

Griffith Review 55

State of Hope

Robyn Archer, Patrick Allington, Kerryn Goldsworthy,
Chris Wallace, Dave Graney, Peter Sutton, Eva Hornung,
Nicholas Jose, Anna Goldsworthy, Peter Stanley.



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Griffith died in 1920 and is now best remembered in his namesakes: an electorate, a society, a suburb and a university. Ninety-six years after he first proposed establishing a university in Brisbane, Griffith University, the city's second, was created. His commitment to public debate and ideas, his delight in words and art, and his attachment to active citizenship are recognised by the publication that bears his name.

Like Sir Samuel Griffith, Griffith Review is iconoclastic and non-partisan, with a sceptical eye and a pragmatically reforming heart and a commitment to public discussion. Personal, political and unpredictable, it is Australia's best conversation.

GriffithReview55

State of Hope

Edited by Julianne Schultz and Patrick Allington

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COVER ART Nigel Murray-Harvey
Captain Adelaide 1973
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
159 × 129 cm (framed)
Image courtesy of Flinders University
Art Museum, Adelaide.

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Australian Government



INTRODUCTION

Born of reform

Holding faith in hope

Julianne Schultz

THE REFORM CLUB, the imposing Palazzo-style structure on Pall Mall, one of London's grandest thoroughfares, has entered the popular imagination as the quintessential gentleman's club. Its camera-ready elegance – the soaring atrium, sweeping staircases and cosy parlours – has given the private club an unusually public life.

As in so many clubs, the portraits and busts of its founders and luminaries are on proud display. The men featured in the pictures were less the stuffy embodiment of the class-bound status quo; they were men with a vision. In many ways they changed the nature of Britain and the shape of an empire. They were principal architects of the 1832 Reform Bill, the pragmatic British response to the French Revolution, which became the first step towards universal suffrage.

Two years later, many of these men were in the House of Commons when the legislation that would transform 'waste and unoccupied Lands which are supposed to be fit for Colonization' into a model colony was passed. Within another two years South Australia was proclaimed in seaside Glenelg, a colony based on a thoroughly modern mix of commerce and ethical values: financed by land sales, without slaves or convicts, where the rights of 'Aboriginal Natives' to occupy their land was enshrined along with religious freedom, the separation of church and state, franchise, access to education and other social innovations.

In May 1837, a committee of twelve gathered to assign names to the streets and squares mapped out in Colonel Light's plan for Adelaide, and the link to the Reform Club became tangible in the city's CBD. Thanks to decades of research by Dr Jeff Nicholas, collected in his three-volume opus *The Streets of Adelaide*

(Torrens Press, 2016), we now know that the names of thirty-five of the thirty-seven streets selected that day were members of the Reform Club.

For anyone with even a fleeting knowledge of Adelaide, it is a disorientating experience to see the embodiment of a city in the refined marble surrounds of a Pall Mall club. Within a decade, South Australia was welcoming not just free settlers from the British Isles seeking a freer and more prosperous future, but Germans seeking religious and political freedom – and it was taking the commitment to respect the rights of ‘Aboriginal Natives’ seriously. The Reform Club origins explain a lot about Australia’s most unusual state; it helped shape a very different colony. South Australia has long been comfortable at the cutting edge of social, economic and political innovation.

MICHAEL O’LOUGHLIN IS one of the great Aussie Rules footballers, a talented young man who moved from Adelaide to become a star with the Sydney Swans. Although he missed his family when he moved east, it took some time, and participation in the SBS series *Who Do You Think You Are?*, to discover the richness of his connections to South Australia. His family had played a unique role connecting Indigenous and settler societies.

Kudnarto, Michael O’Loughlin’s maternal forebear, was from the Clare Valley. In 1848, at just sixteen, she married Thomas Adams, a shepherd who had emigrated four years earlier. Theirs was described in the *South Australian Register* as the ‘first lawful marriage to a European’, and the evidence suggests it was a love match. Not long afterwards, Mrs Mary Ann Adams was given a grant of land – one of the forty-two sections that the settlers had allotted to the ‘Aboriginal Natives’. The grant at Skillogalee Creek was ‘for the term of her natural life’, which tragically ended just seven years later in 1855 – and with it the promise that the land would pass to her sons when they reached adulthood.

Two decades on, by the time her son Tom was old enough to resume the land, the policy had changed. In response to a letter Tom wrote asserting his rights and pleading for his land, the Protector of Aborigines in 1875 said he could ‘find no legal authority to give land to an Aborigine’ – and so the costly legacy of dispossession extracted its toll on Michael O’Loughlin’s mother’s family.

Accompanied by the SBS producers, O’Loughlin travelled east to the Coorong in search of his paternal ancestors, and discovered the rich history

of his great-grandfather's legacy. Millerum was a leader in the Ngarrindjeri nation, a man who made his way in the settler world while remaining committed to preserving culture and language. He was the closest associate of Norman Tindale, who devoted his life to mapping and documenting Indigenous clans, country and culture.

The images of O'Loughlin in the Coorong, listening to the recordings of his great grandfather singing and of him in Adelaide meeting Tindale's now elderly daughter Beryl, who considered Millerum her grandfather, are among the most powerful moments television could deliver. A tearful O'Loughlin promised to continue the family tradition to 'show the way, share culture and tell stories'.

THE HOPE THAT shaped South Australia has not evaporated, but it has been tested by the harsh realities of an unlikely settlement. The early promise of the Reform Club visionaries delivered a rich legacy, including female franchise and progressive innovations, but at times it also fostered inward-looking complacency and provoked a conservative backlash. Within two decades the recognition of Aboriginal land rights evaporated; within several generations, the towns named by German settlers were Anglicised and many of their descendants interned, and a place defined by the separation of church and state became known as the City of Churches. These legacies still linger. Yet over 180 years of settlement, new visions have, with surprising regularity, become reality, as new people and ideas take root and old initiatives are revived. If a place can have hope in its DNA, it is in South Australia, where it will be an essential ingredient to make sense of the challenges of a new epoch.

THIS EDITION OF *Griffith Review* has been produced with the support of Flinders University and Arts SA. It features South Australian writers, and those with a legacy of association with the state. Co-editor Dr Patrick Allington has been a pleasure to work with – he is a gifted and knowledgeable writer and editor with deep insights into South Australia – and his colleague Professor Julian Meyrick a wise and generous collaborator.

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*The New Work Order, Foundation for Young Australians, 2015

**The Princeton Review; US News and World Report rankings

ESSAY

So dry a homeland

A thirst for life quenched, a new thirst for answers

Robyn Archer

THERE ARE STILL some hot summer nights when I can tool around Adelaide with the windows down and feel like a teenager on the hunt. It's 30 degrees at eight in the evening, and down at the beach people are queuing for ice-cream. Henley Square's pumpin' and hoons are chuggin' the strip.

In from the beach, away from the respite of a sea breeze, the western suburbs are on heat. The suburban dreariness gets sexy again, as it was before the word *bogan* had currency and we didn't know that's how we'd be described half a century later. My brain takes a sharp fork in the memory road. One way leads back to the music and the dances, the microclimate of slow dancing and drive-ins; the other pushes forward to tourism ads touting beautiful South Australia, with green and hills, vines and heritage.

My South Australia was dry and flat. Our weekend trips were never south. Whatever clapped-out second-hand car Dad was running at the time, it always headed north – to places even drier than the northern suburbs where we lived. We'd do a day trip either to his stamping ground around Mundoora-Fisherman Bay, or to Mum's at Morgan-Cadell, that bone-dry Mallee route. Dry and hot. When I first drove out of Adelaide, to make my fortune in Sydney – heartlessly just a few days after my mother had a hysterectomy – I know my body was craving the subtropical soft I had already felt

four fabulous times, on those trips to sing on Channel Nine's *Bandstand* while I was still at high school.

And yet, the teenage years in '60s Adelaide were deliciously fertile. The barren dry of a Housing Trust enclave in Enfield – then the end of the line, marked by the Northern Hotel – was counterpointed with the unbridled excitement of music, ear pressed to the portable record player as Phil Spector commanded the Ronettes to speak for us: 'Be my, be my baby.' Music whetted the sharp thrust of our teenage crushes. Dancing every week with Ray, as we chased the Twilights in the hope of hearing yet another Beatles cover before it was released in Australia, was as desperately anticipated as was catching a glimpse of Kathleen in the baking concrete yard of Enfield High, where seventeen hundred students toiled under the command of Headmaster McCarthy, whom I later discovered was hunting for communists among the staff as vigorously as his American namesake had done not so many years before.

I learnt decades later that McCarthy (the South Australian) was gathering evidence on dangerous subversives like my science teacher and a couple of others who, in his eyes, were pinkos through and through. His was not the spirit of reform that saw this place become the first Australian colony to allow religious freedom outside the Catholic and Anglican faiths (hence the Adelaide moniker, City of Churches), first to give women the vote, and the first state to decriminalise homosexuality. Such contraries still exist in parliament, and are typified by, for instance, Nick Xenophon v Cory Bernardi – though Nick's anti-euthanasia stance puts him too in the same flock as those politicians and church leaders who make nonsense of the claim that Australia is a secular society.

I knew the science teacher McCarthy had targeted as the one who'd taken a gang of us to that long-demolished jewel, the Theatre Royal in Hindley Street, to see Vivien Leigh play Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock was played alternatively by John Alden or John Laurie. It didn't occur to us at the time to ask why a science teacher would take us to the theatre, and we certainly had no concept of political affiliation. Miss Scriven was just plain cool. The school was straight.

OUT IN THE barren wilds of Gepps Cross there was no music on the curriculum; it was up to me to start the lunchtime music club – me and a guitar. And those of us streamed into top science were not allowed to do home economics or art or woodwork. Options away from double maths, physics, chem, Latin, geography, English and French were strictly limited. But the suburbs we inhabited were alive and ripe for fun. Imaginations were rioting, oblivious of a wild decade emerging around them. For us, the '60s were not the cliché they subsequently became – their glamour appropriated into the formative years of so-called selfish baby boomers, and a source of resentment. These were years of adventures and experiment for anyone who dared.

But even during the '50s, mistakenly maligned for a cultural dryness akin to the unmade roads we manoeuvred our bikes along, a local attraction like the Enfield Pool presented itself in anticipation as liquid luxury. You wouldn't call it romantic, but it overflowed with teenage longing and looking forward. Diving and swimming underwater, you'd stand in the pool with your legs apart and the boys would dive between them. Skin to skin was not overt, but sparking energy was everywhere, and so eagerly awaited. Then another bike ride home in the dry heat of an Adelaide summer dusk and a plate of cold Fritz and cucumber, with tomato-and-onion salad smothered in vinegar.

Was it the same in every city in every state in Australia at the time? Trying not to romanticise, attempting generously to afford all Australians the luscious recollection of puberty and the wet dreams of our teenage years, I still keep thinking it was different in Adelaide. Perhaps the difference was in a higher contrast between pool and pavement, between softness in friendship and hardness in the unmade streets we ran through. And the unrelenting dry of the background to our adventures.

The founding fathers thought the River Torrens would support a city – they were wrong. Soldier of fortune Colonel William Light thought he could contain a city inside four garden parks – he was wrong. The water dried up and the city sprawled. Outside Adelaide, the pastoralists mercilessly denuded their fields in an attempt to make crops yield while the Murray's seemingly infinite powers of irrigation eventually produced a glut of fruit. To get to my mum's birthplace now requires a drive through bare, brown, dry, stubbly

country to a place where the vines and the groves are ragged and abandoned. What other hopefulness was also abandoned?

WHEN HE MADE his break from ‘the old man’ – the fake grandfather for whom he had toiled in various inner city pubs – Dad worked for a time at Kelvinators. He cycled there, and took a tough, brown leather kitbag with his lunch in it. One of his brothers-in-law worked there too, and another worked at the British Tube Mills. South Australia was a model of CSIRO doctrine, which at the outset, one hundred years ago, had its sights on an international reputation for Australian agricultural supremacy. The images of fields and wheat and noble sheep are ingrained in the visual memory of the ’50s at primary school. But it became obvious that wheat and sheep would not be the only answer to the country’s global ambitions. Postwar strategy determined that Australia would lead the world in manufacturing; in South Australia we drove the Holdens that were made here, and later we drove the Mitsubishis that were made here. Creature of habit, I still drive one – and we are only just at the grievous end of that abandoned phase.

Dad lost his job as a mechanic at a second-hand car dealership that went bust during the credit squeeze in the ’60s, and drove trucks to Mt Isa for a while. When Mum and I cried too much, he was helped by one of his brothers-in-law to get a clerk’s job at a subsidiary of the British Tube Mills, and saw out his working days there – a salary man with no super.

Meanwhile, I was blessed with a Commonwealth scholarship – which was, despite its egalitarian justifications, still a rare thing in boganland – and found myself in an era of hope and apparent progress. It felt as if the dryness of the ’50s, which I never hated and never resented, started magically to produce lush stuff in the late ’60s and into the ’70s. Don Dunstan poured refreshing waters on eager imaginations as he preached avocados on the Murray and a love of the arts. The state began to flower, and in that garden, time and again, I got my chances.

FAST FORWARD SOME forty, mostly successful South Australian years, to September 2016. It is the night before my mother’s funeral and the next day my family will agree with a smile that ‘the old girl’s not going quietly’. The

weather is apocalyptic. The power is out and we scramble to Ikea for more candles. The sky is low and dark and there are no streetlights to comfort the gridlocked roads. There's something distinctly exciting about it; I want to ring interstate, but I have to use the mobile sparingly in case charging is a long time off. I learn from the car radio that the entire state has lost power, and compliment the kids at Ikea for the Swedish engineering that allows them to stay open. They tell me it's a German building, and I feel foolishly proud of my German heritage and cultural affinities. There are fewer people than I've ever seen in what's become a family-outing destination, but the candle section is lively with an excited, hurried air.

Back at the flat, my tiny space now looks like a set for *Liberace*. My neighbours have a battery-powered radio and I get bulletins on the half hour, the first being that the premier is saying power may not be restored until tomorrow afternoon. Interesting funeral, I think, and haul out the ukulele to see if I can remember the chords to 'Abide With Me', the beautiful hymn I last sang in Lucknow's Christian burial ground at the first-ever memorial service there for Walter Burley Griffin.

I don't enjoy the suffering and loss of life they usually entail, but I do enjoy catastrophic moments for the reminder they give us: that as much as we take it for granted, we do not control nature. I have enjoyed disaster movies since the 1950s in Hoyts Ozone Enfield, especially the classics I was weaned on – *The Rains of Ranchipur*, *The Naked Jungle*, *Elephant Walk* and, more recently, *The Perfect Storm*, *Twister*, *Outbreak*. Big storms (getting bigger all the time), high heat, fire, flood, earthquake, tsunami and plague: all of them tell us we are still not in control, and that in cruel and brutal ways the earth demands respect. People living closer to the land understand this better, often on a daily basis, but we in cities frequently forget. Here at the beach, when the king tides rise and wipe out sand dunes, and the winds gust across the gulf from the west and blow out windows along the Esplanade, we have a chance to be more regularly reminded.

The power is restored much more quickly than expected, and the next day – the morning of Mum's service – we learn that a massive storm simply knocked down the huge power-line-bearing structures. The sense of danger kicks in way too late, as we hear stories of a hospital where backup generators

failed to kick in, of embryos unfreezing. It's only now I wonder how all those old people my mother so recently slept near got on in the dark, despite the sad little torches on their bedside tables, and reflect on my carelessness in enjoying the moment and my forgetfulness of anyone on life support.

But mainly what I'm thinking, as I put on a raincoat to go and harvest lavender and rosemary – things which grow well in the sand and salty air – for family and friends to place on Mary's coffin, is the arrogance with which any human here thinks they can predict what nature will do even tomorrow, let alone in ten, one hundred, one thousand or one hundred thousand years. Because a Royal Commission has now declared nuclear storage safe to consider, and we South Australians are being asked to share the commission's confidence. But in the wake of the storm, and the observation that, while such storms have always been around, their effects are more dramatic in the higher temperatures that climate change is producing, we must be sceptical about arguments that rely on the premise of geographic and geological stability.

It's not as if South Australia hasn't had volcanic activity: Mount Gambier's major tourist attraction, the Blue Lake, bears tantalising witness. And it's not as if the state hasn't had earthquakes: a fond memory from the northern 'burbs is of Dad scooping me up in his arms and running into his meticulously designed sunken garden at the front of the house as it shook to its flimsy grey concrete-brick foundations in the middle of the night. And, yes, I should do more research on the vast difference between the lands on which Mount Gambier and Adelaide sit, and those proposed for the facility in the north. But I, like hundreds of thousands of others, won't have the time or skills to do that research and will just have to trust what others say.

Many of us trusted the Don, who was already ill when he went through the world investigating the safety of nuclear power and its storage. It felt to me as if the disappointment killed him. He hoped for new energy and economic alternatives for South Australia, but his hopes were dashed when he couldn't be convinced that nuclear waste could be safely stored – couldn't countenance the damage that would be caused, for both the land, in this state and beyond, and for the state's reputation, if some unforeseen act of nature occurred, such as we have since observed in Fukushima.

For those of us who love the place, some of the damage is already done. Many who have worked hard at building South Australia's cultural reputation see that reputation being eaten away by the prospect of the state being labelled a dump. It risks becoming a laughing stock, even if the pursuit for much-needed alternative streams of income come from a genuine place. It might make more sense if the state could profit from its own nuclear energy and store its own waste; but not to have energy and yet to take the world's waste feels, some say, absurd. Others will say dangerous.

Yet even if a seismic event never shifts the ground so dramatically that the waste spills or leaks and makes the land toxic, there's the risk that the state's reputation is suffering simply in considering this move. Is something like the achievement of Adelaide's new status as a UNESCO City of Music enough to counterbalance such fears? We relish the tourist tout of splendid vineyards; I am a Coonawarra snob out of Southwark heritage. I also cleave to the dry red landscape of the Flinders. The gulf waters I hear each night I get to sleep in my own bed host not only sharks but King George whiting too. I'm not oblivious to the natural beauty and riches of this dry place. I miss it when I'm away a long time, and cherish the return.

SHOULD WE BE PROUD of this proposal, and think of it as consistent with the spirit of bold reform and hopefulness that has characterised South Australia since its beginnings? One young relative of mine observed that we could be doing the world a favour by storing safely what other nations are storing haphazardly, without the kind of advanced technology South Australia can contribute to the project. It's a subject we were discussing in a ward of the Royal Adelaide Hospital where my mother was in what turned out to be her fatal decline.

This clever young woman reminded me of the amount of nuclear waste already being stored underneath us. Like the light rail in Canberra, is this a project that the young can support, despite the cost, while older citizens quiver? Or are the grounds for scepticism well-founded? Is this dream of a clean green state in line with the surprising humanity that grew from its aridity?

It is unfair that the recent massive power failure was exploited by opponents to criticise the state's reliance on renewable energy targets, but it

is unwise to ignore the many questions, both scientific and spiritual, that a nuclear proposal invites. The First Peoples of this land gave clear warnings about disturbing the deep heart of Maralinga. They said a huge bad force would rise up, and more recently apologised to the people of Fukushima because they believed it was likely that Australian uranium had ended up there. Is the proposal for a nuclear waste facility in South Australia a dream, or a nightmare?

At the same time, there is triumph over the submarine-building contract. 'Jobs and growth', the cry goes up, recalling Brecht's ironic poem 'Freedom and Democracy'. And yes, South Australia needs jobs. But does Australia need submarines? Aren't those in the know reckoning drones the better investment? And is this contract resigning South Australia back to that 1950s manufacturing ethos, to which the men of my family once adhered? Places that don't get these kinds of major project bailouts have no choice but to get creative and invent new jobs for the twenty-first century: new smart projects and occupations, facilities and services. More suspicion: in this case, that the smarts will be happening in France, and in South Australia only blue-collar jobs – genuinely great for the short-term fix for those out-of-workers, but if it really means harking back to a manufacturing past in lieu of getting smarter post-manufacture, what is the promise for the state's future?

South Australia has a noble history of risk-taking. I, and so many others, have benefitted from those risks and that spirit of reform. We love the state, its natural beauty, splendid produce, and all the relative calm of Adelaide in comparison with bigger, busier cities. Mostly, our hope is that decisions made now will ensure that generations to come, from this country and others, still feel the same way.

Robyn Archer AO is a singer, writer, artistic director and public advocate for the arts. She is the City of Gold Coast's strategic advisor, arts and culture; Chair of the Gold Coast Cultural Precinct and of NIDA's MFA (Cultural Leadership) program; and artistic director of *The Light in Winter*, which she created for Federation Square. She won the Helpmann Award as Australia's Best Cabaret Performer of 2013, and was named Cabaret Icon at the 2016 Adelaide Cabaret Festival. She is a member of the European House of Culture and a mentor for the European Festivals Association's Academy. She holds honorary doctorates from both Flinders University and Griffith University.

ESSAY

Stormy times

Living with uncertainty

John Spoehr

IN SEPTEMBER 2016, South Australia was buffeted by the most ferocious storm in half a century. Apocalyptic clouds gathered as thousands of lightning strikes hit the saturated landscape. The nation watched the unfolding crisis as an intense low-pressure system, two tornadoes, flooding rains and high tides demonstrated nature's raw and unforgiving energy. Cyclonic winds felled transmission towers in the north, triggering a blackout that plunged the state into darkness. Meanwhile, torrential rains threatened flash flooding, provoking two days of collective trepidation as swollen rivers broke their banks, destroying crops and inundating houses.

The blackout was met with incredulity, triggering a political storm centered on the state's reliance on wind-energy generation. That transmission towers laid strewn across the landscape was an inconvenient truth – the power of wind rather than wind power was the problem. It was a cruel visitation in a state already buffeted by economic headwinds.

South Australia enters 2017 facing mass layoffs in the automotive manufacturing industry and the potential closure of the local steel industry. These two shocks combined threaten to obliterate more than twenty-five thousand jobs.

With economic growth expected to remain subdued over the remainder of the decade, there were growing fears in late 2016 that unemployment and underemployment would rise sharply, exceeding levels reached in South Australia during the global financial crisis (GFC). While the GFC inflicted great economic damage and hardship internationally, Australia and SA fared much better than most expected. In September 2008, then Premier Mike Rann boasted that careful management, and continued growth in mining, meant that unemployment fell to 4.4 per cent. Rarely does Australia outperform the rest of the world during global economic crises, but the early adoption of stimulus measures, rather than austerity, bolstered investment and employment at a critical time.

While unemployment rose significantly in following years as plans to open new mines were put on hold, it remained well below the frightening heights reached during the recessions of the 1980s and 1990s. The national unemployment rate stayed below 6.2 per cent, in trend terms, while SA's unemployment peaked at 8.2 per cent, a fifteen-year high, in July 2015. By August 2016 it had declined to 6.6 per cent. This was exceptional by international standards.

Australia emerged less scathed by the global economic storm than many other parts of the world, but the high Australian dollar acted like a wrecking ball on SA's manufacturing sector, and the collapse in commodity prices brought about a dramatic end to what was a modest mining exploration boom. The state lost thousands of manufacturing jobs during this period – taking total losses to around twenty-five thousand over the decade. The closure of the automotive manufacturing industry follows this, threatening a period of slower growth and rising unemployment unless additional job-rich investment measures are put in place.

While so many other nations were plunged into deep recession by the GFC, Australia avoided the calamity through both stimulus and sustained Chinese demand for the nation's mineral resources. The 2008–2009 Rudd government's \$42 billion stimulus package did what it needed to do – fill the investment gap created by the sharp decline in private investment at that time. Without it, it is certain that unemployment would have risen sharply and remained high for many years. By contrast, those nations that pursued

austerity policies, notably Greece and Spain, experienced chronically high rates of unemployment and underemployment, creating great social and economic hardship for millions.

With Australia's response to the GFC fresh in the minds of some, and the closure of General Motors-Holden looming, federal policy-makers have felt compelled to act more boldly to prevent escalating unemployment and hardship in the wake of the closure. With investment of more than \$1.3 billion per year lost from the South Australian economy as a result, new projects are needed to fill the gap and prevent unemployment rising in early 2018. While the project to construct twelve new submarines in South Australia will generate early site preparation work, their manufacture is not likely to begin until the mid 2020s. Temporary work on the construction of offshore patrol vessels aims to keep the workforce intact until the submarine build gets underway.

The social and economic costs of responding parsimoniously to the automotive closure are high. South Australia goes into 2017 with a male unemployment rate of around 7 per cent, and male full-time employment growth in reverse. This is a diabolical combination. After peaking at around 365,000 in 2008, total male full-time employment is now around 336,000. It threatens to get much lower. During the 1990s recession it bottomed out at around 313,000. So with male full-time employment in reverse, job prospects for men in particular are poor – both in terms of quantity and quality. All the recent growth in male employment has been part-time, so we can expect underemployment to rise sharply with the automotive closure given the lack of full-time employment growth in industries where men predominate. While continued growth in employment in service industries has underpinned rising female participation in the workforce, much of this growth has been in casual and part-time jobs, fuelling rising underemployment for women.

Employment growth in South Australia is largely concentrated in health, aged care and community services, providing limited opportunities for workers with decades of experience in manufacturing. For those who do successfully make the transition into the service sector, it is often into less secure part-time and casual jobs, fuelling the rise of underemployment. For many others the risk of unemployment is high. Around one third of retrenched manufacturing workers typically experience long-term unemployment after

retrenchment, particularly during periods of slow growth. To avoid this it is necessary to bring forward infrastructure and construction projects that provide much needed short-term employment opportunities while efforts are underway to accelerate the growth of more enduring jobs in areas where demand is strong. In other words, short-term job-rich stimulus needs to coincide with medium-term industrial transformation and diversification efforts in response to major shocks like the automotive closure.

The end of a boom in engineering and construction projects is compounding the poor jobs outlook. On the back of the 2009 stimulus package, substantial commitments to infrastructure expenditure by the state government boosted growth over the five years to 2016. This included the new Royal Adelaide Hospital, which acted as a catalyst for investment in adjacent research and education buildings by the university sector. The great urban development that is taking place in the city of Adelaide will be transformative. Billions of dollars have been invested in a new health precinct, oval, light rail system and convention centre. This process of modernisation and invigoration has been accompanied by a significant increase in the residential population.

The bulk of this work is due for completion in 2017, when capital expenditure is expected to decline in the absence of new projects coming on stream. Agreement on a suite of new projects is urgently needed.

FORTUNATELY FOR SOUTH Australia, fear of an electoral backlash at the 2016 Federal election appeared to motivate both the Abbott and Turnbull federal governments to break a recent drought on jointly funded capital works projects. One of the last acts of Tony Abbott as prime minister was to announce a commitment of \$790 million to the one billion dollar Northern Connector road project, a forty-three kilometre freeway that will link Gawler and Regency Park. This was a breakthrough in federal–state relations at the time, opening the door for further possible infrastructure commitments from Canberra. Of course, South Australia could choose to fund additional infrastructure projects through increased borrowings, given record low interest rates. Whatever the funding source, the immediate imperative is to sustain high levels of infrastructure expenditure in an effort to contain

rising unemployment when the full impact of the automotive manufacturing closure hits in late 2017. This of course needs to coincide with efforts to accelerate the diversification of the South Australian economy into areas where domestic and global demand is strong. Having made some progress in funding negotiations with the federal government, the South Australian government identified a suite of infrastructure projects for the federal government to consider co-investing in during the 2016 federal election. While no agreements have been struck to fund any new projects, the multi-billion dollar package of transport and infrastructure projects is not likely to disappear off the radar altogether, particularly with a state election looming. The state government will need to be an aggressive investment partner to get the package of projects off the ground.

HAVING ENDURED THE ravages of extreme weather, SA faces an economic storm when General Motors-Holden and much of its supply chain closes in late 2017. This will be a more serious shock than the closure of Mitsubishi Motors in 2008 because it comes at a more difficult time in the state's economic history, and will impact the entire automotive supply chain. Estimates of the direct and indirect job losses in South Australia resulting from the closure have been as high as twenty-four thousand, depending on the assumptions used. While some strategies have been put in place by the state and federal governments to support workers and companies, the closure leaves a \$1.3 billion per annum investment hole in South Australia. While progress was being made towards filling this hole, there is a high risk that unemployment and underemployment will still rise.

South Australia's economic woes were compounded when the struggling Whyalla steelworks was placed into voluntary administration in 2016. Whyalla is a quintessential steel town, home to about twenty-two thousand people. Around a quarter of Whyalla's eleven thousand strong workforce is employed by Arrium's steel manufacturing and mining operations. Closure of both would fuel a vicious cycle of decline in the absence of offsetting investments like expansion of BHP Billiton's Olympic Dam operations. Nothing short of transformative change will ensure the ageing steelworks' future. This is likely to include the need for a major upgrade of ageing steel furnaces and

the modernisation of systems to enable the manufacture of higher value steel products and a diversified product range. It will also require patient investment by the South Australian and federal governments to enable the plant to survive – something policy-makers across the political divide appear to agree on.

Given the federal government's response to the threatened closure of the automotive manufacturing industry, it was hard to imagine any substantial assistance to the ailing steel industry. Fear of a backlash at the 2016 federal election appeared to elicit a more pragmatic response. In March 2016, the government announced that it would bring forward the upgrade of the Adelaide-to-Tarcoola railway line, directing a major steel order to the Whyalla steelworks. It confirmed that it would also be willing to provide a loan to Arrium as part of a joint state–federal government rescue plan. This stood in stark contrast to the combative approach taken during the height of the automotive crisis three years earlier when Tony Abbott declared he would 'not chase them [GMH] down the road waving a blank cheque at them'.

With all the difficulties facing South Australia, the Turnbull government was under enormous electoral pressure from the surging Nick Xenophon party and a more united Labor Party to deliver some good economic news in the 2016 campaign. Having supported the Northern Connector, South Australians eagerly awaited the decision about where the nation's new fleet of submarines would be manufactured.

Hopes faded in late 2014 that SA would remain the centre for naval shipbuilding when former federal Liberal defence minister David Johnston declared that he 'wouldn't trust' the Australian Submarine Corporation (ASC) 'to build a canoe'. It proved to be a major error of judgement on his part when Prime Minister Tony Abbott sacked him from the ministry.

The day after Anzac Day 2016, Prime Minister Turnbull delivered welcome news to South Australians and South Australian Liberals worried about their flagging electoral prospects: French company DCNS was awarded the contract to design twelve new submarines to be built in Adelaide at a cost of around \$50 billion. In addition, the state would also be the base for the manufacture of offshore patrol vessels for two years before the project was transferred to Western Australia. These projects amount to a \$90 billion

investment by Canberra in defence shipbuilding, enough to underwrite the defence manufacturing business for decades to come.

As long as a high proportion of the design, construction and sustainment work is undertaken locally, the submarine project has the potential to accelerate the transformation and modernisation of the manufacturing sector. Maritime defence projects – designing and building submarines – are among the most complex of engineering projects. They require the development and application of advanced technologies by highly skilled workers. A network of sophisticated companies is needed to deliver and maintain a fleet of vessels that can endure incredibly demanding operational conditions for decades.

THE GREAT SWEDISH economist Gunnar Eliasson has argued that complex manufacturing projects like military aircraft and submarines represent ‘technical universities’, places where high value knowledge and skills are developed and successfully applied. Nothing can be taken for granted, however. To extract the full benefit of these projects, it’s necessary to appreciate the value of complexity and put in place the required policies and practices to leverage the full range of opportunities that can flow from very large-scale knowledge-intensive projects. Some of the institutional building blocks for extracting this value are in place in SA, including the Tonsley Innovation Precinct and Flinders University in Adelaide’s southern suburbs, the SA health and medical research precinct surrounding the new Royal Adelaide Hospital, the Waite Research Institute, Technology Park in Adelaide’s northern suburbs and the TechInSA bio-innovation precinct in Thebarton.

The successful implementation of highly complex defence projects relies on well-established global defence supply chains, dominated by the US, France, Spain, Germany, Sweden and Japan. Locally owned defence electronics, systems integration and manufacturing companies play an important but ancillary role in all of this. While foreign players dominate the Australian defence industry, South Australia has developed foundational expertise and infrastructure to ensure that the state is able to play a major role in the delivery of ships for the Australian Navy. Without the ASC shipbuilding operations and Techport at Osborne, South Australia would have little to contribute. ASC has decades of experience in shipbuilding, delivering some highly

sophisticated manufactured products, and the world-class facility at Osborne is able to draw on a highly experienced and skilled workforce.

Past experience with complex defence projects tells us that substantial economic benefit can be captured by harnessing so-called knowledge and technological spillovers – commercial applications of knowledge and technologies in the civilian sector. New and existing companies can benefit greatly from this, particularly where deliberate strategies identify and capture such spillovers. One of the most likely is the exchange of high-value knowledge and skills among scientists and engineers, helping to accelerate both understanding and applications of advanced technologies such as 3D printing, nanotechnology and smart materials.

While many local jobs will flow from the shipbuilding projects, many more could be generated in industries such as medical devices, assistive technologies for the elderly and those with a disability, energy generation and storage, and autonomous vehicles and boats. Significant progress has been made in the medical and assistive-devices sector through the Medical Devices Partnering Program, run by the Medical Devices Research Institute at Flinders University. Additional resources need to be invested in expanding and replicating the model, but this will take time. While the submarines won't be in production until the 2020s, major site preparation and design work will generate short-term job opportunities, although not necessarily for those who are made redundant in the automotive sector.

WHILE THE SEARCH for economic Eldorados remains irresistible for politicians, few would have anticipated that the Jay Weatherill-led state Labor government would establish a Royal Commission into the nuclear industry. On 19 March 2015, the Premier did just that, and commissioned Kevin Scarce AC, former governor, to investigate 'the potential for increasing South Australia's participation in the nuclear fuel cycle'. The audacity of this was astounding, with no clear endgame declared. This was high stakes politics given the Labor Party's historical opposition to nuclear power, processing and storage, and the premier's ties to the 'left' of the Labor Party. Commissioner Scarce reported to the premier on 6 May 2016, dismissing nuclear energy generation and processing of uranium, but concluding that large-scale

radioactive waste storage could deliver a significant economic benefit. This claim was contested by environmental groups, the Australia Institute and several unions, and putting aside the merits of the economic argument, it is difficult to imagine the proposal will jump the bar of community support the state government has set itself to trigger a more detailed feasibility assessment. Even Finland, which is well advanced in the construction of a waste storage facility, has indicated that it will not store other nations' nuclear waste. It seems highly improbable that South Australia will become the international exception and take on nuclear waste from around the globe.

The premier made much of the need to get community agreement in order to further investigate the Royal Commission's recommendations. In 2016, the state government commissioned the Orwellian sounding democracyCo to implement a 'citizen's jury' to test the proposition 'in what circumstances could South Australia pursue the opportunity to store and dispose of nuclear waste from other countries?' Citizen's juries have been used before in South Australia, but to resolve far less complex problems like how to reduce the numbers of unwanted animals, and how motorists and cyclists might share roads more safely.

The juries were a manifestation of the Weatherill government's 'consult and decide' approach to governance, an attempt to avoid accusations levelled at the government in the past of being insufficiently consultative. While most South Australians were not particularly interested in the nuclear waste debate, thinking it unlikely to lead to anything tangible, a relatively small group of influential individuals, including Kevin Scarce, who is also chancellor of the University of Adelaide, mining industry leaders and some academics, were strong advocates for a nuclear industry in South Australia. Key figures in the Weatherill government, including former industry minister Tom Kenyon, along with former federal Liberal MP Sean Edwards, have been enthusiastic advocates.

In November 2016, the Citizens Jury delivered its verdict on the Royal Commission's proposals. Two thirds of the jury of more than three hundred participants rejected the proposal, stating that they did not want to see SA storing high-level nuclear waste 'under any circumstances'. Despite their judgement, the premier continues to consider the nuclear waste storage

proposal, and has announced a state-wide referendum to gauge the opinion of South Australians on the subject.

DESPITE A NUMBER of high profile mining and energy projects failing to get off the ground, hopes remain high that the sector will eventually deliver a substantial jobs-and-growth dividend. While the much-hyped \$30 billion expansion of the Olympic Dam by BHP Billiton was put 'on hold' in late 2013, a scaled-down version of the project is likely to proceed when commodity prices are more favourable, and more cost-effective extraction methods are available. Less likely to proceed is the search for oil in the Great Australian Bight, with BP walking away from a billion-dollar commitment to deep-water oil exploration. While the minerals and energy sector will be a significant contributor to export income and tax/royalty revenue, it is not likely to generate the thousands of jobs needed to replace those lost in manufacturing, particularly given the growing use of automation. After rising to around nine thousand at the peak of the exploration and investment cycle, employment in the South Australian mining sector declined to just six thousand in 2016.

South Australia's jobs challenge is complicated by the revolutionary implications that new technologies have for the way we work. It forces a reconsideration of the employment growth potential of existing and new industries. While employment growth has always been impacted by technology, a new debate now rages about whether technologically induced job creation will be outpaced by job destruction flowing from automation and applications of artificial intelligence. We have long been told that technology will generate more jobs than it displaces, but this is now much less certain. Existing technologies will automate many routine tasks, and more sophisticated jobs are now at risk as advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning are making it possible to also automate an increasing range of complex tasks such as medical diagnosis, debt-risk assessment and human-robot interaction. Some estimates suggest that more than 40 per cent of all jobs are vulnerable to high levels of automation over the next decade. More recent research focusing on the automation of tasks rather than jobs suggests a much less dramatic outcome. Whatever measure you use, regions with

industries that have a high proportion of jobs involving routine tasks will be significantly impacted. South Australia will not be immune from this.

While fears about disruption and automation are not without foundation, they tend to be technologically deterministic – overestimating both the pace of change and the relative advantages of automated solutions. There is little doubt that the current wave of technological innovations is truly transformative, particularly when paired with the power of digital technologies. Nanotechnology, biotechnology, photonics, 3D printing, artificial intelligence and simulation are among a suite of revolutionary technologies transforming industries and workplaces.

When applied holistically for the benefit of society, this new industrial revolution bristles with opportunities to build a more diversified, knowledge-based economy capable of generating rewarding, well-paid and secure jobs. Complex problem solving, creativity and design are foundational capabilities, alongside deep knowledge and critical insights from the social sciences, humanities, science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Securing this knowledge-intensive social and economic development pathway will require sustained investment in the uptake and diffusion of technology by government and industry, along with the modernisation of social and physical infrastructure and the innovation ecosystem.

Investment in modernising the Adelaide CBD has already delivered great benefits. Last year, The Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Adelaide the fifth most liveable city in the world. While the state government has done a great deal to modernise and invigorate the city, much more needs to be done, particularly in suburban Adelaide. The benefits of nation-building investments in suburban and regional development in the postwar period and the 1970s have been exhausted. This needs to be remedied by targeted investment in modernisation of the state's suburban centres, particularly in Adelaide's northern suburbs, where significant population growth will be accommodated over decades to come.

A strategy to bring disparate policy agendas together is urgently needed. The state government needs to be a more aggressive driver of this, boosting the capacity and capability of its relatively meagrely resourced economic and industry development divisions within the Department of State Development

(DSD) to lead the co-design of sophisticated sectoral strategies in collaboration with industry, universities, agencies and NGOs. The DSD once boasted the most cultivated manufacturing strategy in the nation, *Manufacturing Works*. Released in 2012, it was a blueprint for a more integrated and sophisticated approach to transforming manufacturing, increasing its complexity and global competitiveness. It needs to be refreshed and reinvigorated as part of a suite of strategies designed to accelerate industrial transformation and diversification in South Australia.

South Australia lacks well-resourced economic and industry policy development capabilities in government, industry and academia. The DSD has limited capacity for economic development strategy and policy development. Meanwhile, the Economic Development Board has not renewed the substantial work it did on economic strategy in 2009.

The major industry associations – including Business SA and the Australian Industry Group along with SA Unions – make only modest contributions to economic development strategy, relying on the state government to play the lead role. Broadly speaking, South Australia lacks the sophisticated economic and industry strategy it needs to deal with the profound economic challenges it faces. While the federal government made a contribution to this through its reviews of the South Australian and Victorian economies in 2013, the responses lacked grounding in a sophisticated national innovation policy and appreciation of the need for a more interventionist role for government in economic and industry development.

WHILE THE TURNBULL government's 2015 National Science and Innovation Agenda helped to fill the innovation-policy vacuum, real progress is slow. Significant institutional and cultural change is necessary to improve innovation performance, particularly in relation to the commercialisation of highly complex goods and services that sustain knowledge and skill-intensive employment. This would go a long way to improving global competitiveness. National and state innovation-partnering programs are needed to support collaboration in areas with high growth potential like medical devices and assistive technologies, energy storage, prefabricated construction, and health and ageing services.

The one-off projects currently being funded by national funding schemes – including the Entrepreneurs Program, and the Australian Research Council and National Health and Medical Research Council – are important; they must be complemented by increased investment in grounded industry and community-linked research and development initiatives. We don't yet have the right models in place for doing this in a sustained way in Australia, although there are good international examples to learn from: the German network of Fraunhofer institutes, and Finland's VTT Technical Research Centre, point to ways to accelerate knowledge transfer and industrial transformation. Fraunhofer IAO Stuttgart has partnered with the Australian Industrial Transformation Institute at Flinders University on a series of industrial-transformation projects in assistive technology and changing demand for goods and services arising from population ageing. The state government could help to accelerate the development of these strategically important international collaborations through partnership arrangements to extend the capabilities of South Australia's universities at a modest cost of around \$25 million over five years.

While dark clouds gather on the economic horizon, the threat they pose could be minimised by job-rich stimulus measures to accelerate the growth of knowledge and design-intensive industries in response to both domestic and global demand, particularly from the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, entrenched unemployment, growing underemployment, poverty and inequality must be confronted by well-integrated social and economic policies with the same commitment and vigour that we have seen in times of crisis when great storms, drought, economic shocks and recessions threaten hardship and suffering. South Australia must be well prepared and positioned to manage all of these challenges.

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MEMOIR

Fly in, fly far away

Life together, at a distance

Tracy Crisp

THE ARGUMENT IN the car starts the way it always does. One brother's arm is around the other's shoulders, the two are wrestling, both are laughing and then the eldest uses too much force, the youngest screams and from the front seat I swear. It's as if it has been scripted, except...

'It's different with you here,' I say to my husband. 'One of them sits in the front when you're not here. There's no arguments.'

This is how it has been the whole week of his visit. He doesn't know which seat is his at the table or where he should hang his towel. He doesn't know where to drop the kids for school or which day the bins are emptied. I moved some dresses out of the wardrobe to make room for his suit, but there's no drawer for his socks, so he uses his suitcase. We eat from plates and drink from glasses that he has never seen. I sleep on the right when I have usually used the left. And now we are in the car that I bought, driving him back to the airport, and our boys have started to fight. I hadn't noticed they were missing until now.

For six months I have lived in Adelaide with our children while he lives in Abu Dhabi. We did live together in Abu Dhabi, all of us, for seven years, but then it was time for me to leave. The usual array of expatriate worries underlay the decision: giving your children somewhere to call home; missing too many family weddings; parents not as young as they used to be; and, year

after year, the distance growing between you and your friends. It was time to come home.

But the issue of my husband's employment seemed insurmountable. At other times in our lives when we've wanted to move, we've just chucked in our jobs and taken our chances wherever we've landed. But it's different this time. We're older now and so are our children. Our superannuation, paying for our children's university degrees, the uneasy knowledge that health in middle age becomes a more precarious thing – we have to be more careful. 'We can always come back,' we said to ourselves as we prepared to leave Adelaide again. 'There'll always be a job.' But after seven years, too much had changed. Old allies gone, a new CEO. The Adelaide office is managed out of Melbourne now. My husband is an engineer and there aren't many cranes on the skyline.

'There's a job in Sydney,' my husband said as we tried to negotiate his repatriation. 'We could go to Brisbane. What about Perth?'

But I wanted – I want – to live in Adelaide. We can afford a better house, we understand the schools, the food is good, the festivals are fabulous. But there's much more to it than that. I'll be fifty soon. After a lifetime of wanderlust and restlessness, of travelling here and living there, I'm feeling the need to settle, to bury my roots in something more than sand. It is a deep and visceral need. I'm from Adelaide; what's the point of living in Australia but still not feeling at home?

And that's how it's come to be that I live in Adelaide and my husband lives in Abu Dhabi.

'CAN YOU CHANGE these light bulbs while you're here?' I ask when he arrives. 'Can you hang the corkboard? Can you buy a rake and a broom and deal with the leaves?'

I can do all these things, of course I can. I can change light bulbs, drill holes, rake leaves – but I have underestimated the physical energy that moving back to Adelaide would take. I'm sick of problem solving, I'm over making decisions, and I'm exhausted. You're here for five days and you've got six months' work to do, my love. Roll up your sleeves.

'Have you got your passport?' I ask in the car.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ he says. ‘I guess it’s in my bag.’

‘You haven’t checked? I would have checked.’

‘She would have double-checked,’ says a voice from the back seat.

‘She would have triple-checked.’ His brother.

Of course he hasn’t double-checked, because he doesn’t need to. I have already forgotten that in the life he leads it’s part of the subconscious act of leaving home. Wallet, phone, passport.

I feel the physical distance between myself and the rest of the world. In Abu Dhabi people come and go, come and go. London is six hours one way, Singapore is six hours the other. In Adelaide, people leave. Or people stay. A six-hour flight will hardly get you out of the country.

At night, I lie in my bed and listen for the Emirates flight to Dubai. I follow the sound of the plane for as long as I can out over the sea, banking, turning, beginning its twelve-hour flight to the west. This is the noise that woke me in the mornings when I was a child. When I was my children’s age and my parents brought me to Adelaide, we stayed in my grandfather’s house a few streets away from where I live now. I woke to the sound of planes taking off, flying over the suburbs as they left Adelaide behind. Listening now to that late-night plane, I remember how it felt to wake in that house down the road. Somewhere safe that wasn’t home. ‘Goodnight, my love.’ I send a final WhatsApp message. ‘I can’t wait until you are home.’

‘Do you know my biggest fear?’ I said to my husband when we were trying to work out how it would all work out. ‘I’m scared you’ll die and then I’ll never have sex again.’

‘What? Why would you think that?’ He laughed. ‘I won’t die.’

But as our period of global celibacy grows longer, I feel our intimacy diminishing. Skype calls get harder to co-ordinate, and each time he visits we take longer to find our equilibrium. I think of all the hundreds of thousands of immigrant labourers. Philippine families who can’t afford trips home. Labourers who have their passports taken by employers. Get over yourself, I think.

EVEN AIRPORTS ARE more relaxed on Sunday mornings. The place is full, but no one is running across from the car park or pushing their way

to the front of the queue. My husband gets his bags checked through for his connecting flight to Melbourne, then on to Abu Dhabi.

‘Coffee?’ he asks.

‘Is there a Subway?’ asks our eldest boy.

They line up at Cibo and I go to the newsagent. I think of the many long nights ahead, and buy *The Saturday Paper*, *The New Scientist*, *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian Weekly*, and *Adam Spencer’s Big Book of Numbers*.

‘Have a good journey,’ the woman behind the counter says to me.

‘Oh, I’m not...’ I stop, because I don’t have the energy to explain and because she isn’t interested in my explanations. ‘Thanks.’

I go back to Cibo. The hot chocolate is as good as it ever is, the cheese in the piadina is melted the perfect amount, but the *caffè latte* is more of a miss than a hit. We stand at the long glass wall, looking out over the tarmac to the gentle grey line of the hills.

And then we are standing at the gate and the final passengers are boarding.

How did it happen? How did we come to this place where we would be spending our lives together but living apart?

‘It’s not the life I would have chosen.’ I have heard myself saying it over cups of coffee and glasses of wine. True enough that it’s not what we planned – even two months ago we didn’t know we’d be living like this. But it’s not the life I would have *chosen*? I don’t know if that’s true, because what life would I choose? Which decisions would I make differently? Which fingers of fate would I pray to change direction? I will always want to leave, to travel, work overseas. And I would always want to come back.

My husband crosses the airbridge. He does not look back. I watch as he lifts his hand, rubs it across his forehead and over the back of his head.

I cannot catch my breath.

‘It’s all right, Mum.’ The boys close in around me. The youngest starts to talk and the eldest rubs my back.

On our way out, we pass a man my husband used to know back in the days when we said we could always come back. He has put on weight, his hair has thinned, his corduroy jacket is brown. I think of catching his eye, of waving, but the forks in the road and paths not chosen make it all too exhausting.

The youngest boy is still talking, the eldest still rubbing my back.

We get in the car and, partly because we have to take care of each other now, but mostly because there is one in the front and one in the back, there are no sibling arguments.

I drive and soon we are home.

The key is in the lock, the door is open.

The corkboard has not been hung.

The lightbulbs have not been changed.

Leaves, blown by the wind, scrape across the verandah and into the foyer.

My love is flying and I am still.

Tracy Crisp grew up in Port Pirie and Adelaide. She studied in China and Mexico, lived in New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates and has returned to Adelaide to establish her funeral consultancy, Vivimento. Her second novel, *Surrogate*, is set in the Royal Adelaide Hospital and will be published by Wakefield Press in 2017.

REPORTAGE

Dispatches from the radical centre

Nick Xenophon and the independent tendency

Dennis Atkins

SOUTH AUSTRALIANS HAVE a reputation for being a little bit up themselves. They speak with soft-toned vowels. They boast of their free-settler status, pride themselves as being the progressive heart of the nation and proclaim dominance in the arts, viticulture and cuisine. In Queensland, which is Australia's yin to the yang of South Australia, they say there's no snob like a South Australian snob. Through this mix of pride and suffering, the peers down long noses, South Australians don't worry too much, unless you talk to them about their economy. That's when they bristle, because it's always been a fragile entity – always looking for the next big project, the next big thing to carry their social and artistic ambitions into the future.

Many east-coast commentators have scorned South Australia for having a cargo-cult mentality, whether it was the defence industries of Woomera more than a century ago, the now almost defunct auto and white goods industries of more recent decades, the Roxby Downs mega mine or, in its latest iteration, the multi-billion dollar submarine contract. It's no surprise that, as the auto industry was slowly being shut down, state Labor governments had a decade-long 'Thinker in Residence' program – there were twenty-five of them – who did all manner of things from expanding the tram system to promoting a better and more cohesive design culture.

One other thing South Australians can boast of as being different is a political culture that bucks trends. For almost half a century, South Australia has had an independent streak in its polity, but it's not like that seen elsewhere. Queensland has its right-wing populists such as Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party, Clive Palmer's United Party and Bob Katter's eponymous party – all of whom have won parliamentary seats in Brisbane and Canberra during the past twenty years. In South Australia, meanwhile, this maverick trend has grown from the centre, with its modern appearance beginning in the early 1970s when the Liberal Movement broke from the traditionally conservative Liberal and Country League, and is still apparent today with the strongest new force the state has seen, the Nick Xenophon Team, outpolling Labor and taking seats from both major parties at the 2016 election.

Perhaps it's a coincidence of geography that a state with a radical centrist streak is in the centre of the nation, but the roots are deeper. From being the first place in the world to give women universal suffrage in 1895 – Australia was the first nation to do so a year after federation in 1901 – the state was also a trendsetter in education policy, setting up church-backed schools to complement the state system. Long-serving conservative Premier Tom Playford was a statist, promoting and backing state-owned utilities – such as a nation-leading power grid – and establishing one of the best public housing programs in the country. The state also played a prominent role in assisting and protecting manufacturing. It's no surprise it has been the scene of a moderate independent political tendency, such as we now see with Xenophon.

Xenophon sees the support for his own party as an ongoing tradition, and part of a heritage that sets South Australia apart. 'South Australians have always been receptive to new ideas, and we have seen our state as an incubator to new ideas,' Xenophon tells Griffith Review as he scurries through the streets of Adelaide, always on the go and always with a to-do list. 'Our share of the national population has slipped from about 10 per cent to 7 per cent, but we still manage to produce new ideas and we are looked to by those who are trialling trends and products.'

According to Xenophon, for decades companies would test products on consumers in the city known as the Athens of the South – taking national gambles on those that won favour and junking those that received the

thumbs down. 'Maybe we are an incubator for democracy,' muses Xenophon, continuing to riff the thought with a suggestion that other, more participatory political models could be trialled, not just one that cracks open the two-party system. This is already happening through a Better Together program, kicked off three years ago by Jay Weatherill's Labor government. This has seen three annual citizens' juries look at specific policy sets, such as ways to share the roads safely, and has developed a number of initiatives including Simplify, which asks the public to send in ideas to cut or reduce regulation.

The father of this modern centrist streak in South Australian politics is Steele Hall, who was premier of the state for just over two years, from April 1968 to June 1970. He is unique in Australian politics because he effectively legislated himself out of office, tossing out the so-called 'playmander' that had kept the Liberal Country League in power for about forty years, and introducing the first one-vote/one-value electoral system. The gerrymander had the state divided into just thirteen metropolitan seats, but twenty-six in the often sparsely populated country districts. Steele Hall expressed his embarrassment after being elected in 1968 despite having scored just 43.8 per cent of the popular vote against Labor's 52 per cent. Hall was a great proponent of social change – not just enacting electoral reform but also making great leaps forward in welfare, Aboriginal affairs and the regulation of abortion.

The Hall government also presided over the first decriminalisation of homosexuality in Australia – a cause led by Murray Hill, a Legislative Council member and father of Robert Hill, who was a successful Liberal senator and minister in the Howard government. Popular myth has Don Dunstan's government – which succeeded Hall – liberalising homosexual laws, but what the Labor Attorney-General Peter Duncan did was provide greater rights to gay people. The first to knock the bricks out of the wall was Hill, with the full and enthusiastic backing of Hall.

The electoral reform Hall put through parliament cost him the subsequent election, but his taste for independence didn't fade. He resigned from the Liberal Country League after two years as Opposition leader, saying the party had 'lost its idealism and forgotten its purpose for existence'. Hall formed the Liberal Movement, which had three parliamentarians: Hall and Robin Millhouse in the Assembly and Martin Cameron in the Legislative

Council. Xenophon is one of many South Australians who remember Hall's role in the history of his state and its place in national politics – Hall went on to serve three years in the Senate and fifteen years in the House of Representatives. 'I think he was one of the greats of all time,' says Xenophon.

Xenophon nominates Hall as not just his favourite South Australian politician but also the most underrated in the last eighty years. 'He was an incredibly principled modernist who reformed the electoral system to his direct disadvantage. He was a visionary who was the father of the now world-renowned Festival Theatre that's at the heart of Adelaide's arts heritage,' says Xenophon. 'His success – and his long-term popularity whenever he ran for office – was because he was a centrist, someone who instinctively knew where everyday South Australians stood on issues and never got out ahead of the people. He banned Scientology, knowing it was a threat to religion and freedom.'

South Australia was also a stronghold of the Australian Democrats from the time the late Don Chipp set up his 'keep the bastards honest' party in 1977 until it disappeared thirty years later. Hall's Liberal Movement – now having added the word 'new' to its banner – merged with the Democrats, giving it a local MP in Millhouse, and over the coming decades a trio of female leaders – Janine Haines, Meg Lees and Natasha Stott Despoja. Support for the Australian Democrats was always strongest around Adelaide, although the party only managed to get more than a 10 per cent share of the national vote in its debut showing in 1977 and the year of John Howard's great win, 1996.

Xenophon followed in this tradition of occupying the radical centre after John Bannon's Labor government legalised poker machines more than twenty years ago, and the young Adelaide lawyer – who looks and behaves like a cross between the American consumer advocate Ralph Nader and Peter Falk's Columbo – found himself dealing with more and more casualties of this new way to take people's money. This sparked what has proved to be a twenty-five year crusade against pokies, which has gathered plenty of support but failed to result in any legislative change.

What it has provided is a springboard for a national political presence following a decade in the South Australian Upper House, where he became the first independent elected to the chamber in six decades. He was joined

by another Xenophon candidate, Ann Bressington, in the state parliament in 2006, having got within 5 per cent of the Liberal vote statewide, and outpolling the party at many booths, especially in the metropolitan area. Soon gaining a reputation as the great *stunt-meister* – he built a model gravy train to protest MPs' entitlements, and brought a goat to parliament to implore people not to 'kid around' with their vote – Xenophon became the subject of continued speculation that he would switch to the federal parliament. It was unsurprising that when he did announce his intention to run for the Senate at the 2007 election, it was next to the giraffe enclosure at Adelaide's zoo, saying he'd 'stick his neck out' for the state.

Now, a decade later, Xenophon is still in the Senate and he has three colleagues in Canberra with him as part of his Team. Rebekha Sharkie took the outer metropolitan seat of Mayo from the Liberals with 55 per cent of the two-party vote. In the Senate, Xenophon's team won two places, with Stirling Griff and Skye Kakoschke-Moore joining their leader. Xenophon and Griff managed to get elected in the first six of those successful in the double dissolution poll, which means they'll enjoy six-year terms. Elsewhere, the Nick Xenophon Team (NXT) candidates in one metropolitan seat came second to Labor, leaving the Liberals in third place, and in two rural seats pushed Labor out of the traditional first two spots.

It's an electoral success like no other for a third party, and the next test for Xenophon's Team will be the state election due later this year or early in 2018. A poll in mid-September 2016 put the NXT party on 22 per cent of the vote, just five points behind the Labor Party and, after preferences are distributed on a notional basis, placing the Liberals in a 53–47 per cent winning position. Xenophon says his party will run at the state election, and he has ambitions to win the poll. 'It will be targeted and strategic and we're in it to win, but it will be a question of making the best use of our resources,' he says. 'We will target both Labor and Liberal seats because we want a genuine choice from the political centre. If we cause the major parties to lift their game it will be a good thing for democracy in South Australia.'

This highlights just what a disruptive and unpredictable impact Xenophon's team could have – even though research shows its candidates take support from the Liberals and Labor in equal measure. South Australia's

Jay Weatherill has had two get-out-of-jail-free cards, taking power at the last two elections despite losing the popular vote. Xenophon might break the premier's winning streak, which could cause the son of Greek migrants to crack a wry anti-gambling smile.

When asked about South Australia's propensity to throw up centrist independents – an unusual political occurrence as revolutions usually start from the extremes – Xenophon says there's an easy, quite glib, reason for it. 'I'd explain it by saying we've always been in the shadow of the eastern states,' says Xenophon. 'Western Australia does its own thing and has vast mineral wealth, but here in the middle we feel overshadowed, and one way to get noticed is to show a bit of rebelliousness. It's both a curse and blessing.'

Xenophon says he didn't embark on a political career consciously but rather it was just what he felt he had to do. 'I'm driven by issues and I do have fire in my belly,' he says. 'Until that goes I will keep getting up in the morning and pushing ahead. I still regard myself as an outsider and not part of any kind of tradition – although I do acknowledge South Australia does have a political heritage that is different to the rest of the country.'

South Australia's Liberal leader, Steven Marshall – who might become a future premier courtesy of Xenophon – confirms the centrist nature of his state's politics by claiming he is to the left of the ruling Labor Party. To emphasise the point, Marshall says his party has legislation before the parliament to decriminalise prostitution – something that's being opposed by the Labor government, which is beholden to the socially conservative SDA Union. Marshall is also pushing for a plaque to recognise Steele Hall's vision for Festival Centre when it undergoes major redevelopment next year.

WHAT ABOUT XENOPHON himself? He's fifty-seven, and while one of the national parliament's great hypochondriacs, suffers from some ailments, including a persistent bad back. If you're sick he knows a medicine for it – almost always a natural remedy – and he carries antibacterial hand lotion because he fears germs. If you're talking to him and mention a book you've read or heard about, he insists you text him the title so he can add it to his already impossible-to-finish reading pile. This is a metaphor for his life – he is always overburdened with things to do, causes to champion and media stunts

to pull off. However, there are always more things to do and new angles to play and exploit.

You can hear his brain telling him that if he does one more thing he might crack a problem open or break through to the public. There really is no one like him in national politics, although more sober politicians in the major parties see him as an opportunist and populist who doesn't mind some back-to-the-future, old-fashioned protectionism to advance his South Australia-first agenda. If his health stays on the better side of okay, he probably has another six-year term in him, which would take him through to 2028 if there are no early polls. It's hard to know if his little band of Xenophon followers will survive, but his wave in South Australia has yet to crest.

The state poll will tell us more about this new force in South Australian politics, and the next federal election in 2019 will put Rebekha Starkie's popularity in Mayo to the test. The Senate vote at that time will also show how his statewide support is holding up. When Xenophon had a fellow upper house colleague in state parliament, the two fell out bitterly and Ann Bressington quit the Xenophon team and joined the Katter Party – and soon departed the political stage altogether.

In many ways, Xenophon has been in the right place at the right time throughout his political career, even if little of it was planned or plotted. His rise as a Senate force came as the major parties were sharing historically low approval ratings and he had a name recognition of which most politicians can only dream. In a state like South Australia, living in the shadow of the eastern states and having something of an ignored snob's chip on its shoulder, the man who promises to carry the flag across the borders to Canberra and keep shouting until something is done will always enjoy an attentive hearing from a willing audience. Xenophon shows no signs of slowing down or editing his to-do list. What is in no doubt is that he knows his state as well as any politician seen in the last fifty or so years.

Dennis Atkins is the national affairs editor with *The Courier Mail* in Brisbane. He was born in the Adelaide Hills and started his forty-year career as a political journalist and commentator with News Limited in that city.

