

Deluge: a collection of original poetry with exegesis

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original poetry with
exegesis

for Jūra, Anita & David

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The Camden Poems *Deluge*

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Edward Reilly
Newtown Geelong
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Abstract

This thesis consists of two distinct sections. The first section consists of the two books of original poems, the first being *The Camden Poems*, a set of fifty-two quatorzains. These unrhymed sonnets have as their focus the immediate human environment of my life in Geelong and the Western Districts over the past twenty years. In many ways they are celebrations and observations, although some of the poems are critical in their stance.

The second book of poems, *Deluge*, is a collection of twenty-three long poems set in Geelong during the flood of 1995. It utilises two urban myths of drowning to create a new myth as enunciated by the Narrator, about the Barwon River, its people and environs.

The second section is constructed as six chapters of prose addressing critical concerns. After an introductory chapter sketching out the main concerns and range of investigations undertaken through reading, I devote three chapters to detailed examinations of how a range of poets have addressed similar concerns. The following chapter presents detailed exegeses of the two books of poetry I have written, and is followed by a detailed bibliography.

I have come to two conclusions in the course of this investigation. Firstly, that I am capable of writing a series of long poems in a sustained effort on a self-determined mythological theme. Secondly, that the life of myth in this present age is elusive and that much work is needed to make myth viable and real to both the writer and reader.

The Camden Poems

Edward Reilly

Newton Geelong 2000

The Camden Poems

Living here

We bought a divorced estate,
Learning to like the road's fall,
Its bushy nature-strips, even neighbours.
No two houses the same style,
The sixties abut red-brick palaces,
Discreet moderns in flat-tops tuck back,
Our two doctors have the best views
Closest by our three-flood river.
In Winter, piles of leaves raked,
Parents and friends motored to advise
On the parquetry - but we laid carpet
To hide that ten-grand extravagance:
In coming times, tourists will gawp
At our *maisons bourgeoises*, our motley.

Tinge

An afternoon we would rather avoid,
Cool tinge on the air, greys over blue,
Television murmuring in the front room,
Chocolates, one glass of wine, siesta.
Can you hear the cold wind coming
Off the south-west seas, a gull mewling
And the rush to haul in topsails?
White water off the port bow -
Desperate days: it's vicarious now,
We live longer but with lessened lives,
Yet I am too wrung out by too much
And too little done - my left hand curls
Over each line as it inches out
Mooring ropes in a safe harbour.

Dazzle

What little whispered in my ear
Dazzles me without question, the Sun
Not less so on this Fall afternoon -
Whenever I have listened to your tales
Swift as silk peening hammers
Telling me so little, I must go
And guess again each syllable
Compassion then, forces the tongue to join
Its full self to another's needs
Given to withhold itself,
No less a net for these months
Lacking sense only for myself:
I look at what our hands do,
Taking parallel tracks in the air.

Neighbours

Rumour has it that there's strife
Brewing like over-cooked coffee
Gone acrid and dense - will they return
Saying little and lacking for little else -
Polite smiles and pressed conversations
As the year returns to Winter?
Strangers' cars drift down the road,
A *cul-de-sac* really, drivers alert
For the impending signs of divorcement,
Garbage cans left out too long,
Sullen children - we know the vultures,
Red *BMW* or black *Lexus* ticking over,
The drivers' suits are stoat-sleek
And their secretaries barely out of school.

Glass Door

Once the children had bedded down,
The cat wanted to play at phantoms
Till I found him hard at the glass door
Shadow gazing at a sour blackness in the yard,
Like all lost loves at sea, or wind-wrack
Toed out of the gravelling sand at Anglesea Spit.
The cat's swart swagger and joint of tail,
Even when the wind would not stop
For neither love nor fear, sharpened my fear,
Blackness rolled to the glass
At each floorboard a mauve imprint -
Too giddyng - the cat and I fell back:
What if the night had caught alight
And we could not see outside?

Tybalt

Always about snakes, brown and fat with mice,
Our black cat dreams with his tail swishing,
Claws half-extended - this he does by day
Hidden amongst my marigolds and geraniums:
At night though, when cats spurn sleep,
He's a shadow melding into greenery,
A phantom's shadow - velvet killer -
Boyo in snakeskin jacket and silver buckles.
There's hardly a whisper of air
In the front yard where he lours,
Blood on the brown grass -
Our assassin is decked in borrowed finery:
A Chevrolet with tinted windows passes by,
Neighbourhood dogs quiet for once.

Fall

In the last week or so, the sky has sighed
Grey as a retiring schoolmaster
Walking out of an ebullient fourth form,
So like his humour, chilled, withdrawn
Into speculations about coming poverty.
Grace it seems, is lacking in our clime,
The changes too sudden to be credulous
For we still remember the ease of Fall.
We watch a lone cyclist make his way
Across the steep hill on the other side,
Speculate how long it would take
After a rainstorm for the new houses to fall:
As I write, the sky is clearing
And we will lack rain for a week.

Today's Words

By turns, the day has come skimming across,
Though there's an edge to the breeze,
My words being measured out by hammers
Echoing across the river valley, and then
Our collie's mad scramble at starlings.
It may be possible that my hesitation
Is not caused by those, but myself
Taking too long a time to fall at this leaf -
If it's going to be finished with, done,
Done well that is, Adams said this at a Seminar,
You must put yourself into the process
Without let or stint ... fair enough,
But as the neighbour's brash dogs say,
We leave off till morrow what's for today.

In Circles

The house asleep, perhaps two hours now,
We feel safe enough to put on the record-player
You wanting Diamond and Streisand -
Then later I dig out my scratchy music,
Body-swaying airs we would've heard
Had we been in Smyrna or Constantia.
Our sunburnt brick-veneer masks
All errors and foolishness,
We danced in a brag of sways,
And I'd argue that passion lives
In the twist and turn of eyes and hands,
Enough blessings for an hour of joy -
Who would have believed us,
One foot after another into looping circles?

Broken Wing

In the next house, someone has a 1950s movie
Blaring thin marches over a jet soundtrack,
Hayden Stirling is solving an ethical problem,
A USAF test pilot thinks of Rin Tin Tin
Rescuing the neighbour's cute daughter -
What do *cumuli* and *cirri* care?
When I was walking between trees
On my way to Queen's Park Bridge,
I found a broken wing, bloodless,
Feathers still shining by moonlight
A smell of salt and wavetopping breezes,
There was sand between the pinions -
Who had fallen to Earth this time -
My lover perhaps?
I have no cash to pay for this letter to you.

Window View

Today we are all wearing our woollens.
Most of the children have switched
Into their Winter gear, not even April,
And the beech tree across the road has gone to gold.
In a photobook, I viewed a birch forest
This time of year in a far-off field,
Together they were huddled against the winds
Which were only an expectation, they bent
Towards the Sun as though at Communion.
I was reminded of this when lighting candles -
She looked on me saying, "My Son grieves".
I had not the words for right response:
At the crossroads nearby, a desacralised Church
Breaks wood and stone against our Fall.

Aisling

The usual night, late to bed
Then tossed up again by two,
Long hours of indwelling and bile
Before grey light announces herself
Smiling at my bed-end:
"What's it you're so fearful of?
I come to you each night
And whisper you your dreams: dance them!"
Dance: the bedcover is twisted,
Cat digresses about the moon's intemperance
Sighing of woes unnumbered,
Leaving me with a broken phrase.
So the room's chilled, the alarm purls
Time for today's first *noir*.

O Moonlight

In the middle of your turning, a sigh
Escapes, no, more like a dragging foot
All lethargic for want of good sleep
And the door left to swing open all night:
O moonlight, you walk in like my familiar
Coming to the mirror, tresses let down,
Your little songs quite impossibly wordless
Lightning between sighs and far thunder.
It makes me feel as though I am asked
To trace a slight significance on trust,
Not inherent in the night's quality,
But the soft passage of sighs and frozen sounds.
The bedspread stiffens now that it's cold,
I turn and join your sighs, vague, expansive.

Lady Abdy

Balthus, 1935

Light broods on still waters, at windowsills,
Gilds their contours, secretive and loving
At edges of drapery and windows -
It's almost noon, the room is private.
Ten seconds, then ten more, limitations
Edging towards a form of resolution,
Then as afternoon falls, three things -
The air chills, so we draw up the covers,
Light burns red across the dusty town
And our bellies growl, empty.
Draw back the curtains a little more,
Let the last Sun envelope me,
I am abandoned to all but love,
Or is it that love has abandoned me?

For Eurydike

Momentarily, when you turned your head and
Loosed that single smile which burns me still

Beneath the skin, I mistook what little advice

My heart could have been given.

Then, why was your laughter induced in those
Men crowding the foyer and long corridors?

Their whispers and sighs shadowed our footsteps

Yet my ears heard only you.

The west wind blows no colder than your disregard,
First you were the smiling Sun, then you let Winter

Enter in just one hour.

I tremble. I sweat the sleepless nights away,

Making again a Summer of gathered-up

And wanton smiles.

A Choice

Hermes looks like a wandering student on *Ringstrasse*
And Paris is a mere boy: he's chosen the blonde, of course,
All willowy curves wrapped around an ice heart.
She reaches for the golden apples, quite shameless.
He should have lived with each of them for a year and a day,
No woman can hide her feelings for that long,
Being dragged into the bedroom nearly every night.
Three years of marital bliss would beat a twenty year war.
Athena's helmet is a bit lopsided, but offend her –
All of Attika is offended and ready to defend their honour,
Hera's sense of matronly dignity is readily bruised,
She'll go home and all night splutter into Zeus' ear.
Of course no good will come of it, just as no good
Came to Kraemer's Vienna: anyone for *Anschluss*?

Bride

Landscape with Figures, Jean Bellette 1945

You have been my constant friends for twenty years
Ever since I first crossed your threshold, saw
What these chambers held in the way of gifts,
Being led, much like a shy bride to meet all
Welcoming strangers. There was a place set aside,
A glass given to my hand and kind words said.
These wedding guests I count as my friends,
Vassilieff, Fairweather and Bell, and others
I recall from my days in the halls at North Terrace:
So I find myself at ease in this new house.
Jean Bellette knew that as well, for three couples
Stand around a votive fire at some interrupted point,
Each pausing from their given tasks, welcoming:
The bride will settle in, life will go on, homely.

Edit

Awakened at four, thinking it was later,
Then letting the coffee cool whilst rewriting
These twenty or so sonnets, another neurosis
Is in the offing, pen lacerates paper -
A pool of yellow light over the dining-room table
Yet not even a hint of dawn by second cup
The beats have come calling to the door
An ice breeze cuts my pyjamas:
Nothing happens - all I can do is edit -
Ink flows as if it were my blood
And I pricked by thorn-hedges
High enough to deter even a Diarmuid:
Wrong by an hour, leaving off,
I fall down corridors - no light, no light.

Looking over my shoulder

for Trevor Code

The local server is down: from what's said
Signals have been wheeling like seagulls
Between ourselves and across the waters
Then cancelling out, severing our links.
In Washington, Cherries are blossoming
And in Worcester, no doubt Maples have budded,
Perhaps two or more months till finals
Then the promise of a long, listless Summer.
It becomes impossible to write without
Looking back over my shoulder, seeing him
Seated by his queenly dolphin, netted.
I would be there, even if it snowed hard,
A bland watcher of that *Heldenzeit*,
Taking in each note of what I admire.

Main Street, Worcester

for Michael True

Across the road, dodging traffic to a bar,
Cool, inviting, where I settled down
For two beers and desultory conversations,
Then back out into the light afternoon:
So like Adelaide, Clark sitting in midtown
Students tumbling out into the streets,
Whole suburbs enveloped.
Maples, I think, were at their golden best,
Dapples of red and green - a pre-Soviet flag
Buried away in exiles' collective memories.
Hearing a New Englander's voice, I am jolted
Back to my loose ramble along Main Street,
Though I have only walked a little way
And my brown river breathes her own song.

On the Road to Anglesea

Anglesea road is a mirror bouncing mirages -
Pleasure domes, tropical islands, curls -
We see ourselves as we were
Some twenty, thirty, years gone.
When I sit to watching the traffic
The car doors transpire dreams
Which fall together in a great troop
And rise to make afternoon clouds:
That night it rains dreams on ropes of traffic
Tying up distances between beach and home,
Every child mirrored in salt-drops
Evaporated from tops of blue waves:
The skies will clear, mirages beginning again,
And the next day will fall back into the sea.

Bell's Beach

More than a wave, more a force
Raging in from green depths,
Sandcoast cannot withstand,
The granitic spit is broken,
Black riders climb mountains,
Hanging for a feather's breath
Then slide into oblivion,
Or so light, like skipping gulls
Riding upthrust currents,
Then a salmon-hero's leap
Exulting in the light - just
As gods at serious play,
And equally careless.

Closure - Stingaree Bay

Next to the three-table cafeteria,
A leaf-littered front yard
No more than six paces broad,
A workman unscrews a brass plaque.
Mr. Lim, the Chinese Naturopath
Smiles by his boxes of inscrutable pills,
The Clinic Nurse, her mascara running,
Turns her back on the still street.
"No suspicious circumstances":
Robert W. had gone for a last swim
That warm day in late April
In just six inches of saltwater.
One notice only in DEATHS,
And the whole town is guessing.

By the Sea

We get no time to rest it seems,
All nineteenth century utilitarianism
And this interior's hardened heart,
Or whatever ethic drove this country's founders -
They have turned their backs to the sea,
But here I'd rather be swimming deep,
Rock pooling or just sitting by the edges.
I would hope for this Summer to have reached
Deeper into my leached self -
Burning only for love we'd all repose
By the sea and rebaptize our race
Like new athletes, gold and undefeated.
I want for the waves to catch fire,
For the sands to purge my wandering.

Sartre at Nida

Between midday and four o'clock,
A common time to go walking
If only to get away from your hosts'
Incessant chatter: yet you talked
Endlessly, not letting a word in,
Lest it edge like a crab on the sands
Into the ponds of thought.
No free swimming this afternoon.
You were squatting at Mann's
Beachhouse then, or had you
Paid curt homage to Kant's grave,
Then been driven to Nida?
If it's any comfort, *philosophe*,
Lenin has been kneecapped.

Sulkie

In that photograph, you emerge from the pool
With the sunlight streaming out behind,
All other details are whitened over, the water
Oddly enough, an opaque haloed ring,
In your one smile drawing out all my sadness -
It had been a hard Summer -
Saying cast aside that dulling mirror,
Throw yourself away, make free -
Little Sulkie, I did this and swam
As far out as my arms could ache,
Diving deeper than my breath would allow,
Leapt higher than a swordfish:
This morning I woke up well before four,
Swum outwards, ever towards your light.

Orthodox Easter

Before us the sky blazing out
Over this autumnal landscape,
Strangely warm for an Orthodox Easter -
All's turned around in this alien place -
I have fought all my life
And made incarnate such fearful joys
Quite separate from each of us,
Just as we are distanced within
These green walls and burnt hills.
My granite self now prays,
Torments itself, calling you *sea*
And begging heaven for light:
So here it is, my voice
Spiralling up out of darkness.

White Crosses

for Andria Zuccolin

And it was then, yesterday,
Or even the day beforehand,
As their souls sang out
All under a starry vault,
Their bodies but shadow-kisses:
The sky was no longer distinct,
Names of rivers wash away,
Winds bitter on their lips.
Someone has planted a white cross
Where ghosts live, roadside:
Is this the wrong place,
Or are the maps wrong again?
No use in crying now, God
Redrew them long ago.

Our Body

Our body, our soul's manifestation,
Yields to a surgeon's knife,
The dull grunt of a carcass,
Nightsweats and fevers,
The world is as uncertain a place
As anywhere:

 only water is softer,
Opening like a lover's flower.
Even so, it can scald,
Take shape and lacerate.
From the highest mulberry tree
Cars looked like toys, the city
Distant as a dream of towers:
On windwave I swam to heaven
Mindless of the coming night.

Last Blooms

Folded in on themselves, the last
Blooms of Hibiscus and Bottlebrush
Fall away easily in my hand,
Their once-wanton scents now faint.
House remembers bloom-time
And bright Summer blaze,
Their windowsill dances
Were more readily understood
Than my words: silence
Is the birthstone of flowers
Like heat off concrete paths
Between midday and four o'clock:
They're discards now, tears
Drunk from cupped fingers.

A Birch

for Ieva Kains

You had sent me a Birch for transplanting
Into the grubbed nature-strip,
To brandish its youth against
These grey skies of coming Winter.
In the sear light of late afternoon,
Veins on each leaf are clearly seen,
Webbings on the back of my father's hand
Traced against his translucent flesh.
Our bodies, more Water than Bone,
Sing soft musics with the nights,
And trees, like this golden Birch,
Tap the air with a swing of each limb.
It will arise higher than I can reach,
With its heart-songs, grace our street.

Rush

A half-hour between classes, paperwork done,
Our chatter as we sort and staple
It's a rush to get Reports done by tonight:
Nothing has changed in the landscape,
Though we stand on our hands, cartwheel,
Do our gymnastics to please the crowds -
Change for the sake of change?
We measure progress as a barn dance.
In another country, tea-ladies bring mince pies
And hot coffee for elevenses,
A schoolmaster's shelves groan with leather Virgils,
Even the janitor addresses one as *professore*.
Last week, windows broken in Room 38,
The hired Vandals are at our throats.

Room 38

The linoleum floor glitters,
Broken shards cut like arrowheads,
Our re-entry is more than
An essay on uncertainty.
If the window has been shattered
And leaves swept in from the green park,
Shadows blackfisting their way in,
Then there's no holding back the tide.
All is dissolution and grime,
Cabinets opened like sardine cans,
Untidy leafpiles shifting easy,
The smell of burnt papers and wet.
It's only a small war – we sigh,
Sweep the floors and begin again.

At Minyip

Undershoe, he flashed away in a treble ripple,
Gold and fierce, dispersing us in terror,
A cold space left behind, grass slicked,
Dust settling down against the gravestones -
My forefather had come to his rest here,
About as far away as needed for peace -
Ravens and magpies withheld their comments.
All the music heard was wind
Cutting across stubble fields, barbwire notes
On the quiet, a few words floating,
And the wire gate aching when it opened -
I am there again - the children querulous
Unnerved by nameless graveplots -
Snake watching us.

Atlas

Singing in lost tongues

Of a geography drawn in part:

The Atlas pages are read like a Missal printed

Before the great cataclysm:

Murrabul, Barwun, Warrambin, Kurung, Wathaurung:

These stud our speeches

As basalt and granite

In a limestone plain,

Getting in the way of plough and road.

Going about the back country past Colac

I see great piles of stones

Singing in those lost tongues,

Heaved aside for the ploughing

Outlasting the rusted harrows.

Into Winterwood

It was raining earlier this afternoon,
The red setter had been kennelled
Content with her bones and blanket,
So we went off to bed for a time
Phone off the hook to discourage jangling callers,
Our curtains half-drawn, lacy breezes,
With just enough light to see by:
Later, with the fallen sun's coolness in the house
And silence thick amongst the roses,
I had woken, stoked the fire and then
Slipped away to dress quietly
As not to disturb your dreamings:
The roads had been slicked, I skidded,
But found my way into winterwood.

Out of my pockets

Out of my pockets I pull those things
That are retained by chance:
A comb for golden hair, a packet of seeds,
A pewter ring fashioned by child's craft,
Some broken cigarettes from France,
A fish-hook snagged on a cheap hand-bill
Announcing last week's dance,
And even an Amber bead:
It came from your necklace last night
When we dashed in from Mackenzie's:
If the Moon were bright then, you
Were brighter still by the lace curtain
Brushing down your hair
As is your ritual before coming to bed.

Two days rain

Squatting by the black ledge with weeds
Stinking of cattle piss and two days' rain,
I drank at my small flask
Of Jameson's that'd been in the bag,
Myself secreted well back
Trying to ignore the endless fall
Straining to hear the first birdsongs
That would mark the clouds' lifting:
The setter came in, near me at last,
Wet from her long adventuring,
Smelling of back ridges and the mists
Rising from grassy paddocks:
A trout leapt to tackle my wrought fly -
Gone, too quick for my golden rod.

Break

The marriage almost broke you, my friend,
All those long years in the Americas
Among intense strangers chattering in pairs,
Much the same tongue as ours, but different.
His constancy at the drinking the whole shelf
Even after you'd smashed his gin stock
And given away the two gallons of Bourbon
To someone less pitiable than himself.
They, you said, who burnt in their new pride
And the shifting masses of white provincials
Who had not the slightest idea of where the centre is,
That affrighted you out of the Carolinas:
You turn from the proffered glass and pace the floor,
Asking when his ghost will fill the door.

One white siesta hour

One white siesta hour
The town lay in bed, windows
Open to catch any stray breeze,
Bedrooms shaded in twilight wherein
Young wives loosened their shifts
For husbands and dreamlovers:
At last, Corinna came, skirts lifted,
White hair parted just so,
Like a lady of a hundred lovers.
She rose up in all beauty
To snatch the prize from my grasp,
O then she cast me in the surge:
Why say more? But whisper this,
How I died, her name on my lips.

Then

Silver-tipped green, the trees have gathered cold
Spring's showers glassing over the dunes
And we argue about the possibility of being pragmatic
About such matters as can be told,
The purple geraniums' stockiness, a daisy's
Golden eye, the likelihood of a hot summer:
We wait, for what, we are unsure.
Is there a forgetting of the possibilities,
A release from the worried particulars
As seasons hurry towards Advent?
In the corner plot, I've placed two punnets,
Grosse Lisse, displacing some rooted Basil,
Thinking of last Summer's good handfuls:
The particulars will take care of themselves.

Shrove Tuesday

Bending a little towards the Sun,
This one tree dances gold and green
At the field's edge: schoolchildren play
Their games with serious intent,
Yet none could say why this one tree
Is singular of all its kind,
Gathering in armfuls of light,
Herself the reaper of high Summer.
If tomorrow I remember
Little else save her shy curtsy
In slow sway of fluttering leaves
And the gaming children's bluster -
Such delight would I encourage
My heart to store, for surety.

Stony Rises

The road winds towards Stony Rises
Out of a thistle-strewn plain:
Hereabouts the distances are made
Out in terms of farmers' years.

I think you know what it is like.
Each rock had to be put on top
Or side by side of brother rock
To delineate the winding miles.

Fields and fences give this land
The look of being tamed, but
This is an impossible status,
For at edge and corner are trees
Their fingers finding interstices,
Breaking imprisoned boundaries.

West Paddock

There is no lack of thistles
In the west paddock
Where the clay hill slumps:

But, over the ridge and south
Almost to the main gate

The fields are rolling waves -
New grass for later haymaking.
I can reckon the difference
Between seasons
By the depth of this grass.

A carter was contracted
To cut the paddocks
Just before Christmas:

I saw the tractor as it rolled,
rolling.

North of the highway

North of the highway, dry land,
And further north, desert and salt:

There are roads I have not seen,
Places I have no wish to see,
Knowing already the sun's brunt
From what little I've learnt
In reading vast geographies.

How the asphalt simmers.
It sticks to my boots.
I can taste the saltdrought and sand.

Yet, there are those who live on
Hereabouts, besides hare and eagle,
Fox and sheep:

 perhaps it is how
They cope with the here and now.

Near Moriac

Quarried, or taken out of fields,
Set in motion
Fluid contours meeting
At gate or sharp corner
In shieldsaplings and mounds,
As weatherwalls:
They have stayed set
But for microentropic shifts and falls.
For ourselves, moving on
Shadows into the light,
A soft breeze,
Little more than sighs:
A vine gone wild, alien,
And walls hosting swifts.

At Robe

At Robe, the sea and clouds,

Where the road breaks
Into a hundred runnels
Down to the sands.

These things are gathered: a spiral shell,
Cuttlefish, driftwood and a grey stone
Which when split on its long axis
Yields a fossil, just like that,
A spiral shell, in all its logarithmic glory.

We race across the sand
Plunge into the curling foam
Glad to slough the day's heat:

Almost as far out as is safe
We turn to see the burning shore
So far off,
 another place.

Weather Day

"the farmer prays ...", Jorie Graham

Fog. The white buses fold into vales. Phone calls drop out.
Over the ridge a tractor coughs and lurches at the field.
The farmer's wife takes out a morning's wash: will it rain?
Each thinks the same. On the paddock grass, a hardy
Firstfrost clings to each green shoot, tickling with promises.
It could persist until noon. Gravel crunches under car tyres,
As the radio forecasts in transistor tones, the sun will set early,
Be reluctant to rise, much like ourselves: a cold front promises.
Their children have gone to school, it's Friday, sports day,
The eldest is living at Newman, sends e-mails on Tuesdays,
Correcting his sister's essays, sends his little brother jokes
Even his father can understand. She longs for his voice.
Almost noon, she walks downhill to the sheds with a wicker basket
Picked up at the Agricultural Show, scrubbed out, lined in white linen.

Concerning Sleep

There are three kinds of sleep: that which rests,
Is complete from the first moments of rest til cockcrow,
When he rolls over, holds her fast for an hour or more, is late to rise:
That which teases: long nights broken by noise and bluster,
Cholicky babes, bladder nights, heartburn nights,
Unstoppable shufflings between bedroom, toilet and television –
Two or more of those and the week is wrecked: worse still,
White nights of walls emanating electricity, lace curtains floating.
They decide to get into each other, cups of bitter tea.
He would fain lie down under an oak tree on the ridge, sleep:
What have I forgotten? To do? To pray?
Each petal of the yellow, black-eyed daisy clutches a crystal
All for the lack of rain. The farmer heaves his left leg stiffly,
One stride at a time marking out the home path. A cat follows.

Oasis: Like Almonds

Like almonds against the tongue, his flowers
Shaped themselves in a mirror, always before her
A face appearing, disappearing, a trace lost,
Found high above all, by the almond grove,
Making her heart melt like high snows:
But I will hope continually for those things
Which nature is said by all to do,
Such as an immature rainbow over his head,
Seeing where there is an army, strong as a fair
Running waters by the almond grove.
Most everyone seems to have something to sell
And it turns out that the pilgrim meets with
An angel trained in that sense of lurking,
As I saw her mutable in fancy, blossoming.

Oasis: Chrysanthemums

And patience, experience, and experience, hope
Of what I am, and will be, what death created made long ago,
Those same chrysanthemums appeared in funerals
Nourishing me with slips of cinnamon.
Some men and beasts which walk amongst you
Speaking of images, groves,
Even of hills covered in groves.
If someone has the power over you, there are gifts, like speed,
Diversities bringing motion into politics, and hope,
Something of which I did not even know.
For as there be a truth to suck divinity
From the flowers of nature, winter surely follows.
This much, even I at my desk know,
Her love is firm, her care continual.

Oasis: A Bank of Lilies

Speed is in the air, and it should be clear to us
How to change the images of the past
Like a bank of lilies laid in disarray
When certain men would come down
Nearer to view their prey, asking,
Is there any sight in the white of a lily?
These lilies are the power of the flame,
 As is the glass we spoke of before.
Lilies were proposed to the senses,
And so, scores of ordinary people have felt that
Cedar beams, and brick and plaster
Would fall in raging flames, all that foes should flee.
The lily does not remember why
She's not married till she is eighteen years.

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Deluge



Edward Reilly

Newtown Geelong 2000

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CANTO I

The wildness of it

well, the wildness of it, is not gone, but, I can be, cooler, eh?

CHARLES OLSON *Letters for Origin* 1950 - 1956

Morning papers, and radio, and television
Are full of tales of heroism and loss,
Graphs chart the river's unstoppable rise:
The Kardinia Park levee has been breached,
Caravans and factories flooded, lives awash -
Barwon Heads battles for its own salvation:
Not that rain chooses to stop at all
But rather the surge is even more at drink
Leaving us as an island - ourselves alone:
Our sins must have been immense.

Ask among the drownèd dryads: their hands
Flailing to grasp soaked banks, every where
Their battered trunks hugged downwards.
Each branch, leaf upon leaf, shudders
In barely articulate words, slipping past
To whisper our names as their saviours.
A child, bright as light, stands by my side
Touching hands for strength, then is gone.
A glittering Moon has parched my sight,
I reach out my hand to grasp broken twigs.

I had dreamt of her before: waiting one day
By a bus-stop, it was raining, I had retreated
Into a doorway and heard a girl's voice,
At echo on some stranger's remarks.
Then the slow movement of a fawn coat,
A chance smile and slow recognition.

I can hold that moment, fixed,
Yet as slippery as the grass underfoot:
The bus pulled up all noise and spray,
Behemoth at flight, dream slipping away.

In 1848 the river rose so harshly it broke
The first timber bridge at Belmont, and then
In 1870 another great wall of water swept away
Old Queen's Bridge, nine years after its building.
In 1880 and 1952, the waters peaked below two fathoms,
Then in 1995, that mark was over-reached.
Now that records are kept, meticulously,
We can see that floods come in waves,
Their graph, taken over 150 years
Resembles the mane of a prancing pony.

And then went down the sloping street
Set feet on sodden grass, saw the raging tide,
Made stand there for the coming day
Lest all the houses be borne away, and ourselves
In lamentation and fear as upvalley storms

 Buffeted us in our long vigils.

Then we sat under cover, hands to a fire,
Talking of floods and droughts till evening,
Sun fell behind slopes, shadows stretched over all.

We are come in the deepest of all our winter nights
To our forefathers' first landing on these shores,
Peopled by shadows slipping our grasp,
Even the hard glittering Sun eluded definition
And the stars, looking out from a new heaven,
Stretch backwards and lefthanded.
An upside-down land of brilliant excess,
Harsh mistress who had burnt deep creases
Around the eyes and souls of all who walk here.

The children and agèd came to watch as well,
Telling us with tears of farmsteads drowned,
Levees broken and the television shouting at us
"All's done with the world, we are flooded away!"

And black priests
Stalked the camp's edge claiming souls for their own.
The men watched and sent the others off,
We made the night's business coffee and bread
Our own libations, and prayed despite ourselves,
Lest the foaming torrent flood us to drowning.

Moon, a pocked sphere, furtive, saw
Men gathered by his daughter's skirts,
Caused the deluge to further her spate,
Rising to flood as high as three men
One standing on one, standing on another.
In the half-light disbelieving we saw swept away
Cows and sheep, a house-gate, other shapes,
And the branches of trees reaching up
As if crying out for some god's compassion:
"Why is this so?" one watcher asked aloud.

Naked herds of the damned replied thus:
This river has drunk our of blood, our souls,
Cast us into an evil dream where rats
Haul us towards Hades' shores, we object,
Yet the good gods are deaf to our plea.
Silver-eyed, one amongst them rose up
Crying, I thought she had grown roots
Into the riverbank and stood immaculate:
"But look", she cried, "at the gash about my breast".
We a saw her heart-sap weeping.

"Pull down, pull down the crowned towers",
Was the cry, and they set to with axe and saw,
Put plough and coulter to grasslands, burnt
Then harried, ate their fill, till now we find
She is barren and more unyielding each Summer:
We have seen newsreels made after two Wars
As steel chains and balls broke the forests,
Three days' walk southwards, three westwards,
All was struck down, and each day more:
Some of us grew frightened, "We knew
Good times, but now a reckoning's being paid".

This is how they appeased the river gods:

Someone from the back blocks, someone unimportant,
Was dragged to the bluff then struck dead, her glory lopped off,
And the body cast into waters - a cruel process
But thought to be efficacious against misfortune:

Speke relates

Near Uganda the kings butchered at least a thousand
Each year for good harvests, luck in battle, and the like:
I wonder what honest burghers of our town would say
If the Barwon were choked with their daughters' remains.

Sky dark, cloudless and starless,
At midnight a shower of stars,
We heard shouting from upstream,
Discord in the big houses -
A woman wants her lost child
And we read of planets in alignment
Of the Medjigorje Virgin's sooth
Chaos let loose on a sinful world:
Too old for such a deceit,
I see only what is in front of me.

Like a long-married couple they lay prone
Hands linked in one another's,
One turning in the roil, so the other
Rises, stretches and turns itself to fit
Arm over gently loving arm.
The grass underfoot is heavy with dew,
For once it is not raining and lovers
Faithful, having kept vigil, return home,
To hear their wives whimper and sigh
Bedrooms opening out on uncertain tomorrow's day.

In the pearl-mist that passed for dawn
One of our fellows found a tall man's jacket,
Tweed, a packet of cigarettes in one pocket,
Wrapped in plastic to keep out the damp, I suppose:
We thanked our nameless benefactor, for
None had seen the stranger go by that night
Nor heard him as he cried out his last words:
When light would prod us homewards, news -
Police had been searching for a tweedy man:
Friend, there but for fortune go I, or you.

Outside my morning window, a tree's
Purple flowers blow in rude rain.
Can they add to love's candour?
The wind also is of love's process
Squawking like nesting sparrows
In fear at the black cat's padded feet.
One day they will hold the keys
Of love, explode into white doves,
Partake of sacred bread and holy wine:
Even the commonest are so transformed.

•

CANTO II

He lay in the middle of the world

He lay in the middle of the world, and twitcht.

John Berryman, *Dream Song* #53

If only we could speak to each other in civil tongues
Mixing the everyday in with heaven's desired outcomes,
So rounding off this undone business, our redemption:
It's almost as if nothing has been fulfilled -
Rainbows twisted slightly to the left as I turn away
From you, I still see snow-covered Ararat whence we came:
Then doves nesting in that oak which bears first buds
I would feel new words growing on my tongue -
How else could I name those long worms and raucous
Cicadas crawling out of the Taurus mud?

She sang in broken words those hymns of her childhood,
Agnus Dei sliding into *Faith of Our Fathers* and then away
Into night patters and side-show prattle - *knees up, knees up* :
At the same time she had abandoned her lovers,
Infant of Prague be our guide to the other side,
Then said to him, you sleep there in your bothy,
Drink as much beer as you care, but not here,
Sanctum sanctorum my bed for Him alone is reserved:
In sad fact, the old man was a soak, and she
Much the same, drinking in the stars' liquor.

We keep coming back to the same phrases
Even if we had tried to shuck off Babel, for you say
Shut not *turn off* the light on going to bed
Remembering how grass was lusher in olden days
Or how poppyseed milk soothed infants' aches,
And I burr my tongue on *bairn* and *ruin* :
Perhaps our mitochondria show up in speech
Or in the way we begin to die so slowly, every day
My heart rehearsing its foregone aneurism
Or your insistence on the house being tidy always.

He once said that he admired the maiden Ophelia
For it was Summer then, and would have been warm,
Not like those years in the heaving North Seas,
Steel-tooth wolves waiting on the run home to Skara Brae,
Or later, watching men topple overboard and plummet -
Davy Jones was well-fed - a pause - they died quick,
Not like me, eh? - and then the long quiet as we drank -
It's a different cold here, damp and unforgiving:
When at last the Police found his clothless corpse
We could not but notice the small posy of soursobs,
Daisies, wild spinach and fennel knitted into his fingers.

A small barn with tarred shingles falling off,
Holes where mortar has rotted on the weather-side,
I can poke my finger through and gaze upwards
Or spy a ripped *Playboy* pinup of six years ago,
All pneumatic, airbrushed - angel of desire,
Redemptrix of rheumy men who'd rather drink
Than go courting or trim the hedges of a Saturday -
He sat in there and listened to football all day:
After he had gone, the vegetable patch fell rank,
With spuds and turnips all joyed to seed.

This river runs through my dreams, I worry
With my heart sick to the core or count birches
Swaying in light breezes by an unnamed lake -
There's a small house, empty these days, where
I want to live, watching the waters flow past
In long roils all the miles from the Otways
Then slithering past the middle of the world.
I would, if I had the wherewithal, rebuild,
Paint it white with blue trims as in Donegal:
On mornings of the full Moon, I'd share songs
With blue wrens and dancing magpies.

What have I forgotten? Beginnings and ends, dates,
Details of hair and how the eyes were exactly placed,
What varieties of Rose and Maize mother cultivated,
Even if she used parsley to decorate mashed potatoes.
When the gas was put on, I stopped bringing in wood
For the kitchen stove: washing took a half day,
I would lay on the concrete floor and wide-eyed watch
Blue flames rubbing themselves against the copper bowl:
There was no rain that Spring, we sluiced the garden
So her Roses would blossom in sad pinks.

In those days of the floods, my neighbours said
Snakes had taken to breeding like profits - prophets? -
And if I had taken to swimming in the flood, like boys
Pumping their surfboards above Buckley's to Queen's
And come roaring down evading snakes, it seems
Under my hand I would have gathered a mermaid
Or your handkerchief edged in silver, pine needles,
A mix of who knows what else - clumsy landscapes -
The broken dreams of five-generation farmers
Scratching for their patrimony against the Banks.

A fence straggles between one field and another
While clover grass ignores posts and wires
Or the long lines of stone placed atop stone.
Catching scraps of tossed meat my dog leaps
High into the air and can see to the other side
Of the world to sweeter days, damper nights:
I sit on the fence, deciding which way to tumble,
Throw straws to the wind - some drift southways
Where the long swells come in from far off icelands:
Some grit northwards to the gibber plains.

Past Forrest, the asphalt peters out, suggests white gravel,
Falls into unresolved browns and grays, a walking track.
Their car can be driven only so far, for the rest - they pass
By black box, ironwood, pines clustered at gullyhead.
Going on, light comes in short blazes, rainbows of birdcalls,
Phrases promised by loose currawongs, then the quiet,
Not even the hammer-carols of magpies far down the gully
Where the first seepage turns to smirr of coldwater:
They spread themselves out, jam-jar opened, rye bread,
Butter still cold in its foil, fritz & slaw, Chablis,
Put themselves onto the lists of lovers gone missing.

When it was raining at night, I could distinguish
Between four footsteps rising over the hills -
Ice pellets would tapdance on the tin roof,
We shook and held each other, then a great drumming
Swept up the valley, trees danced naked -
The third rain was like white water rafting
All *shushes* and murmurs - but the last wetted,
In and under the eaves, dribbled down windows -
Now when the house is still in the pearl hour
There's a fifth movement, one note, heartbeat.

Like the webbing on the back of my father's hand
Each leaf-vein could be seen quite clearly
Stark against translucent flesh, blood singing
In the clear light of late afternoon.
Our bodies are more water than bone,
Sing soft musics like golden birches
With swaying limb and bended trunk,
Tapping the air on rainy nights:
This small birch, new planted, will soar
Higher than summer, be golden as a rainbow.

He fell into the flood, gently, a raindrop
Folding into a pond with such a small ripple
Unremarked by keen osprey or returning dove
A merman swimming under bridges, past sheds,
All the way from silver Queen's to steel Breakwater,
Speaking in the hidden shining tongue
Each riding with them the flood's full reach
To taste salt and ice - three days he swam,
Then rested in the reed beds at buckley's cave,
His acolytes gentle ducks and wordless pelicans.

Now that I'm no longer ensnared, I can praise
What lives and dances with Sun and Moon,
What longs to stride between hills and the sea,
Taking each step higher from grounding
How far is it to the earth's bowline?
A butterfly could reach there in one wingbeat
Outpacing us even if we had a following breeze:
We must not falter nor rest for one day
Our skiff is insane for the afternoon light,
Life-lusty, and leaps over each billow.

All across the Brisbane Ranges out to Pentlands,
Behind the Otways and ten leagues seawards,
The grey herds have gathered in their clans -
Crayboats tie out their marks, race to dock
Before broken wavetops topple them down:
The air is strangely still, sun struggles,
Night-rains come visiting for hours without end
Outstaying their welcomes: our guests take leave
And hit the road back to bleak Metropolis,
Their laughter echoing still in the passage.

•

CANTO III

You cannot leave these things out

You cannot leave these things out

Ezra Pound Canto CV

Easy: my gyre downwards, so softly,
Then white billowings of heartbeats
Parted and paired, black swans belling
My family dead from darkness,
All emptied out as voided seed
To the brown flood, holding you
As never I had all those years:
Yet redfin and tench fed with me,
Trout, eels and carp inquired of me,
When all I wanted was to weep.

All things, yes, do happen at once:
Someone's shouting to a child strayed
Too close by watershore, it's raining -
A woman drinks her third sherry,
A budgie and her pimp enter
His red *Capri*, by appointment:
Hymns on an electric organ
Wash from Chapel on Belfast Street:
So, on the third day drifting still,
Reeds and grasses all my coronet.

Young woman in a red dressing-gown
Sits on her back verandah, smokes
A black cigarette, can't see me
Past the rails as I sing these lines:
She does not know I can see her,
Nor that the black cigarette she cradles
Is a crab crawling through her belly,
Nor what the fruit of her womb be
In twenty years from now - I know,
Yet I'd like to have a last drag.

A man is walking the hallway
Of his house, bare but for a cigar,
Finds something to laugh at
Then lounges on his back porch
Watching a hawk's considered vortex:
In a bedroom at the hallend
A younger woman half asleep
Croons her self-song, "I am loved, I am loved":
Hawk talons down sixty metres
His coney cries - "Love me, love me".

In the War, I was hit hard -
So they cut out some new shrapnel:
A Field-Nurse came to take my heat -
When she leant over her left apple
Fell out of its golden tree, and was kind
On a weekend Leave Pass, to me:
As I saw mates passing into death,
I would not follow them at all,
No bearded voice admonished me
For tangling in woman's tresses.

Know the Summer Sun is in Hell,
She whispered, I'm alone - so dark,
Then the girl swam off wordless,
Being quite dead - I had read of a child
Falling fifty metres from a balcony:
My tongue moved, but being not dead,
Yet, could not speak openly to the dead:
By charcoal grills her parents list,
At times, they say, they discern fillies
Calling their stallions through barbed wire.

You can tell where her folk came from,
All those Chapel saints' names for streets,
Black stone churches and planking halls,
Dour Sundays of sober suits, some men
Busying themselves with collars
Or speaking in made-up tongues:
From my father's cot I could set
Keel to breakers on Scotland's shore
Mere twelve miles across the waters
Her quiet hills ablaze with purple fires.

If worms don't find me at Buckley's Cave
Maybe I'll get to Rowing Sheds,
Or ease my way down to Breakwater -
I would like to be rafted to Connewarre
Where I could cross the sandy bar
Past the Capes Otway, of Good Hope -
What a stretched sailing it would be,
Cross the Line into roiling waves:
I could come to rest by Kintyre
Set my watch over Isle Magee.

The tin shed was big for the block
Almost as large as our house, frayed
At the cuffs like this tweed jacket,
Once the boys had gone was empty,
Never worked in it - too hot or cold,
Draughty every other day:
In my bothy, where you saw me,
I built it, I could read *The Herald*,
Tide schedules, tune into the Home Service
Shetlands ... Malin Point ... Finnesterre ...

Course I drank, just as fish breathe
A man drinks and lusts and then dies -
No sin in standing with workmates
Quiet words in *The Britannia or Carlton*,
They know me well at *The Cremorne* -
I'll drink fill I'm full in the gunwale
Then be sailing homewards at the setting Sun:
Anything's better than a Chapel
Hymns in a minor key, prayers -
The bar's my altar, black beer my wine.

My feet were sore, I'd been walking
Since three-fifteen before breakfast -
I could not sleep in my own house,
Filled with her trinkets and frills -
I threw away a good third of my life
In a bottle, and would do so again:
Tried throwing myself in front of a car
But that scared the driver - I should
Practise transforming into a wagtail
Or become a windtossed wattletree.

There's fennel and spinach gone wild,
Soursobs, thistles, salvation jane,
Also gold ragwort clusters on hillside
In fifty-pace saucers - almonds,
Wattles and ubiquitous gums,
Black forests of pine and cypress:
They fondle and kiss the wind's press,
Are happiest in upvalley westerlies,
Try to trick us into belief
Beauty is Truth, a Samurai sword.

The Greeks used to place a gold obol
Over each closed eyelid of the dead
So paying the soul's passage to Hades -
Four dollars would be a cheap one-way fare
But with interest rates and the banks'
Iron fists, I'm a fisher kept from fishing:
So when I cross the Lethe, no doubt
As cold and muddy as this long stream,
Take my seaman's ticket in lieu
And treat me with respect, O Charon.

My left foot's caught on some tendril,
The old watch has fallen off, my glasses?
I long to be happy at town's fate
But the flood is passing me by:
An eel, flank flashing in silver and green
Undoes my vest, button after button
Dropping like pebbles dislodged at cliffedge
Wafting into the mouths of waves, out of reach:
I do not feel homesick, for I can see
Stars glittering in the rainwashed night.

Stranger, you will find me disrobed
If at all I am to be found, eyes sealed:
Hawk can see me, as can snake and rat,
Tyler dog ticks my toes and opens
The doors to your temple in true speech:
Now I can name the world as it is,
Deluge - brutal as mountain-birth and ice floe,
Sending home all my mates - seagods
Well worthy of their fifty years salting,
To stand keening at their widows' doors.

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CANTO IV

Songs of the First Night

I say she because my body is so still

JORIE GRAHAM *Materialism*, p. 26

My song begins, making the world fruitful,
My garden and bower, sweet blushing roses,
Passionate as a wanton scullery maid
And her lover, our lady's hireling:
Once I sat still beneath an apple
Waiting for its fall, as I -
My father would laugh out aloud
At all of my mother's queer stories,
Then fall to planting out green slips
With an eye to Summer's displays.

What's this quarrel over him?
Not enough of the Gods' friendship,
Or the daily throng and politic?
So he's flown the coop, what else
Could you expect from the old cock?
Our latter days now see ruin and blight,
Estates sold off, wasting of elders
In befouled beds and narrow closets.
If my spirit were to leave these hills
Who be left to tend your fireplace?

Neither ebony nor gold could buy
Me a gracious high-ceiling house
Where I could escape from you -
Not even in the far African *veld*,
Nor the back alleys of Thessalonika,
You follow me like an unwanted dog:
My pockets, like my heart,
Emptied by your sweet words,
Follow me through the streets,
Paupers begging for tourists' pennies.

Ten golden delicious did I pluck,
Wild tree-fruit untouched by hand,
A gift for you kind sir, pretty weeds,
Some white, some gold as my tresses,
Moon also, settling on the rim
Almost unbalanced by earthshine:
A cruel storm bends the reedbanks
All creatures take to warm shelter,
You sir, still walking the roads,
Rain in your eyes, or are they tears?

Lift a glass to the old goat,
He still reels in the lassies
With nod, wink and a full tup,
Waving his staff about in plain sight.
Would you believe it if I said
He mined his purple from caves
Or that grapes are paupers' souls
Their prayers making us rich?
Fill my glass and let the spotted hound
Sleep on while we play at cards.

Your motorcar would pass over,
In less time than it takes to cough,
This gracious bridge, not one for all,
Crafted with care from black hillstone,
My back fits its fretted archway
Where, coronate, I sing these ditties:
Here grow Easter lilies and pinks,
Blackberries in wily luxury,
Manic banquets of gentian,
In secret edges, sweet Alysoun.

Sabina, my neighbour, would low in *Deutsch*,
Swinging through the house - my Hannes
Will come home to my *gemütlichkeit*,
O my refrigerator was made overseas,
It throbs for his return, the kettle is hot -
Every day her soprano sparked off the walls:
I prefer a gentler tongue, endless songs
Countering common sweat and babble:
Listen to the riverwash over granite,
Its kissing of salt and fishing boats.

Fauns and good-time girls all have fled
Their would-be picnic day lovers -
Fauns wanted to be chased,
Not wooed, the girls to be paid -
All too easy to deny Venus her dues
Turning hearts hard as river pebbles.
Four bachelors over their glasses
Take tongue to songs of travel,
Dust and boney cows for company
All lonesome on the dry plains, happy.

Twins glitter low above these hills
At times lost to our sight,
Trees and fences apt to obscure,
Street lamps hurt through tensed rain -
I would rather see all dancing
In gully breezes, arm in arm,
Lovers gone foolish for little reasons
We dead dare not guess at:
Try hard to remember their names
Saying their syllables against the night.

She holds sway over this place,
Where the workers are we girls
Calling to each other tales of love
Lost and won last Saturday's dance,
Who's full of it and who's done:
Near the farmhouse, that side there,
Shaded by a row of glossy pinetrees,
She sits with her suckling babe,
From the other breast her white eagle
Draws blood to sweeten his bread.

I will sing about an apple bush
Which gave of itself fruit and flesh,
Now I do want for these both
Old man, I hunger for Paradise
Having seen all there is between
Lake Connewarre and the Source -
I sing you, there are some fine gardens
Walled about, guardian angels
At their gates brandishing bright swords,
Yet I have not sung in Paradise.

Too early for bed? It's still light
Enough for me to read your face,
See the rabbits on the far bank:
They don't wait for the Sun
To hide his face - they're shameless
As street dogs and stallions at noon:
All too soon it will be Winter
When the wind cuts loose,
Then Night will come riding in
Even before we've broken slumber.

Look! The star *Aurora* swims our way,
Time soon for lovers to steal off
Leaving beds rumpled and happy hearts -
Star, if I had one wish granted
It would be ...

 forever childish

In a partytime dress, pink sash,
Ribbons for my glorious crown:
You sir, have passed love's wanton state,
As I am fixed, before it bloomed.

What is happening to you, sir?
Your vest is askew, a shoe's gone,
You don't need glasses hereabouts
So they're no loss - look at me,
My party dress is ripped at the hem,
Its blue silken sash trails upstream
Though I keep my velvet ribbons bound:
See how the fish are adorned,
Silver and gold scales, black fins,
Steel razors to pluck at our flesh.

I had my own golden room, dolls
Lined the cupboards or slept with me,
Thinking it no shame Ken and Barbie
Would cuddle in a matchbox bed,
Her blue eyes always open wide:
As she slept, delicate stories of love
Formed on her open lips, I hear again
From sweet-lipped carp and fluorescent eels:
I want for sleep ...

swim you on.

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CANTO V

Riverwalk

for Jura

Across the brown river and halfway up greenhill
an almond tree opens up his blossomed arms
to the rising sun, her kisses rain down on a folded kilt,
golden oxalis, cabbage weed and rabbit scuts
thick as these last three weeks of driving rain.
Some twenty yards higher, under a brick wall
which the bankrupt fisherman built for his garden,
a companion dances in the long valley winds,
for once I pause and gaze across to the other side
drinking in all the colours spread out before me -
pinks running into the light blue of cloudy sky,
the greys and whites of a late winter river, scraggy
ironbarks and golden reeds settled under cypresses.
That noise, like sharp rumours and counter-whispers
sweeps down from the blackridge facing off to the West,
small streaks of plugged fire, wet underfoot, raucous shriek
go winding through meadowgrass, rape and wort,
and with their words in my pocket I turn left:
I can still taste you, your flavours falling into shape
so that I give form to them, peppermint and sweat,
the flash of blue eyes and flutter of eyelash,
golden hair spilling over the pillowslip, tissues,
coffeestains and long imbibed breaths, the telephone
endlessly burrs in the distance of a shadowed corridor
and left unanswered till it tires itself to quiet,
flesh flecked and mottled, grunt and ease,
the dog's sudden quiet after an hour of barking.
Even in this cold wind I can taste suntan oil:
out of a tucked pocket come memories, playing
at perspectives and proprieties of place and time,
the aftertaste of sex is like Whitley's painted shapes
our bodies were folded into summery fluidities.
The classroom I'll slip into tomorrow will be raucous,
girls half-grown to womanhood, boys sodden with glory

there's no fragrance after lunchtime -
little Eros pops up his head from time to time
around the edges of exercise books, and Mars
has invaded the asphalt with blood and spittle,
but still, beauty performs her rites and lustrations
knowing the year's turn is but three weeks away:
In the flooded billabong, there's a ghost tree,
ducks, of all things, perch well up with galahs and ravens,
disparate like most visions we come to know,
and the scatter of carnations, daphnes and columbines,
wild apples to pick, roses for seeing love and rue,
more likely duckweed, sharp tussy and stinkthorn,
wild aniseed and stray fennel, african martyrs-thorn
and an acacia about five years planted in glorious goldbud,
then other straggling bits, and plastic bottles, papers,
everything jumbled together much like memory
inserted and eclectic, whatever beauty is in commonality
is much like what's underfoot, but it suffices,
shot through with that light rebounding down the valley.
I fall into shadow, there on the other side of the river,
where passing voices are heard in another dialect
as though a border had been crossed, differences heeded,
not that one must kneel to the path, but rather take note
of the messengers and heralds, these weeping willows,
who tell me that God's voice has fallen again,
that we live in the cusp of times too terrible to relate,
and that the News tonight will be full of horrors,
sharp arrows of sorrow hurling out from nowhere:
this new world has no need of dock and thistle
or the purple braid of salvation through a wheatpaddock.
What is it we dream of in our sleep? The Earth arising
invisibly through and by us towards mothering Sun,
Or a lapse in to the western waters? You were dreaming still
as I slipped back into our afternoon bed, and I watched,

dustnotes shafted the falling light, and I don't remember
sleep and all my dreams, only the taste of suntan oil and salt.
The river resists interpretation: his cathedrals hewn for pulp,
for cabins and cowshit paddocks, his inscription in barbwire,
even his proper name euphonised for our particular use,
yet living or dead, loving or buried alive in grey Winter,
we are transparent to him as the timeless aether
through which his signs move through in brown flood
to the sea, singing *Thalatta , Thalatta, I will be reborn in you .*

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August, 1995

CANTO VI

Eternal Memory

for Silvio Apponyi: Sculptor

Pheidias

It concerns us to try on new glasses and say those things
 For ourselves, not for others, as to how we can remember all,
 Whether it be the sunlight on the hillside or an off-shore wind
 Casting itself over still waters to sharpen the edges of windowsills,
 Or what we have willed ourselves to see, putting aside any fears:
 Let us go out into the world of imaginings held within one's palm -
 For this we will need all our tools and art to become as angels
 Who can dance on pinheads and thrice span the world's belly:
 Look at this stone the sculptor Apponyi has carved, the seal's form
 Was not immanent in the rock's chemistry nor in its geometry,
 Rather it was in the designer even before he had raised hammer
 And even before that, for there were seals sunning themselves
 As they let the sculptor's family come by with their quizzing eye,
 Before that as well, but we need not be actual angels to trace
 How far back the thread of being may unravel, but there and then
 As light rounded and sparked in the pebble, his hands shaped a seal:
 Would the seals know themselves in this, as we do see ourselves
 Mirrored in those works in which we move through the days?
 Which is not of itself come out of some object before a mirror
 Or cannot be put into glib words such as these are: they are pure
 Sources of shining light, of summer days remembered, undiffused,
 Even though they have taken up form, which like the prime source
 Sings us into silence as Pheidias added nothing but was in himself.
 Enough we do not slight ourselves by saying we are fooled
 Into thinking this shaped stone is an imitation of life, of course not,
 We realise that stone seals swim in stone seas, breathe stone air
 Have stone words to answer our strictures, have come out of salt.

Grandmother

The old market women bask in late Summer sunlight and breathe in
A different air to their grand-daughters, as once they had breathed
Not finding beauty in a black shawl and stained shift, but beauty
Sharpens our eyes to what we have not yet seen willingly,
And if it cannot be found at first we must look harder for ourselves
For all her works inhere in the first and last comings of light:
My grandmother saw me eat grass as I played the Bull to her Ariadne,
And in all her days there was not one stripling like me on land
Or over the seven seas, indeed, not even her brothers who danced
The London ladies off their feet through Lancers and Country Quadrilles
Fine gentlemen they were with emu plumes and polished leathers
Keen sabres in the dust of Arabia Deserta - Bersheeba their death-bed -
Only to see her made lame and then tethered to a steel ship,
Her stained sails flapping high amid gully breezes and Salvation Janes
At the last tram-stop on Northfield Section: I read *Biggles* to her,
Showed her my colouring-in book while Mother talked to Matron,
Sat on the end of her bed wondering why the Missus opposite
Who had a tube stuck down her throat sucking her blood and bones,
Now was gone all away, and there was a new Missus blindly crying:
The ward stank of quietened children, husbands' silences, priests' words,
As the kind Nun led us from the curtained bedside into the garden,
Her wimple was ample, flapping as she sailed over the Hospital wards
Bent on her mission of salvation, Rosary Beads clacking together,
A hundred women blessing her who had healed them when they were sick,
Blissful in the afternoon light over Parafield, going north to Seven Hills,
Onwards, ever onwards to their Jerusalem - so it seemed then to me
That Nuns were like those quickening angels of the Last Day,
Kitted out all in black skirts, black leather belts and white wings,
Knitting for us our several destinies on the three-yard blackboard,
JMJ and June 22nd, 1952 St. John's Day scribed in coloured chalks
For us to copy in laboured hands, maps of our unknown coasts
Where be strangers laying in wait for stray souls and lost mothers.

Voices

The fog lifted for an hour or so about noontide,
 Icily beautiful for once this Winter of miseries, sun
 Still blunting hard edges off the souwesterlies,
 So it's never cold enough for snow, but cold enough,
 And the clipped lawns are sodden: a Pelican sits
 Midstream just cruising along without effort,
 Going with the river's flow from hill to sea.
 Each morning wrencalls trill out from the reedbanks
 In plain enough tongue, it's time to be about
 And for the neighbourhood's dogs to call and raucous,
 For quietly conversing couples to set out around noon
 Along the tarmac paths from Queen's Park Bridge
 To the pub at Fyansford, and a leisurely stroll back,
 Commenting on the damage done by last year's flood,
 Watching the energies fly out and over the golfcourse:
 A red kestrel wind-rests high over the wooded gap
 Between two housing developments, watching.

We hear all the new settlers' tongues in passing -
 What do they speak of? Their pasts, troubled flight
 From eastern borders, forced rests in outlandish towns,
 An oaken forest felled at a whimsy? More likely
 Gout and Kidney Stones, the insignia of fifty years.
 The stars pull us along by unseen silks:
 If Saturn sets at dawn in Winter, then why do disasters
 Fill our bulletins with such impure songs,
 Our eyes see too much, and these cold days
 Drag us towards the longest of nights and disorder
 Hanging over our placid river: we ask that our
 Simple tasks be just that, the placing of black marks
 Onto slivers of birch-bark or cowhide, or the imprint
 Of glyphs by wooden blocks, plain speeches.

Would, if I could, retreat to a thick holt high upstream
Where I would have built a sandstone *tór*,
To oversee my City curving round Corio Bay.

Wren, Kestrel, Pelican

You pass us with Sunday gait
In twos much like ourselves, but
Grave in your paired gatherings
While we dance lithe quadrilles -
Our brethren are dancing also
Windcatchers, waterwalkers, swimmers -
Reeds bend under our tiny feet
We are no more than feathers
Hollow bones, red string for gut
And song - have you heard us?
We are soft and low, breeze-wingers
In the old-tongue of your boyhood -
Laudate in terra omnia

When the Pelican decided to go, he took three steps
Over the waters, lofted a yard so on a low slope,
Kept going at it for a time, until I lost him
As he flew under the Barrabool Street Bridge -
No need to put on a show for the flash motorists
But noticed by two fishermen amongst the reeds
One wearing a flat Russian cap like Bronštain,
Phlegmatic, waiting for Carp or Eel, watching footsteps
On the stream, yet no-one remarks upon this sight
That a bird, awkward, even ugly by some standards,
Walked on water - we live in unbelieving days.

My eye aspires to the Moon's soft pass
Over all the rippling waters, as the wind - I
At ease in lifting across the reed beds
My breast is white, wings black speartips:
Oh, I am shining in my river-coursing
From the silver bridge at Canoe-Tree Bend
To Breakwater where the iron and asphalt bridge sighs
I am an arrow heading to Lake Connewarre
Where he dances between Sheep Plain and Fish Mouth
Telling black Brim and shy Eel of his lust,
Why his face is so burnt - all for love's pity,
And I, I nestle in the steady lap of wave and tide
Heavy lidded, long beak turning under my wings
My half-eye opened on the afternoon's closure.

"You know, he was just standing there, crying like a child,
A grown man, a soldier at that, surely he had seen her
Washing her hair before, henna gushing out, you know,
And yet he cried out loud like a child, his wife ...":
The other glanced round at the bare trees alongside -
"*Weiß du nicht, daß* - Love melts a man? - of course he cried,
But to die of typhus - that was bad. Old age, well,
My dear sister, is bad enough - go slowly, slowly - *ai* ".

Drowning, not even a wave to the gracious air,
He sought a last glimpse of me: yet I'd tear
Out his eyes with a polished hook, deny
Him my curve and dip - let him drift down
His body gasses will bring him to me soon,
I'll strip the white flesh of childhood:
I see myself on blue days when I'm high up
Moving along the brown river, frightening
Lesser creatures - there's a cry floating -
Children - they're amazed at my dive,

My soar, my clutch, my crushing weight.
Naked, he does not regard me at all,
Yet I am eating him in, like smiling lilacs,
Like flesh-hooks and flowing mountains.

"I wonder, if the Spheres themselves do not sing
In accordance with the Nature of their Separations,
Not that this would be an Absolute, but Relative,
Harmonious": She nods in partial understanding,
"And then, each of us - " He holds her hand closely,
Fog rolls close in, the river is flat grey against the sky,
A flotilla of Coots moves round the reedbed, chatting
In red-beaked conversations.

Coda

O that you
Were in my arms again
Summer never fled
False as a silken rose
Is love, an empty bed

The fog flows back into place, warm as blood:

Overhead a flight

are they doves?

cracks the cloud:

There's a rush into the westing storm, pure light

Rubs off the grey water and around the dead eucalyptus.

Last night I saw a satellite taking a new course

Contrary to the world's roll and tumble, South to North,

Coming upon us unheralded: the fog stinks of factories,

Bare river, all gone quite still, afternoon falling away,

My footprints marked out on the sward, waiting for frost,

On the morning, pelican, wren and kestrel my witnesses.

•

St. John's Day 1996

CANTO VII

Songs of the Second Night

Jest v blizosti liudej zavetnaja čerta

[In human intimacy there is a secret boundary]

Anna Achmatova

They can't sleep: at three he makes tea
Which they sip in the silent dark.

She thinks of their son playing,

He of their daughter.

The television has been left on,

The Loungeroom is full of grey

As in Winter mornings and dreams.

Other rooms own sighs of longing,

Expectations, blankets, ponyrides:

Perhaps next Winter in Bali

While grass grows of itself.

The Gods of that place will be kind;

She will wear a saffron garland

Clap hands, calling out her lost child's name.

The Moon is reluctant to dance

In circles about himself, and these nights

Are colder than a forsaken bed,

Stars fail in their earthfall,

Bairns await their conception:

Yet these Cootamundra wattles

Anticipate next year's Spring:

Raining again,

Boughs stoop their golden tresses

Singing for the sun's return:

Behind, a row of cypress

Shroud themselves along a fenceline

Their backs to a brown river

Dragging black skies to themselves.

By the shimmering hedge we waited.
An hour passed, then another,
And was gone. Taking in the rain
We found ourselves at the path's end,
Turned, only to see you leaving
As though we had failed an assessment.
Our shouts fell on marbled statues
Who regarded us with disdain:
 But this scene had been played before
 On other days wintry with fog
 Rolling thick with promised regret:
A fine day for wind it was,
And that your hand was cold,
Was enough to hold fast for warmth.

In long meanders, blue in midday heat,
The river falls past their farm into light,
And living in light, climbs hills,
To empty into mountain tarns.
Its music has risen over the burial ground
Through foregone night, words teetering
On the edge of some transparent
 Argument
Between continuity and change.
The mercuric of deluge is known
As well as verse, line and phrase,
Yet as ever, water slips between the fingers,
Cannot be held any more than sunlight:
 All things have come together in splendour
 As the river floods their farm in light.

As if they matter, the little things:
Dust drifting under the windowsill
Crickets' songs so loud sleep fails,
Dripping taps, stiff hinges,
A lettuce browning for want.

That night

He ate curried sausages yet again,
Day-old bread, an apple, drank beer,
The clock's battery had still functioned
Though he wasn't sure of the time.
The house was so full of echoes
He'd taken to sleeping on the back verandah.
The bathroom had been washed out - twice -
But some stains are indelible.

Where the river shifts a mile or so
And considers sleep before noon,
Nothing much happens, except a half-smile
Or a slight waver of flowerheads,
Red and purplish, dew scattered,
The very least of all imaging
In her beauty; what was once hard
Has now become easy, like forgetting:

You rove the patio, kitchen and hall,
Flat foot slapping, slipping, stopped -
We will have a rainstorm

To wash the garden in luminous tears:
As difficult a process as angels
Shedding their wings to be like us.

Who is this come amongst us?
His cloak barely covers his belly,
And he stinks of goat.
The widows have welcomed him
And the Priest has deduced
He's not a wandering Bogomil,
On the contrary, he's too simple
For something so subversive,
A lost shepherd perhaps?
Then, there's his woman, dreaming like me,
A wild thing heavy with child
Who has been heard singing in the glades:

Least of all the Stars

Pitiless

Their fall preordained.

Joys as vaulting

Cumuli

Tears as saltsea

We all need hope:

Put fear aside

Learn from stars

The past is irremovable

The self's core

Endures

Even if the edge blunts:

Grace is celestial.

Some balconies remind me of bark, bluish grey,
Wood deeply scribbled in Martian edicts,
Bright nails in serried configurations:
The air smells of cold and resin, still the paint glisters
Under the snow's white burden,

The smell of turps splattered about:

There is an openness about the hieroglyphics & their icicles.

The town sits black and circular like a shellacked plate
Under the snow's white burden, tree boles and tramcars
Have black shadows. Then a telephone call
Sharp as a child's broken doll.

So then, even metaphors have obtuseness.

We go out onto the street.

Who will guide us now?

Who needs Winter and Summer?

They watch these nights uneasily,
Tossing in their marriage-bed,
Waking twice or more, sipping tansy;
Television is no cure,

Nor baths, nor bed.

Against their window, whispers
And cries from the estuary,
The moon is still reluctant,
Though bream are shoaling
And the fields are full of fox stink:

She weeps by a shut door,
Cannot bear to touch its handle,
Its shadow is quiet, her breasts
Overflow, staining her satin bodice.

•

CANTO VIII

Culling Dieback on the Road to Ballarat

What is poetry which does not save
Nations or people?

Czeslaw Milosz

They stand in the sandy paddocks, ghost gums whose limbs
 Reach higher than ten men's arms outstretched to heaven,
 All in a cluster to themselves on the southmost slope, their prayers,
 Concerns borne inland by the wind, the others, still wearing
 Grey-green cloaks will wait for the farmer in his utility,
 Swing shut the barb-wire gate, then stoop to peg it in place,
 They sigh, he's coming, and watch for the set of his shoulders
 As he hefts the steel and ambles up the cattle-track for to see:
 But the living need not fear, for the man is about his proper task
 As any farmer who has chosen the deadwood gone root-rotten
 For the common fire, for like a common canker or affliction
 Dieback must be cut away by blades sharper than tigers' teeth
 Then recalxed to black ashes to be put back into the living soil.
 I stopped the car and watched as the farmer went about his job,
 Gently swinging his axe from one grip to the other then choosing
 The first ghost for the striking down, stroke following stroke
 As the morning's task was done till at last the first man fell,
 No gunfighter ever hit the dirt like that in the movie theatre,
 He'd crumple, or jump backwards or dance in crazy heel-spins
 As his fancy woman comes rushing from the Saloon all crying & kissing
 Before Marshall Dillon calls for the Priest, these fell sore and stiff
 Each resigned to Fate, knowing what it is to be kneecapped, stripped,
 The long butchery of gnarling teeth, petrol stink, and then fire,
 So they are shriven of their several cankers by a single hand.

By the time it came for the Sixth Consulate, Marius resorted to bribes
 Large enough to convince the electors this was no great shame
 For heroes need their due portion when seated at the Gods' feast-table,
 Yet so shamed that he bellowed like a calf when stuck fast
 In its mother's belly, he could be heard all the way to the Forum,
 Dragged out from Minturnae swamp only to be reborn
 In his seventieth year at Ostia, African in his lunatic hatred:
 He drank blood from temple floors, spared neither the elderly
 Nor infants whom he had piked if the squealer's sire was gone -

What child deserves to die no better than a piglet or scrawny chicken
For the sake of mere politics - so a fine picnic was had by all
Till he choked on the first morsels of the seventh consulship.
Worse is to come, as is the usual course when the meal's half-done,
All theirs to have, and then more as the hunters become haunted
By the ghosts of those they had slain at Ostia and in the Forum:
But what a fisty beast was that Sulla who had six thousand
Best Samnite freemen shot down in the sheepfolds, they'd wanted
Nothing but the fresh air of their own freedom and their farms,
No bankers nor legionnaires breathing in their winecups,
The best fighting stock in all Italy gone to the knackery,
So much waste that the long river was glutted, the sea stained,
And at Praeneste a whole city put to the sword in the one day.

We read this in Iuvenalis and Lucanus, and wonder at the senseless
Logging of forests in the lands we call our own but are others' profit,
Sense the stench of silver from our own Senate and Tribune
Which parties have forgotten the honest work of docking thistles,
Milking a home herd for the making of cheeses and salted butter,
Of haycarting and the blistering heat of back-burning in February,
Who pass by a farmer cutting down the dieback gums in winter
Estimating the resale value of the land if only it were not so isolated,
A pretty suburbia here, a pig-farm on that rise, a tourist park
Overlooking an ordered rural landscape: still, the cutting goes on
Until he is satisfied that all the dead wood has been brought down,
Cut into billets, stacked, and something can be done about the canker.
Who'll have his farm in the new order? Someone whose hands
Are not spotted by blood, there are easier ways in our time to kill -
Keep the taxes high, bleed him in the name of free trade,
Seduce his children, sell the idea of a comfortable life as a right -
And they'll walk off without turning into salt pillars by the roadside,
It has become more than anyone can bear, and even in this land
A Gracchus would fail as they failed over there, all theory,
No hay-splinters the groin or a byre-child tucked away,

It takes more than book-economies to pull a lamb or horn a bull,
To put a bullet into the skull of a foundered mare, no more
Sense than what's common and learned in the month to month,
And it's all dirt under the fingernail, little is pretty about it:
It's time to fear the Gracchi, for a Marius and a Sulla will follow
Surely as that clump of tussockgrass spreading across the western plains
Will fill the bellies of kyne and sheep with an empty promise of food,
Or the dingos will be drifting down from drought country, no water,
And with the farmer gone to bankruptcy there's none to cull the sick
Or ride guard on the boundary-wires, and when it comes to calving
All sorts of carrion come flocking in, uninvited, for a free feast:
So there comes a point when the land becomes wasted, unrecoverable,
Not enough for even an honest eagle: so it will be in coming years,
It is written clearly for us yet we do not read the Histories rightly,
Trusting to ourselves as men sailing out in a barque which rides wavelets
Let alone a storm for which it was not built: look, the horizon!

Listen, is that not the swish of six thousand arrows and men
Crying *Merry* - all to no avail ? Steel cannot hear, iron cannot see -
Bookwork has no sense but for its own strength over farmers,
Over workers and their wives, will crush the children in its maw,
Create monsters and call them necessities, but not heroes,
Will suck blood from the crevices on the temple floor, and moan -
None does love me - any expiation would come from love, not iron,
So I turn back to watch the farmer hard at his honest culling,
Storing all what's good and needful in preparation, discarding waste,
Knowing the wattle and bottlebrush uncover themselves to their suitors
Sweeping in from the salty west, and that the dam's overfull this Spring.
It is here and then his seed will take root, flourish and find harvest.

CANTO IX

Here be swift currents

Here be swift currents, white tides to carry the unwary
Further out than safe for lesser men. We have taken
Scant notice of those pretty banners flapping over the clubhouse,
Hiding ourselves in blanched coves by the point break.

Oddly enough, the rockpools are still for the while,
At least until the incoming billow and surge stuns
With its flooding over in a white roaring and fury:
Pools comfortable enough to plunge into, frolic and hide from the sun

Or from strandwalkers' studied blindness. *On french leave*
As it were: we've cast aside wary responsibilities, You and I,
Have left behind those constricting rags of daily concerns:
Love folds us to adult silliness, makes us childish in delights.

Where your white neck curves into an alabaster shoulder,
There is a beauty mole, which tempts my swanning eye
Into those slight valleys and holts of desire, I have become
An explorer of silken sight and touch. Lead me on, guide me.

Our feet can feel the pulling tide as water is sucked out
Then in again through a hidden declivity in the rockshelf,
Our embraces mingle as two antinomies, unequal parts,
Warm water at our feet, washing over us, the cool surf

Sharing our secret selves with crabs and anemones,
This unsullied beach's free gifts: ambling fools
Pass us by, as they do all true lovers such as we,
Who retreat as into our safety house, this silent pool.

From the surf club a siren sounds: there is a shouting
Skimming over waves. Embarrassed couples appear on cue
On the washed shore to view the spectacle, pure Hollywood:
Frightened children, desperate parents, heroic rescue.

If someone had asked if we were lovers, I would not say
Anything at all, but hold you closer, and with silence smile.
Then we would take coffee on the promenade at Lome:
We may have been recognised, but we'll not care this while.

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23 May 1999

CANTO X

The Mares in their fields

In the one acre we have the bard's triad

V. BUCKLEY, 'Louisa Stewart is Foaling'

When I lay by my mother's side, reading of a naughty boy
Sailing away to a land where amusing demons raged,
Or of his brother flying through a bread-mixing machine,
She spoke in measured tones to my father, who turned the page
And laughed at the boy's long buttoned-up sleeping suit,
Ignoring my mother's pleas that the lawn be mowed,
"Today", for her parents were to visit, and I must be silent
As a sacristan or a bride fingering her trousseau:
Like a baby I nestled between her breasts and daddy's arms
Read them a story of the boy who comes to no harm.

I sat by myself after lunch, on the grey balcony
Counting clouds and calling out their changing shapes.
There was a boat and an aeroplane, a ballet dancer,
Lithe as mother dear, not the least a jungle of apes
Swinging from cloud to cloud as the sun fell down.
There was a stallion also whose mane did flow
In a hundred black streamers off his curving neck.
He held his tail all stiff and spiky like an archer's bow.
I rode him into the westwind between castles and towers,
Swinging low to gather liies, soursobs and blackeyed flowers.

I practised prancing before my grandfather, who laughed.
He said, "You're being a stallion, when you ought be a mare!"
So upsetting my parents that they didn't speak at dinner
Until mother served our favourite, icecream and brandy pears:
There was shouting in the kitchen after, so I sat alone
Where in my room I could hear the bare scrape of crow's claws
Going over the garage's tin roof, and my father's rant.
My white cat was quite unconcerned, she sat and licked her paws.
Everyone was terribly nice at supper, and in my bath
I swam like a pony galloping down the bridle path.

I do what I want to do, and shut the bedroom door
So no one can see me when I write my love letters,
Practise at being a ballerina, plait a crown of flowers
Or just sit at my window, which is far better
Than going to school or being just like the others, normal.
I set the alarm for ten to twelve so to see
The midnight sun come dancing down the sky
Then count failing stars until the clock shows three:
Below my room, under the house's pylons, a river rushes,
In fierce torrents night winds disturb the bushes.

Before I died, I dreamed this dream of horses gathering
Under a sky blue as the sea on a late summer day,
Covered not by clouds but by a clear canopy, I saw stars
Still shining through. The sun was very bright and halfway
Declined towards the western hills by Barrabool and Moriac.
An Angel appeared to ride over the Ceres Road
His head of hair stood out like my prancing steed's.
On his belt four keys hung on a ring, and he played
Tunes like a Currawong that winter afternoon, on a reed.
He had blue wings, like a kingfisher, and eyes as bright
As a thousand lanterns or the moon on a cloudless night.

I clung to the Angel's back, he bore me far away,
So far that I could not see this place from mine.
He set me amongst the mares in their field,
Let me ride, my swift sixteen-hand stallion.
The mares snickered and heaved as he rolled his eyes,
They pressed themselves, shoulder to shoulder,
Pushing amongst themselves in whinnies and sighs:
Even the noblest horse cannot sing nor speak,
So I filled my lungs, sang them love songs for a week.

They told me not to shut my door, to stay well off
The balustrade, praised when I would dance,
Let me paste a stallion on my bedroom window,
And like a showpony, practise a high leggy prance.
After I drowned, no-one came to the house for a while.
They had tea out with my grandparents, who cried
When the "House for Sale" sign was nailed to the fir.
The removalists came, and all the front lawn died:
Some other child lives in my room now, the decal pony
Still lifts his foreleg, keeps the boy from being too lonely.

My grandparents live near Forrest and keep house.
She gathers eggs each day, he chops firewood
Though his heart is bad and she worries too much.
When my parents do visit, he eats an egg saying, "Good!"
And the men sit outside to nurse a whiskey or two,
While aunts crochet and answer the burring telephone.
My river runs past their farm, there are mares
Agisted for a neighbour, in the long paddock out front:
Today they are running up and down the wire
Testing the gates as though the wind were on fire.

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July 1999

CANTO XI

At Goat Island

A queer isolated and gated place

CHARLES OLSON 'Cole's Island'

Going There

When at last the waters had fallen away, and we stood in mud
Up to our ankles asking ourselves - who amongst us
Rejoices now that the thunderstorms have ceased
And there's a suggestion of a rainbow in the East?
Taking strength from each other, knowing that together
We would set things aright, heroically, lop branches, clear paths,
See to it that those corpses of trees be dragged, riverbed cleared of snags.

That was the start of nothing but a new fear bearing down on us
With all the weight of missed memories and singular years.
Some wept and stood aside, their burden too great
Even for the blue wrens and piebald wagtails returning:
Yards fell silent, voices choked in mid-word.
Day after day we looked at each other in fear,
Unsaid rain pattering down on rooftops once again,
Weather charts showing the slow swing of black armies,
Pointed phalanxes sweeping all before them
As the river slopped around in its muddied course.

Nights were the worst: I lay wrackt in bed, coughing
Between windgusts and neighbours' cardoors slainming shut,
Small threads of love and habit my only constants,
The telephone poised to cut into my dreams, fears more likely,
Of a river surging over levees, washing us all out to sea,
We would become albatrosses skimming unending waves.
If I had known then what now I know,
Those fears would have been snakeskins
Shed easily, souvenirs folded between tissues,
Some child finding them in a far off year
When the estate was about to be broken,
In all innocence proffered to an agèd parent -
Put it away - it hurts - the hurt child's fears

Consoled as now I laugh a little at them.
The mud dried out into a thick silt, stinking,
As did the rotting reeds and trash brought down,
And summer was unlovely that year, so much
Tree-grandeur stripped, a season of practicalities:
My comer had gone, I regretted its green coolness,
Yet I was free, shivering in the four a. m. cold
On the back veranda watching heaven's gyre
Drawing me up as the target gathers an arrow,
The Archer remaining in perfect stillness.

There is a Synagogue in this town,
Sitting by the Lutherans and Catholics,
Stripped of its texts, its people disappeared:
Incongruous now, an office building
Utilitarian shed and gates out back.
God fallen silent, making his Alia.
My hands cannot trace any inscription,
Nor can I find King David's mark.
Who is there to say Kaddisch
Or welcome the youth to light?
From Synagogue street comer
I see the glittering bay,
Ships and pleasure yachts
Negotiating morning haze.
Rain sets in, empty streets.

On Goat Island they find some wild roses
Hybrids spring out of scraps carried down,
Brambly and fierce-thomed,
White skirts, hems bleeding,

Requiring not so much interpretation as acknowledgement:

I have made it a small custom to plant

Different roses slips each Springtime:

They're just like us, these roses, artificial

In that they are conscious of desire and prayer:

We must find the codes of scent and colour,

If roses can speak straight to us,

In serried ranks of petal, stem and leaf.

I wish you were a rose durable as marble,

Men would walk by remarking on your beauty

Not just now but forever,

Voices shifting with tongues and customs.

Before our eyes, evidence

Our forebears were blind

As much as we are: the heap

Is about a half metre high

Scrub covered

A trench

Cut into one side for lime,

No other signs of summer camps:

The river sings their tongues

Faded in the wind,

A plover chatters,

Black mud squelches underfoot.

When we were children playing hopscotch,

Numbers grouped in odd lots of squares and spirals,

Such as can be seen on a snail's shell

Sometimes chalking out half a court

Skipping from first to last, tailing in blue chalk,

Fibonacci would have been amused.

Strange how relationships between numbers and beauty
Are glimpsed when you're not looking,
Belly-laughing at how innocent were our games,
That Mother's rose garden was a map of Paradise.

On Goat Island we were told this is all there is,
Nothing more, only this. Our youth is dust,
The years will be read in the river:
Between the flood's debris and remnant paths
We picked our way mapless, I fumbled for a light,
Mists rose up and swamped the riverbanks,
Everything gone quiet, mourning for Rilke,
Not even his Angels could do better than this
Misdirected padding about towards Dawn.
Those rose stems I had souvenired wrapt
Inside my jacket, fullness, blood,
Hunger for damp earth, whispering rose-songs.

Morning dew rises into mists
More constant than all histories
Pursuing men and rivers to the end,
Voiding middle ground: what Will
There is, struggles in the darkness,
If I looked up, might I see
What there is:

Sun or Moon

Confounded:

Loose rose petals.

Do you remember what it was like waking
Well before anyone else in early Summer?
Go outside and watch the world coming alive,
Alarm clocks rousing the parents to coffee,

A cockerel strutting before his first yodel,
The milkman's cart up by the Convent,
Plane engines loud over at West Beach,
Stillness could be weighed in each hand.
There are no goats on this mudflat,
Frogs gone silent, odd bird noises,
Traffic rumbles by Breakwater,
Otherwise quiet, empty, discomfoting.

About You

Who are you? radio's clamour distracts my answer
So I rise, walk over and turn off the choral voices.
This day winds play rough-house, plastic chairs dance
All about the backyard, houses burst into flames
Birches and wattles shake themselves to the core,
The two cats and hound gather at the backdoor, refugees:
In winter the sun is nothing but a show, a joke,
About as warm as a disaffected lover, leaving you.

Still I can't answer, my tongue has fallen into muteness,
It would rather be flying over the You Yangs, taking
In light from the edges of late afternoon clouds
Blossoming like Cootamundra wattles along Elcho Street
Into words suddenly splitting clouds into raindrops,
Or skittering a black pebble across the now still river.

It's hard enough for men to understand each other,
Even when they share a common tongue, let alone
Roses and briars, sea and shoreline, let alone ourselves.
Each July a pair of nesting kookaburras take up guard
In a clump of eucalyptus some two hundred paces
From my backdoor, announce themselves in morning carols,
They're welcome as are the pelicans and mallards.
Amongst themselves they are loquacious, yet I guess
At their day-long conversations, their debates and songs.
What truths would they tell me, other than dew sparkles
Each morning like crystal
Or they can see to the other side of the moon?

Within her own outwards spiral a kittyhawk
Breaks loose from earth's snares,
Surfs the winds' edges, threads to heaven.
I would follow and find myself on a high ledge,
Converse with all the aery beasts, even with angels.

They told me once that a rose was an osprey
Imprisoned in her own wickedness, she wanted
Both earth and air, discontent with what she was.
The gods said - stay a cloud-skimmer, river-piercer -
Yet she flung herself screaming, talons wide
Only to break herself against the slate rocks:
Taking pity, the gods mingled her blood with earth,
Fashioned this rose.

Rose

And then I could ask - *Who are you?*
Pinch yourself and look in a mirror,
Run a finger over a seam to check stitching
Eternity a promise of embraces:
When you look through a window,
You stand back, not displaying yourself
The street passes by, when it's quiet
Will you go out to water the geraniums:
When you hear gunshots from near Buckley's Falls
Louder than they were last night,
So loud in fact neighbours call out,
One telephones for the Police,
A boat is upon the river, men shouting:
When you close the door behind yourself,
All is hush, there are no answers.

You look in the mirror for worrylines,
A radio is playing next door, pinch loose
Folds of flesh between forearm and elbow,
Recheck the stitching on a hem, set out
In green-bowed sprays in a grey vase
Those yellow, pink-lipped roses from friends:
You place the bowl of roses on a linen cloth
Draped over the dining-room table.
The telephone rings,

You don't answer.

I had cut myself when pruning, my thumb
Swelled and darkened so much, infected.
When the local GP lanced it open
My blood was as black as this ink, thick
As rose sap on wintry mornings.
Who? Hu huu! The joke's on us. Not Angels

But Barn Owls ask the most questions
When out of sight, irritate our stiff necks
With such questions that follow us to sleep:
I cannot sleep, someone's by my window,
There's a light in the corridor, Moon rise,
Our refrigerator is singing to the taps,
A skein of shadows drifts towards Fyansford.
I wish I could sleep - even if I fell asleep
Goat Island would come rafting by,
I would be walking down nameless tracks,
A few rose cuttings wrapt in my coat,
Still looking for the shorewards path.

This distressed *respublica*

Is at its own entrails,
A wounded hound
Driving itself crazier,
Circling outside banks,
Playing the ATMs
For a last *Iubilate*:
Charon should take note,
But he's asleep -

Too many
All young, blood splashed -

MORS LIBERTATEM FECIT

Over wrought iron gates:
A young girl in a party dress
Pink ribbons, pink sash
Poles a Barque

To Goat Island.

CANTO XII

Black Rose

Roses hardy as clover ...

LOUIS ZUKOFSKY *80 Flowers*

D ark, thick silt, gardeners' fancies
and phlox, alysoun, clover knots
factory waste, fortune's lost heirs,
tomorrow finds them, but then
tomorrow falls, each petal, petal:
light washes over my papers
as tomorrow comes, if then,
dust mote mnemonics in rows -
this red pen my remembrance.

Storm seven days, breath's span,
our river rose fell down
a slim ship between hills
and sea, all verdant silver,
river gums reach lightwards, higher,
a circle of hawks entwined,
roses for the Virgin's crown:
blithe on budding Bengal Rose
would that Angels could dance.

Thunder of making, all glory,
this so secret Goat Island:
cantos as weeds and stray hybrids
darkness plashes against first light
pink edging petals roil themselves
clouds from the West incoming
before sunrise, or late gloaming,
was woo'd by herself, or
slipping away, a wooing Unicorn.

Soft petals, signs fall downwards,
low at tidal edges, all
replete alchemics cutting clear morn:
we are nothing but naked,
each day's account sharp thorn
spiraling up towards a budding:
I hear you pray, Virgin,
thrice blood-red blooming, your golden
gate sword and guarded flame .

Rightness of their immaculate choice,
whispering soft as first sea-dark,
fire-forged, sharp as envies,
lichens enveloping stones in waves,
flowers against the night, stars
are no less light-riven than
each little ripple on æther:
You and this One Rose
dancing damascenes on steel, shining.

Bruised by one word may
anguish against Winter, seed
by edge of Heaven's weald:
Eros by himself is not enough,
for flowers will grow down,
daisies, soursobs, crabapples and burrs,
clover, mustard, underfoot, all glorious:
my fall into Summer's roving
is as onto love's contusion.

Backwards as seconds, hours, sleeps,
even in years, reigns, Houses,
History's first footing on Alba,
gorse, moss, wolves' land, trout-elect:
my father's house set high
a loch at either hand:
at Breakwater once I felt
the gibbous Moon's incessant groan
plunge my hand into steel.

I saw a wolf once
all black and silver fur
unflinching in a stone rain:
the river was let pass
between wolf and into pines:
campfire tales, wolf flees wind,
a seaman's wife left him,
a track of *Rosa Odorata*.
her desperate path over stones.

Black rose unfolds herself, languorous,
bleeds into swift coming night:
quiet signs, raindrops, mercuric oceans
all gladness and pity welling,
your lips taste of light:
that soft hour just before
heft and last settle, ease,
all's turned, clicked, locked: darkness
crams all into her mouth.

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CANTO XIII

The Corridor

Evening escapes me and evaporates

Fernando Pessoa *The Book of Disquiet*

Each corridor makes its own pattern of quiet footsteps,
Their use, written in unpublished almanacs of history's
Wants and desires, slips by us. Paintings stink of linseed.

Figures in a landscape of painted trees and rocks
Question their images - am I not beautiful - a child calls,
Help me - cries the falling son. The painter's work is done,
But I as a reader trace my finger along the rough frame
Seeing the gapped joint and planning its repair. I see
A man behind a desk putting words together in silence,
His pen dipping and swaying between inkpot and paper.

A door leading into the corridor is open, no one is there.
He cannot explain the tumult, sobbing and shouting
His pen has decided to put down on the sheet of paper.
The pen writes of itself, assuming responsibility,
A subject the pen is likely to validate as it moves
In soft lines across an ever so blank paper:
The writer holds his left hand on the place he thinks
His heart beats, the hand should be somewhat lower -
The only possible explanation is that he is suffering
An angina attack, or the thought of one coming.

The idea of such an attack - or a love affair - grips him
So that he starts scribbling a history of all the noises,
Yelling and silences that fill the corridor outside his room,
Resigning himself to what a painter could admit
Must be a visualisation of the ineffable, a construct
Having as much validity as the real thing as when they raced
Down the brown Barwon in full spate - he sees the fiction
Engendered as a fiction from which to consider his past:
Is he writing a history of the corridor, or is he a subject
Of what the pen is racing to complete before the next wave?

