

NORTHERN TERRITORY 2007

# *Literary Awards*

short stories, essays & poems

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*The  
Kath Manzie  
Estate*



Northern Territory Government

Northern Territory Literary Awards 2007

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## Introduction

The Northern Territory Literary Awards has now reached its 23rd year. This year 254 entries were received and the quality of the writing across the five genres – short story, poetry, youth, essay and Indigenous – has been marked by an unusual degree of imaginative creativity, emotional engagement and skilful, precise yet evocative use of language. Echoing the trend of previous years, poetry continued to be the most popular of the five award categories, followed by the short story. This year it was pleasing to note an increase in the number of entries in both the essay and youth sections and a wider variety and higher standard of writing in the pieces submitted for the Dymocks Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writers' Award.

The judging of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander category continues to be a challenging task as writers can submit entries across a broad range of writing forms. This year's judge remarked on the ability of the better writers to engage with both prose and poetic form. She remarked on the sensitive way in which writers explored the themes of "...loss, separation, struggle and resolve", moving from the departure from family and country to "the process of returning to community and land". The author of the winning entry was encouraged to continue writing so that readers would have "the pleasure of again reading such works".

It was also very heartening to note the continued increase in participation in the Charles Darwin University Essay Award. This is the only category where entries must conform to specific criteria, in that the aim or purpose must be clearly stated by the writer and the essay must have relevance to the Northern Territory. The best of the essays, as published in this edition, will both delight and interest readers in terms of the wealth of historical and cultural research, the depth of analysis and the variety of the writing.

As critics throughout the ages have remarked, the desire to express thoughts and feelings in poetic language is imbedded deeply in the human psyche and this is borne out in our own literary awards with the continued popularity of the Dymocks Red Earth Poetry Award. Although the poetry category does not require any particular reference to the Territory, this year's participants followed a trend set in previous years, often choosing a tropical 'northern' setting to describe the unique character of our local environment. As the judge was pleased to remark, of the 123 entries submitted, most poets demonstrated an understanding of "the versatile form that poetry offers". However, she rewarded writers who created poems that readers would always appreciate and remember, combining "all aspects of the poet's art work in harmony".

The Dymocks Arafura Short Story Award attracted 86 entrants. The best of the stories addressed strong human themes such as the conflicting worlds of different cultures, family relationships and unlikely friendships, employing compelling description and use of dialogue in contrasting writing styles.

Once again the Northern Territory Literary Awards is deeply indebted to the commitment of its sponsors. Appreciation is due to Dymocks Booksellers, Charles Darwin University and the Kath Manzie Estate for its sponsorship of the Kath Manzie Youth Literary Awards. In the absence of this strong sponsorship, it would be difficult to ensure the sound future of the awards which offer Territory writers such a unique opportunity to have their work rewarded, published and read.

Finally, sincere thanks must also be extended to our panel of judges, Professor Wendy Brady, Vivienne Hayward, Andrew McMillan, Dr Carmel Gaffney and Jenny Rowden without whom the Northern Territory Literary Awards 2007 would not have been such a success.

Robin Hempel  
on behalf of the  
Northern Territory Literary Awards Committee 2007



## Free Me Country

*Jack Manguji*

Here I am in this lonely room  
Life now hell I'm full of gloom  
How did I ever end up in here?  
My life now in constant fear  
I once had great liberty  
Living at bush on my country  
Catching turtles in the deep blue sea  
Eating possums, bandicoot, plenty of tea  
There was no beer that was the rule  
Grandfather says that's only for fools  
Live off the country be part of the land  
One day son you will understand  
Country and you should always be one  
Living together united under the sun  
The blood that runs deep in your veins  
Gives life to you just like when it rains  
Our ancestors keep watch every day and night  
Make sure that you do what is considered to be right  
Respecting your elders especially the land  
But I forgot the laws and lived for the green can  
I forgot all that was ever taught to me

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Became slave for beer and was no longer free  
 I brought my family great shame  
 And moved to the city seeking fame  
 I live in the long grass not far from town  
 And roam the streets with other countryman  
 One day this man asked do you want to be free  
 That night I cried for my mother country  
 That night I dreamt I was back on the land  
 My grandfather's voice kept saying understand  
 Then suddenly it all became clear to me  
 I must return home to my mother country  
 My life now no longer full of gloom  
 I have long since left that lonely room  
 Living back home on my mother country  
 Appreciating my family and being free



## A Question of Identity

*Ellen Maria Pocock (Nabajin)*

The teenager watched her mother intently, the daughter could see she had that far-away look upon her face. She had seen that look many times over the years and she wondered what troubled her mother. "What's wrong Mum?" The mother replied, "there's a hole in my heart". The daughter's worried look gathered further response, "not the kind that doctors can fix, bub. You're growing up, your brother Frederick's gone, you'll be leaving home soon enough and I still don't know where I come from."

Her mother was one of the Stolen Generation, Maida Brooks who married Frederick Pocock to become Mrs Maida Pocock. Her married name and her seven children the only real blood family her mother had. Her mother's story began a world ago, and told to her children with loving care as only an Aboriginal woman could, that the stories be told many times and often that they become a part of the child, that the child become the elder and the stories be passed from generation to the next. This is the story of Maida Pocock.

*I don't remember being taken away, but I know I was. I was only little one then, I only have one memory of a woman I think is my mother. I remember her coming to that Kahlin Compound with that older boy who must have been my brother. She would sit down there, and me and that big boy would play.*

When her mother would tell that story she could feel the love that her mother felt picturing herself as a small child, playing under the watchful eye of a parent with a big brother. She herself knew the love of four big brothers, and how safe she felt with them around. Until only recently, they lived in the same house as they had since moving back to Darwin after the cyclone in 1976.

