



Australian Women's Book Review

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Submissions: Potential reviewers of recent books, please email Professor Carole Ferrier, in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History at The University of Queensland. Email address: c.ferrier@uq.edu.au

Editorial

This issue of the *Australian Women's Book Review* brings a diversity of works across a number of genres from memoir to novels, to collections of ephemera. Each of these books explores women and men, real and imagined, across time and space, as we were, as we are now and as we might be.

Among the non-fiction reviews, Sharon Bickle opens up *Things That Liberate: An Australian Feminist Wunderkammer* to explore the “cabinet of curiosities” from the 1960s to the 1980s, and finds that “what is most powerful about this collection of writings: the ‘things that liberate’ are not things at all but the women themselves,” as well as that second-wave feminism very much “defined the conditions by which women lived their lives.” Taking a humorous approach, Jessica O’Neill reviews two collections of feminist responses (*Destroying the Joint: Why women have to change the world* and *Griffith REVIEW 40: Women and Power*) to the “collective and ongoing tantrum that continues to be thrown by the masculinists of Australia.”

Angel Browning reviews Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for The Time Being*, a novel addressing life and death issues for people and the planet, from bullying to pollution. Bonnie Evans follows Lisa Jacobson on “a poignant journey” into the future through *The Sunlit Zone* – a novel whose brevity “belies its richness, the sea’s surface compared to its unfathomable depth and vastness.” Tiarney Miekus discusses Favel Parrett’s novel set in a Tasmanian landscape, “bleak and ravaged by humans.”

Alice Reynolds reviews *Z*, a novel which retells the life of Zelda Fitzgerald, giving her a voice often obscured by that of her more famous husband, Scott. One of the most powerful and fascinating new novels this year, Marion May Campbell’s *Konkretion*, is reviewed by Shamara Ransirini. The central character is an ageing feminist academic Monique, loitering in Paris. A former student of hers, Angel, is writing about Ulrike Meinhof, another historically obscured voice – indeed, definitively cut off when she died in Stammheim prison after the arrests of the leaders of the revolutionary Baader-Meinhoff group, active in Germany in the 1970s.

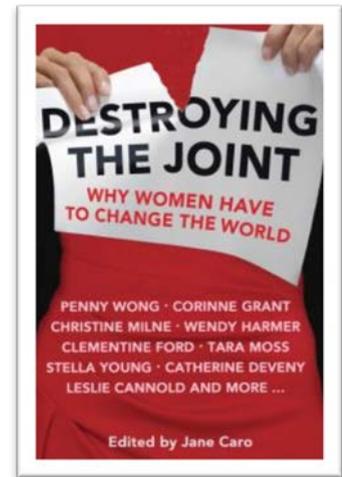
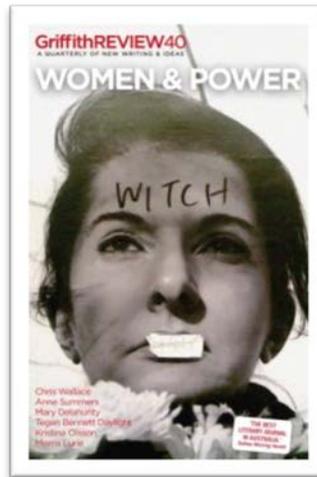
Finally, we are pleased that several of the books reviewed in this issue, including Carrie Tiffany’s *Mateship with Birds* and *Mullumbimby* by Melissa Lucashenko, have won (and continue to win) prestigious literary awards as well achieving popular success. *Toyo*, reviewed here by Emily Zong, a recent example of Asian Australian writing, which depicts a convergence of “contemporary Australian experience with Japan’s twentieth century modernity; is another prizewinner. Another again is Kristina Olsson’s haunting memoir *Boy, Lost* reviewed by Melissa Fagan who explains the core message that “we are all episodes in others’ lives, and others are episodes in ours.”

Ladies' Night

Jane Caro ed. *Destroying the Joint: Why women have to change the world.*

St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2013

Julianne Schultz ed. *Griffith REVIEW 40: Women and Power.*
Melbourne: Text Publishing 2013



Reviewed by Jessica O'Neill

WHEN Julia Gillard successfully negotiated to form government in September 2010, many thought the cause of women's equality was moving in a positive direction. As feminist daughters of feminist mothers this is what we'd been promised. Sure, we were expecting a bit of the usual backlash but not the collective and ongoing tantrum that continues to be thrown by the masculinists of Australia. John Howard's battlers might have dog-whistled racism back into the House but Gillard's move to the Lodge unwittingly unleashed the hounds of subtle sexism and overt misogyny in the Parliament and in the press.

Two years into the red-faced, snot-nosed screaming, Australians were, maybe, like many a tired mother pushing a shopping trolley, just trudging along trying to concentrate on the good things like surviving financial crises and not being Greece. But on 31 August 2012 Alan Jones, Liberal Party parrot and professional human being impersonator, gave voice to two of the Seven Great Untruths of the Mainstream Media. The first, obviously: winnable Asian land wars. The second and third: that women have as much power as men and that they are "destroying the joint" with it. The tantrum had gone too far and on 9 October 2012, Gillard delivered to the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, the supermarket slap heard around the world. Well, everywhere but the Canberra Press Gallery, obviously.

Barely two seasons later and freshly picked from the *zeitgeist* came two literary collections concerning women and power: *Destroying the Joint: Why Women Have to Change the World* and *Griffith REVIEW 40: Women and Power*. Speaking at the books' Brisbane launch, former Queensland Premier Anna Bligh speculated on whether this was a new wave of feminism taking shape. She wondered if it was the response to, or the cause of growing misogyny in public life and in the media. But, *is* that what is happening? Or is the old feminism, as I am starting to suspect, shaping up with new media to kick the wrinkly, grey arses of the old media, its assorted moguls, mouthpieces and puppet politicians? Is that the "joint" we're destroying? Please note that the preceding questions are mine, Ms Bligh would never say "arses" in public.

In the hope that they can provide some guidance I convene some contributors to the

collections for dinner and, hopefully, a show. As usual, I'm running late and everyone else is already at the table when I arrive. This is strange given that the restaurant is most definitely located in my own mind. See those bottomless glasses of wine? I did that.

Unflustered by her host's late entrance, *Destroying the Joint* editor and all round communications legend Jane Caro points me to an empty chair, signals the waiter to fill my glass and continues seamlessly the story of her reaction to Jones which was to take to Twitter with a call to action: "Got time on my hands tonight so I thought I'd come up with new ways to destroy the joint, being a woman and all. Ideas welcome". Ever generous, Caro adds that Jones must be given "his share of the credit (as the) gift that keeps on giving" (Caro x).

The table erupts into laughter, comedian Corinne Grant launches into her inspired 'white guy on commercial radio', routine: 'Ladies, you are not destroying the joint, you are destroying yourselves. Every time you ridicule good men who just want ladies to be ladies... bang on about women's rights... demand respect... argue back and insist that your opinions are valid, men like me think less and less of you. Is that really what you want?' (Caro 204-5).

More laughter. The waiter looks a bit uncomfortable. Nervous? Offended? I call him over and promise it's really not about him, that it's the system and he's just as oppressed by it as everyone else. He doesn't look completely convinced but he does fill my glass again. I explain to him that between the Alan Jones types on the radio and the Tony Abbott types in the Parliament we're all a bit sick of blokes whinging about women having power, especially considering we quite clearly don't have as much of it as they do.

Julianne Schultz, editor of *Griffith REVIEW 40: Women and Power* offers a bigger, less individual, less blame-y, picture: "Women may be better educated than ever and less dependent on men, even for procreation, but the dream of equality remains elusive, even in the most privileged societies" (Schultz 7).

With a knowing smile and a complete absence of irony, the waiter asks me if this is a hen's night. I look around the restaurant at the other large tables. Many of them, in fact nearly three quarters, are all-male groups. Writer, ethicist and 2011 Australian Humanist of the Year, Leslie Cannold spots me looking: "Thirty per cent is the point of critical minority and therefore critical change. When 30% of any workforce or team is female, women become visible," she says. "There are ample studies to show the ways in which 30% constitutes a critical mass but for me the proof of the pudding has always been in the way the most terrible sexists start squawking whenever the 30% mark in their field of endeavour is approached or reached... It's an intuitive thing... because when they look around the joint is no longer being run solely by and for them" (Caro 37-8).

I notice that sitting beside Cannold, Catherine Deveny, social commentator and comedian, is tapping a bright red pencil on the table with more and more enthusiasm. “I’ve always said I wished there was a scientific way to prove that women who colour outside the lines cop a thousand times more vitriol and it’s a thousand times more vicious” (Caro 157). Everyone at the table is nodding. We all remember how Deveny was pilloried for disagreeing with an old white man on *Q&A* -- and an old white cleric, Anglican archbishop Peter Jensen, at that. Comments on the Twitter feed for *Q&A* referred to Deveny as, among other less printable things: ugly, idiotic, nasty, frustrated, bitter, humourless, disrespectful, sarcastic, catty, hateful and (perhaps the worst of all the lady-crimes) “up herself” (Caro 158). Academic Chrys Stevenson studied that episode of *Q&A* in detail. We are all shocked but not surprised by the findings: Jensen spoke twice the amount of words as Deveny; they interrupted or interjected four times each; Jensen was asked by the host to speak eight times, twice as many as Deveny who was also asked twice to keep her response brief; and an audio engineer found that Deveny maintained a vocal level consistent with the other panellists (Caro 158).

I suggest that these results are even more worrying because for the show’s producers they are the intended outcome. I believe that *Q&A*, under the guise of diversity, uses smart articulate women like Catherine Deveny, Jane Caro and more recently the erudite and informed Corinne Grant, to provide what once would have been called “colour and movement”. *Q&A* and other panel shows on the ABC such as *The Drum* cast them for the very reason that Stevenson’s research reveals: to seem louder and more offensive than the white guys with power, money or influence who make up the rest of the panel. As the public broadcaster the ABC has cleverly used these women to garner sympathy for, or at a minimum distract from, its increasingly blatant conservative bias. The Liberal National Party also offers up sacrifices in the forms of the detestable Sophie Mirabella, the irrelevant Amanda Vanstone and the two lady Bishops. Also appearing are the Right’s shock-jocks *sans* phallic microphones Janet Albrechtsen and Miranda Devine; these women serving to make their male colleagues look like the best of a bad bunch. On a positive note I offer that Catherine has displayed excellent time management skills by provoking the majority of the outrage while taking up minimal amount of important man talking time. Well done.

