
6. Ibid., 56
7. Wright, *Preoccupations*, xii
8. Latour, *Inquiry*; see Chapter One, n.9

modesofexistence.org - which invites the continued collaboration of critics with the aim of further developing his research. A range of research outputs, creative and artistic as well as critical, have resulted. Released as a text in English in August 2013, it has fallen beyond the scope of this thesis[9]; nevertheless, it has the potential to open up interesting possibilities with regards to reading contemporary literature. Similarly, further research in these directions would contribute to the continuation of the project I have started here.

Because this project is an instauration which is ongoing. With new research, new relations may be entered into, new speculations made. These may not always be successful, in the same way that the text I have produced is not in every way successful. But still I am in that process: choose, try, throw away. And so the instauration will continue to move, constantly shifting as points of relation shift. Participation in this sense is in *trying* – "Try again, fail again, fail better"[10], words Julie Mongarret has borrowed from Samuel Beckett as a motto. In trying, I am participating, and in participating I move towards new possibilities, new voices, new capacities to express. Out in the forest, I hang low over my horse's shoulder. The weight of my heels is sunk deep off the stirrup, counterbalance to my upper-body, forward and out of the seat. We are galloping. I float over his withers as he twists and turns. A hind foot shoots out from under him and we scramble. A fallen branch appears and we launch. Clay is greasy under hoof. The wind is sharp in our face. I am borrowing his power, he my imperative. We are sharing our joy. The world is a different place, together. The ride, the movement takes on an existence of its own. And somehow, we have both been transformed.

9. The French version *Enquête sur les modes d'existence* was released mid-2012, but demanded too great an effort of translation to be properly addressed before my intended submission.

10. Julie Montgarret, 'Navigating Tensions: Fraught Fictions and Fragile Facts' (Wagga Wagga: Charles Stuart University/Active Print, 2012), 19. Exhibition catalogue.

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