



Australian Women's Book Review

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The Tree-of-Life Sends its Energy Underground (2016)

Kathryn Brimblecombe-Fox

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Editorial

By Carole Ferrier

Kathryn Brimblecombe-Fox's painting, on this cover of the *AWBR*, from her "Dronescares" series, encourages meditation upon the application of technological advances, specifically within the history of warfare. It depicts militarised drones—machines that deliver weapons. Their deployment for targeted attacks in remotely controlled strikes has developed and increased over time since the second Gulf War. During the presidency of Barack Obama, counter-insurgency airborne drone measures in undeclared battlefields purported to minimise civilian casualties. However, these strikes have given rise to urgent questions about the identification of terrorists, since any male close to a target can fall into the category of "terrorist," whereas a female or a child in the vicinity is less likely to be categorised in this way. Other justifications for this style of drone warfare are that they can prevent planned attacks on local populations, and save the lives of American warfighters or others from the "free world" who may have their "boots on the ground" near the target or "kill zone." The remote nature of drone operation also removes pilots from possible harm or death, thus minimising American citizenry concerns about sending troops to fight and die in distant wars.

The recent film *Eye in the Sky* depicts the use of drones for surveillance that enables targeting of individuals for assassination. Drone technologies have experienced accelerated development over the last decade; drones resembling small birds or insects that can carry out the type of surveillance shown in the film are now being developed and used, including in swarm situations. Surveillance drones can also be equipped with lethal weaponry. However, surveillance on its own contributes to intelligence that assists in target identification.

Skunk Drones, produced in South Africa, are used in India in Uttar Pradesh by the police force; they can be flown over demonstrations and fire paintballs or tear gas pellets. Apart from the military, the other "armed bodies of men" that maintain or extend the power and hegemony of the rulers of nations, in countries with capitalist or state capitalist economies, are the police forces. Angela Davis in 2001 described the United States as "a prison industrial complex," and the Indigenous incarceration rates in Australia would suggest that term is also applicable here. Policing, in various

countries, is also becoming more “robotised.” Robots can of course serve generally useful, peaceful purposes, such as the removal in Hanover of World War Two bombs, or of landmines in Cambodia, that never exploded, but at the same time there is a market for new inventions, such as the first Tactical Combat Robot, built in Israel, that can fire 14 rounds of ammunition, or pepper spray or blinders, its quiet manoeuvres, including indoors or underground, directed from a remote screen.

Karl Marx suggested that those people who were irrelevant to, or an impediment to, capitalism’s advances were viewed in its logic as “surplus populations”; in more recent times, Ian Shaw suggests, these populations are positioned in a “necropolis” of those seen as “socially dead” that embodies “a rematerialisation of a social war between a fortified bourgeoisie and a planetary surplus population.” Refugees (those separated from their original home) and those who are unemployed, disabled or aged (those with no or less-productive work) exemplify, he argues, the two categories of “the exiled and the disposable”; a haunting spectre presenting impediments to capital accumulation and the (apparent) social cohesion of the “strong state.” These populations are problematic for producing the most unfettered and efficient profit extraction as possible; surveillance and containment is, accordingly, increasingly important, since the state maintains its production (and choices) of energy and goods, through its notions of “jobs and growth.”

Life on the Earth depends upon water; severe drought, combined with military conflict, has produced major famines and the displacement of millions of people, most recently in South Sudan and Yemen. The Queensland government, apparently considering “its” water inexhaustible, has promised Adani Enterprises all the water they want (estimated at 26 million litres a day by 2019), free of controls, for the huge new coalmine proposed in the Galilee Basin, inland from Rockhampton. Agriculturalists are concerned about the impact in relation to the groundwater upon which crops, vegetation and animals depend. Adani is already being investigated in India for bribery and corrupt business practices, in relation to other ventures. The Adani companies in Australia, established for the rail link to the mine, are owned by a tax haven in the Cayman Islands, Atulya Resources, and hence probably would not be liable for environmental damage or pollution such as has already occurred at the wetlands and turtle breeding areas, and on the Reef, around the Abbot Point coal terminal.

Brimblecombe-Fox's painting on our cover also depicts the reaction of the Tree-of-Life (a symbol of the interconnectedness of lifeforms on the planet) to the latest embodiment, in the drones, of the military industrial machine. An increasing urgency about how rapidly the climate is changing, and how the Anthropocene seems on a path that threatens the survival of all species, including the human, has been articulated by Clive Hamilton who suggests that "world futures ... clashing civilisations and machines that take over the world" are being discussed without vision by "futurologists trapped in an obsolete past ... as if climate scientists do not exist. It is the great silence."

Ann Jones has documented on Radio National some of the rise of environmental consciousness in Australia; she gives a quaint example from before the well-known protests--as Green Parties began to emerge in Europe and also Australia from the 1960s. The English arrived in 1803, and begun to build their settlement on the Hobart Rivulet. At the laying of the foundation stone for the first reservoir for Hobart, governor Fox Young spoke like this;

Water is a gift from heaven, and the water's blessings will be to rich and poor alike, supplying baths, wash houses and fountains.

The clean, pure, cool, invigorating unpolluted waters, which these waterworks are designed to protect, should be surrounded by a plantation...of trees, shrubs, flowers and green grass—all suggesting the higher and more enduring life of Man, which like water, springs from Earth, but has its origin in Heaven.

The Bower, surrounded by five metre-high ferns became, back then, a place for weekend bushwalking, by the white settlers, around the Reservoir and pipelines.

Along with Green Parties elsewhere, in mid-1960s Australia the Greens emerged out of organisation against the interruption of the Franklin and Tamar rivers and the huge national campaigns against the Dam, eventually ended with a 4-3 vote in the High Court that allowed the Federal government, and Bob Hawke, to stop it proceeding.

Marilla North, reviewing Anne McLeod's biography of Marie Byles, draws out Byles's contribution to women's participation in originally all-male bushwalking groups around Sydney in the 1920s, their formation of women's bushwalking groups, and how Byles

became, perhaps, “the first environmental lawyer” in Australia. North also quotes a recommendation that Byles made in 1945 in relation to National Parks that resonates remarkably with our own times:

personally conducted parties led by scientists would be the most acceptable of all visitors... After all why should Man in his arrogance say that primeval lands are of value only insofar as they subserve his ends... Cannot Man, for once, admit that there are other things beside himself with rights, and that he is not the only being in the universe.

Donald Trump's accession to the American presidency, with an expressed disdain for climate science and for the Environmental Protection Agency (handed to Scott Pruitt and Reince Priebus to be re-oriented towards “growth and jobs”), now threatens to withdraw the United States from the undertakings of the Paris Accord to reduce carbon emissions and turn away from fossil fuels and oil pipelines towards clean(er) energy sources. The triumph of Trump (temporary, but already having reversed many forward directions) has also been threatening the escalation of serious tensions about nuclear armaments that recall those in the 1950s, when Simone de Beauvoir and many others thought a third world war would soon come, and Doris Lessing published in 1962 *The Golden Notebook*, whose central character Anna was preoccupied (along with sexual politics and gendered constructions of what might be called “madness”) by opposing militarism and nuclear weapons and joining the Aldermaston marches. Lessing wrote in her new Preface to the novel in 1971 that what she thought was coming would make what she understood as feminism look “small and quaint.” Feminism, in its continuing development, and its influence over, or in, other critical currents has I think proved her wrong since gender analysis can be seen to be indispensable in considering solutions to almost every social problem, though often not used with the depth and comprehensiveness that feminist scholars call for.

Lessing also read with attention and apprehension the American marine biologist and conservationist Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), a book dealing with the impact of pesticides on the whole ecosystem, including humans, that was influential in the rise of the environmental movement--partly because of a hostile onslaught on it from chemical companies, Monsanto in particular. DDT was banned in the United States in

1964, but the chemical companies, including Dow, would find new markets during the Vietnam War.

An inspiring narrative of what Carson called “the wonder of the natural world” is the story of a bird given the name E7 and the scientific documentation of her migratory journeys with flocks of bar-tailed godwits over the ocean between continents. Every year, 70,000 godwits (a large number, but half as many as ten years ago) make the journey from their Northern summer breeding grounds in Alaska in September and fly back from New Zealand the following March. E7, tagged and tracked by satellite, flew 10,200km from New Zealand to a wetland on North Korea’s border with China and, after feeding and resting, flew another 5,000km to Alaska. Aided by tailwinds, she made the return trip of 11,500km without stopping at all. E7 “slept” by shutting down one side of her brain alternately, and burnt up 50% of her body fat for energy; the birds navigate by analysing polarised light to orient to the sun by day and follow the stars at night, it is thought. “They can work out where North is but presumably they have to learn a Southern Hemisphere compass as well. It’s not good looking for the North Star in New Zealand,” says Paul Battley at Massey University; “it shows how incredible and extreme birds can be” (*National Geographic News* 14 September 2007).

Increasing knowledge and developing critiques of the uses of technology for, or with, destructive or damaging purposes in relation to human or animal life have given a new importance and relevance to traditional and continuing Indigenous practices of such things as ecology, conservation, land management and astronomy. Carson’s *Spring* is “silent” because the birds are gone. Indigenous Australian women writers recount the old stories in contemporary voices. As examples, in Melissa Lucashenko’s novel *Mullumbimby* (2013), the presences and the voices of birds are central in the landscape. Alexis Wright uses parables of birds as leading participants in her fiction, in her first novel *Plains of Promise* (1997) and, in particular, *The Swan Book* (2013) stories of bird migrations that might sound almost legendary have turned out to be true. The telling of stories counterposed to patriarchal narratives of war machines and perverted technologies remains a line of powerful resistance in the troubled times.

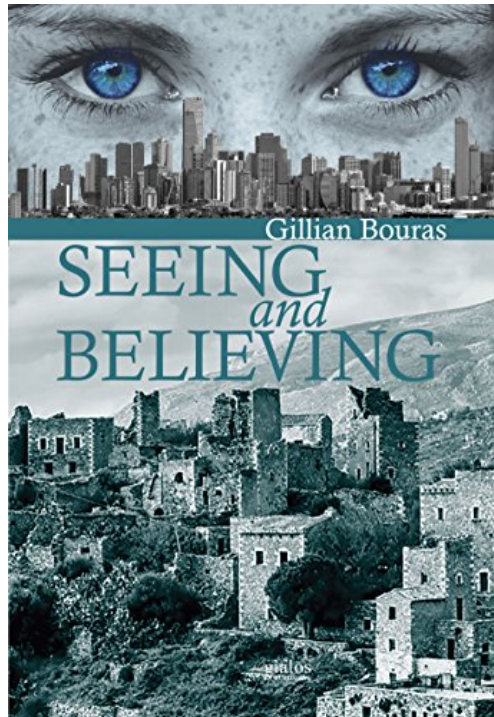
The Conspiracy of Beauty in Greece

Gillian Bouras. *Seeing and Believing*

Athens: Gialos Publishing, 2016.

Available on Amazon and from the publisher

Reviewed by Jena Woodhouse



SEEING and Believing, Gillian Bouras's sixth book drawing on her experiences and observations of life in general, and life in rural Greece in particular, offers fresh pleasures and perspectives both to her first-time readers and her long-time admirers. That it succeeds in doing so is due to the quality of her writing, which has never been better, and her perspicacity and capacity for reflection, which have never been more compelling.

I am, broadly speaking, of a demographic to which this book is likely to appeal, being of a similar age to the author and having spent ten years in Greece. However, my experience of Greece was principally urban and Athens-based, so differing in many respects from Gillian's; and in Australia I grew up in the bush, while Gillian spent much of her life in Melbourne. There are nonetheless points of convergence, in that we both enjoy walking in the Greek countryside and are both captivated by the natural beauty of Greece (what Gillian calls "the conspiracy of beauty in Greece"), while being mindful of its harsher realities. But the glimpses and vistas of and from the Peloponnesian village which Gillian called home for more than three decades are all her own, and distil the vividness of immediate observation with reflection on what is observed. Her delight and interest in all manner of subjects, and the literary resources with which she

communicates her perceptions in such a way as to engage the reader's imagination, so that he/ she, too, sees and believes, lie at the heart of this chronicle (loosely speaking) of family, friends, communities, animals, gardens, loves and griefs, seasons and journeys, language and literature, memories and stories.

While the writing flows easily from topic to topic – embracing the dual homelands of Greece and Australia in its scope and rhythms – sorrows and heartache, the author's and others', are also present as threads of more sombre hue, interwoven with the intense colours and luminescence of the Greek *topos* and the differing textures that form the familiar fabric of Australian experience.

Migrants are like Heathcliff's Cathy, tapping persistently at the window of the past. They realise they can never truly go home again, yet their hearts and spirits continue to yearn. (29)

... goodbyes have become an integral part of my life, to the point that I hear that ghostly and inevitable whisper at the very moment that I am saying hello: sometimes I think of my heart as a vast echo-chamber of farewells. (64)

* * * *

"Anthropologically speaking, the outsider is both dangerous and in danger. I should know." (26)

When her mother-in-law asserts that Gillian, as her daughter-in-law, is different from other "foreigners," even those from a village two kilometres away, her words "You're different, you're **ours**," elicit an uneasy response. "I felt I was different, obviously, but I didn't feel I was **theirs**. And those feelings remain until this day. I am different; I am most emphatically **not theirs**" (68).

A significant part of that difference lies in **not** being born into a world where cultural constraints, especially in relation to women, are not challenged by those born to the culture in question, but are often flouted by the author, a woman from a culture which does not impose those particular constraints. So it is that Bouras makes it her practice to go for long walks during the customary siesta time, and often in places where it is not customary for villagers to go for walks, such as the *remma*, the branching gully that cuts through the village. Her husband's initial reaction to this had been consternation. "What will people think? What will they say?" (96). These questions

circumscribe women's lives in the village, whereas for Bouras, the imperative is framed antithetically, and in terms that resonate strongly with me, as an Australian of rural origins: "If I can just get out the front door everything will be all right" (119).