REPORTAGE

Waiting for the sun

Port Augusta's search for a post-coal identity

Michael Dulaney

EVEN THOUGH I have been lost in the pop-culture megastores of Tokyo, and touched the bronze horns of the Wall Street bull, I never truly appreciated the redemptive power of capitalism until I visited an auction of equipment from a decommissioned coal-power station. It was where I learned there is a legitimate market for 3,000-horsepower motors and semi-used spools of insulated cable. An auctioneer told me a bright-red fire door – ten feet by twelve feet of tempered steel clad with pounded aluminium – was to be repurposed as the entrance to someone's 'man cave'. Whoever had the unenviable job of cataloguing this industrial detritus had alleviated his or her boredom by coming up with sarcastic descriptions for some of the more underwhelming items: 'Divorce Pack' (three fridges, a microwave, two heaters and a cabinet); 'The Trap!!' (a mysterious steel cage contraption); and 'quantity grease tins on wall'. All of this was being sold to clear the way for the demolition of Alinta Energy's brown-coal plant at Port Augusta, a dirty old giant of industry that had sat on the saltbush tip of the Spencer Gulf for six decades. We had come here on a cold Tuesday morning to wander through the carcass of the power plant, which had incinerated enough little brown rocks to power a few thousand homes for something like 65 million hours, and either pay our respects or make out like carrion. One guy, David,

whose father had worked at the power station for two decades, had brought his camera to document this piece of local and family history.

‘When are you ever going to get to see something like this again?’ he said, gesturing towards one of the cavernous hallways.

These sentiments were everywhere in the final days of the power station. For better or worse, the plant had defined Port Augusta for sixty years. This was, after all, a town where people driving back from holiday did not feel they were home until they could see the chimney and powerhouse sitting like a decaying steel ship on the horizon. Not only did the plant dominate the skyline, ash from its furnaces and wastewater from its turbines was pumped into the salt lakes that mark Port Augusta’s eastern boundary, defining the layout and landscape of the town. It was a place integral to the lives of multiple generations and was still supplying South Australia with almost a third of its power and employing five hundred people before it was switched off for good.

Given its importance to the town, it seemed strange that most locals reacted with half-hearted agreement and a shrug at my attempts to frame the final day as significant. Sure, some people were still frustrated that the end had come sooner than expected and with short notice from Alinta. But for the most part they had moved on. Their hearts and minds had already been won over by a new vision of the city and its post-coal future, a vision of Port Augusta as a renewable-energy hub advanced by a coalition of local volunteers and national environmental campaigners calling themselves Repower Port Augusta. It’s an alliance that links grassroots campaigners and the local council with national organisations as diverse as the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, the National Union of Workers and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation.

The group wants Port Augusta to host Australia’s first concentrated solar thermal power plant, a technology that uses mirrors to direct solar energy towards a tower containing a medium – such as molten salt – that can hold heat to generate electricity when the sun is not shining. Two companies have already shown an interest in the region: SolarReserve, a US company who have proposed developing a 110-megawatt molten-salt plant modelled on its Crescent Dunes facility already operating in Nevada; and an Australian

company, Solastor, which has proposed a 170-megawatt plant using its proprietary but unproven graphite-storage technology.

Along with the climate and public health benefits of solar thermal, Repower claims the technology can directly replace the number and types of jobs as well as the 24-hour baseload power production of the old coal plant. This has helped the campaign garner the support of the residents, and one of the first petitions gained fifteen hundred signatures in five hours.

While the group has commissioned plenty of modelling to support its claims, among the locals there is an intuitive belief that it is Port Augusta's destiny to be the renewables capital of the country. They point to its connection to the electricity grid, its easy access to water from the Spencer Gulf and, most importantly, the three hundred days of sunshine the area receives each year – such a bounty that producers for the 1960 movie *The Sundowners* spent five weeks filming in the region as they felt it was the only landscape bleak enough to look like a NSW farm destroyed by bushfire.

'We want one half of the picture to have a background of deep green,' remarked one of the producers, 'the other half has to look burnt down – hence Port Augusta.'

MORE THAN ANY other group, Repower has determined the way Port Augusta sees itself in the wake of the coal plant. It's a campaign based on Port Augusta's identity – that nebulous question of civic and social character that occupies many regional centres and is reflected in the type of industries they accommodate, the look of the streets and surrounding landscape, the themes and sponsors of public events, how the people dress, what they value, their language, their history, which politicians they support and a whole bunch of other local quirks too minor or abstract to describe. While you could point to plenty of indicators of how this sense of civic self is manifested, most people who actually live in town just *know* the identity of the place.

This is part of the reason that the new renewables paradigm was easy for the residents to accept. Rather than seeing themselves as living in a coal town, they saw Port Augusta as a power-generating town – the energy source for their livelihood was beside the point. If anything, the new technology was received as an opportunity to expand their skill base and begin a new era of

industry in the region. The problem for Repower has not been convincing residents of the merits of renewables, but maintaining the campaign's momentum through the vagaries and frustrations of the political process.

'That's been part of the challenge for us, because this seems like such an obvious direction to take,' says Lisa Lumsden, Repower's spokesperson and Port Augusta councillor. This shift in collective purpose seems obvious in hindsight, but it would not have been possible without Nancy Joy Baluch, the iron lady of the Upper Spencer Gulf, who died in 2013 and is remembered in national obituaries as a 'solar campaigner', such was her dedication to the Repower cause in the last few years of her life. Joy's recruitment as a solar thermal proselytiser was no small milestone, particularly for the early days of the campaign.

As the mayor and patron saint of Port Augusta for nearly thirty years, Joy earned her reputation as a hard-headed leader who used her acerbic tone and gift for plain speaking to put Port Augusta in the national spotlight time and again.

She was a hater of many things: whingers, whiners, bankers, the 'bloody do-gooders', political correctness, the media and sports of any kind, which she considered to be a waste of time and a national distraction that would facilitate a peaceful takeover of Australia on Grand Final day by 'the Asians'. Joy was intolerant of the 'soft generation' and an advocate for setting police dogs on Aboriginal people, but also for changing outdated attitudes towards homeless shelters and domestic violence refuges.

She was known by her political rivals as 'that skinny bitch', by her admirers as a 'multi-dimensional woman', and as Joy by everyone else, partly because her mother refused to call her Nancy (her father's choice, based on the name of his first girlfriend and also his childhood pet goat).

'Men don't like strong women, I've found,' she once said on the subject of making enemies. But what she really opposed, more than anything else (and this is perhaps understating the considerable weight of her loathing) was the power station, which she blamed for the fatal lung cancer of her beloved husband Teofil and the chronic asthma of her son Emil.

Residents had long complained of lung cancer and bronchial disorders caused by the noxious gases and particulate matter from the power station.

These claims were repeatedly denied by the state government, which instead blamed the health problems on higher rates of smoking in the area. A six-month campaign for the release of SA Health figures by the local council and Doctors for the Environment Australia revealed there was a doubling of lung cancer rates in the region compared to the expected average, despite smoking rates only being 7 per cent greater.

Like other great leaders, Joy had her own creation myth, based on a series of childhood visions where she saw Port Augusta as a great city bathed in light – a message from God that instilled her with the belief that she was destined to rule ‘for this time in history’. Although she had identified some form of renewables as the solution to the city’s health problems and industrial future, for many decades Joy’s vision of the city lacked form.

These preoccupations coalesced during a presentation in 2010 by Beyond Zero Emissions (BZE), a climate change think-tank and one of the founding members of Repower. Mark Ogge, BZE’s former operations director, remembers the ‘surreal experience’ of walking into the Port Augusta council chambers and finding an unlikely ally for their plan for 100 per cent renewables in Australia, the centrepiece of which was a solar thermal plant at Port Augusta.

‘Joy just cottoned on to the potential straight away I think, like she just thought, “Yeah this could directly replace the coal plant,”’ says Ogge.

‘Some members of the council were pretty sceptical. One of them said, “Oh well, what about the cost of all this?” and Joy just turns around and snaps, “What about the cost of treating people for advanced lung cancer in hospital, councillor?”’

Joy was later asked to speak at a public meeting organised by BZE to explain its fully costed solar-thermal proposal. Given they were in coal territory, the group toned down their pitch to limit what they thought would be a hostile reception from the crowd. Mark credits Joy’s impassioned speech – which elevated the modest proposal to nation-building fervour – as the turning point for the campaign.

‘I’ll always remember it – at the end of her speech she said, “Listen, this isn’t about Port Augusta, this is about Australia. We should be building 3,000 megawatts of this stuff here and it should be built all over Australia, it should

be the new Snowy Mountain Scheme.” And I was just floored, because Joy was a pretty conservative person, but for her, it was like she didn’t hold back.’

This was the first public airing of the town’s new identity. When you hear people who once worked at a coal plant complaining about ‘importing dirty brown coal power from Victoria’, you know a profound shift has occurred.

REPOWER HAS NEEDED every bit of zealotry to sustain the campaign during a time of great scepticism towards renewables in Australia, not just through the years of the Abbott government – with its cuts to the Renewable Energy Target and Australian Renewable Energy Agency funding, attacks on wind farms and praise for coal – but also over the past eighteen months, a turbulent period in which price spikes and reliability issues have eroded public confidence in the South Australian electricity network and the state government’s renewable energy policies.

At the height of these price spikes, an Adelaide-based solar industry leader pulled out his phone during dinner at a regional development forum in Port Pirie to show me the app he uses to monitor real-time prices in the National Electricity Market, the wholesale market that covers every state except WA and the NT and accounts for roughly 90 per cent of the electricity consumed in Australia.

South Australia was an alarming shade of red on the colour-coded map, in stark contrast to the green-shaded eastern seaboard. My friend said he was rarely shocked by the app, noting that South Australia has the highest power prices in the nation. Just a few weeks earlier, the wholesale price had briefly hit \$9,000 per megawatt hour, about a hundred and fifty times the yearly average, on one of the coldest winter nights of the year. It was a perfect storm of the factors that contribute to high power prices in South Australia. The state is a world leader in renewable energy, with 40 per cent of its power coming from wind and solar. When these are not generating power, the network relies on a fleet of expensive gas generators supplemented by an interconnector link with Victoria, which was offline for several months for upgrades.

The keynote address at the Port Pirie forum was delivered by Greg Hunt, former federal environment minister. He delivered a brief, folksy narrative

detailing his links to Hastings, a steel-producing region in Victoria, before resuming his monomaniacal quest to enshrine the death of the carbon tax as a victory for the environment. He painted a picture of an electricity network in chaos and described South Australia as ‘the test case for everything we warned about’, to a chilly reception from the assembled renewable energy specialists in the room.

In September 2016, Hunt’s ‘canary in the coalmine’ mentality resurfaced when a once-in-fifty-year storm caused a statewide blackout. South Australia was still in darkness when renewable critics – Nick Xenophon, Barnaby Joyce and Malcolm Turnbull among them – began blaming wind power, despite the electricity market operator reporting the storm had damaged twenty-two transmission towers and severed the network in two.

Such attacks on the state’s energy policy have become commonplace. Although various commentators have pointed out that the market dominance of gas generators and the high price of gas, the lack of competition in the privatised electricity network and the regulation of the National Electricity Market all contribute to high power prices in South Australia, the vast swell of noise about the issue has been directed at renewables.

Repower’s Lisa Lumsden says she has learned from similar episodes in the past that the sniping of ideologues is correlated with subdued activity for the campaign.

‘It really had an absolutely direct effect on the amount of interest we were getting,’ she says. ‘A lot of international interest is taken in Australia and the big companies are listening to every word the politicians say, and if it doesn’t sound like there is a supportive leadership they go elsewhere, where there is.’

It’s not just big companies that are paying attention to the attacks on renewables; Repower’s grassroots supporters are listening too. One of the effects of the blackout was to give weight to the experts who have claimed the falling cost of solar panels and home-battery storage means the future is in a decentralised power network with less reliance on the grid – a direct challenge to the idea of large-scale power projects like solar thermal. All of this has led to Repower’s base becoming restless about the future of the campaign.

‘People are asking, rightly enough, “Well, we’ve done quite a few of these petitions, when is something going to happen?”’ says Repower chairman

Gary Rowbottom, who joined the campaign after a seventeen-year career at the coal plant.

They at least have a new target during these trying times. Letterbox drops, sixty-second TV spots and a billboard in Adelaide have all been deployed to win the ‘contest between clean solar thermal and gas’ for the contract to supply three-quarters of the state government’s energy needs. Repower wants this to be allocated to a solar-thermal project, believing this would ‘get this campaign over the line’. Instead, the state allowed the owners of the mothballed Pelican Point gas generator to also tender for the contract.

The government’s decision is being billed as a ‘make or break’ moment that could set the Repower campaign back at least three or four years.

‘It would be a massive blow economically. All the jobs and the skills we have here would end up moving out of town or be lost,’ says Lumsden. ‘The community is in dire straits and we need a future.’

WITH ALL OF this anxiety over solar-thermal investment in Port Augusta, there’s a certain irony that a 40-megawatt solar tower already dominates the skyline on the drive into town. Rather than producing electrons for the grid, the Sundrop Farms tower is being used to grow millions of tonnes of hydroponic tomatoes in the desert using only seawater and solar energy. This is probably one of the most advanced farming operations in the world, producing 40 per cent of the truss tomatoes supplied to Coles (about 15 per cent of Australia’s tomatoes) from a twenty-hectare greenhouse sitting in the arid salt pans on the outskirts of town.

The Repower website mentions Sundrop, but its homepage also states that Port Augusta is a ‘town at a crossroads’. The statement refers to the choice between coal and renewables, but also alludes to another transition that has so far gone largely unremarked. Port Augusta’s location – where the national highways from Perth to Sydney and Darwin to Adelaide cross – and its role as a service centre for remote communities in central Australia have contributed to the town becoming a regional hub for Aboriginal people from around the country. Thirty-six nations are represented here at any given time. A 2012 study by the Australian National University noted the Aboriginal population has increased from 5 per cent of the total population to 20 per cent

in just a few decades, so that Port Augusta now has the highest Indigenous presence of any regional centre in Australia other than Broome and Alice Springs. It is an example of the demographic shift taking place in many inland towns, driven by a ‘dual dynamic’ where the movement of Aboriginal people into urban centres is combined with the out-migration and ageing of the non-Indigenous residents.

According to the ANU study, current trends would result in the Indigenous population increasing a further 38 per cent by 2031. The authors considered the need for different jobs, policy responses and the possibility of a ‘demographic dividend’ as the relatively younger Aboriginal population goes through the same ageing processes as the rest of Australia. All of this is to say that if the identity of Port Augusta is being remade, then clearly Aboriginal people – a prominent and rising share of the city’s population – will play an important role in its post-coal future.

It remains to be seen whether this is on their terms. A separate ANU report, produced following a community dialogue event in 2010, outlined the ongoing marginalisation of Aboriginal people from local politics and the community. It alludes to the construction of identity, one where Aboriginal heritage and culture ‘have yet to be celebrated and highlighted in the image and nature of the town’.

Maybe the civic sense of self is just like the individual one, in that it ignores uncomfortable realities and outside perspectives to maintain a sense of purpose and cohesion. It relies on a kind of blindness – to alternate histories, to the notion that having your identity located in a coal stack is to align yourself with the death of the world.

‘You know the way I see it, the community for sixty years exchanged their health – particularly for the first forty years when it was absolutely filthy – for economic security,’ says Lumsden. ‘I think it was a “hallelujah” moment for me, really, to learn that we didn’t have to live with coal any more but could still transform our community.’

There was a time here when three quarters of the male workforce were employed in government agencies (a greater proportion than in Canberra at the time) and thousands of people worked in the Commonwealth Railways workshop, which was later shut down at the expense of a fifth of all jobs in

town. With this in mind, what does it mean to say that Port Augusta's future is at stake if it is no longer a power-generating town? Regional development researchers bemoan the tendency for regional towns to place all their efforts into attracting 'white elephants' – the grand and risky projects that will supposedly save the town and its future. Instead, they say regions can grow, can be successful, by relying on diverse jobs and small improvements that make a place liveable. This is not an argument against building a solar-thermal plant, just to say that identity can occasionally be a distraction. A limiting of possibilities.

When the coal stack came down at Playford A, the first of the three power station chimneys to fall, people hooted and hollered, clapped and cheered, saying 'there she goes'. SolarReserve visited town shortly after for a public meeting to outline their grand schemes for six towers of 660-megawatt total capacity that would support twenty-four thousand jobs during construction. 'I really hope if it's built that they name the tower after Joy,' says Mark Ogge, reflecting on his years with Repower.

Just a few weeks later, Sundrop officially opened its facility, holding a ceremony to celebrate the first trucks laden with tomatoes rolling out to Coles supermarkets around Australia. Some people were already saying the farm's solar tower had replaced the old coal chimney in their hearts.

ESSAY

In the dark

When 'truthiness' eclipses the truth

Tory Shepherd

A CELEBRITY CHEF declares dairy causes osteoporosis, and cholesterol medication is bad. Parents shy away from giving their children life-saving vaccinations. People are stringing crystals around their neck, then necking kale juice on the way to the chiropractors to have their neck cricks cracked.

'Truthiness' – where made-up information parades as fact – too often trounces truth. Thanks to Web 2.0, we are swamped by information. And many people are unable to sift out the misinformation. Some start to fear science and all it has produced. The anti-vaxxers and those who reject modern medicine join tribes online and in the real world and reinforce each other's beliefs. Climate deniers snuggle down in their comfortable little belief cocoons, rejecting evidence and rational thought.

There are many reasons bullshit is dangerous. It is also regressive. It may seem super-modern to embrace television chef Pete Evans' idea that calcium from dairy mysteriously leaches the calcium from bones, but in truth most of his advice has more in common with pre-Enlightenment thinking. Progress and growth – two things desperately needed in South Australia – depend on knowledge, science, technology, medicine. Facts.

A specific area where facts are often ignored in favour of truthiness is climate change. The phenomenon of climate-change denialism shows no sign

of being beaten down by ever-increasing evidence that the climate is in the process of change and human activity is to blame. And denialism has a new champion in the federal parliament – One Nation Senator Malcolm Roberts says all the world’s scientific organisations are corrupt and climate change is bunkum. At the same time, there is an enduring scepticism towards renewable energy and its role in reducing emissions.

When the lights went out in South Australia in September last year, the state was plunged into real and metaphorical darkness. The ‘black system’ event was unexpected and shocking, but while families were still searching for their candles and torches, politicians had already started blaming the state’s reliance on wind power.

Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce said South Australia relied too much on renewables. ‘[Windpower] wasn’t working too well last night, because they had a blackout,’ he told the ABC. South Australian Senator Nick Xenophon quickly blamed the ‘reckless’ transition to renewable energy. ‘We have relied too much on wind,’ he said. Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull steered away from directly blaming renewables, but cynically used the situation to say there were ‘questions to be asked’ about South Australia’s power mix. At that early stage, no one could shine any light on the cause. It may be that more information emerged to implicate wind power directly. But what is clear is that certain people were in an unseemly haste to blame the turbines.

So, all of a sudden, South Australia was at the centre of a tussle over renewables and action on climate change. Just when the state is leading the pack on renewables, and when it is in dire need of new industries and new jobs, the path ahead became decidedly less clear. The federal government took aim at ‘aggressive’ renewables targets, signalling they are not about to swing more support behind them.

At the time of writing, the Australian Energy Market Operator’s advice was that wind farms were involved, but only in an incidental way; they were designed to shut down when the system went wonky and that shutdown triggered a big draw on the interconnector to Victoria, which then crashed the system. However, neither climate change deniers nor politicians want the

facts to get in the way of a good story. That is eternally true of politics. But why do people with no clear vested interests hold false beliefs in the face of contradictory evidence?

MOST PEOPLE BELIEVE some non-scientific things. Some of those beliefs can be harmless. The danger comes when people bunker down on potentially harmful beliefs and reject any contradictory evidence. Their brains ossify. They stop learning and reject the scientific evidence.

When we were primitive beings we found meaning in star patterns, in forked lightning, in the entrails of goats. Now we know how to fly to the stars and we've started to understand how to use them to understand how the universe was formed. We use science to predict and tackle bushfires sparked by lightning, and to tell us how to sous-vide a goat; we use data to predict the future.

We may have progressed as a society, but there is still far too much backwards thinking. Michael Shermer, who wrote *Why People Believe Weird Things* (Henry Holt, 1997), writes in *The Believing Brain* (Henry Holt, 2011) that Homo sapiens believe things for a complicated and sometimes random series of reasons. Why they hold on to the wrong beliefs is the interesting question – why, when presented with evidence of climate change or the benefits of renewable energy, do some refuse to accept the facts?

Shermer refers to the TV series *The X-Files*. Credulous FBI agent Fox Mulder has a poster in his office that reads 'I Want To Believe'. Humans want to believe, in part, because we have evolved to be pattern finders. To find the evidence. Those who could track the droppings of prey or spot the telltale signs of a predator were more likely to survive. Finding patterns in stars might help you find the way home.

Shermer points to how this operates for conspiracy theorists (those who believe man never landed on the moon, or that September 11 was a grand hoax) when he writes in *The Believing Brain*: 'It is because their pattern-detection filters are wide open, thereby letting in any and all patterns as real, with little to no screening of potential false patterns. Conspiracy theorists connect the dots of random events into meaningful patterns, and then infuse those patterns with intentional agency.'

There are elements of conspiratorial thinking and ‘intentional agency’ in all anti-science theories: vaccinations cause autism, but the vested interests in the medical establishment are covering it up; putting fluoride in water is not about dental health but a way for the government to control the populace; climate change is an invention of scientists desperate to maintain their government funding. With so much data involved it’s easy for deniers to find their own patterns, their own ‘proofs’ of the great conspiracy.

Where Shermer seeks to understand, Bernard Keane and Helen Razer are scathingly dismissive. In *A Short History of Stupid* (Allen & Unwin, 2014) they argue that facts have been eclipsed by opinion, a common hypothesis when people talk about how the media has become dominated by ‘feelpinions’ and shock jocks: ‘Facts do not matter. And this is bad enough in itself. But it is not just that we feel entitled to our opinion, as nearly everybody does. We are obliged to have an opinion. . . . An opinion is empowering. An opinion is a sign of high self-esteem,’ they write. ‘Facts, in fact, have become a sort of optional extra.’

It does sometimes seem hopeless to argue in favour of science when so many seem to see it as an ‘optional extra’. Humans have an astounding ability to jerry-rig their own brains, shoehorning in the stuff that concurs with pre-existing beliefs, yet blocking out anything that might disrupt those beliefs. And there’s the internet as a friend and a bulwark. It is possible to Google in such a way that each search reaffirms already established points of view. Facebook or Twitter can be curated so you only hear from those you already agree with. The web can be used in order to cement confirmation bias and shut out dissent. Online, no one can hear you screen.

SOME ARGUE THAT truth is relative. Climate change deniers claim their (cherry-picked, wrongly interpreted) data is more valid than NASA’s, say, or the Bureau of Meteorology’s. Still others state science is a set of beliefs with no more claim to truthfulness than a religion. And having a different belief to the mainstream makes people feel special. They’re not just ‘sheeple’, unwitting believers in what the authorities say, but are part of a special subsection of society that possesses the truth. Like an intellectual secret handshake, they learn the language and attributes of their new society. David Aaronovitch, in *Voodoo Histories: The Role of the Conspiracy*

Theory in Shaping Modern History (Jonathan Cape, 2009), writes that pseudo-scientists (specifically pseudoscholars):

[Understand] what everybody else doesn't, what everybody else would most like to deny. They are the lonely custodians of the truth and they got there through the quality of their minds – and by being brave enough to read a book.

They see themselves as warriors.

Let's go back to chef Pete Evans again. He, and his hordes of followers, think he has just as much right to give medical advice as, say, someone who is medically trained. They're picking this misguided sense of 'my opinion is worth as much as yours' over actual truth. Truthiness trumping truth again. Another example is when, in October last year, Senator Roberts clashed with Australia's Chief Scientist Alan Finkel over climate change; Roberts is certain he knows better than our top expert.

Online, deniers and conspiracy theorists strengthen their bonds with others who believe the same misinformation as they do. The mistrust of the 'establishment', of the accepted science, too easily turns to loathing. This is where the divide between science and anti-science really kicks in. The conspiracy theorists loathe the system, and the system starts to loathe them in return. Pseudoscientific beliefs are consistently debunked by scientific institutions such as the Australian Medical Association, the CSIRO, the Cancer Council, NASA. But those who feel they are treated with contempt are unlikely to change their minds; they only harden against the 'authorities' that dismiss their strongly held thoughts.

Meanwhile, this anti-science tendency is getting traction outside the conspiracy theorists purview. It's creeping into our political system. Note how the government keeps saying we have to 'respect' One Nation and their voters – the voters who think climate change is a fabrication, that Muslims are to blame for their kids not being able to get jobs, and that the Family Court system is to blame for men bashing and killing women. Some in parliament already professed these beliefs. Now others with similar attitudes have the heft of the balance of power in the Senate, and therefore the power to shift policy.

Aaronovitch again: ‘The belief in conspiracy theories is...harmful in itself. It distorts our view of history and therefore of the present, and – if widespread enough – leads to disastrous decisions.’ There are myriad very good reasons society grants everyone their own facts. Voters, obviously, influence parliament and politics, and therefore policy. If that influence is not fact based, there is more likelihood of public funds being directed to ineffectual programs. A smaller chance of taxpayer dollars going to mitigate climate change, to encourage vaccination, or to astronomy rather than astrology.

The believing brain skitters over contradictory evidence; debunking bunkum is easy on paper, but it’s nigh impossible to convince someone who has convinced themselves that they are right. In *The Debunking Handbook* (University of Queensland, 2011), John Cook and Stephan Lewandowsky warn that it is far too easy to reinforce a myth. ‘Mud sticks,’ they say. You can go all out talking about why people who believe climate change isn’t happening are wrong, you can back it up with rock-solid facts, and people will still take away the message that ‘climate change isn’t happening’.

Even as the Australian Energy Market Operator insisted there was no evidence that the intermittent nature of wind-generated power was the reason South Australia went black, people kept targeting wind farms. They heard only what they wanted to hear.

In response to conspiracy theorists, pseudoscientists, shysters and fraudsters, there is a grand temptation to smack them down. The ‘smackdown’ has become a beguiling thing celebrated by some aspects of the media. ‘Boom,’ they say. ‘Watch this scientist take down Malcolm Roberts!’ It’s a misplaced optimism, this idea that by ‘nailing it’ with some pithy words on *The Project* or Q&A, suddenly people will wake up to their false beliefs.

If people already believe in her, they won’t suddenly see Senator Pauline Hanson as the fact-free bastion of bitterness that she is. Rather, they’ll see a smug media gloating about the treatment of someone they admire. By this stage they’ve committed themselves to their beliefs. The smackdown is just a smack in the face, and will earn no converts. Throwing facts at people doesn’t change their minds; it might even drive them deeper into their little belief cocoon.

SLOPPY, ANTI-SCIENTIFIC THINKING leads to poor policy, stagnation and deaths. Climate change denialism and resistance to renewables means that at a federal level Australia is not doing all it can; the manufactured ‘controversies’ put the brakes on progress.

The rejection of well-proven science can be fatal. That has been shown in those who reject vaccination, or conventional cancer therapy. If the world does not speed up its action on climate change more people will die through the increasing volatility of the weather.

Truth, arrived at through the scientific process, leads to progress and growth. South Australia, particularly, is in need of a rather large growth spurt. Our employment levels are languishing. The economy is worse than sluggish. Our dwindling share of the nation’s population means we are set to lose one of our federal seats in parliament, leaving us with just ten MPs in the House of Representatives of one hundred and fifty seats.

Science is a beacon of light in the quagmire. South Australia has the beginnings of a way to finally ditch the ‘City of Churches’ tag and become the centre of rational thought and progress. Of wind farms and solar power and peerless thinkers and cutting-edge technologies. World-class medical facilities and top-notch researchers. Science can make our wine and cheese even better. It can open up new avenues of industry and create jobs.

South Australia has a proud history of progressive thinking, and the next leap is well overdue. The settings are ostensibly in place; Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull talks endlessly about investing in innovation. Our very own Christopher Pyne, as defence industries minister, will focus on ensuring the government’s enormous investment in submarines and ships has a full flow-on benefit throughout the state. The blackout-induced attack on renewables is a step backwards – hopefully the only one.

Our state government has consistently backed renewables, has invested in the new Royal Adelaide Hospital, and has created the magnificent South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute to attract the world’s best minds.

Perth’s mining boom has finished booming. Sydney’s glitter is glistening, Melbourne’s bubble is popping. Adelaide has the glimmer of a new beginning. We have to convince the next generation – and the one after that, and the one

after that – to reject anti-science. South Australia must become a state that thoroughly and unashamedly embraces rationality and progress.

If there's one little acronym everyone uses to discuss the state's future, it's STEM. Science, technology, engineering and maths. All of which rely on truth and the rejection of truthiness to succeed. Our new jobs will be in renewables, as well as advanced manufacturing, submarines and ships, medicine – avenues of research we don't even know about yet. Wind turbines and solar. Then the nuclear industry, maybe.

We already have the intellectual infrastructure to lead thinking on this. We have always combined our prestigious arts festivals with academic adventures in the traditional and the social sciences. In 1897, Mark Twain wrote of Adelaide in *Following the Equator*:

You see how healthy the religious atmosphere is. Anything can live in it. Agnostics, Atheists, Freethinkers, Infidels, Mormons, Pagans, Indefinites: They are all there. And all the big sects of the world can do more than merely live in it: they can spread, flourish, prosper.

What should spread, flourish and prosper here now is rational, scientific thought. An antidote to the world's woo woo.

Once upon a time, a University of Adelaide academic, Professor Frank Fenner, was instrumental in virus control. He halted the spread of the rabbit-killing myxoma virus. He also drove the eradication of the smallpox. One guy, from little old Adelaide, stopping the viral spread.

South Australia needs a vision for the future. A vision for jobs and growth, sure, but also a more soaring mission. All the optics point to science, medicine, technology.

The late Carl Sagan was one of the best the world has seen at promoting rational thought. He wrote in *The Demon-Haunted World: Science As A Candle In The Dark* (Ballantine Books, 1997):

We've arranged a global civilisation in which most crucial elements profoundly depend on science and technology. We have also arranged things so that almost no one understands science and technology. This is a prescription for disaster.

Either the politicians have to lead the way, or voter sentiment must shift and force them to stick to the scientific path, to recognise the might of climate change and the power of renewables.

Facts and science are the way out of the demon-haunts. Stopping the viral spread of truthiness and steering the boat back to truth. That's South Australia's hope and its candle in the dark.

Tory Shepherd is political editor and senior columnist for *The Advertiser*, where she contributes two weekly columns: one on Canberra's spin, and a second on the other ways in which bullshit infiltrates our world.

ESSAY

Diminishing city

Hope, despair and Whyalla

Peter Stanley

EXACTLY FIFTY YEARS ago, in the spring of 1966, my family left the Pennington Migrant Centre in Adelaide to drive up Highway 1 to Whyalla. Our destination, BHP's Milpara hostel, was a full day's journey away in a second-hand faded blue Ford Zephyr. As recently arrived migrants from Britain, the drive would take us into an utterly unfamiliar landscape: the red-soil and saltbush country of South Australia's upper Eyre Peninsula.

We were not alone. Whyalla was booming. BHP's steelworks had opened the year before, the city's shipyard's orders book was healthy, while ore from Iron Knob was being shipped from Whyalla in increasing quantities – my father was to work in BHP's diesel locomotive repair shop. The Stanleys – like many of Whyalla's newcomers, working-class Britons (in our case Liverpoolians) – were optimistic about our future in a brand new Housing Trust semi-detached in a dirt-pavement street on the city's expanding western fringe: this was the new start in a brand new, sunny country for which we had left rainy, grey Liverpool.

We were surely not alone. Thousands of other migrants were arriving in the city. In our first year there the Housing Trust constructed over six hundred houses, and in the decade of the 1960s Whyalla's population doubled, from fourteen thousand to thirty thousand. Its newcomers reflected

an extraordinary ethnic diversity – booklets promoting the city to migrants spoke of forty-five or more ethnic groups living there, with the largest groups in the late 1960s from the British Isles, from elsewhere in Australia and from Europe (mainly Germany, the Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Spain and Poland).

BHP and the City Commission promoted the city's advantages aggressively. A 1964 BHP promotional booklet extolling its climate, facilities, community amenities and lifestyle (one my family almost certainly read) ended: 'This, then, is Whyalla: a place where a young community leads a busy, sunlit life, a city which is growing, always growing.'

But the growth of the 1960s stopped in the following decade, when the population had reached around thirty-four thousand. In 1978, BHP launched the last of the sixty-four ships built in Whyalla, bringing to an end the twenty-year boom begun with the construction of the steelworks. Between 1977 and 1983, the Housing Trust built only one hundred and twenty houses. Whyalla began a gradual contraction, one that continues still. In 1980, the sociologist Roy Kriegler published *Working for the Company* (OUP), an analysis of 'work and control' informed by his time as a labourer in the shipyard's final years. He identified what he saw as an intractable dynamic of alienation among those who worked for BHP, a malaise of lack of commitment that infected the city as well as its industrial workplaces. Kriegler, writing in the wake of the shipyard's closure, ended his final chapter with a prediction: 'Company Town to Ghost Town'. Reports of Whyalla's demise were premature, but he was not alone in his pessimism.

The shipyard's closure coincided with the growth to maturity of the children of the migrant generation of the 1960s like me. It became usual for young people to leave Whyalla. Among the seventy-five or so members of my own, very large matriculation class of 1974, many left Whyalla for work or study (as did I). At the thirty-year reunion in 2004, no more than two or three still lived in Whyalla. Many of those remaining found limited opportunities for work and little sense of fulfilment.

A *Survey of Drug Problems in Whyalla* by the Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia in 1985 found 'no positive community feeling about Whyalla', and that 'the entire social life of Whyalla revolves around alcohol'. Not surprisingly, a quarter of the young people interviewed said that they drank 'because there is nothing better to do in Whyalla'.

I came to know several of Whyalla's incarnations. I had grown up there in the boom years, had worked at the steelworks in vacations, and while driving taxis became closely acquainted with Whyalla's pub and clubs. I also wrote a Litt.B. thesis about the town's voluntary war effort during the Second World War, which the council published. Through that research I gained an understanding of both the earlier wartime boom and of the insular little community it had disrupted. And because I continued to visit the city, over the ensuing forty years I saw it diminish.

The shipyard's closure hit Whyalla hard, but it went down fighting. Community workshops in its wake cast about for ideas to generate a sustainable economy. Ideas to diversify the city's economy included rabbit farming, a ferry (or even a bridge!) across Spencer Gulf, and exploiting the ever-elusive tourist dollar. None came to much. From the 1980s, Whyalla became better known for providing a home for welfare recipients than for producing ships and steel – its Housing Trust stock allegedly enabled beneficiaries in Adelaide to be offered accommodation, if they were willing to move to Whyalla. With the arrival of Indo-Chinese, South American and East African refugees in successive decades, Whyalla maintained its ethnic diversity, including a small community of Indigenous people, some Bargala, the region's original inhabitants.

Looking back over the century since BHP renamed the little ore-shipping port of Hummock Hill Whyalla in 1914, we can identify cycles of hope and despair against the larger rhythm of expansion and then contraction. For at least fifty years Whyalla has seen optimism and idealism but also, if not despair, then its close neighbours, alienation and apathy. The city has seen repeated contests between hope and pessimism. Both seem to be embedded in the city's culture, in its people's repeated responses to the challenges with which their situation confronts them.

WHYALLA HAD BEEN a tiny company town until the late 1930s. It was simply an ore jetty and a railway workshop, loading iron ore from Iron Knob, fifty kilometres away in the Middleback Ranges. In its first incarnation as a small ore-shipping port, Whyalla had been remarkably stable. The 1934 federal electoral roll, for example, listed some eight hundred voters,

but the surnames of five families accounted for a tenth of residents. Whyalla seemed free of the sectarianism endemic to Australia eighty years ago – the town's Catholic and Anglican ministers played in the town's orchestra. In the late 1930s, the Playford state government persuaded (and subsidised) BHP to build a blast furnace, and a shipyard followed in 1940. The town's expansion upset that stability.

During the Second World War the town grew from fewer than a thousand inhabitants to nearly seven thousand, most drawn from the economically depressed Eyre Peninsula and Mid North. The war years saw hardship – many families attracted to the town by war work lived in tents and shacks in what was called 'Siberia' – but also a sense of hope after years of worldwide, national and local economic depression. People built their own houses, bought them under the company's scheme or sought Housing Trust homes – small, but well built and secure after the rural poverty many had known. But the war saw tensions between old residents and new. Established residents dominated the town's social organisations, especially its voluntary war effort. Newcomers were, however, active in pressing for civic improvements, and for improved working conditions in the company's shipyard and blast furnace. Under the leadership of trade unions and groups such as the Housewives' Association, newcomers pressed for price control, new schools, bread and postal deliveries, telephone and bus services, cheaper water and better housing. They expressed a powerful idealism characteristic of a generation that fought and worked for a better world.

While established residents accepted the company's paternalism, newcomers (almost all from rural South Australia) pressed for representative local government. BHP, reluctant to pay for the larger, more expensive town services but equally loath to relinquish control, engineered a compromise in the form of a Town Commission. The commission, established by the state government in 1944, comprised three representatives each of company and residents, chaired by an independent commissioner, Charles Ryan (who held the position from 1945 to 1970). The commission reflected idealism, pragmatism and paternalism. The elections for the first Town Commission in 1945 revealed the extent to which many of Whyalla's newcomers yearned for a better society. The three ratepayers' representatives included Eric Stead,

a member of the Communist Party and an embodiment of the ‘progressive’ movements in the town. (‘Naturally, we are not very pleased with the results,’ the company’s director in Whyalla reported to head office in Melbourne.) Eric Stead’s election reflected, of course, the Communist Party’s popularity generally at the end of the Second World War. But it also disclosed the deep yearning among a generation traumatised by economic depression and war and its desire for a better life; something that Whyalla’s new houses and company-subsidised services could provide.

Many of those attracted in wartime moved on after 1945, but those who stayed formed an enlarged ‘old Whyalla’ – notably loyal to the paternalist BHP (naturally, known to residents simply as ‘the company’). That stability was disrupted once more from the late 1950s. Again supported by a state government (still Playford’s), BHP built a steelworks at Whyalla. This brought about the boom that brought the Stanleys and tens of thousands of other newcomers to the city.

Whyalla’s sense of itself as a community – as distinct from the dismal catalogue of deprivation on a range of socio-economic indicators – has never been clearer than in the *Australian Frontier* report of 1973, at the height of the second boom. Produced by a Melbourne social research consultant in response to a request by the new Whyalla City Council (which supplanted the commission in 1970), the report investigated the ‘Factors Influencing the Stability of Whyalla’. It drew on a ‘Community Self Survey’ co-ordinated by a Congregational church social worker, Don Sarre, notable because it reflected then views of residents rather than planners. Sarre’s report documented two contradictory themes. One was of physical or social hardship and deprivation. It noted the concern of doctors and nurses at the incidence of boredom, isolation and depression, and that at least half – and perhaps two thirds – of respondents had no firm intention to remain in Whyalla. Don Sarre identified the ‘inadequacy of the nuclear family’ as a key cause of instability – most newcomers to the city (over half migrants or their Australian-born children) had no extended families and the support they could offer. But among those who remained (which included some of the Stanleys), people expressed yearnings for facilities and conditions that would enable them to make a home in a place not immediately seen as hospitable, or even (at the height of summer)

habitable. They valued 'the ease of making good friends' in the city and its healthy climate, and they had aspirations and desires. Their wishes expressed a powerful positive vision. They wanted better educational opportunities for their children, more parks and gardens, and, above all, better and more local control over their community. Don Sarre, reflecting on the report forty-odd years later, recalled that the aspects that most struck him in retrospect were the energy with which Whyalla's newcomers built a community and the quality of community leadership evident in the city's expansionary period. Teachers, for example, staffing the dozen primary and four high schools were often graduates, 'bonded' or posted to the country and bringing a quality of youthful, professional enthusiasm that matched the aspirations of their pupils' parents.

Despite this idealism, by the 1990s the city had slipped to be the state's third-largest city (after Adelaide and Mount Gambier, a reflection of Whyalla's decline rather than growth elsewhere). Visiting at least annually I observed how shops closed, shopping centres became increasingly shabby and how houses and then entire blocks of Housing Trust houses fell derelict and were then demolished. Signs of Whyalla's decline were everywhere: driving in from the airport, among my mother's litany would be 'there's another Trust house knocked down'; but she'd also express pride at 'the new leisure centre' or 'the new Harvey Norman'. The local newspaper, the *Whyalla News*, begun in 1940 as a weekly, went to twice weekly in the 1950s, thrice weekly in the 1970s and then declined, losing pages, advertisers and readers. It now appears once a week again, like many country newspapers permanently on the brink of closure. The decline of the city's human infrastructure can be seen in the case of its Protestant churches. In the early 1970s, nonconformist congregations supported half-a-dozen clergymen and several other social and community development officers. Now the Uniting Church has one minister in the entire city, though arguably the need for the social and spiritual support that churches represent could not be greater.

On virtually any socio-economic measure in the 1990s, Whyalla scored more poorly than other cities in South Australia, even in the state's 'iron triangle'. Whyalla's Department of Community Welfare office, a 1990 study revealed, had the highest per capita number of 'clients' in the state. On an

index of 'relative socio-economic disadvantage', Whyalla at 911 was below Port Pirie and its lead residues (at 921), Port August at 943, Mount Gambier at 957 and genteel Victor Harbour at 1011. The study also revealed shockingly high levels of domestic abuse, as suggested by the numbers of women seeking shelter. One area of just eight streets around Jenkins Avenue produced 201 'clients' (though a similar-sized area in the city's east produced just one).

In the face of these grim realities, Whyalla had its boosters. The council remained resolutely positive, even though most initiatives failed to deliver the benefits promised. The *Whyalla News* seemed to have a generic news story permanently set, ready to be deployed, beginning with the headline '[insert name of company] plans will bring jobs'. Sue Scheiffers' privately published 1985 history of the city, *A Ribbon of Steel*, though appearing a decade after the shipyard's closure, was sub-titled *Whyalla Surges Ahead*, and catalogued a relentless succession of development, urban amenities and civic progress. As a serial grey nomad, in the 1980s and '90s, my mother became a one-woman travelling embassy for Whyalla, persuading dozens of fellow caravanners in parks all over Australia that, regardless of its reputation, Whyalla was a paradise.

OF THE MIGRANTS of the 1960s who remained, their health was now evidently actively harmed by the environment in which they lived. Epidemiological surveys by the state's Department of Health in 2005 established shocking figures of chronic illness. Whyalla's residents manifest significantly worse health than people in comparable towns. Rates of lung cancer were 'significantly higher' – over 50 per cent greater, as were chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (77 per cent more), alcoholic liver disease (70 per cent more) and chronic hepatitis (330 per cent more). The report had been prompted by long-standing concern over the red dust emitted from the steel-works, and especially its iron ore-processing 'pellet plant'.

Nevertheless, the early 1990s saw yet another wave of consultants' investigations, facilitated workshops and strategic planning, again with wildly optimistic outcomes. The report of a planning weekend among city council elected officials and employed officers in 1991 came up with extravagant ideas, such as developing a resort for Asian honeymooners and redeveloping

the local racecourse and golf course to attract international punters and players. The workshop considered several scenarios for Whyalla in 2001. While accepting its remote, hot and dry location and its 'dirty' industry, participants nevertheless foresaw it at worst becoming a 'pleasant backwater' – and even then thought that 'ghost suburbs' might generate visitors. One positive scenario for an 'innovative, entrepreneurial, attractive human and humane' city sketched out a 'green, almost tropical environment' based on recycled water and tourist attractions (such as a large sculpture park) that would, naturally, 'put Whyalla on the international tourist circuit'.

Despite the city's unpropitious situation and its precarious economic base, its people – and especially its city council – remained doggedly optimistic. In the 1990s, after two decades of decline, there arose a brief and, as it turned out, almost fruitless movement to make Whyalla an exemplar of the new 'ecocity' movement. The council, in association with the Adelaide-based Centre for Urban Ecology, endorsed plans to generate power from Whyalla's abundant sunshine, creating a 'green city': a paradoxically enticing vision for a place that received only 270 millimetres of rainfall but over three hundred sunny days annually. An 'eCopolis', as its proponents called it, involved 'creating vibrant human settlements...shaping a healthy economy in keeping with ecological principles [and] promoting social justice and wellbeing'.

The ecocity push reflected Whyalla at its most optimistic. In *Whyalla Why Not?* (Centre for Urban Ecology, 1996), sustainable city theorist Paul Downton espoused the visionary idea that Whyalla could become 'internationally renowned as a centre of the global solar industry, as well as being a major tourist destination'. He wrote a short story, set twenty-five years in the future, painting a bold vision of a solar-powered city living in harmony with its environment and enriched by 'green' industries. The ecocity idea set out to 'reinstantiate the city, not only in environmental terms, but economically and culturally'. The Whyalla of 2021 it envisaged would have 'a seriously major rock music industry' and would have made multiculturalism work. Its population would have doubled but its jobless rate would be the lowest in Australia.

The vision of Whyalla as an ecocity offered an idealistic vision, as passionate as the boosters' prophecies of growth thirty years before. It failed,

killed by lack of investment. Its only reminder is a water-recovery plant near the city's racecourse, its bare red-earth berms giving no idea of the passion that inspired it. That the would-be ecocity's economy remained fundamentally dependent upon mining and processing minerals, using coal-generated power and water brought from the ecologically failing Murray River, remains a sad and tragic irony.

The early years of the twenty-first century saw a further burst of optimism, based on the promotional slogan 'Whyalla: Where the Outback Meets the Sea'. In 2005, the council was promoting the city optimistically: 'long a steel and ship-building hub, Whyalla is now experiencing a tourism renaissance based around its proud industrial history and natural phenomena'. In truth, tours of the steelworks attracted few visitors, and the tourist promotion office was now putting its eggs in the basket of the Whyalla Maritime Museum, itself based on the preserved Second World War corvette HMAS *Whyalla* (the first ship built in the shipyard, launched in 1941 and in 1987 hauled ashore). Even more, they hoped for a boon from fishing tourism, from the annual angling festival, and from the exploitation of the giant cuttlefish, which swarm in the waters of nearby False Bay. While the lure of Spencer Gulf's snapper and kingfish has failed to attract gourmet travellers, the cuttlefish do attract a thousand or so divers each winter. Successive mining or processing proposals, boosting the prospects and benefits of aquaculture, betalene (an algae used in food manufacture) or the processing of titanium dioxide, came to nothing; more is hoped from reports that the Indian energy giant Adani might develop a solar-power plant in one of the city's huge – but virtually unoccupied – industrial estates. Sometimes it seems that the city's main product seems to be consultants' reports and optimism in industrial quantities.

For all that the city has become smaller and poorer, Whyalla remains (as the town commission's 1965 booklet put it) 'a city of contrasts'. Alongside the dominance of the pub-club-bingo and poker-machine culture that seemingly characterises the city, it is also, paradoxically, a place with greater access to culture than comparable communities. Partly because of its isolation and perceived disadvantages, the state government and other agencies have long made special efforts to bring culture to Whyalla. (I first heard Mozart's

Eine kleine Nachtmusik live in the Nicholson Avenue primary school library, because South Australia's arts council sent a string quartet on tour in about 1973.) The opening of what is now the Middleback Arts Centre in 1985 has given Whyalla residents an impressive program of theatre, music, ballet and other performances. Nor is the culture all imported. The Whyalla Players have performed musicals annually since 1956, and not just the traditional Rogers and Hammerstein or Gilbert and Sullivan repertoire, but also complex and recent works such as *Phantom of the Opera* or *Cats*. Again, this suggests a triumph of optimism over the city's unpromising background of deprivation. Ironically, the Middleback Arts Centre is located in the same precinct that houses government and church employment and welfare offices.

This ambivalence can be detected in the reflections of resident writers published in anthologies produced by successive incarnations of the Whyalla Writers' Group (WWG). In 2001, Julie Drogemuller, in her poem 'The Beauty of Whyalla', reflected lyrically:

Her eyes,
are the lights
that shine
in the clear starry nights.

And her name is Whyalla.

Contributors to another WWG anthology, *Iceblocking in Red Haze*, expressed the disaffection seemingly endemic among the city's 'youth'. In a piece featuring a sustained diatribe beginning 'I hate Whyalla', an anonymous author ended her piece, paradoxically, by writing fondly of 'the red sand, the saltbush, the desert...the RED HAZE, my home Whyalla'.

As this suggests, while arguably a community in perpetual crisis, optimism can be found – not least in the pages of the city's perennially failing newspaper. Jan Vrtelka, a Czech migrant, wrote dozens of letters to the *Whyalla News* in the mid-noughties. He later published a selection of more than sixty of them under the telling title of *All for Whyalla*. Mr Vrtelka's optimism for Whyalla's potential seemed boundless. He too advocated developing coastal

resorts and making the railway to Port Augusta – which had carried passengers for only two years before closing in 1978 – the means to ship cattle to Darwin for export to Asia. He also proposed desalination plants, a medical school and university to make it the ‘education hub of western South Australia’. The coastal track to Port Augusta, he claimed, could rival Victoria’s Great Ocean Road, if only it were sealed. He urged the introduction of dog-sledding (on sand) and land yachts (on mudflats near the city)! Whyalla, he thought, should plan for a city five times its present size: entice refugees to settle, he argued – perhaps having himself fled Soviet oppression. Mr Vrtelka’s pride in Whyalla was not unique. Like my mother, he regarded Whyalla’s heat as invigorating, and its generally fine weather as without parallel. It was as if the authors of BHP’s boosting booklets of the 1960s lived on. Jan Vrtelka’s optimism was at least rooted in an awareness that things really were pretty crook. He knew that the city’s population had declined more rapidly than in any comparable second city in any state in the world. He understood the notion of ‘a diminishing city’ – an oft-used catchphrase – but he struggled against it.

Whyalla’s economic decline appears to be terminal. Ore mining in the Middleback Ranges brings modest benefits; as did the Santos natural gas development at Port Bonython on nearby Point Lowly in the 1990s. The development of BHP Billiton’s copper and uranium mines at Olympic Dam has not contributed much to Whyalla’s economy. BHP divested itself of the steelworks in 2000 to OneSteel, later taken over by Arrium Steel, with each transfer costing jobs. Over the decade the total workforce in the steelworks – once six thousand strong – fell to around sixteen hundred. In April 2016, Arrium called in administrators and offered the plant for sale. Today, the future of the steelworks remains uncertain. If it were to close, not only would Australia lose its only manufacturer of ‘long steel’ products, but without its principal employer Whyalla would be mortally wounded, economically and socially. Fundamentally, the question is whether an industrial community can survive in the harsh environment of the upper Eyre Peninsula. Arrium Steel’s collapse may reflect the structural impossibility of attempting to make steel in such a place, rather than merely chronic mismanagement and a worldwide glut of steel.

But amid the predictions of economic collapse and the social dislocation that would inevitably follow, optimistic voices are also heard. The city

council's 2015–16 Strategic Plan predictably aims to create 'a vibrant, attractive city offering our community a diverse range of sustainable economic, social, environmental and cultural opportunities', creating 'an energetic, harmonious, integrated community actively involved in shaping Whyalla for current and future generations'. Just as deprivation and despair has been an ineradicable part of Whyalla's inheritance, so too has optimism and hope. A recent visit to the city disclosed new homes privately built where Housing Trust units had been demolished and, as well as many 'For Sale' signs, new businesses opening (a perennial triumph of optimism over economic reality in the city). Amid forebodings of doom, quixotic headlines characterise the *Whyalla News*: 'Afloat with hope'; 'City on the mend'; 'Whyalla expands to great future'; and, of course, 'Jobs boost for region'. The local council has launched a rebranding that will, they hope, attract tourists. (The cartoonist for the *Whyalla News* – who happens to be my elder brother – suggests that instead of 'Where the outback meets the sea' it adopt 'Where the steelworks used to be'.) With the death in 2016 of Jim Pollock, long-term mayor named in obituaries as a 'Whyalla warrior', no fewer than seven candidates are standing for election as mayor – they all have positive visions for the city's future. On the way to the airport I stopped off at a magnificent exhibition of quilts by the Whyalla Quilters, whose members had produced over a hundred pieces, a startlingly characteristic expression of the creativity that Whyalla's people can display.

No one is really sure what 'Whyalla' means in the language of the Barngala people – they were devastated culturally before anyone thought to ask. It may mean 'place near water' ('Where the outback meets the sea'), or it may mean (in the classic Indigenous response to a white questioner) 'I don't know'.

Whyalla: I don't know.

I am grateful to Don Sarre, Ingrid and Stephen Stanley, Naomi Haldane and Ana Morris of the Whyalla Library Service, and Teresa Court of the Whyalla City Council.

Professor Peter Stanley of UNSW Canberra is the author of twenty-seven books, including *Whyalla at War* (East Street Publications, 2004). His recent titles include *Lost Boys of Anzac* (NewSouth, 2014) and *Bad Characters* (Pier 9, 2010), which jointly won the Prime Minister's Prize for Australian History in 2011. His work has previously been published in *Griffith Review* 9 and 48.

Bigger than heaven

The past remembered, forgotten, unmade

Shannon Burns

1

I RECALL VERY little about myself before the age of six. I possess no photographs to jolt the hidden memories, and those few relatives I see at birthday and Christmas celebrations have only the faintest sense of what I was like as a boy. No baby mementos; nothing of the toddler; no kindergarten tokens or pre-school art works; no school portraits or athletics day medals; no locks of hair, first teeth, first boots; no record of first words or cherished toys; and few revealing anecdotes. As I sit to write these first lines, my inner archive is almost blank as well. There are only a handful of images left over: small, discontinuous fragments, which may or may not be authentic residual traces of an otherwise forgotten landscape.

I had trouble breathing as a toddler. I recall waiting in the steamy bathroom for what seemed like an eternity – probably twenty minutes or so – until the coughing fits were over, and my throat and chest were clear. I sat on the floor with my back against the bathtub, half asleep, immersed in an alien atmosphere, before it was time, at last, to dry the steam and sweat from my body and return to bed, and what dreams may come. At some stage in those early years I convinced myself that fire engines were screaming vehicles that roamed the streets in the dead of night, driven by flaming firemen who routinely set houses ablaze. If I could hear a siren growing louder and louder – which often seemed to happen – I would tuck my head beneath the covers, slow my breath, and beg to be spared.

MY PARENTS WERE born poor and, as far as I know, remain so. One was the daughter of Greek immigrant labourers, who migrated from small villages in the north and south of Greece in the late 1940s; the other was one of seven children who were abandoned by their father, an English sailor, and forced to live in state care when their mother couldn't pay the bills. This in a time when Greeks were derided and orphanages were more punitive than caregiving.

My father rarely spoke of his childhood, but one day, as we were travelling alone in the car together, he mentioned the orphanage, and spoke of how he and his siblings were treated there. It was a kind of apology for his own failings, I suspect, but too subtle for me to grasp at the time. His descriptions conjured images of inmates lined up naked in a prison yard on a freezing night, jointly enduring punishment for obscure misdeeds, their wardens waiting for someone in the line to break, to either confess their misdemeanour or to inform on another child. This is the image I recall, but I doubt that I properly understood the circumstances my father described to me, since whenever I found myself alone with him – which was rare – I experienced a paralysing nervousness that distorted all of my senses, so that I could barely make sense of what he was saying.

I RECALL WAKING on a cold cement floor with blood dripping from my nose. I'm four or five years of age. My memory has always been that my mother beat me and left me in the laundry, and that a little later, when I woke, I could hear voices talking merrily in the adjoining kitchen. I was forgotten, perhaps, or she expected me to emerge from the laundry eventually, pretending that nothing had happened. Yet it seems possible that two different memories have merged in my mind: those of being beaten; and those of blood noses, which I was prone to, and their remedy, which required me to lie on my back on a cool floor, pinching my nose with a wet flannel. Perhaps I fell asleep doing this, and the puddle of blood around my face was the result of turning over while asleep, instead of a beating. Perhaps my mother saw me unconscious on the floor and decided that a rest would do me good, before shutting the door to seal out the light, so that I might sleep longer. Or perhaps she'd only beaten me in an ordinary way – a slap or two across the face, a

knuckle over the head – and at that moment, under that mild duress, my nose began to bleed, without direct injury. She wouldn't have felt responsible for the blood. Maybe she was upset that the punishment had been stalled by the bloody nose, before her rage had been satisfied, and sent me off to do the usual thing – lie down on the floor, wet towel, dark room, a calming atmosphere – with more than usual indifference.

Nothing is certain.

Mum was violent and vain, but affectionate. Her love manifested in firm lipstick kisses on my face, followed by spit-wet tissues smeared against my cheeks to wipe her markers away. Her cuddles were an immersion into perfume – strong, obscene odours – and she liked to keep an orderly, spotless household. I loved nothing more than waking to the sound of her tidying the house, vacuuming the floors, dusting the picture frames. It strikes me only now that her cleaning frenzies often followed long night-time absences. The vacuum cleaner signalled her return during the early hours of the morning, as much as maternal care. It was a sign of her presence, and her presence was a token of her love.

I had numerous babysitters, and mum assured them that, to relieve my unhappiness, they had only to prepare hot vanilla custard after dinner. But they were rarely as capable as her in the art of blending custard powder with milk, and their concoctions were always lumpy and tasteless. What was intended to serve as a comfort in her absence instead reminded me of it all the more. Then, in the mornings, she'd either sleep in very late, and I would have the run of the house, or she'd wake before me, or decide against sleep altogether, and clean frantically.

But is this the real sequence of events? Did she clean the house after going out regularly at night, or did she only clean when she stopped going out? Another way of posing this question is: did my mother concern herself more with housecleaning while she was working as a prostitute, or when she was unemployed? Was she driven to purify the house after those long nights – and therefore, in a sense, cleanse her entire domain – or did that phase of her life inspire an indifference to cleaning altogether?

When I was four or five, I came to believe that mum had AIDS. So said the neighbouring children, who heard it from their parents. The house next

door was dark and grotty, and the twins who lived there were always filthy. Jill's hair was permanently knotted and Jack's face was covered in food. Their parents rarely spoke to my mother and the kids were instructed not to come into our yard. While we were always, on the surface, 'cleaner' than most people in the neighbourhood – my hair was neatly kept, my clothes freshly washed and ironed, our house immaculate – we were also the most despised, the untouchables of the street. Kids were instructed to avoid mum, and by extension, to avoid me. After all, I was the child of a woman who 'had AIDS'. I was the one with the mother who went out at night and slept in late, and who welcomed dangerous men into her home. I was the tainted child who had to be kept at a distance.

FOR MY FIRST five years I lived in an attached, single-level, red-bricked government house on Whiteparish Road, Elizabeth North, in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. But when I think of the fire engines that populated my childhood nightmares I see myself standing at the window, watching the firemen and their flaming hoses as they point their nozzles up to me. I am above them. When I try to recall that first bedroom at night this synoptic view comes to mind, which must be the viewpoint from my earliest dreams. But the bedroom is a changeable place, and my memories of daytime are at street-level.

Awake at first light, I watch the streetlights dim outside my window. I look across the road, through high, leafy branches and up to the brightening sky. It must be summer because I'm not cold. There is some chance that the bedroom door is locked, so I can't leave the room, or – more likely – I'm too small to reach the high doorknob. When the sun comes fully into view I'm permitted to call out to mum, who may or may not be home. Until then, I fade again into blankness.

2

ELIZABETH NORTH AND its surrounding suburbs were developed in the mid-1950s, on farming land north of Adelaide, as part of a careful postwar

plan to industrialise South Australia and grow its economy. Wedged between Salisbury on its southern boundary and Smithfield to the north (both established more than a century earlier), these newer suburbs have been home to waves of working-class migration; largely British at first, then other Europeans, before greater diversity took hold in the latter part of the century. Some pockets of the northern suburbs are broadly working class, with high employment in various manufacturing and related industries – at least until recently. Others house a significant number of unemployed people. In 2015, Smithfield-Elizabeth North had an unemployment rate of 23.6 per cent, and the general trend for that area has been something in the order of 20 per cent over the last few decades. It holds a large proportion of South Australia's public housing, and, according to census figures, around three-quarters of its current adult population failed to graduate from high school.

It's now thirty years since I left Elizabeth North, as a small child, but my lasting impressions of the place bear out these figures. The only person I knew who had a job at the time was a young uncle, a security guard. My maternal grandparents worked in factories before I was born, then accepted a pensioner's version of early retirement. Most of my extended family were on a parental pension or unemployment benefits and lived in public housing, and none of them finished secondary school. My father was forced to seek employment in my teenage years, and worked in a factory, briefly – resenting every minute it – before injuring his back, claiming worker's compensation, and settling down on a disability pension.

By the time I left home, I was so ashamed of my parents' idleness and reliance on welfare that I found it challenging to ask for any kind of support for myself. My request for Austudy was refused because, as the counsellor tilted her head toward me expectantly, pen poised over the page, I found that I was more comfortable with rejection than representing myself as a victim, even if it meant that I had to drop out of school.