They lived in their new house now, with her youngest older brother Robert and his wife Dee and children living a house

behind in a street over. The move was bought about by the passing of the eldest in the family through suicide. It was funny how in an instant all their lives changed, things could never go back to the way they were. No more three bedroom house with big louvre windows, the flyscreen missing from the laundry window so those who didn't have a key could always get in to the house at any time of the day or night.

There were always lots of people in the house, brothers and sisters and their partners, kids, cousins and ring-ins. A house full of people, and a house full of love, never a lot of money but always a couple of stew pots full of food to feed all those who came inside. Now, there was only the three of them – Ellen, her brother William and their Mum. This house had sliding windows, it was hot and had no garden, and Ellen longed for their old house and her biggest brother, and she sort of understood that longing that her mother had if only from a youngster's view.

*I only have that one memory of mum, because after that I was taken to a place that would be my home for many years while growing up, I was taken to Croker Island Mission. We would get up early every morning for PT or physical training as the sisters would say. We would do star jumps, and go for runs, and when the war was getting closer the sisters would make us practice running into the bush so we could hide from the Japs. They made it like it was a game so that us kids wouldn't be so scared.*

*When the war did come and things must have been getting bad, the sisters got us kids off the island. Sister Somerville wrote a book about our journey, it was called 'They Crossed the Continent', and it detailed our experience. I didn't know at the time, but the government had told the Missionaries to get out and leave, and that meant without us. But those were some strong people with real faith and they weren't about to abandon us. I remember a lot of walking, so much walking, and being really hungry. Them big kids would catch food, and show the sisters bush tucker and that would keep us going. I sort of remember the bungalows, they're in Alice Springs there somewhere. We stayed there because that had*

*a big waterhole. In a couple of places I remember the Army giving us a lift in them big trucks, I don't know maybe something like them old Blitzes. I just know they was big trucks, because that one Army man would pick us up, and there was another Army man in the back to pull us in the truck.*

*I don't really remember too much more about the trip, except that we ended up in Odford in New South Wales. We went to school down there and we lived in dormitories same as on the island. I remember we would walk past these orchards to get to school. One time this farmer caught us climbing the fence to pinch some fruit, me and Polly Dean, but he didn't get angry and sometimes him and his wife would drop some things to the Missionaries for us kids. A lot of stuff would be really ripe, some rotten, but it was depression times and war years and every little bit of food was good.*

*I knew early on that I was psychic, and Sister Somerville knew as well. There was one lady that would come visit, not all the time, but every so often. She was a lovely woman and she always had a kind word for us kids. I remember having this dream, and the lady told me she was coming to visit us the next day, and I just knew it was real. When I awoke I was so excited that she was coming and it was the first thing I had to tell Sister. But when I told her the woman was coming Sister said how could I know? I told Sister that the woman told me in my dream, and that she would be coming. I was so adamant, but Sister didn't believe me and thought I was lying and I was punished. However just like in my dream, exactly as I pictured her the woman came around lunchtime and Sister apologised to me. It was then that she knew I was psychic.*

*Another of my vivid memories of being down south was getting very sick, and I think at one time when I was really sick that I died. I remember playing in the most beautiful garden with all the lovely flowers you could think of, and I wanted to stay. But Jesus he came to me and told me that it wasn't my time and I had to leave the garden, but that one day I could come back.*

*It's hard when I think back to those times, there are parts I recall so clearly as if it were yesterday, but others not so clear. We stayed in New South Wales for a few years, then the Missionaries brought us back to Croker Island. That's when they started training us children up to be domestics and ringers because the Government policies were to "breed the black out of us". I was the baker for the island and would get up earlier than anyone, and bake the bread before going to PT.*

*On one of my trips into Darwin I met the man that would be my husband, a strapping young man named Frederick Henry Pocock. He would come to meet me to take me to the dance in town, but there was never any funny business. He had been in New Guinea in the war, cutting trees for bridges and after getting out of the army said he was never going home to Bendigo to that bloody cold country again. We got married on the 15th of July 1954. When we went to apply for the marriage licence the woman asked me how old I was. I didn't have a clue, I could have been 15 or 25 for all I knew. I asked the Missionaries and they didn't know either. What they decided was that I would surely be old enough for marriage and that they would write a certificate from the island (Croker Island), stating that my birthdate was on the 10th of July 1936, that way I would be 18 and old enough to marry. That was how I got my birthday, and my wedding anniversary I suppose.*

*We went bush, and worked all through Litchfield and Kakadu, my husband and his good friend Ray Pethrick and his wife Calico (Rosie). In those years we cut timber, fished, hunted crocs and shot buffalo, and made inroads that would later become the main roads through Kakadu and Litchfield. I very quickly fell pregnant with my first child Frederick and he was born in 1955. I raised seven children of my own, but there were others that I claim as mine, two in particular being a young full blood girl called Daisy Pandela and Russell Collins. Of my children I had, my oldest were like chalk and cheese, Frederick was dark with dark eyes and handsome, and Elsie was so fair with red curly locks and very beautiful. There was a woman in town who wanted to adopt*

*her, but after having not known my own mother I was not about to let my own child be taken. The Government was still taking children even then, but there were some who were given up by their parents, but not my children.*

*We lived in Adelaide River for a few years, the children would walk 2mile to school and 2mile home again. The menagerie of animals they had, dogs and cats, our wingy flying-fox that couldn't fly, crocs and possums, wallabies and roos, the folks at the pub would send people down to our place just for a sticky at all the wildlife. Those could be hard days there, sometimes Old Fred would go to town and leave us with 10 pounds, a box of 22 and the rifle, that would have to last us a month or more. The children learnt that every shot counted, cos if you missed you didn't eat, it was that simple.*