It's like wearing a new shirt when going out on a first date,
The boy thinks more about getting a soupstain on the shirt
Than of the girl's bodice and shapely line: distracted,
He seems offputting and she is reluctant to go out again:
Or even like a painter being so consumed in the placement of the stroke
Just so, that his ghosts have evaporated before the oil dries.
The corridor is even more crowded, they open the studio door
Demanding to be noticed. When he walks into the kitchen
He is surprised to see his father working on an old radio,
The suicidal cousin reading a forbidden book, stray cats.

There is a time for words. For them to be done with and let
Shapes manifest themselves in the great gulfs of empty corridors,
Make the measure of ourselves even more immense, a divide
Like a cañon splitting a continent in two unequal parts,
Or to look at it from the valley floor, a river running
Between head and the ensoulèd corse, its living core:
The very first step we take is at a word to oneself,
Our limbs thinking of themselves an image a few inches forward
And we lunge to catch ourselves lest we escape this world's
All too comforting babble, the thought of which is its own speech.

Word of words and the newness of words make real each emanation
As he walks between studio and kitchen, the corridor sings to him,
Every painting on the walls have come alive - lovers entwined,
A cattle drive, dancers in a bower, grandfather sighing for home,
The painter at his small canvas unaware of the magnesium sun:
He had stopped writing and turned off his lamp beforehand.
Now the corridor stretches out at his feet, he must struggle,
There are too many in his path: it is hard for him to map out
Just how far it should be between his chair and the kitchen,
To name each step, to placate those ghosts crowding his path.

In the kitchen, he examines the pages of the paper, ink smudging
At the lines' extremities. Corrections are made in pencil.
How will it look when typed out? When printed by letterpress?
He thinks of the typographies that would explode letters,
Making them dance to the beat of idea and purpose,
Articulate themselves in five thousand human tongues
One word at a time as the ink dries out, water evaporates,
Each molecule a lost tongue sliding off the page,
Poems of histories of his will to overcome aloneness,
To begin again from nothingness at each rosy dawn.

There is no shame in a didactic poem, or in writing one,
But sooner or later, probably as soon as the ink dries,
There is only a scrap of paper with spiders' tracks
Running from one side to the other, a painting or sketch
In blue-black: It will take an eye to see and tongue to sing
The dance of signs down the corridor, one step at a time,
Moving between two known points, there and here,
The next half of the coming step already framed on his tongue:
Turning and beating hand against the corridor and walls,
His body counting out the letters which make his name.

If he were to return to thinking about the exact moment
Its immediacy was made real, he would gaze through the kitchen window
And see his mother outside. She has fallen, the day's wash spilt.
She has clutched her chest with her right hand,
A cat licks her left hand which fingers the dew-wet grass.
There are no neighbours to call and her children are at school.
Nothing he could do even if he had looked out. In time he would see
His mother get herself up and walk over to a bench, sit a while,
She would doze for the rest of the day. He would fall to weeping,
Clutch his fist in a ball so the pain would evaporate somehow.

And if he were to step outside, knowing that time has written
What had been scratched onto the fence-post, saw it again,
That playing out of what had been again and again for all days,
He would see an old man in shabby trousers and stained shirt
Looking for a tweed coat, cigarettes and lighter in its pockets.
He might see the cracks in the wall which he has papered over
In that most elaborate of disguises, his pages of spider-tracks
Which he has spun out of sheer fantasies and desires:
He would mark the distances between ghosts and wall,
Make the very thought of both something to examine.

He lets in a mewling cat, feeds it milk and dry pellets.
He comes back down the corridor with a coffee cup in hand,
A history book in the other. He adjusts the tilt of a painting,
Closes the spare-room door and turns off a dripping tap.
The gas heater hums too loudly. An alarm clock sings,
And he hears his own footsteps following. There is no wind outside.
He sits behind a desk inking blue-black words on paper,
Mouthing them as he writes, dipping and swaying over them.
The door to the corridor stays wide open, and his guests enter
Crowding over his shoulder to see what he has written tonight.

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27 May 1999

CANTO XIV

The Surgeon's Song

"This is a dog," they said uncovering a body
Stinking of clinical formaldehyde and late Summer.
They had asked me the first cut and teach
Rows of students standing on raised tiers.
I was gowned in a green robe, given a cap,
My ablutions were brief. They were in a hurry.
I raised my hands, trembling a little
As if I were at prayer to a starry being.
When I made the first incision in a true line
Fresh blood welled out of the wound, a slow fountain.

"This, a dog," they would say as if it were an honour
To have someone like me to slice it open,
Then they tell me with downcast eyes, "Remember:
"This Clinic is funded by a benefactor, who is nameless,
By the State, which is ever present, and simple gifts
Left by the halt and lame who struggle to our door
After many days of travail and bitter pain." So,
Will more fresh blood well out of the long wound
To compound my confusion? It seems to me
This inert beast had a secret to tell. I proceeded.

"Tell us", twelve crones cried, "Will the infant r
Recover?" They wait outside the Clinic, weeping and wailing
As the Death Notices are posted on the Bulletin Board.
But they speak in their own tongue.
"Bar Bar", I bleat. None can understand me, nor I them.
The dissection continues slowly. The preservative
Stinks of old shoes, musty cupboards and women's shawls.
I am gagging as I lift out long belly-ropes,
Kidneys, the Liver and all those grey-green cells.
Lungs, like a bloody Placenta, are laid out as well.

"This, a child", one of the old crones whispers and blesses herself.
Writhing on the floor, her mouth flecked with foam.
Though I know so little, her speech made sudden sense.
Words slurred: "One girl and her brother
Walked out along the strand, gathering smooth stones.
They built a ringfort with those stones by the shore
To trap the eternal sea and have her for themselves".
As I finished the dissection and turned to teach,
Each part those parts of our guts which is an amulet
Against Fate, the dog sighed, "Make haste, make haste".

"This, a dog, thay had said, but no beast this child
Raising herself from the mirroring table.
"I'm so hungry", she said, bent over backwards and ate her own heart,
Liver, kidneys and all the waterworks, lungs as well.
She stood before us as she had been born.
I dream of her still, a child alone in this world
Which make lies as easily as truths, and we bleed
Each time we close our eyes to dream of her.
Some students averted their eyes, most not,
Whispering amongst themselves, "This is a dog!"

Once, my mother had so little food in the house
We ate bread and beans for two nights running.
She sobbed in the kitchen, and my father swore
We would not go hungry, ever again, ever,
Banging the door on the way out to ask for a raise.
The radio soughed to me through black earphones
Each night till I fell asleep. Beloved Beethoven
Gave me light's clear ray into the gathering dark,
My safety line, each piano stroke a pebble
Cast onto the intrushing sea to build a palisade.
When he came home, he would gently lay my headphones aside.

"This is a dog!" She delights in the joke, pointing out
To assembled students who cannot believe
What their eyes tell them is truth, not Truth:
A resurrect child raises her arms, elbows bent,
Shaking her fingers as though she were tickling ivories
Intensely as Glenn Gould in his hunched up ecstasy.
My seashells march in lines along windowsills,
Ants build nests between sandgrains. A naked child
Runs through the hallways and out into the woods,
Calling for the dog to jump through a rainbow.

"Dogs are always true to their thingness", they muttered.
Or, "We alone can pass through curtains!"
And, "Dogs make men happy, sometimes the reverse is true".
The other doctors were leaving. They had never seen
A dissected specimen arise to taunt them,
And those students, milling about like so many calves!
On the whiteboard, I had drawn a comparative chart -
Canis familiaris on the left, *Homo sapiens* opposite,
Their innards outlined neatly as in *Gray's Anatomy*.
There is no difference, in truth, between them and us.
Somehow, we all arrive and leave on the same bus.

"This is a dog's corpse", I would say to myself
If only to guard against sliding into despair.
The old women left without being asked
The new child walking in their midst calling for the Moon
To come dance the path with them.
She was to be gone for those years I worked
Being a better surgeon, the best cutter there is.
The nurses smile and titter. My colleagues are skeptical.
Human corpses do not turn into dogs, nor dogs children.
Heaven keeps regular time. We are all dream-riven.

"This is a dog", I say, and raise my hands to heaven
Arms bent at the elbow, calling for my cap and gown.
I drink a half-bottle of whiskey to tell myself
That dog corpses do not turn into children, I control
What little there is left of the seven elements,
That this new blonde DoA is not the resurrected child
Witnessed out of formaldehyde and summery light.
At the first cut, waves of blood rose like bile,
So much of it flooded the steel bench, the room
Filled to the ceiling lights, I am drowning in her blood.

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12 May 1999

CANTO XV

Point

Hereabouts, the surf lackadaisically washes through the gap,
between the real beach, as daughter would have it, and the Point
whose teeth are hungry for cut feet, and if I sit here, just resting,
my rod dipped into the swell which comes rolling way in
from the far-off icebergs congregated near Heard Island,
perhaps a schnapper or trevally will be self-sacrificing enough
to waltz its matilda into my wine-sizzle and sour cream, perhaps,
and all those things I can see from this station, the grey hills
flecked with the reds and greens of housetops, great steam plumes
rolling out of the power station tucked in behind the township,
then there are steely lines snaking towards further coasts,
even to the highest of hills we could walk to their summits,
gaze upon other summits and their valleys beyond our hellos,
thick clusters of eucalypt and lines of planted cypress on boundary lines -
these cut across the natural rise and fall of hill into ravine
as good men are themselves so put into ranks and orders:
a paint box would be useful to imitate this masterly composition
so divided into light and dark as a cincture splits you into similar zones,
your golden head following arms curved into sunlight, I in shadow,
so that hillscape was composed of transformed bits and pieces,
some uplifted sediment cut through year by year in rain, an hour's climb
like the roundels of Aldinga where I had spent my summers as a boy,
the nearby Otways stride out of sand dunes and grey riverflats -
painting this view would be a lie, colours slip, though from here
homage should be paid as I think of Balthus on the mountains
in high Summer before this scarp's landscapes were put to the tractor,
not to speak of lovers in tight dilemmas thinking of sand dunes,
hidey nooks, screening rocks or the ten lost tribes of wives and mothers,

half-eyes open, Grace and Gloriana mucking at their feet as Colin
ventures out to knee depth giving battle to the tides, a Diarmuid
yes, with those long legs and shock of golden hair, he would win the sun:
crystal pools and surge holes yield a scuttling crab and a penny, a haunt for
grandfathers and lonely uncles down after haycarting,
cheque in hand, expectations of a summer *frisson* at The Cumberland
nights balance between Magellan and Amundsen in transit,
while this summer will, it seems, transgress all the usual decencies
on Tuesdays especially, when husbands tend to be delayed in the City
or even on Thursdays, before the weekend starts at shopping,
they spread themselves out oiled sardines, and neighbours won't notice
their lovers' BMW or Audi parked at high noon when dogs sleep:
the end of another day when the clouds accumulate overhead,
our light bodies are burdened with an attenuated greenness
so much removed from the European shades of pine and oak, grey stillness,
before the first thunderhead blackens in the quiet
so we light the room with two candlesticks - how we waver,
small wall shadows of ourselves before the laying on of hands
and the light falls suffused with each breath made,
so softly do we speak that the moth's whirr becomes an insistent call
to enter this chamber, there is little else to believe in:
it is like the disappearance of an imagined book from the shelf,
or an old friend who won't, can't, reply to our epistles
even after the ice has melted and calls to the sunken city, which
go unremarked, our letters are returned with red-ink stamps,
then after the last act has been done with, we check for damage,
a glass of last night's red wine, cooled to the point of chill
as its silkiness has now gone spiky, quite metallic:
the great cypress under which we'd parked our pushbikes,

lies now sprawled over half the road, insect-men darting
between black coils of electricity, angry buzzing and ripping
as the sappy wood falls to bits, some youths build a beach bonfire,
and the anonymous *they* will plant another next autumn
to grow tall, burst out in great purple wreaths fit for a queen:
in five summers' time when I will return so rainy day,
the sea making its play again between black rocks offshore.



CANTO XVI

Songs of the Third Night

For more than a month or so, I had withheld myself
From the act of writing down anything at all,
Not those simple day to day necessities
Such as signing credit card or bank withdrawal slips,
I neglected to show friendship in scribbled cards
Sending cold e-mails rather than speak on a telephone,
It was much easier to punch in a set of numbers
Avoiding conversation with clerks, leave no trace:
The dam had to burst at some point, ink spilled over
And pages glutted themselves with scribbled rain.

Most evenings, I walk with the piebald collie
A hundred steps downhill to the riverpath, veer left
Then amble to the end of the cleared riverbank,
Sometimes breast the slight rise past reedbanks:
There I let him off his leash and he goes ambling away
Nosing into unfamiliar clumps of grass or plunges into the swamp:
A grey long-necked egret stood warily as the collie splashed by,
Parakeets screeched overhead: there are times when
I wished I had a good biro and scribble pad
Both tucked away in the inner folds of my windcheater.

Notes found on scraps in a pocket: Captain Foster Fyans
With three policemen, was appointed Police Magistrate 1837
To keep the peace hereabouts and out into the distant West –
Reputed Fyans led shooting parties, not just for game
But for the local Barrabool who had made the mistake
Of not knowing cattle and sheep were gentlemen's property:
I keep looking for Fyans' cottage, but like much of our past
We know it only by an entry in yellowing papers:
A wind springs up the valley, tears scraps of paper
Out of my hands – Fyans' life falls into a puddle.

An insistent ghost, he lingers at Fyansford
Where the Monier concrete bridge has spanned the river
Since in 1900, a wonder to its age: cost £4506:
Irrelevant now that it has been bypassed by the asphalted highway.
King Baliang, also irrelevant to progress, last of the Barrabool,
Was befriended by Fyans, a sober gent., given to disputation –
How quaint it would have been to be befriended
By your family's killer, but then the Barrabool were no saints
Quarrelling with the Bunninyong people in 1844
Slaughtering the remnants of the Otway horde in 1846.

I have had those dry spells before, long thirsts, droughts even,
Months when my journal would lie open and idle,
When I could no bear to read anything, read nothing,
All the books in my Library had been read, twice,
Leery of anything new, wary of the dust covered shelves:
I indulged myself in the blank screens of wasted lands:
However, redemption comes to us all if we wait – one afternoon,
Rambling without fixed purpose, I saw a young mother
Dangling her baby in the shade of a Willow,
Two young magpies stood to one side, heads cocked, wondering.

In the cool of this morning, a family of magpies carolling,
Roosted high up in the eucalyptus in our neighbour's yard,
Announce that this is their valley – this is a contested claim,
And if the Radio has not yet blurted out the News
Or the Collie begun his morningsong, I can hear
Another gang of magpies and a kookaburra downstream:
Then it's on full blast – honeyeaters chirrup, starlings longjump on the tin roof,
Parakeets run suicide missions past cats, evade them in barrelrolls
The cats want to come inside and be fed – and the smaller magpies,
Shrikes if properly named, are tentative visitors on the patio.

Gellibrand and Hesse came over from Van Diemen's Land
February 1837 looking for land to grab, lunched at Roadknight's
Someway upstream from the junction of the Moorabool,
Then got themselves lost in the western wilderness,
More likely to have been slaughtered by the Karakoi near Colac,
Blood on bluestone – but then the squatters had their own problems,
Swanston and Thompson on the lower reaches, Pollock at the ford,
Then the servants, all old lags from across the waters, ran off:
Timmons and O'Donnell didn't quite make it to Cathay
And were hauled up before the Magistrate, Capt. Foster Fyans.

Two hundred and seventynine Barrabool folk were listed in 1836,
Got themselves sick on flour and blankets and grog,
Then twenty years or so later, a dismal picture,
The Barrabool had withered to a mere forty.
Magpies sing this song on Winter afternoons.
What was it like for the last of this people to huddle
On a mere one acre at Ghazeepore Road? Only three
Were left over in 1867 – Jerry, Billy and Henry,
They planted three sheoaks in Johnstone Park:
By 1885, the trees, like the planters, were turned to dust.

But writing about these things is not to live the life,
It is an off-hand distancing of oneself from the pulse,
Yet, for the life of me I wouldn't want to be a settler
Heroically blazing a path through gum & wattle,
Putting up with boiling days or sleeting nights – stoic
In the face of lost cattle, grubbing for Steiglitz gold,
Nor to be in Fyans' raiding parties – a brutal shambles
Practised first in the home colonies then out here:
We close our ranks on our fathers' sins, forgive them
Then reap the fruits of their bloody labours.

All History is sordid and unbearable, Gods' wrath
No less than Man's greed shape borders, dig canals,
So, what we see now as green pastures were once forests,
The wretches what we see now in Redfern's back streets were once men.
We live on the uncertain edge of flood after flood,
Washed up on strange strands like so many scraps
And we have brought our burdens with us: I can dream of valleys
Untouched by axes, years without memory,
Before my very eyes, I have seen the stars dance,
Men's marks few and passing – uncultivated lands.

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21 February 1999

CANTO XVII

Aubade

I had a mirror, rimmed around by a pale plastic ellipse
And would sprawl on my mother's favourite couch
Admiring the light as it caught in my russet tresses.
I have dancer's legs, and wore satin slippers
So as to step and prance so lightly around the house
No one could hear my passage through the hallways
But that my pearls and party dress would rustle, sigh,
Our white cat following me, her little bell tinkling.
I had 1911 atlas of my grandfather, in which to make journeys
From Tomis deep into the forests of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

One day, a man with a camera came to our house.
He took photographs of us all. I had to smile.
Grandfather asked if I would have my photograph taken
With him, and I leant against his knee in my striped dress,
But I couldn't smile, nor he: I touched his wedding ring.
It felt so electric and drained all of our energy,
So our parlour turned blue for the afternoon,
And grandfather looked sad, though he was happy for me.
He said that if ever I should go on a long journey,
To be sure to map it in the atlas, so he would follow me.

Mother was the only grown up child in the house,
Grandfather lived out in the country: he was a child as wen,
But my father was a man of affairs, he knew everything,
Too much to still be a child. So mother and I
Would go shopping together and buy little things,
Or I would watch while she had her beauty treatments:
We would go swimming together at Fairhaven
And she taught me how to paint her toenails, massage her neck.
She would treat me to Earl Grey tea and sandwiches
On a day when I should have been at school, or at piano lessons.

That is all I remember. The balcony had a high rail
Which I used as a balance bar when no one looked.
The river rushed up to take me in her embrace.
It was like my first kiss, long and cool.
I kept my eyes closed for ages, breathed in silver.
My new friends were carp, eel and trout.
I made my bed beneath a sunken tree trunk,
Watched while college boys dipped oars overhead:
I tasted seasalt on my lips, even this far upstream,
Knew then I'd set out on a journey one fine morning.

I am swimming towards Reedy Lake. I will reach Lake Connewarre
Before noon, then broach the estuary at Barwon Heads.
I will float into a green sea and join the calving whales,
Loll like them in shallow waters under Teddy's Point.
There is nothing more in this brown river for me,
My home has been sold to strangers, is boarded up.
I have heard your tale thrice over in nights of flood
Lingering into sodden days of discomfort and roil.
Soon I will be free as a wave dashing against the headland,
Be transparent as flecks of salt embracing golden sands.

See, a truck is grinding gears as it turns into Townsend Road,
It passes the publican at Breakwater Hotel, he is sluicing
The driveway with detergent, steam rises from the asphalt.
Strappers have taken out the mares and geldings for their run.
Away from the iron rumble of a goods train, traffic
Picks up its unending conversation with St. Mary's town:
Too early for schoolchildren, buses have one or two passengers,
Lonely, huddled well away from the draughty entrance.
Most ordinary people wave farewell while taking a last bite,
Before walking out into the tangled skein of their daily lives.

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8 July 1999

CANTO XVIII

Marengo Beach

value is virtue is life

CHARLES OLSON

Noises outside the window, shapes flitting,
someone switches on a radio, coughs:
if it were whispered of, even softly,
our uncertainty would not be scattered
as raindrops making their dancers' patter
across the red tiled roofs, down drainpipes
drip drip, focus for the non-sleep hours,
middle-night, far too early for dawn:
this is where the heart is, bed and bodies
pressed inwards, unreachd and rueful.
Very little is likely to have happened today,
a postman passed by without stopping once,
garbage gathering yet three days away,
each hour grows a greyness, telephone still
refuses to call out as it does at inconvenient times:
what if it were Wednesday instead
as it was a week ago when you had talked
the day long all in a fit of enthusiasm
until I had to show you into a taxi:
I paid for it if I remember now,
and we'd not left the bed till luncheon
not so long ago, and the proofs
in the form of loveletters, photographs,
telephone accounts with numbers called
some of them not in my pocketbook,
lingering on in my tray along with the sketch
I made of you swimming long laps
while the bathtub overflowed down the stairs,
you longing to return to our saltsea,
our sinlessness before time had set in
as a map of lost possibilities, though none
could now expect it to have lasted:
it's like that these days when so little happens
or can be made to happen in the meantime.

The neighbour-woman dips her bread into bitter tea
she brews a portion everyday in a silver samovar,
which sings of a far-off Moscovy,
and all the couches have antimacassars,
she fears germs, grease, cats, and won't tolerate
strangers in her good room: introduced by rites,
step forward, then left, then bow to kiss proffered hand,
young men may grace her house, and it is allowed
to be intimate without an exchange or handshake
much less an embrace, her starched bedsheets
too cold for honest immediacy or kisses,
so the fine young men twitter in corners,
regarding her shyly, for she is rumoured
to be luxuriously, shyly, passionate:
on with the concert record, let's sit and listen,
a woman's soulful song moving in festoons
as strange envelopes drifting between tonal C minor and D,
between potted plants and out into the jungled conservatory:
I can still taste your lips on mine.

How does it come - as sound or as a shape?
More often than not colours and tastes initiate,
wine may turn to vinegar in the glass
or the whiskey bud stay with me as my chest
tightens and expands for a week or more: nothing's said,
everything in the room becomes false ripples,
raucous coots by the ornamental pool:
In a week before the first words can be uttered
the football field and empty classrooms be my notebooks,
so little happens, in my classes either noise or silence,
lunchtimes withdraw: nettle soups, stonebreads.
This is the joy of falling into oneself
through the membranes raised up by sheer need,

with habits I make small signposts, like steles
commemorating wins and slaughters:
today, I closed off all outside thoughts so
a stanza was written as children ground their teeth,
shared laughter, through this traversing
towards a glimpsed shore, what that is,
is not what the periplus of dreams has described,
even NASA's aerial photographs are just as unreliable:
pleasing is the snailtrack across wet ground
in the mornings after rain when the dog is too wet
to sit and accommodate himself on the kitchen floor
enough in his sense of getting itself near enough,
all in one piece, journeying still across the deserts.

At high tide, the sharp rocks, leftbehinds, secret pools
their hidden surfaces look assured of themselves,
better this way at least from the touristic point of view
otherwise the shorescape clutters with recognised sequences
inconveniences in the photographers' field of view,
the improbable sequence can be seen the second time around,
redeemed yet again we live as though there is no concerted meaning,
as though the picture frame could be left draped on the rocks:
fractured, unlike us, this pace is more a decoupé exercise
you had left on the desk only half-finished, but still,
it feels so good, you've assembled it with velvet and foil:
remember the rock which sheltered us in our passions
a screen against passersby, it is washed away
into the sea's great mothering matrix by now,
laughter's remnants are like honey on the lips
long after the act and its consequences have eroded:
this game has its own peculiar rules, unlike the others,
passion can bias the dice or skew a ouija-board,
and yet we interrogate tea leaves left over in the glass cup
sipping on the sharp vodka as our hostess sings *oi li oi la*

of life's little surprises, shifts in the wind as unexpected gusts
come in from offshore, pool surfaces ruffled,
rocks withdraw their frothed lips, and still we keep at passion:
what is perplexing is truthtelling, so it seems even as it ends,
then as a reminder, only as that, I've kept it,
your swift glance that poets promote as a metaphor
for Cupid directing his arrows into a swain's heart,
target willed to stumble into love, such an imprecise term,
call it what you want, passion, silliness, terror,
all because of some ashen shaft, too easy to dismiss:
in time one learns the old saws were right, his shafts
both hard and gentle so that Keats' ambivalence must be respected,
and come as unexpected as a gunshot outside the motel door -
but they got it wrong in one respect, emphasise not the heart
but the hardened knot under the ribcage, thirsting bellyfire:
now you've done it, the quiet ways are gone
as are any illusions about love, whatever that is,
you will need to yield up your respectability
come swim with me at hightide, for now I struggle
sleepless, much less able to cohere into dumb day,
always coming to relay the coverlet over a tussled bed
and wanting the tides to recycle this beach:
at four a.m. the corridors are cold, I get the knack
knowing this and similar arcane facts about the world
its intersections of heavenly planes or the spheres' musics
several to the angels' kenning, or elms at song by my classroom,
though at times I feel the world shows no outwards signs of love
but perhaps a mirror will tell what I have known,
your glance transitional, new love afoot,
a just sufficiency to get around to the next day.

In those days we asked rather little, gained much,
for the most part images would blur across
windscreens or be wrapped around the Friday fish, little room
for looking back in consideration of hard objects
protruding from the pages and letters of home
distant voices we'd ganged too far it seemed:
twelve cairns would teleport to the seashore
evangelising the muttonbirds, admonishing us
to be more observant of commandments -
the corkboard was full of such things and bills -
an unreal country, a wet desert in winter:
there were those clear days as winds stopped and cumulus clouds lofted
well above the sun herself, when we renewed
all the gambles and desperation of loving,
to swim out well beyond the break into clear water
where we could see the bottom rocks and kelp,
dancing flashes of barrèd silver daring the odds
to shut out everything but our warm country
seeing how the world outside shimmered and our bodies
subsumed into the sand, so that it was not until we surfaced
that this wee pebble would go on in its orbits.

As if we are the pivot, such silly pride we have,
the essentials swim elsewhere in the darkness,
who can see but the angels and unborn stars, miraculous beings
nodding to each other over our sleeping forms
as the world dances round on mother's skirts,
our wishes hang upon a certain balance between day and night,
and I am pleased these patterns make sense if only
because our outwards spiral into the black aether
from closed couplings, just as the gods themselves outgo
though all will fold back into itself like the tide's daily rise and fall
and we too will come back into ourselves:
but not for the timebeing, delaying a while

as I turn back into dreams, forgettings and memories
accumulating in the summer skies:

a hawk circling above the riverbanks,
rides aireddies then flips to stuka down - a scream.

It grows steadily, anxiety is lacking now,
so what drives this compulsion to set down
in long coruscations the unnamable,
it is as if my sketchbook is filling with scratches:
the shape is yet to emerge.

If the map is true and there is a simulacrum
pinned under the ruled grid of numbers,
codes and letters, indices to a dusty gazetteer,
so the taking down of observations can
lend itself to an approximation of the real:
but how quickly the soul deserts its husk
seeking out stars without consideration for the world,
storms still toss about as rescuers come down from the hills,
tardily, hands over their brows, saying night has shut the door,
a memory of Earth's map in hand, perhaps
fear as well, there's no speech to be made,
but in the sight of teeth and spars,
remembering the last passage of lip on lip
then the holding back, drinking deeply as one dare,
knowing that the light never dies, as in flowers and forests
it is reborn, whose song it was of the blue wren nesting,
flight of tern and gull, wavewatchers, wavelaughers:
fortune has it that we must be housed in these raiments
which suit us well enough, though we are put together
more like a collage than Light's perfected image:
the mapbook is missing a leaf, let fingers trace the surfaces
as our souls mark out heaven's measure
which crosses the long latitudes without let.

Pliant angels, whose task it is to resound in tinkling notes
all our lightest joys or to be as sad as the dumb beasts,
likewise to fly to all four compass points at once
only to come together at some time and place
that a barque is driven on to the reef, that its log be rewritten
as the stars would have it so, and any argument about Free Will
becomes futile as picking over History's scabs,
que sera, sera - too well we warble that ditty:
having left Brendan's floating islands to clash,
away from the cliff face, the country opens out
in a series of fields and valleys, a knot of rocks,
the cartography is easily read, marked out in green and brown,
no uncertainty, feet back on the dusty ground
and there's a settlement before we reach the town
the north wind takes away saltknowledge from the lips,
like a woman discarding herself of a former lover.



CANTO XIX

Aisling

O child of the pure unclouded brow and dreaming eyes of wonder,
Did you walk naked upon a broken carpet,
Ravens perched on each shoulder, whispering them secrets?
And when you bent to disturb an ants' castletown
Did you not trace out their paths between honeypot and stone?
When you walked into my dream you sang a raven-song
Deep-voiced and fog-piercing, in your hand a dry-stick sceptre,
Bending over to remove a stone lodged between your toes,
And your hair tumbling like a waterfall on fire: you sighed,
"All our mornings are consumed by Summer's last light."

The paddock is dry. We have been without rain for too many weeks
As though the Earth's breasts have run out of milk
Well before we children should have been weaned.
What beauty there is in the morning light is the class model
Waiting to undress, shoulders hunched under a Cashmere, hair loose -
But the students have not yet arrived, it's getting late -
If she is made to wait too long then she'll get edgy,
Go dry at the turndown of her mouth, stiffening angularity:
She sees me through the half-opened door, smiles.
The air is so still we forget the world is made of fire.

Summer has chosen to linger on for weeks more
Marking the light in curious angles through the Park.
Half-hidden in the pinetree's shadow, her hair is caught
In an orison of flame spurting up to a cloudless heaven.
Her sisters draw away, downhill to the Bay
Or bathe themselves in the Sun's magnificence.
Now that the schoolchildren are back in their classrooms
I have the Oval and sky to myself and ravens
Who in faithful pairs cut close to the unmown grass:
They will descend later for their afternoon conversations.

I stare out of my window, strain to hear them:
Ravens, like trees, speak only amongst themselves
As no-one seems to want to hear their feathered speech,
Though they have much to tell us: they tell
What it is like to see through a wormhole to China
Or into a soldier's mind, how gold accretes in rivers,
How men's prayers are borne by the wind a thousand miles
To be lost in deserts. Trees too have their tales,
Slow artesian inching from Kosciuszko to Jingellic,
Granitic dreams of a land as lush as Eden. Silences.

Tomorrow, if it rains, all colour will be leached away
Leaving only gray and mottled greens where there is scarlet,
Yellow and intense fires in the leaves: it will be a lesser world
We will live in just out of daily need and habit.
That, I suppose, is the usual sense of something lost
That her very name chokes on the remembering tongue.
Two boys are carrying a canoe up into the burning forest.
The elder is lithe and balances with one outstretched arm.
A younger lad, stocky, holds the canoe. Disregarding how cold
Is the sea, gathering clouds, clad only in bathers,
Seagulls circling around in the darkening sky's face.

The sea! The sea! We came out of it on storm-wrack,
Walking between the black of snakes' teeth and blacker surge,
Leaving behind the stink of byre and rotted fruit. Our rags
Scarce enough to cover bare bones, those our tickets here,
Passage given grudgingly by their leave, not our wish.
You could call it freedom, this turning landwards
From the saviour sea which had borne us before the wind.
The boys walk back to the lapping edge, collect oars,
Life jackets and hats: as the elder boy bends he turns
Towards the high-curling waves welling up from green tarns.

On my lips, salt-rind, my hair and body smelling of it,
Pungent and sweating: it will linger with me
The long evenings when we take to walking the suburbs
Exchanging desultory comments with our neighbours
Or the odd stranger passing by: not even a hot bath
Will scrub away this peculiar salt-skin I've grown.
It was melted into me the first four seasons here,
Rivers of fire and ash, before the great flood.
Not even that would wash away the salt-spots
From my eyelashes, from underneath my fingernails, tongue.

Your garden is full with the magnificence of petals,
Twenty rosebushes ranged in wanton rows,
Sweet scented in their last efflorescence: some decay
Before my eyes as each day I walk to the postbox.
Rot starts as a brown ulcer at the lip, spreads,
And by the third day makes its way into the rose-soul.
Clumps of Alysoun by the gate-posts, Basil & Fennel
Are ranged in pots, planted out or have gone wild:
Yet they will go the world's way in Winter as the god flees,
One bud at a time: resurrection will need wait some while.

You walk between parkland trees naming each one as you go
With a touch and twist of leaf, scattering seeds abreast,
Carpeting the parched ground with knobs and pearls.
This forest quickly turns dark, thorns and bracken sprout:
I follow behind in faltering steps, a simpleton
Trying to glimpse you one more time before you go.
Give me your blessing, say just one word to lift me
Out of this brambly world into the vault so blue
Beyond ice, beyond all depths of the southern seas,
Its cape enveloping me in a sea of forgetting ease.

Whatever your disdain, O child of pure visage and dreaming eyes,
Tell ravens your secrets, then may they fly to me,
Take grain from my outstretched hand and tell me
How to trace out the honey-paths between home and you:
All myself, I've walked out of the burning forest,
Which trees have counted their ringèd years beyond our measure,
Now teach me how to pull down heaven onto a parched land
To bend autumnal branches to make my scarlet crown,
That like you, I may walk naked and unafraid a thousand miles
Singing of there mornings consumed by the Sun's last light.

•

4 June 1999

CANTO XX

A View over Queen's Park Bridge

A single day stands still

Donald Hall *The One Day*

I had come to tell you what has been swept away,
What was lost in the river's brown thrust from the Otways to sea,
How the sky fell in upon itself and how needed was this downpour,
And as you watchers have seen, there was loss of cattle,
Costly gear and the odd tree or so, but no deaths of men
Written up in *The Geelong Advertiser*. For all its bangs and fury
Our flood was a quickly buried affair, in public at least,
But as I know and have written to you, there was more:
So I have also come to brush away the sleep from your eyes
To render in penstrokes, what little more in this matter can I tell.

In the market laneways and in the parking lots, where housewives
Raid the larder for to feed their demanding brood, at Myers and Target,
In the bars of Great Western and Saleyards where men gather
Watching other men play at the sports of their lost youth,
And in *TimeZone Arcade* where boys in heroic make-believe
Turn their backs on river and sea, this wanton flood
Was an enforced wait in their pursuit of golf and games,
Or their day out on the bay fishing for Cadmium Flathead:
They do not see the great heave and sigh of storm fronts,
Nor do they know the smell of Nitrogen after thunder.

Now I stand on the bluff of Windmill Hill overlooking the bridge,
Where the road to Hamilton snakes up to the street leading
To the black-stoned door of St. Mary's, to which all streets lead,
Then across the still-flooded park to dull towers of concrete
Those squat fingers pointing at rainclouds, daring Pluvius for more,
Though now we're tired of each day's play of headlines.
When this flood does fall back - we're all thinking of this -
It's a long haul back to the daily round of shopping and gossip:
Sightseers from Melbourne have parked in the mud, splashed about,
Take awed photographs of the river as it flows over the silver bridge.

Fly high like a kestrel over David Collins' house and range free
Long miles from Barwon Heads to the sourcewaters, you'll see
Men in the hill country clearing fencelines, mustering bedraggled herds
Back into higher dry paddocks, their sons in reluctant boots
Plodding behind, dreaming of escape to Queensland or a safe office,
Women who make volunteers' sandwiches in between period cramps,
Watching the dolloped-out soapies, saying - I don't want to stay around,
Their daughters, who sleep with anyone promising paradise:
The kestrel will lead you to the truth of the matter -
One day, visitors, you will see clearly as I, all our betrayals.

Once, I had a blue house on the edge of a country town.
The people friendly, the school - children less knowing than today's,
But of course one should not gild the past, nor its people.
Even so, it was a good house, in a good town, we were happy.
My Irish Setters would demand to be walked after school, so we
Strolled up Rands Road and into the back lanes, looking for mushrooms,
Easter Lilies, or the small gems of wild orchids. I kept them leashed
As they pulled and tugged me into the roadside grasses. Two carcasses,
Greyhounds, were laid out, flensed so expertly I could see their musculature.
The Police said they had been stolen from a racing trainer up North.

A colleague led a flighty young thing to his bed, abandoned his children,
And we heard later of his success in business. He still prospers vilely.
The first wife hit the Valium, someone stitched her together.
A carload of students overturned, two girls in the back seat were killed.
The Sunday-school teacher, a pretty girl in the senior class, went dancing
Only to wear her apron high by the summer's end. The Protestant Minister
Ran away to Warnambool with a farmer's wife, and the relieving Priest,
Catholic, was said twenty years later to have fiddled the Altar Boys -
He's a drunkard now. I tell you, the banks foreclosed on tenant-farmers,
Petrol and Diesel became uneconomic - droughts, uncertainty, floods.

Some good men go about their daily duties, see to the calving, do accounts -
Their wives are patient, some cultivate small gardens and flower beds.
They drive into townships if only for the gossip and yarns, then come home
To an empty house. Now that the children have left

- who will take the farm?

A daughter returns for the summer, helps out, weighs her options
In love and security, decides to marry her suitor from Ecklin.
They will live in the hills estate outside of Colac and keep the cypress line.
Her father plants a row of poplars leading up to the restumped house:
They will lease out the back paddock to a racehorse trainer,
Their nights will be filled with stampedes and foalings by lamplight.

We go visiting new friends on their country estate some twenty minutes out,
His window squires over a grand valley, a line of willows by the creek,
Fat cattle grazing as his profit margin edges towards a squatter's due.
Where fleecy clouds overhead scud, floodwaters rose and fell
In less than two or so days - no traumas here - the grass is greener,
His wife sleeker than others downstream, and more bejewelled.
We are set out on leather chesterfields as if on royal elephants
Riding the long passage between Marseilles and eternal Roma:
He waves his hand over the land set out in the oiled window frame,
William Duke could not have painted a clearer picture.

From another house, that of my friends who paints and etches,
I could look both up and down the two rivers' courses, and I see
As much as a kestrel in one sweep of his brown arrowflight
Or as much as one could rove in a day's ride on horseback.
We're over the worst of it - a glass of wine helps the day
Flow on past the delay of a single fixed point - *schwerpunkt* -
As I pause on the bluffs overlooking the silver bridge
I had seen his ghost leaping off and then it was swept away:
This is something I could not talk about to her, to anyone,
For he had seen me watching him: horror, pity and self-pity.

Kestrel wheels within sluggish bubbles of rising air,
Hammers down on a luckless fieldmouse - we all must eat
That we may fly: in the late afternoon I see cloudbanks
Moving in stately lines, their kilts flapping as they march
Their bagpipe music is wind and rain thrumming on far fields,
Their plaid the grey smoke of housefires and golden sunshafts.
In the topmost branches of black pines over way, magpies
Come together in parliamentary session, recalling what it will be like
When the steadfast sun is resurrect and bleaches out the flooded earth,
Of their joyous idleness, when at last summer wills itself to rebirth.

•

28 May 1999

CANTO XXI

Pause and listen

Did we gain some precious thing in processions of devotion,
Those candlelit prayers to her we named the fruitful womb?
She walked with us uncomplaining of an Easter chill,
Cold, for autumn had come down in an Anglican town.
We stood around the bonfire singing the psalms
Our Catholic litanies, as our neighbours, Protestants all,
Shut their doors, children shepherded in, blinds firmly down
Against the winded candles and all the holy lights
As midnight voices were whipped along, and she, the sweetest Queen
Could be heard even the next morning in the magpies' song.

Mrs. Gilbert had thought it lovely, said so over a fresh brew
And scones when she visited mother on Easter Tuesday.
Auxillia Christianorum, we have grown lax to our tasks
Taking too much comfort in our fat fortunes. Wolves
Are truer to their appointed place in creation's realm
Than any of us, self-licensed to seek improbable peace.
Still, the store of grace cannot be exhausted, there being no limit
On what can be given and taken between true friends, that is,
You and I did gain then in those processions of devotion,
Something to do with the separate portions of peace accorded lovers.

There are those occasions in which one has no choice
But to walk in virtue, there arise no question
In others, in so many other times and places
We do have those delicate dilemmas to vex our souls.
We will come, each and each, to a journeying point
Where there is a hidden crossways to be ours alone
For which there is one stark moment of refuge
As if we were the last stragglers in from a storm:
Light a candle for each of these, Kolbe, Bonhoeffer,
For Roméro, for Kennedy and the unnamed thousands,

And now for one another, for all who may suffer
The rope, knife and not so metaphysical bullet.
I do wonder at such goings on, does goodness revolt
Politicians so much that not until death will torments halt?
Perhaps the safer, more pragmatic course is to read *I Qing*,
Be worldly wise, and be cast along by the four winds
Like an inconsequential scrap of paper across the barracks yard,
To go by signs, avoid choice. I pause and listen.
The wind is in the reeds, the river slaps against the pier.
I pocket my book of histories and turn homewards.

Each day's goodness is measured out as a sustaining broth,
For children play their innocent games in rehearsal
With harsh days coming as surely comes the night,
As surely then, we stand here silent onlookers:
How they sing and shout to each other, such lust
Going unchecked as a south wind across the estuary.
They are saplings in springtime bursting with green-blood,
Waving their lives in the face of the coming season.
Such goodness cannot be put out by default
Or commission of error, willing sin upon themselves.

O there is no cause for an unseemly despair:
A child's goodness is like the deep well at Nabulus
Which brought joyous refreshment to the people,
And which signals a rebirth and a new Pentecost.
You will see between the wavefurrows seagulls skitter,
Shadows gorging themselves on the brine's bounty:
They can live with the wind, calculate its fine playfulness
Its many moods take what is offered as their right.
Yet we hesitate, grow fossilised in our plastic shoes,
Deny the rain access to our starveling faces.

We should not become so fearful of windy places,
As children play and shout, the gulls are singing too.
One mind's eye is enough to compass the whole cast
By taking to the accumulated clouds, soaring hawk-high,
So far above the dales beyond snowy hills, far out
Into the blue ozone violence of the stratosphere,
That all creation fall into minuscule points of light
Alive with the teemingness of his intent. I then,
With my black camera mindfully storing images,
Am just as much a tourist as any other in this place.

It's enough to amble along the township's streets
To see faces, hands, see how the weeds survive
In small crevices between footpath and guttering,
And the lone white dove about the town hall, preening:
Machines are impenetrable to my eye, they exude
A back indifference to our kind, their makers,
Breaking what little balance there is between us,
For it is too easy to adore the brutalities, their powers:
The park drunkard is asleep under a cannon, rusted face creased
With too many care-filled stories for my insistent snapshots.

Well may you ask what's on the other side of this mossy wall
Silently tempting the young men, and consider it carefully,
Peruse the stones' quality, encrustations of moss and lichen,
Their equanimity in the face of fleeting seasons, warding off
Strangers' impertinent stares and even angels' swords.
All without words they stand between neighbours' steads
So quiet, unrevealing, impervious to youngsters' treads.
Yet, if you did clamber up this tree and swing yourself out
High up on this winging rope, way above the clouds,
You would see well beyond the treed horizon, past the wall
To the next, pause and listen to the wind, well before earthfall.

•

5 July 1999

CANTO XXII

Hy Brasil

Paradise was glimpsed
An embroidered kimono
Red chrysanthemums

And four golden cranes
Rising from this outmost land:
Snowflakes on silk fields.

My robe wave and sand,
Lank seaweed for my necklace,
Driftwood at my hand

Mansions rise off pearls,
Apples grow on coral trees:
Anemones crown.

Remembered gladness:
White rivers fierce as sunset
Glass burning my fingers.

Flown beyond icebergs
Saddled on a crane's long nape:
Planted in kelpstrands.

Here in Hy Brasil.
The gates of paradise open:
Gladly I wear its gown.

Wind my sole comrade,
Gulls and terns my equerries:
Who now shares my bed?

For this is love's isle
Risen from the southern seas
Seven leagues past Lorne.

CANTO XXIII

A Masque - The Exchange of Letters

Our speech interposes itself between apprehension & truth like a dusty pane or warped mirror

GEORGE STEINER *After Babel*, p. 59

A Masque - The Exchange of Letters

Characters:	First Voice	First Dancer	(Narrator)
	Second Voice	Second Dancer	(Walker)
	Third Voice	Third Dancer	(The Girl)
	Fourth Voice	Fourth Dancer	(Epona)
Ensemble:	Percussion, Bass, Flute & Keyboard		

This Canto, 'A Masque - The Exchange of Letters', is to be performed in a space approx. 10 x 10 metres before an audience seated on the floor - the musical ensemble is placed stage left / front on low settles.

The Four Voices will stand at the back of the performance space while the Dancers have liberty to move at will in between Ensemble, Voices and Audience. Costuming is simple and conducive to movement.

A detailed commentary & suggested staging is contained in the exegesis.

There is no meaning to be found in this, except in its realisation as performance, the detailed notes for which are to be issued separately to the performers alone.

A hollow page:

You would, yes,

Question these things

If I am at my lamp-

Lights of a day, is

Always at the door:

Hiding your energy,

Your fryth and fear,

Your glimpse as

First fall of rain,

Embedded granite,

Wanting our soul.

But it is changing,

Always: when did you

Keep it in front so,

Waiting as if you could -

In some ways delicate,

An unended walk:

She enthrals you

So why should the end

Be sought hereabouts?

In the soul alone

Or on the skin,

Of all places

This is the coldest.

Caught between thumb
And ringed forefinger,
Nought remains,
Time withheld by
Beats and wonders
Of ebb and inflow,
Risen waters blent:
Yet our hands -
Even if joined
Left to right
Like lovers by a mirror -
Still strangers.

Don't go far away,
You're lost as well,
As if you had turned
And all's gone to salt,
The world opened out
In blanching wounds
So we could reach out
As rain blowing in,
The West a prepared place,
My feints
Hand and mouth each day
Committed
Still held apart:
Ask me where
I am led.

Even if it's not so

You knew I wanted

Pressing to end it

The same thought

As is the case

Sleeper - going easy

A long spell in slumberland

Above storms.

Hidden folk - all

Belovèd at some time:

A row of pines

Stands by the schoolfence

Singing rivers,

Mists and acts of intellection

One source

Only once.

Formèd clouds slumber

Giving back whatever

It's gone now

Nothing can hinder

The night-sky burning:

My gross faculties

Are tidal surges,

In and out, higher

Giving back what's added

Strong, unencumbered:

As consequence

Whatever we think

Is light,

Out of reach.

Gatherwood flames

Tongues cleft by chance

Dreams of stars

Before conception and birth

Not always in favour

Two souls perhaps

Formed from rivermists

And welded dreams:

Smoke from temples

That amalgam which feeds us:

If at each time

Never telling us

The first time,

A taste of stars

Fell on our tongues.

Hail storms!

Monsters are born!

Don't glance behind

Forget, forget

The day can't be adjourned

In this waiting game.

As those lights

In the red morning

We hang

By silver cords

You know unbearable light

They say mandrakes

Cry:

What do we see

In the mirror?

Introibo ad altaram

The end of waiting

Every broadcast

Every raincloud:

Our chameleon selves sing

We are old, young,

Made manifest

Out of us, so

I'm stepping backwards

With melodies

Fearless against the road.

Just as we come

To an embrace

Answering yes, and yes,

What could bring fear

Saying we are out of breath

Out of love

In that space

Walking backwards

Into the future, eyes

Roving over salt,

Lost to our desire,

Yet still it moves.

Kindly surpassed by light

How strange it does

Me, not stopping.

I feel edgy

Just as I fear

Against that I know,

Throwing shadows away

Losing maps, keys, wallets,

All of which makes me

Precarious:

Kingly soul of light

Will I forget thunder?

Let it be not

As a normal happening,

Love is always

Surprising,

Can't get away:

All the same

Where breath ingathers

Making clay poppets

Themselves breathing

To dance the coming Sun

Free forever?

Same words make screens,

Yet my father flew

Into rages, remember

Not to take words

Like children in a garden,

Be surprised always.

Made by starlight
The world will burn
Itself, this suspicion
One of our hardships.
I go forward
Opening a stone door
Taking in each draught,
Wind on lips, rainbows,
Arab songs on radio,
Grass underfoot:
Streams shift
All given borders,
Torment flowing out:
A silver ring
At Blackwater.

Nembutalled selves
Lost, and I cannot
Stand perfectly by a wall,
A detour of forgetting,
Our waiting, part
Of ourselves:
Nothing's really new,
It is more than enough.
Runes fall down,
Seven colours of clouds
And more certain
Than anything seen,
Steel is perfected
As hollow lead.

On Mount Ararat

Each of us is a dancer

Hand to hand

Over the threshing floor,

Turning out to be

Yet another stone,

Tools of chance.

This desire to tell you,

You do not know

Lightning's movement

Towards being, then splitting

A flight of doves:

What if she would not come

To your hand?

Partly with haste:

If you were not,

You should know there be

Local discomfortures,

Blades of grass touch:

Almost finished

With us.

Query what each
Of water, quern, stone,
Can see: all open
Without going back,
And the streets incessant,
As if the spaces
Between discordant lovers
Were boundless.

Remembering landscapes,
Von Guérard's especially,
You must talk
Till other voices awake:
The world ends here,
A fair stream.
Whatever beasts feel,
Centaur would
Delight in.

Stranger, set magic with fear,

Water the monuments

So we are turned

Hurriedly - steps going up

There, as is an answer

To however you be:

All you, all around

It shifts,

A leaf's dance

Real on my fingers.

Together, perhaps,

Shallow waters:

Did you know between them

Found in a space within,

Still apart

To each other:

Like roses we speak

Or water gone to weed,

Green will arise

Next summer,

Rose and weed together.

Unless the memory of tongues
At shelter, moving waves
Almost at stillness in my mind,
Nor an object to stay near,
Calm, winter coats, two
Or more workmen
Against a rainbow:
The road's closed,
Silence of improbabilities,
A wall of things
Besides oneself,
Blood on the cobblestones.

Vowels wanted, light runes
Recalling your likeness,
A perfect circle, folds,
Wool and rain:
These tales fall quiet,
Yet I carry on,
We had what isn't,
A golden leaping,
Songs, speeches.

Waiting like this
Makes me possible,
For as impressions
Or turns, never direct,
Sly, the body gets life,
Touch and taste,
And desire too:
Maiden or man,
Our dark probables
Become familiars.

X has two edges
Each fox and tiger:
When you look
Touch the small sharpnesses,
A progress of thistles,
Teeth gritting.

You cannot make
Distinctions seen
Where breath is gathered,
But even less so
A secret wind,
Natural form
Breathe against axe-steel.
In the sea
Fryth is glory.

Zephyr-like to the ear
It opens with a question, and doubles trying to tell
What we must consider
What to say
Abrupt songs
Knowing all there is to know:
We call this place
Field, paddock, stubble-ground:
A good place
To begin a poem.

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Deluge: a collection of original poetry with exegesis

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Edward Reilly BA Hons, MA

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Faculty of Arts / CLACS – St. Albans Campus

Victoria University of Technology

Volume 2 of 2

Chapter 1

A learned, difficult art

Introduction

A learned, difficult art

ROBIN SKELTON¹

I have lived and breathed Poetry ever since picking up an illustrated anthology edited by Peter Summerfield, *Worlds*, which brought together Thom Gunn, Charles Causley, Séamus Heaney and Ted Hughes.² The photographs made these poets' worlds real to me, and enabled me to first venture out on the task of teaching Poetry to less than enthusiastic Year 10 classes at Mt. Gambier Technical School and Timboon Consolidated School. Those poems about the realities of farm life spoke directly to the students, and they could in turn tell their own stories about life on a dairy farm, or their father's shift work in the cheese factory, or fighting bushfires and their loneliness. I found that this Poetry, albeit British and Irish, meant more to my Western District students, children of dairy farmers and loggers, than those facile pieces about a sunburnt country that are standard fare in school anthologies of Australian Poetry. Further, poems such as Edwin Morgan's, constructed through the eyes of a Martian, spoke in their generation's language, cool, quirky, and not at all like anything they had encountered beforehand, and helped them construct a form of truth for themselves.

My own journey towards the writing of Poetry has come slowly enough, evolving about a realisation that a teacher needs to be a practitioner of what is taught, not just a mirror or refractive glass. So I began to write with purpose when I set aside teaching Chemistry for Literature, and began to uncover some skills with language that had remained quite buried away. Through that process I believe that I have been able to discern a Self, which lives its own life and for much of the time has

remained hidden from ordinary personality, supernatural almost. Here I am paraphrasing Ted Hughes on T. S. Eliot,³ but Robert Graves and W. B. Yeats had also been of much the same mind. For Eliot, his starting point had been an emotional and spiritual emptiness, for myself it was a chaotic and unshaped life which needed some form of centre outside of domestic and occupational ritual.

In those school days, when my world was filled with the mystery and beauty of the Latin liturgy, it was possible to discern an axis upon which our souls could take flight, leave off the dry suburbs and cruel streets, and cohere in a world we knew was eternal and true. But our tongues were cut out, Englished, desacralised, depoeticised, decentred. So small recoveries of the sacred could be made in hymning my wife's beauty, making lyrics for children, addressing the joint concerns of my friends. Onto that I could graft a reawakened sensibility about the mythic past, gained by my close readings of the great myths, Celtic and other: and all of this brought back in great rushes memories of my father taking up the bagpipes at age forty-five.

One of the first long poems I was happy with, written almost fifteen years ago, celebrated that moment, his *ceol beag* - small music - filling the Lounge and bringing friends and neighbours to the door to listen. When I had written that poem, I realised that I could somehow shape and give reason to memories and events. Likewise, when I saw the statue of Cuchulain at the O'Connell Street Post Office, Yeats' avatar I suppose, it fixed for me the real force that our words take on. Did Yeats' verse inspire the insurgent Seán Ó Reilly to storm Dublin Castle? Did he, like MacDonagh and Pearse pray to both the Crucified Jesus and recite Yeats' words about Cuchulain in the same breath? Not that I have ever wanted someone to act upon my words, but rather if the poems I write can cut away

some of the fog, show some truth - however constructed - in a different light, then I may be content.

But will I? As Ted Hughes points out, once the true Self is aroused, once it is given life outside of the restraints of our routines and conventions, then it seeks to become the knowing focus of our whole being. Life without the act of Poetry becomes listless, unhinged: that is, once I had realised that I could make words form into satisfying structures, evoke images well beyond what I had only vaguely dreamt of, like discovering I could photograph ghosts. Who could be content with just photographing ghosts? One must become a ghost in order to commune with them.

So, in my own view, Poetry is significant of itself because it is a path, a technique, by which we can approach the extraordinary in our lives, recover that which has been hidden, and perhaps create some new truth about ourselves and our world.

The significance of this project is partly to demonstrate to myself a capability to write in poetic form sustained and coherent writings. I will present two books of poetry, the first being a sequence of unrhymed sonnets, quatorzains, dealing with my experiences and reactions to my life in the Western Districts and Geelong, communicating how I have shaped my Self in the face of a new, and at times hostile, environment. The second book will read the great floods which have rushed down from the Barrabool Hills and Otways to swamp the lowlands of Geelong as a metaphor of renewal of the land, and perhaps of the people, tying in my ideas about this landscape which will be discussed in the earlier chapters of criticism.

I wish to achieve a reading of the landscape around Geelong and Western Districts, a reading which has not been effected beforehand. In this endeavour I have two Australian models in mind. Namely, Barry Hill's thought-provoking

Ghosting William Buckley,⁴ which dealt with the legend of the escaped convict, William Buckley and his life amongst the local Kulin people. Hill used a range of writing techniques and formats for his poems, ranging from formal to free verse, and was able to demonstrate how land and people interacted with each other, and how Buckley's spirit, or ghost, still haunts us in our misdealings with the original people of this region. In the second text which acts as a model for my concept of what a locally-grounded poetic would be, Laurie Duggan's evocative *The Ash Range*,⁵ the great bushfires which ravaged Gippsland are explored in terms of their causes and effects upon the people and the land. I will be more than satisfied if my two books of poetry and associated critical writings cause people to reflect on their experiences and emotions as they face the problems associated with living in this region.

The poetry, criticism and exegesis together will constitute an original contribution to contemporary Australian literature. In my early surveys in the field of poetry about Geelong, I had found nothing comparable in scope, and little landscape poetry of note, only a few poems about the You-Yangs, a cluster of low hills, by the Geelong-born Antarctic explorer, John Béchervaise. As I have published and read passages from my work in progress, the audience feedback has been positive, my audience now extending beyond Geelong. We must celebrate the local, make our own lives significant, give meaning to the everyday as well as to the extraordinary things we find on our own doorstep, or in this case the interfaces between these Western Districts, this city and the sea.

For others, the significance of the project as a whole will be quite different. I must demonstrate that it is possible to take the Creative Writing process well beyond the exercises encountered in undergraduate courses, and extend those ideas of interaction between criticism and writing which underlie MFA courses such as

offered at Wollongong University and in the USA. At this level of thesis, one is encouraged and enabled to extend the process of inquiry and writing to a significant level not enabled elsewhere.

Moreover, publication arising out of the thesis process will create new contexts for the development of a regional poetry for Geelong and the Western Districts. While there is a small and active Geelong Writers group in this city, it needs the critical context from which to develop into an informed, critically conscious movement which can have a much broader literary and social significance. It not sufficient for us to let our Australian cultures be determined by centres such as Melbourne and Sydney, for such would disenfranchise many people living outside of those centres of power and influence. If our cultural lives are to be enriched, then many voices must be heard. Finally, as a teacher, I am very conscious of the lack of confidence our youth have in the region, they do not know the legends, much less the history of this place, and certainly lack sustaining mythologies. With this thesis completed, I will to be able to go out to student and adult audiences and demonstrate how to construct meaning for themselves through writing about their known localities, and so contribute to the community something of the opportunities that have been afforded me.

So, in coming to an explanation how I have gone about the task of writing poetry, I am impelled by two forces. Firstly, there was a realisation that I had been writing poetry for almost two decades out of an unarticulated and only partly developed realisation of my goals. Secondly, I have been writing without having fully explored this craft of poetry, as it is practised by others and by myself. This thesis and praxis seek to address and redress those two forces, so that I am better able to realise myself as a poet.

To be a poet is not the same as writing poetry or verse. It can be demonstrated that while writing verse in Australia is a very popular pastime, there being many competitions and with little journals proliferating, only a fraction of that vast output which can be considered as having been crafted. That is, poetry is something consciously made, following in the sense of the Greek ποιέω, 'I make'. It is interesting to note that in Middle English and Lallans, the word for poet is *makir*, a direct calque of ποιητής.⁶ Art, that is τέχνη or Craft, is all in poetry, as I will show in the course of this thesis. And, while we are accustomed to the notion of inspiration in poetry, quite properly so if one reads Robert Graves carefully, such a force needs to be shaped and given life if it is to be tangible. In this there is no difference between a poet and a composer or painter: energy needs form to be manifest.

What is this energy? Having been raised as a Catholic, and still querulously so, it seems to me that still the best explanation is to postulate the existence of a soul, ψυχή, which is the engine driving mind and body to whatever ends it has determined for itself. Just what the interaction is between these separate parts of our being becomes quite the exploration of those specialists in the psyche: priests, doctors, artists, and ourselves as poets.

The spiritual realm has been overseen by many different priesthoods throughout our known histories. In post-Reformation Catholicism, the role of the priest not just as celebrant and teacher, but also as confidant and mentor has been emphasised. In my own youth, I was quite lucky to have close by men who were exceptional teachers, learned and trustworthy, scholars and writers in their own right. While they had their faults, just I have my own faults as a teacher and writer, these priests and religious brothers were able to act out a sincere belief that it is the spiritual in mankind which is our determining quality, that we can exercise our

human gifts for good. Writing, of whatever kind, was seen as a manifestation of one's inner self, one's soul. Hence, it was without embarrassment that my earliest teacher of Literature, Fr. Cole SDB, was able to revel in the sheer exuberance of Shakespeare's language and wit when we awkward adolescents began to grapple with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Two years later, when mulling towards my matriculation examinations, my teacher at CBC Adelaide, Bro. E. Howard, tossed Arthur Miller's *Collected Plays* on my desk and suggested that I read them, for enjoyment. Simple acts one may say, but those teachers unlocked some undefinable energy in my heart, as then unrealised, and only now being put into some formal shape.

One way of expressing this notion of psychic energy is to call it *libido*, which we too commonly associate with sexuality, which itself is one aspect of the forces within ourselves, as demonstrated by Sigmund Freud. He and other early psychologists were able to unlock repressed sexualities in the European soul, and it is possible to hazard a guess that they were able to propel the Romantic program to its ultimate conclusion in Surrealism. But as far as poetry is concerned, the deepest impact was made by C. G. Jung whose temper and imaginative writing have had direct influence on writers such as Robert Graves, Charles Olson and Séamus Heaney. So in the course of this thesis, as I explore both psychological and craft aspects of these and other poets' work, I shall be making direct and indirect allusions to Jung's ideas, without making an attempt to deeply investigate them, rather taking them as part of an already established matrix. What will concern me in this thesis is the use to which ideas and materials are put in the construction of each writer's poetic.

A detailed explanation of Jung's ideas and their direct application to Charles Olson's work can be found in *The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum*.⁷ In this text,

Stein uses Olson's last known piece of writing to recapitulate the full range of literary and spiritual influences informing Olson's poetic, especially in the latter part of his life. Each word, every literary and mythological allusion, all personal and geographical references are lovingly enumerated and explained. Stein makes it clear how Jung's writings had been read closely by the poet, then adapted, even appropriated, into the developing series of *The Maximus Poems* and beyond, and especially with this particular poem-in-making, 'The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum'. Discovery of this text has enabled me to confirm a particular strategy in writing *Deluge* the major poem of this thesis, by allowing the central persona to speak within a symbolic language which would otherwise be denied if I had retained a merely plain speech for him. His energy, his *libido*, needed an affirming code which would allow me to articulate him as a mythic character. Just how I go about crafting that voice will constitute a section of the long exegesis which takes up the second part of this thesis.

Here I will be concerned with developing a realisation of what I have actually done in my writing, not merely by listing and explaining all the referents, but also by trying to use what insight into myself I have gained in reading psychologists such as Jung and even Reich, but also in trying to comprehend the extent of other influences such as Graves and Heaney and others on my work.

An artist who has greatly influenced my imagination is Max Ernst. In his works such as 'The Forest', I see many of the elements I believe to be valuable in digging into the psychological bases of personality and behaviour: chance, brutality, a certain openness to externality, honesty and so on.⁸ More than any of these, Ernst shaped and layered his hallucinatory images, holding a mirror for each of his viewers. So it is with poets and their works - we read into them what we have in our souls, as much as we read the poets' souls.

Perhaps through these processes of investigation I shall be able to more clearly articulate and realise my goals as a writer. But such must be firstly grounded in a preliminary process of clarification, a setting of the ground rules. As I will point out, part of this process is a denial of commonly held beliefs about what Australian poets should and do practise in their writing, and in part a series of selection and affirmation from the works of poets whom I admire for both their craft and psychic energies.

I will argue that it is not proper for me to appropriate either language or mythology from the local Kulin people, as was done by the Jindyworobak poets in the period 1930 - 1950s. My argument is centred on a double realisation, firstly, that previous practices are forms of cultural appropriation and as such are quite immoral. But also I must argue that as I am not Aboriginal and have no access to their languages and mythology, except in a second-hand way, I must invent my own means of explaining the land and my relation to it. However I must flag that I have no wish to be insensitive to Aboriginal culture, admiring efforts to teach and revive the languages of the Northern Territory. If one remembers that Gaelic in both Ireland and Scotland, even though eroded by centuries of active oppression and discouragement still can produce poets of the calibre of Sorley MacLean and Louis de Paor, or that modern Hebrew, now the active national language of Israel, had its start as the liturgical language of the Jewish diaspora - there is hope that at least several of the Aboriginal languages of this island can be revived and be used for the full expression of social and cultural needs of the various Aboriginal peoples. But while I may be a student of languages, and can display an awareness of the connectivities of local peoples and places, I must disavow any assertion over what is not mine to use.

Since I set out to explore aspects of this area, the coastline and coastal interior between Warrnambool and Geelong, in which I have lived since 1974, I have needed to find models of craft, language and insight. The poems of Séamus Heaney had first come to my close attention early in the piece as so much of what he wrote about seemed to fit the experiences of living and working in the farmlands of the Western Districts. As I have noted, he spoke directly to my students about the tensions and disappointments they experienced, and gave me a way of beginning to write from the inside of myself. That clear, distinct voice, the rhythms of his poems were not English but akin to the sounds I had heard as a youth, when post-War Irish immigrants from Belfast and Derry had sat in my mother's parlour or gathered round the bar with my father. It was not the soft blather of Cork or Dublin's sweet blandishments that I heard, but rather ice coming off the sea, cows waiting to be milked, fierce families, fiercer loves. So Heaney has stayed with me as a constant all these years.

Curiously my reading of Heaney led me backwards into re-reading Robert Graves, both as a poet and mythologist.⁹ I had been introduced to his work by Max Harris who ran the best bookshop in Adelaide. Even now it is possible to go back into Graves' writings and poetry and discern elements of which I had not been aware, and which only now find their correspondence in the poetries of Heaney, Olson and Lowell.

I mention Lowell in this context, for there is a thread binding him to the others I have mentioned so far, and that is his willingness to re-imagine the place to which he is bound in a new linguistic code. While in this thesis I examine Lowell for what I want in terms of his technical skill, I am also aware of his deep spirituality, his tortured soul which never seemed to find peace. In Lowell, and in Olson, as I shall show, the poetry comes out of a close fusion of style and sensibility, and

because of this I am willing here to appropriate, model and subsume myself into their works as it suits me. I am like a bowerbird decorating my nest, hoping to catch the eye of my mistress, my Muse.

There is nothing wrong in this. A poet will take to himself whatever measure, word or image as pleases him, suits the craft or sates his conscience. He will deck out his pieces in lines as brief as a single word or longer than an Alexandrine, shape stanzas like topiaries, incorporate Chinese ideograms or nonsense syllables if the end of making a poem is served well.

However the reader will see that I am if nothing else, cautious and rather conservative in my general practice, realising that my voice needs order and pattern to communicate my feelings and ideas. I have been able to flourish for at least five years writing within those chosen boundaries, yet reading and experimenting all the while, so that now when I see the need to vary my voice and measure, I can do so with utter confidence.

As the poet, critic and teacher Robin Skelton wrote in the mid-seventies, a "poet may have to be a clever and conscious craftsman" as well as being able to engage in philosophical speculation.¹⁰ The implication for myself as a practising writer is to set a course of readings, both factual and speculative, from which to sharpen my Art. But then, having left formal learning aside some time ago, I have become a collector of trivia, and am wont to fill my memory banks with much stuff which seems at first to be irrelevant, or at least tangential. But those items are the fuel for my poems, just as Ezra Pound's Cantos are filled by details of Economic History, letters and garnishings from Chinese dictionaries, or as John Montague summed up Ulster's long burning agony in *The Rough Field*.¹¹ I am devoted to both books, as I am to other long and speculative poems, such as Hugh MacDiarmuid's *In Memoriam James Joyce*,¹² or W. H. Auden's 'New Year Letter'.¹³

It has been quite recently claimed by Australian author, Christopher Koch, that the modern novel has replaced the long narrative poem,¹⁴ I cannot but feel that such a position is dictated by current economic forces and not by æsthetic considerations, and had I wanted to write a novel, then concept, process and product would have been entirely different. But this desire of mine to write poetry rather than prose has been with me now for a good many years, and has found its realisation in this æsthetic, this particular project.

Literature Review

The primary aim of this thesis is to present my writing of a number of poetry texts within the framework of my own life and observations pertaining to Geelong and its surrounding districts. Given the particular nature of this thesis, which I have been given to understand is of a pioneering venture at Victoria University of Technology, I have sought to make a wide-ranging survey of the literature available in the area of Poetry and Poetics, encompassing a wide range of post-War writers, and to gain an understanding of the cycles of floods which have affected Geelong since settlement. I am also engaging in subsidiary sets of readings related to certain psychological states and to presentation of the printed word, so that the major poem presented, *Deluge*, can be perceived in relation to the broader movements of literary sensibility.

This literature review is presented in the form of brief annotations and framing comments on texts read, followed by a full bibliography representing the extent of my reading to date. By this means I aim to give the reader a clear idea of the extent and focus of my reading since I began this study in early 1996. Not every text read has led to a specific line of argument in the chapters dealing with literary criticism, nor even to specific images in the poems written, rather some of the

reading undertaken has provided contexts for understanding the work of certain poets and for the form as well as content of my own poems.

The initial field of reading and research has been in extending my current knowledge of modern poetry, especially that written in the USA and Canada since the 1950s. A related consideration has been to read widely in some post-War European literatures and literary history, selecting those poets displaying traits I had wanted to include in my developing work. I note how the reading of any given text or article has been of use to me in this project.

Contemporary American and Canadian poetry is vibrant and many-hued. I began my reading in this field by considering Jorie Graham's *Materialism*,¹⁵ which must be taken into consideration because of the sheer energy of her language. Her technique of setting her own words in contrapuntal style against selected readings from Wittgenstein, Bacon, Brecht, Whitman and others, sites her own work as an important criticism of Western preoccupation with external matter, illuminating those internal desires which sublimate and alter our perceptions of the material world.

Initially, my closest reading has been of the later works of Robert Lowell, in particular his *History*.¹⁶ Lowell had found that the use of unrhymed sonnets, that is, quatorzains, suited the construction of quick sketches on subjects of interest to him, providing units of ideas which could later be integrated into a continuing pattern. Once the writer got into the habit of writing in this style, ideas came rapidly and he was able to generate a substantial body of worthwhile work.

I then undertook to read John Berryman's *The Dream Songs*.¹⁷ Both poets' formal structures of unrhymed sonnets or ten-lined stanzas were adapted to my writing. However in the development of my reading and the writing of my major poem in this thesis, *Deluge*, the work of Charles Olson has become influential. His work,

collected and edited by the scholar George Butterick, *The Maximus Poems* indicated an opening of a way out of the formalistic impasse my use of Lowell-Berryman form had led in developing a long poem.¹⁸ Olson's ideas of projective verse have allowed for a closer reading of John Ashbery and other contemporary poets, such as Jorie Graham.

Mark Strand's *Dark Harbor* and his earlier *Selected Poems* both provided good examples of current poetic technique, while allowing a different perspective on how modern American poets have addressed problems of relating their personal concerns with the external world.¹⁹ Mary Jo Salter's *Sunday Skaters*,²⁰ and Cole Swensen's *numen*,²¹ provided further interesting examples of contemporary writing, in this case by women who have fashioned quite distinct poetics out of their experiences. John Ashbery's particular style in both *Rivers and Mountains* and *A Wave* has modelled long lines of poetic discourse, and has suggested through his use of language how a particular sexual quality can be invested in the landscape.²² Galway Kinnell's powerful texts, *The Book of Nightmares* and *Imperfect Thirst* have both been touch points. He is a poet of memories, familial and personal, who, in texts such as *The Past* and *When one has lived a long time alone*, achieves poems which are well-wrought and moving, all the time anchoring them in the real and particular of his life in Vermont.²³

These poets above all have demonstrated the importance of local observation, fine detail and sensitivity to their various landscapes as enlivening elements in their work. While not slavishly imitating any one poet in this regard, I have been able to critically reflect upon the drafts of my poems in the light of this extensive reading and ensure that the poems, especially in the longer passages, retain a sharpness of observation and action.

The genre now known as the Long Poem is, as a form of poetry, of particular interest. Smaro Kamboureli's anthology, *On the Edge of Genre: The Canadian Long Poem*, explores the Canadian contemporary scene with a series of examples.²⁴ This book contains extracts from George Bowering's *The Kerrisdale Elegies*, which themselves are a reprise on Rilke, demonstrating the continuities of concerns about the connections between self and place. Bowering's attractive work has been treated fully by Roy Miki's *A Record of Writing: an Annotated and Illustrated Bibliography of George Bowering*.²⁵ Jeffrey Walker's *Bardic Ethos and the American Epic Poem*,²⁶ demonstrates how Whitman's legacy has been embroidered upon from his day through to William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound, to figures such as John Ashbery. Williams is treated in detail by Donald Hall in 'William Carlos Williams and the Visual'.²⁷

The development of the long poem as a specific contemporary genre has enabled poets to work with some sense of completion in their attempts to comprehend the world. The purpose in reading extensively in this genre has been to validate my desire to investigate certain physical and psychological states at some length in *Deluge*, which has become increasingly diverse in form and content as it has progressed, as are its models.

I have not been content to confine myself merely to North American poetry, but have also looked to Europe and for my purposes I have divided post-War European poetry into two broad sections, Anglophone and Continental. The Irish poet Séamus Heaney writes in English and so is accessible to a very wide readership. His work has proven to be central in my reading and exploration of critical approaches to poetry, for he seems to have been able to locate the matter of gender in his poetry. Sensitive readers will note that the masculine monologues carried out in early poems such as 'Digging' and 'Undine' develop a roundedness

and sense of fulfilment in the later "Glanmore Sonnets".²⁸ As will be demonstrated in the passages on Heaney, his work becomes centrally important in any enterprise seeking to discern a relationship between ourselves and the land. The importance of the notion of land-naming, *dindseachneas*, is confirmed in reading Seán Mac Réamoinn's *The Pleasures of Gaelic Poetry*.²⁹

Latterly, I have re-read the poetry of Robert Graves, particularly his holograph *Love Respelt Again*,³⁰ and also his mythopoetic critical works for refreshment. A chance finding of a second-hand copy of Kathleen Raine's *The Hollow Hill and Other Poems 1960 - 1964* led me to purchase a copy of *Yeats the Initiate*.³¹ Both Graves and Raine teach the importance of magic in poetry - not everything is reducible to plain language.

I began my readings in European poetry by going back to Gunnar Ekelöf's *Guide to the Underworld* and *A Mölna Elegy*.³² The first text takes the reader well away from the surface of this world into an exploration of the mythic substructures which map the destinies of those initiates into Ekelöf's system of beliefs. It is a lapidary text, setting personal observations against a deep interest in Byzantine and ancient Egyptian gnosticism: deeply spiritual writing in which sea and land mirror human emotions. *A Mölna Elegy* afforded another view of Ekelöf's eclectic style. In Ekelöf, and later in the poems of Czesław Miłosz, there is another world, lush, exotic, green. Both his recent work, *Provinces: Poems 1987 - 1991* and prose memoir, *Beginning with my Streets*, afforded an insight into the close correspondence memory and place have in European post-War writing.³³

The other strand of reading has been to approach the Baltic poets, amongst whom I count Ekelöf. Having read Tomas Tranströmer's *Baltics*,³⁴ I then began working on the poetry of Sigitas Geda. He is not well known in the West. One English-language critical article on him has been found, this by Rimvydas

Šilbajoris, 'Existential Root concepts in the poetry of Sigitas Geda',³⁵ and I have begun the slow and painstaking process of translating parts of Geda's *Mamutų Tėvynė*,³⁶ and had considered weaving these translations into *Deluge*. Geda's poetry sparkles with a love of the land, which has been linguistically poeticised as a woman from the time of the pioneering Lithuanian poet, Kristijonas Donelaitis (1714 - 1780). He personalises and caresses the land through his language in a way that I can recognise as being parallel to the underlying processes in the poetry of Heaney and Milosz.

Another Lithuanian poet is Judita Vaičiūnaitė, a selection of whose work has recently been published by Stuart Frieber, editor of *Field*, and his colleague Viktorija Skrupselis in *Fire put out by Fire*.³⁷ Elsewhere, I have previously discussed her work in outline emphasising her close connections with other contemporary Baltic poets.³⁸ The Estonian writer, Jaan Kaplinski, who has been likened to the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert, uses the forests of his native land as a tool to explore the nature of human relationships, and the page upon which his script would be written.

In my readings of Heaney and the European poets, once again the notion of place lore has become important, and especially the idea that the land itself is personified as a bountiful woman. This insight was significant, for it allowed me to attempt a reading of my local landscape in similar terms, and to resolve to my own satisfaction a process by which I could represent the land, and in particular, the river.

I have not found much to attract me in most Australian poetry, much of it being cast too much in a Bush-Ballad style or weakly appropriative as were the Jindyworobaks. Psychological poetry such as Christopher Brennan's and Vincent Buckley's *Last Poems*³⁹ had always attracted me, they are so like Ekelöf, being far

removed from the dry as dust social-realists. All the other poets in my schooldays' edition of R. Howarth's *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry*⁴⁰ seem to descend into a *Jindyworabakarie*, although some contemporary Australian poets, such as Kris Hemensley, Mark O'Connor and Philip Mead, are able to deal with our present situation in a refreshing manner. The most refreshing of all Australian anthologies is still *The Best of The Ear*.⁴¹ In it, Kris Hemensley was able to collect that poetry and prose which must still be considered at the cutting edge of Poetics in this country and as a much-needed inoculation against those tendencies to inward closure advocated by nationalist groups such as the Jindyworobaks.

On a different theme, the question of poetic translation into English has been addressed carefully by Robert Bly in his *The Eight Stages of Translation*.⁴² I have also delved into a range of anthologies of non-English verse, such as the ubiquitous Penguin series - German, Russian and Italian - all of which at some time or another give substance to the whisper of inspiration. Spatola and Vangelisti, *Italian Poetry, 1960 - 1980: from Neo to Post Avant-garde*,⁴³ and a Swedish collection, *Literally Speaking: sound poetry & text-sound composition*,⁴⁴ have both been useful reference points when considering possible layouts for a projected chapbook to be developed from Canto XXIII, 'A Masque: An Exchange of Letters after The Deluge'. A facsimile edition of Paul Eluard's *A Toute Épreuve*⁴⁵ has also proven to be an inspiration in terms of the possibilities of marrying text and image in a book of poetry.

Anna Balakian's *The Fiction of the Poet*⁴⁶ carefully examines notions of self-construction on the part of symbolist and later poets such as Rilke and Yeats. Further critical reading included Annabel Patterson's *Pastoral and Ideology*,⁴⁷ and J. S. Hans' *The Site of Our Lives: The Self and the Subject from Emerson to Foucault*.⁴⁸ Both of these texts led me away somewhat from my earlier concerns with Poetics as

such, but have helped me towards a partial understanding of how the poet may construct an edifice which is both reflective of himself and refractive of the observed world.

I have made extensive use of two texts which have developed my perceptions of the Australian landscape. The first is Max Oelschlager's pioneering *The Idea of Wilderness*.⁴⁹ Complementing that text is Paul Carter's disturbing *The Lie of the Land*.⁵⁰ This is a major contribution to our understanding of how a European-centred reading of the land, the interior especially, has contributed to our mythmaking, and the degree to which these myths are erected on shifting sands. I have used this text as a sounding board in my discussion of the Jindyworobaks' poetic program.

Questions of poetic language are addressed in Juri Tynianov's *The Problem of Verse Language*,⁵¹ and in Edward Larissy's *Reading Twentieth Century Poetry: The Language of Gender and Objects*.⁵² The American connections were fully explored in Laszlo Géfin's *Ideogram: Modern American Poetry*,⁵³ Helen Vendler's lucid essays in *The Given and the Made: Recent American Poets*,⁵⁴ and by J. M. Rabaté's *Language, Sexuality and Ideology in Ezra Pound's Cantos*.⁵⁵ Poundian ideas and language are also explored in a vast range of critical works, I found useful both K. Oderman's *Ezra Pound and the Erotic Medium*,⁵⁶ and Stephen Cushman's 'The World is not Iambic: Measure as Trope'.⁵⁷

Romantic ideas of composition and inspiration are critically explored in Robert Young's essay 'The Eye and Progress of His Song: a Lacanian Reading of The Prelude'.⁵⁸ A specifically Australian investigation of the connections between poetic language and perceptions of the landscape is to be found in Martin Leer's article, '"Contour-line by Contour": Landscape Change as an Index of History in the Poetry of Les Murray'.⁵⁹

In reading criticism of the poetry of Séamus Heaney, I have relied heavily upon Robert Molino's *Questioning Language, Tradition & myth: the Poetry of Séamus Heaney*.⁶⁰ This is a fully rigorous examination of Heaney, not as an affirmatory nationalist or sectarian poet, but rather provides a new portrait of someone who has been willing to challenge the somewhat comfortable preconceptions of what it has meant to be an heir to the Yeatsian tradition. For that double burden is more than carefully explored in P. Costello's *The Heart Grown Brutal: The Irish Revolution in Literature, from Parnell to the Death of Yeats 1891 - 1939*.⁶¹ Further insight into the condition of contemporary Irish writing was provided by John Montague's collection of essays, *The Figure in the Cave*.⁶²

Heaney's own criticism cannot be neglected and his collected essays, *The Redress of Poetry*,⁶³ is a shining example of what can be done by a practising poet in addressing his own. S. Burris' *The Poetry of Resistance: Séamus Heaney and the Pastoral Tradition*,⁶⁴ tends to take a fairly predictable stance, but the particular essay which has attracted my attention is J. Haffenden's 'Séamus Heaney and the Feminine Sensuality'.⁶⁵ This has served to sharpen my appreciation of Heaney's perception of his relationship to the land in a particularly sexual way, realising in contemporary terms the movement and moods of the Aisling or vision-poem. As my work on *Deluge* progressed, I found that I was constantly referring back to Heaney's poetry if only to validate the stock of images I was using, especially with the two female voices in the poem.

A more general collection of critical essays is Robert Hass's *Twentieth Century Pleasures: Prose on Poetry*.⁶⁶ This deals with Tranströmer, Lowell and Milosz, amongst others. I enjoyed reading Ted Hughes' *Winter Pollen*.⁶⁷ Like Heaney, Hughes the poet has evolved into a major critic, discursive, often lateral in his writing processes, but always entertaining, insightful and informative. His early training in

anthropology shines through as he relates poetry to the world outside of itself. Alan Garner's *The Voice That Thunders*⁶⁸ is a thoughtful evocation of his native Cheshire folklore and demonstrated clearly the viability of application of such knowledge to the writing process. Camille Paglia's massive study, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* was illuminating with respect to Heaney's image of the bower.⁶⁹

Mythological and psychological themes are well catered for in general University Library stacks, but I have joyfully purchased and utilised a range of texts to my advantage. Both *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves,⁷⁰ and *Of Gods and Men: Studies in Lithuanian Literature* by Algirdas Greimas,⁷¹ have been invaluable sources of thought about the underlying mythology of a flooded river. On a more rarefied note, I have worked through a Lithuanian-language text by Pranė Dundulienė, *Senovės lietuvių mitologija ir religija* [*Ancient Lithuanian Mythology & Religion*],⁷² which has some specific references to the Deluge story as it appeared in the Baltic region.

Australian poetry has had a number of generous critical works published in the last decade or so, not the least being Livio Dobrez' *Parnassus Mad Ward: Michael Dransfield and the New Australian Poetry*,⁷³ and in a more orthodox vein, Andrew Taylor's *Reading Australian Poetry*.⁷⁴ Both texts have been stimulating in their discussions, and Dobrez in particular is provocative and interesting.

The reading of literary biographies has assisted me in seeing each poet as a distinct creative entity, their differences being enormous, the one thread binding each to each has been their common bond to the one Muse. Major biographies which have a literary-critical value include J. Haffenden's *John Berryman: a Critical Commentary*⁷⁵ which is both appreciative and mournful, while H. Bloom edited a series of useful papers for the celebratory Carlos Williams. Robert Graves' life is

treated sympathetically but not uncritically by Miranda Seymour in her *Robert Graves: Life on the Edge*.⁷⁶ Robert Lowell's life has been extensively mined, Ian Hamilton's *Robert Lowell: A Biography*,⁷⁷ and Eileen Simpson's wry *Poets in their Youth*,⁷⁸ offer differing views of Lowell's creative processes. A far less palatable but needed investigation of the forces which drove Lowell's poetry is Jeffrey Meyers' *Manic Power: Robert Lowell and his circle*.⁷⁹

Tom Clark's *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*⁸⁰ fleshed out an initial knowledge of this major poet's life, work and influence, and the published correspondence between Olson and his contemporaries have proven to be of more than passing interest. A related text is Jeanne Hokin's *Pinnacles & Pyramids: The Art of Marsden Hartley*⁸¹ which has clarified some rather obscure points in Olson's poetry. The life and work of William Everson [Bro. Antonius] is commemorated in *The Poet as Printer: William Everson & the Fine Press Artists' Book*.⁸² Vincent Buckley's memoirs, *Memory Ireland* and *Cutting Green Hay*,⁸³ were consulted to refresh my memories of the man and his style of speech.

Much of my inspiration for the writing of specific poems has come from pictorial sources. One poem, 'Walking from Johnston Park', was based upon a reading of William Tibbits' watercolour, 'Coronal, Geelong' (1882) which is currently exhibited at the Geelong Regional Gallery. The use of similar paintings and historic photographs assisted me in constructing my long poem, *Deluge*.

Since my interests in Art embrace that conceived outside of the Berlin - Paris - New York axes, my reading has included such texts as S. P. Compton's *The World Backwards: Russian Futurist Books 1912 - 1916*,⁸⁴ which looks at the application of new artistic principles to book-design. I plan to use such principles as discussed in these texts in the design of my completed work.

The Polish-French artist, Balthus, is a painter whose mysterious and eroticised landscapes I found to be direct source for images in several poems, e.g. 'Lady Abdy': both Jean Leymarie's *Balthus*,⁸⁵ and Sabine Rewald's *Balthus*,⁸⁶ were consulted. Max Ernst's state of dream-like rhapsodic escapism is the subject of the retrospective study by W. Spies *The Return of La Belle Jardinière: Max Ernst 1950 - 1970*.⁸⁷ Both Rosemary Waldrop's *Body Image*, with photography of the danced word by Nelson Howe,⁸⁸ and Hans Richter's *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*,⁸⁹ were consulted in matters regarding early performance texts and Dadaist manifestations. These readings were applied to the construction of 'A Masque: The Exchange of Letters' as described in Chapter 4. A more general text, giving the background to contemporary developments in art, and indicating some connections with the world of Literature is Edward Lucie Smith's *Movements in Art since 1945: Issues and Concepts*.⁹⁰ A rich source of images and starting point is the collection of images in *The Art Book*.⁹¹

In attempting to address the significance of my proposed thesis, both the critical writing and the poems themselves, I am drawn into an age-old debate. The questions - Is Poetry significant? Is the making of Poetry significant? - have been asked in many different ways over the years.

Much of what I know about the significance of Poetry has come from my own reading of and sense of affinity to an ever-widening chain of contemporary writers, mostly poets but some essayists and novelists as well, with whom I can hold at least a conversation of the mind, and on the rare occasions when I can talk with fellow-poets such as Kris Hemensley, proprietor of Collected Works Bookshop in Melbourne, or Cameron Lowe, co-editor of *Core*, a Geelong-based literary magazine, I am speaking in a language in which I can be understood.

I have tried speaking in other styles of discourse. History, Sociology and Linguistics still remain fascinations. I can devour the pages of Norman Davies' *Europe: A History*⁹² with such great pleasure, or read an account by Hercus of the Aboriginal languages of this region with some degree of understanding. Art histories, dictionaries and novels are all jumbled together on my shelves, but the vast bulk of books I have sought out and bought are anthologies, collections, biographies of the great poet heroes of the past fifty years - Ezra Pound, Robert Lowell, Charles Olson, W. B. Yeats, Sylvia Plath, Allen Ginsberg, Thomas Kinsella - even Ern Malley has a niche here. Criticism, rare issues of obscure poets in English, Gaelic and Lithuanian are placed next to the Latin of Virgil and Ovid.

Conclusion: On Creative Writing

risisse Cupido dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.

OVID⁹³

In Ovid's opening account of how he came to write his delightful *Amores*, he retells the occasion with wit and verve. Not every Roman poet would want to produce a Virgillian epic of "wars and armed violence in the grand manner, with metre matching theme", a tub-thumping pæan to Augustus or one of his ancestors, especially if distracted. Ovid's excuse for writing love-poetry in preference was that he fell to playful Cupid's wiles: "his arrows never miss", and who can refuse a God's commandment? Poetry is a vocation and a task sacred even in these secular times, and the poet who refuses to acknowledge the Gods, in whatever form they choose appear, takes the real risk of falling into sterility if not blasphemy or mere prose.

At times throughout the *Amores*, Ovid reminds himself and his readers of that initial vocation, even if he uses mocking tones:⁹⁴

Another of Cupid's commissions. Hands off, moralists!

Lover's tender strains will shock you.

On the basis of his treatment of figures in his poems, one suspects that privately Ovid was something less than credulous in his attitude towards the Gods, but he was not immoral, and certainly not a prude, rather a realist, when it came to the business of love and lovemaking. He could see through Augustus and his régime's propaganda about marriage and economic honesty for what it was and I think had seen that his true calling was to write about the human condition. Even so, he was not immune to the temptations of the State, and as late as Book III was still tossing over a choice between Elegy and Tragedy.