My way of coping throughout childhood was to pretend, as best as I could, that my family life was of the typical, working-class variety, and I held myself apart from everyone I knew in order to sustain the illusion. I never invited friends to my house, and I broke up with girlfriends – sometimes cruelly – whenever further intimacy threatened to reveal my true

circumstances. I hid the parent–teacher interview forms and was unfailingly evasive if teachers or counsellors expressed concern or curiosity. I found that I could ‘pass’ as normal simply by seeming aloof and independent, and that false image was more important to me than anything.

I refused to tell the Centrelink lady what she needed to hear because the mask I’d been wearing was all I possessed. I preferred to seem wilful and stubborn – and suffer for it – than be openly vulnerable. But instead of starving or becoming homeless for any length of time, I found that I was capable of something that hadn’t been modelled for me: work, to a higher standard than expected, over a sustained duration. The unskilled labouring jobs that I found left me filthy and exhausted six days per week, but I could accept the daily misery more often than not, since it provided a semblance of independence.

3

SOMETIME IN 1985, my mother sent me for a holiday visit with my father, and I haven’t revisited Elizabeth North since. I was taken away at night, still half asleep, in a stranger’s car, clinging tightly to a thin black garbage bag, which held all of my clothes and, as I imagine, a few toys. I remember the unfamiliar black roads lit by faint headlights as we drove. I had to strain my neck to see above the dashboard of an early model Ford or Holden, and was amazed that the driver simply trusted the road to keep extending beyond the darkness.

It was a week before my father and stepmother broke the news that I was now in their permanent care. Feeling homesick, I’d asked when mum was coming to get me. My stepmother said that she wasn’t, then gave me a strange look and went to speak with my father, who had assumed that I already knew. For a while I was convinced that they were keeping me against my mother’s will, or that they’d tricked her into giving me up. I felt sure that she was desperately searching for me, all over town. But after a month or so my mother called to say that she was in hospital, or had been in hospital, and was too sick to care for me. She promised to come and get me when she felt

better, though, and said she loved her little man and thought of him always. When she asked how much I loved her I replied as I always did, because I knew it pleased her: 'Bigger than heaven.'

4

THIS IS WHAT I know: Terrance Burns met Theodora 'Roula' Bageas while he was dating her sister. Their love was figured on betrayal, both hostile and libidinous. Roula was in her late teens. Terry was twenty and travelled everywhere barefoot. Neither had finished high school and both were decorated with amateur tattoos. Things may have been good for a while, but it didn't last: they argued fiercely and Terry left. Weeks later, Roula tracked him down and said she was pregnant. So he moved back in, and they prepared themselves for parenthood.

Eleven months later I was born. By the time my father discovered the deception, it was too late.

There is something chastening about this mode of conception, about knowing that, by most ordinary standards, your conception was aberrant. And for the comparatively 'respectable' Greek side of my family, which my mother belonged to, my beginnings carried a shame that couldn't be easily remedied. It was shocking enough for an unmarried Greek girl to mix with boys who were not from her tribe, but to fall pregnant to one was irredeemable. The restrictions imposed on young women like my mother, by their families and Orthodox communities, were unduly onerous, and she either had little regard for them or found them unendurable.

For years I wondered why my desire to learn Greek and to call myself Greek were rebutted by relatives (to my uncles I was a *dogga*, or a feral Ozzie, and not even remotely Greek) but I now know that my birth, and my mother's behaviour in general, triggered her family's ostracism from their community. They were no longer invited to regular events and celebrations, and my grandparents stopped attending their church, out of embarrassment. My uncles, who were still teenagers, chose to reject their ancestry altogether in favour of a resolutely Australian identity, which they still carry.

My conception brought exile and shame to half of my family, and was the elaboration of a harsh deception committed against my father. Even so, I'm told that Terry began drinking heavily when my mother went into labour, and that he strode proudly through the streets of Elizabeth North in the early hours of the next morning, rousing the neighbourhood with the joyous announcement of my birth. And while I can't recall meeting any great-uncles or great-aunts or second cousins on my Greek side, or ever stepping foot inside an Orthodox church, my grandmother adored me, and my grandfather endured me without obvious distaste.

5

THE DECEITFUL WOMAN who uses sex to get her way is an intolerable – and resolutely misogynist – caricature, yet it approximates my experience of Roula.

She was often violent. If a man did something to upset her, she would fly at him with sharp nails and ear-piercing screams. It didn't matter where we were or what the provocation was or who was in the right or wrong, she was unstoppable when the urge to maim someone overcame her.

I was two when she attacked Terry with his guitar, smashing it over his head. He stormed out of the house and never returned.

Other boyfriends would handle things in their own way: some disappeared quickly; others stuck around despite the beatings; and others may have returned the violence with interest, or threatened to do so. I never saw anyone hit my mother, but I saw her inflict black eyes and lips and noses with furious abandon; I saw her tear shreds of skin off a man by punching him with the large, diamond engagement ring that he had given her; and I saw that man accept the beating with a kind of masochistic forbearance that was truly devastating. She would come for me with a similar lack of restraint, often wielding a hair brush – but I, at least, had the good sense to run for my life.

6

BEFORE TERRY, ROULA'S first serious boyfriend was a kid called Shane who, she said, died while train surfing. She'd tried to name me after him but my father wouldn't have it; instead they settled on Shannon, which carries the ghost of Shane but veers in a different direction. Both are Irish: Shane is a cognate of John (God's gracious gift) while Shannon reaches back to Sionna, the Celtic goddess and 'possessor of wisdom'. I have no Irish ancestry (that I know of) and I've never been wise, or liked my name, but the sense of Irishness stuck and bestowed some curious fidelities later in life. If I embraced the legacy of Homer and Socrates on the strength of my Greek blood, then I claimed Yeats and Joyce largely on the strength of my name.

Roula also suggested, once, that I was named after a dog from a popular song in the late '70s. Shannon goes for a swim at the beach but drowns, which prompts a sorrowful falsetto from Henry Gross:

Shannon, is gone I heard.
She's drifting out to sea.
She always loved to swim away.
Maybe she'll find an island with a shaded tree,
Just like the one in our backyard.

There was an almond tree in our backyard, overlooking prickly weeds, surrounded by a cast-iron fence. It offered very little shade and hardly blossomed. At the back of the house were slatted windows, which I could remove when my mother failed to come home or if I was locked out and desperate to go to the toilet. I can see my mattress drying on the back porch too – and relive the disgrace of it – alongside a green and blue budgerigar called Pretty Boy, who died from exposure one night, after he was left outside uncovered. In the front yard there were soursobs and down the end of the street there were red shrub roses, which I'd pick for mum, making a show of wooing her, of being her handsome man and one true love.

7

THE PAST IS a place that fades from your mind as you drive steadily into the darkness ahead. When you leave your mother, or your childhood, there is no return; instead, you find some way to forge ahead, to remake whatever has been unmade and to strip away those parts of yourself that threaten the life you've patched together. For me, after my teenage years, there was no use in having a past, and this made me impatient with other people's reminiscences, the stories they told over and over, the memory anchors that seemed to stabilise their sense of self, reminding them of where and how and to whom they belong. Perhaps I was being melodramatic when I decided that I belonged nowhere to no one in no way, but that idea of myself worked well enough for a while.

I know that I was lucky. That I just scraped through. That lifelong dysfunction is only a misstep away. But the mask of normalcy has lost its appeal, and I'm beginning to think that the past is a place I can no longer renounce, that it explains parts of me that are otherwise inexplicable – to myself and everyone else.

POETRY

Adelaide detours

Jill Jones

From the south

What is the smoke?
Is this a city or something
more inexplicable?
Don't talk of alleys, this is
a suburb, see the trees.
There is no river, not really
roads are slightly tattered.
There are garlands on the strips
between districts, wine and roses.
Trucks fall from the hills
full of heat and catch.
They fall through the ages
and their sides open.
Who understands the steam
the drains, grates, overpasses
all too strange now?
A kind of history that arrived
out of the south
with tradewinds, something
to sell.

Clipsal interludio

Mosquito racing cars
bus huffing peak hour side
swipe in addition to
squares you go round
mallets in your head
attempting da capo
again to catch
the ghost of Bach's
Goldberg 'composed
for...refreshment of
...spirits' or local
ghosts Gawler Gouger
Goyder Grainger
as singing past
the cemetery as
ratty or raspish as
a colony pretending
it's free singing past
the murdering guns
and waterholes
metal is still calling
periodic table drifts
across the plains a hole
for whispers all that
porn distributed
like a Pirie Street
brief syncopations
in the city grid
control gone
on Gorge Road
welcome to the barriers
bushfires rage in
your head the mall bawls

flash aria break glass
 in emergency lick Pale
 off the Rundle
 kill time with variations
 in a Port Road jam.

**Early thoughts while turning onto Anzac Highway on
 14th September 2015**

Stuck at lights at Anzac Highway, hello Le Cornu corner
 a rooster crows, is it a phone, maybe not, it *is* early
 so, it may be a rooster, the city is full of birds

Like those magpies on TV aerials on the treeless plain, on the lookout
 like car drivers, like hunters
 like someone trying to avoid Richmond Road in the morning

Ah, the city, full of straight roads made for managers
 political news made by managers
 and summer's early swerve is like any heat
 but not like any heat, it's a spring surprise, and

this is now
 among the Austerity houses, the mock Tudor houses
 and the new factories, where small things can happen
 such as not ticking the boxes

such as not turning right to the airport
 not rushing to the east coast (but I am)
 or taking a plane to Port Lincoln or Whyalla
 paid for by somebody's budget, someone keeping tabs

Or not turning left, as if there was any authority left
in a straight drive from Bradman, or South Road, or Cross Road
all roads are cross roads, with that heat that is now, and unmanaged

Later, the security industry will pull me aside to test me
for the bomb I thought about in a new dream you can't control
it's just a job, scanning for nothing, not like the magpies

that are being hounded away by wattle birds, native miners
they swoop us all the same

But this is now, the airport still waits
there's some broken glass glinting in the spring sun
just there, by the roadside
today someone will crunch it, another roll-over that hurts

Like the waning welfare state and official kindness
apologies retracted or run down by the spectre haunting the brown sky
where all that's solid holds itself within the air
the things that can be measured but ignored, the real conditions of life

Whatever it is that happens now, in the hard light
small, beautiful, endlessly suburban
the melting air

Note: the earliest draft of this poem was written on the day of change of Liberal Party leadership (and prime ministership) from Tony Abbott to Malcolm Turnbull, 14 September 2015.

Driving through Dulwich

Looking along the city plain
there's nothing to say
trees shimmy or wither
 unexpected wind
a sigh of making
weather depends
from branches and eaves
depends on actions
 synaptic, molecular
and sky seems ageless
but above clouds
it's fading where
sun drops in
a hissy machine
 music radiates
day's wheels are careful
around the barriers
this week we have spectacles
 and avoidance
an election poster says
'save the unicorn'
 already torn.

Murray andante

The night fills with Bach
with the clear cold
a gas fire doesn't touch
outside rattle of a skateboard
not gelling with the violin

skateboard guy, I've seen him before
rolls back towards Gilbert Street
the slow movement begins
it's not quite a baroque town
the grids almost classical

but the Bach andante claims it
now the outside softens
again giving access somehow
to measure, of steady streets
lack of blue shadow and a

width of days along with my
steady lostness in a bowl
of clarity, while above my eyes
the green and grey hills
need to stretch my thought

and rain suddenly hits the roof
then stops, quick, all this water
that doesn't go to rivers
that doesn't cease the drought
nor bring me back to

a mind that accompanied me
once through funky allegros
and andantes and other
more humid songs
unlike the passing of trams at

Pirie Street, as lawyers progress
to sandstone courts where
cameras linger, sensations of the local
a city's petty crimes
well, that's cross continental

like the sad river, as even
the blind hours remind me
killed state by state, classical neglect
not even this rain nor
this music allays.

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MEMOIR

Dunstan, Christies and me

Growing up in the 'Athens of the South'

Chris Wallace

ADELAIDE'S GOLDEN AGE began when the Beatles flew into town on 12 June 1964, electrifying the citizenry out of their country-town torpor into a screaming mass on the streets. It ended when a dressing-gowned Don Dunstan resigned office on 15 February 1979, the last day of the most exciting state government Australia has ever seen. I spent most of that period in South Australia's excellent state education system, basking in the glow of a premier who seemingly made the earth move and stars pan gloriously across the heavens in a small city that, for once in its life, felt like the very centre of the universe. No joke.

In the 'infant industry' era of the 1950s and 1960s, South Australia had its economic development policy down pat: subsidise big manufacturers to set up shop, and support them with state-funded infrastructure. A continuous flow of 'ten-pound Poms' arrived to fill the production lines. Cherry farmer and conservative Premier Tom Playford brought – and sometimes outright bought – industrial development that otherwise had no business being in a place as beautiful and isolated, and economically irrelevant to the rest of Australia, as Adelaide.

Thus Chrysler and General Motors were there (forever after on the public teat). Chrysler nestled alongside Port Stanvac in the south, while General Motors-Holden set up plant to Adelaide's north. Holden's workers lived in

Elizabeth: hot, flat and poor. Chrysler (subsequently Mitsubishi) workers lived in seaside Christies Beach, working-class winners in the geographic lottery of immigrant blue-collar work.

In March 1965, Frank Walsh beat Tom Playford despite the latter's gerrymandering – or 'playmandering', as it was dubbed – and became premier. Walsh may have led Labor to victory for the first time in thirty-two years, but industry policy continued the Playford way. Two years after Walsh's victory, Don Dunstan, his attorney-general, succeeded him. For twelve years under Dunstan – briefly punctuated by two years of conservative government under Steele Hall early on – Adelaide was the 'Athens of the South' and Don its philosopher-king.

PORT STANVAC OIL Refinery brought my family from Cronulla to Christies Beach, newly designated by town planners to become a working-class enclave in the midst of the beautiful Fleurieu Peninsula. My parents were match-made by workmates at Kurnell Oil Refinery in Sydney. Arch worked in the field, Bobbie in the mailroom; Arch was divorced, Bobbie widowed with two sons and a house in Cronulla. Arch disliked his Kurnell boss, a bad-tempered Welshman who borrowed £20 and never repaid it. It wasn't the £20 but the principle, Arch would say. So when in 1962 the chance to work on the new refinery start-up of Standard Vacuum Oil Company – the Far East joint venture of Standard Oil of New Jersey and Mobil – he grabbed it. Arch fell in love with the Fleurieu's stony coastline, wild St Vincent Gulf waters, stunning vineyards and almond groves, and pure Mediterranean-like climate.

At Port Stanvac, Standard Vacuum Oil not only got naming rights to a bit of the South Australian coast but an adjacent public housing estate as well. When we arrived in Christies Beach, forerunners of the tens of thousands of families who would move there in ensuing decades, it was golden paddocks as far as the eye could see, all the way down to the sea – part of Lambert and Rosa Christie's 1895 farm established on the traditional lands of the Indigenous Kurna people. The first six Housing Trust homes had been built, and we moved into one. A supermarket and doctor's surgery went in soon after, as hundreds of other Housing Trust homes sprang up around us. The speed was astonishing. Opposite the shops is a little park with a bronze sculpture

by John Dowie from 1965 of two seated Aboriginal warriors, called 'The Rainmakers', donated by immigrant German businessman Eugen Lohmann – the only pointer to the producer of the near instant and, for the time, highly liveable mass housing all around it.

Lohmann's company, Wender and Duerholt, made prefabricated camp accommodation (*Baracken*) during World War II, and afterwards switched to making pre-cut timber-framed houses at high speed to replace houses razed in the war. Lohmann, watching Berlin being divvied up and wanting a safe haven, moved his business to South Australia in the 1950s, winning contracts to build five hundred houses at a time in the rapidly expanding city – including, in the early 1960s, Christies Beach. As a small child, that Dowie bronze seemed to me like a miracle from the outside world, the only original artwork for miles and seemingly the only visible Aboriginal reference on land on which, until relatively recently, the Kurna people had still lived.

In fact, the schoolteacher next door and her family had Aboriginal heritage. Across the road was a German engineer, his Austrian ex-opera singer wife and their children. Arch had been in the RAAF in World War II, Rudy a pilot in the Luftwaffe; now they were workmates at the refinery and the sons of both families were in the RAAF air cadets together. There was a cop and his family, and an old petrol tanker driver and his wife. There was a secretary from the refinery and her husband. Everyone had kids, sprinklers and front porches. On summer nights – stinking hot in a way only Adelaide can be – people would sit in the dark on their front steps and have street-wide conversations, yelling from front step to front step, quaffing local d'Arenberg and Pirramimma wines poured from glass flagons while their kids frolicked. Andy from up the road and I would tear along the pavement on our trikes and, when one of us yelled 'bomb!', stack them sideways onto the grass, enacting obliteration in a Cold War nuclear strike. We were five years old.

Arch collected the flagons, acid-etched circles around them and popped the bottoms off to make individual glasshouses for seedlings. Our backyard became an Eden of homegrown vegetables, bountiful fruit trees and well-loved pets. Nature was everywhere in that patch of suburbia rapidly assembled in the service of industry, surrounded by the Fleurieu's stunning beauty. When the next-door cat broke into the hutch housing our baby rabbits, my

brother stuck his air rifle out the kitchen window and shot it. Every so often, a refinery workmate would drop off snapper in a bucket of seawater just caught from his boat in St Vincent Gulf. Come winter, there was mushrooming – strolling through green, wet Willunga paddocks with eyes peeled, knife in hand. In summer it was off to the farm of Dutch friends, the Boerema family, on the Onkaparinga River in Old Noarlunga to pick the warm, sweet strawberries thriving on the river flats. And there was swimming and burning and peeling at the beach, home to Grey Nurses and White Pointers that had food enough to leave us alone. And always, trips to McLaren Vale cellar doors, yarns with the winemakers, discussions about the last vintage and the next.

All year round, lanky lads came round to work with my two teenage brothers on their hotted-up bombs. Arch put in a garage with a pit so the boys could work standing up under their engines. Bobbie made sandwiches, a whole sliced loaf at a time, and ferried them out to the amateur mechanics. The local police knew my brothers. After all, they lived among us. Their knocks on our front door were mostly to complain about, and sometimes to issue a summons over, noisy exhausts or drag-racing – and once because one knocked over a power pole, taking the Christies Beach electricity supply with him.

THERE WAS SUBMERGED racism too – but only against the English. The ‘ten-pound Poms’ quickly swamped our half-dozen houses on all sides as Wender and Duerholt popped up houses quicker than our Sunbeams popped up toast. ‘Whinging Poms’ was heard muttered under the occasional breath, but not too loudly because they were everywhere and, in any case, many became our mates.

Politics was a rolling discussion. Arch had been a shop steward in his youth, talent-spotted but not tempted by an invitation to join the Communist Party while a twenty-something shale miner in the Capertee Valley – now a World Heritage site, and the second-largest canyon in the world.

Bobbie’s mother, whom we visited annually on our trip ‘home’ to Sydney, was a Tory with a vicious set against Gough Whitlam. She was convinced he dyed his eyebrows (very black, while his hair was very white – possible in nature but impossible in Grandma’s eyes). On the 1,395 kilometre drive from

Christies Beach to Cronulla in the unairconditioned, seatbeltless Holden, with Arch chain-smoking Kool cigarettes and Bobbie wrangling damp flannels for our necks, I anticipated the political discussions to come. Grandma got some push back, not least because Gough and Margaret Whitlam were shire residents too when we lived in Cronulla and gave Arch and Bobbie their own children's no-longer-needed bassinet for me.

I learnt that politics could be complicated. Arch leaned left, yet argued swing voters were the only smart ones since they make and break governments. Grandma may have been a Whitlam-hating Tory by temperament, but at the same time was a fierce Australian nationalist of the England-hating kind. Over slices of passionfruit sponge and hands of euchre – she was a terrific card player – Grandma recounted bitter stories from her Lancashire childhood, before her father moved the family to New South Wales. Her own grandfather had been killed down the mines, a hundredweight of coal the compensation; her father was a coalminer too, risking the same fate, or at least 'black lung'. As a child, half her day was spent in school, the other half working in a Wigan cotton mill – this in the early twentieth century. Walking home from church on Sunday mornings, the whole town reeked of boiled cabbage, she said with vaudevillian disgust. England is a terrible place, she would say – a terrible, terrible place. The briny air and blue skies of Cronulla were tonic indeed. But New South Wales had Bob Askin as premier, simultaneously a dull and shifty man. I knew that when we got back to Adelaide – though it would never truly be home since it seemingly took five generations to become a local – exciting Don Dunstan would be there.

Arch taught me to read from newspaper headlines starting with those in the biggest, simplest font. Unsurprising, then, at eight years old for me to argue the case for Dunstan and Labor in the run-up to the 1968 election at a neighbour's barbeque. Don was the one. He cared about, and spent money on, health, education and the arts. He was a moderniser, a thespian, a poet, cook, fashion plate, policy wonk, tastemaker and defender of rights for women, Aboriginals and people from other cultures. He recognised – he embodied – difference. He was smooth. He was from 'now'. He made Adelaide exciting. He made *us* exciting by association. Exciting people moved to Adelaide because of him and what he did to the place. They all came at once and gave

exciting locals context. (We didn't realise they would all leave at once after the Dunstan party was over, and that many of us would leave too – though to be truthful, I started planning my getaway at four years old.) After decades of South Australian slumber, he stirred *hope*. Our futures seemed limitless. Today we would say he was cool, a rock star. Too good to be true? Too good to last? We didn't ask. But having succeeded Frank Walsh during the previous term of government, in 1968 Don had to be elected premier in his own right to continue leading Adelaide out of the musty, late nineteenth-century cupboard it had been locked in, further into the contemporary world.

ALL GOOD DRAMA requires reversals, however, and at the 1968 election the gerrymander delivered Don's, despite my backyard advocacy. Votes in country seats were worth multiples of those in the city. Dunstan Labor's comfortably superior vote translated into a hung parliament, which the Steele Hall-led Liberal and Country League controlled with support from a lone conservative independent promised the speakership. Dunstan railed publicly, rallying huge crowds against the gerrymander. Steele Hall – himself a small 'l' liberal – was sufficiently embarrassed to make electoral reforms presaging Dunstan's election in 1970. At which point the Dunstan decade proper began.

It is difficult to convey how conventionally narrow and 'white bread' mainstream life was in Adelaide. There was an Italian restaurant in Hindley Street with red-and-white check tablecloths where you could get good spaghetti, considered the height of cosmopolitanism. Eventually, a Chinese restaurant opened on the esplanade at Christies Beach. Revolutionary. The parochialism of most locals was something of a wonder to we blow-ins. Not that we were sophisticated cosmopolitans – far from it. But we had tuned into South Australia's powerful sensory pleasures. The salt, the sea, the maritime air, the lush green grass burnt to pale straw under the bluest skies and brightest sun in the Southern Hemisphere; fresh fish from seas bordering the whitest sand, like something from Homer. (Eat at the *Star of Greece* in Port Willunga today and look out at that ocean: Odysseus would recognise it, you will agree.)

Meanwhile the world, in the form of the pragmatic multinational meritocracy of the refinery, sat around our dining table. A Texan executive, a Jewish chemist, an African-American engineer, the Native American wife of

the refinery co-worker who brought us snapper, a young Australian engineer just 'finished off' at Mobil's expense at Princeton. Then there were the two Malaysian-Chinese women, Hoe Yee and Hoi Mee, who lived with us for a while, sponsored by a local service organisation to fortify their nursing education for use back home. Hoi Mee brought a suitcase stuffed with rice and matches with her, fearing shortages in little-known Australia. With my parents, two brothers and me, Hoe Yee and Hoi Mee made seven people in a 100-square-metre house with three bedrooms and one bathroom. No one thought twice, the density of living not a matter for remark. The then exotic aromas of Malaysian cooking wafted from our kitchen and up the street to the fascination of neighbours.

In 1970, the same year Dunstan's continuous nine-year run in power began, we moved from Christies Beach to Old Noarlunga – from Housing Trust territory to the bucolic beauty of the southern vales proper. Arch and Bobbie bought three blocks of land on the banks of the Onkaparinga, and produced endless bounty: organically grown fruit and vegetables from the chocolately, sun-blasted loam built up over millennia as the Onkaparinga flowed, flooded and subsided again and again. Indigenous Kurna women had legendarily hid in the riverbank to avoid the raiding parties of neighbouring tribes. By 1970, the only Indigenous residents in Old Noarlunga were a family who lived in the one public house inside the Onkaparinga's horseshoe-shaped riverbend. I didn't understand why, when I tried to talk to their daughter at school, I got short shrift. My paternal grandmother told me tales of riding horses through swollen creeks and otherwise playing in the bush with the Aboriginal kids she had grown up with in Far North Queensland. Why not us? I get it now. Wish I had then.

Our Christies Beach neighbours bought the adjacent block. Each family built new homes – ours 120 square metres, theirs 130 square metres – fantastically large compared to the old ones. It was still the era of one bathroom per house, but the creep had begun: instead of lounge-dining rooms, each house had a separate lounge and a kitchen dinette. The neighbours put in a ten-metre in-ground pool, an unheard of luxury – even above-ground pools were rare. The two families wore a path dubbed the 'Birdsville Track' across the vacant block between them, going back and forth to poolside barbeques at their place,

barbeques under the cotoneaster tree at ours – bottles now, not flagons, of wine from Coriole and Seaview just over the hill tucked under the adults' arms. The sentimental favourite at ours was when Arch picked the summer's first corn cobs. Bobbie stripped off their papery sheaths and silky hair and served them hot, smothered in wedges of melting butter and grainy salt – a peasant ritual of the deepest satisfaction. Similarly basic, and sometimes more exotic, pleasures were to be had at the homes of new best friends 'Vicky' and 'Old Pred', charming and cultivated eastern Europeans – Russian and Hungarian respectively and, in retrospect, possibly living under assumed names. If you wanted to get lost in the world, becoming organic fruit and vegetable farmers on a few acres of river loam in the crook of the Onkaparinga River was and remains hard to beat. The juxtaposition of Vicky and Pred's sophistication with the old stone house and beat-up peasant farming clothes they wore was stark, Pred's beret the only gesture to the old life, whatever that old life might have been. The political chat, domestic and international, was always good.

Dunstan measured up well. Reform after reform rolled through, anticipating the Whitlam government's social democratic push. Don cut a dash, up the front steps of Parliament House on North Terrace in pink shorts, reciting poetry atop an elephant at the zoo, pioneering 'living apart together' when he and his second wife married but chose to live in separate, nearby houses. Adelaide during the golden years gave one license to be different. Don was different, different from any premier before or since. I was always going to be different but if he could be different, that made it so much more okay for the rest of us to be different too.

I SKIPPED CLASS too at Christies Beach Primary School, doing Year 3 and 4 in the one year: 1968, the year of my first Dunstan advocacy. The teachers were good, the school well led, the classes orderly and standard of education decent. Nearly everyone's father, and some of their mothers, worked at the refinery or Chrysler. There were few obvious social problems, though I did wonder why April, who sat in front of me in Year 5, shaved her legs. There was bullying but it was survivable. The school inspector was diligent and liked to even things up in class. Once he posed me a spelling question I would likely fail – a lesson in humility – then posed an easy one to a struggling classmate, to build his confidence. In a working-class school,

this boy was from one of the poorest families. Awed at being singled out by the school inspector, he sat stunned, red-faced, and wet his pants. The sight and sound of that trickle of urine falling from his shabby grey school trousers to the shiny lino floor beneath his bench seat still tugs at my heart. I hope things turned out well for him. We all had to learn how to survive somehow.

I survived through truancy. I was a regular truant from Year 5 on. I had bad hay fever, or bad whatever-it-took, and would stay home and listen to my brothers' LPs on the stereogram. The Beatles' *Rubber Soul* and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* were favourites. It wasn't the school's fault. It was the days before stretch tasks or opportunity classes. They did their best to make school lessons less boring, jumping me ahead to later-year English classes, but it wasn't enough. Home was more interesting. The music. The political chat. Older brothers to roughhouse with when they came home from their apprenticeships in the afternoon. *Monday Conference*, *Four Corners* and *This Day Tonight* on black-and-white ABC Television. The world came into our living room. Change was afoot.

High school loomed. I won a half-scholarship to an establishment grammar school in Adelaide: motto, *Virtute et Veritate*. The local doctor sent a short typed note of congratulations to my parents – to me an astonishing act of personal recognition. (Our school did not have prizes so this was an unusual event.) The grammar school posted the uniform list. I read it with anthropological fascination: gloves, hat, prescribed shoes and socks, prescribed underwear even. Another world. But there was a rock musical coming up at Christies Beach High School. I went. It was fantastic – long hair, loud music, kids hanging from the rafters, making it all happen. Goodbye grammar school scholarship, hello Christies Beach High: motto, 'Work, Life, Play'.

I BEGAN AT Christies Beach High in February 1972. That month I saw Led Zeppelin play at Memorial Drive Tennis Club, accompanied by one of my brothers. *Led Zeppelin IV* was so new that when the band played 'Stairway to Heaven', hardly anyone knew it. At the other end of the year, in November, Dunstan danced onstage in the finale of *Hair*. In between, his government passed legislation establishing the South Australian Theatre Company and the South Australian Film Commission, passed the Age of Majority (Reduction) Act, the Corporal Punishment Abolition Act, the Ombudsman Act, the

Daylight Saving Act, the Community Welfare Act and the Coast Protection Act, as well as consumer protection laws, and occupational health and safety laws, among a raft of other initiatives.

That same month, Opposition leader Gough Whitlam delivered his 1972 federal election campaign speech at Blacktown Town Hall in Sydney. Arch brought home a portable reel-to-reel tape recorder and I taped the great man's words: 'Men and women of Australia...' It was electrifying. Even the promise to install sewers in Sydney's western suburbs seemed visionary when the words fell from Whitlam's lips. When we took the tape recorder back to the refinery, not even the pervasive sickly sweet smell of hydrocarbons could dampen my mood. The world was a huge and beneficent place of endless hope and opportunity, where the state was a force for good, if only conservatives would get out of the way. Or so it seemed.

Christies had nearly two thousand students on two campuses with a huge, treeless oval in between. (Memo, South Australian Department of Education: Would it have hurt to plant some trees?) Christies had a rough reputation. Years later, when I was a young journalist working in (Old) Parliament House, the local MP would point across King's Hall and proclaim, 'Her! See her? She went to Christies High and survived!' But really it was just working class, with all the attendant difficulties: principally, homes with few or no books and little tradition of reading. Teenage pregnancies, drugs – but remarkably few given the size of the school. The outstanding things about Christies were the incredible teachers and systematic encouragement to get you to make the most of what you had – when you weren't surfing, that is.

Sometimes that encouragement simply came through trust and decent resources. The art teachers, whom we loved, for example, trusted us to hang out in the art rooms at lunchtime. One break I was flicking through HH Arnason's *History of Modern Art* – I'm not sure whether it was a school resource or belonged to the teacher, but it was out in the open where, had we really been delinquents, it would have been nicked. I came across Paul Klee's *Sinbad the Sailor* (1928): it flicked a switch in my head. Art was it. The following year I began painting large, hard-edge abstract minimalist works. Teachers bought them. At the end of Year 11, I decided to drop out of school to go to Paris and be a painter. Arch refused to sign my passport application.

Reluctantly, I returned to school for Year 12. That's when Christies Beach High came into its own.

You can cage a questing student and create trouble for everyone, or you can give them their head and see where it leads.

Each morning in Year 12, I would go to school and get my name ticked off the roll. Then often, upon the bell for first period, I would walk out the gate and grab a train at the station across the road into the city. First stop: State Library of South Australia, to read. Second stop: Art Gallery of South Australia, to look at art. Third stop: Adelaide University Bookshop, or perhaps the Mary Martin Bookshop in Gawler Place – then still owned by Mary Martin and Max Harris – to read books for free, careful not to bend the spines; then the train back to Christies Beach. There was a lot of thinking time each way. How civilised having the train station right next to the high school. How civilised of the school to let me regularly walk out that gate when the mores of the day said I should be locked up. How kind the teachers were who let me sit, after a few weeks' diligent swatting, the exams at the end of the year anyway – except perhaps the art teacher who asked archly, when I came to deliver my portfolio of works for Year 12 art, 'Are you still enrolled?'

The world had changed by then. The Whitlam government had been dismissed; constitutional coup author, Malcolm Fraser, was prime minister instead of electrifying Gough. The state had ceased being an unequivocal force for good. I was shocked – but then, I was young and naive. Finding out life was not entirely just, like discovering that life is not *entirely* meritocratic, was essential learning. And by now a strange animus had begun to swirl around Dunstan. The conservatives got him in the end, a miasma of rumour undermining a good man and excellent premier, destabilising and corroding his government. The dressing-gowned resignation was still some way ahead, but you could sense it coming. I had left town by then. At sixteen years and fifty-one weeks old, I got on a bus to the Australian National University in Canberra and too rarely returned. Adelaide's golden age had left an enduring imprint.

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ESSAY

Radical roots in Fiji

The impact of colonialism on Don Dunstan

Angela Woollacott

SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S REPUTATION for progressive reform extends back to its origins in Edward Gibbon Wakefield's scheme for imperial systematic colonisation. Wakefield's grand plans, which inspired followers and shaped several colonies in Australasia, aimed to rid Australia of convict transportation and to assist respectable free settlers. While land policy would limit the expansion of the frontier and regulate class relationships, those who worked hard would be able to acquire land, and settlers would have a voice in the framing of their laws. Wakefield's scheme was born in the milieu of early nineteenth-century British philosophical radicalism. Jeremy Bentham died before South Australia was settled, but he was a keen supporter of its planning, and suggested that it be named to reflect its radical promise: 'Felicia', 'Felicetania' or 'Liberia'. Regardless of just how well the state has lived up to those early rosy hopes, its sense of reformist exceptionalism has been woven into its history. One of its most important political leaders, Don Dunstan, the democratic socialist and nationally influential premier from 1967–68 and 1970–79, self-consciously adopted this tradition by titling his 1981 political memoirs *Felicia*.

Though he never set foot in Australia, Wakefield's politics were to be shaped by his own imperial experience in Canada and New Zealand. His

colourful life story is widely, if only partially, known. But what is less well known is that the state's nation-leading reforms in the 1960s–70s also had imperial roots. Dunstan was born and grew up in Fiji, and much of his passionate commitment to racial equality, as well as his antipathy to colonialism and to petty official tyranny, derived from what he observed there. He knew and would say that his experience in Fiji had shaped his politics.

Dunstan was a trailblazing reformer, an advocate of social justice and civil liberties whose pioneering legislative initiatives included the first racial discrimination act, the first Aboriginal land rights, and the first sex discrimination act in Australia. Under Dunstan, South Australia was the first jurisdiction in the country to decriminalise homosexuality. He introduced full constitutional democracy to South Australia, and turned it from a provincial backwater into a state synonymous with food, wine, the arts and multiculturalism.

While his name became inextricably linked with South Australia, it was Fiji that shaped him. From his infancy, parts of his schooling and his first career as a lawyer, to his involvement in the Movement for Democracy in Fiji late in life, Fiji was always a part of Don Dunstan. Its climate and vegetation, food culture, language and music shaped his sensibilities. Its social fabric and racial politics created his strong sense of justice and political values. In 1974, he told a television audience: 'I was born and brought up in Fiji and, having a Fijian nurse-girl, I could speak Fijian as soon as I could speak English. The Fijians are an intensely musical people. My earliest memory is lying in bed and hearing groups of Fijians drift by to the *koro* [village] and they'd always sing; it was quite spontaneous when they were going anywhere, and they'd sing in close harmony because they had an acute musical ear.' The musicality of Fijians may well have been a reason Dunstan developed a passion for playing the piano (well enough to perform for others), and contributed to his belief in cultural diversity.

DONALD ALLAN DUNSTAN was born on 21 September 1926 in Suva. At the time of his birth, his father Francis Vivian Dunstan was the Suva store manager for the merchants Henry Marks and Company, and the family lived in a house overlooking Suva's main wharf. But when Don was two, Viv, as he

was always called, took the position of store manager for Morris Hedstrom's in Nausori, the town thirteen miles to Suva's north-east dominated by a Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) mill. CSR was an Australian company, a core part of Australia's commercial dominance in Fiji. Since the late nineteenth century, Australia's business interests in Fiji constituted a form of colonialism – and a direct link between Australian settler colonialism and crown rule there. Don's early childhood and adolescence were spent in Nausori. His mother, Ida May (Hill) Dunstan, lived the privileged but restricted life of the white colonial housewife, caring for Don and his sister, Beth, who was two years older. Nausori's population of Indian labourers and families, the local villages of Fijian landowners, and the white CSR managers, missionaries and families constituted the world Dunstan first knew.

Fijian food shaped his tastes and senses as much as the music. In an essay published shortly after he died in 1999, Dunstan recalled:

[I]n Fiji, as a small boy there was the constant challenge of the new. I readily accepted the fruits I grew up with in our little sugar mill town – bananas were a favourite (I loved them mashed with sugar). There was always papaya with lime juice for breakfast and I feasted on pineapples, mangoes, tropical mandarins, passionfruit and granadillas. I learned to love the fresh river fish and the wonderful taste of mud crabs caught in the estuaries. Since I had eaten it from the hands of my Fijian nurse-girls as a baby I could feast on the staple Fijian starch food – *dalo* – (a grey-fleshed taro which they simply boiled and fed me in gooey lumps) although objectively it really tastes like soap!

Like the other European families of their class, the Dunstans had servants. Beside the Fijian nurse-girls when the children were babies, there was an Indian man cook, who occasionally had a young Indian boy helper, and Moses the Fijian gardener. Moses would mow the lawn, and tend the garden, including a vegetable garden that helped to feed the family along with the ducks and chickens they kept. It was a world of white privilege that had been established in 1874 when Fiji became a British crown colony, and entrenched by the importation of indentured Indian labourers from 1879.

The indentured labour system was terminated in 1920, six years before Dunstan's birth, but the Fiji in which he grew up was starkly stratified by race. The sugar plantations and mill towns of the preceding decades were a brutal world where the Indian 'coolies' were driven hard by overseers by day, and forced to live in crowded hovels called lines. White CSR managers lived in fear of 'coolie' uprisings and murderous assaults. But white men charged with killing an Indian or a Fijian were frequently absolved by the courts. Denied land ownership, from 1924 Indians could become small tenant farmers, which enabled a degree of self-sufficiency, though they often juggled such farms with jobs as servants and labourers. Many were illiterate. At least in some areas, part-Europeans lived in their own townships, segregated and treated as a caste unto themselves. Fijians held rights to their traditional village lands but most lived in poverty. The Europeans, including the Australians, were not all rich by any means, but they held the political and social power, living in relative ease supported by labourers and servants and enjoying a lifestyle only possible for a colonial ruling class.

Dunstan's various media interviews give us a few details of growing up in a household with Indian and Fijian servants. But we can glean further insight as to what this may have been like for a child on a daily basis from *Fiji – Memory Hold the Door*, a memoir privately published in 1996 by Betty Freeman, Fijian-born daughter of Australian parents. Freeman was born in 1916, so her childhood in Ba on the north-west coast of Viti Levu (the opposite coast to Nausori) was ten years earlier than Dunstan's. But Ba was also a sugar mill town, and Freeman grew up in a household on 'CSR hill', with a social structure very like that in Nausori. Her father was the CSR chief engineer. In this colonial world, the white men were 'sahibs' and the women were 'memsahibs'. Despite the strict rules by which her childhood was governed, Freeman observed and interacted with the household servants closely. Like other European residents, including Dunstan, she picked up various Fijian and Hindi names and phrases. She knew Ungapa, the family's illiterate but skillful cook, and the other 'houseboy' well. After the family had finished breakfast, and while the 'houseboys' were eating theirs outside, Freeman would sit and chat to them. They would speak to her, she recalled, in fluent English they would never use with her parents, telling her of

small events around the household such as chickens hatched, a calf born or a mongoose trapped and drowned. She would even peek through the slats from under the house to watch them perform their ablutions in the outside bathing area, which she described as modestly conducted. Morning callers to the house included 'John the Chinaman', with his baskets full of vegetables. The neighbourhood's shared daily routine included the strictly observed practice that the 'memsahibs' would shower only when the 'houseboys' were away for a break in the mid-afternoon. The local primary school enrolled any child with a European surname (while charging a small fee), which meant that the mixed-race children who inhabited their segregated settlement called Newtown were admitted. But, Freeman recalled, the children all knew that they would never mix across the racial barrier outside school.

For Dunstan, growing up in such a household and town fostered his sense of racial injustice. This was a world where 'sahibs' and 'memsahibs' wielded, to varying degrees, public, political, economic and social power, and their households were microcosms where racial and class inequalities and anxieties played out intimately on a daily basis. As Freeman's stories enable us to glimpse, unequal relations in colonial households were personal, negotiated, and could be mediated with degrees of familiarity – and even affection. It was not only that Australians' gender expectations were confronted by Indian men doing the cooking and some of the laundry, and 'memsahibs' enjoying degrees of leisure and privilege – along with privations and, at times, hardships – familiarity with Indian and Fijian food, language, music and singing, even their religious festivals and practices, could have cumulative effects, perhaps not least through knowing individual servants, workers and neighbours well. Like Betty Freeman, Dunstan's life was shaped and coloured by Fiji, despite being born to Australian parents. In Dunstan's case, both Viv and Ida were thoroughly South Australian in their birth, family backgrounds and upbringing. In various ways, South Australian customs and attitudes must also have shaped the household in Nausori.

NAUSORI WAS THE Fiji headquarters of CSR, which had begun its Fiji operations by establishing plantations and building a large sugar mill there in 1880. When the Dunstans arrived in 1928, the mill produced about

twelve thousand tons of sugar per year. It was essentially a company town. Social divisions were inscribed on local geography. Don would recall: 'It was always referred to as "the hill" in Nausori, which is where the officers of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company lived. All the officers lived on the hill, the mechanics and other people who were regarded as more lowly lived on the flat.' The Dunstans' house was down on the flats in walking distance of the Morris Hedstrom store, but they socialised a good deal on 'the hill'. In consequence, their world would have been shaped by the CSR's notorious social rankings. Not only did it matter if families lived on 'the hill', they were regarded as either 'in' or 'out', depending on whether they were in the 'officer' class. Only chief engineers were officers, which made life difficult for second and third engineers who were still expected not to socialise with the mechanics. Company wives were expected to fall into line: they were to socialise only with the other women deemed appropriate according to the husbands' positions. And these psychologically potent distinctions were just among the Europeans! The Dunstans were admitted to this rarefied social world because of Viv's position as manager of the largest store, though not all those in commerce would have been so favoured. Local planters and any government officials would also have been 'in', while missionaries were not always considered acceptable – and there was a Methodist mission just the other side of the Rewa River.

From 1937 to 1939, Don attended Suva Boys' Grammar School. Fundamental to Suva Boys' Grammar were its racial restrictions. Dunstan would joke disparagingly that the headmaster must have had a light meter: to be admitted to Suva Boys' Grammar you had to be of at least 51 per cent European parentage. His best friend at school was part Fijian – though Dunstan would say he looked completely European. Dunstan ran into trouble with his parents over this friendship. His friend wanted him to go and stay at his home on his parents' small island in Suva Harbour, but Ida and Viv refused. Nor would they allow Don to bring his friend home. Don thought this 'absolutely absurd and hurtful and bad'. In these years he also became friends with a boy whose father ran the Methodist mission, and a teachers' college for Fijians, across the river from Nausori. There, Don met some young Fijian men he liked, but would not have been allowed to have them home.

AT DIFFERENT POINTS in his life, Dunstan wrote fiction and sometimes poetry. In 1944, as an undergraduate at the University of Adelaide, he – along with Donald Simpson, his old friend from St Peter’s College – briefly edited a literary magazine they called *Grist*, which, rather optimistically, they aimed at students ‘throughout Australasia’, including senior high-school students. In fact, the magazine was both short and short-lived. The edition dated 5 June 1944 lists Dunstan as editor; he penned the editorial, two poems and a short story titled ‘The Compliment’. This story reveals just how much Fiji occupied his thoughts and memories, even when he had not been there for some time. Set in Nausori, the story contains descriptions such as: ‘Nausori was a town of smells, he thought. Crabs and curry, incense and coconut oil, dust and garbage – the compound smote one’s nostrils.’ It boasted insider knowledge, such as an allusion to a film starring the singing cowboy Gene Autry, who was ‘Fiji’s box-office favourite’. The plot involves a police superintendent determined to prosecute the local Irish publican for selling liquor to ‘natives’ who did not have the requisite permit to buy it. The new, ambitious and punitive superintendent hides uncomfortably in the field behind the Rewa Hotel one long evening to try to catch this illicit trade in action, but fails. To his chagrin, the publican had been fully alert to his vigil. This brief story is replete with references to Fiji’s social fabric, such as the ‘cook boy’ speaking Hindustani in the hotel kitchen, the stylish Fijians lounging outside the picture theatre, and ‘the half-caste girl’ in the box office. At least as striking is the antipathy towards the police at the heart of the story, showing that this theme, important later in Dunstan’s life, had its roots in what he observed growing up in Fiji, including racial discrimination.

In 1947, when Dunstan was twenty-one and a law student at the University of Adelaide, he lived in the prestigious St Mark’s College. Among the short reports that the master of St Mark’s made routinely on each student, in October 1947 he wrote:

Mr Dunstan, the son of the manager of Morris Hedstrom in Fiji, aspires to follow in the footsteps of Wilberforce and others in the crusade against the exploitation of the coloured races. He is one of the very few socialists the college has ever had; he is a utopian socialist working on constitutional lines.

It's telling that Dunstan evinced his passion for racial justice as early as his university days, and made it so clear that even the conservative master of St Mark's felt the need to mention it in his report. This is the passion that would drive Dunstan to instigate reforms of national, as well as state, significance.

IN 1965 HE played a key role at the ALP conference that removed the words 'white Australia' from the ALP policy. Dunstan served on the committee that made this recommendation to the Federal ALP executive, and presented the report, as he said, 'in ringing tones, hailing the end of the Labor Party's support for the White Australia policy'. It was a moment of which he was particularly proud. Near the end of his life, he was also proud to recall that, as the first ever minister for Aboriginal affairs, he had 'ended "protection", "assimilation" and removed all discriminatory legislation and regulation, introduced and had passed Australia's first Aboriginal Land Rights legislation, and the first Prohibition of Racial Discrimination Act'.

In 1968, when Don Dunstan was honoured with an invitation to deliver the prestigious HV Evatt Memorial Lecture, which often deals with foreign policy in recognition of Evatt's time as minister for external affairs as well as being first president of the United Nations, he chose to speak about the Pacific. His lecture was a plea for Australia to be more engaged with the nations of the Pacific and to give them more aid, not least because of Australia's historical commercial exploitation. The lecture was something of a geographic, economic and political tour of the Western Pacific. But it was Fiji to which he devoted the bulk of the lecture. Fiji, he asserted, 'presents the greatest problem in the whole area, and the greatest need of Australian assistance'. Traversing Fiji's history of colonisation, land titles, the extent and consequences of the sugar industry, he pointed to the involvement of various Australian and local companies, mentioning Morris Hedstrom by name. He stressed the inadequacies of educational provision, and then turned to political tensions and constitutional limitations. He argued that Indians were disadvantaged politically, even while Indians and Fijians found common ground in their resentment of Europeans. Fiji was just as much Australia's responsibility as New Guinea and Papua, Dunstan contended: 'Fiji's lack of development, Fiji's communal tensions and the constitutional problems arising from them

have grown from Australian exploitation and neglect. It is time immediately to right this by measures available to us' – in which he included significantly more foreign aid. Dunstan urged the lifting of immigration restrictions against Fijians and Fijian-born Indians, concluding his lecture with the plea: 'I fail to understand why we should bring migrants all the way from Europe when on our doorstep we have people to whom we owe much – and for whom we do nothing.'

Fiji's mix of imperially imposed class and racial discriminations, with a rich and vibrant culture shaped by both the indigenous and imported populations, gave Dunstan a life-long sense of both what should be abolished in South Australia and what, through government reform, it could become. In these ways, Fiji inflected the democratic socialism he adopted as a student at the University of Adelaide.

DUNSTAN BECAME A critic of British colonial tenacity (in places including Cyprus) and an advocate of Australia becoming a republic. He came to believe that Australia should embrace its Asia-Pacific location. Through developing direct relations with Penang, Malaysia, for example, he believed that South Australia could become a beacon of change in this way too.

His childhood in Fiji also shaped his passionate interest in food and his belief in living in harmony with one's climate. Dunstan's genuine curiosity about, and enjoyment of, food inspired him to become an excellent cook, to publish his own cookbook and, towards the end of his life, to be a restaurateur. In a section of his cookbook advocating an Australian cuisine that carefully blended Asian and European elements, he disparaged the 1970s Australian version of 'curry', recalling the 'delicious goat and chicken curries at the table of my father's great friend, Battan Singh.' Both his own appreciation of food and wine, and his determination that Adelaide should take full advantage of its salubrious climate, drove him to reform licensing laws to enable outdoor dining – what would become the café lifestyle, another area in which South Australia led the way. And his years in the tropical discomfort of Suva developed his belief in practical codes of dress, including wearing shorts to work, which he did for years before the photograph of him wearing pink shorts on the steps of Parliament House was taken, which became such a clichéd

trope often used to demean his bisexuality. Dunstan's success in South Australia became, in turn, an inspiration for reforms that might be made in Fiji itself. Even after Fiji became independent in 1970, racial, legal and economic inequalities continued. From 1987 to 2006, Fiji suffered four coups, and its constitutional democracy was badly fractured. In the late 1980s, Dunstan took an active leadership role in the Australian branch of the Movement for Democracy in Fiji. His same commitment to democratic ideals and belief in the possibilities of political reform, which had made his state the great example of Australian social progress during the 'Dunstan Decade', were now directed towards repairing and improving his beloved Fiji.

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FICTION

THE PALAIS

ANNA GOLDSWORTHY

WHEN RUBY FIRST moves to town she stays with the Miss Wrights on Prospect Road, on the recommendation of her Aunt Maude. Aunt Maude is a frequent visitor, and if Ruby is spending the weekend in town, she joins them in the parlour for afternoon tea. The Miss Wrights have a horror of drafts, of *catching a chill on the kidneys*, but the atmosphere in the parlour – with the heavy drapes drawn to protect the furniture – is the closest of all. Occasionally a ray of light steals through a gap in the curtains, illuminating the room like a diver's torch. Cat dander glitters and somersaults in the air like plankton.

'I've been warning everybody for years to avoid tomatoes, haven't I, Ethel?' says the elder Miss Wright.

'Tomatoes never used to repeat on me but now they do,' laments Aunt Maude. 'It's a shame really, because I used to enjoy a tomato chopped up on my toast in the morning, just so, but those days are well beyond me now.'

Miss Wright takes a final, conclusive slurp of tea. 'At our age, we have found, time and time again, that regardless of how thoroughly you chew, *tomatoes will repeat.*'

Ruby is not sure how old the Miss Wrights are, but estimates they must be at least forty. On the mantelpiece, amidst the doilies and trinkets, stands a framed photograph of a young man in uniform,

posing before a *trompe l'oeil* garden. His legs are bound up to the knees in puttees, and his arms are clasped firmly behind him, forcing his belly out like a petulant toddler's. The strap of his slouch hat looks uncomfortably tight across his chin. But he is a fine-looking man, and Ruby's eye is frequently drawn to him. She has never asked which of the Miss Wrights he belonged to.

'We've found mutton to be a more reliable offering,' ventures the younger Miss Wright.

'You can't go wrong with mutton,' agrees Aunt Maude.

In fact, of all the challenges of boarding with the Miss Wrights, mutton has proved the most formidable. Not only the eating of it, although this does require a concerted act of will: a suppression of the gag reflex and conscious deployment of the swallowing muscles, in order to expedite its removal from the mouth. At least such violations are transient. Of more lingering concern is the smell. When Ruby first moved in, she often woke gasping in the night in the room she shared with the younger Miss Wright, as though drowning in mutton stew.

How she longed to be back at the farmhouse! To think she had once been vexed by Mother's mania for fresh air!

She fears the smell has permeated her clothes to the extent that she now avoids sitting next to strangers on the tramcar, particularly if they are well turned-out themselves. At National Mutual, she prefers to take a constitutional at lunchtime rather than squeeze into the kitchen alongside the other girls. Only last week at morning tea, Agnes whispered something about *mutton dressed up as lamb* and Ruby almost jumped out of her skin, before realising it was a reference to Mrs Wagner's attempt at the Mainbocher silhouette.

'And of course one must take proper time over one's meals,' offers the elder Miss Wright. 'The world's gone mad. Everybody in a hurry, running hither and yon. No one with the time or care to chew properly.'

The eyes of all three women alight upon Ruby.

'How are you getting along with that night school? Not over-doing it, are you dear?'

‘I’m getting along well enough, thank you Aunt Maude.’

‘She certainly keeps herself occupied, practising her shorthand and *what have you*.’

‘I paid good money for that course. And I’m determined to make the most of it.’

Aunt Maude winks at the Miss Wrights. ‘No doubt keeping busy with those typewriting machines and whatnot.’

As if she knows anything about it.

In fact, Stott’s Business College could scarcely be further removed from the house on Prospect Road. On Tuesday and Friday evenings, Ruby catches the trolley bus along Grenfell Street after work, gratefully clasping the ham sandwich in a paper bag that marks a furlough from mutton stew. As she climbs the steps into the Remington Building and takes the lift up to the third floor, she feels she is ascending to the future. Everything at Stott’s speaks of modernity: the efficiency of shorthand; the percussive pleasure of typing; the mechanical sweep and shudder of the return key, clearing away the past and making space for the new. And then there is Miss Stetson, formidable and angular in Dior’s new look, emphatically not the sort to dwell upon her own digestion.

A quiet and orderly office is an effective one.

In typewriting, as in life, speed follows mastery.

Ruby takes these pithy remarks down in shorthand, transcribes them into her calligraphy book and then types them out, until they have become her own. Afterwards, she catches the tramcar back to Prospect Road and lets herself into the house. The blackout curtains are drawn, but she switches off her flashlight before creeping into the bedroom, where the younger Miss Wright is already snoring. She removes her clothes in the darkness and drapes them over the back of a chair. If Miss Wright wakes up she will likely ask Ruby to help settle her over the chamber pot, and some nights this seems more than she can bear.

THE VERY FIRST evening of night school, Mr Singer kept her late at the National Mutual, even though she had expressly told him she

needed to leave on time. So that when she arrived, Miss Stetson had already begun the introductions.

‘To be early is the first sign of organisation,’ Miss Stetson observed.

‘My name’s Florence,’ whispered a dark-eyed girl in the back row, shuffling over to make room for her. ‘Florence Myer.’

It would have been rude not to reply. ‘Ruby Whiting. How do you do.’

‘No businessman seeks a chatterbox for a secretary,’ remarked Miss Stetson.

Ruby had started the course with no intention of making friends, but Florence now saves a seat for her every week, and she finds she enjoys her company. Florence is no beauty, and yet she has a boyfriend whom she talks about constantly, always referring to him as *Dale Rogers* – never just Dale – as if he were a matinee idol. Sometimes, as Ruby sits in the parlour on Prospect Road of a Sunday afternoon, pondering tomatoes, she imagines the Hollywood weekends of Florence Myer and the glamorous Dale Rogers: tennis parties, cocktails, jazz bands at the Palais. A wonderful life, surely, and she is glad that someone is living it.

Sometimes Florence invites Ruby to join her for a milkshake after class, but there is always a reason not to – some darning that can no longer be put off, or a letter overdue to Mother. But on a whim, one balmy evening at the end of March, Ruby agrees.

She is still intimidated by town, by the industry and noise and the sheer existence of so many strangers. Amidst these chic shop girls and purposeful businessmen, she feels like a strapping, overfed farm girl. She marvels at the way Florence seems able to parse it all – the office workers hurtling past with their suitcases; the sullen girl at the milk bar taking their order; even the soldier kissing his sweetheart in the adjacent booth – without interrupting her conversational flow.

Dale Rogers has a dear friend Harry Phillips who already has a girlfriend, which really is a crying shame because none of our set is the least bit keen on her and Dale Rogers and I both agree that you and Harry Phillips would simply be perfect for each other.

Ruby sucks the cool liquid through the paper straw, and as the paper becomes soggy in her mouth she wonders what Dale Rogers could possibly know about her. And yet it is not unpleasant to be discussed. She absently catches the eye of a man striding past the window, and he grins and tips his hat, and she feels a sudden, unexpected joy. Here she is, Ruby Whiting from the farm, sitting in a milk bar with a new friend in a town that finally seems to be making room for her.

‘You do get us a lot of attention,’ Florence observes. ‘You should be one of those model girls.’

‘For goodness sake,’ she laughs. ‘There are much lovelier girls out there.’

‘I don’t know about that. And I have news. Dale Rogers is having a twenty-first birthday party at the Palais on Saturday.’

‘How lovely.’

‘And I’d love you to come too.’

‘Heavens!’

There were countless reasons why she could not. She had promised Mother she would return to the farm on the weekend to help her with the fowls. And she only has her debutante dress, which – much as she loved it at the time – she now sees betrays her as country. Most crucially, there is no swain, nor any prospect of there being one.

‘I still think you’d be perfect for Harry Phillips,’ laments Florence. ‘But he’s already accounted for, at least for the moment. But Harry does have another friend who is also nice – you really could do much worse – and he doesn’t have a girlfriend, and wants to go to the dance anyway. And Dale Rogers and I both think you should go with him. Do say yes, Ruby! I have it all arranged!’

There is something about the evening – the warm air rising up through the open window, with its metropolitan bouquet of asphalt and gasoline; the voluptuous vanilla milkshake in her mouth; the extended silences and sudden laughter of the lovers in the adjacent booth – that induces recklessness. Back at home that night, Ruby sneaks her debutante dress out of the wardrobe in the darkness, and hangs it in the sunroom to air.

On Saturday evening, Harry Phillips comes to Prospect Road with a man called Wilf Bryson. It is immediately clear – both to Ruby and the Miss Wrights – that Wilf Bryson will not do, but when Ruby arrives at the Palais she notices a young man sitting across the table, with a serious, broad forehead and a steady gaze. After she has danced with Wilf, and with Harry, the serious-looking man approaches her, and introduces himself as Arthur. He has a delicate, pencil-thin moustache, and when they dance, the moisture beads there like dew. She feels an unfathomable urge to touch it, to wipe it dry. The band plays ‘Embraceable You’, and Arthur holds her tighter. He doesn’t seem to object to the smell of mutton at all.

LATER THAT YEAR, her sister Daisy comes to town to join her, and they move into a boarding house on Buxton Street in North Adelaide. It is altogether a more cosmopolitan affair than the house on Prospect Road. Ruby is out a lot now – not only at work and night school, but also with Arthur or Florence and Dale Rogers’ set – but is always glad to return home. There is Daisy of course, who is reliable company; and Mr Wells, forever listening to the war report in the sunroom. And then there is Mr Bell, Arthur’s boss, occupying the large room at the front, though they keep such different hours she rarely sees him.

Their landlady, Mrs Weston, is a divorcee, a fact Ruby has chosen not to relate to Mother; nor has she mentioned the frequent visits of a Dr Fletcher, with whom Mrs Weston appears to have some sort of understanding. But she has reported that Mrs Weston runs a very tight ship, and that meals are resourceful and varied. Occasionally Mr Bell joins them for tea, though he tends to take his time returning home after work, stopping off in town somewhere for a drink, and no doubt meeting up with a certain type of woman.

One evening, as she was leaving the insurance company, she saw him waiting out the front for Agnes from the typing pool. The foolish girl brought her new silk stockings into work the following week, and stroked them in front of the other girls as if they were a kitten. No doubt they were supposed to feel envious. Instead Ruby felt a

triumphant contempt, though she still freshens up before going down for tea, especially on a Monday and a Wednesday, when she knows Mr Bell will be there.

The boarding house is quiet this evening, apart from the drone of the war report. Ruby has overdone it lately with her mauve gown, so she brought out her debutante dress on the weekend and Daisy helped her renovate it. A more racy cut of the décolletage; a yard of material shorn from the skirt. All traces of the 1930s removed, and of her old country self. As she is admiring their workmanship, there is a knock on the door. Of course it is Arthur. He is always over-punctual.

But as she opens her bedroom door, her heart starts pounding, as if her body knows first.

He is holding a sprig of jasmine from the side garden. Back from work early, evidently.

‘Good afternoon, Mr Bell.’

Technically it is evening, but afternoon sounds more proper.

He bows, presenting her with the garnish. ‘For the charming Mademoiselle Whiting.’

‘Why, thank you. You’re too kind.’

She remembers carrying on like this with her father sometimes, at the farm. It’s just a bit of fun, after all. Nothing that would trouble Arthur, if he knew.

But then Mr Bell moves in closer, pinning the jasmine to her dress, so that she can smell the alcohol on his breath, and something else beneath. The scent of his skin. It is too intimate, and she holds her breath.

He steps back and appraises her. ‘A fetching picture. Aren’t you going to invite me in?’

‘Perhaps we could join Mr Wells in the sunroom. I could make you a cup of tea.’

She curses herself immediately for sounding old-maidish. Why didn’t she suggest a port?