Holding aloft a full bottle, Anne Summers wonders if we’ve all had enough wine to start talking about the dreaded “Q” word. She says “the situation is not just bad, it is diabolical. Enough to embarrass even the most dedicated misogynist” (Schultz 159). Women currently make up 15.4% of ASX200 companies’ non-executive directors and 9.2% of executive positions in the top 500 (Schultz 158). The mainstream media’s negative reaction to quotas, for example the *Australian Financial Review*’s Tony Boyd who, based on selective representation and interpretation of a Norwegian study’s findings (Schultz 159) summarily dismissed the concept, indicates the resistance to legislation to enforce even low quotas. Summers says she believes that legislated quotas and penalties are necessary

for change and we should be embracing them -- “if it takes fear to force change, let’s keep talking about quotas.” In response to the media concocted issues of “reverse discrimination” Summers asks if “we think for one second that if there were an equivalent tool offered that would enable men to get jobs, promotion, raises and generally be top dogs, that they wouldn’t grab it with both hands? Do women think men worry about what other people think about the tactics they use to get ahead?” (Schultz 160). I wonder if this is not exactly why MBAs were invented and worked so well until those pesky ladies found out about them.

Corinne Grant pulls out her cigar and fake moustache: “Women aren’t made to lead anyone, unless it’s up the garden path. Everybody knows that. There’s never been a woman who has run anything, ever. OK, there’s never been a woman who has run anything successfully, ever. OK, there’s never been a woman I’ve wanted to root that has ever run anything successfully, ever” (Caro 200).

I ask Lily Edelstein and Steph Bowe what they think about feminism and the media. Edelstein, who by 17 was already an accomplished creator of satirical artistic zines says, “completely aside from ‘feminism is a dirty word,’ teenage girls aren’t given power to define themselves without society telling us how they should be” (Caro 49). Bowe, a writer of young adult fiction, says she doesn’t want to speak on behalf of anyone else but then goes on to nail some pretty universal truths for the world’s women: “I think that when girls do not have support and good female role models among their family, teachers and local community, they look to wider society... it’s still easy to be (negatively) affected by popular culture and the media” (Caro 218).

“Of course we’re all a bunch of mostly white educated chicks sitting around in Australia in 2013 talking about our everyday sexism and feminism,” I say draining the last of the bottle in front of me and giving a “more please” nod to the waiter. “Is it enough to share the stories? Is just telling the truth of the struggle enough to destroy this joint?”

Sometimes, the inspiration might be all we need. Over dessert, Kris Olsson regales us with stories of the pioneering professional women of late twentieth century Queensland and how they just “got on with it” (Schultz 55-65). And Melissa Lucashenko takes us even further back in history to meet her great-grandmother Christina Copson, a fearless woman, a fighter who when faced with her joint being destroyed became “a fucking *hero*” (Caro 69). Sometimes, we need to do more. Jo Chandler recounts politics and sexism in Papua New Guinea (Schultz 66-82) our near neighbour in geography but not in social development, populated by women who would likely view our privileged lives in a way that would shame us.

I wonder aloud if it’s time to stop destroying this media-contrived joint, walk away and start building a new one. Jennifer Mills, novelist and fiction editor at *Overland* says that

“old, centralised media is dying an undignified death” but she wonders if hashtag activism though effective, is enough when the “cycles of outrage... become a repetition of the mainstream pattern -- a propaganda of distraction in voluntary miniature” (Caro 112-3).

Chris Wallace’s spectacular essay “Standing up to P” takes the generally accepted perceptions of *men*, *women* and *gender* out of the mix for an objective analysis and develops a “strategic appreciation” of our situation. Wallace says that we need to move away from the false, mainstream media friendly dichotomy of women versus men and calls for strategic action. “We have to have a strategy to win the war, not just tactics leading to the odd battle won here and there... We have to respond to (the) challenge to see the system we are in as a whole, not just its constituent parts... let's not be our own well-meaning enemies. Let us instead get smart, get strategic and get going” (Schultz 17).

So plans are made. Hugs and kisses all round. A generous tip left for the waiter. Home? Or shall we head downtown, hit a cigar and whiskey club, and get Krissy Kneen to read us some of her glass-cake-cabinet-shattering porn? (Caro 263-276).

“Taxi?”

“No need,” I say, “just step on through to my frontal lobe.”

Jessica O’Neill has, after many years in the wilderness of marketing and public relations, returned to the study of Literature and Creative Writing in the School of EMSAH at The University of Queensland.

A Walk through the Virtual Feminist Archive

Alison Bartlett and Margaret Henderson
eds., *Things That Liberate: An Australian
Feminist Wunderkammer*. Newcastle upon
Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013

Reviewed by Sharon Bickle



THE title of this edited collection, *Things That Liberate*, conjures images of the Women's Liberation movement – that period in Australia from the mid-1960s, through the 1970s, and even into the early 1980s, when women came together in various collectives for actions that claimed, reclaimed, or simply demanded women's equality, and to force an end to oppression, militarism and male supremacy. In this small volume can be found many of the artefacts and elements associated with that struggle: banners and placards, consciousness-raising, genital self-examination, and the modes of women's self-expression: self-published books, newsletters, badges.

My own experience with Liberation feminism is slightly different to the contributors in this collection -- women who were immersed in and at the forefront of this heady period in which it seemed women were taking charge of their own destinies, measuring progress, as Silver Moon describes the women at Greenham Common doing, in the miles of fence and razor wire they dismantled (61–62). Slightly younger than these women, but not so young as to belong entirely to third wave feminism, I am the “annoying kid sister” of this generation of feminists -- too young to have taken part, old enough to be stirred by the call to direct action: the notion that equality was not to be given, but taken; patriarchy was not to be negotiated with, but smashed. It is this sense of excitement, of movement, of sisterhood that comes across particularly well, I think, in this collection of short writings.

Bartlett and Henderson describe the book as coming out of a consultancy for the National Museum of Australia to compile a list of artefacts for a feminist collection, a comparatively conventional social history exhibition that never eventuated due to budgetary limitations (4). This process highlighted for Bartlett and Henderson the powerful way in which objects call forth stories and emotions or, as the volume's opening quotation from W David Kingery has it, function “as myths and as poetry” (2). A few of the writings in the collection would have fitted neatly within this conventional exhibition-style framework: Martha Ansara's clapperboard, Kathleen Mary Fallon's archived books, or Kay Lawrence's fascinating Suffrage Tapestries woven to commemorate the centenary of

suffrage in South Australia, to include the people of Adelaide in a community, and to symbolically disrupt the notion of parliament as a bastion of male power and privilege (166–81). However, most of the other contributions are not what we would think of as archival or exhibition descriptions of historical artefacts.

The concept of an Australian Feminist Wunderkammer -- a cabinet of curiosities -- shifts the reader's attention away from the institutional, the public archive with its suggestion of, as Foucault understood it, institutional power and control, and paves the way for the variety of responses found here. In this sense, the volume both engages with and enacts feminist historiography and its critique of male-centric history. The most obvious way it does this is in Ania Walwicz's contribution, "Poem," which is both the object being described and an attack on institutionalisation and its expectations, all done in her characteristic style:

i drink ink again now but not the same not the same way not like then or than
or that it all seems different now justify me then margin then place me then
place me in a book now if you like me gender becoming the becoming who i
am now who i was once ... (141)

Margaret Henderson's exploration of the effects on her emerging feminism of Patti Smith's *Horses* with its intratextual interruptions, and Jane Armstrong's "Radio," make use of personal reflection as a means of evoking the ability of women's music to open up women's minds and to change lives. Indeed, most of the writings in the collection use fictocritical strategies to situate the objects within their lives and their feminist ideology.

Nevertheless, there is something ironic in the idea of a volume that--according to the Cambridge Scholars website "explores objects that changed Australian women's lives"--yet what quickly becomes clear is that the majority of these objects are absent: lost, dumped or, even, never present as in the case of Alison Bartlett's fascinating discussion on the feminist rejection of bras and the fallacy of bra burning. As Anna Szorenyi remarks:

When in 2007 I was moving interstate for my first proper academic job and
was packing up a house, I had no time, and I put the poster into the recycling
bin. I knew that it should have gone to the State Library's archival collection,
but it was the weekend, and they were closed, and we had to be out of the
house. (146)

In a similar way, Sara Dowse's blouse, Pearlie McNeil's kombi, Bronwyn Winter's placard, Adrienne Sallay's pocket mirror and even Marguerite Johnson and Leni Johnson's replaced toys are based on objects that might--even perhaps should--have been preserved but now no longer exist. Szorenyi's comment, "I had no time," re-creates the sense of energy and drive pushing social change forward, but it also makes clear that, as a movement, second wave feminism was of the present moment: concerning itself not with the past or even really with future generations of women, but responding to the NOW. Other contributors meditate, not on single objects, but on types of objects and the way in which they

enabled feminists to reconceptualise or circulate ideas: for example, Susanne Gannon's sea sponge, Alexandra Winter's tofu, and Jean Taylor's gestetner. This is poignant in its own way as a reflection on feminists' commitment to applying their politics to everyday life and their ability to do a lot with very little -- to hand produce what was needed from scrap or with few resources. Combine this with the sense of being caught up in the momentum of rapid social change -- and the book does effectively capture the heady excitement of a time in which activism was seen as affecting radical social change - and the reasons why this could never have been a book of objects becomes clear. Second wave feminism was a force re-shaping Australian society, and in rejecting institutions and their structures, it seems these women couldn't foresee a time when feminism itself would be studied as history within these very institutions. It is only now, as this generation are thinking of retirement, that the historiographic impulse is emerging and collections of material are being considered. In this way, Bartlett and Henderson's book is more a virtual museum of feminist history in Australia than an actual one.