When Robert Graves had at last emerged from the long dark shadows of his experiences in the trenches, and was able to take up that heart-felt calling to be a poet, he seized upon the one theme which could satisfy both himself and the Goddess who directed his pen. He was not able to clearly articulate what had driven him all those years he had attached himself to the malefic Laura Riding, or how he had managed to survive the awful shock of news that his son, David Graves, had been lost in action against the Japanese on Arakan in 1943.⁹⁵ Randall Jarrell was right in intimating that Graves had invented the figure of "The White Goddess", as she was not named as such in either Classic or Celtic mythologies, unless she is the half-hidden Alba, that is "White", of Latin placenames, and in Celtic mythologies we are ever-mindful of the three-fold aspect of the Goddess. However, whether invented or rediscovered, she served Graves as a fount of inspiration as well as he served her in the pursuit of Poetry.

A day or so after his death on 7 December 1985, some of us were gathered for a Deakin Literary Society seminar at the Waurin Ponds Campus, when Trevor Code

announced Graves' passing, and read to us the dedicatory poem to The White Goddess, starting with these lines:⁹⁶

All saints revile her, and all sober men
 Ruled by the God Apollo's golden mean -
 In scorn of which I sailed to find her
 In distant regions likeliest to hold her
 Whom I desired above all things to know,
 Sister of the mirage and echo ...

As Code recited the poem, eyes closed, voice intoning, the room fell quiet and I swear that a white dove flew past the window bay overlooking the campus lawns. One of the women in our party lay rigid in her easy-chair, her hair standing on end and eyes rolling back into her head - I grabbed her glass of wine lest it spill into her lap. None but I noticed. Over the years, I have asked myself two questions: why a *white* dove and not one of the many brindled pigeons which lodge themselves thereabouts - and why did only I see this woman's seizure? I have no answers even yet.

Not that we had been talking about Graves in particular that day, but rather about how we set ourselves to the task of writing and we had engaged in some exercises to start ink flowing to the page. Code's method, which I use now, is to start with some object, words or an image set before me, a "talisman" as Graves would have it, from which I can conjure images and associations. A chip of bluestone may be charged with psychic reverberations enough to set off a train of thought about a building, the sight of bent and sullied reeds at the riverside was the beginning of my lines about the 1995 flood, a line from the Alexandrian poet, Kavafis, enough to start me into writing a set piece for a poem in progress.

In my study, I surround myself with talismanic objects such as a Hopi Sundisk, a Buddha carved from soapstone, a reproduction of the Black Madonna of Vilnius,

a certain silver ring which I wear for good fortune whenever I drive or write, a particular fountain pen with which I must write the initial drafts of poems. I have surrounded my workdesk with photographs of poets: Pound and Lowell at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Graves in his black hat standing by a lough in Co. Wicklow, Anne Sexton at laughter, Thomas Kinsella with gaze blazing, Durrell's quiet smiling voice echoes - "It's fatal to love".⁹⁷

Then I like to teach my classes in the one room overlooking the one field in Eastern Park, where I can see the changes wrought with each passing season, the children at field-games and the passing of cars and light trucks along the through-road. When I am in my writing phase, I decorate my classroom with images that may help me at any stage, and any arbitrary room-changes and subsequent visual displacement unnerves me.

There is also the inexplicable business of seizure as a poem grows from an uncertain seed into a dream or seeks articulation on the tongue. My family complains that I withdraw from them, both physically and emotionally, teaching in a noisy classroom becomes painful as my ears begin to hurt with each scrape of chair on linoleum and each child's raised voice. I avoid my colleagues and walk out of the school whenever possible. The words come sometimes too slowly for the pain to be borne, other times I must write down every syllable lest one be lost. I write down what words and lines I can, sound them out in a half-loud voice, sometimes correcting as I go. It is not a process I can fully control, I am not an Apollonian writer.

Not that what is written in the first effort is allowed to stand as is, because lines, images, words and sounds need fine-tuning to make a poem. As Ovid noted, he had to make a choice as to which metre to use in his *Amores*, and discovered that Cupid's fortuitous stamping on the page transformed the martial double

hexametric couplet into the uneven coupling of hexameter and pentameter the ideal vehicle for his elegiac verse.⁹⁸ A nice conceit, but Ovid was at the height of his powers and knew the possibilities and limitations of his language and the forms available to him as a poet. As Robin Skelton emphasised in his writings, poetry is an art as much as it is the product of inspiration.

Skelton also characterised poetry as "learnèd". To fulfil that condition, I have learnt my craft as well as I can, reading widely and voraciously handbooks and guides, knowing the lives of the poets, and all the time seeking out new poets, new ways of writing, so that by now I claim a fair knowledge of the forms and styles of a broad range of modern writing and can apply that to my classroom teaching and own practice. So, in my practice, I seek to make an object, written and verbal in form, out of the stuff of my learning, my readings, my dreams and inspiration, and I seek to make it polished as befits a product of this chosen craft.

In the following chapters I address some of the problems I have had to confront, and the many sources which I sought out in writing my own poetry. I set up the frameworks of landscape in which I have written and address questions of technique before delving into the long process of exegesis on the poems themselves. In this way I hope to have come to grips with both the *creative* and the *writing* aspects of my work over the past three years of this project, and communicate all of this to my readers. The poetry I present here is really the core of the thesis, all other writing pointing to it and elaborating.

The first offering is a collection of quatorzains, *The Camden Poems*. In this text I am as much concerned with a question of form as well as tonality and voice. I give detailed comments on each poem in the course of Chapter 5.

The centrepiece of this thesis is *Deluge*. Conceived as a book, *Deluge* is structured as a set of twenty three Cantos, borrowing Ezra Pound's term for a sequence of

related non-narrative stanzas. For this, I have chosen to set each Canto within the context of the great flood of 1995, which I have taken as a manifestation of the Goddess of this land. And I take as my characters people, real and imagined, swept away by the force of that flood from their livings in the reach of land near Ballarat and by the River Barwon far out to sea. Their voices are heard, singly and in chorus, throughout this poem.

The final Canto, the twenty third, is 'A Masque: The Exchange of Letters', which had evolved in the course of my investigations into how poetry is written, as detailed in Chapter 4. After the drafting process was complete each stanza has taken on an existence of its own, being extended, revised and reset to suit my eye.⁹⁹ As noted beforehand, it has further evolved after reading Richter and Waldrop into a blocked script for performance. This may be produced as a separate chapbook wherein I have played around with layouts, illustrations and fonts, looking for a menage of eye, ear and whole body, for I believe that Poetry deserves to be presented as something more than blocks of lines on a blank page. As a start in this direction, the text of this last Canto is presented in parallel columns.

In thinking about my work, I will let Ovid's works speak in closing:¹⁰⁰

ad mea formosos vultus adhibete, puellae,
carmina, purpureus quae mihi dictat Amor.

that is:

My poems are written at Cupid's dictation
to catch the eye of Beauty.



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Chapter 2

A Sense of Place

Introduction

Signposts whitened relentlessly

SÉAMUS HEANEY¹

This chapter is written as a number of clearly marked sections each a separate investigation into what frameworks I could use in creating my poetry. At the conclusion of each section the reader is directed to certain passages within the poems, and to related passages in the Exegesis, exemplifying my poetic response to the problem being considered. I firstly examine how the idea of wilderness has resurfaced as a paradigm in our literature and then examine the Irish tradition of *dindseachnas*, that is, name-lore as an example of land-personification processes within European societies, and as related to their poetries. Reference is then made to a deeply-rooted personal memory which leads to the second section, in which I explores in more detailed terms some aspects of our problem as Australian poets in respect to the land as exemplified by the Jindyworobaks and present-day successors such as Les Murray. The chapter then proceeds in the third section with an investigation of our current predicament of using Aboriginal terminology within the act of poetry. The fourth section considers the 1995 and other floods as a suitable framework for a literary project and the final section investigates the question of whether one can consider the local landscape as gendered.

The focus for my writing are the lands and waters of my region, as defined by the Barwon River, the nearby coastline, forests and inland plains. Having lived within that boundary for about twenty-five years, I can claim some knowledge of the area, and although I live and work within the confines of a suburban society, by choice I place myself on the headland known as Urquhart Bluff, on the Great

Ocean Road, to survey all that surrounds me. I have wanted to develop this perspective in my writing, but have needed to find the tools by which to go about my business.

My justification for closely examining the notion of place comes from several exemplars. Robert Graves sought to devise an "historical grammar of poetic myth", and in so doing presented us with a key to rejoin both Classical and Celtic myth and poetics to our modern sensibility.² While one may think that Graves' work is too delocalised from a particular place, it must be remembered that he viewed his Muse the very embodiment of the life-force which welled out of the Earth herself and gave expression to him as a poet in the form of particular women. His life was one of constant crisis and displacement, and only in his study at Deyá in Majorca, was he able to remove himself into an imaginative reconstruction of place and time, and to some extent banish the demons which had afflicted him since those terrible days in the trenches.³ Other poets, such as Séamus Heaney in Ireland, Charles Olson in Massachusetts and Sigitas Geda in Lithuania have focussed our attention on the real work of incorporating quite disparate bodies of knowledge about the land and its myths into their works.

They also act as exemplars in the terrible process of displacement from their birth-land in differing ways. Graves, as noted, led a restless life, more often than not living outside of Britain because of family and bureaucratic pressures. Heaney was forced out of Ulster by the gunning down of his cousin and persistent death-threats. Olson's life was a constant juggling of jobs in varied places outside of his beloved Gloucester, and Sigitas Geda, like many poets under totalitarian regimes has had to undertake internalised displacement in order to survive. These displacements are echoes of the greater shifts in population endured by countless millions in this past miserable century. In the time of breaking of nations, those

shifts of peoples were accompanied by great losses, not the least being that sacred thread binding a folk to its particular lands, and through mythologies of place to their own sense of self. The damage done to many peoples has been immense, and this may go part of the way in explaining the often aberrant manifestations and behaviours displayed by peoples through War, industrialisation and the general loss of what is loosely termed wilderness.

In Oelschlaeger's monumental study, *The Idea of Wilderness*, the author takes great care to sort out the tangled skeins of ideas about our place in the natural world as they have evolved since Palæolithic times.⁴ He demonstrates that our cognisance of wilderness has changed from complete identification of the human with the surrounding world, as evidenced by artistic remains, to the present self-serving objectification of things outside our own narrow socioeconomic interests. Oelschlaeger states that "harmony with rather than exploitation of the natural world was a guiding principle" in Palæolithic societies, that the act of hunting, for example, was balanced by rituals dealing with the mysteries of life and death, a principle still displayed by existing aboriginal populations.⁵ Likewise, such populations were closely integrated to their physical environments.

The shift in paradigm and sensibility came with the growth of settled farming populations, but was crystallised in the emergence of the "tribes of Yahweh", a collection of disparate peoples who coalesced into a state under the legendary David, "Melek Israel", about three millenia ago. This aggressive state had as its base good natural resources, a literate warrior elite and a coherent, self-serving, ideology. As the tribes shifted from wandering bands of shepherds and hunter-gatherers to a settled community of farmers and shepherds, their spiritual concept eschewed a God of Nature to one "above nature who had designed the world expressly for his people".⁶ We in the West are the direct inheritors of that state's

desacralisation and rationalisation of Nature, and are only now learning the cost of the spiritual and ecological trade-offs that were made some three millennia ago. Other traditions are available still. Some would take refuge from the world, while others would seek to go back as far as possible towards a primary consciousness of our place in the scheme of things. The American writer, David Henry Thoreau, is commemorated for his text *Walden* more as a touchstone than for being read and acted upon. Yet taken all together, Thoreau's writings do constitute a powerful and spirited address to the problems which we face as dirty and noisome industry continues to explode upon the consciousness. In *Walden*, Thoreau carefully developed his sense of place by grounding his venture in both the practicalities of making a living and by articulating his spiritual framework. Each complimented the other.

Oelschlaeger rightly points out that the key to Thoreau's heightened consciousness of place was crystallised not by pond-side but in his cathartic climb of 31 August 1846, up Mt. Ktaadin in Maine. It was an illumination as profound as Wordsworth's on Lake Windermere: ". . . Think of our life in nature, - daily to be shown water, to come into contact with it, - rocks, trees, wind on cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common* sense! *Contact! Contact! Who* are we? *Where* are we?"⁷ Thoreau's leap towards a new mythology of place discarded all those years of learnt bookish sensibility, is a powerful illumination and reverberates over the next century through American letters.

Gary Snyder's work can be seen as an example of Thoreauvian influence, especially in *Turtle Island* which explores "the intimate bonding between a man and place, *mana* and life".⁸ Deeply influenced by his early life in the woods of the north-west and his post-graduate work in Japan, especially years of Zen Buddhist practice,

Snyder's *œuvre* has developed outwards into an active perception of man's web of relationships to other people and to the land itself.

Another response to our current malaise has been to re-investigate the archæological roots of European consciousness, then reinterpret these findings in modern form. The Lithuanian-born archæologist, Marija Gimbutas, was able to discover, catalogue and interpret many pre-IndoEuropean objects from the region of Old Europe, that is the Aegean - Balkan - Danubian circle. Gimbutas articulated a symbolic grammar of the Great Goddess and follow its traces into classical and modern European mythologies and linguistic features.⁹ Her basic position is that Old European society was agricultural and non-violent, and either matriarchal or paired, that is both male and female in its power-structures. However this culture was supplanted in the southeast of the continent by the incursive Kurgan, that is IndoEuropean, warrior-bands from the trans-Pontic steppes, their culture being characterised as pastoral and patriarchal, the direct ancestor of our current cultural sensibility. Through Gimbutas' work it becomes possible to see how the tensions between new and old beliefs were worked out on a mythic and sacerdotal level in a range of European societies.

Some ecological activists have seized upon such findings by Gimbutas and others as the basis for a constructed ideology like Ecofeminism or even the reinvention of Wicca, but in reality our attitudes have not shown a major shift away from conventional paradigms. Since the Romantics popularised praise of uninhabited Nature, our literature in Australia has displayed a marked tension between this cultural marker and the absolutes of our lives in the coastal cities. Yet the impulse to find a quiet place, a shaded bend by the local creek, a certain rock at the beach, remains a compelling impulse in our lives and as sources for our writing, whether or not we consciously believe in a particular ecological or matricentric ideology.

Irish literature in particular, recorded the various strains of belief and practice of a European people compounded out of disparate ethnic and cultural strands. As the gift of writing was only fully established amongst the learned and administrative classes with the advent of Christianity, the Irish were able to bring to the writing table at least a millennium of Celtic-language oral tradition, and a native sense of place pre-dating arrival of the IndoEuropean Celtic groups as the Danaans from northern Europe and the Milesians from Spain. The Irish remained remarkably different, one may say conservative, in their social behaviours and attachments to living places, perhaps as a reflex of their already long history.

When encountered by the Patrician missionaries and later by the English at home, the Irish were noted for their natural approach to many matters of conventional morality, sexual regularity being more or less confined to the emerging bourgeoisie, but once displaced, fell into defensive modes of behaviour: perhaps it was the breaking of the connections between place and spirit that disturbed the natural rhythms of their lives. We do know that in Celtic, and particularly Irish, mythologies, the role of love and lust is deeply connected to the role of the goddess as Divine Mother and personification of the land.¹⁰ We read in the *Tain* the legendary Queen Medhbh of Connacht was noted for her sexual capacity, quite often disapprovingly by the bookmen.¹¹ As well as being the lover of the virile hero Fergus mac Roich, Medhbh was able to claim she was "full of grace and giving".¹² It is possible there was such a heroine, just as that Boudicca (Boadicea) of the British Iceni was castigated by the Romans for her sexual bounty and rebelliousness. For our purposes, we must treat such expressions of licentiousness as the literary manifestation of one of the characters of the Goddess.¹³

If we mistakenly connect the divine role of the Goddess with human emotions such as love, then we are disappointed to find so little of what we think of as love in early Irish literature. There are tales of wooings and elopements, such as the tale of Diarmuid and Grainne, which became in others' hands the romantic tragedy of Tristan and Iseult, but such tales deal with the erotic encounter rather than the personal relationships between the lovers. Likewise, Celtic mythology did not have a singular goddess of love, such as an Aphrodite or Venus, that function being taken by Aongus - the Celtic Apollo. Yet the vigorous sexuality of the goddess and heroines must be remarked upon. Literary and mythological processes are parallel, the texts reflecting the ritual nature of love and love-making. Only much later, in the hands of the bookmen and under the influence of imported genres did the personal psychology of love become more fully elaborated.

Love and sexuality in Irish mythology and early literature is a manifestation of the Goddess as Divine Mother and personification of the land. That cult of the Mother-Goddess is attested in Gaul from prehistoric times, and may well have preceded the first Celts to Ireland. The chthonic cults of Early Europe were female-fertility based and the reflexes of an intensely agricultural and settled society.¹⁴ In Irish legend, one early population group bore the title *Tuatha Dé Danan*, which is totally explicable from Indo-European glossaries as 'the people of the goddess Danu - the giver', and in both Gaul and Britain the notion of 'Great Mother' was awarded the title of *Madron*. Her identification with the earth is made explicit in the name of a Kerry mountain *Dá Chích Anann* - The Paps of Anu - the goddess of the province of Munster, to whom the people owed their fertility and wealth.¹⁵

Such an equivalence between the Goddess and the Earth is extended beyond local affiliations to comprise the domain of the cultural nation, the whole land, so that Ireland has carried a trio of divine eponyms Ériu, Fódla and Banbha who reigned over the land at the time of the coming of the Gaels. More generally, localities such as rivers, townlands and provinces were closely associated with female deities. for example, *Áine* a "fairy queen" has her seat at Cnóc Áine in Co. Limerick, *Aoibhead* of Craig Liath in Clare and *Clíodna* of Carraig Clíodna in Cork. That the otherworld is primarily female in character has been a long-held trait in Irish mythology, and has coloured belief and practice to present times. Of course, it goes against the modern industrialist grain, which has seen the operative power in the world as being wholly masculine, able and willing to usurp the processes of life-making. Yet even with the application of industrial processes to farming, a poet such as Séamus Heaney can still recognise and give voice to the enduring. As a poet well aware of the two, even three languages of today's Ireland, Hiberno-English, Ulster-English which is akin to Lallans, and the various Gaelic dialects. Séamus Heaney has been assiduous in digging down into the land's expressive roots, calling himself an "etymologist of roots and graftings".¹⁶ While the "Glanmore Sonnets" came after his flight from Ulster in the face of direct threats to his family and the offer from the American critic, Anne Saddlemeyer, of a place of refuge outside of Dublin, Heaney maintained that linguistic element which had its first expression in the poems of *Death of a Naturalist*.¹⁷ His verse, making "art a parody of earth", could be interpreted as a surrender, to the elements of rural life and caste, but more likely than surrender, Heaney's poetry, and the "Glanmore Sonnets" especially are an affirmation of the good which informs and sustains all life.¹⁸

While Heaney had been cast as speaker for the silenced peoples of Ulster, this is a role he had disavowed earlier:¹⁹

I used to lie with an ear to the line
 For that way, they said, there should come a sound
 Escaping ahead, an iron tune
 Of flange and piston pitched along the ground,
 But I never heard that ...

Gerry Adams had earlier spoken of Sinn Féin's tactic, an Armalite in one hand, the ballot box in the other: those who had wanted, or feared, Heaney would take up his voice like an Armalite had to cope with his rejection of both, for his avocations are poetry and criticism rather than a Pearse-like self-mythologisation.

In the first of the "Glanmore Sonnets", Heaney opens a ground rich in the long centuries of habitation. He lays his language, "vowels", against forced usage, "gorge" and "Vulnerable", to allow rebirth "breathe", "quickened", "breasting", so as to live with his "ghosts" and fears. Heaney's concerns are as much to do with the processes of making art out of the very stuff of his life, yet it is an art which he makes the "paradigm of earth". The natural world still hides itself until the writer is able to unlock the earth's secrets, the artist as magus perhaps, cutting into the "subsoil of each sense". The American poet, Robert Duncan, often spoke of his preparatory work and trial pieces as "groundwork", a fruitful metaphor: in the second sonnet, Heaney's use of music "slughorn and slow chanter", as a second metaphor for his art further indicates his realisation of the need to exert control. So he extends the metaphor by which his language, "vowels", and craft, "verse", are likened to a plough-horse in harness, which must be "turned around" in the process of preparing the ground, to make these poems so rich and moving.

How we construct the world, and consequently construct our relations to it, is through language. If our language is at variance with our neighbours', acquaintances' and families' use of language, then we will inhabit a different world

to them. In the fifth sonnet, Heaney muses over the word "boortree": he describes it as having "green young shoots, its roots like freckled solder" - it is a living entity. Yet the word "boortree" is something unknown to me. Heaney gives a clue, "It was our bower as children", and knowing that little, perhaps dangerously so, about how north Irish speech sounds and is conventionally transcribed, I can equate *boor* with *bower*. But then Heaney springs a surprise with "elderberry" creating in my mind's eye a thicket of fruiting trees, their branches held apart to create what we called in our childhood that "hideyhole" we created in the feathery tamarix hedge. Whatever referent Heaney has used, "boortree" or "bower tree", it is quite different to my referent and in reading the poems, I must attempt to find some way of interpreting the images and language being given me. But still, even a negative connotation to a word can help build its substance.

The notion of the bower as the seat of love is recalled, rather negatively or extravagantly, in the image of Cleopatra's barge, her portable bower.²⁰ Heaney's bower is positive and moral, owing more to Yeats' vision of the Rose than to Spenser's bower, which more often than not becomes a place where wrong-doing is transacted.²¹ In effect, Heaney asserts the moral and affirmatory value of his experience within the bower, and helps me as his audience to reconstruct the linguistic markers needed to read the poem.

Likewise, by connecting Lorenzo and Jessica, with the legendary Irish lovers Diarmuid and Grainne, Heaney makes an equation of value to his complex Irish experience with the accepted prestige of Shakespearian drama and language. Now if that process can succeed for one pair of mythical lovers then surely it can be extended to many other features of Irish Literature and landscape for a broader audience. Some readers may want to resist such a proposition, and exclude particular national or cultural attributes from inclusion into their literary canon,

but I feel that Heaney's poetry, especially these celebratory sonnets, have given voice to the land and people in our increasingly urbanised and anglicised world. But for land-myths to remain in place, it will take further generations of poets and other artists to uncover them and given them life, making them vital once again within the new cultures.

We need not move out of Europe to see this process at work. In considering Baltic literature, the loss of early texts and submergence of native cultures under more vigorous and intrusive forms of Christianity have made it difficult to reconstruct mythologies of the land. Algirdas Greimas has been able to use well-attested linguistic sources to effect partial reconstructions of various mythological schema.²² In particular, I want to concentrate on a cluster of characters around the figure of *Laima* who perhaps is the closest in kind to the Gaulish Madrona noted beforehand. A sequence of resemblances and relationships can be established through an examination of folk-song.²³ The primary female deity, Laima (Luck) gives rise to several daughters including, Aušrinė (Morning Star), the eldest being Saule (Sun). Baltic myths of the origin of mankind are framed by the influences of Laima and Aušrinė, and just as in Celtic myth the element of water is associated with the birth of both land and mankind. These are universals of mythology, for on the other end of the Eurasian landmass, both Japanese and Maori myth as well harness the notion of the land and humanity being born through divine agency out of primal waters. That is, a certain place is something given to us by God, we must keep it sacred both in our language and in our living.

Such myths can also be taken as metaphors for the making of poetry out of primal psychic material, our dreams and wishes, hopes and fears, childhood memories as well as adult passions: floating islands in the great Sea of Being. Yet it is hard to easily say where the impulse to make poetry comes from: most of us would agree

that we wish to observe and record our emotional responses, our thoughts, or to recreate - the motives are mixed. For some, the initial impulse remains buried in an unrecovered childhood. In working through my own motivations, I came across this one memory - a rootedness in a certain place and the spirit it embodied.

A curious boy, when in Grade One, I climbed to the top of the large Mulberry tree in our family's backyard. It was not too hard to scramble up between the branches and at least find a crook to settle into, locking my legs around a rough but comforting branch. Beneath my perch the neighbourhood lay mapped out with houses scattered along the gravel of two long streets reaching down from Marion Road which stretched from the far-off southern foothills to Kilkenny's industrial suburbs. Over on my left I could see the single tower of the Queen of Angels Church, where I had been baptised, and beyond the low rises of Adelaide itself. Closer, a belt of brown paddocks held two suburbs apart and skirted the redbrick and terracotta of the local orphanage.

Two very tall palm trees stood about a hundred yards away in the grounds of an Orphanage. I knew that Barn Owls sometimes roosted there when they made their midnight forays, for I had seen their ghostly shadows slide out over the paddocks looking for fieldmice: one had taken to perching on the bridge over our side gate, which was let into the high western wall. I used to climb out of my window on clear summery nights and sit up on top of that brick fence and watch the stars, and the owls at flight over the stubble paddocks just across the road.

Past the Orphanage I could see the next line of houses in Lockleys and beyond them the flat wastes on which the Airport was to be built. It was a wild place where all the culverts drained into, so that by late July it had become marshy and difficult bogland. One rainy weekend a boy my age slipped from the banks of the

creek at Richmond, falling into the swollen flood: he was swept away like our balsa and paper yachts we had played with in the gutters that day. He was never found, though hundreds of local families scoured the creekbanks and wastelands. I think he would have drowned quickly, in great fear.²⁴

When I was few years older, I became more daring and climbed way to the top of that Mulberry tree in our back allotment, swinging crazily from side to side, taking in the whole cauldron from Mount Lofty to Henley Beach in my compass. I fell asleep up there one afternoon, far too dangerous, for I fell off my safe purchase only to tangle in tree limbs before I hit the ground. I awoke in terror, surrounded by green jungle, a cluster of ripe mulberries just within my grasp and stuffed them, unwashed, into my mouth as if the juice would reassure me I was alive. Only later was I afraid. That memory has stayed with me in some form ever since, though I had need to dream it in order for its beauty and terror to be brought out in a written form.

For the poets such as are discussed throughout the thesis in this context, Séamus Heaney, Sigita Geda or Charles Olson, the process of heightened recall which, taught to us by Wordsworth in 'The Prelude', most often centres on the poet's sense of place, that is, memory is anchored in the concrete and particular. The Irish used a particular term for this process, *dindseanchas*, place-lore, and encompasses the naming and explaining the names of localities, elaborating their qualities and sights, descriptions extending even to the plants, animals, events and especially the people particular to the place. A poem set in Donegal township on the northwest Irish coast would be replete with references to The Four Masters, the quay, emigrants and even to Boston, the next Parish across the water. Likewise, the Aranda songs recorded by T. H. F. Strehlow are replete with

detailed landmarks and mythological references. These are Heaney's "signposts",²⁵ which assist the listener place a poem in its proper context.

In terms of the poems I have written as the core of this thesis, the reader may wish to note how I have utilised items of place-lore in *The Camden Poems*, as in 'Minyip', 'At Bell's Beach' and 'Neighbours'. Also it could be noted how *Deluge* is constructed with detailed local description, and as a corporeal passage down the River Barwon and out to sea.

The problem for Australian writers has been how to address the task of contextualisation. In the next section I examine the path taken by the Jindyworobak poets and then proceed to meditate on our current predicament in a writing process that seeks its place in the land. There are no easy solutions, but I have hoped to find one which is suitable for my needs.

The Lie of the Land

Poetry ... seemed to be implicated in this process of colonisation by mimesis

PAUL CARTER²⁶

I have a quarrel with Australian poetry, or rather, with the canon that passes as such, and so with what I was taught and the expectations of my students as to what is Australian poetry. This quarrel began with my teachers' insistence on reciting Dorothea MacKellar's jingle, "I love a sunburnt country ... ", in weeping tones, or Mary Gilmore's 'Old Botany Bay' as some invocation to departed ancestors: and those dreary Bush Ballads, some may have been amusing, but they were so empty, so much like the landscape north of Burra. Why anyone would hymn a brown land, its scrubby bush, its failures and disappointments was, and is, a mystery to me. But since my particular writing enterprise is so deeply set within

my local landscape, and in particular within a flooded landscape, I ought set things right and come to some accommodation with the past.

Writers' attempts to portray the Antipodes from the earliest days bore the heavy burden of corrupted form and diction, and settler need to propagandise the new land to their Home communities. William Charles Wentworth and Charles Thompson twanged bardic lyres industriously in cascades of empty but dangerously proto-nationalist phrases:²⁷

Strike, strike the bold convivial lyre!

Let lofty poems wake the soul!

Let ivy'd bands each heart entwine,

In one harmonious whole!

Even the belated influence of Romanticism's more sympathetic attitudes to the realities of landscape can do little to rescue our newly-revived heroes, Charles Harpur and Henry Kendall, from their irretrievable awfulness. Then the course of poetry in Australia joggles along into the doggerel of Banjo Paterson or Henry Lawson's tub-thumping. Yet Paterson and Lawson are rehashed for school anthologies and popular assemblies, and Kendall is touted as a sophisticated response to early Australia. If the Muse does inhabit Australian poetry, we ought look for her in the tortured self-examinations of Christopher Brennan or in the delights of John Shaw Neilson, who do not really figure in accounts of what is commonly meant by "Australian poetry". The meaning of that term has been set by the development of a particular pre-War ideology, which still imparts a very strong sense of Australianness, one which I feel is quite incorrect and distorting.

For some inexplicable reason, Adelaide has been the site for at least two major movements in Australian Poetics, firstly the Jindyworobaks and then the group clustered around Max Harris as the Angry Penguins. They were alike as much as water and oil. The Jindyworobak Club was established in 1938 by Rex Ingamells

as a self-consciously and aggressively Australian literary movement which placed a special emphasis on Aboriginal culture as an expression of Australianness. Like many nationalist movements, the Jindyworobaks were proselytisers and propagandists, with particularist doctrine outweighing poetics in consideration of what was good in writing, and like many European nationalist movements, it indulged in doctrines of land-mysticism.

Peter Hopegood, a mythmaker and anthropologist, remarked that the Jindyworobak Club "set out to depict the culture of Australia in a way that endorsed the suggestion advanced by Spengler that continents shape everything within their shores to a special, almost demiurgic blueprint".²⁸ *Blut und Land* indeed! Of course, we can now recite the errors and crimes to which blind acceptance of such a doctrine can lead, yet the Jindyworobak program is still very much alive in the formation of what "Australian poetry" is taken to mean at many levels. Not the least being the wide acceptance of Les Murray as the current bard and icon for a particular kind of Australian poetry. So in offering readings of the poems below, I am aware of the tension between my Gravesian belief in a personal Muse, who may well be manifest in aspects of the landscape, and what I think to be extreme and untenable doctrines about bonds between this continent and ourselves, the settlers.

Ian Mudie lived almost all of his life in and around Adelaide, and was closely associated with Rex Ingamells as an editor and advocate. Critical response about his writing has been quite divided, on one hand it is claimed he was "a serpent of mediocrity" and that he knew "nothing about poetry",²⁹ and yet on the other hand his avocation of *mateship* as the essential hallmark Australian relationships has been adopted as a national myth. His best-known piece, 'They'll Tell You about Me', is too awful to contemplate and is best left aside, however, 'Sitting Room,

Strzelecki Homestead' is replete with detailed observations and a tough-mindedness which attracts me.³⁰ Set in the remote and inhospitable area known as the Strzelecki Track in the far north of the State, the poem begins with a description of an abandoned "last homestead". It is a ruin, and Mudie transforms the desert sands, which have "crashed through" the windows and flooded the house, into a metaphor of wasted dreams, a great dry wave sweeping away all the plans for "vast flocks" and "fruit trees / near the bore" and even "vegetables near the overflow". This sand "erases" time and silences memories, it is the great blotting paper of European endeavour in the Centre, leaving only a "fluid mirage" of rabbit and dingo, the imported being harassed and destroyed by the native.

As Carter points out the early pioneers often felt that they had been lied to by the land, so green and lush when explorers such as Mitchell and Strzelecki had passed through in certain seasons, only then to be faced by inexplicably drought-ridden seasons. The early settlers' hopes for a lush interior, an Inland Sea, a new America, were so strong that they deluded themselves into believing that Paradise must be over the next sandhill. We know that it is not so, that what we're left with is a rooftop "protruding above the hand-smooth surface of sandhill". For a nationalist, Mudie's poem is unenthusiastic, unexpectedly sombre and resigned to the realities of settler life.

But more often than not, Jindyworobak poetry descended into niceness, as is Rex Ingamells' vignette, 'Garchooka, the Cockatoo':³¹

Though the waters, wind-stirred and red-glowing,
 shadowed by the evening gloom of gums,
 bend in their banks the way the day is going,
 while a gold-haze of insects comes
 over the ripples in their coloured flowing,
 Garchooka, beating from high branches, screeches
 discord up and down the river-reaches.

As he strains to achieve Hans Heysen coloration, Ingamells writes an almost Australian Academy piece with obligatory mention of eucalypts and riverscape, yet its one effective word, "screeches", is able to shatter the biscuit-tin illusion. The poem goes nowhere, it is a purely self-contained piece, and I do wonder at the gratuitous inclusion of the word, "Garchooka".³² Like the boulders of our Western District paddocks, it must be navigated around being unassimilable into the poem itself. What does "Garchooka" mean? Is it a simple onomatopoeic word like our "Chook", which prompted my classmates' reaction when the poem was read out as an example of what we ought to strive for in our writing, or is it a mythic figure whose name and function need explaining before the poem can take on a deeper meaning? To my mind, pieces like 'Garchooka, the Cockatoo' are empty gestures, ornaments, the equivalent of lace curtains in Glenelg house-windows.

But Ingamells was not always so vacuous, his 'Ship from Thames' presents a series of lively set portraits of settlers and immigrants in Sydney Cove: local officials, redcoats, "pale wretches", sailors and the Governor himself. However, in the last stanza Ingamells reveals a then unfashionable sympathy for people, whom I assume are the remnants of the local Aboriginal population:³³

Aloof, the slandered and abhorred
 behold from off a quarried rise
 the cause of all the stir abroad,
 a fiercer glitter in their eyes.

Perhaps a greater willingness to hear the voices of Kuri, Tiwi, Aranda and the many other first nations of this continent may spring from that recognition by the Jindyworobaks of the vitality of their lived myth. Recent acceptance of Kevin Gilbert's work is a good sign of some degree of rapprochement between quite different ways of seeing and inhabiting the land, and certainly Les Murray in his

masterful 'The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle' has put to good use a notion of cycle of songs mapping the landscape.

However, Murray still must be taken as a late representative of the Jindyworobak movement's insistence on the uniqueness of extra-urban landscape as the sole Australian ideal. At this point I want to examine two of Murray's poems to demonstrate how he has both remained rooted within that ideology, and how he has moved outwards from the Jindyworobaks' narrow nationalist programme. 'The Mouthless Image of God in the Hunter-Colo Mountains' is an extraordinary poem by any measure.³⁴ Set in the suburbs of a country town, with all the characteristic place-markers and distinctive animals, "plovers" and "magpies", noted. We know where we are in this poem. Given the title one may expect a lesser poet to make portentous theological statements, but Murray rather focuses on the fun it is to "work ... up" a dog just "for a laugh", listening to the "tinny chain reaction" with "you barking at the epicentre".

One wonders just who Murray is addressing in this poem: it may be the nameless, generalised reader, we use "you" in such a careless way in the common tongue, or it may be "You", Murray addressing the spirit behind that "mouthless image" of the title. At the end of the first stanza, the tonality shifts in such a way as to give support to the latter notion:

... till horizons-wide again a tall
pavilion of mixed timbres is lifted up eerily in full call
and the wailing takes a toll: you, from playing the fool
move, behind your arch will, into the sorrow of the people.

There's a joker loose, or is it that the many peoples themselves are jokes, personified as pig, fowl, rooster, boar, she-cat, kitten, hawk and so on, a Dr. Dolittle capable of speaking "to each species in the seven or eight / planetary words of its species". Then the poem moves on from Murray's quiet joking, to an

appreciation of the power of laughter and tears, "we laugh because we cry", and finally devolves into a meditation on the essence of speech and its purpose. The poem's logic is in its movement away from the backyard and muddy streets into an overview, as though Murray is expanding his worldview in the actual process of writing.

While recognisably grounded in the Australian landscape, Murray's poems continue to challenge the view of what is normal in the entity known as Australian Poetry by his willingness to incorporate settler experience and champion the special qualities of his own clan. His is not a black armband view. In 'Physiognomy on the Savage Manning River' he plays with the legends of pioneering, especially with those surrounding the processes of settlement, how the Manning District was in particular viewed by the writers of Sydney Town as a particularly wild place, with its own daemonic spirit, the redoubtable Isabella Kelly.³⁵ Murray has his fun in this poem, but incorporates unashamedly that language of the settlers who moved up the river, the Gaelic of his Scots forebears. He writes in the language effortlessly,

Seo abhainn mar loch - the polished river is indeed
like a loch, without flow, clear to the rainforest islands
and the Highland immigrants on deck ...

and at the closure, a Highlandman's wry comment is recorded:

Thig lá choin duibh fhathast. The black dog will have his day yet.
Not every dog, as in English, but the black dog.

Gaelic, the hidden and suppressed language of a good one-third of Australia's peoples, has its place in Murray's lines. This is unusual even in our present multicultural, monotonous Australia, where it has been denied its place in schools, not even that Irish order, the Christian Brothers teach Gaelic, and like Welsh and German as well, it was drummed out of the lads who came down from the hills to enlist for the 1st AIF. That is one part of the secret history of this country which

has not been accounted for in our poetry. So if Les Murray makes certain readers uncomfortable, provokes them out of accepted ideologies of what Australian Poetry ought be, then well and good. We need stirrers, we need to have accepted ideologies challenged and confronted.

But I am not finished in my quarrel with Australian poetry and with its lie of the land. We are, by and large, a coastal community, not dwellers of that three-quarters of the land-mass which is all but inhospitable drylands and desert. Not enough attention has been paid to that elemental fact in our poetry, and certainly that fact has not yet been fully accommodated into our mythos.

Nothing if but not outrageous, A. D. Hope put paid to Jindyworobak fantasies in his 'Australia'.³⁶ It is, he wrote, "the last of lands, the emptiest / A woman past the change of life", the Muse he charged, had turned into Sycorax and that we were no better than Caliban, "cultured apes" it would seem. I suppose Hope had his axe to grind against that time's prevailing orthodoxies, but the poem remains true in its observation of a land peopled by "monotonous tribes" and overblown cities viewed as "teeming sores". He would rather have turned to "the lush jungle of modern thought" for comfort and spiritual revelation, a notion anathema to nationalist sentiment.

A few poets, and we must count them carefully, have treated the coastal edge of the continent with a degree of sympathy. Not surprisingly, the islanders of Tasmania seem more aware of the sea and its moods. Christopher Koch makes a virtue of Tasmania's isolation, for like Vivian Smith's work it is markedly and confidently *regional*. I do not use that word pejoratively, but rather in a sense of sympathy. Moreover, Koch is willing to confront the moral dilemma of the Tasmanians' dispossession from their land. In 'Shelly Beach', he places the reader in an identifiable site and clearly delineates his observations of "a forgotten ring of

land / Sentinelled with grey ghost-gum corpses".³⁷ Koch does not sentimentalise, for he reads the land as "ill with an illness that was very old", it smells of "sickness", the water has become "timid". One wonders as to the cause of such a condition, as "the boy" who has entered this secret place, treads with "guilty" feet over a midden of shells. Like Ingamells' poem previously noted, this closes with a bird-scream, but the difference is that the bird's cry of pain and fear is echoed by the boy who believes "the sound had made a curse" on him, and us.

What had changed in terms of sensibility in the twenty-five or so years which separates the two poems? Firstly, Nature is no longer automatically viewed as beautiful in conventional terms. We see a coastal wasteland through the eyes of boy, who like Wordsworth's alter ego in 'Nutting', is deeply affected by the inhabiting spirit of that place. Koch takes us well beyond the ordinary into the sacred, the blasphemous and memories of a murdered people. That is, Koch is willing to interpret the land in a way which morally discomforts and abrades us.

As a contrast, Randolph Stow writes with continued wonder and delight about life on the coastal edge. In 'The Recluse', Stow treats a mysterious Prospero-like figure cast up like "wrack" on our western shores, and extends an historical consciousness to include the Portuguese explorers who named the area "*costa branca*, the white coast".³⁸ Stow's use of a lone speaker is a device well known from the Romantic Coleridge, and one may have expected an extended tale, but this is quickly terminated as though the history of the place is too difficult to approach. Certainly, the positive reference to Portuguese explorers rather than the more fashionable Dutch or British strikes an unusual note in Australian poetry.

In 'Sea Children', Stow celebrates those qualities and activities of domestic life which have become only recently an integral part of Australian propaganda for overseas consumption.³⁹ A day at the beach still conjures for me memories of

timeless hours spent playing in dunes and estuaries, first attempts at skin-diving and surfing, endless walks to the third set of rockfalls and back again, sunburn, lemonade.

So common was this experience, whether we lived in Adelaide, Perth or Sydney, we didn't think about it all too often as being a subject for Australian poetry: prose writers like Helen Garner, Robert Drewe and Cathy Lette got in first. When it comes to pictorial art, photographers, not painters, felt most comfortable at the beach. Was it because poets and painters were still stuck in the trope that "Australia" is a synonym for "The Bush", or do we feel inordinately guilty for enjoying ourselves on the weekend?

Perhaps we have our view fixed in the wrong direction being heirs to false expectations about this "new Britannia in another world".⁴⁰ What we should be doing is examining our lives on the circumcontinental edge and its seas, where we actually live, not where we live in a collective imagination. Further, the Jindyworobak ideal of Mateship must be seen for what it is, a pattern of behaviour forced on disparate peoples, many of whom had been dispossessed of national, linguistic and self-identity by the operations of British imperialism. The only way to survive when dumped on Sydney Cove, or wherever, was to work together. But mateship is no more Australian than bread and butter, and when elevated to a national ideology replete with an idealisation of the displaced original peoples it is to tell ourselves a dangerous and self-inclusive myth, because its opposite process, exclusion, is applied to anyone who is not one's "Little Mate".⁴¹ In truth, Australian society is parochial, divisive, exclusivist, arrogant and culturally impoverished. It is trapped into indefensible belief-rituals which our neighbours rightly see as the hallmarks of a "tribe".⁴² Further, calling Australia a "nation" as many politicians and writers are wont to do, will not do, for there is no way in

which the various ethnic and religious elements, English and Celt, European, Aboriginal or Asian, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, not to mention Muslim and Buddhist, could ever share anything in common apart from residence. This is about as far as one can move from the Jindyworobak belief that Australia could be redeemed through the application of an aboriginal-based mythos to the people and achieve a unifying, monocultural national ethos.

So, the outworking of my feelings about poetic response in this country has been a turning away from the traditional tropes of our poetry to focus more upon the coastal regions in which I have lived all my life. As expressed in 'At Minyip' my horror is as much directed at the brown vacuum of outback Australia which had desiccated and swallowed up my great-grandfather as at the snake itself. Hence, the reader will find me much more comfortable and receptive to the world in poems set by the Barwon River or along the coast.

The Jindyworobak premise was ridiculous even in its own time, but its present reflexes are not merely simple-minded but appropriative of Aboriginal dignity and also dangerous in the present political context. The seeds sown in my childhood have left me querulous, so now I doubt if there is any such thing as "Australian Poetry", just as I doubt there is a "nation" of Australia, for what we have on this continent are disparate collections of peoples, and disparate collections of writers and their writings. I would rather celebrate the local, the particular, my coastal lands and the sea, and while constrained to write in English through the operation of certain historical factors, I am aware that I could have been writing my poetry in French, had La Perouse been not so tardy, or even Portuguese, had the Mahogany Ship made successful landfall. Everything is relative, there are no simple certainties.

Our predicament

You cannot build bridges between wandering islands

A. D. HOPE⁴³

In reading the Australian landscape, we Europeans are faced with the dilemma of having come into the land without foreknowledge of its histories, without the tongues that would tell the significance of each hill and valley, of each rock and gentle plain. This section of the Chapter examines implications of the dilemma I believe we face, and examines those linguistic foundations of several place-names which are to be found locally, and which must be considered in writing my poetry. We have come into this land as strangers, acted as strangers would, blundering about, ripping and changing the land in the false belief that our actions alone have mattered, that they are without dire consequence. What we have lacked in many cases are those elements the Irish writer Benedict Kiely calls a spirit or "sense of place",⁴⁴ which seems to come so easily to those poets who have not been displaced by their own or their forebears' migrations. They can speak out of the earth itself. In shifting from there to here, we took with us an ideology which attempted to ignore what this land would tell us, silencing its voice.⁴⁵ In leaving, we have forgotten what our own fathers had in their histories, so as Ania Walwicz says, "I forget everything ...".⁴⁶ We fall into a vacuum of beliefs and knowledge: so realising, we have closed our ears and eyes to what lay before us. This happened just as much in the visual arts and in the written, and still happens. Of course, we were wrong: this land did have its own tongues and contours, its own folk who lived within, and it is the raw consequence of colonial processes in this country that native peoples have not merely been decimated, as had happened in southern Africa, but rather driven to the brink of extinction where all linguistic

and social cohesion has been lost. In many post-colonial societies, even those in former Soviet states, native elements have been able to revive to such a point that linguistic and social continuity has been possible. But not here - the nexus between folk, tongue and land has been pushed aside to the margins. In examining a map of the area in which I live, a quick vocabulary check shows that there are 37 items deriving from colonial and post-WWI settlement, while only 24 items are of Aboriginal origin, each of which is totally incomprehensible. Memories of the local people with matters regarding the details of this lost tongue may well be suspect, given that no-one around Geelong speaks the Wathaurong dialect of the Kulin speech. The other interesting point this map reveals, is how those Aboriginal place-terms have survived far better the further one is away from the city itself, that is, the map clearly graphs displacements of the local language into formalised, even ritualised, memories of the former inhabitants, a process echoed in the larger map of this continent.

At a gathering of scholars discussing common problems of Australia and South Africa in post-colonial times, it was apparent that both societies were in a state of flux.⁴⁷ Both countries, once parts of the British Empire, share great commonalities, similar latitudes, arid and fragile interiors, and shared settler myths of an empty land. Certainly there are differences but it struck me that in reading maps of the two lands there were similar patterns of naming. For example, in Australia the greatest concentration of European, mainly British or Irish, elements predominate in the Boomerang Coast. Even so, the names of many landscape features were taken from the results of surveys conducted amongst the local populations before intensive European settlement, so that the local river is called the Barwon, and is derived from a Wathaurong word, which flows from the Otway ranges, named after one Lord Otway. Similarly in the Republic of South

Africa, there is a marked band of European names, British and Afrikaans, indicating the movement of European conquest and settlement, but also a very marked series of remnant Xhosa and Bantu place-names as could be seen by even a cursory inspection of the respective maps.

One could ask what processes have led to such a mixture of language stocks being reflected on the maps, and possibly one could say that while European names do indicate early settlement and land-clearing, the native names indicate resistance and persistence by the local peoples. Such a notion would need to be tested against detailed historical records and those directives given by colonial authorities to settler groups. In Brian Friel's *Translations*, reference is made to the situation in Ireland where the Ordinance Survey was carried out according to instructions from London.⁴⁸ Local names were to be transliterated in such a way as to make phonetic sense to the English occupiers, so that *Baile Beag* was to be written as *Ballybeg*, or translated so that *Cnoc Ban* became *Fair Hill*, or more ridiculously, *Bun na hAbhann*, literally 'river mouth' is put into English as *Burnfoot*.⁴⁹ Friel's point is that these acts of naming were really acts of appropriation and colonisation, and part of a conscious attempt to destroy the mental landscape of the Irish people in the name of progress.

Another post-colonial Irish writer with a concern on the act of naming is Paul Muldoon whose *Meeting the British* works with ideas and conventions of poetic language. He feels quite free to question the benefits of colonisation in his native country, and especially is free to use the colonisers' language against those acts which have disfigured language and place for so long. He reflects upon the refractions and misunderstandings between coloniser and native, and between the nature of common Irish speech and its English reflexes.

For example in writing of the effects of a hidden bomb he delineates the gross indecency of the act and its effects:

Once they collect his smithereens

He doesn't quite add up

They're shy of a foot, and a calf ...

We are left without tears.⁵⁰ But Muldoon takes the point further in each of his poems, that the indecency lay in the initial colonising act, appropriations of the land, and dispossession of people and language. Rape, burning out and expulsion of those sections of the native population which would not turn or comply with the new order are still common enough, whether in today's Bangla Desh or East Timor, but just as distressing are the attempts to appropriate each land's mythic landscape. In this respect, Spenser's *Fairy Queen* could be counted in part as one attempt to English the Irish landscape, while Holinshed's *History* is a joyful revel in bloody sequences of marches, burnings and expropriations.

In the post-colonial situation it becomes possible for artists and writers to approach the land in a recuperative way, though there are opposing tensions between colonisers and natives. By the 1800s Anglo-Irish writers such as Maria Edgeworth in *Castle Rackrent*, or George Moore in *Muslin*, try to provide sympathetic portraits of some of the Irish encountered, but from a distinctly separate and distant viewpoint. Yeats, by some miracle, was able to straddle three worlds, the Anglo-Irish *tig mór*, the purely Irish and mythical *Tir na nÓg*, and the modern world with all its contradictions and confusions. Yet he would have been counted amongst the appropriators given his background and continued use of the English tongue for all his writing, at least until that point in his life where he became subsumed by the nationalist cause and chose to participate in the reborn country's political as well as its social and literary life.

As a result of linguistic dispossession, English remains embedded in Irish literary and political processes, with Gaelic being used only by a pitiful fraction of the people. And while distinguished writers such as John Montague, Thomas Kinsella and Séamus Heaney translate from Gaelic and write in English, I feel that only in the Gaelic language will writers such as Seán Ó Riordáin and Louis de Paor be able to fully reconstitute the landscape and its people.

In South Africa, the fierce divisions between Afrikaans and English writers as agents of the colonial process, the situation remains less obvious. Certainly some Afrikaans writers have displayed empathy with the land and the many peoples, seeing themselves as dispossessed and disenfranchised by the British after the Boer War, much like the Quebecois after the Canada Act, whilst English writers in South Africa continued to justify their acts of colonisation, and latterly as liberators of the land. Perhaps their consciences had been pricked somewhat by the effects of the all too obvious abuses during their term of tenure. Certainly the romanticisation of both Xhosa and Bantu so evident in Bryce Courtney's tedious epics, *The Power of One* and *Tandiya* perhaps represent an attempt at reparation for such barbarians as Cecil Rhodes and Winston Churchill. Of course in Australia, the temptation to appropriate and romanticise has been all too evident, while credit must be given to early, non-judgemental writers about the land and people such as Watkin Tench.

In the making of poetry which has attempted to take cognisance of the land, critics have tended to be positive about the methods employed by indigenous cultural groups such as the Aranda, as exemplified by T. G. H. Strehlow's translations of 1933, Aranda place-poetry was deeply constructed around the process of naming and describing natural features, associating these with culture

heroes and cult figures, allowing the reciters and listeners to construct their own mind maps of a richly inhabited landscape.⁵¹

A. Shoemaker has less than praise for a poet such as Les Murray who has attempted to build a syncretic convergence of quite different cultures in a poem like 'Thinking about Aboriginal land rights I visit the land I will never inherit'.⁵²

Perhaps Murray, the most generous and perceptive of souls, was doomed at the outset in his undertaking, for he is better at writing poems like 'Driving through Sawmill Towns' where he deals closely with the landscapes our people have made over the past two hundred years.

T. Birch investigated the controversy which had erupted from the decision of former Victorian Minister for Tourism, S. Crabb, that certain natural features of the Grampians National Park "would revert to their Aboriginal names".⁵³ We do not know what will be the eventual outcome of the dispute over whether the name will be popularly known as *Gariwerd* or *Grampians*, or which cultural group, the indigenous Brambuk or the settler Scots and Germans, will eventually hold cultural capital in the District. But this dispute does provide some clues as to the depth of bitterness about the process of land-naming, and has taken on an added twist with both the Mabo and Wik decisions.

Major Mitchell's blindness to the true state of the state of habitation, now rectified by these two judgements, was due to there being no houses, nor castles, nor any European-style armed resistance to his progress. He looked for the wrong clues and saw an empty "Eden".⁵⁴ But as with the region around Geelong, the Western Districts were inhabited, owned and named. Hereabouts, Capt. Foster Fyans and others did their murderous work all too well it seems, for there are no detailed or useful records of the local languages known. Even so, there are some mechanisms

by which the approximate meanings of geographic features such as the Barwon and Moorabool Rivers can be reconstructed.

The coastal strip extending from Geelong to Werribee and then around Port Phillip Bay was inhabited by speakers of Eastern Kulin dialects, while a vast inland area now known as the Western Districts and Wimmera were the lands of the Western Kulin.⁵⁵ Vocabulary items were taken from words lists provided by both Yarra Valley and Wimmera speakers and are used here to yield common elements. It must be stressed that the Kulin dialects were closely related, even if there was some variation in items, as can be seen by the following four simple comparisons:

Item/Dialect	Wergaia	Wembawemba	Woiwaru
1. water (p. 290)	gadjin	Gaden	bana
2. dingo (p. 260)	wilger	wilgar/wirengen	wiringgel
3. snake (p. 281)	gunmil	Gunwil	gunmel
4. yes (p. 292)	nga	Ngongwe	ngaie

Kulin vocabulary items

Making the assumption that one can infer similarities and transfer meanings across dialect boundaries, it seems that the Barwon River may be constructed to have the simple meaning 'river', given Wergaia *barengg* 'river' (p. 199) and Wembawemba *barngga* 'to thirst' (p. 175), from a root *bar(e)ng. Our current transcription {barwon} possibly arises from a local variation or even the hearing of the WK retroflex [r] being labialized as [r + w] to yield [*barwën].⁵⁶

The item {moorabool} occurs as the name of the river coming down from the Moorabool District near Brisbane Ranges, to join the Barwon at Queen's Park, and as a street in Geelong. The suffix { - bool} also occurs in the placename {warmnambool} which perhaps could be connected to the word {billabong} and the element [bil] in Madimadi *bilgiri* 'flood' (p. 216). The first element is harder to

track, perhaps Wembawemba *mureng* 'head' (p. 189) could be considered, yielding a compound like [*murembul] meaning 'headwater'.

{Corangamite}, the name of the federal electorate stretching from Geelong to Colac, has an initial element [gureng], reputed to yield the name of the Corio horde which was reckoned to occupy territory in the triangle between Cowie's Creek, Werribee and Ballarat, and were thus the SE neighbours of the Woiwuru. In Woiwuru, *guremil* is the name of the main southern foothill of Mt Riddell near Healesville (p. 235). In Wergaia *gurung* means 'tall' or high' (p. 207). If the suffixes { - ite} and { - eit } can be taken as indicating 'place', then {corangamite} may mean 'high place'. More than any other placename investigated, this so strongly reinforces identification of the local people with a particular gathering place.

Our problem as poets in this context is to find a tongue with which to deal with the problems of description and argument: it is not proper to merely invoke those few remaining placenames - *murra(m)bul*, *barwun*, *moriatj* - but we must remind ourselves of what was lost by the Kulin clans in their dispossession. Further, because of our strangeness to this land, the loss of indigenous tongues, we also have lost those mythologies attached to the land. We really do not know how the Kulin apprehended this land, the rivers and waters, and its coastline, excepting in the most general way. There are some retellings of Kulin myths, but at a great linguistic and temporal remove. Moreover, it is not for me or any other European poet to appropriate their brief remnants claiming them as my own. Such words may "stud our speeches as stones",⁵⁷ but they cannot be an organic part of our speech. In the early poems first collected as *In Early Winter*, I had tried to grapple with my situation living on the western coastal fringes of Victoria, and being increasingly conscious of my family's role in that region over the last 160 years. I incorporated a number of aboriginal names into one of my poems.

current practice is not to loosely use words from the Aboriginal linguistic pool, and if they are used, it is only to mark specific places through poems' titles or as commonly accepted geographic markers.

Whatever linguistic and cultural "bridges", to use Hope's term, even if out of direct context of his poem, that can be built between European and Kulin in this part of the continent need to be built on the basis of recovery of their lost culture. If it were possible for the Kulin and other indigenous nations to recover and revivify their tongues then we would all be the better for it, but the grim reality is that the colonial machine was so efficient, so thorough that there are not crucial numbers of people needed to keep alive a tongue separate to English, especially in regions south of the Murray River.⁵⁸ I can only conclude that for ourselves, if we are to live and grow in this landscape, we must reinvent, rename the lands to our own bruised usage, and hopefully out of that process will come a fuller understanding and appreciation of what has preceded us.

The 1995 floods as a suitable framework

Omnia pontus erat, derunt quoque litora ponto

OVID⁵⁹

In setting up a groundwork for my writing, I wish to examine the phenomenon of the floods which have afflicted Geelong and the Western districts, and which have been recorded ever since first settlement. This examination shall take place in two stages, the first being a consideration of the floods of 1995 and some of the mythic background to our cultural understanding of the importance of floods. The second stage shall be a consideration of contemporary poetic responses to the idea of a flood.

By 8 November 1995, the Breakwater Bridge in South Geelong was awash and the road between Belmont and South Geelong cut, as was Settlement Road and even the Princes Highway between Lara and Little River. While the highway to the Western Districts had been elevated in most danger spots, and so was less likely to be cut, only cars were allowed through at Moriac and near Inverleigh the road to Hamilton was blocked off at a number of key points.⁶⁰ The human cost was beginning to show after it became apparent that the rains would not cease and floodwaters would continue to rise. Residents of local caravan parks found themselves in a very precarious situation. At the Barwon Caravan Park, home to a permanent population of over a hundred, people found themselves trapped by the swirling waters and in trying to make their home into "a sandbagged castle" discovered to their horror that "the moat was an enemy rather than a protector", after the sandbagged levee gave way.⁶¹

Like many others, we drove out to watch the waters swirling under Queen's Park Bridge and heard stories of how difficult it was for colleagues to get into Geelong across the Breakwater, and for a time even to drive up Moorabool Street into Belmont. The waters had risen quickly, for by noon on Monday 6 November, after a weekend of solid rain, the river had risen only about a metre and was expected to peak and subside, like it usually did. As a keen fisherman, I would appreciate the river being flushed out. But the Barwon River levels continued to rise and within a day the flood level at the McIntyre footbridge had reached about 4.3 metres, a little less than the November 1978 peak.

Now floods in the Geelong and Western District have been a fact of life ever since settlement, and there is reason to believe that flooding is a necessary part of the natural cycle. However, we do not understand those cycles of fire and flood and build our towns, roads and bridges in the belief that they are usual conditions.

Perhaps we are too much like real estate agents, wanting to believe that the best conditions will always prevail on auction day. However, our blindness costs us dearly. In May 1852 floods swept away the first Barwon Bridge in Moorabool Street, and twenty-eight years later the river swelled 1.83 metres, a grown man's height, well above what had previously been a flood benchmark.⁶²

In the 1950s, as the community was re-establishing itself after the War, two great floods were recorded. On 20 August 1951, some 76 mm of rain had fallen over a 30 hour period, causing floods which damaged roads, washed away bridges and flooded homes. Small towns were isolated, Forrest, Anglesea, Lorne and landslides blocked access to Apollo Bay. Less than a year later, on 17 June 1952, the Barwon rose even higher, inundating riverside industries and forcing the evacuation of homes in the lower reaches. In the Otways, 558 mm of rain fell over a five-day period. Apollo Bay was totally isolated and food supplies had to be taken into Brimlea. Geelong did not suffer alone, for the whole State was reported as being "swamped". Twenty-six years later, 20 November 1978, floods again broke levee banks and threatened property losses.

But that passed, and we were more concerned with the bushfires of Ash Wednesday which threatened at one stage to race up the valley, perhaps to find its way to our small haven. But with human complacency, the seasons were left to themselves until the great flood of 1995, which did pose a very real threat to our neighbours and colleagues, if not directly to ourselves.

On the Tuesday afternoon, we drove past the flooded land opposite Holyrood Ave., then down to the end of Gairloch Avenue, which fronts the river, only to see the Turf Farm under three metres of water. That night at its height, the flood came within a half-metre of the houses at the bottom of Camden Road, and we spent at least one restless night waiting for neighbours to call on our help to

evacuate. In a macabre phrase, the local newspaper called the floods "a sightseers' bonanza", with local residents becoming "tourists in their own region the past two days".⁶³ Like tourists we crowded on the turn-off at Windmill Hill, as the levels abated somewhat, we spent the following dawn watching as the brown surge passed this time high over the Queen's Park Bridge pavement. Upstream, the flood raced over Buckley's Falls in "tumultuous rapids" which manifested as a standing wave of great beauty, and daredevil boys who had jumped in about a kilometre further West could be seen clinging to their surfboards as they were swept uncontrollably over the weir and then downstream. The sunset on Tuesday night was intriguing, as it brought a false sense of peace even as the brown torrent was flooding into backyards and factories. The river had spread over Queen's Park where the two rivers, Moorabool and Barwon, formed a vast lake which was bathed in the red rays of the setting sun.

On the night of Wednesday 8 November, the flood peaked at 5.2 metres at the McIntyre Bridge, although near us it would have reached some 6 metres, given the narrow channel of the river valley. A flood marker, about 200 metres downstream from my house, showed the corrected levels for the McIntyre Bridge, downstream. Even four days later the river was still well above its normal level.

Our colleagues who lived at Ocean Grove and Barwon Heads had to take special leave in order to join the sandbagging brigades, their own houses at risk. Others could not get through, for the floods had breached all roads in from the coast for at least three working days - an anxious, enforced rest. Of course, not a few students decided to go out and help their Uncles back on the farm at Wallington. The human costs were high. Houses were flooded at Marshall, caravans overturned in the parks, the Salvation Army warehouse in South Geelong inundated so badly that much of its relief stock of clothing and household items

was ruined, and the low-lying market gardens at Batesford scoured of their crops. About a week later, there were even reports of looting.⁶⁴

One friend, Mr. D. Power, who runs a waste paper and general recycling business, had all his machinery wrecked by the force of the swirling waters, all the stored newsprint was ruined, and the floors of the factory were covered in inches of foul silt. I joined with a group of friends to clean the factory with shovels and firehoses, we had to recover hundreds of car tyres which had been pumped out of their cages, shattered glass littered the ground, and the place stank as the sun perversely shone out over the ruined factory and still raging river. We all cursed the flood and wondered what would happen next time, yet were thankful that no lives had been lost.

While I had been aware of the nature and potential dangers of this particular flood, it has only been in the last few years that I have begun to consider what might have been, and what could be, the fate of this city and its people had the flooding continued. We know now that this was the highest and most intense flood for forty years, the river level peaking at about 5.2 metres above the averaged river level, and we are also beginning to be aware of the gross environmental effects of global warming, such that could lead to increased frequency and magnitude of flooding in our rivers, and even to noticeable sea level rises of 1 to 5 metres with consequent important social and economic effects even in our local area.

The flood's profound impact has been relegated to memory, and we assure ourselves that next time will not be as bad, that flood alleviation measures will cope with the situation. Yet when I talk about the floods and their impact on our local community, there is something of a sigh in the voice which indicates that people fear the next flood, that it will be worse, and possibly so bad that it bears

not thinking about. It is as if we are bred in this community to expect the worst will come of winter flood, and of summer fire, partly because of the ingrained Biblical tale which is part of every child's experience, but also because in other layers of consciousness, we are aware of the potency of The Deluge as metaphor. Our present worries about floods and other natural disasters are quite real and warrant sensible precautions whether we be householders or planners at a continental level. But there are far more deep-seated fears about floods which are reflected in our folklore and literatures. Within our culture, the Bible supplies us with a paradigm of The Deluge as a vengeful God's punishment for our sins: all excepting a few are destroyed. As my edition of the Bible puts it: "... the flood stood fifteen cubits higher than the mountains it covered. All mortal things that moved on earth were drowned, birds and cattle and wild beasts, all the creeping things of earth and all mankind ... ".⁶⁵ All of which seems a rather drastic punishment for our collective peccadillos, especially the length of the flooding, "a hundred and fifty days". Noah, as hero, survives, and as the Earth is remade anew by a merciful God promising that "never more will the living creation be destroyed by a flood", and sets " a bow in the clouds" as a "pledge of my covenant with creation".⁶⁶

Whilst we now know that the Hebrew redactors of this tale worked from a common stock of stories which may have had their origin in a natural disaster in the Euphrates lands, or even as a dim recollection of the Black Sea's flooding some three millennia ago, any number of explanations for this tale are possible. However the story of The Deluge retained its popularity as a good story and formed the basis of the mediæval drama *Noe's Flood*, and still is remembered in an attenuated form, disaster stories being an especial fare in popular cinema, with volcanoes or even asteroids threatening to erase humankind from the face of a

sinful world. Ironically, when first we came to Geelong, which as a town is not so much sinful as dull, we were considering buying a house in Newtown, where it rained heavily and the River Barwon flooded. But being then innocent of the undercurrents of this town, this street, we had no idea about its significance other than this flood was anything other than an interesting spectacle. Twenty years later, it seems a portent.

That the idea of a great flood, or deluge, could be taken as metaphor for cleansing and renewal in many folk traditions and literatures is not that surprising, given that flooding is an essential part of the cycle of vegetable life. In Egyptian times, the whole economy depended upon the annual flooding of the Nile Valley, an event which has become somewhat more regulated since the building of the Aswan Dam, and upon which a whole mythology and an enduring civilisation was built.

The best known of classical references to a great flood is contained in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which the poet adapts and transforms an earlier Greek version for his narrative purposes.⁶⁷ Ovid's method is to weave his various stories into a vast and elaborate tapestry, overwhelming the reader with his application to detail and also by the swiftness of the transformations which he describes. The epic poem outdoes any of Virgil or Horace in its scope and with better humour, beginning with an account of the world's beginning from chaos, and the transformation of the elements into a coherent whole.⁶⁸ The Four Ages show a progressive decline from Gold to Silver, then to Bronze and finally to Iron. Perhaps the latter two designations are historically accurate for it is a schema which ironically enough archaeologists follow in their accounts of the civilisation's development. In this last age, all sorts of wickedness appear, giving full scope for the moralising story-teller. Jupiter himself makes a report to the gods of the first

metamorphosis of man to beast, a punishment visited upon Lycaon for his wickedness, remembering that his name, Λυκάων, means 'werewolf' or 'wolfman'. Playing the role of stern father of both the gods and men, Jupiter pronounces judgement on the world, intending to destroy the whole human race.

Jupiter cries out in anger:⁶⁹

nunc mihi qua totum Nereus circumsonat orbem,
perdendum est mortale genus: per flumina iuro
infera sub terras Stygio labentia luco!

Not that the gods were entirely happy with this sonorous outburst of paternal anger, they were concerned with the after-effects, the lack of sacrifices to themselves, and the descent of the world into mere bestiality - humanity did have some saving graces.

Afraid of consuming the world and the heaven's vault by firey thunderbolts, Jupiter remembers: "one of fate's decrees, when a time would come when sea and earth and the dome of heaven would blaze up, and the massive structure of the universe collapse in ruins".⁷⁰ Not being one of those deranged men who would murder the whole family then commit suicide, Jupiter finds a way safer for himself and the rest of the gods, sending "rain pouring down from every quarter of the sky", causing a great flood.

Ovid's description outdoes the Bible in its attention to detail of wind and weather. Jupiter lets loose the South Wind, which bears "dripping wings ... his features shrouded in pitchy darkness. His beard was heavy with rain, water streamed from his hoary locks, mists wreathed his brow, his robes and feathers dripped with moisture."

Jupiter also sends his brother Neptune, the sea-god, to drown the world: "across wide plains the rivers raced, overflowing their banks, sweeping away in one torrential flood crops and orchards, cattle and men, houses and temples, sacred

images and all". Nothing was spared, "earth and sea could not be distinguished: all was sea, and a sea that had no shores".⁷¹ Ovid describes the desperate attempts of people trying to save themselves from the flood, the Nereids' wonderment at finding groves and towns under water, the mass drownings of goats, wolves, sheep, "and tigers".

All are lost, except the cousins Deucalion and Pyrrha, who remain to repopulate this world. Described as "the best and most upright" of all the men who had ever lived, Deucalion is granted the power of remaking the world, of repopulating it with man and beast, and the amelioration of Jupiter's first wrath. Ovid then swiftly moves on to give an account of the myth of Apollo's slaying of the serpent Python and the restoration of earthly order and first celebrations of the Pythian Games.

The moral of Ovid's tale, and I believe that Ovid wrote as much as a moralist as a witty entertainer, is that humanity will reap punishment for its wickedness and abuse of the gifts given by the gods: perhaps here is a basic ecological as well as moral lesson that in our own time we ought heed. Throughout the *Metamorphoses* the poet's love and knowledge of the wild countryside shines through, even though he was a polished and well-travelled Roman, enough of his youth at Sulmo stayed with him for his detailed descriptions of the natural world to enliven his verse.

One of the earliest independent flood-tales in Western literature comes from the book known as *Lebor Gabala Éireann*.⁷² Tuan tells the tale of the settlement of Ireland, but significantly states that it was an empty land that the hero Partholón had found after sailing from Greece, for the Great Flood had drowned the earlier immigrants led by Cesair, a daughter of Bith son of Noah. All had perished in a great flood except Fintan, who survived through many ages and went through

similar transformations of salmon, eagle and hawk, and became witness to the many events of Ireland's bloody history. Partholón, who followed, had, like the hero Juozas in the Baltic myth, to fight against a race of Giants, the Fomhoire, that is, '[peoples] from across the seas', in order to retain possession of the four green fields of Éiriu, that earthly paradise.⁷³ While the text has been dressed with some Biblical references in order to make it palatable to the Christian hierarchy, this *Leabor Gabala Éireann* has enough different material to indicate that it is a reflex of a common Indo-European folk-myth.

That belief is substantiated by echoes of the Flood Saga which are found even in distant Baltic mythology. In the Lithuanian tale known as 'Saulė ir Vėjų Motina' [The Sun and Winds-Mother], a hero with the christianised name of Juozas [Joseph] sets out to discover the second Sun which has "always appeared" to him.⁷⁴ But he is no Christian hero, for like Amergain in the Old Irish tale, he a shape-changer, transforming himself variously into a wolf and a hawk, and comes to the palace of the Winds-Mother and there wins the hand of a beautiful maiden, Aušrinė, the Morning-Star. However in order to do this he must contest against a race of Giants who had populated the entire world before the flood, "having multiplied without measure, and all were evil, they detested and scorned each other".⁷⁵

Greimas asserts that the Baltic myth of a flood is quite independent of the Biblical text which "is only one of the more general versions of the Mesopotamian flood myth", and points out that the myth is encountered from Alaska to Australia.⁷⁶ In the Baltic schema, the earliest inhabitants of this Earth were the Giants whose God's epithet, Praamžis, meaning 'Before-Time', so indicating a generalised concept of the distant past. Mythic mentality tries to consider why things are as they are, rather than seek scientific causes.⁷⁷ By dividing history into epochs

separated from each other by cosmic markers, such as flood or plague, people then can give a sense of structure, even purpose, to their historical and mythological narratives. As to the cause of flood and plague, overpopulation and consequent social disorder were seen as the primary cause, not for their own sakes, but because the Earth herself had asked God for an alleviation of her suffering.⁷⁸

After the creation of the universe, when much of the world became populated, the earth began to complain to the Lord God that she could not bear it. The Lord God heard her out and permitted a flood. After that there was another rapid increase of men, the earth asked the Lord God to ease her burden. The Lord God sent a plague.

As a general characteristic of Baltic mythology, the Earth's appearance in the scheme of things is associated with water, which either changes the world or is the primal element out of which the world and its inhabitants, men and beasts alike, emerge.

Further considerations

It seems to me that the general topic of a flood is worthy in itself to consider for a number of reasons such as the impact the flood of 1995 has had on this town, and because of the enduring image of a flood in our historical and mythic records. I now want to examine a number of poems that employ the notion of a flood, or wave, indirectly as their basis of explanation of the world.

The first is John Ashbery's poem, 'A Wave'.⁷⁹ It is an enormous piece, some twenty-four pages long, defying rapid and easy analysis, and which I have approached in an open-ended manner, letting each line work its way into my consciousness before setting out on the next. The effect is cumulative like the slow ingress of a Spring Tide at Barwon Heads.

The poem begins with a triplet, each line standing on its own, yet indefinitely connected:

To pass through pain and not know it,
 A car door slamming in the night.
 To emerge on an invisible terrain.

The first line looks like the introduction to a general proposition, much like Hamlet's musing "To be, or not to be", framed in the Infinitive and begging for a substantive confirming verbal phrase such as "is like". But the phrase is missing, and Ashbery forces us to guess where that phrase should be so that we supply our own re-readings: either - *To pass through pain and not know it, is like a car door slamming in the night* - or - *To pass through pain and not know it, is like to emerge on an invisible terrain*. There is an edge of uncertainty about this writing even in the first three lines, barely alleviated by the establishment of "our home" as a place of "serenity" where "all kinds of nice / People" are "calling / Attention to themselves". Ashbery's tone is rather mordant, none seemed capable of "taking advantage" of the prevailing paradisaical conditions - the inhabitants seem to do nothing. There is an allusion to a Deluge and subsequent loss in the lines:⁸⁰

It's another idea, a new conception, something submitted
 A long time ago, that only now seems about to work
 To destroy at last the ancient network
 Of letters, diaries, ads for civilisation.
 It passes through you, emerges on the other side
 And now is a distant city ...

And even if there seems to be no clear narrative line in this poem as it moves from one general proposition like "One idea is enough to organise a life and protect it", to another, "As with rock at low tide, a mixed surface is revealed", Ashbery's poetry is viewed by Philip Mead as happening as a continuing, natural chain of phrases, words given shape and meaning to the everyday waves and flows of consciousness.⁸¹ He never seems to posit an actual event in the ebb and flow of

this verse, but rather engages in a strategy which dissembles and works towards our realisation that it is a meditation upon experience. That rush paradoxically "always coaxes us out, smoothes out our troubles".⁸²

The poem is organised as a series of loosely connected stanzas, just as each stanza hangs together as a collection of disjointed sentences and phrases. The following stanza will serve as an example of Ashbery's method of stanzaic construction:⁸³

As with rock at low tide, a mixed surface is revealed,
More detritus. Still, it is better this way
Than to have to live through a sequence of events acknowledged
In advance in order to get to a primitive statement. And the mind
Is the beach on which the rocks pop up, just a neutral
Support for them in their indignity. They explain
The trials of our age, cleansing it of toxic
Side-effects as it passes through their system.
Reality. Explained. And for seconds
We live in the same body, are a sibling again.

He opens with a water image at the shoreline, the one element to which he will keep returning later in the poem. For example, lines and phrases such as "moments as clear as water / Splashing on a rock in the sun" (p. 73), "waterfalls" (p. 76), "a canoe" (p. 77), "maelstrom" (p. 84), "Pine Creek" (p. 86) and "thirst" (p. 89), illuminate the poet's immersion in this central image. But the seawater has hidden all the hurts of the underlaying rock, that "detritus" which is our "mind", a sort of greyish *tabula rasa* upon which the rise and fall of the waves will write down our current "trials". Where one may expect the image of water to be an eternal cleansing, that is our stock expectation from the teaching of the effect of Baptism in Christianity, Ashbery's wave merely has efficacy "for seconds" when the speaker is reunited with his vanished other, that "twin brother" who is invoked further as the poem develops.

If the grammatical structure of the stanza is laid out, it can be seen that Ashbery proceeds in a series of conditional, or better, conditioning statements as shown by

the sentence openings, "As with rock ... Still, it is better ... And the mind ... And for seconds ... ", which flow one to the next in easy colloquial style. Further, of the ten lines, seven are enjambed: all verbals are in the simple present tense, such as "is", "are", "pops up" and "explain", with some present and past participles, "cleansing" and "explained", and also an infinitive, "to get to". Ashbery places no strain through a complex grammatical construction on the reading voice as similar patterns are obtained in following stanzas.

The subjects of each Stanza's opening lines are quite varied, ranging from loss of opportunity (S3, p. 68), to art (S3, p. 70), the remembered past (S2, p. 72) or in closing Stanza, memory as a wave of questioning (S2, p. 89). The indication of these opening sentences is such that within each stanza a small momentum builds up, so that by the closing phrase, the reader has lost sight of the opening sentence and is drawn across the white space of separation to the next Stanza. For example, in the last page of the poem, Even though "back" is marked with a full-stop, the use of "And ... " to begin the following sentence almost gives rise to an enjambment so that the final phrase of the first Stanza could also be read as the opening of a final Stanza:

Much that had drained out of living
Returns, in those moments, mounting the little capillaries
Of polite questions and seeming concern. I want it back.

And though that other question I asked and can't
Remember any more is going to move still farther upward ...

'A Wave' is something more than a set of structures, it has a force, an inevitability which is difficult to fathom in purely rational terms. In discussing another collection by Ashbery, Kevin Hart argues that the poetry becomes "intelligible ... not clear" if one is willing to wrestle with the codes of conversation favoured by

the writer.⁸⁴ Whatever is real in this poem quickly elides to the surreal, or should the term be super-real, leaving the reader to search for connections, that is to actively read and question the text rather than to sit back and merely accept it for what it sounds to be. As I pointed out, Ashbery does not make great demands grammatically or aurally, but by his quick movements from one phrase to the next, pictorial imagination is kept very active. For example in the final Stanza of fifteen lines, he engages us in at least ten major and different images, ranging from a wave of remembrance to a brusque host to war. After more than twenty pages, the reader is left breathless, exhausted. This is the very antithesis of naturalism where the one idea is taken and elaborated upon with almost loving care, and with 'A Wave' one is pushed to ask if there is a single locus, what Hart calls an "intentional act" for the poem.⁸⁵ Probably not, but rather the poem is impelled by an underpinning vision of ebb and flow, flood and recession, glassy surfaces and hidden grey stones.

'A Wave' points a way towards writing with a difficult subject, where detail is important, but also in terms of technique, allowing elisions and quick transformations to propel a poem, especially a large work, and so retain the reader's interest. The poem's formal structures underpin its process, and in its own way echoes Olson's notion that a poem's form should follow, not lead, its content.

In looking towards a second major poem for examination, it is interesting to note there are some modern variations on the idea of the flood, especially focussing upon the victims and consequent reflection upon the notion of one's mortality. The image of the a drowned man recurs, in Kenneth Slessor's sailors of 'Five Bells', and T. S. Eliot's referral to "Phlebas the Phoenician" in "Death by Water".⁸⁶

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
 Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
 And the profit and loss.

A current under sea
 Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
 He passed the stages of his age and youth
 Entering the whirlpool.

Gentile or Jew
 O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
 Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

Eliot's style of cold, clinical observation serves his purpose quite well, and allows him to combine mythic elements with the language of the English Bible, "consider ...", to render a moral injunction against materialism, so echoing the saying: "What does it profit a man ...".

The figure of Phlebas disturbs. He is not readily accessible in the common stock of mythological characters, but seems to be part of a resurrection story in that he has been drowned and has been cleansed. This accords with Eliot's use of mythic themes towards a private religious language, and if Phlebas is a resurrection-figure, like Osiris who is interpreted as a proto-Christ, the significance of his drowning becomes more than just a wry observation on the transitoriness and uncertainty of life. "Consider [his death]" must also imply "consider [his rebirth]".

Further, it must be said that within the context of all of 'The Waste Land', the Phlebas episode is but part of a general concern with water and flooding. Eliot's desert implies a lack of water, is the opposite of Ovid's flooded world. In Eliot's sacramental schema, water and its flow is the very essence of life itself. "Death by Water" forces one to offer personal interpretations which the reader knows are uncertain, that their truthfulness will ever be tested and no final answer can be given. Certainly, we as readers are victims of Eliot's use of myth and symbol.

On the other hand, Thomas Kinsella's image of a drowned man was used in a different manner, as a ghostly Kerberos at Lethe's shore in his celebrated poem 'Downstream'.⁸⁷ The context in which Kinsella began his investigation of those major questions of mid-life - Who are we? Where are we going? - is beyond the full scope of my present enquiry, but we do ask these questions of ourselves as we grow older, as we make the transitions between childhood and awareness, and at other crucial stages of our lives.⁸⁸

Contemplating his thirties in 'Mirror in February', Kinsella had noted:⁸⁹

Now plainly in the mirror of my soul
I read that I have looked my last on youth
And little more: for they are not made whole
That reach the age of Christ.

Quite clearly, Kinsella had reached some turning point in his life, and part of the necessary process of growth and redefinition is to be found in our first poem. While there is much in the early body of work which is lyrical and gentle, such as 'Lady of Quality' his open declaration of love for Eleanor Walsh, or 'Baggot Street Deserta', a contemplation on his vocation to be a poet, by the 1960s, the tenor of Kinsella's poetry changed, and he was prepared to examine the darker moods and forces which he perceived in his life and society. 'Downstream' can be grouped with two other poems, 'Old Harry' and 'A Country Walk', the three being written out of a common impulse to address some major issues Kinsella had wanted to confront, not the least his role as a poet, and can be read as an archetypal journey into the underworld, through Death and resolving into the Light - not for nothing had Kinsella wanted to read Goethe - that is, as an essentially Romantic enterprise.

While the American critic Thomas Jackson suggests Shelley's *Alastor* as a model,⁹⁰ its immediate origins are in an expedition Kinsella had taken some years

previously with Seán White, boating downstream to the ancient monastery at Durrow, which like Tintern Abbey or Little Gidding, was once a site of devotion and learning, but now sadly decrepit. From the very start of the poem, nature is a negative force full of "shadows" and "furred night-creatures", the channel narrows thrusting the rowers towards "roots / Crawling full of pike", threatening to "cage us in". They are trapped and he is stirred to frightful questions.

First he must confront a childhood nightmare, the corpse of a man who had "died in terror". That latter word is repeated in the next line, and Kinsella's language is brutal and to the point - "the soil of other lands / Drank blood that Summer with a body of thirst", emphasising the fate of so many wretched people in "the European pit" at that time. It was a time of violence, and he is able to trace its lineage back through "seven hundred years accurst" of Ireland's own history, which it shares with the rest of Europe. We sense echoes of Blake, Dante, Breughel in his image of a Hell "tall chimneys flickering in their pall" inhabited by "swinish man" whose beastiality is unlimited: Caliban unbound is still stalking us.

Any notion that Death could, or should, be "formal", dignified and peaceful was shattered for the young Kinsella in the confluence of his double realisation, his "coming to conscience". Here, I am struggling to remember an illustration in a 1950s Catholic magazine, which in Disney-like fashion imagined a flood of souls streaming up into Heaven, serene and redeemed. Certainly, Kinsella's mention of a "formal drift of the dead" corresponds to my vague memory of an illustration and I have wondered for a long time as to the correspondence. But that this image is a pious simplicity is easy enough to recognise now, but something was needed to jolt one into recognition of the truth.

Once that false view of Death is realised, Kinsella pushes the poem out of its confined space. If the poem had been stopped here, we would only have a ghost

story and a vague gesture at meaning. But he leaves the ghost of the past "Spreadeagled on a rack of leaves", in order to confront his own mortality. The skiff takes the youths into a most dangerous place, "pure depth" which calls to "their flesh", any false move would mean tipping over, and probable drowning.

It is here that Kinsella introduces the image of the Swan, but it is strangely double-edged: " a quiet hiss / As we slipped by, adrift ... A milk-white breast ... / A shuffle of wings betrayed with a feathery kiss ... ". Firstly I would have thought that Kinsella has intimated a saving Grace is at work in the world. The Swan is familiar to us as such a symbol in Yeats, and is described in the familiar phrasing "milk-white breast". But there is also the Old Irish poem 'Ní Bhfuighe Mise Bás Duit' ('I will not die for you') where an ungrateful youth praises the lady's attributes, "swan-like body" and "gentle hand, a lime-white breast", but refuses to "die" for her, is resistant to both love and death.

Perhaps in Kinsella's poetic, the Swan is more ambiguous than at first glance, for she emits a snake-like "quiet hiss", and nests in "darkness". The Irish critic, Maurice Harmon suggests both Christ and Judas are gathered into this ambiguity,⁹¹ and if Harmon was working closely with Kinsella in the preparation of his critique, we can take the ambiguity of the Swan as symbol as an premonition of Kinsella's Manichaeian tendencies which were to emerge in his later poetry.

The final images of those "phantoms of the overhanging sky" intimates to me a vision of cosmic order which affords a rationale and pattern to life and death, that beyond the evil and dross of this world there be an "order, glittering". However, physical reality must be observed, the two adventurers must still search through "the darkness" before they are secure, before they have been able to redefine themselves.

A related poem, 'Wormwood', derives its title from the star of the Apocalypse whose fall to Earth will change the waters to bitterness and cause the death of great numbers: the plant known as Wormwood is however the basis of an elixir - Vermouth - bitter sweet, intoxicating. In a sequence of six poems, in which Kinsella explores the contradictions of love and desire, one may expect a certain tension between salving power Love and something barely named which is its opposite.

In conclusion, poems which have dealt with The Deluge, and the notion of drowning, have been a powerful element in our literatures, even though our culture fears floods, as much as it fears bushfires, and abhors the idea of drowning. Every winter and spring we watch for indications of yet another flood, and in summer the Melbourne tabloid *Herald-Sun* and local television news services constantly remind us of the dangers of unfenced swimming pools and treacherous surfing conditions. These are elemental fears which we avoid, except by sensationalism and thick black headlines, for our culture there is not the recognition of the inevitability of flooding, of drowning. Perhaps we are driven by a denial of our own foolishness in the abuse of this Earth, believing that nature is benign and that no matter what, there will always be a rainbow after the storm, that the drowning child will be rescued by the faithful household pet. These are suburbanite fantasies of redemption. Yet if we dream deeply enough, flooding and drowning can be related to the idea of Baptism and rescue from Sin, and it is this aspect which I will consider towards my work in the closing Cantos of *Deluge*.

A gendered landscape?

'S is fearr ná'n tír seo díogha gach sléibh' ann
Bán-chnuic Éireann Ó

DONNCHA RUA MAC CONMARA⁹²

A linguistic aside

Before beginning to examine whether one can think of our landscape as gendered I will consider some matters of language. All too often in Australia, and other parts of the English-speaking world, we do apply our limited monolingual knowledge to problems in poetics and linguistics and declare our local solutions as Universals. Modern English tends towards a neutered, genderless grammar, with only those words related to living creatures being assigned grammatical gender on the basis of perceived sexual assignment. All other words are treated Neuters. This was not the case in Old English, nor is it the case in any other Indo-European languages, even those most closely related, such as Frisian, Dutch and German. Certainly in other living Indo-European language in Europe and on the Indian subcontinent, linguistic gender and sexual gender are not identical.

So it is worth noting at the beginning of this discussion that in most Indo-European tongues, the concept of land or earth is expressed by words of feminine gender. Accordingly we encounter words such as *terra* (Latin) and its Romance reflexes, and *tír* (Gaelic) sharing a common root *tersá 'dried out'.⁹³ Baltic reflexes are *žemė* (Lithuanian), *zeme* (Latvian) and **semme* (OP), while typical Slavonic reflexes are *zemlja* (Russian) and *ziemia* (Polish), all possibly deriving from a root *ghem - related to a cluster of words for genesis or birth.⁹⁴ Germanic words however, all derive from *erthó - which is a masculine stem formation.⁹⁵ Other

Germanic forms include *eorþe* (Old English), *jörþ* (ON), *airpa* (Gothic).⁹⁶ Likewise land from **landam* (common Germanic), and element meaning 'floor', is also masculine in gender.⁹⁷

Also, words for sea and river are feminine in gender in many Indo-European languages: the sea itself has reflexes of *jura* (Lv. and Lt.), *mare* (L.), *mere* (Eng.) and *muir* (Gaelic). Reflexes for 'river' are very interesting: while *upė* (Lt.) *upa* (Lv. & OP) can be connected to Sanskrit *apa*, from IE **áp* 'water', the same root is found in *abhainn* (Gaelic). A second root **sreu* 'flow', yields *sriovė* (Lt.), *strāva* (Lv) *sruth* (Ir), *stréam* (OE) & *straumur* (Ísl.): all such words are feminine in grammatical gender.

Oppositely, the notion of a lake is often masculine: *ežeras* (Lt), *ežers* (Lv.), **assaras* (OP), *ozero* (Rus), *saras* (Skt) representing one root, with *lacus* (Lat) and *loch* (Gaelic), representing another notion, possibly meaning 'enclosed'.⁹⁸ However, names of countries, and lands are commonly feminine. For example, *Lietuva*, the native name of Lithuania, derives ultimately from *lyti* 'to rain', i.e., 'rainland': *Éire*, ultimately from a root meaning 'green': *Italia* from **vitalia*, literally 'a good place for vealers, that is, poddy-fields'.

A last example to be given in this discussion is the concept of gender as related to the celestial sphere. Reflexes of the roots for 'sun' **sáwel* and **sulno*, do vary in gender: but Baltic *saulė* (Lt) and Germanic **sun-ón*, are feminine.⁹⁹ Those words for the Moon which derive from **ménes-* / *méns-*, such as *menuo* (Lt) and *móna* (Gmc), are masculine.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand Latin derived its word for the Moon *lúna*, from **leuksna* 'lucifer / light-bearer' (cf. both *lúx* and *lúmen*), cognate with OP *lauxnos* ('stars'). This word *lúna* and all its Romance descendants are classed as being feminine in grammatical gender, and so becomes responsible for a paradigmatic shift in how post-Classical societies reinterpreted their cosmologies, in

contrast to the northern cultures which retained the sense of a feminine Sun and masculine Moon.