‘I don’t think so,’ says Mr Bell. ‘I think I’d rather come in here, with you.’

And he walks into her room and sits down on Daisy's bed, just like that.

She busies herself at her dressing table.

'All alone this evening,' he observes.

'Daisy has gone home for the weekend. I mean, back to the farm. To help Mother. You know, with the spring cleaning and with one thing and another.'

She has warned Daisy, in the vaguest of terms, to be careful around Mr Bell. Though this was probably unnecessary. He has never shown much interest in Daisy.

'No young ladies staying overnight either.'

'No.'

'None of Dr Fletcher's "patients".'

She would like to ask him who they are, these anonymous young women who pass through her room some nights, and the spare bed stripped so quickly the next morning they might never have been there. But to ask would put her at a disadvantage.

Mr Bell loosens his tie and settles back on to Daisy's bed.

'It's been a long day at the munitions works. I'm sure your young paramour will tell you the same. I'm talking about Arthur.'

'Yes, I know who you mean. He'll be here shortly.'

She takes her gloves out of the drawer and places them on the dressing table. Proof of her imminent departure.

'He's a very lucky man. And, I must say, a fine accountant.'

She had once suggested to Arthur that his boss had quite a reputation. That she was not only going by what she heard at the boarding house, but that girls at work were implicated too, though she didn't actually mention Agnes by name.

Arthur didn't seem to understand, or to want to understand, and she had felt gossipy and small-minded and left it at that.

'There are outside pressures, of course. Especially with the Japs coming into the picture. But I'm doing my best to protect his place on the reserved list.'

'Thank you.'

The last thing she wants is Arthur going off to war. She likes having him around, for one thing. And it would hurry things up between them too much.

‘As I said, he’s a fine employee.’ He studies her for a moment. ‘And I’m sure you’d do your bit to keep him here.’

She glances at him. He is a nice man, really, despite his weakness. Surely he is not making a threat.

He offers her a cigarette in her own bedroom. The cheek of it!

‘I’ve seen you in that gown before. But you’ve altered it. It’s very becoming. You’re a credit to womanhood at this time. Very resourceful.’

Despite herself, she blushes. Arthur would never have noticed, but Mr Bell has calculated her secret vanity. Not her looks: she doesn’t feel that she owns them, particularly. They came on so quickly, like an attack of something. But her resourcefulness: this she has worked on.

‘Though I suspect you could do with a few extra luxuries once in a while.’

She is not sure if she has heard him correctly, but her body jumps to its own conclusions.

‘Oh I make do,’ she says, feebly.

And then there are voices in the hall, and a loud knock at the door, and it is Arthur. Of course he is early; he is always over-punctual.

And she is only partly relieved.

ARTHUR DRIVES THE entire length of O’Connell Street in silence and parks the car on North Terrace, staring glumly out at the Palais.

‘Turn off the headlights, dear,’ she suggests.

The inside of the car smells like spring, and she remembers the jasmine on her dress and discreetly removes it. On the other side of the windscreen, eager couples make their way to the Palais. The men are sober and grown-up in their dinner suits; the pale-clad women seem to flutter under the gas lamps.

It all seems a little frivolous, really, when there is a war on and all.

‘That was inappropriate, that was,’ Arthur says finally. ‘And I trust it will not happen again.’

‘Arthur dearest,’ she tries. ‘Nothing happened.’

This is not entirely true. For one thing, Arthur came bursting into the room, flushed and handsome in his dinner suit, and bore down upon Mr Bell on the bed before the poor fellow even had a chance to stand. They shook hands vigorously, too vigorously, and volleyed each others’ names back and forth.

Mr Jenkins. Mr Bell. Mr Jenkins. Mr Bell.

And then – and this is what feels irrevocable – Mr Bell had stumbled as he tried to stand. And reddened, and righted himself.

‘Well, I don’t know what happened, but I trust it won’t happen again.’

He steps out of the car, and when he comes to her side to let her out, she can scarcely bear to look at him. He is too beautiful, with his grave face framed by his white bow tie. Part of the problem tonight was that he had looked too splendid.

‘Off dancing, are we?’ Mr Bell had asked, after he had regained his footing.

‘Yes, indeed,’ Arthur had replied. ‘Off to the Palais.’

As if that settled everything. And he had put his hand in the small of her back, and steered her out of the room before she had a chance to say a proper goodbye.

‘If nothing happened, we will not speak of it again,’ he says magnanimously, and takes her arm and guides her across the street. They enter the wide swing doors and are engulfed by sound. Harry Boake Wright and his band are playing ‘Cheek to Cheek’, and everybody seems to be laughing, never mind the war.

‘Look! Florence and Dale Rogers already have a table!’

She waves more vigorously than she might have otherwise, and they make their way through the crowd.

‘How are you, Florence darling?’

‘Ruby, you are *enchanting!*’

‘Haven’t you two done well, finding such a table as this!’

These are fine and ordinary words, the type of words they have spoken many times before. And a little later, Arthur leads her out to the dance floor, and they dance well together, as they always have.

They will not speak of it again, and perhaps nothing happened.

Except that as Arthur guided her out of the bedroom, she had turned to take her gloves from the dressing table, and caught sight of Mr Bell's unguarded face in the mirror. This was the moment of intimacy. There was a resolution in his smile, and it was all she had been afraid of.

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ESSAY

Behind every story

Recovering the past

Kerryn Goldsworthy

IT MAY NOT be the best painting in the Art Gallery of South Australia, and it may not be the most valuable. But one of the gallery's most historically significant paintings is an enormous canvas by the nineteenth-century Adelaide artist Charles Hill, entitled *The Proclamation of South Australia 1836*. Painted decades after the fact, it shows the gathering of South Australia's earliest white settlers near the beach at Glenelg, all still living in tents and all come to hear the Proclamation. This is a real historical document, one that officially announced to the settlers that, with the arrival of His Excellency the Governor on this hot Adelaide day aboard the *Buffalo*, the colonial government of His Majesty's new province had been formally established. Subsequently published in the second issue of the *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, on 3 June 1837, the Proclamation exhorted them:

...to conduct themselves on all occasions with order and quietness, duly to respect the laws, and by a course of industry and sobriety, by the practice of sound morality and a strict observance of the Ordinances of Religion, to prove themselves worthy to be the Founders of a great and free Colony.

This is the section of the Proclamation most frequently quoted. But it's only the first of three paragraphs. The other two, less well known, might come as a surprise:

It is also, at this time especially, my duty to apprise the Colonists of my resolution, to take every lawful means for extending the same protection to the NATIVE POPULATION as to the rest of His Majesty's Subjects, and of my firm determination to punish with exemplary severity all acts of violence or injustice which may in any manner be practiced or attempted against the natives, who are to be considered as much under the safeguard of the law as the Colonists themselves, and equally entitled to the privileges of British Subjects.

I trust therefore, with confidence to the exercise of moderation and forbearance by all Classes, in their intercourse with the Native Inhabitants, and that they will omit no opportunity of assisting me to fulfill His Majesty's most gracious and benevolent intentions towards them...

The optimism and idealism of this document is touching but ironic; only fifteen years later, an angry correspondent to *The Adelaide Times* on 24 May 1851, identified as 'A Looker-On', showed by what large measure the colony had already failed in these intentions:

Shame Upon Us! We take their land and drive away their food by what we call civilization, and then deny them shelter from a storm... What comes of all the hypocrisy of our wishes to better their condition?... The police drive them into the bush to murder shepherds, and then we cry out for more police... What can a maddened black think of our Christianity to deny him the sod on which he was born? He lived before the white fellow came on the natural produce of the soil. You grow hundreds of bushels of corn on his land but deny him the crumbs that fall from the table... They kill a sheep, but you drive his kangaroo away. You now drive him away from his own, his native land – out upon it; how can God's all-seeing eye approve of this?

THE DATE OF the ceremony depicted in the painting is 28 December 1836. In the background, a number of relaxed-looking Aboriginal people watch this white weirdness. In the foreground, the colonists – dressed in the fashions of 1836, with many uniformed soldiers and sailors among their number – stand or sit around a central group. The humbler, happier-looking people are on the outer, along with children and dogs. Po-faced ladies in heavy early-Victorian bonnets and shawls, despite the 39-degree heat, are lined up closer to the action, as are the straight rows of uniformed soldiers and sailors at attention.

But the eye is led by the lines of composition and the colours of their clothes to a small knot of officials busying itself about the document at the very heart of the picture, located dead centre in the middle foreground. It is being held and apparently read out by a saturnine man in black facing a heavy-set, heavy-faced man in the middle of the group, the most splendidly uniformed of all. Many of the figures here are portraits of real people who were present on the occasion: the large and splendid naval man is South Australia's first Governor, Captain John Hindmarsh, in whose name the Proclamation is being made. The man in black is his private secretary, George Stevenson.

Clearly belonging in this cluster of officials and yet standing slightly apart from them, dressed in light mufti more suited to the heat than their military splendour or sombre clerical garb, is a man with his back turned to the viewer. Although we can't see his face, it's possible to deduce something of his personality and presence. Alert, a little portly, clutching his high-crowned light-coloured hat in both hands behind his back, he seems young despite the thinning of his wispy, sandy hair. The painting gives a faint impression that he is quietly bouncing on the soles of his feet.

This is Robert Gouger, first Colonial Secretary of South Australia, over whose signature the printed Proclamation will appear. Now thirty-four years old, he has been working in London towards the official British founding of the Province of South Australia for seven years, recovering from repeated rejections and rebuffs to try again and again. In the painting, you can see a tent in the background: this is Gouger's own home tent, set up on his arrival aboard the *Africaine* in early November, from which he has just emerged with his colleagues after refining and signing the Proclamation document. In the

Adelaide heat of a mid-afternoon in late December, behind a flimsy curtain in the tent, his wife lies in labour with their first child. For Gouger, this moment is the culmination of seven years of advocacy, planning, hard work, married hopefulness and unquenchable optimism.

In the annals of the state, it is the wayward visionary Edward Gibbon Wakefield who is most often cited as ‘the father of South Australia’, and it is the brilliant, charming and mercurial Colonel William Light whose name, of all its founding fathers, is best known. But Robert Gouger was that most rare of creatures, a pragmatic idealist: he had both the largeness of vision required for such an ambitious project as the founding of a colony, and the practical application, determination and energy required to see it through. His youthful philanthropic ideals, born of distress at the condition of the English poor in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, had led him to collaborate with Wakefield in a scheme for a planned colony to which impoverished British citizens might emigrate to seek a better life.

Within a few months of the moment recorded in this painting, Gouger will be a childless widower. Within a year, after he has been arrested and then sacked and sent packing in the wake of a public fist fight, he will be at sea, on his way back to England. Within four years he will be back in South Australia, reinstated with his reputation restored, but sustaining grievous financial losses as the province teeters on the edge of bankruptcy and dissolution. Within ten years, he will be dead.

EARLY IN 2016, the federal government’s so-called ‘efficiency dividend’ carved a bloody trench through Australian cultural life with funding cuts to half a dozen major institutions: The National Museum of Australia, National Portrait Gallery, Museum of Australian Democracy, National Film and Sound Archive, National Gallery of Australia and National Library of Australia. As reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 22 February 2016, one of the results of this was an announcement by the National Library that among other enforced budget measures, including major staff cuts, they would be obliged to scrap some elements of one of their most valuable and much-loved resources: ‘The library will also cease aggregating content in Trove from museums and universities unless it is fully funded to do so.’ Trove is an online

platform, developed and run by the National Library, through which both researchers and members of the public can find the sources and locations of millions of items: newspapers, journals, diaries, letters, photographs and more. Much of this material has been digitised and can be viewed immediately, via the Trove portal, by anyone with an internet connection.

There was a prompt response to the announcement of these funding cuts in an article on *The Conversation*, ‘Treasure Trove: why defunding Trove leaves Australia poorer’, in which Professor Deb Verhoeven and research archivist Mike Jones detail the many uses of Trove, and argue for its unique value as a cultural resource and as a tangible manifestation of democracy in action:

Making Australia’s existing investment in information resources freely and efficiently available is...a self-evident public good in terms of equality of access. The democratisation of information has clear benefits...

What’s more, Trove’s ‘digitised newspapers’ resource includes an inspired, enormous, ongoing exercise in crowdsourcing. The newspapers have been scanned, and from originals in poor condition the text is predictably corrupt. Any reader, looking at images of the originals with the scanned typescript in a column on the left of the screen, is able to contribute actively to this massive project by checking and correcting the digitised text against the original item. Not only is this useful for future users of the resource, but it has an unexpectedly powerful psychological effect, making the user an active part of an extraordinary common enterprise.

For those seeking to understand the past, the use of Trove can unearth the most unlikely and illuminating stories, documents and details. The 1851 letter to the editor of *The Adelaide Times* quoted at the beginning of this essay, deploring the colony’s shameful treatment of the Aboriginal population, is something I stumbled upon by the merest chance when searching via Trove for something completely different – and it sheds some new and startling light on the Adelaide of the mid-nineteenth century.

And for those tracing their family history, Trove opens a large window through which any Australian citizen can make a personal connection to the

living past. A search using Trove can take us beyond the names and dates to fragments and chunks of information and revelations about family members long dead, and can sometimes provide pieces of the puzzle that we hadn't even realised were missing. I had already known that my great-great-grandfather Stephen was an early white settler with five sons (or was it six?), but it was only after I'd tracked him down via Trove that I discovered he'd also been an experimental farmer, a regatta-winning sailor, and a persistent if unsuccessful seeker of Ballarat gold.

WHEN I WAS first approached in 2010 by NewSouth publisher Phillipa McGuinness to write the volume on Adelaide in their City Series, I had read about Trove but had never tried to use it. Over the next year, as I researched and wrote, I found myself leaning more heavily on its apparently inexhaustible resources, not for facts already known and easily found elsewhere, and not only for new facts, but for detail and colour and individual voices – for the breath of life that would aerate and amplify the names and dates of the official records. Whimsical combinations of search terms threw up some startling stories; shuffling the search results so that they were listed in different orders (earliest first, latest first, most relevant first) revealed items and leads that might otherwise have been missed.

I found a story about a floating dance hall of elaborate oriental design moored on the River Torrens, always packed and popular with Adelaide's bright young things of the 1920s, and a story about the night that an extravagantly enthusiastic young lady danced straight over the side of the boat and had to be rescued from the river. I discovered that the Torrens, small and creek-like as it may look, was so notorious for drownings – accident, murder and suicide – that there was a dedicated police officer whose entire job it was to fish the bodies out of the river, and a small sentry-box arrangement set up on the riverbank to station him. I learnt that on the banks of the same river, in the days before Christmas 1944, a crowd of fifty thousand people gathered for the first time, as night fell, to sing carols by candlelight and raise money for a children's charity; when the organisers ran out of programs for sale, the citizens made donations and sang the carols from memory.

And I learned a great deal about Robert Gouger. The ‘founding father’ who persists most strongly in Adelaide’s collective public memory is not Gouger but the brilliant Colonel Light, whom we still thank for the layout of the streets and surrounding parklands, and whose impressive statue looks out from North Adelaide over the city proper and away to the Adelaide Hills. There was already plenty of easily found material on Light in the library, including a full biography; on Gouger there was comparatively little. But the more I read in newspapers, and other resources I found via Trove, from Adelaide’s earliest days, the clearer it became that without Gouger, South Australia as we know it would never have existed.

THE BARE BONES of Gouger’s life can be easily found in the official biographies and histories, and they are dramatic enough. Broken in mind and body by his efforts to establish the colony, by the death of his young wife and baby son, by the quarrels and financial difficulties of South Australia’s infancy, and by the tricky meanness of the Colonial Office in refusing him a pension, Gouger died poor and mad back in London when he was only forty-four. On the other side of the world, his unquiet ghost haunts the colourful and cosmopolitan-grotty Adelaide street that bears his name.

But behind every story there is always another story, and if you want to get to know Gouger in life – in the flesh and in the round – you go down the rabbit hole of the Trove collection to find the various documents that give you glimpses of his life: the reports on his activities in the newspapers of his time, the attacks on him, the defences of him, the one little miniature portrait that makes him look like an unsavoury minor character from a Victorian novel, the letters he wrote and the letters he received, and the tributes to him that continued to appear in Adelaide newspapers a hundred years after the 1836 Proclamation that was to prove, in retrospect, the high point of his life. These documents and newspaper reports of his time reveal him as a man of passionate feeling, Dickensian humour and devout religious belief.

You can find, for example, an article published in South Australia’s centenary year, 1936, in which an impassioned correspondent called E Phillipps Dancker makes the case in the Adelaide *News* of 29 June for ‘Robert Gouger, Father of Our State’:

...South Australia this year is celebrating its first centenary, but up to the present no mention has been made of the founder, Robert Gouger, the man who conceived the idea, did most of the work, sustained the flagging interest, fought a great fight, and was killed in the battle.

You can also find extracts from Gouger's own journals, edited by Edwin Hodder and published as *The Founding of South Australia* in 1898, in which he described his feelings as the *Africaine* approached the site earmarked for Adelaide and he saw the South Australian coastline for the first time:

November 3rd [1836] – About 4 this morning I rose and went on deck... As I watched the changing shore, and reflected on the years of anxiety and labour which I had devoted to this enterprise, the alternations of hope and chagrin which I had suffered as the prospect of its accomplishment appeared near or distant, the degree of success which had at length been attained...my varied emotions almost overcame me, and I was by no means sorry to retreat to a part of the ship where, undisturbed, I could watch the progress of the vessel.

If this was the high point of Gouger's life, the low point came less than a year later. Still in mourning for the wife who had died of tuberculosis in March, followed a few days later by their infant son, Gouger then found himself embroiled in an ongoing quarrel with the Colonial Treasurer, Osmond Gilles, which culminated in the public punch-up briefly and neutrally mentioned in his *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry. But if you go to Trove and dig deeper, you can find this story told in numbingly detailed and ornate Victorian prose, from several points of view, as well as in the more dashing and rather gleeful report in *The Sydney Herald* on 20 November 1837:

...a series of mutual recriminations have recently terminated in a regular stand up fight, in the public street, between the Colonial Secretary, Mr Gouger, and the Colonial Treasurer, Mr Gilles! His Excellency Governor Hindmarsh designates this boxing match as 'a disgraceful outrage upon public decency; a disgraceful street fight,

&c', and has, upon his own responsibility, suspended Mr Gouger from his office...we think that if the Governor possesses the power to suspend (which is questioned) he ought to have suspended both parties.

Gilles was notorious in the colony for his uncontrolled temper and outrageous language – disliked by almost everyone, but also very rich and generous with his money. He bailed out the cash-strapped colony on several occasions, and he supported the Governor – almost as choleric a character as Gilles was himself – in all of the latter's many conflicts and squabbles and power struggles with other officials. If you read between the lines, it's possible to conclude that Hindmarsh was making a scapegoat of Gouger in order to placate Gilles.

Whatever the truth of the story, by May of 1848 Gouger found himself bereaved, disgraced, sacked and en route home to England. As the ship approached the coast of South America, they ran into a storm, as he records in his journal entry for May 28:

At this time my own sensations were tried to the uttermost. The chief mate told me he feared it would be all over with the ship, and that by the morning she would be a complete wreck... At the same time Miss R. fell into strong hysterics, and by way of preventing the attention of the Captain and officers being devoted to her, she became my charge. Her female servant refused to help her, saying that she had enough to do to think of herself! I made no reply to the woman, nor to the steward who also refused assistance. My own mind was mercifully preserved in a state of perfect tranquillity. I felt no fear, but a firm confidence in the Almighty filled my heart; and knowing how little I could expect from human aid, I placed myself in His hands...

After another nine energetic and turbulent years on both sides of the world, and after – as Edwin Hodder puts it – 'his mind, consequent upon the too heavy strain placed upon it, gradually gave way', Gouger died in London on 5 August 1846.

A little over two months after Gouger's death and two hundred miles to the south-west, the *Princess Royal*, a 'fine barque' full of Cornish emigrants in search of a better life, departed from Plymouth on its way to the free colony for whose existence they had Gouger, more than anyone else, to thank. Aboard the ship were my great-great-grandparents, Stephen and Elizabeth, aged twenty and twenty-two respectively; their first child was born the following June, three months after the ship arrived in Adelaide. Elizabeth must have been newly pregnant when they embarked, perhaps so newly pregnant that she didn't yet know.

MY FATHER IS one of Stephen's and Elizabeth's great-grandsons. His military service record shows that he was in the Royal Australian Navy from 1944 until 1946, a teenage Able Seaman aboard the corvette HMAS *Warrnambool*. It also shows, in the column marked 'Marks, Wounds and Scars', that at seventeen he had a scar on his right arm. This information has been typed onto his card. Someone has later crossed it out and corrected it in handwriting: 'Scar left arm.' (The scar is, in fact, on his right arm.) The entry under 'Eyes' wrongly says 'Brown' and has gone uncorrected to 'Green'. All of which goes to show how treacherous the official record can be, and how easy it is to miss a truth that has gone unrecorded.

What made this scar? If you use Trove to search the collection of digitised newspapers for my father's name, you will find a short item in the South Australian *Register* of Wednesday 3 December 1928 under the heading 'Casualties' and the sub-heading 'Boy Bitten By Dog':

On Saturday, Colin Goldsworthy, infant son of Mr. and Mrs. L.R. Goldsworthy, was badly bitten on an arm and shoulder by a dog. He was hurried to Curramulka, where Dr Angus stitched the wounds.

Behind the scar on the wrong arm in the official service records, there is a human story with a child and a dog in it, and a farm and some worried parents and a calm country doctor. No way would even the most skilled researcher have found this item before digitisation and collection in a searchable form. Trove gave me this.

But behind this human story, in turn, there is some unwritten family lore. Any altercation between a curious toddler and an annoyed working sheepdog, if not interrupted by a third party, is likely to have fatal results. My father had not yet turned two, and he was rescued from the dog by someone who, in doing so, almost certainly saved his life – and, by extension, mine – but is not mentioned in any of the three newspaper reports of this incident. Just over six years later, though – and again, of course, I found this via Trove – in the *Adelaide Advertiser* for 27 February 1935, there appeared this brief notice under DEATHS: ‘Button. – On the 26th February, at Linden Park. George Button, late of Curramulka, aged 70 years.’

George Button was a Narungga man who had lived on the farm with my family from childhood. My father remembers being taken as a schoolboy to visit him in the nursing home not long before he died. He and my great-grandfather Henry – a younger brother of the child conceived in Cornwall and carried across the world to be born in South Australia – had been inseparable as children, and died only a few months apart.

Henry and George may have been half-brothers: that is, they may both have been Stephen’s sons. George’s Narungga mother is absent from any version of this story, but the family lore about his paternity, while unproven, seems extremely likely. If George was Stephen’s son, that makes him my father’s great-uncle. But nobody knows the truth.

And as you can see, there is no mention of George in that little newspaper report. The erasure of Aboriginal history in this country has taken many forms, and this small story is one of them. The unrecorded truth of that moment on 29 November 1928, when a white baby boy was saved by an old black man from being badly mauled and perhaps even killed by a dog, is a truth that lives on in my father, on whose arm the scar can still be seen, and who will be ninety next birthday, if he makes it that far. Behind every story, there is always another story.

Kerryn Goldsworthy is a freelance writer and critic, who spent seventeen years as a lecturer in literature at the University of Melbourne. She has served as editor of *Australian Book Review* and as a member of the Literature Board of the Australia Council, has edited four anthologies of Australian writing and has written three books, the most recent of which is *Adelaide* (2011) in the NewSouth City Series. She won the Pascall Prize for Critical Writing in 2013, and was the inaugural Chair of the Stella Prize judging panel, 2013–15.

ESSAY

Remembering Roxby Downs

Mythology, mining and the latent power of archives

Peter Sutton

IN 1842, THE mainly British and German settlers who had arrived en masse at the beginning of South Australia's colonial history six years earlier were given a huge economic surprise. The colonists, largely farmers, artisans and public servants and their dependents, learnt of the discovery of copper ore at Kapunda. Kapunda was only eighty kilometres from the colonial capital of Adelaide. Three years later, the world-renowned bonanza copper lode at Burra was discovered. Other South Australian copper mines were to follow, and they gave the economy a huge stimulus by high-yield, low-cost mining within workable distances from a port. Even though mineral exploration was on the colony's drawing board from 1835, South Australia was largely intended to be founded on the steady labour of cropping and pastoralism and reaping the fruits of the sea. Suddenly, luck was a key player too.

Shift forward to 1975, to the forbidding desert west of Lake Torrens – a vast salina in South Australia's outback – where gravitational and magnetic anomalies were indicating that the vicinity of Roxby Downs Station was prospective for copper. Since 1969, geologist Douglas Haynes and others had been making the relevant theoretical and predictive discoveries. Western Mining Corporation had the exploration licence. Driller Ted Whenan put down the first diamond drill hole close to Olympic Dam, named for its

construction in the year of the 1956 games held in Melbourne. The Whenan Shaft at the mine would eventually reach down more than a kilometre.

The discovery was unparalleled in Australian mining history, except perhaps for Mount Isa. Olympic Dam has the largest uranium body in the world and the fourth-largest copper lode, as well as producing substantial quantities of gold, silver and other minerals. The troubled South Australian economy of the 1970s and 1980s, which had lost much of its manufacturing base, was rescued by mining royalties. By the late 1980s the mine, currently owned by BHP Billiton, was running smoothly, and a quiet little service township called Roxby Downs flourished nearby among the red sandhills.

But the trip to get there had not been entirely smooth. In the 1980s, Roxby Downs was the locus of a very public and muscular conflict between anti-nuclear protesters and the state. As this was well out in the public domain, I leave it for others to reflect on; my concern here is with a largely concealed contestation between the company and Aboriginal people, and between different Aboriginal groups. Having held the country since time out of mind, the Kuyani people's descendants (now also identifying as Adnyamathanha), except for a few who also had Kokatha ancestry, were unable, for a series of complex reasons, to be part of a 2014 Federal Court consent determination (CD) over the land that included Roxby Downs. The native title rights in their country were in effect gifted to the post-1850s immigrant Kokatha group. While some Kokatha families had established genuine post-colonisation ties to the consent determination area through work on sheep stations, this did not mean they had native title rights there that had persisted since the advent of British sovereignty. Such continuity is crucial to the native title test.

This tale involves the recording of multiple Kokatha sacred sites at Roxby Downs in 1983 and, afterwards, at places in the vicinity of Roxby Downs where nothing had been recorded only shortly before with the same informants. It ends with a fierce contest in the Federal Court in 2015–16 between the Kokatha and the Kuyani and Barngarla peoples, over native title claims on a single huge feature close to Roxby: Lake Torrens. Justice Mansfield's decision in that case – *Lake Torrens Overlap Proceedings (No 3)* [2016] FCA 899 – is in the public domain.

IN SEPTEMBER 1980, I was taking part in the Finnis River Land Claim hearing in Darwin. The late and revered Justice John Toohey, sitting as Aboriginal Land Commissioner in a borrowed church hall that offered us the microclimate from hell, was receiving the evidence of Aboriginal witnesses. He did so with his usual courtesy, his untiring interest in the facts, and an enviable clarity of mind. Dignity without aloofness was his trademark in court, whether under a banyan tree on the Daly River or in the air-conditioned barrens of a public building.

I was about to become embroiled in a story where the absence of a figure such as Justice Toohey – a non-judicial mediator and decision-maker who was held in genuine awe and respect by all parties to a dispute – would contribute to the shemozzle that became the Roxby Downs Aboriginal sacred sites saga. Surprisingly, a number of books have been published on the Hindmarsh Island story, which has some clear parallels, but no book of any substance has been written about Roxby Downs as a powerful moment in cultural and race politics in Australia – although this side of the story does play a cameo role in histories of the mine by Keith Johns, John Showers and Bernard O’Neil.

Little impress of the Roxby environmental conflict seems to have remained in the public memory. This is despite plenty of media coverage in 1983 of the three hundred arrests and the presence of two hundred and fifty police when the Campaign Against Nuclear Energy (CANE) confronted the state at the aptly named Canegrass Swamp near the mine site. Shallowly descriptive, ‘Canegrass Swamp’ was a name imposed by the colonists who arrived from the 1850s. Its real name was Piya-piyanha. It is a Dreaming site for the Two Snakes, named Kurkari and Yurgunanggu, whose vast songline came from Aranda country in Central Australia, headed south via Arabana country west of Lake Eyre and arrived at Piya-piyanha, close to Roxby Downs in Kuyani country.

Luise Hercus, a linguist who specialised in languages of Victoria and South Australia, had documented this songline long before 1983. She worked closely with me on the Roxby regional literature survey I completed in 1981; she had worked tirelessly for decades to ensure that the old people’s knowledge of sites, songs and mythology in the wider Lake Eyre Basin was recorded

and properly translated. For her pains, she was criticised at meetings and in the media over her involvement in the Roxby research, and received abusive phone calls. Luise knows a lot about ideological hatred. She still remembers having to wear the yellow Star of David on her clothing as a schoolgirl in Munich before escaping with her family to England.

Three years before the pitched fracas at ‘Canegrass Swamp’, a phone call from Hugh Orr in Adelaide reached me in Darwin between the sittings of Justice Toohey in the steaming church hall. Hugh’s firm was on a shortlist to carry out baseline data gathering for the early stage Olympic Dam mining project. Kinhill Stearns, another Adelaide engineering company, was hoping to carry out the related environmental impact study (EIS). For the archaeological side of things they had hired Phil Hughes, a colleague I knew from my Canberra days and a consultant with real academic street cred. They also needed an anthropologist for the social impact study. If successful, the tenderers would commission the work to be carried out during 1981.

I expressed an interest. To an extent this was living dangerously. I hadn’t stepped into the impact study arena before. Aboriginal land rights and the mining industry were in repeated collision at the time. The heavy drivers on the mining side in this particular case were the Australian Mining Industry Council, and one of its key members was Western Mining Corporation (WMC), whose boss, Hugh Morgan, took an aggressively conservative and, unusually, Christian fundamentalist stance on land rights. But the Olympic Dam impact study was to be done under both federal and state government requirements, and my client would be Kinhill Stearns, not WMC. I thought this would form enough of a buffer to defend my reputation for objectivity. My habitual independence from unwelcome external influence, at times a thorn in the sides of others, was here going to be a blessing.

NOTHING MUCH HAPPENED at my end until March 1981, when I was contacted by Phil Fitzpatrick of the Aboriginal Heritage and Relics Unit (AHRU) in Adelaide. He had been asked to draw up state guidelines for the EIS and sought my advice. I offered to visit him with copies of useful documents, including those relating to the Social Impact of Uranium Mining Project that was then in full flight in western Arnhem Land. At that

time I was preparing myself for intensive fieldwork in the same region of the Top End, as a consultant to the Northern Land Council on the Jabiluka uranium negotiations.

I went along to meet Phil Fitzpatrick, and with him Rosemary Buchan and Tom Power, both also of the AHRU. Here I made my first note about an Aboriginal people usually called the Kokatha, who would be central to the Roxby Downs story for the next thirty-five years: 'David Schinnick, Margaret Kelly, lawyers re Kukata.' The Kokatha were organised but, as yet with no legal protection for pursuing their land-rights interests, pressure, protest and persuasion were their main tools.

Like other Aboriginal people, however, the Kokatha had allies in the state heritage bureaucracy. Given the presence of Fitzpatrick, an ex-kiap, and his Irish colleague Tom Power, this departmental pro-Aboriginal culture had been strong at least since the 1970s, when Bob Ellis had run the AHRU. It was common knowledge that public servants running the environmental and heritage bureaucracies in Adelaide generally either leant or leapt enthusiastically towards the causes of protection and tradition rather than those of economic development.

At this time, I was also asked by Bryan Jenkins of Kinhill Stearns to map out a prospective program for anthropological field research in the Roxby region. One day in 1981, Kinhill had had a meeting with Roger Goldsworthy, Minister for Mines and Energy for the state government. Goldsworthy was a political heavy. During the meeting Goldsworthy, chief negotiator of the Roxby Downs Indenture and deputy premier of South Australia, had been, according to a note from my conversation with Bryan, 'paranoid – fear of land claims'. But he wasn't delusional; these claims were indeed to come.

I eventually met the client who thus far had loomed silently behind my Kinhill contact, the ever-smiling Bryan Jenkins, whose sporting of a bushwalker's beard spelt 'environment' rather than 'development'. This client was a company set up by a joint venture for the Olympic Dam project, called Roxby Management Services (RMS). Its head was John Copping, an old-school gentleman manager whose roles in the Roxby tale included trying to play cricket with often hostile Aboriginal interests, trying to rein in his own legal pit bulls, and attempting to juggle a solution that appeased all. The

lawyer with him at this meeting was Geoff Witham, a man with whom I was to clash vehemently on more than one occasion later. Copping overruled him pretty often.

Bryan Jenkins's Kinhill colleague Bill Woodhead was also at the meeting, as always cool and apparently running very well on idle – a true pro. Also present, among others, were Rosemary Buchan and Phil Fitzpatrick, whose unit was not to be involved in any research but only in assessment of the results of the EIS. And then there was a man by the name of Colin Woolard.

Colin Woolard was an RMS geologist who had a lot to do with arrangements at the mine site. No township had been established when he took me on a quick tour of the site eatery and the men's demountable accommodation, and the surrounding sandhill country. Once out on the sandy tracks, and even off the tracks, he drove like a contestant at the Mallala Motor Sport Park. Colin's huge hands made the Toyota steering wheel look like one taken off a kid's billy cart. He was all health and strength, and seemed to be glowing in his role as equerry to one of the most gigantic precious mineral enterprises in the world. And he clearly knew every inch of a great penumbra of sand and rocks and claypans and bushes stretching out many kilometres from the mine site. He walked me over a sample of the millions of stone artefacts and bits of debitage covering what looked like an unliveable environment. The old people were tough. But where were they now? Colin was to become a player in the attempts by anthropologists (and linguist Luise Hercus) to map parts of the same country in cultural terms later that year and afterwards.

I told Bryan Jenkins my position in entering the field at Port Augusta would be greatly facilitated if the state government or RMS were to make an apology to the relevant Aboriginal people about the lateness of contact with them regarding the mine's development. This delay had been disrespectful, though perhaps not illegal. Sites of significance were protected by state legislation, but native title was yet to be recognised and legislated (it became law in 1993). Sites were, as a result, a key legal pathway to formal Aboriginal recognition in the Roxby region.

On 28 April 1981, I suggested to Kinhills the need for a regional Aboriginal Sites Council, a proposal I thought should be offered to the local Aboriginal polity by the state government, albeit on the company's or

Kinhill's suggestion. The proposed council could act in relation not only to Roxby Downs but also a brace of projects in outback South Australia, including Santos, Dow, Lake Dey Dey and others. I proposed that site custodians should be paid \$80–\$100 per day for their work, less if their knowledge was less specialised. RMS paid graduate technical consultants \$100–\$150 per day at the time. John Copping was not opposed to engaging Aboriginal people as consultants, but thought the company should begin by funding small numbers and 'go in gently'.

Copping thought that the government should make the apology directly through Phil Fitzpatrick. He was, after all, a public servant, and well known to Aboriginal people in the region as a sites officer. Copping's company generally took the stance that it was the government's responsibility to act as honest broker between the Aboriginal polity and that of the developers. I thought so too. Some key people in the government worked hard to evade this responsibility. They mostly lacked courage – the courage to deal with Aboriginal people directly and realistically. Coming from many years in Queensland and the Northern Territory, I was thunderstruck at the absence of any depth or spine in the Adelaide bureaucratic subculture when it came to Indigenous affairs. Be nice and do nothing dangerous. Live with the double exposure of showing respect and tolerance for a conquered people who were largely dispossessed. And at 4.40 pm go home to Norwood and have a shiraz.

Phil Fitzpatrick was too junior in the system to be handing out state apologies. Another, much more senior public servant, Peter Ellyard, discussed with me the possibility of the relevant minister making an off-the-record apology while meeting with Adnyamathanha people at Balcanoona the following week. This was in the Flinders Ranges, and thus far the people most visible in opposition to the mine had been Kokatha people of the deserts west of there. The two mobs weren't known to get on too well, even though there was some shared ancestry. This idea clearly didn't have legs. It was a grab at symbolism in the absence of a grip on *realpolitik*.

MEANWHILE, I STARTED researching the literature on the Roxby region in preparation for a baseline report. According to Kinhill's Bryan Jenkins, two senior public servants, Peter Hill and Ted Phipps, had decided

that my suggestion of a sites organisation for western South Australia should be restricted to simply reviewing my report after it had been completed. I responded that this would vitiate the original purpose of the proposed group, which was to provide a properly run organisational structure for Aboriginal interests over the long term. The state was being resistant at more than one turn.

My research was also meant to be in preparation for fieldwork. One of my conditions was that I would not start fieldwork until the consent of the various Aboriginal interest groups had been negotiated. This never happened, so in the end I submitted my literature survey to Kinhill Stearns late in 1981 and withdrew. The fieldwork was done by others in 1981–83. Two vital anthropological field reports from 1981 went missing for thirty-five years. When they were rediscovered and put into evidence in the Lake Torrens native title case in 2016, they landed as a rocket from the past. I return to this later.

On 5 May 1981, Phil Fitzpatrick drove me to Port Augusta in an AHRU vehicle to meet with the Kokatha Peoples Committee (KPC) at the local social club. First, though, we went to the National Parks office to meet Des Coulthard and his fellow ranger Vince Coulthard, both Adnyamathanha men of the Flinders Ranges. Des was later to spend about a fortnight with Luise Hercus and myself mapping mythological sites in the mound springs country near Lake Eyre with the last of the old-style initiated Arabana men: Arthur Warren, Brian Marks and Glen Hull. Vince Coulthard rose to become a power in the politics of the Flinders Ranges. We bumped into each other from time to time over the decades, and he was in the Federal Court on 9 August 2016 to hear Justice Mansfield publish his decision on the recently heard Aboriginal native title claims over Lake Torrens. We nodded across the pews.

I had made all sorts of notes on what I was going to say at that first Kokatha Peoples Committee meeting. This included informing them that Roxby Management Services hadn't contacted them yet because they were prevented from doing so by the state government; that I had told RMS that the anthropology field research had to be negotiated before it started, and that was why I was there; that my report would be checked by the relevant

Aboriginal people for accuracy, and questions of copyright sorted out; and so on. But this script was short-circuited. John Thomas, Simon Dare and other Kokatha members cut to the chase. Thomas, deputy chairman of the committee, dominated the proceedings. The chairman, Bill Clifton, was a non-Aboriginal man married to a Kokatha woman. He seemed to be a neutral linchpin, taking a low profile.

Among other things, Thomas said RMS should be financing his committee to engage its own expert researchers. (This did, in fact, eventuate.) Simon Dare said the reason the government wouldn't fund the KPC or let RMS talk to them earlier was because it was against land rights. I asked them if they would consider sharing control of the research. There was no clear response because, as Thomas said, they needed expert advice first. I wondered if my Queensland Murri friend Michael Mace might be available to give that advice. Aboriginal Queenslanders were at that time far more experienced in dealing with difficult government and industry struggles than their counterparts in South Australia.

John Thomas complained that there had been no written contact from RMS. This was offensive: 'We are not illiterate,' he said. Indeed, his own well-written document of 1981 containing a map of Kokatha country was to have its day again. It was one of several sources Justice Mansfield relied on in 2016 to conclude that Kokatha claims to Lake Torrens only post-dated the 1980s.

Simon Dare suggested at the 1981 committee meeting that the whole Kokatha area should be surveyed for sites *before* any further exploration, to avoid potential accusations of made-up sites. The issue of sacred site 'discovery' or 'extension' or 'creation' among the younger generations was not going to go away. This suggestion returned like the eye of a hurricane in 2016.

The next day, I continued the conversation with John Thomas at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs office in Port Augusta. He proposed various compromises, though these were just his own ideas. The Kokatha could work with me if RMS would also fund them to employ their own anthropologist; if not, they were prepared to block the research work. Thomas suggested Kokatha involvement in the research be on a consultancy basis: \$300 a day, say, to go to the Kokatha Peoples Committee, with senior people

like Richard ‘Ningel’ (pronounced *Nyinytjil*) Reid being paid \$150 a week to participate in the fieldwork. We left it at that.

TWO DAYS LATER I was back in the Top End to resume fieldwork in Western Arnhem Land. This job, on the Jabiluka uranium mine negotiations, was one I was doing for the large and well organised Northern Land Council (NLC), whose structure and powers had been a matter of federal legislation and reliable funding since 1976. By contrast, the KPC in 1981 were a voluntary organisation short on staff and funds, and even shorter on any kind of statutory blessing. Unlike the NLC they had no legal land rights base, only a toehold through state laws about protecting Aboriginal sites of significance. Even more of a problem, in the long run, was that they only represented part of the Aboriginal population that had genuine historical and cultural links to Roxby Downs. The others had pretty much no voice and no organisational advocates on the Roxby scene.

This issue was raised by Kinhill Stearns’s Bryan Jenkins at a meeting in Port Augusta on 28 August 1981, with Kokatha representatives Ningel Reid and Joan Wingfield. I was there, as was the Kokatha legal representative, the bullish young Christopher Charles of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM). Charles said ‘other tribes’ were not represented and mentioned the Kuyani. He then passed the ball to Ningel Reid, who said, ‘We’ll tell our *own* anthropologist, not yours – we got it in head.’ Reid then moved straight into saying that if the Kokatha divulged (sacred) information in the wrong way, they would not merely be criticised by other Aboriginal people but would be ‘six foot under’. This kind of unpredictable change of subject, or perhaps speaking in a private code, was typical of Ningel.

Somehow, the Kuyani were once more off the agenda. But this moment flagged a notable feature of the Kokatha future in the 2000s: the use of the sacred domain, in the next generation of Kokatha, to attempt to disenfranchise those with anciently embedded rights, but who could be portrayed as having little sacred knowledge of the land in question. I was later, in 2015–16, to conclude for the Federal Court’s consideration that the Kokatha claims on Kuyani country were a case of attempted annexation.

Witness intimidation was a feature of the trial in Port Augusta in 2015. At one point, Justice Mansfield had the courtroom cleared of all Kokatha people, so that a Kuyani woman could give evidence. She testified on oath that she had been threatened with bashings by certain named Kokatha women if she gave evidence. There was no later news of anyone being arrested for witness intimidation. I wondered why.

Ningel Reid made a statement at the August 1981 meeting about an issue that had already arisen and would come back to haunt his people in 2016. As I recorded in my notes at the time, he was concerned that sacred sites identified after the drilling phase would be considered by others to have been invented; that is, fictionally placed close to the mining action. Christopher Charles thought my standing, if I were the anthropologist recording the sites, would circumvent this criticism. In any case, it was the company's fault (their 'moral and political responsibility'), Chris Charles said, that the company had failed to consult Aboriginal people before the drilling. 'You are now doing too little too late!' he told Bryan Jenkins, shall we say, firmly.

Chris Charles also told Bryan that the Kuyani had, in the past, referred their interests in the area to Ningel Reid, who then interposed: 'I'm boss of this area,' adding that ownership of the country was for 'old people' to resolve, not something done on paper. Evidence of a Kuyani delegation of their sovereignty to Ningel Reid has, as far as I know, never been discovered. Ningel claims he is the 'One Man', the only 'Buddoo' (*bardu*, initiated man) for Kokatha country including Lake Torrens, and designates himself as the 'perpetual chairperson' of the Kokatha People's Community.

IN 1981, THE Kokatha were finally able to secure the services of Canadian expatriate anthropologist Daniel Vachon. The two most senior Kokatha men, who had both worked as stockmen in the Roxby Downs area and were said to know the country, went out with Vachon on two field trips to map the country in the general area of the new mine site. These were Max Thomas (now deceased) and Ningel Reid. On the second trip, their numbers were bolstered by senior men from the far north-west of the state, a region where religious traditions were far more intact.

Vachon's valuable credentials included fluency in a dialect of the same language as Kokatha (Pitjantjatjara) and the fact that he was a *wati*, an initiated man in Western Desert Law. If anyone could record sacred sites with senior Kokatha men, and not have material information withheld from them, it was him.

Daniel Vachon made two reports and submitted them to the ALRM's Chris Charles. (Vachon told me in 2015 that he himself kept no copies at the time.) The reports then disappeared. For thirty-five years they remained so, until by chance, during the Lake Torrens native title trial in 2015, historian Tom Gara found photocopies of both reports. He had been in Canberra, working his way through the archived field records of geographer Jane Jacobs who, in 1981, had been studying the land rights movement in Port Augusta as a postgraduate student, and had taken or been given a copy of Daniel Vachon's reports. I come back to them later, where I detail Vachon's finding that senior Kokatha men knew little of the Roxby country's traditions and could name no sacred sites there.

Vachon was followed by Rod Hagen, who had long been a researcher with the Central Land Council in Alice Springs. Like Vachon, Hagen was briefed only to investigate Kokatha interests in the Roxby area, not those of others, especially the Kuyani, of whom both researchers were aware, according to their reports. Hagen made return field trips to the Roxby area in 1983 with Max Thomas and Ningel Reid and others, who located and mapped plenty of sacred sites both at and near the mine site and in the wider surrounding country, although none on Lake Torrens, and no name for the lake itself, and indeed no Aboriginal names for any of the sacred sites. The distinctive patterns of rocky outcrops to which they were guided, at times at least, by Colin Woolard, were linked to the Sleepy Lizard Dreaming. On 13 October 1981, Adelaide's *Advertiser* newspaper reacted to the Hagen reports with 'New look at Roxby sacred sites'. It was indeed a new look.

Hagen visited many rock outcrops at and around the Olympic Dam mine site in early 1983 with Max, Ningel and others, and on that trip eighteen nameless Dreaming places were identified as Sleepy Lizard sites. This absence of names was not restricted to the Sleepy Lizard sites. Hagen did not speak a relevant language and was not a *wati*, but his recordings included a lot more

mythological sites identified by the Kokatha men than had been recorded from the same men by Vachon.

Hagen, according to his extensive tape transcripts, repeatedly asked these men, including Max Thomas and Ningel Reid – men with decades of personal familiarity with the area – for the names of places and features. Repeatedly on the tape they said they did not know, or had not been told, these Aboriginal place names. In the Roxby Downs area they knew plenty of English names, such as Jimmy Hole, Lake Torrens, Phillip Ponds, Chimney Pothole, Old Wire Waterhole, Centenary Dam, Cane Grass Dam, Sandstone Dam, Olympic Dam and Dogleg, and the old Aboriginal names of stations and towns that are in common use and are on the petrol company maps.

My conclusion from this in one of my Lake Torrens reports was that these men had very little traditional knowledge of the landscape in 1983, but, through stock and other station work, had come to learn the location names used by the pastoralists who employed them. This picture was consistent with that obtained two years earlier by Daniel Vachon, except that multiple Sleepy Lizard sites had suddenly come onto the record, densely arranged around the Olympic Dam mine site and also elsewhere.

The company had seen Vachon's 1981 reports, or at least knew what was in them, and raised questions about the sudden appearance of this new swathe of sacred but unnamed sites in Hagen's reports, which appeared on the heels of the KPC's dismay and disappointment with Vachon's results. A dispute appeared to be brewing fast. The late Professor Ronald Berndt, a Perth resident and an elder statesman of Australian anthropology, was engaged by the South Australian government to act as a kind of arbitrator. He was to peer assess Hagen's reports. Dr Lee Sackett, then an academic anthropologist at Adelaide, also took part in the discussion process with Don Hopgood, by now the relevant minister, and myself. The meeting took place in Parliament House, in the belly of the state government.

Ron Berndt's position was that it was 'desirable to assume that the Hagen report is reliable', in spite of the shortcomings of its 'methodology'. These shortcomings were that, 'at a social anthropological level', the report was 'not prepared as well as it should be', more elaboration of the mythologies and genealogies was to be preferred, and site descriptions were 'not as clear-cut

as one might expect'. Despite this, he considered the Hagen report to be 'on the whole convincing', even though he had not been able to study Vachon's results by way of comparison. Ron Berndt did mention Daniel Vachon's reports, of which he had heard from RMS, and said he had not been given access to them. Strangely, he made no comment at all on his own quotation from an RMS document: 'The Vachon surveys were completely organised by the Kokatha People's Committee on their own initiative and as a result the Joint Venturers and the Government were informed that there were no sites of anthropological significance in the Project Area'. 'Anthropological' here referred to non-archaeological, living cultural sites.

Hagen's reports made no mention at all of Vachon's. His introduction to one of them acknowledged drawing upon reports by myself, Luise Hercus, Phil Fitzpatrick and Kin hills. It was as if the chief informants for his report had not in fact gone over the same ground with Vachon two years before and come up with next to nothing.

Later, I was better able to understand why Ron Berndt went along with the material in the Hagen report without insisting on seeing the Vachon reports, and in the absence of a report based on complementary field work with Kuyani, Arabana and possibly Barngarla people. In his own statement to Don Hopgood, Ron made a strong point of the status of the Kokatha people, who were 'in a socially, economically and politically disadvantaged condition, and still trying to cope with the negative public attitudes and regulations that have dogged them for so many years'. His focus was on forging a compromise between the Aboriginal people and the miners: 'The primary issue rests on misunderstandings, and our aim must be the resolution of conflicting views. It is in that "atmosphere" that I approach the issue of compromise.'

Ron Berndt intimated to Don Hopgood that he thought 'instant recognition' of sites was a legitimate means of 'site designation' by people who had suffered colonial devastation. He said: 'The process by which site designation is arrived at (examples of which are demonstrated in the Hagen tape transcriptions) is not necessarily a traditional one. One could not expect it to be, in the light of the social, cultural and physical disruption which has occurred over the years. "Instant recognition" is one kind of response, along with recognition through discussion and consultation with Aborigines drawn

from cognate cultural areas...’ Indeed, it later became my view, on the balance of probabilities, that the 1983 sites had, in most cases at least, been newly ‘read’ into the landscape by Hagen’s informants.

I think there was another motivation behind Ron Berndt’s reluctance to question the Hagen report: he had a distinct desire to avoid confrontation himself, but he liked to take the role of peacemaker. He’d acted in this way during Ted Strehlow’s fight with the University of Adelaide over ownership of his ethnographic collection and the creation of the Strehlow Research Foundation in the mid-1970s.

Ron Berndt had also had a searing time as an expert witness in the Gove land rights case of 1972, an experience he did not want to repeat. He never subsequently appeared as a witness in *any* of the many land claims located in his own former field areas. He had been under surveillance by ASIO during World War II, as a possible fifth columnist of German ancestry – an experience that clearly scarred him. I knew him reasonably well over some time, from 1973 until his death in 1990, so these are not wild guesses. But I was taken aback at his virtual rubber-stamping of the Hagen reports. At the time, I thought this was sowing the wind. It was.

The Hagen report’s sacred sites were duly entered on the state register, and things more or less settled down. By this stage I had pulled out of the consultancy and gone off to Cambridge on a post-doctoral fellowship, and also into a time of recovery, with my young family. Telling my sons bedtime stories, walking along the Backs, and experiencing the St Matthew Passion at Ely Cathedral and Monteverdi’s Vespers at King’s College, were perfect antidotes to many months of overdoing it on both Jabiluka and Roxby Downs, and various Northern Territory land claims. Happily, the dusty swag was back in Adelaide, and the mosquitoes in their swamps.

IT WAS MORE than ten years later that the native title regime began. Under it, the Kokatha put in a claim over Lake Torrens and the country west of there for many kilometres. After the Kuyani and Barngarla put in their claims over the lake, it was split off for processing separately, to be contested three ways. After much negotiation, the Kokatha and the state signed off on a consent determination in which the Kokatha were given exclusive recognition

as the native title holders of the country west of the lake, as far as Wirraminna and Parakylia, north to Billa Kalina and south to Yudnapinna. This block of 34,000 square kilometres is a fair bit larger than Belgium. Roxby Downs and the Olympic Dam mine lie within its boundaries. Determinations of native title were, by the time of the Lake Torrens trial, already in place for most of the country surrounding the Lake.

The Lake Torrens Overlap Proceeding didn't commence until 2015. Expert anthropologists engaged by the parties were Bob Ellis (Kuyani/Adnyamathanha), Jon Willis (Kokatha), the team of Deane Fergie, Rod Lucas and Paul Monaghan (Barngarla), Patrick Sullivan (Kelaray, a mining company), and myself (the state of South Australia). My client contact in the state was lawyer Peter Tonkin. Peter's father, David, had been South Australia's premier from 1979–82, and had presided over the early years of the Roxby development. As a liberal Liberal he also piloted new anti-discrimination laws and the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act. When he was succeeded by Labor's John Bannon in November 1982, the Roxby development continued as before.

We wrote and submitted our pre-trial reports to the Federal Court in 2015. The court was the only entity to which we could, and had to, swear allegiance. After the claimants' witness evidence, and after reading each others' reports, we submitted supplementary reports later that year. Cross-examination of experts took place early in December and we submitted supplementary reports soon afterwards. On 1 March 2016, the expert evidence came to a close. Right to the end, my client, South Australia, had argued from the outset that no Kokatha native title had existed on Lake Torrens, and the Kuyani and Barngarla former native titles had been washed away by the tide of history. I agreed regarding the Kokatha claims, but took the opposite view about the Kuyani and Barngarla, and said so.

The basic wash-up was that all the experts except Jon Willis, acting for the Kokatha, considered the lake to have been, at the time of establishment of British sovereignty, Kuyani in the north and Barngarla in the south. Roxby Downs is on the west side of the northern part of the lake and, on the balance of the evidence as I saw it, was in Kuyani traditional country. We concluded from a mass of evidence – not all of it consistent, but nonetheless on the whole clear – that the Kokathas' ancestors were, at the time of effective British

sovereignty (circa 1850), in charge of country a great distance from Lake Torrens. The closest Kokatha country at that time was around Mount Eba, Bon Bon, Tarcoola, Coondambo and Kingoonya, approximately 150–200 kilometres west of Lake Torrens. The Kokathas' presence as workers on sheep stations closer to the lake, and most likely (I argued) on the lake's substantial Andamooka Island, which also carried and still carries stock, had come about due to a general migration east during postcolonial times. They had walked into a relative vacuum left by the departed or dead Kuyani and Barngarla, whose populations had been mullered by the grindstones of colonial impact. It was clear, I argued, that the original peoples had not conceded the country to the Kokatha, nor had the Kokatha succeeded to it in a form acceptable in Aboriginal law.

In my reports to the court I had been critical of the Kokathas' anthropologist, observing that his reports 'consistently advocate the case for the Kokatha applicants to the exclusion of all others'. I based this assessment of Willis partly on his asserting in his main report that the historical and ethnographic record 'consistently identifies the Kokatha as occupying the territory from Lake Torrens west toward Ooldea and north-west towards the Everard Ranges'. He stated this without dealing adequately with a significant number of sources covered in the reports of the other experts that contradicted this position. His caveat that lack of time had not allowed him to be completely satisfied with this report, and had rendered him unable 'to satisfactorily absorb all of the expert reports and other historical material', led one to expect a much more cautious pronouncement on the tendency of the record. In the course of the trial Willis came to adopt the opinion that both Kokatha and Kuyani may have lived in the same area west of Lake Torrens at the time of sovereignty, but persisted in the claim that Kokatha rights in the area would have remained exclusive to them. But evidence of such co-existence was not there to support this assertion. Willis also dismissed other evidence in the absence of what I would regard as adequate scholarly grounds. This was the case with his rejection of the firmly and long-established anthropological picture of Aboriginal country/language relationships, a topic on which he was prepared to pronounce in the absence of having ever studied the subject properly: 'The idea of country having a linguistic or language identity was

a new one to me,' he wrote, attributing the idea to linguists, suggesting to me he was unaware of the comprehensive record for regions outside his own specialism in which this 'idea' is in fact Aboriginal tradition. Hence, in my view, he acted at times more as an advocate than as the expert required by the Federal Court guidelines. I was surprised when I read Justice Mansfield's decision, in which he rated Willis as objective. In my view he wasn't.

The Kokathas' barrister sought early on to have all expert evidence relating to the area from the western shores of the lake and 140 kilometres further west to Wirraminna, the country in the Kokatha consent determination, excluded from any part in the trial. More precisely, what was to be expunged was any expert evidence that might call the determination into question. Because the lake was girt by consent determinations, the same would have to apply to the entire encompassing historical and anthropological context of the lake.

The problem for the anthropologists, who were bound to affirm that they had not omitted anything of substantial relevance to the case in their examination of evidence, was that Lake Torrens was to be surrounded by legal facts that erased most of the evidence central to the question at issue. Only evidence about the lake itself was to be given weight.

The Kokathas' counsel argued that the Kokatha consent determination of 2014 had found the Kokatha were the native title holders of the described lands since British sovereignty and this was now a fact in law. The Kuyani/Adnyamathanha had failed to press a case for the country west of Lake Torrens, and because the determination was negotiated, no thorough connection report on the country had been carried out. He complained vigorously that myself and others were trying to subvert the legal fact of the determination and go behind it. He claimed the experts should be prevented by the court from making scholarly use of any evidence that went against the consent determination:

MR HUGHSTON: ...they must assume that the only people who have traditional rights and interests, and have always had traditional rights and interests in the areas of the two consent determinations, are the Adnyamathanha people on the east, and

the Kokatha people on the west. They have to accept that. That assumption must be factored in to any report that they do. And for them to look beneath the determination and look at the early ethnography and come up with their views as to whether yes, well, Kuyani people had rights over there in the west and therefore, you can assume that – you can infer that they had the rights in the lake because they've got it on the west side and they've got it on the east side. That's simply impermissible...

NO SCHOLAR OF any conscience could quietly go along with this absurdity. The power of the legal arm of the state to guarantee that the moon is made of green cheese is scary sometimes. Perhaps just as scary for Hughston's clients was the possibility that, in the course of the Lake Torrens Overlap Proceeding, the Kokatha consent determination would be revealed as the grave error and injustice that (in my assessment and that of others) it was, and the revocation process available under Section 13 of the Native Title Act might be invoked.

When this evidentiary issue came up in the Port Augusta courthouse during the lay evidence, I was astonished to hear Justice Mansfield say that any anthropological or historical evidence relating to the Kokatha determination and the other surrounding determinations that might call into question the findings of the determinations would be given no weight in his reasoning. Most of the evidence that was relevant to an anthropological and historical account of Lake Torrens itself as a land unit and cultural entity lay in its relationship with its surrounds; the lake itself was largely uninhabitable and devoid of anything except salt, save for a few islands and a few mainly saline springs. Lake Torrens itself was a brick in the wall of the Stuart Shelf and the Flinders Ranges. To understand the brick, as I put it, you needed a view of the wall. We were being told that the wall was out of bounds – the purpose of the brick had to be understood in legal isolation of it. Dr Johnson was right: anthropology and history were gagged, while the law brayed.

At that moment, I couldn't see any point in staying in the game. I left the Port Augusta courthouse quickly. I didn't slam the courtroom door, no – it banged shut all by itself. I went straight back to the motel and started

packing to go home. The state team came around one by one, and eventually persuaded me to stay. They had up their sleeves some peachy keen argument that would mean the contextual evidence could maintain a ghostly presence in the proceedings. At least, I conceded to myself, we could leave behind a credible and quite detailed record for the future, especially the future of the Aboriginal families who came from the region and for whom a lean historical past would now be richer, if they wanted it.

The Kokatha had given Justice Mansfield and other male participants detailed mythological accounts relating to Lake Torrens: to its internal features, to its entirety as a form, and to sites on its largest island and along its western edge. They claimed it had only ever been theirs, and that their country extended exactly to the eastern shore and no further.

The Kokatha had been consistent in saying that, although some of their site-myth knowledge had come to them courtesy of elders from a long way away, and some of it from Ningel Reid, the most crucial and richest source of their knowledge of the sacred sites both on Lake Torrens and around Roxby Downs came from one chief source: the late Max Thomas. While Max could not be called as a witness, Ningel was alive and assertive and one of the most senior Kokatha men. He was never called. Almost all of the Kokatha's own evidence of any substance was given by members of younger generations.

We knew much of what Max Thomas had told Rod Hagen in 1983, because Hagen tape-recorded and transcribed some of it and included a lot of it in his report. What Max had or had not told Daniel Vachon two years earlier had apparently been lost, and no comparison between the two was possible.

And then the lost reports dropped out of the sky like V-2 rockets. Tom Gara found Jane Jacobs's copies of them during his Canberra archival visit in late 2015. In his first report of 1981, we could now read, Vachon had written about his first mapping trip with Max Thomas and Richard Reid:

The men who made up the field party were selected by themselves as being most knowledgeable of the study area. In my opinion, unless other people can accompany us on a second trip, we will be forced

to indicate to RMS [Roxby Management Services] archaeological [sites] only – places the KPC [Kokatha Peoples Committee] would want no mining on the basis of protecting a forgotten heritage.

Mythological knowledge is worse than thin, it is non-existent among these informants. The men themselves know that others will need to be involved if the myths are to be re-learned.

Unlike those people who still retain their religious traditions, these men:

- a) Sang no songs during the trip – a constant practice in the North-West [of SA]. They admit they do not know them.
- b) Know no Aboriginal place names.
- c) Knowledge of the people who do know the country is very thin.
- d) Identify wilyaru as the only ‘dreaming’. The term seems to be used in a generic fashion for any site.