For me, this is what is most powerful about this collection of writings: the "things that liberate" are not things at all -- even with all the myth and poetry we can invest in them -- but the women themselves. What emerges strongly through the text is the energy and the commitment, and the dedication to the cause of Women's Liberation. The sense that feminism was not an intellectual idea but something that defined the conditions by which women lived their lives.

If the book gives us a stirring account of some of the successes of Women's Liberation, it also gives us glimpses into the price paid by feminists and some of their disappointments. Bronwyn Winter's account of her sister Rosemary's life as an activist and her descent into schizophrenia and ultimate suicide is a moving homage to the way in which women inspire each other, but were also helpless to intervene to save their sisters from the effects of drug-use. In another way, Megan Le Masurier's analysis of Germaine Greer's confronting naked photograph in *Suck* magazine reflects not only on how the idea of cuntpower liberated her as a young woman, but how Greer felt sold out by her fellow activists when naked photos of the other male editors did not appear alongside it as planned, leaving her a lone female object for consumption (121). Tellingly, even though Greer later recanted her theory of cuntpower, Le Masurier is able to reclaim it as a basis for her personal sexual expression (125).

In conclusion, what Bartlett and Henderson have succeeded in doing here is not what I expected when I opened this book: a meditation on objects. And certainly not in the sense of historical artefacts to be found in a museum or exhibition. Objects, their presence and their absence, are used instead as a narrative structure through which to relive the experiences of women in liberation groups in the 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s -- and the book does this very well. For one who remembers this period in imprecise fragments, or for those feminists too young to remember the period at all, this book is an

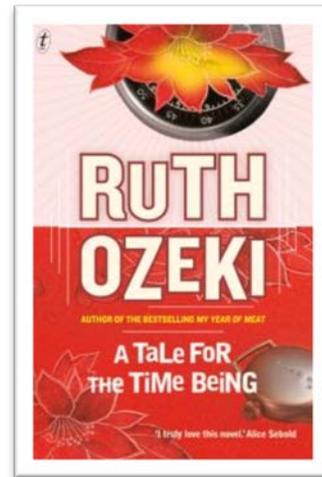
effective and affecting way of understanding how transformative these events were. Indeed, in many ways this book brings home the frustrations older feminists feel when looking at the younger generation. Older women -- steeped in the importance of activism, of demanding and defending their rights -- who thought feminism's perpetual revolution would roll on, driven forward by a new generation; and a new generation regarding Liberation feminism's legacy ambivalently, for whom activism means a disembodied engagement with social media rather than the close sisterhood of share houses and collectives.

Sharon Bickle, after being a post-doctoral fellow at The University of Queensland is now lecturing at the University of Southern Queensland. She is the author of *The Fowl and the Pussycat: Love Letters of Michael Field, 1875-1909*, and a number of articles on women's writing in the Victorian period.

Surviving Time

Ruth Ozeki. *A Tale for The Time Being*.
Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2013

Reviewed by Angel Browning



WHEN Ruth finds the diary of a Japanese teenager washed up on the shore of an island off the coast of British Columbia, she does not suspect that she is about to meet a “time being.” She is captivated by the blunt honesty of this young stranger and sets out on a journey of discovery to find out whether Nao did kill herself, or ended up as a victim of the 2011 Japanese earthquake and its subsequent tsunami. This expedition in turn leads Ruth to an adventure of her own, uncovering her own source of frustration and how to overcome it. By closely following Nao’s journey and expanding her view of Japanese culture, time and global pollution, Ruth discovers that she is a “time being” too.

A Tale for the Time Being is Ruth Ozeki’s latest novel. It seeks to connect the lives of two people across space and time. By setting the two main characters in alternating chapters with mini-chapters in each segment, Ozeki holds the reader in suspense, eager for more information. Time in this novel is complex and linear, but also fragmented and interconnected. Conveyed to the reader in ways that make you stop and think about your own position in time, as well as what it means to the narrative’s central characters. This unique tale opens with Naoko’s explanation of herself as a “time being” and ends with Ruth’s open invitation to Naoko or Nao (pronounced *now*) to be found from the other side of the world, inviting the reader to interpret events fluidly. With her detailed explanation of quantum mechanics, the theory of Schrödinger’s Cat, Japanese culture and Zen Buddhism, Ruth Ozeki creates, slows and rewinds time in this metafictional masterpiece.

Nao grew up in the suburb of Sunnyvale, California, where her mother was a housewife and her father was a leading computer programmer for a large company in Silicon Valley. After the collapse of the Dot-Com bubble in 2001, Naoko’s family were forced to return to Tokyo where, unemployed and penniless, they live in a bad part of town in “truly a disgusting apartment” (Ozeki 44). Used to the American lifestyle she has led all her life, Nao is not able to “fit-in” in her Japanese school, and she becomes the victim of violent “ijime” or bullying. This relentless school torture and her father’s shameful attempts to kill himself lead Nao to plan her own death. In this way her diary becomes an extended suicide note.

At the beginning of the novel, Nao declares that the purpose of writing the diary is to “tell the real life story of my great-grandmother Yasutani Jiko. She was a nun and a novelist and New Woman of the Taisho era” (Ozeki 6). Although the diary does indeed tell some of Jiko’s story, Jiko’s narrative is soon eclipsed within the text with Nao writing mostly about her family’s history and herself. Of central importance, however, are the lessons that her great-grandmother has taught her, like how to “bully a wave” (Ozeki 192) and develop her “true power” or “SUPAPAWA” (Ozeki 176). These important life lessons enable Nao to acquire the strength to endure her home and school situation and come to the realisation that she is in fact a “time being.” This realisation is imperative to the central themes of the novel because ultimately, the diary is itself a time being, as well as an elegy.

The diary is not the only thing that Ruth (based on the author) finds washed up on the shore of Desolation Sound, her island home. Indeed, Nao’s Hello Kitty lunchbox is revealed as a *wunderkammer*. Alongside Nao’s diary is an old World War Two watch that belonged to Nao’s great-uncle Haruki Number One and some letters. Ruth reads the diary a little at a time, the way she pictures it being written, extending the notion of the diary itself as a discrete collection of artifacts; curiosities that become interconnected in the act of reading. The further she reads, the more captivated she becomes by the tragic, compelling and cathartic story that is Yasutani Naoko’s life. With the help of her husband, Oliver, and the rest of the island’s inhabitants, Ruth starts to unravel and piece together this mysterious person.

The parallels that are made between the two main characters, Nao and Ruth, become apparent to the reader early in the novel and again at the end. Ruth is a novelist who finds herself struggling to move forward with the autobiography she is engaged in writing at the time she finds the diary. Nao is also an autobiographical author, trying to figure out through her diary whether or not she wants to continue living in a world in which she feels she has no place. Touched by time, these two people find a way to connect with the lives of each other in ways they never imagined possible. The issues that Ozeki incorporates into this novel -- bullying, suicide and death, ecosystems and pollution -- are made confronting and immediate by the way in which the novel interweaves people, artifacts and histories in a way that cannot be avoided by its readers. In doing this, Ozeki leads her readers to understand the impact of culture, of humanity and above all, of time.

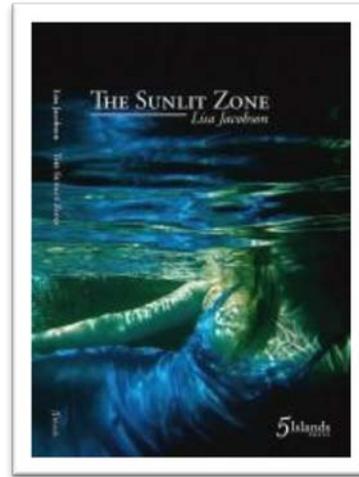
Angel Browning is studying Literature at The University of Queensland.

Swept Away with the Selkies

Lisa Jacobson. *The Sunlit Zone*.

Melbourne: Five Islands Press, 2012

Reviewed by Bonnie Evans



THE “sunlit zone” of Lisa Jacobson’s title is defined for the reader on the very first page of this remarkable book: it is a layer of the ocean where sea-plants flourish, and “which the deep sea diver must keep in her sights if she is to return to it” (7). In Lisa Jacobson’s verse novel, we follow a woman called North, and her climb back to the metaphorical Sunlit Zone, back to life and light. *The Sunlit Zone* is a well-written exploration of grief and new life, of things lost at sea, and things that wash up with the tide.

The story is set in 2050 and the years preceding it, and follows North, tracing her ties to the ocean. Her mother and father live in an empty house that echoes with loss. Her twin sister, Finn had genetic mutations – gills, webbed toes and a barnacled scalp – and has disappeared into the sea. “Finn was born first,” Jacobson writes, “in a furry caul with a sleek seal shine” (21), marked from birth as of the ocean.

The sea called her, as it called to selkies in old folk-tales. Selkies are seals who shed their pelt and turn into human women, who may fall in love with those on land and live there while they slowly waste away, their heart tearing them in different directions. In the tales, they always disappear eventually; love cannot overcome their nature, and like these creatures, Finn eventually returned to the sea. During their teenage years, North had been charged with taking care of her flighty and otherworldly sister, and it is while North is distracted by a tryst with her first love Jack that Finn vanishes into the waves. After the tragedy, Jack moves away, and North is left alone to grieve her losses.

At the beginning of the novel, a whale beaches itself outside North’s seafront flat, and all at once, the past follows it, rolling back into her life like a wave. Jack comes back to stay, bringing with him suppressed emotions and memories from fifteen years ago, pulling the ever-present spectre of Finn out into the light. North must climb her way out of the depths of grief and guilt, untangle the knotted threads of her life and begin to heal.

Jacobson's imagining of the future world is characterised by the melding of the natural and the artificially-engineered. The manufactured and the wilderness clash violently and melt uneasily into each other: infant boutiques genetically engineer embryos, creating "designer babies"; phones are attached to human bodies; strange fish-human hybrids swim in the waters; and North's blue dog, Bear, keeps company with an ultraviolet cat. Modern technology has become inextricable from life; it is written into DNA and implanted beneath our skin. Bursts of technicolour highlight the superficiality of North's society; humans can turn cows green and beaches lilac, but cannot fix the damage they have wrought on the environment, and smog clouds float on the horizon.