Land gendered as feminine

Now it may be felt that the concept of linguistic gender is merely a formality, but if we remember that in inflected tongues of the Romance-Celtic and Baltic language groups, there must necessarily be an identification of word referent and its gender through the very working of the language. Some simple examples will suffice to demonstrate this contention.

Grazi žemė, mūsų Lietuva yra (Lithuanian)

Bella terra, nostra Italia est (Latin)

Tá álain tír, ár Éire (Gaelic)

'A beautiful land, is our Lithuania/Italy/Ireland'.

The whole tenor of each sentence is feminine: the governing noun for land/earth in the first phrase is feminine in gender, subsequently the adjective must be feminine, and is linked to the name of the country which is also feminine in gender. So it is no surprise that in those languages where the notion of land or country is feminine, that it is addressed as if it were a maiden or fruitful woman, witness for example the image of Ceres depicted on early French stamps as an invocation of the spirit of *La Belle France*.

In Old English, the nominal inflexion showed not only distinctions in number (singular and plural) and case, but also in grammatical gender. Four distinct cases for each number, and at least three noun classes can be noted. Even so, there had been considerable reductions in the number of distinct case-forms, indicating future trends to an almost caseless state as obtains in Modern English, whereas Old English nominal declension partly demonstrates the intricacy of the language at that early stage.¹⁰¹

It is important to note that generally in Indo-European languages grammatical gender was not dependent upon considerations of sex. While nouns denoting males were usually masculine and females feminine, those indicating neuter objects were not necessarily neuter. *Stán* (stone) is masculine, *móna* (moon) is masculine, but *sunne* (sun) is feminine, as in German, and as in the Baltic tongues. As pointed out beforehand, in a Romance language such as French, the genders are quite the opposite: *pierre* (stone) and *lune* (moon) are feminine, while *soleil* (sun) is masculine. Each language seems to find its own reasons for distributing grammatical gender differently.

However, since English has become effectively a neutered tongue, that is, the concept of gender now works so that all sexually male objects are treated as masculine in nominal gender and all sexually female objects are treated as feminine in nominal gender, gender as a grammatical concept no longer plays a determining role in nominal and most pronominal inflexions. From such a shift in the grammar, we can postulate a corresponding shift in sensibility and writing regarding the land and its attributes. That is, the land is no longer able to be personified as *she* through the working processes of language. For poets working in the English tongue other forms of metaphorical investment need to be made because of this shift in linguistic process. The second part of this section will make an examination of poems in several languages to illustrate this idea more fully.

One early Irish poem in which the land is personified in the feminine is 'The Seagulls of Loch Foyle', which I give here in its original and English versions.¹⁰²

Faoileanna Locha Feabhail
 Romham agus im dheaghaigh,
 Ní thigid liom im churach
 Uch! Is dubhach ar ndeadhail.

The seagulls of Loch Foyle
 Before me and after,
 They come not with me in my currach.
 Oh sad is our separation!

Mo radharc tar sál sínim
 Do chlár na ndarach ndíoghainn;
 Mór déar mo ruisg ghlais ghléinboill,
 Már fhéaghain tar mh'ais Éirinn.

I stretch my gaze over the salt-water,
 From ship's deck of strong oak.
 Many are the tears of my grey wet eye
 As I look back to Ireland.

Now the style of language to which the lost land is no different from that with which the bard was wont to address a beloved woman. Likewise, in the folksong 'Coillte glasa an Triúcha / The green woods of Triúcha' connexion is strongly made between a land envisioned as a natural paradise, an embodiment of *Tír na nÓg* wherein death and sin have no dominion, and fertility, as embodied in the beloved who is addressed.¹⁰³

Where Marvell's mistress was "coy", one must read this and other folk-lyrics as indicating anything but such withholding modesty - both Irish and Scottish literatures are full of reciprocated feelings. But more to the point, it is the deep association of the land with the feminine which is so striking. That had been evident in our earliest recorded Irish poems, the poet in a rather bitter mood repudiates the overtures of a beautiful woman:¹⁰⁴

I will not die for you,
 Lady with the swanlike body:
 Meagre men you have killed so far
 And not the likes of me.

In the context of his address, it is her attributes which call for our attention, "teeth like blooms ... flank like foam ...", and so on. This habit of praise of a woman, or disparagement here, linked to images of the landscape was maintained in Irish verse, flowering in the poetry of Séathrún Céitinn (1580 - c.1644) of Co.

Tipperary. He had gone to Bordeaux, taken his doctorate in divinity and wrote an influential history. In a major poem, 'Óm sceal ar ardmhagh fáil / At the news of Fál's high plain', written after the Flight of the Earls (1607), he laments the loss of national sovereignty at the downfall of Ireland's great families at the hands of the English. Céitinn pictured the land as a mother drained of her natural ability to feed her children:¹⁰⁵

O brazen Fodhla, it is shameful you do not see
 It were fitter to nourish Míle's sweet high race.
 Not a drop is left in the plain of your smooth bright breast,
 Drained dry by the litter of every alien sow.

Certainly this habit of addressing the land through a female persona was continued into colonial times, expressed even in English, though in bitterer tones where Ireland is no longer seen as a fair maiden, but as an old, ruined woman, the Shan Van Vocht who had witnessed all the hopes and failures of the 1798 Revolt.¹⁰⁶ This figure of the *cailleach* continued to stand for Ireland even after Independence had been won, so strong was the transformation of Ireland's image, as to be seen in poems such as Padraic Colum's 'An Old Woman of the Roads',¹⁰⁷ or Séan Ó Riordáin's 'Ice Cold',¹⁰⁸ and continued for a long time. Only now with the erotically charged poetry of John Montague does the *cailleach* transform into Ceres in 'A Dream of July'.¹⁰⁹

Two Lithuanian poems

Yet this habit of personifying the land as a woman is not confined to Irish poetry, and is congruent with similar usages in literatures written in other Indo-European languages. In this discussion as to whether the landscape can be thought of as gendered, I wish to draw attention to two Lithuanian poems. The first is a passage from the great work *Metai* (The Seasons) by Kristijonas Donelaitis (1714 -

1780).¹¹⁰ This small section is taken from the part dealing with the doubtful pleasures of autumn.

Žemė su visais pašaliais įmursi verkia,
 Kad mūsų ratai jos išplautą nugurą drasko.
 Kur pirm du kuinu lengvai mums pavežė našta,
 Jaugi dabar keturiais arkliais pavžiuoti nepigu.
 Ratas ant ašies braškėdams sukasi sunkiai
 Irgi, žemes bauriais išplėšdams, teškina šmotais.
 Vei, laukų sklypai, visur skendėdami, maudos,
 O lytus žmonėms teškėdams nugarą skalbia.
 Vyžos su blogais sopagais vandenį siurbia
 Ir baurius purvus kaip tašlą mindami minko.

In my first translation, this reads:

The earth immured by the frozen ground cries
 As our cart-wheels tear at her soaked back.
 Where earlier two nags had easily carried burdens for us,
 Now it is hard to shift with four steeds.
 The wheels turn heavily on creaking axles
 And, tearing at brute earth, ripples the surface.
 Oh! the field-strips, all abouts are drowned, bathed
 In rain which washes folks' backs in waves.
 Our sandals suck in water with awful hurts
 And ugly filths like kneading rucked dough.

Neither Nature nor the land is always paradisaical, and nature poets who ignore the truth lessen their poetry. Donelaitis, following on in the classical tradition took care to portray the land and her people as they were, and not as a prettified and patently false account. As with visual artists such as Goya or Rembrandt, it is only through such an accurate portrayal does a poet reach a state of sublimity to which one may aspire. In this extract the land, Žemė, suffers as much as the people and beasts through the onset of harsh autumn. It is a realistic picture, and as I have emphasised before the suffering land is gendered as feminine exclusively: thus it is

her back which is soaked and torn (l. 2), the poet later identifying the land with the folk who are similarly afflicted (l. 8).

Looking at our situation

Such detailed personification cannot escape the reader's eye and ear in the two inflected languages as demonstrated, and reflexes into modern Hiberno-English have also been demonstrated. But what of the situation in modern Australian poetry? I have wondered if it is possible to posit a gendering of the landscape that is commonly accepted by both writers and readers, and in the absence of grammatical processes which would initially allow such a sensibility as shown in other European languages and by their practitioners, what other devices have poets been using?

Perhaps I should start with the dystopia of A. D. Hope in his doulful 'Australia' in which the land is "drab green and desolate grey / In the field uniform of modern wars": this is "the last of lands, the emptiest".¹¹ Even so, Hope advanced the notion that out of our pullulation "some spirit" might escape towards an unnamable freedom outside of the context of whatever is "called civilisation". A gloomy poem indeed, but interestingly one which strongly personifies the land as a feminine presence, referring to the land as "she" several times, and particularising "a woman beyond the change of life". This poem's personification of the land is quite the opposite to the previous depictions discussed in which she is usually seen as a young, fertile maiden, but perhaps is too easy a target for my purpose: three more recent poems by much different writers may serve to further illustrate my concern.

Robert Adamson's 'Into Forest' is a brief but detailed evocation of the forest as a manifestation of one aspect of this land's inscrutable nature - and as such it is a

reflex on Harpur's addresses to the Australian Bush.¹¹² However, there is a shut-off quality in this poem, the poet not so much being "into forest" as excluded from it. Two exclusions operate and negate any sense of fecundity: firstly, the wife is contained "behind / sheets of glass", withheld from contact with her husband and from the forest world, a part of that condition of "panic" and hysteria which contributes to so much of Adamson's edgy style. Then, as he says, his dilemma is that he must "try to remember a face in a language / we speak trees in". In this shutting out from the wealth and growth of the forest we realise that we have lost the ability to communicate with the natural world.

In contrast, Mark O'Connor's 'Minnamurra Forest' sees forest and land as a "symphony" and as "a hundred feet of fertile greening gloom": the red cedar wears a "light bunched-green / lace skirt" which swirls out, the leaves flirt with "furtive sigh".¹¹³ Here, O'Connor is ready to imply an active and positive feminine presence. In stark contrast, the raped landscape of western Tasmania is the focus of Roger MacDonald's 'Zeehan's Waste Acres', in which he places himself in "this mined-out land".¹¹⁴ Yet, even in this landscape of "old hessian and concrete", MacDonald maintains that the land is "inviolable", the implication being that the powers of regeneration will defeat man's rapine.

Some poets however are still able to perceive the land as fruitful, feminine and vital. Robert Gray in 'Journey: the North Coast' glances out of the train window to see a varied countryside:¹¹⁵

The train's shadow, like a bird's,
flees on the blue and silver paddocks,
over fence posts carved from stone,
and banks of fern,
a red bank, full of roots,
over dark creeks, with logs and leaves suspended,
and blackened tree trunks.

It is worth quoting that longish passage to emphasise the poet's natural empathy to the transcendent in Nature, which I identify as feminine. That Gray's choice of "*silver* paddocks", "*red* branches" and "slender *white* gumtrees", echo the very adjectives used by the Irish poets to delineate both woman and the land. A skeptic may entertain the notion that such colours and qualities are universals, that all poets would fall into such linguistic usage. But it is not mere vocabulary but the ideated usage that fascinates, crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries, betokening a far deeper urge to identify the land and the feminine.

I notice then, that in the contemporary Australian poems surveyed, not so much the land as trees are sometimes taken as symbols of the feminine, while the land itself is personified either as neutered or as barren, "past the change of life" as Hope so sharply said. The feminine is seen as a product of the fruit/life bearing process, which in turn is dependent upon impregnation, and not as an independent, chthonic force - we have no Demeter to walk this land, and hence there is no Persephone marking out the natural cycle of the year.

Were the land to be positively invested as a feminine, fertile presence, then the poet would need to perceive its active shaping role in the affairs of mankind. But then how can that be done if we are so bound to our suburbs and our neutered tongues? Perhaps we need to abandon that late Eighteenth Century Rationalism which has led us to reshaping the landscape so that it conforms to a preconception of what it ought be, or perhaps we may want to invent or use another tongue so that we can reveal to ourselves truthful relationships between ourselves, and ourselves and the land. The poet's task is perhaps just that, to recast what matter is at hand, to lead readers into a pattern of reconsiderations.

Whether we can now read the landscape as a gendered process is still open to question: as I have indicated above, we do not have in our tongue the means to

invest it with a grammatical process which would easily lead us into such a personification, and by and large, poetry has not been sympathetic to such direct imaging of the Australian landscape. Perhaps it may well be the best approach to disregard the possibility of a femininely gendered landscape, to allow it to be neutralised. But that, I fear, would only be complicit in the already terrifying degradation of this land's physical and social structures - that's another issue to be faced elsewhere - how the neutral objectification of the land has led to certain derogatory attitudes and practices - and to a certain swagger in Australian poetry. Despite all that which is implied by the loss of gender in English language and consequent loss in sensibility, I would hope that in my poetry, I will be able to pay some attention to the sense or spirit of place, that *hagia sophia* which has made the world incarnate, and possibly have paid her my dues.



Endnotes

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- ¹ 'Night Drive' in P. Muldoon ed. *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, Faber and Faber, London, 1986, p. 238.
- ² Robert Graves, op. cit.
- ³ M. Seymour, op. cit.
- ⁴ M. Oelschlaeger, op. cit.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, p. 17.
- ⁶ *ibid.*, p. 43.
- ⁷ D. Thoreau, *Maine Woods*, pp. 93 - 95, cited in Oelschlaeger. op. cit., p. 149.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, p. 265
- ⁹ M. Gimbutas: 1. *The Language of the Goddess*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1989; 2. *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe - Myth and Cult Images 6500 - 3500 BC*, University of California Press, Berkeley, rev. ed. 1982.
- ¹⁰ P. MacCana, *Celtic Mythology*, Hamlyn London 1973, p. 85 - 86.
- ¹¹ T. Kinsella, *The Tain*, OUP, Oxford, 1969.
- ¹² *ibid.* p. 53.
- ¹³ "Goddess" is a shorthand term I use encompassing both Gimbutas' and Graves' insights.
- ¹⁴ M. Gimbutas, opera. cit.
- ¹⁵ Languages are mutable, and in Irish there is an equation, or confusion between the terms Danu and Anu, described in Cormac's *Glossary* of c. 900 AD as "mater deorum Hibernensium": P. MacCana, op. cit.
- ¹⁶ S. Heaney, "Glanmore Sonnets #5", *Opened Ground*, Faber and Faber, London, 1998.
- ¹⁷ S. Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist*, Faber and Faber, London, 1966.
- ¹⁸ M. Molino, op. cit. p. 141 - 144 for discussion of Heaney's tendencies in this sequence.
- ¹⁹ S. Heaney, "Glanmore Sonnets #4".
- ²⁰ W. Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, II, ii, 197-8.
- ²¹ C. Paglia, op. cit. Paglia makes at least 33 separate references to Spenser's 'Bower of Bliss' in the course of her argument.
- ²² A. Greimas, op. cit.
- ²³ *ibid.* p. 150 - 4.
- ²⁴ I wrote this passage after drafting the first four Cantos of *Deluge*. Was this memory sitting behind me all the while I was conceiving and writing of the drowned gid?
- ²⁵ S. Heaney, 'A Night Drive', op. cit.
- ²⁶ P. Carter, op. cit. 1996, p. 7.
- ²⁷ R. Howarth, op. cit., p. 15.
- ²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 172.
- ²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 152.
- ³⁰ I. Mudie, "sitting Room ...", R. Howarth, op. cit., p. 154 - 156.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, p. 174.
- ³² Spelling of Aboriginal names is still problematic, a better version would be *Gartjuka*.
- ³³ I. Mudie, op. cit., p. 174.
- ³⁴ L. Murray, *The People's Otherworld*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1983, p. 55 - 56.
- ³⁵ L. Murray, *The Daylight Moon*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1987, p. 9 - 12.
- ³⁶ R. Howarth, op. cit. p. 119 - 120.
- ³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 292.
- ³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 297 - 8
- ³⁹ M. O'Connor ed., *Two Centuries of Australian Poetry*, OUP, Melbourne, 1992, p. 226.
- ⁴⁰ W. C. Wentworth: Howarth, op. cit., p. 15.
- ⁴¹ Mr. Justice L. Murphy - apochryphal saying.
- ⁴² cf. R. Hardjono, *White Tribe of Asia: An Indonesian View of Australia*, Monash Asia Institute, Clayton, 1992.
- ⁴³ A. D. Hope, 'The Wandering Islands', *Collected Poems: 1930 - 65*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1966.
- ⁴⁴ 'A Sense of Place' in S. Mac Réamoinn ed., op. cit., pp. 93 - 109.
- ⁴⁵ P. Carter, op. cit., p. 8.
- ⁴⁶ A. Walwicz, 'Poland', J. Leonard, op. cit. p. 192.
- ⁴⁷ K. Darian-Smith et al. *Text, Theory, Space: Land Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*. Routledge, London, 1996.
- ⁴⁸ B. Friel, *Selected Plays*, Faber and Faber, London, 1984.

- ⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 410.
- ⁵⁰ C. Wills, 'The use of Land, Language, Imperialism and Trade in Paul Muldoon's Meeting the British', N. Corcoran ed. *The Chosen Ground*, Seren Books, Wales, 1992, p. 121 - 149.
- ⁵¹ L. Gunner, 'Names and the Land: Poetry of Belonging and Unbelonging', K. Darian-Smith. op. cit. p. 115 - 130.
- ⁵² A. Shoemaker, *Black Words*. cited L. Gunner, *ibid.*.
- ⁵³ T. Birch, 'A land so inviting and still without inhabitants: erasing Koori Culture from Landscapes'. K. Darian-Smith, op. cit. p. 173 - 188.
- ⁵⁴ *ibid.* p. 180.
- ⁵⁵ L. A. Hercus, *Victorian Languages: A Late Survey*, ANU, Canberra, 1986.
- ⁵⁶ The symbol [ə] is used to indicate a schwa or neutral vowel.
- ⁵⁷ E. Reilly, *The Camden Poems* [included in this thesis]
- ⁵⁸ One widely quoted estimate for the critical mass for a language to survive is 60,000 competent speakers. 75,000 speakers of Scots & Cape Breton Is. Gaelic, maybe 100,000 Irish Gaelic speakers. Sadly, there are not even 60 active Kulin speakers. Nothing is so sad as the death of a language.
- ⁵⁹ P. Ovidius Naso *Metamorphoses*, tr. F. Miller, Harvard Uni. Press, Cambridge, third ed. 1977, p. 22 - "All is sea, and a sea without a shore".
- ⁶⁰ *Geelong Advertiser*, 'Roads closed by flooding', 8 November 1995, p. 2.
- ⁶¹ J. Laird, 'Park residents fight', *Geelong Advertiser*, 8 November 1995, p. 2.
- ⁶² *Geelong Advertiser*, '143-year history of floods', 8 November 1995.
- ⁶³ *Geelong Advertiser*, 'Flooding a sightseers' bonanza', 9 November 1995.
- ⁶⁴ *Geelong Advertiser*, 14 November 1995.
- ⁶⁵ Bible, tr. Mgr. R. Knox, Burns and Oates, London, 3rd ed. 1959: Gen. 7, 20 - 21.
- ⁶⁶ *ibid.*, Gen. 9, 11 - 13.
- ⁶⁷ The handiest version is Ovid *Metamorphoses*, trans. M. Innes, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982.
- ⁶⁸ M. Innes, 'Introduction', *ibid.*, p. 13.
- ⁶⁹ "But now, wherever old Ocean roars around the earth, I must destroy the race of men: I swear it by the infernal streams that glide beneath the earth through Stygian groves": Miller tr. *ibid.*, p. 14 - 15.
- ⁷⁰ Innes, op. cit., p. 36: all following translations are from Innes' version.
- ⁷¹ Ovid., op.cit.
- ⁷² J. Fitzpatrick *The Book of Conquests*, ed. P. Vincent, Paper Tiger, London, 1978: the title means literally 'the book of the taking of Ireland' in Old Irish: following passages taken from text.
- ⁷³ P. MacCana Celtic Mythology, Hamlyn., London, 1973, p. 57.
- ⁷⁴ A. Greimas op. cit., p. 64 ff.
- ⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 76.
- ⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 137.
- ⁷⁷ *ibid.* p. 147
- ⁷⁸ *ibid.* p. 148.
- ⁷⁹ J. Ashbery, 'A Wave', *A Wave*, op. cit., p. 68 - 89.
- ⁸⁰ *ibid.* p. 68.
- ⁸¹ P. Mead, 'Memoranda Of Our Feelings: John Ashbery's *A Wave*', *Scripta* 4/1, 1986, p. 113.
- ⁸² J. Ashbery, op. cit. p. 72.
- ⁸³ *ibid.* p. 70
- ⁸⁴ K. Hart 'John Ashbery and the Cimmerian Moment', *Scripta*, 8/1, 1992, p. 281.
- ⁸⁵ K. Hart *ibid.*, p. 285.
- ⁸⁶ T. S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', J. Leonard ed. *Seven Centuries of Poetry in English*, OUP, Melbourne, 1994, p. 139.
- ⁸⁷ T. Kinsella, *Poems: 1965 - 1973*, Wake Forest Uni. Press, Winston-Salem, 1979, p.58 ff.
- ⁸⁸ The following passage is derived from my occasional paper, 'The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella', An Leabhar Reading Group, Melbourne, 1998.
- ⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 63
- ⁹⁰ T. Jackson, *The Whole Matter: The Poetic Evolution of Thomas Kinsella*, Syracuse Uni. Press, Syracuse NY, 1995, p. 24.
- ⁹¹ M. Harmon, *The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella*, Wolfhound Press, Dublin, 1974, p. 43.
- ⁹² Donncha Rua Mac Conmara writing in exile in Newfoundland: "her barest rock is greener to me than this rude land - O! the fair hills of Éire O!". S. MacRéamoinn, op. cit. p. 102.
- ⁹³ C. D. Buck, 1.21: all etymologies Buck unless noted otherwise.
- ⁹⁴ *ibid.*

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- ⁹⁵ A. C. Baugh, *A History of the English Language*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2nd ed. London 1959, pp. 65 & 71.
- ⁹⁶ Abbreviations used: Gmc = common Germanic, Isl. = Icelandic, L. = Latin, Lv. = Latvian, Lt. = Lithuanian, ON = Old Norse, OP = Old Prussian, Skt = Sanskrit,
- ⁹⁷ Buck, op. cit. 1.21.
- ⁹⁸ ibid. 1.33.
- ⁹⁹ ibid. 1.52.
- ¹⁰⁰ ibid. 1.53 & W. Skeat, *Etymological Dictionary of English*, OUP, p. 384.
- ¹⁰¹ Baugh, op. cit. p. 65.
- ¹⁰² S. MacRéamoinn, op. cit. p. 99.
- ¹⁰³ S. Ó Tuama and T. Kinsella, *An Duanaire 1600 - 1900: Poems of the Dispossessed*, Dolmen, Mountrath, reprint 1985, p. 283.
- ¹⁰⁴ ibid., p. 6 - 9.
- ¹⁰⁵ ibid. p. 84- 85.
- ¹⁰⁶ T. Kinsella *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, OUP, London, 1986, p. 256.
- ¹⁰⁷ ibid. p. 321.
- ¹⁰⁸ ibid. p. 360.
- ¹⁰⁹ J. Montague, *The Great Cloak*, Dolmen, Dublin, 1978, p. 44.
- ¹¹⁰ K. Donelaitis, *Metai*, State Publishing House, Vilnius, 1956, p. 76: see also the trans. by P. Tempest, *The Seasons*, Vaga, Vilnius, 1985, p. 80.
- ¹¹¹ R. Howarth, op. cit, p. 119 - 120.
- ¹¹² J. Leonard, *Contemporary Australian Poetry*, Houghton Mifflin, Melbourne, 1990, p. 142.
- ¹¹³ ibid. p. 155- 156.
- ¹¹⁴ T. Shapcott, *Australian Poetry Now*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1970, p. 111.
- ¹¹⁵ ibid., p. 155.
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Chapter 3

Poets at work

Introduction

In one acre we have the bard's triad

VINCENT BUCKLEY ¹

In this Chapter, I continue earlier investigations but with a refined focus on how several poets have gone about the business of reading the land. This first section is quite brief, and introduces a range of voices engaged in this process. The second section returns to Séamus Heaney's work, which had been introduced in the previous Chapter, refocussing on the particular role of the feminine in his poetry. The third section considers the work of the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz, sketching out his life as a series of physical displacements and yet as a continuous circling back to a remembered sacred place which holds the key to his soul. The following section is an examination of one poem by Vincent Buckley, 'Louisa Stewart is Foaling' taken from his *Last Poems*, from which the central images of birth and regeneration will be applied to the Cantos of *Deluge*. The fifth section of this Chapter examines notions of masculinity as expressed in some poems I have translated from the Lithuanian poet, Sigitas Geda. The final, brief section, brings this Chapter to a conclusion. Again, wherever possible at the end of each section, the reader is directed to certain passages within the body of my poems, and to any related passages in Chapter 5.

A consideration of how poets have read the land in recent times indicates to me a continuing belief that the land ought be considered in terms of gender, as an emanation of what Robert Graves calls "the White Goddess" or Robin Shelldrake has nominated as "Gaia". Their reasons for using such terminology are well-grounded in particular programs of poetics or geopolitics which are explained in their works. For my part I am prepared to accept such notions as a shorthand, but

in so doing, I do not wish to necessarily enmesh myself in the fullness of ideological and religious battles that are still being fought about the use of such terms. I have seen with my own eyes the effects of over-population, industrialisation, sprawling cities and spoilage of the countryside, without reverting to a neoclassical mythology of cause and effect. Melbourne spreads its three million over hundreds of square kilometres of dull, never-ending suburbs and asphalted roads. Even here in Geelong, local boosters are calling for more farmland and river flats to be subdivided.

I have lived in this house for almost twenty years now, and still find great peace and pleasure in walking four houses downhill to the banks of the Barwon River. There I can rove all the way up to and past Fyansford Hotel branch either along the Moorabool River which eventually goes as far north as the Ballarat foothills, or follow the main course past Buckley's Falls, and were I to set out with determination, work my way over a week of short journeys into the Otway Ranges coming to the river's source near Barramunga. I can walk downstream to the Breakwater Bridge and Barwon Valley wetlands, or cycle further still past Goat Island and down to Lake Connewarre and the eventual outlet at Barwon Heads.

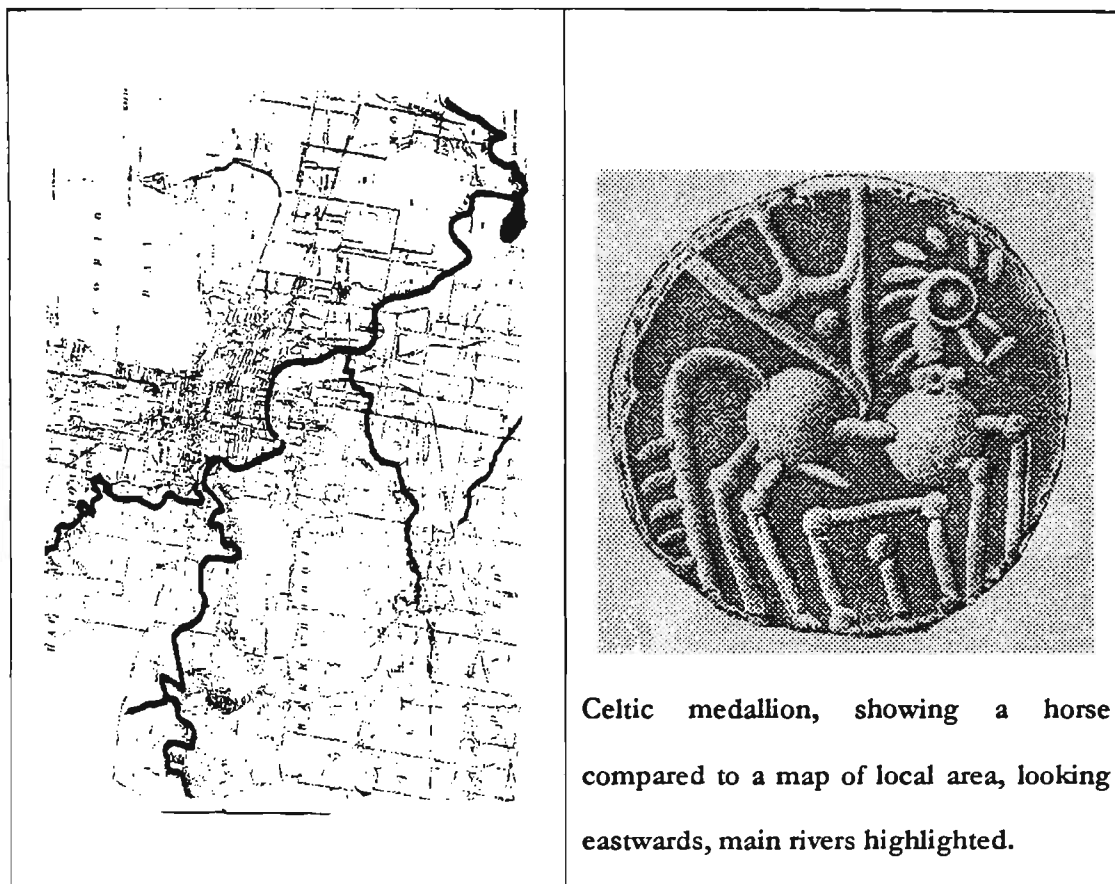
From the Barwon Valley lookout at the dead end of Read St., about a half-mile away from my house, I can view the Barwon River valley which is little changed from the day when Eugen von Guérard painted that prospect in 1860.² There are a few extra buildings, the old papermills distant to the left and a line of electricity pylons is straggling into sight, and there is also a pipe bridge near Fyansford, but in the main von Guérard's peaceful prospect remains. Likewise, if I drive for ten minutes up to the growing settlement at Ceres, I can look back to the township and bay, just as the artist did in 1856, and with just a squeeze of the eyelids ignore the industrial build-up and high rises of Melbourne to my left.³ In many ways, von

Guérard affords a bucolic view of the district in his day, as the settlers comfortably fitted themselves into a natural world which pleased the eye and yielded good profit to one's labour. Of course, that is a favourable reading, and one must realise the artist had patrons to please and a market to cater for, but still his overall tone in depicting the land is positive, as were many of the early settlers' accounts.

However, that view collapsed into the Victorian pathos of painters like McCubbin as shaping visual paradigms of the landscape. Attempts to go inland, the setbacks after the heady days at Eureka and that eventual Depression of the Century's end signalled a revisionist view of the Australian landscape as hostile and brutal. But then, any rainfall less than 20" (50 mm) a year cannot sustain the types of agriculture settlers had brought with them from Europe, and the gradients between sustainable rainfall lands and semi-desert come too quickly for much development to take place on the fringes. In my grandfather's time, that myth of sustainable bushland development was acted out in the disastrous clearing of the Mallee.

If I lay out a large-scale map of the district with South at the top, tracing the outlines of the Barwon and Moorabool Rivers and their tributaries, I can discern a figure stretched out across the land. She, and my choice of pronoun is deliberate for as I will show that for my purposes this is a quite proper reading, is prancing across page, her head being the Bellarine Peninsula, Freshwater and Waurin Creeks her flying mane, the Moorabool, Yarrowee, Warrambine Rivers and Hovell's Creek her long limbs, with the Barwon River making out her spine and high-raised wind-feathered tail. She is Epona, this is the manifestation of this particular district's genius.

Of course, this is quite fanciful. But if a comparison is made between the two images below, one can see how I read the figure of a horse into the region's hydrography.⁴



One could read into the geography any creature one wished, or merely read the map as a series of roads and railways designed to facilitate commerce. An engineer does not propitiate the local river-gods when building a bridge across a creek, nor do town planners care too much about land's natural contours when laying out a subdivisional grid: man's steel, asphalt and concrete ought not bend to natural forces. Yet they do, after each flood the engineers and road-builders have had to return and rebuild. Bridges have been wrenched away, railway trellises pulled awry, asphalt and concrete eroded as easily as sandcastles on a beach, power pylons twisted beyond use. Nature has its way with us, mocks us beyond endurance, like a cheeky schoolgirl who knows no shame in letting the whole Parish know what's what at the Manse.

In the various poetries written about this land, some have come close to a reading which satisfies me, but they have come with what I feel to be the wrong mythic framework, one which misses on seeing into the land. As Andrew Taylor points out, much of what has been written about this continent has been framed in the mode and language of romanticism and its successors, modernism and post-modernism.⁵ The governing myth of that poetry, and related visual works, has been that of the foundation and exploration of a "New Britannia", and only latterly did the arts move towards an exploration of the differences between the Old and New Worlds, and not even yet have these differences reached a resolution. Ours is still a colonial, and colonising, society. We still seek to impose ourselves upon the landscape with new highways, bigger cities, faster railways. Our predominant social icons are still masculine, the Digger metamorphoses as the Footballer, for example Plugger Lockett, or as Cricketer, Shane Warne, and if we have a female icon it is the anorexic Kylie Minogue. As Taylor points out, "Nature in Australia is still female - but secular, stubborn, and usually not very friendly" which must be tamed, subdued, controlled or even raped in order for it to be possessed.⁶

John Montague, an Irish poet who has visited here, is given to an opposite view.

He dreams this:⁷

Like a young girl
Dissatisfied with
Her mythic burden
Ceres, corn goddess ...
Mistress of Summer,
Steps sure-footed over
The sweet smelling
Bundles of grass ...

It may be felt that this is a particularly European vision, but then we are Europeans, albeit displaced, in language and religious viewpoint, and I believe that

we have carried from over the seas the tools which can attune us to Nature as warm, bountiful and even generous. But more than anything else, as a writer I need formal devices by which to read the land within the usage of my tongue and sensibilities.

To begin with, I will investigate some aspects of the poetry of Séamus Heaney as a way of acquiring and unfolding a viewpoint about the feminine in the landscape. I choose Heaney because of his currency as a writer, strength of his writing and the sense of commonality I have acquired with him over some twenty five years of reading his work and an identification in his national and religious background, visiting some of the areas in Ireland he has written about.

The second poet, Czeslaw Milosz, may seem a world away in the language of his poetry, but Milosz shares with Heaney a parallel responsiveness to Nature. That Heaney has written admiringly on Milosz, and I have walked the streets of the ancient city and banks of the river Milosz has written about, also helps me in establishing a sympathy with his views about and empathy with Nature.

The third poet who offers a reading of the land, Vincent Buckley, has been closely identified with Melbourne, but in the primary poem I discuss in this section, 'Louisa Stewart is Foaling', he pays homage to the Goddess in the form of Epona, so giving me access to a central image for my writing. Lastly, I discuss some of the works of the Lithuanian poet, Sigitas Geda, who of all four poets has the strongest most masculine voice of all, even while giving praise to Nature and her gifts.

I notice, at this time of writing, that all four poets are Catholic, in one sense or another and probably not very orthodox or conforming, and other poets considered or referred to later in this thesis, more often than not, stand in or are allied to that tradition. All have responded to the natural world making hymns,

becoming rhapsodes. It is outside the scope of my work at present, but there must be some scope for a reading of the poets who have praised the natural world and their continued alliance to that faith.

Readings of the Feminine in the poetry of Heaney

A rowan like a lipsticked girl

SÉAMUS HEANEY ⁸

A rare phoenix indeed is the poet who can renew himself from the ashes of the creative fire time and time again as each stage of his life is followed through and done with. Heaney has this marvellous supple grace which has enabled him to do just that in his movement from the earliest volumes, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969), until his most recent *Seeing Things* (1991). The amazing and delightful prospect of reading a new collection from Heaney is the act of renewal carried out on each page. There is masculine strength in this, but like the phoenix, a femininity which has yet been little noticed by critics and which counterbalances the more obvious masculine. The two forces are evidenced in the ranges of subjects and discourse, language and imagery chosen by the poet.

In the first part of my overall discussion of the evolution of Heaney's selfhood in this section of the Chapter, focus will be concentrated on the feminine elements in his writing. I will review a wide selection of poems in which the poem's persona, or in which the prime subject being addressed, is feminine. The review will progress through his work, as well as considering subject groupings. It shall be noted that the feminine aspect is often linked to images of water through such agents as water-sprite, sea-maiden, shore-woman and the like. Other linkages

between the wet and the feminine forbade the operation of evil in the world. The second part will examine complementary masculine images in Heaney's work, especially in the latter stages of his poetry. A third part will bring together the various strands of relationships between Heaney as poet and the land which has given him sustenance and materials for his writing. By close examination of what Heaney has said, or inferred, about creative processes, some assessment can then be made of the complex relationships which underpin a poet's work in this era. By proceeding in this manner, I hope to refocus attention on Heaney's writing and avoid rather simplistic critical assertions and repetitions which are all too common with respect to Heaney's work. As with the examination of other poets' works, I shall assess what methods of approach would be useful in my own writing.

Some comment on previous critics' work is required at this point, if only to demonstrate the gaps which still exist in the critical fabric, allowing some room for a reinterpretation to go ahead. Ronald Tamplin,⁹ Nicholas McGuinn¹⁰ and Neil Corcoran¹¹ were useful early explicators. Tamplin's text was designed for Open University, whereas McGuinn's was clearly aimed at senior secondary students. Both carried sets of background briefings on place and history, critical explications, maps and illustrations. Corcoran's guide compares favourably to these two, being much more focussed as a literary critical text, presumably aimed at tertiary students. It has by far the best working bibliography on Heaney to that date, and is not outclassed by Tamplin's text, and has the further advantage in that aspect of being published by Faber and Faber, Heaney's international publishers. Whilst they are useful introductions for their target audiences, they need thorough revision and updating if they are to continue to be of further value.

Sidney Burris¹² and Henry Hart¹³ coming somewhat later, began the process of sifting through a more extended range of texts. Both operate from a north

American perspective and are not nearly so reticent on the Nationalist - Loyalist conflict in Ulster. However, they both tend to operate in the standard critical framework through the very nature of the college audience they intend to serve and by the need to encompass all of Heaney's work in one swoop. It is all very well and good to offer an historical or biographical development, but some larger overarching framework is now called for, especially as one can sense some boundaries to Heaney's œuvre - *tempus fugit*.

Michael Molino is perhaps the most perceptive of recent critics.¹⁴ He emphasises Heaney's role in questioning the functions of traditions, language and myth with respect to the act of poetry. That is, Molino has absorbed at least some of the basic notions of deconstructivism, and has applied them to his task. As Molino notes in his introductory remarks, reading and establishment of context go hand in hand. His strong readings of Heaney follow the general pattern of publications, but enriches his insights with constant cross-reference to other Irish, and other writers, who have informed Heaney's development. W. B. Yeats and James Joyce certainly are there, but also T. Kinsella, T. S. Eliot, and latterly the enduring qualities of Dante, whom Heaney has adopted as his *psychopomp*, are marked presences. At time of writing, it seems that critical assessment of Heaney's work is more or less agreed in both the ground rules and detail. He is a known quantity, and as such is in danger of slipping from his place in the poetic pantheon when the next young poets arrive with a new set of (mis)readings of Ireland.

Feminine presences

Most critics have been blinded to the feminine voice in Heaney's poems - a strange omission, indeed, when an early poem such as 'Undine' speaks so clearly through a female persona. At this point it is worthwhile to refresh some

referential points regarding Celtic mythology, which despite Molino's position that Heaney is essentially a sceptical revisionist in such matters.¹⁵ The natural world and the supernatural interpenetrate at many points, and to make a rigid distinction between the two would have struck a pre-Christian Bard as rather pointless. Moreover, the divine force was manifested in both masculine and feminine forms, rather than in the severe monosexuality of early Christianity. Hence, the land itself, its rivers, the surrounding seas were all seen as direct manifestations of the divine and in whom each man and woman was able to establish a direct relationship.

As pointed out by John Sharkey the feminine aspect of the Divine is represented quite often as a triple goddess - maid, matron and crone, or as a particular manifestation.¹⁶ It is interesting to note that the early Europeans recognised water as a first principle and life-source, reflecting their dedication of many river sources as sanctuaries to the Goddess. This dedicatory process is borne out by the large number of votive figures which have been recovered - carved wooded objects, skulls, gold statuettes and also weapons and household tools. In the Celtic lands, we can note that the Matronae, three divine mothers, gave their name to the River Marne, and the spirit Sequana names the River Seine. Likewise the West European rivers Neckar, Main, Lahn, Ruhr and Lippe are all Celtic in origin. In Britain, the R. Severn was named after the goddess Sabrina and the River Clyde has its name after Clóta, the Divine Cleanser or Hag at the Ford - a death-goddess encountered by the doomed hero who knows his end is nigh when he sees her washing his blood-stained clothes. While the Goddess is bountiful, she is also merciless.

Likewise, rivers and wells were seen as the womb-openings of the Earth Mother and invoked under different names and aspects. Every sacred spot had its

guardian spirit in attendance manifesting itself in different forms, cat, fish or bird for example, according to the circumstance and disposition of the people. The moon is also connected to these sources and identified in Celtic, Latin and Greek mythologies as feminine, empathetic to the flow of tides and menses, being named as the three-fold Morrígan, Macha and Badh who presided over birth, life and death. Heaney's 'Sheelagh na Gig' is one of a group of poems by John Montague, Thomas Kinsella & Vincent Buckley celebrating the famous, and to some eyes obscene, graven image at Kilpeck, where a *Sile* squats, holding herself open for all to enter.¹⁷

In this respect, 'Undine' repays close attention, for it sounds a note which, while seemingly suppresses in the course of much of Heaney's subsequent work, bubbles up now and again as a reminder of her potent force.¹⁸ The word 'undine' is derived from Latin *unda*, wave, indicative of her vital force made evident, quite distinct from the spirits of still pool or deep seas, and whose Celtic predecessor would have been a *uisce-bean*, that is 'water-woman', to whom a power of prophecy was attributed. While Heaney may have expected many of his readers to understand the classical appellation, the latter would need to have been pointed out, consciously even, so that the complexity of the association between the Undine and the land could be developed in full.

The poem itself has been cast as a monologue in which the Undine has welcomed the farmer's actions, showing her gratitude by "dispersing' herself to "his roots ... his brassy grain". But there is also a note of assertion in her welcome, for "I alone/ could give him subtle increase and reflection". This is not the song of a submissive or beaten spirit, but one who recalls her liberation from a blocked state to full participation in a rite of fertility.

Heaney sexualises the encounter between the farmer and land. While the farmer is fully realised as a male figure, equipped with the force and "spade" of a lover, much like the "pen" in 'Digging' the implement is clearly an external sign of maleness, she is able to move over the waiting land in the voice and form of a nubile girl. Her virginity is exactly delineated by her shocked modesty when "he saw me finally disrobed". This is a disarming and quite unexpected touch following on from the opening images of masculine force - "He slashed the briars ...": yet she proved eager for the encounter, running "quick for him", rippling and churning. The tone here is quite joyous.

Her freedom, her selfhood, is asserted by her actions. The verbs used are all fluid and active, movemental: "ran", "running clear", "rippled and churned", "swallowed", "dispersing myself", "could give" and "warned". Her vocabulary stands in strong contrast with the short, jabbing verbs associated with the farmer: "slashed", "halted", "saw", "dug", "took" and "explored". By such means Heaney is able to indicate the extreme polarity of the two forces being considered. Even so, the protagonists do not remain static. The Undine swiftly moves from the status of an eager girl to that of a knowing mistress as "he took me to him", allowing herself to be "explored ... so completely". Some readers may be outraged at such willing surrender to male potency, but the Undine, with Heaney as her interlocutor, recalls the act in purely positive terms, acknowledging that he made her "human". The final phrase knowingly echoes Auden's lines "Lay your sleeping head, my love,/Human on my faithless arm...",¹⁹ acknowledging that it is the act of surrender of the self within love's physicality which brings both elemental urges, male and female, into a realisation of our essential humanity.

In Celtic myth, and I am sure that Heaney is here working through his knowledge of it as much as he works through Classic myth as common ground with the

readership, water is a potent and healing element. One may view the statuettes deposited at such shrines as are to be found at the headwaters of the Sequana (River Seine) or at Aquae Sulis (Bath) or to see even these days, ribbons tied to votive-trees by wells in Ireland and Brittany to realise the continuity of belief which associates flowing water with creative force. Natural medicine, one may rightly say, but also a deeply felt acknowledgment of matters outside of the control and force of men.

To focus on the feminine in Heaney's work, especially in as much as it illuminates his relationship to Ireland, is then to undertake an exploration of partly-chartered territory. As noted in 'Undine', and as will be seen in the next section, Heaney's men act out their destinies on the landscape, and while being coloured and affected by it, are not the chthonic and liquid figures which will draw the boundaries for every mood and action possible in his poetic. The Undine, as a young woman, appears time and time again in a range of poems related to the matter of Ireland, especially until about his fortieth birthday, when the feminine presence undergoes a marked change.

In an early poem, 'Lovers on Aran', the water spirit is evident as the waves of Atlantic Ocean watching over two lovers enacting a tryst, much like a modern-day Diarmuid and Grainne.²⁰ One could suppose Heaney himself to be partially the subject. Interestingly, as in 'Undine', the sea is an active agent characterised by the use of forceful verbals: "came dazzling", "came glinting", "Broke on", allowing for the probing nature of this poem to be enunciated by a series of contrasts and questions. The battle for possession or dominance as played out in courtship is echoed through questions posed. In 'Undine', the resolution of identity only came about by the interpenetration of feminine and masculine, each being seen as complementary to each other, rather than as resolute oppositions. At first it would

seem that the sea "sifting from the Americas" - a phrase redolent of John Donne - would "possess" the island by virtue of overwhelming force. But any question can be turned around and as many men may fear, one may become possessed by the object of one's desire through her acceptance. As bruising as is the wash of saltwater on granite, it is the island which eventually possesses, contains and ameliorates the sea.

The identification of water and the feminine is continued in 'A New Song',²¹ where "the girl from Derrygarve" serves to recall memories of a particular place, focussing his attention on the fluidity of memory. It is this "river's long swerve", the feminine sinuousness of the R. Moyola which is recalled as "pleasuring [itself] beneath alder trees". Heaney purls the thread with a vocabulary of liquids - "water", "smooth libation" and "poured". In 'Twice Shy', the courting couple are imaged as "Still waters running deep / Along the embankment walk".²²

He builds a connective tissue of holy waters and feminine in the image of the "vestal daughter". Again, as in 'Undine' he uses a classical term, "vestal" as a reading on a particularly Celtic-historical figure, paralleled in many Indo-European mythologies and histories who purifies, washing away fault. Greimas points out that in pre-Christian Lithuanian mythology, water is the essential curative element, closely bound to notions of Resurrection of the Dead Hero which is effected by Aušrinė, the Morning Star.²³

But here, Heaney turns strangely enough to the mythologised figures of the Amazons - partly recalled in Homer, but more vividly remembered in the figures of Scathach and her companions.²⁴ The water-nymph must assert herself against the "land", resist all that would tame and domesticate her. There is a shift surely here, from the eager and compliant girl of 'Undine', and her willingness to resist is emphasised by the forceful image of "river tongues" which are bound, "must" is

the word used here, "to flood" those foreign holdings on native turf. Here, Heaney comes as close as ever he does to an open advocacy of a particularly northern language, whether Hiberno-English or Gaelic is debatable, and recalls John Montague's lament for "a severed head speaking with a grafted tongue".²⁵ Yet Heaney's lament is dulled, unlike another powerful Irish poet, Thomas Kinsella who has written extensively in and translated also from Gaelic. Heaney gives no indication of having written in Gaelic or wanting to take the question of language further than this. Further, in contrast to the linguistic despondency of Montague and Kinsella, Heaney's linguistic imagery is triumphant and militantly Amazonian.

He carefully excavates opposing linguistic codes of conflict, occupation and suppression. "Demesne" is Anglo-Norman, "Castle Dawson" and "Upperlands" are planted English, whilst "bawn" can be either Gaelic *ban*, 'white', or Lallans 'fort'. These words stand in opposition to "rath" which is purely Gaelic *rath* 'council house' as in German *Rathaus*, and "ballaun", which is again a Gaelic word, *balbhán* 'a dumb person'. Elsewhere, Heaney has celebrated the "vowelling embrace" of Gaelic. For instance in 'Broagh', the elusive grapheme {oa} is realised as a labialised front vowel [*we:*], and is quite ungermane to received pronunciation, as is that "last / *gh* the Strangers find / hard to manage".²⁶ In 'Traditions' Heaney comments on how the native "guttural Muse" had been enclosed with a foreign framework, yet re-emerging in the odd turn of a verb or spoken custom.²⁷ Such perceived rudeness is ironically emphasised in the place from which Heaney's figure arises - Derrygarve - for 'oaken-rough' would be the closest English equivalent one could find: like John Montague's "rough field", the sacred place holds its naming despite the acts of colonisation and plantation, as is language, *teanga*, itself is a feminine function in as much as it has subtly resisted

those processes. Likewise the water-sprite herself guards her appellations, "vestal" and "Moyola".

However, not all female figures in Heaney's poetic are so active. For in any set of circumstances between men and women, great tensions can and do arise out of the very nature of human relationships and each person displays a range of characteristics. So it is in several poems I wish now to examine, for they show another aspect of the feminine as it is treated by Heaney. In 'Night Drive',²⁸ the speaker's act is one of invocation of an absence, "I thought of you continuously", which is linked to the absent woman's essential "ordinariness" brought to mind through the night by homely "rain and hay and woods" of the French countryside. The name of each small town passed through, "Montreuil, Abbéville, Beauvais", parts of an ongoing litany of vague promises or expectations. There comes a sense of closure in the third stanza as the "open car" makes its way into the blanketing night, only to take a frankly sensual turn in the last stanza "Italy / laid its loin to France on its darkened sphere", recalling the most intimate of actions between sleeping lovers.

Likewise Heaney addresses the feminine in a range of other positive images of the familiar bond between men and women. In the poem, 'At Ardboe Point', he indicates once again a journey, this time past a lough to Ardboe and a fleeting reference to intimacy.²⁹ The poem's focus is at first on the annoying thicket of insects, but these impede him only as much as "the last veil on a dancer". Heaney's trick is to turn the poem from the mundane to the intimate and extraordinary with a simple turn of phrase. The implied sexuality then subverts the preceding imagery.

Darker aspects of conjugal love are dealt with in 'Wedding Day'.³⁰ Here the prospective bride has gone missing - the reasons are still not clear as images of

that day are recalled: "why all those tears / the wildgrief on his face / outside the taxi?" The poem does not explicate itself, save that Heaney's addressee expiates her grief in song becoming "like a deserted bride". Jumbled and dazed images are left unresolved, and the poet's retreat indicates a need to seek succour "Let me / Sleep on your breast to the airport".

So far, in those poems examined, Heaney's treatment of the feminine has been both erotic and devotional in that he has assumed the role of lover and watcher. In each instance, the feminine has been invoked as an aspect of the Muse and anointed with the attributes of maidenly purity through the image of a "vestal", and secondly the essential attribute of nurture, the word "breast" being used several times over. The two aspects are not in conflict, especially as the feminine is viewed as a manifestation of a nurturing land itself. However, as things in Celtic mythology come in threes, so to the maiden and matron must be added the figure of the *cailleach*, that is, crone. Yet these are not absolute divisions, the maiden has within her the incipient matron, while *cailleach* still recalls her earlier self. In an early poem, 'Poor Women in a City Church',³¹ Heaney treats the transformatory nature of religious devotion on "old dough-faced women". Heaney views the process of prayer as both ritualistic and renewing, for "you cannot trace / A wrinkle on their beeswax brows". This is not simple devotionism. What is being enacted here is a miracle of sorts. We all know our mortality well enough, but as the poem indicates, the inner processes of renewal are experienced in outward show, and more importantly for our argument here, such renewal is exhibited through these women.

In three interesting poems Heaney further moves from the outward delineation of women to interior states. These are monologues in which the speaking "I" are clearly feminine as in 'Undine'. The farmer's wife of 'A Wife's Tale' speaks of the

experience in bringing out a luncheon to her husband and other men working at threshing.³² The division of labour is absolute, for what had once been a joint task had moved with mechanisation to become solely a man's undertaking. The thresher is an unapproachable beast, "the big belt slewed to a standstill, straw / Hanging undelivered in its jaws." The image has some disturbingly female undertones, a Grendel-like being which could just as easily chew up the men who tend it as it will the straw which it will eventually bundle into shroud-like sheaves. As a wife she is now merely a provender, gratefully accepted as such, but in the end belonging "no further to *the work*" [my emphasis]. This is an absolute remove from cooperative relationship between farmer and the water-sprite in 'Undine', and like Hardy in his lament for the passing of a more innocent farming régime in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Heaney is able to clearly demonstrate the nature of the breakdown of rural life through a skewed approach to the nature of work: "the work" becomes an objectivised, external matter, removed from the warp and weft of Nature. Likewise in 'Shore Woman' and 'Maighdean Mara',³³ the women's interlocution reveals estrangement from frightening masculine domains. The hardness of their lot is epitomised by the prefacing proverb *Man to the hills, woman to the shore* - dense and elusive as the saying is, it provides the framework for these women's torments. She went off with him fishing for mackerel, possibly as a new bride being shown his work, just as a proud new husband may take his bride to the computer laboratory or to Ford's stamping room - but the experience puzzled and defeated her with its ease - "so easy it's hardly right". Later she becomes "frantic" with fear, just like the hooked mackerel, as the skiff appears to be threatened by a school of porpoises: "I lay and screamed" she recalls. The woman's resolution to be her husband's partner is broken, and she is forced to

resolve her status as one fixed firmly to the shore, inhabiting the border regions between "parched dunes and salivating wave", a secure if confined zone.

'Maighdean Mara' treats the legend of the sea-maiden, or *silkie*, from the viewpoint of the *seanachai* (story-teller) and in variation to preceding poems is objective in the telling, although one senses a sympathy for the maiden's plight. The protagonists are unnamed, but as "he" and "she" are archetypes playing out a tale well-enough known amongst the people of the northern seaboards. Here she is merely a sea-maid tricked into wifehood by the sly fisherman who "stole her garment". Not modesty but boundedness ensues: "follow / was all she could do". Her fate was that of the ordinariness of eight years of house life, suffering to give milk, losing her vital connexion "the ties of her voice" between herself and the sea.

But how she is released from her bondage is interesting, for she was inextricably linked to her garment, which, having been hidden away by the fisherman within the house and undiscovered by her, bound her to the house. The thatcher-figure had been treated by Heaney in 'Thatcher' as an agent of change, a magician in his own right, having a "Midas touch". Certainly as an external male force, the thatcher enabled accidental displacement of the maiden's garment, for when brought out into the "night air", she is enabled to re-draw upon its potency and break the "dread hold of bedrooms".

The poem returns to its opening image of the sleeping maiden "her cold breasts / dandled by the undertow". Unlike the water-sprite in 'Undine' this one does not receive "man's love" with joy - the sea then is a far different and remoter medium of femininity than lough and stream, inimical to humanity, even though Heaney continuously associates the sea with some aspects of the feminine.

Themes of love and self-sacrifice are inextricably linked in several further poems. If the sea is feminine, it is also a place where the feminine suffers for her lover, or else it is the blind cycle of procreation as in 'The Return'.³⁴ The trout's act of return to lay her roe is deliberate, blind but necessary self-sacrifice ensuring the continuity of her race. But what of the series of sacrifices observed by Heaney amongst his own kind? In poems such as 'Bog Queen', 'Strange Fruit' and 'Punishment',³⁵ the use of violence is exterior to the victim, their sufferings are inflicted by others. That acts of violence are suffered upon women can be paradigms for the broader political processes in the Six Counties should come as no surprise. For if women have had to suffer rape, indignities and great sorrows, so has the land. 'Act of Union' makes the point quite clear - but here the "I" is "imperially / male" and as the conjugal act depicted here is really a rape, such a union is invalid. The bride is really a victim, speechless, "raw".³⁶ Yet while the voice is male, the implied unspoken voice is feminine, for her "gash" and "heart" have begat "an obstinate fifth column" which is "cocked / At me across the water". In 'A Drink of Water' the *cailleach* reappears, a representative victim of the "union", her youthful dignity reduced to that of an "old bat staggering", who serves to remind us to be "faithful to the admonishment of the cup".³⁷ That is, one remembers and gives proper accord to tradition. In poems such as these, Heaney leaves much unsaid, and those gaps have been supplied by a range of critics of English policy from Tom Paine's words to the latest bombing in London.

Violence is inimical to the life-force, it destroys the young men and young women in different ways, and destroys the space one has for independent thought. Heaney's flight to Dublin was criticised by many, but I can only view it as a life-affirming action, almost feminine in a world that demands that its men take up the

pistol instead of that particular "gun" with which Heaney first acknowledged his call to be a writer in his much-anthologised early poem, 'Digging'. So one may ask why a society would choose to kill. The "little adulteress" is surmised by the speaker in the poem to have broken a social taboo, and that is a fanciful supposition, but accepting the young woman's need for "love", we can observe the nature of her suffering. Stripped naked, head shaven and blindfolded, she is a de-eroticised object. Heaney effects a double vision by connecting this bog "queen" with the young women punished by their tribes, "cauled in tar / wept by the railings". Revenge exacted upon supposed moral laxity is "tribal, intimate". In 'Strange fruit', the victim is a "forgotten, nameless, terrible / Beheaded girl" whose acceptance of her fate overcomes both men's axe and their gropings towards some sort of "reverence" being paid to her - even by Heaney himself as a time-removed onlooker. As cruel as war and religion are, and have been all our recorded histories, there is something mind-numbing in the acts which led to the deposit of victims in the bogs of Denmark at the time these acts were recorded by Diodorus Siculus.

One can trace this line of observation and argument regarding the presence of the feminine so far in Heaney's work leading back to what he had heard and seen in his early life. Even so, Heaney, like Thomas Kinsella and John Montague before him, he has been attacked as sectarian simply because he has chosen to write about local realities from which he had emerged. That there is not that tendency towards social-realism or deracinated abstraction which afflicted so many other English-language poets in their attempts to be modern, could be viewed as one aspect of Heaney's devotion to his voicing of the feminine as part of the broader working out of the conflicting forces in Irish history, and that of the "tall kingdom" for that matter.³⁸ That the proclaimed love of their neighbours was

actualised as rape is no surprise to the Irish, indeed, as illustrated by John Aubrey's almost pornographic account of Sir Walter Raleigh's encounter with an Irish maiden well illustrates.³⁹

He loved a wench well; and one time getting up one of the Mayds of Honour up against a tree in a wood (twas his first lady) who seemed at first boarding to be somewhat fearful of her Honour, and modest, she cryed, sweet Sir Walter, what doe you ask me? Will you undoe me? Nay, sweet sweet Sir Walter! At last, the danger and pleasure at the same time grew higher, she cryed in extasey, Swisser Swatter Swisser Swatter. She proved with child, and I doubt not that this Hero tooke care of them both, as also that the product was more than an ordinary mortal.

Such damned conceit. If an "act of union" is undertaken by force, no amount of post-coital sweetness will mollify the wronged party: the maid, Caitlín na hÚlaháin, was broken to fall to a crone's estate, just Ireland herself was reduced in sovereignty to the status of an abject Province. Being a well-lettered people, Heaney's countrymen would think that a "union" is an honourable joining of equals - this is the informing and fructifying ideal which was witnessed in 'Undine', so underpinning Heaney's bitter irony in his political perspective.

Strangely enough, for all his address to feminine themes in those poems so far examined, one senses a standing back from full emotional engagement. The injured women of 'Shore Woman', 'Strange Fruit', even 'Punishment', are kept at a distance. His real affections, other than those addressed to his wife in several poems, are directed more towards the feminine as realised in the land itself. Hence the inhabiting spirit of "The Glanmore Sonnets" cannot be Anne Saddlemeyer, to whom the poems are dedicated. Rather, Heaney's "paradigm of art" invokes the figure of Grainne, a Persephone-like figure, as having granted him the chance for self-renewal, even while the overburdening tone issuing out of Heaney himself is an overtly masculine sign. The initial images of a "lea ... deeply tilled", awaiting that "entering" which would give rise to the next harvest. In this,

the feminine earth is both passive and receptive, dependent upon a man's actions. The following two sonnets switch attention to more idealised feminine figures, the "Dorothy" of William Wordsworth, one of Heaney's acknowledged poetic models, and the unnamed presence who shares "our drinking water ... heart", vibrations indicating connections.

In the fifth sonnet, Heaney's recollection of the "boortree" triggers a series of images centred on "our bower", and is the clearest image of regrowth and reassurance so far in this sequence: "small buds ... flourish in the hush".

Then in the magnificent tenth sonnet, Heaney wryly likens himself and wife to "Lorenzo and Jessica in a cold climate / Diarmuid and Grainne waiting to be found" by highlighting their fugitive selves and interdependence as they shelter in the comforting "moss in Donegal".

These "Glanmore Sonnets" mark a major transition with regard to the feminine in Heaney's poetic stance, his interest now becoming more directed to metaphor rather than human history. One could believe that his flight across the border was an unmanly act, so that his poetic manifests itself as an atonement and working out of all the forces which had crushed him. I would rather say that his flight was prudent and self-conserving, allowing Heaney the necessary space to work through the themes which later emerged in *Field Work* and later volumes of verse, for it was a new domestic situation at Glanmore Cottage that enable him to embark upon the long process of criticism which has yielded both *The Government of the Tongue* (1988) and *The Redress of Poetry* (1995).

In later poems, Heaney's treatment of the feminine requires separate comment, for it is almost as if his Muse has frowned upon him. A note of discord is first struck in 'A Dream of Jealousy'.⁴⁰ While Heaney calls the poem "a dream", the very act of recall is an elaboration and public statement of a sense of uncertainty:

had the dreamer chosen to suppress this as a public record, as we more often than not do with our dreams, then we would come to believe that he had accepted and internalised whatever message was implicit within the dream. Yet to make such a dream public is to play around with the reader's credulity and estimate of the poet as the ever-faithful husband who had celebrated his love, not just lust, in previous poems such as 'Night Drive' or 'Summer Home'.⁴¹

I assume that the "you" of the poem is Heaney's wife and acknowledged Muse, as he plays with dream images of two ladies in "a shady / unexpected clearing", their conversation loose and flowing like a "single white tablecloth". One thinks of a situation as depicted in Manet's 'Déjeuner sur l'herbe' (1863).⁴² Yet despite such a tranquil setting and its manifold allegories, a quiet self-mockery dominates the poem's tonality which refers to the dream in terms of anxiety, perhaps despair, at what's been lost as the poet makes his lust apparent. It is a false choice to say who is the most desirable of the two women, "you and another lady", but Heaney's sexual voyeurism brings about his Muse's "wounded stare". Domestic drama indeed, but one marking an injury in his poetry from which it is hard put to recover.

So the last manifestation of the Muse comes in 'Song' quietly, innocently in the form of a maiden.⁴³ Heaney's acceptance in this poem of the maiden's what-is-ness however is tempered by a passage which moves from purely sensual recognition, "rowan like lipsticked girl", to a realisation of the way Nature works through the actual in the girl's speech and song: "mud-flowers of dialect / and the immortelles of perfect pitch". Such consciousness of the image's implications indicate other fields of concern, and we must remember how Heaney came to call his important first book of essays after the notion of control of speech, which certainly should be taken as a marker of his growing self-awareness.

Writing about his transition from Ulster to the South, we can mark a "pure change" in Heaney's work as he takes leave of many of his themes in "Clearances":⁴⁴

The space we stood around had been emptied
Into us to keep, it penetrated
Clearances that suddenly stood open.
High cries were felled and a pure change happened.

No more the careless rhapsode, for in the following poems of his late thirties, especially in this sequence, "Clearances", Heaney switches the central feminine images from those of the maiden to that of the *cailleach*. Coming at a time when he was regrouping energies and establishing himself as a teacher-critic, we must acknowledge that Heaney's sensibility had shifted into a well-defined pattern incorporating past debts, yet straining towards new avenues of thought and expression. Hence the title "Clearances" for the sequence of poems dedicated to Mary Heaney.

As with all those poems dealing with his life in Ulster, Heaney is able to make clear recollection of the objects and actions by which their lives were defined, simple acts such as preparing food, taking the washing down from the line, Easter prayers together - "our *Sons and Lovers* phase" - by which a mother-son relationship can be defined and enriched. That closeness, however, is defined against a growing realisation of gnawing differences as the son returns on vacation from school and college. They play a language game in which they are both complicit: he would not correct her naïve pronunciation, and concede his learnt speech:⁴⁵

... So I governed my tongue
In front of her ...
... I'd *naw* and *aye*
And decently relapse into the wrong
Grammar which kept us allied and at bay.

Mary Heaney had her own rich history of place and family echoing that of the region: a Protestant great-grandmother who converted to Catholicism for love, running "the gauntlet that first Sunday / down the brae to Mass at a panicked gallop": stones only at that time, shaven heads and pitch cauls would come in a more barbaric age. Yet amongst all the uncertainties of life she created a secure haven for her family out of which Heaney quarries so many good memories of the womenfolk in this sequence, so rounding out his portrait of his governing Muse.

I have examined at length in this section Heaney's approach to the feminine in order to demonstrate a critical reading at some variance to critics such as Molino who would assert that Heaney has challenged "tradition, language and myth".⁴⁶ Rather, Heaney has immersed himself in all three aspects of the poetic process and has succeeded, as a complement to his undoubted masculinity, a sensitive and knowing reading of the feminine.

In my own work, I strive to emulate Heaney in this respect through the direct employment of feminine mythic image and vocabulary, especially as they would relate to the central characters of *The Girl* and *Epona*, and also to the minor character of Walker's wife, in the poem *Deluge*. While the choice of *Epona* to characterise the spirit of the River Barwon is predicated upon my reading of Vincent Buckley, the choice of *The Girl* as Walker's guide was taken in the light of this reading of Heaney's work.

Earth and Imagery in Lidiya Šimkutė's poems

from the linen I grew in Samogitia soil
from the coil on the sunbeating rock
from the spell that you cast
in love call on spinning wheel mast ...
LIDIJA ŠIMKUTĖ⁴⁷

Staying connected, keeping the linkages with essential myths of self, which define us in opposition to the grinding blandness of the present and its desouling process, is the poet's task. In this, the poet in our distressed societies is very much the prophet, the seer, the *vate*, whose additional burden it is to bring us to our senses as to the great wrongs suffered by the Earth and its folk, but as well, its beauties and wonders. The latter are too easily put to one side.

Lidiya Šimkutė, has woven her texts from many elements, some terrifying, some wondrous. She occupies a particular space, sharing some of the characteristics of many Australian and Lithuanian poets, yet at the same time has created a singular poetic. In the contemporary poetry of the newly-liberated Baltic Republics, there are significant voices being raised amongst younger poets and intelligencia against the rush to riches and the continued spoilation of the natural world.⁴⁸ The work of poets such as Sigitas Geda, Marcelijus Martinaitis and Judita Vaičiūnaitė is beginning to attract the detailed attention worthy of major European poets. In Latvia, Knuts Skujenieks struggles to express the deep anxieties and contradictions of his condition.

Lidiya Šimkutė has produced a body of lyrics which have slowly come to the attention of Australian audiences through translations and by her readings in Adelaide. Her first book of verse, *Antrasis Ilgesys* [*The Second Longing*] was published in 1979, the second *Prisiminimė Inkarai* [*Anchors of Memory*] in 1982, and the third volume *Vėjas ir Šaknys* [*Wind and Roots*] in 1991: all of these were

published overseas. She has translated her own verse from these collections for publication in English in the USA, Europe & Australia, and has also published an interesting monograph concerning her extensive collection of Lithuanian Bookplates.⁴⁹

As Šimkutė has noted, the experience of emigration as a small child and the long-term involvement with the Lithuanian community in Australia has led to an acute awareness of the linguistic problems attendant on such small communities in an overwhelmingly monolingual environment:

"With time, I became aware that my way of thinking, feeling and being was different from the Anglo-Saxon's way of thinking feeling etc. And, as my poems were mainly concerned with the senses, invariably I was drawn to express myself in my mother tongue"⁵⁰

With her acute sense of being a poet in both the Australian and Lithuanian cultural realms, Lidiija Šimkutė assumed a double burden. But also, her most recent writings redemonstrate her affinity to her generation in the Baltic Republics, and announce a new, prophetic note in her poetry. The assuredness of the prophetic voice arises out of that sense of Self which only comes gradually to the poet. Much of Šimkutė's earlier work was exploratory, and her writing was that of a most lyrical nature poet, but also one that interrogated the world with troubling questions of identity. Her poetry inevitably returns one to the most basic of questions: *whence come we?* As she has stated elsewhere: "I could be seen as a cosmopolitan choosing as a tool the language closest to my heart; but as a poet I feel myself destined to be a lifelong seeker for a place, in both the physical and metaphysical sense".⁵¹ Born in 1942 near Kretinga in Žemaitija [western Lithuania], Šimkutė arrived in Australia in 1949 after several years in post-war German DP camps. She attended school and undertook tertiary studies in Geelong after an internship in Perth and a year's work, then shifted to Adelaide,

where she lives with her husband and is a practising Dietician and Nutritionist. These seem the ordinary bald facts of many of Australia's post-war generation, but Šimkutė undertook something extra in her life when she chose to extend her studies of Lithuanian language and culture, first through the Lithuanian Institute in Chicago, and later through study at Vilnius University and extensive reading.

The publication of her third volume in Lithuania is a milestone for an Australian writer, made possible as much by the sudden release into freedom of the Lithuanian state as the Soviets disintegrated as by the long years of contact and exchange between writers in Australia, Europe, the USA and Lithuania.

As her work has matured, Šimkutė has made a transition through translation into writing, at times, in English, and reading to a widening Australian audience. Then, as her writing has developed, she has taken part in many Adelaide poetry readings as part of Writers' Week in the Festival of Arts and other events, and has been the recipient of Australia Council - Literature Board awards in 1987 and 1991, and a grant from the S.A. Dept. of Arts and Cultural heritage in 1993. She has also taken part in the Spring Poetry Festivals, Lithuania 1992 and 1993.

In all of this activity, Šimkutė has maintained a deep interest in the mythological processes of the Self, reading works in psychology, world religions, mythology and art. She has published in the field of *ex libris* Lithuanian bookplates, having collected widely from a range of modern Australian, American & European artists. While this and her extensive travels do not necessarily explain her growth into poetry as such, it is what she writes which gives us the clue to her impulse as a poet. In an interview with the artist Harijs Piekalns, co-curator of the 1990-91 Adelaide exhibition of recent Latvian art, she highlighted the concept of the relative effects of exile on an artist's work.⁵² That theme of exile is taken up more directly in her article 'Life makes strange connections' in which she cites the

example of poet Oscar Milosz, who despite his stature as a francophone poet, still recognized that it was the separation from his homeland - *Teynė* - which provided him with the impulse to write. Echoing him, Šimkutė says, "the important thing is to have as little as possible in what is called the world of reality - a world ruled by the absurd cult of domination and matter".⁵³

Given the recent backlash in Australia against multiculturalism in the popular media, one may ask why someone who has benefited from the shelter and relative freedom offered by Australia should turn away on this land and language. Any number of post-war immigrants have whole-heartedly profited by their embrace of whatever rhetoric was available at the time. But as Šimkutė has indicated, Australia has been a place of mixed blessings.⁵⁴

Australia has formed me ...
Australia has given me bread and water ...
... Australia has absorbed me into its wide open spaces ...
Australia has been restrictive, narrowing and critical ...
Yet Australia is my land; it has given me shelter ...

As a site for her *topos*, Australia has been too alien to the spirit, having a double-edge of both shelter and inhibitor to the poetic spirit. That is not a singular observation. as shown by the work of other poets such as Dimitris Tsaloumas, and even native-born writers such as Patrick White, who have had to live in the interstices of land and psyche in order to carry on with their craft. There is another factor in her continued sense of alienation from the Australian mainstream, for as Šimkutė noted in discussion with the Lithuanian critic Janina Riškutė and the Austrian poet, Christian Loidl, "Australian poetry is dominated by word games, word mechanisms, ... which seem to be obstacles to be overcome".⁵⁵ Elsewhere, she has characterised her poetry "as appearing spontaneously".⁵⁶ This being the case, her use of a heightened, magical code in her writings, a tendency which has intensified over the years, opened new questions

about the direction of Lithuanian-language poetry "in exile", and how it can now be reconciled with new tendencies which have become apparent since the beginning of this decade, and also how her work is to be considered within the context of the whole of Australian writing.

It was a paradoxical, disturbing, yet inspiring first of six visits for Šimkutė to Lithuania in late 1976 in depths of the Brežnev Era, which provoked trains of thought leading her to an exploration of the mysterious interconnectedness of Self and the world. That, and a keen sense of aloneness occasioned by a realisation of the early loss of a twin sister, may have propelled Šimkutė into writing: "for me, personally, poetry is the speech of the soul, and my soul, whether I wish it or not, grows out of the Lithuanian soil".⁵⁷ Being a writer in the Lithuanian language in a still overwhelmingly monolingual and mon(oton)ocultural Australia can only heighten that sense of separation from an "environment where the body had learned to cope but my mind was neither confident nor at home. For there were many people who, I found, did not want to understand, and whom I could not understand". Hence, like other Lithuanian poets such as Jonas Mekas in New York , or Oscar Milosz in Paris, Lidiya Šimkutė listens to the inner Self, constructing prayers to "broken roots".

What then are these unfathomable anchors which bind her to such a relatively small country half a world away? It is a beautiful country as I found in my visit during the (European) Summer of 1992: deep forests, clear rivers and skies, low rolling hills, farmsteads. To some extent a closer look at reality would show the negatives of poor farms and failed collectives, graceful cities surrounded by Soviet-built highrise flats, the spectre of the Černobyl-model nuclear reactor at Ingalina. But these are the lots handed out by Recent History and can be ameliorated. The deeper memories are preindustrial. Children still go out to stay

with relatives in the countryside during the long Summer break, one only need step off the main Riga - Klaipėda (Memel) road a hundred metres or so, and lunge deep into a timeless forest, know stillness, see farmers working *with* the earth as their forebears have done: such that the elements of a sustaining myth, fostered by stories and legends of parents and readings, can be realised in a way that we cannot do in our Antipodean cities. Only by stepping back into her remembered childhood, Šimkutė was able to release the storehouse which had awaited her.

The logic of language choice becomes inescapable: to stay true to herself Šimkutė had to choose a hard road for the exploration of the senses. It is not the choice that this English-speaking country would normally condone, let alone encourage. We come part of the way with the Leros Press series of bilingual texts, such as Louis de Paor's *Aimsir Bhreicneach - Freckled Weather* (1993). Here in Australia, one could argue that immigrant languages are doomed, that they are irrelevant in this day of English-language supremacy: the same could even be said of any so-called minor language in the European context.⁵⁸ But such is a terrible hybris with which one day the gods will indict the utterers. Each possible language brings to bear on the world its own special subtlety, nuances & obscurities. For example, let us look at a deceptively simple phrase taken from the Vulgate Bible, Genesis 1:13:

Latin:	Fiat lux. Et facta est lux.
Italian:	Sia luce. E fu luce.
Lithuanian:	Tegul būna šviesa, ir būvo šviesa.
English:	Let there be light. And there was light.

How different is each, if only in phonology and syntax, how rich is the treasure-trove of tongues! In a conservative language such as Lithuanian, the organisation of thought is tighter, compacting the semic code through verbal modes, allowing a greater flexibility of word-order than in an analytic tongue such as English. For example, in one passage we read:

Tu ateini ir išeini,
Stabteli ir praeini,
Tai ir yra
Mano amžinybė.

A tension is established between the various modes of *eiti* (to go): *at* -eini (come), *iš* -eini (leave, go out), *pra* -eini (go past, pass by), which really cannot be matched in the English version:

You come,
Hesitate
then pass.

That is
My eternity.

A beginning can be made in exploring poems from Šimkutė's works. The first brief poem of all in *Antrasis Ilgesys* [*The Second Longing*], 'Juodžemis' ['Black Earth'], is physical in its expression of desire to regain the lost motherland, but also could be read as desire to transcend the reality of earth into something more sublime.

This is a recurring theme in her poetry:

Siekiu mėlynos erdvės
Nes juodžemio grumstas rankoj.
Žydra erdvė akinanti,
Kai juodžemio grumstas rankoj.
Erdvė man nepasiekiamą,
Kol juodžemio grumstas rankoj.

In her own translation, this reads as:

I reach for the blue sky
Black earth is in my hands

The blueness is blinding
When black earth is in my hands

The sky is beyond my reach
While the black earth is in my hands.

The poem turns on the contact between the speaker and a clod, "grumstas" of black earth, something of the like not known on this continent. It is peaty,

substantial, having its own distinctive odour, we may catch its trace sitting in a pine plantation on a cool autumnal evening, or in a single malt whisky. Moreover, this *juodžemis* is the first manifestation of the lost motherland. Such deconnexion with the mythic Earthmother, *Žemyna*, had been likened by the noted archaeologist Marija Gimbutas to the Greek notion of Demeter in all her functions.⁵⁹ We are aware of the custom of emigrants and exiles to take with them at least a handful of their native soil, or even a sprig of flowers. If it is not possible at the time of exile, their children at least can return, or have smuggled out some few grains of sand for their graves. So, to hold a clump of mother-earth in the hand is to reconnect oneself with that land's psyche no less, to know that which gave one birth.

'Žiema' ['Winter'] reinforces the already present images of darkness, and adds a new tension:

Badas paskleidė žolėje endemijos skraistę,
Dangus išblykšęs,
Debesys liesi ir kaulėti
Išalkusi žiema valgo
iš mano saulėto delno.

Laikas jau tempia stygą,
Jau virpa strėlė lanke,
Gimsta džiaugsmingas ilgesys -
sutiksiu pavasarį erdvėje.

This translates as:

Hunger prowls the grass
The sky is pale
Clouds bony and lean
Winter eats the Sun
from my palm.
Time pulls the bow,
The arrow of life trembles
Joy and longing are born
with the Spring.

Here Šimkutė re-echoes old beliefs still underpinning Lithuanian spirituality. The absolute contrast between *žiema* (winter) and *pavasaris* (spring) ensures an all-pervading tension: winter's days are brief, light is fleeting, and snow blankets the whole country, freezing the earth for three or more months. It is so cold that birds will fall dead out of the sky, frozen in mid-flight. No wonder that world is haunted by wolfish hunger. But Spring heralds Summer, *vasara*, and in this memories and imagination revive hope: this is the bowstring's tension, the arrow's flight. A third short poem, 'Nebūtis' ['Nonbeing'], is similarly bleak and there is no movement towards hope. Yet the images are those of earth, grass and wind:

Paklydęs vėjas nebežino laiko
ir uždusęs slepiasi slėny.

Nekalta žolė
negailestingai čiulpa žemės sultis:
kažkieno žingsniai mindo sielvartą.

That is,

The wind is lost,
Purpose and time
forgotten
It hides unbreathing in the valley.

The grass
sucks the earth.
Steps trample
the grief.

"Grief" is demonstrated through the triple negatives, *ne*-bežino (not knows), *ne*-kalta (guiltless) *ne*-gailestingai (cruelly), the verbal violence of *čiulpia* (sucks) and *mindu* (tramples), and most of all, by the tonality set in train by the very first word, *paklydęs* (lost). It is as though one's very being is stripped away. *Vėjas* (wind) echoes *vėlė* (soul) in as much as *spiritus* or *psyche* underline a reading of *wind*. In these three brief poems, one senses the first stirrings of an individual voice, lyric, but dark as *juodžemis* ('blackearth') itself. We enter an alien territory, a land of

auguries, of *laumės* and *velniai*. It is not an easy place to imagine, half a planet away. It must be constantly invoked, remembered, mused upon: this is an exile's task. Her third volume, *Vėjas ir Šaknys* [*Wind and Roots*], brings together elements of her first two books. A third and newest, section, 'Sudužusio Vėjo Šukės', ['The Shattered Wind']. Šimkutė chose the title of her collection symbolically as it depicts her own destiny. Her roots, still deep in the Lithuanian soil, yet fate has blown her like the wind to have settled in a vast, so different Continent, and being committed to travel to other countries of the world. In one of the poems from this volume, which is given here in part, Šimkutė explores a mysterious and ineffable presence occasioned by the realization that dreams as much as language can create the necessary fortress in which an inner life can flourish.

Žvakės

Šešėliai dūžta kolonom
ir verkia sirenų balsai.

Apsvaigęs vakaras
skęsta užmaršty,
o nepaklūstanti ranka
braižo rytietiškų simbolių
ant pilkos sienos ...

Her English version reads as:

Candles

Siren voices
Shatter the columns

An uncontrollable hand
Etches symbols
On a watery wall.

*

Following Your eyes
I see
And feel
You in me ...

In poems such as these, developed out of the original Lithuanian versions, Šimkutė emphasises the interconnectedness between an evolving and essential

mythology and our Self-realisation. For her, mythology as a human construct enabling us to fit into an otherwise inexplicable world. Yet this mythology takes on an autonomous existence, much like the act of speech itself and grows differentially according to the inclination of each people. For example, gender aspects of the Sun and Moon are reversed from our usual way of thinking: Saulė (Sun) is female, while Mėnulis is masculine. The consequent reworking of mythic elements can be shown in this *daina* in which Perkūnas (Thunder) is pictured as the avenger of the Sun's honour:⁶⁰

Mėnulis walked alone
 fell in love with Aušrinė
 Perkūnas, greatly enraged,
 Smote him in half:
 "Why did you leave Saulė?
 Fall in love with Aušrinė?
 Walk alone at night?

As shown by Marija Gimbutas and Algirdas Greimas, Baltic mythology took on a structure and complexity to rival the Classical, Indic and Norse variants of the basic Indo-European materials. While the Baltic variants of the heroic tales have been only partially kept, much of the day-to-day material was preserved against the tides of Christianity and colonial occupation in scattered farming households and amongst the working population, a situation not unlike that in the Celtic lands. The chief repository of this mythology is a vast collection of folk-song: in their various categories known as *daina* 'song', *giesmė* 'hymn' and *rauda* 'lament'. In her travels to Lithuania, Šimkutė has acquired several collections of folk-song material, and has access to a range of other materials in collections both here and overseas, which constitute a constant mine of references for her writing.

In reading collections and translations of the *Dainos* in which this mythology is preserved, one senses a closeness to the natural world and an almost Blakean

moral view of its relationship with the human. She displays this quality in 'Svajonės' ['Beyond Cloud], in both phrasing and in imagery:

Svajonės

I

Ši vakarą
neisiu į dangų
ir lydimą žvaigždės
pasitiksiu mėnulį.

Neradusi atramos
prisėsiu prie savęs
ir padainuosiu sau dainelę -

tokią švelnią,
tokią švelnią ...

This reads in her translation:

Beyond Cloud

I

This evening
I'll face the stars.

Without a friend
I'll sit
By my side
And sing a song
Heard elsewhere. ...

Šimkutė herself has written extensively on the role of mythology for Lithuanian readers, demonstrating how the ancient beliefs have persisted despite christianisation, and been incorporated into current Lithuanian religious and poetic language.⁶¹ Pondering on the elements of originality and universality of Lithuanian mythology, with particular reference to the well-known folk-tale 'Eglė Queen of the Serpents', as compared to other nations' folk-tales, it can be said that heightening and contrasting their peculiarities, along with the collective unconscious and universality of symbols, define specific national characteristics.⁶² As in other European cultures, the older names for spiritual entities have become demonised in part, though through the efforts of lexicographers, writers - especially poets - there still exists a continuity of mythological language from the

present till prehistoric times. The spirits of place are felt presences as much as they are in Éire or India, and are not the learned invocations of a few scholars.

It is that lack of felt presence in Australia which had driven Šimkutė in on herself in her earlier poems, and then to travel out to restore "broken" connections. Her poetry echoes this shift. The first volume, *Antrasis Ilgesys* [*The Second Longing*], had explored themes of love, loss, time, and grappled with "the fragility of the human being".⁶³ Then in *Prisiminimų Inkarai* [*anchors of Memory*], Šimkutė developed her examination of memory, silence and essential mythologies, which is carried over to this third volume. In a brief lyric 'Nereimstanti jūra', Šimkutė demonstrates how recent experiences have refined her poetry in the direction of a more lyrical path:

Nereimstanti jūra
baltais dantimis
drasko uolas.

Vėjas skundžiasi
kad Perkūnas
perskėlė Mėnulį.

In her provisional translation this reads:

The restless sea
with white teeth
tears at the rocks.

The wind complains
that Thunder
has split the Moon.

Short pieces like this constitute the bulk of *Vėjas ir Šaknys* [*Wind and Roots*] and as such encompass both the mythological aspects of Lithuanian verse and a keen sense of language. Those natural elements of sun, sky, earth, wave, rock, time and the injured Moon recur throughout her lyrics, while the poetic structure is closely linked in metre and vocabulary to the genre known as *dainos*. Christian Loidl, the

Austrian poet, in his essay 'Body of syllables - the Poet Lidiija Šimkutė', has called the *daina* "a basic force of Lithuanian folklore ... [consisting] in the awareness of the gap between what is and the ideal, together with a longing to bridge the gap...".⁶⁴ The imagery is sparse, much more concentrated than most Lithuanian poetry in its willing limitation of images employed.

The concentrated, inflected, nature of the language also contributes to the poetry's beauty and difficulty. These aspects are not fully reflected in the process of translation, even in some of Šimkutė's own versions. And whilst thinking about her use of language and *daina*-like structures, it becomes apparent that the Lithuanian-language lyrics could well be set to music, although there would be some problems with a shift into English translation which would also entail subtle shifts in meaning. For example, as there is no prefixing definite article in Lithuanian, but rather an adjectival suffix - e.g., *geras vyras*, '(a) good man' vs. *gerasis vyras*, 'the good man' - introduction of the definite article into a translated phrase, even if understood or demanded by colloquial English, skews sense and rhythm, so that "nerimstanti jūra" could equally be "a restless sea", so shifting imagery into a less definable area.

Also there is the usual problem of translation in that there is never a straight match between words and senses: "nerimstanti" does indicate "restless", but the word's core /-rim-/ has more to do with "peace", so while "restless" makes do, the sea's deep discontent becomes a surface thing. Likewise "skundžiasi" is a bitter, cutting word, linking euphonically and etymologically through the root / -sk- / with "perskėlė" - translation necessarily loses both qualities. One could go on, and as other Australian translators have noted, it is the poetry one tries to capture, as much as the literal sense.

Another difficulty in translation is the loss of referents, for example, very few anglophone readers would recognize Perkūnas as the Thunder God: substituting either Thor or Zeus would introduce a false cultural bias, and disturb the set of relationships between mythic elements. "Thunder" is only a temporary measure, although a proper scholarly apparatus in a full edition would be most useful to readers. Further, how many general readers would be familiar with the legends in which Perkūnas and Mėnulis ('Moon') play out their quarrel? But Baltic mythology, as noted above, is self-contained and needs the work to become current in English translation as much as Celtic mythology needed that work before poets of the calibre of Yeats and Heaney could hammer out their mature poetry.

Having undertaken the devil's task of working between "broken roots" and what the Irish poet John Montague calls a "grafted tongue", Šimkutė has now had to develop a sharper critical sense of herself and her inheritance. In interview with the Lithuanian writer Jurga Ivanauskaitė, Šimkutė has indicated how far her impulse to write has become better understood. "Not long ago, I read some fine Anaïs Nin's pieces, in which she answered the question, why it is we write. A Woman's writing - always for whom the plain truth is unsatisfactory. We desire and at the same time reject ... the results of our imposed Christian culture".⁶⁵

This becomes clearer in excerpts from sequences such as 'Vidudienio Kaitra' ['The Heat of Noon'] which show a willingness to grapple with major ethical questions. By prefacing these poems with a direct quotation from Gen. 2, "And God said to him, from all the trees ... ", Šimkutė has indicated her puzzlement over the strange Christian doctrine of Original Sin. "This aspect of the Christian faith has always bothered me - the fact that we are born with Original Sin - so we are born with GUILT - and - this is a strong component of Life - and I see this in my mother and other Lithuanians although no doubt it appears in all Catholics, perhaps [all] Christians".⁶⁶ In remembering her visits to Lithuania, Šimkutė noted the "old

women with their rosary beads and walking on their knees for penance (with their black scarves) by Aušros Vartai [Eastern Gate in Vilnius] which houses the miraculous Black Madonna. These women have always fascinated me as an example of this GUILT they feel, and the obligation they seem to have in demonstrating their penance":

Nuskynus obuolį nuo šakos
ir atsikandus uždrausto vaisaus
- buvau ištremta į žemę.