For women like Kyria Aphrodite, Gillian's mother-in-law, walking was associated with working – fetching water from the well, for there were no taps in her house until 1975; tending the grapevines and cutting fodder for the animals, harvesting the olives and a host of other chores. Women did not walk for pleasure or for the good of their health, and were not seen abroad without a legitimate reason, so Gillian's habits to the contrary were regarded as eccentric. We learn, too, that Kyria Aphrodite possessed neither clock nor watch, having no need of, or use for, such devices, since, according to the author, "traditional people make no real division between working time and free time. Traditional life does not measure time according to commercial value; rather, it follows the beat of the seasons and the liturgical year" (72).

An important part of the liturgical year is Lent, and we are told that it is a Lenten custom in some parts of Greece to plait bracelets out of strands of red and white cotton, to be worn from the first of March until the first swallow appears, when "you cut the bracelet off your wrist and hang it on a branch of the nearest tree, so that the swallow will have something with which to start building its nest" (92).

Another tradition associated with Lent is that of *Kyra Sarakosti* (the Lenten Lady):

In the days before calendars and diaries, Greek housewives would bake themselves a biscuit figure of Kyra Sarakosti as a way of keeping track of the weeks of Lent. Kyra was pictured without a mouth, because Lent is not a time for eating ... things one likes. Her hands are demurely crossed on her breast, for Lent is a time for prayer and self-examination. And she has seven feet.

Every Saturday, with one week elapsed, ... housewives would cut one foot off the biscuit. The last foot was cut off on Holy Saturday, Easter Eve. Then it would be tucked into a dried fig, which would be placed among many others; whoever selected the special fig ... was assured of good luck. (92-93)

Yet, even as Bouras reserves for herself the vantage point of the perennial outsider, she is privy to the rites and secrets of a world outsiders are seldom privileged to

witness. Even something so basic as routine ablutions proved more arduous and complicated in the village context:

When I was first here ... just having an all-over wash ... took a whole morning ...

In winter-time, it was a case of first light your fire, then fill the cauldron with water from the cold-water tap, and then wait an interminable time for the water to heat to something resembling lukewarmth. While waiting you readied all the necessities for ablution, including a small wooden trough which gave standing-room only, and a tin dipper.

There was no bathroom, so you bolted yourself into the area above the donkey's stall; he gazed and brayed while the wind whistled through numerous cracks in walls and door. You had your bucket of warm water and dipper ready and you stood in the little trough, which was less than six inches deep, and poured and soaped and poured again. You turned blue; you did not muck about: this wash could take as little time as three minutes after a morning's preparation. (71-72)

The wealth of detail about local lore and practices includes an account of the sand baths indulged in by the elder village women.

In the summer months of long ago the old yiayiades would cram into the village bus and head for the beach early. They would hold each other up, laughing at their own boldness, as they went, step by hesitant step into the very mild waters of the Gulf of Messenia. None of them could swim: all wore extremely modest black bathers, usually home-made, and cartwheels of straw hats secured under the chin with stout elastic bands. Gentle exercise was the thing, along with lots of gossipy chatter ... they would emerge and move on to the next stage of the proceedings: the sand bath. There were rows of hats and black tops visible: the rest of all those creased and dimpled bodies, worn-out by constant hard work and all-too-frequent childbirth, were buried up to the waist in sand. The whole object of the exercise ... was to guarantee a good winter and a sturdy protection against arthritis. (67-68)

* * * *

Later sections of the book are devoted to a return visit to the Wimmera, the scene of four years of the author's childhood; to Nobel laureate and author Nikos Kazantzakis, and some of his views on history and Greece; and, fascinatingly, the Greek journeys of the twin Scots sisters Agnes and Margaret Smith, born 1843 – heiresses whose gender denied them access to the careers in medicine and science they wished to pursue, but set them on a tangent which led to their collective knowledge of fourteen languages, including Ancient and Modern Greek. They became intrepid travellers, with the implicit intention of demonstrating that women *can*, and, in the course of their travels, discovered a palimpsest at St Catherine's monastery, Sinai, which turned out to be a fifth-century Syriac text of the Gospels. This was translated by Agnes and published in 1917 as *Light on the Four Gospels from the Sinai Palimpsest*.

Also of interest is Agnes's *Glimpses of Greek Life and Scenery* (1883), illustrated by her sister Margaret's watercolours and including an account of their travels in the Peloponnese, "which then had very few passable roads; instead it had a reputation for being a brigand-infested wilderness" (168). It was terrain where women did not venture.

All too soon this book, *Seeing and Believing*, came to an end for the present reader, who enjoyed its warm, personal tone, its reflections on all manner of people and their lives, its fascinating disclosures and glimpses of the author's life in a Peloponnesian village at a period when it was on the cusp of change. The plangent note of mortality that surfaces from time to time is present from the outset, and encapsulated in vignettes such as the scene witnessed from a hotel balcony in Corinth, of a murmur of starlings that fills the field of vision with its swirling, shape-shifting mass, only to vanish as swiftly as it appeared (78-79).

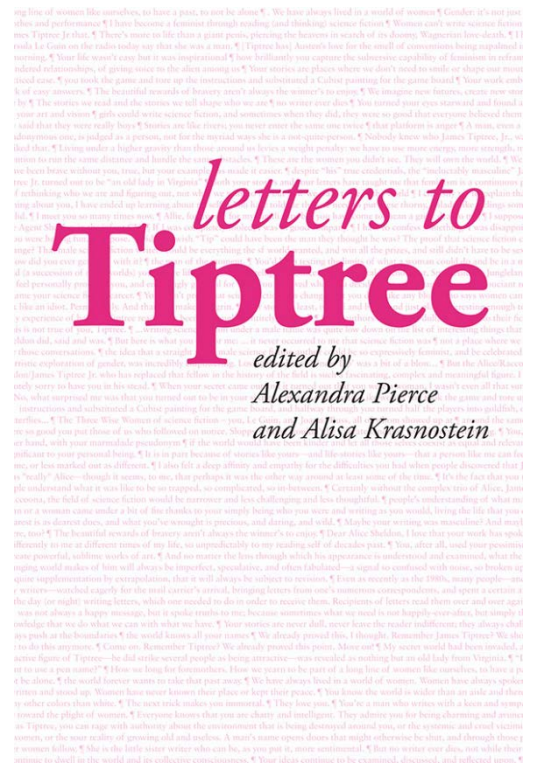
This is similar to the effect of reading this book. Except that the scenes it depicts with such vitality and veracity linger longer in the memory when one can revisit them as often as one wishes.

Jena Woodhouse is a widely published writer of poetry and fiction. She lives in Brisbane.

Drawing Back the Curtains of SFF History

Alexandra Pierce and Alisa Krasnostein,
eds. *Letters to Tiptree*
Perth: Twelfth Planet Press, 2015.

Reviewed by Anita Harris
Satkunanathan



I was sixteen years old when I first read “The Women Men Don’t See” by James Tiptree Jr. in 1991. I was a teenager in a small agricultural town in Malaysia who saved her lunch money every week to buy Science Fiction and Fantasy (SFF) books, when she wasn’t borrowing them from the library. The collection I bought had three women in it who were to influence the way I thought about the world, and about my own writing. Ursula K. Le Guin’s “Winter’s King,” and Joanna Russ’s “When It Changed” haunted me when I read the tales for different reasons. “The Women Men Don’t See” was another quietly feminist work of science fiction. So much of “The Women Men Don’t See” resonated with a quiet anger, bristling through the typeface with recollections of multiple elisions. In my twenties, I finally learned that Tiptree was in fact Alice Sheldon, and that she had written for many years under this pseudonym because of the freedom it had given her. I preface this review with my anecdote for three reasons. First, many of the letters in *Letters to Tiptree* resonated with my own personal experience of my “start” in SFF. Second, in my reading of this collection, I asked myself several intersectional questions in relation to gender, class, and race privilege. For instance, I speak of the heritage of the SFF community and fandom, but am painfully aware that access to this heritage is not easily attained by most. There is also the problematic centring of SFF works in North America, which tends to work towards eliding the work

done in other cultures, in different languages. For instance, in Malaysia, the classical hikayats have SFnal elements that predate much of Occidental science fiction by centuries. Third, as a newly professional SFF author writing from the margins of those intersectional categories, reading these letters packed a visceral and emotional punch for me which is deeply pertinent to my discussion of the collection.

Letters to Tiptree is an intimate look at one of the most enigmatic writers in Science Fiction and Fantasy (SFF) history. Alice Bradley Sheldon, as an SFF author who wrote under the male pseudonym James Tiptree Jr., received considerable acclaim and was feted as a visionary SFF writer. Her real life is, however, eminently more fascinating. Sheldon was a Major in the United States Army Air Forces and a spy working within the photo-intelligence unit. Sheldon was also an academic with a doctorate in experimental psychology. Her works reflect the complexity of the woman, and the letters are a testimony to the impact she had on scholars, authors and editors in the field. Along with Ursula K. Le Guin and Joanna Russ, Tiptree paved the way for many women SFF fans within the westernised canon of SFF who themselves became authors. The main aim of the book under review is to facilitate a dialogue between active writers, editors and activists in the SFF field and the deceased Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree Jr. This covers her impact on the field of SFF, the influence of her works and her legacy to the contributors to this collection, and also commentaries on the issue of gender and feminism within the context of SFF.

The editors, Alisa Krasnostein and Alexandra Pierce, based in Perth, write that the book comprises four sections. They asked the contributors to write letters to “celebrate, to reflect, and in some cases to finish conversations set aside nearly thirty years ago on Sheldon’s death” (v-vi). They were rewarded with a diversity of contemporary responses that are erudite, personal, emotional and interrogative of the canon of American speculative fiction. Second, the editors reproduced correspondence Sheldon had with Le Guin and Russ. Third, academic writings on Sheldon’s literary output as well as her identity are reproduced. Finally, the editors themselves write letters to Tiptree in the fourth section of the collection. Together, the different sections provide an emotional and visceral journey towards understanding the enigma of Sheldon as well as her impact upon the genre, and on the writers outside of the centre who have read her works.

Sheldon was an educated and worldly woman who wrote from the perspective of an American SF male writer. Despite the fact that she wrote many stories that reflected an awareness of minority writers and people from the margins, she was still vastly privileged. This is an important point that has been covered by more than one of the writers in this collection, particularly Rose Lemberg, Alex Dally McFarlane, and Bogi Takács. The effect of Sheldon's unveiling upon the western world of SFF resonates with writers from beyond the margin, if perhaps not in the same way – and it is the gist of this nuanced conversation that I find within the collection which speaks to me. The different perspectives on Tiptree and her life reflect diverse perspectives and experiences within SFF fandom itself. The letters written to Tiptree in the first section of the book are informative epistles penned by important figures in SFF, speaking to the first moments they read her works, and the impact the revelation had on them. One of the most powerful letters comes from L. Timmel Duchamp who writes that she was mostly immune to that impact, but not to the awareness of what occurred after the revelation of Sheldon's gender. The truths that seemed to be trailblazing when Sheldon was Tiptree was elided because a woman does not have, as Sheldon maintains and Duchamp avers, a "moral credibility." The works of male SF authors are judged for their ideas, their innovations, and their insights. The works of women SF writers are never judged separately from their identities as women. This heart-breaking realisation is penned ever-so succinctly by Sheldon, and Duchamp unpacks the paragraphs efficiently, revealing the painful reality of writing within a white male-dominated field.

What impact does Sheldon's writing have on people situated even further from the centre of SFF? Takács writes about a first encounter with Sheldon's work in Hungary, through the pages of *Galaktika*, and comments on Sheldon's childhood travelling with her parents in Africa and how it made Sheldon aware in her own way about the lives lived by marginalised cultures outside of the centre, an awareness that would have perhaps lent weight to other efforts towards inclusion were Sheldon still alive today. As Tiptree, Sheldon often wrote letters to editors asking why women were not present within their collection, so Takács's assertion is definitely on point. Joyce Chng, a Singaporean Chinese writer, on the other hand writes about the struggle to have a voice in South East Asia, outside of that centre and what Sheldon's words meant to her as a Singaporean writer who discovered her own voice and identity through writing

pseudonymously. Rose Lemberg, a writer who is an immigrant from the former Soviet Union unpacks further the kind of privilege that Sheldon had, and shares feelings of dislocation because of writing from outside of the centre of a USA-centric feminist SFF tradition. Lemberg writes with a fierce anger about lacking things that Sheldon possessed, a privilege owing to Sheldon's position in the Northern American canon of SFF. Lemberg's timely rebuttal is a reminder that the struggle for inclusion goes beyond "The Women That Men Don't See," extending into the awareness of the marginalised and the multiply-marginalised who still struggle against the weight of a centralised SFF canon. I enjoyed the letters of homage but felt that these marginalised perspectives were extremely essential in framing the continuing story of the history of SFF. This story includes the present and continuing struggles of a diverse, globalised SFF community towards better inclusion of SFF across margins, across languages, across geographies.

Sheldon's performance and literary ventriloquism spanned the performance of James Tiptree Jr., or "Uncle Tip," as an avuncular American author, and as the more feminine Racoon Sheldon who was supposedly Tip's protégé. Reading these letters, one becomes aware that more than one author felt that the layers of personalities worn by this author were manifold and complex. I was particularly interested in the viewpoints by queer and genderqueer authors with regard to the revelation of Sheldon's identity, which may be seen as straightforward to a heteronormative lens but becomes markedly more complex through the lens of the LGBTQIA spectrum. McFarlane most succinctly captures this quandary:

What does it mean for the story of Tiptree – of gender in science fiction – if Alice Sheldon was a man? Too easy. Alice Sheldon, James Tiptree Jr., Racoon Sheldon – they never said it straight. They never used easy words. Yet we do. What does it mean if Alice Sheldon was not our easy narrative?