As a result of this, there is a sense of dis-ease in Jacobson's novel. Humans have separated themselves from nature, destroyed it and morphed it beyond recognition, according to their whims. Nature and science exist in a state of discord. It is an uncanny portrait that Jacobson paints, unsettling in its familiarity. It is not difficult to imagine contemporary Australia transforming into something like that portrayed in the novel.

North resides in the liminal, the in-between space between science and nature, sea and land. She is amphibian, torn between land and water, and the novel compares her to a frog. She is a scientist who is haunted by the sea, and by ghosts. Barriers are washed away, melted down: asleep and awake, night and day, life and death, past and present meld together when those from North's past return, and her memories give us bittersweet glimpses into her youth. Again, I am struck with familiarity; Jacobson writes these moments as if they are recalled by memory, with the awkwardness and naivety that I remember from my own childhood.

The language is dreamlike and dense with metaphor, and Jacobson imbues her vivid, sensory poetry with a narratorial voice that has emotional authenticity. Although North lives in an advanced, artificial world, she is intrinsically, imperfectly human with faults and flaws, a contrast which echoes her status as a person existing in liminal spaces and strikes a chord.

In the novel metaphors sink and resurface, but one in particular never goes away; the novel does not permit us to forget the sea. The ocean is pervasive and powerful, invading every aspect of North's life, every passage of Jacobson's verse. It is repetitive; perhaps, to some readers, overstated. It is inevitable, inescapable, and intangible, it destroys, it overwhelms. For North, it is her past and present, her loss and grief. Above all, it is the very essence of her twin sister, Finn, her strange, familiar other half. For North, the water is "sister-coloured, if I let it be" (64), tinted by Finn's memory. In the end, North resolves her inner turmoil, and while looking at the ocean, she finds her "sunlit zone", her peace.

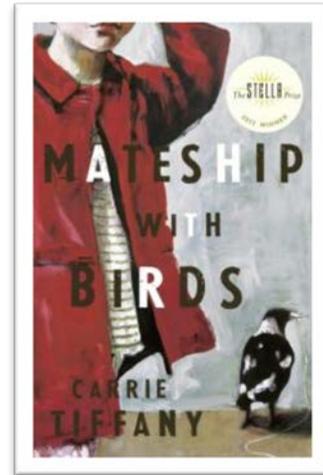
In many ways the novel itself is like the sea; sprawling, rippling and flowing. The relative brevity of the volume belies its richness, the sea's surface compared to its unfathomable depth and vastness. Reading *The Sunlit Zone* was, for me, a poignant journey; it was like wading out to sea, and being swept up by the tide.

Bonnie Evans is a second-year BA/BComm student at The University of Queensland. She is studying English literature, film, and television, and is particularly interested in gender issues in literature and media.

Love's Instinct

Carrie Tiffany. *Mateship with Birds*.
Sydney: Picador 2012

Reviewed by Jena Woodhouse



At a panel discussion of finalists in the Prime Minister's Literary Awards at the 2013 Brisbane Writers' Festival, Carrie Tiffany was asked to describe her process when writing a novel. The chair mentioned drafting and revising in a way that implied a series of defined and predictable steps or stages. Commenting that she wished it were as clear-cut and sequential as the chair implied, Tiffany outlined what actually happened in the case of *Mateship with Birds*: a combination of diligence, thoroughness and perseverance with an unerring instinct for what is potentially relevant to a literary work as yet only partially revealed; an ability to trust one's instincts and recognise research material that coincides with the storyteller's quest for authenticity.

Tiffany, who is employed as a journalist with an agricultural publication, related that she began her preparations for *Mateship with Birds* by skim-reading all the issues of the *Victorian Dairy Farmer* (if my memory serves me correctly) for the decade of the 1950s, selecting more or less instinctively items to copy; she explained to the BWF audience that she couldn't have accounted, at that point, for why she selected particular articles and excluded others. At a stage when the gathering of preliminary material was complete, she cleared part of her house of its furniture, laid out the pages of articles and some early drafts of fragments of her own text on the floor, then walked around them until she had selected the items she felt were relevant to her project. She then arranged the pages in a provisional sequence and commenced writing in earnest. I must apologise if my own recounting of this stage is inexact, but this is what I recall of her verbal account of her creative process.

Mateship with Birds, the end result, is an interesting and engaging text on several levels. As one raised on a farm not dissimilar to that of Harry (one of the principal protagonists), I found the book's integrity and authenticity refreshing, and enjoyed its unhurried bucolic rhythms, underpinned by the sense of purpose essential to the farming enterprise. Amid farming life's sometimes messy and distasteful duties, both animal and human characters emerge with their warts-and-all dignity intact, bar one, a neighbour called Mues who has some rather nasty habits. The other human characters, Betty Reynolds and her children, Michael and Little Hazel, share Harry's matter-of-fact, unsentimental respect for animals and instinctive empathy, irrespective of

species:

But here comes Pauline; her pleated feet, her thriftiness, the bunched flesh behind her knees, her pudding chest, her liquid eyes. The shy way she has of dipping her head as she steps up into the shed each morning, as if she thinks she must push against the dimness to be let in. He reaches for her udder. The first milk spurts over the back of his hand and drips between his fingers. It's as warm as blood. (129)

Harry's relationship with his whippet, Sip, is also described in human, though something more intimate than anthropomorphic, terms:

That first day when he collected her, and in the Dodge on the way home took off his coat and tucked it around her shoulders ... it went along in the usual way after that. An alteration in the focal length - each fixed for the gaze of the other. The imbibing of odours. The warm soil of her head, the bread and vinegar of his crotch. A babble language followed quickly by regret for the first hard words. Physical changes. The sharing of personality and mannerisms.

All her expressions are known to him. Her squinted blink, the thwop of ropey tail against the lino, the shame-clamped jaw. Then familiarity. Indifference. Forgetfully, he sometimes runs his hand across her ribs. If it's early on in the week, a Monday or a Tuesday, he'll say, 'That's enough then. That'll do you for the rest of the week,' and she'll lean into his knees, blissful at the sound of his voice. (8)

Betty Reynolds, a forty-five-year-old single mother of two children, teenage Michael and Little Hazel, who rents the house next door to Harry's farm, arrived in the small Victorian town of Cohuna, pregnant with Little Hazel, eight years before, and now works as an aide at the Acacia Court Home for the Aged.

Betty keeps a notebook in her handbag with a record of the children's illnesses and accidents. When she arrives home in the evening after work and hears their voices, bored and ordinary in the kitchen, she feels a rush of relief. The children are safe. Another day has passed and she has not failed to keep them safe.

1945-46

Michael: Burns hair at stove, pecked by gander, skewered with fork, constipation, infected splinters, ball-bearing lodged in ear, sticky eye, fevers, boils.

Little Hazel: Colic, croup, nappy rash, fever, runny stools, earache. (35)

The reader could draw loose parallels between some of the exigencies of Harry's farm work and those of Betty's work at the Acacia Court Home for the Aged, which are observed with a compassionate but unsentimental eye. "Betty doesn't say something is broken, she says it has 'come from together'." (170)

Betty has her favourites in the same way as a mother has a favourite child. Cliff with his poet's face, Jack's hands - she imagines them on her sometimes as she cleans his nails. Ern has something, in his confusion. Bill who came in with blue marks all over his body - his wife never gave up sleeping with him, despite his incontinence. For three years she wore her blue plastic raincoat to bed each night and then she died. (40)

The overarching narrative thread of the novel is the multiple strands that converge in natural,

uncontrived ways to knit Harry, Betty, Little Hazel and Michael into a family. The counterpart in the animal world is the kookaburra family, details of whose daily lives are recorded in the margins of Harry's dairy ledger:

Instinct,
from where I stand,
from on the ground,
looks like love. (179)

In fact, as the title suggests, birds feature prominently in the novel, and are observed closely by Harry, who encourages Michael and Little Hazel to take an interest in them too. "Hazel Reynolds' Nature Diary" is a delight. That the binoculars of both households sometimes stray to the human occupants on the other side of the paddock seems a natural extension of this interest.

With its substantial rural sector, Australia has produced many narratives of rural life. *Mateship with Birds*, written, as it happens, by a woman, does not go over old ground, but offers fresh perspectives, and connects, albeit tenuously, with a body of fiction by women, about farms. One thinks of Olive Schreiner, Isak Dinesen/ Karen Blixen, Doris Lessing, all of whom wrote memorably of farms in Africa. Not to mention Alice Munro's stories of Canadian rural life.

There are, of course, precedents in Australian fiction, but few, at least of my acquaintance, that fall within a similar compass to that of Carrie Tiffany's concerns, whereby human and animal characters are treated with an equal degree of attentiveness and respect. Tiffany is able to see the world through each of her character's eyes. Whether they are observing or being observed, the acuity of her portrayals elicits empathy and a sense of intimacy that some may find too close for comfort. However, there is no denying their veracity.