Taip ir likau ieškanti
pažinties ir gyvybės medžio.

In her translation:

Having picked the apple
and bitten the forbidden fruit
- I was exiled to earth.

I remain searching
for the tree
of knowledge and life.

In this and other recent work, especially her translation into Lithuanian of sections of the 'Thunder Perfect Mind' from the Nag Hammadi gnostic texts in *Poezijos Pavasaris* 92, suggest new directions in bringing to awareness our ambivalent human characteristics and the awakening of Wisdom (Sophia) in the ambivalent symbol of the Serpent. She has discussed at length with Jurga Ivanauskaitė the symbol of the Serpent as it appears in both Lithuanian and Christian myth. Whilst in Christian mythology, the Serpent is seen as having seduced Eve from her initial state of Grace, and is consequently the co-initiator of mankind's fall into Original Sin, in Gnostic doctrine, the Serpent is not seen as an instrument of evil, but rather as a symbol of absolute knowledge, "hence it brings together Heaven, Earth & the Under/Otherworlds".⁶⁷ Likewise, in Baltic mythology, the small green snake - *Žaltys* - is still honoured by the farmer's wife with a nightly plate of milk, an act of remembrance of earlier homages to Patrimpas [also Angis], the Baltic counterpart of Mitra.⁶⁸ Similar struggles over the interpretation of the serpent symbol is reflected in the work of the contemporary Irish poet, Thomas Kinsella, whose use of this motif derives from an extensive

reading of Jung and other writers: without using the term "gnosis", Kinsella's views are considerably divergent from what one would view as standard Catholicism. This is a long-engrained Irish habit, as can be seen in Mary Condren's discussion of the role of women in Celtic Ireland and also in the continuing debate within Western Christianity. (Condren, 1989).

This willingness to reinterpret the old stories found in the *dainos* in the light of recent ethnography and religious speculation makes for a greatly limited audience amongst the Lithuanian community in Australia. As Šimkutė has said, "a poet wants to have contact, to have dealings with others, to go and open another heart ...", so that these new notes in her work have begun to find new audiences. Firstly, the publication of her third volume, a range of interviews during her most recent visits and translations from the Nag Hammadi texts, in Lithuania, represent a significant opening up of a wider audience. Readings in Vilnius and contact with a range of Lithuanian poets in Lithuania and the USA have been important and confirmed her valuation of herself as a practising poet. But also there has been increasing recognition of Šimkutė's work here in Australia - especially in Adelaide - where she has given a range of readings of new works in English .

The poems, which draw upon the core of Lithuanian mythology and folk-tales, she calls magical incantations, they draw the general reader into a new world. The following poem, 'I'll spin you a tale', draws upon the tragic story of Eglė,⁶⁹ the Serpents' Queen, who incurs the jealousy of her consort, Angis, is metamorphosed into a (spruce) tree:

I'LL SPIN YOU A TALE
my favorite tale
of Egle the queen , from a forest unseen
from the sleeve of her dress
a story that is continually spun
of song lost in sea
of silken clear thread
of linen, rye bread
to remind you of me

from words so bizarre
i'll dig up a state oh so strange
 for your imaginary range
from pillow on bed and my demonic head
 and a chance step into the hue ...

The tone is set in this poem by the verb "spin", and similarly in the passage given at the beginning of this article by the verb "weave". In one sense, to spin and weave are women's work, set aside for the long winter nights, but also are an apt metaphor for the making of magical tales such as that of Egle's transformation and drowning - her bitter tears becoming the amber washed up onto the shores after a storm, and worn by women wherever they live around the Baltic Sea's shores. In four 'Magical Incantations', Šimkutė has reached back into the oldest layers of Baltic mythology, but also the elements invoked, spinning and weaving, making and gifting, are universal, building the necessary bridges between that past and our present. Šimkutė's gift to us is to make that imagined past alive so that we can enter into dialogue with her about how deeply rooted tree of Self can withstand the cruel winds of passage.

Šimkutė's published work as it stands has marked a clear statement of one poet's search for the inner Self. While one could merely imagine a prelapsarian, preindustrial world, wherein life is lived according to an idealised myth, she has known that the world is to be lived in and that the poet's task is to make essential connections between the present and the imagining world, making us more authentic beings than we are now. This Australia, whilst giving her "shelter", also proved to have had its difficulties. She has chosen to go inwards and connect with archaic memory and transcendence. Some writers would have us appropriate Aboriginal mytholgy in order to make us more Australian, but it takes a far greater cost, as Šimkutė has found out, to reject that as inappropriate and go back to the birthland in order to construct an autonomous and fruitful Self. As one part of the incantations reads:

I weave you a sash
from serpent's call on the block
and the stir in the sting
from the shadow of passing cloud
... Spring is in the air.

Progress from an exploration of one's Self, whether defined against a feeling of loss or through a joyous assertion of a spirituality abroad in the world, towards a broader, more public voice has not been easy for Šimkutė. However, it is a progression that other Baltic poets, whether living in the Republics or in Australia, of her generation have made. What marks out her poetic as being noteworthy are those special senses of seeing and saying.

The closest parallels in voice I could advance as initial comparisons for Australian readers are those of Antigone Kefalá, whose acute sense of displacement has resolved into a finely attuned perception of her current environment and Vicki Viidikas, of Estonian parentage, whose scarred dreaming owes more to her reactions to the Australian, and now Indian, worlds. These fine writers are like Šimkutė in their ability to stand back and write of their experiences, interpreting this country in styles growing out of their feminine and immigrant backgrounds. But she is unlike them in her newly evolving incantatory style: a new voice is emerging in Australian poetry.

A group of English-language poems under the title, 'Frames of Mind', were published in *Southerly* (54:4): these are a translated and re-worked cycle from her second book, *Prisiminimų Inkarai* [*Anchors of Memory*]. Another group of Lithuanian-language poems were published this March in the Lithuanian journal, *Mūsų Pastogė*. These short verses follow the form and tenor of her third volume - for example:

THE CLOUDS DO NOT LOSE THEIR WAY
Nor the wind

Only we
Having forgotten our purpose
Drift through alien spaces

These newest writings have not been solely focused in English, but are also finding publication in Lithuanian, there being themes and structures held in common - for example:

IŠ MANO DELNO

išskrido žvaigždės

į tolimą kelią

sekdamos

Tavo kelionę.

In my translation, this reads:

STARS FLEW

from my palm

to a distant land

following

Your journey.

It will take time for the new poems to emerge fully, but Šimkutė is a very active writer, presenting her work in Adelaide, and travelling to both the USA and Europe, and she has started to gain the wider audience in Australia which befits her work. In recognition of the need to speak out to a wider audience, she has undertaken the arduous task of translating and reworking the bulk of her work as given in the three books from Lithuanian into new English-language cycles and titles. She has also been writing more poems in English directly, so as to become a truly bilingual poet. While this may seem to contradict the earlier statements about poetic sensibility as being embodied within a particular language, that is not being denied, but there is a need to make one's work known. Translation is a proper act, especially if it represents a sensitive interpretation of the original work. I had earlier mentioned Louis de Paor's bilingual publication of his *Aimsir Bhreacneach*, and mention could be made of *The Book of Epigrams* by Dimitris Tsaloumas or Kevin Hart's translations of Giuseppe Ungaretti. These and other volumes have begun to grace our bookshelves. So surely Šimkutė's work, given its connections with such an ancient culture, its lyrical strength and development over the last decade, deserves sympathetic bilingual publication in Australia and elsewhere.

A realm remembered

The earth, neither compassionate nor evil, neither beautiful nor
atrocious, persisted, innocent, open to pain and desire.

CZESLAW MILOSZ⁷⁰

Czeslaw Milosz has essayed in prose a number of times into a search for self-definition, this process having gone on for the past thirty years or so. Beginning with *Native Realm*, Milosz has gathered a range of memoirs such as 'Lauda', through to *The Issa Valley*, and more recently in *Beginning with My Streets*, he has explored the tensions implicit in being a Lithuanian - Polish expatriate intellectual in a post-War world.⁷¹

He has led an interesting life, to say the least. Born in 1911 in what is now Lietuva,⁷² he moved about as a child through the Eastern Marches of Europe until his family settled down on a country estate. After a Catholic schooling he attended the fabled University of Vilnius.⁷³ During that period the University was a Polish-language institution as Poland's dictator, Giniot-Pilsudki had seized that eastern slice of Lietuva so controlling the Warszawa - Grodno - Vilnius - St. Petersburg railway line. Milosz was attracted to a range of literary-political groups such as the Students Vagabond Club and the Intellectuals Club, slowly drifting towards a more or less Left-radical position. He edited some anthologies of verse and graduated as *magister iuris*, thence launching himself into the disturbed eddies of a Europe torn between two rival ideologies and their beast-masters. But he survived the War and later served unhappily in the new Polish state before leaving for Paris in 1951, and a decade later taking up a teaching position at Berkeley.⁷⁴

Native Realm is subtitled "a search for self-definition" and proceeds in the form of a personal and intellectual biography. Most importantly for our discussion of "self-definition", it is written in hindsight over the space of a half-century and the text has a sharp political edge to it: *liberal* in the proper sense of the word, and generous even to those men whom he castigated for their sins. His political

awareness was sharpened by displacement: whilst living in San Francisco, a political refugee or exile, Milosz had found that Western Europe - here meaning Britain, France and the USA - had a "false" image of Europe to the East of the Oder-Niesse line.⁷⁵ In deciding to write about himself, Milosz initially defined himself as "an Eastern European" indicating that this attempt to explain another Europe was now the beginning of "a voyage into the heart of my own, yet not wholly my own, past".⁷⁶ Hence, the second quality of Milosz's style, *inclusiveness*.

For his first twenty years Milosz had lived entirely within the Baltic sphere into which he had been born. *Native Realm* allows him to trace out the tangled histories of place and many nations, demonstrating through his own family how inseparable these threads had become. While some German ties are indicated, on his mother's side the Lithuanian Kurnaitis and Syrutis families were the strongest influences,⁷⁷ whereas the father's family honoured distant connections with the fabled progenitor of the Milosz clan. Demonstrating the vagaries of definitions of state and nationality, Milosz traces out the contradictory career of his cousin, Oscar Venceslas Lubicz-Milosz, 1877 - 1939, a son of minor gentry, who took to the vocation of Parisian boulevardier and poet of note. Later in life he served as an envoy of the newly-independent republic to France during the inter-War years, having acquired the Lithuanian language by rummaging through dictionaries to supplement any childhood knowledge. Comments by Milosz about his cousin's example indicate a motive for leaving Soviet-occupied Poland, if only for the chance to breathe, and also may be a factor in his current ambassadorial activities in Lithuania and Poland.

Family then, was one element in Milosz's search for self-definition. The second element was the actual physicality of the land itself. *Native Realm* has some small interesting passages in which he describes his homeland. These elements are picked up again in *The Issa Valley*. Like Mickiewicz in the epic poem, *Pan Tadeusz*,⁷⁸ Milosz explores place in such detail that the valley's rhythms echo life's essential patterns for all inhabitants regardless of labels of nationality or religion. Place

imposes patterns on the developing selfhood of a youth for whom one day, or one month can provide as many experiences as a lifetime for most people. His favourite remembered place maintains its hold during the course of his varied travels, the association between activity and place explicit: "I remember the shore of a lake. On one side were post-glacial hills covered with fields and villages: on the other, forest".⁷⁹

Similar memories have been expressed by Rose Zwi about her childhood in the town of Žagrė, to the north of the country on the Latvian border. For Zwi however, the forests and parks became the setting for events so sinister that whatever was beautiful in that land, memory has become sullied beyond all mention. Yet as she notes, "remembering may not be enough, but to forget is unconscionable".⁸⁰ While her comment is made in the context of the murder of at least 3000 people, including members of her own family, it is a reminder that forgetting the past can only make us ignorant of what we are, and lead us into believing that we are somehow able to escape our histories. That is simply not possible.

Another critic, Simon Schama, demonstrates this notion quite clearly as well. In his detailed examination of the connexions between place and formation of self-image, Schama begins in the dark, tangled forests of Biełowieża on the borderlands between Poland and Lithuania. There, where his forebears were Jewish wood merchants, the deepest roots of family and the tragic histories of many nations and religions are inextricably intertwined.⁸¹ Like Miłosz, Schama travels well beyond his starting point, and uses the intersections of place and memory to construct new ways of self-examination, trying to grapple with so many counter-currents of European and American history.

In his youth, the fields and forests of his native countryside were about as close to unsullied Paradise as Miłosz could get. As important, that sense of Paradise is heightened by a sense of contrasts with the lands beyond the Sparrow Hills out to the wilderness of Siberia where his father loved to hunt, or the dull greyness of

Russia proper - "a chaos and an infinity".⁸² In his account of the spiritual qualities of the Lithuanian countryside, Milosz echoes other Lithuanian writers such as Kristijonas Donelaitis who wrote *Metai - The Four Seasons of the Year* in Latin hexameters,⁸³ through to the contemporary poet Sigitas Geda.

Vilnius, "city of my youth" is detailed in *Native Realm* as a lively place of some 200,000 inhabitants, much the same as Geelong today, but was an important inhabited site dating back well before the unification of the Lithuanian State in the thirteenth century as shown by recent excavations.⁸⁴ Pilsudski's *coup d'état* in Poland and subsequent invasion of what was termed Central Lithuania,⁸⁵ resulted in the flight of many Lithuanian intellectuals to Kaunas downriver, while the remnant inhabitants were split in professing either Polish or Yiddish to the new authorities. Milosz, half-Lithuanian, stayed on, though his mother Kurnaitytė was able to negotiate the new borders with insolent ease: passports, after all, are only pieces of paper serving to hinder the free flow of people and families.

In my childhood, this region was the mysterious origin of many colourful items for my albums. Its stamps bore both the Polish white eagle and the Lithuanian knight in an effort to evoke the long-lost Jagellion Commonwealth. No one knew where it was, and I could not find it on the pages of any post-War atlas. Perhaps it was as artificial a creation as Never-Never Land or Garfield Crimmins' creation - *La République de Reves*.⁸⁶

Milosz's more detailed account of the city as place had to wait till the publication of *Beginning with my Streets* in which he speaks of the "wealth" of his memories and provides a very detailed correspondence between certain streets of the Old City - Antokol, Arsenal, Baszta, Foundry, German and Wilenska - and how each connected out to the various points of the surrounding countryside or to the Rivers Nemunas, Vilija and Nėris. His detailed descriptions can be followed even on a present-day tourist map though one must make a few adjustments clearing away the dross of a half-century of Soviet overlays. Today though, this city once both Jesuitical and Masonic has put its linguistic house more or less in order - the

street signs are in Lithuanian, not Polish, not Russian - while the city Police speak a Belarus-Polish jargon when patrolling in the Summer. As my host in Vilnius, Adomas Butrimas, remarked as I was leaving for a long day's journey by bus to Warszawa in August 1992, "in summer the Lithuanians leave for the forests, only the Slavs and Turks remain at the railway stations": in some ways Vilnius is still a frontier town.

Milosz is a generous writer, allowing space for other voices. In the Chapter, 'Dialogue about Wilno with Tomas Venclova', Milosz joins with another poet sharing a passion for the same place, engaging in a bantering way across a linguistic and historic divide.⁸⁷ What emerges in their statements is a common rootedness, even though the city had changed, in some ways totally, over a generational gap spanning the 1940s to the 1960s. Still, the spirit and essence of place remained. Perhaps it is the persistence of red terra-cotta roofs set against whitewashed walls and the green of oaken forests which flow into the city, even shielding the inhabitants' eyes from the ugly realities of high-rise apartments along Taikos street and surrounding districts.

While I have concentrated on only this one aspect of the search by Milosz for self-definition, it links quite readily with other poets' working through to their own notions of self and for my purposes the links in the processes engaged in by both Séamus Heaney and Sigita Geda are apparent and demonstrable. For Milosz the kernel of self had to be found in the process of recovery of specific memories which could be shorn up against the brutal uncertainties of war, displacement and exile, no less than T. S. Eliot was able to do in his series of poems such as 'The Waste Land' in dealing with post - WWI displacements. Milosz's memoirs are reconstructions, rather than direct recalls from a jotted Diary, but given the acceptance of them by his peers, we accept them as realities and can come to approach a state in which we are subsumed in his fabulous realm.

Three poems

But what gives order to this realm? Without what would we be as dumb beast, knowing but articulate, unable to sift out those threads which lead us backwards to the realm of self? Milosz brings his two concerns of origin and order together in his recent collection of poems, *Provinces: Poems 1987 - 1991*.⁸⁸

'Linnaeus' explores that aspect of order in Nature which is both inherent and transparent to the informed mind, and had been displayed by Milosz in his prose writings, as discussed previously. His strategy is first to recall the delights of youth and then by rich association and prayer, pay tribute to this protean figure, seminal not only for Milosz in his youthful development, but a key figure in the whole of the Western intellectual enterprise.

The poem is sited in early summer with suggestions of youthful energy:⁸⁹

Green young leaves. A cuckoo. Echo
To get up at four in the morning, to run to the river
Which steams, smooth to the rising sun.

This is a joyous rural boyhood in which Milosz can rightly call Linnaeus "one of us", enabled to live "every day in hymn, in rapture", and by conscious action, maintaining the link, Milosz imagines the boy Linnaeus "with his botanic box" giving names to creation "like Adam in the garden". Milosz pictures Linnaeus as called to undertake the task started by the first man before he was "expelled too early" - an expulsion echoing the poet's later exile. The fruits of Linnaeus' labours were to be found in the appreciation of the Milosz family at a time when so much

... on earth
Was unattainable ... perishing,
Here we could love, safe from loss

The poem closes with a prayer we can heartily echo for ourselves:

May his household, orangery, the garden
In which he grew plants from overseas
Be blessed with peace and well-being

But even so, the poem returns to Milosz himself as the maker of this "chemical ode", who in contrast to Linnaeus has been -

... deprived of harmony
Am a wanderer and a gatherer of visible forms,
Envyng them ...

In his self-awareness Milosz intimates both the joys of innocent youth and the bitterness of a world gone awry, as he can look back into the past and carefully conflate all aspects, the 1920s melding into the 1940s without rupture. In as much as Milosz is right in doing this - the great temporal fault-line between the old Europe and our present lies somewhere then, the applications of machinery and ideology altering the world beyond all imagining thereafter.

That note of regret is amplified in its specifics through a dialogue Milosz undertakes with his cousin and predecessor, Oscar Milosz in 'The Thistle, The Nettle': "When", he asks himself of an uncertain future, "after the clamor of tongues, the award goes to silence ... who shall I be?" ⁹⁰ By setting the growths of wastelands, "rusty railroad track, the sky, silence" as a metaphor for what will become of Nature after our inevitable failure, Milosz admits to himself and to us as well the greatest fear of any poet is that "silence"

But this is not just the dead silence of an endworld, rather the dumbness of the victim, of the sufferant who has failed "to be redeemed by the gift of arranging words". This is the closest Milosz comes to despair, yet even in this state echoing George Steiner's musings in both *After Babel* and *Language and Silence* on the great horrors of that last War, there is a kind of beauty sought even in the lowliest and most hurtful of flowers - "the thistle, the nettle, the burdock, the belladonna".

Like an Orpheus, we too are enjoined often enough to not look back lest we lose the irrecoverable past and yet, on the other hand, we are kept in the dark about what will be our lot in coming days. If the past was slippery and recounted as a series of contradictions, then little wonder that we see our lot as having to navigate by uncertain and false stars, speeding us to seek our way in auguries, horoscopes and other superstitions.

How did poets cope with the future in those days? W. H. Auden and Robert Graves, of all the modern English-language poets, were the most clearsighted, in their highly contradictory ways. While I have a great affection for Graves and his reassertion of the importance of mythologies in the construction of one's poetic,

it was Auden most sanguine, who took stock of himself and his world newly at war in 'New Year Letter'.⁹¹ He writes:

To set in order - that's the task
Both Eros and Apollo ask;
For Art and Life agree in this
That each intends a synthesis,
That order which must be the end
That all self-loving things intend
Who struggle for liberty,
Who use, that is, their will to be.

A few months into the German War and with the Americans wavering, it was a time of uncertainty and anxiety, even for someone who had quite deliberately left the scene of conflict. Could Auden see past the immediate? At least he was not a total pessimist and held some value in men's capabilities to do good regardless of the circumstances they found themselves in, at that time at least. But that was at mid-century. Forty years later in 'A Poem for the End of the Century', Milosz was able to delve into the still-festering canker that had been hidden in the façade of post-war prosperity: *Angst* is never vanquished, it merely hides behind the rock of a masked self.⁹²

Why then if "the notion of sin had vanished" and the Earth in a state of "universal peace" would the speaker be impelled to search for "an answer" to an unasked, unarticulated question? "Innocence" may well have been a Potemkin village, rather, "pain and guilt" are inherent "[i]n the structure of the world". Milosz's vision is profoundly antiseccular owing more to his Catholic, almost Manichaean one may imagine, leanings and origins than to the thin veneers of materialism.

Given the day on which I write this entry to my Journal, it is appropriate to consider Milosz's lines:⁹³

Don't think, don't remember
the death on the cross,
Though everyday He dies,
The only one, all-loving
Who without any need
Consented and allowed
To exist all that is,
Including nails of torture.

He acknowledges Christ's act of Redemption as an act of will rather than mere Fate, yet like Fate His act was "totally enigmatic" because we in our limitations as men cannot articulate such love which goes beyond speech, beyond the reach of mere wordsmiths.

Certainly, there has been a long-needed reappraisal of Milosz's stature as a poet, both by the Europeans and Americans, straddling as he does the Atlantic and two continents. Milosz is belatedly seen as one of those European poets who have had such a profound impact upon American letters since the publication in 1976 of Robert Pinsky's *The Situation of Poetry*. Pinsky, still harbouring New Criticism as a secret ideal had shunned "discursiveness" at a time when such a quality was being exploited by Milosz and others as an antidote to the tightening restrictions of form which reflected the increasing chill of the Cold War.

In her account of a recent four-day festival honouring Milosz, Martha Bayles lists the poets and critics who came to take part: Robert Pinsky, Séamus Heaney, Helen Vendler, Tomas Venclova, W. S. Merwin, Robert Haas and many more.⁹⁴ Milosz has proven to be influential, but not in orthodox ways. As Heaney put it, "the part of him that is Derrida is put into the interrogator's cell with the part that is Solženicyn".

Such is the poet's dilemma at the end of this strange era. In order to define himself against a disintegrating world, he must become like an Orpheus and reach back, even though all the Gods and most politicians would have us disregard the past, even in the knowledge that in so doing he risked being silenced. Czeslaw Milosz chose not to be silent, gave witness to an all but unrecovered past. Hence his strength as a poet and essayist - he garnered the past in a way few others have dared, extending the common borders of Western poetics - so that we can now count poets such as Zbigniew Herbert, Tomas Venclova, Sigitas Geda and Joseph Brodsky as contributors to our common rubric.

His importance as far as my poetic is concerned is his luminous invocation of remembered place through the careful enumeration of names, descriptions of

place and people with whom he lived, studied and worked. While he is very much a theological poet, that is one constantly concerned with questions of the spirit and doctrine, he is also a poet for whom Nature is an ever-present friend. In these matters, I find a voice with whom I can resonate, and three Cantos of *Deluge*, 'Eternal Memory', 'Point' and 'Marengo Beach', I have aimed to capture some of those resonances for myself.

Epona as a metaphor for the living psyche in Vincent Buckley's 'Louisa Stewart is Foaling'

music, fertility, blindness

VINCENT BUCKLEY⁹⁵

In this section I examine Buckley's poem, 'Louisa Stewart is Foaling', in some detail and demonstrate the use of Epona as a metaphor for the feminine in the landscape. But beforehand several poems from *Last Poems* are discussed. It will be argued that Buckley, like some other Irish poets of his generation, had moved from an earlier cultural pattern which was apprehensive of the feminine, to a whole-hearted acceptance. 'Louisa Stewart is Foaling' is then read and examined as a celebration of life.

Vincent Buckley's life was in many ways a reflection of the Irish-Australian story, but his was one that never was of the mass, rather he was a singular talent: poet, critic, teacher and public intellectual who has had a deep influence on the course of Australian literature. Over the course of a long academic career, Buckley was granted a personal Chair in Literature at the University of Melbourne. He died quite suddenly in November 1988, and consequently his widow, Penelope Buckley, and colleague, Christopher Wallace-Crabbe, constructed a posthumous volume, *Last Poems*, from files and notes. This volume brings together a great garland of completed poems and fragments. He had moved us with a reading of

'Louisa Stewart is Foaling' at a Deakin Literary Society meeting some months before he died. *Last Poems* has confirmed the links with contemporary Irish writing previously demonstrated in *The Pattern* and *Late Winter Child*.

The first part of *Last Poems*, entitled "A Poetry without Attitudes", is the more complete, interlaced and contrapuntal in nature, while the second section, "The Watch's Wheel - Pieces and Songs", is much more tentative, though containing some important fragments. Despite the incomplete nature of the book, and lacking the final touches Buckley would have brought to it, *Last Poems* is as important a collection of poetry as has been published in Australia over the last decade.

While Buckley's work in specifically Australian Literature can be readily traced, he was also deeply interested in Irish Literature in more than an academic sense. He had first visited Ireland in 1955 after studies at Cambridge, and continued to visit through the following years. As he stated in interview with Jim Davidson, he had come to Ireland largely bereft of an historical and mythic paradigm which would relate the realities of modern Ireland to the pared-down folk-memories of his upbringing.⁹⁶ But then, as he surmised, his "Irish poet friends are as removed from their early nineteenth or their eighteenth century roots as I am", citing favourably though, Thomas Kinsella's "deliberate attempt" to investigate the sources of *his* culture. Buckley's awareness of his place in the Irish diaspora became more acute each time he revisited Ireland.

His later development as a lyrical poet is to be seen in the two collections, *The Pattern* and *Late Winter Child*, wherein Buckley's sensitivity as a poet comes to the fore, especially in pieces such as 'The dreamchild is curious', a celebration of his daughter's inner life. She is precocious, much loved, imagined as dreaming "of your body/in its own dream", an image which develops into a vision of a surreal "new city" being traced into the ground. Buckley's vision shimmers, and is wholly dependent upon the electricity of affection between himself and his daughter.

In later years, Buckley had suffered intermittent bouts of illness, and partial recoveries. Some months before his death, the Deakin Literary Society invited Prof. Buckley to be its guest for an evening at the CAE Centre in Melbourne. He discussed his two volumes of memoirs, *Memory Ireland* and *Cutting Green Hay*, and also reminisced about life and times at Melbourne University. In the main however, he read from typescripts of his as yet uncollected poems.

As he read, the voice softened, and we had to strain to hear each syllable against extraneous nightnoises, and in that silence we could catch the cadences of a voice well attuned to singing. He was a small man, with dancer's feet and hands so delicate. The words danced and wove their patterns, and by the end of it all there was little to be said, but to let the silences dissipate.

At the time of his death, Buckley had been working on a long poem 'Brought up on the Fears of Women', which is published in *Last Poems* both as a complete poem and as a group of incomplete "pieces". These allow us to look at some other links to the idea of the feminine in his poems outside of the love-lyrics of earlier collections. These "terrible pictures", taken from a childhood in a remote country town, evoke the gap between two worlds: that of boys - shoving, rude and sexually aggressive, and quite hurtful, and that of women - admirable, provocative, magnetic and conscious of the ever-watching audience. While these are definable boundaries, they are crossed and redefined in the course of the poem.

The girls and women of *Last Poems* are not overly romanticised, though there is admiration, being cast into that ancient three-fold mould: maiden - "the small girl hopped", matron - "glove and supple voice", and then *cailleach* - "you grow old". How consciously he had worked his subject matter into that particular pattern is open to conjecture, but in others of *Last Poems* the use of mythological motifs becomes quite apparent.

These motifs - could we call them archetypal? - became woven into deeply-felt personal memories: this boy, for whom the feminine is the source of great

mystery, wonder and fear, establishes a pattern to be followed in many of the poems. His reaction is not that of the rough fellows, "Bert and Clive Brown (who) jerked at her dress", but one who stood "at the gap in the palings ... listening ... watching". Only later does the observer turn to judging what he has seen, becoming aware of his own need to act:

Brought up on the fears of women,
we could not wait to grow families
of our own; we grew them
arrogantly ...

Now the second part of *Last Poems* contains both a further 'Piece towards...' the longer poem, in which he lists these specific "fears of women" he had been "brought up on":

...all emissions of matter; intruders;
fluxes of blood, marsh places;
flooding and drought in the womb;
the electricity of cats; stonefaced moons;
HIM; uncensoring or mute gods;
too close a brotherhood; and bats fertile as threads
of excrement tugging in the bedroots of the hair,
getting into, into your brain;
travel, unclean counterpanes...

This is not a list of superstitions as such, but of common expressions from a time still part of, or remembered as, an essentially rural life. The shift to suburban sensibilities, and a television-driven culture, would obliterate these fears and replace them with others, and what Buckley has done in part is to enumerate and celebrate the specifics of a passing culture.

In the opening passage of the "series", where he refers back to some earlier poems, and early hopes that a modern society could cure the human condition, but then we have learnt something of the price demanded of us in our break with the nurturing Earth. Elsewhere he had written "Civilisation has rebuked us all/with its barmy smile and suit clean as sherry". What we call "civilisation" is

shown to be a complete negation of all that is holy, for it is "lonesome", a state of "the breakdown, / with its surreal and postmodern /choreography of suicide". The poem, these "pieces", begins to examine the very early and formative influences playing throughout our lives, even after they've been consciously put aside, the poet dimly remembering "women's fears". He recalls the act of his mother sweeping back her "hair / against bats" when walking down an avenue, the look of triumph as she emerges, untangled. There is further reinforcement of the son's identification with feminine forces within the household, " your perfect setting", where Buckley repeats the image of mother and son as "interlocutors in touch talk lucrative with secrets".

In reading this passage I am reminded of certain passages in Galway Kinnell's *The Book of Nightmares* which also move uneasily between fond remembrance and an almost strangling fear of something that cannot be named directly, perhaps alluded to.⁹⁷ Buckley puts these as in the previous text: "The Four Last Things: /stench, fugue, blindness, the creeping in the body... , so returning us to the earliest "fears of women". I found these and others of *Last Poems* to be quite disturbing. Buckley had struck a raw nerve, not quite what I had expected from the gently nudged ironies of Buckley's own reading of 'Louisa Stewart is Foaling' on that night.

Then there is one poem, 'Deathmares', dealing with the very opposite, seeming to encapsulate so many of the "fears" as they apply to the observer rather than to the observed.⁹⁸ These "Deathmares / pull the staring body" into the places of death, "panels of ship, plane, or coffin". The feeling is quite claustrophobic and unsettling. The poem envisages a series of enclosures which are the stifling of the soul. He imagines the dead hemmed in "No space to pause or turn in", a complete aloneness as alluded to before in his image of modern civilisation. In one way, 'Deathmares' is a reprise on T. S. Eliot's meditations on the pointlessness of so much of his era in 'The Waste Land', but Buckley goes deeper in his surrealist imagery, almost as if he were walking the empty streets of a de

Chirico painting. What possessed Buckley to write in painful detail of suicide in the "pain of a scraped wrist" I do not know, but he is able to question whether the death-experience was so excruciating that the pain of death would have been enough "to free that catatonic self" from oblivion. It is as though he is trying to shock himself and the reader into a desire to stay alive.

Harking back in his memories, Buckley recalls the religious "processions that we once walked in", decked out in distinctive "red sashes", the colour of the Sodality of the Sacred Heart, which "our mother pinned at our shoulders". But all that is gone, as have all "protectors" such faith and mothers, leaving one naked to the onslaught of the "Deathmares". One could refer to that fearful painting by Fueseli, quite popular in illustrated children's books before the War as a possible starting point: the poem builds relentlessly upon childhood memories and fears, all the while presided over by "Deathmares", counterparts to the "whole coven" which galloped through the forest on the birthing of Louisa Stewart's foal, as seen later. Moreover, the poems I refer to are underpinned in the double process of birth and death by a presiding Goddess, the horse-image, embodied in the "mares". I doubt though that Buckley was as explicit as Graves had been in advocacy of pre-Christian theologies, but he was a keen turfman and grew up at a time when the horse was an integral part of Australian country life, and the mare's image is deeply engraved on the consciousness of those of us who have grown up outside of the enclosing strictures of "civilisation".

The one poem that remained with me from Buckley's reading that night was 'Louisa Stewart is Foaling'.⁹⁹ Irony indeed abounds in this celebratory poem: this mare represents a "Strange / vanity" being "named for the grandee's family" which had failed Ireland in her hour of need, and in lieu of the gentle beasts in attendance at Christ's birth, there are "stable rats, [which] if they're watching, do it quietly". In the two centuries since the great struggle of 1798 much has changed, but "the Beresfords", a leading family amongst the former Ascendancy, have returned as "magistrates, bosses, titular studmasters". Regardless of what men may

have said and done, "Louisa Stewart" goes about her business of foaling "stifflegged on her side".

At this point, Buckley departs from straight naturalism and political irony to strike a magical note, for he introduces the persona of "the blind mare, who's not in foal this year", a stable companion and conduit for the "thread of wireless harpmusic", Carolan's I believe from Buckley's comments that evening, so that:

In the one acre we have the bard's triad,
music, fertility, blindness,
the whole of life:

Now this particular poem may not be central to Buckley's achievement as a poet, but it brings together the several disparate strands of his imagination and practice to make a most pleasing piece. In the past, it had been Buckley's modernism that had been praised. "By the late 1960s", he had, "brought together a rare combination of imaginative, social and religious interests", and had been later noted "for his powers of lyricism and observation".¹⁰⁰

This poem, 'Louisa Stewart is Foaling', utilises those interests, resting on a balance between past and present, of memory and actuality, and works gently on the tensions between the various elements. For those of us who have seen or assisted in the raw actuality of a mare "birthing", it is a noisy, sweaty business. If all goes well, she can drop the foal out in the paddock unassisted, but here the mare - well bred and too valuable to be left to mere chance - is in need of human help: ropes, muscles, and sweat. It is a difficult enough task even for us.

Buckley surrounds that rawness with celebration and irony: her very name, "Louisa Stewart", is the cause of a quiet mocking, "strange vanity, to name your racemares after yourself", especially having recalled the recent and bitter past through a rebel's song. Yet, he tells us she "did her job in style", "cool as the gentry" she was, intimating some quiet admiration of those qualities which elsewhere he has queried.

But more importantly than those currents of recent political history are the enduring continuities. In *Memory Ireland*, Buckley had noted how that rural country "is not, as often said, a land obsessed with history, but a land of largely forgotten pre - and posthistory".¹⁰¹ Strange that, coming from a poet who has written so acutely about both Australian and Irish political cultures. In this poem, those pre-histories come alive: rats in the manger, watching, as did the cattle at another birth. And then he invokes the "bardic triad": firstly, *fertility*, then *music*: "a thread of wireless/harpmusic out the window", another rope to help heave the foal's forelegs out into the world, lastly blindness - "the blind mare, who's not in foal this year". This "bard's triad....the whole of life".

In celebrating life, and feminine "style", Buckley has also introduced a connexion to a more ancient past, here I am thinking about the figure of Epona, the horse goddess, whose cult still exists in an anti-heroic, attenuated way of the horsey set, to be found in Australia just as it is at the Curragh or the Home Counties. It is all too easy to make fun of what is now a costly past-time, but scratch the surface, and our male fear and reverence of horses and women run in close parallel. Women and horses are associated even more closely as being wise, knowing, even magical creatures in 'The Coven'. In surface details, the first part is a nicely realised description of the mare-herd in their parkland setting. They are identified with the field and forest - "heads like swollen flowers" and "tree colour", reacting with one will, that is, "*Making strange*". They are like the "fears of women", those "... emissions of matter, intruders /fluxes of blood ..." and so on.¹⁰² Likewise the word "coven" suggests a wisdom and behaviour outside of the scientific-rational world constructed, by men mostly, and is something to be feared, if not denied - "Well, what is a man to say?" - as if mares, and women, have their own impenetrable way of doing things.

At this point, I would like to switch attention to several poems based upon the image of the Sheela-na-Gig at Kilpeck Church. Peter Porter's poem, 'Kilpeck Church' is by far the longest and most intricate, but strangely out of sympathy

with the human spirit which created and revered her.¹⁰³ The second is the better-known poem of the same name, by John Montague, which while clinical and detached to some extent, celebrates the sheer physicality of life as a rebuke to the traditional male squeamish avoidance of all that is sexual and progenitive.¹⁰⁴

Then there is Buckley's own version of the *Sile* in 'Sheela-na-Gig':¹⁰⁵

The wintry keen goes. He has cut a
scythe line through the dry berries
and scraped stone-dust from the *cunnius*.
Now two men, squatting in the rain,
are measuring her with red rubber, saucy as latex
as though for a young bride's coffin.

In comparison, the first two poems are somewhat overwrought, even obvious in their approach, and Montague's closure seems to provide Buckley's starting point. He acknowledges the *Sile*'s sexuality, "saucy as latex", but links the thought back to his previous phrase in 'Nightmares' - "winding-sheets, rough sides of hessian."¹⁰⁶

Several interesting parallels and differences can be noted to other poets' works. We know well enough Robert Bly's early poems on the image of the fearful mother, that cycle I had found to be both shocking and yet illuminating when I first read it. Likewise, John Montague's early poetry demonstrated a continuing contrast between male and female attitudes and which is worked through in his later poetry, which becomes like Buckley's, liberated and self-assured in their treatment of sexuality. Montague's venture in publishing *The Lost Notebook* marks an open acknowledgment and acceptance of the specifically erotic in his nature. In contrast, Thomas Kinsella has always been more a poet of *agape*, being more innerwards directed. Even in their respective investigations and interpretations of the Irish past, both Montague and Kinsella have moved far from earlier positions, and like Buckley, adopted decidedly modernist techniques in their writing. That breaking of previous poetic patterns has enabled these poets to refamiliarise themselves with the feminine on quite different terms to earlier generations of

poets. For Vincent Buckley especially, there was a putting aside of "fears" brought about by emigration, dispossession and ignorance, so that by the end of his life, when he came to read 'Louisa Stewart is Foaling' to us on that night in 1988, he was in full celebration of life, and the passage from one generation to the next. Where Louisa Stewart "did her job in style", so had he.

The application of Buckley's use of the mare-image "Louisa Stewart" as a life-motif to my work is to be found in the appearance of the horses by the banks of the River Barwon and in the figure of Epona who gives voice to the fourth Canto of *Deluge*.

Masculinity despite itself in the Poetry of Sigitas Geda

Is this true what you have felt, what you still see?

SIGITAS GEDA¹⁰⁷

In all of the previous sections of this chapter I have focused on some European and Australian poets' approaches to the feminine as a means to discern how they have gone about reading the land. It is fair to say that the poets so far discussed have been empathetic and sensitive to the feminine in the landscape, and that one can arrive at mythic structures for one's own writing. But this reading needs some redress, and as I have had a long-standing interest in trying to read and translate some of the lesser-known European poets, I undertook some translations of the works of the Lithuanian poet, Sigitas Geda. What I saw before was a poet deeply engaged in his landscape, but whose language and sensibility is quite different to any of the poets discussed, far more masculine in his sensibilities, and it is for these qualities that I include this examination of the man and of aspects of his work in the chapter.

The image appearing before my eyes is that of a dark-haired man, bearded, hands in pockets with his coat collar turned up against the winds of early Spring, walking through fields. Why pay attention to him? There's nothing that remarkable about

a fiftyish man, but that he is talking to himself, quietly, under his breath, naming the country, its people, birds and beasts, its flowers. He is sometimes accompanied by other men and women, who likewise go about giving names to the land, taking a head of rye and casting the seeds over the green land. This man, as are his companions, is a specimen of that strange creature known in Scots as *maker*, or in Gaelic as *ollamh* or *filid*, in Latin *vate*, that is, *seer*, and in seeing the land and its people, Sigita Geda gives them shape and substance beyond the ordinary, beyond the everyday, and invests the objects of his vision with mythic potential.

I intend to offer a reading of some of Sigita Geda's poems, and also to demonstrate parallels in some early poems of Séamus Heaney, and show that although where the poets are aware of and reverence Nature, *Gamta* in Lithuanian, as a manifestation of the Feminine, there is present in their work an innate and quite violent masculine undercurrent.

Robin Skelton, the Canadian poet and critic, reminds us that in approaching a discussion of poetry that it is both a calling and an art.¹⁰⁸ The first notion is simple enough: we realise this as a subtle intimation - *pašaukimas* - being communicated to the potential poet by the Muse, though for each of us our Muse will assume different embodiments. Geda's Muse certainly has a carnal incarnation, not æthereal, and as such accords with his strong masculine impress upon the words and music he chooses to describe her.

The second concept, that of craft, is the more debated. In English-language poetry, tussles over rhyme and metre are never-ending and are usually undertaken in total ignorance of the radically different nature of that language's resources in comparison to other languages from which we derive our models. The poet's craft becomes one of cutting and placing. In what I have read of Lithuanian poetry, the craft is similar in that one must cut away the social overburden and linguistic dross in order to renew the tongue, so that the poetry can live. In both poetries,

the task is always as Ezra Pound had said, to "make it new". But renewal depends upon what has gone before, and upon the strength of the Muse's call.

We may ask, what comes first in the formation of a poet, the whisper of the Muse's voice or the fruition of a long apprenticeship with language? Is it as it happened with the Irish poet Séamus Heaney, that the calling to poetry was realised in one instant through the sound of his father digging in the backyard that Nature and the great chain of History were revealed at that one moment? ¹⁰⁹ I do not know enough yet about Geda's formation as a poet, where he first glimpsed his Muse, but I do know that she invigorates his works, that he is possessed by her in no small way, and through her realises the *mythos* of his land.

Sigitas Geda was born in 1943, near Lazdijai, in the Dzūkija region, and after school he attended Vilnius University. He has written at length of the elements which have formed him.¹¹⁰ Geda believes that a poet's inspiration springs from childhood memories. A child learns by listening, questioning, watching and imitating others. Childhood gives one licence to be at the centre of an adult world, as people tolerate chattering, questioning children - but a verbose adult is often told to be quiet. Geda also wonders how many people listen to poets like himself and understand what is being said; they pretend to understand poetry, nod their heads wisely or interpret poems as they see fit, even embroidering meaning to suit themselves. Geda remembers although fifteen years had passed, when he stopped in front of the same shop, in true *déjà vu*, he could remember a person's gesture, hair, a look. He feels that a person's soul can be compared to the flames of a fire.

Geda often says that childhood has provided him with much inspiration for his poems, remembering that when he was five going on a long journey to St. Ona's Church in Vilnius in a horse-drawn carriage through many towns. he remembers where the horses were stabled, the Latin intonation of the Priest and his vestments, the unknown. At home, his family, the fields and land were commonplace to him, but the rituals of fishing with his father or berrying with his female relatives provided a sense of adventure.

After Church, Geda would always go to visit his godmother. He remembers much eating, drinking and joking. He was grateful there was another boy of his own age to play with. The kindness of the men with whom he shared quarters overwhelmed him with their gentleness towards a little boy, enveloping him in a comforting atmosphere so he would not feel homesick. The journey back home took the young boy through forests, over hills, and past old orchards filled with gnarled and bent apple trees - an old *daina* sprang to mind - "Vai žydėk ... žydėk... sausa obelėle ...".¹¹¹ This is not just a folksong, but a hymn to resurrection and life, of a woman's woes, of the forbidden tree of Paradise: and so we can trace Geda's love of Nature which is reflected in his poems.

Geda says that his poetry is linked to flowers: his Uncle's garden brimmed with flowers - *bijunai* and *pivonija*. It is not true that men do not like flowers, it is, he asserts, that men appreciate flowers in a masculine fashion. Lithuanians attach much importance to the masculine and feminine side of things. A wine can be described as feminine because it is mellow and sweet, but vodka will always be described as a masculine drink. Forty years have passed but Geda still remembers what flowers grew in his Uncle's garden. Lithuanian poetry, he believes, is linked to the fields, the land, in fact, with man's relationship with the whole environment. Again, he remembers when he was little, watching a Cuckoo feed her young and coming to the conclusion that poetry is very similar in that man gives it life and nurtures it with his soul. It is linked with the whole mystery of life. The War also had an effect on the nation's psyche. Geda watched the cycles of life go on even in times of war. The imposed collectivisation of farms and this affected his family, the traditions and culture of the Lithuanian people. At school, he was told to study, study, study. He wonders where are those teachers now who prepared him and his generation for life and imbued him with a desire to exercise his brains and nurture his soul. At University, Geda remembers Prof. Sezemanis who inspired his students by the reading of Heraklitus. The old proverb "God helps those who help themselves" struck a chord in Geda's heart. Man, he

believes, is put in this world to do something, to worry about others, to help others. He finds it hard to socialise with immoral people, his only weapon is poetry which he equates with the truth, in which eyes all are equal, prince or pauper.

The rhythm of life is a wonderful thing, there is rhythm all around us, the howl of the wind, the ebb and flow of the ocean, the swaying of pine trees. Everyone must find a rhythm in life in order to find peace within themselves. He remembers also a childhood séance when he and other children screamed with fear that perhaps they could call up beings from another world.

Geda's travels have taken him through Odessa, Lviv, Kraków and many other places in the search for truth and meaning. In the hard times, he often found inspiration in the works of Vincas Krėvė - Mickevičius (1882 - 1954)¹¹² and Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875 - 1911)¹¹³ and also in the living. Man, Geda asserts, needs to have a wild side, and calls himself the wildman from Dzūkija.

Throughout his published work, from the early *Pėdos* to the recent *Septynių vasarų giesmės*, Geda has remained close to his naturalistic roots, although his work has displayed increasing complexity.¹¹⁴ He raises questions of continuity of the land as a physical entity inhabited by all varieties of living creatures, and there is a blurring of the edges between the land and the living. In his second book, *Strazdas*, Geda transforms the priest-poet Antanas Strazdas (1760 - 1833), into a mythical man-bird who visits the whole country, observing his people "bent over their work by their masters' hand".¹¹⁵ Geda's strategy has not been to inflate language but to retain the plain speech of farmers' idiom and dealings with the realities of daily life. As Šilbajoris points out, Geda's development as a poet was to sanctify everyday life by creating a magical dialogue between the persona created and the natural world: this process of entwining the Self and the world is carried out by the repetition of the opening phrase:

Ir aš žinau, ką pasakyt norėjau ...

[I know what I meant to say ...]

(*Manulio žiedai*, *Moon Flowers*, 1977).

Such a repetitive device approaches the power of prayer.

Geda has been willing to look outwards from Lithuania and has created cycles of poetry dedicated to François Villon and Pablo Picasso, and later during the Brežnev Era, he created the powerful collection *Mamutų Tėlynė*.¹¹⁶ In the last fifteen years or so, Geda's poetry has been varied, and although Šilbajoris claims that some of his work shows "signs of disturbance, lack of confidence", by the time of publication of *Septynių vasarų giesmės* Geda has returned to an earlier confidence and multilayered strength.¹¹⁷ So, from what I have read, and from what his Lithuanian readers tell me, Geda's work is enigmatic, provocative and deeply entangled with his native land. He is a difficult poet, and perhaps for that reason alone, it seemed worthwhile addressing his work.

Prior to my visit to Lithuania in 1992, I had read some of his work, and had been made aware by the Adelaide poet Lidiya Šimkutė of the high critical regard in which he is held. So when my Vilnius host Adomas Butrimas took me into the University's bookshop, I had some definite targets in mind, and was able to buy this volume, *Poezijos Pavasaris 92*.¹¹⁸ This is an annual anthology containing a wide range of poems and critical writing. I noted that Geda had contributed some translations of John Donne's "Holy Sonnets" and three quite long and complex poems. Some of the poems in this anthology I found that I could roughly translate on sight, having much the same phrasing and imagistic framework as the *dainos*. However, Geda's poems are opaque: they do not work in the lyrical mode, the writing employs surrealist devices, disconnective phrasing and sudden shifts of mood and rhythm. The vocabulary is difficult to access and presents a very different sensibility to that one has come to expect from the lyrical modes of writing. It presents challenges.

I have translated two of Geda's long poems from the anthology noted, 'Rytieškos sonatinos pradžia' ('The beginning of an oriental sonatina') and 'Keturai kvartetai'

('Four quartets'). The first poem is a frank and physical hymn of praise to the act and essence of love. The poem is initially embedded in an act of will to recall and shape memory, "... dar atmena / Still it seems ..." he states, wanting a memory which is shaped out of the physical details first, before the emotions can be redeployed. We note that there is a lack of sentimentalisation, nor is there any mention of love as such, but rather the beloved's body is both "aukuras šventas / a sacred altar" and a profane place strangely asserted through the denial of her sexuality. His sense of sight - "it was pink", taste - "goblet" and touch - "waxen porcelain" are the vehicles through which memory is then given shape. By the end of the first stanza, Geda has generated a complex of images which have a broad appeal to the senses and which have generated a forward movement in the poem. Yet then, in that stanza's last line there comes that interruptory exclamation, "viskas mano ir viešpatie tavo ne mano / what's mine God is yours, not mine", there is a shift signalled towards an outer perspective, acts of love and having, however defined, now involve a spiritualising factor.

Everything "goes out of sight" and the poet becomes aware of another force possessing him. This is not the lust of an inconsiderate lover, but rather the inscaping "mirtis ir gyvybė / death and life". A further externality is represented in the phrase "žiaurus meteoras / cruel meteor", representing the possibility of new life. Let us guess that if Geda had read Heraklitus, then the common Plotinian image of the falling star, as found also in the poetry of John Donne, could be imputed as representing the possibility, the fear perhaps, of the natural consequence of love-making. That is, there is always the possibility of infusion of the other in any dual relationship, and the inherent untenability of that "vešli arabeska / luxuriant arabesque". That realisation creates a double to the Self, a need in as much as fire creates its opposite - Water, which can watch, observe and note, and not be moved.¹¹⁹ This realisation leads to the sense of desolation which is the dominant tone of the second Stanza and which is further developed by images of denial. The lover is not "logical", that is actively mindful, nor is he

simply a receptor of experience, "moulded earthenware", but rather as we have seen is a sexual barometer responding in most complex and imaginative ways to experience.

It would seem that at this point the poem's mood shifts quite severely. The series of denials in the strange distich:

jokio dievo ir tikslo dangaus nesupranta
vien tik sausgyslių kaulų ir kraujo ir formos

nothing is understood of God and heaven's Good
merely sinews bones and blood and form ... (l. 29 - 30)

Strange, because of what we have known of Geda's deep-rooted spirituality, and because he seemingly retreats from the earlier "holy vision" into a realisation that what is external to Man is ultimately unknowable. In the aftermath of ecstasy come the simple and necessary act of putting on one's clothes and distancing oneself, *quel tristesse*, and yet the vision of the beloved remains, gentle, lyrical, like Botticelli's Venus.¹²⁰

tu lieki amžinai atskleista susisupus
į vijoklinį sparną į kriauklę į kiaukutą

[... staying forever veiled and enfolded
in bindweed wing and seashell and carapace ...]

Then the poem shifts into a series of separations, exploding in surreal oppositions constructed by role and gender. The masculine Ego (Aš) is set up as the active agent in respect to the passive Other (Tu), that is, "billow", "gypsy", "Lorca", "church", "hunter" and "toothbrush" act against the more containing "wave", "flora", "bench and kneeler", "deer" and "offertory lamb", clearly fulfilling the expected masculine-feminine roleplay. But as I indicated, Geda works in a surreal mode, reversing this trope of containment in lines 43 - 44 where the feminine "Tu" becomes both "State" and "treasury" to his "Exchequer" and "tribute", she is "watcher" of "fearful prayers". This exchange of roles mirroring the constant

shifting within any emotional relationship, but also the ease with which the feminine can shift identification from erotic to maternal: this gives an uneasy, unresolved edge to that masculine "Aš". Geda's strategy is to bring each episode to a closure, so an equilibrium is reached.¹²¹

kilimėlis priglausti pavargusias kojas
atnašavimo pienas viltis kur aukojama
[A rug for my weary feet to rest on
where there's an offering of fertility's milk and hope ...]

But then, when one may have expected a reflective passage on the nature of love, or some similar sentimental device as would be offered by a more conventional poet, Geda re-explodes expectations in a furious set of happenings, so that the poem does not end in a joyous note, rather it recalls in harsh and dark images warlike "phalanxes" and an "armored flotilla", historical absurdities "Columbus drowns", bitter-sweet flashes of memory from his travels in the Caucasus, childhood memories "flax Vaižgantas' cross" and fear of the conflicts that were still wracking the country as the Soviet empire collapsed.

The closing distich:¹²²

prakeikimas mirty amžinai atgiminas
liūdnas trikampis velnio pramanas angos ...

the deathbed curse is eternally reborn
the devils' sad triangle a concocted doorway

is the bleakest statement in the poem, light-years from the earlier remembrances of the act of love: and yet the poem is unfinished, marked by the ellipsis.

While this poem was difficult to translate, for example, having to deal with the disconnected syntax of lines 50 - 61 or the passage lines 22 - 30, when trying to gauge Geda's intent and mood shifts I found initially frustrating: "what's happening?" I would ask myself. But as I indicated at the outset, Geda's complexity intrigues me, and as one hopefully attuned to post-modernist poetics, I believed that it was worth the effort in going through the formal exercise of

translation. The poem slowly, very slowly, revealed its riches and allowed me to make my own interpretation of the poem. Despite Geda's caution, after all, a poem is a triangular conversation between the Muse, the poet and the reader: or is the reader merely a mute onlooker?

More than likely, Geda's readers had been active participants in recent and bloody events. That northern winter of 1990 - 1991 was cold and cruel: the bear was shedding his fur, his limbs, teeth and nails - and people were hurt in the fallout. We in Australia had seen telecasts of the Berlin Wall crumbling and how the Vopos stood back and would not fire on the people - after all, there was no point in a civil war; but then we saw the tanks roll over unarmed students outside the Vilnius Television Tower, that was an uncivil action. It is in that context of stress and uncertainty we must approach the second poem, 'Keturai kvartetai / Four Quartets'.

This poem begins with a clear reference to T. S. Eliot's comment "April is the cruellest month" and develops initially as a re-reading, not of 'The Four Quartets', but of the first section of 'The Waste Land', that is, of 'The Burial of the Dead'. If we place the first nine lines of Geda's poem against Eliot's, we can see how Geda pays homage to his mentor. Eliot has his variation on Chaucer's opening to *The Canterbury Tales* in:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

Geda differs from Eliot, as much as he had distanced himself from Chaucer, by introducing that querulous, probing tone which marks the poem as a whole. In my translation, Geda's opening reads:¹²³

In Spring, when beauty and tears are dead,

as the cold wind has defeated both your raincoat and the forest,
blonde primrose unlocks heaven,
coltsfoot grows on hills, like God's annunciation,
who knows, with what God thinks: with grasses, horsetails
stocklings and sunflowers - these modest blooms,
which crawl up from the earth - like wolf-scythes, lilies,
unveiling their colour to the world unafraid,
o what is colour? not a voice? o indeed with what does Sun hymn?

Eliot's poem rewrites the many voices of post World War I Europe, tracing a recurrent motif of a land laying waste and the possibility of its return to fertility. It needed a quester to ask the right questions and to seize the opportunity to restore the land to beauty. In his 'Four Quartets', Geda is that inquirer, but also the scornful jester, social critic of an almost post-Soviet society. Given the impress of the sacred land on his Self, Geda builds himself that persona of quester and while the scene is set by a naming of the blossoming grasses, horsetails, stocklings, lilies, all of which magnify the Sun's hymn, the poem is not shaping up as an easy apologia for a beneficent God of Spring. Rather, it will become a contemplation on the living presence of Death, personal and national.

The poem's despair is signalled by the repeated reference to hanging oneself: reasons for this black act are not given, but that a foul mood seems to have settled over the land, the nation's (literary) goddesses are portrayed as wanting to leave, and Muses refusing to do their duty of love. Yet there must be hope, for Geda invokes two significant poets, Kazys Binkis (1893 - 1942) and Albinas Žukauskas (c. 1930s - 1970s) as his witnesses, his helpers even.

The state of play in 1991 was less than satisfactory. The first liberalising impulses of Perestroika looked as though they would be buried by an increasingly nervous leadership, and Geda's description of Lithuania as a "cesspool" at that stage, while hurtful, may well have been accurate. The truth was elusive, as was hope. The voices in the crowd ask "what's the truth?" That was a matter of conjecture, yet everyone had gathered to give witness to the truth. Who were these people? As Geda lists them, there were the Lowlanders (Žemaičiai), Highlanders (Aukštaičiai),

Southerners (Sūduvai and Dzūkiai), Poles, Germans & Russians: whatever their *gens*, they were gathered as members of a unique *Respublika*.

I read the poem as a structured *collage* of the many voices, individual and collective, of those people gathered together on those cold winter nights of uncertainty. Waiting for the tanks to come, they had time to assess their past, the rotten state of socialist-realist writing, the collectivisation of conscience, the sheer dreariness of having to sing the same song as everyone else, "echo sonatinas, until you go out on a pension". No wonder then that if the momentum of 1990 - 91 had failed, the rope would have been the more preferable to repetition.

However bleak these two poems may be, they are suffused with a knowledge and a realisation of humanity's relationship with the land, which is far more resilient than men and women who have such finite lives. Geda's vision may be dark, but it does not close over into blackness - rather he retains his sense of irony throughout. So, in dedicating the latter poem to T. S. Eliot, Geda staked a claim for himself as a poet to be read with serious intent. He did not set out to imitate Eliot, but rather exhibited an awareness of the ridiculousness and despair of the naked human condition. Eliot, we know, turned to a particularly Anglican mysticism, wrongly labelled "High Church" or "Anglo-Catholic", one which sought to include Nature and the pre-industrial world as a means of solving our peculiar collective angst. His touchstones are clearly marked in that passage I previously gave. Likewise, Geda in his poetry, continually turns back to the land, however cruel and unforgiving times may be, as the ultimate sustaining metaphor. It is a farmer's gesture, knowing that the only true sustenance is that which can be husbanded from the land herself. Moreover, his voice is that of a man equally at home on the farm as he is a participant in the city's political turmoil: I imagine Heaney's voice grown harder.

The problem for contemporary men in their writing about the land, about relationships centred on place, in expressing themselves in a masculine style, is how to avoid falling into the "redneck" mode so defiantly wielded by Les Murray,

and some others. Geda succeeds in maintaining his manhood because his primary focus has been to explore the existential dilemmas faced by his generation in the face of debilitating oppression. Likewise Heaney succeeds but in a different way, and for different reasons. In writing previously about Heaney and the feminine, I had made a tentative exploration of the notion of codependence of the two polarities. But now I wish to turn my attention to the notion of masculinity as it is evidenced in the poetry rather than as some prior construct against which texts are to be tested: evidence then interpretation.

'Digging' is accorded first place in almost every anthology including Heaney. My encounter with this poem came from an ABC Radio program late one winter night in a concrete-brick flat in Mt. Gambier, then later from a reading encountered in Geoffrey Summerfield's *Worlds*.¹²⁴ This book contained a treasure-trove of modern British poetry. This book gave fleshly images to half-remembered words, though I could recall the cool timbre of Heaney's voice, clear and fresh, growling in that Ulster tonality like I had heard in the Irish Club in Adelaide. It was not the soft blather of a Corkman, or the flat style of Galway, Dubliners were too oratorical: in Heaney's voice I could hear the cold wind coming off the Lough, sense the swell of cold potatoes in a gunny sack hefted up onto the dray first thing in the morning. I found myself connecting to the as yet unseen world oceans away.

There was something else also in 'Digging' cutting to the heart at a time when I was deeply estranged from my own father. Whatever he had tried to build between us had been broken down by my own wilfulness, which at the time I saw as a strike for independence, which in its bungled way it was, and his savage hurt. It took too long a time for that to be mended even in part for either of us, and in the end, it was hard for either of us to say too much to each other, but in Heaney I got a sense of what it could have been like, a sensed continuity of generations, of a son's willingness to admire his flesh even while acknowledging the strains and difficulties. But then, now that I am the father of a son, I can only wonder if the

most tenuous of links will survive the strains of what is an horrendous and painful life we must endure.

At least in 'Digging' and 'Follower', its companion piece, the roles men play out in their society were defined against an eternal backdrop - the land, and though a son may eventually leave, there was always the chance to take up the plough-horse's reins, to dig. But even in this setting, there can be reversals.

Critics have rightly focused on 'Digging' as an entry into understanding his early work.¹²⁵ Firstly, there is an acknowledged indebtedness to Ted Hughes' precursor poem, 'Thought Fox'. If one looks for parallels they are there, not just on the surface but also in the two poems' concern with the act of poetic creation. 'Digging' begins as a recollection of events in tranquillity - the speaker's thoughts of his father and grandfather as farmers. But there is also a sense that the speaker is cut off from farm life. The poem is framed with speaker sitting at desk, pen "snug as a gun", a weapon or tool. This connects then to that "clean rasping sound" of the father's spade which releases his thoughts from the confines of the room and out into the wider farming world.

The second stanza initiates a sequence of contrasting interpretations: firstly, the father being "twenty years away" could either be the speaker remembering a past event parallels or echoing present, or the father himself could be archaeologically digging to his origins. Then, the father's "rhythm" implies the naturalness of his actions, although it could be the speaker's perception of the father being in harmony with nature, a trait the speaker feels he does not share. Similarly, the speaker's grandfather spent his days, "going down and down / For the good turf. Digging", as if the depth of the soil holds a special secret. Finally, those smells and sounds synæsthetic sensations triggering memories that the speaker recalls in his contemplative state: the "smell", the "squelch and slap", and the "cuts" memories awakened in the speaker's mind as he looks down on his father digging?

The act of digging turf is also the act of excavating the speaker's personal heritage, his lineage through his father and grandfather, or his mythic heritage which is

evinced as a connection with a tradition of soil and land. All such interpretations are invited by images of son, father & grandfather, who are complicit in acts of violence, as implied by the recurring image of the "gun", and by Heaney's preoccupation in poems such as 'Digging', 'Blackberry-Picking' and 'The Barn', all coming from *Death of a Naturalist*, in which poetry is a weapon by which the "naturalist" is put to "death".

'Follower' is a necessary companion piece in that the father's skills, this time "with a horse-plough" are celebrated. The child rides "on his back / Dipping and rising to his plod", being both a joy and a burden. Perhaps the dénouement is too trite -

I was a nuisance, tripping, falling
Yapping always. But today
It is my father who keeps stumbling
Behind me, and will not go away.

The role-reversal is too complete, but as in several other poems where older men are celebrated, such as 'The Forge' and 'Thatcher', there is a ready acknowledgement that the strength of these men lies in their craft akin to a wisdom which he has not yet achieved as a poet, though the poetry itself is quickly moving to such a realisation.

This is a distinctly masculine joy, especially in the way that Heaney celebrates such thingness through clear and detailed descriptions. For example, in 'Thatcher' the itinerant craftsman has been courted by the family, "bespoke for weeks", and when arrived "unexpectedly" he is the source of wonder to the children clustered around - what they see are the tools, "light ladder and a bag of knives ... well honed blades", not the man or how he related to the family - harking back to 'Digging' where the "pen", "lug" of spade and "bottle" are the foci for the son's memories. Other poems in the early books can be read as texts of a farming life well within the reach of our present memories: it is that quality of thingness in our memories which makes them so and which marks them as masculine constructs.

There is another thread binding Heaney and Geda, and that is the act of seeing, or rather looking. One supposes that a poet, like a painter, will take note of his surroundings and the objects which inhabit his life. Both poets get under the skin of what they observe, they are watchers, note-takers and sketchers of the real world. Heaney's portraits of his family and friends do not need photographs to make them come alive, the language is so strong that we can see his father and grandfather at the turf, or the clumsy, brutal RUC sergeant come calling. In Geda's poems the birch thickets and oak groves come alive with the sounds of birds and forest creatures, and we are made to see in our own mind's eye a lone suicide on the ruined farm, or the platoons of helmeted OMON guards outside of the television tower at Vilnius in January 1991. While temperamentally the two poets are quite different in their acceptance of what they have witnessed, the very act of looking in the way they have seems to me to be utterly masculine and unsentimental in their objectivity and toughness in the way they order their respective worlds.

In my examination of Geda's several poems, and the parallels with Heaney, it becomes apparent that even where the poets are aware of and reverence Nature as a manifestation of the Feminine, there is present in their work an innate and opposite unresloved force. This brings about a fruitful tension in their poetry, just as there is tension in our own daily lives, which is displayed in language and form. For a practising poet aware of such tensions, one must ask whether such tensions ought be resolved, if ever they could be, and to allow those tensions to enliven the work. I have constructed the first four Cantos of *Deluge* in such a way that the voices of the Narrator and Walker are clearly masculine and are counterpoised by the stated femininity of both The Girl and Epona. In the other Cantos where the Narrator speaks, the tonality and voice is clearly my own, but paying due tribute to the inhabiting spirits of land, river and sea.

An Impulse to Read the Land

The tree near me is the one I climbed
fifty-three years ago

VINCENT BUCKLEY¹²⁶

In this chapter I have dwelt on the question of relationships between several poets and their responses to the landscape, having posited a proposition that the land ought be considered a feminine presence. In so doing, I have avoided recent rhetoric employing Sheldrake's notion of the physical Earth as Gaia, for my enterprise is poetic rather than conservationist or socially reformist, although I do acknowledge there may well be connections between these positions and my vision. It is apparent to many of us that the physical world has been adversely affected by the explosive growth in human populations and activities over the past five or so generations, and I suspect that the damage done may well be irreparable and that what ever landscape our children inherit will be altered beyond recognition. All the more reason for reading the land, for conserving those writings, paintings and photographs which set out to delineate the landscape from the time of settlement. Yet as I have pointed out, the collapse of such heroic readings of the land such as afforded by the paintings of Eugen von Guérard into the Victorian pathos of McCubbin as shaping visual paradigms of the landscape had signalled the view of the Australian landscape as hostile and brutal. This position continuing and reinforced in the works of Nolan, Drysdale and Williams, their pessimism echoing A. D. Hope's despairing depiction of Australia as "a woman past the change of life".¹²⁷

What can be found to set against such pessimism? Is it possible to regain von Guérard's sense of wonder and reverence, if not in the visual arts then in some other medium? It is my belief, and I attempt to show this in my practice, that instead of worrying at some concept we nominate as "Australia", it is our task to delineate and celebrate the particular, the region and neighbourhood, those places

immediate to ourselves. We are past the stage of being nationalists, defining ourselves out of some sense of inferiority against the rest of the world, for we have seen the fruits of that excess in our own lifetime. Moreover we witness the ridiculous lengths our Arts bureaucrats have gone to in attempting to redefine what it means to be "Australian" with each change of governmental economic policy. Once we were a "New Britannia", now we are supposed to be "Asian".¹²⁸

When Col. William Light was set the task of settling and developing the infant colony of South Australia, he chose to plan the site of Adelaide as two Roman camps across the valley of the River Torrens. Adelaide proper is laid out as a square, one English mile to each side, with broad avenues following compass lines and generous boulevards placed for each Quarter. Across the Torrens, Prospect is set irregularly and slightly askew, but with no less generous proportions. In both parts of this new settlement there were no curving avenues, no real consideration given to local topography, excepting that the bending Torrens valley caused a small misalignment between the two parts. Light's vision is that of an armed camp set against the Kaurna people and other hostile unknowns, a latter-day Cæsar come to establish *Britannia Nova*.¹²⁹

That squareness of grid and ruler is masculine, imposed and imperial. That vision is repeated in the layout of my city, Geelong, as though Light's plan had been taken and set out upon a quite different topography. Whereas the settlers from HMS Buffalo trekked inland from Holdfast Bay for safety's sake, our settlers found fresh water close by and stayed close to shore. While Geelong's one-mile grid is conditioned by the curve of Corio Bay and its hemming in by the River Barwon, its main East - West avenue, Moorabool Street, affords a splendid view down to the Bay, while it is intersected from the North by Malop Street. To the North, just as in Adelaide, a grid was established for Newtown from whence one can view the confluence of the flood-prone Barwon and Moorabool Rivers. It is a grand view one has from the lookout on the Ceres Road taking in the rivers, bay, a line of volcanic cones marching out to the West and low hills of the Otways and

Brisbane Ranges, and while one is conscious that there has been a determined attempt to impose grids and lines across the landscape, all of mankind's efforts come to nothing in the falling light as a cold front comes in from the direction of Cobden. As I look towards the city and its suburbs, they are blotted out in silver and grey sheets, the rivers dance in snakelines and the bay is striated by golden light. Somewhere to the right is a lowering mass of rain forests and pine plantations. This region is no "New Britannia", or any other ideological construct for that matter, it is quite unlike any other place on the continent. It must be taken for what it is and due deference given to the proper spirit of this place.

In this Chapter, I have demonstrated that these poets, drawn from many lands, have given such deference, each in their own manner to the spirit, the goddess even, of their particular place, and in so doing have wrought enduring Poetry. Then it becomes my task as a writer to be sensitive to, and respond openly to the influence this landscape can have upon me. If I ignore, with good reason, the sentimentality of later pictorialists and follow a certain line of painting and drawing, I see before me a vibrant and honest land. Because of this realisation I find now that I can admire the paintings of von Guérard and some of the other pioneer painters for their openness, and willingness to engage with the land. It is harder though to have much regard for much of the earlier poetry set in the district, cluttered as it is with corrupt diction, cheap sentiment and the fashions of time. I go tree-climbing, like I did some fifty years ago in my parents' back yard, seeking to forge a clean poetry, one which makes a new reading of the land and its moving spirit.

Endnotes

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- ³ E. von Guérard, 'The Country near Geelong', *ibid.*, p. 64.
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- ⁵ J. Taylor, 'A Case of Romantic Disinheritance', *Reading Australian Poetry*, op. cit., p. 22 ff.
- ⁶ *ibid.* p. 33.
- ⁷ J. Montague, 'A Dream of July', *The Great Cloak*, Dolmen, Dublin, 1978, p. 44.
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- ²³ A. J. Greimas, *Of Gods and Men*, Indiana Uni. Press, Bloomington, 1992, p. 92 - 97.
- ²⁴ T. Kinsella, *The Tain*, p. 29 - 31.
- ²⁵ J. Montague, *The Rough Field*, 1972, p. 26.
- ²⁶ *Selected Poems 1965-1975*, p. 66.
- ²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 68 - 69.
- ²⁸ *ibid.* p. 37.
- ²⁹ *ibid.* p. 38 - 39.
- ³⁰ *ibid.* p. 81.
- ³¹ *Death of a Naturalist*, 1966, p. 42.
- ³² *Selected Poems 1965-1975*, p. 35 - 36.
- ³³ *ibid.*, pp. 86, 88.
- ³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 46.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 111, 118 & 116.
- ³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 125.
- ³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 97.
- ³⁸ *ibid.* p. 125.
- ³⁹ N. Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, Faber & Faber, London, 1986.
- ⁴⁰ *Field Work* p. 50.
- ⁴¹ *Selected Poems*, p. 37.
- ⁴² P. Schneider et. al *The World of Manet 1832 - 1883*, Time-Life Int., 1973 rpt., p. 34 - 35.
- ⁴³ *FW* p. 56 - see also J. Montague, 'A Dream of July', *The Great Cloak*, p. 44.
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Chapter 4

Our Flawed Selves

Introduction

Carl Solomon! I'm with you in Rockland
ALLEN GINSBERG ¹

Ginsberg is dead: the front-page feature in today's paper stated that Ginsberg, who had beforehand been diagnosed with terminal liver cancer, had died after suffering a stroke.² It was terribly sad news, no-one wants to see another suffer, especially such pain as is endured through cancer. Whatever he was like in his seed-time, and perhaps the movie version of William Burrough's *Naked Lunch* got his youthful character right,³ Ginsberg's influence in latter years has been positive, a mellow professor of the poetic arts.

Listening to Ginsberg and some other poets, "Elders" as they would be called by Robert Lowell, now one of them - quite "otherworldly", was an unnerving experience. Some read poorly, some well: often too many years separate speaker and listener, and I had that uncertain feeling of hearing someone speak from the other side. It was impossible also, to have preconceived the qualities of timbre and accent that moulded these poets' voices. W. H. Auden, despite his long residence in the USA, still sounded very English, very nervous and high-pitched at first, mellower and gentler in later life, the flat [æ] a signal of his re-made life, a poised analytical voice matching his icon. Where Eliot's voice was dry, Pound's is chantic and impassioned, sometimes verging on the edge of hysteria. He all but sings the 'Cantica del Sole' in a high-pitched growling voice, un-American, almost Scots in its [r] sonority - shamanist. The Ginsberg material was recorded later, and is accompanied by a finely composed orchestral suite. He sounds sweet almost, reasonable, perceiving the edges to which he can push himself and his audience: we will lose a fine voice all too soon.

But Lowell's voice came as the greatest surprise: it had a richness, a rounded depth totally unlike any other American voice I had heard on radio or television: one wonders if he had, like Auden, synthesised a voice out of his trans-Atlantic voyages. Whatever, as he read his poems, especially 'John Berryman' and 'To Frank Parker', the sad tremulations and pauses, references to suicides and illnesses of his friends hinted at the very troubles afflicting himself.

In considering three of these, Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden and Robert Lowell, I wondered what might bind them together objectively? They shared much of a common time and place, their lives intersected now and then, but more importantly their work constitutes a linked overlapping of poems standing at the very heart of a modern view of literature. More trivially, they each lived by the ocean, incorporating elements of their personal landscapes into their works, and, they all lived at one time or another at the very edge of self-destruction. Each had to grapple with some flaw of character so as to make mythic sense of this world.

We could add any number of poets and artists to this list. Who was mad? Arthur Rimbaud was schizophrenic, Paul Verlaine a psychopath, Antonin Artaud utterly insane, Ezra Pound a lost cause, Robert Lowell a manic depressive and poor W. H. Auden more sinned against than sinning. Who killed themselves? Vladimir Majakovskij, Modigliani, Hart Crane, Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath.⁴ Even gentle John Berryman jumped off a bridge. Who died too soon, who lost or gave away or sold his birthright of talent? Who gambled for inspiration and failed? Who knows? Jeffrey Meyers' exploration of the causes of the self-destructive tendencies of many of Lowell's contemporaries makes rather horrifying reading.⁵

The Muse, who gives all, must exact a terrible price from the few she favours, even though we live in, and embrace, a secularist *weltanschauung*. Robert Graves spoke of her as a fair young woman, white of skin, high cheekbones rouged, raven

tresses, dressed in white and saffron, hound at leash, huntress by moonlight. She gives of herself and takes from each poet unequally as it pleases her, and as Graves intimated, always there is a price.⁶

If strange things happen where she is,
So that men may say that graves open
And the dead walk, or that futurity
becomes a womb and the unborn are shed,
Such portents are not to be wondered at,
being tourbillions in Tune made
By the strong pulling of her bladed mind
Through that ever-reluctant element.

What should be made of Robert Graves, myth-maker supreme, who stands far outside the ambit of most modernist verse? He inhabits a different, older world, far removed from Auden's Freudian analyses, from Pound and Lowell. Graves' world is anti-Atlantic, Mediterranean, is anti-rational, magical. But I will have no truck with his cold chastities, his dislikes for Auden and Pound, for they were makers just as much as he - corrosive passions are a trap and have no place in a poet's baggage. Perhaps Graves is best left for another study wherein the Muse herself is sought:⁷

All saints revile her, and all sober men
Ruled by the God Apollo's golden mean -
In scorn of which we sailed to find her
In distant regions likeliest to hold her ...

If the Muse's burden is not enough, the poet must be on guard against an inflated reputation, false friends, wasteful passions, against family, avarice and vanity. Graves withdrew to Deyà, Auden to the USA and Austria, Pound into a fantasy of his own construction. Yet the world would exact its own price, and more often than not it comes intruding into all the carefully guarded secret places to snatch away the poet's life, his special vanities. From the steel cage at Pisa, Pound could see how everything had fallen into dust: his false dreams, foolish hopes, hermetic ignorance of evils committed for and by his chosen heroes. As he writes in his despair: ⁸

Thou art a beaten dog beneath the hail,
A swollen magpie in a fitful sun, half black half white
Not know'st wing from tail
Pull down thy vanity ...
Pull down thy vanity

I say pull down.

If the photo-image of Lowell is one of the writer sprawled on his bed at Castine or Milgate Park, or that of the younger Auden imperiously gazing at the camera over a curling cigarette, or Graves withdrawn into the shade of his wide-brimmed hat, that of Pound is different. In Richard Avendon's photograph of 1958, Pound implodes.⁹ Is someone like Pound more to be pitied than scorned or reviled? Allowances made for his mistakes? Some would have left him in the steel cage at Pisa to rot, or have him incarcerated at St. Elizabeth's, a New York mental asylum, until his death. His peers however recognised his predicament, his illness. They visited and comforted him after he was declared insane. They came to listen and to talk, perhaps to make their own judgements. T. S. Eliot, Archibald Macleish, Hugh Kenner then a student, Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore, and then Lowell, himself no stranger to mental asylums.

The award of the Bollingen Prize for the Pisan *Cantos* served further to isolate Pound and highlight the predicament of a committed poet in the real world. The jury, which included some of his visitors, had been able to separate the man from the work, but much of the world could not. In time, Pound's position in the USA was untenable even upon his release, and he retired to Italy for the rest of his life.

Were the *Cantos* a failure? Was Pound's life in vain? I do not know. Vast sections are unreadable, his socioeconomic theorising based upon misconceptions of the reality of human nature, and there seems to be no apparent structure to the whole work, despite his apologists' labours. Yet parts do work, and the idea of an

extended construction has had its beneficent influence: Charles Olson's *Maximus* poems, Basil Bunting's *Briggflats*, and even Lowell's *History* owe their shape and being to Pound's example - many poems welded into one vast poem.

Auden's work went through many quite different phases during his lifetime, and it is only towards the end that one senses the binding together of the many disparate elements of his craft. and so, it would be too simple to discuss Auden too readily, to minimise his worth, for he was difficult and accomplished in his life and his work in which he was able to resolve many of the conflicts existing between his life and work. Poems such as 'Lullaby' (1937) and 'New Year Letter' (1941) attest to his enduring power.

Perhaps a key to understanding Auden is in a conversation with Howard Griffin about St. Augustine's conversion to Christianity.¹⁰ Auden noted that even before hearing the child's cry of "tolle legge, tolle legge" there was a long period of hesitation and unrest". The cry was merely a goad to action: "All we know is: at one point something passes over the edge and in these changes suffering plays a greater part than knowledge". In this I wonder, how much Auden was speaking of St. Augustine or about himself? Or even of Pound, or of others such as Robert Lowell who had suffered because their all too human natures were balanced at the edge.

Robert Lowell as a model

I had, from my beginning, to adore heroes
& I elected that they witness to,
show forth, transfigure ...
JOHN BERRYMAN ¹¹

My initial interest in the poetry of Robert Lowell stemmed from a reading over the summer of 1975 - 76 of Chad Walsh's anthology *Today's Poets*.¹² This selection of British and American poetry dating from the 1930s, how impossibly distant that time now seems, started with 'The Cycle' by Theodore Roethke and ended with Brian Patten's 'Sad Adam'. In between these constraints, I was delighted by the quirkiness of Kenneth Patchen, seduced once again by Lawrence Durrell's impossible visions of a lost civilisation, and skirted around the corners of John Berryman's *The Dream Songs*. Lowell's students, Sylvia Plath and W. D. Snodgrass were included as well as Anne Sexton and Gary Snyder. As my reading expanded, I realised that Walsh had left out a whole packet of poets, Ezra Pound, Robert Creeley and Charles Olson, as well as most of the Beats, and in some ways needed to be placed next to other anthologies if a proper perspective of American poetry 1930s - 1970 were to be gained. Still, it served as an introduction.

The Lowell selection included the long and intriguing 'The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket' of 1943, which I attempted to imitate one afternoon after viewing some shipwreck at Peterborough, but to no avail. One needs the rhetorical heft of felt Catholicism to build upon an initial sensation, rather than an analytical cast of mind. Then there were two poems, one about Eisenhower, 'Inauguration Day; January 1953' and 'Robert Frost', both of which became indelibly associated in my mind with the images of these two men whenever they appeared in television documentaries. At least Lowell was willing to write about contemporary events in

an unequivocal way: then 'Memories of West Street and Lepke' came at me with all the force of cinema-verité, such a contrast in style and manner from the first poems read.

Not until much later, when I chose to re-read as much of Lowell as I could for an essay on himself and Pound, did I have the opportunity to read the work from start to end. And not only the poems, but I was able to read the critics and biographies, especially Ian Hamilton's rather gossipy tome, *Robert Lowell: A Biography*,¹³ as well as Jeffrey Meyers' lacerating *Manic Power*. It seems that no domestic detail is too trivial for some, and biographers have been willing to delve further now that even more personal papers have come to light allowing for publication of the revisionist Paul Mariani's *Lost Puritan: A Life of Robert Lowell*.¹⁴ Further background reading were other biographies and accounts of that heroic time in American letters, such as Eileen Simpson's affectionate if deep-bitten memoir of John Berryman and his circle, *Poets in their Youth*.¹⁵ Biographies and memoirs of Lowell's pupil, Sylvia Plath, were rather numerous and contentious. Like Ezra Pound and W. H. Auden, Robert Lowell is an exemplar of the flawed man, a poet who almost lost everything he had worked for and the gifts he had been born with. Some say he failed, that death cheated him at last. He was aware of his own mortality, knew he was dying when he at last returned to New York.

In *History*, Lowell had written of Baudelaire:¹⁶

... above, below me, only space and shoal,
the spaces, the bat wing of insanity.
I cuddle the insensible blank air,
I envy the void insensibility
and fear sleep as one fears a great hole ...

In this he gave voice to his greatest fear, not death, but madness. He knew well the debilitating fear which would have crippled his creative powers. The example of Pound's breakup was before him, and he had his own history.

What made him so? What wind blew the course of his poetic development so erratically, careering from one pole to another? At first guess we could say his early life - parents, upbringing, environments, schooling all could have played a part. To be born a Lowell in Boston was a fine thing, but the mother's family was equally distinguished, and his mother in particular displaced the father as the stronger personality in the marriage and developed into an all-consuming manipulative monster: ¹⁷

The first years after our first child was born,
the daddy was out at sea, that helped, I could bask
in the rest and stimulation of my dreams,
but the courtship was too swift, the disembarkment
dangerously abrupt . . .

In contrast, the father was ever a shadowy, ineffectual figure to whom Lowell was never really reconciled, and even in *Day By Day* the old sailor appears as a lacklustre, broken Ulysses.

Another factor which seems to have operated in Lowell's early development was an almost total ineptitude with his emotional and spiritual life, all of which has been adequately chronicled by the biographers. But whether it was his repudiation of his Unitarian - Puritan background for a fevered Catholicism, his switch to "fire-breathing" conscientious objection after volunteering to serve in World War 2, or later his almost annual infatuation with a new woman, Lowell was always ready to question his beliefs and actions, even those conceived in the full flight of his mania. Perhaps we should view this as the emanations of a partly-shaped mind which slowly moved towards a full realisation of selfhood.

In my considerations of Séamus Heaney and Robert Lowell, I have made reference to their employment of both quatorzain and sonnet as a unit within the larger context of their works. At this point I want to explore the mechanics of these two forms as a springboard for more general discussion of the relationship

between form and function in conveying the poet's voice. The sonnet evolved in the early thirteenth century as a new Italian poetic form, *Sonnetto*, that is 'little song', which was structured as a double tercet refrain following a double quatrain, the older Sicilian *Strambetto*. The new form was used for sentimental and amorous rhymes, and the first *sonnetti* were apparently published by one Giacomo da Lentini (circa 1200 - 1250) a courtier to Frederick II. These were in the form of hendecasyllabic lines, rhymed *abababab.cdecde*, so establishing the octet-sestet division, enduring to this day as one of the normative patterns for sonnets.¹⁸

Io m'agio posto in core a Dio servire
com'io potesse gire in paradiso,
all'auto loco c'agio audito dire
si mantiene sallazo, gioco e riso:
sanza Madonna non vi voria gire,
quella c'à blanda testa e claro viso,
chè sanza lei non poteria gaudire,
estando da la mia donna diviso.

Ma no lo dico a tale intendimento
perch'io peccato ci volesse fare,
se non veder lo suo bel portamento,
lo bel viso e lo morbido sguardare:
chè lo mi teria 'n gran consolamento,
vegiendo la mia donna in ghiora stare.

Da Lentini stays faithfully and expertly within the chosen rhyme and stanza scheme, with the 3rd. conjugation infinitive {ire} endings of the octet linking to the first conjugation {are} endings in the sestet, contrasting to the participle endings of {mento}. I observe also that not all lines are end-stopped. Further, it can be seen that the language is quite loose, that is *cantabile*, showing the contractions and elisions of the spoken tongue. Metrically, the poem shows its debt to song in that a steady rhythm pervades the lines, but allowing for sufficient

variation in voice and tempo to keep the listener's interest. For example, the opening line could be scanned, showing the long-stressed syllables in bold, as:

| **I**o m'ag**io** po**sto** in co**re** a Dio se**rvire** |.

Whereas line 9, the opening of the sestet, comes heavily down on its opening syllable, so shifting the line's metre:

| **Ma** no lo di**co** a ta**le** int**endi**ement**o** |.

So technically, as well as aesthetically, Da Lentini wrote a well-turned sonnet, in which a central idea was examined from several different aspects. Certainly, what enlivens this poem is that tension between the poet's desire for his "donna" and the reality of an ideological establishment, in this case the Church, which would channel literature towards its spiritual and political ends. The inherent contradiction between an austere and wholly spiritual Christian Paradise and its oriental-inspired Garden of Delights is resolved through his declaration of love for a "Madonna". This latter term is conveniently ambiguous, and could be read either in the more orthodox fashion as a poem of devotion to Our Lady, or more likely as a praise-poem to an earthly counterpart.

The sonnet did evolve further in form, with Guitone d'Arezzo (1230 - 1294) reforming the octave as *abba.abba*, with the following sestet split into a new two-fold pattern, *cddc* plus *ee*. This arrangement allowed for greater flexibility and variation in end-rhyme and grammatical structures, that is, increasing the scope of variety for both speaker and listener. This form was taken up by Dante in *Vita Nuova* and *Canzoniere*, and by Petrarch in his own *Canzoniere*.

It would seem that this structural development suited the Romance languages given their closeness in grammatical structures and vocabulary formations, for later both Spanish and French poets adopted the form. They found it allowed flexibility and subtlety for their languages' polysyllabic end-rhymes and mellifluous

rhythms. These of course, could be readily adapted to song requiring and allowing aural reinforcement of the poem's words.

As a form, the Sonnet has associated with it all the prestige of a reborn culture, so that by the end of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the sonnet had made its way into non-Latin territory. Poets in the Netherlands, England and Poland, and later in Germany, Skandinavia and even Russia, experimented with, adopted and modified the Sonnet to their own needs and tastes. In Italy, the Sonnet continued its development and practitioners such as Torquato Tasso (1544 - 1595) and Michaelangelo Buonarroti (1475 - 1564) and Baldassar Castiglioni (1478 - 1529), reaffirmed the Sonnet as a structure suitable for a wide range of subjects, such as religion and politics, not just for amorous dalliance.

The English Sonnet had its origins with the work of Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503 - 1542), who established a preference for a closing couplet in the sestet, whilst retaining the Petrarchian octet, *abba.abba*, as shown in 'The Hind'.¹⁹ Because the English tongue has quite different linguistic resources and somewhat limited sound patterns in contrast to Italian and French, the continued repetition of rhyme-clusters could have sounded monotonous and dulling. So, Henry Howard, the Lord Surrey, (1517 - 1547) radically varied the opening octet by inserting a new double rhyme-cluster in place of the second *abba* cluster, so obtaining the following pattern - *abab.cdcd.efef.gg*, as in poems such as 'The Cornet' and 'To His Lady'.²⁰ But this form violated the traditional pattern of octet followed by a sestet, and Surrey's unrelenting iambic beat would have been more suitable to a dance rhythm. However, Shakespeare did follow suit with some greater subtlety.

It is instructive to look closely at this heartfelt and astute poem, based on his unfortunate affair with the fickle Anne Boleyn, especially remembering Sir Thomas Wyatt's fate in the Tower of London. Let us begin though, with an

analysis of its rhyme and rhythm, having numbered each line of the 1913 manuscript text. This poem is also known as 'Whoso List To Hunt', and is modelled upon Dante's Rime Sonnet CXC, which having a rougher, more irregular meter than found in Tottel's Miscellany which smoothed it out in accordance to intervening linguistic changes.²¹

The Hind

Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind,
 But for me, alas! I may no more -
 The vain travail hath wearied me so sore,
 I am of them that farthest come behind.
 Yet may I, by no means, my wearied mind
 Draw from the deer; but as she fleeth afore,
 Fainting I follow. I leave off therefore,
 Since in a net I seek to hold the wind.
 Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,
 As well as I, may spend his time in rain:
 And graven with diamonds in letters plain
 There is written her fair neck round about,
 'Noli me tangere, for Cæsar's I am,
 And wild for to hold, though I seem tame.'