*There were good times, and funny times too. There was one time in particular that Lynette was little, and the boys brought her back a present. They had told her the present was kangaroo eggs, and had her nursing these "eggs" for I don't know how long before I found her carrying them all wrapped up keeping them warm in some pretty hankies. She was so proud when she came to show me, and told me to guess what she had. I listed animals, and finally I said "Well, what you got there?" What the boys had in fact given Lynette was kangaroo balls (testes), and the look on her face when she found out was humour enough for them boys. Funny, terrible, but still funny.*

*That was just the way that it was, hard times for everyone but people could pull together to pull through. Old Fred knew everyone, and I think there were a lot of people that knew Fred. He would bring people home for dinner, but I would cook and stay out of the way. Even after I married Fred, I was still a shy person. It was only through having to talk up for my kids that forced me to learn to open my mouth. Like when William cut his foot on arc mesh. It was getting dark and William had been chasing Robert making scary noises, and it was right on bath time. Robert snuck out of the tub and grabbed a lump of wood, the next time William came back in making noises Robert whacked him*

*with the wood. William was wild, he chased Robert all over and Robert went up into the Blitz, William chased him and as he was climbing up he slipped and the arc mesh went straight through his foot. Robert, instead of helping his older brother, went back and gave him a hiding for scaring him, all the while William couldn't move from where he was. I had to go and pull William's foot from the arc mesh, I told him to count to three, but I pulled it on one before he could have time to think. I bathed and dressed William's foot, until it was healed.*

*My youngest son had his share of troubles too, when we lived at Four Mile hole somehow or other he cut the tendons in the back of his leg and when it healed it made his leg short so that he walked with a limp. This was one of those times when I learned to open my mouth. I talked to people to find out who was the best doctor to fix my baby. In the end we got a referral to Dr Mounzie, and he operated on Robert when other people said that he would be right. But I know how cruel children can be when you're different, and I didn't want that for my boy. That Dr Mounzie he did a great job and now when Robert walks you can't even tell.*

*My other boy Frank, when he was born he was so small he didn't fit in a regular nappy. So what I did was I would make a nappy out of my ladies' handkerchiefs and while they were still big on him they at least sort of fit. Frank was a child that needed something, he was always crying, and I just remember carrying him all the time, and when I was too tired, either old Agnes or Mullama (the women that worked for my husband and I), would carry him for me. But in spite of his start, Frank grew up to be an excellent bushman, with great tracking abilities and a crack shot like no other.*

*My last child Ellen, was a difficult pregnancy. When I found out the doctors told me I was going to have twins, Fred was over the moon. But one of them babies just didn't make it. I lost a few pregnancies, but in those days we just didn't talk about it. The year Ellen was born Cyclone Tracy hit Darwin, we went to Adelaide with other evacuees and it was at that point in my life that I decided I wasn't going to put up with the violence*

*from Fred. When we went back to Darwin I got a Housing Commission place and that's where we lived until my oldest boy passed. He had two terrible car accidents, and was not expected to live through either one. He never slept after the second one and I suppose in the end it was too much for him.*

*I have six children left, and I love them all so dearly. If it weren't for my two daughters I would still not know who I am and where I come from. They dug through mountains of old papers and found Mum. She was this little old woman, with a big stick in a yard full of dogs just watching you for her because she could hardly see. In the end I only had Mum for 11 months before she passed but she taught me so much. When I went to her, and walked in that yard we hadn't called ahead and told anyone we were coming. That old woman just looked at me and started crying. "My baby, my baby she been come home to her mummy." She just knew without a word being said, and in that time the hole in my heart was healed. I knew who I was, where I came from, and that she never stopped looking or hoping that I would find my way home.*

Looking back all grown up now, I myself find a hole in my heart. Thinking you have so many tomorrows can sometimes leave you cheated with all the things you could have done. I had always intended on helping mum to write her story, but with her passing this year on my birthday there is no more time.

Wishing I were still the teenager at the beginning of this story will not make it happen, so now I write to fill the hole, the space created in my heart for the loss of my mother, my teacher and the person who was the better part of my soul. I know she was proud of all of us, her children and grandchildren. I only hope that we can live up to the legacy of a woman who struggled and endured more hardships than she ever let befall her children that we might have a better life.

For my mum, in the end her work was complete. She was Maida Pocock, daughter of Nellie Wangernin; mother and

grandmother to many; an Aboriginal woman who had survived depression, drought and cyclones, floods and fires, war and even being a non-citizen in the country she was born. She was loved. This is how I'll tell her story to my child, as an Aboriginal woman does, many times and often...



# Shrink

*Bruce Hocking*

Grey hairs quivered on his neck and a chill rippled his spine. Dr Thomas Singleton slammed the brakes and the wheels of the troop carrier locked hard, sending it into a skid. When the vehicle stopped, overtaken by the cloud of dust that had been following, it stood on the edge of the road staring out into the bush. Miles of flat red earth, sparse stunted trees and grey-green bushes shimmered as if surrounded by textured glass. It looked back, hot and disinterested.

“Damn him,” he muttered as he tried to soothe his neck with a rub of his hand. He flipped his Akubra towards the back of his head and squinted insipid blue eyes into the late afternoon sun, a crimson ball hovering over the edge of the world ready to bounce. Up ahead sat a silhouette like a bush stripped of leaves, erect and perfectly still in the breeze.

*“Fucking blackfellas and their superstitious bullshit.”*

But he would go no further that day. He merely pulled out his swag, an esky and some cooking gear, pulled the top off a tinny and waited for the silhouette to let him pass.