It is too easy, as McFarlane says, to simplify the narrative of Sheldon/Tiptree as though we are witnessing a Shakespearean comedy in which the great reveal is that there is a woman hiding behind the performance of a man. The truth cannot be that easy.

Although I really enjoyed the letters written by contemporary authors to the memory of Sheldon and of her legacy, the best part of the collection for me is still the visceral,

intimate letters exchanged between Sheldon and two of SFF feminism's luminaries, Le Guin and Russ. The intellectual and emotional camaraderie displayed veer into flirtation more than once, particularly so in the case of Russ who was openly a lesbian. The discussions curated by this collection revolve around Sheldon's identity, and here I think the editors did a canny job of guiding the reader to the question of whether it really mattered what name Sheldon wore in the end: Tree, or Racoon, or Uncle Tip. All of these multiplicities of identities are part and parcel of who Sheldon was, a truth that was embraced by both Le Guin and Russ through their individualistic perspectives. It was a story of friendship that needed no additional tests or conditions beyond the personalities that took life in the handwritten letters. This is part of an important tradition, of an intellectual communion of ideas and possibilities that one somehow feels inhabits a rarefied space within fandom, one which is peppered with names familiar and dear to those who have grown up reading SFF shorts in pulp magazines or curated collections. The casual name-dropping of Chip (Samuel Delaney), or Vonda (McIntyre), and the various anecdotes that highlight the struggle and adventure of writing within the SFF genre, invite the reader to be part of a world where multiple possibilities grew out of an intersectional overlap between class privilege and gendered oppression. This struggle is part and parcel of the inheritance of SFF authors regardless of where they are, but – as Lemberg reminds us – this inheritance is not universal and has been accessed only by those who can speak and read English, and have access to the stories and the anecdotes which are part and parcel of what Helen Merrick calls the legacy of the "Secret Feminist Cabal." For some, such as Takács, this legacy may be accessed through translations, and in recent years it has been shown that translations play a huge part in diversifying the genre and its outreach.

The final parts of this collection are the introductions to Sheldon's works by her friends and colleagues, and the letters from the editors themselves to Sheldon's ghost. *Letters to Tiptree* is an emotionally honest collection that is not only an homage to Sheldon. The collection problematises, as much as it extols, that central legacy of SFF feminism. It is a necessary problematisation, one that opens the door to further conversations on how SFF feminism can be made more intersectional, a conversation that I believe Sheldon would have valued, and contributed to in her own way, if she

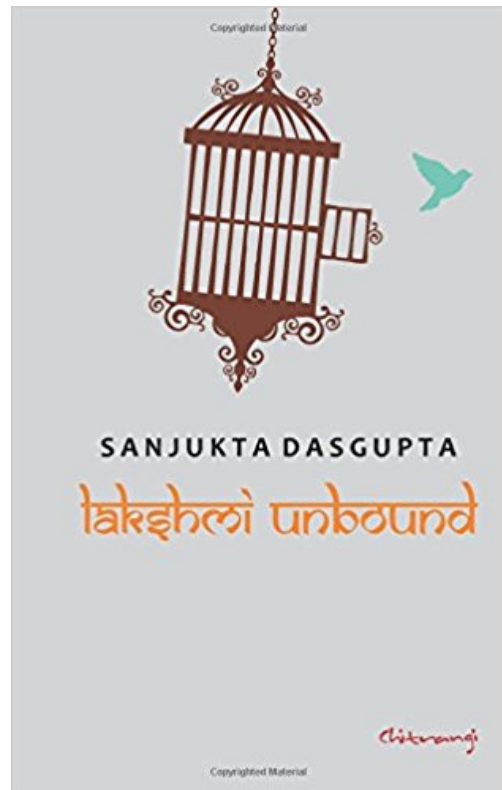
knew there would be so many of us out here in the margins, writing back to the legacy she, Russ and Le Guin created.

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The Goddess, the Icon and the Breaking of the Stereotype

Sanjukta Dasgupta. *Lakshmi Unbound*
Chitrangi, 2017. ISBN-13:97893-85782-
73-2

Reviewed by Susri Bhattacharya



NOW we Indians can proudly say that we have one icon of our own – neither a Hercules nor a Prometheus but a female icon. The homely goddess who is worshipped in a regular basis on Thursdays – Lakshmi. As a surprise, she is no more a “kalas-bound” deity but an active participant of our time voicing the courageous claims –

I just can't be Lakshmi
I have to break the silence
My wealth is not jewels
My wealth is my gipsy spirit.

Yes I am speaking about the recent publication from Chitrangi. The current anthology of poems by Sanjukta Dasgupta – *Lakshmi Unbound*, follows a number of other books by her of short stories and poems. This book contains altogether thirty-one poems and these are dedicated to all the “liberated lakshmis” of India who are always battling against taboos and social restraint and, hence, advancing the possibility of greater harmony in both home and the world. The iconic deity, the goddess Lakshmi is now reconsidered as a free spirit and shows the initiating of a break in the chain. The

couplet of the inaugural poem shows a witty challenge by the writer who wishfully accepts that she is Alakshmi and is not bothered about the stereotypical binary that prevails widely in India – *lakshmi* (“angel in the house”) or *alakshmi* (possibly a “Hecate,” a witch or the antitype of lakshmi) –

I am Alakshmi

Trap me if you can ...

Nowadays we can see new approaches towards the Dalit, the oppressed other. The dalit girls are, then, the margin of the margins. We can see some experimental intertextual poems where the characters of Tagore find a new shade. In the poem called “Chandalika,” *actually* inspired by Rabindranath Tagore’s dance drama *Chandalika*, a cultural evolution occurs as we find in the last lines an echo of one of Earnest Hemingway’s titles creating the magic in the poetic cauldron:

Traumatized Chandalika

After many, many centuries

Smiled at last

For the sun also did rise for her.

In this book we can find a new combination of myth and culture. The snapshots of the everyday can be traced in the poem “Festival of Lights” where the energy of Kali and the grace of Lakshmi are celebrated while a young woman in her “*dirty faded sari*” dances under the flyover, finding a momentary celebration of her virtual empowerment in “Lakshmi puja” or “Kali puja.” The globalised sisterhood denotes that this effort to find an identity is eternal and is not geographically restricted. “Mrinal’s First Letter,” which is inspired by one of the short stories of Rabindranath Tagore (“Streer Patra”), becomes at once radical and revolutionary as it declares Mrinal to be the “elder sister of Nora” (in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*). Literary spaces connect and form a powerful sisterhood that can easily announce –

... I shall not return to 27, Makhan Baral Lane
ever again...

But the most radical statement comes through the poem named “Eleventh Muse,” in which we come to know about a very important factor of poetry writing – the Muse.

There was a classical tradition of the poets, invoking a Muse to aid them in the creation of lyrical aesthetics that are the generative symbols; a creative signifier to air the individual talent. Automatically a question arises – if a woman decides to write poetry then what will be the gender identity of her muse? So to speak, what is the muse of Anna Akhmatova or Emily Brontë? Do they need any magnificent-male counterpart as their muse to create poetry? Or, are they bold enough to take the bruises or bravos directly upon themselves? Ardhanariswar is the newfound symbol. It is a spirit – an animated version of dualism in energetic harmony – a fusion of two Indian gods, *Shiva* (male) and *Parvati* (female), symbolising gender equality:

The Eleventh Muse
The shy, sure and steady Muse
Of an ancient land
Ardhanariswar,
The androgynous creative spirit
The inspirational Eleventh Muse

The concept of *Alakshmi* itself is a challenge to the notion of our religious scriptures. In Puranas, we can find that *Lord Shiva* has also a similar notorious counterpart named *Jalandhara*. In that lore he is portrayed at the end as a part of Shiva and he is even worshipped in Madhya Pradesh in India while *Alakshmi* faces a total abandonment in our society and culture. So, in this book the scholars and the readers of gender and literature find the Asian muse called Ardhanariswar. Lines play poignantly on this note:

Ardhanariswar! Ardhanariswar!
The poets exclaimed with joy
We have searched for you
Among the icons of the West
While you were here, shy, gentle, elusive
Yet proud and powerful
Waiting for us to claim you
OUR very own Eleventh Muse



The book is a special collage of distorted fragments. Sometimes it tells the saga of a sleeping village and suddenly captures in printed words the mindscape of unknown people, such as those about whom we might casually read a newspaper report. Thus the poet tries to create a new genre where the mundane, morbid newspaper accounts are aestheticised wonderfully in poems like “Talaq” or “I Killed Him M’Lord.”

The economic and social perspective of a middle-class educated woman is well denoted in the poem named “A Poem A Day Keeps the Psychiatrist Away.” Poetry is the medium of her catharsis. Not the glory or the advertisement of the intellect but a need to channel her perception along with her perspective. In the world of power dynamics and molecular violence what should be her psychological device to beat the gloom? The “woman;” the “mother;” the “bearer” does have a combination of a soft but powerful psyche. It detests casualties and mass violence:

...I am helpless
I can just write a few lines
I can't use an AK47
I don't know how to use it
I can't even buy it
It's too costly for my slender purse
And I can't stand torn limbs, open skulls

I can't stand faces
Arrested in grotesque grimace
Of sudden death

To conclude I would like to revisit one stereotypical question, "why poetry? Is it for the large audience who won't be able to understand these coded lyrics?" History says when rhythm and words are mellifluous, the words live on and ideas flow on from person to person. This book is engrossing for its magic of simplicity and keen sense of word-art. Professor Dasgupta has made my task easier as, through her words, perhaps we can answer this question.

Yet like a speck of sparkling diamond
The inviolate poem will linger somewhere
As long as words survive.

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The Biography of a Wife

Judith Armstrong. *Dymphna*
North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly
Publishing, 2016.

Reviewed by
Christina Ealing-Godbold



DYMPHNA Clark has come to the attention of the biographer, Judith Armstrong, and the nation, through her role as the wife of Australia's best known historian, Manning Clark. Usually, this is not a basis for notoriety or indeed, sufficient attraction to persuade an author to undertake a feminist biography. The biography charts the changes in persona of the young woman throughout her studies and her marriage. The author gives her reason for undertaking this "biography of a wife" as perceiving the need to expose Dymphna Clark as a brilliant linguist and translator in her own right, rather than as she was known – as an academic's wife and a mother of six children.

To achieve this, Armstrong used a combination of factual biography and imaginative conversations to achieve an interwoven work, the purpose of which is to bring the characters of Dymphna and her husband Manning alive to the reader. A biography is always best read with knowledge of the sources consulted. Armstrong outlines the limited number of sources left by Dymphna, which include her diary, written at 16, some letters given to the National Library, and some oral interviews with the National Library. However, in this case, there were also many other sources, including the papers of her husband, Manning Clark, held at the National Library, and the records of universities and newspapers, charting the journey of one of Australia's most famous

historians and his family. Armstrong therefore could have written a purely factual biography, but chose to add meaning and personality using imagined conversations and scenarios. Armstrong's choice of methodology attempts to illuminate the woman as a person, contradicting her previous portrayal in published and unpublished sources as a partner, assistant and supporter.

Judith Armstrong's biography of a wife, *Dymphna*, follows her subject's life as a young immigrant child who arrived in Australia at the age of five, the daughter of a Belgian father and Swedish mother. Armstrong used the letters, diaries and stories of both her subject and her husband to great effect in narrating the journey of a young woman in mid-twentieth-century Australia. Beginning with her childhood, the extreme difference between the mono-lingual and mono-cultural Australian lifestyle, and that of the inhabitants of the childhood home of Dymphna, called *Huize Eikenbosch* in outer Melbourne, is particularly well illustrated by the author, in regard to the focus on educational achievements. Armstrong illustrates the various changes in language used in the household, with changes from morning to night, weekdays to weekends, and for a variety of other reasons. Dymphna's father, Augustin Lodewyckx, was a scholar of modern languages at the University of Melbourne. The young Lodewyckx children were taught to speak German, French, Norwegian, Swedish, Dutch and Flemish as well as English. Each language had an occasion or situation to which it was best suited, and so the family switched in and out of each language as they chose. Moving on from the local primary school, Hilma Dymphna Lodewyckx was sent to Presbyterian Ladies College where her brilliant results led to an entry to Melbourne University at sixteen. Dymphna took a break from study and, travelling with her mother, went to Germany to meet relatives and immerse herself in the culture. Following her gap year, Dymphna excelled in languages at Melbourne University, winning the coveted Mollison Scholarship to study in Europe.

Central to this biographical work, however, is the romance between Dymphna and Charles Manning Clark, also a student from Melbourne University, who travelled with her to Europe where he was to attend Oxford University. He constantly urged her to leave Germany and join him at Oxford University in England. There was a strong element of concern for her safety in Nazi Germany, but Clark also wished her to take on the role of wife, and forgo her academic study. The biography illustrates the changes in Germany in the 1930s, from the information in Dymphna's travel diary,

describing her experience as a 16 year old travelling to Germany in 1933, compared with her letters to Manning in regard to her experience as a postgraduate student at the University of Bonn in 1938. The biography is also of interest to students of Australian history, regardless of the journey of its subject, Dymphna Clark. It illustrates immigrant marginalisation in suburban Australia (Dymphna even rejected a scholarship to Janet Clarke Hall at Melbourne University because she did not “fit in” socially); the lack of status of Australian History in university curricula prior to the 1950s; the experience of Australian students who continued to make their journey to Europe to obtain the essential overseas qualification despite the clouds and threat of war; and a fascinating look at life for the inhabitants of Canberra in its formative years.