The first observation is that the metre is iambic, that characteristic being determined by the final foot in each line, but with free variations to the trochaic. Taking the first and seventh lines for comparison, such variations can be readily noted. In line 1 the metre can be written with stressed syllables in bold, and each foot delineated within dividers:

Who - so | **list** - to | **hunt** | // | **I** - know | where - **is** | an - **hind** |.

That is, the sequence can be read, with a cæsura after the third foot, as:

| trochée | iamb | mono | // | trochée | iamb | iamb |.

The tenth line, which introduces that note of irony and bitterness which has made the poem so politically alive, can similarly be treated:

| As - **well** | as - **I** | // | **may** - spend | his - **time** | in - **rain** |

This line is more regularly iambic, with the third foot switching to trochée after the mid-line cæsure. It should also be noted that lines do vary in the number of syllables, lines 1 and 7 containing eleven and ten syllables respectively. A further embellishment in analysis is added depending upon whether one is tempted to read Wyatt's dialect as having retained pronunciation of the final {e} in words such as more and sore, that is being pronounced [mo:rë], [so:rë], for this could alter the reading of line 2.

| But - for - **me** | al - **as** | // | I - **may** | no - **mor** - e |

That is, a tetrametre in the shape of

| anapest | iamb | iamb | amphibrach |

as against:

| **But** | for - **me** | al - **as** | // | **I** - may | no - **more** |

a pentametric line constructed as | mono | iamb | iamb | trochée | iamb | iamb |. Much depends on how the poem is read aloud, the reader's dialect or linguistic knowledge, and certainly in there is evidence in Tottel's *Miscellany* of 1557 that the linguistic changes of the Great Vowel Shift and loss of final schwa, here symbolised as [ë] had been effected.²²

The rhyme scheme is as discussed, *abba.abba.cddc.ee* and presents no surprises, except that he rhymes mind with wind, perhaps indicating something more than a visual rhyme or even as a pun. Wyatt also uses a form of phrasal rhyme through repetitions in lines 1 and 9, "Whoso list to hunt" and "Who list her hunt", and by the driving verbal structures in the first person such as "I know", repeated some eight times in the first ten lines. This is reversed by the mirror phrases "Yet may I" and "As well may I" in lines 5 and 10, allowing for a sense of uncertainty and doubt to be sounded.

Like the Da Lentini sonnet, Wyatt's poem succeeds because of the tension between his desire and reality of "Cæsar's" ownership of the "Hind", one Lady Anne Boleyn. Wyatt did eventually pay for this high praise and resentment of the tyrannical King Henry VIII - his own life. Like Giordano Bruno (1548 - 1600), author of a more ætherial sonnet, 'Amor, per cui tant'alto il ver discerno',²³ he found that sonneteering could be a risky profession.

The sonnet continued to develop, Edmund Spenser (1552 - 1599) ever-continental in his tastes, altering the rhyme-patterns within the quatrain to be both more ballad-like, but establishing aural links between each quatrain in the form *abab.bcbc.cdcd.ee*. From this point, the sonnet in English poetry was firmly established with Shakespeare, then Milton and generations of poets till today employing it in a range of forms and for different purposes. For most readers, Shakespeare's diction and steady iambic tread remains the pattern sounding away in the background of one's consciousness.

But there are other models of sound and structure, and a brief consideration of Auden's poem, 'Rimbaud', will illustrate some of the shifts in technique and sensibility that have taken place over the past four hundred years.²⁴

Rimbaud

The nights, the railway-arches, the bad sky,
His horrible companions who did not know it,
But in that child the rhetorician's lie
Burst like a pipe: the cold had made a poet.

Drinks bought him by his weak and lyric friend
His five wits systematically deranged,
To all accustomed nonsense put an end;
Till he from lyre and weakness was estranged.

Verse was a special illness of the ear,
Integrity was not enough; that seemed
The hell of childhood: he must try again.

Now, galloping through Africa, he dreamed
Of a new self, a son, an engineer,
His truth acceptable to lying men.

Now, this is not one of Auden's better poems, and is rather flat in tone and contrived in structures and phrasing, but for my purposes it is important because it demonstrates a peculiarly modern sensibility, and a willingness to tackle a difficult subject. Moreover, Auden's metre is far closer to contemporary speech-patterns than may have been expected even in the middle 1930s. Line 5 is wholly idiomatic in Auden's dialect in its stress-pattern, with initial emphasis being placed on the subject-noun:

| **Drinks** bought | him **by** | his **weak** | and **lyr** - | ic **friend** |.

One could quibble about "lyric" as a common word, and Auden did have a tendency to embellish otherwise a quite plain diction with technical vocabulary, though all to good effect. Moreover, he was prepared to violate canons of versification, with a mixed set of linkages between the octet and sestet, abab.cdcd.efc'.fec': that is the second quatrain's rhyme {-end}, is echoed in the sestet's {-en}. Further, the constant employment of front vowels in rhymes such as [-aĩ], [-ët], [-end], [-en], [-ir] and [i:md] tie back the lines to the beginnings of lines with words such as "nights", "his", "drinks", "till" and so on. As Auden states of verse, it is "a special illness of the ear", demanding that the speaker and listener collaborate very closely in their shared journey, but surely a sonnet is an even more specialised condition.

Like Science-fiction writers, it is useful for poets to play around with questions of possibility - "What if?" - "Why not?" - "Should not?". What if one discarded the

warts of Frenchified and Latinate speech and purified the tongue, taking in the vast storehouse of dialects and local speeches? What if one injected real conversations into the body poetic? Why not jettison rhyme as an ornamental device? Should not the visual become as important as the aural in constructing a poem for publication on the Internet?

When Ezra Pound (1885 - 1972) embarked on his series of vast constructions, he was willing to break the rules. Each Canto became a treasure-trove. Here is a section of 'Canto XIX', constructed as a reported conversation:²⁵

... "So there was my ole man sitting,
They were in arm-chairs, according to protocol,
and next to him his nephew Mr. Wurmsdorf,
And old Ptierstoff, for purely family reasons,
Personal reasons, was held in great esteem
by his relatives,
And he had dispatches from St. Petersburg,
And Wurmsdorff had his from Vienna,
And he knew, and they knew, and each knew
That the other knew that the other he knew,
And Wurmsdorff was just reaching into his pocket,
That was to start things, then my ole man
Said it:

Albert, and the rest of it.

Those days are gone by for ever".

In some lines such l.3, Pound is rigorously and idiomatically iambic, whereas in other places, such as l. 8 the metre is rough and jagged - because that is the way we speak. The subject-matter of this unrhymed section, technically a quatorzain disregarding the possible deficiency of a line, is part of an examination of the various states of Hell, as expressed by snapshots of London's life, low and high. What Pound was attempting was nothing less than a complete portrait of his times, undertaken by placing historical detail next to lyrics, together with snatches of autobiography and meditative passages.²⁶ In the 1930s Pound's style was as

revolutionary as Majakovsky's had been in Revolutionary Russia, for he was engaged in a poetry which included large passages of quoted prose, broken into phrases and lines, and even transcribed letters - a style which was later taken up by Olson and later by Lowell, amongst others.

Likewise, within *The Pisan Cantos*, Pound built up his argument by smaller units within much longer rhythmical structures derived from Provençal practice.²⁷ For example, in 'Canto LXXVI', we read the following unit, more formal than the previous example, being constructed out of two seven-line sections:²⁸

... So that in the synagogue in Gibraltar
 the sense of humour seemed to prevail
 during the preliminary parts of the whatever
but they respected at least the scrolls of the law
 from it, by it, redemption
 @ \$8.50, @ \$8.67 buy the field with good money
no unrighteousness in meteyard or in measure (of prices)

and there is no need for the Xtians to pretend that
 they wrote Leviticus
 chapter XIX in particular
 with justice Zion
not by cheating the eye-teeth out of Don Fulano
 or of Caio e Tizio;

Why not rebuild it?

While it is not my intent to go into Pound's philosophies and political beliefs in this discussion, it is important to note that the purpose of his method is to highlight certain elements, which through a process of repetition and elaboration, created a shimmering and incandescent whole. The greatness of his *Cantos* can be disputed, but they are compelling as much for their value as a method as for their complex content.

John Berryman's avoidance of a sonnet or quatorzain as the base form for his verses is evident in his two major long works. *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* is constructed similarly on a grand scale, some fifty-seven short passages of eight lines.²⁹ Whereas the three hundred and eighty-five poems

of *The Dream Songs* are each constructed as three stanzas of six lines.³⁰ But even though he has avoided the sonnet form, and I cannot find in the published criticism any reason he may have given for such choices of form, he still emulates the sonnetteers in a close adherence to a chosen form which affords both a rigid architecture and the possibility of flexibility. Taking, for example, the forty-fifth passage:

And they tower, whom the pear-tree lured
to let them fall, fierce mornings they reclined
down the brook-bank to the east
fishing for shiners with a crookt pin,
wading, dams massing, well, and Sam's to be
a doctor in Boston. After the divisive sea,
and death's first feast,
and the galled effort on the wilderness endured, ...

As in all other passages, one rhyme is used for the first and eighth lines as formal markers, while a second rhyme is used to tie the fifth and sixth lines together. The metre is relatively free and is colloquial, Berryman taking great pains to draw upon Anne Bradstreet's papers so as to obtain the right tonality for his poem, and lines vary in length and emphases. At times, whole passages enjamb, as does this one, carrying over their argument to the next. That is, while Berryman was able to find a suitable and satisfying architecture, it was not allowed to dictate outcomes, but rather served the poet's purpose.

At this point, it becomes necessary to examine some of Lowell's quatorzains with regard to structure and language, and to examine if the form was suitable for his purposes. The first poem to be examined has the same subject as Auden's which was discussed previously.³¹

Rimbaud I. Bohemia

I walked on the great roads, my two fists lost
in my coat's slashed pockets; my overcoat too

was the ghost of a coat. Under the sky -
I was a young student, Muses. What an affair
we had together! My only trousers were a big hole.
Tom Thumb, the stargazer. I brightened my steps with rhymes.
My inn was at the Sign of the Great Bear,
the stars sang like silver in my hands.
I listened to them and squatted on my heels,
September twilights and September twilights,
rhyming into the monster-crowded dark,
the rain splashing on my face like cheap wine.
I plucked the elastics on my clobbered boots
like lyrestings, one foot squeezed tight against my heart.

The metre is basically iambic, but with free variation, and line lengths vary from 9 to 14 syllables, whilst retaining a fundamental pentametric rhythm. As with many English-language poems, lines do carry over formal printed boundaries, only to be held in check by a following mid-line cæsure, as in each of lines 2 to 5. This device both allows and holds back the colloquial flow.

It seems that Lowell stumbled into writing in the manner he did, partly because the projected "Notebook of a Year" begun in 1967 had not been expected to develop into a long poem, and partly because the unrhymed form allowed him a certain freedom.³² As Lowell said in conversation about his work:³³

I didn't find fourteen lines handcuffs. I gained more than I gave. It would have been a worry never to have known when a section must end; variation might have been monotony ...

Notebook is in unrhymed, loose blank verse sonnets ... It can say almost anything conversation or correspondence can ... [allowing] me rhetoric, formal construction, and quick breaks ... One poem must lead toward the next, but is fairly complete ...

Words came rapidly, almost four hundred sonnets in four years - a calendar of workdays. I did nothing but write; I was thinking lines even when teaching or playing tennis ... Things I felt or saw, or read were drift in the whirlpool, the squeeze of the sonnet and the loose ravel of blank verse.

Calder traces the evolution of this project into *Notebook*, the poem's third and much expanded edition and its subsequent transformation into two texts, *For Lizzie and Harriet* and *History*. While these finalised publications cannot be thought

of as "process" texts, the term is Calder's, they have their root and origin in a sustained four-year arc of writing, and still bear the brunt and bruise of Lowell's struggle to shape his disparate materials towards a sense of unity. While all poems borne out of process must make some acknowledgment towards the artifice of poetry, in this case the remembrance of the Sonnet as form, there are few if any concessions in *Notebook 1967 - 68*. As Calder points out, other younger poets working in much the same field, such as Creeley in *A Day Book* (1972) have taken on Lowell's challenge and extended process into a consciousness about creating the long poem. This is what I am interested in, how to go about composing a large poem, and it would seem that this basic unit, call it sonnet or quatorzain, the linguistic difference is really too minor for it to be a field of contention, offers a path by which I will be able to proceed in my own project.

But then I have found there are very few recent detailed critical analyses of Lowell's poems, the fashion for literary biography having swamped the publishers' better judgement. So for purposes of this essay, I accept all that has been written about Lowell's life, especially his continued illnesses and the treatments foisted upon his suffering body, and want really to focus on one aspect of his later writing - the quatorzains of *The Dolphin* and *History*.

Since the midsummer of 1967, Lowell was producing lines at an extraordinary rate, all rather "slack fourteen-liners - unrhymed, unmetrical",³⁴ and quite uneven in the quality of the drafts. He was able to continue working at the rate of four such poems per week until Christmas, by which he had generated some seventy such poems. Everything had been poured into their making: private musings, family matters, public events, conversations - he used a novelist's technique to recreate his own world, so much so that by the end of the next year some 4000 publishable lines had been composed³⁵.

Lowell had several models to work from, not the least Ezra Pound's Cantos - remembering his conversations with the aged Pound at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital - though even in Life Studies he had only tested the boundaries of disobedience to form. Then again, John Berryman had been publishing his Dream Songs in a similarly loose format, each poem usually being three stanzas long, each stanza of six lines. Meyers is quite explicit in his claim that Berryman's evolving work was a "major influence", and it seems that Lowell did acknowledge this.³⁶ The Berryman model offered the notion of structure against which initial journal jottings, hence the deceptive title of the title - Notebooks. He made the decision that the movement of the collection's plot, if it can be called that, should follow the long season of mid 1967 to the autumn of 1968, but as Lowell noted, "not a chronicle or almanac".³⁷

Later, such success as Lowell had with this form, gave him the basis to develop the lovely and often searing poems of The Dolphin. This collection is framed by two dedicatory poems, 'Fishnet' and 'Dolphin', which serve to remind the reader of the double play that occurs between Poet and Muse, that the Muse is desired but in the long run is a free spirit: ³⁸

your wandering silences and bright trouvailles,
dolphin let loose to catch the flashing fish ...

Yet in this, his "collaborating muse" has been, he admits, his "guide". Also, in these framing poems is that note of regret that his life has moved into a final phase wherein his circles of friends diminish, and that the "line must terminate": a strangely melancholic frame for a collection commemorating a new love, especially if the propositions "Poets die adolescents" is taken as true. But then, Lowell had suffered enough to realise that his time was limited.

Two poems from The Dolphin are sufficient to analyse in some detail in order to gain an overview of Lowell's technique and material. The first chosen is 'Summer

Between Terms 1', which reads so deceptively and colloquially that one is inclined to skip through it on first reading - but wait, take each line at a slower pace, then re-read³⁹:

The day's so calm and muggy I sweat tears,
the summer's cloudcap and the summer's heat. . . .
Surely good writers write all possible wrong -
are we so conscience-dark and cataract-blind,
we only blame in others what they blame in us?
(The sentence writes we, when charity wants I. . . .)
It takes such painful mellowing to use error. . . .
I have stood too long on a chair or ladder,
branch-lightning forking through my thought and veins -
I cannot hang my heavy picture straight.
I can't see myself ... in the cattery,
the tomcats doze till the litters are eatable,
then find their kittens and chew off their breakable heads.
They told us by harshness to win the stars.

The first distich gives us a time of year, a framework for us to imagine ourselves at Milgate Park.⁴⁰ Yet it is an uncomfortable environment, which gives rise to his "sweat". Out of this the next triplet swings to a consideration of writers committing a "wrong", and examining the real possibility that writers do so by scapegoating or transference of inner unease. Lowell does this quite wittily in the verbal switch of "[to] write" for "[to] right", emphasising the visual puns and consonance of each initial {wr} in "writes", "write" and "wrong". Graphic linkage of the letter {w} from that line to the next three, allows Lowell to carry the argument a stage further - to the next shift in focus, "I".

"Charity", the gift of caring for others, would demand that he exclude Blackwood from blame, almost in anticipation of the caustic reviews that would be accorded by critics or close friends such as Marjorie Perloff and Adrienne Rich - and I suspect that charity would later be furthest from his disposition when later he would dismiss Rich to the "minor, definitely minor" category of women writers.⁴¹

It's a moot point that Lowell ever underwent a "mellowing" in order to admit his errors, rather a clear-sightedness brought on by his miseries, what he calls the "branch lightning" which had permeated his faculties. Not only his illnesses though, for Lowell may have been recalling the shock treatments received for his numerous nervous breakdowns - brutally overdone bursts of raw electricity directed into the brain.⁴² Perhaps also Lowell recalled that he had even shared the same Boston hospital facility with John Berryman - Maclean's.⁴³ That treatment seems to have affected him physically, especially the sight, for one notices from photographs that the spectacle lenses have grown thicker, he is less kempt - all that rugged handsomeness destroyed. That illicit photograph, given without permission to Newsweek by one Thomas Victor, seem to make Blackwood, himself and the children look like "a secret polygamous poor white family", about as far removed from their several origins, but possibly so much closer to the truth, especially their shared proclivity for serial marriage and relative poverty.⁴⁴

As "himself" has become invisible, a ghost-poet, then the sense of self as a civilised person is replaced by the primal, savage Id, remembering that Lowell had been nicknamed "Cal" by both family and friends when at St. Mark's School, as much a Caliban as Caligula,⁴⁵ and in these lines alluded to himself by the kitten-eating tomcats to be more like a Goyan Saturnus devouring his offspring.⁴⁶

The last line then presents a problem: who are referred to by "they"? Grammatically this pronoun should refer back to "tomcats" two lines previous, but is nonsense if taken literally. His teachers? - this would be a more consistent reading given that he has kept referring back to the past in his poems, but I feel that it is more likely that he is referring in general terms to those ideologies which had permeated American, especially Yankee, life in the pre-War period. That

sense of listlessness and almost despair which was marked in the first distich has been fully developed into an acid-edged vision of failure - a self-lacerating poem. On first looking at 'Records' it is the immediacy and intimacy of tone which astonishes.⁴⁷ Who is speaking?

" . . . I was playing records on Sunday,
 arranging all my records, and I came
 on some of your voice, and started to suggest
 that Harriet listen: then immediately
 we both shook our heads. It was like hearing
 the voice of the beloved who had died.
 All this is a new feeling . . . I got the letter
 this morning, the letter you wrote me Saturday.
 I thought my heart would break a thousand times,
 but I would rather have read it a thousand times
 than the detached unreal ones you wrote before -
 you doomed to know what I have known with you,
 lying with someone fighting unreality -
 love vanquished by his mysterious carelessness."

When this poem was published, it sorely hurt Elizabeth Hardwick for it is so close to her life's disappointment, Lowell's betrayal of both herself - with Blackwood - and also for their daughter, Harriet. Elizabeth Hardwick was "furious" when she learnt of the existence of *The Dolphin* even when in draft form.⁴⁸ But what Lowell had done was to incorporate the daily stuff of his life directly into his poems, much like W. C. Williams in *Paterson*, or even F. Scott Fitzgerald in *Tender is the Night*. In this case, the very stuff of the poem was private correspondence from Hardwick to Lowell, materials which one would normally resist allowing into the public gaze. Whatever the cost his actions may incur, he felt it was his prerogative, if not a loving duty, to carve out of his personal life some sort of meaning from the few elements that helped him anchor his focus on life.

Technically, the poems are anything but "slack", for as I have shown in this limited, initial discussion, each poem has its internal linkages and crossovers of

image and voice, and sets of external references which helps the volume accumulate its force. Even the insertions of materials from correspondence confirm Lowell's conscious shaping of material - though one would need Hardwick's letters to see just what and how Lowell had worked with - but her voice emerges from the page. If we were to white-out the titles, which seem to be editorial insertions, more guideposts on the year's path, then these quatorzains could be viewed as incorporate stanzas of the one poem - which in one sense Lowell had adhered to throughout his revisions and reshaping of the basic worksheets.

In trying to break the Summer cycle of reading and then nothing written that is the writing block, I had earlier tried process of Chance. It seems to have worked, and I am still working in a practice which is yielding at least one series of poems. Strangely enough these have emerged as fourteen-liners. But in the last fortnight I have taken to working directly to worksheets, drafting anything between three and ten poems in a working session.

These sessions have ranged from an hour snatched from the jaws of classroom commitment to a lazy day when the family was in and out of the house at odd intervals. I have found that more than ever before, I need relative silence and to be away from the sounds of others' voices in order for the poems to shape out the first thought or image into a draft. I need a degree of solitude. As Walter de la Mare once noted, "the writer must stand back from the press and habit of convention. He must keep on recapturing solitude".⁴⁹ Also, I have noticed how my visual and tactile senses have become quite extraordinarily heightened in the middle of writing a poem. The chair and table must be comfortable and steady, I use my favourite fountain-pen, not being able to bear to compose upon the keyboard and screen - sounds not within my control become bleak distractions,

such as a door slamming or the unwanted intrusion of a colleague into the room I have appropriated. Yet household commonplaces, the faint hum of the dishwasher or the whitenoise from a television set, or the collie-dog's frustrated pursuit of honeyeaters, do not prise me away from my desk. After a while my teeth feel furry, or my toes itch, I need to drink a third coffee: if a piece has taken some sort of shape, I can rewrite parts, shift lines about then shuffle it into the tail of the paper pile.

Physical processes no doubt mirror whatever else has gone on in the mental passage which lead into the first drafts as they appear. I am eclectic in my approach: anything which crosses my sight, which falls within my hearing, from another text becomes a starting point, is taken as a line or phrase out of which the poem proceeds. Perhaps there is a mystery to this, but if Jung was right in supposing that our collective unconscious feeds us all our ideas, images and words out of a common cultural stock, then what I produce onto the page must eventually ring some bells and recognition for both myself, and in the long run, for other readers - that path upon which Language must travel is already mapped out, the poem grows out of those images which float into the linguistic framework.

Before starting on the poems, and all through their writing down, I had been reading both Mariani's and Hamilton's biographies of Robert Lowell, then Ginsberg died - suddenly it seems that the world has shifted on its axis once more and we can mark out some boundaries of an heroic era in letters. But these poems are of more mundane stuff, quite deliberately so, and I have seized upon what I have been able to see and take a given moment, using the Lowell model of "slack fourteen-liners" as a framework as much as an artist would use the size of a sketchpad to shape the drawing's boundaries: even so, the framework need not be

filled in completely, or even one could work outside of them by pasting on an extra sheet. There is no magic in this, only one's needs to use paper as a tool.

Another Music in the *Maximus Poems* and beyond

the flowering plum
out the front door window
sends whiteness
inside my house
CHARLES OLSON ⁵⁰

Renewed interest in the works and influence of Charles Olson (1910- 1970) was signalled to the broader reading public by Tom Clark's detailed biography, setting Olson against the vast panorama of post-War American political, educational and academic life.⁵¹ Olson's own sense of presence in American letters was defined by his reading at the Berkeley Poetry Conference in 1965 which in turn stimulated a new productive period in poetics, just as his work had been stimulated by contact with like minds some fifteen years beforehand.⁵²

In reading Olson's work, and in the commentaries about him, I am struck as to how open he was to the influences of his time and how he has incorporated them into his work. He was certainly influenced by the philosophical currents of his time, as with so many of his contemporaries, he greatly esteemed the English mathematician and philosopher A. N. Whitehead (1861 - 1947),⁵³ as well as the Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung.⁵⁴

While George Butterick has edited the complete edition of Olson's monumental *Maximus Poems*. He has also sought out and published both the complete correspondence between Charles Olson and Robert Creeley as well as producing a detailed guide to Olson's poems. Many other editors and commentators have

added to the list of texts and articles dealing with aspects of Olson's life and work, the most recent being Stein's detailed explication of Olson's last act of writing, 'The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum'.

In Australian letters, Olson's influence is acknowledged by Andrew Taylor as editor of the new journal, *Boxkite*.⁵⁵ Taylor makes an opening comment so grand in its sweep that it deserves a full quotation: "Olson has taken me to the depths of the chasm and back again. He has been both Virgil and Geryon on an ineffable journey, both guide and conveyor; instructor and vehicle and as Robert Duncan said, *the big fire source*".⁵⁶ That a contemporary Australian editor such as Taylor holds such a high opinion of Olson is intriguing, and has been the start of my re-reading of the *Maximus Poems* and associated materials, which hitherto I had found somewhat obtuse not being that well-read in the small details of Massachusetts colonial life. I suspect that my undergraduate aversion to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and the general transcendental tenor of that era has had much to do with my perception of Olson as a difficult poet. But in trying to write the various Cantos of *Deluge* what others read as a difficulties I can see and articulate with clarity, and increasingly have found myself able to swim with Olson in the welcoming ocean that is his poetry.

The *Maximus Poems*, proclaims its importance and difficulty in its very format. Both the Jargon/Corinth and Butterick editions are formidable books to handle being 28 cm high by 42 cm wide. It sits imposingly on a table or is nestled in the lap of the reader, texture of paper and quality of binding reminding the reader of an ancient and treasured text of secrets. Indeed, Olson's polemic is as much that of a teacher as that of a poet. The setting of the verses at first strikes one as irregular, with detached lines and phrases drifting across pages, dated lists and account books reproduced in columns, intimate notes and asides tucked away at

various stages of the book. The initial impressions of difficulty can quickly give way to feelings of confusion and loss, for there is no simple narrative line that is readily apparent to the outsider, a certain historical knowledge is assumed on the reader's part, and all too often that knowledge was lacking on my part.

That has been remedied at least in its main outlines, and I can see a certain validity in Olson's argument that America's cornerstone is to be found in Gloucester, rather than New Plymouth: that the whole tenor of America's commercial and pioneering endeavour is a reflex of the patterns first established there. Social historians will take exception, will point to other strains and threads in that continent's history, but the enduring tone of the *Maximus Poems* is that of a hard-won prize wrought out of unpromising and stony fields: it would have been easier for the pioneering fishermen to have admitted defeat and sailed back to safer waters.

However, my first concern is with Olson's poetic technique, and I will examine his work as typified in several passages from *Maximus* (I & II) and from 'The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum', each representing a stage in the evolution of his poetic, and attempt to address the question of "flatness" as indicated at the beginning of this Chapter. These passages are chosen for their relative accessibility and their suitability to my purposes in writing.

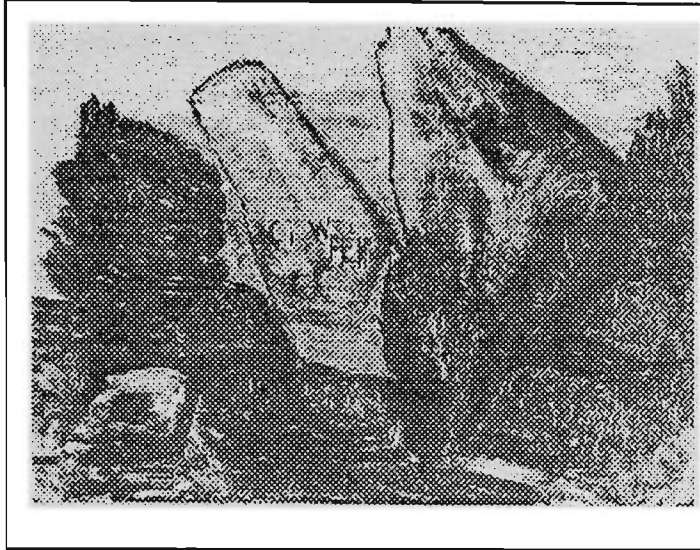
The first passage from begins with an evocation of the painter Marsden Hartley (dates) who drew his inspiration from the Dogtown area outside of Gloucester. ⁵⁷

(As hands are put to the eyes' commands

There is this rock breaches
the earth: the Whale's Jaw
my father stood inside of

I have a photograph, him

a smiling Jonah forcing back those teeth
Or more Jehovah, he looks that strong
he could have split the rock
as it is split, and not
as Marsden Hartley painted it
so it's a canvas glove ...



Marsden Hartley *Whales Jaw* (1934)

The first thing to note about Olson's compositional style is his meticulous attention to appearance of the text on a page. He had articulated the celebrated notion of projective verse much earlier (1949 - 1950), and like John Cage, his later associate at Black Mountain College, was very much a man of his times, assimilating with gusto new developments in mathematics, psychology and the cinema. His initial draft of the article looked like this: ⁵⁸

PROJECTIVE

VERSE

(projectile

(prospective

(percussive

vs.

the NON-projective, what we have had, pretty much (outside Pound &
Williams), what a French critic calls the "closed," visual verse, the lyric,
if you like, the "personal" ...

Olson's graphic device of indentation and moving print across a page may well have had its origin in his contact with the painters and graphic artists at Black Mountain College, such as Franz Kline and Ben Shahn, as well as with many student designers' displays of book covers and typography. But he also may have

been aware of other forms of *poesie-concrete* as first practised by the Russian Futurists and the Surrealists.⁵⁹

Olson's revolutionary statement on poetics, 'Projective Verse', was published in *Poetry New York* in 1950, establishing him as a protagonist for open forms of poetry and an opponent of the dominant literary movement, the New Criticism, as represented by critics such as F. R. Leavis in England, and in the U.S.A. by Allan Tate, John Crowe Ransom and Lionel Trilling. Other writers associated with that school included W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop and many others. One assumption of the New Criticism had been that there are forms deeply rooted in tradition which are most suitable for poetry and for prose and that a poem or narrative can be measured by how well it follows that particular form. In such a view successful conformity or virtuosity became the measure of achievement. Robert Creeley noted rather astutely that such forms become the "means by which lesser men made patterns of work for the better - so to perpetuate their own failure". Robert Duncan, who came out of a Kabbalist tradition completely different in spirit to the trans-Atlantic New critics, observed that the need for a set of rules and conventional forms grows out of the need for control and a fear of the unknown or inexplicable. He observed that for the inexpert there must be reference to a ruler in time.

Of course there were reactions to such an extreme and scholastic formalism which seemed to contradict the notion of poetry as a means of emotional expression which had become associated with the Romantic tradition. Olson's protest was to propose an alternative in verse which he termed "open" or as being "composed by field" in which the poem is conceived as an "energy-discharge" held together by tensions, a sort of yin-yang situation, with text moving about an unyielding "pivot" as Pound had postulated earlier in his *Cantos*.

Robert Creeley had suggested to Olson that "form is never more than an *extension* of content",⁶⁰ which proposition Olson incorporated into his statement, but also paralleled the general thought in modernist movement as exemplified in the Bauhaus approach to the creation of everyday objects as well as to art. Olson was led on to state that this energy should not be dissipated by meditation but that one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception in the writing of a poem. That is, the poem becomes a movement, a transmission of energy from the poet to the reader by the constant flow of images and sounds. In this, Olson made a great stride in articulating to English-language readers what had been known long ago to the writers of the Vedas, that poetry and song are communicated by the flow of the speaker's breath, incorporating both sounds and silences, and that the line of one's poem is determined by the measure of each man's particular breath: it is that differential element which will make my poetry different from another's.

The publication of "Projective Verse" was the catalyst for the new wave of writers to be able to communicate their concerns, ideas and nascent writings, rather than work in individual silences. Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov and others, used this growing network, at first centred around *The Black Mountain Review* to keep alive new forms and the processes of discovery. That is, Olson's personal traits of expansiveness and openness became translated into a theory of presentation, a reaction against the still straight-jacketed nature of American society and its poetics. He sought to claw his way back to the open seashores of the earliest settlers and their pioneers successors: poetry he thought of as being sharp and purposeful as a harpoon, a projectile, a tool, something shaped to a purpose.

In the "Whale's Jaw" passage of *Maximus*, Olson lays out the grounds for his argument by recalling his immigrant father, Karl Olson, whose cost in settlement in a new land was his eventual defeat by that America his son had chosen to celebrate in his political life. The father is prophetically posed inside the rock formation known as "Whale's Jaw", joking at the incongruity. In this, the poet likens him to a "smiling Jonah", and if the reader remembers Olson's earlier study of Melville, *Call me Ishmael*, then the image is clouded with doubt and uncertainty. There is a consequential shift as the image of Jonah transmutes to that of Jehovah, his antagonist, the earthly father transfiguring to that of the Heavenly Father so "strong / he could have split the rock".

These transformations of image and metaphor occur very quickly, within a few lines, and it requires a sustained effort on the reader's part to keep up, but once Olson's habit has been integrated into the reading process, there is some confidence in one's ability to read the text. But as Jonathan Cullers has dourly pointed out, "as yet we understand very little about how we read".⁶¹ Reading Olson demands more and more of his expanding audience, because he is apt to shift ground again and again, so that the method of reading him cannot be merely a mechanical process. For example, when he shifts focus from discussing "Jehovah" to "Marsden Hartley", a painter of New England landscapes, a new referential language is needed:

Hartley had so many courages,
and such defeats,
who used to stay too long at Dogtown,
getting that rock in paint,
he was so afraid of night, and loons

but what he did with that bald jaw of stone, ...

Firstly, it would be useful for the reader to know who and what was Marsden Hartley. Even more helpful would be a reproduction of some of Hartley's art, perhaps difficult to find, but illuminating in showing the reader how some other artist has imagined the great "Whale's Jaw" which is a rock formation which was painted by Hartley.⁶² Yet Olson is at odds with Hartley for his "transubstantiations" in which the terrifying beast had been turned into a cultic object, a plaything almost:

Such transubstantiations

as I am not permitted

nor my father, who'd never have turned the Whale Jaw back

to such humanness neither he nor I, as workers,

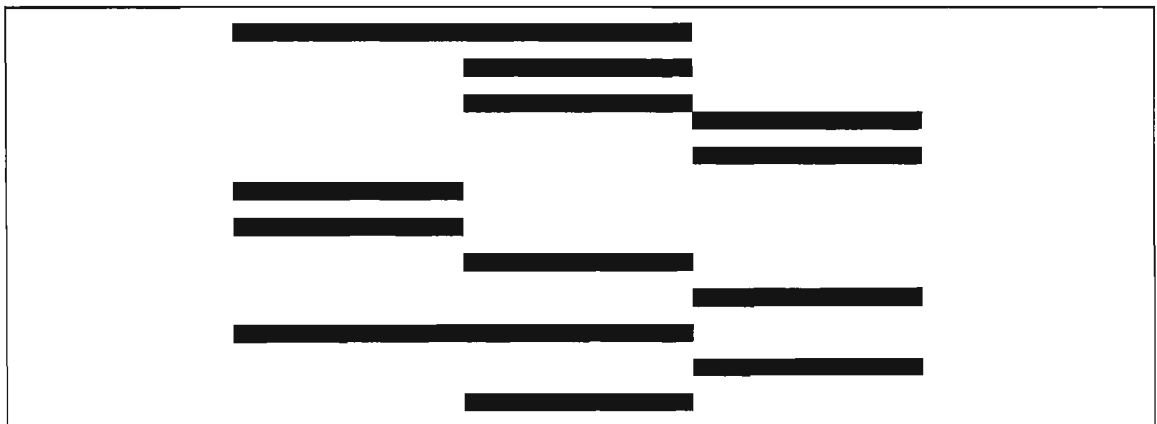
are infuriated with ...

It interests me that Olson's technique allows him to introduce major ideas through very simple means. What he has done in this passage is to demonstrate the spiritual strength of his beloved father through that series of transformations, Karl ⇌ Jonah ⇌ Jehovah, and yet be able to say that the Catholic concept of transubstantiation is disallowed to the "workers": using this device Olson is able to encapsulate a number of crises in the American psyche. Firstly, there is the tension that exists between a Catholic spirituality, its "humanness" as Olson puts it, and the Judeo-Protestant concept of the all-powerful and demanding Father-God who cannot be humanised. Secondly, Olson hints at the conflict within his own family life, father Swedish and Lutheran, mother Irish-Catholic and himself a convert to Catholicism, like Lowell, and engaged in a series of sexual and marital relationships, each of which had their particular religious and moral colourings. In this, Olson is mirror of the many religious currents and social passions which gripped post-War America, however, he had the sense to resolve these conflicts in

a realisation that for the polity to hold fast doctrine needs to be tempered with common civility:

The men of the matter of this city
(who was it did carve the Lady?)
are never
doctrinaires

Such is the conclusion. The eye, as much as the reader's voice, has been led through to this point by a series of discrete stanzas which have been laid out on the printed page as tesserae, tiles in a pattern as intricate as a Roman mosaic or a musical score.



Visual patterning of stanzas in *Maximus*

The blocking of these stanzas, so demonstrated in a tabular format, gives a visual realisation to some of Olson's notions as to how his projective verse is to be effected. It is a visual-musical dance like a Piet Mondrian abstraction, a dance for his Muses, as much as it is a verbal exposition of ideas and images, and as such is typical of Olson's compositional technique.

Gerald Burns has recently noted how fortunate Olson was in the setting of his poems onto the printed page. As he points out, the *Maximus* text was beautifully set in Stuttgart when published by both the University of California Press and Jargon/Corinth, and followed by Butterick's complete edition, with "elegant and expressive" indentations, and wonders at "the placement of multiply-indented blocs, seeing them over that jump from the manuscript when the line-lengths

shrink" delicately altering the proportions of each of the verse sections.⁶³ Such attention to typesetting detail is an important instructive to any poet who wishes that his work be read carefully and with some appreciation of the forces which have gone to construct a poem. The modern habit of commercial and many literary publishers economically printing everything in Times Roman 12 point produces dull pagework and dull æsthetics. The eye feeds upon variety and the unexpected. For this reason alone, Olson's use of Bembo and Garamond founts is to be applauded.

The second passage chosen, impossible to reproduce by word-processor, is 'Letter, May 2, 1959'.⁶⁴ This is a longer piece, taking up seven full pages, each of which has its own set of shapes, its own choreography. I find this exciting: as Olson is able to get the typesetter to make the type follow the contours of the manifold whorls and countercurrents of psychic energy. The page is made to dance before the reader's eyes, and to read the passage illustrated, one must turn the page around, much like a ship's captain trying to match his prospects with a hand-drawn chart. These visual and tactile aspects of Olson's craft are exciting.

Olson's preoccupation with the processes of establishment of the American polity, and the personal costs entailed are facilitated by his method of presentation. He focuses on the individuals who settled in the Gloucester area, follows their movements and notes their achievements, sufferings and failures: this is a very different approach to History to those who write in abstracted terms of social and economic movements, draining the pages of human blood and endeavour. Olson saw quite clearly that his America was the result of individual struggles against a seemingly unmanageable environment and petty ideologies. Even in his own time, he had seen his father destroyed.

Olson makes the first page come alive with the people of his town their settlement and constant movement across the landscape. He initially maps out the area of Gloucester "formerly called Meeting House Plain, near the early settlers' first meetinghouse", just east of the Annisquam River, and about a mile north of the harbour itself.⁶⁵ As Butterick describes the compositional process, Olson wrote out this "mapping" on the back of a airmail letter - Olson was in the praiseworthy habit of quickly writing down any information which came to hand, on any piece of paper available!

That energy which his paper "Projective Verse" had promised is evident on the page, raw and only partially shaped at first, but transmuting as the poem is assembled into its later stages. Even as he hammers the raw material into lines, the energy comes out of the matter and out of his breath, communicating an urgency of concern, even when the events referred to are some four centuries gone. For example, in this passage:

Fishermen
are killers. Every
fifty of 'em I pick off
the Records seek
the kame I was raised
on and are startled,
as I am, by each granite
morraine shape Am in the mud
off Five Pound Island
is the grease-pit
of State Pier

Go 'way and leave
Rose-Troup and myself
I smell your breath, sea
and unmellowed River ...

Not even in Butterick's otherwise detailed *Guide* is this passage explicated, but here Maximus, the speaker for Olson in all of these poems, mouths a bitter commentary on the flux and shift over time in his beloved city. The "kame", that is a glacial ridge which defines the channels of the Annisquam River, is covered by urban development. More bleakly, "Five Pound Island", so named for the price the early settlers had paid the local inhabitants, is now concreted over, converted to the "grease-pit" of the State Fish Pier, extending one thousand feet into the inner Harbor. Olson's choice and placement of that splitting phrase emphasises the degradation of the natural landscape, now made useful for "Commerce".

The last page of this particular poem is a series of transcriptions from letters and printed sources, such as Pringle's *Book of the Three Hundredth Anniversary*, and Rouse-Troup's 1930 biography of John White, an early settler in the area. Olson's aim was to convey to his readers the passage of time and the realities of settlement in Gloucester. The poem connects Gloucester with the explorations of Pytheas, the Greek explorer who left the port of Massalia (Marseilles) to venture north beyond the Western Gates, perhaps as far as the Shetland Islands, and connects also with later adventurers who pushed their way into the Arctic Ocean. Never far from Olson's underlying mythology was the suspicion that the Atlantic was more of a passageway than ever it was a barrier, and we must be mindful that Gloucester was not that far, in sailing terms, from recent discoveries of Viking remains: or as the Irish would have it, the next parish past Donegal is in Boston. He concludes with another graphical device, reproducing in numbers the depths of the local channel, but looking like a great whale ready to swallow up "their ship", so returning the reader to a contemplation of the relationship between sailors and their prey.

I have been prompted to use the term *flatness* in discussion of both Lowell and Olson by a chance reading. Olson had been agonising over the compositional layout of the Cape Golliard edition of *Maximus IV - VI* to his printer, Barry Hill. He was puzzling over choices in font, when he spoke of his aim to achieve "that same flatness (& strung out quality I want, & require, to make my staves show any reader what is the exact condition of these letters, syllables, words & how they sound to the silent ear ...". It seems to me that Olson's reaction to the New Critics and their cohorts is well contained in this statement, for although *flatness* may imply monotony to some critics, his avocation of plain speech and found objects has allowed the characters to speak for themselves. The poet has liberated those characters not by the imposition of a predetermined poetic form, in an aureate or knotty tongue, as had Lowell in his early works, but through the use of plain facts of being. Letters, statements, maps, passages from old books and the poet's voice make the *Maximus Poems* a rich tapestry of many and varied voices.

The poems from Book III are quite different. In these Olson indicates his growing interest in Jung's writings and their application to his poetic. I believe that Olson had been moving in parallel to Jung and other psychological investigators, especially as a result of time spent at Mayan excavations on the Yucatan Peninsula. He had been writing to Cid Corman, a Boston poet who had an influential radio program on poetry and who was beginning to publish Olson's poetry in *Origin*. In his letters over a six-year period, Olson advised Corman on the setting up of *Origin* as an organ for the new movement in American poetry. Ten years after the close of this correspondence Olson had reached a point where his self-confidence lets him write a poem, 'The whole thing ...', in what can only be described as blank verse.

The whole thing has run away so fast it breaks my heart
 Winter's brilliance with the sun new-made from living south
 I also re-arisen another numbered year from December's
 threat. Love all new within me ready too to go abroad. Ice
 snow my car as hidden as a hut beneath it children pass-
 ing without even notice, every house so likewise in-
 teresting because of snow upon each roof. Lamps, and day,
 nothing not new and equally forever upon this earth. All
 but me, damned as each man in death itself the evil
 which throws a dart of dirt and shadow on my soul and on
 this Sunday when in this light, and on this point, no
 conceivable hindrance would seem imaginable to darken
 or in fact any difficulty of any sort except to keep
 my eyes out of the sun-blaze on the sea and careful also
 not to notice too directly the street, frozen and slippery as
 the light

This is an unsent letter to his daughter, dated below the text, "Sunday January 9 1966", and is included in the final publication by Butterick, I feel with justification. The format of this poem struck immediately, as it nestled between pieces which threaten their own destruction, would fall apart if unrestrained by the editorial process. But this looks complete, with each line centred about a pattern of ten words, rather than a more orthodox syllable count which would give too great a flux. The word is the beat, the metronome, which allows Olson to precariously position the beginnings of sentences at line-breaks, "Ice" (l. 4), or even the ends of phrases at the beginning of a line, "threat" (l. 4), setting up almost unbearable tensions as the poems developed. He ties that tension together with a central image of "brilliance" (l. 2), and one is not accustomed to thinking of Olson as an imagistic poet, but here "this light" (l. 11) shines through, so that all the other images, things such as "my car hidden" (l. 5) or "the evel / which throws a dart of dirt and shadow" (ll. 9 - 10), are brought together in Olson's lament over his ebbing life, his "whole thing". It is the cry of a mortally ill man whose heart cannot go forth.

Yet about a month later, in "I have been an ability - a machine ...", Olson is able to positively address himself to his self-imposed task of recording Gloucester, noting:

The love I learned
from my father has stood me in good stead
- home stead - I maintained this "strand" to
this very day ...

In the closing two-page passage of the poem, Olson bursts into exuberant swirling typography which deserves reproduction if only for my future reference in breaking the normal boundaries between text and art, and in signalling a psychic shift out of a constrained state.

Olson returns to the themes of foundation and cost which had preoccupied him in the "Whale's Jaw" passage, where Obadiah Bruen was noted as having moved away, forced away one wonders, to eventually found Newark. Olson asks:

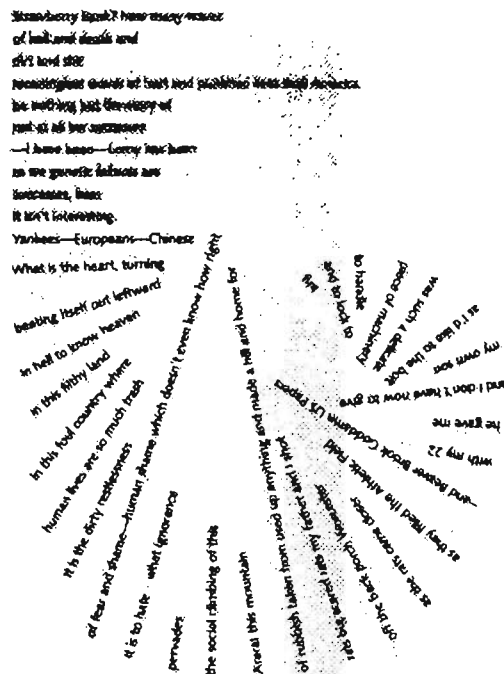
how many waves
of hell and death and
dirt and shit
meaningless waves of hurt and punished lives shall America
be nothing but the story of
not all her successes ...

This wave of despair at his own failure, which he magnifies into failure as a general condition in "this filthy land", is graphed as a great curling wave which threatens to destabilise the page in its ferocity, but it also mirrors the curved trigger of the .22 rifle which Karl Olson had given his son to shoot at the "rats big scared rats my father and I shot / off the back porch at Worcester". The closing word of this hook, "fire", triggers his thought-projectile towards his "beloved father" who is the word-glyph of the following page, where the father stands tall.

How sad it is to note that Olson's attitude to the country which he had once served as a senior official is now quite bitter, calling it a "Hell", such a contrast to the earlier, more hopeful poems. He looks even to the possibility of taking this

idealised polity, "Gloucester", and "sailing away / from this / Rising Shore", adding in forcefully prayerful tones, "Forever Amen", as if he had rid himself at last of a mighty burden. It is the last outburst in the complete edition of the *Maximus Poems*.

In later life, ill and overwrought by personal problems, Olson's verse disintegrated, though still circling around the same set of concerns, looking more and more for solace in the works of C. G. Jung, who seemed to represent for many of Olson's generation of writers a way of explaining their very mixed religious and cultural heritage.



Olson's expressive typesetting

As he was dying in hospital, Olson made one last effort to articulate his thoughts, to explain something of himself, in his scribbled draft of 'The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum'. The pencilled script is legible enough, and Butterick has edited into typescript so that one can at least read its surface. Stein's work in delving into the meanings of words and references has been invaluable, but what fascinates me is Olson's sense of journey and the joy with which he embraces what he would

have realised to be his last task. It is like Hiawatha's arrow being shot upwards into the night.

In this proto-poem, Olson considers the "World-Tree" as his central image, of a "healing" of the gap between Heaven and Earth, a prophylactic against the darkness which will eventually close in at the time of "the End / of the World". In all his poetic, Olson, as an heir to the twin strands of Lutheran and Catholic doctrines, had sought to create a spiritual rather than an earthly Paradise in his beloved father's city, Gloucester, and had set that as his pivot, his Yggdrasil, the one pure act of God's creation.

as well as the World its original
aamsara --- that it is there at all
& in its prime condition & time
when it was breathed forth by God
himself as an act of his own nature ...

Now he sets his draft in two columns, with the above left-hand passage sitting next to a passage which is Buddhist in inspiration, but carefully, as if struggling to remember the details of his reading:

value is virtue is life
but all these sound high falluting
if I don't use Buddha careful &
immaculate I know no way & have
found none to correct - even in
English - his right use in
the 8 Somethings of the 4-fold Path ...

Of course, as a draft passage, it is only useful to my argument as an indication of the way in which Olson proceeded with composition: there are fits and starts, false trails which would have been abandoned in the long run, and phrases which stand out like gems which would have been nurtured and polished in the completed text. In his death-struggle Olson conceived of the Tree of Life as transformation of a "flower" growing downwards from Heaven. I wonder if this

is that "Black Chrysanthemum" of the title, and have wondered what I can make of it later in my own work, but it seems to me that as a metaphor for God's Grace, or even in another religion's terms - for Buddha's Compassion - that image of a downwards-thrusting bud unites all of Christian and Norse, and Buddhist, iconography into the one beautiful symbol. Perhaps *in extremis* we are granted a glimpse of Paradise.

The other point about Olson, pertinent to my own endeavour, is that like Lowell he flourished in a supportive teaching environment. While it is fashionable to decry the union of practising poets with their institutionalisation in schools and Universities, if the atmosphere is right and one is not overly burdened by unwilling students or an unsympathetic administration, one can work quite well as a writer, or artist, or composer, as was shown by Olson and his confreres at Black Mountain College.

His years there were the most productive of his life. As early as the summer of 1951 he had written *Apollonius of Tyana*, a No-style dance play, and another play on the life of Nijinsky, *The Born Dancer*. He was able to work on the *Maximus Poems* and formulate his ideas about history, and encouraged other young writers to enrol and work at the College. He has brought in Edward Dorn as a student, and engaged Creeley, Duncan and Hellman as teachers of literature and writing. Perhaps these years were the closest he had got to realising his ideal polity.

Previously, I had indicated how I had used Lowell's "slack sonnets" as a model for much of my work over the past few years. Olson's work has taught me another approach, that is, ways of being more open in my compositional processes. As I will show in the exegesis of *Deluge*, I begin with tightly structured stanzas in the opening Cantos, but as the flood bears its voices further and further downstream, and eventually out to sea, the poems breaks boundaries of form and content.

Further, I begin to incorporate some materials which conventionally seem to be unpoetic, collage them with my own lines, allowing content to influence form.

In his reaction against New Criticism Olson was able to provide a fresh impetus to post-War poetry, and his influence is still felt. Yet his is only an influence whereas the established and still-prevailing models of poetry, at least in English, retain their formal grounding in neo-classical metrics. There is a continuing tension between those who feel safest when working within set forms and those who are ready to move outwards and employ new ways of expressing themselves within the context of understandable language. There will be a point where language itself constitutes its own barrier and beyond which all is mere babble, like Ted Hughes' linguistically incomprehensible *Orghest*, which sought to delve into pre-Christian teachings: or is it that perhaps one moves from spoken language to the different realms of Music and Art? For my own part, I will not choose to go that far.

However, it becomes increasingly apparent in my reading about both Robert Lowell and Charles Olson, that they were intensely aware of the forms of presentation of their work. For Lowell the act of reading in public became the incubator of a colloquial, looser style of poems in *Life Studies* and his public poems, especially at the time of the Vietnam War. Olson, on the other hand, incorporated many of the graphic influences he had encountered at Black Mountain College and insisted on the importance of visual presentation. So good is the quality of presentation in his early texts that they have become collectors' items in their own right. While one may agree with the Street Poets that poetry ought be given out free on the corner, or with the late Joseph Brodsky that a poem, rather than the Gideon *Bible* should be left in motel bedside drawers, the poem as a visual and sound object is something to be striven for.

Chance as a framework

Two dangers never cease threatening the world: order and disorder.
LYN HEIJINIAN

To make a poem is as risky as crossing a ravine by means of a frail rope bridge. At any time the skein of language can untangle, or courage may fail, and the poem will fall away from one's pen, never to be rescued. My own writing has been marked by many slippages, fallings away from what was first imaged before articulation, and I often have cast away at a week's tangled work, all for nothing. Sometimes, a lucky phrase or the chance coming together of word and image would shift ground so that a growing poem came to life. I have wondered also, how one's life and art are determined by factors other than one's will or schooling, and just how much is determined by La Bella Dama Fortuna.

My first supposition is that chance could make a poem, that poetry is a game we play for the joy of making as much as for the outcome. But like many games, poetry is what the poet Robin Skelton (Ireland 1925 - Canada 1997) had characterised as a "learned difficult art", replete with form, word choice, rhythm and rhyme. These devices may, and often do, overwhelm the making of a poem with their formalism, and so lose that chancy, exciting edge that keeps one still playing at it. On the other hand, formal rules can free the writer in interesting ways, where simple expression could lead to chaos and mere formlessness. I will follow this latter thread of tension when I examine some set frameworks against which poets have achieved quite extraordinary results.

Perhaps unpredictability is ingrained from the moment of a poem's inception, and if the openings could be freed, then the chancy, magical aspects of a poem could be advantaged. Skelton was an astute teacher, and despite his grounding in pre-

War traditions, had assimilated modernist processes, as shown in the printing of his poem, 'Wovoka's Shirt'. As he indicates, it is hard to work out what is the "exact combination of personal experience, cunning craftsmanship, poetic scholarship and sheer luck" which contributes to the making of a poem. Skelton meditates on how the dream process may allow a blocked poem to develop, the mind freely joining words and images when unhindered by conscious shaping.

But is this chance? John Wain's account of the genesis of 'Poem' demonstrates "the combination of lucky chance with recent personal experience". He had read in early 1975 of a group of Italian soldiers who had been captured some twenty years beforehand by the Soviets and incarcerated in some intolerable *Gulag*. They had snared a pigeon, tied a scribbled note to its leg, and let it fly loose with their hopes. The pigeon was eventually snared in the West, where someone read of their plight. Wain's poem is a meditation on such suffering and intolerable grief as theirs. Moving as it is, the poem hinges in its conception on that one moment where the unexpected had collided with all the writer's previous training, prepared sensibility and his word-craft

In his three texts on the craft of poetry, Skelton does not comment on matters of whimsy, paly and chance. Indeed the poetry handbooks regularly assigned for student reading seem to ignore any developments after the turn of this century and one must look for examples of different approaches to poetry-making outside of the regular book-lists.

I was excited by a screening of *The United States of Poetry* in the Australian summer of 1996 - 1997 on SBS-TV and the release of its accompanying text, an event which should have resensitised us to the oral foundations of poetry and also to its very eclectic nature. Anything and everything is grist for this populist poetry. Moreover, as Larry Eigner says, "a word for nothing" is just as good as anything, a

chance scrap to paste on the page chronicling the human condition - in Eigner's case the condition of being a cripple encased in a motorised wheelchair.

In my readings of this and other contemporary collections, I have been struck by the way in which discontinuities of subject matter, chance occurrences and inclusions, even gaps, have been used as tools in the poetic process: that is, the well-wrought poem has become more of an historical curiosity than a living model, although there are still many poets who are quite happy to remain with the familiar. But are their poems alive, or just predictable?

Our own national bard, Les Murray of Bunyah, has interesting things to say, and presents well-crafted, intelligent, even provocative poems - but one can play the game of fill-the-gap with a class of high school students. This is done by whiting out a key word or two in each line of a poem, and then asking students to predict what the missing words might be - the point is that they can predict what is coming, the language and imagery too often being predictable. A similar quick survey of Robert Creeley's 'The long road' yielded similar results. This is not to say that Murray and Creeley are bad poets, lacking in craft or wit, it is just that their predictability fails to excite at times, and surely one test of a good poem is its ability to raise the base-bristles high enough to shave, without resorting to lather.

As I am as much interested in the question of chance, that is non-predictability, as I am in craft, as usually taught, when it comes to how poems are made, for it is the chance conjunction of ideas and images that creates new life-forms, new avenues for any text.

Consideration needs be given, of course, to the medium in which Poetry is composed, for it has different needs and codes to the visual and musical arts. Noam Chomsky, an analyst of Linguistics, is generally acknowledged to have declared that the brain is hard-wired for language, that is, verballity is an innate

human trait. This is my second supposition, that the implication is that linguistic boundaries for a poet are fairly hard and fast, and that they cannot be transgressed without a failure of meaning, as happened for example in the Dada movement. Other linguists and psychologists have indicated that humans possess multiple intelligences, each of which can act separately, so that the visual and musical faculties are apartments, each requiring quite different codes of operation. Perhaps that is why we try so hard to integrate the separate faculties into a single form by the creation of such Operas as Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, in which all three vectors are intended to subsume the audience's intelligence. But in ordinary matters, the oral/aural duality of language works to constrain and channel the sensibility according to well-defined rules of phonology and syntax within the one language common to speaker and listener.

The very nature of language is that it is a tool for communication between people, and even within oneself. The rules of a language are simple in their basics, and while there may be debate about the relative importance of deep as against surface linguistic features, some aspects of the communication process are essential. At first, I will consider what happens within any one language, taking English as the basis for discussion.

The most important aspect, and here has a profound effect upon the art of poetry, is the sound transmitted and received. If one reads an English poet such as Chaucer to a senior secondary school audience for the first time, attempting a Middle English style of pronunciation as modelled by Neville Coghill, the first lines of *The Canterbury Tales* -

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour

Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
 Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
 The tendre croppes ...

- are incomprehensible to most listeners.⁶⁶ Certainly students can decipher a meaning from the printed page. Yet "Aprill" should be pronounced as [a:pril] rather than [eipril], and "roote" as [ro:të] rather than as [ru:t]: in all six long vowels have undergone shift to diphthongs.⁶⁷ The English tongue has suffered such profound sound changes in the last five centuries that the transmission of Chaucer's meaning is inhibited. Similarly, if I were to present a tape-recording of the work of a modern Scots poet such as Hugh MacDiarmid, or a Nigerian poet such as Wole Šoyinka, even with the text, the sound barriers would be all but impenetrable at first hearing.

However, rules for historical and dialectal pronunciation can be learnt, and if students have earlier access to a Romance or Germanic language where sound - symbol correspondences are more uniform than in the Modern Englishes, some problems can be solved.

The second aspect of the communication process is that of vocabulary. Chaucer used quite a number of French words, perhaps this was his native tongue and English had been acquired as an historical and political necessity. These items of his vocabulary do not always square with our current usages: "inspired" retained its primary meaning as a "breathed upon" or "quickened", rather than the current vague notion of "feeling".⁶⁸ Chaucer's text continuously presents such problems. Taking a random example, the Clerk's phrase "habundant of vitaille",⁶⁹ referring to the thickly peopled plains of Italy, can only be deciphered with the aid of a specialised wordlist, and that phrase Chaucer could equally as well written in Middle French, "habundant de vitaille". The point is that communication between

Chaucer and his twentieth century readers is a learnt act on our part, the effect of which is to stop the slide of Chaucer's work into cultural darkness.

In contemporary Irish poetry, it is sometimes necessary to clear up a point of vocabulary, such as the puns available by use of place-names like "Phoenix Park", an Englishing which is actually derived from the Gaelic phrase *fionn uisce*, meaning "the place of white water", referring to the broken waters of the River Liffey. Irish poetry does not suffer from such usages, being the heirs of a long-standing tradition of what is known as *dindseachnas*, the lore of places. Yet in another time and place, the lame attempts of the Australian Jindyworobaks to incorporate slabs of Aboriginal vocabulary into their works have led to obscurity and eventually to their loss. Relative to the recovery and teaching of Chaucer's language and work, some enterprises do not have the seeds of growth within themselves.

But the third aspect, perhaps more to the point in discussing contemporary poetry, is the actual structure of language. Such arrangements, commonly known as the grammar, set the rules by which communication is effected. One can easily learn to overcome barriers of historical or dialectal pronunciation and vocabulary, but grammatical barriers are harder to surmount. Again harking back to Chaucer's "That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke", contains a grammatical fossil "hem" which needs explication as the Southern dialectal form third person plural accusative pronoun, "them" not having travelled down from the North. If one were to reach further back to pre-Conquest varieties of English, then such examples would be multiplied, so that the opening of the Lord's Prayer in Old English -

Fæder ūre,
 Ðu þe eart on heofonum,
 sī þīn nama gehālgod ...

has become barely understandable to the modern ear.⁷⁰ Languages change and vary not only in vocalisations, but also in their structures.

So, discounting experimental or macaronic texts or even bilingual presentations, poetry and prose alike are monolingual, and dependent upon those mutually agreed rules. Neither speaker nor listener can break those rules to a significant extent without severe misunderstanding, and if the rules for speaker and listener of say, pronunciation or lexemes, the orthographies of writer and reader, are different, then incomprehension results. This is a commonplace in linguistics. One can learn new languages, just as one can become acculturated to new visual patterns in visual arts or the ear accommodate new musics, but spoken language remains relatively fixed and predictable within comparable timeframes.

What if, elements of unpredictability were introduced into discourse, more especially into poems, where operates a conjunction of eye and ear: would new patterns, exciting images emerge? What parallels may there be between such poetry and the work of artists in the visual and musical fields? As a test, I have embarked on a number of experiments which play around in the fields of poetry, looking at the conjunctions and dissonances of the mind's hardwiring and elements of chance.

Max Ernst, John Cage and William Bourroughs in collaboration with Brion Gysin are amongst those examined with a view to the role played by chance in the creation of their works. This is then followed by an account of two experimental texts resulting from procedures adapted from selected models.

Max Ernst - collages into Art

Max Ernst (1891 - 1976), one of the major figures of the surrealist revolution in visual arts, evolved out of that strange conjunction of the Latin & Germanic worlds, Köln, which he claimed to be still haunted by the spirits of virgin saints and great magicians, such as "Albertus Magnus who lived and died there".⁷¹ In one sense, Ernst continued in that tradition which had sought to conjure the precious out of dross and ephemera so as to reveal those essences of creation which escape our everyday attention. No less than his colleagues in the Dadaist & Surrealist movements, Ernst was a poet, that is a maker, of the extraordinary.

But the everyday world is not magical if accepted in its tawdry detail. In recounting his early experiences with the process of Art, Ernst noted that he once saw his father paint a picture from nature in the garden, then taking it inside to the studio for finishing, and suppressing a bough because it disturbed the composition - then having in mind his painting, Ernst snr. went out and cut off the offending bough, so that there should no longer be a conflict between his picture and the offending tree! As a result, Ernst, at seven years of age, it is claimed, experienced the first movement of a long-lasting revolt against such determinism, and from this grew his desire to get beyond realism in describing the relationship between art and nature.⁷² Other experiences, some quite terrible, such as the simultaneous death of his favourite cockatoo and birth of his sister Lori, encouraged the notion that chance conjunctions of beings, words and images do magic out new life-forms.

Ernst's acute mind, combined with mastery of technical form, led to the creation of haunting, esoteric collages which were original in the depth of their literary and intellectual content. He combined elements of wallpaper, advertisements,

scientific illustrations and photographs, often evoking fantastic or monstrous landscapes, interiors, beasts and anthropomorphic beings. His 'Stratified Rocks ...' of 1920 modifies an anatomical engraving with chance inclusions of warts, ruptures and cankers in such a way that the observer is both mystified and repulsed. Later, he was able to create haunting images out of the process of frottage, wherein he took the extraordinary risk of being passive to the materials at hand. Ernst had discovered that random processes such as collage and frottage exclude conscious procedure, dissociating pictorial elements from their known contexts. As such, one may well speak of an æsthetic of dissociation but with only slight damage to the original images.⁷³

The external object had been dislodged from its usual setting, separate parts being liberated from their relationship as objects so that they could enter into totally new combinations with other elements.⁷⁴ Ernst was able to manipulate his universe with the deft touch of his skilled hand, much to the discomfort of his readers. Even André Breton, who had outrageously claimed to be the leader of the surrealist movement, was in awe of these creations of both Max Ernst, and his early partner Leonora Cannington. Ernst's first collages were received by Tristan Tzara, Louis Aragon and others, who were moved totally. His collage-novels, such as *La Femme 100 Têtes* (*The Woman of a 100 / without Heads*), and *Une Semaine de Bonté* (*A Week of Goodness*), developed dramas of total fantasy. These strange creations implicated the bourgeoisie in such forces of desire beneath their respectable façades that their hidden order erupted into such psychic carbuncles, that they were seen for the diseases they were.⁷⁵

While Ernst shared many traits in common with the Surrealists, especially their exploitation of chance associations to reveal psychological insights, he was always an anti-Utopian.⁷⁶ Given that movement's use of automatic procedures, even the

frenzied scribbling of Mrs. Georgie Yeats comes into this category, it must be realised that automatism as a purely creative process produces results of significance only where it is seen as a limiting boundary. What interests us in the works of the Surrealists, and even with Ernst, is our observation of the laws of processing and presentation as a manifestation of an individual talent. W. Spies asserts Ernst's acceptance of that principle of chance, never modifying "an acceptance of an accepted theme through mere stylistic caprice, deformation or expressionism". So, when in *Maximiliana*, Ernst took the notion of chance in both writing and graphics to a new boundary, the whole text resembled a novel or illustrated anthropological treatise from an unknown time or civilisation, with a scholarly overlay of commentary in German. Each character of the text looks like an Egyptian hieroglyph, or better its demotic scribal form, alligators, fish and sea-birds swim the depths of each page, or are they Mayan characters, out of the pages of Olson's notebooks?

Ernst had taken a step well beyond the edge of what one normally accepts in a written text. And even though his importance in breaking the accepted boundaries of visual and written texts into the subconscious has been accepted, in that he is viewed within the context of the Surrealist movement, that this notion of collage be extended into one's daily practice as a writer is still to be fully realised.

John Cage and the music of Chance

John Cage (1912 - 1992) was a protean, quirky figure in the world of contemporary music, who understood the indeterminate nature of this uncertain world well enough to be daring enough to play with the accepted rules of making music. In his willingness to cut across accepted boundaries, and insistence that

beauty be found in the extraordinary, Cage was like Ernst for his music descends below consciousness.

Developing his notions about music, Cage created works such as *Piano Concert* which only gave hints for the players' improvisation, the piano part being played in any desired order, and with an orchestral part to be realised by an indeterminate number of players on any desired instruments.⁷⁷ In works such as this, Chance is the operative factor in succession and duration of given sounds, allowing greater interplay between player and listeners.

Not all writers are as appreciative of Cage's presence as Emma Harris in her account of his activities at the pioneering Black Mountain College.⁷⁸ Further, Cage's music has been rather harshly characterised as an "abnegation of the Will", although this discounts Cage's obviously playful intelligence.⁷⁹ One infamous piece, *4'33"*, consisted of an open Piano and some four and a half minutes of silence, though there are others seeming to fit more conventional contours. He was also willing to abandon any rational control over the compositional process by throwing dice or using the *I Ching* to give players freedom of performance. In *Imaginary Landscape*, a piece for twelve radios, random noise assemblages can occur.⁸⁰ Cage was acutely aware of the literary connections permeating his music, and in 1952 published a text, *Haiku*, in which he was able to demonstrate his collaboration with other artists in producing music as an artefact.⁸¹

In developing his notions about music, Cage eventually became aware that even radically new music such as *She is Asleep*, scored for wordless voice and prepared piano, or *Sonatas and Interludes*, scored for prepared piano, came too close to the practice of chromatic serialism which he had first wanted to avoid. Hence later works, such as *Concert* for piano and orchestra, gave only hints for the player's improvisation, leaving chance as the operative factor in succession and duration

of given sounds, allowing greater interplay between player and listeners. Interpretation, not passivity is demanded, and so one cannot give a Cage text an innocent reading, for it is not a given, but a participatory act on the part of the listener. Cage was able to take this notion of listener - audience participation to a physical stage in the happening of mid-1952, opening the doors to new developments in the arts during the 1960s.⁸² In such happenings there was little control by the organisers once the first parameters had been set out, chance reinterpretations by the actors, intervention by audience or the Police, or even break-downs of equipment meant that one event could vary greatly from another, even with the same script.

However, purely in considering his music, I am able to construct a series of reactions, tactile, visual, even linguistic, in listening to Cage's *XX*, which I know full well have little or no resemblance to whatever the composer may have had in mind at the time of writing. Yet there must be some congruences, after all we are all embedded in this matrix of current western cultures, and unless totally unschooled and never having listened to the ABC, one would have some inkling that there are musics beyond Beethoven and the grey Germanics! Listening to post-New Orleans jazz at least would give one an idea of the possibilities that music texts could undertake.

So in taking a chance with composition processes, Cage was able, like Ernst in the visual field, to extend boundaries, make new textures and new emotions accessible to his audience. Can this be done with tongue, lip and palate as well? An interesting boundary case was the 1971 production of the dramatic work *Orghast*, which, as produced by Peter Brooks and Geoffrey Reeves, sought "to deprive the actors of every facile verbal association, facile verbal concealment of the deeper kind of truth that we wanted to release".⁸³ A strange proposition coming from a

poet who had used language in precise and harrowing ways in earlier texts such as *Crow*. The production evolved so that the actors eventually used wordless music as their vocal component, the sounds produced having only chancy associations with any meanings the audience may have wished to invest in them.

It seems then, that chance can play a vital role in the production of works that are essentially musical, that is, having sounds independent of speaker - audience lexemes, and that writers such as Cage do move within a now-accepted musico-linguistic code, quite different even from the serialists who were so revolutionary in their day, and that the acceptance of chance within musical processes is not a matter of dispute or misunderstanding.

Burroughs and Gysin - cut-up texts

However, Chance still needs to be demonstrated as a creative principle for the production of written texts, and it may be claimed that there are several viable precedents. In those writing experiments of William Burroughs and Bryon Gysin which produced such surrealist texts as *Nova Express* and *The Ticket that Exploded*, the method of producing chance collisions of text and image was quite simple. Passages from diverse texts were cut out at arbitrary points, placed into an array and then disordered. The resulting conjunctions were then rationalised and edited to produce new texts. For Burroughs, the cut-up introduced elements of randomness and time, allowing one to walk around the subject, juxtaposing what one was doing and what was happening. Cubists, Pablo Picasso in *The Card Player* and Georges Braque in *Young Girl with Guitar*, and had made similar experiments in randomness by sticking pieces of newspaper, wallpaper, oilcloth or other fabrics onto a canvas and then using painted areas to cohere the disparate

elements.⁸⁴ Likewise, Hans - Jean Arp (1887 - 1966), the Surrealist, had made his intent explicit in Collage with Squares arranged according to the Laws of Chance.⁸⁵

Initial choices of what texts to cut did naturally influence the outcomes, and it may have been expected that some cuttings were made with outcomes in mind. However, the important point is that by randomly associating quite different passages and their images, the resulting disjunctions took to themselves quite startling imageries and tones, producing that unease of surrealism the authors had been seeking.

If collage can work in the making of visual or musical texts, creating new fields of perception, then it may be possible to do likewise with written texts. Some experiments are evidenced by the Dada movement, but most of these were pure nonsense, aiming to disembody texts from meaning. Such poetry created was based upon conjunctions and discrepancies of sound, sight and associated meanings, and long continuous texts were rare. Surrealism tended to produce rather long manifestos of a political nature and were earnest rather than Ernst, though as noted previously this artist did produce a surrealist text of some length which was composed of an invented, meaningless script and indecipherable images. On the other hand, the Burroughs - Gysin collaborations did yield sizeable, coherent texts, and still attract a following.

In Australia, the perpetrators of the infamous Ern Malley hoax, Douglas Stewart and James McAuley, had proceeded on collagist grounds.⁸⁶ Sources used included standard references, a rhyming dictionary and a US army report on mosquito control. However, this jape did great disservice to the progress of modernist processes in literature, not because of the nature of the texts themselves, but rather because it catalysed the underlying socially conservative nature of a would-

be literary establishment. The Ern Malley texts have dated rather badly, being neither modern nor experimental, merely what was thought to be so at the time.

Cutting up the Waldrops and others

It can be claimed that writers such as Burroughs and Gysin have used this technique of collage, and that the results are as strange and wonderful as Ernst's visual texts or John Cage's music: at least, in my reading of those genres, the parallels can be readily seen. The test then of using Chance as a factor in the making of poems is not to examine so much the works of others as to undertake the work for oneself.

Rosemary Waldrop is a distinguished American writer and publisher. In an early work, *Nothing has Changed*, she works with small phrasal units which of themselves leave the reader to fill in unspoken gaps.⁸⁷ The first poem of this text reads:

I
A sort of empty number
relations
never more present
all you
around you
let yourself
it moves but that's my fault
yes yes you said
across the words

The poem is discontinuous, the reader having to fill in the gaps, and more disconcerting for the standard reader is the poet's assumption that one will readily engage in this process in order to create meaning for oneself. There is no canonical meaning to be derived from this and the remaining thirty-four poems which proceed in a similar style. Likewise, Keith Waldrop works at the linguistic

and imagistic edge. His 'The Chances of Magic' is characterised by truncated phrasing, formality of layout and silent interstices.⁸⁸ The first page of this poem is given:

A Action a kind of
 image.
 Gradually, drawn
 among its

 Volumes. Articulate
 sketches as
 invitations
 to an

 aura. Halo.
 Just at or
 past the edge.
 Overloaded.
 surface re-
 quires exploration. Different
 system of
 bookkeeping. Suggests

a hard-and-fast
 muddle.
 An
area of
 departure.

What interests me in such examples of Keith Waldrop's is how arbitrary, or chance, divisions of phrases leads to dislocation of conventional meaning. Any meaning which I can construct out of a reading of this is individual and idiosyncratic, and less likely to have commonalities shared with other readers than if we were reading a text which used a more conventional grammar, flagged logical linkages or even was laid out in a less fractured manner. The isolation of the reader is now an acknowledged part of contemporary poetics.

The other poet whose work has interested me, and from whom I was able to draw some lines and phrases is George Oppen's *Primitive* which contains several poems which, as with the Waldrops' poems, carry interesting structures, arbitrary spacings, lines isolated as though they are pasted into the overall discourse, and above all, a sense of incomplete articulation.⁸⁹ The opening piece, 'A Political Poem', displays these qualities.

for sometimes over the fields astride
of love? begin with

nothing or

everything the nerve

the thread
reverberates

in the unfinished

voyage loneliness

of becalmed ships and violent men

and women of the cities'
doorsteps unexpected

this sad and hungry

wolf walks in my footprints fear
birds, stones, and the sun-lit

earth turning, that great

loneliness all
or nothing
confronts us
the image

the day

dawns on the doorsteps its sharpness
dazes and nearly blinds us

Oppen's achievement in *Primitive* was remarkable, as Michael Heyward remarks, his "intensity of seeing" the product of many years of close, acute observation and the laying bare of language to its essentials.⁹⁰ As such, a few spare phrases, a line, a word even would find its way into the gathering.

These were the beginning materials for my first assay into cutting and selecting. After many false starts and reconsiderations, by late January 1997 I had distributed lines from Rosemary Waldrop's texts to twenty-six separate sheets as first-lines: then selected at random any other lines which seemed striking or unusual, distributing these over the various sheets. Random lines from the other texts were copied out and then distributed. No attempt was made at cohering the separate words and phrases into meaningful units during this first stage.

The first sheet assembled at this early stage was thus made of quite disparate lines and phrases, corresponding to a rough scattering of cut-out images or sampled musical phrases from heterogeneous sources. It read at this initial stage:

a sort of empty number
would you
in questions which
if I'm my
lamps of daylight

and always the door
you hide your energy
glimpses of an ~~earlier~~ primaeval innocence

This passage was then worked minimally, with changes being made to fit appropriate phrases together, to then read:

A hollow number:
you would, yes,
question that which
If I'm at my
lamplights of a day,
always at the door
hiding your energy,
glimpse ~~an early~~ primaeval
innocence.

Further work was undertaken, cutting and adding words and phrases. At the same time I had recalled some early passages from Plotinus which I had read some years ago, and which seemed may fit. Quite arbitrarily, I took lines from the opening sections of the Ennead, ⁹¹ and sought to insert these into the growing text.

The third stage of the draft now read:

A hollow number account [page]

You would, yes,
question that which,
If I'm at / [my]
lamplights of a day,
always at the door
hiding your energy,

- your

A hollow numbers
glimpse / [first
innocences. fall of rain
embedded deeply as granite
wasting and waiting its /your soul.

[fryth and fear], sorrow and hurt
wanting and waiting
they have their seat
they are embedded
as deeply as granite

The completed drafts eventually took shape by mid-February 1999, and were then typed up over the next fortnight. While some effort had been put into sequencing them by means of assigning an opening letter, A - Z, for each poem, this I felt had locked the pieces into a determined relationship. To break that emerging pattern, I allowed the principle of chance to work once more, selecting each sheet by the opening letter and rearranging the sequence randomly by shuffling a pack of 26 cards, an Ace of Hearts corresponding to A through to 3 Spade standing for Z. The new sequence was accepted, the opening lines reworked so that the opening letter stood for the poem's position in the sequence, and the file with which I am reasonably satisfied then printed. Later, this text became the basis for a section of the long poem, *Deluge*, as 'Canto XXIII: A Masque: A Chance Exchange of Letters'.

The three sonnets of "Oasis"

Some fourteen lines and phrases were each selected at random from three sources, the (King James) *Bible*, a literary anthology,⁹² and a copy of the journal, *Oasis*.⁹³ These lines were printed out on separate sheets, cut up into strips, selected

at random from their piles & pasted onto three sheets. The sheets were photocopied, shuffled, and an order established as indicated by the code preceding each line showing the base text and lines. The three sheets as given below were treated then as first drafts.

Sheet i

3.6 like almonds ... his flowers
 2.11 shape or mirror always before her
 1.14 a face appears, disappears, a trace is lost, found
 3.3 made the heart of the people melt
 3.8 high above all
 3.2 but i will hope continually
 2.4 those things which nature is said to do
 3.12 a rainbow was on his head
 2.2 see where an army, strong as fair
 1.2 Most everyone seems to have something to sell
 1.5 and it turns out that the pilgrim meets with
 1.9 Angel has been trained in that sense of lurking
 3.11 running waters
 2.13 i saw thee mutable of fancy

Sheet ii

3.4 and patience, experience, and experience hope
 1.13 what I am, and will be, death created long ago
 1.12 same chrysanthemums appeared in funerals for men & beasts
 2.14 and nourished with slips of cinnamon
 3.9 some which walk among you
 3.7 images, groves, hills
 1.3 if someone has the authority from one who is causing
 3.5 there are diversities of gifts
 1.10 speed brings motion into politics
 1.8 which i didn't even know
 2.12 suck divinity from the flowers of nature
 2.7 her love is firme, her care continual
 1.4 the following winter
 2.8 this much, if there be truth

Sheet iii

1.1 speed is in the air, and it should be clear to us
 1.11 change the images of the past
 2.5 like a bank of lilies laid
 3.1 and certain men came down
 3.14 is there any taste in the white of an egg?
 2.10 nearer to view his prey
 3.13 the power of the flame
 2.3 as the glass we spoke of before was proposed to the sense
 2.1 the ditty does not remember
 2.9 not married till she be eighteen year
 1.6 and so, scores of ordinary people had felt that
 3.10 cedar beams
 2.6 and raging flames, that many foes shall rear
 1.7 has experienced a profound famine

In looking at these as first drafts, I was struck by the lucky, and sometimes quite incongruous, combinations which had been created. The next stage is, of course, more difficult, for as indicated above, spoken and written language needs the connective tissues of prepositions and conjunctions, linking verbs and pronouns, even the rewriting of phrases so that some sense can emerge.

I took the drafts away for reworking over a few hours, intercutting between them, and coming away satisfied that at least they each had a viable shape and tone. One determination made early in this process was not to be overly concerned about formal shape, that is, the number of stresses per line was to be variable, as demanded by the sense of each line and image, and that no formal rhyme scheme would be imposed - however other sonant devices would and were used if proper to the poems' emerging shape.

The first poem 'Like Almonds' then reads as:

3.6	Like almonds against the tongue, his flowers
2.11	shaping or in a mirror always before her
1.14	a face appearing, disappears, a trace is lost, found
3.8	high above all, by the almond grove
3.3	made the making her heart of the people melt like high snows:
3.2	but i will hope continually for those things
2.4	which nature is said to do
3.12	such as a rainbow was on over his head, immaculate
2.2	to see where there is an army, strong as fair
3.11	running waters by the almond grove.
1.2	Most everyone seems to have something to sell
1.5	and it turns out that the pilgrim meets with
1.9	an Angel has been trained in that sense of lurking,
2.13	as I saw thee mutable of in fancy, blossomed.

In coming to the second sheet, I set myself the problem of maintaining both tone and subject within the limitations of the lines that I had laid out on paper. By now it was evident that the given sequence of phrases must be re-ordered if such sense were to emerge from such a chance allocation. In this, of course, I was violating any principle of pure chance which may have been in the background of my first thinking on this experiment.

So as in 'Like Almonds' and 'Chrysanthemums', further movement was apparent in 'A Bank of Lilies' through splitting or shifting lines, and other minor changes. Perhaps more than in those earlier two poems, meaning emerged more readily, perhaps the fall of the line-strips had been luckier, or that the sense of the previous two poems has carried over so that this is not so independent as sequential.

This can be tested by mapping the three poems side by side and showing an interconnecting web of associations, but which one could argue they are of course are embedded in the original texts. To my eye, what emerged is a meditation on beauty, and perhaps its mutability, as mediated by a central female figure. How she has emerged is not surprising given the drift of my reading of such Muse-saturated poets as Robert Graves and John Montague. But I must insist that this process was as much arbitrary, that is dependent upon chance allocations, as it was one of conscious insertion of a word or shifting of a line.

Breathe in hard!

The poems of either set were far from complete at the time of drafting this paper in early March 1997, and I am very much aware of the need for honing and polishing - Robert Graves took some eighteen drafts to get his magical, brief poem 'A Bracelet' from first rough scribbles to an elegantly-worded typed sheet.⁹⁴ Having underscored this aspect of the poetic craft, I do suppose that I have shifted ground from my original supposition that Chance could make a poem, to a more orthodox notion that Chance is an element in a poem's development.

Those elements deployed in the making of my poems were not of course pure Chance, as quite deliberately I had taken parts from pre-existing texts. Their linguistic qualities of sound and meaning still inhere despite being wrenched from their former environments, and then again, their style and form do greatly affect the new environments into which they have been placed. If I did have at hand a powerful computer program which would randomly take words out of a dictionary or phrases from a text, then I suppose that the degree of Chance would have been enhanced. Even so, the shaping sounds of language, that hardwiring of the mind, would be needed to weave such elements into patterns of sound and meaning, that is a poem. It cannot be escaped that poetry is a verbal art, fully embedded in linguistic processes, and as such there are some ground-rules against which it is measured. So I have confirmed for myself that second supposition, linguistic boundaries for a poet cannot be transgressed without a failure of meaning.

Yet even within those rules of language, something quite fortuitous can happen: for example, my recognition that the substitution of the sound [t] for [s] would change the emphasis of a whole line (sheet i), or changing the lexeme {ditty} to {lily} in 'A Bank of Lilies', could affect the development of a whole poem. Even the chain of association which led from "number" to "account" thence to the final choice "page" ('A') was a matter of chance association and selections of a word. Chance, then, can operate at the lowest level, affording for variation of phonemes and lexemes, triggering associations of images which can then lead to larger compositional units.

At another level, the appropriation of whole units of text into the body of a poem does also lead to the creation of something quite new, although, more than with small incorporative units, greater adjustments and risks do need to be taken. Call

it the creative mind, or even one's training, the ways in which one carries out that task are not as dependent upon Chance as heightened sensibility. Behind the pen, and the mind manipulating it, I am inclined to believe that another element is at work: "the lily does not remember why", but rather it is the instrument through which the poem's power will take shape.

Taking a deep breath and avoiding a hard determination, I am sure that chance can and does play a role in the processes of development of a text. This I have demonstrated as a celebrated process in both musical and visual arts, and in the two experiments it can be seen that chance, as much as any other element, was at play in the fields of poetry. Finally, given the success of this small experiment, I have incorporated these into the closing stages of *The Camden Poems*, and commented briefly on them in the exegesis.

Ways of writing the Land's Poetry

At Beverley Farms, a portly uncomfortable boulder
bulked in the garden's centre -
an irregular Japanese touch ...

ROBERT LOWELL 'Terminal Days at Beverley Farms' ⁹⁵

As it is my intention in *Deluge*, as it has been my practice in *The Camden Poems*, and even in other scattered pieces, to write in such a way that the poetry is clearly sited in definable locations within the Western District, I will make a consideration of several key poets and their works as to the manner of how they have written the land's poetry. From that consideration I will lead towards a summation of the findings made in the course of the previous chapters.

My phrasing is deliberate and needs explanation. As Paul Carter has pointed out, the Aranda people of the Central Desert were engaged in a "reverent miming" of the land and its fauna..⁹⁶ As the pioneer anthropologist T. G. H. Strehlow

described the actions of the local hunters, "keenly observant of every minute change" in the action of the hunted animal, and consequently modifying the very grammar of his language in order to bear witness to his and the animal's behaviour.⁹⁷ That linguistic behaviour is mirrored in the people's artistic response to the land, and Strehlow's recordings yielded at least some insight into ways in which the land could be written.⁹⁸ As I have indicated previously, I have no wish to appropriate, but rather seek to find my own terms and modes of working, yet the process of naming landscape features must be central to the process of writing the land as a poetic mode.

Lowell's *Life Studies* broke new ground in American poetry, introducing what has come to be known as the confessional mode: and while we here in Australia have taken to confessing ourselves in verse, has poetry become the new therapy? - one wonders. What is all too often overlooked is how deeply embedded is the whole book in the landscape of his growth from childhood to early manhood.

Listing some of Lowell's titles indicates how conscious he was of the idea of place in his writing: 'St. Mark's', 'Memories of West Street and Lepke', 'The Quaker Graveyard at Nantucket' and the whole of that extraordinary book *The Mills of the Kavanaghs* so generously praised by Randall Jarrell as being "powerful and impressive".⁹⁹ In *Life Studies*, Lowell clearly centres himself and his readers in the process of remembered place: '91 Revere Street' is sited in that part of pre-War Boston, facing Broad Sound, hard by the Brahmins' Beacon Hill and Louisburg Square, threatened by the overspilling Italians just to the north of their house. His earliest school, Brimmer, gave him access to views across the Charles River where he could see Boston Common, "a now largely wrong-side-of-the-tracks park".¹⁰⁰ He places his earliest pugilistic adventures by the monument to Washington on Commonwealth Avenue, and his nascent historical-political imagination was fired

by dinner table tales of his father's and naval colleagues' expeditions to far flung outposts of the emerging American commercial emporia, Cuba, Nicaragua, China. Lowell makes the house come alive with details of dinners, his parents' troubles, their strained relationship with each other and other members of their respective families and friends, but most of all, one senses the closed in gloom of the house, its "majestic, hollow boredom".¹⁰¹

Detail and inference are the keys to Lowell's evocation of place. In 'My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow' he places in parentheses as a marker of time and place, "1922: the stone porch of my Grandfather's summer house". The time is important for both Lowell and the reader. He recalls his awkward childhood with some embarrassment, the outburst against his parents' pipedreams of their son being educated by a Grand Tour of " ... Fontainebleu, Mattapoisett, Puget Sound ... ", his deep attachment to his "Grandfaather's farm".¹⁰² Note how Lowell emphasises the family's collective ownership of the property, writing of "our Alpine, Edwardian cuckoo clock", and immediately of "Our farmer" as though the labourer were a possession just like the clock. The whole of the second stanza is peppered with possessives, "our", "my", "his", "its", giving rise to a sense of ingathering and hoarding of memories. The landscapes and objects on the farm are meticulously and lovingly listed: "alley of poplars", "stand of virgin pine", "root-house", "sunflowers" and "pumpkins", a cornucopia of memories.

But why a "last summer"? Uncle Devereux, having fought in the Great War as a volunteer Canadian officer, was now dying of Hodgkin's Disease, once an untreatable cancer of the lymphatic system, now leaving his ancestral grounds for a "last honeymoon". Incurable Keats and Coleridge shimmer behind Lowell's flat, anti-Romantic style of speech, the drama of death and departure enacted against autumnal plumpness.