The spirit man was wild and ancient. Hair rusted hard with dirt sat shocked on his head like a Medusa – snakes frozen by time. He had planted his nakedness in the dirt, back straight like a tree trunk and legs coiled below like roots anchoring him to the earth for eternity. He was surrounded by silence.

*“Superstitious bullshit!”* was the only sound for a mile around, a rifle crack shooting into nowhere at nothing at all.

The psychiatrist waited for two days until the old man moved on.

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A continuous cloud of red dust exploded from the rear of the troopie as it racketed along the unsealed road and anyone watching within a thirty-kilometre radius knew exactly where

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he was going. Lajamanu, an Aboriginal community on the northern edge of the Tanami desert was at the end of this road. There was nowhere else. Royalty cars with empty eyes sat rusting on the road's edge. The locals had bought them with the sudden wealth the mining company was forced to pay for destroying their land. They were abandoned just as abruptly when a tyre shredded or a rock blew out a windscreen. Left to mourn in the desert they deteriorated piece by piece. A wheel gone one day, a shotgun blast tearing metal skin the next. Decay was rapid out here, for man and machine.

He had begun his journey in Darwin about a thousand kilometres and now more than three days north-east of here. Up north there are rivers, forests of spear grass taller than a man and thick stands of eucalypts with white arms reaching awkwardly towards the sky like a ballet troupe freeze-framed in full flight. Like the land, there is a different quality to the people up there. This country shaped a man into something much harder.

He had come to the Territory all those years ago to become a man of the desert, yearning to be rid of the effeminate boy who had once stood terrified outside the gates of the best private school money could buy. His small size and gentle nature had made him a target for any bully looking for sport. Years of psychiatric training after graduation couldn't scissor loose the bastardised schoolboy from his psyche so he had tried another way. He clawed his way to the top of his profession in Darwin and then he regularly quit the city to visit remote communities and feel the power of the country beneath his boots.

He loved his boots. R. M. Williams, the bushman's brand. During those painful school years he had discovered Cuban heels. For a while, the extra height they gave him brought an illusion of extra strength. He had walked tall like a mountain peak as high as the rest and sought revenge on boys he shouldn't have. Several terrible hidings forced him to retreat but he never abandoned the belief that his boots could work magic in him.

Like Clark Kent emerging from a telephone box, he still felt invincible when he wore them.

.....

When he arrived in Lajamanu they told him the spirit man and his favourite granddaughter had gone walkabout. When very young she had talked in a monotonous high-pitched voice so the old man called her Cicada and the name stuck.

*"Fuck him for holding me up,"* Singleton spat. He cherished his visits here. Over the years he had spent hours between consultations prowling the streets, watching her play and watching her grow. He was white and important. People kept their distance. She was his heroin, a craving he couldn't shake.

Cicada was sixteen when her grandfather wandered into the bush and never came back. They say he went to greet his ancestors who took him to their dreamtime home in the desert where the serpent sleeps. Now it would be his son, Cicada's uncle, who would sing retribution to those who broke the lore.

The moment all the sorry business was done a spear flew out of the dark in a whisper and ruptured Uncle's liver. Some Lajamanu mob sought payback for old justice meted out to them by Cicada's grandfather. Early next morning, Grandfather came in a dream to put a green light into the centre of her chest for protection. Cicada woke and sobbed when she saw him standing at the foot of her mattress with her uncle by his side. He waited, smiling, and when she was ready he warned her that there were those who wished her harm too.

.....

Her hair, as black as cloudy night, played with the silk of her shoulders. It was impossible to tell where her skin began and her hair finished. She was terrified. The whites of her eyes glared wild into the eyes of neighbours forcing them to look away. People she had known all her life began to shun her. She heard Grandfather's words pound in her ears to the rhythm of her heartbeat, warning her of danger everywhere, in everyone.

Death could come from any direction. There would be no rest for her here. Cicada convinced her parents to take her into Katherine to live with an aunt. She would be invisible there. The pubs, cars and white people would confuse any evil spirits sent to find her.

Tall, straight and bereft of that self-conscious pride that uglies the very beautiful, Cicada could never stay out of sight as she walked the streets of Katherine in crowds of strangers. But it wasn't her appearance that led him to her. He could be trusted of course and her family had told him where she was. He often stopped and prowled, every sense organ alert. That day his skin quivered and his nostrils flared. He knew there was injured young nearby, separated from its herd. He hoped it would be her. He locked onto the scent and began to follow.

Cicada's heart felt danger clamour at her chest. She glanced over her shoulder but too fast to see him. She quickened her pace and then heard heavy boots scuff the road behind her. Fear flowed wet onto her skin. She ran flat out through lines of people ambling past shopfronts like camel trains, into a service station and out the back to the park. He followed as best he could but his deepest craving, like days-old hunger, powered him only a short way before his lungs gave out and legs buckled. He watched as she disappeared into the trees towards the south side of town where her auntie lived. He would get another chance.

After that the voices whispered more urgently, telling her to trust no-one. Her life depended on it they said. Get them before they get you. She saw hatred in everyone's stares and she heard a threat in every voice. She started to carry a knife. Feeling the slice of the blade in her fingers took away the panic for a while. Smoking gunja did too, but in time it painted evil on the faces of even the closest of family. She started to flash her knife at anyone who came close and she constantly muttered to the green light in her chest.

One Saturday afternoon Cicada's parents came for her and even they looked dangerous. They drove her to the hospital where

white people stuck needles in her arm and they watched as a length of hair-string was taken from her vein with the blood. Her parents knew the string was the sickness the Lajamanu mob had sung into her but the doctors told them a different story, that she had a serious disease called psychosis. Of course they couldn't know. They said that because she saw things that were not there and heard angry voices that were not speaking, she was sick. She needed expert attention and the place for that was the psychiatric ward in Darwin. Her parents thought Cicada might be safer there so they let the doctors fill out a form and prove her insane. Then they flew her out.