The frankness and wry humour with which physicality and sexuality, the sensuous and the sensory are depicted reinstate the natural order, so that the effect is never forced. Even confronting subject matter is presented as part of nature, or sometimes, in the case of Mues, a neighbour, "against nature." The terms in which Betty, Michael, Little Hazel and Harry observe themselves, the life of the body, the world of birds and animals, and each other, are sometimes startling in their directness, but never unkind. Here, we see Betty observing herself:

Betty tries not to look at her reflection in the co-op window. She glances. There's nobody about. She stands in front of the glass, pulls her stomach in and smiles. The puffy flesh of her cheeks rises up around her eyes and she is brought up sharp by the sight of herself so doughy, so exposed, like when her hair has just been cut and set and there is too much of herself on display. This is how she feels most of the time now; always blowzy, always overstuffed. She can't stop touching the flesh that rolls over the waistband of her skirt, or fingering the mounds that form on either side of her bra straps. She looks at her legs as she peels off her stockings in the evenings; everything is dragging downwards - the heaviness of her thighs has settled lower around her knees and calves; the bones of her ankles are going under. She tells herself there's nothing to worry about when she's out in public, when she's dressed, with lipstick. But here, standing in the main street, in front of the glass... She looks at herself side on, sees her

ear and her head above it where patches of dry white scalp show through between the curls of her permanent. The curls don't look like hair; they look like something made out of hair that has been stored in the back of a cupboard. She moves closer to the glass, examines the deep grooves in the skin around her mouth where it meets the deflated flesh of her lips. The lines around her mouth and the scored skin between her eyes - a fork mark - make her look angry and tired; tired in a way that sleep can't fix. (11-12)

Harry observes Betty differently:

He likes her plump forearms, the cardigan pushed up around them; the gilt band of her watch digging into her wrist. He likes the sound of her clothes moving about her middle. When she turns to speak to him he notices her softening jaw and her mouth - the lipstick on her front teeth. He's been watching all of this, over the years, watching her body age and temper. (22)

This matter-of-factness lends the novel an appealing freshness that is devoid of the titillating coyness and artifice with which the erotic is sometimes presented. Tiffany tells it plainly, and this exerts its own erotic power, and carries the shock of the familiar in ways that may have become unfamiliar. It is as if we are being reminded of the obvious that we have somehow overlooked, or seen in a distorted way.

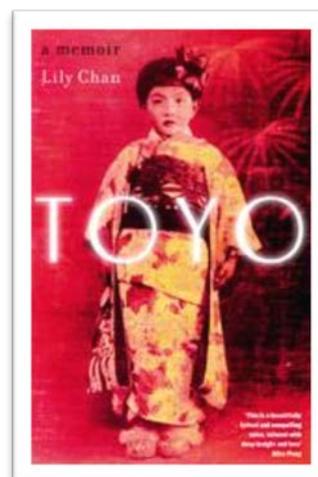
Carrie Tiffany is a generous writer and a generous person. *Mateship with Birds*, despite its author's disclaimer at the aforementioned BWF 2013 panel discussion ("I'm only a hobbyist"), received the inaugural Stella Prize (2013), whereupon Tiffany announced her intention of sharing her prize money with the other shortlisted authors. *Mateship with Birds* is a book imbued with its author's characteristic generosity.

Jena Woodhouse is a poet and fiction writer. Her most recent book was a novel, *Farming Ghosts*. A collection of short stories *Dreams of Flight* will be published by Ginninderra in April 2014.

Recording and Remaking the Story of a Mother

Lily Chan. *Toyo: A Memoir*.
Melbourne: Black Inc., 2012

Reviewed by Emily Yu Zong



LILY Chan has been heralded as a brilliant new voice in the Australian literary milieu. *Toyo: A Memoir* was the recipient of the 2010 Peter Blazey Fellowship for a manuscript-in-progress, and 2013 Dobbie Literary Award for a First Published Author. The Dobbie judges described Chan's life writing debut as the combination of a memoir's intimacy with fictional vivacity, the convergence of "contemporary Australian experience with Japan's twentieth century modernity," and an "imaginative" recovery of the secrets hidden behind her family history.

Toyo depicts the life of Chan's grandmother, Toyoko, a resilient and brave woman who endured the turbulence of WWII Japan and "the shock of arrival" (Meena Alexander's wording) in the Anglo-Celtic suburbs of Western Australia. Twenty-seven-year old Chan has noted that she wrote *Toyo* nonstop for ten years, the desire to collect and record her grandmother's stories being as exciting as stocking lollies in a jar ("Lily Chan on the Story behind *Toyo*"). Chan refuses the label Asian-Australian for her book, resisting the pressure to be categorised as a marginalised writer and read in a limited way ("Foreign Lands a Winner for Writers"). Indeed, *Toyo* reaffirms the importance of new forms of transnational life writing to a younger generation of Australian writers. Writers such as Chan and Alice Pung reach out toward ancestral roots through remaking and re-imagining lives in a distinctively Australian way which demands more interrogative interpretation and meditation.

In *Toyo*, connection with the past trickles like a natural flow, soothes the heart and grants courage to herself and others. I am impressed by the mothers' capacity to break free, to make lives and to love, however minimal the agency that they have within the cultures depicted. Toyo's mother Kayoko, born into Fukue Island's bustling fishing industry in southern Japan, escapes from domestic bondage as a maid and later a mistress within the Takahashi family in Japanese-occupied Qingdao, northern China. When Toyo is conceived, Kayoko swallows her shame and, carrying her illegitimate child, she resettles in Osaka and starts afresh by opening a western-themed café for the city's upper crust. Kayoko is assertive and diplomatic, protecting her daughter from the rumour of illegitimacy and displaying an admirable grace from her position on the margins of society. Together, mother and daughter bravely face social questioning, World War Two's bomb raids and the post-war reconstruction. Her mother's

principles are clearly imprinted onto Toyo's character, she has the same stamina, demureness, and the unbending heart; enabling her to embrace her unconventional life. One example of this is when Toyo holds in her cries of pain during childbirth and remembers: "She has been initiated into toughness by her mother, who had held her little hand proudly in the street, ignoring curious glances and queries about an absent father, a kimono wrapped around her statuesque frame" (117).

The loss of her mother at seventeen leaves Toyo bereft. By marrying into the post-war Chinese minority, an ethnically abject group in Japan, she relinquishes citizenship and social esteem. When she too becomes a mother and integrates into Ryu Zhang's family, Toyo acquires a second life as "a wife and a mother and a sister and a daughter" (119), and gradually buries the truth of her illegitimacy. The premature death of Ryu means their love is short-lived, but nevertheless it resonates emotionally throughout the rest of her life. Toyo lives with dignity and assurance, as Lily recollects, "She was an empress. She held royal court of her own" (In "Lily Chan"). Toyo concentrates on the details of life, and tutors Lily's mother on wifely duties and feminine precision: "cooking, cleaning, washing, greeting and entertaining guests all had particular qualities to be honoured, dissected, made apparent" (169).

Immigration creates a rupture in her regal world, and when Toyo returns home she feels like an outsider both in society and at home, but she is too proud and independent to surrender. Language-restricted, she nevertheless starts conversation with strangers to gain acceptance, and disciplines her grandchildren with Japanese propriety. Toyo enwraps herself in the solace of the past, fragments that mediate her pain and offer solid anchorage. We see the persistence of an immigrant, a woman and a mother, who has undergone the drama of history and life across several landscapes, and who refuses to give up until her last moments. If not for the Alzheimer's disease that takes not only her memory but her defensive walls, the final secret of Takahashi Toyo would not be revealed, as Chan writes, "Her secrets cracked open, one by one at first, then hordes tumbled out like baby turtles scrambling towards the sea. It took seventy-four years to crack the last secret" (254).

Chan's lyrical prose is fluent; poignancy mediated through a poetic sweep of images, affections and humour, she adroitly negotiates the third-person singular tone, and fills the gap of retelling through the use of informal language and vivid details. In an ABC interview on the memoir, Chan described the tension between presenting memoir accuracy with preservation of narrative continuity, attributing the third-person voice to a lack of "sufficient/enough presence" of the author in the story's settings: "When it came to stories she had not told me herself, I imagined how she would react or feel according to what I already knew about her" (In "Lily Chan"). Dialogues, conversations, folk songs and letters provide a domestic context which stitches the pages together, infusing visual pleasure with emotional density. In one moment, we see Toyo mischievously babbling "Otosan" ("Father") in the arms of her seldom available father, her mother scolding her; in another we read her letter lamenting a flabby stomach with other relocated children in the temple: "sometimes we are so hungry we eat lice" (44).

The detailed portrayals in this memoir haunts the heart: Toyo sneaking cakes to eat in the café; the temple episode in which the children live in “the Kingdom of Itchiness” with lice eggs on their clothes “bobbing” to the water surface “like sea froth” (45); the wartime recollections by Kayoko including a man whose head was cut off, but whose body kept running for ten metres; her astonishment after drinking snake broth; a motorbike ride without destination; the flinching from a goodnight kiss; avoiding exposing her speechlessness to her granddaughter. Of course, Chan’s remaking itself opens up many questions -- including whether the characters’ dialogues are too innocent or formal, or whether they weaken the stories’ lifelike properties she is seeking to construct.

In *Toyo*, Chan also participates in the larger conversation on transnational reinvention by younger generation immigrant writers, the retelling and re-imagining of historical turmoil and the social conventions of original homelands that the writers themselves have not/have hardly experienced. Maxine Hong Kingston responds to her “outsider” manipulation of Chinese folk legends in Timothy Pfaff’s interview by commenting: “the way I keep the old Chinese myth alive is by telling them in a new American way” (26). Chan’s book, with its sense of historical reality and narrative artistry, maps and interrogates the creative pathways emerging through transnational life writing in Australia. It is surely the best way to pay tribute to her ancestry and to honour the love to a grandmother.

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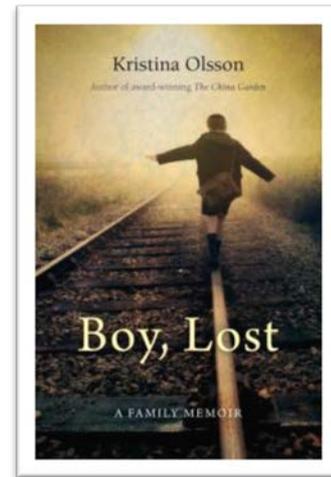
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Episodes in the Lives of Others

Kristina Olsson. *Boy, Lost*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2013

Reviewed by Melissa Fagan



Children are always episodes in someone else's narrative, not their own people, but brought forth into being for particular purposes.

SO wrote historian Carolyn Steedman in her 1986 memoir *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*, which contrasts two working class childhoods – her mother's in 1920s Burnley, and her own in 1950s South London – in a work that is a mélange of autobiography, social history, and psychoanalysis. “Each child grows up in an adult world that is specified by both politics and social existence,” she wrote later, “and they are reared by adults who consciously know and who unconsciously manipulate the particularities of the world that shaped them.” She goes on to provide examples from her own life: her mother's father was killed in the First World War, and her own father was “knowingly and unknowingly” removed from her.