In 'Dunbarton' Lowell celebrates his time with his beloved grandfather, the times spent on his farm, some ninety kilometres northeast of Boston near Everett Lake, stopping "for brownies and root-beer" at Nashua about half-way on their drive, poking about the family gravesite. Then in 'Terminal Days at Beverley Farms' he evokes the ennui of his parents' retirement in a new commuters' suburb just north of Salem, a "two minute walk to the station ... [with] no sea-view", but compensated for by the efflorescent "late August sumac, / multiplying like cancer / at their garden's border".¹⁰³ In this latter example, Lowell was able to make meaningful and effective a small shift in tone from straight description, "late August sumac", to comment upon the creeping death which he saw afflicting not only his parents but their generation: the "cancer" which ate at their society was inherent and rampant. All through *Life Studies*, one feels that it may well have been subtitled "America Past", for the country in terms of its landscape and polity had changed unalterably, and one senses for the worse, since Lowell's childhood.

Yet there is still a remnant of affection for the familiar places. His 'Sailing Home from Rapallo' constantly reiterates their magnetic attraction, the central image being that of "our family cemetery in Dunbarton" buried under "blinding snowdrifts", just as his father lay "buried beneath his recent / unweathered pink-veined slice of marble".¹⁰⁴ Even in the fearful 'Skunk Hour' Lowell does not move too far away from his familiar geographies of Nautilus Island, Blue Hill, some 15 kilometres south of the city centre, and the Trinitarian Church. A reader could easily map the speaker's lonely journey.

In later works, Lowell's fixedness on specific places is tempered somewhat by a broader view, an incorporation of present experience into his wider perspective of historical and literary processes. *The Dolphin* contains a number of place-specific poems of note, for example: ¹⁰⁵

A sharper air and sharper architecture -
the old fashioned fishingtackle-box skyscrapers,
flesh of glass and ribs of tin . . . derisively
called modern in 1950, and now called modern.
As if one had tried to make polar bears
live in Africa - some had actually survived,
curious, strong meat permutations of the polar bear. . . .
It wasn't once, O it wasn't so,
when I came here ten or twenty years ago. . . .
Now I look on it all with a yellow eye;
but the language of New Yorkers, unlike English,
doesn't make me fear I am going deaf. . . .
Last night at four or five, whenever I woke up,
I found myself crying - not too heavily.

He begins by noting the differences between New York and Britain, where he had been living with his third wife, Lady Caroline Blackwood. Photographs of old New York make it to be very much like a European city, but the brash modernism and the choking presence of automobiles had changed the place out of familiar recognition. New York's sharpness applies not only to the architecture but to the atmosphere itself, and by extension to New York's "language", loud, brash and intrusive. The place and its style, despite its initial awkwardness and rawness, had mellowed and been accepted, adapted itself to a hostile environment, like Lowell's wonderful metaphor of displacement, those "polar bears". Yet there is a sense of loss from that place which extends to his friends and memories, so much so that he attempts to recover his bearings: ¹⁰⁶

almost obscenely, complaisantly on the phone with
my three wives, as if three-dimensional space were my breath -

Yet for all his carping about being cramped in New York, there is a recognition of it being a generous place, for these women, "three writers, none New Yorkers, had their great years there".

While his major late volume, *History*, ¹⁰⁷ dealt with men and women in the context of time's river, he began the collection *Day by Day* with 'Ulysses and Circe',¹⁰⁸ signalling the importance of imaginative place in our grasp of ever-present realities of human relationships. The shores are familiar to his readers: Lowell only needs to note how "small" Circe's island is and juxtapose that to a passage referring to

Penelope, waiting as the reader knows on another small island, Ithaka, for the experienced reader to construct a mind-map, fully referenced, so that the poem can explore Ulysses' dilemma as he tears himself from one woman's embrace to face another's. But of course, having read the two previous poems of *The Dolphin* are we not tempted to map Dublin as Circe's island, fit New York onto Ithaka? Reading forward to 'Last Walk?', that notion of Dublin as being an enchanted place, one which offered a form of peace now grasped at in desperation, is reinforced by Lowell's choice of setting, some "twenty miles" upstream on the River Liffey "torrential, wild / accelerated to murder". The river's spate can be read as a clue to the poet's emotional turmoil,¹⁰⁹ but strangely for Lowell, he does not name that Castle by which "artificial pond" he had lingered, we are left with a generalised, hazy image, a mere gesture to the place itself. Lowell's earlier technique had been to use the literal and the real, one could use a guide book to walk around Boston and other cities with his poems, but the real map was just as much metaphorical as literal, and it was through the stronger abstracting process that the poet's energy was projected out to his reading public and onto the landscape of his work.

That energy, which I have identified with the term *libido*, has been termed "manic" by J. Meyers. He sees Lowell's energy as "destructive", the result of an "unhappy" childhood and a series of broken marriages, the victim of a "monster" mother, leading to "infidelity, alcoholism, violence and mental breakdowns".¹¹⁰ All of which was true for Lowell, and probably true enough for many of his acquaintances such Theodore Roethke, Randall Jarrell and John Berryman. Perhaps the spiritual boundaries of the USA in their lifetimes were too constrictive, their upbringing too cossetting for them to be able to fully express their restlessness, to fall back in love with the land - perhaps their chosen paths of

town and gown closed out possible visions. Jack Kerouac's solution was to move across the landscape, absorbing and reinterpreting the mythology of the open roads and plains in a new hipster-jazz style of prose: but he was slammed hard against the brick walls of formal, middleclass oriented criticism which eventually broke him. And for all of Lowell's undoubted brilliance of mind and craft, his writing of place was allowed to dissipate into the gesturalism of his later poems.

This is not so much the case with Olson, for even in the later poems of the complete *Maximus* volume, he has continued the process of crafting his images directly through detailed place references. In the early sections, references to place and character are rapidly unfurled, so much so that the reader must go back over the text, check references to build and rebuild a mental map of the place Olson creates. For example, 'Letter 5' initially demands a great deal from its reader. It begins with references to "the Antigoniish man ... pulled out ... from under Chisholm's Wharf".¹¹¹ One is left wondering why this Canadian had wandered South and what he was doing half-drowned: hiding? drunk? We are not told, but the imagination is left to work its ferment. As the poem progresses, so details accumulate. The reader is drawn into an intense local culture with painters such as Helen Stein and Marsden Hartley, writers and editors, ships and the shoreline crowding each line of the expanding poem. This process of naming is continued right through the volume.

In 'Great Washing Rock',¹¹² written on Christmas Eve 1967, Olson hovers between closed and open lines, attempting to describe a landscape which has been all but obliterated over time, just as he felt himself being worn away, just three years before his death. While the site cannot be identified from the modern frontispiece map which lacks detail, the poem records Olson's efforts to make a fix on the Parsons family's "own five-way apportionment" of land at Stage Fort.

He gives the reader dates, bearings and times of the observation, viewing what is now Stage Fort Park from 28 Fort Square. At this site, the Parsons would bring ashore their fish catches to dry and salt before export, in so doing, lay the foundations for the trade which Olson believed to be the foundation stone of further settlement in northern America.¹¹³ Olson sets the land in a firm historical context and relates all this back to the speaker's didactic voice.

In 'That there was a woman in Gloucester ... ',¹¹⁴ Olson attempted to create linkages even further back in time and place, in a great arc which flowed across the North Atlantic from Gloucester to Greenland and down to Castillo on the shores of the Bay of Biscay through the agency of a Beothuk-Micmac woman. Her remembrances are recorded and amplified by the poet who pictures her as a child travelling along the coast in a half-enclosed canoe which looked so much like a boat in Pleistocene wall painting. This was all grist to the mill of Olson's cosmic thinking for him not to have seized upon it as his metaphor of continuity and connectedness between the eastern Americas and their counterparts across the seas. Olson not only writes the land, but he writes the oceans as well.

These latter considerations of Lowell and Olson indicate the pressing need to take into account local detail in the building of my poetry. It is all too easy to fall into vaguely emotive effusions and generalisations, as though poetry is only to be about elevated feelings, an opinion often expressed by well-meaning people who are not practising writers. The gritty reality of the real world all too often is felt to be unworthy of poetry, but then we must not forget that the great foundation poem of the Western world, *The Iliad*, is replete with minute and detailed observations of the grossest human faults and behaviours, as well as the noblest. Homer was an acute observer of the actual and local.

I had begun this series of critical explorations in Chapter 1 with a detailed review of the literature I had encountered over the course of preparation for my writing, and then proceeded to explore the notion of creative writing as far as it applied to my own work.

As I had indicated in Chapter 2, I have been grappling with the problem of approaching my local landscape as a site for the making of a major poem. Having explored some of the complexities of naming and language, I came the conclusion that the Jindyworobaks' program of linguistic inclusion and appropriation was unsuitable and that I had to carve out some means of naming the land for myself. Considering the floods of 1995 as a major event, I was able to explore their impact upon Geelong and surrounding districts and so was able to show how they could be used as the background for the writing of a sequence of poems.

The question then explored was whether we could consider the landscape as gendered, and I was able to chose and explore the notion of the landscape as being gendered feminine through a series of linguistic and metaphoric considerations.

In moving onto Chapter 3, I have engaged in detailed considerations of several poets, namely Séamus Heaney, Czeslaw Milosz and Vincent Buckley, in their readings of the landscape as a feminine presence. I also showed that in the poetry of both Sigita Geda and Séamus Heaney a strong masculine voice was also present, lending unresolvable tension to their work.

Then in this Chapter, I have made detailed consideration of how poetries are written. This has been firstly by exploration of the works of Robert Lowell and Charles Olson in particular, then in the second part by an exploration of the role of chance in the making of poems. Results of those explorations have been integrated into the corpus of both *The Camden Poems* and *Deluge*.

So, for my practice in writing, I have taken it as a valid technique to write the land by naming and description, by close references to maps and histories and any other materials I can collage, Lowell's "portly uncomfortable boulder" serving as a touchstone bringing my writing always back to the remembered particulars of place and time.

Further, I have noted how Olson's theory that content determines form has been utilised in his practise, as much as I have retained an awareness of Lowell's use of set form as referential framework. Yet I beg to be eclectic, seeking to shape my poetry as it suits my craft. As will be seen in the following Chapter, the poems of both books have grown out of my considerations of the local district, its people and my reactions to a life lived hereabouts for the past twenty five years.

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□

Chapter 5

Exegesis of *The Camden Poems* and *Deluge*

Making bread, making poetry

modern artists count on interpretation by highly skilled critics
GUY DAVENPORT ¹

In this Chapter I become my own interpreter and critic, a role demanded by the need for the reader to have ready access to all the references and allusions in the two books of poems. This is both a task and a joy. As Guy Davenport rightly insists, all criticism is the practice of an art form, and as with any art form is manifest in a number of quite different, even contradictory styles, such as the widely differing approaches taken by celebrated critics Hugh Kenner and Randall Jarrell. There is no one style of literary criticism which must be employed, one writes in order to make an account of a work complete as possible. It is no different than baking a loaf of bread, for the pleasure taken in one's work is reflected in the pleasure gained in the consumption of the final product.

Davenport is a critic whom I admire. He is a gracious essayist, translator and short story writer. He has an enviable reputation as a teacher. In his collection of essays, *Every Force Evolves a Form*, he shifts the short story form towards the density of a scholarly essay, the visual richness of a filmscript. The form of his critical writing varies. An essay such as 'The Champollion of Manners' is a review of the works of Claude Levi-Strauss.² There are no footnotes, a few asides, and the language flows like a crystal brook. In 'Balthus',³ Davenport presents his essay in seventy self-contained stanzas of three and a half lines, his formal structure echoing the painter's, his style, halfway between essay and prose-poem, mimicking Balthus' ability to find the one exact gap between Surrealism and Mannerism, a style later consummated in *A Balthus Notebook*.⁴

We are all too familiar with the confining formalities of Leavisites and the New Critics, or the convolutions of Derrida and Althusser and their followers. I prefer a plainer style of speech, even to the point where I believe transcriptions of conversations between poets can be more helpful in illuminating and guiding one towards a fuller understanding of a work, such as that put together by Donald Hall some twentyfive years ago.⁵ Informal comments, letters, journals such as *Field* and *Boundary 2*, occasional chapbooks and television broadcasts have all been used by me as useful sources and in themselves constitute a body of criticism.

When it comes to my writing, the reader will notice that I have used the formal structures of the literary essay in the first four chapters, but in the following chapter, the exegesis of my poetry, a looser style is adopted. There I am engaged in a process of reinvestigation and rediscovery, as well as providing a formal account of the poems. It resembles a transcription of a discussion panel or an extended conversation with myself, such as Lawrence Durrell has published in *Blue Thirst*,⁶ but always I have in mind that I am waiting for someone else to read these words, so that they become a conversation. Such looseness is like a comfortable tweed jacket, familiar yet formal enough to suit a range of purposes.

After my years of teaching in schools, I suppose that I have come to value clear, direct modes of writing simply because I have seen too many students reacting negatively to what is wrongly termed academic writing. I have even known of mature-age students rejecting opportunities to proceed to further studies because of perceived difficulties in decoding linguistic forms. There are social and familial factors at work in this, certainly, but the ability to speak clearly, to come directly to the point in writing, and to communicate with a range of audiences for different purposes must be given their proper value. I hope my writing reflects this belief.

Concerning *The Camden Poems*

swiftly and noiselessly stepping and stopping
WALT WHITMAN⁷

The subject materials for *The Camden Poems*, have been my surroundings these last twenty or so years, moving in and out of that focus as the fancy has taken me. I have consciously used this short form as a scalpel, cutting into the core of my observations and reactions to this neighbourhood and life in the Western Districts. The predominating tone is cool, burnished.

About twenty three poems were drafted over a week during early April 1997, with new poems being written in the latter part of that month after I had returned from a trip to Tasmania - these began to move in new directions. Initially, I had not chosen to order them into subject or themes, merely to collect them in order of composition. However a new group being written in response to my excursions to the Geelong Art Gallery in July 1999, I decided to revise the order into its present form.

The first group of poems is disparate in subject matter - ranging from reflexions on living in my house in Camden Road, to dream poems and responses to various artworks to memories of my 1992 journey to the USA in 'Main Street, Worcester', and perhaps evoke the presence of Walt Whitman. This first group closes with a reflexion on the status of teaching in 'Rush' and an account of my reactions to an act of vandalism visited on my classroom. The second and smaller group, begins with an account of a search for my great-grandfather's gravesite in 'At Minyip', and deal with my observations and reflexions to experiences before my wife, Jura, and I shifted to Geelong and the children were born. For about the next fifteen years, we regularly travelled down to visit and stay with friends in the Port Campbell area.

1. 'Living here'

It is a good place to start a family and this book of poems, this house in Camden Road, Newtown Geelong. How we came across it was something of a saga recorded in my Journal at that time. During 1978, we had been living in a rather shabby rented house on Percy Street, Chilwell, since coming in from teaching at Timboon. The first weeks had been traumatic, with our pet Irish Setter being run over by a car on the first day of the new school year, the yard flooding and evidence of my mother's continued ill-health. House-hunting became a necessity as soon as the Timboon property on Rands Road had been offered for sale. As we had been advised that housing prices in Geelong would soon rise, we took to cruising the streets, speculating on where we would live, how much we could afford to pay, access to shops and so on - all those uncertainties a married couple face in such a shift. The house we would buy needed to be in easy reach of schools, both for ourselves and for a future family. We rejected the offer of a fine house in Torquay as it was too far out of town, though on reconsideration I would have preferred to live by the sea. A house we had inspected at Drumcondra was well-priced but needed at least an additional \$6000 in cash invested in repairs - and the southside suburbs did not appeal.

I had spotted an advertisement for a three-bedroom house in Newtown for a price which was within striking distance. We chased the property, found out from the agent that it was what he called a "divorced estate". That divorce had been bitter, and the children were living with their mother. Even though the estranged wife was pursuing a relatively quick sale and had dropped the price well below valuation, the quoted price was about \$4500 above our cash savings. The process was forced along by a letter from our renting agents, who informed us that the owners would be requiring our rented Percy Street house from 4 December 1978.

The bottom fell out of our world, and I had no idea of how to raise the difference between what we had at hand and what we needed.

With a little faith and perseverance, the house more or less fell into our laps. It had looked so fine - I had seen polished floors through the windows. We were very enthusiastic, bargained the price down, got the Bank to back us to the hilt and plunged into a debt which was not paid off until my father's legacy was available some eleven years later: a long and tedious time of penny-pinching. My mother's health had continued to deteriorate since my parents' visit from Adelaide in early November, and my brother phoned through the news that she had died on 29 November 1978 of a ruptured aorta when under anaesthesia at Flinders Medical Centre. Strange how things worked out, for during this stressful period our daughter was conceived, one life ending another emerging.

Our house is sited on the lower end of Camden Road, after it has become a cul-de-sac, some four houses up from the riverbank park. The nature strip until recently was graced with a melaleuca and prunus, though with recent very dry summers they had both started to die off and shed limbs, quite dangerously, so the Council was called in. Now the grass outside my front gate is being regrown, and will be graced this Winter with some new planting, *Betula*, deciduous and graceful.

Our neighbours are a mixed lot. One family, the Barnetts, were conscientious Baptists - not quite the "footwashing Baptists" of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but committed enough to move out to Coldstream and for Mr. Barnett to retrain as a minister of religion, until such time that venture failed when he ran off with a parishioner's wife! The next block downhill was bought by a youngish business couple, the Moores, who had the Polar Milk business, and built a substantial two-storey red-brick palace with a swimming pool in the back yard.

That has since been filled in - Mrs. Moore felt uncomfortable with the next door neighbour's children peering down at her sunbathing. Uphill, our immediate neighbour had come out to Australia as a Displaced Person, and still works for Ford. His house is modest, flat-roofed and cool in summer. On the other side, the big house was once owned by Les Borrack of the Geelong Football Club and sublet to the likes of Tom Hafey and John Devine. Now Farmer Kenyon has it, the tennis court grows and tethered ponies.

Two doctors have prime positions at the end of the street overlooking the river which floods from time to time, one a youngish General Practitioner with aspirations to leadership in his field and the other a clinical psychiatrist who heads the regional mental health service. When the big flood did come in 1995, these houses were a mere one metre above the flood level. Another day's rain would have made for interesting times: as it was we were consumed by an unnamable anxiety for ourselves.

A lawyer and his family lived a few doors up the hill, but he ran off with someone else's wife this last summer, and is now *persona non grata*. We have also a fair swag of retirees living hereabouts - real estate agent, teacher, surveyor - a mixture of people and backgrounds, who somehow mind their own business and help each other from time to time. After all that I can associate with living here, the place suits us as well as anywhere we could imagine living, and the poem celebrates that aspect.

2. 'Tinge'

Inexplicably, this poem veered up out of my domestic concerns and swings of mood, back to my constant wish to be by the sea. My son has been reading these accounts over my shoulder and remarked that it would have been fine to have

lived at Torquay - it seems that even as I write and edit, this is becoming a public document.

Nothing extraordinary had happened in the days previous - this poem began as I saw grey clouds against patches of blue sky. The scene also started me on the course of making a linocut - and have been working fitfully towards a series to complement the poems. The persona, though, of this poem is separate from myself - I am not a sailor, nor have ever been on a boat in anything other than a minor squall, so my experience of the sea is quite vicarious. The voice in this poem is perhaps the most Lowell-like I have evoked so far.

As any certainty about continuing as a teacher had been undermined by a nasty assault at the front gates of school some years ago, I had been rather depressed, and had lost my nerve to some extent. Something had happened that week in class, I now cannot recall what, but the cloud-shadows on the hills opposite and the exact colours in the late afternoon sky matched my shifting moods.

I was surprised and pleased when this poem in particular elicited positive responses from audiences. Then, following a suggestion from my wife, I sent copy and a rough translation into Lithuanian to Mr. Bronius Žalys, editor of the Lithuanian weekly paper, *Mūsų Pastogė*. Mr. Žalys undertook a proper translation and published it:⁹

Atvėsimas

Popietė, kurios tikrumoje norėjome išvengti,
Vėsa, atsiradusi ore, pilkšvuma mėlynės,
Televizijos murmėjimas priešakiniam kambary,
Šokoladiniai saldainiai, stiklas vyno, vidurdienio poilsis.
Ar girdi šaltą vėją atūžiant
Nuo pietvakarių jūros, krykštauja žuvėdra
Ir skubą nuimant viršutinės bures?
Putoja vanduo laivo priešakio kairėje pusėje -
Desperatiškos dienos: dabar jau iškentėtos,
Mes gyvename ilgiau, bet sumažintais gyvenimiais,
Nors esu išvargintas dėl perdaug
Ir per maži padaryto - mano kairė ranka gniaužiasi
Apie kiekvieną sruogą, kai ji pamažu slenka
Pritvirtant virvės saugiam uoste.

I was intrigued by the process of translation, having tried it myself, for the second language has greatly affected the aural qualities I had striven for in the original. This was evidenced when this poem and 'Last Blooms' (#30) were read in their alternative versions by myself and Mr. Žalys at the Music and Literature Evening of the 20th Lithuanian Cultural Festival, 28 December 1998, Geelong. It is one thing to try to translate another's poem, and read it out, but to hear my own work so treated was both satisfying and disorienting.

3. 'Dazzle'

This and the next eleven or so poems move fully in the opposite direction. There was a new confidence, as though I was able to step away from the bleak visions of 'Tinge' and 'Fall', moving into the light again. What amazed me, some three weeks after writing the first draft and being put into the desk drawer, is how well it stood up on re-reading.

On revising the earlier chapters of this thesis, I can now remember my use of the word "dazzle" originated from reading Ian Hamilton's biography of Robert Lowell. In particular, Lowell used this word in 'The Next Dream', which Hamilton quotes in full, though strangely enough it does not appear in Lowell's prose notes which are given immediately after.¹⁰ Such grabs at remembering come only when the mind is prepared.

At that point, I decided on a stylistic device: each line in this collection would start with a capital letter, e. g., "Swift as silk peening hammers" (l. 5), if only to halt that annoying alternation between upper and lower case type at the start of each line, since I do not choose to use rhyme. In this way I hoped to emphasise visually the line as a basic and unifying unit. I had seen the word "peening" somewhere beforehand, and in checking I could find "peen" only as a verb meaning to

hammer with the thin edge opposite the flat face: at this stage I have let it stand as a gerundive.

When starting out on this book, I had not read John Berryman's works in their entirety, yet I had begun to read Haffenden's commentary with interest. I can recognise in Berryman, and others, the same dips and swings between bleakness and the light. Whether this is active self-modelling or merely a congruence is neither here nor there, I take comfort in knowing that the poems have advanced a little, taking one step at a time, and that people enjoy hearing them.

4. 'Neighbours'

The ordinariness celebrated by the television drama of this name hides what really happens in a neighbourhood. Scarcely any deal with marriage breakdown. This poem grew out of a rumour, which I hoped two years ago to have no basis in truth, that our friends were "experiencing difficulties", as one neighbour intimated with a wink and a nod - gleeful perhaps of another's troubles. While we have known the couple under discussion, since they built their house about sixteen years ago, all the poem's details are gleaned from other observations: I am more interested in the tone being generated than other people's unhappiness.

Since I wrote the first version of the poem, and read it late last year at the Geelong Wintergarden and on local radio, the rumour came true. In January 1999, our neighbour, the lawyer, left his wife and children for someone else's wife, and is now conducting a bitter war against them. No other poem of this book has the power to silence an audience and at times I grow hesitant to write in a similar vein, wondering if the poem actually caused the event.

5. 'Glass Door'

When working through the earlier section of this chapter one night, our late black cat, hero of many a children's bedtime story, normally asleep on my son's bed, took fright and raced into the kitchen, stood in front of the glass sliding door, fur all fluffed out, sparking. The cat stayed in this agitated state for a good ten minutes, and I became in turn, quite fearful - what was going on outside? Only after I had switched on the outside lights and roused the collie, still asleep after barking at pigeons and starlings all day long, did the cat's fear roll away.

That was quite unnerving, as the cat was something of an emotional barometer in the house, making himself scare when trouble came to the front door, or contrariwise, snuggling up to anyone once peace had been established.

6. 'Tybalt'

These poems were quickly coming to me in clusters: three in a day if I were lucky. Although the cat was named "Puška", Lithuanian for "Kit", I was ready to rename him. In the closing weeks of the first term some years ago, I had been teaching Romeo and Juliet to Year 10 students who had been quite responsive. Many had seen the new version directed by B. Luhrman. The cat had killer snakes before, and it was not difficult to make the transition between this warty, sleeping and agitated cat and the villainous Tybalt who so hated peace.¹¹

For some unknown reason an old model Chevrolet had kept cruising the street that night - it fitted the mood of these lines. Even after we had settled down to the night's routine, the cat was still edgy, claws extended, bothering the dog who only wanted to sleep - and when he did eventually nuzzle in at my feet, he fell into a fitful dreaming - snakes perhaps. He has since fallen victim to a neighbour's car, and is reincarnated in the next black cat, our third.

7. 'Fall'

My poems were getting bleaker at this stage, playing around with the double meanings of "fall" as both *Autumn* and a *descent from Grace*. The struggle of each of us against what little life has to offer - perhaps that is too bleak a vision, but my Catholic childhood has had its lasting effect in that I am able to consider and happily allow for the use of religious imagery and language in my writing. By this stage in the writing, I was willing to put away the notebook for the day. I let it rest for some months, typed it into a good copy and sent it away for publication

8. 'Today's Words'

This poem was begun when sitting outside, looking across the river valley where another ugly new frame-house is being built on what should have been a longitudinal zoological park. The new houses can be seen behind my house in the photograph accompanying the comments on 'Living Here' (# 1). Each hammer blow could be distinctly heard - my frustration with the process of getting the critical part of this thesis shaped to my satisfaction had been growing. At times, I felt as though it would take forever to come to fruition, and who would employ a grey-bearded, fresh-minted *litterateur*? Always I must battle my inclination to leave things off until tomorrow.

9. 'In Circles'

This is closely based on personal recollection of a time when the children were younger and we would still indulge in listening together to popular music well before it fell into the grunge mode: not that I like Neil Diamond or Barbra Streisand, far too sentimental by half, but suitable for that time and place. My

preference these days is for *rembetika* and the minimalism of Phillip Glass: but we could be carried away on waves of sentiment and the insistent tom-tom.

I especially like writing the line "We danced in a brag of sways", taking the word "brag" from Basil Bunting well out of context, but here the noun suits the action so well however badly and brazenly I would dance on those nights.¹² Basil Bunting (1900 - 1985) was another poet in the Pound - Olson line who is little known here, but appreciation is growing.

10. 'Broken Wing'

Some years ago I had been walking along the riverpath between Camden Road and the Queen's Park Bridge, when I did find a torn-off, bloodied wing of a sea-bird, rather larger than a seagull's. It appeared to have been wrenched out of its socket. Perhaps some cruel boy or wild dog had mutilated the bird. The carcass was nowhere to be seen. As for the house sounds, our neighbours had their television turned onto a midday movie, one of those black-and-white USAF adventures. These memories of long, wet sick days spent in front of the television, the movie plots becoming interchangeable, is how I mixed in Hayden Stirling and Rin-Tin-Tin, two icons of my childhood.

The last line - "I have no cash to pay for this letter" - it is untraceable, but comes out of memory as much as it may have to do with the lack of pennies in my wallet at the time of writing -,but it sounds right for a 1950s movie.

The whole poem's surrealist edifice is not as one may expect if poems were necessarily logical constructs, for it is without a logical plan. It would be more appropriate if we realised that they are more exercises in super-reality, their business being to put the reader closer to the edge of pain.

11. 'Window View'

When the weather tilted for a day towards winter in late March 1997, I found myself sitting in an upstairs empty classroom looking over Ryrie Street. There was no heating in the school that day, so we all took to wearing jumpers and coats, unlike the previous weeks, which had been in the 30s. I could see a tree across the road, probably a beech or elm, its leaves beginning the processes that mark out approaching autumn. This image connected to some photographs of the Baltic region I had been looking at the previous weekend: hence the spatial jump in line 5.

Working from the photograph, I had imagined these autumnal trees, bent by the winds, to be "at Communion" when visiting St. Mary's Church, which is not far from the school where I teach. In that Church is a reproduction of the Częstakowa Madonna, which in typical Polish fashion evokes sentiment and guilt. The school had bought the Shenton Church, which previously had been deconsecrated, its parishioners having moved away. Elsewhere in Geelong, there are Churches all fallen into disuse, even a vacated Synagogue to which I refer in Canto XI of *Deluge*, 'At Goat Island'. The use of a capital letter in the word "Fall" is deliberate and refers the reader to the earlier poem, 'Fall' (#7).

12. 'Aisling'

The weeks leading to the writing of these poems were marked by broken sleeping patterns, and in the early mornings after I had awoken with a feeling that something was wrong, a generalised anxiety, a dream perhaps, but my Muse appeared at the foot of my bed and asked of me - "What's it you're so fearful of?" I had no answer, but somehow writing this poem lifted me out of that wretched pattern of the "usual night". The Gaelic word, *aisling*, usually taken to mean

poetic vision or dream, in the poetry of Aogan Ó Rathaille (c. 1675 - 1729) was a far more overtly political form of expression, in the poet-dreamer meets a vision-woman who foretells a Stuart redeemer.¹³ But in his later poems, such as 'Gile na Gile' ['Brightness most Bright'], neither her beauty nor his bravery are a match for goblins and strangers.

I had originally written *café noir* as the closing phrase, but leaving out the drink demonstrates the rapid letdown from that unnamable, undefined apparition, and so this poem ends with a descent into blackness.

13. 'O Moonlight'

After the previous poem, this came easily. I recalled that beautiful poem by John Montague, 'A Dream of July'.¹⁴ I had lived with that poem for a good ten years, every since I encountered it when researching Montague's work for my Honours thesis. His version of the *aisling* was more accessible to me than the more involved and elaborated images celebrated by the classic Irish poets Seán Ó Tuama and Thomas Kinsella.

On re-reading I noticed that "sighs" had been used thrice, in lines 1, 8 and 14. I had thought of replacing them with near equivalents such as "moan" or "groan", but neither would do justice to the drawn-out and higher pitched. To keep a similar sound and use words such vowels of the diphthong, [ai:] as "cry" or "weep" or even "tears" would skew my meaning.¹⁵ So, it stays, but note how the modifier in each case shifts emphasis and meaning. At first, "a sigh / Escapes", and the reader is alerted to presence of a spirit which inhabits that bedroom. Then later, the woman's audible dreaming, her "little songs", can be heard "between sighs and far thunder". The bedroom is filling up with sounds which, as

the night gets colder, freeze in their places forming a glass cage around the marriage bed, which is the speaker's only refuge.

14. 'Lady Abdy'

Born in Paris in 1908 of Polish gentry, Balthasar Klossowski de Rola, the Franco-Polish painter known variously as Baltusz or Balthus, whose works cover the six decades till 1983, was in many ways an enigmatic figure. After his parents' marriage all but dissolved, he was informally adopted by his mother's lover, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke who acted as patron for his first published works. In the anglophone world, Balthus is generally thought of as a painter of pubescent girls, but his work has been shown to be quite varied and is now regarded as a key element in European art this century.¹⁶

Rilke wrote a generous introduction to the young artist's first assay into the illustration-essay, *Mitson*. Even though these drawings these are childish, they reveal a clear sense of narrative leading from a stray kitten's discovery to integration within a loving family to his inexplicable disappearance on Christmas Eve. His next assay into textual illustration were the powerful pen and ink renditions of scenes from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* in which Balthus, as he now spelt his name, explored the sexual and psychological tensions between Heathcliff and Cathy. The artist was successful in capturing Heathcliff's brooding, dark psyche which stands in contrast to the heroine's growing realisation of Self which has grown quite separate to her earlier childish affections.

In the illustration I chose to work from for this poem, 'Lady Abdy',¹⁷ Balthus painted his subject in a primitive style, with golden light flooding in from the left-hand frame, throwing her features into sharp relief.

She seems discontent, pensive, and so I invented a moment at which she engages in a soliloquy about her situation, not knowing anything of this Lady Abdy, except what I had read into the painting. Balthus' first exhibition at the Galerie Pierre in April 1934 had caused a scandal in that his large paintings which included *The Street* and *Cathy Dressing* as well as this one.



Balthus, *Lady Abdy*, 1934

Whilst many of his paintings are charged with eroticism, even provocation, it would seem that their effects on viewers even until today is brought about by the relative familiarity of place and habit.

Surrealist painters had attempted to explore the heretofore forbidden and delicious world of dreams, Balthus explored the commonplace endowing it with a dreamlike quality. But also, one must keep in mind Guy Davenport's comment that "Balthus has a Greek wholeness",¹⁸ by which I take him to mean a knowing frankness about the world: a quality I had come to admire more and more as I continued to write the Cantos of *Deluge*, as I was completing this book.

15. 'For Eurydike'

Though I am still unsure about this poem, as it has been difficult to revise, I have retained it in the collection as it leads to the next two poems written in early July 1999.

16. 'A Choice'

If any one man deserved the contempt of the Greeks it was Paris of Troy. I dashed off this poem quite quickly in the Gallery after I had worked on the previous poem for over an hour. Johann Kraemer (1861 - 1949) painted *The Judgement of Paris* in 1888, and it is placed on the south wall of the Douglass room in the Geelong Art Gallery.¹⁹ It varies the compositional form from the painting of the same name by Peter Paul Rubens (1577 - 1640),²⁰ and is not nearly so appetising to the eye. Aphrodite is portrayed as a rounded blonde, and in the fashion of the times, is painted as an almost asexual being. Perhaps Paris, a boy rather than a man, saw her as the less threatening.

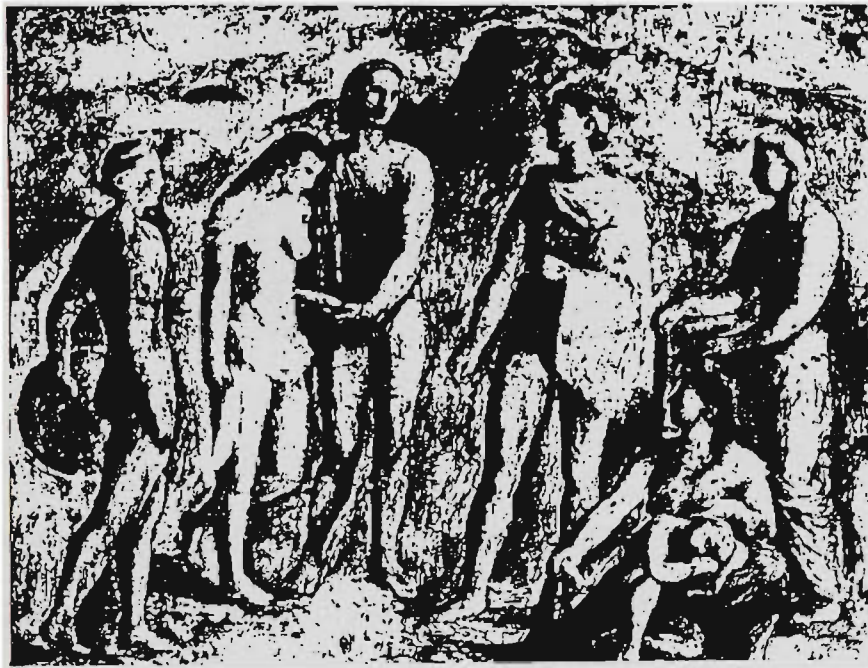
Athena is wearing rather incongruous headgear to signify her warrior status, though it is more likely to have been a fireman's helmet than an archaeological relic. I doubt that he would have chosen Hera, for all her royal status, Kraemer shows her as a bitter-mouthed housewife. She is not amused by Paris offering a golden apple to her rival.

17. 'Bride'

Ever since I first came to Geelong and started haunting the local galleries, I had been attracted to this one painting. Bellette's life has started to intrigue me: she shifted to Sydney from her native Hobart in 1939, and then left Australia for Europe in 1957. I know little of her work and life but those other of her

paintings I have seen, if only as reproductions, exude a cool classicism, and they are difficult to decode. So in the absence of any defined references, I had invented my own story of a young bride brought into a family circle.

On seeing this painting again in late June 1999, I acknowledged it as a familiar, having deliberately sought it out most times I had been in the gallery, just as when I revisit the National Gallery of Victoria and spend at least five or so minutes gazing at Rodin's bronze of Balzac.



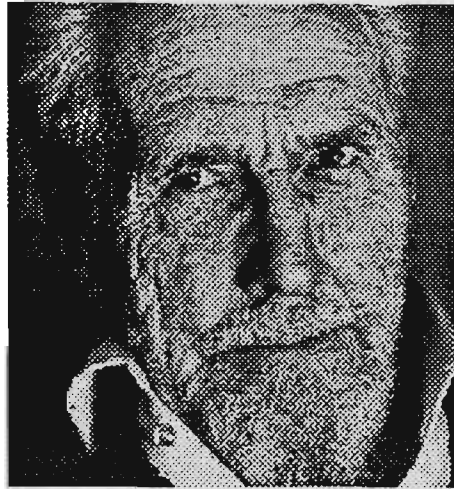
Jean Bellette, *Landscape with Figures*, c. 1945

18. 'Edit'

"Beats" (I. 7) should have read "beasts", but the fingers typed a word which must have come from my reading of Eileen Simpson's memoir of poor, haunted John Berryman's visit to Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, a "real bug-house".²¹

I read also Allen Ginsberg attempted in 1953 to visit Pound, who seems to be the pivot between two groups of poets, East Coasters, such as John Berryman and Robert Lowell, and West Coasters, the Beats, all of whom seem to have been afflicted by great tribulations of the mind.²²

Did the times in which they lived predicate such suffering, or did they bring their woes upon themselves? The fashion for Freud, and later for Adler and Jung, may have been a replacement for organised religion or even coexisted with the religious impulse, but certainly these poets had themselves as surely as mediæval flagellants.



Ezra Pound, 1885 - 1972

The situation in this poem is such as in 'Aisling' or 'Tinge', but here I was more conscious of the need to use my time, but unable to write anything new. Why? Why? What was stopping me? I had only a few clues of association to begin with. My habit in early mornings is to walk sown the corridor as quietly as possible, not wanting the family - even the cats - to be disturbed, taking a pile of blank paper and my favourite pen. If I turn on the computer someone would hear the whirr of the hard-disk drive and ask why I am up and about. It is much quieter to let pen scratch over paper - then revise on screen In my frustration at not being able to write, I jabbed, "lacerated" the paper - ink splotches everywhere, till at last I grew weary and realising I had woken at four a.m., not five, padded back to a warm bed - some more dreamless sleep before school. This theme is treated at greater length in Canto XII, 'The Corridor'.

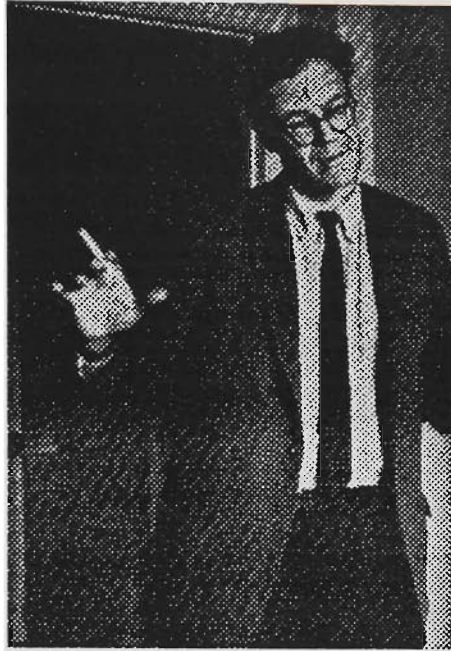
19. 'Looking over my Shoulder'

Trevor Code, now an Adjunct Professor at Worcester Polytechnical Institute, Worcester, Mass., who had first introduced me to Lowell's works when I was an off-campus student at Deakin University, is the dedicatee of this poem.

We are all gatherers of gossip, and so little new detailed critical work is offered in Mariani's biography of Robert Lowell, repeating so much of what had appeared in Hamilton's biography and Simpson's memoirs, that I had decided to use my access to electronic libraries. The key word "links" came about because I had been trying to use Deakin University's Internet service, and for about an hour getting the dreaded message **LINK DEAD**. My inquiries had led me to understand that the circular path connecting Geelong nodes to the Monash University server was still being fixed. I think all sites are in a state of flux and overload. As I found out in talking to friends at the University of Tasmania when visiting in 1998, all tertiary institutions are having problems in maintaining such electronic linkages. Despite the wonders of electronic communication, they are dependent upon fragile optical fibres, corroding copper wires and even atmospheric conditions. I am still far more comfortable and excited in a library containing stacks of dusty books.

I had wanted to check sources and some references to do with Lowell and Berryman, but then had to drive out to the Waurn Ponds campus library, the weather turning into our autumn with wind and rain coming off Corio Bay in horizontal sheets. I recalled my brief time in Massachusetts and how Prof. Ronald Adams, at a Victoria University seminar on the St. Albans Campus, a year or so ago, had mentioned that he would soon be in Washington in time to see the Cherry trees in blossom. We had been getting photographs of two metres or more of snow and the Spring floods in Minnesota and Montana - the whole north

blanketed. My phrase "no doubt Maples have budded" rings rather hopeful for this year and Lowell's presence in these poems is invoked.



Lowell teaching poetry, Boston, 1960s

This is one of my favorite images, Lowell teaching with such passion and intensity, such a contrast to that photograph published by Mariani without permission does queer both Lowell and Blackwood, but while Lowell's poems of *The Dolphin* indicated it was she who had been "netted", I would prefer to re-read that, for in that photograph he seems the more passive, quite captured by his sea-queen. Eventually Lowell had to make the break from Lady Caroline Blackwood, he was too ill and lost to continue on in Ireland.

All heroes meet their doom quite unprepared for the manner of their going. The biographies hint that Lowell knew he was ill, but to die alone in a taxi was not fitting. I used the term "heldenzeit", perhaps it does not exist in a standard wordbook, but I knew that a *Heldentenor* is a singer of heroic parts use of a German term seemed more than suitable in this instance. I resolved in 1996 when starting out on this project, that if I did have half the chance, regardless of the winters there, I would find my way to Boston and New York.

Then in April 1999, I did get to Boston, as well as San Francisco. There perhaps those cities' stones would tell their own stories about the heroic age of American letters which came to an end with Ginsberg's recent death. There's much of present-day writing which seems to me to be too refined, unable to construct a mythos as did the works of Lowell, Olson and Ginsberg.²³

These *Camden Poems*, of necessity, scratch at surfaces, so I am trying to extend the scope and power of my writing in the long poems of *Deluge*. Perhaps between both sets I can construct a myth about this river and its spirits.

20. 'Main Street, Worcester'

Dedicated to Michael True, formerly of Assumption College in Worcester, and who graciously entertained me for an afternoon. Michael had been an associate of the Berrigans in the 1960s, and like many of the American Irish intelligencia were not particularly amenable to conservative pressures, secular and religious.

Worcester is a smallish manufacturing and University town some 140 kilometres to the west of Boston. I had driven there from Los Angeles in August 1992 to visit Trevor Code and stayed with himself and Mrs. Jenny Code at their rented house in the leafy suburb of Holden. The autumn countryside was arrayed in dazzling colours. The new college year had begun and as Trevor was quite busy, Jenny guided me on a car trip upstate to places of interest.

Of especial interest was especially *Fruitlands* where Emerson and the Alcotts had attempted to establish a transcendentalist colony in the distant wilds. What struck me most forcibly was the smallness of the rooms - they were small people in those days due to factors of climate and nutrition. Clara Endicott Sears, another diminutive lady, was one of the Boston transcendentalists.²⁴ Her account of the colony makes for fascinating reading, and I wonder if any of us still has the

pioneering spirit it would take to join in a colony of like minds in an effort to make the world a more perfect place. I had been to see Prof. Stanley Sultan of Clark University, in his spacious study at the English Department building. This is a white clapboard suburban house that has been absorbed by the rambling expansiveness of the University as it has outgrown the original campus.

In my first student days at Adelaide University, I had the sense of being part of a City, being able to walk easily to Mary Martin's Bookshop where Max Harris sat as tyler, where I bought Graves' *The White Goddess*, my first venture into unorthodox mythology. The transition between town and gown was easily made. I found that same sense at Clark, which I do not find in those institutions segregated to the outer suburbs and stony paddocks of Clayton, St. Albans and Waurin Ponds.

Prof. Sultan had quizzed me on some indecipherable passages in Joyce's *Ulysses*, which I suppose could have been checked in a reputable concordance, but the surprising thing was his disinterestedness in Joyce, or Kinsella, as Irish writers, rather he was interested in the modernist processes in Literature: as a post-interview corrective, I hastened to buy his text on Joyce from the local bookstore.²⁵ I ended that hot day in the cool, inviting bar across the road: the beer was more of a chilled lager than the other styles I had tasted - very welcome.

21. 'On the Road to Anglesea'

Once the automobile had been invented and adapted to beach picnics, summertime traffic jams became inevitable. So much for the freedom of the road in which I had exulted first in reading Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, and later, Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.²⁶ In 1992, I had driven a hired car from Los Angeles to St. Louis following Route 66, but along far better roads, before moving northwards.

Once I got out on the open road the temptation was to keep on driving, to stop for as little time as possible. It was quite intoxicating. Likewise, when I was a consultant for the Department of Education, I would arrange to conduct inservice seminars as far away from Geelong as I could: Warrnambool, Hamilton and Portland were targeted. I would make sure I did not need to take any departmental passengers, and head out with a day or two to spare.

In summer, I do try to get away to distant, deserted beaches: a passion not shared by the rest of the family. This one day, I was taking my children and their friends down to Point Roadknight and the road was packed with a thousand like-minded drivers. A drive which usually takes thirtyfive minutes from front door to the beach took an hour or more. Traffic jammed on the descent past the Fire Station. I spent much time looking into my rear-vision mirror, seeing heatwaves roiling up from the asphalt.

After all that, the weather closed in after we had been on the beach for only two hours. We retreated to a friend's house, where the adults sat on the verandah watching the clouds falling into the sea and drinking red wine.

22. 'Bell's Beach'

For three years this poem had only thirteen lines. Its deficiency quite unnoticed.

Then I realised a line was missing in the count. The middle section read:

... Hanging for a feather's breath	1.6
Then slide into oblivion,	1.7
Or so light, like skipping gulls,..	1.8

As the poem was to be reconstructed as a quatorzain, with the turn at the end of the 8th line, a solution was arrived at by discarding the abstract word "oblivion" with a more definite image of drowning.

... Hanging for a feather's breath	1.6
------------------------------------	-----

Then slide under silver waves,	1.7
So many gone to water graves:	1.8
Or so light, like skipping gulls ...	1.9

The use of rhyme at the turn then demanded that the last two lines be restructured to:

As gods play at serious	1.13
Games, and are as careless.	1.14

The vowel-linkage of [ei] between "games" and "waves / graves" helps tie the poem together, making it aurally far more satisfactory than it had been, though as with any rhyme, it still seems a little forced.

23. Closure - Stingaree Bay

Dr. Robert Weymouth had been our children's paediatrician, and solved the mystery of the colic that had plagued them since birth, having terrible consequences for us all. This simple poem is for him.

Robert had his own problems, and drowned in shallow water at Stingaree Bay near Point Henry. I believe an open verdict was returned.

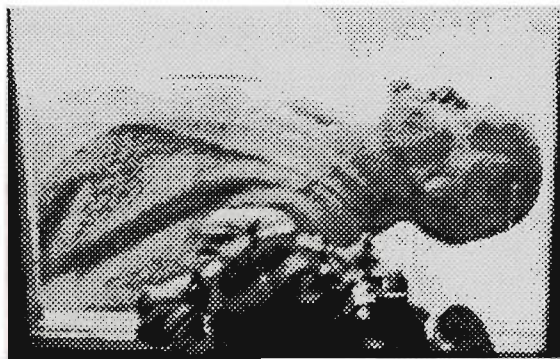
24. 'By the Sea'

Taking up from 'Tinge' (# 2), my own disquiet with my actions, frame of mind, lack of advancement is clear enough to myself, the family, my friends even, and I transfer this all too readily into the more general state of affairs. In my reading of this country's sparse history, I am constantly amazed at the futility of rhetoric and action which leads us to look inwards to the deserts, where there is nothing but brown snakes. If we should be looking anywhere for our destiny, it should be the green seas between our coast and the Antarctic and the other two great oceans.

I had hoped this last Summer to bathe, purge, even rebaptise myself - I was in need of that and found myself on a cool afternoon, late January 1999, repeating the poem to myself. There was no one else on the beach, but the wind listened and took my words away with it.

25. 'Sartre at Nida'

Three images triggered this poem. In 1992, I had visited Vilnius Museum of Antiquities, and through a back window saw a statue of Vladimir Lenin, cropped below the knees and resting face upwards in a weed patch. He had once dominated the park in front of the museum, addressing the city of Vilnius in the same posture one saw in every other post-Soviet city. "Kneecapped" seemed appropriate word, though in the context of the ongoing situation in Ulster it is more an Irish reference.



Lenin's statue, recumbent, Antiquities Museum, Vilnius 1992

Then Jura had previously visited the vacation residence of Thomas Mann (1875 - 1955) at Nida (Nidden) in the northern summer of 1995 and returned with stories and photographs of orchestral and chamber concerts on the strand facing the Baltic Sea. She mentioned how Mann, whose works I had read, was still greatly admired by her Lithuanian colleagues.

From 1931 till he fled Germany, Thomas Mann used to take his summer holidays at the seaside town of Nida on the sandspit known as Kursių Nerija, a few

kilometres south of Klaipėda (Memel). He remembered "the fantastic world of sandy dunes mile on mile, the birch and pine groves full of elk".²⁷ In the Nazi régime, Göring had commandeered it as his holiday residence, and later in the Soviet era, it was a sightseeing spot for favoured guests of the Writers' Union and similar bodies.

The third image, half-remembered from a photo-album, was Sartre himself walking along the beach, all wrapped up against the weather, looking quite myopic and discontent. I think the photograph was taken about the time when he was trying to disentangle himself from Stalinist elements of the French Communist Party. I wondered if Sartre was beginning to recognise the nature of the Party he had lived with for so long.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 - 1980), philosopher and writer, had been my hero of sorts when I was an undergraduate. I had acted in his play *Morts sans sépulture* / *Men without Shadows*, at Adelaide Teachers' College in 1965, and had read all of his novels, and then all of Camus, in Penguin versions. As I have no French, I tried to read *Being and Nothingness* in translation. I was defeated by it, as I still am by most philosophy texts, but that didn't stop me from imaging myself as an existentialist, and I took to wearing black rollneck jumpers and smoking *Gitane* and *Gauloise* cigarettes. I became somewhat more sceptical about Sartre after his compromised involvement with the radical fringes of the 1968 Paris movement, and abandoned him for the more accessible Irish and American writers whom I had started to read once I began teaching.

26. 'Sulkie'

Again, this is an account of an *aisling* manifested in the form of a mermaid, such as encountered in Joan Baez's singing of the Childe Ballad, 'The Silkie of Sulle Ferry',

but thinking that I have seen the word in some Scots vocabulary, I have used the spelling {sulke}. The word occurs in Lithuanian as *silke*, 'herring', and is a common enough word in the Baltic Sea region. So perhaps she is Han Christian Andersen's mermaid who sits so pensively on the rock outside København.

Where do my dreams come from? I cannot ever recall seeing a mermaid, let alone a live herring, while I have seen a dugong and a swordfish in *National Geographic* documentaries - perhaps these disparate elements forge the vision which emerges unbidden when and only when the mind is receptive. Then, how many dreams have I forgotten? There are those mornings I awake with a start, just before the radio stutters on, knowing that I will hear the ABC Newsreader tell me about a particular car accident or living bacterium found in a Mars rock, even if I had not heard the News for two days previously. On other mornings my mind is fogged till ten o'clock. A grey blanket over everything all hours since last night's supper. These dreams are my lanterns.

26. 'Orthodox Easter'

This and the next two poems are constituted from reworkings of images and phrases found in my reading of Anna Achmatova.²⁸ Her poetry developed rapidly after the publication of *Evening* in an edition of only 300 copies in 1912, with three further collections following over long years of war, revolution and civil strife.



Anna Achmatova, 1889 - 1996

This was a sad, troubled time when her husband, the intellectual and soldier Gumilev, was executed for anti-Bolshevik activity. Both Achmatova and Gumilev had been founding members of the Acmeist movement with Osip Mandelštam, placing great importance upon sounds and image clarity - partly in reaction to the fevered mysticism of the earlier Symbolist Movement, and also as a recognition of the need to communicate to a much broader audience in times of stress. On the other hand, Majakovskij and his group developed towards Futurism, reacting to the dislocations of the modern world in a most extraordinary way. Achmatova was prepared to look back to traditional lyric vocabulary and themes which had been employed by Aleksandr Puškin (1799 - 1837).

Achmatova's continued themes of love and religion did not go well with the Soviets and she was forced to omit several poems from a 1940 edition, and then suffered direct attacks from that awful commissar, Ždanov. The effect of this treatment of Achmatova was to silence the voices of Russian and other writers for at least four years and to cripple the literary world for the remaining half-century of the USSR's existence: there is a lesson in this for us, even in an ostensibly free environment, for if the State takes to censorship, even if in the shape of

favouritism towards certain forms and themes, then that sense of creative and political freedom which is needed for a literary culture to flourish will be crippled for a time long after the original fault has been corrected.²⁹

It took Achmatova another twenty years to revive her literary reputation, firstly through translation of western works, but then through the *samizdat* process before being able to get her works published more openly. Even so, I feel that critics, not only in the USSR, expect too much of their writers trying to impose their own social and political programs and frameworks into which the writer is expected to fit. She was severely criticised even in the 1920s for remaining within the habits of her earlier books, that is, she had not progressed - whatever that may mean! What these critics had failed to understand was the depth of Achmatova's lyric, feminine, delicate voice, though recent criticism is redressing that position.³⁰

Many years ago when I was first teaching, a friend's grandmother read me this poem from Evening, in Russian - it sounded so seductive that I wanted to learn the language, just so that I could recite the poem for myself: even when translated into English, her poems work through image so wonderfully.

The door is half-open,
the lime trees wave sweetly ...
On the table, forgotten
- a whip and a glove.

The lamp casts a yellow circle ...
I listen to the rustling.
Why did he go?
I don't understand ...

Here, the images follow one another, a situation is developed, understood and then a theme of isolation and loss abstracts itself out of remembrance. Yet, she could write equally well about the bitter years of repression, fear, and exile. Over tea brewed on a silver samovar, the reader told me of a journey she had undertaken via train and sled over iced rivers, through mountains infested with

wolves and even tigers - how they had found refuge on the other side of the Amur River in Harbin.

She next read these lines, again in Russian:

Then be accursed. I will not touch
your damned soul with a groan or a glance.
But I swear to you by the garden of the angels,
I swear by the miracle-working ikon,
and by the fire and smoke of our nights
that I will never return.

This lady claimed it was her own quittance of a Russia which had forced her out, as perhaps it was Achmatova's prescient refusal to serve those forces which sought to destroy her.

When I left my friend's house, it was a cold and blustery Adelaide evening, St. John's Night, and when I picked up my lesson notes for the next day's Year 10 poetry lesson I had planned on the Jindyworobaks. Before that evening, I had admired them for their invocation of what I vaguely intuited as being Australian poetry. Lines such as these by Roland Robinson had held my esteem:³¹

... because The Bush goes back,
back to time unknown:
chaos that had not word
nor image carved on stone.

or even Douglas Stewart's invocations:³²

Ethiadinna, Mrra Mitta,
Mulka, Mungerannie ...

These seemed so nonsensical and mind-numbing in comparison to Achmatova's magic that I abandoned Jindyworabokism forever. That was no longer to be part of my cultural baggage.

There are times when David Campbell or Les Murray do make sense, but it seems to me that our poetry is still all too accursed by our luck and good fortune, that we have had no crucible in which to forge and refine our emotions. Even so, I am all too acutely aware of falling back into a poetry of moods, an extended self-portrait, assailed by the selfsame fears that dogged me as a boy - *Will you recognise*

me? What do you think of me? Then, I had wanted answers, hopefully something friendly and helpful, but now I know that silence is all that one will ever get, from friends as well as from God, that one "can no longer tell beast from man".³³

Achmatova was able to recognise that our human condition had changed irrevocably in the - course of her lifetime' that pure lyric had become irrelevant in the poet's armory. In reading her *Autumn Elegies*, I found that the images fitted my mood at that time, our Latin Easter and Ramadan having passed, and with the discordances in calendars, I knew from my Greek students that on this particular weekend they would be celebrating their own festival. But we are upside down in our seasons, coming into Autumn here, while in the northern hemisphere they await Springtime, their Easter.

I realised that after picking out phrases, more or less at random and assembling them into part lines, I was able to insert my own reactions and alterations, retain what I had done in the two previous experiments, so the passage, ll. 5 - 9, now referred directly to my own situation, in particular to the children, while line l.11 includes Jūra.

28. 'White Crosses'

In late June 1998, we received word that the 22 year old daughter of friends had been killed in a road accident. Andria Zuccolin was a passenger in a small sedan which had skidded on a wet road into a power pole. Both girls in the small car died.

From reading and hearing of Jūra's tales about her family, I had been thinking of the many souls lost in the mapless tacts of Siberia, where my wife's Great-Aunts had spent twenty-five years in forced exile - so many dead to please the whims of thugs and liars. Whatever God there is has redrawn the maps, our ghosts cannot

be recalled, for all our kin are ghosts. I noticed earlier this year that on the highway between Geelong and Melbourne, there was a collection of white crosses set in the median strip, memorials to those killed in senseless road accidents. The poem then wrote itself out of these elements. This is another poem which has the power to silence an audience, both here and overseas as it draws upon an all too common experience we have as survivors of car crashes, psychic breakdowns, even of wars. In a secularised and increasingly uncaring society, the simple act of placing a white cross by the roadside becomes a public, even political statement of grief and anger.

I wondered how long the crosses on the Princes Highway near Lara would endure, given that they are prefaced by a direct appeal to the Prime Minister. Since funding has been granted to upgrade the highway to Melbourne they have been demolished. What signal will that send to ordinary people? Surely we do not want to, need to, lose our youth so randomly, or so cheaply. Could we not design our machines and road furniture so that people are neither injured nor killed? I do not know the answers.

29. 'Our Body'

This poem had been composed alongside 'Then' and 'Shrove Tuesday' in late 1993. Since then, I have reworked it a little, and used a new title to avoid a clash with 'Fall' (# 7).

30. 'Last Blooms'

In the Easter 1997 vacation, we set to cleaning up the house. The Tuesday afternoon was quite bright and warm and our daughter, Anita, announced she would go out into the front yard and do some pruning of the jasmine and

rosebushes. I tackled the hibiscus and bottlebrush, both of which did need some attention, being quite bedraggled. We worked together in silence for an hour or so.

This poem was also translated into Lithuanian by Bronius Žalys of Sydney.

Vasaros Žiedai

Susiviję tarp savęs, paskutiniai
Hibiscus'ų ir bottlebrush'ų žiedai
Nukrinta lengvai į mano ranką,
Buvę lengvabūdiški kvapai tik tik jaušiami.
Namai atsimena žydėjimo metą
Ir skaistųjų Vasaros spindesį,
Jų palangių šokių
Geriau suprantamus
Kaip mano žodžiai: tylą
Yra gėlių gimimo akmuo
Kaip karštis nuo cementinių takų
Tarp vidurdienio ir ketvirtos valandos:
Dabar jos yra bereikšmės, ašaros
Išgertos iš tarp suspaustų nieškusių.

31. 'A Birch'

Ieva Mising-Kains, Latvian Youth Theatre dramaturg, has been a friend ever since our student days at Adelaide University. She now lives on the Mornington Peninsula.

Visiting her house after I had seen the post-Soviet Russian film *Burnt by the Sun*, and had described to her the shots where the wind moves through a birch grove, the birches swaying like young girls in a folk-dance, all the while walking through her garden which had been planted out in pines, birches, firs and many fruit trees. Returning the visit later, she kindly gave us a birch tree as a present, which I have planted out on the nature strip.

32. 'Rush'

Some years ago, I published this rather bitter little poem in the English teachers' journal. This and the following poem, 'Room 38', are a recapitulation of sorts on 35 years of school-teaching.

Are school-teachers really called *professore* in other countries? An old Rumanian emigré and poet, Jorge Oprea de Traché (1926 - 1999) always addressed me as professor each time we met, I had helped him in correcting the grammar of his own translations of his poems into English for local readings. My tutor in Middle School, Fr. Rutkowski SDB, playfully would use the term in speaking to those of us who were on the scholarship track. However, in general, Australian terminology reserves that term for the more exalted staff in tertiary institutions, while the Americans have Assistant Professors and Associate Professors as well - it would be interesting to track the semantic shifts between our cultures. To profess in a field of knowledge is quite different to organising schedules and budgets, and to playing educational politics: in other times, other places, knowledge was perhaps valued more highly than management.

I had come back to my classroom one Monday morning in March, only to find three more broken windows. As to who the vandals were we do not know, but probably they were some disaffected former students, or even casual wretches: it is plain enough that such louts gather outside our public institutions and in their blind, inarticulate rage - at what? - strike out and joyfully cause havoc. They are like the massed tribes of Germans gathered on the opposite banks of the frozen Rhine River near Coblenz at Christmastide 406 AD,³⁴ waiting to swamp what we fail to define and defend. But surely the real threat comes from within our institutions, from those hirelings who willingly close viable schools and even universities, sell off our public assets, bulldoze them and turn them over to mere commerce.

33. 'Room 38'

If I seem bitter and upset in these two poems, I feel that I should be. I had for a long time tried to get all my classes scheduled into the one room, and had at last succeeded. Room 38 looks out onto Eastern Park, and while essentially it is a tin shed, it was my refuge until some vandals again broke windows and despoiled a group of rooms one weekend. The school administration was prompt in getting the contractors in, but we had to live glass with splinters and a sense of intrusion for some weeks. These days I teach next door in Room 37: it has been carpeted and repainted in the last year or so, but is still a vulnerable site.

I have been in schools for almost my whole life, it seems, and except for the long summer holidays of my youth, always at work: a strange and unhealthy situation, but I am the first of my family to complete secondary schooling, and complete a University course in the six generations our family has been in Australia. My parents were always at pains to teach us that Ireland was once a land of saints and scholars and that our estates had been rudely and wrongfully taken away from us. Jūra's family, displaced by war between two fascist governments, had even sharper memories of the promise held out by proper schooling. Crazy sentimentality perhaps, but then once the children of my generation took the bait there really was no option but to continue. This business of education, whether as a student or as a teacher, has been the only way for our family to define itself against barbarian incursions.

Now, our children take it as a given that they will finish secondary schooling, go on to read at a University and enter a profession. While they take our relating of the achievements of pioneer lexicographer Edward O'Reilly,³⁵ or of the escapades of the book-smuggler Antanas Žickus, with a grain of salt, they at least will be able to reclaim some small part of their family's pride.

Each time I see a wrecked chair, a table defaced with obscenities, hear language so foul that I must stop up my ears, my despair deepens. What sort of people are we that our children destroy the very means by which they too can raise themselves out of the bog?

Some years ago I walked around the back streets of Kuta in Bali. The small schools have classrooms open to the elements, benches and seats are roughcast concrete. The children are needy and enthusiastic: they are so hungry to learn. Likewise, there are many students who come into my classroom, despite heat or cold, enjoy the simple tasks of reading and writing, and out of their idealism and common decency they give me great pleasure and some hope for the future. And, when I read either of these two poems, knowing there are teachers amongst the listeners, I pitch at them, and watch their heads nod in mute agreement.

34. 'At Minyip'

In 1991, I took the children on a car journey to Adelaide and the Wimmera while Jura was making her first trip to Lithuania. My great-grandfather, Edward Reilly (c. 1838 - 1906), is buried at Minyip in an unmarked grave. After an eventful working life, he had ended his days as the first librarian at that town's Mechanics' Institute. A literate man, a saddle-maker and cobbler by trade, he passed on his skills and knowledge of Latin down the line to my grandfather, then eventually to me. While we searched around the Minyip graveyard for his gravestone, we almost stood on a two-metre Brown Snake. It slithered away, and we left all rather shaken, not having found any trace of our forebear.

35. 'Atlas'

This was one of a group of poems in which I address some of the concerns about landscape and settlement, which I have addressed with some detail in Chapter 2. What struck me at the time, was the way in which the naming process of the landscape reflected settlement patterns as shown by marking on a map of the districts around Geelong in various colours, indicating Kulin and European names.

36. 'Into Winterwood'

Twelve poems make a group reflecting upon my life when teaching at Timboon in the early 1970s. Leaving my house on Rands Road, it was a mere five minutes and I was on countryside roads. I would take the Irish Setters with me, and turn into an undeveloped road reservation running north of the township for about five kilometres. The Setters would have a good run, and being a game breed did not bother the sheep or cattle. The local farmer, whose children I taught, had his own Gordon Setter and showed me an unmarked track down to a creek bank, a good place to quietly sit and think.

37. 'Out of my Pockets', 38. 'Two Days Rain' and 39. 'Break'

This habit of reflexion and contemplation is helped by having a pocket full of useless scraps which I had begun to use as starting points for linking associations into more formal structures. This and the next two poems, 'Two Days Rain' (#38) and 'Break' (#39), rework earlier groups of lines and define those particular days some twenty-five years ago.

40. 'One White Siesta Hour'

This was my first attempt at modelling a poem after Ovid, trying to capture the feeling of regret I detected in his work. Guy Lee's excellent translations had made Ovid far more accessible and understandable, giving permission to treat the poem in a far more contemporary manner.

41. 'Then', 42. 'Shrove Tuesday' and 43. 'Stony Rises'

As I travelled around the Western Districts, I would make brief observations on scraps of paper and later write them up in my Journals. The poems would coalesce slowly.

44. 'West Paddock'

I once saw the results of a tractor accident, and wrote down some impressions. These have worked their way in to this particular poem.

45. 'North of the Highway', 46. 'Near Moriac' and 47. 'At Robe'

My preference is for the coastal strip rather than for the inland, which I associate with snakes and drought. South of a line drawn from Geelong to Ballarat to Hamilton the country gets 20" or so of rain, and can be farmed. But go north and the rainfall drops off dramatically, the countryside becomes bare and desolate. My travels for the Department of Education took me all the way from Queenscliff to the South Australia border, and we have often driven along the coast from Mt. Gambier to Adelaide, taking in the sights, and sometimes staying at Robe, on the coast south of Victor Harbour.

48. 'Weather Day' and 49. 'Concerning Sleep'

Written in late June 1999, this and the following poem refocus on life outside of my street. In the last three years it has seemed that all of our friends' marriages were breaking up. Our daughter's godfather, a dairy farmer living outside of Timboon, had taken up with another woman, and his wife has fled to Geelong seeking to rebuild her life. As she sat in our lounge room, full of woe over a new twist in the saga, I thought back to happier times, and imagined their earlier life I had known as their friend. The poems only came much later that month when I was outside starting to walk the dog down by the river.

50. 'Like Almonds', 51. 'Chrysanthemums' and 52. 'A Bank of Lilies'

Three poems constituting the group "Oasis" were written as part of the investigation into the role of chance. This compositional process was fully explained in Chapter 4. However, now at a remove of at least two years since the initial composition, I have been able to manipulate the lines and vocabulary somewhat, and am content to let them stand. What meaning could be attached to them, I leave to the reader.

A Last Note

At this point, I have concluded *The Camden Poems* as a project. I must say that I am content with such "slack fourteen-liners" as a form in which to write: they retain their liveliness and have allowed my voice a useful degree of coherence. However, in the second book of poems, *Deluge*, various forms have been explored partly for the sake of examining form, but also through a realisation that each new situation has demanded a different treatment.

Reflections on *Deluge*

In *Deluge*, I celebrate a momentous event, the great flood of 1995, which had a traumatising effect on my local community. As explained in Chapter 2, I believe this event is a suitable setting for collection of poems, and have acted on this belief in writing. These twenty three Cantos are set within a region defined by the Moorabool and Barwon Rivers, particularly the watercourses downstream of Queen's Park Bridge, and the coastline from the estuary at Barwon Heads southwards to Lome. As this book of poems progresses, I develop a multi-focused portrait of the region and its people as symbolised by the drowned Walker and his adolescent Psychopomp. Implicit in this depiction is my firm belief in validity of praising and celebrating the local, incorporating other materials at hand from my childhood and my reading of various myths, out of which grows a new poem fitting for this time and this place.

I do not work methodically, logically, as a technician would, but rather as materials come to hand and inspiration strikes so that *Deluge* was not written as a linear progression from start to finish. Rather, having focused in a general way on the river and coast in some successful long poems, it seemed to me that I could make a body of work cohere about a single event, namely the 1995 flood. So the first Canto was written well after the next three, which in turn were written much later than the material for middle Cantos had been developed. Even then, I was well aware of the need to find and develop new materials for the full structure. I see nothing unreasonable in this, because the book would eventually show order and progress from beginning to end. But it is not a narrative as such: what is the beginning, and what is perceived as the poem's closure are to some extent quite arbitrary, even illusory.

One is limited in presentation of a text by the linearity of books, and I would rather have a set of nine or more video screens set up in a room, with voices simultaneously or in counterpoint coming out loudspeakers matching carefully chosen images and scrolling texts. A different form of presentation may well be possible at some stage in the future, and have different effects upon an audience, but as I must be content with the printed page, I will trust that my audience will make readers of themselves and journey back and forth in the text as it pleases them. But a beginning is needed, and the first Canto is constructed so as to introduce a number of frameworks.

In starting to write these first four Cantos of *Deluge*, I had at hand all of the reading which has been detailed previously, but I was determined not to write an imitation or calque of some other poet's work. The poems of John Béchervaise had celebrated some aspects of the area,³⁶ but I had seen in this river valley, local beaches and surrounding district a unique environment which had not been fully utilised as a setting. I had started in 1996 by completing, Canto XVI 'Point' and Canto XVII 'Marengo Beach', after three sections of the latter had been published, vindicating my wish to experiment with longer line lengths and bigger forms. These I now have placed towards the end of the collection. I was also working on the other long poem, Canto VI 'Eternal Memory'. These had been occasioned by contemplation of objects discovered at the sea's edge, and to some extent reflected my interests in the psychology of memory, which I will discuss in greater detail at a later stage.

As expressed in Chapter 2, in seeking a framework for writing, I came to reject any notion of adapting, or better stated, appropriating Kulin mythology. That has left the only mythologies properly available to me, as I have learnt them through my family and through my readings. As I had been confronted by the effects of

that flood of 1995, and in later going back through photographs and news articles about the event did I realise that concerns expressed in the earlier poems were linked with this particular event. As can be seen in the following photograph, the 1995 flood was extensive, matched only by that of 1951 in popular memory. Five metres, about sixteen feet in the old measure, is quite a rise in water level, and would be the equivalent of "three men, one standing on one, standing on another" (ll. 71 - 72). Yet from memory, I believe that the waters did rise higher to reach the curbside some three metres beyond.

In *Deluge*, four figures will be discerned by the reader. Firstly there is a Narrator, whose voice acts as both an impersonal narrative device. He is strongest in the first and opening stanzas of the following Canto, and is marked by the pronoun "I", sometimes referring to himself, but more often than not commenting on what is before him, allowing the readers to see with his eyes. At other points in *Deluge*, the same pronoun "I" is used by other voices, allowing the reader further points of view.

Voices of the dead are now introduced. The second voice heard is that of the Walker, an aged sailor, my neighbour from Percy St., whose madness and despair led him to his death. He becomes the flower-victim, an offering of appeasement to the flooded river. His is a voice other than the Narrator's, the first other, driving the hidden story of the whole poem. In my belief that this region can be thought of as an embodiment of some local spirit, we could use Robert Graves' terminology of "Goddess" readily enough, then Walker's role is that of a sacrificial victim, similar to those celebrated by Séamus Heaney. The third voice is that an adolescent girl, who had fallen to her death in the river, and who acts as the voice of the river itself, and is Walker's psychopomp, as Virgil was to Dante. She is also an Ophelia or even a Blodeuwedd, Flower - Virgin: that is she is a appropriating

figure who is eventually unfaithful to Walker, deserting him after her *aubade* of Canto XVII.

Other figures and symbols occur. I have placed flowers in profusion about the drowning Walker, to complement the girl who introduces Canto X, 'The Mares in their fields'. As I had shown in my earlier discussion of Vincent Buckley's poem, 'Louisa Stewart is Foaling', the horse is a powerful symbol in all Celtic mythologies. Oddly enough, the horse appears in Irish mythology as a man's name, *Eochaidh*, and is linked to, the tale of Midir and Etain, the adulterous lovers who were transformed into swans.³⁷ The strength and beauty of horses have attracted me since childhood, drawing upon childhood memories of being taken to the Yearling Sales at the Marion Road rotunda and my mother's tales of her country grandparents' life at Cootamundra. These sound out as the fourth voice in Canto X.

Another symbolic figure occurring in these Cantos is the fish, which is often thought to be a specifically Christian symbol of renewal, deriving from the miracle of loaves and fishes, with Christ himself sometimes represented by evangelicals by a stylised fish or the acronym IXΘΥΣ, which is said to stand for the phrase "Jesus anointed son of God". It is more ancient than that. However, these flood-fish are, more like Death's undertakers. Dominating all is The Deluge or Great Flood, which occurs as a motif in many literatures and folk-tales, not the least being the biblical account with which we are most familiar. Like the rainbow which appeared at the end of The Deluge as a sign of life and renewal,³⁸ rivers are symbols of life, and as we are all too well aware, the real source of life in this water-starved land. This river itself, just a hundred steps downhill from my desk, is the great link between land and sea, dancing like a galloping horse.

In completing *The Camden Poems* towards this thesis, I had determined upon continuing with the quatorzain as the form in which my words and ideas would be cast. The usefulness of this model had been discussed earlier, but provided a starting point by which the poems of the next book could be written. Further, in re-reading my earlier notes and in extending the scope of critical reading, I have begun the process of grappling with the whole question of form and voice as it applies in the process of Poetics - not that these reflections offer any definitive map - but then mapping is always a tentative process.

What one tries to do in a poem is to give shape to an idea, and it must be realised that the shapes given to European and American poetries have varied greatly over the course of the last two centuries. That tumultuous time has witnessed at least four major intellectual movements - Enlightenment, Romanticism, Modernism and Postmodernism - each of which has spoken in quite different voices. Who could be more different in their poetic than say Alexander Pope, Lord Byron, John Berryman and Lynn Hejninian? Sometimes the languages of the different poetries have been so estranged from each other that reading backwards has become impossible: Auden's tight octosyllabics may be graceful, but irrelevant to a L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet or we find Eliot's religious inclinations totally alien to a sensualist such as Dorothy Porter. Of course, the point is that differences are not merely matters of language and form, but of intelligence and philosophy.

In my own schooling, the heaviest influence, apart from Shakespeare who had marked our language with his bombast almost unalterably until the Modernists began the painful process of paring back, were the Romantics. John Keats' tuberculosis, William Wordsworth's and Lord Byron's incestuous behaviours, Mary Shelley's prescience of horrors of Science misused - all led this boy's mind

towards the ultimate romantic landscapes of Science Fiction, or more to the point here, the imagined horrors of Coleridge's 'Christabel'. Much later my reading led to an empathy with the lonely, mad figure of Ezra Pound in the detention compound at Pisa. These have been my ghosts as I sought to find a means of writing about my landscape and to discern its resident spirit.

My writing needs to be shaped according to the materials employed and subject matters explored. Where the structure of Canto X was influenced by the nature of the source materials, newspaper reports and journal entries, the structure of the first three Cantos of *Deluge* was chosen to reflect initial stages of the great flood of 1995 and to provide a format by which various voices could be introduced. I had found an effective format in John Berryman's use of a ten-line stanza in his marvellous cycle *Mistress Bradstreet*.³⁹ It is a sharp form, less extensive than the sonnet or quatorzain, enabling one major point or group of related images to be conveyed to the reader before the next stanza is introduced. This form allowed the writing to either move forward in a narrative or to introduce dream-loops in which there are neither narratives nor actions but rather voices are allowed to sound out. The next decision made was to avoid rhyme, which I feel has become more a means of marking closure in contemporary poetry, something which should not be valued for its own sake. I felt that perhaps rhyme should be regarded as a device that could be used on the odd occasion, and indeed I did use this device, somewhat sparingly, in Cantos IX and XV. There are other vocal devices available if the need arises. I had found earlier that in writing drafts for *The Camden Poems* the possibility of rhyme was ever-present, but assonance worked far better, for example in 'Neighbours', where the repetition of [o] and other back vowels near line-ends, irregularly spaced, acted as a useful controlling factor for

the emotions I had wanted to communicate. Likewise, [r] consonance in 'Last Blooms' linked together different lines in a wholly satisfactory manner.

Line length was another matter to consider. I accept Olson's notion that one projects an animating spirit in the writing of a poem, as is Ashbery's interesting practice of writing exhaustively long lines in order to set up a quite different emotional field than one would strike in the poetry of say, Gary Snyder or Robert Lowell. So at some stage, I had determined that variability of line length would be employed as a key device, but not so much for its own sake, as to allow the characters I had begun to imagine to have their own voices. Initially, in the context of the 10-line stanzas I was beginning to write, lines were held in check, neither brutally short, as in Canto XXIII - 'A Masque: An Exchange of Letters after The Deluge', nor extenuated as in other Cantos.

Canto I: The wildness of it

The first stanza sketches out the general situation of confusion and uncertainty as the floodwaters rose. It was a wild time for all of us, and for this reason I chose to use a truncated phrase from the correspondence between Charles Olson and Cid Corman.⁴⁰ In his letter of 3 May 1951, Olson urges Corman to exercise his "governance of ... and the material in it" and seize the opportunity to create a new literary movement, one which Olson felt would have a regenerative effect in those dull post-War years. As I saw it, this flood of ours could have a regenerative effect, if only to bring the local people closer together.

Oddly enough in the course of our trials at this point, the older members of staff at my school were half-jokingly attributing this deluge to, "our sins", such as the introduction of poker machines and table-top dancing to Geelong. There is always a religious undercurrent in our civic discussions and politicking, though I

do think that most business-people, farmers and consumers have conveniently forgotten the biblical injunction to act as stewards rather than as exploiters in our relationship with the land.

The second stanza recounts a dream I had about that time, and gives as clear account as I can. Just who was that child, "bright as light" (I. 17), I do not know, for like many dream apparitions, her actual face or other features could not be remembered: what was important in remembering is that a child touched my hand as I watched the floodwaters surge past. I had been searching for a model way of expressing myself when I re-read some of Thomas Kinsella's sequence "Wormwood",⁴¹ and the poems in John Montague's *The Great Cloak*.⁴² There at least, were ways into the dream, a method of ordering images, a small tale set within a larger order. The third stanza flowed directly onwards from a more recent dream, or perhaps a memory, of another unnamable face. I hope then that these stanzas set the initial mood of reverie and loss and provide a link to Canto XX: 'A View from Queen's Park Bridge' through my statement, "I can hold that single day fixed" (I. 27). This in turn derives from a phrase by Donald Hall and serves as an epigram for that Canto.⁴³

Then I change voice, and in the next five stanzas take the reader swiftly through a history of local floods to the situation as we experienced it, leaving open the causes through the rhetorical device of the question, "Why is this so?" (l.80). This is answered in part by the following three stanzas. These involve another shift in sensibility, and expect the reader to have at least some frames of reference, Classical mythology as well as recent history to grasp at how "immense" (I.10) have been our "sins" against Nature. This sensibility is maintained in the fifth stanza by a calque of Pound's line:⁴⁴

And then went down to the ship,
Set keel to breakers ...

My variation on this takes the people of Camden Road and visitors to the spectacle down to the river's edge where the terrors of this deluge are visited on them.

In the eleventh stanza (l. 101- 110), use is made of Captain Speke's account of human sacrifices in Uganda as a counterpoint to our lack of self-sacrifice in appeasing Nature.⁴⁵ This then links in the following lines to the purported appearance of the Virgin at Medjigorje, which I believe is a consciously profiteering "deceit", and declare my personal preference for seeing "only what is in front of me" (l. 120).

Keeping that in mind, I return to the basic narrative and recount two episodes of the river watch, trees seen entangled in each other's branches and the Police looking for a missing man. In reality, Mr. Walker of Chilwell had drowned himself almost twenty years beforehand, but for my purposes, he fits exactly into the "tall man's jacket".

Not all can be gloom, and I chose to finish the Canto on a positive note, and took as my cue Pound's lines:⁴⁶

the mountain forest is full of light
the tree-comb red-gilded

This movement completes the arc back towards the opening word of this Canto, "Morning".

Canto II: He lay in the middle of the world

I had taken the title for this Canto from a line of John Berryman's *Dream Songs*, a book by a poet I have come to greatly admire.⁴⁷ In 'Song 53' Berryman writes of his alter ego Henry,

He lay in the middle of the world, and twitcht.
More Sparine for Pelides,
human (half) & down here as he is ...

so echoing his own dreaded fits and descents into near-madness and love-induced alcoholism.⁴⁸ I had seen such failings in my student days when a friend drank himself to near-death with Pernod having been rejected by his one love, and known such dangerous obsessions myself. In such a psychic state, the world is centred upon oneself and falls downwards and inwards, crushing the spirit.

My central figure in *Deluge* is a Mr. Walker, a neighbour from my Percy St., Chilwell days, who about twenty years ago left his house and mad wife on a Winter night, presumably drunk, and fell or threw himself into the swollen Barwon River to drown. There was some talk that he had done so deliberately, but I believe the official, and kinder, verdict stated it was an accidental death. His corpse was found some four days later, swept all the way from the Queen's Park Bridge, where he had last been seen, down to the reed-beds of Barwon Valley Park where a rowing crew spotted him and gave alarm.

I take him as my central figure in this poem for two reasons. Firstly I needed a voice other than the poet's, who like the First Speaker in Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood*, would open and close proceedings, intervene at some points and help give shape to the whole. Secondly, if my belief that this land, and its river, can be thought of as a manifestation of a local "Goddess", using Graves' terminology, then Walker's role as a sacrificial victim becomes clearer.

The tone I establish in the first stanza is one of regret, "If only ...", Walker begins trailing off to a realisation that "nothing has been fulfilled", that his life and that of his spouse have come to an emptiness. He is like Noah looking back upon Mt. Ararat with fondness for the heroic days of the past, the first footings into a new

world. Walker had told me terrible tales of his time in the Royal Navy out in the wastes of the North Sea, and then of having to modify his Scots in order to rename everything and understand other people when he had first migrated here. "I grew a new tongue", he once said, echoing the experience of his Gaelic-speaking grandparents when they had migrated from the Highlands to Glasgow.

In the second stanza I deliberately confused Mrs. Walker's religion. Her singing slid from one side of the divide to the other, sometimes I thought her not to be Baptist, but Catholic like my own mother, who also fervently sang her hymns in Church, had her little routines, lines, lit candles in front of the Infant of Prague. But she had sung in an Anglican choir before the War, and would pull out song-sheets regardless of order, mixing hymns with show-tunes.

My neighbour was excluded from his own home for his drinking, and had built himself a brick shed in which to drink and read his banned magazines. His voice continues in the third stanza, mulling over differences in speech between himself and his wife, his dicky heart. Then I change voices, the narrator introduces himself by referring to Walker in the third person, "He once said ...", and relates through this device some of the tales told me about life "in the heaving North Seas", which correspond to what I had heard from Danny Spooner and others, at different times. All those jolly songs about Davy Jones and Patrick Spens acquired a certain grim irony when I was told of why each Aran Island sweater has a different cabling knitted into it. In the lands by the North Sea a quick drowning is preferable to a slow freezing, and the patterns knitted into the fishermen's pullovers are identifiers.

One strange thing emerged about Walker's corpse, it was said he was only partly clothed or even that he was naked, and flowers were grasped in his knotted fingers, which detail gave me an image of Ophelia, who surely was a sacrificial

victim to the gods of war and power. To my mind, Walker was like the ritual victim in Heaney's 'The Tollund Man', sacrificed to appease Nerthus, the Bog Goddess.⁴⁹ The function of such a sacrifice was to ensure that next season's crops would sprout, and often these corpses' stomachs have been found to contain remnants of rough bread and a meal made of seed mixed in with honey.⁵⁰ Walker's carrying of flowers signifies his role in fructifying the river valley.

The narrator's voice continues for the next eight stanzas, reflecting upon Walker's death and connecting the time of his flood and the events of 1995, so allowing Walker to re-emerge at a later stage as a contrapunctal voice which I can use to vary the tonality and pace of the poem as it develops. Such a device will also be useful when it comes to recording the poem.

So the next two stanzas deal with the narrator's memories of a visit to the bothy at the time of Walker's disappearance, as we thought that he had fallen asleep there in a drunken stupor. It was full of old copies of *Playboy* and other rougher magazines, and bags of vegetable seed, which items can be taken as symbols of the Goddess, and even a book of tide tables for some small port on the west coast of Scotland. We searched the streets at his wife's instigation, and Police patrolled the riverbanks finding nothing. The river was not officially in flood at that time, but local children were being warned off as the rains kept on.

About that time my mother died in Adelaide, and I was hard put to cope with the shift in from the Western Districts, a baby on her way, and the uncertainties of living in a rented property. The seventh stanza is the record of a dream-memory I had in 1997, at the time I was writing these initial stanzas. Strangely enough, Mrs. Walker, our neighbour of twenty years ago had a gas-fired copper in her wash-house.

The Goddess now makes her appearance as the addressee of the next stanza, first heralded by the crass photographs in Walker's magazines. When I was writing this stanza, I had been reading of how some of the local lads had taken to the floodwaters and played quite dangerously at surfing the rapids. It seemed to me to be an appropriate way of defying all the official calls for caution on the river: I was struck by the lads' sheer exuberance as they came down the river and around the bend. We wondered of course, what had caused the floods, and while popular opinion blamed El Niño for the rains, older farmers around the area pointed to the massive erosion of the landscape occasioned by over-stripping of natural cover and intense cultivation. So, in the next two stanzas, the narrator moves inland, discovering that even there no comfort is to be found, only "lovers gone missing" in another sacrificial act, swallowed up by the Bush. That sense of immanent danger is sustained in the narrator's memories of the heavy rains accompanying Walker's disappearance. Now that we have a tiled roof on this house, I must listen very hard for variations in rainfall, but in that weatherboard house on Percy St. with its tin roof, every kind of rainfall had a different note, and because Chilwell is closer to the broads of the Barwon Valley where the rains sweep up from the South-West, I could hear the various patterns of rain and hail as they came in from Belmont. At times, the rainstorms would be so loud and strong that they seemed to threaten our rented house which shook and rattled with each gust of wind, underlining our fears and uncertainty.

Sometime after my mother's death and the birth of our daughter, my father came to visit from Port Willunga where he had insisted on remaining, stubbornly self-sufficient. For some reason, that Sunday afternoon he was due to go back on the bus, I noticed how translucent his hands had become, and how suddenly his hands had become arthritic and that he could not finger bagpipe's Chanter to

make the "soft music" he so loved. After a long and bitter break I was reconciled with him, understood more about what bound us together than what had pulled us apart, and so I planted a birch in my front yard as a small gesture, not having the gift of music myself.

The Canto moves back towards Walker, imagining his fall and transformation into a "merman", conversing with the River "in the hidden tongue" and can be taken to refer to both the churning waves of the flooded river and also to the sacred language, Gaelic, which Walker had in his childhood. So, in the fourteenth stanza, Walker sings of himself as freed from the river snares and able at last "to praise / what lives and dances" (II. 81 - 82), rising up towards the horizon, seeking the fight. It seemed to me that a quick and merciful death, such as he had spoken of in his reminiscences of his sailing days would not have been his fate, especially considering his chance remark about Ophelia - and that he was not found for several days afterwards, makes him a suitor to the River. Later, as I have developed the notion of the River as Epona, that manifestation of the Celtic Threefold Goddess as a mare, I have taken Walker on a ride into the unknown.

To close the Canto, the viewpoint pulls back so that we can see the "middle of the world", where the sunlight begins to signal a respite from the previous night's storms, and the narrator now sends the readers, "our guests" (II. 148), on their way. This is a formal closure to the first Canto, and I have deliberately used such a device in order to make each Canto well defined and separate. In the process of public presentation of the poem, I am aware that an audience needs both visual and aural signals to frame their participation in the text. Visually this can be accomplished by white spaces between sections and page divisions, headlines and titles, aurally, certain phrases and their accompanying intonation are just as

important. When reading these Cantos on public radio or to a live audience I have also added a small beginning commentary as a marking device.