.....

*"She has a marijuana-induced psychosis, Dr Singleton. She was brought in from Katherine yesterday with typical paranoid delusions and visual hallucinations. I sedated her with Haloperidol overnight until you had a chance to assess her. I was told that you know her from Lajamanu and would prefer to manage her condition yourself. Is that right Sir?"*

Cicada woke to the voice. She was in a tiny bare room, lying on a single steel bed painted white like the walls. A young black woman, same colour, different world, was speaking to a face Cicada knew. Dr Singleton looked at her with the slightest smile. Strands of grey hair were combed precisely across his head. His stiff white coat was too big for him but his name badge looked important. As the young black doctor spoke he watched Cicada, blue eyes devouring her. They made her shudder.

*"Tablia, my dear. Why on earth have you been smoking all this gunja? It has made your mind very sick."* He was wringing his hands and he spoke too quickly. *"You must realise that all this talk that people from Lajamanu want to hurt you and that your grandfather has put a green light in your chest is all make-believe."* He reached out as if to show her there was indeed no light and she recoiled into the bed. It squeaked in protest. The smile creased his face a little deeper. *"You are safe now Tablia. Magic*

*can't get you in here. We can give you proper medicine to make you well again."*

His face showed only concern for her as he reached out to her foot but it jerked from his touch. She wanted to pull the sheet over her head and escape to somewhere else.

*"It's OK Tahlia. It's me, Dr Singleton. My, how pretty you are. I have no idea why your family insists on calling you by that silly name. Cicada...is that it? Doesn't fit you at all. Cicadas are such ugly creatures."* He savoured each word as it oozed from his mouth.

Her startled eyes stared into his as she shook and retreated further up the bed towards the wall.

*"This is most unusual behaviour for someone who knows me as well as she does,"* he said to the underling. *"Her paranoia is obviously severe. Perhaps you had better give her another dose of Haloperidol and lock her door for now until she settles. I'll come back later and talk with her again."*

When he left the room Cicada softened. The black doctor pricked her thigh and sent her into a world that was all bright colours and languid dreams.

An hour later she felt a vibration coming up from the concrete floor through the bed. She felt the weight of each footstep as it stalked up the corridor toward her room. She knew those footsteps intimately and she began to pant like a heat-stressed dog.

The steps kept coming. She heard the squeak of new leather and the scuff of a subtle limp. Frantically she plunged her hand beneath the pillow hoping against hope that her knife might be there. Empty.

All she had was her grandfather's gift. She pushed hard onto her chest, closed her eyes and looked inside. She saw a green glow, a mere flicker like a sputtering pilot light. She needed much more than that so she talked to Grandfather and gradually the light grew within her...then beyond her...and finally

---

it lit the room. She began to sing the song her grandfather sent, a monotonous electric drone that rose and fell away in a raw pulsing rhythm. She sang to drown out the terror of the footsteps.

The boots stopped and he pondered.

Through the glass pane on Cicada's door he saw an emerald green light, muted by a sheet hung from the inside. The merest flutter in his belly warned him to turn away, there was danger here, but the science in his mind said there was nothing to fear. His world was the real one. Then he heard the sound. It caught him in its fingers and, holding him fast, warned him to give up those thousand dreams in which she had come to him and abandoned herself to his appetites. But he needed those dreams more than safety and he reached out, placed the key in the lock and turned.

The door opened, tentatively at first and a boot stepped inside.

The green light hit him like a blast and his legs collapsed. He fell onto his knees and stared wildly into blinding colour. She was all he wanted but she was gone. The only other life in the room was a single cicada sitting on the bed-head and singing its song. Its sound grew louder and louder. It was both seductive and menacing as it started to hammer on his eardrums. He grabbed at his ears to keep out the pain, yet even as he did, he splayed his fingers a little to hear more clearly. Then he felt his chest heave. The music was so loud it seemed to be driving air from the room. His lungs sucked violently at emptiness. Now desperate to get out he groped for the door handle when an eardrum burst in a fireball. Blood trickled down to his chin and drops of his life started to seep onto his lap. A flailing hand slapped the doorknob and he grabbed it, pulled it with all his strength and fell backwards into the corridor. As the door slammed shut behind him the sound let him go, trapped inside with the light.

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Dr Singleton fell onto the floor gasping for breath and nursing his bleeding ear. *“Why...do this...to me? I just...wanted...to...love you...give...you a better...life...with me.”*

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The cicada stood on the pillow a while, slowing the movements in its legs before it flew through the bars guarding the open window and out into a world where she could be safe.

*“Dr Singleton, are you all right sir?”*

A young nurse with nervous eyes looked down at the streak of dried blood that scabbed the side of his face and the gelatinous pool that had collected on the floor beneath his chin. She shook him gently.

Breathless. *“Tablia has left the hospital with some of her family Dr Singleton. I saw them walking up the road together. They said I would find you here. They said you needed help more than she did. I couldn't stop her. I came as quickly as I could.”*

She bent to take the arm he was offering and helped him to his feet. He was surprisingly light.

*“I'll take you to Casualty to get your ear checked,”* she said.

As he took a step his leg buckled and he almost fell again. He looked down and saw a heel swinging loose from one of his boots.



## Sunwords

*Megan Jacobson*

It had just turned June when I stopped listening. I closed my ears up, like a blink, or a fish gill. See, I could cope with the splashes of swimming pools and the squeals of sun-baked teenagers. The drone of the rugby commentary was just bearable. As were the gull squawks, the surf-slang and the bell on the front door of the fish and chips shop. But it was a rainbow that pushed me over the brink.