While these historical aspects of the work are enormously interesting, even more interesting from a feminist perspective is how the work chronicles the life of an academic woman in twentieth-century Australia. The biography benefits from the richness of the imaginative writing, providing insight into the feelings and frustrations possibly felt by Dymphna. Expectations for a female academic are illustrated by a quote from Dymphna’s letters to Manning in 1938 where she wrote “When we agree that the time is right, of course I mean to retire gracefully.” Despite her achievements, her academic career had a sunset clause which was to be invoked at the time of the arrival of children.

Having given up her scholarship, Dymphna was married to Manning in Oxford in January 1939 and sought to be useful in some way, researching and typing notes for him and cooking suppers in their small room on a spirit stove. Manning Clark is seen to demonstrate his attitude to girls and women throughout the work, and nowhere is it more obvious than when he feared his first child might be girl, instructing Dymphna to “put it back and change it” if that were the case. Further evidence of his attitude is reflected when he wrote to Dymphna that “you have not lived in vain ... now you are responsible for our earthly immortality.” Dymphna was left to give birth to the child whilst Manning took up a new teaching position elsewhere in Britain, and Armstrong brings the young mother’s loneliness and sadness home to the reader. However, despite these attitudes, the biography also captures the need that Manning had for the support and love from his wife, and his passion for her.

Back in Australia, the couple moved according to the need for progression in Manning Clarke’s academic career. Their journey ended in Canberra, where Dymphna made a

home and a garden and cooked for dinners, conferences and the six children in the family. Armstrong is able to convey Dymphna's love for her children, and her pride in her domestic chores and gardening achievements, in addition to casting a spotlight on her academic frustrations.

Her work, translating and researching for Manning Clark (as well as for some other publications) was done in between her domestic duties, the latter being a considerable workload. Her workspace was reduced to a bench in the kitchen and a storage cupboard in the laundry, whereas her husband had a whole commodious study on the upper floor of the house. Enduring infidelity and illness, Dymphna was rock solid in her loyalty to Manning, even to the point of leaving a young baby in the care of others so that she could accompany Manning on a tour of Asia when he requested that she do so. Dymphna defended Clark endlessly, in regard to his *History of Australia*, as well as in his involvement in Australian-Soviet relations – a loyalty and defence that continued after her husband's death.

How many Australian women – writers, painters, poets and scholars – squeezed their intellectual endeavours into a life of domestic duties: cooking, gardening and raising children. This model of female endeavour became the norm in Australian society during the twentieth century for women who had been able to gain academic qualifications. What is unusual about this particular wifely biography is that Dymphna Clark had academic ambitions and achievements greater than those of her husband at the outset that were almost entirely subjugated by the need to support the career of her husband. Many Australian men of the era would have had the same view as Manning Clark and would have enforced their view in homes across the nation, preventing their wives from working outside the home after marriage or expecting them to forgo any serious career goals. Dymphna's story, while beginning differently to that of most women of the era, with academic awards and scholarships, ended in the stereotypical model of loyal partner, supporter and mother. Yet in many ways, Judith Armstrong's biography conveys Dymphna's sense of accomplishment in her life journey, and despite the author's methodology, one wonders if Dymphna Clark would have chosen a different path if given the opportunity to revisit her life. Well written and very readable, *Dymphna* by Judith Armstrong is informative and illustrative of many facets of Australian life, especially the journey of the female academic in the mid-twentieth century.

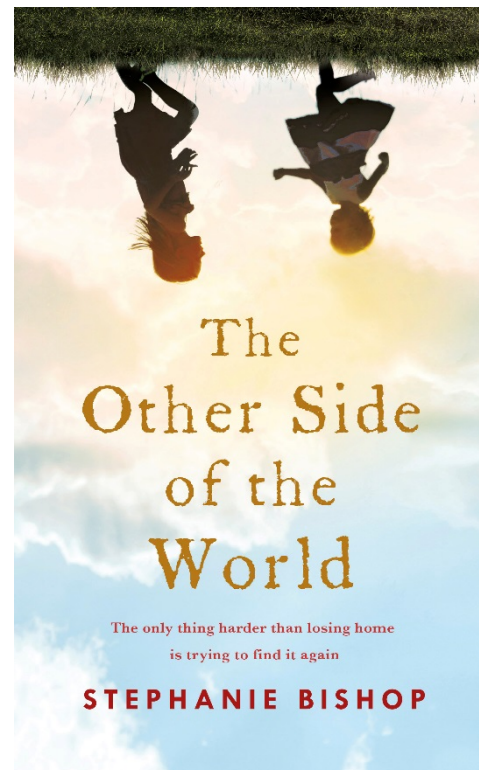
Christina Ealing-Godbold is a Senior Librarian, working at Information Services in the State Library of Queensland, Brisbane.

An Experience of Migration

Stephanie Bishop. *The Other Side of the World*

Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2015

Reviewed by Gillian Bouras



THIS book, with its brilliantly-designed cover, had an immediate appeal for me, for I also left my native land for the other side of the world, although my move from Australia to Greece in 1980 was a very different one from that made by Charlotte and Henry, the novel's protagonists, from Cambridge to Perth in the 1960s. Bishop says that her writing was inspired by the migration experiences of her grandparents, and indeed the twentieth century was one of mass migration, as the twenty-first is also proving to be.

Motivations for migration are seldom simple. My ancestors migrated mainly because of poverty, but also in a couple of cases because of family quarrels. Today's refugees, crowding the beaches of Lesbos, and gathering at European borders, are, for the most part, desperate people fleeing danger and the extreme probability of death. In the novel, Henry feels that geography has determined his life (188). My decision was made because of my Greek husband's homesickness and my own desire for adventure: I felt I had not been anywhere or done anything. I think I also succumbed to the wrong-headed temptation to re-invent myself. Other people simply feel, for many reasons, that they do not fit well in their native lands.

It is Charlotte's husband Henry who is the driving force behind their move to Perth. Interestingly, my middle son once told me that he thinks it deeply unfair to ask anybody

to migrate. And Charlotte: “She said yes because he is her husband. She said yes because she didn’t know what else to do” (40). But once in Australia, despite Charlotte’s obvious unhappiness, Henry feels it is impossible to go back to England: “She must know this. It’s not fair of her to ask for something she knows he cannot give” (104). The drip of information received is cleverly slow, but the reader realises before too long that Henry has always felt displaced. He is Anglo-Indian, “too British to be Indian, and too Indian to be British” (10) and, accordingly, feels on the edge of both cultures; this feeling is exacerbated in Perth, where he has to learn, bitterly, not only about another displacement but about the casual racism of Australian society in the 1960s.

For most, migration is an experience huge in its impact and implications: it is full of disappointments and necessary adjustments, and the migrant’s life inevitably divides into **before** and **after**. Those people who are fleeing danger and death usually know they can never return to their native places, but for people like Charlotte and myself, the thought is always there: **What if I went back?** But Henry has left England in the hope of a better life for his children, in the same way as his parents had brought him there. He is also depressed by the English climate, and of course weather is often a compelling reason for people’s migration. (But many an emigrant from the sceptr’d isle has been disappointed to find that Australia is emphatically not Britain in the sun.) Migration is also an isolating experience, at least at first; as if that were not enough for Charlotte and Henry, Perth is apparently the most isolated city in the world. Charlotte feels that there is nothing in this new place that is hers, and that the tragedy of migration is that one’s place of origin disappears – “Unspoken of, it becomes forgotten.” This is not a view I share; rather I dwell on the idea of the memories that haunt the heart’s possession.

While Henry is an academic, a lecturer in English Literature, Charlotte is a painter, with a painter’s attachment to place and to the natural world. England is her place, and Cambridge is her home: this is a novel about nostalgia. Writer Bernhard Schlink considers that homesickness can be lethal, and many people would agree with him. Nostalgia is also generally considered in a negative light, but yet, in a certain type of person, it can be used in a positive way to create “a country of the mind,” to use Paul Scott’s phrase, and as an opportunity for growth and synthesis of something new made out of the “old” experiences and those happening in the moment. But for some

people the plunge into grief is simply too much. On leaving the house in England, Charlotte “feels sadness everywhere she looks, memories everywhere she looks” (44). Bishop is very adept at describing such things exactly as they are.

Life is largely a matter of balancing tensions, and the reader grasps very early that there are a great many tensions in Charlotte’s life. She has a young child, and early in the novel realises she is pregnant again, and far too soon, as she is already stretched to the limit of fatigue and general debilitation. The other major problem is the old one of the clash between creativity and domesticity. Cyril Connolly famously opined that “there is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall,” and Charlotte’s life illustrates this notion very convincingly: any woman who has tried to combine the demands of a creative project with those of a small baby will agree that Bishop conjures up the conflict very ably and disturbingly, although the reader could perhaps have had more detail with regard to Charlotte’s feeling about painting, and her one attempt to resume her work. Charlotte’s solution to her difficulty will upset and shock some readers, but Bishop suggests that the answer to such problems is seldom simple. Another old question is implicit: is it possible to be true to oneself without hurting others?

Bishop writes excellently on the whole business of parenthood, and the nature of the love we feel for our children – complicated as it often is, particularly when they are very young and dependent, by fatigue, resentment and fear: we fear anything that threatens them, but we also resent and fear the way they, of necessity, take over our lives. She also captures the bewilderment that young fathers often feel on seeing erstwhile wives and lovers transformed into mothers. (And there is more than one mother in this novel.) Often young fathers wonder where they fit in this new situation, and often feel excluded: after all, they can never know what it is like to carry a child, to have it as part of one’s own body.

Bishop grapples effectively and movingly with the whole matter of the way life simply is, with its patterns of change and gain and loss: life is so much more and so much less than we expect. On her return to England, Charlotte’s expectations are confounded, and she has to find an entirely new solution to the old problem of where home is, and what it is. “Home is never the same once you have left it for any length of time and come back. Home is a secret world that closes its door in your absence

and never lets you find it again" (250). We simply have to find a substitute, and the task is not always easy.

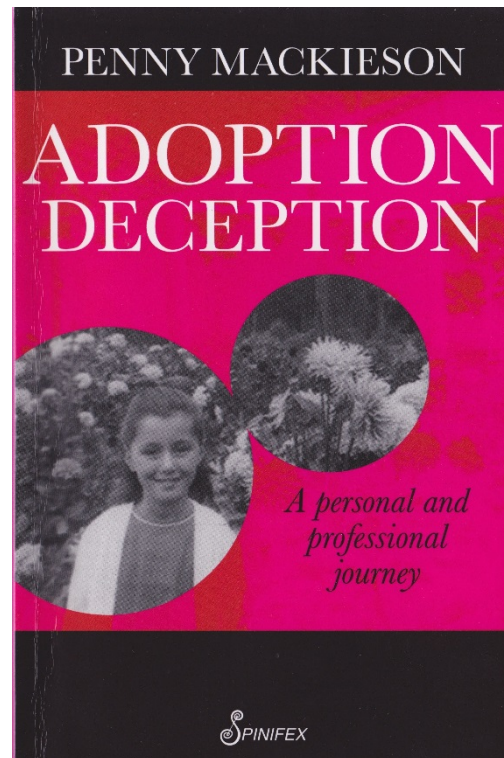
The cover line on my copy of the novel states that it has "a haunting beauty reminiscent of the writings of Emily Brontë and Virginia Woolf." This is a large claim, although Bishop's writing does indeed have a haunting beauty in its evocation of detail and descriptions of scenes in nature. But the comparison does Bishop a disservice, for she has her own voice, one that should continue to be heard, to our great benefit, for a long time yet.

Gillian Bouras has written several books, stories and articles, many of them dealing with her experiences as an Australian woman in Greece.

In the Best Interests of the Child?

Penny Mackieson. *Adoption Deception: A Personal and Professional Journey*
Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2015

Reviewed by Sue Bond



On 21 March 2013, the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard made the National Apology for Forced Adoptions at Parliament House in Canberra. It was a comprehensive statement to the mothers, fathers, and children who were affected by the policies and practices of decades past, when women who were pregnant outside of marriage were sometimes “encouraged,” shamed, cajoled, or blackmailed by social workers, medical staff, religious people or other authorities into signing away their baby or babies. Couples who were unable to have their children “naturally” because of infertility received these babies and brought them up as if they were their own. Some told their children they had been adopted and some did not; the advice varied according to the time and place and institution. The mothers were often told to “get on with their lives” as if no baby had been born to them.

Unfortunately, this significant event was marred by occurring on the same day as the leadership challenge to Gillard. A year later, the media largely ignored the anniversary of the Apology. Penny Mackieson describes and discusses the Apology in *Adoption Deception: A Personal and Professional Journey*, a book that is a combination of memoir and activism for adoptee rights. It is a polemical text, arguing passionately for the best interests of children to be the primary consideration in the formation of

families; adoption is, she insists, not for the benefit of infertile individuals or couples but for the benefit of children who are otherwise unable to live with their family of origin for whatever reason.

The author was adopted as a baby by a family with one other adopted child, a boy. Mackieson describes her family as loving and open about her and her brother's adoption, but she realises that her parents expected them to accept that their lives began with them and not before. The information given to her by her parents about her original mother was incorrect, she discovered later, and her name was changed: she felt "re-labelled, re-badged and recycled into a format acceptable to my adoptive parents" (12). She also acknowledges the difficulties for them in dealing with their infertility and is careful to be fair in her discussions about all adoptive parents. The rest of this chapter reveals her own fertility problems and great losses, as well as her adoptive mother's struggle with her daughter's search and reunion with her mother. Mackieson states how adoption has "profound and lifelong impacts" (21) on everyone affected by it, which is something not always understood by those either inside or outside the process.

Her book is composed of a preface by the manager of VANISH (Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self Help) Coleen Clare, an introduction, and six main chapters, with two appendices comprising the speeches given by Prime Minister Gillard and the Opposition Leader Tony Abbott at the National Apology for Forced Adoptions.