Since the songs and place names are not known, there are no ‘ethnographic sites’ to protect. Without the place names, it becomes almost impossible (but not entirely) to elicit information on the area from others.

This is not to say that no one knows the country. But unless a process of re-learning begins immediately, whatever knowledge of the area remains will be lost within the next few years.

These men know that the situation is desperate, but have little confidence that the younger people share their enthusiasm. In truth, only Richard Ried [sic] and, maybe, Max Thomas are serious in re-learning their heritage. Both are willing to consider having white people who know anything teach them the country.

The picture presented by Vachon’s site records on this trip wasn’t quite so dire, but very nearly so. There were some fragmentary elements of mythological associations that are consistent with other and later assertions by Kokatha and other people. But they did not relate directly to the rock formations Rod Hagen soon found were asserted by the Kokatha men to be Sleepy Lizard Dreamings. Recall that Colin Woolard knew where such outcrops were

located and took the Hagen party to at least some, if not most of them, in 1983. In 1981, Thomas and Reid had not mentioned Sleepy Lizard Dreaming sites to Vachon at all. Nor did the mythic associations recorded by Hagen relate directly to Lake Torrens, even though it is only forty kilometres from the Roxby mine site and fifteen kilometres from Max Thomas's long-term home at Andamooka. In desert terms, these distances are minute.

Vachon's next trip added senior men from remote north-west South Australia. But again he wrote, in his second report of 1981:

...knowledge of sites, including names of sites, and mythological information is virtually non-existent.

Yalata men could be used as could people from Koonibba. It is my opinion, however, that little additional information will be gained from these people.

If the two men from the North-West can be used as an indication, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people from the north have had little information on the area. All northern men repeatedly asked the locations of places, such as Andamooka, Woomera and Pt. Augusta; a situation which would not have been possible if they had had some physical association with the area, even some years ago.

These gaps were filled by Rod Hagen's informants in 1983, and then – east of there, on and in the lake – further filled after 1993. The key moment of extension of mythology onto the lake seemed to have happened in 1996, when Jon Willis and a senior man from Muṯitjulu in the Northern Territory, Tony Tjamiwa, went out mapping with Kokatha people. It was not clear to me that Tjamiwa had ever been to this particular area before.

The elaborate mythology Willis and the Kokatha men described for Lake Torrens and Andamooka Island, Justice Mansfield concluded in his 2016 decision, 'must be post-sovereignty in origin'. This was true, but it was also clear from the context that the Lake Torrens mythology of the Kokathas was not only post-1780s but post-1980s in origin. They now link it directly to Roxby Downs.

MY PROBLEM WITH all this ‘reading’, ‘extension’ or ‘re-creation’ of new sacred sites was not the mere fact of innovative readings of country in mythological terms – I had adduced several unimpeachable examples of this in my own report. Two of these examples involved features of the Canberra region being ‘read’ by visiting men of remote outback origin during the 1970s – men who had never before trod the ACT, but who ‘saw’ the Dreaming events of their own remote countries reflected, naturally, close to the seat of national power and economy. The problem in the Lake Torrens case was the mobilisation of this ancient practice against others in a legal-bureaucratic and developmental environment where intense competition existed between Aboriginal groups. The goalposts had shifted.

However, another set of facts effectively placed all of this evidence of mythological ‘extension’ or ‘finding’ of sacred sites through ‘reading’ the country – of which one had no extant lore – into a kind of native title limbo. During the 1980s, Kokatha people were on record as to the relationship of Lake Torrens to their country in writings from four different sources. These included Max Thomas and Ningel Reid, and other Kokatha senior people. The recorders, on different occasions, were Daniel Vachon, Rod Hagen, Tom Gara and John Thomas. All of the Kokatha told their recorders (or wrote himself, in the case of John Thomas) that country claimed as Kokatha did not include Lake Torrens, but only went as far as the edge of the lake on its western shore. (Norman Tindale had recorded the same fact from two different informants in 1939.) This is how Willis dealt with that crucial evidence while being cross-examined by Adnyamathanha counsel Michael Roder:

RODER: Would that suggest that as far as you’re aware that throughout the 1980s when Kokatha people were asked to identify their boundaries, it went no further east than the western boundary of Lake Torrens?

WILLIS: I think on the strength of the reports that you’ve put in front of me, these reports definitely say that, yes.

RODER: Thank you. Can I suggest to you that that is – that ought to be a very important matter to take into account in determining whether the Kokatha had traditional rights over Lake Torrens?

WILLIS: You can suggest it to me, yes.

RODER: What's your response to it?

WILLIS: I think the 1980s were a particular time in Kokatha history, yes, you know, but the Kokatha have existed for a long time before and after that.

RODER: It's certainly not material that you had regard to or were even aware of when you wrote your report?

WILLIS: I was certainly aware of it.

RODER: Of those 1980[s] reports?

WILLIS: Yes, I've read them a number of times.

RODER: Why didn't you refer to them in your report?

WILLIS: Because I don't – I think what they say is interesting—

RODER: I see.

WILLIS: —in terms of what else I know from other records and from contemporary ethnographic evidence as well as from the evidence from the Desert people, *I don't think that these reports are of interest.*
[emphasis added, PS]

It was only after the Kokatha visited the area with Willis and Tjamiwa in 1996 that the previously unrecorded and elaborate Kokatha mythology of the lake, together with their since-sovereignty native title claims over the lake, to the exclusion of all others, emerged.

In August 2016, Justice Mansfield dismissed the Kokatha claim to Lake Torrens. He found it had not been theirs at the time of British sovereignty. He also dismissed the Kuyani/Adnyamathanha and Bangarla claims as well, saying he was not convinced that they had held any part of Lake Torrens at sovereignty either, even if this may have been the case. He also dismissed their claims because, assuming they did hold the lake in 1788, he did not consider they had kept up the required strength of coherent connection to the lake between conquest and now. Their evidence had also, at times, been internally inconsistent.

And so, after the prodigious efforts required by litigation of this complexity, and after the taxpayer's meeting of some heavenly bills, nobody got a guernsey. Meanwhile, the mine at Olympic Dam has underwritten the

economy of the South Australia for nearly three decades and promises to do so into the foreseeable future. According to the *Australian Business Review* on 5 May 2012, Aboriginal beneficiaries of the Olympic Dam Agreement stood to receive an additional \$920 million over thirty years once the \$30 billion Olympic Dam expansion, currently on hold, takes place. And the word is that underneath the northern part of Lake Torrens is an even bigger mineral treasure than the Roxby blockbuster.

Within a few weeks of Justice Mansfield's decision, all three claimant groups – the Barngarla, Kuyani (Adnyamathanha) and Kokatha – lodged appeals against his decision. The miners with an exploration permit over part of northern Lake Torrens once more had to hold off further attempts at negotiating exploratory drilling while the uncertainty remained as to who, if anyone, they should treat as native title holders.

Stay tuned.

The views expressed in this essay are those of the author, and are not intended to reflect the views of the State of South Australia.

Peter Sutton is an author, anthropologist and linguist who has lived and worked with Aboriginal people since 1969, and is a specialist in the Cape York Peninsula region. He is also a specialist in Aboriginal land tenure and has taken part in some seventy land-claim legal cases over the years 1979–2016 in three Australian jurisdictions: Northern Territory's Aboriginal Land Rights Act, Queensland's Aboriginal Land Act and the Commonwealth's Native Title Act. He has written or edited sixteen books in the fields of Aboriginal languages, visual arts, land tenure, history and policy. His two latest books are *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the end of the Liberal Consensus* (MUP, 2009) and, with Michael Snow, *Iridescence: The Play of Colours* (Thames & Hudson, 2015). He is currently writing a biography of pioneer Queensland anthropologist Ursula McConnel.

Ali Cobby Eckermann

When silence is handcuffed

she knew when she awoke
that some one had raped her
gathering her clothes together
in the back alley she dressed quickly
flushed herself pissing behind a tree
spat and spat and spat to clean her mouth
before joining the anonymity in the mall
and watching for the culprits' eyes

when we first met it was easy
our conversations medicine to counteract grief
in a short while the tonic wore thin
episodes of long-term loss begin to erupt
is this a lull in the love between us
now the silence has been handcuffed?
Or is this simply a test to see
who can utter the key?

Ali Cobby Eckermann's first collection *little bit long time* (Picaro Press) was published in 2009. *Ruby Moonlight* (Magabala Books, 2012) won the 2013 Book of the Year in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards. Her memoir *Too Afraid to Cry* (Ilura Press, 2015) won the inaugural Tangkanungku Pintyanthi Fellowship at the Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature in 2016.

PHOTO STORY

Wadu Matyidi

A long time gone

Buck McKenzie and Eva Hornung



WADU MATYIDI BEGAN in a curious, perhaps unique way. Jillian Bovoro and I started the Adnyamathanha language course Inhaadi Adnyamathanha Ngawarla. It had been running for a term and a half. Most of the students were beginners, some had a smattering of language. Most were of Adnyamathanha background. There were no published resources for beginners and so, class by class, we made our own out of what Uncle Buck and other elders gave us, using linguist Bernhard Schebeck's unpublished dictionary.

Guy Tunstill, who had studied Adnyamathanha, came along, and wrote up on the board what Uncle Buck said, but at that stage there was no fixed or settled chosen orthography for a language that had lived and was dying as an oral inheritance. Guy used Bernhard's dictionary with some adjustments as elders had objected to strict linguistic spelling.

One day Uncle Buck turned up with his guitar and said, 'Let's write a song then.' Songwriter Steve Banham filmed that day for us. Uncle Buck gave a starting line, and then Steve and the class threw corny lines back, and we made a song in English. Then Uncle Buck translated it, Guy wrote it down, Uncle Buck sang it, and we had a song – quite an extraordinary resource for us at a stage when we had mostly just learnt single words and stilted phrases. I took it home and went through the dictionary to make it into a useable resource. This is the song we made that day – a small gem of loss and yearning, and a recording of Adnyamathanha living language and grammar.

*Ukarla vampatanga yuantha
Minyanga nhampaintha
Ilkanthathu wadungurnili
Utana adina ikaanggu inhanga
Yaka, utana adina ikanthai nhinanga
Ngainnga Ngainnga*

There is a flower on the hill
Covered in morning dew
It reminds me of times long gone
That I wish were here still
Oh, I wish I was with you
Oh, Oh

A fortnight later, Uncle Buck said, 'Let's write a story then. It starts *wadu matyidi*... Once upon a time.' And so *Wadu Matyidi* began in much the same way. People threw around ideas, Uncle Buck named the child characters, put them in a context, asked us what they saw. Single-word answers came back naming the animals we knew, and we thrashed out the beginnings of a small story in English that explored Adnyamathanha yarta, and revealed elements of each character at Uncle Buck's prompting.

What happened next was fascinating to witness. As Uncle Buck translated the story into Ngawarla, the story also grew as his Ngawarla brought with it scenes and experiences of his childhood. Old language was reawakened within his memory. He told me that some of the phrases and words he began using he hadn't heard used in forty years.

In each class, *Wadu Matyidi* was amplified, extended with Uncle Buck's memories, and as he gave us these in Adnyamathanha we would write them down, then frantically chase up translations to English to understand how they would fit into the growing story. What started as a simple naming story in English, to be translated into Adnyamathanha, grew into an overwhelming Adnyamathanha story that was, given the richness and rarity of the language, a major project to translate back into English. Term ended with a draft of an amazing story, a resource beyond what we could have hoped for, and far beyond what we yet knew in language.

Over the summer, I worked on the translation, the consistency of orthography, on a glossary, on correcting heard spelling with what I could find in Bernhard's dictionary. I ended up with a more consolidated Adnyamathanha version and, with Uncle Buck's help, worked through unclear meanings to produce an English version. Uncle Buck was still on fire with the story, and over the summer it grew. When term started in 2008, we had a polished story that had been retranslated back to English to reflect its near final form.

UTNYUAPINHA, THE SEQUEL to *Wadu Matyidi*, began in 2008 because Uncle Buck could not let the children he had invented go, and we were all excited by what we were creating. By this stage, I could keep up with him as his scribe. Uncle Buck was driven, and wanted to work on the new story in and outside class. The skeleton of the story again was made in English with ideas from the floor, and then Uncle Buck soared on his memories as he brought it to life in Adnyamathanha.

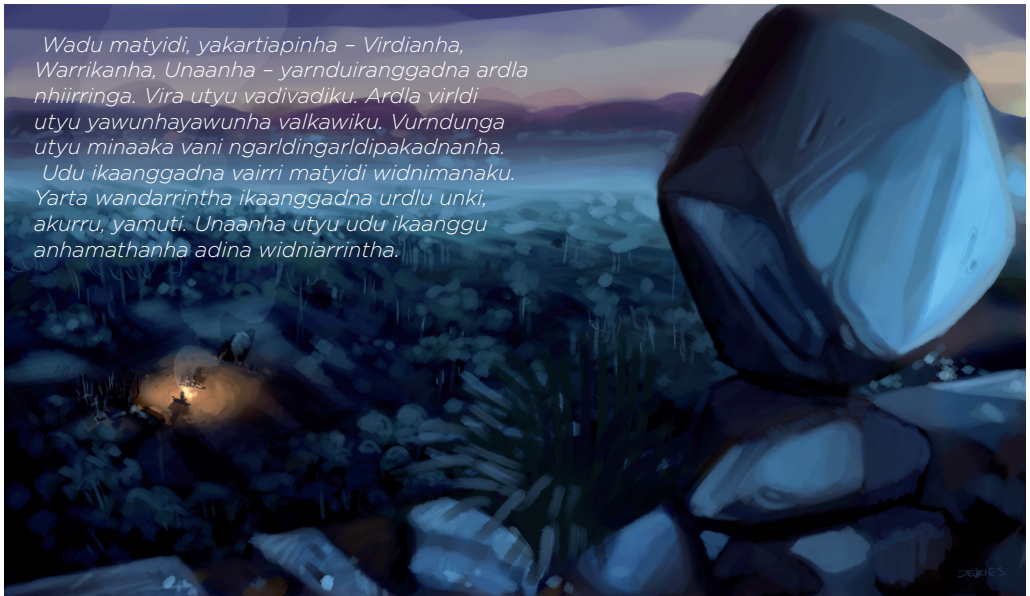
Utnyuapinha is not a traditional story. In it, a language on the brink of extinction asserts itself in a painful, sometimes amusing and deeply disturbing narrative. Uncle Buck was among the last twenty fluent speakers of his language; there are now probably fewer than twelve. Yet Uncle Buck, almost by chance, began to create fiction while teaching his language – and, almost by chance, a novelist and a filmmaker were students in his class. The end result is these books and the award-winning short animation *Wadu Matyidi*.

Filmmaker Marjo Stroud was a student in the Inhaadi Adnyamathanha Ngawarla class. Inspired, she drafted a film script from *Wadu Matyidi* and, with Sonja Vivienne, produced an animated feature. In 2009, the animated *Wadu Matyidi* went into production. Uncle Buck poured himself into selecting voices, coaching, recording pronunciation guides and helping to make his three invented characters live in the voices of the child actors, who were Adnyamathanha siblings from our class. These three young Adnyamathanha voices speak imagined words of their ancestors, and articulate a cataclysmic moment in their history. I was not the only person whose hair stood up on end when first hearing it.

WADU MATYIDI THE book, its sequel *Utnyuapinha* and the *Wadu Matyidi* film script were published for the first time in 2016. For the serious language student, there is much recorded in these books that helps to safeguard and resource Adnyamathanha for the future. These books also complete the process of making Uncle Buck McKenzie's legacy available to all.

Most importantly, they are potent, inspiring works of literature, products of a creative collaboration that drew from Uncle Buck the language and memories of his youth, and his considerable talent as a storyteller. Uncle Buck passed away suddenly in 2012, but I know he would have been delighted with these books. They are published in the form they had at our last editorial meeting. He was happy with them then, but over time he would have changed things – nuances, phrases, memories – if he had had the chance. That was his way.

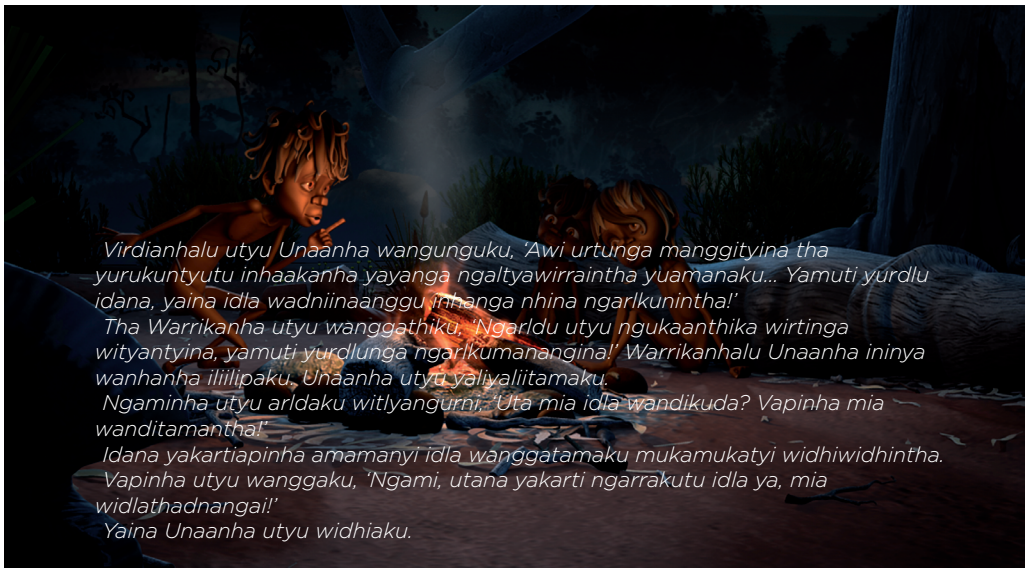
Adnyamathanha Ngawarla is something to be treasured here and now before it is too late. My dream in learning it, and helping to make these books, was to see all South Australian school children study it and, in doing so, truly begin to know their own country. Reconciliation and Australia's ancient languages go hand in hand.



Wadu matyidi, yakartiapinha - Virdianha, Warrikanha, Unaanha - yarnduiraggadna ardra nhiirringa. Vira utyu vadivadiku. Ardra virldi utyu yawunhayawunha valkawiku. Vurndunga utyu minaaka vani ngarldingarldipakadnanha. Udu ikaanggadna vairri matyidi widnimanaku. Yarta wandarrintha ikaanggadna urdlu unki, akurru, yamuti. Unaanha utyu udu ikaanggu anhamathanha adina widniarrintha.

Once upon a time, three children - Virdianha, Warrikanha and Unaanha - were sitting by a small fire. Every now and again sparks would fly into the moonless night. The smoke made their eyes water.

They all believed the vairri could be around in the darkness. They were telling stories about animals that were long extinct, the yamuti, akurru, urdlu unki, but Unaanha thought even these were still around.



Virdianhalu utyu Unaanha wangunguku, 'Awi urtungga manggityina tha yurukuntyutu inhaakanha yayanga ngalyawirraintha yuamanaku... Yamuti yurdlu idana, yaina idla wadniinaanggu inbanga nhina ngarkunintha!' Tha Warrikanha utyu wanggathiku, 'Ngarldu utyu ngukaanthika wirtinga wityantyina, yamuti yurdlunga ngarkumanangina!' Warrikanhalu Unaanha ininya wanhanha ililipaku, Unaanha utyu yaliyalitamaku. Ngaminha utyu arldaku wityangurni, 'Uta mia idla wandikuda? Vapinha mia wanditamantha!' Idana yakartiapinha amamanyi idla wanggatamaku mukamukatyi widhiwidhintha. Vapinha utyu wanggaku, 'Ngami, utana yakarti ngarrakutu idla ya, mia widlathadnangai!' Yaina Unaanha utyu widhiaku.

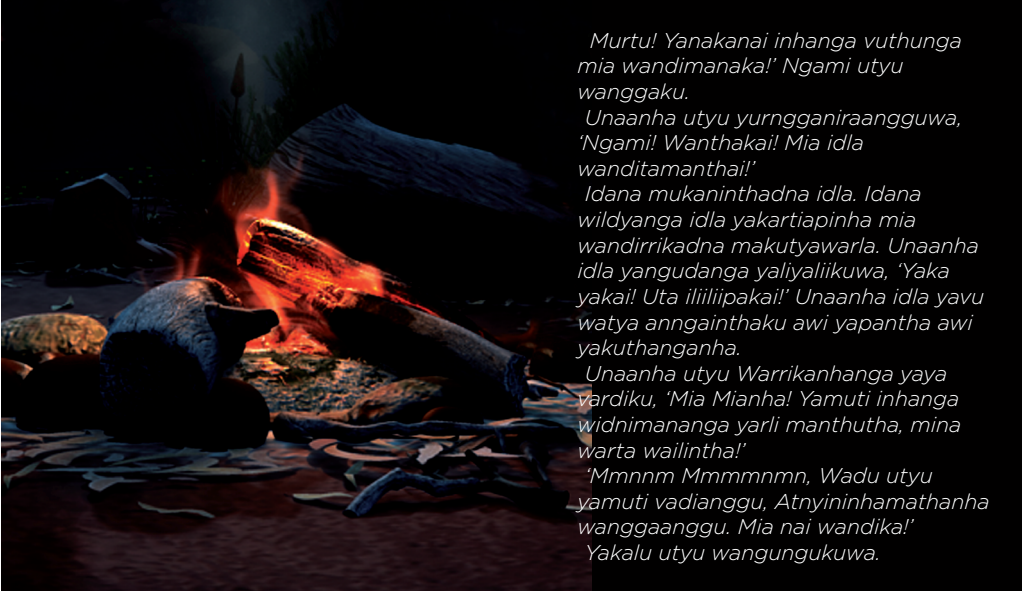
Virdianha said, looking at Unaanha, 'One day you might be swimming in the waterhole and then suddenly you hear this strange slurping sound... And it's the yamuti, come back from the past, and he's after you!'

And Warrikanha said, 'You'd better run fast and get up a tree where he can't get you!' Warrikanha tickled him and Unaanha screamed.

Mother yelled out from the wityla, 'Why don't you go to sleep? Dad's trying to sleep!' So they began whispering to each other, giggling.

Father said, 'Mother, smack those kids, they're disturbing me.'

But Unaanha giggled again.



Murtu! Yanakanai inhang a vuthunga mia wandimanaka! Ngami utyu wanggaku.

Unaanha utyu yurngganiraangguwa, 'Ngami! Wanthakai! Mia idla wanditamanthai!'

Idana mukainthadna idla. Idana wilodyanga idla yakartiapinha mia wandirrikadna makutyawarla. Unaanha idla yangudanga yaliyaliikuwa, 'Yaka yakai! Uta ililiipakai!' Unaanha idla yavu watya anngainthaku awi yapantha awi yakuthanganha.

Unaanha utyu Warrikanhanga yaya yadiku, 'Mia Mianha! Yamuti inhang a widnimananga yarli manthutha, mina warta wailintha!'

'Mmnm Mmmnmn, Wadu utyu yamuti vadianggu, Atnyininhamathanha wanggaanggu. Mia nai wandika!'

Yakalu utyu wangungukuwa.

'Murtu!' Mother called, 'Get in here and sleep inside!' 'I'm asleep! Leave me alone, Mum,' Unaanha whined.

Then silence fell. That night when the children were asleep, lying head to toe for warmth, Unaanha began yelling out in a dream, 'Yaka yakai! Stop tickling me!'

He had to get up to drink from the awi yakutha. Then he nudged Warrikanha awake. 'Mia Mianha! The yamuti is around, tongue hanging out, rolling his eyes!'

'Nahhh! He's long gone! All the elders said! Go to sleep!' His sister said.



Idana anngainthakadna yurndu utyu adina vadivadiku, urlpinga nhampaintha. Awurrunhatyi itni virdinanggaku. Wandirrikadna wida valkithadi ngarika watipantha.

Virdianha utyu wanggaku, 'Vartakuthikanai! Idana Yura wardlathanga ya!'

'Vartakuthikanai! Mika!' Unaanha wanggaku. Warrikanha utyu wanggaku, wirti ngunintha, 'Idana yamuti yurdlu ya!'

They woke up in the morning to the sound of distant thunder. The sun was still hidden, covered by the clouds. They were lying down making out shapes silhouetted in the gum trees.

'Look! There's a man with a spear!' Virdianha said.

'Look! Mika!' Unaanha said.

'There he is, the yamuti,' Warrikanha said, pointing.



Virdianha ngairithadi nhakuntha yuaku, tha wanggakuwa, 'Yavu-ngukarriaripurlā ya, awi yarranga ya. Arda nhulunhulupakanai, tha warratyī marni idla nhawinhawingadikadna, nhakadintha yatha awi ngarlaakawatya yarramanantyu.'

'Yavu wavya arlka walka ngarikunthaanggadna tha ngukakadna varithadi urli watipantha. Virdianha utyu viringa ngukananggathaku wunwunmintha, atnya awithadi ngurantha.'

Virdianha looked to the sky. 'Let's head off before the rain comes,' he said. 'Put some wood on the fire. Then rub each other with warratyī marni to keep warm. It looks like a big rain coming.' They all had a piece of arlka walka, then headed off to the creek bed to try to find urli. Virdianha walked along in front, whistling and throwing pebbles towards the water.



'Unaanha utyu wanggaku, 'Widanai nhakuka ngamakathadi! Warranthu vipinai nhimantharaathu ya!'

'Virdianha utyu arldaku, 'Murtu! Uta alaalpi ngamakanga ipataka, wapmanga vayangina.'

Unaanha said, 'Look at that hole over there in the wida! I'm getting warranthu eggs!' Virdianha yelled at him, 'Murtu! Don't put your hand into a tree hole, a wapma might bite you.'



*Unaanha warlpunti watipantha widninthaku wirtivalkinga.
'Yaka yakai!' yaliikuwa.
'Nhaartanha?' Warrikanha arldaku.
Virdianha arldaku, 'Murtu!
Nhanggapathinanai! Muninga utyu yatha ngarlkungina!
Idana muka idla ngukananggakadna.*

Unaanha tried to get some warlpunti from the branches of a tree.
'Yaka yakai!' He screamed.
'What!' Warrikanha called.
Virdianha yelled at him. 'Murtu, what are you doing! Muni will eat you!'
They walked on in silence.



*Virdianha utyu warndu wanggaku,
'Yanakanai, inhanai nguniathudanha wityarti.
Inhawartanha utyu ngarlandu, ngarlaakanha,'
Unaanha nhunggukalu.
'Inhawartanha utyu warruvipi, tha
urrganintyuwa idla. Inhawartanha
yandurrukura, mardlaapanha,' tha
Warrikanha nhunggukaluwa idla.*

'Come, I'll show you wityarti,' Virdianha said, kindly. And he did.
'This one is ngarlandu, big one,' he said, giving it to Unaanha. 'He'll turn into warruvipi, then urrga. This one is yanturrukura, little one.' He gave it to Warrikanha.



*'Ngai utyu ngaridunha yakarti, Vapardla Ngala Ngala. Idana!'
 Unaanha utyu mina ityanga idla nhakuthikalu widhimangumungu
 tha idla ngunikaluwa
 mantya vanggadiku vapatathadi.
 'Ngai utyu ngaridunha yakarti, Virdianha utyu wanggathiku.
 'Nhakukanai andu idla miringa ngariduwatya wityantha!
 'Ngainggalidi! Itnyanha! Nhakuthikanai Itnya! Unaanha yalialiku.
 Vanhaku Virdianhalu utyu manguvirtniintha nhakuthikuwa.*

'My side's better than yours, Vapardla Ngala Ngala,' Unaanha said, glancing quickly at Virdianha. He pointed to mantya hopping towards the hills.

'No, my side's the best,' Virdianha said.

'See andu scaling the cliff face!'

'I see itnya!' Unhaanha cried, but Virdianha looked at him in scorn.



*'Itnyanha utyu wandara yartanga ikartantha,
 unkaparna miditi Murtu.' Idana Virdianhalu
 utyu ngunikuwa murdlunha wandithaku.
 'Vartakuthikanai murdlu yurdlu yurndu
 vithidinga wandimaku atnya nhiirringa. Vanha
 utyu idana.'
 Idana nhakukadna walha wiringa vanggadiku.
 Valanpila utyu vani arangadiku.*

'Itnya lives in the sand hill country, silly Murtu,' he said. He pointed. 'I'm winning, see murdlu there sunning himself on the ledge? He's real!'

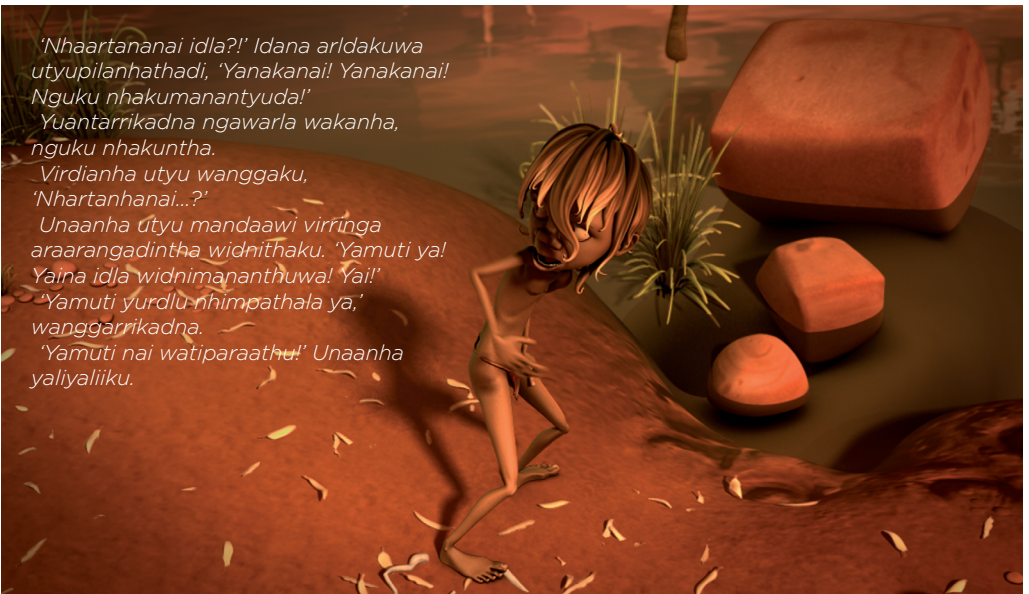
Walha flapped over and they each boasted it was theirs.



Idana Warrikanha utyu nhakuanggu wakarla wiringa vanggadiku ngairringa bidibidi yeyanga manthutha. Warrikanha utyu udu ikaku wakarla tyarratyti antyikalu wirti valkinga. Utyupilanha yakarti utyu vatniintha widnithaku. Warrikanha utyu udu ikaku, mayala anhaplanha; ngai utyu ngukanyu mararra watipantha awi urtuthadi. Tha Warrikanhalu yurukuku wartuli yaliyaliiku arlunga. Tha nhakuanggalu urkinga angatha nguthakalu wirti itnithanga. Tha Warrikanhalu awithadi atnya nhuraku, awi tyaripurrapantha. Tha nguku matlyanga nhakuanggalu.

Warrikanha saw wakarla flying across the sky with a bidibidi sticking out of its mouth. She thought there must be young ones nearby in the scrub. The boys were just playing around. Warrikanha thought, I won't bother with those two; I'll go looking for mararra in the waterhole.

She heard wartuli screeching in the black oaks. She saw urika building its nest at the base of a tree. As she approached the waterhole she threw a stone. It made a deep plosh. Then she saw the tracks in the mud.



'Nhaartananai idla?!' Idana arldakuwa utyupilanhathadi, 'Yanakanai! Yanakanai! Nguku nhakumanantiyuda!' Yuantarrikadna ngawarla wakanha, nguku nhakuntha. Virdianha utyu wanggaku, 'Nhartananai...?' Unaanha utyu mandaawi virringa araarangadintha widnithaku. 'Yamuti ya! Yaina idla widnimapanthuwa! Yai!' 'Yamuti yurdlu nhimpathala ya,' wanggarrikadna. 'Yamuti nai watiparaathu!' Unaanha yaliyaliiku.

'What are these?!' She called to the other two. 'Come! Come! Come and see these tracks!' They all stood around speechless, staring at them.

'What...?' Virdianha said.

Unaanha went ahead, skiting, 'It's the yamuti! It's around again! Ooooh!'

'Could be the yamuti,' they agreed.

'And I'm going to track him down!' Unaanha yelled.



*Tha ngukananggathakadna idla vampatathadi yamuti yurdlu watipantha. Nhakukadnanga awi marldaka yapidi nguthaimanaku. Yavu watya ngairri ukuintha. Irtaapinha utyu mukaninthaku.
Warrikanha wanggathiku, 'Awi utyu yatha ngarlduwatya yarramanantyu!'*

They headed for the hills, then, tracking the yamuti. They saw rain clouds coming up very quickly, and the sky darkened. The birds fell silent. Warrikanha said, 'Heavy rain's coming!'



*Tha awi utyu yarramanaku mirliwamba, vani ngarldu watya. Mil'yarutyu wanggamanaku.
Virdianha arldakuwa, 'Atnya ithipinga ngarlpamanakanai!'
Virrikakadna atnya ithipithadi awurrunha waininggatha.*

Rain came sweeping over the hill; and then, suddenly, it hailed. The wind began to howl. 'Into the cave!' Virdianha shouted. They ran into the cave for shelter, fearful of the thunder.



Tha awurranha yapidi ngarldu watya valkawiku, irta waininggatha. Tha nhakuanggadnangu mirnhimirnhi nhaartanha idla inhaakanha yuamanaku. Yakartiapinha wainga idla yaliyalianggadna.

Just then there was a great thunder clap, making the birds fly up. Then they all saw it, terrifying and strange, standing there at the cave entrance. The children screamed in fright.



'Anty! Wanngapi!' Virdianha utyu amamanyi wanggamaku. 'Anhanha munku idla,' Unaanha utyu yangiyangidinha wainga ikatamaku. Warrikanha utyu ngawarla wakanha ikatamaku. Idana wanggaku idla, 'Yamuti!'

'A spirit!' Virdianha muttered.
'It's dead,' Unaanha sobbed in fear.
Warrikanha was speechless at first. Then she said, 'Yamuti!'



ESSAY

God bless the footy

Dissent and distractions

Patrick Allington

WHEN IT CAME to colourful and controversial views, the long-time mayor of Port Augusta, Joy Baluch, set elite standards: 'I hate sport,' she said in 2008:

I've never had time for it, been too busy looking after a family, you know, surviving. It's a waste of time. I *hate* football and tennis and golf...and if ever the Asians are going to come in it's going to be on grand final day... And they'll just take over peacefully.

I'm not sure exactly which Asians she imagined would swarm South Australia on grand final day, destroying our white-bread, white-skinned way of life. Perhaps all the Asians – the Chinese *and* the Indonesians, the Japanese *and* the Koreans, the Vietnamese *and* the Thais – slaughtering innocent women and children with nothing but the power of kung fu, riding their Suzuki motorbikes, eating butter chicken and guzzling Chang beer after a solid day's conquering.

The term 'Asians' – whether she used it here thoughtlessly, provocatively or jokily – is symptomatic of Baluch, the plain-speaking dissenter. But so too is her attack on sport. There are few things more shocking and inexplicable

to huge numbers of South Australians (weird murders notwithstanding) than someone willing to have a dig at the footy.

Alan Killigrew, a Victorian who came to Adelaide in 1959 to coach the Norwood Football Club, offers a more conventional and comforting view:

After all, what is a football club? It is grass in the middle, posts at the ends, and bricks and mortar. It's people that give it soul. A football club is a living body.

I've heard family and friends describe their church in exactly these terms. Footy isn't just the dominant spectator sport and topic of conversation in South Australia. It's a salve. It's a community binding agent. It's the best entertainment going, even in the digital age. It's a mass obsession, especially when one of the local AFL teams – the Crows or the Power – sit high (or low) on the ladder.

BEFORE THE AFL, there was the much better, much cooler, much more local SANFL. When I was nine years old and living in the lead-smelter city of Port Pirie, not too far from Joy Baluch's Port Augusta, Norwood made the 1978 SANFL grand final. Never mind Asians, little green men from outer space could have landed their spaceship while Dad and I watched the last quarter on the TV in our lounge room on Three Chain Road. Norwood – the mighty Redlegs – were twenty-nine points down at three-quarter time against Sturt, who had only lost once all season. The 'Legs were only so close because Sturt had kicked poorly in front of goal (although as everyone knows, 'bad kicking is bad football'). Norwood's then coach, Bob Hammond, told his players: 'You can win it if you believe you can win.' Inspired – enraptured, perhaps – the players surged. In the chaotic final minutes, umpire Des Foster awarded Norwood's Philip Gallagher a mark – or was it a free kick? – the legitimacy of which Sturt supporters still dispute. On a tight angle, Gags kicked the winning goal.

In the nearly forty years that have passed, I have never strayed far from that spot in front of the television, too tense to breathe as the clock ticked down: nothing could have mattered more. I can still feel the disbelief, the ecstasy, as the final siren went and Dad lifted me off the ground and over his shoulder. Most especially, I will never lose my righteous fury at Mum and

Dad, who had refused to let me get the train down to Adelaide to go to the game. My older brother Matt witnessed history that day from the concrete terraces of Footy Park, and that's the reason he has done so well in life.

Norwood's 1984 premiership was even more memorable, although I wasn't even in the country. By then, I was a painfully shy teenager living with my parents in Logan, Utah, in a valley between two stunning mountain ranges and surrounded by Reagan-hugging Mormons. That year, Norwood came from fifth, winning three knockout finals to make the grand final against Port Adelaide. On the Monday after the final, the family back home mailed us a VHS tape of the game. But while we waited for it to arrive, nobody would tell us whether we'd won. Finally, Grandma Allington, under extreme pressure from her loving son and grandson, muttered down the phone in her faux grumpy way, 'I promised I wouldn't tell you who won. But if I did tell you, you'd be very happy.'

When the tape finally arrived in the mail, we couldn't play it because the US used the NTSC television display system (bloody Reagan! bloody Mormons!). At a friend's place – we had no video player ourselves, although we had access to something like a billion TV stations – we fast forwarded the tape and, with electronic snow for vision, listened to the commentator's distorted voice call the final seconds, his voice slow and deep: 'Theeeeere... itttttt. Issssss... it'sssssss... alllllll... ovvv-errrrrr.' It was a couple of weeks before we found a kind stranger with a set-up that allowed us to watch the game.

Footy embedded itself in my childhood life in deeper ways than winning games and the occasional premiership. I researched everything about football. More importantly, I *felt* everything. I cried one night in 1980, when Port Adelaide's Russell Ebert won his fourth Magarey Medal and so deprived Norwood's Michael Taylor of what was rightfully his.

I wasn't only consumed by the season in progress. One day, Dad took me to meet an old man called 'Wacka' Scott, who let me hold his two Magarey Medals (1924 and 1930). Another time, I traipsed around a suburban cemetery to find the grave of 'Topsy' Waldron, who played in Norwood's first year in 1878 (needless to say, Norwood were premiers on debut). In his book commemorating the centenary of Norwood, *Red and Blue Blooded* (Blaq Books, 1992), Mike Coward wrote: 'Waldron died a pathetically lonely man. He believed only his Norwood Football Club loved him.'

But perhaps most of all, my love for footy and for Norwood was about family. I loved reading old newspaper clippings of my Grandpa's football exploits. Harold Allington was a defender who played fifty-six games for Norwood between 1931 and 1935; he won the 1934 Best and Fairest; he played for the state; he had a clean pair of hands. He was also – and this was the part I loved the most – injury prone: 'This year he is still the shuttlecock of misfortune', *The Advertiser* reported on 17 May 1935. He broke his collarbone, missed ten games from a single concussion, did an elbow, badly bruised his hip, and more. My favourite clipping detailed the day Grandpa cut off the middle toe of his right foot while chopping wood in the backyard: 'Allington, who was wearing slippers at the time, limped into the kitchen unseen, and despite great pain prepared some hot water in which to bathe his foot.' How he managed to chop off one toe – why not two toes? why not half his foot? – was forever a mystery to me.

I was almost as proud of Dad, who played a couple of trial games for Norwood in the early 1960s. He could have made it – or so I've always believed – but he was at theological college at the time. One day the coach – the same Alan Killigrew who said 'A football club is a living body' – spoke to Dad after training. 'You've got to choose,' Killigrew said, 'between football and God.' To my everlasting regret, Dad chose God.

It's been several years since I've been to a Norwood game, although I occasionally watch them on television. I have followed the Crows, the made-up club 'for all South Australians', since their first game in 1991, but never with the same messianic fervour with which I followed Norwood. Perhaps most importantly, being a Crows fan allows me to retain my culturally embedded and familial hatred of Port Adelaide. I go to the occasional game at the cathedral otherwise known as the new Adelaide Oval (South Australians will line up to tell you it's a 'world class stadium'), and I watch replays of high-quality matches. But despite my fading fervour, I retain a version of a football-is-everything mentality. Partly, I'm nostalgic for my childhood. Partly it's because it's still, on a good day, a magnificent spectator sport. And partly it's because I miss my Grandpa.

THESE DAYS, THOUGH, I find myself more interested in footy analysis, rumour and *realpolitik* than in actual games. The AFL is a legitimate and

sometimes compelling space in which to consider a range of political, cultural and social issues, including racism, reconciliation, sexism and misogyny, the deification of the alpha male, the profile of elite women's sport, the use and misuse of 'team first' philosophies, the carnivalised meaning of Anzac Day, the sanctity of Good Friday, performance-enhancing drugs, illicit drugs, gambling, the proliferation of sledging in public and workplace discourse, and more. The AFL's own approach to these issues is sometimes awkward, sometimes PR-driven and sometimes tokenistic. But, at other times, they display some sophistication. Often, it's a bit of both – and in any case, footy fans are hardly the only subset of Australian citizens who struggle to engage constructively with complex issues.

But my interest in off-field matters goes deeper still, by which I mean shallower still. As I write this paragraph, the AFL's trade period is throwing up its usual mix of players trying to leave clubs and clubs trying to push players out. For a week in October, I was transfixed by the possibility that Bryce Gibbs might leave the Carlton Football Club, even though he has three years to run on his contract, and come home – *home* – to Adelaide. I worried about what player or draft picks the Adelaide Crows would give up to get him? Not Mitch McGovern, surely, who could be anything; not Charlie Cameron – please, no – who Eddie Betts has taken under his wing. In the end, Gibbs stayed put, with the Crows announcing they 'were not prepared to meet Carlton's unrealistic demands'.

These are the sorts of footy issues that capture my interest: which coach is about to get sacked? Which player has filmed himself snorting a white substance and whacked it up on the internet? Was Norwood's 1984 premiership – coming from fifth when the finalists came from a top five only – a greater achievement than the Western Bulldogs' 2016 AFL triumph, from seventh to premiers? Only parochialism can deal with an unanswerable question: Norwood is by definition better than the Western Bulldogs or Footscray or whatever they're calling themselves this week, and South Australia is by definition better than Victoria.

All this is harmless fun, innocent downtime. But think back to Joy Baluch, who suggested that we'd be too distracted on grand final day to notice an Asian invasion. Leaving aside Asians, Baluch is on to me – but the situation

is more insidious than she suggests. Footy chat doesn't *distract* me. I don't find myself wondering why I am listening to Trade Radio – yes, for a couple of weeks after grand final day, there's such a thing as a digital nine-to-five talkfest on club negotiations over player movements, real and imagined. I seek out Trade Radio, specifically seek it out to avoid confronting other, harder, messier things. I'm a political junkie who can't bear to hear things I don't want to hear, just as a kid I couldn't bear to watch Norwood lose.

AS CORY BERNARDI, senator for South Australia – *for* South Australia, for chrissakes – has grown in prominence, he has begun to remind me of the giant Christ the Redeemer statue that looks down on the city of Rio de Janeiro. But chiselled Cory is fully animated. I believe at night he moves with disquieting purpose around suburban Adelaide, peering through bedroom windows to see who is bonking who (or what?), a faith-fuelled greed-is-good humanoid who invites and incites ridicule, allowing him cover to get on with the business of (1) saving souls; (2) bringing the national budget back into balance; (3) keeping heathens offshore; (4) fixing the UN; (5) making his Coalition colleagues appear more centrist and moderate than they are; and (6) scaring people silly.

As political activism goes, whinging about Cory Bernardi is an increasingly lame act. This is a bloke who offers his opponents fresh ammunition every time he aggressively expresses his unpleasant and anachronistic ideas. But when, say, Jacqui Lambie tees off at Bernardi – 'prostitutes are far more honest, sincere, humane and compassionate, and better bang for buck than Senator Bernardi will ever be able to deliver' – I laugh but then I cringe (and not only because sex workers can surely be humane and compassionate human beings). My problem is not really Cory himself, but his validation – his valorisation. The Liberal Party – a broad church, at least for some of its members and followers – keeps putting him on their ticket. South Australians, in sufficient numbers, keep voting for him. Taking a stand against Cory means – or might mean – taking a stand against family, neighbours, friends, colleagues. It means being willing to scratch at a veneer of community conviviality and solidarity.

At a certain point, I want to get through my day in a good mood, without feeling the need to scream '*Who the hell did you vote for?*' at the bloke

in the car next to me at the lights. I want to deny Cory Bernardi's public existence, just as I want to avert my gaze from youth unemployment rates, just as I want to pretend that the bodies in the barrels murders didn't happen in a suburb in the city I call home. Instead, I want to think about something truly unjust, like why Norwood never got its own team in the AFL. And so – very often – that's exactly what I do. It's a free country, after all.

PRIVILEGE, DISTRACTIONS, PAROCHIALISM, state pride, complacency, conformity, passivity: these are natural resources that South Australia has in abundance. We can put a positive spin on them too. In *Drawing the Crow* (Wakefield Press, 2006), his book about South Australia in the 1950s and '60s, academic Adrian Mitchell says that Adelaide's long-time moniker as the City of Churches 'identifies not a freak nor architecture nor a rampaging wowserism, either current or in the past, but a lifestyle of civic steadiness, regularity and propriety, the values of its founding settlement, in both its English and German constituency'. I recognise my Adelaide – I recognise myself – in Mitchell's description. And it leaves me deeply uneasy.

In 1957, the year Port Adelaide beat Norwood by eleven points in the grand final, the historian Douglas Pike published *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia, 1829–1857* (MUP). Pike's book – at times riveting, at times dense, at times tedious – opens with these resonant lines: 'South Australia was settled in 1836 by men whose professed ideals were civil liberty, social opportunity and equality for all religions. Though each of these ideas was moulded in England, each was a protest against English practice.' The first colonists, Pike says, arrived harbouring dissatisfaction with the pace of reform in England: 'Only the impatient departed.'

The South Australian self-perception of exceptionalism – a 'sense of difference', as historian Derek Whitelock puts it – emerges from these origins and this origin story. And South Australia has indeed had its fair share of dissenters. There is Catherine Helen Spence (1825–1910), the feminist, electoral reformer, social activist, preacher and writer. Spence thought 'my work on newspapers and reviews is more characteristic of me, and intrinsically better work than I have done in fiction'. Maybe, but her politically charged fiction resounds still, not least a foray into science fiction in which

her terminally ill protagonist trades the last couple of years of her life for ‘one week in the future’.

South Australian dissenters, including Joy Baluch and Cory Bernardi, have often operated within the political sphere. My favourite colonist is Boyle Travers Finniss, who, in 1856, was the first premier of South Australia under responsible government, when the local Legislative Council revised South Australia’s constitution to achieve self-government. In 1864, Finniss led an expedition to select a site for the capital of the Northern Territory. After he insisted on surveying a swamp, some of his men sailed for Singapore while six others acquired a seven-metre boat and floated all the way to Champion Bay in Western Australia. Finniss straddled a line between dissenter and misguided visionary, between principled outlier and dogmatist, between self-confidence and delusion. The US legal scholar Cass R. Sunstein argues that democracies need dissent; he warns against an excess of conformity. But he also condemns ‘political correctness’ – which he calls ‘squelching those who reject left-wing orthodoxy’ – while acknowledging, correctly but unhelpfully, ‘we do not need to encourage would-be dissenters who are speaking nonsense’. Is Cory Bernardi speaking nonsense on behalf of South Australians? It depends who you ask.

And then there is the grand political dissenter of the twentieth century, premier and superhero Don Dunstan, who dragged the state – and, to a lesser extent, the Labor Party – into the modern world, and towards something much more resembling a just world, a fair world, a diverse world, a creative world, a food-loving world.

But in time, the phrase ‘paradise of dissent’ has become a slogan, detached from the complex and messy history Pike told. We don’t need Pike’s observation that conformist tendencies kicked in early in the new colony. We don’t need to think about the practical limits of the religious, cultural and political freedoms imagined by the new establishment. And it’s best, still, that we don’t think too deeply about our treatment of the land’s original inhabitants. In our complacency, we need only know that South Australia was planned (like a kit home), was convict free (at least in theory), and that it has produced a bumper crop of dissenters (like a tomato plant in a Mediterranean climate). We need only bask in the afterglow of the Dunstan era, not protect and extend its legacy. We need only know, or believe, that we are exceptional. According

to Mitchell, 'What South Australians have done, perhaps more doggedly than those in any other region, is to veil or reserve their own regional identity – not because of any sense of inadequacy or unfitness, but because that is the particular character of the South Australian.' Again, I recognise this South Australia; again, I recognise myself in this South Australia. But such recognition offers us a hole to crawl into that is deep and deceptively warm. It offers us the chance to pretend that South Australia, in its distinctiveness, is merely the sum of its better parts. It offers us the chance to imagine that South Australia, a place that exports uranium and has a long association with defence industries, stands aloof from the world.

IN THE END, in the neoliberal and memed world we have created, everything's a competition. So I'll call it: the best ever South Australian dissenter isn't Catherine Helen Spence or Don Dunstan or Cory Bernardi. The best South Australian dissenter is also the best footballer ever. Garry McIntosh was a small, muscled, goateed, hairy, unkempt rover who threw himself into packs, didn't mind a bit of violence for a good cause, and who changed the course of history with his hardball gets and his handballs: premierships, Magarey Medals, an altered perception of the Norwood Football Club.

In 1982, the North Melbourne Kangaroos drafted Macca into the VFL, but he stayed home. When the Crows were formed, eight years before Macca eventually retired, he still wouldn't shift from the SANFL. Did he shun the AFL out of love of the local, out of parochialism, to make a stand against a national league, or as a lifestyle choice? Or did he understand his own limitations: was he just too slow to play in the best competition in the land?

When Macca was added to the SA Football Hall of Fame, he insisted he had no regrets because he'd got to play for Norwood: 'But if I were an eighteen-year-old kid now – with the mentality there is now – things would be different.' Macca hasn't yet been inducted into the Australian Football Hall of Fame. Now there's an injustice, or a distraction, worth protesting about.

Patrick Allington's novel, *Figurehead*, was published by Black Inc. in 2009 and was longlisted for the 2010 Miles Franklin Award. His short fiction, essays and critical writing have appeared widely. He is a lecturer in English and creative writing at Flinders University. He has previously been published in *Griffith Review* 14, 30 and 51.

ESSAY

The value of culture

A dilemma in five pictures

Tully Barnett and Julian Meyrick

PICTURE ONE: THERE are eight people sitting around a table on the top floor of a high-rise building in the heart of Adelaide's CBD. Four of us are from a humanities research project looking for new ways to account for the value of arts and culture to government and the community. Four are economists from the Department of State Development. We are having a laboured conversation about assessment indices for cultural institutions. It is bleak mid-winter in 2015, the worst possible day for us to be having this meeting. The end of mining at Leigh Creek has just been announced. The economists are looking at us with irritation. They talk about robotics, innovation labs, digital special-effects firms. They want to know what we have for them, how arts and culture are going to replace manufacturing and minerals in our stuck-for-an-answer post-industrial economy. They lean forward to hear what we have to say.

When we talk about culture's value, we think we are speaking the same language – arts, festivals, creative industries – but we are not. There is no semantic calibration tool for the words we use, no handheld device wherein we can insert someone's use of a term to check its intended meaning. The word 'culture' is at the heart of this problem. There is an anthropological use of the word: the *culture* of the remote islands of the Hebridean coast. There

is the word as it is used in the cultural sector: galleries, libraries, museums that produce, collect and exhibit *cultural objects and experiences*, and provide access to them to diverse people and places. *Culture* in the sciences is a process of *growing bacteria*, a synonym for acclimatisation. We should also acknowledge the long and rich history of our *Indigenous cultures*. In the media there is frequent and casual use of the word: ‘workplace culture’, ‘sports culture’, ‘a culture of bullying’. For all its variety of meanings, however, culture has two common applications: the broad and the narrow. Roughly: culture as a way of life; and culture as art. The two feed off each other in ways that are hard to measure, sometimes even to describe.

Nor is there a standard meaning for the word ‘value’. The imprecision of language is part of the problem, but numbers are no more precise. Think about our growing need for data literacy – the ability to interpret the numbers that get thrown around the public sphere like so many free-floating beach balls as evidence of this or that. Think about the problems in Excel spreadsheets that create egregious errors in published data. In the exchange between scientists and climate change deniers, both use numbers to make opposing cases. How can both be right? Pie charts are everywhere, demonstrating arguments with multicoloured rhetorical force. We are living in a data-driven world, but numbers are unreliable. The answer is simple, but also incredibly difficult. We need better words and better numbers. But most importantly, we need better ways of integrating them.

Laboratory Adelaide: The Value of Culture is an Australian Research Council project based at Flinders University. It is a small group of policy analysts, humanities scholars and the odd, sometime economist. Its industry partners are the State Library of South Australia, the State Theatre Company of South Australia and the Adelaide Festival. Its official aim is to ‘develop and trial mixed methodologies for analysing, measuring and reporting on the total cultural value of Australian arts and cultural organisations’ and ‘build capacity among arts and cultural organisations to measure and communicate the value of what they do, beginning in Adelaide’. Unofficially, the goal is to close the seismic gulf that exists between *culture* as it functions in the world (messy, mind-bogglingly diverse, part of everybody’s life one way or another) and *culture* as it is understood in

the corridors of government – a function, to be provided in the same way as any other public commodity or service.

There is no magic bullet for ‘demonstrating’ the value of culture. The problem itself is the culmination of years of state and federal policy-making that has consistently failed to grasp how value accrues in the arts and cultural sector (answer: in many and wayward ways and – the kicker – often over long periods of time). Adelaide is an ideal site to study culture *in situ* because of the range, significance and longevity of many of its cultural organisations and events. Adelaide’s cultural sector has one of every type, and a lot of cross-sector collaboration. The cultural ecology is strong and diverse, ‘punching above its weight’ and with a significant historical tail.

In a deep sense, culture is a central feature of Adelaide’s identity. So it’s possible for cultural organisations and researchers to join forces to explore ways of assessing cultural activities that take a holistic perspective of the benefits they provide to the state and its population. In Laboratory Adelaide we ask questions like: how do South Australia’s cultural institutions operate on a day-to-day level? Why do festivals play such a profound role in the city’s cultural life? We look for ways of understanding the value of culture beyond the economic impact of visitor and ticket sales, wellbeing and social justice arguments, beyond the successes (and failures) of the creative industries. In putting qualitative alongside quantitative methods, we create space in the debate for culture’s intrinsic value and for the very long-term benefits it provides. You can squeeze highlights of the State Library’s event calendar into an annual report, but you can’t capture the full significance of the event on a balance sheet. Economic-impact studies do not tell the full story of a cultural organisation, event or sector. Policy-makers require better ways of understanding what arts and culture organisations actually do, and cultural organisations require a new public language for talking about their value. That’s the problem as it stands.

PICTURE TWO: IT’S September 2014 in the Lyrics Lounge at the Adelaide Festival Centre, looking over the Torrens River. Night. The Laboratory Adelaide team listen as Australia Council staff present an information session on their 2014–19 Strategic Plan and new six-year grant program. After a

decade or more of frustrations with the council – its cantankerous boards and convoluted grants processes – the arts community was invited into a series of high-level consultations, out of which the plan was constructed. Now its CEO, Tony Grybowski, and head of operations, Frank Panucci, are travelling the country, telling arts practitioners all about it. The mood is one of good-humoured resignation. This is the arts in the twenty-first century: processes, procedures and paperwork – ‘ticking the boxes’.

The Adelaide Festival Centre is a storehouse of value for South Australia. Opened the same year as the Sydney Opera House, its gigantic, bone-white rhomboidal roof is another iconic symbol of arts and culture. Since 1973, it has played host to millions of patrons – over eight hundred thousand per year – at thousands of cultural events, both new works and classics, the go-to place for city dwellers and visitors, the place where transformative moments happen and the process of being human is enriched. How to put a dollar sum on that? Value is not just about places, stages, events and galleries, but accrues over time, between people experiencing something together, working towards a common goal, creating a shared history. South Australians like to point out they had a library before settlers arrived from England to found the colony (the famous ‘trunk full of books’ the first Colonial Secretary, Charles Gouger, brought with him). Institutions and the maintenance of their programs, staff and buildings are absolutely crucial to culture, both for those who use them as workplaces, and for those who attend them as audiences. Yet it’s an aspect of the arts that often gets overlooked or, in the corridors of power, reduced to capital works items, job counting and calculations of the money visitors spend.

This is truer now that the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ National Centre for Culture and Recreation Statistics has been abolished. The centre, based in Adelaide since its inception in 1991, was formed after constant lobbying from the arts sector. It provided specific data about different aspects of culture and leisure, including the sector’s contribution to the GDP. Numbers do not tell the whole story, but the right numbers are important nevertheless – and the loss of the centre is a mortal blow.

PICTURE THREE: IT is Friday 18 September 2015, a few months after our meeting with the Department of State Development. We are sitting in

a stuffy seminar room in a Franklin Street hotel. It's a *small* room. Three-quarters of it is devoted to a square table for five senators and the petitioners presenting a case. The petitioners have their backs to three narrowly spaced rows of chairs designated for the audience. Clearly the organisers weren't expecting, or perhaps weren't encouraging, many observers. But the room is full to overflowing. Some people are sitting on the floor. Cameras capture the action. Around the room many are tweeting. It is Adelaide's turn for a hearing in the circus that is the Senate Inquiry into the Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget Decisions on the Arts. By taking money out of the Australia Council budget, Arts Minister George Brandis has conjured up a National Programme for Excellence in the Arts, because he 'realised that there was really nothing for the arts minister to do as a result of the arrangements left to us by the Labor Party'. It is clear enough that the NPEA will be a mechanism for funding *his* personal preferences – the antithesis of the arms-length funding principle the Australia Council has operated with for decades.

The Senate Inquiry received an astonishing 2,719 submissions. They came from every part of the cultural sector – music, visual arts, performing arts, Indigenous arts, disability access art, regional groups – and the public. Many were 'confidential', or 'name withheld'. There were massive missives from practitioners, from ex-pats who left Australia to find more sustainable arts careers, from established artists irate that the cuts would stall the commercial progress of the sector and cut new talent off at the knees. 'My name is...and I am a...' The documents are wonderfully, giddily diverse, from one-page pro formas wishing to register disagreement with the government's actions, to angry nine-page rants that detail the connection between art and society. 'I reject...' 'I am outraged by...' There are practical observations, philosophical disquisitions, economic arguments, personal pleas, all dovetailing in the end into a single point: belief in the value of a world transformed through art.

There are actual artworks in the submissions. Memes circulated on social media of famous works of art with Senator Brandis's face pasted in that were later officially handed to the inquiry. Others provided a sample of their work plastered over with the phrase 'MY ART CUT'. There are poems and collages

and a fifteen-second video. It was a campaign that became more effective as it went on, and it included the core attributes of its creative practices in its resistance strategies. As a result, the arts are now more politically organised. If not exactly in fear of artists, the government now understands how annoying they can be.

The inquiry held hearings in most capital cities and some regional towns. At first it looked like we weren't going to get one in Adelaide, but then more dates were added. The five-member committee included two Labor senators, Anne McEwen from South Australia and Catryna Bilyk from Tasmania, as well as a Liberal, Linda Reynolds, and a Green, Scott Ludlum – both from Western Australia. The West Australians leave after lunch, perhaps to fly home for the Canning by-election. The inquiry is chaired by the independent senator and former footballer Glenn Lazarus, from Queensland. We sit the whole day, listening to articulate and nuanced responses as Adelaide's cultural sector stands up and is counted. Do not cut the Australia Council funding, they say. Think of the cultural sector as a whole.

In the field of research into culture's value, the methodology problem has become as thorny as the definitional problem. Governments determine the value of arts and cultural organisations through a set of policy categories based largely on economic data (data which is no longer properly collected thanks to cuts to the Australian Bureau of Statistics). Cultural organisations are required by funding agencies to express the value of what they do through aggregate gauges such as ticket sales or tourism dollars attracted into the state or region. Because measurement indices are dependent upon what can be readily counted, evidence of value is gathered from numbers. Some policy-makers are open to new ways of showing the value of culture. But how exactly is this to be achieved?

The Senate Inquiry, with its national hearings, came in austere times. The rhetoric of justification and defence had a particular resonance in South Australia, where four decades of investment in culture has created the eponymous 'Festival State'. We even bear the title on our license plates. The public hearings and the submissions created a resource, a snapshot of the value of arts and culture by its community. In the final report there is talk about all kinds of value: economic, health, social cohesion, public, longitudinal, institutional,

intrinsic, instrumental, personal, transformative, liveability. Anything and everything: just like culture itself.