I had just had enough of this small talk, and I blamed the sun for it. Before I turned off my ears, I glared at that big yellow orb from underneath my sun hat and zinc, but then my vision started getting dotty, and the doctor advised me against it. Now I'm fond of my vision, there's solitude in what you choose to see. But what you hear? There's not much choice in that at all. And it's the sun that's doing all the talking.

I blame the sun for dragonfly buzzing, blowfly blowing, lifeguard whistles, Mr. Whippy vans and especially cicadas. Come the wet season, and it's not so bad. Some cricket cheers, granted, but all in all the grey clouds gather, the humidity mutes things and the volume is switched down a notch. But at this point, June, July August-ish, the sun's puffed and smug, lordling over my town. I'm not sure on this, not one hundred per cent, but I have a suspicion that the sun god Rah might have retired here from Egypt. Followed the boomers, driving in with their camper vans to wash up with the coastal drift. The sand and desert scrub would have him feel quite at home, and the locals pay him his due respect. So the sunlight natters away like a lonely pensioner, bright and breezy. And I'm sick of it.

We've put up with this inane conversation our whole lives, sunny sunwords skipping around our ears in idle chitchat. So it's been a month since I've switched off. Relatives approach me with exaggerated gestures and stretched out vowels, wrapping their whole mouths around words so I can hear. But I could

always hear. I've just chosen not to listen. And everyone else has listened to the sun too long; they've forgotten how to speak.

So a person's bound to get lonely after a month with no conversation. My whole lifetime, really, if you're counting a conversation of substance – words that pack a punch and bite, sounds with a bit of gumption, not this dried out, washed up, sad-sop variety. I told the sun this; I gave it warning before I stopped listening. I said, "Give it the best you've got, you yellow-bellied blot." And it replied – with a rainbow. So how could I ever take anything it said seriously again? It replied with a mirage, all show and no substance, no end to its tail, its trail of thought. That really wouldn't do. So I decided that was it, no more chances, it was boring me to tears.

I'd have a yarn with the dark, I decided, a month after I'd turned off my ears. Now, the dark seemed like it would have something to say. A dark horse, if you pardon my pun. Not brash like the sunlight – with its hyper-colour signature that's far too loud and tries too hard. No, I'd come to the conclusion that I wanted classy and understated, and looking at the darkness, the signs were positive. Take, for example, the white, un-tanned flesh where a wedding ring sits. A classic example of the darkness' work. Or, if you like, the sensitive skin hidden from the sun from behind an earlobe. Just one breath there will send you reeling.

Yeah, it seemed to me that the darkness would be an interesting conversationalist. So I tuned my ears back on. And I called out to it.

"Introverted darkness. Tucked away between pages of books. The cloak of clandestine lovers, and the vessel of secrets. Won't you come out and speak to me?"

But the darkness wouldn't answer.

So, I'm thinking, I'll go over and say hello. Make an effort to introduce myself. That's what I'll do.

So I climbed under my bed. I lay there shoulder to shoulder with the dark, feeling like we're mates at the pub or old fishing

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partners. I'm saying the silence was comfortable, all friendly-like. I coughed, I scratched my nose. I tried again.

"Osteoporosis darkness." I said. "Your spine is crooked from edging the far corners of my desk, the bottom of my window sill, the gaps between photos and the back of photo frames. Won't you stretch out to walk a little while with me?"

I waited. And the darkness replied with pins and needles.

Now, that's a little unfriendly, I thought. Because it wouldn't talk to me, or walk with me. It wouldn't even glance at me from beneath the hood of its black velvet dress. And, well, my fingers were itchy and I just wanted to peep up underneath the edges of its skirt. But I sat on my hands and I stopped myself. I didn't want to seem improper. Besides which, I'd decided it was time too woo. So I tried again.

I covered myself with my secret trinkets. Stuck them on with tape. I climbed in my cupboard with every special letter, bead and photo stuck to every centimetre of my skin. You see my plan? As if I were a treasure box kept sacred in the dark.

So I called out again with my honey voice.

"Joint cracking darkness, bent over hiding in the lockets that sit next to my sisters' throats. Lonely like the love letters locked in drawers and soaked with you. Won't you sing with me?"

And folded tight inside that cupboard I waited for a song. But that bitch darkness turned up her nose. I crawled out of that cupboard with nothing but a dead arm.

Well if that's the way it's going to be, I thought, as I slapped that arm back into life.

"Perverted old darkness." I yelled. "That is no velvet dress. You're hidden in your trench coat you dirty old creep. You lecher. Lurking in indecent places, slithering underneath swimmers to the white goose flesh..."

But the darkness wasn't listening. And I yelled louder.

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“You muddy nut. You tramp, loitering unclean beneath fingernails. Making friends with the maggots and the mould! No wonder we invented fire to make you go away!”

But it made no difference. Not a scrap. Not a haughty sniff or a punch to piss off. And then it hit me. I realized. The darkness couldn't hear. It had switched off its ears to me long ago.



## The Jelly Beans' Picnic

*Patrick Nelson*

It was another warm, sunny day and all the jelly beans in the land of Bing Bong were as happy as happy could be. The sky was blue and the sun had a big smile on its face and there wasn't a cloud anywhere to be seen, which was just as well. The jelly beans didn't like clouds.

Just then, Ted, the red jelly bean had an idea. “I know,” he said, “Let's all go on a picnic.”

“Yay! What a good idea,” said all the other jelly beans.

Just then, off in the distance, the jelly beans could hear the chugga-chugga and too-woot of a huffing, puffing little steam train.

“Oh, goody, here comes Jane the Train,” said Jack, the black jelly bean.

And all the jelly beans erupted as one and cheered.