Mackieson provides an overview of the history of adoption in Australia since the mid-1800s, noting that adoption was an informal procedure up until nearly 1900, when legislation was brought in to Western Australia, followed in the 1920s by the other states, and the 1930s for the territories and Queensland. Adoption was generally closed, with all connections to the original family shut off in the early years, from the 1940s, when there were more prospective adoptive parents than children available. The Adoption of Children Act was introduced in 1964, and from the 1970s the numbers of children available for adoption fell dramatically. This was due to several factors, including changed attitudes towards single mothers and illegitimacy, and single parent financial support from governments (thanks Gough Whitlam). Adoption changed from "closed" to "open" and secrecy became much less of a problem. Adoptees gradually

gained more access to birth records and the ability to contact their parents/families of origin. The author also notes—and heavily criticises later in the book—the establishment of National Adoption Awareness Week, started by Deborah Lee Furness, and now known as Adoption Change. This organisation campaigns for easier, streamlined access to overseas adoption of children by Australians, and was supported by the former Prime Minister Tony Abbott.

In her chapter on her work as a social worker in the field of intercountry adoption, she describes how it changed globally over twelve years. The numbers of children overseas requiring assistance through adoption declined after the mid-2000s, largely because of improved conditions in their home countries with respect to support and alternative care. Many now needing adoptive families are identified as special needs and are not the children sought after by prospective adoptive couples. Those wanting to adopt children from overseas, according to Mackieson, put pressure upon authorities to reduce waiting times, make more children available from more countries, and make the process more “user-friendly” generally. And this is what the author objects to and argues against most powerfully.

Essentially, there is a mismatch between what the children need and have a right to, and what prospective, adoptive parents feel they need or want and have a right to obtain. For example, the author explains her attempts to persuade prospective adoptive parents of children from other countries not to change their child’s name, as it remains the one aspect of their identity that they can retain. She emphasises that however altruistic and loving these prospective parents are, they will always be adopting a child who has sustained loss and trauma from their situation. However, it was difficult to overcome the emotional needs of people seeking to adopt, and the resultant over-riding of the needs and interests of the child. It is an intensely emotional and difficult terrain with competing interests that incites high passion and sometimes verbal abuse of social workers and others in the field.

Mackieson spends a considerable part of the book describing her campaign against misinformation about adoption issues, largely by letters to editors of newspapers and to politicians and organisations. She succeeds in getting some letters published in response to issues and articles but is often frustrated. The same is the case with communicating with politicians and organisations such as World Vision. This is an

interesting section and shows the author's determination, but it is very long and detailed and could have been shortened to beneficial effect. However, it is in one of these letters that she refers to the "horrific legacy" (84) of the Stolen Generations and how none of the apologies stopped Tony Abbott from acting to promote intercountry adoption. Although the author does not discuss the Stolen Generations in detail, it is clear from her book generally that she does not support any of the practices, past or present, that remove connections with family.

Mackieson is uncompromising on her stance against adoption, believing it to be "a broken and obsolete concept" (141), and unethical because it violates "childrens' universal rights, family connections and identities" (144). She advocates for permanent care instead:

In essence, permanent care is adoption without the bad bits – it provides stable and secure nurturing for the child, while preserving continuity of the child's identity and relationships with his or her family of origin, including their name at birth. (italics in original, 145)

Her argument here is that permanent care is child-focused while adoption is parent-focused, a major point of concern in her book generally. She states that permanent care orders recognise the vulnerability of all parties and the need for them to be supported, maximising the possibilities of trauma recovery.

Being an adoptee myself, and one who was told at the age of twenty-three (making me a "late discovery adoptee"), the arguments in this book resonates particularly strongly. I did not have a positive experience of adoption, not only because of the effects of it being kept a secret, but also because my parents must have received little or no counsel, either about being the parents of a child, let alone an adopted one, or about their own infertility. They had been married twenty-five years when I came along, and my father had suffered trauma both physical and psychological from his RAF service in World War Two. Adoption since then has changed enormously, of course, but there are a lot of us out there who have been affected by those past practices and who have only relatively recently received recognition of their struggles or assistance of any sort.

There is a growing body of research and literature showing these effects. I think it would have been advantageous for Mackieson to mention Nancy Verrier's *The Primal Wound* (1993), as it is a key text for adoptees (and those who seek to understand them) as is her subsequent title *Coming Home to Self: The Adopted Child Grows Up* (2003), and it is backed up by the attachment and bonding work of John Bowlby¹ as well as the trauma work of Bruce Perry² and others in more recent times. It is not so long ago that the medical community thought newborns did not need anaesthesia during surgery as their nervous systems were not fully developed³ so our understanding of how babies respond to their mothers in utero and after birth in those early hours, days, and weeks is still developing, let alone what happens when they are separated from them. It is still poorly accepted or known generally that separation from the mother at birth or soon after, and disruption of that bond can cause trauma and loss to a baby, a child, and reverberate through the years into adulthood. The loss occurred when the individual was pre-verbal, so the memory of it does not exist in our language system, but in our bodies.

However, Mackieson does acknowledge the tremendous amount of research and testimonies from adopted people and those born from donor conception, as this, along with her own lived experience, has gone to form her views on adoption and family formation. She finds it extraordinary that her views are now regarded as radical when they were "commonplace" in the 1980s when she was studying social work. An important point in her last chapter emphasises that adopted children become adults, and that their voices are often disregarded then as well. Any suggestion that adoption is complex and difficult and produces loss and trauma with effects that can continue on into adulthood is regarded as an expression of ungratefulness: "*It is far too easily forgotten that adoption is always forced on the children, but the consequences impact the adults that the children become for the entirety of their lives*" (italics in original, 130).

In her chapter "Apology or hypocrisy?", Mackieson lambasts the former Prime Minister Tony Abbott and his Coalition government for their support of Furness and her

¹ John Bowlby. *Attachment and Loss* (Volumes 1–3). Penguin, Middlesex. 1971, 1975, 1981.

² Bruce Perry and Maia Szalavitz. *The Boy Who was Raised as a Dog and Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook*. Basic Books, New York. 2008.

³ Robin Karr-Morse and Meredith S Wiley. *Scared Sick: The Role of Childhood Trauma in Adult Disease*. Basic Books, New York. 2012: 54.

organisation Adopt Change. It had only been a few months earlier that the National Apology had occurred, and the past practices of adoption had seemed to be buried. The author expresses her horror and extreme disappointment that Abbott could reverse this expectation so thoroughly by endorsing the speedier adoption of children from overseas, ignoring the complexities of the lives of the children involved. She states that “Mr Abbott’s U-turn on adoption policy is a perfect example of social policy creation under neo-liberal ideology – in the context of a disturbing vacuum of social justice and humanitarian ethics and values” (66). This sparks her campaign, described above, of letter writing.

This is a powerful and passionate book about the personal and political aspects of adoption. While it is overwhelmingly negative about adoption and the author believes the practice is outdated and should cease, she does present strong arguments for her case. Undoubtedly there are adoptees who feel that they did not have negative experiences of being adopted, but that does not detract from the increasing evidence of research and testimony that details the deleterious effects of separation of baby from mother at birth or soon after, and the need for these to be taken seriously. Penny Mackieson is concerned with the deeper issues of family formation, and the wider implications of solving problems for children on a societal rather than only at the individual level. This includes avoiding treating babies as commodities, as happened (and still happens) with adoption and surrogacy, and the exploitation of women as “wombs for hire.” Societal attitudes towards adoption and surrogacy and the child’s best interests need to change, otherwise we are in danger of further commercialising conception, birth, and family formation, and violating the rights of women and children.

Sue Bond is a PhD candidate at Central Queensland University working on a thesis concerning adoptee memoir and testimony. She has degrees in medicine, literature and creative writing, has had short stories, essays, memoir and book reviews published in numerous online and print publications, and was longlisted for the *Australian Book Review’s* Calibre Essay Prize in 2014.

Songs of Compulsion

Laura Elizabeth Woollett. *The Love of a Bad Man*

Brunswick, Vic.: Scribe, 2016.

Reviewed by Lesley Synge



ON this short story collection's release in August 2016, Woollett confessed to interviewer Lou Heinrich of *Guardian Australia* (30 August 2016) that women in "messed up" relationships and women whose partners were "evil guys" fascinated her. We're all capable of making wrong choices, she suggested.

The men in her debut collection are not merely "bad" but real and exceptionally dangerous: Buck Barrow, Adolf Hitler, Raymond Fernandez, Charles Starkweather, Ian Brady, Charles Manson, Cameron Hooker, Jim Jones, Kenneth Bianchi, David Birnie, Paul Bernardo and Brian Mitchell. Hitler, Jones and Manson are immediately recognisable, but only a criminologist, or a person with a fascination for criminal couples of the twentieth century, would recognise all the names today.

The narrator in each story is the woman of the couple and her story carries her name: Eva, Marceline, Charlie's Girls and so on.

Under the guise of first-hand reportage, Woollett lifts the lid on the intense partnerships that wreak havoc – sometimes on individuals (invariably female); sometimes on a massive human scale.

The compulsiveness with which the women follow their lovers is one of the intriguing elements of these fictional imaginings. Far from being innocent “star-crossed” lovers like Romeo and Juliet, these couples seem the “born-under-a-bad-sign” types – signs they fail to recognise.

The epigram, from Scottish folksong “The Daemon Lover,” is the perfect motif for each story, and for the collection as a whole:

What hills, what hills are those, my love

Those hills so dark and low?

Those are the hills of hell, my love

Where you and I must go.

The compulsiveness of the paired journeys to “the hills of hell” is bewildering to the reader. They have an afterlife too, as they seem to smoulder on as the book ends, rather like the way the odour of sulphur is easily recalled after a visit to an active volcano.

Woollett is a talented writer. She creates a unique voice for each woman, relying on local colloquialisms to create character. From Manchester to Munich, Missouri to Perth, these anti-heroines from history books and the tabloids give their accounts of journeys which typically begin with sex, and climax in death, with authenticity.

Charlie’s Girls chant a Californian Sixties litany:

We sing ... for our daddies hiding behind their newspapers, our mommies
crying over burnt meatloaf. For all the square-eyed people watching us
on television. (118)

The voices worked so well, I thought, that I was surprised to read Woollett’s candid disclosure in the *Guardian* interview referred to above, that she watched television and films to get in the groove. However she achieved it, Woollett nails it. Over the course of her twelve stories, each with different settings and trajectories, she draws her reader into a habitable world through the arresting voice of the narrator.

Since most of her chosen atrocities occur in the United States, there is a North American feel to the collection. Notable exceptions are Eva in the Führerbunker, and Cathy in Perth, Australia. While Eve’s gaze never lifts beyond the domestic delights of

champagne, the gramophone, silk and fur, Cathy's world is an impoverished suburbia that David Birnie, with his fast cars and furious need for sex, shakes up.

Doing eighty, we take Stirling Highway across the river, past the old factory buildings and flat ground that hasn't changed in twenty years. Dingo Flour Mill. Train tracks. Power-lines. Nothing growing but wild oats and bindi grass. (184)

It's the landscape of the mind that most interests Woollett.

Why do some women find themselves in the orbit of a murderous male and then try to please him as he exploits, enslaves, rapes, tortures and/or kills his – female – targets? Woollett sets herself the challenge of re-imagining their lives as the maelstrom closes in.

Some are young and are being manipulated by ruthless men, and their voices throb with naivety. A certain pathos is evoked as the reader learns of their youth and observes the way their older partners with their narcissistic traits manipulate them. Others are far from pathetic; more like Lady Macbeths urging on their murderous men.

Veronica Compton, enthralled by a convicted strangler called Kenneth Bianchi, is the most startling of these. Described in the appendix as "a twenty-three-year-old aspiring actress and writer," Veronica's imagined story is constructed as a series of gushing letters to a man she has only read about in the papers. "Darling," she addresses him as he languishes in jail in 1980 at the end of his killing spree:

There are days when I am seized by a love for you so violent, I feel the world cannot take it, and must unleash some violence of its own. ... At this moment I am sitting inside my sweltering trailer, writing with One hand and rubbing my clit with the other. (167)

Giddy with the desire to imaginatively enter the mind of a strangler, Veronica goes on to embody him by attempting a copycat murder *for* him; after all, he can't continue to strangle because he is locked up. The "naughty boy!" (171). Examples of women who are, at the very least, complicit in the acts their men commit include Marceline, married to cult leader Jim Jones, who revels in her role as cult matriarch. "Make way for Mother Marceline!" (145). Know-nothing Eva, who plays the role of sycophantic lover to Adolf Hitler, is seemingly without inner conflict.

The characters (and presumably the women on whom they are based) lack psychological insight; some seem to suffer from pathological conditions so I found myself playing forensic psychologist – at least for the women.

Veronica – is she suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder or Histrionic Personality Disorder? As I turned the pages from Blanche to Wanda I imagined that I was spotting, not only Veronica's possible Borderline Personality Disorder, but bi-polar disorder, paranoia and postpartum psychosis. Dissociative dispositions were perhaps the most commonplace. How else to explain shy, spotty Jan? A lumberjack shows her pics of bondage then demands they replicate them in the woods. (He is a clear candidate for the autism spectrum.) What solution does Jan find to stay alive yet keep her man? She helps him kidnap a sex slave whom they keep in a box. This is not to suggest that I, or any other reader, can accurately answer the question that Woollett poses of exactly *why* each of the women heads for those "dark hills" – but she certainly makes us *think* about it.

Woollett herself refuses to play Dr Freud, at least not consciously. To take the collection on its own terms, it's about love, the wild engine of it when hitched to unhinged individuals and causes alike. Woollett seems more concerned with mundanity than anomaly.

This raises an important question – does she intend to make the reader sympathise with the couples, and with the female consort in particular? In showing the mundanity of their concerns – their bad skins, their petty vanities, their cravings for excitement – Woollett, like her subjects, avoids confronting what violence against another human being actually *means*.