Internationally, there is an ongoing conversation about new ways of understanding the value of culture, particularly in the United Kingdom, where the Arts and Humanities Research Council recently supported a massive two-year funded research theme (under its umbrella, some seventy-odd projects looked at the notion in different contexts around the UK). For a while the economic case around culture were captured by the beguiling work of the creative industries, commercial industries that have grown from a kernel of creative arts. This approach sidesteps difficult questions about culture's intrinsic value, however, preferring rich lists and head counts of what the US policy consultant Richard Florida famously dubbed the 'inner-urban creative class', who can power urban renewal and gentrification. There is an economic impact, but the numbers just scratch the surface. Always and again: culture reduced to a narrow conception of economic measurement when the value is much greater.

PICTURE FOUR: THE Laboratory Adelaide team is in Brisbane for the 2016 Science Communicators' Conference. We have been asked to present on how our work on valuing culture might be relevant to the value of science. Queensland University of Technology's Room 360 gives a gorgeous view over Brisbane on a beautiful autumn day. Australia's Chief Scientist, Alan Finkel, stands up to give the opening address and steals our thunder. *Narrative is crucial to the communication of science, its methods and its findings.* Great news! There is a growing consensus that the stories we tell about ourselves matter. That numbers alone cannot communicate the value of what we do. Narrative and narrative skills are critical to Laboratory Adelaide's view of the problem of culture's value, and we are heartened by what the chief scientist says.

But we also hear worrying things. One presenter tells us that 97 per cent of scientists believe anthropogenic climate change so concerning that immediate action is needed. We think: wow, that is a *very* big number! And yet there is *still* little meaningful action addressing the issue as governments haggle over measly targets that will have negligible effect. If 97 per cent doesn't generate action, no number will. Actually, researchers are now finding that

communication of fact-based information does not correlate with behaviour modification. Our actions are governed by deep-seated beliefs, not empirical proofs. Evidence that contradicts beliefs does not lead to change. The lesson is clear: numbers alone don't work, even in science.

Numbers are a problem in culture too. There's always a new number to collect, a new column to fill out on the spreadsheet. We don't stop collecting data, we only add more to what we already report on. There are never fewer indicators. And the more numbers we collect, analyse, measure, report on, compare, the less meaning we can make of the mix.

We live in an audit culture and this, along with the growth of 'evidence-based policy-making', tends to commodify culture as 'an instrument'. The global financial crisis has opened up some critique of the role of financial, accounting and economic approaches to value. Culture is not alone in looking for better ways to talk about what it does. Yet arts organisations small and large are stuck in a process that doesn't allow them to participate in the decisions about what evidence is collected to determine their value. The Australia Council has shown an interest in applying UK research to the Australian context, inviting Hasan Bakhshi, a cultural economist, to speak in Australia, and providing information to encourage organisations to think more broadly about their reporting processes. These initiatives indicate a need for qualitative, narrative-based tools for assessing the value of arts and culture, but do not specify what those tools might be or how they can be developed.

Part of the problem is the incessant conflict between high and popular culture – 'art' versus 'entertainment'. They are certainly functionally different. Art possesses a quality of intractable presence that carries its own justification and stands the test of time. Entertainment is justified by its acknowledged purpose and, while it may do many things, its *raison d'être* is to divert, amuse and engage people. These two different ways of looking at and talking about culture have grown antipathetic discourses. Their estrangement is neither useful nor, in a world marked by technological and cultural convergence, viable. Bringing them together is another laborious but necessary task.

PICTURE FIVE: IT is March 2015, and author Jane Gleeson-White is here to speak at Adelaide Writers' Week about her latest book *Six Capitals*:

The Revolution Capitalism Has To Have – Or Can Accountants Save the Planet? (Allen & Unwin, 2015). What a title! Over drinks we talk about the similarities between the environment and culture. How do you put an old-growth forest on a balance sheet? How do you talk about the investment in arts and culture that may not pay off for decades? They both require longer time frames than electoral cycles or forward estimates can encompass. Once you start seeing culture as purely a series of secondary effects, no matter how well intentioned you are, you are lost. Space has to be found for the idea that arts and culture contribute to our society in and of themselves, and not just as improvements to the economy, wellbeing, mental health, social inclusion, youth outcomes and urban renewal. If the government can achieve these through means less troublesome than the arts, what then is the argument for culture? As intractable as the notion may be, we need to be talking about intrinsic value.

In her book, Gleeson-White talks about the \$15 million hamburger. If we could register in the price of a hamburger the true cost of its production – the environmental cost, the health costs, the cost of transfer pricing and offshore tax havens and so on – we might take a different view about how much to pay. A similar approach would help in the arts: if we could encode in the balance sheet of arts and cultural organisations the *real* benefits to individuals, communities, nations, then the value of that organisation relative to its cost would become clearer. How to do this? Tell a story. We can continue to use numbers but always balanced by narrative. The *right* narrative.

The ‘intrinsic value of culture’ is more than just another type of value. It is a phrase that defines pretty much everything being left out right now from the official assessment of culture. In other words, it is a category of guilty awareness. When we talk with the Department of State Development, there’s a sense that we all know what ‘it’ is. The three questions are: are we measuring ‘it’; can we measure ‘it’; and should we measure ‘it’? Measurement is key to evaluating important aspects of our life – but only if we get the context and categories right. Numbers can become a prison, trapping the minds of those concerned with real change.

Key to our thinking on Laboratory Adelaide are two very simple ideas. First, care with language. Don’t use adjectives as nouns. ‘Excellent’

can never really become 'excellence'. It's sleight of hand. You may have seen many excellent things but you can never hope to see excellence because it exists in an abstract way. Second, strive for prepositional clarity. Know who you are working 'for' and speaking 'to' or 'with'. How prepositions locate themselves in our talk about culture determines the difference between sense and nonsense, between talking about 'it' and talking about nothing at all.

In Laboratory Adelaide, when we ask people who have never been to the Adelaide Festival whether they think it is important, 'yes' is the public and emphatic response. They support the use of public money being invested in South Australian arts and culture. Their enthusiasm is unequivocal. Even 'non-users', as they are drily called in the statistical literature, understand the value of arts and culture in South Australia. Culture cannot salve the economic woes of a state losing its manufacturing and mining. But it is a fundamental component of making us both who we are now, and who we want to be next.

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ESSAY

Intercultural futures

The fraught politics of multiculturalism

Amrita Malhi

‘SO WHAT? THERE’S no story here,’ the marketing consultant snapped down the phone. ‘I mean, bloody hell, the premier’s forever banging on about Asia, and everybody’s heard it all before.’

Welcome to South Australia, a state working hard to internationalise itself so that it might survive its painful economic ‘transition’ now underway. As part of this effort, Premier Jay Weatherill is, indeed, forever banging on about Asia.

Like other state and federal leaders, Weatherill has made it part of his job to talk up Asian engagement in a way that reflects the region’s transformation over the past forty years. As a result, the word ‘Asia’ now carries new meanings in Australian public debate, shifting from simply a place where cheap goods and workers can be accessed to a place where the world’s new rich also happen to live, ready to buy our stuff and invest in our economy. On a national scale, our economy is already so deeply enmeshed with Asia that the region can no longer really be thought of as ‘foreign’, thanks to increased trade, investment and migration to Australia.

The marketing consultant had obviously written up this sort of thing too many times before. Still, I needed her to do it again. I was convening an event called InterculturAdelaide, a policy outreach day in the Ninth International

Convention of Asia Scholars that Adelaide hosted in 2015. I was serving on the conference organising committee as secretary of the Asian Studies Association of Australia.

The government of South Australia had provided strong support for the event, via direct grants and indirect subsidies, and even some help with marketing. The premier spoke on the keynote panel I hosted, and issued a call for South Australians to move beyond a basic passive tolerance for cultural diversity to embrace 'interculturality'. 'Citizens of an intercultural society,' Weatherill said, 'would be open and outward looking in their orientation to the world.' They would aim to 'truly understand different cultures and beliefs', including with the peoples and cultures of Asia in particular, and 'seek to engage with these cultures on various levels'. This engagement would underpin not only our successful pursuit of economic goals, but also allow us to develop an 'ethos' guiding positive relationships with each other.

The premier, along with others on the state's political scene, is serious about encouraging such forms of engagement. Nevertheless, a certain economic reductionism can often creep in to the South Australian discussion about Asia – especially in its corporate and bureaucratic registers. This reductionism is directly related to the state's economic problems, which, for decades, have been accompanied by a demonstrable demographic decline. As part of its campaign to internationalise, South Australia is looking for more new migrants, drawing in part on its international student pool, and is prepared to offer sponsorship in order to retain them. As a result, the fastest-growing migrant groups in this state are Asian, and SA has begun to display a pattern of cultural diversity – along with an increasingly Asian profile – that is broadly similar to that of the nation as a whole.

Like other migrants, Asians of every kind are afforded recognition under multiculturalism, a policy framework under which any identity group is supposedly able to advocate for itself in public. There are, as a result, thousands of community organisations and leaders purporting to represent cultural minorities to governments at every level through consultative structures such as the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission, and the Multicultural Communities Council of SA. With more than two hundred cultural aggregates now present in the South Australian community,

there are a growing number of groups and leaders speaking and working on behalf of the ‘multicultural community’ – whether various members of those communities choose to engage with them or not.

There might even be so many that the politicians can no longer keep up. Sometimes it seems as though they struggle to cope with the demands SA’s cultural diversity imposes on their time and resources. Their lack of cultural fluency appears somewhat at odds with their own stated aim of preparing South Australians for a future of cultural adaptability and global citizenship.

I was chatting with a state politician in the lead up to Intercultur-Adelaide. Did I know that there are *three* Sikh temples in Adelaide alone? she asked with the joking, yet exasperated, air of someone who is invited to too many events, put on by too many different groups. I did, actually – but why wouldn’t there be three temples? Sikhs, like members of other Indian religions, are highly diverse. This diversity was already present before the arrival in India of the British, and enhanced further via our interactions with the Empire, which once scooped up groups of Sikhs and other ‘martial races’ from Punjab and the frontier and took them to its other colonies – Kuala Lumpur, Nairobi, Hong Kong, Rangoon. Many of us, including my parents, were educated in English in liberal Christian schools, and although I was born a fourth-generation Malaysian, I speak English as my first language. When I started school, the language of instruction had shifted to Malay, which I began to speak as the national language. I came to Australia with my parents and my sister in 1987, and have lived here ever since.

One of the city’s three Sikh temples – the converted Colonial Hotel on the corner of Cross and Portrush roads – was set up by people with similar migration stories. It’s the temple of choice for those from Britain’s other Asian colonies, whose parents and grandparents left India before it was even a republic. For precisely this reason, it feels familiar to me, so it’s the only one I’d ever bother to go to. But then I don’t go there much either.

Yet politicians in Adelaide who are running for re-election regularly frequent the city’s temples. I could tell from the tone of the politician I was speaking to that she felt there are just too many ‘multicultural’ groups. Wouldn’t it be simpler if there were just one lot of Sikhs? One event to attend, one meal to eat, one awkward occasion to suffer dressed up in some itchy

outfit covered in shiny sequins, acquired solely for the purpose of visiting 'multicultural' groups?

Yet Australian multiculturalism is built around wardrobes full of such outfits – rarely worn except to attend some public event that calls for 'traditional' dress, or to an 'official' multicultural festival or parade. As new Asian groups expand, occasions that used to attract less attention in the past are now turning into major occasions. Take Diwali, for example, which has grown too big even for the City of Campbelltown, the council that covers a group of outer eastern suburbs – including Paradise, Newton and Athelstone – located around Thorndon Park. In 2016, a minor controversy broke out around Diwali as the Campbelltown Council refused permission to the Punjabi Association of South Australia (PASA) to hold its Diwali Mela in the park.

The council's objections were ostensibly based around the use of fireworks. Reports described a special meeting attended by forty-five people, at which Councillor Rob Tidd argued that the fireworks would affect birds living in the park. PASA, however, responded that the council was being selective in applying its rules, a point acknowledged by Councillor Marijka Ryan, who pointed out that fireworks were deemed acceptable on New Year's and Australia Day.

This discrepancy was magnified by obtuse and seemingly derogatory comments made by two other councillors while debating PASA's application. Councillor Neville Grigg said there was 'no way known that they will be speaking English all day', while Councillor John Kennedy argued that 'ethnic groups do have a habit of hiding behind their language'. The comments were picked up by local and national media, and a matter that could have been resolved through bureaucratic negotiation quickly became a politicised slanging match. PASA President Kuldip Chugha accused the council of 'killing multiculturalism' – an accusation that echoed through the media for days afterwards.

The council then reversed its decision and offered up the park for PASA's use, repeating the proviso that fireworks were not permitted. This time PASA refused, on the basis that fireworks are essential at Diwali celebrations – debateable for anyone who's seen the occasion marked with candles, electric lights, lanterns or sparklers. Yet metropolitan Adelaide has plenty

of venues that permit the use of fireworks, so if Campbelltown didn't want them, PASA could have applied to go elsewhere. They eventually did so, reportedly 'assisted' by the state government, which made its own statements chastising the council.

PASA finally secured the use of Pinky Flat – a prime city spot, and firework friendly – right next to Adelaide Oval.

Campbelltown's embarrassing display proved a great opportunity for a handful of politicians and community leaders to display their multicultural credentials. Yet the controversy also demonstrates how competitively political actors vie for multicultural voters – including new voters from growing Asian groups. This competition drives political parties to take on a heavy workload of multicultural engagement – *three* Sikh temples – generating a cutthroat contest for new migrant loyalties, often enacted through public defences of multiculturalism. Yet competitive electoral politics increasingly intersects with incentives for multicultural differentiation, driving up the intensity of the contest for Asian votes and generating more groups that politicians must engage with. Community organisations multiply, as leaders who are friendly with competing parties work to shore up support in separate constituencies. What we end up getting is a constellation of groups, carving us up into different market segments. The Sikh Association, not Sarbat Khalsa Sikhs or Guru Nanak Society. The Punjabi Association (PASA), not the Punjab Aussie Association (PAASA) – whatever a Punjab Aussie is – and *definitely* not the Pakistani Australian Association (that's PAASA too). If this sounds tricky to navigate, there is also the Indian Australian Association of South Australia, a 'peak' association – as if all the state's Indians have been arranged into a pyramid.

ACADEMICS SUCH AS Will Kymlicka argue with approval that the liberal notion of rights has evolved from its earlier focus purely on the individual. Now, it also includes the notion of group rights – for racial or cultural minorities for whom individual rights do not offer sufficient protection or advancement in societies that might claim to be egalitarian, but in reality aren't. The problem with all this is who's in the group? If the group's a pyramid, who's at the peak? And what is the group's relationship to those individuals who don't really live out its purported group values?

I've noticed this new thing lately in diversity recognition programs, where participants are encouraged to 'bring their whole self' to work and other public places. The idea is that no one has to leave their cultural identity hidden at home. As far as the politics of group recognition go, it's an advance that can improve people's lives. In theory, everyone can speak their own language, eat their own food, say their prayers and wear their identity markers without fear of being shamed or harassed. Those who do attempt to shame anyone – such as those Campbelltown councillors – are swiftly put in their place. There are now dinners, walks and other events to bring different groups together – to create 'understanding' between groups made up of people who have, for whatever reasons, acquiesced to being assembled together in the group in the first place.

Yet one of the ironies of multicultural politics is you can't bring your whole self to the multicultural event. The part of you that doesn't want to wear the 'multicultural' outfit, that's ambivalent about the meaning of Diwali, that can't stand the poorly prepared food, isn't really welcome. I've got plenty of culture, I'm pretty sure of that, but it doesn't seem to be *this* culture. And here's the problem with engagement politics: when the state talks about Asian engagement in overseas markets, it recognises that we're a dynamic, advanced people transforming the world order by being sophisticated and getting rich. Yet when it wants our whole Asian selves celebrated as part of a multicultural nation, we're patted on the head for acting like we're 'traditional'.

I've never got much out of this sort of thing. Nor am I the only one – there are plainly plenty of Asian–Australians who are simply not pining for a place within the group identities favoured by multiculturalism. Many of us live flexibly, adaptably and internationally, and feel no shame in our hybrid identities – even if some might find them inauthentic. Sometimes your 'whole self' just doesn't fit in any of the aggregates of national, ethnic and religious identity that governments consider useful in structuring the nation's 'multicultural' affairs. Yet where does this leave us? With no group recognition – no group, no recognition – we fall back on the individual rights we can access reasonably well as modern people in liberal societies. The liberal individual is the only coherent persona left for us to adopt, as there are no options available other than 'groupism'. With so few political options on offer, small acts

of rebellion can be remarkably satisfying. I have been quietly marking ‘no religion’ on the Australian Census for quite a while now. It’s just about true – I am pretty irreligious and have been all my life. Other than that, I’d mark ‘no ethnicity’ if I could, but not because I live in a fantasy of a post-racial Australia. I just don’t want to support the production of more community leaders who claim they’re somehow representing me.

However, the contest for multicultural votes is now so competitive that politicians will seek you out at home, through your letterbox, even when you haven’t gone out in public to seek recognition for yourself, with or without your purported group. Again, this development is bound up with the way in which political parties compete for ‘communities’, using the identity templates created by multiculturalism.

Take the 2016 federal election, for example, in which both major parties competed fiercely for Chinese support on the one hand, and Indians on the other. I came home one evening to find a letter from my federal MP, Kate Ellis, the incumbent in the seat of Adelaide. It was written in Hindi – and pretty formal, Sanskritised Hindi at that, not in a more colloquial form that I might actually have been able to follow, like they use in Hindi movies.

‘Adelaide mein aap ki avaz,’ it began. ‘Main ne hamesha ek nyayapurna samaj tatha majboot arthvyavastha ko prathmikta di hain, jahan har ek ka swagat kiya jata hai tatha har ek ko mauka diya jata hai.’

I’d learned some Hindi at university, but was having a pretty hard time understanding the letter so got out my dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English. I spent fifteen minutes on *nyayapurna*, *arthvyavastha* and *prathmikta*, only to find out what I’d already heard a million times since 1987 – Labor says it wants a just society and a strong economy, everyone welcome, opportunities for all. I flipped the letter over and read the rest in English. Later, I asked one of my cousins in India to read the letter with me. The response I got from her – Indian-educated through to tertiary level – was that she couldn’t exactly understand everything it said.

I was angry the next day – election day – not only because of the profiling, but also because of the terrible *quality* of the profiling, along with the idea that this crude appeal to my (misattributed) identity might cause me to favour Ellis. Yet this is the nature of multicultural market segmentation – it promotes

competitive fission but it also fails to understand who everybody is, so the system creates larger aggregates that have no coherence. Both sides of politics are keen to win the Indian vote, and I suppose my name on the electoral roll was all that was needed to prompt the volunteer (presumably Indian) involved to contact me. The rest was assumed. It's not really surprising. I've also heard a few South-East Asian Chinese tell me they're being grouped up in campaigns targeting Chinese from China. It makes them really mad as well.

TO HOSTILE OBSERVERS who can't see what's going on inside 'multiculturalism', the whole scene can appear like conveyor belt of special favours to minority groups. That point of view is also well represented here in South Australia, including in the guise of Liberal Senator Cory Bernardi, self-appointed spokesperson for his party's conservative faction and founder of the Conservative Leadership Foundation. Bernardi has lately begun to attack 'cultural relativism under the guise of "multiculturalism".'

Note that he has not attacked multiculturalism itself, a term most Australians use to allude to 'diversity' as a social fact rather than 'multiculturalism' as a social policy. Australian politicians do not generally attack 'diversity', choosing instead, as Bernardi does, to argue that 'our community welcomes those who seek to embrace our values'.

Bernardi has also recently argued that mainstream conservatives should adopt forms of messaging preferred by notorious racist Senator Pauline Hanson, who, after complaining twenty years ago that Australia was being 'swamped by Asians' has since stated that Australia is 'one of the most multi-racial nations on earth' where most Asians 'have assimilated and are proud to call themselves Australians, accepting our culture, beliefs and laws.' Notice that she has dropped her claim that the nation is being swamped by Asians. Now it's being swamped by Muslims instead. This is the far right after having counted the electoral numbers – there are too many Asians now to attempt to harass us, far better to appeal to us for votes instead.

The way the new messaging works is that it holds out a hand to members of minorities who resist being funnelled into the 'multicultural' scene. It takes smarts to understand that enough members of minorities might elect to join the anti-Muslim wedge now being forged if it allows them to break out of

the ethnic pyramids created by the associations, the community leaders, the frictions involved in having to pretend to share a group identity that doesn't make any sense. Any non-Muslim can join in the hatred of Muslims, especially convenient as many refugees are also Muslim, making this overlapping category the most hated group of migrants in Australia. This is the uncomfortable place in which discussions about multiculturalism become bogged down.

The wedge is coming. Since we can sense this, we should also recognise that it's too late to argue that all this talk of 'culture' should simply be rejected. British author Kenan Malik makes this argument, because he too has had it with the groupism and the elevation of unrepresentative spokespeople to the top of the pyramid that engages with government. Yet we live embedded in culture, whether we can draw lines around 'cultures' or not, and it would be better to figure out how to muddle through, to reconfigure how we deal with diversity as we grow ever closer to Asia and Asians. As South Australians love to signal, the state has worked at the vanguard of policy development around culture and diversity – as it apparently did under the famed Don Dunstan, who helped pioneer multiculturalism in the 1970s.

Back then, it seemed culture was at the cutting edge.

Amrita Malhi is a visiting research fellow at The University of Adelaide. A historian of South-East Asia, she is also secretary of the Asian Studies Association of Australia. In 2015, she convened InterculturAdelaide: Cultural Adaptivity for the Asian Century, in association with the Ninth International Convention of Asia Scholars.

FICTION

BAD BREATH

ADRIAN STANLEY

RUMBA WONDERED WHY his parents were taking so long. He was both elated and anxious because he could keep drinking until he heard their car come up the driveway but was worried they might know that he broke into the science lab. Bloody Charlie wanted to light the Bunsen burners because he said they would be able to see better and the torches they brought might have been too bright and would attract attention. Because this was the first time they had done anything like this, they left in such a panic he thinks they left the drawer that housed the scalpels open.

Could be worse – at least he had the scalpel. When Charlie asked him to get rid of it, he made out to throw the scalpel in the creek on their way home. While Charlie was having a shit in the bush, Rumba found a piece of wire and that was what he threw in the creek. Charlie, being his best mate, trusted him.

The boys had left each other at the corner of Charlie's street. Charlie had said he was going home to nurse his hangover.

Rumba hid the scalpel in his dad's shed. He knew no one would find it because his dad rarely touched anything in the shed these days, other than the fridge handle and a beer. Rumba remembers stories of how his mum and dad used to grow most of what they ate and even entered their produce into competitions. What made people change?

he wondered. Rumba got the scalpel out of its hiding spot and held it in his hands. He ran his thumb over the blade and found out the hard way it was sharp. He put his cut thumb to his lips and tasted the salty liquid. He was getting used to tasting his own blood lately.

Rumba could hear the pigeons still settling and cooing in the tree out the back of the shed. He remembered watching them build their nests and how crap they were at it. Some birds are really good at building nests. He also used to watch swallows making their nests under the veranda. Swallows had it worked out; they made perfect nests. The pigeons just sort of threw sticks in a pile and hoped their eggs wouldn't fall out.

There are also other birds that will only eat nectar or a certain type of insect. He remembered feeding seagulls one day when they went on a rare family outing to the beach. He remembered putting a dried-up piece of dog shit in some bread and he and his brother laughing as one of the seagulls gulped it down.

The boys teased the seagulls: 'Hey shit breath, no one is gonna kiss you tonight.'

'Imagine when he has a shit tomorrow and a dog shit comes out, he is gonna freak for sure.'

Rumba remembered the day well. He loved it when they did things as a family and his dad didn't have to go home as soon as they got there because he wanted a drink.

He recalled there was always one seagull that puffed up its feathers and arched its neck to try and scare away the other seagulls. While this seagull was doing this, the others were eating. Admittedly they were eating shit in bread but, hey, they were eating and this puffer seagull wasn't.

RUMBA CRACKED ANOTHER beer and drifted back to thinking about the pigeons. So pigeons, seagulls and other birds eat anything, and are shit at making nests. However, they seem to survive. He thought that if one day there was no nectar or insects for the other birds that they would die. Whereas the pigeons and seagulls would

probably eat them and any other shit that was thrown at them. He also thought about how adaptable the seagulls were. What did they eat when only Aboriginal people lived in Australia? And when did they learn to read? They had an uncanny ability to find out where any Kentucky Fried Chicken store was and, even more strange, where they could find anyone on the coast in Australia that had just bought hot chips.

So Rumba often considered himself like the pigeons and seagulls of the world: he was a survivor, he didn't do things well and he took whatever shit was thrown at him. He also realised that, like the shit in the bread, the things thrown at him at times were disguised as something good, but were actually shit coated in sugar or bread or whatever.

It was about this time that he heard the car pull up in the driveway. He threw down the last of his beer and ran into the house to start watching television with the rest of his family. As he walked in the lounge room, his younger brother told him he stank.

He replied: 'I can fix that with deodorant, but you're ugly and you'll have to put up with that for the rest of your life.'

His brother punched him and ran away. As Rumba got up to chase him, his parents walked in the door. His dad spotted him and said, 'In the kitchen now. We need to talk.'

Rumba got up and slowly walked to the kitchen, where his mum was putting the kettle on the stove and his dad went out the back. Rumba looked at his mum quizzically. She said, 'Getting beer.'

Things were going from bad to worse. His mum and dad were fighting more, his father was drinking more, his mum was worrying more, he was drinking more and his family was falling apart.

He wondered if his life was the same for others, better than others or poorer than others. Sometimes he'd think this, but would see the kid from number forty-five, the kid in the wheelchair, and wondered if the kid thought he had a rough life – or did he think he was lucky because he had a wheelchair? The kid couldn't walk but he may not have the same problems as Rumba and his family.

BAD BREATH

At this point a beer bottle was slammed down on the kitchen table and connected to it was the arm of his father.

Before he looked at his father, Rubma thought he might go down to number forty-five tomorrow and make friends with the kid in the wheelchair.

Adrian Stanley is a Boandik person on his mother's side from Robe in South Australia, and a Kalali person from the channel country in Queensland on his father's side. He is the working on country co-ordinator on the Gawler Ranges National Park in South Australia. He won the Unpublished Indigenous Writer award at the 2013 Queensland Literary Awards, and has previously been published in *Seizure*. This is an extract from the novel-in-progress *Could Be Worse*.

PHOTO STORY

Lost geographies

ANNETTE WILLIS



Lost Geographies is a visual narrative, a journey undertaken over several years through the landscapes and built places north of Goyder's Line in the Flinders Ranges. The land farmed here was once the shoreline of the ancestral Pacific Ocean. What remains today in many of these places, along with scattered sea shells and fossils, are the remnants of settler failure.



During the disastrous drought of 1865 in the Northern Pastoral Lands, the South Australian Surveyor-General sent George Woodruffe Goyder north to determine 'the line of demarcation between that portion of the country where the rainfall has extended and that where the drought prevails'.



Goyder used the southern limit of saltbush and bluebush as a guide in drawing what has become known today as 'Goyder's Line'. It followed roughly what was later mapped as the 10-inch rainfall isohyet and became known as the northern limit for safe agricultural development.



Land sales were restricted to areas south of Goyder's Line until 1874, when clamour for property swept aside Goyder's caution and the government saw it as as source of guaranteed revenue.



In 1878, 300,000 acres were selected north of Goyder's Line as land for more than three hundred new farms - half of which was ploughed for crops.



Two years of good rain was followed in the 1880s by drought, and crop failure on a massive scale.



The frenzied northwards rush by hardscrabble farming families seeking fortune, and sometimes redemption, was followed by a long, stressful withdrawal of farmers and townsfolk.



The landscape of the Willochra, Oladdie, Wirreandra and Wonoka plains bear the marks of what was established and what failed. Hundreds of stone cottages, houses carved into trees, farm implements and even plough furrows remain as silent witnesses.

Annette Willis lives and works in South Australia. Her photography has gained finalist places in Australian and international photography awards, including the Black & White Spider International Photography Awards, the Julia Margaret Cameron Awards for Women in Photography, Prix de la Photographie PX3, International Loupe Awards, International Monochrome Awards, US Mobile Photography Awards and International Colour Photography Awards. She has had exhibitions at galleries around Australia and has shown work in London, New York and at both the third and fourth International Biennial of Fine Art and Documentary Photography.

FICTION

A LOCAL FOOTNOTE

NICHOLAS JOSE

A WRITER HAS come to town. A reputation for greatness precedes him. His prize-winning books are plainly spoken, yet demanding. In person, he is a man of few words. He looks fit, with a sweet smile, and perhaps a little shy. He gets a bicycle and rides, under a blue sky, on the path by the river in the linear park. He doesn't need to know that the lake he passes is artificial, formed by a weir across a flow of water that becomes a mere trickle on the other side, where tortoises sun themselves on the rocks.

The great writer is fleetingly visible here and there, in the library, on the campus, and presumably at the airport as he flies in and out. He appears at writers' gatherings around the world, and in print in many places, and as a subject for countless theses and papers.

He is a strong writer. In his home country, he has dispatched precursors and rivals, and spawned only a few imitators. In the larger pantheon he has also effected a reordering, edging such names as Eliot and Lawrence slightly sideways in their journey to posterity. Naipaul is unsettled. Lu Xun comes into view. This writer is a major figure, a master.

What are the locals to make of his arrival in their midst? Their city, their country, thinks of itself as hospitable, friendly, but that is skin deep. The preference is to turn away, to pull down the blinds, to close in on cherished ways that are peculiar and impossible to share.

Not slamming the door in a newcomer's face exactly, but a readiness to turn one's back before any approach can go too far.

The writer might not know what he is stepping into, even as he makes his surprising choice to stay in this sunny, liveable clime. The thing is, on the face of it, he is able to write his books here.

In this small city there have been more aspiring authors than in many places in the world, but they have never had a world-famous writer before. Prize-winning physicists, yes; a man who discovered penicillin; a pioneering feminist; the Aboriginal inventor on the \$50 note; an aviator; a spaceman – but not this. And his presence only attracts more aspiring writers to Adelaide to study in his orbit.

Another visiting writer, an Australian expatriate, comes to speak to these students on one memorable occasion. He advises them to get out of the place if they are serious about what they are doing. They cannot stay here and be writers, he tells them. He has never been forgiven. The greater writer from far away who manages to write books in this apparently uninspiring environment shows that it can be done.

But how are the local writers to follow his example?

The great writer looks around him, curious, full of inquiry. He rides his bike high into the hills and surveys the scene. He enters the life of this community in all the ways that can happen. Of course he dreads their questions: What sort of books do you write? Would that be fiction or non-fiction? Have I read anything you've written? Sorry, I didn't recognise your name. What are you working on now?

Worse, though, is that other local question: What do you think of us? To which there is only one reply.

The students find inspiration in the great writer's presence and emulate his style. Other writers around town fall under his spell. We all learn new tricks. He encourages us to try things out, to experiment. Fiction becomes metafiction. Lines between self-writing and other-writing blur. First person is transposed into third, and vice versa. Creativity meshes with criticality with new force for new times.

ZOE, ONE OF the most ardent of the students, works in the border zone between philosophy and fiction, and says he has given her permission to write herself into being. She stands before him, her eyes blazing, her raven hair swept back, her straight nose tilted upwards as if to proclaim the freedom she has achieved. Her parents, she says, came to this country as small children with *their* parents, two families from Crete whose children married. Her grandparents never really spoke English, not at home, but they carried philosophy in their bones and from that strong tradition Zoe has emerged, born now in new language under his guidance – a most powerful gift.

And if his cadences are sometimes heard in her writing, as they are in the writing of so many others, if his ideas and his understanding of ‘the life of literature’ – a phrase from one of his old teachers – shapes the work of a rising generation, then that truly is a gift, given and received.

He smiles. She’s not the only one. He has, unwittingly, started a school. The students can trace his lineages too. Through his fingers the curving balls of Kafka and Beckett are bowled onto these southern cricket pitches, the batsmen cringing, the crowd shouting.

The more the country exposes itself to him, the more he sees how it takes without giving: an extractive place where iron ore is dug from stolen land and sold to China to become infrastructure that fuels the growth curve of a one-party state. In praise of folly, he thinks. In the city the people from the desert, Aboriginal people, are moved on whenever they sit down under the shade of a tree by that artificial lake. He sees that now.

These things come in cycles. The golden age is followed by the silver. After Shakespeare came the silver poets of the seventeenth century. His old professor taught him that. And after silver, was it bronze? Until the age of iron comes round again.

He has written about this before, in his birth country, and he understands from the testimony of readers that those books of South Africa apply equally here. As literature, they are true everywhere. There’s no escape. Under different skies the same things are revealed, the same terrible dialectic. Humanity and inhumanity. Vision, folly, suffering.

And from here, who knows where? One day perhaps the great writer will have moved on, to another place starting with A. Argentina. Amsterdam. Atlantis. When he is no longer around, the locals will finger the name on his books with wonder.

An age of iron here too? That's the message of this migratory bird. It changes something for us. It changes everything.

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MEMOIR

After Barbara

Encountering a real artist

Charlotte Guest

My art is something precious; something locked behind my tongue.

Barbara Hanrahan, *Sea Green* (Fontana Books, 1980)

TWO YEARS AGO, a spiritual experience punctuated my otherwise secular existence. I was standing in a strange hallway. The walls were covered with framed prints of the most absorbing detail and colour. The floors were bare, so it looked like an upside-down house with many rugs up high and the ceiling beneath our feet. The hallway belonged to the sculptor Jo Steele, partner of the late Barbara Hanrahan.

Hanrahan was an Adelaide-born artist who made hundreds of prints and published fifteen books. She wrote of womanhood in a way that made most people uncomfortable. She describes squeezing pimples, sweating under nice clothes, menstruation, 'bruised plum nipples' and the 'beard between her legs'. It's as if she stood before a mirror, a representative of Woman, and poked at all the loose bits, frowning and smiling in turn. Musing in her diary, Hanrahan wrote, 'the personal is the only true thing'. She made herself her own muse and didn't apologise for doing so.

I was standing in that hallway because I needed Jo's signature in order to quote some Hanrahan material I'd unearthed in the State Library of South Australia.

'Do you think you could send it to me in an email?' I said, having been given his home number by the librarian.

He laughed. 'I don't own a computer, or a mobile phone. I only have this landline so you will have to come here if you want my signature.'

Later, Jo would tell me that the reason he had no computer or mobile was so he could shut out the world. He didn't know who the Prime Minister was and didn't want me to tell him. 'It's too depressing,' he said, 'there's too much sadness.'

I HAD COME to Adelaide, all the way from Perth, to rediscover Barbara Hanrahan on behalf of the field of Australian literary studies. Imbued with an inflated sense of the importance of my research and armed with a romantic vision of wrenching her from the grips of oblivion, I dreamt about returning Barbara Hanrahan to the lips of Australian literature lovers. My efforts, however, followed a succession of attempts by various people to reignite enthusiasm for Barbara, which themselves went unnoticed. Marion Halligan put it well when, in 1992, she wrote in *The Canberra Times*, 'the loss of Barbara Hanrahan is the loss of a creator of strange worlds in the context of daily life, and one of our finest wordsmiths'. In 2010, Craig Munro similarly described Hanrahan as having 'now largely slipped from view'. I suspect the lack of interest in her writing has something to do with her style. Flickering, densely lyrical, she can lose sight of narrative and wander into unexpected places – like some of the women she describes. In fact, much of her writing is about 'for ever walking...looking at the ground', plucking at the world's flotsam and giving it a good hard stare.

ABOUT A YEAR ago, *Australian Book Review* asked Australian writers to name their favourite forgotten writer, and Gail Jones named Barbara. Jones writes that in *The Scent of Eucalyptus* (UQP, 1973), Hanrahan's first autobiographical novel, it is 'the minute and the hidden, the modern and the particular' that make up the 'dense life-world of a child'. Here, she says, is an entire era 'preserved in fastidious and indiscriminating detail'. That era spanned almost forty years from the 1950s. Barbara died in 1991 – a few months before I was born. She travelled to London and returned to Adelaide with a reputation. She did printmaking workshops at the art school and the girls were in awe of her angelic appearance, her wispy voice and the strong

things she said. To Barbara, it seemed that a 'Woman's Art Movement can only be of service to women who are weak'. Such labels, she wrote, were shackles that would bind an artist who happens to be female, 'badges of respectability in the society we live in'.

In her memoir, *Michael and Me and the Sun* (UQP, 1992), she summarises these thoughts neatly: 'In Adelaide I'd been labelled all my life... But Art didn't heed the labels, and reached out to get me, too.' In an acidic tone she writes of male art students parading around, and their predictable reactions to her prints of genitalia and pregnancy. Her mother, grandmother, great aunt Reece, neighbours and peers receive candid treatment. Adelaide was a provincial town then, a tight knot, and few had the gall to write about those they knew with such unflinching clarity.

A thinly veiled Jo appears, in *Sea Green* and elsewhere. I didn't ask him how he felt about their spats being spread out across the page like messy lunches. Besides, she always revealed her own lowness – sacrificed herself – first, as in this passage from *Michael and Me and the Sun*:

I was two people. One part of me seemed content being the nice girl who just wanted to stay at home and be with them [mother, grandmother and great aunt], and sit in the garden and pull out the soursobs and weed round the grape hyacinths under the prunus trees. But always, right from the start, there'd been this other person who wanted to be like my dead father – wanted not to care about the little things like Have you got clean fingernails?... Are the skirting-boards dusty? That part of me got free when it made the prints, and had made me feel I had to get away.

Sea Green and *Michael and Me and the Sun* work in tandem, picturing Jo and Barbara separately fleeing class-conscious Adelaide and acting out rebelliousness in London and Europe. They are part of a rich, visceral body of work. Yet, despite Peter Goldsworthy dubbing her the most original contemporary Australian writer in 1988, Hanrahan's art vanished with her. There is now the Barbara Hanrahan Building at the University of South Australia, and the Barbara Hanrahan Fellowship for South Australian Writers administered

by the Adelaide Festival and state government. There is a Barbara Hanrahan Lane too. Her name haunts the corridors of the city but seldom registers with its inhabitants. To say or hear 'Hanrahan' and to know her work is like a secret handshake. I wonder how many people read that response from Gail Jones and went out to buy a Hanrahan novel. Or tried to, as most are out of print.

TUESDAY, MILD WEATHER. I went to the State Library of South Australia and found the room that held recordings. The man at the counter took my slip with call numbers and wordlessly retrieved the items for me. He pushed a plastic dish across the counter, similar to the ones you use at airport security. The recordings were on cassette. I looked at the librarian, who shrugged. 'If it ain't broke,' he said. I took my tray to one of the cassette players and fumbled with the machine. Each push of a button seemed momentous, so audible as to be irreversible. I pressed the button with the forward-facing triangle and someone began to speak. It was Barbara, in 1984.

Jo's signature would let me use that recording of Barbara talking to Susanne Hayes at Adelaide Writers' Week. In the interview, Barbara describes her writing and painting as a 'balance between the conscious and subconscious minds'. She talks about how she grasps at magic and the supernatural in her books, and how, most powerfully, she makes herself 'naked on the page'. Barbara employed her skills as a visual artist to play with concepts of writing, creation and the feminine, and to examine the position of women in the art-world in Australia and abroad. 'I want to wake people up from their lives,' she said. In an interview with *Radio National*, Deborah McCullough describes how she met Barbara in 1983. When Barbara asked her to respond to her prints before the opening of an exhibition, Deborah said they were the works of a woman about *being* a woman. This 'self-consciousness was really exciting because it was something that had been denied to women', McCullough says. Women 'had not, until recently, been able to reflect upon ourselves, our lives; we've been actively discouraged from doing so'.

WHEN JO ANSWERED the door and invited me inside, there was a smile playing on his lips. It was the smile of knowing that the place I was about to enter was like no place I'd been before. He seemed to know I was

about to form one of my sharpest memories. In that house, all the things I'd packed into the 'I' of me were rearranged – the kind of rearrangement TS Eliot identifies every time a new work is added to the literary canon. In my memory, the hallway of Barbara Hanrahan's home extends into infinity, a never-ending tunnel of paper and ink.

Barbara's prints depict the strangeness of ordinary women. They picture something similar to the weirdness of repeating a word over and over until the sound becomes so alien that it's no longer the word but waves. Her novels do this too, paying particular attention to the nuances of emotion and the body, of habit and the things we do. The small acts of daily life become so absurd that we wonder why we do them. In *Michael and Me and the Sun*, Hanrahan is given an ironing lesson, learning that 'you did the little bits, collars and cuffs, first; then went on to the open stretches of sleeves, front, back,' and on and on. She describes her grandmother dressing for town in a heavy skirt suit and stockings on a hot day, squeezing her feet into shoes too small. One of the most striking images comes from *The Scent of Eucalyptus*, in which the protagonist describes pinching the head of a pimple until the 'yellow worm wriggles out'. She has a penchant for the things that make us squirm. In that hallway, the feeling of being hemmed in by all those laid-bare women, all that frankness, was something unearthly.

Jo gave me a tour of the house that he and Barbara had shared. I soon discovered that the entire house was furnished with her prints. In the middle of the each room was a sculpture – elegant structures, whose interlocking parts moved in harmony. They revealed Jo's background as an engineer. With the prints on the walls and the sculptures stationed on the floor, it was as if she had made their mutual container and he filled it. I mentioned this.

'Oh, no,' he said. 'Very much the opposite. Barbara is the oxygen in this place, a firm breeze. She even moves things around.'

He told me how one day he found a sculpture of his had moved and he was powerless to move it back. Then, at a posthumous exhibition of her prints, Barbara meddled with the perfectly hung frames so that they appeared off balance.

'Everyone was perplexed,' said Jo, laughing. 'Completely dumbfounded. But I knew it was her. It was definitely her.'

It didn't seem out of place, this kind of talk. It was exactly the kind of talk appropriate to a conversation about Barbara, because a strong spirituality guided her art. Not a religiosity, although she was a cultural Christian, but rather a sense of the inexplicable. As she said in an interview with Elaine Lindsay, 'the thing that intrigues me most about living, and about writing, and everything I do, [is] just the strangeness of the world'.

JO AND I sat on a pair of lounge chairs, the only furniture in the front room. The chairs were positioned on the far right looking at the courtyard that separated the house from the gallery. We talked about Barbara. He told me about her gentleness and fire, her sharp mind. I said how strange it was to hear her voice on those recordings. Someone who had only existed in print before suddenly had a sound. He spoke of the way she would work, sometimes in a fever and sometimes laboriously, painfully. I knew this, having read her diaries and all her books, which are largely autobiographical, but it was truer coming from him. We talked about the family, and when I saw a picture of Barbara, her grandmother and a dog, I asked if the dog was Tinker.

'Yes, Tinker,' he said. 'How did you know?'

'I've looked at all the photographs held in the state library collection. I think I could identify most of the family.'

'I've never liked photographs,' he said. 'They don't capture the essence of a person.'

There is one photograph he does treasure, and he led me back down the hallway to a small room at the front of the house. Inside was a single bed covered with a patchwork quilt, a chest of drawers and a bedside table with a lamp. Instead of pointing downwards as most table lamps do, the bulb was angled ahead. I followed its line of sight and landed upon a large canvas of Barbara in her garden in the 1970s. It was a beautiful photograph. We were silent for a short while.

'It's the first thing I see when I wake up, and the last thing before I sleep,' he said. I imagined him at night, turning lights off as he moved around the house until the only light left on was the lamp that shone on Barbara, her young face, her flared trousers.

In the other rooms of the house were a number of closets filled with first editions of Barbara's books. Jo let me rummage around and thumb through their creamy pages. He smiled at me. Then he gave me first editions of three of my favourite books. We wrapped them carefully in plastic bags because it was threatening rain outside. We felt the visit was coming to a close. I nearly forgot to get his signature for the library sources.

After I left the house, a good friend of mine called. She wanted to know how I was getting on in Adelaide, and I poured the story into my phone. She was elated; she had the most beautiful habit of bursting with laughter and exclaiming at your happiness, as if the thing that was most joyous to her was the happiness of her friends. We talked it over. I said that standing in the hallway was like that moment at the optometrist when they say, 'Now one...or...two?' – and, *click*, you can see. She said I must write to Jo, start a correspondence, or at the very least tell him the profound impact of that thirty-minute visit. I told her I would, undoubtedly. She was pleased, laughed, her voice was like music; she said something about formative moments. The next month, she died.

It took a very long time to write that letter, the one my friend insisted I send. I was worried that the significance of that moment extended beyond my vocabulary. By the end of last year there were sixteen iterations of 'Dear Jo,' stuffed in my desk drawer. At times I considered posting all my failed attempts in the hope he would understand.

Finally, I posted a letter. It reads as this piece does, relaying the story from my perspective. Perhaps he will reply with his own perspective. Perhaps it will be radically different.

I SPOKE TO someone not long ago, got a bit existential. We talked about spirituality, and how it is a moment such as the one in the hallway that makes you realise being secular is just another worldview, another lens through which we peer, in the words of Peter Atkins, 'deeply...into the heart of the universe'. This person commented that at times his secularism felt like the default position for those still searching for something, whether it be something named or something merely felt. It did not feel accidental. Given Barbara Hanrahan's work, her obsession with lived experience and the things

we cannot quite explain, it felt as if there was something cosmic going on, at least inside my head. Perhaps that is what made this experience so profound – the idea of having chanced upon what I was unknowingly searching for.

I revisit the hallway when my mind is not fully occupied with the present. I go back, try to ensure that the corners of the memory remain sharp and varnished. Try to remember Jo's kind eyes. Feel my appetite for wonder restored.

ESSAY

The gathering storm

Adelaide's olive trees in a changing climate

Emily Potter

ADELAIDE'S WEST TERRACE Cemetery has its share of famous residents, not all of them human. The sell-out release of the cemetery's own boutique olive oil, grown on site, has drawn attention to the established groves of olive trees that populate the grounds of the city's most visible burial place. These trees, like the cemetery itself, date from the mid-nineteenth century, a time when death was not something to hide but was incorporated into the everyday lives of the living. The siting of a cemetery on a prime arterial road of the growing city suggested to its citizens that the past would remain visible, but in a settled, eulogistic form. The olive trees, in turn, spoke of the future, with their potential to live for thousands of years. They flower and fruit, and flower and fruit, on and on, silent sentinels over the dead.

Olive seedlings joined the first colonists on the *Buffalo's* journey to South Australia in 1836 (one resulting tree is believed to be going strong in inner-suburban North Adelaide), and were followed by many more. By the 1870s there were tens of thousands of olive trees populating the Adelaide plains, flourishing in the city's celebrated 'Mediterranean climate', and an olive oil micro-industry resulted. According to Craig Hill, a historian of Adelaide's olive tree plantings, Adelaide was the 'olive oil capital of Australia' by the end of the nineteenth century. While the industry subsequently declined, the

trees have remained, clustered in groves around the city's Park Lands, and throughout inner suburbia and the foothills. Hill has called for this largely forgotten history of civic olive oil tree cultivation in the city to be remembered, and celebrated in turn, through renewed investment in local olive oil production. These trees once again look towards the future. And there is an urgent context for taking this seriously.

In late September 2016, South Australia experienced its largest and wildest storm in fifty years – a so-called 'cyclone event' that ripped across the state and brought down its entire power network. Some politicians, including Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, subsequently leveraged the blackout to initiate misleading debate over South Australia's progressive use of renewable energy, claiming that its 40 per cent reliance on wind and solar rendered the network unnecessarily vulnerable. This was despite evidence to the contrary that showed no link between the blackout and renewables usage; rather it was the damage to infrastructure brought about by the big storm that caused the lights to go out. It was here, in the weather event itself, that a more alarming story lay. A media fact sheet released by the independent Climate Council put it bluntly: 'This is a prelude to a disturbing future.' The strong link between this storm and the warming, humidifying atmospheric conditions caused by global climate change indicate the precarious environmental conditions faced by this largely arid state. Along with further extreme storm events, South Australia is predicted to suffer increasingly severe heatwaves and declines in average yearly rainfall over the next half decade. In Adelaide, sea level rises in this period will threaten significant amounts of housing and public infrastructure. Extreme heat will render the city's ageing population especially vulnerable. The social and economic consequences are vast.

Amid this, the olive tree's hardiness is likely to come in handy. Recent research undertaken by scientists at the Casaccia Research Centre in Rome indicates that olive trees in the Mediterranean region are, unlike most other crops, likely to do well under warming and drying conditions. Applying this to South Australia's Mediterranean-like conditions places the state's olive trees in a positive frame. They may be among the last trees standing as climate change alters our world. And as we have long been warned, Australia – and

south-eastern Australia especially, due to its vulnerable water resources – is at the forefront of these predicted impacts. No environmental picture is straightforward, however, and while Adelaide's olive trees might suggest optimism they are also an ambivalent presence in the landscape, inseparable from the circumstances that gave rise to their antipodean presence.

As a non-indigenous tree, the olive signifies destructive pasts as much as it does promising futures. It is an agent of colonisation and postcolonial remaking, now classified as 'feral' in some parts of the Adelaide Hills and up into the Flinders Ranges. The Friends of Black Hill and Morialta Conservation Park report that dense olive groves in national park areas destroy native vegetation and are a significant fire risk due to their high oil content. In the Park Lands, Craig Hill tells us, an Olive Management Plan is duly in place to keep the growth of further trees in check. They are recognised, in a classic postcolonial trope, as both in and out of place, as arrivals from outside that make their home anew but whose belonging is never assured.

Less recognised, perhaps, is the complicity of the olive tree in a long history of attempted erasure in the colonisation of South Australia. Where olive trees were planted across the Adelaide plains, Kaurana people were dispossessed of their land and indigenous vegetation was cleared. A leading reason why olive groves are now widespread in the Park Lands is because in the early colonial drive to clear land, vegetation was depleted to such an extent that olive trees, quick growing and luxuriant, were needed to restore lost shade. Land clearance was a psychological as much as a pragmatic tactic of claim: it signalled the pacification of an unfamiliar environment as well as its amenability to a particular vision of industry and development. Clearance enabled the imagining of a land opened up and ready for the taking; replanting with trees from elsewhere was an effort to compose the script of place anew.

THE GROUNDS OF my own primary school in the inner southern suburbs of Adelaide were stained with a carpet of squashed black olives in early spring every year. Black Forest and its local primary school gained its name not from these olive trees that came with the colonisers, but rather from the dense indigenous bush that once covered the area and was widely

cleared from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The trees in this original 'black forest' (an area known as Kertaweeta to the Kaurna) were eucalypts and wattle, as well as native pines and she-oak, plants with deep roots that promoted healthy soils that were composted by the nutrients from the dense plant debris. This vegetation was a hemisphere away in ecological origin from its subsequent Germanic namesake. Like all places, Adelaide has to live with its mismatched names, such as Paradise in the industry-heavy outer north, or Prospect, where tightly built streets crowd out the once-evident vista down toward the city's heart. These names communicate earlier visions and unrealised civic goals. But other names, like Black Forest, tell a more explicit history of colonisation. The transposition of names from the other side of the world suggests a yearning for home and the refusal to acknowledge the unfamiliar, remaking colonised land in the image of elsewhere. But it also indicates the physical and cognitive challenge of the colonial project. It communicates the uncertainty and fear experienced in the meeting and feeling of profound difference.

Black Forest is sited on a flood plain that historically fills with water every one to two years. Its flooding source, Warriparinga, or Brownhill Creek as it is now also known, was once the most powerful waterway in the environs of what became Adelaide. It was near here, too, that the Kaurna of this area were forced to inhabit a small reserve, right where the floods periodically unleashed their energy, hemmed in by the land grab around them until they were finally moved away to government missions. When the indigenous bush was cleared, the possible plantings that would survive the flooding were few. The ever-hardy olive tree was one that would. This success is, in a sense, the result of erasure. The trees' presence speaks of something prior. What endures from before colonisation must be traced like a living map, coming into view as points are connected. Black Forest Primary School is bordered by Kertaweeta Avenue: olive trees flank its boundary.

In writing this, I think of Toni Morrison's description of 'a rush of imagination [that] is our flooding' ('The Site of Memory' in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990). The complex histories that fed the recent South Australian storms

made their presence felt as Adelaide's intricate creek network, constrained by a complex network of storm-water management, filled and overflowed once again. This is a furious reminder of what needs remembering and what happens when a culture tries to forget. The problem is that postcolonial cultures have a habit of refusing their memories, even when they erupt and overwhelm us.

The early colonisers of Adelaide knew early on this land was unlike the land they had known in the Northern Hemisphere. The Torrens (Karrawirra Parri) was never a river in the European mould, but a network of waterholes connected by a slow-flowing stream that began in the Mount Lofty Ranges and stretched towards the west. With no natural 'mouth', in times of flooding Karrawirra Parri would spread out over these western plains, ushered by a dune system that ran between what is now West Beach and the tidal estuary now known as West Lakes. Despite this, it was treated as the river it was not, dammed and devastated, and continues to catch the city's residents off guard even as it bursts its banks with some regularity.

When the Torrens and its creeks do flood, the rising water pushes out into old familiar pathways west and to the north, reactivating the memory of the ground. One of these runs the length of Port Road and ushers the floodwater out to sea through the Port River at Port Adelaide. For some years after the colony's founding, Colonel Light and subsequent surveyors made attempts to construct a canal that followed this flood line to link the Torrens with the docks at the port, transporting water (unreliably available in volume from the Torrens) and cargo on a fleet of inland boats. Although it was never constructed, this proposed canal was imprinted in the development of surrounding suburbs, and the lots accommodated its ghostly shape. While it's not certain why the canal was not realised, one reason is likely to be the gradient rise of 0.2 per cent that leads from the city to the port – a rise that still doesn't dissuade surging flood waters.

At the start of Port Road, where the imprint of the never-built canal begins, stands a grove of olive trees, flanking the gateway to the city.

FORGETTING REMAINS ENDEMIC to how we continue to design and make our places in a postcolonial Australia. Port Adelaide is a case in

point. This post-industrial waterfront area – the mouth of the Port River – has been on the radar of urban developers for some time now, since the area’s economic and population decline from the 1970s onwards. This was Australia’s largest port for most of the twentieth century, and a strongly working-class area, busy with fishing boats and later ships carrying mineral ore, as well as the many public houses and other businesses that sustained its working population. This changed as export shipping moved elsewhere and manufacturing industries relocated or closed. Now the port’s historic timber boatsheds have been largely demolished to make way for new housing and commercial developments.

Some of these developments were realised as part of the Newport Quays project in the mid-2000s, a property-led urban regeneration plan that sought to build high-density, high-end housing and retail spaces on unused industrial land – a public-private venture branded very visibly as ‘future making’ for the port. Community concerns were raised early on about the project’s failure to accommodate the socio-economic diversity that has long characterised the port, as well as its inadequate protections for the built history of the area that the National Trust claimed was being ‘severed from our collective memory’. Yet a focus on built history inevitably centralises the colonial past. Long and multiple histories mingle at the port, as they do everywhere in ancient land. Histories of older losses move in the humid air of salt and fresh water coming together as the flood plains reach the sea.

When the former South Australian government announced its plans for Newport Quays in 2004, one of its proposed sites, the old CSR factory grounds at Glanville, was already subject to a claim for recognition and protection under the South Australian Aboriginal Heritage Act. This claim had been made by Aunty Veronica Brodie, a granddaughter of Kurna woman Lartelare, who was born at this site in 1851. Aunty Veronica had extensive documentation as required by the act to prove her connection to this site from where her grandmother and mother had been dispossessed when the government sold it to the Colonial Sugar Refinery in 1890. Despite this, in addition to a significant community response in support of Aunty Veronica’s efforts to halt development, her claim was denied. Luxury

apartments and marina berths were subsequently constructed. Within the development is a small community park named 'Lartelare' that acknowledges the Indigenous history of the port – a gesture of remembrance, but a far cry from political and legal enfranchisement, and the historical recognition this entails.

While community opposition did not stop the Glanville redevelopment, which sat within the first two stages of the Newport Quays construction, general dissatisfaction with the overall project did, and its third and final stage was scrapped by the Weatherill government in 2011. In the wake of this, a new iteration of the port development is now being planned. Reassured to have been guided by an 'extensive consultation process', the project is promising to deliver a generative community vision for the future, grounded in an acknowledgement of the past. Just what past is recollected continues to be a case in point. 'Embracing the History', a cultural mapping and survey recently undertaken to inform this second attempt at development, starts with European arrival, and is focused on maritime infrastructure. The exception is a reference to Hawker's Creek, a tidal creek reportedly significant to local Kaurna at the time of colonisation that 'has long since disappeared' due to the dockyards and urbanisation. Disappearance feeds the development discourse of absence, however. Port Adelaide, according to Patrick Archer, one of two developers working on the project, is 'a blank canvas, [and we will be] building on the maritime history that's been there for a long time'.

The continued forgetting of a natural ecology is complicit in the erasure of the human past, a past that does not accord with the developer's gaze. Newport Quays and the latest development plans by Renewal SA situate their blank canvas above a ghost map of dense mangroves, old tidal flows and dunes covered in indigenous shrubs and seaweed, as well as spectral canals and other, older colonial attempts to remake the land. If such developments are future focused, their vision of the future is disconnected from the past and all its vital knowledge for living – surviving – in our country. You can't erase the past and expect to thrive. This is a lesson that South Australia is learning by default, as storms gather and climate change takes effect.

Climate change will erase histories, too, and in doing so it will remind us of others, repressed by the colonial project. It will likely see the olive trees standing, still sentinels over the dead, but also participant in the many entanglements of a postcolonial place, not in denial of them. Back at my old primary school, the elderly Greek neighbours come every year to shake down the olive crop, which, once pressed, is then bottled and labelled by the schoolkids on site. Histories meet and futures are born.

References available at griffithreview.com

Emily Potter is a senior lecturer in literary studies at Deakin University. She has published widely on the spatial practices of colonisation and the politics of postcolonial environments. Her forthcoming book, *Field Notes on Belonging* (Intellect), examines the response of recent Australian literature to the question of non-Indigenous belonging.

REPORTAGE

Changing course

Re-imagining the Riverland

Max Allen

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*
TS Eliot, 'Little Gidding'

ONE WARM LONDON afternoon last autumn, a large group of avant-garde Australian winemakers took over a nightclub in Shoreditch, the capital's current hipster hotspot, for a raucous tasting of their latest wines. The idea was to expose the UK trade and media to some of the buzzy small-batch Australian wines crackling through our own hipster hotspots back home. It worked a treat too: the response to the event was overwhelmingly positive.

One of the winemakers pouring at the event was 28-year-old Con-Greg Grigoriou, who sells wines under his brash, bold, Delinquente label. Con-Greg specialises in on-trend styles – replete with hand-drawn, tattoo-design packaging – aimed at the sensibilities of a young, modern drinker. There's a cloudy, sparkling pet-nat called Weeping Juan; a juicy red montepulciano called The Bullet Dodger; a rosato made from nero d'avola dubbed Pretty Boy.

He was in good company. Many of the leading lights of Australia's new wave were in the club that day, pouring equally out-there styles of wine: Taras Ochota, with his jangly, elbows-and-knees grenache; Timo Mayer with his 'bring back the funk' pinot noir; Si Vintners with their skin-contact, floriged chardonnay.

But whereas all these other makers are from famous, cool-climate ‘fine wine’ regions – the Adelaide Hills, the Yarra Valley, Margaret River – Con-Greg and his wines are from South Australia’s hot, inland Riverland region, its vast swathes of vineyards hugging the Murray as it snakes past Renmark, Loxton, Morgan and down to the sea.

This may not seem like a big deal to you, but it’s nothing short of revolutionary.

‘It was surreal,’ says Con-Greg. ‘To be there, my first time in London, pouring Riverland wine as part of the cutting edge. I grew up in Berri, in the heart of the Riverland. My old man ran one of the local wineries for a long time. But I’ve always lived with this idea that the region’s wines weren’t all that good. That’s what my mates in posh places like the Clare Valley always told me. I wanted to prove them wrong.’

CON-GREG’S MATES AREN’T the only ones prejudiced towards the Riverland. It’s one of the largest winegrowing areas in the country, and produces an enormous quantity of grapes: almost half a million tonnes each year, more than all the other South Australian regions put together, a quarter of the entire national harvest. But ask most wine drinkers where it is or what it’s famous for and you’ll struggle to get an answer. For the last hundred years or so, ever since people started pumping water from the Murray to irrigate vines, the Riverland has been seen by the industry primarily as a source of plentiful, cheap and largely anonymous wine.

The foundations of this reputation date back to the early twentieth century, when soldier-settlers returned from World War I and grew grenache and palomino grapes for the big wineries to make generic sherries and ports. The bulk-wine image was fleshed out through the 1960s and ’70s, when the emerging Australian thirst for table wine required huge quantities of sweet white gordo and sultana grapes to fill flagons and casks of fruity moselle. And it solidified through the 1990s and early 2000s, when the world fell in love with Australia’s sunshine-in-a-glass chardonnay and shiraz: suddenly, supermarket shelves from Birmingham to Boston couldn’t be stacked fast enough with lots of well-priced, reliable bottles.