“I think I can, I think I can,” puffed Jane as she climbed a hill.

“You can do it,” shouted Dean, the green jelly bean.

“You're the best, Jane the Train,” everyone shouted, all at once.

A short while later, all the jelly beans were riding the train through the land of Bing Bong, heading to the picnic park.

“I'm so excited, said Sue the blue jelly bean, “we haven't been on a picnic since yesterday.”

“Yes,” puffed Jane the Train, “and we're nearly there.”

But as Jane chugged round the bend, all the jelly beans spotted the bananas having their very own picnic in the very same picnic park that the jelly beans had planned to have theirs'.

“Oh no, said Jilly, the jolly jelly bean, “there’s a bunch of bananas in our picnic park and there simply isn’t any room for us.”

“Never mind,” said Jane, “I know of another picnic spot, over the next hill by a big gum tree. I’ll take you there.”

So off they went – up the hill and through a tunnel, and down the hill to the gum tree. But as Jane was about to stop, all the jelly beans spotted the nuts having their very own picnic by the very same tree that the jelly beans had planned to have theirs. There were gum nuts and coconuts and peanuts and walnuts and chestnuts and doughnuts – and there simply wasn’t any room for the jelly beans.

“Oh no,” said Nicky, the sticky jelly bean, “it’s enough to drive you nutty.”

But Jane knew of another place that would be just ideal for a picnic.

“I’ll take you over a hill and down a valley to a lovely stream. It’s a perfect place for a picnic,” she said.

So off they went – over the hill and down the valley to the lovely stream. But guess what? As Jane neared the stream, all the jelly beans spotted the smarties having their very own picnic, right where the jelly beans had planned to have theirs’.

“Oh no,” said Sunny, the funny jelly bean, “it’s a hearty smarty party, and there simply isn’t any room for us.”

“Well,” said Jane, “I know of one last picnic spot that may just suit, and it won’t matter who else is there.

“We’ll need to follow the stream to the lake, then cross the bridge and travel down the coast to the beach and keep on going to the very end of the railway line.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Jim the slim jelly bean. “I’ve never been to a beach party.”

And all the jelly beans thought that was a bonza idea, so off they went – along the stream to the lake, across a bridge, and

down the coast to the beach and to the very end of the railway line. But guess what? As Jane the Train stopped at the end of the railway line, all the jelly beans spotted the beans having their very own picnic, on the beach, right where the jelly beans were going to have theirs.

There were black beans, green beans, soybeans, broad beans, snake beans, string beans climbing beans and jumping beans. Never had there been so many beans in the one place. Luckily, it was a big beach and there was plenty of room for all the beans, including the jelly beans.

“Welcome to our picnic,” said Sammy the snake bean to all the jelly beans.”

But a few minutes later Mary the scary jelly bean noticed that the sun wasn’t smiling anymore.

“Don’t look, but I think the sun is sad,” she said.

Just then, Roy the boy jelly bean noticed a cloud in the sky.

“Oh, no. There’s a big dark storm cloud and the wind is blowing this way. I think it’s going to rain.”

This was terrible news. The jelly beans didn’t like clouds, and it would never-never do for the beans to get wet. The only dry place would be inside Jane the Train – who didn’t mind the rain.

“All aboard,” shouted all the beans, all at once.

Just then, Pearl, the girl jelly bean, had a wild idea.

“Let’s take the train somewhere the sun is smiling.”

And everybody thought it was a great idea.

So Jane the Train, carried the jelly beans and the black beans, green beans, soybeans, broad beans, snake beans, string beans, climbing beans and jumping beans back up the coast, across the bridge, past the lake and along the stream. But the wind kept blowing and the big dark storm cloud kept coming. Just then, Jane heard a cry for help. It was one of the smarties.

“Save us from the rain, Jane. It would never-never do for the smarties to get wet.”

And so Jane the Train screeched to a halt and all the smarties jumped aboard.

“Too-woot,” said Jane as she carried the smarties, the beans, and the jelly beans of course, further along the stream, out of the valley and back over the hill. But all the while the wind kept blowing and the big dark storm cloud hovered closer than ever. Just then, Jane heard another cry for help. This time it was one of the nuts.

“Save us from the rain, Jane. It would never-never do for the nuts to get wet.”

And so Jane the Train screeched to a halt once more and a great many nuts clambered aboard.

“Too-woot,” said Jane as she carried the nuts, the smarties, the beans, and the jelly beans of course, up the hill, through the tunnel and down the hill.

But all the while the wind kept blowing and the big dark storm cloud was almost on top of them. Just then, Jane heard yet another cry for help. It was one of the bananas.

“Save us from the rain, Jane. It would never-never do for the bananas to get wet.”

And so Jane the Train screeched to a halt one last time and a big bunch of bananas slipped inside the carriage. And then it rained and rained and rained but no one got wet – except Jane the Train, who didn’t mind at all.

All the bananas, all the nuts, all the smarties, all the beans, and all the jelly beans, of course, were tucked safely inside Jane the Train where it was nice and dry and warm.

“Too-woot”, said Jane the Train, who immediately set off in search of the sun.

She went up a hill, down a hill, through the fields, past the forest, over a bridge, along the coast and around the bend, but

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the sun was nowhere to be seen. The rain had stopped, the clouds had disappeared and the sun had set for another day. Flying high in the sky was a big happy moon instead.

It was late in the evening and everyone was very tired.

“I think it’s time for bed,” said Jane the Train.

“Good idea,” said all the jelly beans all at the same time.

“And let’s see what tomorrow brings,” they added as an afterthought.



## Wharf

*Janet Sparrow*

“Whatcha looking at?”

“The water.”

“Why?”

“Because somewhere in there is that big one. The one that’s always got away.”