Eva & Co invariably dissociate from reality, leading me to ruminate: is dissociation a charge that can be laid against the author herself?

The zeitgeist of each character is amoral at best; their grasp of consequences flimsy or non-existent. Their lover's gaze eroticises their men and their empathy often evokes our empathy, despite ourselves. (Empathy is a quality that the bad men spectacularly lack.) Is Woollett knowingly creating this effect, or is she herself somehow caught up in it?

Interestingly, the collection begins with Buck Barrow whispering in the ear of Blanche. Within a short time they will hit the hills of hell with his brother Clyde, and his wild woman Bonnie. "Baby, wake up," Buck says to Blanche (3).

Given that the real-life women in this collection will end in prison (if they are lucky), or in a violent death (suicide, electric chair) when the law catches up with them, it's an entreaty that the reader can't help wishing would rise to a shout and rouse *all of them* from their moral slumbers. *Wake up!*

Woollett is clever at characterisation, at dialogue, at ambiguity – but is her parade of misery, delusion, warped eroticism and adventurousness intended to illuminate the *causes* of human darkness or simply to titillate? Is she pushing us into voyeurism, making us, with our healthy capacity for empathy, collaborators? Who is manipulating whom?

It's only on reaching (or discovering) the appendix with its brief biographies of the couples that a reader in search of a moral message might find it – straight up, not slant.

I wondered if Shirley Jackson's "The Demon Lover," a serious story about conventional expectations of femininity and sexual frustration, was an influence. It isn't in the Bibliography but around 30 true-crime titles are, including victim memoirs. Several titles about particular individuals are listed, making the workings of Woollett's mind somewhat more transparent.

On reflection, I concluded that Woollett deliberately creates a spaciousness in which a reader can think for herself. Surely these fictional biographies are meant to make us question our assumptions about innocence and guilt, love and its mythical power for good, intentions and motivations, cause and effect?

The Love of a Bad Man can be whatever a reader wants it to be. Compelling. Disturbing. A flirt with criminology. A meditation on contemporary relationships between men and women. An exploration of Freud's belief in the drives of death and sex. A treatise on desire. A treatise on delusion.

The dominance of American settings and stories is slightly more problematic for a non-American reader. Couple-crimes are not confined to the States (or to white women-white men partnerships). A wider casting of the net might have enriched the cache

and taken the reader a little further from the mass media's obsession with "killer-couples."

Another aspect of the collection which is worthy of interrogation is the inclusion of Eva Braun. Hitler ordered mass killings of civilians and the Jewish people in particular and forced a World War, resulting in deaths across the globe on a massive and horrific scale. It sits most oddly with the other stories and tends to trivialise this catastrophe by putting it into the terrain of a bedroom drama.

Apparently, the author is currently working on a "true crime" novel inspired by the Jim Jones cult that ended in mass-suicide in 1978, as is Marceline's story in this collection. It will be called *Beautiful Revolutionary*. I don't know whether to be a-quiver with anticipation, or with the dread that comes with revisiting a calamity in the form of a bestseller.

Reference:

Lou Heinrich. "Inside the mind of Eva Braun: Laura Elizabeth Woollett on *The Love of a Bad Man*." *Guardian Australia*, 30 Aug 2016.

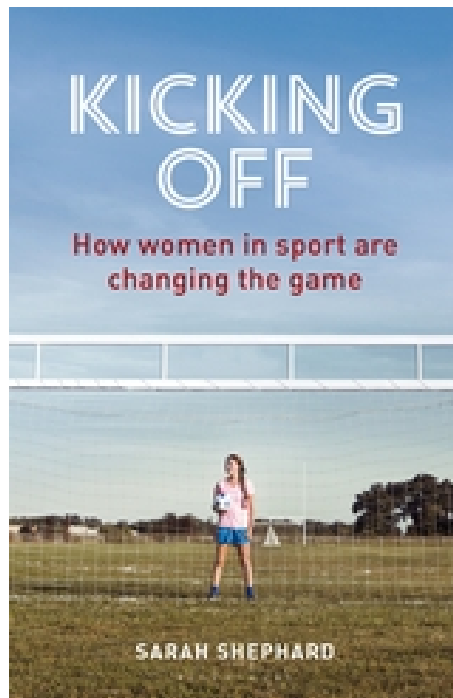
Lesley Synge is a Brisbane writer with an MA in Creative Writing from The University of Queensland. Her latest book is *Wharfie*, the life story of Wal Stubbings, a rank-and-file worker who dedicated himself to making a better world.

Challenging the Dominance of Male Sport

Sarah Shephard, *Kicking Off: How Women in Sport Are Changing the Game*

London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Reviewed by Braham Dabscheck



SPORT, whether at the top or recreational level, is usually viewed as an activity mainly pursued by males. Broadcasters, sponsors, both private and public, and spectators have traditionally been more prepared to follow and propagate male over female sport. Sarah Shephard has been working as a journalist with an English weekly sporting magazine since 2006. The period of her employment has witnessed fundamental changes in the position of women's sport; it is challenging the dominance hitherto of male sport. This book provides a comprehensive account of the various forces at work in bringing about such changes.

In the process Shephard examines the trajectory of young girls in taking up sport at school; the provision of facilities and coaching as they progress into their teenage years; the attitude of various sporting administrators to female athletes; the increasing commercial interest in a number of female sports, and the pathway of females into coaching, administrative and board positions either following the end of their on-field careers or because of their demonstrated abilities in other ventures. If nothing else, *Kicking Off* demonstrates – and it does much more than this – that young girls can be as besotted as young boys with sport and with emulating the feats of champion players.

Kicking Off is organised into two distinct sections. The first is a series of chapters which examine broader issues pertaining to women's sport. These chapters provide information on a wide variety of individual and team sports in both the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The issues Shephard canvasses include what motivates broadcasters and sponsors to back particular sports; differences in the opportunities for males and females to pursue sport; with the exception of tennis and to a lesser extent golf, the wide disparity in incomes earned by males and female athletes; the relative lack of facilities and access to coaching experienced by women; the sexist attitudes of administrators and journalists; problems associated with body image, especially eating disorders of female athletes; and the attitudes of parents, especially fathers, in encouraging/supporting their daughters to pursue sport. In the process, Shephard refers to a wide range of studies and experts on these issues. Unfortunately, such material is not brought together in a thorough bibliography. Her section on Further Reading struggles to complete half a page.

The second section is a series of case studies of leading sportswomen, all champions in their respective fields, and the obstacles they overcame during their stellar careers. These range in length from 10 to 23 pages and provide *Kicking Off* with an enhanced insight into the problems confronting female athletes. In some cases, they not only had to overcome sexism, but also the cliquey "culture" that often pervades sport. Dominant ideas about sport assume it is a space where meritocracy rules supreme. These chapters cast a sad light on this perspective.

The first case study examines the role of Billie Jean King after tennis adopted professionalism and its decision to cut back on women's tournaments. She set about organising female players, created tournaments in which players could compete, found sponsors and convinced American tennis officials that women should receive the same pay as men in the US Open. Equal pay now applies to all opens. Billie Jean King has been heralded as a major champion of athletes' rights.

Other case studies examine Roberta Gibb who broke the rule that women could not compete in the Boston Marathon (she hid in the bushes at the start); the Rugby player Maggie Alphonsi; the Football (Soccer) player Kelly Smith; the Cyclist Nicole Cooke; the US Basketball player Becky Hammon who has the distinction of being the first female to be appointed as an assistant coach of a National Basketball Association

(men's) team; and the Cricketer Clare Connor who is now the Head of Women's Cricket at the English Cricket Board.

Broadcasters and sponsors are attracted to sports which provide highly competitive and skilled contests. The lesson from this for women's sport is the need to create situations in which the most able athletes are able to play and train regularly, and be provided with the logistic and financial support to enable this to happen. This has been occurring in tennis and golf for decades, and more recently in the team sports such as Football (Soccer), cricket, basketball and netball.

Australian sport is on the threshold of major innovations in female sport. Cricketers who represent Australia have negotiated contracts which will see them earning six-figure sums; Footballers (Soccer) have participated in the first ever strike in team sports in Australia that resulted in their incomes being increased to slightly above the minimum wage, and negotiations are in train for payments to players in the W-League; Rugby (Sevens) players are earning incomes slightly higher than this; there is already a well established Women's National Basketball League, currently comprising nine teams; Netball has embarked on an eight-team national competition (it has had five teams in an Australian-New Zealand league which is to be disbanded); the Australian Football League is embarking on an eight-team league, mooted to expand to thirteen teams in 2018; and Rugby League is moving to establish a women's league by 2021.

It is conceivable that within a decade that there could be somewhere between 700 and 800 women who will be able to pursue a career where they will earn "decent" incomes in professional team sports in Australia. And this statement ignores the situation in individual and other team sports. The success of all these codes, especially the new ventures, will be to attract the best athletes to their sport to satisfy the needs of broadcasters and sponsors. They will need to be wary of doing things on the cheap; not expecting women to play for peanuts, ensuring training times do not clash with other work and/or ensuring that payments are high enough for athletes to be fulltime professionals, cover medical insurance and the additional costs of the nutrition and other things that are necessary for an athlete to compete at the highest level. Finally, it is likely that with the growth in women's sport, some former players will obtain employment as journalists/commentators, coaches and administrators.

In an Afterword, Shephard brings together these various themes in advocating a five-point action plan to further the development of female participation in sport. This is: improve the media awareness and profile of sportswomen; confront examples of sexism with the same seriousness as other forms of discrimination; put pressure on sporting bodies to improve gender balance on boards; provide more resources to encourage girls to become involved in secondary school sport; and develop programs to encourage families to raise active children and participate with them.

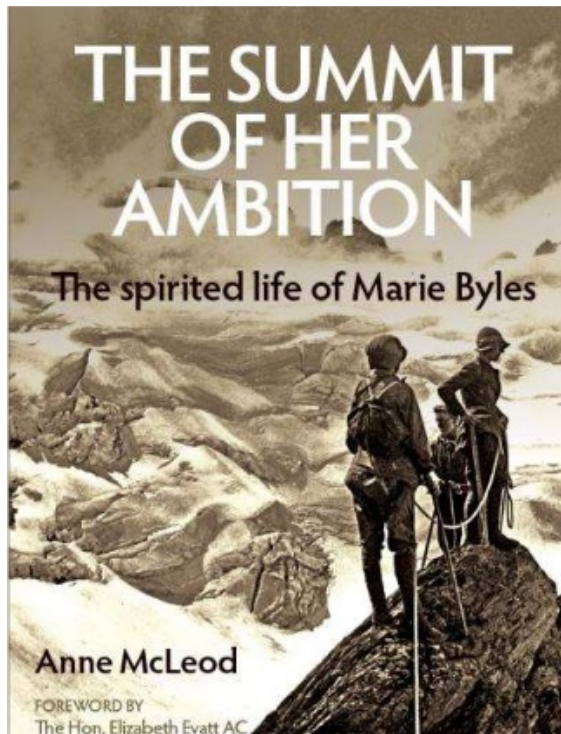
Kicking Off is an important work in that it provides valuable information on a sea change which is occurring with an increasing number of sports being opened up to women. It is not unreasonable to predict that the future—for the UK, the US and Australia--should be one in which more women will be able to pursue productive and well-remunerated careers as athletes. In doing so, *Kicking Off* unpacks and clearly dissects a number of dimensions associated with the nexus between women and sport and offers well-thought-out recommendations for their resolution. It is a valuable work which deserves a wide readership.

Braham Dabscheck is a Senior Fellow in the Faculty of Law at the University of Melbourne. He is an Industrial Relations scholar with a special interest in such issues in professional team sports. He has been a consultant to a number of Australian and overseas player associations.

Pioneers in Conservation

Anne McLeod. *The Summit of Her Ambition: The Spirited Life of Marie Byles*. Sydney: np. 2016.

Reviewed by Marilla North



WITH “conservation” now becoming a key political issue, especially with manoeuvres such as increased rather than restricted off-shore oil drilling, and Gautam Adani’s proposed massive coal mine in Queensland, conservation groups previously seen as focusing upon threatened species are now, in the face of daily warnings, becoming much more assertive about the destruction of earth’s environment that will produce the collapse of the world as we know it—and deploying as many means as necessary, including legal action, to hold it back.

Anne McLeod’s biography *The Summit of Her Ambition: The Spirited Life of Marie Byles*, is the life story of a trailblazing feminist lawyer, environmentalist, explorer and mountaineer—and early western Buddhist. Marie Byles (1900-1978) had a lifelong and close connection to the Blue Mountains and many other wilderness areas of New South Wales and worked to preserve vast tracts of land for national parks. Our current situation shows how intuitive visionary pioneers such as Marie Byles were in their time and suggests that a new re-vision of their stories is overdue.

Marie Beuzeville Byles was born in England on 8 April 1900. Her socialist father, Cyril, imparted environmental principles and took his children to protest against the enclosure of public lands. When the local vicar bought a small coppice (forest) and closed the public footpath through it, she recalled, "Father took us for a walk where the public footpath had been. He cut the wire of the newly-made fence and made us tread over the newly-made garden. He then had leaflets printed and circulated in which he condemned denial of access to public property by private property holders as the 'iniquitous stealing away of public rights.'" (McLeod, 4) Eventually the Vicar had to provide a new footpath. Incidents such as this gave Marie and her two brothers insight into the value of public land and bred a consciousness that individuals could, and should, make a difference.

In 1911, more than a hundred years ago, Marie, at nine years old, arrived with her family in Sydney from Great Britain. Her father, an expert on railway signalling, had been contracted to supervise the electrification of the entire NSW railways signalling system. The Byles family henceforth enjoyed free rail travel, and usually headed up to the Blue Mountains for their winter holidays. As she later reflected:

The train went up imperceptibly, but when the view opened out beyond Wentworth Falls you looked down apparently stupendous precipices and did not look up to any kind of mountains at all but across gorges to a level plateau skyline. The Blue Mountains are a Blue Plateau, but they provided endless good walking. (McLeod, 27).