The problem is that the vast majority of this wine made from Riverland-grown fruit wasn't – and still isn't – sold with the region's name on the label. It's often blended with wine from other regions, so it's sold instead as coming from the bland, placeless geographical indication of 'South-Eastern Australia'. And any tangible association with the real culture of a real region – lazy paddleboats on the slow-flowing Murray; yabbing from the tinny when the river floods; stealing oranges from your Italian neighbour's orchard – is lost.

The small number of large wineries that dominate the industry – the ones making the cheap supermarket booze – use a grading system when negotiating with growers over price. According to the wineries, the highest-value A-grade and B-grade grapes can only really be grown in lower-yielding vineyards in those cooler-climate, 'fine wine' regions I mentioned before. And for many years, the large numbers of relatively small-scale growers in the Riverland have been told that what they grow – what the wineries want – is only D- and E-grade quality. The longer people are told that's all they're worth, the more they come to believe it themselves.

Despite this, when times are good, things go okay for the Riverland growers. In the mid-1990s, when the export boom took off and the Australian dollar was weak, demand outstripped supply: the wineries couldn't get enough fruit, and grape prices were healthy.

But when times are tough – when there's a glut – growers suffer. And times have been tough for at least a decade now.

Around 2006, it became painfully obvious the UK and US supermarkets that had driven much of the huge growth in the region were losing their ravenous thirst for cheap and cheerful Australian chardonnay and shiraz. An oversupply of grapes was forcing down prices to uneconomic levels. Many growers had their contracts cancelled. On top of that, the big long drought was really beginning to bite. Water allocations along the Murray were being wound back and back. The already hot summers were getting hotter, heading into unbearable territory. People were muttering about climate change, arguing about the insistent reality of it over cold beers in dark pubs.

The drought broke in 2010, but the oversupply is still with us. Despite the large companies continuing to churn out huge quantities of cheap wine for export, grape prices in the Riverland are less than half what they were at the height of the boom and have been flatlining since 2010, whereas they

have been steadily increasing in South Australia's other, cooler regions. To compensate for the poor returns per tonne, many Riverland growers are cropping at ever-higher levels, which reduces quality, meaning the fruit slips further down the grading scale. A depressing vicious cycle.

And despite a couple of wet winters, and healthy inflows into the Murray upstream last year, the underlying climate trend in the Riverland is towards hotter summers, more heat spikes and extreme weather events and earlier harvests.

This is why the Delinquent wines stand out. They're handmade in small quantities using non-mainstream, climate-change-ready grape varieties new to the Riverland. They sell for a premium price of \$20 and more a bottle – a huge achievement in a region where the vast majority of production is being shipped out in bulk at less than \$1 a litre.

And they proudly bear the Riverland name on the label.

CON-GREG GRIGORIOU IS one of a small but growing band of people offering an alternative future for the region.

In 2008, third-generation farmer Bruce Bassham lost a contract to sell chardonnay and shiraz to one of the larger wineries. The next year he managed to sell his fruit but was ground down on price by what he describes as 'opportunistic bottom feeders'. Faced with little option but to get out of the industry or completely rethink his whole business, he opted for the latter. He took an enormous punt by converting one part of his vineyard to organic viticulture, and grafting much of the rest over to the new alternative white grapevine vermentino, originally from Sardinia and touted as a heat-and-drought-tolerant variety perfectly suited to the Riverland.

This was risky for two reasons. Organic viticulture was then – and still is – viewed with some scepticism by many in a region where growers habitually use synthetic chemicals to treat disease and spray herbicide to kill off weeds undervine; and there wasn't at that time a huge demand for organic grapes. Also, while some commentators (like me) were loudly advocating the suitability of Italian grapes such as vermentino to the Riverland, they had yet to prove themselves in the marketplace.

But Bruce's timing was spot-on. The next couple of years saw a mini-explosion of interest from smaller-scale winemakers like Con-Greg Grigoriou

and large wineries such as Yalumba, keen to buy batches of organically grown and alternative grape varieties. The forward-thinking grower was well placed to supply; his business quickly grew and continues to expand. He's making good returns, getting three or four times the regional average per tonne for his fruit – more like A-grade than D-grade prices – and even selling grapes to the same winery that cut him loose in the first place and forced him to make the change.

'This time next year we'll have fourteen different white grape varieties and twelve reds in the ground,' says Bruce. 'We sold one thousand tonnes of certified organic fruit last year, and three hundred tonnes of alternative grape varieties. The demand's higher than the grapes we've got. There's a damn sight better interest from the wineries and we get more of a kick out of it than growing conventional grapes. Looking back now, losing that contract was probably the best thing that ever happened to us.'

One of the keenest customers for Bruce Bassham's grapes is Brendan Carter who, with winemaker wife Laura, runs the small Unico Zelo winery at Gumeracha in the Adelaide Hills, two hours' drive to the west. Like Con-Greg Grigoriou, the twentysomething Carters are relative newbies in the wine scene. They came of age around the same time that organic and alternative wine styles were taking off, and weren't burdened by too many preconceptions about the Riverland. To them, as potential purchasers of grapes, there was no concept of A-grade or B-grade or C-grade: all they saw was the grape variety they wanted (the white variety fiano, originally from the countryside around Naples), grown in an appropriately hot climate.

'I pay the same price for Riverland fiano that I pay for Adelaide Hills grapes,' says Brendan Carter. 'Why not? I pay for it to be picked by hand because I want the best quality, and I'm making it into a wine that sells for \$35 because I think it's worth it.'

Again, this is revolutionary talk. Carter even dares to use the hallowed French term 'terroir' – how the country where the grapes are grown influences the quality of the wine – when he speaks about the River Sand fiano he sells under the Unico Zelo label.

'Look at the landscape where these grapes are grown,' he says. 'The red sands, the Murray River, the gum trees: it's the most unique *Australian* terroir we have. And if you grow the right grapes – like fiano, which doesn't need

so much irrigation, and which retains its acidity in the heat – you can express the characteristics of that terroir.’

He believes the European concept of terroir resonates with the Aboriginal concept of connection to country. He’s not alone: a few other winemakers across Australia are beginning to look beyond the industry’s historically superficial appropriation of Indigenous names and imagery – wine labels featuring dot paintings of cuddly marsupials, and so on – and are engaging at a more meaningful level with the culture of the people on whose traditional land their vineyards sit.

In Carter’s case, this engagement comes in the form of an acknowledgement on every bottle of wine he makes from Riverland grapes: he lists the vineyard name, the district name and ‘Ngawait country’ – a reference to the Aboriginal people who have lived along this stretch of the Murray for thousands of years.

IF YOU TRAVEL though the Riverland, especially in the height of summer, when temperatures can nudge 50 degrees and the flat scrubby red soil of the outback shimmers just beyond the watered green vine rows, it’s easy to see the logic of growing grapes like the white fiano and the red nero d’avola.

Nero thrives in remarkably similar heat and similar country in its Sicilian homeland – without irrigation! – and it thrives here. It certainly makes more sense than chardonnay and shiraz, which have been shoehorned into this environment and need all the help they can get, both in the vineyard in the form of lots of drip-fed water, and in the winery in the form of acid additions. And Mediterranean grape varieties are a better reflection of the cultural background of many of the people from Italy, Greece, Serbia, Croatia and elsewhere who settled here after World War II.

But not everyone believes that you need to adopt alternative grapes to provide a viable future for the Riverland, or to make wines that best express the region’s terroir. Some also think a back-to-the-future approach is warranted.

Nottingham-born Master of Wine Phil Reedman is now an Adelaide-based consultant, but in the late 1990s, at the height of the boom, he was the Australian wine buyer for the giant UK supermarket chain Tesco.

‘The thirst was unquenchable back then,’ he says. ‘I would have regularly bought probably four or five million litres of wine for Tesco at that time. People were making good money.’

He still spends a lot of time in the Riverland, much of it helping wineries blend multi-million-litre batches of wine. But his latest project is on a different scale altogether.

‘I’ve been working with Byrne Vineyards, who have substantial plantings on the Murray at Morgan. They have large tracts of white grapes that none of the big wineries want any more: colombard, chenin blanc, semillon, muscadelle. They have no commercial value to speak of – they were being sold as “non-preferred dry white” for below the cost of production. But they’re old vines, on bony limestone soil. If they were in a region like the Barossa, they’d be very desirable.’

So, to make a point, Reedman and Byrne’s winemaker Peter Gajewski treated a small batch of these ‘unwanted’ grapes as if they were making a ‘fine wine’. They were fermented using wild, ambient yeasts in just six old barrels, with no acid adjustment (a near-universal practice with most conventional Riverland white wines) thanks to the grapes’ natural freshness and balance. The result is less than a couple of hundred cases of a rich, complex and extremely impressive white wine called Antiquarian, with a bold \$50 price tag.

Among some older members of the wine trade – the retailers and the sommeliers – charging such a high price for a Riverland wine has raised eyebrows. But Phil has found that the newer generations don’t have the same preconceptions about the region, assess the wine on its merits and are happy to pay the price once they’ve tasted the quality.

‘This is my point,’ he says. ‘Why bulldoze a forty-year-old vineyard that’s producing really good grapes if there is the potential to convert that fruit into something that smart restaurants in Sydney and Melbourne and the Gold Coast will start selling and value? If we can persuade those at the top of the food chain that we can do things better and sustainably in the Riverland, then that might have a trickle-down effect. The problem is, a lot of the growers in the region unfortunately don’t understand this change of perception that’s taking place out there. They’ve been told, year in, year out, that their fruit is D-grade at best, that it will never end up in wines like this, so they believe it. It’s an indurated habit. And I think that’s a tragedy.’

SIX BARRELS OF wine isn't going to change the world, of course. But the symbolism is powerful. And there are glimpses of broader structural change.

Some of Australia's best-known large wine companies are increasing their commitment to organics. Barossa-based Yalumba have recently revamped their range of well-priced organic wines, mostly sourced from the Riverland. Drinks multinational Pernod Ricard (owners of the huge Jacob's Creek brand) have a successful organic wine brand made from Riverland fruit that is sold in Scandinavia. And Angove Family Winemakers are in the process of converting all their vineyards – including the 350-hectare Nanya property at Renmark – to certified organic farming.

The region now boasts a dozen certified organic growers, who between them produce seven thousand tonnes of organic grapes. That's a drop in the ocean when you consider that there are close to a thousand growers in the Riverland, producing almost half a million tonnes – but those seven thousand tonnes are the largest certified organic production of any wine region in Australia.

One of the most important people in the transformation of the Riverland is a humble, quietly spoken man called Ashley Ratcliff, former production manager for the large Yalumba winery and a fierce advocate for alternative grape varieties and thinking differently.

Ashley was instrumental in the formation of the Riverland Alternative Wine Group in 2008. As well as encouraging existing growers like the Basshams to take the plunge and convert to Italian grape varieties, he and his wife Holly have also led by example by establishing their own forty-hectare vineyard called Ricca Terra Farms to grow fiano and vermentino, nero d'avola and montepulciano, which they now sell to more than two dozen winemakers, both locally and as far afield as Margaret River in Western Australia.

The success of the Ricca Terra venture has led to the recent establishment of a new group called 100th Monkey Vignerons, a collaborative cluster of growers specialising in the growth areas of the industry that the wineries are willing to pay good money for: organics, alternative varieties and new, more suitable, higher quality clones of mainstream varieties such as merlot

'The question we're addressing is how can you disrupt the current, fractured process of buying and selling grapes, where growers are price takers

at the bottom of an oversupplied chain?’ says Ashley. ‘What 100th Monkey has done is put together a group of growers with a reasonable amount of critical mass between them – 3 or 4 per cent of the Riverland’s output – who all agree on the best ways to improve the region, and have the combined ability to actually do something about it: to promote quality, to do our own research, to achieve higher prices.’

Ashley is a Barossa boy, born and bred. He bought a vineyard in the Riverland, he says, partly because it was cheaper than his home region, but also because he felt he could make a change to the culture.

‘There’s so much bad news and negativity in the Riverland. All you’ve got to do is say something good and people say “Oh, that’s refreshing!” – and that’s exactly the response you want if you want to inspire change.’

But where does this impulse come from, this desire to remould such an entrenched and seemingly intractable culture?

‘I grew up on a farm,’ says Ashley. ‘I like the people in the Riverland. They’re farmers. They’re down to earth. They frustrate the hell out of me because I think they could do so much more, so much better. But now I’ve got three other families involved in 100th Monkey who can actually also see the vision for what the region can do – that’s exciting.’

‘And you’ve gotta do something, don’t you? Because if nothing changes, in ten years time we’ll all still be peasant growers in a region that’s still oversupplied. And we don’t want that.’

THINKING DIFFERENTLY, TAKING risks and changing culture have all paid off for Tony and Pam Barich.

I first visited Tony and Pam at their Whistling Kite vineyard on the banks of the Murray near Loxton in 2008. At the time, they were into their second year of farming using biodynamics, the controversial system of organic agriculture first developed by Rudolf Steiner in the 1920s.

As the sun rose over the river, I watched as Tony Barich sprayed his sixteen hectares with a fine mist of preparation 501: powdered quartz dynamised in water. The vines were in rude good health: bright green foliage and slender tendrils reaching for the sky. The vines on the neighbour’s property, in stark contrast, were almost leafless, scrawny, close to death, just

sticks in the lifeless, herbicide-scorched ground. The owner had lost a contract with the local winery so he hadn't watered the vineyard all season – walked away, abandoned it.

'I feel like I have to do something different,' Barich told me back in 2008. He was acutely aware of how radical and unusual biodynamics was – and still is – in the Riverland. 'But the old way of doing things up here just isn't working; it's not going to attract the younger generation into the industry. I'm trying to make it attractive.'

Almost a decade on, things are going so well for the Bariches they are planning to lease that abandoned property next door to plant more vines. The certified biodynamic grapes they grow are in demand and they get a good price for their crop. The Whistling Kite reds and whites are made for them by their friends Eric and Jenny Semmler at 919 Wines. They hold open days on the property, and are overwhelmed with positive feedback from visitors and customers.

As a result, succession looks secure: Adam, their younger son, is back on the vineyard and his brother Callan is planning on coming home next year.

'Our eldest has been away for almost twenty years,' says Tony. 'He's an accountant, he's travelled the world. But the last time he visited he saw what we were doing and said "This place is just too good to sell to anyone else."'

Tony has been growing grapes in the Riverland for forty years. He's seen the industry boom and bust, seen most of the other growers in the region cling on to the D-grade bulk mentality – grow as much as they can, take what they can get from the wineries, never talk about quality, never mention the word flavour.

Last year, Tony's biodynamically grown Whistling Kite montepulciano picked up two trophies at the Riverland Wine Show.

'The judges described it as beautiful,' he says. 'For me that was the best reward of all.'

Max Allen is an award-winning wine journalist and author. His book *The Future Makers: Australian Wines for the 21st Century* (Hardie Grant, 2010) was named best international wine book at the Louis Roederer Wine Writers Awards in London in 2011. He is currently working on his next book, a cultural history of drink and drinking in Australia.

FICTION

ONE SHORT MILE FROM LAND

JANE RAWSON

HE FELT IT first when the horses shifted and cried. They had been muttering among themselves all day, but this was different, a note of panic in it. *The horses aren't yours to care about, George*, he reminded himself. He went from cabin to cabin and collected the crockery and cutlery smeared and encrusted with an early dinner, the passengers getting ready for bed.

Jupiter. He'd heard them call the horse Jupiter. He could hear the horses nickering and wondered why it was that everything felt a little off. *I'll leave this cleaning just one moment, he thought, and go below. I'll just make sure someone is attending to them and then I'll return to the galley.*

'Jupiter.' He breathed the name out because there was no one there, only the six horses and George himself. 'Jupiter,' but no horse turned his head to look. He didn't know which among them was the famous racer. They were shuffling still, something anxious about them. He told himself, *You know nothing of horses, what do you mean something anxious, how would you know?* But he felt his own sweat prick a little.

He sat himself on a flour barrel and watched the horses nudge one another, the flick of their tails. He may have closed his eyes. He did not think he had. But when he opened them there was another, a woman. She was running her finger around the rim of the horse's mouth and it stood, death-still, eyelids peeled back and eyes locked on her shadowed face. She leaned forward out of the darkness and

licked the foam from the horse's quivering muzzle and George could hear the creature breathe, a strange whimper deep in its chest. That did not sound like comfort. 'Harvesting' was the word that forced itself to George's mind.

He stood as slowly and quietly as he could and left the enclosure back-first. The floor creaked but she did not once raise her eyes to him, nor did the horse shift its stare from her face.

He returned to the galley and the cleaning he'd abandoned. There were eighteen women on board and he had served each of them dinner during the evening. That woman had not been among them. *But you did not see her face*, he reminded himself. *And you are only one day out from Port Adelaide – how can you be so sure you know your passengers well enough to recognise one in the darkness, in an unexpected place?*

There were steps behind him and a hand sliding into the crack of his arse: Mason, of course. The assistant steward cackled loudly as George turned to flick him with the wet dishcloth.

'You'll have a brandy with us, won't you, Hills? Finish that up and come have a brandy.'

George packed the last of the crockery away and cast the woman from his mind.

The other stewards and a couple of the able seamen were packed around a table in an empty aft cabin. Davey Peters, too, the fireman George had travelled with the last four or five times. Not Mrs Meagher, though; she preferred to stay up front, where the company was 'higher quality'.

Mason slid a glass over to him and asked what he thought of the horseflesh.

'Horseflesh?' Had someone seen him visiting the horses below?

'The sheilas, man. Seen a decent set of catheads among 'em?' Mason asked.

'All mothers and wan spinsters back our way, aren't they, George? Not much chop at all,' said O'Brien, who'd been handling the aft cabins alongside George that evening.

'Haven't seen a one as wouldn't splinter to bits under the weight of me,' George confirmed, and it was true: they were a feeble-looking

bunch. ‘Still, as long as they could hold it together for the duration, I wouldn’t complain if they expired after.’

Mason cackled – it only took the slightest provocation – and poured him another.

‘There is one up front, though,’ Peters said, ‘much more your style, Georgie. Big, plump pair on her, arse like a pumpkin.’

‘Blonde?’ George asked.

‘Brunette as they come. What do they call it? Mahogany or some such.’

He did like a strong, plump brunette.

‘Big girl, is she?’

‘Ooh, I’ve really caught your attention, haven’t I? Nope, not above five four, I’d say, but plenty of meat on her bones.’

George’s Eliza appeared before him, her shining brown hair and adorable chubby backside, and he reminded her he’d be back to marry her soon, he just had one or two more trips to make, a few more coins to save, another girl or two – adventurous, entangled elsewhere; he didn’t like the lonely types – to tumble.

And though he’d cast her from his mind, he did see her again, fleetingly, that apparition among the horses. Had she been brown-headed? A set of rounded handfuls? All he had left of her was a creeping sense of dread; nothing physical he could call to mind.

‘Ledwith, her name is,’ said Mason.

‘Oh, how do you know, you big show-off?’ the cabin boy blurted out, and someone threw a cushion at his head and told him to pipe down.

‘It is,’ Mason said. ‘Bridget Ledwith. She was down below, wandering around, and I asked her did she need a helping hand’ – he mimed groping her arse – ‘was she lost, and she told me all chilly that no thank you she was just fine. I followed her back to her cabin anyway, just in case. Got her name off the door.’

‘Down below?’ George asked.

‘Trust you to pick that up, Hills,’ Peters laughed, and George laughed with him, remembering suddenly the mouth on the woman and thinking what she might be able to do with it.

Between them they finished that bottle and then another one and there were only a few more hours until they all had to be back on deck. George looked around him and saw that only Mason and he and the cabin boy, asleep on the floor, were left.

‘Enough,’ he said, and Mason agreed. It was a stumbling walk back to their quarters, made longer when George declared he was just going above to piss off the edge.

‘Have one for me,’ Mason said, and veered off towards bed.

Just a small look, George thought to himself. *Just a peek. And if she’s worth it, then tomorrow I’ll be all charm. Might even comb the old locks,* he thought.

All the stewards knew how to come and go, unobtrusive, so it was nothing for George to gently slide open the door of Miss Ledwith’s cabin, to adjust his eyes to the dark and scan her sleeping form for flaws and favours. There were many points in her advantage, Mason was right, but there was one thing she was not, and that was the woman George had seen below. The shape of her was the same; the colouring too – it all came back to him in a rush. But when he saw her he did not feel death behind him and the cold pit of the sea floor.

It’s the brandy speaking, George, he told himself. *Cold pit of the sea floor, indeed. Bed now, and a smidge of sleep, then tomorrow a play for this flossie.* But still he couldn’t shake the sight of her, her lips against the horse’s foaming mouth.

He had slept, perhaps, for two hours, then arisen to prepare the ladies’ breakfasts.

AT THE INQUIRY, months later, he heard that some time on that first evening one of the horses had fallen, knocked from its feet by the rough seas. The racer’s owner had demanded a shift in course and the captain had turned the prow of the ship into the swell to ease its heaving. Had it brought about the wreck, this shift? Perhaps. It did not occur to George to stand and say that it was something other than the swell that had caused the horses to panic. He didn’t even believe it himself.

Instead he had told the inquiry, blunt but polite, that he did not know the cause, he did not hold blame; that all he could say was eight

days, eight nights was too long to spend half-submerged in the freezing Southern Ocean with little food and no water and with the dead and the sharks ever increasing in the bloody waters around. But whose fault was it? He didn't know. Perhaps the lifeboat could have come sooner: it seemed it had tried. He was thanked and dismissed with no further questions because it was clear to everyone he had nothing more to add.

He had a great deal more to add, and none of it on that particular topic. He would have liked to ask the court how it was possible that the woman Bridget Ledwith had changed her form so utterly from one day to the next. He would have enquired how was it she had seen into every part of him those eight days and eight nights but now he could see nothing of her because she was gone. Vanished. They mentioned her in the course of the hearing, certainly, but as though it was no great mystery for a grown woman to go missing, to disappear entirely from the colony's face. Privacy, they said, or something; a lady's right to be left alone.

Also, he would have liked to say, how did such a little wreck, such a gentle wreck, break, ruin and drown the lives of so many? He had not even noticed when the ship first lifted and dropped onto the reef. One drop of coffee had spilled from the pot he was carrying to the ladies' cabins for breakfast service; he could see, clear in his mind, that drop as it rolled across the timber below his feet and he felt the shuddering mass of the boat slow, settle, creak to a halt. *Why have we stopped?* he'd thought. *We've arrived already?* But before the thought had even completed itself he saw an enormous wave wash over the companionway, taking men, women and children to the bottom with barely a chance to scream.

He couldn't say for sure that even then he'd realised the ship was sinking. He had dropped the pot and rushed to his cabin to find his savings. Is that something a man does on the brink of death? Perhaps it is. He'd thrust the money in his pocket, and by the time he'd made his way up top, the boat had begun in earnest to tear itself apart.

George had hauled himself over the broken bulwarks, tearing his back to shreds, dodged between the hoofs of maddened race horses stampeding about the deck, scrambled into the rigging of the main mast,

where a phenomenal wave washed over the lines where he clung, and both he and the mast were swept into the ocean. He could still see, always somewhere behind his eyes, that monstrous wave rushing towards him, its foamy head hanging above him, then the blue-black-green crashing upon him, filling his lungs and mind with blank, white, drowning fear.

God, the despair when his trousers, with his savings in the pocket, were torn from him and swept out to sea. *All that bloody stewarding for nothing*, he'd thought, forgetting for the moment he would probably be dead before ten minutes was up. *All that yes ma'am no ma'am right away ma'am and now I haven't got a damn bit to show for it and I might as well drown myself this second. Twenty-four bloody years old and nothing at all to show for myself.* He was in space, it seemed; flying through space. The bottom of the mast had got stuck in something and now the top, with him attached, was thrashing itself about in the air. George had always hated the circus and this did not strike him as particularly funny. Hurling through space with a naked arse he looked towards the ship, expecting a laughing crowd arrayed on the deck, and he'd been surprised to see a mess of floating, splintered lumber, a wet and screaming array of bodies, where once his ship had been. He fell back into the water beside one of the bigger chunks.

That young bloke, Soren Holm, just come from Denmark, reached down and pulled him from the water. George was wearing one shoe and a belt. He felt a body pressed beside him, softer than his own. He turned his head and saw it was her, but with a dampness and coldness about her that told him here, at last, was the woman he had seen below. 'Miss Ledwith,' he said, though he knew she wasn't, and he felt her small, clinging hand slip inside his.

The sun was just beginning to rise.

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ESSAY

Princeland

The tale of a ghost state

Dave Graney

THIS IS A story about a new, breakaway state that was proposed in 1861, taking 18 million acres from Victoria and nine million from South Australia. It was to be called Princeland.

This story is supposed to be a part of a publication with distinctly South Australian themes, but we are going to have to dissolve a few borders here. I heard talk about Princeland a couple of decades ago, and the idea appealed to me. The way the utopian or commercial wants of one hundred and fifty years ago dovetailed with my own Arcadian feels of an Australia once so brimming with intrigue and energy that an idea like that could have gotten any legs. Well, the legs didn't really carry the idea into any kind of reality. Things were still pretty much in a state of flux in the colonies back then, Victoria having only just separated from New South Wales in 1851. The proposal for the breakaway state pimped a population of sixty thousand people.

The Victorian politicians who reacted badly to the idea countered with their stats of the settlers' relatively small populations: Warrnambool, 2,211; Hamilton, 1,197; Portland, 2,804; Belfast-Port Fairy, 2,338. The gold rush had taken the attention of the Melbourne legislature, and places such as these, despite being settled a few decades earlier, had lost their interest. Things were hardly set in stone. These people were walking around, ankle deep in mud for the most part.

I went to the State Library in Melbourne and they had three documents on the subject. One was a copy of the original prospectus that was attached to a petition sent to Queen Victoria for consideration. Queen Victoria sat on the nineteenth-century world much like the statue that sits in Piccadilly, Manchester, described as a 'large black slug' in the song 'City Hobgoblins' by the Fall. Queensland was named after her, as was, of course, Victoria and so was Princeland to be named, so it has been opined, for her boyfriend – sorry, consort – Prince Albert, who popped his cork in 1861.

SO LET'S HEAR what Princeland was all about. The ghost state that never was.

People in Warrnambool, Portland, and Belfast (later called Port Fairy) in Victoria thought they were sending too much cash and produce to distant Melbourne and weren't getting anything like parity back in services or even attention. They had police for instance, but no courts. The same went for the settlement of Mount Gambier across the border in South Australia and the neighbouring towns of Port MacDonnell, Kingston and Robe. These places all thought they were being equally shaded by the distant South Australian capital of Adelaide. So they put together an idea they wanted to get political support for, to separate and join together in a new colony or state to be called Princeland.

We should understand that both Adelaide and Melbourne were not even recognised entities on a map until 1836. They were recent events in the legislature. As far as Melbourne goes, you get a sense of a wild coastline with local Aboriginal tribes having violent contact with whaling ships and their crews over the decades. People crossed between Tasmania and the mainland. When John Batman made his ceremonial gesture toward a future town of Melbourne, it happened with the apparition of the almost seven-foot former convict William Buckley walking into their camp from the local tribe he'd been living with for three decades. The same year, a party sent to the area that was to become Portland was amazed to find it already settled and stocked with sheep by Edward Henty and his brother, Stephen.

The Princeland petition itemised all the revenue coming in and going out of both the Victorian and South Australian settlements involved. There were

five ports in all: Warrnambool, Portland, Port Fairy, Port MacDonnell and Robe. In a time of no income tax, customs duties and charges were a major source of income for any government. The petitioners made a strong case that they were being ripped off by the swells of Melbourne and Adelaide. They wanted out! They projected a plan where revenue could be realised from land sales and import duties at those ports. They itemised what would be spent on roads, police, government offices and elected representatives and schools. It came out that the new state would be running a decent profit.

We should also understand that the land being sold was referred to as belonging to 'the Crown'. There were, of course, the Indigenous Australians to be taken into account. Well, we should take them into consideration; in all the accounts given at the time they are treated very off-handedly. As if they were already fading away, according to some actual plan of God's wise and inevitable devising.

There were tribal groups through Melbourne and around Warrnambool and Portland and down into the Mount Gambier area. The Crown and these newly fangled 'states' were not recognising this. These are the parts of Australian history that are very dark. We see and hear about Aboriginals in the Western Desert and the centre of Australia, up in the Northern Territory and Far North Queensland. We are used to those images of people walking in hot desert or tropical climes with no real need for much clothing. In Victoria it can get awfully cold, so people wore cloaks made of possum skins and sheltered from the wind and rain. We never see these kinds of images. Of course, there was violence and there were massacres. Poisoning of food and waterholes. Perhaps in the future we'll get to hear these stories?

I THOUGHT I could perhaps trace the ghostly presence of Princeland, the forgotten state that never was, through my own experiences. The pressures and grievances that drove the petition for separation were real and didn't just go away. The geography stayed the same, the isolation and the sheer distances between settlements. What could still be sensed of Princeland?

I grew up on the east side of Mount Gambier, just down the road from the beautiful Blue Lake, which sits in the crater of an enormous extinct volcano along with several other freshwater lakes, most of which have disappeared

or are on the way to becoming dry. People are profligate with water, and if climate change is mentioned there is always somebody who will quote a diary entry from a Henty, referring to a dried lake bed when passing by in 1836 on their way to make some money somewhere else. Their voices are still trusted and used as proof of the cyclical nature of the weather and also the movements of underground water. The voices of the local Aboriginal tribes are not heard so clearly. Were they ever listened to?

The street I grew up on was called Werona. There was also Allawah Street and Boandik Terrace. They all seemed to be names steeped in local Indigenous history but everybody around was very European in appearance. There were some Indigenous kids in the junior local football teams when I was active there, one young bloke in Millicent and a tough lot of brothers who all played for West Gambier. I say 'tough' because they could all fight and they were feared, even though they were not the biggest of kids. They lived with white families, having been adopted. We also saw black fellows in the boxing tents at the show.

Boandik was the name of the local tribe that occupied the area from the mouth of the Glenelg River to Rivoli Bay North (Beachport), extending inland for about thirty miles. The other clans occupied country from between Lacedpede Bay to Bordertown. The Boandik (or Buandig) shared tribal borders with the Ngarrindjeri people of the Coorong and Murray mouth to the west, the Bindjali and Jardwadjali to the north and the Gunditjmarra people to the east.

Near Warrnambool is the settlement of Framlingham. The year 1861 was one of great activity in young Victoria, as this place called Framlingham was designated as the last reserve for Aboriginal people in the state. Tribal groupings were ignored and three different clans were moved into this unhappy place: Girai Wurrung (near what became the Mortlake area), along with surviving Djargurd Wurrung (near what is now the Camperdown). The tribe called Gunditjmarra refused to join and established a reserve nearer to their traditional lands called Lake Condah, near Portland. These people are considered unique in Australia. They lived in large villages constructed of stone huts and harvested eels and fish in a sophisticated network of weirs and traps, dated to at least 6,600 years ago. This area is managed by the

Gunditjimara and is of National Heritage and being considered as a World Heritage site.

The football league we played in, of which Mount Gambier was a substantial part (providing four teams), was itself a sort of Princeland in the sporting dimension. It was called the South-East and Border Football League (SEBFL) and comprised teams in the western part of Victoria – Casterton, Coleraine, Hamilton and Hamilton Imperials, and Portland – together with East, West, North and South Gambier, Penola, Heywood and Millicent. To us in Mount Gambier, of course, those Victorian teams were to the east, but we got used to the illogical use of geographical terms everywhere in our lives. The ‘Far East’ in our history books being really ‘Near North’, for instance.

Two teams had the Tiger as their emblem/totem: North Gambier and Portland. Nobody got confused! In the 1970s, the South Australian teams were allowed to build their own clubrooms with licensed areas that gave them a great economic advantage. Now the league has shrunk to six teams, with most of the Victorian clubs leaving for closer associations, and South Australian teams such as Penola defecting as well. Things are crook out there, for real.

Elections in Victoria are still won and lost on the regional vote and politicians ignore the bush at their peril.

Portland, which was to be the state capital of Princeland, has had the ALCOA aluminium-smelting plant since 1986, providing employment but proving to be a political boil on the arse of Victoria. The deal to attract the multinational company to the area involved getting power at very cheap prices (linked to the price of aluminium). The raw material is shipped in from Perth and the finished product is shipped and trucked out. Aluminium has been described as solid electricity, so much is used in its manufacture. There is an estimate that the state has subsidised power to the degree of \$2 billion over twenty years. The power comes from Yallourn, five hundred kilometres away.

Warrnambool has a higher education facility as well as the Great Ocean Road, plus annual visits by whales to drag in the ecotours. A beautiful town built on a rise on one side and the river and the sea. We used to travel there in

the '70s to sample their drive-in, and also to visit a cool import record store. I remember staring at Frank Zappa's *Weasels Ripped My Flesh* and cursing our Mount Gambier record store for not having such exotic, hard-covered fare.

The nearby vintage village of Port Fairy, formerly Belfast, is one of the oldest in Victoria and has a thriving annual folk festival that brings in bearded, polo-necked, craft beer-loving hordes from all over the place.

There is also still, in Warrnambool, the beautiful idealistic workers' utopia that was the Fletcher Jones and Staff factory. It is now a vintage clothes and furniture market, but you are still able to walk around in the factory that dressed the citizens of Western Victoria. Workers were given shares in the profits of the company and there are still lovely gardens where they could eat their lunch or just sit in peace in the middle of the day. Where is this sense of civic tranquillity in our leaning and lifting, warring world of today?

The train from Melbourne to Mount Gambier turns into a bus at Warrnambool to complete the journey into South Australia, as rail lost out to road haulage in the '80s.

MOUNT GAMBIER, AT the time of the Princeland move, had a population of around 880. Isolation was their gripe. It made so much more sense for the farming produce of the region to be taken by road one hundred kilometres to Portland, where it could be loaded onto ships and transported to Melbourne or Adelaide. Instead, with the defeat and disappearance of the Princeland motion, a train line was built from Mount Gambier, across a desert, a river and through the hills surrounding Adelaide to keep it part of the state of South Australia. It started out narrow gauge and broadened at Wolsley and onto Adelaide itself. The rail in the other direction, from Mount Gambier to Victoria, was broad gauge, and then it all changed to standard in 1995 as the Mount Gambier rail line closed. The rail line ran through the city entirely and has recently been converted into an area of public space and native gardens.

I rode that Bluebird train, as it was known, from Mount Gambier to Adelaide a few times, and the last ride I took was in 1988. It was reduced to one caboose rolling through that four-hundred-kilometre journey. It was cute. Smoking at one end and a woman rolling a food-and-drink trolley up

and down the aisle every hour or so. I mean, we could have all gotten up and walked to wherever she was set up.

Naracoorte, which was known as Mosquito Plains at the time of the petition, has long been a town I identify with sheep farms and men walking around in R.M Williams' moleskins. My parents were married there. It has a strange swimming pool cut into some rock and has made its own way for years, through drought and flood, and abided. I've always been a little spooked by this area.

Penola was until relatively recently a wonderfully downbeat and depressed place. I loved to drive through its dying, melancholy streets. The old football oval and the occasional resident swatting a fly from their face and staring as you glid by. Then Mary MacKillop. All around the area, for a hundred-kilometre radius, there are signs with a silhouette of a nun. If you'd been educated by nuns and brothers from the South Australian Catholic schools of the '60s and '70s, this is a chilling sight indeed – and music from old horror movies always comes to mind. Yes, the town has been revived by a flick of the quill from Il Papa in the distant Vatican. I preferred it when it was on its death cot, wheezing out there in the baking sun. It would have survived anyway, because of being smack dab in the heart of the Coonawarra wine region and having such gifted soil for vineyards. It's strange playing music in that area – you get prepared for hicks and roughnecks coming in from a day of hay baling, and you get people telling you how they take gallons of expensive wines out on the fields to do that work and then offering you a line of coke. It's changed out there! It's no *Wake in Fright* any more. I miss those crude, savage bastards.

THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN governor, Dominick Daly, rejected the Princeland petition – which was sent to the British Government in 1862 – without going through the Victorian legislature. The Duke of Newcastle, who was the Secretary of State, rejected it, advising he would only consider it if it came from the South Australian and Victorian governments and told the petitioners to 'better choose their representatives' in the legislature. Edward Henty, who had recently been voted out of his seat in the Victorian parliament, appealed directly to the Duke, but to no avail.

In the end, despite much trumpeting for the cause from businessmen and their newspapers in Warrnambool, Mount Gambier and Portland, the petition gathered fifteen hundred signatures, which, out of the estimated pool of sixty thousand proposed Princeland inhabitants, impressed no one. There was also a petition of anti-secessionists given to the Governor of South Australia.

The threat of secession stayed in the background as a real threat, though, and the Parliament of South Australia was seen to expend much more money in the south-eastern area after the idea of Princeland and the grievances of the local squatters and business owners had been aired. They got their court and public buildings and better roads to Mount Gambier after 1862, and the moorings and jetty at Port MacDonnell were improved (even though it would never be a satisfactory harbour).

Princeland – there it blew! In some ways, they did have some points. That map was drawn up awfully quickly over a lot of – especially South Australian – land that no European had ever set foot on. Couldn't they have had second thoughts and given it a burl?

ESSAY

Trace fossils

The silence of Ediacara, the shadow of uranium

Alice Gorman

AS AN ARCHAEOLOGIST working in the remote areas around Woomera and the Nullarbor Plain, my understanding of South Australia was first informed by rocks and soil. There were fossils of extinct boneless animals underfoot, caught in the shadows of a long-evaporated sea. The angles of deliberately fractured stone betrayed a human intent, the sharp blade discarded where it performed an unknown task. Beer cans lay rusting around the remains of a campfire. A mound ribboned with broad tyre prints marked a grave full of radioactive aeroplanes. On a dusty barracks window, someone had used short strips of masking tape to spell 'Chernobyl'. The adhesive still held, although the tape had become splintered and dry.

This was a landscape of fossils and trace fossils – the preserved impressions left by the passage of a living body through sediment – jostling for attention. On this land surface, South Australia presents an arc extending from the 'death mask' fossils of early multicellular life to the human leap into the solar system. Sure, you might say, this could be said of many locations on Earth. But here it seems laid bare for any who can read the distinctive pattern of signs.

THIS WAS ONCE a shoreline in a silent world. Throughout some terrifying ice ages, when glaciers reached almost to the equator, microscopic

single-cell creatures held on to life in the freezing oceans. As the ice sheets retreated, warmer shores opened up on the Gondwana supercontinent, including what would later become the Flinders Ranges. Microbes swarmed together in mats to colonise the sandy sea floor. Wind and water were the only sounds, but there was nothing yet with ears to hear them.

The rhythm of the waves created undulations on the sea floor, to which the microbial mats cleaved. For millions of years the green ocean carpet flourished in the shallow waters. Around 635 million years ago, new forms of life appeared as additional tiers in this simple ecology. Multicellular creatures, similar in appearance to fern fronds, anchored themselves in the mats by a round root-like hank. Some eschewed a stalk and lay flat against the surface like fallen leaves. Others took the form of segmented worms squashed into round pancakes. There were no brains, bones, or mouths; nothing ate anything else in this world.

Far from 'nature red in tooth and claw', this was nature basking in the sun, in no hurry to change. The most dramatic events to occur over millions of years were storms. The surges of water these produced would drag the button holdfast of the fronds across the sandy floor beneath the mats, leaving a crackled trace until the wave passed and left it swaying again. In one of these storms, a sudden influx of loose sediment was dragged over the fronds, knocking them flat and covering them with silt. There was too much weight to break free and these limbless, toothless creatures had no way to burrow out.

Gondwana drifted, split, folded and, around 540 million years ago, uplifted, raising the ocean floor to form the slopes of a mountain range.

Standing in front of the Ediacara display in the South Australian Museum, the ripples in the stone cast shadows that allow you to almost see the shimmering of the shallow water that once moved above it. The 'elephant skin' texture – where the hank of a single fern frond was dragged in the storm surge – is visible in the stone, as is the wiggly path or trace fossil of a small worm that escaped burial.

In effect, South Australia is the trace fossil of an earlier continent, or an earlier planet – perhaps not even this one. The Ediacara fauna are vastly different to present life on Earth, and may provide an analogue for life elsewhere in the solar system.

IN THE PLEISTOCENE era, starting from about 1.8 million years ago, the ice sheets advanced again. With so much water locked away in the ice, vast plains were exposed on the continental shelf. Plant communities died off and soil formation slowed as temperatures and rainfall decreased. No longer consolidated by vegetation, sediments were blown away in the cold winds. *Aeolian* is the word, like a harp with a dry rustling sound. The sand traversed huge distances, settling into waves of dunes reflecting the wind direction. Iron staining turned the quartz sands Martian red.

Low saltbushes and bluebushes were studded across the dunes at the edge of the ranges. Sometimes there were forests of large saltbush. Giant kangaroos, three metres high, were as tall as these forest canopies. They loped along the saltbush dunes with their smaller cousins, sometimes venturing to the open grasslands that stretched to the distant coast of Sahul.

The 'lion' *Thylacoleo carnifex* roamed the plains, stalking the 'tapir' *Palorchestes azael* and other herbivores. Waterholes were perilous places where the giant snake *Wonambi naracoortensis* coiled in wait. Taking shelter from the cold wind in a limestone cave, Aboriginal people might have looked out to see the huge shadows of a herd of diprotodons, the marsupial 'rhinoceros', or *Genyornis*, the powerful two-metre-tall flightless bird. If these animals were reptiles, we would call them dinosaurs.

At the height of this cold, dry period – between thirty and nineteen thousand years ago – a person might have seen the ocean only a few times across their lifespan. A nacreous abalone shell, excavated at Allen's Cave on the Nullarbor Plain and dated to eighteen thousand years ago, speaks of a journey hundreds of kilometres overland to the shore. Specialist knowledge was needed to travel far from permanent or regular water sources: how to find water-bearing roots, rock wells from which water evaporated slowly, and Artesian springs. Perhaps more was needed too: kangaroo-skin water bags, the endurance to carry a coolamon of water for miles without spilling a drop. The desert sands and the porous limestones of the Nullarbor don't hold water reservoirs, and the aridity turned the lakes to the west and north of the Flinders Ranges into salt.

Aboriginal people would have noted but passed over the sedimentary rocks that preserved the Ediacara fauna. Instead, they searched for chalcedony,

chert, silcrete and flint. With an understanding of how these stones fracture, you can make a cutting edge sharper and more sterile than a metal surgical blade. Glassy veins of such stone, nacreous in their own way, occur throughout the calcareous plains of the Nullarbor.

Countless scholarly papers describe the climatic conditions and biological record of the Last Glacial Maximum. Between the lines of these papers is an indication of how Aboriginal people may have experienced these landscapes. In the field, I always hope to catch a glimpse of this life where the red dunes are exposed – a stone tool or the ashes of a hearth, perhaps. Mining companies, however, would mostly prefer these traces vanished.

THE ICE MELTED again, and inundated the great coastal plains. The megafauna were long gone, leaving behind their more successful cousins the kangaroos, emus and wombats. They competed with new migrants: sheep, cattle, camels and rabbits. The livestock, particularly cattle, did very well on saltbush.

It was still arid out in the north and centre, though droughts lasted just a few years instead of thousands. The years 1863–66 were particularly severe. The Surveyor-General of South Australia, George Goyder, was sent out in 1865 to define the area where reliable rainfall divided agricultural land from grazing land. In the absence of rainfall records, he observed geology and vegetation to create a line stretching over three thousand kilometres, from Pinaroo on the Victorian border to Ceduna in the far west. South of the line was dominated by mallee scrubs, and the north by saltbush and other chenopods.

A few years later, seasons had improved. The bold bought land above Goyder's Line for cropping. This line was not, however, just a mark on a map; as successive drought oscillations continued, farmers were forced back south, abandoning homesteads and even whole towns, the crumbling remains of which are still visible today.

In the process of settlement, trees were cut down for fence posts, telegraph poles and firewood. On the treeless Nullarbor Plain, soil was stabilised by delicate biological crusts formed from lichens and bacteria. The hard hoofs of the livestock cracked them like the toffee shell on a *crème brûlée*, and the dust blew again.

In 1945, the CSIRO scientist RW Jessup was sent to investigate soil erosion in arid areas of South Australia. He noted the degeneration caused by the combined effect of rabbits and stock. When rabbits reached plague proportions and began to run out of food, they ate the young shoots and ringbarked trees. They even climbed trees to reach the foliage and got stuck in the branches. Fast growing species could bounce back, but slower trees like mulga and myall suffered the most, especially in the absence of Aboriginal burning regimes to germinate seeds. Jessup noticed the Precambrian rocks but did not stop to look for fossils. He was more focused on the windblown sands: evidence of how pastoralism was re-creating the arid conditions of the Pleistocene.

The same year saw the end of the Second World War. Far away in another hemisphere, a rocket capable of reaching outer space had been built and two bombs detonated. These events would shape the world for decades to come, and leave their imprint in the outback of South Australia.

IN 1946, THERE were many people roaming the South Australian deserts. One was geologist Reg Sprigg, searching for uranium to supply the growing demand for nuclear weapons. He started with the old Radium Hill mine in the east, and surveyed Mount Painter in the Flinders Ranges, before coming to the Ediacara Hills in the north of the ranges. On the gentle slopes, he was struck by ancient sandstone slabs, generally a poor type of stone for fossil preservation. But he'd seen fossils in this sort of rock before, and so did not dismiss them. The round impressions that he saw looked like flattened jellyfish and large segmented worms, but the rock was clearly Precambrian. Only single-celled animals were supposed to be preserved in these rocks.

The discovery was initially received with scepticism. Some argued that the shapes were natural phenomena. Others disputed the dates. It wasn't until the discovery of similar fossils in Namibia, Siberia and other locations, and the support of some University of Adelaide academics, that the Ediacara fauna were acknowledged to be genuine. The creatures then received names. *Dickinsonia* was the flat pancake worm. The jellyfish turned out to be mostly the discoid holdfast of the frond-shaped *Charnia*. Reg Sprigg lent his name to the mysterious segmented *Spriggina* species – maybe a worm, maybe a frond,

maybe something like the later trilobites. The decay rate of uranium isotopes trapped in a zircon crystal from the Namibian site confirmed that the fauna dated from 635 million years ago.

While Reg Sprigg continued his search for uranium deposits, men from the Army's Survey Corps were on the gibber plains around Mount Eba, mapping an area the size of England to enclose a rocket test range. The Anglo-Australian Joint Project was established to develop weapons for Britain, and Australia hoped, through this arrangement, to gain a greater defence capacity to fend off Asia. The German V-2 rocket, which had devastated London in the last months of the war, would form the basis of this new weapon system.

Senior British military personnel took a flight to see the proposed area for themselves. They flew over the Central Aborigines Reserve on the borders between South and Western Australia, the direction in which the future rockets would be launched. To their eyes, the red desert recalled another: the white sands around the Trinity site in New Mexico in the US, where the first atom bomb was exploded in 1944. The Australian author Ivan Southall described this view later in 1962: 'Here it was, one of the greatest stretches of uninhabited wasteland on earth, created by God specifically for rockets.'

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE BECAME a trace fossil in the land deemed empty – hidden in plain sight. Kokatha, Pitjantjatjara, Adnyamathanha and Barngarla people lived on missions around the state, and gathered in coastal towns that offered them the employment that the rocket range had promised but didn't deliver.

At this time, white Australians thought Aboriginal occupation had been a few thousand years at most, and many believed Aboriginal people were dying out – the inevitable result of the 'stone age' being superseded by the 'space age'. Ironically, it would take American chemist Willard Libby's invention of radiocarbon dating in the 1940s – an idea that came to him when working on the atomic bomb for the Manhattan Project – to establish the much deeper antiquity of occupation. John Mulvaney's 1962 excavation of Kenniff Cave in Queensland used radiocarbon to obtain a date of nineteen thousand years ago, during the Last Glacial Maximum.

In 1947, on the first reconnaissance for a place to build the township that would service the rocket range, surveyors found tens of thousands of stone tools at Phillip Ponds. Recognising that evidence of Aboriginal occupation also meant the presence of water, they selected this location for the Woomera Village, named after the wooden spear-thrower used by Aboriginal people in many parts of Australia. The street names in the new town were sourced from a vocabulary compiled by HM Cooper, published in 1948 as *Australian Aboriginal Words and Their Meanings*.

Only three other rocket launch sites existed in the entire world in the 1940s. In the following decades, Australian scientists designed sounding rockets for upper atmosphere research and worked on British long-range ballistic missiles like the Blue Streak. They also collaborated with the US in establishing another new technology: tracking the satellites that were planned for launch in the International Geophysical Year of 1957–58. In 1957, the world's first satellite, Sputnik 1, sent its distinctive beep into the ether and initiated the space age proper.

MY TRIPS TO the Woomera Prohibited Area are sometimes to advise mining companies about heritage issues, and sometimes to do my own research on Australia's space program. One day, I'm taken out to the derelict structures once used as launch pads for a unique hybrid rocket. The satellite launcher Europa was a collaboration between six European nations and Australia in the early 1960s. The two launch pads stand on the edge of a blindingly white salt lake. Rock art sites can be found on outcrops and boulders around the lower edge of the steep shores. Against the wind, I imagine the tremendous roar of the rocket's engines and think of Ivan Southall's description of the landscape in his 1962 book, *Woomera* (Angus & Robertson):

It's almost like you are living in another world, just as though you had been shot off in a spaceship and let down on some strange planet where men had never been before.

Writing about Woomera and Maralinga, Southall constantly emphasises the silence of a landscape where, he avers, even Aboriginal people speak in

undertones. This seems supremely ironic when you think of rocket engines roaring, or the more sinister blast of an atom bomb. From 1956 to 1963, Australia supported Britain in a series of nuclear tests at two locations outside Woomera's perimeter, Maralinga and Emu Field. Southall visited Emu Field in 1962 where 'sprayed with yellow paint, and silent in the sand, are abandoned trucks and jeeps and weapons once too hot to handle. There, near the bomb towers that vanished, the very surface of the desert has become as glass.'

The vitrified sand is the same iron oxide-coated sediment of the Pleistocene aeolian dunes, now with a greenish tinge like a cheap wine bottle. Such nuclear glass is highly collectible, and is sometimes called trinitite after the glass from the Trinity site in New Mexico.

The resonances of these tests aren't fading any time soon. Generations of Aboriginal people and white Australians still suffer the effects of exposure to radiation. The shadows of the radioactive fallout – the 'black mist', as many Aboriginal people call it – are almost inescapable when you travel west in this state.

At Woomera, I go to look at the grave monuments in the cemetery on the hill outside the town. There are multiple stillbirths and infant deaths often in the same family. People don't like to talk about it, but there are stories of women wailing in the streets, driven mad by unassuageable grief. A local urban myth held that if a pregnant woman stood on the hill facing Maralinga during a bomb test, the sex of the foetus would be revealed in x-ray silhouette.

On the far west coast of the state we're walking through the saltbush and tyre-piercing bluebush to a rock hole, where some of the traditional owners want to carry out maintenance by clearing the accumulated weeds and dirt. On our way we pass an unusual farm shed. It's made of lead, scavenged from Maralinga by the landowner. I learn that such scavenging has distributed the artefacts of rockets and bombs all over the state.

On another day, the women are driving up the Ooldea track towards the intercontinental railway line. One roasted a wombat the night before and distributes chunks to us. As we gnaw on the bones, the women point out campsites off to the side of the track. You can't necessarily see anything from the road, but the locations are loaded with memory. These are places where

they camped during the trek from the Maralinga lands down to the coast. It wasn't safe to stay, but leaving created its own devastation.

Finally, I'm here at Maralinga. Despite four phases of remediation, there is so much to catch the archaeologist's eye. No doubt the last people in white radiation suits to leave the site after the clean-up in 2000 thought all the residues of the hot yellow machines and bomb towers were safely interred in the burial mounds. I'm used to working at the scale of stone tools, though, and find the surface is scattered with small artefacts like broken ceramics and beer cans. What really sticks in my memory are ephemeral traces of human presence. Along the wire of a perimeter fence, someone has looped bits of metal and twist ties in a line. A square grid has been drawn in the gravel near a radio tower. The tyre tracks of earth-moving machinery around and over the large burial mounds make me think of rover tracks on Mars.

This land is already a nuclear waste dump. The locations and proposals change, but the same apparent 'emptiness' that brought rockets, nuclear tests and detention centres now attracts commercial interest in storing nuclear waste from other nations. It's the end of a cycle that starts with the mining and export of Australian uranium. The redistribution of uranium is a very Anthropocene process, part of the dismantling and reassembling of the planet.

In the end it will all be buried, all become an archaeological site. Long after the molecular structure of the human-made materials has broken down, the uranium and plutonium will still be decaying. Future archaeologists may find it difficult to determine if these radioactive deposits are natural or cultural. Maybe the distinction will be irrelevant.

THE STORY ISN'T quite over yet, though. The Ediacara fauna gave their name to a new geological period, and while their relationship with contemporary species is still hotly debated, they have changed the way life on Earth is viewed.

The megafauna had largely disappeared by ten thousand years ago. The role of Aboriginal people in their extinction is also hotly debated, though archaeological evidence does not support the 'overkill' hypothesis. New genetic studies are now pushing back the date of Aboriginal arrival in Australia to more than sixty thousand years ago.

Goyder's Line is shifting south under the impacts of climate change.

Reg Sprigg, who died in 2008, established the Arkaroola Sanctuary in the Flinders Ranges. The Mars Society of Australia selected it as their primary Mars analogue landscape to pursue both planetary science and practical aspects of Mars colonisation.

After becoming the fourth nation in space with the launch of the WRESAT-1 satellite in 1967, Australia's ambitions have languished. Woomera is still a busy test range, but we are no longer at the forefront of space exploration.

Maralinga has been handed back to its traditional owners. You can visit as a tourist.

The wind has been a constant theme. Once the dominant sound in the Ediacaran world, now it drives giant wind turbines supplying power to the state.

One planet's past may be another's future. The Ediacarans have vanished from South Australia, but deep time is always waiting to burst through the crusts of the surface. In the words of Ivan Southall:

In the most barren regions, the most lifeless regions, strange things happen after rain. Primitive crustaceans suddenly stir in the saline mud, reminding one of the dawning of time.

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ESSAY

Learning the local language

Starting over again

Lea McInerney

IT WAS IN a Melbourne museum that I realised I didn't know the traditional name for the area in South Australia where I'd grown up. I was leaning over a large map of Victoria carved into wood and displayed on a low table. On it, the boundaries of the state's thirty-eight Aboriginal language groups were marked out. Within each one was a button. Touch it and a voice pronounced the name.

I worked my way around the map, tapping each button. Then I zeroed in on the Melbourne area, where there are five language groups: Woiwurrung, Boonwurrung, Wathaurong, Taungurung, Dja Dja Wurrung. I'd tap one, listen, say the name under my breath, tap it again, listen, say the name again, move onto the next one, do the same, over and over.

I love words, not just the look of them and the work they do, but the sounds they make. These words had a rhythm all their own. They set up a music in me that stayed as I wandered around the rest of the museum, learning about Victoria's First Peoples, their relationship to the land, their stories of the creator and protector spirits, Bunjil the eagle and Waa the crow. By the end of the afternoon, I knew more about the deeper story of this place I'd lived in for just five years than I did about the place that first formed me.

I WAS BORN in Clare, a small town two hours' drive north of Adelaide. For seventeen years, through the 1960s and '70s, my world was family, that town of three thousand, and the bush and farms and vineyards around us. Mostly we were descendants of Irish, English and Scottish immigrants, with a few Italian, Greek and Polish families in the mix. My own ancestors on both sides were Irish, and had settled near this same area in the 1840s.

At my primary school I wasn't taught anything about Australia's First Peoples. At high school, the history subjects on offer were modern European and classical studies, and an Australian history subject that in hindsight could have been called 'Australia since 1788'.

When I finished school I left Clare and lived in Adelaide for a few years, travelled overseas for a while, then settled in Tasmania in the late 1980s. I'd become interested in Australia's colonial history and was reading about it a lot. Occasionally I went to talks by local academics and Aboriginal people.

I moved to Melbourne in 2008, during the week of the national apology to the Stolen Generations. Soon I was learning about the Wurundjeri people, and bit by bit I came to understand about the different language groups making up the larger Kulin nation. I started reading up on local history, getting to know important sites and dates in Melbourne for Aboriginal people, going to Tanderrum ceremonies, and seeing plays about places like Coranderrk. It made me feel both more connected to Melbourne and more uncomfortable about what I was hearing and what it all meant.

All through the years, I went back to Clare regularly to see family and friends. But I was oblivious to the history of the people who'd lived there for tens of thousands of years before – I didn't know their name, culture, language, anything.

From the internet, I'd learnt that the original people were the Ngadjuri, a word in their language that means 'we people'. I had no idea how to pronounce it. Each time I tried, I'd stumble over it, mumble 'nud-jury', then 'naa-joorey', then shake my head and give up. I felt stupid and awkward.

Several years ago, on a regular trip back, I decided to stay on longer and start finding out what I could.

THE CLARE MAIN street as you come in from Adelaide is as familiar to me as my own hand. The oval, the bridge over the creek, the old two-storey

banks, the fish-and-chip shop where I earned pocket money and, halfway along the main street, the two-storey town hall that houses the local history centre.

I walk into the foyer and up the wide staircase, my hands on the smooth, varnished wooden banister I remember sliding down as a child. The room is huge, with high ceilings, tall bookshelves and a massive wooden table. Along a wall and tucked into corners are old grey filing cabinets, computers, a heavy-duty photocopier. The volunteer on duty is the mother of a boy I was at school with, and after a quick catch-up I tell her what I'm after. She finds me a book and some folders, settles me at the big table and leaves me to it.

The book is *Ngadjuri: Aboriginal People of the Mid North Region of South Australia* (SASOSE Council Inc, 2005). On the front is a painting by renowned contemporary artist Robert Hannaford of a group of pre-colonial Aboriginal men walking through a stand of gum trees. Alongside it is an old sepia photograph of an Aboriginal man dressed in a light-coloured three-piece suit, his hair white, a slight smile on his face.

On the back cover is a map of the mid north of South Australia, marking out Ngadjuri country as it was documented by anthropologist Norman Tindale in 1974 – a roughly rectangle shape of land extending from Gawler in the south to the lower Flinders Ranges in the north.

Starting from the top, I trace my finger over the map, silently sounding the names of the towns. Bimbowrie, Waukaringa, Minburra, Mookra, Coomooroo, Orreroo, Paratoo, Oodlawirra, Nantabibbie, Pekina, Tarcowie, Yongala, Appila, Mannanarie, Belalie, Gumbowie, Terowie, Caltowie, Canowie, Yarcowie, Ulooloo, Bundaleer, Booborowie, Manoora.

All are familiar to me. When we were children, my dad took us for drives up north to visit relatives, and he'd often recite the names of the towns, arranging their order to make them rhyme and sound a rhythm: *Oodlawirra, Nantabibbie, Orreroo, Paratoo*. On he'd go, his eyes twinkling. All these years later, I instantly remember the rhythm, nodding my head to the beat of it.

I slide my finger down the shiny paper and pause at my home town, and a cluster of other names I know well but which sound so different from the others – Clare, Sevenhill, Penwortham, Watervale, Leasingham,

Auburn, Riverton. It's abrupt, the shift. In time, I'll come to understand more about why.

THE NGADJURI BOOK was published as a teaching resource for South Australian schools in 2005. Writing it took a decade of work by many, among them Ngadjuri people, schoolteachers, curriculum staff, archaeologists and historians. The book's genesis lay in two sources: research by Ngadjuri man Fred Warrior and archaeologist Sue Anderson, and a booklet produced in 1995 by Fran Knight, a teacher in the mid-north town of Peterborough who had spent years researching Ngadjuri history and culture so she could teach it to her students. Printed on high-quality gloss paper, there are colourful photos and illustrations on many of the one hundred and fifty pages, and at the end of each chapter are activities for teachers to use in the classroom. The content covers Ngadjuri country, language, Dreaming, traditional life, archaeology, the arrival of Europeans, resistance to invasion in the 1840s, dispossession of the land through to the 1900s and a final chapter on shared history and the future.

I flick through the whole book, then return to the section on language. From a side bar, I learn that Ngadjuri words that end in *-owie* mean fresh water. Caltowie, where my cousins grew up on a farm, is 'waterhole of the sleepy lizards'; Booborowie, where I played netball, is 'round waterhole'; Yarcowie is 'wide water'.

Too soon, it's time for the history room to close, so I take down the book's details and later, back home in Melbourne, order my own copy. The day it arrives, I settle at the kitchen table with a coffee and head straight to the chapter on language.

Over three hundred words are listed, first from English to Ngadjuri and then from Ngadjuri to English, along with instructions on how to pronounce them. I sit, like a kid again, in my classroom of one, slowly, methodically, following the invisible teacher.

Ng at the beginning of words is pronounced the same as English words ending in *sing*. 'Sing', I say, then drop the *si-* part and notice the place in my throat where the *-ng* sound is made. *Ng*, I say over and over, until it feels right. Next, how to say the vowels – *a* as in but; *e* as in pet; *i* pronounced two

different ways depending on where it is in the sentence; *o* as in pot; *u* as in push. Consonants like *k*, *g*, *t* and *d*, I learn, are said more softly than we say them in English – the book says they aren't sounded with a puff of air. I didn't know that's actually what we did, so I say them the English way first, noticing those puffs of air. Then I try without the puff. Things are starting to click.