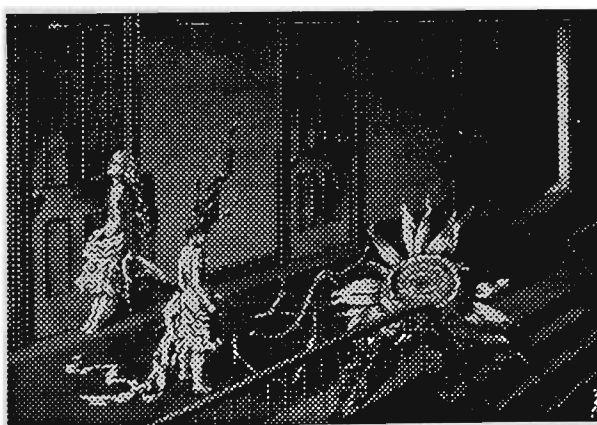
Canto III: You cannot leave these things out

Ezra Pound, in writing his great Cantos, has provided us with a box of tools with which to write and think about poetry. His enterprise, like Charles Olson's and Basil Bunting's afterwards was to be inclusive, to not leave out any detail about a chosen matter. All three poets' works will endure by virtue of their inclusiveness, their monumentality. I tried to be more exact in my descriptions, more precise, so that the reader could in theory follow the pathway from Queen's Bridge to Breakwater and identify plants and sites mentioned in the various stanzas. Hence, this Canto is constructed to include as much as I could garner about Walker, hence not leaving "things out",⁵¹ so that his voice would further animate the whole poem's progress.

Walker's voice informs all of this Canto. I had begun with the title 'The Drowning Man', but that would have laboured the point too much, and the speaker's context should be picked up by the reader immediately. I used the word "gyre" (III. 1) from W. B. Yeats quite deliberately so as to lead the reader into "swans belting" (III. 3). The swan is a figure from deep within Celtic imagery. In the tale, 'The Children of Lir', four innocent children of the Celtic sea-god were transformed by their wicked stepmother into swans, doomed forever to circle the world's oceans and live in the bitter cold waters of loughs and fords.⁵² Robert Graves placed the Whistling Swan - *Ela* - at the day of the northern autumn equinox, 22 September, and the Mute Swan *Géis* - in October, following his companion in flight.⁵³ But our Antipodean swans are colored black, and signify trespass, as do introduced species which are quite detrimental to the river's

ecology. Walker's use of "you" (III. 6) in this and following lines is not directed at his mad wife, but at the river's inhabiting spirit, whom I take for the sake of this poem, to be Epona, the symbolism of which had been previously discussed in the passages on Buckley.

In the second stanza, time is arrested as Walker begins a series of observations as he begins his drowning journey downriver. These images come from my observations of the local area, the anxious mother at a family picnic at Queen's Park, the neighbourly dipsomaniac who lost her family business out of the till, we even had a prostitute working the area for a while. On Belfast Street, Newtown, there was a Baptist Chapel from which a dwindling congregation could be heard straining in accompaniment to a rather tinny electric organ, that image leading in almost by default to an image of the drowning man as a Christ-like figure through the phrase "on the third day" (III. 19). Glib perhaps, but the reader would be mindful also of the "small posy of soursobs / daisies, wild spinach and fennel" (II. 39 - 40) previously described as being grasped by Walker in his death-throes. He has become the flower- man, a sacrificial victim to the Goddess of this place, like those found in north European bogs.



Dorothy Tanning, *Ein Klein Nachtmusik*, 1946

I had previously been impressed by a reproduction of one of Dorothea Tanning's paintings, *Ein Klein Nachtmusik*, which depicts two adolescent girls in states of

inexplicable reverie.⁵⁴ They are, standing in a hallway which has a door opening onto a sunlit room. There is a gigantic, broken sunflower writhing in front of one of the girls. My faulty remembrance of this painting initially gave rise to a shift in the imagery, for in the following stanza, the "young woman" is now wearing a "red dressing gown" (III. 21). The sunflower became transformed to a tobacco leaf, dooming her by the cancerous growth it will induce in her womb. Yet even despite his knowledge of the inevitability of heavy smoking, and Walker in life had gone through at least one pack each day the time I knew him, there is still that human desire for one "last drag" (III. 30). The reader has become aware that Walker now has gained prescience, even while he is not quite ethereal. This follows through to the next stanza in which smoking becomes associated with pride and lust, he is the hawk, she the defenceless "coney" (III. 40), her love only inciting his cruelty, the word "coney" being chosen rather than "rabbit" not simply for euphony but because of the sexuality inferred by its vocalisation.

Walker would sit for hours on a Saturday afternoon by his bothy regaling me with tales of his adventures at sea. We would share a bottle of beer, he used to bury them in the cabbage patch where they would be kept cool even on the hottest of days, and in Winter they were stone cold. He told me of his time on one convoy which changed him from a ship's boy to a man, experiences which no one should be asked to go through. I believe he ended the War on a promotion to Petty Officer, so easing his passage to Australia. The rest is self-explanatory, except that I have borrowed the image in the last line from a Robert Graves' Poem, 'The Snap-Comb Wilderness', beginning:⁵⁵

Magic is entangled in a woman's hair
For the enlightenment of male pride ...

In his drowning journey, Walker meets a girl, a child who had fallen off the balcony off her parents' house overlooking the river. It may be just a local myth,

but within a year of shifting to Camden Road, we were told by neighbours of a terrible accident in Jackman Avenue, where the very wealthy have houses perched on the top of a precipice overlooking the Barwon River. They are all surgeons and executive businessmen, their wives engage themselves in charity work or serve on the Art Gallery board. An only child, she was not recovered from the river and, in despair, her parents shifted out of town a year or so after. I have no doubt it did happen, so I bring her into the river as another sacrificial offering. The horses mentioned used to live in the paddocks just a little way upstream until the last vacant land overlooking Buckley's Falls and the Millrace were sold off in May 1998.

The line "Know the Summer Sun's in Hell" (III. 5 1) is a misreading after two lines in Pound's 'Canto LII':

Know then:
Toward summer when the Sun is in Hades.

For my purposes the opening line indicates the girl-victim is a Persephone-figure, claimed by the river in order that life be renewed. Known also as Koré or Flora, she was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, condemned by her abduction by Dis to live half the year in Hades, but redeemed by the Eleusian rites of repentance and rebirth. In our Winters, we hope for Spring's return. So in the seventh stanza, I had retained traces of Mrs. Walker's religious past, as the area around Chilwell was very much a Baptist and Congregationalist stronghold, the working weavers and their families having been imported from Glasgow and Belfast before and after the first War. There is also a strong Masonic element in the old working suburbs, so reproducing the socio-religious milieu out of which their families had come. Walker, having served with men of many faiths and from many parts of the old Empire, had little regard for the narrowness of his wife's people, even though I gathered he had once been a member of a sailors' Lodge. The body

speaks of Walker's desire to go out once more to the high seas, and in the eighth stanzas charts the course of his death-voyage from this colonial outpost to the lands around Kintyre, his home. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus and his men were gripped by such nostalgia, νοστος, a longing to return, that it kept their ultimate goal in mind, no matter what the temptation or trial placed in their way. Even so, Walker's nostalgia for Scotland in real life was tempered by his bitter wartime memories and his poverty.

Walker's conversations with me rambled: more often than not as he was usually very drunk by tea-time, they were full of regret for his sons who had left the house and parents to their own devices. In his bothy, he had a reasonably powerful radio with which he listened to the world, as well as his magazines and bottles.

The last five stanzas of this, the third Canto, are given in Walker's voice as he drifts down the flooding river. He recalls the occasion of his death, his desperate but fruitless attempt at killing himself by throwing himself "in front of a car" (III. 87), that is how the poet Randall Jarrell suicided.⁵⁶ There was something kind about the old man, even despite his madness and increasing vexation with his wife, realising that such an action on his part would only cause grief to someone else. A few days before his disappearance, Walker had pointed out how free seemed the wagtails which had visited his cabbage patch. As the late Stuart MacDonald, prisoner educator and co-founder of the Geelong Street Poets, had pointed out to me, wagtails were thought by the local Wathaurong people to be Death's harbingers: a notion which after all these years I have rejected as being applicable to us as Europeans, rather seeing in them a spritely dance of liberty and joy.

That comment gave me a pathway into the twelfth stanza, for in it Walker hymns all of creation as his body is borne downstream. I repeat the growth-motif which had been attached to the drowned figure in previous stanzas, clothing the landscape with flowers and trees I have observed in my neighbourhood. However, I indicate that Walker has his doubts about the truth of his journey, and even in as he sings his hymn, he must reverse the Romantic equation of Beauty and Truth, for as we know all too well the Truth is often unpleasant, a Yeats' Samurai sword an instrument of cruelty.

A friend, Simon Edwards, has been an undertaker, and at breakfast once told me of a Greek family who insisted on placing a golden two-dollar coin over each closed eyelid and on the tongue of their dead father. I thought this unusual, but then he started to regale the table with a series of funeral customs some of his clients insist upon: hearts cut out and embalmed as a lover's keepsake, the dead buried with a pet cat, a child dressed in her communion dress or a bride in her wedding gown. Sailors used to wear a gold earring, not for decoration, but to pay for their funeral costs. The three coins would have only been a token, a folk-memory, and as Pound had taught us in his Cantos, the wickedness of *usura* has robbed coinage of its former value, kept fleets from going to sea, has destroyed peoples. Walker's prayer to Charon is a bitter parallel to Henry Lawson's short story, 'The Union buries its Dead'.

The last stanzas deal with his release from this world, as his body is stripped of its vestments and carried towards the waiting sea. His earlier nostalgia is replaced by a contentment in seeing those "stars glittering" (III. 140) whither his soul will eventually return. So that in his final address, Walker invokes the kindness of strangers and makes reference to the final mysteries which he had been taught in Lodge. A *Tyler* is a door-keeper (III. 144), and remembering that Hades was

guarded by *Kerberos*, the spotted hound, the juncture between ancient Greek myth and later inventions is clear to me. Earlier in our conversations, Walker had disputed the equation of Truth and Beauty, and here names this world's Truth as "*deluge*, brutal as mountain-birth and ice-floe" (III. 147), for having swept his soul out to sea, well away from this world, as had other forces of Nature taken his mates. Then (III.148) I varied Pound's own phrasing of the phrase "οὐ θεᾶ ἐκέρην εἰς χόσμον... they want to bust you out of the cosmos",⁵⁷ to provide a formal link back to the opening epigram and to reinforce the antihuman nature of this flood which turns ordinary men into "seagods" (III. 148), who, like himself, must be honoured. Yet as "seagods" they too must grieve, to stand "keening at their widows' doors" (III. 150).

This Canto's act of closure is the manifestation of profound grief, and cessation of Walker's voice. At this stage, the mythic process in the poem is incomplete, it needs other voices in the chorus of the drowning deluge to sound out their tales as their souls too are swept out to sea.

Canto IV: Songs of the First Night.

I have still retained my formal ten-line stanzaic structure in this Canto, yet towards the end I allow the stanzas some greater movement, breaking lines, and foreshadowing even more displacement in following Cantos. Line lengths are more variable than before, as short as trimeters but usually pentameters. I have reserved the use of much longer lines for the later lake and sea Cantos.

The voice now changes from that of the tortured, maddened Walker to the young nameless girl who had fallen from her wealthy parents' balcony and drowned in this cruel river. The epigraph was chosen more or less fortuitously from Jorie Graham's difficult and intriguing text, and allows me to signal a change in

narrative focus.⁵⁸ "She" is Koré, in keeping with her role as Persephoné, positive in her nostalgia, looking forward to Spring and return, though resigned to fate. Her task is to make "the world fruitful" like Eve, and is awake to those human passions which are necessary for that to be. She comments briefly on her fall, no less a natural happening than an apple's fall in Autumn, and quickly tells the reader something of her family life.

Her voice and behaviour are inconstant: the "you" she addresses is Walker (IV. 11), who now comes to her as an unwanted suitor, too old like one of those "elders" (IV. 17) she refers to. She insults him, calling him an "unwanted dog" (IV. 26), a ghost "still walking the roads" (IV. 39), yet is capable of picking "ten golden delicious" apples to complete his raiment (IV. 31). In her refusals she names fantastic bride-prices he would pay and far off places she would hide in, her parents' wealth serving only to attract beggars and suitors. The first five stanzas of the Canto give her a full voice, charming, vixenish and quite contrary. This is how I imagined her to be.

Why "ten golden" apples? At the time of writing the words came thoughtlessly, yet they strike chords in my memory. The apple is often seen as a source of discord, Eve's temptation was to eat the fruit of the Tree of Moral Knowledge, which Yeats had referred to as the "golden apples of the Sun".⁵⁹

However, this girl's tempting offer of apples and "pretty weeds" (IV. 33) to Walker does not touch his heart, he is still unreconciled to his death. Her voice grows sarcastic in the fifth stanza, instead of accepting his role as victim, Walker has sought to play Bacchus. In the following stanzas the girl's songs are presented, each being quite separate, and only in the sixth and fourteenth stanzas does she directly address Walker. She begins her songs with a remembrance of him racing in his car across the old Fyansford Bridge "in less time than it takes to cough" (IV.

52). Before reconstruction of the Hamilton Highway through Fyansford, it bore the traffic with ease, but now it sits to the northern side of the highway, left to its own devices. She continues in her songs, listing flowers growing hereabouts, and this carries over into the seventh stanza's gentle mockery of Frau Sabina's self-absorption in her housewifery and material objects of the household.

The girl, in revealing her preference for a "gentler tongue" (IV. 67) than Sabina's German, and in her references to "fauns" (IV. 71), "Venus" (IV. 75) and "Aurora" (IV. 121) places herself firmly in a Humanist-Renaissance habit, one that is our learnt and treasured tradition. I have at hand a Latin reader bearing the name "D. Reilly" inscribed in a curling hand. My Aunt Doreen poured over Nepos, Ovid and Caesar in schools as my grandfather Edward Reilly shifted from Hopetoun to Jerilderie and Broken Hill: then when he went off with the First AIF, she was sent to the convent on Angus Street, toting Bryce's *Second Latin Book* of 1867 with her. Later this and other dusty textbooks passed into my father's hands, thence to me. They yet may yield it in further Cantos.

The pictorial sources of lines; (IV. 71 - 90) are a half-remembered painting of Fauns and Dryads in an Australian setting presented by painters such as Rupert Bunney and Jeanne Bellette. It seems both appropriate and yet incongruous that artists sought to classicise the Bush, because they faced as much difficulty in coming to grips with their situation, and longing for their cultural base, and were either unable or unwilling to use and appropriate what little they knew of indigenous art.

By now the girl's song is frankly one of praise for the spirit of the river as one who "holds sway" (IV. 91), and is the symbol of all life in her action of feeding both her child and "her white-eagle lover" (IV. 99). I introduce this figure giving a male principle, or balance, to the processes of fertility. He appears in the form of

an Eagle, as does Zeus, but this particular raptor is an Osprey, which I take to be the river's totem, whose figure will reappear and animate the voices of Canto XI. And as the girl slips further into the night (IV. 120), she dreams for Walker of the Tree of Paradise, even though she has "not yet sung" there. She is conscious, more than he, of details of deterioration, how it tears and plucks, stripping the old man of his vestments.

Her last song is one of innocent childhood lost, for now she knows what is meant by human "shame". Whence her experience? Yet she takes what we may think as highly inappropriate as symbols of innocent love, two plastic dolls, names them, remembers them "cuddle in a matchbox bed" (IV. 144) and transfers her love to the fishy beast of this turmoil and tumbling deluge.

Canto V: Riverwalk

This poem was drafted very quickly in late August 1995, taking about three days between first draft and a typed copy. In contrast to the first four Cantos, this was written as a single run of blank verse, irregularly six or seven beats to the line, trochaic in emphasis, and as such can be grouped with the following Canto which was completed a full year later. This form suited my purpose at the time, achieving a descriptive, ruminating voice I have assigned to the Narrator.

The poem came about like this. Well before the November floods, I was about to take a walk one early spring morning along the banks of the Barwon River, and noted as I descended the hill that an almond tree in full blossom (V. 2) was lit up by a brilliant shaft of sunlight. A patch about twenty yards across was illuminated, the rest of the hillside still in shadow, so the almond tree looked to be especially favoured. Were I far more religiously or mystically minded, I might well have taken it as a blessing: it had been a particularly gruelling past Term at school. I

noted it, as I had noted previously bows and cracks in the retaining wall built for one of the new houses on the hillcrest overlooking us. Reputedly, this house had cost over a million dollars before the owner, a fisherman turned businessman had declared bankruptcy (V. 7): I have heard recently he had died tragically in a boating accident in Darwin. Someone else lives there now and has the grandest view along the valley. Images first, then words, then lines formed, and I started to write on some scraps of paper as I walked.

Turning upstream, I can see plantations of pine and cypress on the abutment just before Queen's Park Bridge, the top structures of which could be seen clearly as the floods covered its roadway during the flood (Canto XX). I then have paid some attention to the low life observed on my daily walks, and I have tried to find out the names of as many of plants and animals as I can. Most handbooks seem to pay attention to the more spectacular specimens, but I like those who have somewhat inconsequential and underfoot lives such as "scraggy ironbarks and golden reeds" (V. 12 - 13), and "raucous shrike" or *piwi*.⁶⁰ The next section (V. 19 - 32) is a recall of the joys and commonplaces found in married life. The reference to Brett Whiteley (V. 31) came merely out of my memory of shapes of his paintings, rather than from any particular painting I could recall. Strange that, because I do not particularly like his work, there's something too cold and wilfully alien in the paintings for me to like, though he seemed to be attractive to some of my Literature students who were also taking Studio Arts at school. This section moves immediately to a consideration of the human actualities of teaching in a large city school, and does not seek to idealise or glamorise the students (V. 33 - 40). Going back on my tracks and heading towards the Shannon Avenue Bridge, I head downstream towards the Yollinko wetlands, a patch of about fifty acres of

billabong and scrub which has been replanted and fitted out with elevated and convenient walkways.

People are encouraged to come into the area and see for themselves something of what the area may have been like before the river was depleted of its cover and riverbanks. There's a particularly quiet spot where the builder placed a platform jutting out over the river. I celebrate those small and inconsequential plants and flowers which I can see from my vantage point (V. 44 - 47), but then there are also the signs of human waste which must be noted down (V. 48).

My side of the river was in shadow for that spring morning, and most people who go for a 'walk tend to cross over onto the sunnier north bank. The flat river and lack of breeze made snatches of even the most private conversations clearly heard from where I was standing on the elevated platform. Two women on the other side were speaking of events in Ulster, their voices like those I had heard as a child in my parents' parlour (V. 55). I caught only a few phrases, but it was enough to understand their sorrow and concern, and their laughter. I recalled John Montague's lines:

As my Province burns,
I sing of love,
Hoping to give that fiery
Wheel a shove.

The people of that wounded province, like those of other discarded peoples, cannot understand the mechanisms of history which are making a world of cold economic order bereft of human kindness and consideration. Like all working-class people of Ulster, Catholic and Protestant alike, they are regarded by some experts to be of the same class of plants like bracken and thistle or as *Patterson's Curse*, weeds to be pulled out and eradicated (V. 64).

However, I see in these plants evidence of what little history we have, and in lines of prickly purple flowers, I can only see what my Grandmother's family named as

Salvation Jane, stockfeed for a day season. The poem then moves quickly to its conclusion, foreshadowing the darker tones of Cantos XVI and XVIII.

Canto VI: Eternal Memory

John Tavener's *Eternal Memory* had a powerful effect upon me when I heard it first.⁶¹ Its melancholic moodiness and gravity had induced a dreaming revery at the time when my wife and I had been discussing some matters about family and friends in Adelaide. I had been given a small bronze casting by the Adelaide sculptor, Silvio Apponyi (b. 1949), as a gift for my fiftieth birthday some years beforehand. Consideration of this gift, the absence of friends and memories of my childhood, gave rise to the first lines.



Silvio Apponyi *Platypus*

One may ask why I should use "Pheidias" as a subtitle. That childhood becomes an even more privileged territory when considered against the period of stress I had endured at school and the fear engendered by the terrible floods of 1995. I was able to look back at my past with greater clarity, and had purged myself of much of the terrible anger I had felt in relation to that past and especially to my estrangement from my father. Memory became a process by which the past was rewritten and the world as I see it can become spiritualised. So in the opening lines, I quickly bring my reader to a consideration that "we will need all our tools

and art" in order to transcend the world's dross, to become "as angels", (VI.7), the references to dancing on a pinhead or circling the planet come readily enough from theological conceits and Shakespeare's Ariel.

The legendary Pheidias carved the statue of Pallas Athene in the Parthenon, and comes to mind as the truest example of a sculptor out of my memories of the character Pheidias whom I heard speak each week on the ABC's *Children's Hour*. He was expert employed to talk on the Radio about Art, and we were encouraged to see with our mind's eye, and later look up, the magnificent sculpture and paintings he spoke about, to share with him the lives of the artists. When talking about sculpture, this Pheidias insisted that the sculptor merely released the shapes that were inherent in the stone from the beginning. I imagined that Pallas Athene sprang not so much as out of Zeus, but out of the very fabric of Mt. Olympos. Later, in Rilke's accounts of Rodin's chiselling of the marble, the same idea is expressed.⁶²

Silvio Apponyi's small sculpture is shaped from outside, he imposes form upon resisting materials, stone or hardwood, and then forms a mould to cast the finished piece in bronze. It is opposite process, but now I wonder if Apponyi is that far removed from Pheidias in seeing a seal or platypus swimming beneath tough tissues.⁶³ I wrote that "the Seal's form / Was not immanent" (VI.9-10) in the material itself, and knowing crystallography would only yield angles and chemical bonds, the Seal's shape must have been his conception, his vision, before the work was started.

Looking at a collection of Silvio Apponyi's carvings and castings of Seals, Possums and Kangaroos, it became apparent that these beasts inhabit a universe all of their own. We as readers of sculpture invest them with an "imitation of life" (VI.25), but that is the power of our imagination, the only life they have in the real

world is in the "stone", wood and bronze, from which they are made. We must realise that we keep a grip on what we see in front of us, just as Pheidias was aware that his creation was merely a simulacrum of the Goddess. I suppose what I was trying to get at in this poem was the nature of memory, which if we allow it, becomes a new reality, manufactured even. We must guard against this reconstitution of the past, making it into something which it was not.

My maternal Grandmother, Anastasia Quinlan-Cawthron, had come from a fortunate family, Tipperary people who had the sense to leave Sydney Town to settle in the Cootamundra region. They prospered in wheat, horses and hotel-keeping. Some of the boys had been in the Mounted Police, "always a day or so behind the Kellys", she would say. She snared a fine young Englishman, Mr. Robert Cawthron, who had been sent out on remittance to join the family business in New Zealand. They married, he turned Catholic, lost his fortune, survived Anzac Cove and then went to the Somme only to be gassed. He returned, and was successful in business, but when the Depression came he lost everything again, and died in the early years of the next war.

My first memories of Grandmother were of a fine lady, lace-curtain Irish as the Americans would say: quite tall and red-haired, of a jolly disposition who laughed at her grandson's showing-off. Her brothers and her husband's brothers all had been with the Light Horse, most of them were cut down in the last charge at Beersheba. She would not go to see the Chauvel film about the Light Horse, and it was understood that tales of the Great War would only be about the boys' adventures with lords and ladies in London. Then, when I was still in convent school, she suffered a Stroke paralysing her left side. This robbed her of speech and dignity.

It took her eleven years to die, isolated all that time in Ward C2 of the Northfield Infectious Diseases Hospital. Our family visits each Sunday were a ritual and more often a burden, especially in the early days when my father did not own a car, and we took the tedious tram into Adelaide and then out to Northfield, then all the exhausting way back again. The worst part of it for my mother was that she would make friends with the other ladies in the Ward, send me over to cheer them up by reading from my schoolbooks, or she organised Christmas concerts with the Ladies' Auxiliary, only to return on the next Sunday to find an empty bed and hard-lipped relatives. I knew nothing of Death then, and could not fathom why certain beds were curtained off, or that I had to be quiet when I had been quiet in class all week.

Some months after the floods had subsided, and the Council had cleaned away much of the mess, I started to go back out for walks along the riverbank. It was our way of reclaiming the landscape, a ritualised Sunday afternoon stroll after lunch, or a brisk striding out just before tea at six. The day I wrote this poem, it was very cool, the river fogbound, and yet the banks alive with birds.

I passed by two old ladies, all cardigans and raincoats, taking their time to walk up and down on the newly cleaned pathway. They wore silver and amber ornaments, and as I passed by I could pick-up that they were speaking in low-pitched German. What they were saying was unclear. If it had been my father-in-law, with his friends, he would have been reminiscing about grand themes in Middle Europe's history and politics, for he is consumed by these terrible hurts, but the women were more likely to have been going back over "the insignia of fifty years" (VI. 81). Perhaps they have the right approach, perhaps there is very little Free Will to be exercised, and our scope for action must be confined to the commonest of tasks. This is the position I take in the closing lines and like W. B.

Yeats, would withdraw from a world which cannot be controlled into a secret place, a "tor", (VI. 33), as celebrated by him in 'The Tower'.⁶⁴

The last section of the poem, "Wren, Kestrel, Pelican", begins in the Wren's voice. A blue-tailed dancer of "lithe quadrilles" (VI. 97), these tiny birds are the most brilliant and enchanting of all the creatures I observe in my daily walks along the riverbank. They praise God in every movement, every little song, and I give them a small Latin text of my own, *Laudate in terra omnia - Praise all things on Earth* - it is a command, not a prayer.

Another praise-giver is the lugubrious and quite hilarious Pelican, who actually walks on water with three or four steps in the struggle to rise into the air. No-one has ever remarked to me how extraordinary this feat is, and I was struck by the unblinking indifference to this wonderful sight on the part of two fishermen, one wearing a cap like that worn by Leon Trotsky, the ultimate disbeliever. So in the following stanza I give Pelican his voice to boast of his "shining in my river-coursing" (VI. 122), and use his voice to link back to the Walker, "he" (VI. 126). But in the following stanza that pronoun, "he", cannot refer to Walker, but is for another man who was lost for love, and I return the reader back to the two German speaking ladies, now telling tales of the past. Then Kestrel has his say, relating Walker's dying moments, his last wish to have a glimpse of some beauty (VI. 141), but as a raptor, this is not Kestrel's concern. He is a flesh-eater, and gives the poem its harder, more realistic edge, set against the women's philosophical speculations in the final stanza.

I had left the poem at that point, but came back to it in mid-June 1996 before revising the final copy, and wrote a mixed piece "Coda", incorporating several observations. Here I tie together something of the general theme of memory, which I now think is more like footprints on an impermanent surface than a stone

sculpture. Footprints wash away with the tide or are cut away when the grass is mown. They can be reimagined, but never remade.

Of all the Cantos I had written until mid-1997, this satisfied me the most, for I felt that I had achieved a particular voice in the poem which had been lacking in earlier pieces, and from thereon it became somewhat easier to get into the stride of articulating ideas and emotions at some length. As the Cantos developed then, I was quite willing to change about forms as it suited the mood and situation, though as the reader will note, I do employ more the formal structure of a 10 line stanza as a recurrent form from time to time.

Canto VII: Songs of the Second Night

In form, the ten stanzas of this Canto are written as quatorzains, though with two exceptions, and were drafted in parallel with some of the early parts of *The Camden Poems*. I found that they did not fit in that collection and were adapted and incorporated into *Deluge*, making the parents of the drowned girl their narrative focus. As with Canto IV 'Songs of the First Night', these stanzas can stand alone and I dare say could, and ought, be set to music such as that played by the Kronos Quartet.⁶⁵

I had heard of the child who had fallen from the balcony of the house in Jackman Avenue, and had in the late 1980s visited an acquaintance who lived in that street. It looks directly over the river, and as the lady of the house remarked, falling over would be very easy. Whilst we did not speak of the accident which had befallen the child whose parents were selling up, some houses upriver, a sense of fear overcame us as we talked. We walked away from the balcony, quite uneasy. C. G. Jung, the philosopher, spoke of his belief that we shared in a collective unconscious, that our fears and hopes, as manifested in dreams, often were

displayed through common symbols. He notes that when a complex of this collective unconscious "becomes associated with the ego, that is, becomes conscious, it is felt as strange, uncanny, and at the same time fascinating".⁶⁶

The fear of being drowned in a flood is still very strong in this country. Years later, I met my acquaintance at a Geelong Art Gallery function in the autumn of 1996 and recalled our earlier conversation. I had forgotten about it since drafting these stanzas. She had since undergone a remarkably bitter and physically damaging divorce from her husband, a prominent Geelong surgeon, remarking that it was "queer" that her marriage had not survived her husband's dalliance with a secretary young enough to be his daughter, while her neighbours' marriage had survived their daughter's death. The neighbour had become religious, she said, and had taken herself to Bali these last few years (VII. i. 10). I had written the first stanza of the Canto before hearing this and at that point, experienced much the same horrible, sinking feeling experienced when I heard of Andria Zuccolin's death well after I had written 'White Crosses', or when 'Neighbours' proved itself true. We then fell to talking about the flood and the damage it had caused to the pathways, and the stink of the mud and debris caught in trees and reeds. She remarked also that during the flood she feared the river would rise so high it would flood her house, sweeping away the children and herself while the husband and his mistress would be saved. She was not bitter, but feared her dream.



Li Gardiner *The Deluge*

Li Gardiner's painting, *The Deluge*, shares in this common fear.⁶⁷ She pictures the house as though the family has broken off its meal in haste, a relentless surge spilling through the casement and already has flooded into the dining room. Behind the table, there is a reproduction of *The Last Supper*, a loaf of bread sits half-eaten, wine is spilled on the table. I note also the seashells on the rug. In these stanzas, however, the river has fallen quiescent, still, mirroring the couple's dreams.

The opening landscapes of the poem are familiar by now, but in the third stanza, in the husband's dream, he remembers an assignation in the local Botanical Gardens, and in the closing stages, these dream-stanzas keep shifting in their settings.

The ninth stanza is a variation of a section of a poem by the Lithuanian poet, Tomas Venclova (b. 1937),⁶⁸ and inserted itself easily enough into the argument of this Canto, especially with the image of the "child's broken doll" coupled to "a telephone call". I had been trying to translate some other Lithuanian poetry as exercises, and found this stanza quite approachable. Venclova's structure was followed as best I could, but eventually the variation has taken on its own form,

which is the way it should be unless one wishes to produce a mere literal translation and not a poem. This Canto closes with a sense of hopelessness, the mother's prayers notwithstanding. I had heard from a medical practitioner, a friend who has worked as a grief counsellor, that he had known a case in which a woman had lactated when grieving for a lost child. I would expect this if the child had been unweaned, but the girl was supposed to be almost thirteen or so when she fell and died. Even so, I felt that this terrifying curiosity could be included.

Canto VIII: Culling Dieback on the Road to Ballarat

It seems that over the past few years many writers have begun to share a greater concern with "social and narrative exchange".⁶⁹ I began writing this Canto in late 1995, being much exercised by recent debates about the collapse of what was left of a local farming culture, and remembering our experiences in the mid-1970s when many families were thrown off the land by bank foreclosures. I had also at that time been reading some histories of the Roman Republic, and noted how Rome had slid into anarchy and fallen away from its proper religion and civic virtue and through a combination of capitalist greed and foreign wars. The independent farmers, *yeomen* in English, were all but extinguished as an effective class. I fear such a process of rural dispossession, as it presages civil war and the rise of an urban-centred imperialism.

The poem is organised as four long passages of uneven length, lines have been lengthened and are generally heptameters. Sentences are very long, there are only two in the first stanza and one in the second stanza, with breathing pauses indicated by colons. These are deliberate rhetorical devices allowing for the reader to pick up speed and vocal strength as the poem progresses.

The first stanza begins with a simple observation. I had been driving up to Ballarat when I noticed that a farmer had started work on cutting down the windward side of a stand of trees: all had died and I assumed that he was getting himself firewood or preparing the strip for replanting. He was using an axe, not a chainsaw, and was still at it when I was driving back home in the late afternoon. For my purposes I assumed that the trees had been afflicted by dieback, a disease facilitated by earlier wholesale land clearing, and I recalled recent newspaper reports on how serious the problem was, and still is. It seemed to me symptomatic also of our political situation. That thought led me back to my reading at the time, and I incorporated a precis of the accounts about the failure of the Gracchi brothers to carry out their promised reforms, and how two of Rome's bloodiest dictators, Marius and Sulla, preyed upon Rome.

Not that the Gracchi were better by nature, only by degree, for their careers were cut short. Further, the nature of their proposed reforms in allocating lands to landless army veterans, much like the land settlement schemes in the Wimmera and Heytesbury district after both wars. The established landowners and yeomanry would have been adversely affected, there being no virgin lands left on the Italian peninsula.



Denarius of Sulla ⁷⁰

That problem was only solved when G. Julius Cæsar and successive rulers sent settlers into what is now Provence and Romania. Taking land away from established farmers, or forcing their dispossession, can only lead to greater injustices and social distress.

This had been one of the most difficult, and for my readers, the most puzzling of all the Cantos so far. When I first read it, Trevor Code expressed a concern about what voice was being used by the narrator, and being heard by the audience. Perhaps I read too quickly, but as I see it, the turn is in the question, "Who'll have his farm in the new order?" (VIII. 59) This question is perhaps now being answered as we lose control, not just of our farmlands, but to an ever-increasing extent, of our daily lives.

Canto IX: Here be swift currents

This short piece is structured quite differently from any preceding poem as a set of eight quatrains, and for a change and more formal effect, I use rhyme in each second and fourth line, and the poem's language style hints at childhood stories of pirates and their treasure. The lines again are long, with six or seven stresses in each. This poem continues the movement away from direct narrative, allowing the reader to recall the remembrances of Canto V 'Riverwalk', and to withdraw somewhat from the details of flood and loss, anticipating Canto XVI 'Point'. It is a brief interlude before the next Canto, 'The Mares in their field'.

Canto X: The Mares in their field

Formally, this poem follows the 10-line stanza structure used before, but in keeping with the girl's voice, I have resorted to using a simple rhyming pattern, *xaxa xbx b cc*, within each stanza.

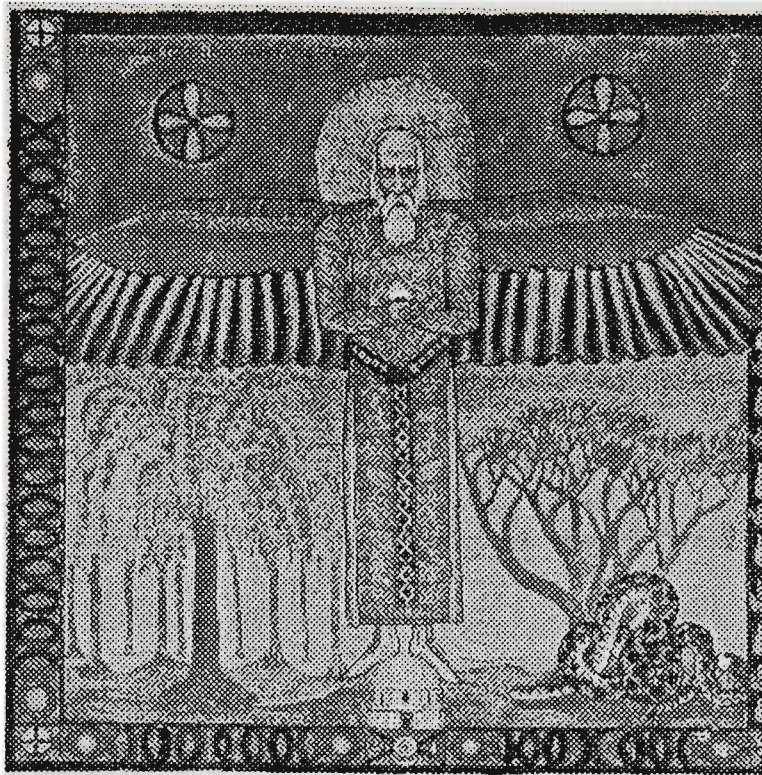
Again the narrative focus changes, the young girl, Walker's psychopomp, recalling her childhood days at home. Her reference to Maurice Sendak's imaginative stories, which appeal to all ages,⁷¹ are taken directly from our experiences as parents when the two children would pile onto the bed, listen to and read their favourite books. Home, at that age, is a place of safety and refuge, or at least should be.

As this only child grows up, one can imagine how she was kindly indulged by her parents, a room for herself, dancing and gymnastic lessons. Yet there are tensions: the father disagrees with his father-in-law, and in contrast to the "boy who comes to no harm", this girl falls to her death whilst playing on the balustrade overlooking the Barwon River.

Now this is purely speculative on my part. I have no eyewitness account to draw upon, only a vague urban legend mentioned when we first shifted in some twenty years ago, yet the story has stayed with me. It is a fierce drop of at least thirty metres from the top of Jackman Street near Windmill Hill. If it is true that a child fell, and drowned, then there is some foundation for my little tale, but even if not, the process of making a myth is well established by now.

A stallion is present here as the girl's mount as the male counterpart to the figure of Epona invoked earlier. Her dream of the stallion could be interpreted as an expression of an emerging self-awareness of her sexual persona, which at such a young age is not necessarily constrained by adult models, hence the parents' frosty silence at her grandfather's remark, innocent and perceptive at the same time. The girl sees herself as special, increasingly private and withdrawn in her behaviour, yet half-aware of the dangers surrounding her.

So, in death, her refuge is the great stallion which then transmutes into an "Angel", which is certainly not a Christian image in this context. Where this being came from, like so many images in this series of poems, I am not sure. The closest image I can recall in retrospect is a mandalic drawing by Carl Jung of an angelic figure with blue wings, named by Jung as Philemon.



Jung's depiction of Philemon in *The Red Book*

As described by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, Philemon was the kind husband of Baukis who gave shelter to Zeus and Hermes, and were saved by the grateful divinities from the Deluge: there was also a disciple of St. Paul by that name.

Her vision then becomes that of what she has become, an Undine or river-spirit, able to dispassionately comment on the world. Her family is seen objectively, as are her actions as horse-singer and guardian keeping "a boy from being too lonely", identifying with the plight of the mares confined by "wire" and frightened by a premonition of the "wind on fire".

Canto XI: At Goat Island

Goat Island is the land of the dead. In the Old Welsh poem, 'The Spoils of Annwn', the otherworld is an island known as *Annwn*.⁷² It is presided over a deity who is both generous and severe patriarch. The Greeks named this guardian god Hades, a substitution for an earlier Indra, the Indic thundergod. The nature of this deity is confirmed an in equation in Baltic mythology of Indra with Perkunas by A. Greimas. This is fitting considering Walker's previous life as a sailor, and implicitly, as warrior, for we can think of Goat Island as Walker's Purgatory wherein he is to be cleansed of his earthly burdens, and allowed then to progress to Hy Brasil, the sailors' watery paradise (cf. Canto XXII).

There is an actual place some eight kilometres downriver called Goat Island.⁷³ It is a marked on an ordinance map as a patch of land about three hundred metres long by fifty metres wide, lying in swampy ground between Breakwater and Marshaltown, unknown to almost everyone I have asked over the past three years. It is here that I imagine the body of Walker to have been discovered after the floods had subsided.

The Canto is given in three parts, each with a different focus, echoing the thoughts of the people coming down to the mudflats as part of cleanup teams. What they find there will surprise them, but only in the closing lines do I let the reader in on the island's true nature of the island of the dead, with the girl acting out Charon's role. (XI. iii. 57 - 61). The first part, "On the Shore", takes the Narrator to the site and begins with his recall of the clearing work. "Thunderstorms" and "rainbow" are noted in the first stanza and may alert readers to the mythological inferences being made, and the "fear" felt by the workers arises from their natural apprehension. The floods may return. But they also denote their suppressed reactions to being on sacred ground, wrens" and

"wagtails" symbolising the guardians of that place. The Narrator's fears are expressed through his sleepless nights (XI. i. 19 - 31) and will re-emerge in Canto XIII 'The Corridor'.

In the fourth stanza I recall a sensation experienced about the time of the flood, when as noted I was standing outside before dawn watching for meteorites. I must have been very tired for I was giddy and felt that the sky was revolving around me, it was almost an out of body experience, but not one as spectacular as that reported by Jung.⁷⁴ Having dabbled at archery as a youth, I am aware of that perfectly still moment just before releasing the arrow, and how one must visualise being with it as it speeds into the bullseye as though "the target gathers an arrow" to itself (XI. i. 39).

The next stanza displaces the reader into Yarra Street, looking down past St. Mary's towards the bay. On the south side and diagonally opposite, is the old Synagogue, which fell out of use as a house of worship as recently as 1984. Other than a National Trust plate, there are no inscriptions in the stonework, no *Mogen David* visible. The site is now owned by the Environmental Protection Agency, and the building itself is closed to visitors.

So this is another place of worship fallen silent, and I remember about the time of the disbanding of the local Hebrew Congregation a local academic commenting that there were not enough Jews in the area to say *Kaddisch* or make a *minyan*. Unlike many places in Europe where synagogues and churches were deliberately destroyed along with their congregations, we in Australia seem to let things go through indifference brought about by the apparent success of our secular society. As I drive around Geelong, I see the holy places converted into offices and houses.

Returning to the island in the sixth stanza of this section, the Narrator describes the discovery of "wild roses / hybrids carried down" (XI. i. 56 - 57) growing profusely there. Interestingly, the rose, which I knew from my readings of W. B. Yeats as a symbol of the Virgin, is described by Jung a sign of the Mother Archetype.⁷⁵ While the two could be interchanged, especially in Catholic iconography, I prefer to see these roses as a signification of Walker's psychopomp, the adolescent girl having left behind some sign associating herself with the drowned sailor. They are wild sports, untamed hybrids, whereas my mother set out to grow roses in a formal pattern as a last desperate evocation of the fine gardens she had known as a child (XI. i. 94).

In the second part of this Canto, "About You", the addressee of the opening question is Walker. The Narrator is puzzled and muses on the implications of the discovery of Walker's body, and in the process observes the characteristics of the late spring season. The story of the osprey, the white sea-eagle, changed into a rose, is my own invention and is modelled after the general thrust of the tales of Ovid. This process of the Narrator's introspection concludes in the third section, "Rose".

Canto XII: Black Rose

This short Canto follows directly on the foregoing, and is constructed of nine brief lyrics. In these lyrics I celebrate the small flowers and even weeds I have observed in my strolls by the banks of the Barwon River. I do not set out to advance the plot in any way whatsoever in this Canto which was first written as a movement around the flower themes dwelt upon in the previous poem. I had also been reading Michele Leggott's commentary on Zukofsky's *80 Flowers*,⁷⁶ which was realised in its commentary only in its published form shortly after the

poet's death. I have not had access to the text proper, but rather was able to read what poems were noted in the commentary. These poems impressed me for their delicacy and sensitivity to both image and language, which I hoped to learn from in the process of writing these nine stanzas

I used Zukofsky's nine-line stanza in this Canto as a variation on the ten lines of many of the other Cantos, and in playing around with the various structures have found it satisfactory for this type of lyric. Often the fifth line acts as a turn, or *cæsure*, for the stanza, as in stanzas 1, 2 and 9: sometimes that process occurs near the fifth line. In all, these stanzas seem to be far more singable than those in other Cantos.

The poems in this Canto are in their own way a prayer to the Virgin Mary, whose avatar has been the adolescent girl of previous Cantos. This is made clear by the use of a Unicorn, a symbol of untamed nature, who in mediæval times was thought to have been pacified by the Virgin. As the stanzas progress, especially in the third and fourth stanzas, and in seventh stanza, Walker is confirmed as the speaker. The story of the wolf-wife is an old one I had heard from the mother of an Estonian friend in my youth.

The rose has been interpreted variously, and I will not go into the various readings of this image to any great extent, taking them as understood and accepted. However, mention should be made of W. B. Yeats' use of the rose as a key image in his collection of short stories *The Secret Rose* (1897) which drew upon his knowledge of myth as well as his connection to the Order of the Golden Dawn.⁷⁷ The rose in Yeats' prose and poetry is usually read as a symbol of the spiritual as opposed to the world's obsession with material gain.⁷⁸

The reader is called to imagine Walker's spirit being still on Goat Island, poking around in the post-Deluge mud and detritus, coming across a bank of flowers,

"phlox, alysoun, clover knots", and others, and the roses, "hybrids" derived from all the various seeds and cuttings washed downriver. Other flowers, however, have their place on Goat Island, and each flower has contributed to the healing force experienced in this poem. Alysoun, celebrated in many mediæval ballads, is a girl's name, and while the Girl, Walker's psychopomp, has been left nameless, what would be a better name than this, the first flower named? But then, Walker also names some of the flowers and weeds seen growing along the riverbanks over the years, none other being as evocative as this name.

This is Purgatory, and here Walker's soul is being prepared for eventual transition into Paradise. So the external world shows the inherent conflict between the "One Rose", the Virgin herself who has been personified in these Cantos by the Girl, and the "Black rose" who "crams" all creation "into her mouth". This is the terrible, devouring Kali envisaged by Willem de Kooning in his series of paintings on which the poet Robert Bly has commented so perceptively. Walker's purgation can only come after a terrible struggle which is mirrored in the following two following Cantos, rather than explicitly related.

Canto XII: The Corridor

This poem has as its focus the Narrator as maker, his fears and imaginings, and those ghosts standing in attendance as he writes. As such, it is an investigation into self-awareness of the act of writing, part of the overall process of self-mythologising that this book has become. It is one of the more recent of this series, and was finished at school in May 1999 in the midst of finalising reports for the first semester. I had been searching around for suitable images of the Deluge in various art books, and had almost thought it was a pointless exercise, as Michelangelo's Sistine paintings seemed too familiar.



Wassily Kandinsky *Composition VI*

However, I did find this image of *The Deluge* by the Russian painter, Wassily Kandinsky (1886 - 1944), to be overwhelming.⁷⁹ While totally dissimilar in treatment to the Michelangelo murals, as an abstract, it is conceptually far darker, far more pessimistic. It is quite large, some three metres wide. In imagining that I am viewing the painting and not a thumbnail reproduction, I must brace myself against the impending crash of a tidal wave of colliding forms and colours. There are three main points of focus to this composition, which are seen in sequence. Firstly, one is drawn into the bright pinkish vortex at left centre. Focus is then carried to the right section by multiple lines representing torrential rain, where a dark locus of discordant forms, which can be interpreted as rain lines, increases the confusion. The view then shifts to a blue form outlined in blacking covers below torrents of rain and crashing waves. I found this explanation far more disturbing than I first thought, as I had only ever seen Kandinsky's paintings as colour fields, without narrative. A title using a word such as "Composition" naturally rendered it so - or so I had thought from my reading of a history of Russian abstractionist movements. My own essays in painting have been pictorial rather than abstract.

As a writer, I am bound by lexemes, in which unless one practises in the manner of Hugo Ball and the early Surrealists, writing is invariably associated with

concrete meaning, implied or explicit: it is impossible to use words to create an abstraction.

All these considerations were sitting with me when I began working on a new poem, about which I had no idea of its subject matter, nor how it would begin or end. I had only a feeling of unease to work with, a sense of frustration underscored by the frantic activity in the staffroom. One night, family asleep, I was assailed by noises and the sense that there were people in the house and the poem began to take shape from there, with a portrait of the Narrator Writer engaged in the act of writing. As Thomas Kinsella has noted, one's need for the actual touch of a favourite pen can initiate journeys of rediscovery and confirmation:⁸⁰

I turned aside
into the Pen Shop
for some of their best black refills.
The same narrow cell,
with the same attendant
over alert all my life
long behind the same counter.

A writer's life must have some points of constant contact so that the web can hold, one of my constants being a thick-barrelled red Schaeffer pen using black cartridges, or sometimes even an old-style nib pen and a bottle of Quink. I like the tactility of pen against paper. As I wrote, having both images by Kandinsky and Michelangelo at hand, the poem progressed through the first four stanzas and all the while I could not rid myself of a notion that there were people who wanted to read my developing drafts, and even dictate what was to be put down. I like to work in an environment that is as quiet as possible, especially when in the drafting stage, and cannot compose a poem directly on the keyboard.

My desk at home is placed in a cramped room between the main body of the house and our bedroom-extension. As I sit at the desk, from the corner of my eye

I can cast the occasional glance down the corridor to my left. The noises in the corridor eventually subsided and my fear that mood for writing would evaporate was assuaged.

A point about technique: as I draft lines, whether from notes or directly, I will by the time the first stanza has been roughed out check on the format being used. As the poem progresses I will count words, syllables or beats, using my fingers, or annotate lines, to do my counts, and depending on choices being made, I even start looking at whether rhyme, in whatever form, should be a factor. Such considerations need to be made at an early stage as the poem's flow and logic, its outcome will depend upon its form as much as upon any other factor.

The next four stanzas came later that night after taking a break to read about the poet Majakovskij and the Russian Futurists who created such wonderful printed texts which seemed to explode off the page (XIII. 64). I recalled my mother's bad turn, her first angina attack, when I was still in primary school, knowing that I am also likely to suffer similarly if I am not careful about diet and taking my prescribed medicines. In writing out the lines (XIII. 81 - 90), strangely enough when sitting in the upstairs staffroom, everyone else talking, I realised that even if I had been at home when my mother had her bad turn, there would have been little I could do but run across to the neighbours and stand about helplessly, weeping as I did when I recalled how she looked that afternoon we came home from school.

Mr. Walker, too, would fall to weeping and wringing his hands after a few beers in his bothy, telling me about the horrors of wartime. He returns in the next to last stanza to make a ghostly appearance (XIII. 94). The Canto closes with the Narrator engaging once again in his trade, now letting his "guests" enter so they too can read the completed 110 lines.

Canto XIV: The Surgeon's Song

While I was in Fargo during April 1999, I heard a paper given by Dr. Kathleen Slobin on some fieldwork she had carried out in Niger River valley. The work undertaken by her team was worthy, and included an account of teaching local medical students how to undertake a dissection. However, what caught my attention was her story of social deprivation, and the eventual death of a girl through malnutrition. The account was so horrific that for the next two nights I had nightmares in which child and the dogs being used for dissection lessons were conflated. I committed this poem to paper immediately. The poem is not a transcription of the paper, but rather my reaction to it. I have sent a draft by electronic mail to Dr. Slobin since I returned, and her response has been encouraging. In part it reads:⁸¹

Your poem is very powerful and I for some reason have wanted to separate it from my own work. I am wondering if you will be rewriting it ... do you do that with your poems. The imagery of the old crones puzzles me...the writhing on the floor. I am coming to see all the associations with death in my dream--the old crones, perhaps, being signs of bridges between life and death... I am also beginning to see how the dissection is a kind of autopsy ... a looking backwards, a simplification of the violence rendered so profoundly in colonial/post-colonial discourse.

The poem makes the Narrator the poem's focus, telling the dream as it had been experienced. Certain figures not in Dr. Slobin's paper are introduced. The "twelve crones" (XIV. 21) are taken from Irish mythology and the sixth stanza is a recollection from my childhood, triggered by the child's hunger noted in the previous stanza.

Of course, dreams do not need to make sense, not are they always readily open to interpretation. As the dreamer - writer I can only report certain things, and the interpretation offered by others could be illuminating.

A Consideration of Canto XV: 'Point'

Given that the Barwon River eventually washes out to sea, and its burden flows out past the beaches at Torquay and Anglesea, and is dragged down past Lorne into the depths of the Southern Ocean, this Canto is used to mark the beginning of a group which take an overview of the landscape after Canto XVII 'Aubade'.

In this Canto, which carries the title 'Point', referring to Point Roadknight south of Anglesea, I was concerned with two matters when writing. The first was technical, how to go about creating long lines, perhaps like John Ashbery in *A Wave*,⁸² trying to break away from my practice of using often quite short three-foot, or four-foot lines of the previous quatorzain series. I had tried that approach in some drafts of Canto XVIII: 'Marengo Beach', which follows, but the results were not consistent enough for my liking. The second task I set myself was to capture a nostalgic tone for my hero, Walker, without the voice turning towards bitterness or regret.

Charles Olson had written about the writer's breathing as an important factor in writing, and to mimic the conditions of getting longer speech-breaths in preparing the draft, I turned the A4 sheet of paper sideways, forcing myself to write across the page, filling it to the edge before starting on another line. In so doing I was able to set up something approaching irregular six, seven or even eight beat lines, which was most pleasing for they seemed to work in a relatively unforced way.

The first two lines are stressed thus:

Hereabouts, the surf lackadaisically sloshes through the gap,
between the real beach, as daughter would have it, and the Point

Longer lines have become relatively rare in modern English-language poetry, reflecting a pretence for the limpid lyric or a belief that the art is more in capturing colloquial speech than in construction of what is felt to be an artifice. But then, a poem is something that is made, just as a sculpture is made. So in

exploring the long line I discover for myself new rhythms. For example in the following lines (XV. 14 - 16):

thick clusters of eucalypt and lines of planted cypress on boundary lines
these cut across the natural rise and fall of hill and rayine
 as good men are themselves so put into ranks and orders:

The openings of each line tend to be marked by a strong double beat, spondees (' '), with this feature recurring even within lines, acting as a tensioning device, being set against the laxer dactyls (' x x) and iambs (' x). Related to this heavier beat is the use of alliteration, with velar [k] and [g], and lateral [l] and [r] being placed in proximity to nasal [n] and [m] in these three lines. Of course, alliteration and other devices if overused would distort the free flow of words and ideas, make the piece call too much attention to itself as do even the very best of Gerard Manly Hopkins' poems. Once having acquired the pattern, I was able to make the poem work towards my chosen end.

I had been thinking about the processes of loss and memory for some time after the floods and had found myself one wintry day visiting friends at Point Roadknight in Anglesea. This at least gave me a setting from which to work, and fashioned the poem as if Walker, the hero and now dominant voice of all these Cantos, were viewing the area, and yet my voice, as Narrator, constantly cuts into the process with personal references such as "daughter" (XV. 2), "we" (XV. 48) and at last, "I" (XV. 64), making the closure complete.

The poem itself is relatively straightforward, opening in the first twenty lines with a description of the beach and view back into Anglesea and surrounding hills from the rocks of the inner point. I join this with a brief remembrance of my boyhood summers at Aldinga, and confuse these with the Otways: there is always a double frame of reference working away in these poems, linking observed present with remembered past. For example, there is a reference to another

painting by Balthus (XV. 44 - 47) by which I try to evoke the mysteriousness of loving, as against the brashness of the earlier passage in which the theme of infidelity and marriage was picked up earlier from the poem, 'Neighbours'.

The Canto then reverts to a consideration of landscape and remembered mock-heroic figures of men and boys at play. However, in their actions, they do invoke the Goddess. She is again "a queen", her proper title being *Stella Maris*, that is, 'Star of the Sea', appropriately enough the name of my very first school, 1950 - 1951.

Canto XVI: Songs of the Third Night

A note about starting poems: as will be discerned, I often take a painting or other image as a point of departure, something suggests itself, makes a word or phrase, and the first thoughts are committed to voice or paper. Early 1999, I had come to an impasse in my writing. It had been a long and difficult summer vacation as I had been on the organising committee for a national festival for the Lithuanian community. The critical work had been attended to but no poems had been completed for three months while I had been fossicking around for materials to use. I had been reading widely, and had noticed one poem, 'Withdrawal', in a collection of Québécois poetry. Frémon's noting of one's need to abstain from writing coincided with my emotional state, but happily acted as the necessary trigger.

I plunged into research and found actual accounts of the cycle of floods have been rare, and histories of Geelong and the local area record progress and prosperity, avoid too much mention of disasters. One such disaster has been the virtual disappearance of the local Barrabool people by the 1870s, with only a small group able to sustain a sense of cultural identity. The poem records their being

swept aside in a great wave of immigration, drawing my account from a number of sources and follow these closely.



Reading in San Antonio, Texas, April 1999

Reading this poem to audiences in Australia and the USA has elicited, quite surprisingly, a common response and expressions of sympathy for the Barrabool people. My audiences in Austin and San Antonio knew the histories of the Apache, Comanche and other peoples very closely, and were able to relate to me some tales of how the intrusion of land-hungry settlers from across the Mississippi had affected them.

In checking through the drafts of this poem I had recourse to ask a colleague, Mr. Craig Morley, about the heron of stanza two. He had seen the same bird about the same time I was writing and has been an invaluable source of information about local fauna. His loan of a guidebook has helped me learn names of the many birds nesting along the river valley.

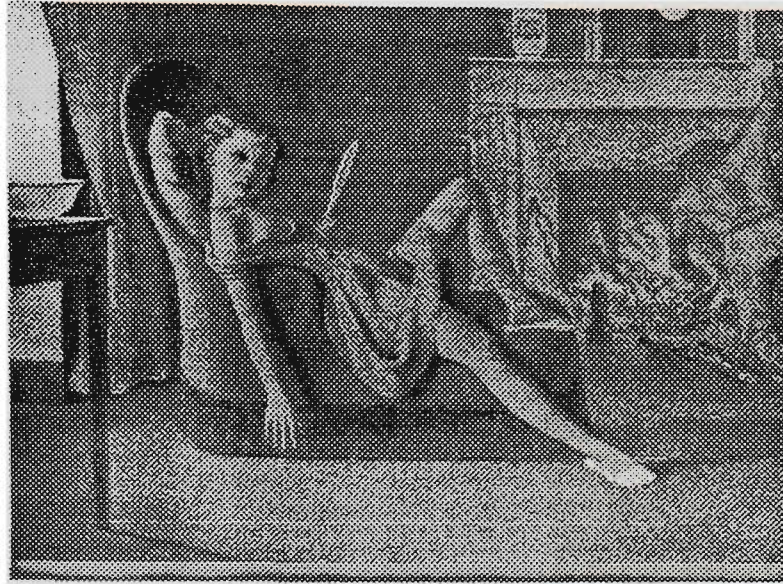
The turn at the start of the ninth stanza echoes the feelings expressed in Canto VIII, a theme which runs as an undercurrent throughout the Cantos. But is the voice too strident - has it been said once too often? Yet, I am mindful that Pound was quite happy with hammering away at his chosen themes throughout his Cantos, many and varied as they are. The point needs to be made again and again, I feel, so that it registers with the reader over the long period in which these poems would be addressed.

Concerning Canto XVII: Aubade

At this stage in the development of *Deluge*, I wanted to re-engage the voice of the drowned girl who has been Walker's psychopomp. The reader would have read through the black passages of Cantos IIX - XIV, and moved into the more hopeful next two Cantos. From this point onwards Walker will be left alone, and will not reappear until the fantastic masque of Canto XXIII. Her childish self-absorption makes her departure and his loneliness all the more unbearable as she recites her aubade.

Now an aubade is defined as a "dawn song, ordinarily expressing the lovers' regret that day has come so soon to separate them. English examples may be found in Chaucer's narratives, *Troilus and Creseyde* and in 'The Reeve's Tale'.⁸³ It does not have a necessarily fixed form, but is often structured as a dialogue between the two lovers. However, this Canto consists only of the girl's part, Walker's response will come in Canto XXII, 'Pause and Listen.

The girl is as self-absorbed as Narcissus, reversing gender roles as had Balthus in *Les Beaux Jours* in which, a pretty adolescent girl primps her reddish hair in front of a pearl handled mirror.⁸⁴ I follow the painting in its details of her costume and attitude, such as her "russet" hair and "satin slippers", but other details, such as the atlas, are invented. The male figure at the fireplace, her lover, has been omitted.



Balthus *Les Beaux Jours* 1944 - 1945

The grandfather figure of the second stanza is taken from my viewing of a second painting by Balthus, Joan Miró and his Daughter Dolores (1933 - 1938),⁸⁵ in which the Spanish painter looks quite abstracted while his child is "fidgety and eager to escape". The "striped dress" of this stanza is another detail I have used directly.

As the drafting process progressed, this child became more and more alive, and I found that I no longer had to refer to given images for the process of invention to flow. The details of stanza three were readily invented, excepting that the tonality was derived from some comments by the noted American critic, Guy Davenport, in his monograph on Balthus. "There is a sense among the French", he writes, "that adulthood is a falling away from the intelligence of children".⁸⁶ Hence, the child-mother and the girl are perfect allies in a success-oriented, masculine world, and their empathic absence from the duties of schooling and the like.

The Canto's tonality changes in the second half, her personality has been established during her journey downstream with Walker, and I am able to move to an overview of people as they go about their morning business, flood or no flood, the not-quite cathedral of St. Mary's of the Angels brooding over this town.

Canto XVIII: Marengo Beach

Marengo is a small township on the coast well to the south of Lorne on the Great Ocean Road. I had retreated there some years ago to complete some writing, and it has good memories for me as a place of complete peace, and was able to work at a fast clip for three days running. It was late winter, and in between bursts of writing I took to walking along the strand and across the rocks, finding shelter under a rock, sitting and mulling over what I was then writing.

The poem itself was finished much later when I had started using long lines as noted in discussion of Canto XV 'Point' and its points of reference have been covered in much of the foregoing.

Canto XIX: Aisling

In this Canto, which independently bears the same title as one of *The Camden Poems* noted earlier, I make a last return to a consideration of the girl who has led Walker on his journey. I had started writing with the phrase "O child *on* the pure and unclouded brow ... " taken directly from the title of a painting by Brian Dunlap. Changing the preposition *on* to *of*, the line then led into a series of images in the first stanza so that an aisling, once again, was invoked by the Narrator. Specific images are drawn from an now-familiar range based on my observations of the Barwon River valley and coastal regions, but there are some which warrant further comment.

In the second stanza, I invoke Nature as a "class model". At Geelong High School an ongoing dispute has been whether or not the senior students would be allowed to have access to a live model for life drawing. Usually, the administration gives way to the strident moral minority and students must make

do for themselves by attending extra classes at the Gordon TAFE Institute or at private studios. Once, the school's Art Department did employ a model, an ex-student of mine who needed what little that was offered for the job: we passed in the corridors. Later, she remarked on how tense and uncomfortable she had been at first, would have walked out on the first day, but stuck with it and her own studies. One student's work, in red chalk, was able to capture the highlights of her hair and cashmere shawl across her shoulders, a reluctant symbol for that summer.

Three ravens appear on the Cawthron coat-of-arms, the motto being *Deus corbus pascit* [God feeds the ravens]. May 1999, when teaching in Room 37, a chilly portable, a gang of ravens was holding court outside the windows as I was drafting these stanzas. They cluster together in groups of thirty to forty, made up of smaller families of five or six birds. It had been raining and the ravens moved in for a week or more, displacing the local magpies and seagulls and were enjoying themselves enormously, digging for insects and raiding rubbish bins.

The next image of the two boys and their canoe floated in from seeing the neighbour's boys heaving their fibreglass boat down to the riverbank, the disposition of their bodies as in Geoffrey Smart's painting *Wallaroo* (1951). The last three stanzas return to a direct address of the maiden, "child of pure visage", calling upon her for the courage to venture out into a world increasingly hostile and hard to endure.

Canto XX: A View over Queen's Park Bridge

The Narrator is preparing to finish his story of the great flood and its outcomes, siting himself on Windmill Hill, overlooking the unique structure of Queen's Park Bridge. Its single lane connects Newtown and Highton.

Taking up the perspective of the ruddy-faced kestrel, which had featured in Canto VI 'Eternal Memory', the Narrator's overview extends from Fyansford to Yollinko wetlands and bird sanctuary, then further out into the west and backwards in time to reminiscences of life at Port Campbell. This then leads back to two closer views. The first recalls visits to friends living near Moriac and refers to Geelong from *Mr Hiatt's, Barrabool Hills* 1851 by William Duke (1815 - 1853) which is displayed in the Geelong Art Gallery. The second house is the former residence of Geelong artist, Rosemary Coleman: this stands on the ridge just below the preparatory school and allows one to attain the kestrel's viewpoint without having wings.

From this point, the Canto covers familiar ground as the Narrator leaves off and returns to his memories to become explicative of his viewpoint and rather more didactic in the following poem.

Canto XXI: Pause and listen

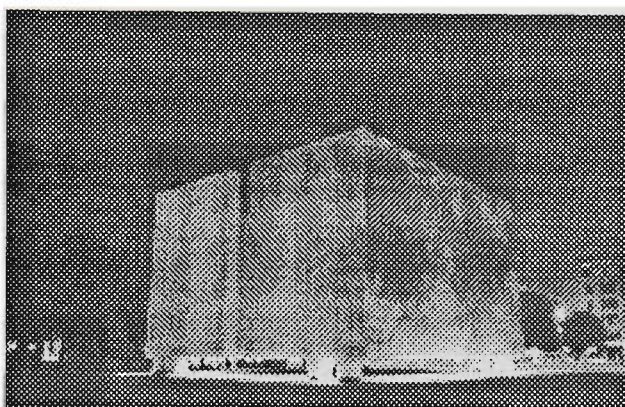
I had wanted to end the book with the previous Canto, but elements of this poem had been in draft form for several years, and took final shape in the first week of July 1999. Its placement is still debatable, but coming towards the end of this sequence of poems it can be read as a caution to the reader. The first stanza opens with the Narrator questioning the value of a Catholic upbringing. In the early 1950s the Salesian clergy at Brooklyn Park was engaged a process of post-War renewal, and imported a particularly Italo-Polish flavour to popular devotion. Candlelit processions made their way from just outside our house along Anna Street and then along the palm-lined avenue leading to the small chapel where the walls had been decorated with a florid mural dedicated to Our Lady Help of Christians. We children were taught, quite earnestly, that eventually Russia would

be converted and placed under her protection. These priests and brothers included survivors of concentration and refugee camps, their first-hand accounts of the War and after colouring our sense of an impending apocalypse.

Mrs. Gilbert was the one non-Catholic of the neighbourhood with whom our mother could talk freely, and she did not indulge in the inane and insulting comments of some of our neighbours. As children, our experience of religious exchanges were mostly negative, not being allowed to attend Protestant or even State schools, and having very little contact with even neighbourhood children, let alone our cousins whose mothers had dared marry outside of the Church! In retrospect, these were isolating and debilitating experiences quite at odds with the rich liturgy and joyous singing of the processions and what we later learned for ourselves during Vatican II. As I write these remarks, revising this Chapter before it is printed for examination, I am curiously conscious that today is the Feast of the Assumption. So now I complete the loop back to my boyhood some forty years ago on a rainy suburban Adelaide street, cycling on my way to serve at Mass. Her image was painted by Bro. Peter as a mural in the small chapel at the Salesian School, Brooklyn Park. She stood on the world's orb, her foot stamping on a writhing serpent, her sky-blue robe wrapped about her: for us boys, there was something both comforting and terrifying in this. Many of the boys at the school were orphans or abandoned children of separations and divorces. After their losses of mother-love, she promised spiritual protection for themselves and possible retribution on those who had harmed them.

The third stanza then looks to other models of Christian behaviour. I had first read of Peter Kolbe and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in the Salesian staff library where I was given free reign in my tenth school year. Apart from an unmarked pre-World War I set of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, I found some books on heroic figures of

World War II and the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. These opened my eyes to stories other than those told by English and American authors, and when the school had acquired a few Hungarian boys from the refugee camps, they told us in broken English of how they made petrol bombs to throw at Russian tanks. Blood, petrol and heroism mingled with piety and incense. It is natural for a youth to want for heroes, and I still hold Bishop Romero and John Kennedy in high regard, even if they both had enormous flaws of character: none of us can be anything but human, flawed.



Kennedy Cenotaph, Dallas

When in April 1999 I was able to travel to Dallas, I sought out the Kennedy Cenotaph in the late afternoon. Despite the flow of traffic and tourists, I was the only visitor at that site. It consists of eight high concrete sheets, pinned together to make an enclosed space around a plain black marble slab bearing his name. The lower wing sections were defaced, and it seemed strange that no one else was there, though more people were in attendance at a nearby shop stocked with the usual tourist trash. In all it was a deflating experience, but then what else could one expect? Heroism is in the action, not in memory.

As it seems to me, many of my generation have been so traumatised by the loss of our earlier ideals that they have retreated into either a bland pragmatism or sought religious experience through new and strange cults. Some are devotees of the

book of changes, *I Qing*, claiming their lives can be no more disadvantaged by using this as their life-guide than by relying on more traditional means. However, when considering the children I teach, I am constantly amazed and renewed by their fresh and sometimes challenging view of life. Not all of them, but many are able to disregard all the negative influences with which their lives are burdened and create small miracles.

So, in the ensuing stanzas I make reference in John's Gospel to an episode at Jacob's Well at Nablus in Samaria (John 4: 1 - 30). Then, this reference transmutes to the Pentecost symbol of the "white dove", as the informing spirit, and then in turn transmutes to a seagull, which "hawk-high" provides an overview of the world. The idea of hope is reinforced by the appearance of those weeds that survive even the most determined efforts of gardeners to rectify and sterilise the city's appearance. Then, in stark opposition to such elements of hope and light, is the "drunkard" whom I saw wandering in a park near the Kennedy Cenotaph, and the children's "earthfall" of the last stanza, both echoing the sentiments of an earlier poem, 'Fall'.

To what extent this Canto succeeds in being didactic: and acceptable, coming from Walker as a fallen figure, is debatable. He seeks redemption by whatever means are available, and gathers various scraps of memory and teachings leading into the last of his utterances in the next Canto, 'Hy Brasil'.

Canto XXII: Hy Brasil

I have deliberately kept this penultimate Canto simple and-peaceful, as lyric in nature as I could. Beyond the western horizon out of Donegal and the Hebrides, the preindustrial Irish and Scots imagined as the place of final repose, sometimes confused with *Tír na nÓg* [Land of the Young]. In keeping with Walker's origins

in western Scotland it seemed appropriate to name his final resting-place, Hy Brasil.

If Goat Island is to be thought of as an earthly version of Purgatory, then Hy Brasil is as close to Paradise as can be reached by Walker. He is sustained by his vision of a kimono, and the purgation of Self as endured by his spirit in the long journey down the Barwon River through Lake Connnewarre and finally out to sea. His redemption has been made complete, he is, at last, at rest with himself.

Canto XXIII: A Masque: An Exchange of Letters after the Deluge

This ultimate Canto has been the most problematic in that I have hesitated several times as to whether it should be included. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, these verses were generated out of a consideration of the forces of chance, and are built from a series of formally unrelated elements. They could have been put aside as a mere appendix, as a record or as evidence of the experiment then being carried out. However, if read alongside the directions for the Masque as given here, and the reader's imagination richly applied, I feel that these verses warrant inclusion as the final Canto.

The question being presented here is whether meaning can be constructed out of materials which of themselves are meaningless. I hold that there is no meaning in this Canto except that which is found in the actual performance by individual members of the audience. With luck the audience will each walk away having constructed a meaning for each of them, there being no possibility of consensus, and would have no idea of what the phrase "an exchange of letters" means to another.

Of course, there will be some commonalities, as conditioned by our cultural setting in late twentieth century Australia. If I were to provide each with a copy

of the text and illustrate with photographs of the participants and give a brief history of the Masque, then further commonalities would be formed. The core business of this Masque is to be found in the text, itself a random assemblage.

The one clue or context I would give, however, would be that the curtain be a tapestry or light-projection of a well-known painting of The Deluge. Likewise, the program would have this image, or parts of it, repeated on the covers. Something like Michelangelo's grandiose mural in the Sistine Chapel would give most members of the audience some contextual detail to frame expectations.



Michelangelo *The Deluge* (detail) 1509

Michelangelo himself had personal experience of a great disaster. He had fled the sack of Florence by the French armies, as foretold by Savonarola in a sermon some fifteen years before it happened.⁸⁷ These images are filled with sense of despair which were echoed by many who watched from the Barwon levees those anxious nights. Everything could have been swept away.

I had earlier signalled my concern in the connection between meaning and speech with the quotation by the European polymath, George Steiner: "Our speech interposes itself between apprehension and truth like a dusty pane or warped mirror".⁸⁸ In his writing Steiner works his way around the notion that all our

current languages are the broken shards of some primal *UrSprache* in which utterance and object fitted perfectly. He claims that Eden's language "was like a flawless glass; a light of total understanding streamed through it". This idealist position is the basis for the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, which has become incorporated in common belief as a kind of Second Fall. We now speak in diverse tongues as a form of Divine Punishment for our collective *hubris*.

The reflex of this is of course, a belief that if everyone would now speak in one language, it could be taken as a sign of our collective Redemption. Theologians and metaphysicians of language have striven to ameliorate this latter version of the Fall. Surely Pentecost's gift of tongues to the Apostles represent such a Redemption? Surely if we babble on like Pentacostalists or Snake-Baptists, or even claim that the King James version of the *Bible* is God's Word given in stately English, we are saved. This may explain the current Anglo-nationalist push in the USA and Australia, to force everyone to speak English. Such wicked self-delusion! I speak English merely because I was born into a family whose forebears had been politically dispossessed, whose tongue had been eradicated, whose bodies were transported to the far ends of this planet. Australia is a Siberia: I am a Siberian. My preference would be to live in a Gaelic-speaking community, to have Latin as my liturgical language, to be more skilled as a reader and speaker of my wife's language, Lithuanian, to have Goethe's German at my command. Not that I am unskilled at English, or have any real quarrel with this tongue: it does its job well enough, but is opaque and damned difficult to make dance.

Moreover, English has its limitations in what it allows us to see of the world. For example, take the common noun *ship*. Nowadays we think of a ship as a large ocean-going steel vessel, driven by diesel engines. But its origins reveal that a ship was something more humble. In Old English it was written as *scip* and cognate

both Gothic and Icelandic *skip*, and with words like *skiff*, *scoop* and *shape*. Its Primitive Germanic form was probably *skipa*.⁸⁹ But what does the word ship actually mean other than a big tin can? The clue comes from both within English and from the Latvian verb *škitab*, meaning 'to cut or hew'. We can now think of a ship as something which is shaped, or better still, scooped out of material, a floating log which has been somehow fashioned to more comfortably accommodate a sailor.

Suddenly, one word opens a doorway to a lost world where craftsmen hewed out pine logs with adze and fire to float upon the north European marshes. This word was confined to that culture area, for the principal Indo-European word, **nāwis*: Latin *nāvis*, Greek *ναυς* Sanskrit *nāu*, had been displaced in northern speeches, Germanic, Celtic and Baltic, all for lack of broad expanses of open water. Adapting to their marshy surroundings, they had reinvent the concept ship with what linguistic and conceptual toolkits they had at hand.

Similarly, when Whorf was able to crack the code of Hopi, an isolated Amerindian language, he was astonished to discover a completely different metaphysical mindset at work in relation to the workings of Time and Space, wherein the shaping influence of the observer on the process of observation is of prime importance.⁹⁰ The Hopi had anticipated Heisenberg's *Weltanschauung*, 'world view', but more so had anticipated the new Physics by a few millennia. Repeat these processes and differences hundreds and thousands of times as the progenitors of all our tongues hewed and harried their ways into the world as the ice-sheets retreated, and slowly the original vision of the world, if there were just the one sight of Paradise, has been transmuted into a hundred different and non-congruent ways of expressing the world. Would it not be better to look at the

world through many different lenses and accept that the one path is not necessarily the only path to the Truth?

There are two radically opposed versions of linguistic theory bearing upon this problem of how we see and express the world. One, the Universalist, such as articulated by Leibniz and in some varieties of structural linguistics, seeks to discern a universal structure of language common to all humans. Differences between languages are seen as surface details. The other, Monadist, declares that universal deep structures are either fathomless to investigation or are so abstract and generalised as to be trivial, that the relationship between speech as sign and object as signified is absolutely arbitrary. Further, it could be argued that the major language groups developed quite separately out of a general predisposition to speech in protohuman populations before cross-cultural contacts.

English by itself, or any other language, offers the poet a diminished *Weltanschauung*. Nor, as Steiner can claim, can any one language "give its readers a key to the meaning of existence", and by implication give meaning to our utterances. What we utter is completely arbitrary. That I now say *ship*, whereas I would say *long* if I were speaking in Gaelic, or *laivas* in Lithuanian, demonstrates not merely historical principles, but the very arbitrariness of which sound is associated with any one object.

Now it is realised that nonsense, that is arbitrariness carried over to an extreme, does generate both prose and poetry, yields nonsense lists of kingdoms and artificial alphabets, all of which are a very old genre acting just below the surface of nursery rhymes and limericks, spells and riddles and mnemonic tags. Moreover it is possible to create words and lines, whole poems even, which are pure nonsense. For example, the opening of Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky' splines

normal English with artificial words which operate within the rules of English phonetics and orthography.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
 All mimsy were the borogroves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe.

Another form of nonsense could be made by shifting linguistic gears as the utterance progresses. For example, there is a German Christmas Carol 'Ubi sunt gaudia?' which dates from the fifteenth century and reads alternatively in Latin and German. This would have sounded nonsensical in part to the laity. Surrealist poets, Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp & Hugo Ball attempted, as part of the Surrealist program, to "cure man of the madness of the time" by gnomic, artificial utterances. Listeners were invited to construct meaning for themselves in poems such as 'Elefantenkarawane':⁹¹

jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla
 grossiga m'pfa habla horem
 égiga, goramen
 higo bloika russula huju ...

Such a notion of arbitrariness is carried over in this Canto to very process by which the sounds, assembled into lines, are associated with, and infer meaning to the Canto's objects and to their representation as a Masque. Hence, we could raise the question of what may be the real language of this Masque when it is performed. Is it the set of words and lines randomly put into the appearance of order? Is the meaning to be found in the body movements of the dancers, singly and collectively? Or in the exchanges between Voices, Dancers and the Ensemble? If we could discover the real language of this Masque, then perhaps this would become a way in which we can explore the generation of meaning itself.

A possible performance of Canto XXXIII

As discussed previously, the materials of 'An Exchange of Letters after The Deluge' were generated through a randomised process, the aim being to demonstrate a means of poetic production. However, this exercise developed its own impetus in the months following and serves as the core of a Canto in its own right. This Canto differs from all the others in that it is presented now as a performance piece and carries a revised title indicating a shift in intent. That is the new title, 'A Masque: An Exchange of Letters after The Deluge', becomes the playground for my characters to enact a drama of exchange.

The term, Masque, has an interesting history.⁹² It developed in the Renaissance primarily as an entertainment in which masked or disguised figures performed highly imaginative, often fantastic, action interspersed with songs and dances. Adornments to the actions derived from popular song, folk dance, morality plays, games and court ballet, many influences contributed. Italian Masques were splendid in their presentation of mythical and fantastic subjects. The greatest artists such as Brunelleschi and da Vinci were called upon to design costumes and settings, and machines were invented to incorporate fountains, volcanoes and sky scenes. Traces of the early, improvised forms of Masque may be intuited in the Capulets' evening festivities in Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, and a more elaborate form certainly underlies all of *The Tempest*.

Masque developed towards both Drama and Ballet, as evidenced by 'The Masque of Blackness' which was devised by Inigo Jones and Ben Jonson in 1605. This work incorporated Dance and Song, but also began the movement towards a dramatic unity as an aesthetic principle. As a poet, he argued in Neoplatonic fashion that the design and words of the Masque were its soul and that the spectacle and dancing its body. Jones on the other hand, regarded the visual

spectacle as the principle organising factor, and his great productions were lavish by any scale.

Even today, this artform has not been forgotten, and John Ashbery has written an entertaining Masque, albeit disguised by its title, 'Description of a Masque'.⁹³ In it, Ashbery assembles a cast of seven nursery rhyme characters in a bar decorated with a Tenniel illustration from Lewis Carroll's *Alice through the Looking Glass*. Into this mélange are introduced two more characters, Mania and a Stranger: the action proceeds from there, probably much to the audience's bemusement.

Whatever the form or occasion of a Masque, it called upon the presiding figure of the household to assume the role of the allegorised deity, expressing a partnership of culture and power. In the closure, masks were to be removed revealing the actors' true selves, who then took their partners from the audience, so expressing the highest values of a humanist-classical society. This process can be readily viewed in the film version of John Fowles' engrossing novel, *The Magus*.

But also, this is a drama of *exchange*. I define this term by the actions of the Masque's participants. They exchange, and interchange, seemingly meaningless lines, as well as abstracted dance and mime movements. At the end of the performance, the performers' removal of their masks and exchange with one another through a random process movement will further indicate that the Masque could be continued, with any actor being called upon to take any part.

In this Masque, words provided by myself as a writer are in one sense the very core of the work, being random lines and for the audience most likely meaningless. Moreover, the spectacle which I have devised for the audience mitigates further against any direct explication of meaning. I expect members of the audience to construct their meanings from the presentation. If they gain enjoyment or insight from the presentation, then so much the better for them.

Several organisational principles are operated in this Masque. Firstly, randomness: the twenty-six stanzas, marked **A** to **Z**, have been generated in the process described, with some slight intervention providing markers for assignment of parts to four Voices, **VI**, **V2**, **V3** & **V4**. At all times the four Voices remain standing on small platforms, approximately 50 - 90 cm. high, just enough to make their faces clearly visible above the dancers. The second principle is an actual exchange of voices: the presentation of these stanzas is envisaged as the echoing and interplay of four Voices representing in turn, Narrator, Walker, The Girl and Epona (River Spirit). Directions are given as to when each Voice will emerge or cut into another Voice's lines.

The third organisational principle is the use of Dance and Music: there are four Dancers, **D1**, **D2**, **D3** & **D4**, one representing each of the four Voices, while assigned movement patterns, spaces to occupy and cues, are asked to create their own choreographies, which may or may not be directly related to the lines being spoken, but will be directly related to the Music pieces created by the small Ensemble which is placed to the far down left, and facing across, the stage. Costumes and masks for Voices and Ensemble will be in a simple Grecian style, while the Dancers' masks should be as fantastic as possible.

Stanzas A - D: The First Sett

As the Voices and Dancers enter, they will each discover and take a mask from the properties box downstage left, there may be some interplay and exchange at this point, but by the time the Musicians have taken up their places in the Ensemble and have begun a rhythmic clapping, the four pairs of Voices and Dancers would have assumed position at stage rear. The Dancers will be kneeling or prostrate in front of the Voices.

After a brief silence, all Voices begin to chant, and there is no movement until the 2nd Voice says "But it changing ... ", whereupon the 2nd Dancer alone arises and begins an enthralled movement. He is joined by the other Dancers when the 3rd Voice begins the stanza "Caught between thumb ..." matching the 2nd Voice's line "In the soul alone": the Voices will overlap, especially as Voice 4 begins her line "Don't go far away". Towards the end of the last stanza, the Ensemble reverting to a rhythmic clapping, the Dancers will all be engaged in set movement or random exchange of movements. After "I am led", silence ensues.

Stanzas E - H: The Second Sett

By this time the audience ought understand that while they are witnessing a performance labelled "Masque", that another element obtains. In the 1960s and beyond, performance artists felt that dramatic structures had become all too enclosing, and under the influence of the psychedelic movement, began to invent new styles of performance, be it street theatre, political events or semi-public events which they termed "Happenings". These were attempts to totally engage people in their bodily senses, overloading all senses through a conjunction of music, action and in many cases through ingestion of illegal drugs. Some attempts have been made to heroicise the Happening as "an attempt to create a collective consciousness or make a new Jungian mythology."²⁴ My view is that if any meaning came out of the drug-taking associated with these events it is to be found in the veins of Brett Whitely or any number of creative artists who let themselves be destroyed. Transcending that black note of despair is the joy of liberation from dead forms of literature and politics. I want the performance of this Masque to reflect that joy.

So in this second sett, the Voices will all lighten their tones, the Dancers and Musicians shall be delicate, using the words and lines as indications for exchanges

of movement and rhythm. The sett begins with Epona (Voice 4) speaking directly to Walker (Voice 2) in time to a slow bass and flute tune. She is reconciliatory, gently urging Walker throughout the stanza "Even if it's not so", Dancer 4 standing behind and over Dancer 2, front stage right. This enables D1 and D3 to interact in the rest of the space as the 3rd. and 4th. Voices work through the following stanza "Formèd black clouds". The exchanges become more complex, with the last seven lines of "Gatherwood flames" interwoven with the beginning of the final stanza in this sett, "Hail storms!" The sett ends with a wild, joyous music, all dancing to exhaustion as a large sheet mirror descends at the rear from the flies, *deus ex machina*. This mirror need not be of glass, that would be too heavy and expensive: the better solution would be to use panels of burnished aluminium or some other highly reflective medium, so long as the audience can see all actors reflected in it. The mirror device allows the actors to enter interior space, and for the audience it will ensure greater visual complexity. If the mirror panels can be at slight vertical and horizontal angles to each other, even warped, then dimensionality can be further complexed. Lighting should be on the dancers so that they are reflected in this Mirror.

Stanzas I - L: The First Mirror Sett

Another four stanzas are included in this sett which is to be performed in a more solemn style than the previous, beginning with flute, bass and drums, the dancers moving in procession to face the Mirror, when VI starts. He is overlapped at "I'm stepping backwards" by V3 and V4 whose dancing counterparts, D3 and D4, engage in a waltz from the line "In that space". When that is finished, before "Precarious", D4 will cross to D2 to engage in a Tango, with D3 dancing alone. D1, representing the Narrator, remains upstage, alone.

This sett should be presented simply, lightly and in time to quick Waltz and Tango rhythms so that it carries a sense of lightheartedness and enjoyment.

Stanzas M - R: The Long, Fast Sett

It is essential that the momentum of the latter Tango be maintained, even quickened to a Samba. This sett contains six stanzas, each much longer than the previous, and audience attention needs to be maintained. Lighting should shift so that very bright lights are directed at the Mirror, and the stage left darkened, dancers' images will become obscured.

For the first half of the Sett, each Dancer is separate, D1 beginning his Samba as V1 starts his reading. The effect I want in this presentation is that power and authority. The 1st Voice will need to be clearly heard over the Ensemble and the dance needs to be very masculine, very authoritative in style to match. As V4 cuts in with "Nembutalled selves", she will need to be heard clearly, but is more muted, and the corresponding dance by D4 only begins after the last line of her stanza, "As hollow lead".

The 2nd Voice, meanwhile, has started to read at the same time at V1, and the corresponding dancer, D2 remains still until he can join D3's girlish dance after the joint, soft enunciation of "Almost finished / With us." The sett quickly closes as all dancers retreat to stage rear and all Voices chorus the stanza "Query what each", and is concluded by 4th. Voice reading "Remembering landscapes" at a slightly slower pace.

Stanzas S - X: The Second Mirror Sett

This sett needs be also very rapid, building to a climax of light, movement and sound. All the lines should be belted out as fast as it is possible to say them, but

in varied manners, frantic, agitated, guardedly or even mechanically as noted on the page. Music should be jazz-mechanical and industrial, prerecorded tapes may be used. Throughout the first four stanzas all dancing is individual and random.

At the end of the fourth stanza, a long note is sounded on the flute, DI begins a group of jerky movements in time with the 1st Voice, while the other three dancers begin their movements in concert only on "X has two edges". A long silence is needed to conclude as the Mirror is drawn upwards.

Stanzas Y - Z: The Last Sett

The end is at hand. The stage is flooded with a dark blue wash, drum roffs are repeated in concert with bass and flute. AR the dancers withdraw to the rear of the stage before they start again. The Girl, V3, reads out the stanza "You cannot make" in its entirety. If the lines have not revealed to the audience impossibility of constructing a common meaning from random shards, then that position is spelt out quite clearly in these lines, and in the last stanza as well which is spoken by the 4th Voice. The Tango motif is to be repeated at the start of the last stanza, and is a triple dance with Walker always between and surrounded by the Girl and Epona, with DI remaining near his alter ego, the Narrator.

The Tango should be danced for a while even after the last words are spoken, and perhaps one couple should remain dancing during the last business and as the curtain comes down.

Closure

To emphasise further the arbitrary nature of the relationship between sign and signified in this Canto, the actors are to place their masks back into the properties box after their performance. They will bow and receive the puzzled applause of the patient audience. However, as the lights dim somewhat, they will break up

move into small different groups and take materials out of the properties box. They will put back on masks and clothing, mixing them, and take up positions as if they were to begin again.

Point made, the curtain, with Michelangelo's depiction of *The Deluge*, will descend, and the audience can leave. What interpretation they make of it in Foyer conversations or on the way home will be the validity of the performance.

Concluding remarks

I had set out in constructing the text of *Deluge* to create a myth of loss and redemption set against the reported event of the 1995 Geelong floods. As the process of writing the various Cantos continued, I have come to realise that there is not one single myth, but a many-layered complex in which I, as Narrator, am an integral part and enactor. Any attempt to write an objective, third-person saga was abandoned by the writing of the third Canto and incorporation of reflective pieces such as 'Point'. The process has been to connect together a range of voices in which fictions about Walker and the Girl stand beside my recollections of my life, stretching back almost forty years: in effect, I hope that I have made myself part of this myth about Geelong and the floods of 1995.

After nearly four years of writing about this subject I have exhausted both the word-lode and myself, and I must stop writing at this point. Already parts of *Deluge* have found publication in various magazines or have been read in public gatherings, and as indicated, I am pleased with the level of reception. All that remains now are the formal processes of close editing, assemblage and then to search for publication in both oral and printed form.

As for what I will write next, a beginning is being made in the shape of a modest project about landscape in cooperation with some friends. There is no need to hurry, the river will outlast me.

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