* * * *

In her senior high school years in Sydney, Marie had been made Head Prefect at the Presbyterian Ladies College in Pymble, evidence of her leadership prowess. Slight and small of stature she was nonetheless an indomitable force. Her excellent Leaving Certificate results in 1918 gained her an Exhibition to the University of Sydney where she graduated in Law in 1924. She resisted the prevailing wisdom that she should be satisfied to remain a solicitor's clerk in the boys' club that was the NSW legal fraternity. Perhaps her eventual success in breaking through was helped a little by her father's status and high regard in the New South Wales politico-business community. She gained admission as the first "lady solicitor" in that State, gazetted in June 1924. Marie went on to establish her own firm, M.B. Byles and Co., in the upper North Shore suburb

of Eastwood in 1929, in the wake of Grata Flos Matilda Greig (1880-1958), a barrister and solicitor who, having gained her Bachelor of Laws from Melbourne University in 1903, practised in Melbourne, Victoria, from 1905. Prior to Greig's graduation, Ada Evans had graduated in Law from Sydney University in 1902 but had not been permitted to practise until 1918 when the NSW Enabling Act became law. Evans, however, declined the chance to practise, feeling that too much time had elapsed since her graduation and she would hence be behind the eight ball in the profession.

* * * *

Since early adolescence Marie, with her "pirate gang" of female friends from high school, had explored the wildernesses of the Hawkesbury estuary and Bouddi Headland from her family's Palm Beach Holiday home, "Seawards" on Sunrise Hill. She had gathered a small group of "daring Daniels," as her mother dubbed them, and in her post-graduate years they ventured further, into the Upper Blue Mountains and the Royal National Park south of Sydney. In 1928 Marie set off on a trip "By Cargo Boat and Mountain" around the world to develop her Alpine climbing skills. She ended her trip by climbing Mt Cook in New Zealand. On her return home Marie joined the newly-formed Sydney Bushwalkers' Club and, with them, she enjoyed an exhausting schedule of bushwalks throughout the state.

In 1932 the originally all-male Sydney Bushwalkers began a campaign to save the Blue Gum Forest in the Grose Valley from destruction. The Federation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW was subsequently created as a lobby group. Acting as their honorary solicitor, Marie Byles dedicated her legal skills to preserving vast areas of NSW for National Parks and became, as McLeod argues through her narrative, in effect Australia's "first environmental lawyer." Byles was one who both talked the talk and walked the walk, combining her love of bushwalking with her legal skills. In 1932, after the success of the Blue Gum Forest campaign, Marie set about ensuring that her beloved Bouddi Headland wilderness would be next on the Federation's list of priorities. She assigned her law clerk, Pearle Gibbons, to search titles at the Lands Department and make copies of maps and plans, and Marie eventually convinced the Federation to make Bouddi its next major cause.

They issued an invitation to the Lands Department to send a representative to inspect the Hawkesbury estuary region. The Department, in turn, requested that the

Federation send a deputation to escort the Gosford District Surveyor, one Mr Barry, on an inspection tour. Barry was easily convinced of their submission's value and offered to include a wider area than they had originally hoped for. On 5 July 1935, 263 hectares on the Maitland Bay Peninsula were gazetted as "Reserved Natural Park."

* * * *

Back when Marie decided to break the gender barriers and join the, previously, all-male Sydney Bushwalkers, over one weekend in 1929 she had set out to lead a mixed-gender "tramping" group and re-discover a route from the Grose Valley up to the plateau of Mt Hay. They stayed in Leura overnight. Early the next icy winter's morning they climbed down the steep escarpment into the valley and breakfasted there. Marie reconnoitered and finally located the pass, and the group subsequently scaled the cliffs and returned to Weatherboard Station, in (now) Wentworth Falls, arriving back in Sydney by train that Sunday evening. This route is now known as Byles' Pass.

Another renowned conservationist, Dot Butler, who helped save the Blue Gum Forest; the ranger, Ruth Schleisser, who helped establish the Blue Mountains Flora and Fauna Preservation Society, and the botanist, Isabel Bowden, were among many other pioneer women bushwalkers who made tremendous contributions towards Blue Mountains Nature Conservation and the bushwalker's tradition of the joy of being *in* nature, and thus closer to its spirit.

Writing prolifically for the Sydney Bush Walkers' club journal, Marie struggled to convey the profound association she felt with the timeless land: "There is something in the contact between the human being and nature which is very hard to explain, but as you lie on Mother Earth and look up at the stars the life force seems to bring a new health to your tired limbs and worried mind ... I only know that if you love it then whatever the pains and however tired you may be in the office the next day, you will do it again and again." (Marie Byles, "Many Lives in One" SLNSW MSS 3833)

In 1939 Paddy Pallin (another British immigrant) and Marie Byles established The Bush Club. It catered for newcomers to bush walking, especially bush lovers who did not want to go camping. Its members included some artists and intellectuals, and a number of Jewish refugees; it had neither entry tests nor overnight camping requirements. The Bush Club minutes show the Club's engagement with issues such

as fire management, land purchase, sale of wildflowers, development near various reserves and sanctuaries, and the preservation, declaration and management of Bouddi National Park.

* * * *

Marie Byles's visit to China in early 1941 began a choice to pursue more the life of the spirit. She spent a week alone above Blue Lake, practising the pursuit of solitude and detachment through a different kind of engagement with nature. She concluded that solitude in nature was a means to deeper knowledge, but could not be knowledge in itself, observing in her journal: "There is a deeper life behind where God is and life found – darkness of sense. But God is the silence of the soul and God is nearly meaningless without the bitter music of humanity. Nature will always be my friend but the way to God is in my heart only. She cannot help me except by giving silence." (Byles, "Many Lives" SLNSW MS 3833)

From 1941 to 1944, Marie was Secretary of the Federation and editor of *The Sydney Bushwalker*. By then she was changing her focus from adventure to conservation, a decision made in part because of a permanent injury to her foot early in 1941, from a fall on the path from Maitland Bay up to the Scenic Road in her beloved Bouddi Natural Park. "Fate took possession of the arena of my life," she wrote, "to lose one's feet for walking" (McLeod, 91) was the worst fate to befall a bushwalker. Yet it also coincided with her changing spiritual orientation.

Moving towards an increased commitment to Buddhism, which she connected with recognition that the Self was a small part of all life, she built Ahimsa, a simple, small cottage set in bushland north of Sydney where she lived alone, sleeping out on the open veranda to be closer to nature. She encouraged the property's use as a centre for Buddhism and land restoration. Her recognition of the Buddha as the first great conservationist brought together these two themes. She would bequeath her home, Ahimsa, to the National Trust of NSW where it remains today as a retreat.

* * * *

Her efforts to link the practice of Buddhism with conservation – an example of the ahimsa principle, the respect for all living things – found accord with her brother Baldur's commitment to the avoidance of the onslaught on creatures, and she

extended that to apply to all aspects of the whole natural, living environment. From as early as the 1940s, Marie used this argument to press for full protection of the State's new wilderness areas. In the case of the Snowy Mountains wilderness area, an attempt had been made to reconcile grazing and conservation with the description of a State Park rather than a National Park, and also to provide a "primitive" area in which total conservation could be recognised. Marie, as Secretary, actively influenced the Federation of Bushwalking Clubs to recommend that the Kosciusko Primitive Area should also exclude people. This created conflict with Myles Dunphy, longtime gun-carrying, recreational bushwalking advocate who, nonetheless, displayed the highest regard for Marie's "solicitor's mind." Myles told film-maker Gillian Coote (c1980), "Marie was a person you could not bluff, not that you wanted to, but you had to be dashed careful how you talked to Marie because you knew she had a mind that weighed the odds all the time because she could stand up in front of a Magistrate ... she had that demeanour, that knowledge of the Law." (Myles Dunphy to Gillian Coote, *A Singular Woman*, 1983.)

The two most vocal conservation advocates disagreed strongly over land use in certain parts of the new Kosciusko State Park. Marie championed the "primitive area" concept to cover primeval or truly "wild" tracts. In elaborating this concept she took care to point out that a "wild" area did not exist simply to give human beings the pleasure of seeing it and that, ideally –

personally conducted parties led by scientists would be the most acceptable of all visitors ... After all, why should man in his arrogance say that primeval lands are of value only in so far as they subserve his ends? ... Cannot Man, for once, admit that there are other things beside himself with rights, and that he is not the only being in the universe. (Byles, "What is a Primitive Area?" *SBW Journal*, July 1945)

The debate would take decades to resolve. Myles Dunphy had, or so it seemed to Marie, no comprehension that "nature had rights." The idea of denying anyone access to wilderness areas was an abomination to Dunphy. For Marie, wilderness, on the other hand, was part of the spiritual life. Renowned environmentalist and educator, Allen Axel Strom (1915-1997), then a young Sydney bushwalker, told Gillian Coote when she was researching her Marie Byles biographical documentary, "A Singular

Life" (1983), that Marie "believed that one had direct responsibility to do something for the bushlands." Sadly the struggle to keep Kosciusko's integrity has been lost since it was overtaken by the development of ski resorts in 1952. The tourist villages now accommodate tens of thousands of skiers each season and the outcomes of roads, sewerage, ski lifts and human depredation belie the term "National Park."

* * * *

As an adolescent in World War I and until well into her thirties, Marie had made her bedroom on the outside, partly-enclosed veranda of the family home, Chilworth, in Beecroft on Sydney's then semi-rural North Shore, and at Seawards, their Palm Beach holiday home. When she built her own abode, Ahimsa, on two hectares in Cheltenham, one suburb down the line from her parents, she incorporated a three metre-square veranda wrapped around the core which served both as her *al fresco* bedroom and living room, always open to the stars and the creatures of the surrounding bushland. Marie was in her sixty-seventh year on the night of 20 November 1966 when she was dragged from her sleep, raped and nearly murdered by an unknown man. A neighbour discovered her unconscious the next morning, covered in blood, her skull fractured and her jaw broken. She was taken to the nearby Sydney Sanitarium Private Hospital (The San) in Wahroonga. Marie was unable to help the police as she had no memory at all of the attack and there were no fingerprints or any other evidence and, of course, DNA testing was still two decades away. Her many Buddhist and bushwalking friends kept the story out of the press. But popular wisdom persisted that the attacker was a disgruntled client of her law firm. Florence James and Linda MacIntosh would think otherwise after reading Marie's (unpublished) manuscript "Hidden Light from Japan" (1966) when she subsequently came to stay with them at the house they shared in the Blue Mountains. Marie had written in her Preface that she had allowed a young male Buddhist aspirant to stay at Ahimsa in retreat. He had taken for granted that she would cook him rice for his meal, as he had witnessed with the mendicant monks in Asia. Marie's feminist hackles rose and she dismissed him, handing over a packet of rice and a box of matches telling him to cook it himself. He screamed violent abuse at her, knocked the rice from her hand and stormed off. She later discovered that his father was in a mental hospital. Florence finally wrote to Marie's brother, Baldur, suggesting that this line could be investigated. It seems that it was not.

Florence James had reconnected with Marie – after a sixteen year hiatus in their friendship – soon after Florence returned from the UK to settle back in Australia in 1963. (In 1968 she would formally engage with the spiritual affiliation most congenial to her ethics and values by joining the Peace Testimony of the Quaker Society of Friends.) When Florence was told of the rape and near-murder of Marie, she and Linda immediately offered to care for her during her convalescence at Lumeah, their Bedford Rd, Woodford residence. After nearly two months at The San, Marie had initially accepted the offer of home care with her Theosophist friend, Bertel Wernitzky, in Thornleigh. Bertel was a trained nurse with a clinical approach to her friend's needs and so was well equipped to deal with a singularly difficult patient. However Florence was also offering editorial assistance with Marie's ongoing Buddhist publishing projects so, after two months with Bertel, in early March 1967 as a heatwave engulfed Sydney Marie got Baldur to drive her up to Woodford where Lumeah's wide veranda offered her the outdoor sleeping quarters she preferred and cool evenings. She was a post-trauma victim, carrying with her considerable emotional and physical illness. Her life-long sense of impunity, "daring to be a Daniel" with independence and invulnerability, had been shattered and, in a moment, she could be reduced to abject terror. She was angry, she raged and she hit out at the gentle, loving care the two women offered her. The convalescence became a nightmare for her solicitous hosts. She beat her breast and screamed hysterically at her own "intolerable burden of sin at the root of all her bad karma" (McLeod, 170), taking on the guilt for the crime against her body. Florence and Linda were convinced she was at breaking point. When she insisted on returning to Ahimsa to live alone again in her semi-wilderness they believed her sanity would be at stake if they tried to stop her.

In Florence's correspondence with her life-time friend, Dymphna Cusack, as she tried to convey the issues that were involved during that troublesome time, Florence described Marie's "contradictory nature" and her "multi-faceted self-deception." In a letter to Dymphna dated 2 July 1967, carbon copied to Christina Stead, Florence referred to the "beating up" of Marie and her subsequent arrival at Lumeah in March, presenting as "a five stone cage of bones." She stated, too, that Marie's period with them had "a prolonged, disturbing and destructive effect on both of us ... a neurotic, lonely, unhappy woman who craves love but does not know how to give it – she can't live on even terms with anyone – she's made a cult and a virtue of rising to spiritual

heights beyond the reach of anyone but Buddha, Gandhi or Christ ... in that order.”
(Florence James Papers ML MS 5877)

* * * *

This biography is a good read and a compelling life-story which has great relevance today. A bellwether sounding from nearly a century ago, Marie Byles sends us clear warning of what could occur if we further forsake our wildernesses as we have in the Kosciusko National Park; the Great Barrier Reef is a major case in point, as is the Hunter Valley. The Coal Seam Gas high-tech search helicopters are mapping the Blue Mountains National Park right now.