Syllables are all emphasised equally. So Ngadjuri can't be 'nud-jury' or 'naa-joorey' as I'd been saying. I put it all together and even out the syllables. Nga-dju-ri. Three syllables, even weight; *Ng* as in sing, *a* as in but, *u* as in push, *i* as in happy. Ngadjuri.

Next, the lists of words. I start with the Ngadjuri ones, randomly pick them out and say them aloud, concentrating on making the sounds. Then I go through the English list, reading each one out then saying the Ngadjuri translation a few times. Words for different animals, birds, insects and plants, words for water, fire, sky, clouds, sun, moon and stars, for people, for actions. Words like *butji*, *maluku* and *gundu'maluku* for different types of cloud formations. A word for eye – *mena* – and another – *menawalpu* – for being sharp-eyed. One for 'to dance' – *mutanga* – and a different one – *guri* – for an imitative dance. Words like *mulka* for 'to talk' and *jata'mulka* for 'talk by sticks on the ground' – also known as 'silent talk', a skill you need when hunting. Even a word for 'shaking out dust' – *kunma'rindma*.

When I get to the letter 's', I notice there are seven forms of the word spirit – ancestral beings, spirits causing heat, spirits that tease, spirits inhabiting hills, spirit-children, spirit men and women, spirit world. All this going on in the place where I'd grown up, and I'd had no idea.

Most of the words in the book came from the man in the cover photograph. Barney Waria was a Ngadjuri man born in 1873 in Orroroo, north of Clare. His mother was the daughter of a medicine man, his father was born at Booyoolie Aboriginal camp in the mid north. His surname is a variation of a Ngadjuri word meaning second male child. At some stage, it was anglicised to warrior.

An initiated elder, Barney Waria knew that his language and culture were in danger of being lost forever, so he made regular trips to Adelaide between 1939 and 1944 to tell anthropologists what he could. Norman Tindale knew him and described him as a perceptive and thoughtful man.

HISTORIES OF AUSTRALIA that include perspectives of the First Peoples are more plentiful now. Some time ago, when I was reading about early colonial Australian history, I listed the dates when the capital cities were founded. It helped me piece together the waves of arrival of colonisers and convicts, and the pattern of disruption for the people already here. Sydney 1788, Hobart 1803, Brisbane 1824, Perth 1829, Melbourne 1835, Adelaide 1836, Darwin 1869.

Among South Australia's often-touted claims to fame is that it was the country's only freely settled state, founded at a time when a new consciousness about the treatment of so-called native people in British colonies had emerged. In 1833, slavery had been abolished in Britain after years of social pressure. The Black War in Tasmania, from 1824 to 1831, had not long ended. It was well known in British parliamentary circles that many of those living here already had resisted strongly, and that the death rates were high. This formed part of the backdrop to the plans being made in London for a new colony.

But the founding documents – the South Australia Act of 1834, Letters Patent of February 1836, and the Proclamation read out by British officials at what is now Holdfast Bay in December 1836 – were conflicted and contradictory. On the one hand, 'the native inhabitants' were recognised as having occupation of the land and the right to continue to occupy and enjoy them. On the other, the territory marked out for settlement was said to consist of 'waste and unoccupied lands...fit for the purposes of colonisation'.

This inherent conflict continued to play out in those early years. Land wasn't meant to be taken up by colonists unless its original owners had voluntarily ceded ownership and been awarded compensation. But early settlers who had bought preliminary land orders in England claimed they had first choice. Meanwhile, the colony's second governor, George Gawler, in power from 1838 to 1841, oscillated between defending the rights of Aboriginal people to their land and regarding them as inferior and not capable of entering into treaties or bargains.

In October 1839, in an act of acknowledgment of prior occupation, Gawler sent out a decree to South Australians to record the names that Aboriginal people had given to features of the landscape, and for these to be

included on public maps. This, I realised, was the explanation for all those Aboriginal words for names of towns north of Clare that I'd noticed on the map of Ngadjuri country, while the explanation for the mostly English names south of Clare through to Adelaide lay in the timing.

In those early years, new arrivals from England and the eastern states were pushing inland from Adelaide in search of fertile land and overland routes for moving sheep and cattle. Some, like 21-year-old John Horrocks, who took up land in early 1839 before surveys were completed, named small settlements after people and places in England and Ireland.

The pattern of dispossession of the Ngadjuri people is similar to that of First Australians in many parts of the country. Europeans arrived, saw fertile land with water sources close by – which Indigenous people had been using and keeping clean for tens of thousands of years – and began to move in. They brought in large numbers of sheep and cattle that contaminated the water, trampled the ground where people grew edible plants like yams, and took over the grazing areas that kangaroos and other native animals fed on.

In those early years, Ngadjuri people were, as it was often put at the time, 'dispersed'. Exposed to new diseases, many became ill and died. Those who tried to resist the settlers, or who took sheep and other supplies to feed their families, were treated as criminals and many were shot or hanged. Others were driven from their land, forced onto the country of other Aboriginal people, and later into Christian missions where, for the most part, they weren't allowed to speak their language.

BEFORE AUSTRALIA WAS colonised, over two hundred and fifty languages were spoken, many with different dialects. Where South Australia now lies, there were around fifty distinct languages. Aboriginal people were naturally multilingual. Up until British contact and for a while after, Ngadjuri people were fluent in the languages of the people from lands around them, including Adnyamathanha to the north and Kurna to the south.

Across Australia today, fewer than one hundred and twenty languages remain in daily use, the majority of those in the northern and central parts of

the country. At present, only thirteen are considered strong, meaning they have fluent speakers across all generations. Among these, in South Australia, are Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara. Of the remaining languages, some are still spoken by at least a few adults, but not by the children. Others have people who speak a few words and phrases. The most fragile languages are those where knowledge survives only in books and archives. Ngadjuri has been one of the latter for a long time. However, in recent years Ngadjuri people have been making moves to revive it.

KARINA LESTER IS a Yankunytjatjara Anangu woman who lives in Adelaide and works with Aboriginal communities around the state to maintain, revive and reclaim their languages. She co-manages the Mobile Language Team, located in the University of Adelaide. I'd heard her speaking on a podcast, slipping easily between her traditional language and English.

When I spoke to her from Melbourne, she talked about the pride she sees in people as they come to know their language. She sees it in the children too, a growing confidence as they develop connections to country, and with the old people.

Prior to contact, she said, people knew through language how to keep country alive and thriving for future generations. 'You grew up on an area of country and you knew the place names, you knew what food to eat, how to prepare seed cakes, how to use kangaroo or goanna, how to keep rock-holes clean, why it was important to harvest only what you needed.'

Linguists used to believe that when a language had no remaining speakers, that was the end of it. But during the 1980s, with the realisation that many Aboriginal people were working hard to keep their languages and traditions alive, this belief shifted to one of cautious optimism.

Kurna, the language of the original people of the Adelaide area, is one of South Australia's early language-revival success stories. Like Ngadjuri, there were no living speakers, only archive material. Since the early 1990s, members of the Kurna community have been working with a linguist to reconstruct their language.

I learned from Karina that, while there is no set formula, communities and linguists draw on historical records and look to neighbouring languages

for similar patterns. From this they can start to build a vocabulary and grammar, and produce dictionaries, learner guides and teaching material. Sometimes, she said, a breakthrough can happen when someone comes across an old family notebook and it opens up a new source of information about language and culture.

Kaurna people are increasingly using their language, and it is being spoken at welcome-to-country ceremonies and utilised in the renaming and dual naming of significant places. It's also being taught in local schools, as are about nine other South Australian languages, with around five thousand Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students studying them at forty-nine of the state's schools.

Kaurna words are even being used by people like my mother. In the Adelaide CBD with her one day, I saw a sign saying 'Kaurna'. By this stage I knew the first part sounds like a G rather than a K.

'Gurna,' I said.

'No,' said Mum.

'Gaurna?'

Mum shook her head. I gave up.

'Garna,' she said, confidently. She's heard it often at public events.

A YEAR AFTER my visit to the history room in Clare, I'm in Adelaide again, this time at the State Library to watch a CD-ROM that Ngadjuri people, led by Patricia Waria-Read, a descendant of Barney Waria, made with linguists in 2009. In the closed-in quiet of the reading room, the librarian loads it for me and I sit in front of the screen, headphones on, reading and listening to the Ngadjuri welcome to country.

Alongside colourful photos of birds, animals, plants, the sun and the moon are the local words, written and spoken. There are photos of current-day Ngadjuri people, many of them children, sitting, eating and talking, while recorded voices speak the word for each action. I sit there smiling as I hear them, recognising the different sounds of the vowels and consonants, and the patterns of the syllables.

The welcome to country has three variations – one for the top end of country, one for the middle and one for the bottom. I have the Ngadjuri book with me and I check the map – Clare is located in the middle section,

red hawk country. The others are bronzewing pigeon and whip snake. I try to picture Ngadjuri people giving a welcome to country to the early colonists and wonder how it would have been received and understood. Then I wonder if any of my ancestors – those Irish immigrants who'd arrived in Ngadjuri Country in the 1840s – had ever heard it spoken, and what their response might have been.

MY SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD NEPHEW Dominic went to the same school as I did in Clare, many years after my time there. Recently I asked him if he'd learnt about Aboriginal history and people.

'Yep,' he said. He remembers classes in grades three to five, taught by his teachers and sometimes guest speakers.

'What do you remember?'

He replied instantly.

'The land that it was – the Ngadjuri people's all the way up to Peterborough.'

Saying Ngadjuri came easily to him. I pointed that out and he agreed, adding with a grin, 'Don't ask me to spell it, though.'

LAST WEEK I made another trip to South Australia for the unveiling of a sculpture of an Aboriginal woman and child. It was in Riverton, a town of eight hundred people not far from Clare. Modelled and donated by Robert Hannaford, who has had a lifelong interest in Ngadjuri culture, it had been more than twenty years in the making as the community worked to raise funds to cast and install it.

South Australia's governor, Hieu Van Le, a former Vietnamese boat person, did the unveiling honours in the presence of two of Barney Waria's descendants who'd been involved in the planning over the years. Vincent Copley spoke about ancient Ngadjuri rock art in the mid north. Vincent Branson welcomed us to country in the Ngadjuri language. I stood there, part of the crowd of well over a hundred, smiling as I recognised the words and what they meant.

In the past, when I saw Aboriginal words written down, I'd skim over them. They looked foreign and I had no idea how to pronounce them. It was

easier not to try. Now I take pleasure in the sounds, and the fact that I can say them. No doubt I stumble, and do it with a strange accent, but it feels like I'm a little closer to the deeper story they hold.

I would like to pay my respects to the Ngadjuri People and to acknowledge their elders - past, present and future. Thanks to Karina Lester and Adele Pring for background information and generous insights, and to the authors of the Ngadjuri book and CD-ROM, and to the many others who helped bring them to publication.

For references, see griffithreview.com

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ESSAY

Outlaw one

Defending identity in the native title era

Eve Vincent

‘THE WIND IS my hairdresser,’ says Sue Coleman Haseldine, known locally as Aunty Sue, stepping out into her dusty yard and letting the hot north wind rush through tangled thick black hair. A wire clothesline stretches across the dirt yard, tractors and car carcasses rust away in a nearby paddock, dogs run out to greet approaching cars, and in the middle of this scene Sue stands with a cigarette in a curled hand. She lives on a wheat farm with her whitefella husband, Gary, near the small, isolated South Australian town of Ceduna. From her yard, a strip of flat grey-blue sea can be glimpsed to the south. North of the chip-dry paddocks, ‘out the back’, lies a vast stretch of bush – stunted mallee shrublands roll away on sandy waves.

The task of the hairdresser is to subdue and shape hair, human hands and tools bringing this naturally occurring stuff under their control. But Sue styles herself in conscious opposition to this, subverting the hierarchy of human will/natural forces. She is drawn to images of wildness and rebellion, joyfully submitting to the wind, which here represents the unpredictable and powerful forces of the natural world and its capacity to overpower human designs.

Sue embodies a kind of refusal to have her passions tamed. She has taken up a position ‘against native title’, despite the fact that native title legislation is

designed to recognise Indigenous connections to land, and subsequent rights and interests in it. Her experience of native title claims over recent decades ultimately proved disempowering, spurring her to reject native title on the grounds that it fostered divisions and conflict within this rural Aboriginal community. She is 'against mining', even if it purportedly promises the economic salvation of remote and regional Aboriginal worlds such as hers. Mining might well mean jobs, Sue concedes, but it also involves extracting monetary value from 'country', which Indigenous people regard as vitally alive. 'Out the back' lies a realm of significance, dotted with specific Dreaming sites, as well as an intact natural environment that was the familiar home of Sue's mobile ancestors, even if it is uninhabited today. To travel out the back is to renew contemporary relations with country and recall this ancestral past: Sue is determined these landscapes remain protected from material imperatives.

Yet for all her toughness, Sue both refuses *and* embraces. While she is well known locally for the things she is against, in this moment she also playfully meets the wind.

I FIRST MET Aunty Sue in November 2006. Throughout my twenties I was involved in various environmental and social justice campaigns in Melbourne; a close friend from those activist days suggested I seek her out.

At our first meeting, Aunty Sue slung an arm across my shoulders and gave me a firm squeeze.

'Welcome to our country,' she said gruffly.

As a white Australian – 'born of the conquerors', as poet Judith Wright put it – I have long been afflicted with a variety of postcolonial anxiety about inheriting the white legacy of inflicting violent dispossession on Australia's First Peoples. Aunty Sue's welcome warmed me.

That November I slept on a rusted-spring bed frame and thin foam mattress out on the veranda at Sue and Gary's farm. Aunty Sue spent the week acting as a guide for me and two friends; we picnicked out bush, lost money on the Melbourne Cup, waded into warm water at low tide to claw razor fish out of the mudflats, and camped with around twenty members of Aunty Sue and Gary's extended family behind steep cliffs.

I returned to Ceduna in March 2008 as an anthropology PhD student, and lived there for twelve months. It was as a grassroots environmental activist and potential political ally that I was welcomed; ambivalence and occasional suspicion surrounded my role as novice fieldworker.

Most importantly, I shared a commonality with many of the Nunga and whitefella locals whose lives soon became enmeshed with mine: I returned that March as a sleep-deprived new mum, with a ten-week-old baby in tow. I dragged *minya* (little) Ned with me everywhere: he gnawed gummily on a gristly wombat bone, crawled into rock pools and was mesmerised by ‘bush telly’ – the fire. He was, Gary liked to muse, a ‘little bush baby’.

Aunty Sue remained the central figure in my doctoral research, consistently directing my attention to her critique of the native title claims process, which I came to write about. Her warmth and humour, as well as her ability to craft a narrative and generate insights out of ordinary occurrences, made a lasting impression on me.

Sue spent her childhood on the Koonibba Lutheran Mission, located approximately forty-five kilometres west of Ceduna. As a young woman she met Gary, whose family has farmed in this wheat-growing district since the early years of the twentieth century; in the late 1960s they danced together to the jukebox in a Greek café in the adjacent port town of Thevenard.

Sue has raised six of her own children (one deceased), as well as ‘growing up’ a host of other kids, and is now a grandmother and great-grandmother. In her most recent phase of life she is proud to have earned a public identity on South Australia’s west coast as an activist and rebel – or, as she puts it, ‘outlaw one’.

A PERMANENT EUROPEAN presence was established atop the Eyre Peninsula in the 1860s with the founding of the pastoral station Yalata, west of Fowlers Bay. The region’s early pastoral economy was labour intensive; Aboriginal people were engaged as builders, fencers, shepherds, well sinkers and outstation keepers. By the 1880s, kangaroo hunters had set up camps on and around the Nullarbor Plain with the aim of eradicating kangaroos, which were then considered vermin. Historians Peggy Brock and Jim Faull both note that kangaroo hunters also employed Aboriginal people, valuing

their hunting and tracking skills as well as their detailed knowledge of the country. Brock also reports that Aboriginal women were frequently abused in the hunters' camps, and that by 1894, when the hunters left the area, Aboriginal people were starving as a result of increased pressure on their food sources.

When the pastoral leases granted in this region expired in 1888, a new generation of South Australians was granted land. Subdivision of larger pastoral properties began, giving rise to agriculture – mostly wheat cropping – which worked the land much more intensively than pastoralism, and encroached further on Aboriginal ceremonial and economic life. By the turn of the century, the food supply situation for local Indigenous groups was critical, and the period, as Faull documents, was punctuated with violent encounters between Aboriginal people killing sheep for food on the one hand, and shepherds, the new farmers and their families on the other.

At this critical juncture, Lutheran missionaries arrived to found Koonibba Mission in 1898.

Sue's great-grandfather, Micky Free, began gathering Aboriginal people to the site selected for the mission to begin the task of scrub clearing. Around half a century later, in 1951, Sue was born, the fourth daughter of a Kokatha mother and a white father – a local farmer with another, older white family of his own who played a limited role in her life until his death.

While he never lived with her mother, Aunty Sue remembers him bringing his ute to the mission loaded with fresh food. One of Sue's sisters told me their father did not like the fact his supplies were then shared out among kin. He sometimes stood by his truck to watch his children eat, an image that speaks of both his familial affection and his distance from Aboriginal cultural mores.

Sue also vividly remembers hiding in the scrub with other fair-skinned kids, then termed 'half-caste', to escape the reach of 'welfare'. As is well documented, twentieth-century state-based assimilation policies resulted in the permanent removal of many Aboriginal children from their families. Fair-skinned children were particularly vulnerable to removal by state welfare authorities, as these policies aimed to absorb Indigenous children into white society, resocialising them as members of the mainstream of Australian citizenry. Out bush, Sue remembers, fair-skinned kids learned to survive for

days at a time. Aunty Sue continues to relish the eating of bush foods, such as *gulda* (sleepy lizard) and *wardu* (wombat), which nourish her physically and spiritually as she draws a connection with the times of plenty enjoyed by ‘the old people’, as well as her own memories of evading ‘welfare’.

Sue’s grandparents assumed an important role in teaching her to speak Kokatha, ‘behind the backs of the missionaries’. She remembers her days in the mission with ambivalence – the kindness of individual Lutheran pastors and teachers is tenderly recollected, but she also stresses the ultimate failure of their attempts to sever Koonibba families from their Indigenous identity, cultural traditions and languages.

In 1963, the missionaries departed and the South Australian government assumed responsibility for the settlement. Sue remembers the sudden end of a whole world as the mission’s gates were ‘ripped’ down. ‘I thought [it] was sacrilege, because they were really pretty.’

Sue and her family dispersed at this time, ending up in Adelaide and Port Lincoln, while many other mission families began moving into Ceduna.

Historians and anthropologists working in this region agree that throughout most of the twentieth century, Nungas of the west coast of South Australia organised and expressed their collective identity around the shared experience of life on Koonibba Mission; they were ‘Koonibba people’, and used ‘Koonibba’ as an identifying label when they moved into the region’s towns to live in fringe camps and work in places such as Port Lincoln and Wudinna.

This has changed.

ACROSS THIS REGION, Aboriginal people primarily identify with the ‘tribal’ labels of Kokatha and/or Wirangu and/or Mirning – as well as Pitjantjatjara. What’s important to note is that on the west coast of South Australia, as elsewhere in Australia, the native title claims process has played a role in nurturing the return to differentiated land-based and language-group identities, a process of reclamation that can have profound social consequences.

Native title legislation followed the celebrated 1992 High Court Mabo case. The High Court affirmed that prior to colonisation Indigenous peoples across Australia held title, in common, to their land under their own laws and

customs. Indigenous people seeking recognition of their contemporary native title rights and interests partake of a claims process that involves amassing information that will hopefully verify claimants' continuity of connection to the country of their ancestors.

This process can drag on. At the end of 2013, nearly eighteen years since native title claims were first lodged in the region, the Federal Court found that Aboriginal people on the far west coast of South Australia held native title rights and interests over approximately eighty thousand square kilometres.

Over those decades, many Ceduna Nungas drew on colonial records to revive an identity as 'Wirangu', an appellation that had largely fallen into disuse by the mid-twentieth century. There is no doubt engaging in this research was richly rewarding and revelatory for many. A wealth of archival information was brought to light as part of the research necessary to the formulation of a native title claim; in turn, many Indigenous people redefined themselves more strongly in 'tribal' terms, either electing to embrace a 'tribal' identity more fully than they had in the past, or changing the 'tribal' term to which they attached themselves. Auntie Sue's family, however, were reluctant to revise the terms of their self-understanding via engagement with the historical and anthropological records of the colonial period. They see themselves as Nungas who also 'always knew' themselves to be Kokatha people, living out their lives on Kokatha country and speaking the Kokatha language. As more and more Ceduna Nungas have (re)discovered their Wirangu-ness, to be Wirangu attained a kind of local moral and practical authority because, in narrow terms, Wirangu people were deemed 'traditional owners' of the coastal area where Ceduna is located.

The native title era, scholars agree, has intensified a process that began with the 1976 passage of the earlier Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory): 'traditional owner' status is elevated, coveted and can be bitterly fought over. Experiences of movement and dislocation, common to the colonial era, can render certain Indigenous groups unable to fulfil the legislative definitions of traditional owner, or to embody broader public expectations of what this category should mean. In Ceduna, Kokatha-identifying people, whose histories, families and genealogies are intimately bound up with those people who now identify as Wirangu, found themselves

positioned as people who *lack* traditional connections to the coast and to many specific places – including where they were born and brought up, as well as specific sites to which they express deep attachments and of which they have hold cultural knowledge. Aunty Sue perceives she has been asked to accept that the ‘traditional’ country of Kokatha people in fact lies far north of the familiar places she understands as her own.

The whole process, Sue says, divided ‘sister against sister’, and at its height saw opponents cross Ceduna’s main street to avoid contact with one another. Aunty Sue came eventually to eschew contact with the whole native title claimant group, which continued to meet both in order to finalise resolution of the claim and to negotiate with development interests. Importantly, this group was an amalgamated group, which joined together Wirangu, Kokatha and Mirning interests in recognition of the impossibility of disentangling a shared history and advancing a successful claim in exclusive terms: it was the primacy accorded to the category of Wirangu that Aunty Sue could not accept.

I found this fast-changing situation impenetrable for some time. Now that I have some understanding of it, albeit from an outsider’s perspective, I sometimes find myself explaining it to people who ask about my PhD research or the time I spent living in Ceduna. Anyone privy to local Aboriginal politics in the native title era – whitefella or blackfella – finds the scenario I describe depressingly familiar. However, others find Aunty Sue’s objections excessively obstinate or obscure. What’s at stake for Sue is best understood in the context of its longer historical resonance. As a girl, Sue was defined by the state as ‘half-caste’, and the spectre of removal stalked her childhood. In the 1950s, it was the Indigenous capacity to change, to emulate white social norms and to assimilate into white Australian society, that was most valued by the state. In response, Aunty Sue’s grandparents and others proudly instilled in her a strong self-understanding: she was Aboriginal, a Koonibba Nunga, as well as Kokatha. In the native title era it is the Indigenous capacity to satisfy the requirement of cultural ‘continuity’, to remain relatively ‘unchanged’ as it were, that is valued and rewarded through the native title claims process. Aunty Sue is intent on remaining loyal to the terms of her self-understanding and remains wary of invitations to fulfil the state’s revised image of desired

Aboriginality. Sue sees native title as another cruel state intervention into her self-understanding, which grants outsiders a role in defining her identity. In response, she staked out a local position 'against native title', insisting 'we know who we are'.

And Sue is a critic of more than the legislation's effects on Aboriginal people's identities and relations: on the one hand, the Native Title Act's 'right to negotiate' statutes compel mining companies to account for Indigenous interests in land, yet on the other compels Indigenous people to compromise on these interests as they accommodate extractive resource industry designs.

The Native Title Act's passing in late 1993 ushered in a period in which 'tribal' identities emerged as ascendant in Ceduna and were then concretised: 'tribal' affiliations became the basis of defining *differences* between family groups, who were previously defined in common as members of the 'Koonibba mob'. This period also saw an increased interest in exploring for minerals in the region. As legal scholar David Ritter has shown in *The Native Title Market* (UWAP, 2009), native title legislation provides claimants and holders with no rights to veto or consent to resource extraction and development. However, under the act, mining, among other land uses, triggers the opportunity for native title claimants or holders to negotiate compensation or 'benefit' packages with developers. The instruments of these rights are called Future Act Agreements and Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA). From Aunty Sue's perspective, native title is a system that has served to facilitate and expedite the expansion of the mining industry in her region at the cost of the destruction of precious country.

While Australia's latest and most lucrative mining boom is widely accepted to be over, the extensive exploration of the Ceduna region resulted in the development of one mine, Jacinth-Ambrosia, on the far western edge of the Yellabinna Regional Reserve, which started extracting the mineral sand zircon in 2009. In February 2016, the mine's owners, Iluka, announced a temporary suspension of mining activities at Jacinth-Ambrosia due to flagging global demand.

The atmosphere was optimistic, however, in December 2007, when the local native title claimants, whose interests were by then represented by an incorporated body called the 'Far West Native Title Group', signed an ILUA

covering Jacinth-Ambrosia. ILUAs are commercial and confidential, and as such are difficult to scrutinise in detail. What is publically known about this particular agreement is that the package of benefits included a target of 20 per cent Nunga employment at Jacinth-Ambrosia, which media releases state has been met since 2012.

Aunty Sue's family members staged a silent protest at the local footy oval where the signing took place in 2007. 'We don't have a political voice,' Sue told me. 'We don't have any rights at all because we won't join up with native title.'

What then?

AUNTY SUE DIRECTS her considerable energies into organising a twice-yearly cultural event. Every September, as the Seven Sisters first blink in the southern sky, and again in March, before they slide beyond view, she leads a camping trip 'out the back', into a series of 'multi-use' conservation parks, which also allow mining exploration. The trips, known as 'rock-hole recovery', entail six, sometimes seven days of four-wheel drive travel and involve visiting a series of rock-hole sites. Rock holes are permanent water sources scattered among semi-arid mallee woodlands and shrublands – some comprise a series of shallow pools, others are akin to deep wells.

Aunty Sue's family jointly undertake these rock-hole trips with urban-based conservationists, recruited through social media networks.

'I used to always go out the back and clean rock holes as we could,' she says.

When the volunteers became involved in 2006, 'we started the rock hole cleaning and maintenance in earnest then'. Volunteers are enjoined to assist in these practical tasks and, in the process, learn about the threats facing country. Over the years, this has served to build a non-local support base for Aunty Sue's opposition to mining, drawing in resources from afar.

Aunty Sue stresses the continuity between past practices and the present. In pre-contact times, these stores of water would have been vital to sustain mobile Indigenous groups living in a semi-arid region and were carefully nurtured. Sue, just like her forebears, clears rock holes of debris, such as animal remains, leaving them clear to be replenished by rainfall.

I came to see, however, that the rock-hole trips also arose as a response to Aunty Sue's family's frustration and disappointment with native title. When Aunty Sue and her family undertake trips out to country, they signal their rejection of what they see as the passive, even submissive, role of 'claimant'. Aunty Sue is defiantly assuming that she is entitled to enjoy and express her relationship to country, refusing to wait to be recognised and authorised to do so. Second, rock-hole recovery involves Aunty Sue's family group realising this relationship via physical activity. This sensory, sensual experience stresses a contrast between the process of outlining people-country relationships to satisfy the state's requirements in words, and the process of expressing and living this relationship with bodies. Finally, the tasks undertaken over the course of rock-hole recovery are highly symbolic. Rock-hole trip participants clean out permanent water sources, maintaining the ecological health of significant cultural sites they see as neglected by other Aboriginal people who assert a privileged relationship as 'traditional owner' with these places.

In September 2008, Aunty Sue first set participants the task of uncovering the edges of a small, partially obscured rock face. This was intended to unsettle the confidence with which the native title claimant group, from whom Aunty Sue separated herself, declared rock-hole sites identifiable and protected: a buffer surrounds them, prohibiting exploration within a zone proximate to the sites. But over the course of Aunty Sue's life, she says she has seen this particular rock hole shrink. She has watched a line of trees come 'marching down the hill' and start encroaching on the rock face. Indeed, other rock holes she remembers from her childhood, when Koonibba men took her on long hunting expeditions to supplement the mission's inadequate ration supply, can no longer be found at all.

That September, a ute loaded with shovels, brooms and kids trundled back and forth along the track from camp to the rock hole. The kids quickly set to work scooping the dirt out of what appeared to be superficial ponds. As it turned out, the ponds proved to be deep rock holes filled with compacted red sand, and rehabilitating them was heavy, hard work. A few of us started work on the edges of the rock face, scraping and digging away the layers of dirt, trying to trace its contours.

With brooms, trowels, shovels and even the jagged plastic remains of a broken bucket, trip participants scraped away layers of fine, red-brown dirt. Heavy mounds accumulated on tarps, which were spread out at the rock-hole's edge. Dirt was driven away.

On one occasion, Aunty Sue paused her sweeping and shook her head, feigning exasperation. 'Housework!' she exclaimed, leaning on a broom.

Two long afternoons and then a full day, from sun up to sun down, were spent digging out the rock hole, gradually seeing a pool emerge and the rock face take form. This immensely satisfying process is still underway, eight years later.

In digging out this specific site, Aunty Sue's actions symbolise a more general condition, which underlines her family group's opposition to mining. The country that sustained and was sustained by 'the old ways' is still there – it lies submerged rather than lost.

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FICTION

THE HONESTY WINDOW

REBEKAH CLARKSON

A SMALL PRINTED card offered extra towels, if they should need them. They hadn't been provided in the first instance, Leah read, because the guesthouse was eco-friendly. The card was cream coloured, expensive and embossed with an unfamiliar font. Leah rubbed the corner between thumb and forefinger, tilting her head to one side. Normally, she could pick card stock with her eyes closed. Oh well: she propped it back on the marble bathroom vanity, angled just so. In the mirror she caught a glimpse of her wrist tattoo, old and shabby, the black heart more blue smudge these days. She rotated her forearm back and forth, watching the tattoo appear and disappear in the mirror, like it belonged to someone else, someone a long way from here.

Leah was in the Barossa Valley, and this was the poshest guesthouse she'd ever seen. The only other time she was somewhere nearly as posh was their wedding night last year. They were in the city then, at the Hilton. She remembered Patrick telling her that hotels say 'eco-friendly' because it's trendy, when really they can't be bothered washing your extra towels. He was standing in a pair of green satin boxers when he said that. She remembered watching his clean, pale body as she folded the second-hand wedding dress and laid it in the pearly cardboard box provided by the hotel. How sure Patrick had

seemed then, how his eyes shone with certainty – about the towels, about all sorts of things.

He was asleep now. He lay stomach down, one arm dangling over the side of the bed, his face slack, lips fuller than usual. Patrick looked different asleep: loose, even the texture of his skin. Watching him sleep made Leah uneasy, as if she might be called upon for something she wasn't capable of. When Patrick was a newborn baby, his mother told her, he slept all day, and all she did was stare at him. 'Hours and hours,' his mother told her. 'And intuitively, I just did it intuitively. I didn't know anything about attachment theory back then.'

Shona had dropped in unexpectedly and seen the box of Pregnosis on their kitchen bench. Even though Leah and Patrick had said they weren't going to say anything until it had actually happened. It was an 'agreement'. So many agreements. Leah was left thinking, What the hell is attachment theory?

Getting pregnant was the reason they were here, but it didn't really make sense; the second MasterCard was for emergencies only. Patrick had said that, but then he used it to book them this suite. One night in this guesthouse was the same as a week's mortgage repayment. Plus, Leah could have got them something for under \$100 on lastminute.com that still would have been nice. Not as nice as this, for sure. She picked up the miniature toiletries, one by one, put them back down again. They were so much prettier than their full-size versions. Just like real babies. They were Aveda too. Expensive. Her mind wandered to eBay, as it did. With the insertion fees it was hardly worth it for something so small. If she had more, though, she could arrange them into gift packs, start them at .99 cents. They'd go off at .99 cents. Might finance an entrée in the restaurant, she thought ruefully, or one of those little chocolates with coffee. She slid her fingers down the smooth cabinetry and pushed: a gentle, satisfying *click*. She squatted to inspect the open cupboard: black hairdryer, single roll of toilet paper, a small pile of white paper bags. No stockpile of Aveda. Leah stood and let her eyes wander 360. She hadn't properly taken it all in when they'd first arrived, just a quick glance around before Patrick pulled her to the bed. He'd used the word 'weighty' as he placed their bags into

the alcove of the thick sandstone wall. ‘Weighty’ was a Shona word: odd – not one that people would normally use to describe a guesthouse. Patrick’s mother was a psychologist and had lots of ‘buzzwords’. Even still, Leah could see what Patrick meant: this place was weighty. The en suite was total luxury: white and cream and chrome. The spa bath was deep and long, big enough for two people lying head to toe. Above it was a tiled recess lined with glass jars filled with pastel-coloured salts and other jars holding unlit tea lights. A chrome rail-thing lay across the bath and held a bar of handmade-looking soap. An oversized yellow rubber duck sat next to the soap. The duck was purposely out of place, Leah knew that. It was meant as a novelty, like that artist-lady Shona always invited to her ‘soirees’: Tubby, Tabby, whatever her name was. Leah had casually asked how to spell it and then typed ‘soiree’ into her phone. Why don’t you just call it a BBQ? she wanted to say to Shona.

She undid the plush bathrobe she’d found on the bed and then pulled it in tighter round her waist. She didn’t feel like having a bath anymore. She checked her new Fiorelli watch – had only just stopped feeling guilty whenever she looked at it – five-thirty. Another one-and-a-half hours before dinner. She would wake Patrick in an hour, at the latest. They’d argued again till two this morning, the usual topics – sex (he said it was like she wasn’t *there*), finances (why were they going somewhere so expensive if they couldn’t even manage the mortgage?), her (he said ‘anger issues’).

The restaurant was part of the guesthouse, and sort of famous. It had been on *Postcards* on TV and also in the *SA Life* magazine she’d seen at the doctor’s. The magazine said it could be hard to get a booking in the restaurant, that you had to be organised and plan ahead. She and Patrick had a booking at seven.

Sex was out of the way. It was feeling more and more like the article said it would. The article was like a self-fulfilling prophecy. ‘Keeping Your Sex Life Alive While Coping With Infertility’ – it was by someone called Judith and she had a PhD about it. Judith said that sex was once spontaneous and fun and about passion and lust, but now it was more like a task and just about the calendar and when the woman

was ovulating. Leah was ovulating now, that was certain – she could feel it: the pulling ache down one side of her pelvis. It wasn't as if they'd had any of the tests yet – it was still early days. 'You're both very young,' the GP told them, and she managed to smile and frown with the one expression. 'We'll try for another twelve months before we'll start worrying about anything.' She said 'we' as if she'd be trying too. It was Patrick's idea that they see the doctor. He'd thought they'd get pregnant the first time he didn't use a condom.

It was just like Patrick to find that article. And to organise this. To try and find solutions for problems that didn't even exist. 'Somewhere really special,' he'd said. 'It'll be romantic, even if it doesn't happen.'

When Patrick talked like that – sentimental – Leah twitched and squirmed like the baby guinea pig those kids brought over to show after work last Friday. Those kids had no boundaries: they were always jumping the fence to show Leah and Patrick things – a gecko with no tail, new skateboards, boxes of fundraising chocolates – and the little one, the girl, she was too young to be jumping fences and visiting strangers' houses. Leah would know. 'You can have a hold of Cappuccino if you want to,' the boy had said. Leah put her hands in her pockets, in case he forced the guinea pig on her. She was slightly repulsed by the rodent-like thing, but she felt sorry for it too, writhing away in the kids' hot small hands.

LEAH WORKED AT Joe Barnett's printing shop: out the back. She told people 'retail' but really she was out the back, stacking and packing orders. When people asked Patrick and he said 'electrician' or 'sparky', Leah felt proud and annoyed. That was a proper job that needed a piece of paper. She'd left school at the end of Year 10, back when you still could – it was hardly a choice. If she had a chip on her shoulder for not finishing high school, the new night job at Coles wasn't helping.

Last week she'd seen Patrick's brother's new girlfriend in aisle four. Always 'Patrick's brother' when she thought of him now, never Scott. His girlfriend had described to Leah the shortfalls of the new beauty salon next door. It might be open after hours, she said, but it

was irrelevant because they were hopeless and that was why she had the big red blotch between her eyebrows: they'd practically *burnt* her with the wax. She could sue, probably. Leah had kept stacking. She liked the part where you lined the tins into perfectly neat rows and she didn't really blame the girlfriend for going on – it wasn't as if she had a uniform or anything.

'Oh! What're you doing?' the girlfriend said and only then did Leah remember her name: it was Jess. Patrick's brother had a new girlfriend every month.

'Working,' Leah said, 'I work here.' She laughed lightly.

'Oh. Oh! Sorry! I thought you worked at the printing place in the main street? Does Joe Barnett still own that?'

'Yeah.' Leah rolled her eyes. 'Mortgage.' She didn't say anything about trying for a baby. Jess nodded slowly, like she was doing quiet calculations.

Patrick's brother had a new franchise with Donut Delirium. Jess was the company's accountant and had helped with the start-up. Patrick's brother was always starting business ventures. 'The population up here is going off,' he told Leah, 'and you have to grab your market share.' Girlfriends were found wherever he went; the old were dumped, or he'd kid them up and try and keep two or more going at once. He found girls at The Barker, in cafes, down in the city at clubs, once on a football trip to Melbourne, a rodeo trip to Alice Springs, and once, half passed out on the street: that was Leah.

Leah was replaced by Kate, the American twice his age he met in Cambodia. Leah fell harder than anyone expected. In the space of two weeks, she lost six kilos and it showed. Shona had stroked Leah's cheek, said perhaps she might like to stay for a bit, to get back on her feet.

'Sometimes I'm scared my brother is amoral,' Patrick said to her. 'I mean, that he has no conscience. That he doesn't even care about other people.' He'd taken Leah to Millie's, where he bought her a hot chocolate and a shiny custard tart. She felt him staring at her mouth while she ate. She'd seen parents of small kids lean forward like that, watching every mouthful for the satisfaction of those calories in.

LEAH WALKED AROUND the bed and quietly pushed the louvred doors dividing the two rooms of the suite. She let her fingers drag across the black marble top cut around the stainless-steel sink. Everything in here felt like this: heavy, shiny, deep. The walls themselves would have to be a foot thick. Nothing was skimped, cut back or faked. Not like their house. They'd taken the cheapest option for everything and sometimes, no option at all: no flywire on any of the screen doors and no floor covering in the spare room, just bare cement. It wasn't like she had imagined, not perfect, with everything neat and clean and matching, like the Harvey Norman catalogues.

It all seemed so unbelievable in the beginning – an impossible fantasy – like pressing her face against the window of Deanne Helly's dollhouse; that girl didn't know she was alive. The one afternoon Leah had spent at Deanne's house had been a revelation. She'd wanted to shrink herself. She'd wanted to sit on one of those little burgundy velvet couches with the turned mahogany legs in that tiny perfect lounge room with the real wallpaper on all the walls. Her skin had tingled at the back of her neck, like it always did, when she wanted something badly. It travelled down her back, exactly the same, when she and Patrick drove around the new licorice-black streets of Gladeview Park estate.

Leah liked to chart the progress of other people's dreams. Up they went, frame by frame, brick by brick. Saturday afternoons she spent reading AVJennings floor-plan pamphlets like they were romance novels. It was her biggest, most consuming desire and the desire itself was soothing, a rush of calm, like a drug coursing her veins.

Patrick worked double shifts – he'd sold his car to pay his brother's creditors and there was the wedding too. And then, incredibly, Lot 39 was theirs. They had champagne with Shona and Patrick's brother and his new girlfriend Bec, manager at the new Gloria Jean's on Morphet Street.

For months, Leah and Patrick went to the lot alone, after work and on Saturdays and Sundays. They'd pick up McDonald's Meal Deals and have picnics there, play 'what room would I be in now in Blueprint 155 or Aurora 130?' games. They cancelled their Foxtel, stopped doing

Friday nights at The Barker, moved in with Shona. What they were building would be real and solid. That was how they felt, even though the walls of their new home were only paper thin.

Leah pushed her knee into the wall of the guesthouse and felt its resistance against the side of her hip. You couldn't dent these walls. At home, they cracked and collapsed against the heel of your shoe. Six weeks in the new house and there it was, the first splintered gash in the plasterboard.

Leah wanted to say this: it wasn't a big deal. It looked worse than it was, than it should have been, than she'd *meant* it. And it wasn't as if she'd hurt a person: it was a *wall*. Patrick was all wide-eyed and quiet. It would have been so much more straightforward if he'd yelled back, maybe kicked something too. But the hole was in the lounge room, at the front of the house – they'd gone with the Aurora 130 – where everyone could see it.

And so Leah had agreed to see Jane.

'Perhaps,' Jane offered, after their third session of going nowhere, 'perhaps you feel...angry that...do you think, maybe you feel some jealousy...toward Patrick?'

Leah turned her head and looked Jane in the eye. Jealousy toward Patrick? She wondered then if Jane had talked to Shona. Wasn't there a privacy thing, even if Shona was paying?

'Because, you know, that would be very understandable, Leah. Very understandable, when I think about some of the things you've told me, some of the things you've told me about your own childhood...all that *chaos*?'

Jane was leaning in, sitting on the edge of her trendy yellow chair. Leah saw that a strand of her frizzy orange hair was stuck to the corner of her mouth. She tried very hard to imagine all that hair straight. Would it even be possible, Leah wondered, to use a straightener on hair as frizzy as that?

Chaos? Jane didn't know the half of it, nobody did.

'Okay, then,' Jane said, crossing one leg over the other and leaning even further in, 'what is it about Shona, do you think, that makes you *soooo* mad?' Jane growled and huffed through the word 'mad', as if

Leah needed it acted out. Had she said that Shona made her mad? She couldn't remember, maybe she had. She looked around the room trying to remember how they'd got to here – had she missed something? She'd been thinking about what she'd put on Jane's desk, if it was her desk – certainly not that ugly ceramic elephant. Maybe an oversized hourglass, like the one in the gift shop that was always closing down.

'You love me, don't you, Leah?' She could barely look at Patrick when he'd said that. She'd been telling him about Jane's hair, about how orange and crazy and frizzy it was. Patrick often laughed at Leah's stories and impersonations. She thought he might find it funny, with her joke about Jane practically falling off her chair. They were pulling into the driveway. Those words came out of Patrick's mouth like they were spring-loaded.

'What?' Leah said, climbing out of the car, smoothing her jeans. 'What do you mean? Of course.'

LEAH HEARD RUSTLING and a small groan from the bed. Patrick had turned his body, shifted the pillow under his head and pulled the waffled blanket over himself. His eyes were still closed. It felt weird poking around the suite while he slept. She felt as if she was in a bubble, not really here, as though these moments didn't properly count for anything. She watched his bare shoulder roll faintly back and forth with his breath. Patrick had the same pale freckled skin as his dad, something Leah had learnt from photos. Patrick's dad wasn't dead but he was as good as dead (Shona's words). He'd run off with Heather Schmidt – one of his parishioners – when the boys were teenagers. The two families had been close friends. Back then, it was church on Sundays, youth group on Fridays, camping trips, car-pooling to footy practise and tennis clinics – even Christmas dinners together. It wasn't something they chose, Patrick's dad had explained to his family; it wasn't about choice. He told them that he and Heather were soulmates and were moving to Byron Bay. When he didn't come to Patrick and Leah's wedding (too difficult for everyone), he'd sent a long letter instead. They were building a straw-bale house, Patrick's dad wrote, and it was nearly finished. Patrick and Leah were invited to come and

stay. We both can't wait to meet her, the letter said. And the guest room, where they would sleep, had an 'honesty window', which meant they could look through it and see that the house really was made of straw. Patrick had laughed at that, hard and fast like a machine gun. Then he folded the letter over and over until it was a tiny square and tossed it in the drawer with his Duke of Ed certificates and old school reports. He'd barely seen his dad since he was sixteen, he told Leah.

Patrick was always meant to go to university. But then it was just about money and how to get it quickly. It was Shona who went in the end, starting with the STAT when the boys were finishing high school and then slogging away until she had an undergraduate science degree and then honours and then her proper psychology degree. Everything about his mum had changed, Patrick told Leah, even her hair and the way she dressed. My mum is amazing, Patrick told Leah.

The boys were still part of the youth group, were still going to their dad's old church when first Leah turned up, skinny and gothic and tied to nothing and no one. 'You, young lady, are staying for dinner,' Shona said when Scott brought her home like a stray mangy cat. Then Shona said, 'Lasagne!' like it was a big announcement and she pulled a massive pyrex dish out of the oven like she was used to feeding football teams, as if she was the greatest woman who ever lived. Garlicky beef and burning cheese and smoky acidic tomatoes filled Leah's nose and she realised she was starving but also nauseous and weirdly light-headed. Scott's hand resting inside her thigh under the table. Patrick watching her and his brother from the opposite side.

LEAH KNEELED TO open the bar fridge. It fit neatly inside a mahogany sideboard, custom made, no doubt. French champagne, a row of three whites, two cans each of tonic water and dry ginger ale, a block of Green & Black's organic dark chocolate, and a small stainless-steel carafe three-quarters filled with milk. She closed the door, stood up. Above the sideboard was a wall-mounted shelf holding two hardcover books on luxury ecological hotels of the world. Next to these was a line-up of miniature bottles – tiny spirits and liqueurs. She reached for the Belvedere vodka. Ran her thumb

over the embossed white winter-tree branches wrapping the bottle. This wasn't shoplifting, because you were *supposed* to help yourself to a minibar. But the impulse felt familiar. Anyway, she'd cut back on that – just a few small things – watches, bracelets, rings, and only when she was down in the city. She never did it in Mount Barker and only did the chains: Witchery, Sportsgirl, Diva, Dotti. Most of it she sold in the evenings, on eBay, when Patrick was watching TV. It was only keeping things that made her feel guilty.

She twisted the tiny black lid, split the paper label and pulled out the miniature cork. Vodka hit the back of her throat and spilled across her lips. She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, jaggling her lower lip with her engagement ring. She pressed a palm to her lip and laid the empty bottle at the bottom of the small black bin, carefully covering it with a tourist brochure. She reached for the mini single-malt whisky, split the foil lid and drank that too. Then the Bombay Sapphire gin, in its pretty turquoise bottle. The Cointreau rolled sickly sweet in her mouth and burnt the back of her throat.

She tried to remember how last night's arguing had started, but all the words – his and hers – seemed grainy, blurred, like they had no meanings. She tried to bring them forward for close inspection, tried to remember why she was trying. This was how she felt when Jane did the hypnosis. Jane said hypnotherapy could be very useful with memory trauma, though she didn't use it with everybody. Jane wanted Leah to relive the whole thing with her mum and the boyfriend with the Kawasaki 250, from when she was five and they were at the river. She still had the burn scar, mottled and sloppy, like she'd spilt her own skin down her ankle.

Jane wanted Leah to *talk* to her five-year-old self, to comfort and reassure her, to tell her that she was safe now, that she could leave all that hurt – all that *chaos* – behind. Over and over Jane droned on: *all is well, all is well*. Leah lay back in the recliner like Jane said, closed her eyes even, breathed in that slow, measured way. She imagined stacking tins of tuna and cans of chopped tomatoes and boxes of Barbecue Shapes. It was like one of those old-fashioned video games and she had to stop them crashing down, *blip-blip-blip*, as she stacked.

When Jane asked in that flat, funny voice she was using for the hypnosis, ‘Can you see her, Leah?’

Leah had whispered, ‘Yup.’

‘Why don’t you hold her hand?’ Jane had suggested then.

What? Leah thought: *I don’t want to hold her stupid hand.*

‘Okay,’ she’d said, clearing her throat, and Jane whispered: ‘Great.’

LEAH ROLLED HER tongue across her lip, blood metal and the beginnings of a blister. She pressed her finger into the puffy rise and then moved her hand away, stretching it in front of her. Her fingers were long and fine – ‘Piano hands!’ Shona had declared on that first night, clutching them in her own and giving them a squeeze.

Leah wriggled her fingers, as if she were playing piano midair. Her engagement ring and wedding band swung around, still too loose, even though they’d been refitted twice now.

Patrick had bought the diamond ring without her knowing – without anyone knowing – secretly had put it on lay-by at Sheils and paid it off slowly.

One night in the middle of summer Patrick took her to a Thai restaurant down in the city (Leah had never eaten lemongrass and he couldn’t believe it). On the way back up the freeway he’d turned off at Eagle on the Hill. The air was still, as though a breeze had never blown and never would again. She was wearing a floral dress with a girlish bow tied at the back, found at the op shop and not really her style. Her thighs were sticky with sweat, her stomach bloated from all the rice.

And then Patrick was kneeling in front of her, one knee up, like in fairy stories and movies. ‘Leah,’ he said, and he pulled the red velvet jewellery box from his jeans pocket. Later she realised he must have had it there all night. All through her talking about moving to Darwin and the things she said about Scott. ‘I can make you happy,’ Patrick told her. ‘You should marry me.’ He opened the box, took out the ring, and said it again: ‘I can make you happy.’ Then he slid it onto her finger, where the diamond swung around and hung loosely out of sight. ‘We can get it resized!’ he laughed, as if he’d solved the only thing that would ever stand in their way.

She wanted to slow everything down. She wanted to catch up. She wanted to say: *Wait! I don't feel well. I don't like this dress. It's too hot. My mascara is all smudged.*

She kissed him.

And then Patrick became all serious. 'Leah, I believe something,' he said. He held her face in his hands. 'I believe that we're *meant* to be together. We're *meant* to get married.'

She nodded, lowered her brow and said, 'Yeah.'

The effect was like a spreading virus. For a moment she was quiet, transfixed by the notions assembling in her mind. 'Imagine...' she said, and she looked into his shining eyes, beads of sweat pooling in their corners. 'Imagine...' she said again, '...if I'd never left Sydney? If I'd never come up here that night, no idea where I was? Patrick, you know I had no idea where I was! Imagine if your brother hadn't seen me at the bus stop? Imagine if I'd never stayed, never gone to the youth group? Imagine if you'd stayed home that Friday night? If you hadn't played that game of footy? If you'd still been on crutches? Imagine if none of those things had happened?' And she laughed, incredulous, amazed.

Scott's new girlfriend – Kate – and that stupid holiday in Cambodia, was suddenly, strangely irrelevant. All the other girls too. Then and there, Scott became 'Patrick's brother'.

Leah could still recall the fleet of expressions that passed over Shona's face when they got home and announced the news and presented Leah's new ring. Patrick's mother turned Leah's hand in hers, and stared hard at the diamond as it slid around, back and forth like it was a small but dangerous creature that had made its way into her home. Very softly, her voice strange and high at the end, she said, '*Patrick.*'

LEAH TURNED AWAY from the sideboard and the fridge and the shelf and leant across the small breakfast table, toward the covered window. The man in Curtains and Blinds had demonstrated raising a roman blind when they'd gone in for a quote last year.

'There's no point, then, is there?' Patrick said after they'd moved into their new house. 'No point in saving for that blind.' It was a question, but his voice was pleading.

‘What d’you think?’ Leah had shot back. ‘Jeez, Patrick, they were just shitty old sheets. I wouldn’t have done it if we had the new blind. As if I would’ve ripped a new blind.’ Part of her believed it. She did lose her shit sometimes, it was true, and she wasn’t proud of it, but it was never at people. And apart from the hole in the lounge room wall, the only other holes were in the wall of their walk-in ’robe, not in any public space. Not anywhere people could see.

So they still had ugly old sheets tacked over all their windows. In winter, it would be freezing.

She angled and pulled the cord on the Roman blind and wound its slack around the bird-shaped chrome hook. Her mouth pushed against a smile. It had to be the prettiest time to come to the Barossa Valley. Row after row of shiraz vines, some with leaves still in faded green, others deep red or burnt orange, others completely naked, with dark, knotted limbs. Streaks of sunlight cut through the vines and the grey of the cool afternoon. Small brown sparrows hopped and dipped through leaves littering the ground. The perfect place to make a baby. Beautiful Patrick was right, absolutely right. Coming here was an excellent idea. She wondered why she’d questioned it? Because being here did make sense. The skin around her cheekbones slackened, her shoulders dropped in that familiar and lovely way. Her breath was slow and relaxed. She had a thought about alcohol but it was vague. Was it something she’d discussed with Patrick? Jane? Or maybe it was both?

No, that’s right. She remembered. You weren’t supposed to drink alcohol when you were pregnant or trying to be pregnant. Or was it only when you were actually pregnant? She checked her watch. And that. She would stop. The shoplifting was just a little habit, like those women who ate too many carbs and those men who looked at too much porn. Something she could control, absolutely.

She made her way to the bed where Patrick was sleeping. She lay down next to him and pushed her face into the back of his neck. He groaned and reached a hand behind him, placed it across the back of her thigh and gently squeezed. ‘Hey, baby,’ she said.

He flipped his body over so that his face was close to hers. 'Hey, yourself.' He pulled her in closer and she giggled and then lifted her head and found his mouth with her tongue, warm and sour.

He pushed her back to the length of his pale, freckled arm. She ran her hand back and forth across his bicep, arched her neck.

He grabbed her hand still and held it up high. Awake now, he propped on his elbow. 'Leah! Really? Spirits? Fuck.' He flung himself back down on the bed, ran a hand through his hair and then covered his face.

She didn't want him to be sad or cross. She smiled. Yes, she'd been drinking. She was probably drunk. But it felt good. He should see the view from their window. She moved her hands over his chest and hooked her foot over his ankle.

'Leah, please. What are you doing? How long have I been asleep? An hour? I thought you were going to have a bath. You said you were going to have a bath. We were... Don't you want...?' He made a sound as though he were trying to lift something beyond his strength. He pushed her away and sat up on the bed with his head in his hands. He stayed like that for a long moment, and she worried that he might be crying. She hated it when Patrick cried. Then he stood quickly, walked into the en suite. She heard his feet padding around on the marble tiles. She heard him say, 'God. We had an agreement.'

She sat up on the bed. Tucked her hands under her thighs.

Patrick reappeared in the doorway. 'Leah.' He often did that: said her name at the beginning of sentences, like people did with children. 'This has got...'. He ran a hand roughly over his face. 'This stuff has got to end. I can't keep doing this. Feeling like I'm living in a... I dunno. I don't know. I don't even know. What you're going to do next.' His eyebrows were bunched, his teeth chewed his bottom lip. 'Leah,' he said again, and this time his voice broke on it. 'I need to know if...'. He gulped for air, his pale, freckled chest puffing and then deflating.

'Patrick, I just had a couple of drinks. S'fine. You should have one too. You need to relax.' She pushed herself back onto the bed and circled her stomach with her hands. Imagine if there was a baby in there now. Imagine if an egg had met a sperm and their cells were

multiplying together right now, forming an embryo, a zygotey thing-amajig...right now, as she lay on this bed. Imagine what they would tell everyone. A baby. She wanted to say this to Patrick, to paint a picture of this possibility, to cheer him up. She heard him slap the doorframe with his palm. Then he knocked his head against the wall.

He said her name again. 'I need to know if you love me, Leah. If you want to be with me. Please. Just tell me if you love me. You never say it, Leah.'

This again. It always came back to this. She sat up. 'I do. I do say it, Patrick. God.'

He raised his arms, hooked them over the frame of the doorway and shook his head in disbelief, a small, sad smile across his lips.

'Okay. I love you. Alright?'

'I need to know how you love me.'

'Huh?'

'How do you love me?' His voice was urgent.

'I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you mean, Patrick.' She felt her forehead tighten above her eyes.

'How? Please. You said you love me. But how do you love me? Like a friend? Like a brother? Like a father?' He slammed the palm of his hand against the doorframe again. 'Just say it. Say it. I need to know.'

'Patrick. Calm down. I had a couple of drinks. It's not that bad. Shit. I thought we were supposed to be relaxing. Making a baby, whatever. I thought this was what this...was all supposed to be. Arghhh!' She put her hands through her hair. It felt thin and greasy, and she remembered vaguely that she was going to wash it in the bath.

'I need to know, Leah: *how* do you love me?' His jaw was clenched. His eyes dark and strangely wide.

Leah felt sick. 'Alright! Okay, okay.' She thought she might vomit. 'I love you like...'. She searched herself. She realised that it was like something. She stood, swayed slightly, felt the robe loosen and fall off her left shoulder.

If she hadn't drunk the spirits, she'd probably be able to think of what it was, how she loved Patrick, work this out. Because she did

love him. But something had been buzzing in the back of her mind since she saw that rubber duck sitting on the bath in the en suite. Something she'd forgotten, from a long time ago. A specific, little memory. Somehow it seemed relevant to this very important question that needed an answer, though she wasn't sure how.

She'd been alone. Had she thought to call the police? Unlikely. But she was too little to be alone. She must have called the police. Well, someone did. Was she seven? Eight? They'd come and picked her up. She sat in the back of the police car, and they drove in the dark across the city. She'd watched the lights blur into one straight neon line of red and blue, green and white. It must have been emergency foster care, just one night. There were a few of them, nights like that, but only once to this woman's house. Her name was Jean and she didn't have a husband, but she did have a glass-fronted cabinet filled with tiny dolls from all around the world. Her husband used to collect them for her, before he 'passed', Jean said. She let Leah touch them. Dolls in kimonos, in German dancing dresses with their hair in perfect plaits, hair in sleek buns with blunt black fringes. She stroked them and turned them in her hands and lined them up and rearranged them.

Then Jean had run her a bath. The bath was deep and pale pink. The tiles on the walls and floor were shiny black and the whole room was huge, bigger than any bathroom Leah had ever seen before. She sat up in the bath, straight backed, her thin hair tickling her dry shoulders. There was a rubber duck in that bath, probably put there as a toy for kids like her. Leah had watched it bob around her with its black beady eyes and its cold plastic body and she'd thought: *Orphan*. Being in that big bathroom naked and all alone with that rubber duck had somehow made her feel like an orphan. But not in an entirely bad way. The thought had given her a shiver and for a moment made her feel dramatic and curious. It was a strange mix of feelings.

Jane would love that.

Leah focused her eyes and saw that Patrick had clenched his hand into a tight fist. He slammed it into the doorframe, hard. It made a loud whump, a sickening crunch, like a small bird hitting a window. He pulled his fist back and pushed it hard into his forehead. Blood

trickled through the cracks between his fingers, down to his head and across the length of his eyebrow. He pursed his lips, blinking furiously as the blood reached his eye.

‘Like my Grade 4 teacher.’

Patrick groaned. ‘What?’

‘Patrick. I loved my Grade 4 teacher. He was my hero. He taught me everything about the solar system.’ She flung her arms wide to demonstrate the hugeness of the solar system.

‘Jesus.’

Patrick slid down the doorframe, squatting in his boxer shorts, his hand holding his head, clutching at his ginger hair. He leant back into the en suite and reached for a handtowel, wrapping it thickly around his fingers.

Leah slunk to the floor next to him. He dropped down, let his legs flop loosely out in front, rested his head on the doorframe and closed his eyes. Leah picked up his bound hand and unravelled the towel. The fine hairs on his fingers were matted in blood, the white skin across his knuckles split and jagged.

‘Oh, Patrick. Look what you’ve done,’ she crooned. She turned over his hand. ‘Look, it’s okay, okay? Trust me.’ She lifted his chin, and he opened his eyes, squinting as though he were looking into a bright light. ‘Look what you’ve done,’ she said again, and she tutted and clicked her tongue. She moved his hand – limp and unresisting – across her body and placed it on her lower belly. Fresh blood from his knuckles streaked across the velvety white bathrobe. ‘Look. We’re going to have a baby, Patrick. A baby.’ She spoke slowly and firmly, as though Patrick might be waking from a deep sleep. Leah held his hand on her stomach and looked into his face. ‘You still don’t get it, do you? I honestly loved my Grade 4 teacher, Patrick.’

She rocked forward and arched her head around the corner to the kitchenette. The window was almost black now, the vines barely visible. Without the playfulness of light, they were just shadowy outlines, their branches menacing limbs. She leant back against the wall, Patrick’s arm secured across her body with her elbow, his hand still resting across her belly. His head was angled awkwardly against

the doorframe, his eyes were closed again, his breath slow and shallow. Then he cupped his hand and gripped the hollow at her waist. He lifted his other arm wedged behind her back and wrapped it round her shoulders. He pulled her into his chest and buried his face into the top of her head. She felt his lips on her scalp.

Leah held the Fiorelli watch up to her face. It was well past seven. They'd missed their booking. They wouldn't be having tea in the famous restaurant. They would stay here in this room then, just the two of them. She wasn't hungry anyway. She snuggled back into Patrick's warm body. She felt the thumping of his heart against her shoulderblades, felt it begin to slow and then, a little later, she noticed that it matched exactly the gentle measured beating of her own heart.

Rebekah Clarkson's award-winning short fiction has been published widely, most recently in *Best Australian Stories 2014* (Black Inc.), *Australian Book Review* and *Something Special, Something Rare* (Black Inc., 2015). She lives in the Adelaide Hills. 'The Honesty Window' is taken from *Barking Dogs*, her debut novel-in-stories published with Affirm Press.

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