Steedman's statement has become something of an epigraph for my own work-in-progress, a family memoir, and it came to mind while reading Kristina Olsson's award-winning 2013 family memoir, *Boy, Lost*. Peter, the eponymous 'lost boy' was just sixteen months old when he was separated from his mother - Olsson's mother, Yvonne – at Cairns railway station in the summer of 1950. The book opens here, at this crucial moment. Yvonne is nineteen; she is fleeing her husband and Peter's father, Michael, a man who is “darkly beautiful” yet dangerous: violent, neglectful, a gambler.

(she is a) girl with fugitive eyes and an infant on her hip. She is thin, gaunt even, but still it is easy to see these two are a pair, dark-haired and dark-eyed. She hurries down the platform towards the second-class cars, slowed down by the weight of her son and her cardboard suitcase. It holds everything they own, everything she dared to take.

Yvonne finds a seat in one of the last cars and attempts to settle her son with some food. Moments later, a man -- Michael -- appears at the door, walks towards her, and roughly pulls Peter away. Yvonne stays on the train, and returns to her family in Brisbane, where she will soon give birth to Sharon, Peter's half-sister. Within a few years, she starts a new life with a new man, Arne Olsson, a kind and gentle Swede – Kristina's father. In

the meantime, two-year-old Peter moves with his father to Junee, in south-west New South Wales, where he contracts polio. His wasted left leg is fitted with a calliper. After two years in rehabilitation at the Far West Children's Home, he returns to his father, now living in Dungog. They will move often, and Peter becomes a serial runaway, living life on the margins of society. Mother and son will not see each other again for almost forty years -- and until that moment her other children remain unaware of his existence.

Olsson gives equal weight to Peter's and Yvonne's stories, deftly interlacing the two narratives in short, untitled sections, many of them barely a page long, slowly building momentum towards the reunion of mother and son. In parts, the story is harrowing. Physical violence, injury, illness and pain are revealed in sensory detail: "hips and elbows and knees smack against wood." Or they are chillingly implied: Michael "expresses his relief and concern with a variety of implements: a strap, a piece of wet rope, a dog chain." My reaction to these descriptions was visceral -- there were moments where I found myself gasping. *Boy, Lost* is the best kind of page-turner; its combination of a tightly-wrought structure, a predominantly present-tense narrative, and spare yet emotive prose, creates a perfectly-weighted balance between the desire to know what happens next, and to linger over the words on the page.

The loss is experienced on both sides, and Olsson is an empathic, yet impartial narrator, never making judgements, only seeking to understand *why*. "The only safe way in was as a journalist," she reveals in the book's Afterword, "objective, writing in the third person." Peter's story in particular is shocking, and Olsson is both compassionate and restrained in her approach, allowing certain things to remain unsaid, (and) the narrative to stay unresolved. The reunion between mother and son, and meeting of long-lost siblings, is a happy occasion, and after all that has come before it, the scenes that unfold in its wake provide a welcome catharsis. It must have been tempting to leave things there -- to give the story a happy ending. Instead, Olsson acknowledges the temptation, and presses on.

In the weeks that followed we told ourselves a story, a fiction about a boy lost and found, a family reunited, a mother's grief dissolved. It was simple: Peter was back; we'd get on with the business of including him in our lives. There in front of us was the happy ending we'd always strived for, unknowingly, for our mother.

But it wasn't simple and it wasn't a story. It wasn't entirely happy and it wasn't even an ending. Peter embodied the fracture at the centre of our lives, and though we didn't yet know why, I think we suspected it..

In the Afterword, Olsson writes of the story's inception: how Peter came to her four years after their mother's death read to her from official documents relating to his life -- court transcripts, medical records -- and asked her to write his story.

So his question sounded simple, at first - in many ways it was. Peter needed to make sense of it all, I thought, to make a recognisable shape for his life. His childhood was the stuff of myth, wild and insubstantial, hard to believe. He needed to make it all real - to pin it down by speaking it and seeing it

written, by making it a *story*. One, perhaps, that he could believe too.

Peter's version of the story began when he contracted polio: "he was the solitary protagonist... he was the self-made hero of his life, enduring his suffering, vanquishing his foes... born with the calliper and the pain, already two years old." As Olsson pointed out to him that was only part of it: the boy had been stolen from his mother, that's where the story began. In an interview with Jo Case, published by The Wheeler Centre, Olsson spoke of how it took some time before she felt she was "entitled" to tell the story. "There were so many things we weren't supposed to know," she said. "But entering the story with a whole heart meant I was finally able to look at my mother as the woman she was, and at my own experience."

By exploring both sides of the story -- what it means to be lost, and what it means to lose -- and how this one event impacted on the wider family, Olsson in *Boy, Lost* has written a book that at the heart of it, seems to say: we are all episodes in others' lives, and others are episodes in ours. In the book's closing pages she relays a phone conversation she had with Peter after she'd finished writing it. She admitted to him, in tears: "*It wasn't fair... we had her, the best of her, and you missed out.*" Peter agreed, before graciously conceding that they were all lucky, that this is what Yvonne had taught them: "*to see the glass half-full.*" *Boy, Lost* is a beautifully realised testament to this legacy.

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Avoiding the Water: Aggressive Men and Unhappy Families

Favel Parrett. *Past the Shallows*.
Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2011



Reviewed by Tiarney Miekus

FAVEL Parrett is a female writer and she isn't writing fiction about women. Her debut novel, *Past the Shallows*, focuses on the lives of three brothers, Joe, Miles and Harry, and their relationships with each other and their abusive father. Yet their relationships are overwhelmed by a female presence they cannot escape – that of the boy's dead mother, who died in a car crash when Joe, Miles and Harry were only young. It is the story of a family and Tolstoy exists everywhere: "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

Set in the Tasmanian coastal landscape and removed from larger Australian society, the novel is relayed through the vision of Miles and Harry, aged thirteen and nine respectively; the exact ages of the boys are not revealed until the later pages of the novel. Yet the language is sometimes too simple, it lacks rigour and themes are drawn out subtly as the novel drives slowly and quietly – the success of the work rests on whether Parrett can pull your heartstrings enough by the end.

Harry in particular is an alert child; good natured, overly innocent and endearing to the point of pain as we watch an ugly series of events plague his tiny existence. For Miles, existence seems almost futile as he is forced to do fishing work on the boat with his Dad and his Dad's equally aggressive friend, Jeff. It is not simply a generational gap that sees Miles and his Dad differ about abalone fishing, but rather a question of how the Dad uses his children only for his convenience.

Life is not fun, here on Tasmania's south coast. It is a narrow, confined reality set at the end of the world. There is no such thing as time existing externally from the family's day-to-day lives – no references to anything other than Cadbury, Milo and peanut butter, all of which are considered big brands with the worth of gold. The family is devoid of bourgeois lifestyle in every possible way and are living in destitution: "the bank owned everything" (7). It is too bleak to be merely a dig at the middle-class lifestyle of a Tasmanian neighbour who drives around in a flash car and is the only person in the area to send his children to a private school, but is rather an indication of how Australia treats its poorest and remotest.

The family is fragmented due to a combination of the mother's death and the father's drunken, aggressive and evil behaviour. The father is a rancid man who is only referred as the ominous and authoritative "Dad" except when his name is cited by an official, making him human and bent to the authority of others for one moment. The simplicity of "Dad" gives universality to the savage father – he is one who must be feared and one who all things, including life, rest upon. He is a true portrait of oppressive authority. At the same time, he is cut out like cardboard, too distant and repulsive to empathise with. His motives for severe cruelty don't add up and I'm left having to conclude that he's simply a madman or that Parrett has plotted to *not* make him understandable or empathic; there's simply no reckoning with a man like that.

If the present life of Dad's bitter ways makes living unbearable, then respite is often found in the recollections of the mother. She is a truly silenced female, and yet no event in the present happens without a past memory of her. Never given a name, she lingers over every passage and her plans to run away with her children and her adultery are Parrett's given reasons for the father's savage behaviour.

With the memory of the mother, the past is everywhere and the story is half in the present and half in memories. The past is so close it compresses every action in the current moment, as Miles in particular is held down by memories he can't quite understand and can't quite shed. The future, then, becomes something unimaginable, vague and utterly unreachable. The only moment Miles can live free of the past is when he is surfing, so zoned that time can't affect him: "Time bends and ripples – moves past your eyes frame by frame and you feel beyond time and before time and no one can touch you" (135).

Meanwhile Harry finds respite in a neighbour, George, and his dog. At this point it is all too similar to the relationship between Boo Radley and the children in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Yet Boo Radley manages to save the mockingbird and Harry is not given such restitution. The allusion to *To Kill a Mockingbird* tempts us with a high idealism, albeit the impending sense of doom of the novel. Parrett denies us any sense of true justice.

In a novel where everything is dark (darkness and lack of light are a constant metaphorical and literal problem for the characters), it is the environment that surrounds every action, every passage, and every character. Just as the three brothers cannot escape the Tasmanian coastal landscape, the reader is tied to the same geography. It's not a comfortable portrayal, since it is bleak and ravaged by humans: "And it looked like all this land had been cleared once. A long time ago. When the forest was cleared it never looked right when it grew back" (117). There is a lingering romanticism about a world untouched by human hand, which Harry (the character most intuitive to the environment) finds in an imagination of the afterlife: "The land just as it had been forever untouched. Dark green tracks of forest over hills and mountains and rolling down valleys. Trees as far as he could see" (223).

But before the landscape, comes the ocean, and: "Water that always there. Always everywhere"

(1). Harry is ardently afraid of the water, and the ocean is synonymous with the character and violence of Harry's father. It is the unpredictability and the authority of the ocean: "He knew the way he felt about the ocean would never leave him now. It would be there always, right inside him" (1). Yet a very clear difference is made between human cruelty and the qualities of the ocean in the form of a shark attack that takes place early in novel.