I have a few minor quibbles with Anne McLeod's text. The Index far from satisfies the professional, biographical researcher and the Endnotes are simply not moored to the text. These shortcomings make the book difficult to navigate for those who participate in the feminist discourse within the twentieth and twenty-first century literary and socio-historical "conversation." Nonetheless, *The Summit of Her Ambition* does provide us with insight into Byles's spirited life. I sincerely hope that Anne McLeod finds a producer interested in translating this biography into a feature film. Who could play the complex role of Marie Byles?

The dead call us out of the past. They ask to be heard, remembered, understood. Biographers are their messengers, charged with the responsibilities that need imagination as well as accuracy. (Richard Holmes in Michael Holroyd, *Works on Paper: The Craft of Biography and Autobiography* (Little Brown & Co., London, 2002) 10.

Thanks to Robert G Jones for his assistance with this paper.

Marilla North has been researching the life and works of Dymphna Cusack and her kith and kin since 1979. She has done extensive archival research on many of Cusack's colleagues, including in Marie Byles's papers in the Mitchell Library. Brandl & Schlesinger recently published *Yarn Spinners* as the first volume in her "Come in Dymphna" multi-text biographical project. A Chapbook, "The Love Poems of Dymphna Cusack," will follow in mid-2017.

Airborn Weaponised Drones and the Tree-of-Life

By Kathryn Brimblecombe-Fox



IN my painting, *The Tree-of-Life Sends Its Energy Underground*, the tree, representing all life, is vulnerable to attack. It stands alone in a tumultuous landscape. Weaponised remotely piloted Reaper drones circle above it. Are these drones readying for attack? Their Hellfire and guided missiles certainly seem aimed and ready. Or are the drones loitering so their sophisticated surveillance systems can gather more information – before attacking? The turbulent sky is swept up in the intrigue, yet light on the horizon signals hope, the dawning of a new day.

The tree is surrounded by the light of the new day. It draws this light into a halo of protection. At the same time, it sends its seeds, sap and roots deeper into the landscape – a subterranean landscape. Here, potential new trees hibernate, dormant until it is safe to emerge as seedlings or suckers. The landscape seems ripe, fiery and fertile, ready to re-charge. Yet the painting could be read a different way. The tree could be wounded, its death imminent - its blood seeping into the landscape. This blood, however, still holds the ingredients of life.

The turbulent sky also has stories to tell. It demonstrates that our sky is an increasingly contested place where surveillance and attack threats from above have created a new or artificial sky. In some places in the world, such as Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan and Northern Pakistan, skies are feared. In these places a drone's loitering capability, and ability to switch from surveillance mode to attack mode, create a persistent threat. Architect Eyal Weizman's ideas on the verticality of threat have triggered some of my

inspirations.⁴ When the sky is feared, distance collapses and access to the beauty of cosmological perspectives is obscured. In *The Tree-of-Life Sends Its Energy Underground* the drones are painted the same colour as the sky to expose their camouflage attempts. However, there is hope. Red, white and yellow star-like dots combine the energy forces of the tree-of-life and light. They act as reminders of cosmological distance, from the nano to the cosmic. They also conjure the presence of distant galaxies and in doing so they remind us of the surrounding universe.

The Tree-of-Life Sends Its Energy Underground is from my recent “Dronescares” series of works on paper.⁵ The paintings have been inspired by my recent research into contemporary militarised technology, particularly airborne drones and night vision technology. The impetus for this research came from an interest in, and concern about, existential risk posed by emerging technologies. This type of risk could mean the potential demise of the human species, or its radical disruption, as a result of malevolent, accidental or unforeseen outcomes of emerging technologies.⁶ A particular interest and concern is the accelerating nature of developments in artificial intelligence and its integration into weapon systems. This coupling enables the development of Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWS) where human input in decision making loops is minimised and possibly removed. Progress in the development of Lethal Autonomous Weapons concerns many people, including artificial intelligence researchers and developers, physicists, philosophers, computer scientists and others. This is evidenced in the number of people who have signed the Future of Life Institute’s “Autonomous Weapons: An Open Letter from AI and Robotics Researchers”.⁷

⁴ Eyal Weizman, “The Politics of Verticality: Control in the Air,” *Open Democracy*, accessed May 18, 2016. www.opendemocracy.net/ecology-politicsverticality/article_810.jsp. Eyal Weizman is Professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London.

⁵ For more about my “Dronescares” please see “Portfolio: Dronescares by Kathryn Brimblecombe-Fox.” This is an interview that was conducted with me by Maggie Barnett from the Centre for the Study of the Drone, Bard College, New York. <http://dronecenter.bard.edu/portfolio-dronescares-by-kathryn-brimblecombe-fox/>. More “Dronescares” information and images are also available on my “DRONESCAPES” page on my blog <https://kathrynbrimblecombeart.blogspot.com.au/p/dronescares.html>.

⁶ Research on existential risk posed by emerging technologies is conducted at research centres including, amongst others, the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, University of Cambridge <http://cser.org/> and the Future of Humanity Institute, University of Oxford <https://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/>.

⁷ Future of Life Institute, “Autonomous Weapons: An Open Letter from AI and Robotics Researchers,” (July 28, 2015), <http://futureoflife.org/open-letter-autonomous-weapons/>.

Tree-of-Life⁸

In my paintings the transcultural/religious tree-of-life symbol acts as a reminder of life, human and non-human, over all time. I paint the tree either as a beacon or as a cascading mass of branches across a painting. The branching appearance of the tree speaks of life giving and sustaining systems, for example, human vascular systems and Earth's water systems, as well as energy forces that propel the universe. I often paint drones with surveillance or targeting signals emanating from their wide-area intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems. These signals, although branching in appearance, contrast with the tree-of-life's complex and seemingly random branching patterns. This contrast prompts questions about how accelerating developments in contemporary technology pervade, infiltrate and mediate life.

I attempt to tease out how the tree-of-life can symbolically contribute to an understanding of life in the twenty-first century. It has been a meaningful symbol of life across cultures and religions for eons, why relegate it to past history without exploring its present and future potential? I ask, what might the tree-of-life say about systems in the digital age where operative and instructional algorithms remain invisible. In many of my paintings I also include binary code instructing words such as LIFE and Human. I gain a contrary enjoyment in hand painting code, making it not only visible, but also colourful, even aesthetic.

Drones⁹

Airborne drones are "unmanned," remotely operated vehicles. This means they are piloted from ground control stations that are often situated thousands of kilometres from surveillance or attack targets. Crew at these stations also operate a drone's various surveillance, communication and weapon systems. Other support staff maintain drones at military bases that can also be remote to the piloting and surveillance crew, as well as targets. Drones currently, therefore, cannot be described as unpiloted and uncrewed. Even future robotic piloting, surveillance and maintenance systems would mean that drones could still be described as being piloted and perhaps

⁸ For more about my interest in the tree-of-life please visit "Tree-of-Life Dreaming" blog post where I write about the tree-of-life and provide other links to more posts.

<https://kathrynbrimblecombeart.blogspot.com.au/2015/05/tree-of-life-dreaming.html>.

⁹ I recommend visiting *The Centre for the Study of the Drone*, Bard College, New York website. It is a good starting point for research into military drone development and use. <http://dronecenter.bard.edu/>.

crewed. However, in an age of accelerating developments in autonomous systems, where artificial intelligence replaces human operative and instructional capabilities, the term “unmanned” signals the removal of the human being from decision making loops and operational tasks. This removal could be called a process that de-humanises or perhaps, un-humanises. An ominous neologism *un-humanned* pops into mind. The replacement of the human being by robotics and artificial intelligence is a hot topic across a number of industries. However, the word “unmanned” in relation to weaponised drones brings the removal of the human being into sharp focus. This is especially so because the human being is not necessarily removed as a potential target. In the future, death by Lethal Autonomous Weapons may precipitate the final removal of the human being, maybe the human species?

The historical trajectory of the airborne military drone goes back to conflicts such as World War Two and the Viet Nam War where they were used as decoys, for surveillance and to assist bomber targeting. They were used for similar purposes during the first Gulf War. However, developments in military drone capabilities have accelerated since the United States weaponised drones in the aftermath of 9/11.¹⁰ Since then a number of countries now have operational military drones variously capable of long range, long dwell and endurance surveillance and/or targeting. These countries include the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Israel, China, Iran, Russia and Turkey.¹¹ The Royal Australian Air Force has previously provided drone surveillance support to Australian troops and partners in southern Afghanistan, with their final mission occurring in 2014.¹² Since then Australia has continued with a drone procurement and training program.¹³ Organisations such as ISIS have developed airborne drone improvised explosive devices (IED) by attaching explosives to smaller domestic/civilian drones.¹⁴

¹⁰ Mark Bowden, “How the Predator Drone Changed the Character of War,” *Smithsonian Magazine* (November, 2013), accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-the-predator-drone-changed-the-character-of-war-3794671/>.

¹¹ Dan Gettinger, “Drones Operating in Syria and Iraq,” *Centre for the Study of the Drone* (New York: Bard College, December 13, 2016), <http://dronecenter.bard.edu/drones-operating-in-syria-and-iraq/>.

¹² Royal Australian Air Force, “Remotely Piloted Unmanned Aircraft Systems,” accessed December, 2016, <https://www.airforce.gov.au/Technology/Remotely-Piloted-Unmanned-Aircraft-Systems/?RAAF-ascmBdhDi9vUAlg7bh3rpB1QbBuByBHJ>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Dan Gettinger, “Drones Operating in Syria and Iraq,” *Centre for the Study of the Drone* (New York: Bard College, December 13, 2016), <http://dronecenter.bard.edu/drones-operating-in-syria-and-iraq/>.

Developments in drone swarm technology have also hastened.¹⁵ Swarming means there are multiple drones working as a team. In a swarm, drones are less reliant on Global Positioning Satellites (GPS) for orientation because they relay geo-spatial information between themselves at the same time as adding to their banks of geo-spatial data. If one drone is “taken out” the others automatically re-calibrate and continue on their mission. Increasing self-learning capabilities and autonomous systems are evidenced in recent drone swarm developments.

I wrote about two films in a recent article “Kathryn Brimblecombe-Fox: *Red Rain*” published in *Hecate*.¹⁶ These films are *Eye in the Sky* (2015) and *Ex Machina* (2015).¹⁷ Here, I offer some further thoughts on *Eye in the Sky*. The film grapples with moral and ethical dilemmas associated with drone targeting and killing. It demonstrates how the human being is currently involved in decision making loops. In the film a decision to strike high value targets (HVTs) is thrown into ethical chaos by the presence of a young girl in the vicinity of the kill zone. If the HVTs are able to continue preparations their ultimate suicide mission will kill many people. Human intervention in manipulating the delineation of the kill zone co-ordinates eliminates that threat, but has dire consequences for the young girl and her family.

Eye in the Sky raises many questions about the use of drones for remote surveillance and killing. It also raises questions about a future where more autonomous systems are likely to operate. Would an autonomous system have struck earlier? Would it have immediately halted processes once the little girl appeared? In the film, an insect-like drone operates as a surveillance tool that covertly enters the building where the suicide bomber is being prepared. As drones become smaller and can operate in swarms another killing scenario presents itself. The HVTs in *Eye in the Sky* could have been “taken out” by lethal drone-insects capable of entering the intimate spaces of a

¹⁵ Various countries have reported drone swarm technology. These have been reported in a number of media outlets. Examples are: *BBC*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-38569027>; *Digital Trends*, <http://www.digitaltrends.com/cool-tech/perdix-drone-swarm/>; Dan Gettinger, “What You Need to Know About Drone Swarms,” *Centre for the Study of the Drone* (New York: Bard College, November 3, 2014), <http://dronecenter.bard.edu/what-you-need-to-know-about-drone-swarms/>.

¹⁶ Kathryn Brimblecombe-Fox, “Kathryn Brimblecombe-Fox: *Red Rain*,” *Hecate*, 42.1 (2016): 131-134.

¹⁷ This online article examines the technology demonstrated in *Eye in the Sky*. Peter Asaro, “Dr Peter Asaro on Drone Technology in *Eye in the Sky*,” *Sloan Science and Film* (April 19, 2016), <http://scienceandfilm.org/articles/2686/dr-peter-asaro-on-drone-technology-in-eye-in-the-sky>.

building. These kinds of technical developments pose significant questions about the use of drone surveillance, and their potential lethality, not only in conflict and counter-insurgency situations, but also in civilian policing environments.¹⁸

Conclusion

Paintings like *The Tree-of-Life Sends Its Energy Underground* engage with the figure of the military drone to address various issues associated with life, humanity and technology in the twenty-first century. However, I suggest that the medium of painting offers a counterpoint to contemporary technology. My paintings, although addressing complex technological issues, do not rely upon digital or cyber instruction or connectivity to exist. Nor do they need to be switched on at a power source. The hand of the human artist reminds us of the agency and presence of the human being.

Kathryn Brimblecombe-Fox is currently enrolled in a Masters of Philosophy in Art History at The University of Queensland. She is a visual artist with a practice and exhibition history that spans many years. The cover image, *The Tree-of-Life Sends Its Energy Underground*, for this edition of the Australian Women's Book Review is a painting from Kathryn's recent "Dronescares" series.

¹⁸ For more on the role of drone surveillance and the blurred lines between military and policing operations please read Ian Shaw, "The Urbanization of Drone Warfare: Policing Surplus Populations in the Dronepolis," *Geographica Helvetica* 71 (2016): 19-28, <http://www.geogr-helv.net/71/19/2016/gh-71-19-2016.pdf>. Ian Shaw has recently published *Predator Empire: Drone Warfare and Full Spectrum Dominance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).