While they are fishing, a shark plunges onto the boat, crushing Miles and another worker, Mike, who tries to save Miles. Jeff, who one could only describe as a basic male, laughingly shoots the shark multiple times. Not satisfied, Jeff drags the body on deck and slices "through her white underbelly... She was pregnant" (55). Jeff hacks into the womb revealing three pups: two dead and one alive, which is then stabbed through the head. Animals kill to eat and are neither cruel nor kind: Jeff's act is one of machismo.

Environmental and animal destruction often sits as a consequence of male ego and the environment as a man's plaything. Miles and Harry are ostracised by their father multiple times for failing to measure up to his standard of what a man is. Of course, the irony is that any reader can see the father's cowardliness and the son's bravery. Miles and Harry don't match the traditional idea of what makes a man, and ultimately it is suggested that such presumptions are outdated.

After the disappearance, or death, of the father the water becomes lighter, something Miles can navigate, handle, understand and respect. It is still dark, but is now, in the final lines, "Rolling out an invisible path, a new line for them to follow. To somewhere warm. To somewhere new" (251).

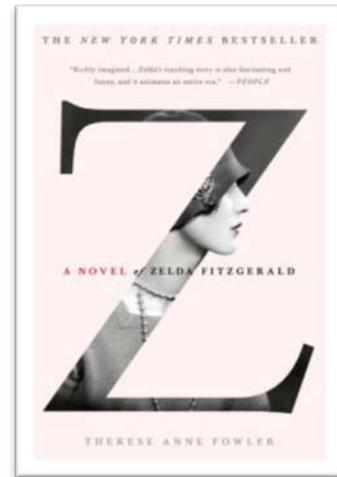
The novel is filled with overwhelming trauma, but it attempts to deal with this trauma by an ending that offers near infinite possibility for the characters. For a work that is embedded in realism, I can't quite feel whether such a bittersweet finale is plausible, in light of the consistent trauma the characters have been dealt – but if Parrett has pulled you into the emotional core of the novel, it could seem fitting.

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Reclaiming a Beautiful Truth from the Jazz Age

Therese Anne Fowler. *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*. London: Two Roads, 2013.

Reviewed by Alice Reynolds



Look closer and you'll see something extraordinary, mystifying, something real and true. We have never been what we seemed (Fowler 5).

Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald have indeed never been what they seemed, and Therese Anne Fowler's promise in her historical novel, *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*, is to see the 'realness' of people behind their stories. In Fowler's words, "fiction based on real people differs from nonfiction in that the emphasis is not on factual *minutiae*, but rather on the emotional journey of the characters" (374). In this regard, *Z* fulfills its own criteria: Fowler's novel recreates the emotional journey of Zelda Fitzgerald to give the reader what is, at face value at least, a rich rendering of Zelda's life, but also more profoundly an arena for Zelda to reassert herself, so to speak, from the grave.

The story of the Fitzgeralds is a central part of American Jazz Age mythology: the publication of F. Scott Fitzgerald's hugely successful novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), catapulted them both to celebrity status and, from that time on, they spent their time traveling across the United States and Europe, mixing with some of the most influential literary and artistic minds of the day. The glitter of celebrity eventually gave way under pressure from Scott's alcoholism and his early death in 1940. Similarly, Zelda's life also descended rapidly into madness culminating, only eight years after Scott's passing, in her death in a fire during her stay in a sanatorium.

A perennial question behind their mythologized relationship has been whether it was Zelda who ruined Scott, or whether Scott and his alcoholism drove Zelda to madness. In Fowler's biofictional account, it is Ernest Hemingway who poisons Scott against Zelda; a poison that runs through every vein of this book. Little is known about the reasons for the animosity that resulted in Hemingway's scathing characterisation of Zelda as a conniving hawk in his *A Moveable Feast* (1964), but Fowler provocatively imagines Hemingway propositioning Zelda in an alleyway as a possible explanation. To some this may represent too radical a break from the factual *minutiae* of established truth, the unwritten compact between reader and author within nonfiction, but Fowler is quite up

front that her text is not biography (374). If the reader surrenders to the fiction and leaves behind “truth”--whatever that may be--the encounter between Zelda and Hemingway is quite plausible, and adds to the engaging creation of Zelda’s emotional journey, as well as the characterisation of Hemingway.

Fowler subtly reminds us that this story comes from literature, that the characters are defined by literature, and that history is fundamentally a constructed narrative. She structures the novel into five parts--one for each stage of Zelda’s life--and each of these is prefaced by a quotation from an esteemed literary figure: T.S. Eliot, George Eliot, Baudelaire, Carroll and Fitzgerald himself, creating an intellectual literary road map of Zelda’s life. The use of these quotations gives the narrative a literary self-reflexiveness which both reminds the reader of the Fitzgeralds’ mythological status and anchors them within the credibility of their historical moment, important in a novel that could so easily be dismissed as nostalgic farce.

Whether this novel is successful, therefore, depends on the individual reader, on their knowledge of and commitment to the “real” story. What can be judged, however, is the believability of the female voice it attempts to recreate. For the most part, I feel Zelda does speak to her readers. She speaks of her time, of what she could not achieve and of what she could have, whilst urging women to embrace the famous message of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925) to “run faster, stretch out our arms further” (182). There is an added poignancy as Zelda is not able to run as far as she would like, but the ambiguous final words “and now, I wait” (360), seem to tell us she is waiting for the women after her to embrace the independence she could not.

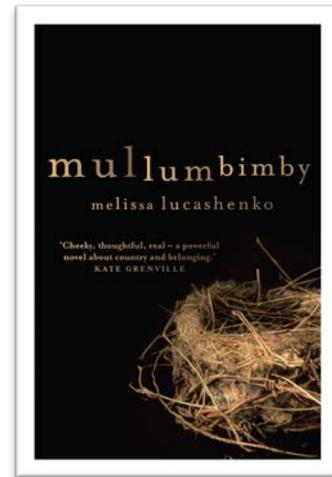
This novel is difficult to categorise. Indeed, decisions come down to a matter of taste when applied to this novel, and whether you as a reader can reject commonly accepted history for Fowler’s version of a historical life. I reached the end and inexplicably knew I had read something of consequence by a woman attempting to give voice to a woman who helped to pave the road of female independence. Whether it succeeds entirely becomes irrelevant to a certain degree, when just the act of recreating suppressed female voices in literature is itself an endeavour to be celebrated. There is a beautiful acknowledgement throughout the novel that “the past lives in the present, just like he always said, like he always wrote” (Fowler 366).

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Cracking Light on the Shadowlands of the Australian Landscape

Melissa Lucashenko. *Mullumbimby*.
St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2013

Reviewed by Emily Hastie



It is one thing for a novel to openly engage with culturally and politically charged issues (in this case, racism and Indigenous representation in contemporary Australia). It is quite another thing for a reader to feel capable of participating in this conversation and finish with a smile on their face and a tear trail on their cheek. It is this deeply emotive accessibility that elevates Melissa Lucashenko's *Mullumbimby* as a triumph of Australian women's literature.

In the subtropics of northern New South Wales, Jo Breen has bought a plot of land in the home of her Bundjalung ancestors. Brought up in the white-dominant society of the twenty-first century, Jo is determined to reconnect with the land and tradition of the Old People that has been systematically lost to her generation. Brimming with fierce wit and dry humour, Jo navigates her way through the struggles of Indigenous identity in a postcolonising Australia, the challenges of mother-daughter relationships with her angst-ridden teenager Ellen, cultural tensions with neighbours, surviving on a minimum wage, and, of course, the time-old torment of opening one's battered, broken heart to love again – in this case, to the gorgeous, educated Indigenous man Twoboy. Written with an endearing blunt honesty and realism, Lucashenko weaves a yarn of dynamic measure that immerses the reader in the lives of the marginalised; both disrupting stereotypes while encouraging reassessment of existing structures and attitudes.

Lucashenko's opening line immediately reveals the narrator's satirical tone that pervades *Mullumbimby*: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, reflected Jo, that a teenager armed with a nikko pen is a pain in the fucking neck' (1). This intertextuality in Jo's narration frequently appears alongside traditional words of the Bundjalung people throughout the novel, demonstrative of a hybridised culture and the liminal space occupied by contemporary Indigenous Australians.

It is this brusque and straight Indigenous-Australian vernacular that succeeds in forging this (white) reader's sense of an intimate authenticity in its reading, simultaneously making it accessible to the mainstream Australian audience. This narrative voice ultimately positions readers to emotionally engage with the marginalised perspective, subverting the default position of non-Indigenous Australians who relate to Aboriginals as the 'Other' – marking *Mullumbimby* as a progressive work of subtle political and cultural reform(ation).

Heavily involved in the battle for Native Title rights, Twoboy represents the poignant endeavour toward reclamation and preservation of Indigenous culture within the pervasive white framework of the Australian landscape. Twoboy's character simultaneously provides an empowering model of the modern Indigenous Australian while exposing the racialised presumptions of the surrounding dominant culture: "I'm a big, powerful, educated black man! Nobody – *nobody* – in this country, except for a few Goories, thinks that I'm a good idea" (201). Both Jo and Twoboy are strong representatives of their people, negotiating a bridging of the gap between modern society and ancient tradition.

A distinctive element of Lucashenko's work is her ability to procure an emotive connection – an almost tangible experience – between the reader and the environment of the narrative. Grounded in the fundamental Indigenous belief that land and self are inseparable, this powerful relationship is communicated through intensely visceral descriptions of the land and Jo's interaction with the sentient beings that are of it. Throughout *Mullumbimby*, Jo has deeply spiritual encounters with wrens, herons and wedge-tail eagles, insinuated as messengers and experienced with a reverent sense of mysticism. This extends to lingering descriptions of the abundant beauty synonymous with the Byron Bay hinterland. As a work preoccupied with belonging and country, this aspect of the novel enriches that interest.

In many ways, the satirical tone of *Mullumbimby's* narrator is reminiscent of fellow Indigenous Australian Vivien Cleven's novel *Bitin' Back*. Thematically, however, *Mullumbimby* explores the crossings of race, modernity and spirituality in the context of Australian society in a way that has some affinities to Toni Morrison. Lucashenko's narrative offering a wholesome and certain sense of spiritual return to the land, has some other resemblances to the writing of Louise Erdrich.

Mullumbimby presents a strong and rare voice for the Indigenous community, triumphing as a political and cultural work that disrupts the inherent mechanisms of racism that continue to operate in Australian society. Through her tactful narrative style, realistic characters and vibrant interpretation of the Australian landscape, Lucashenko has written very significant work of Australian literature. It will resonate especially with domestic readers as the social and geographical elements of the narrative depict conditions very close to home.

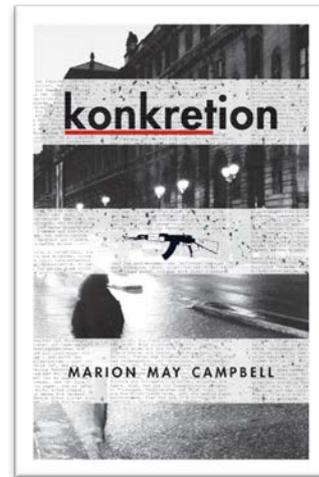
Mullumbimby is a story that encompasses ideas of justice, redemption and reconciliation, and expresses desires to connect and to be understood. There are no simple answers to be found as is clear from the role of Jo's daughter, Ellen in the story. But *Mullumbimby* asserts itself as a relevant and vital contribution to Australian writing now.

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(Re)reading Meinhof

Marion May Campbell. *Konkretion*
Crawley: UWAP, 2013

Reviewed by Shamara Ransirini



DISCUSSING the origins of terrorism in Western society, Richard L. Rubenstein (8) maintains that a disillusionment with language, a sense that action has to replace the failure of words as communication, prompts many revolutionaries into acts of terror. Marion May Campbell's latest novel *Konkretion* explores the complex and nuanced relation between not only language and the woman revolutionary, but language and the woman writer as well.

To a reader with a palate for experimental kind of writing (by which I mean writing that departs from the common realist mode), Campbell's novel can be an appetizer. Using poetic language, she weaves an intricate meta-fiction. The novel, which positions itself as still a "draft", contains fragments of two other texts, which are similarly "works in progress", one text is written by its protagonist Monique Piquet, an aging university academic and writer, summarily dismissed by the academy and the publishing industry, who walks the streets of Paris, as flaneur, reminiscing on the past, while searching for inspiration; the other text shares its title with the novel, and is the "reimagining" of the German rebel Ulrike Meinhof written by Monique's one-time protégé Angel Beigesang. Meinhof, and Gudrun Ensselin (whom the text frequently refers to) were key figures of West Germany's Red Army Faction (RAF) a left wing radical militant group which came into operation in the 1960's, and are often regarded as pioneers of the movement (Melzer 41). In popular discourses, both women are often portrayed as "good daughters turned bad" (Melzer 41) which reflect the cultural anxiety women militants evoke.

The "main text" is as much about the musings of Monique Piquet as it is about her interactions with both strangers and friends, and her need to "only connect" (118), recalling E.M. Forster's famous passage in *Howard's End*, "Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted and human love will be seen at its height. Only Connect". If *Konkretion* is about Monique's need to connect with people, with her past, it is also about the need to interact with the text, with its multiple narratives and writers and, inevitably, multiple readers. Such interactions between the various narratives, writers and readers, effect the shape shifting that occurs consistently in the novel; this in turn corresponds to the "category blurring" (Betensky 186) form of writing that Ross Chambers defines as "loiterature", which "disarms criticism of itself by presenting a moving target, shifting as its own divided attention constantly shifts" (Betensky 186).

The opening scene sets a lonely Monique waiting in an airport terminal, an impersonal space but one that has the potential to bring people together and reaffirm human relationships. As the narrative progresses, Monique seems to discover that she can connect with people in the least expected places : in shared laughter with a bus full of passengers, “the old heart is flooded with the simple happiness of being here, now” (119), and in acts of random kindness by strangers “sometimes the present will redeem the past” (118). The reader does not miss the irony at Monique’s expense, when she confesses that she didn’t expect “direct warmth” from Angel (124).

As the focus consistently moves between Monique, her memories, the multiple texts and her interaction with them, the novel acquires a kaleidoscopic effect. But at its heart is Monique “without the desiring or desired body” (3). Her concerns arising out of her aging and fragile body, ridden with peripheral vascular disease and osteoporosis, and her struggle against self-pity and oblivion “bereft, cut loose, feeling characterless...” (3), might appear banal and mundane, but they materially determine Monique’s movements and her daily existence. As the body is foregrounded in Monique’s narrative, it seems to be positioned centrally in Angel’s portrayal of Ulrike Meinhof as well, but in a different way. Reference to Monique’s and Ulrike’s maternal roles, however, is a significant similarity in their narratives, even though both women seem to depart from the dominant and traditional roles of motherhood. What is striking are the links made in both narratives between the female body and language. For Monique, words and the body are inseparable and her publisher’s exasperated concern, “can’t you imagine anyone not being a writer? No, it’s as if you can’t” (8), becomes self-explanatory. Just as she is acutely self-conscious of the restrictions imposed by her aging body, she is also aware of the limitations of ordinary language and its arbitrariness. She needs, we read, a “fictional sheath”, an “identity that needn’t be a bunker, the self being a mere fiction these days” (23). The fear of physical obliteration, made real by aging and decay, corresponds to the possibility of symbolic oblivion through language: Angel reminds her, “one must write or be written: one must write out or be written out” (61). Meanwhile, Angel speculates what might have happened, if writing had become, for Meinhof, “a movement through the body, a kind of street performance” (45). Angel sees a link between the “performative drive” of both language and the body. She assumes that Meinhof’s failure is partly a result of her unwillingness to exhaust this potential in language and argues that the latter could have, instead of remaining hostage to ordinary language, re-created or re-invented, “a poetics... a performative drive to disrupt” (48).

Even though Angel does not explicitly address what a revolutionary poetics might entail, she implies that had Meinhof been able to transgress the either/or dialectic by using the performative power of language, by letting “the poem ride her through” (51), her story might have ended on a different note. As Margaret Scanlan, too, points out in another context, whether the abstract and experimental kind of language promoted by poets like Stephan Mallarme (who is referred to several times in *Konkretion*) could necessarily appeal to the larger public, or address revolutionary concerns, remains unclear. Language, as Monique reminds us in the novel, can be arbitrary and unpredictable: the slippage between words that she frequently

uses, including “revolutionary”, “terrorist” and “host”, “hostage” (107), illustrates this point. Does the text then suggest that in postmodernist discourses, language is over- determined? More to the point, does it complicate the transformative power of language in a revolutionary cause which Angel seems to take for granted?

Angel’s apparent suggestion that a revolutionary poetics, grounded in the woman revolutionary’s body, should substitute for political violence-- or could have done so, at least in Meinhof’s case--is controversial at several levels. The notion underlying her argument is, “what if [Meinhof] found a mode of poetry to channel her refusal, her despair, her outrage, a circuitry through the body?” (44). That the female body is metaphorically linked to language, however, is not a new concept. As clichéd as it is, why do we continue to perceive women’s self-expression in terms of their bodies, symbolically or otherwise? And why does women’s resistance, even when it is articulated in the form of writing and poetry, necessarily have to be located in her body? And even if revolutionary poetics is a desirable alternative to violence, whether it is practical or effective remains unclear. Monique’s comment early on in the text, “we’ve heard of this twining of poetry and revolution before” (20), cynical as it sounds, might be still worth exploring.

“Did you want redemption for them [Meinhof and Esslin]? Or something like reconciliation?” (130). Monique’s question to Angel might resonate with some of Campbell’s readers as well. Meinhof’s narrative reads like a dominant representation of a “typical” woman militant’s story. It contains most of the formulaic ingredients one has grown to almost expect from such a portrayal: Meinhof as bad mother and wife who abandons her children for the cause and then struggles with guilt (85); Meinhof as a young woman whose relationship with her mother (foster-mother in this instance) is fraught and complex (133); Meinhof as allegedly insane (131). With this in mind, Monique’s response, “this is no heroine’s story” (49) does not surprise. Angel’s version of Ulrike Meinhof does not discuss her political consciousness nor the radical ideology of the Baader-Meinhof gang. Instead, like many dominant narratives of women militants, it explains Meinhof’s revolutionary politics primarily in terms of “personal motives”: her suppressed rage against her husband’s patriarchal authoritarianism exploding against society (133). But what perhaps makes Angel’s writing unique is the touch of irony she gives to Meinhof’s narrative: “how to be a revolutionary with cleaning and ironing to do!” (54) or, “I’ve chosen long ago to block that leaking hole called mother” (60). As Amanda Third’s study on Ulrike Meinhof maintains (86-7), the dominant discourse in the West represents the women terrorist in paradoxical ways: first, she is supposed to be more ruthless than her male counterpart and is more feared, and therefore constructed as “hyper terrorist”; second, she is also “hyper feminine” as she is more irrational and emotional. The woman terrorist, Third argues, “threatens the possibility of representation itself” (87). The dominant “history” that Angel refers to is a narrative that has systematically marginalised Meinhof and other women militants. If Angel’s objective is to satirize that history, Monique’s warning that satire “so easily *posts* (my italics) the defused revolutionary energy back to the conservatives” (130) recalls the complex relationship between language and representation.

It is perhaps not surprising that Mary Campbell's *Konkretion* has to end on a typical postmodern note, with a comment supposedly made by Felix Ensslin, (the son whom Gudrun Ensslin reportedly "abandoned" as a child in pursuit of the revolution): "the measure of your humanity is what you make of the stories you inherit" (141). This recalls a suggestion made by the narrator's mother in another novel, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, that sanity is the ability to tell the same story, but in different ways. As *Konkretion* positions itself as a "draft," it compels us to take note of the limits of language in capturing and conveying complex and multiple human experiences, including but not limited to, the life and work of a woman revolutionary. Angel's recollection of Felix Ensselin's words, "we are always unfinished business at the end" (141), perhaps suggests that this incompleteness of narrative needs to be recognized, in a postmodernist vein, as necessarily inevitable.

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