Michael stared at the craggy face pocked with salt: salt of oceans; salt of industry. The old fella frowned as his eyes met Michael’s stare of wonderment. The rod dangled over the wharf and the line swayed with the tidal current. The man’s fingers rested, feeling the gentle bob, bob, bobbing of the weight on the ocean floor. Above them the near perfect sky of the dry season held firm, its blue haze arching over them. A never ending amphitheatre, the artists’ brush marks were still visible in the few cirrus that floated aimlessly on its surface.

Michael set down his milk crate next to the man and opened his bag. Out came his hand line and the decomposing bait that had slowly defrosted on the bike ride. My name’s Michael,” he announced importantly. The old fella grunted an acknowledgement and then spat on the concrete. The sputum laid there, raw egg white. In the glare of the noon Michael imagined it cooking slowly – scrambled not poached. Unleashing the rusty hook the hand line unravelled and stiffly lay on the floor. Michael baited up expertly and then dropped the line in. Down it went into the water. A rounded ‘plop’ a satisfying ‘plop’. He unwound the line until he felt the weight hit the bottom and the wound up one turn. The old fella watched him surreptitiously, suspiciously. He didn’t like kids. Kids didn’t like him. It was an arrangement he had always been rather smug about and as he had forgotten that he once was a kid himself, their world remained a sweet and uninteresting mystery to him. Michael was dangerously close to invading his

space. He raised a nostril in a sneer, picked the other one and stared out to sea.

Michael began to whistle, quietly at first building to a crescendo of tuneless notes that once may have been a melody but had been liberated into something resembling a free jazz performance. “D’ya have to?”

Michael stopped.

The humming started slowly and low and then as his confidence grew, Michael’s rendition of ‘Advance Australia Fair’ began to resonate. It made his ears hum and his nose vibrate. Not a particularly patriotic child, he had developed a passion for singing the national anthem at any opportunity. He was never picked for a school assembly performance despite many appreciative comments from teachers. “It was quiet before you rocked up,” said the old fella, his fingers twitching on the rod. A droplet of sweat began its journey from behind his ear on its road south. Michael watched as its course was altered and diverted by the creases and furrows burnt into the old fella’s neck. Such a circuitous route, that by the time it reached the grubby collar there was nothing more than a streak of it left. Michael thought about geography and glaciers and Mr. Cartwright’s voice as it strangled any possible love of the natural world; he thought of the homework that should have been completed; he thought of detention on Monday; he thought of the thrill of the big fish. He stopped humming.

Quietly and deliberately the old fella wound in his line and as the hook leapt free of the water he tutted audibly. Hardly surprising that it had been so fruitless: the bastards had stolen his bait again. As he rebaited his hook from a small supply of squid, he noticed Michael watching him. It was his turn now... “Whatcha looking at?”

Michael flushed. He hadn’t meant to stare. “The water,” he echoed, pretending to look past the man to the harbour beyond. The old fella tipped back his hat, pulled his grimy hand across his brow and sighed. “Look. This is a big wharf –

plenty of room for everyone. Why don't you give a bloke a bit of space and fish over there?" He pointed to a spot well along the wharf. He scratched his chin. He wasn't used to the direct gaze that Michael offered up. "But I always fish just here. This is my spot."

"*Your* spot? Since when did some wet-behind-the-ears, nobody of a kid like you have their own spot?"

"Since I was **eight**." Michael was adamant.

"Right." The old fella cast out again nodding and raising his eyebrows. "'Since he was eight,' says he," he repeated. Immediately followed by an incredulous echo, "Since he was eight!"

The old fella looked at him. "Little bugger must be all of 10 years old now. The cheek of it. The bloody cheek of it!"

Michael opened his bag and took out a defrosting water bottle. The beads of condensation glistened and dripped onto his leg. "Want some?" The old fella reached into his bag, retrieved a beer and flicking off the top took a deep slug. He stared back at Michael then back out to sea. The old fella mused upon this boy's courage. "Not every lad would come bowling up to some complete stranger and just sit there, large as life, happy as Larry." He had always taken a kind of pride in his unfriendly demeanour, happy that a mere look would keep the rest of the world at a good spitting distance. Especially kids. He'd never liked kids and as he had never married, never fathered, never been the jolly tolerant uncle then it was no business of his to stick his nose into their skinny high pitched business.

Michael reached into his bag and grabbed a sandwich. "I got a spare." He motioned to the lunch box. "For Christ's sake lad! I don't want a sarnie, a drink of water, a crappy version of the bloody national anthem or your company. If you have to fish here in *your* spot then do it quietly will ya?"

That was hard for Michael. He had always given and in return had been welcome. His world was full of good things and good people. He'd never come across someone with quite

such antipathy to his fellow creature. He shrugged. The old fella stared out to sea and as he did felt Michael's gaze on his shoulder like a warm hand. Flattening his lips and scratching his neck he noticed Michael shifting in his seat and smiling at him through a mouth full of sandwich. For a moment, just for a moment mind, he felt something. It was like an itch or perhaps a burning sensation, or maybe it could better be described as a tingling. Maybe he was imagining it. But no! There it was again, the sides of his mouth were moving. Upwards they curled. His lips cracked as his facial muscles pulled his features into an unfamiliar expression. 'Well, I'll be blowed!' The old fella tried to straighten his face but it was impossible. The smile was stuck there. Like a magazine photo vandalized by a small boy, a smile had been drawn over the top of his usual face.

Michael grinned and without offering a word, an exchange, an explanation, threw himself off the wharf. Down he shot. Feet first. Gannet-like he entered the water leaving a trail of bubbles and a baseball cap in his wake. The moment between Michael leaving the wharf and the old fella's realization was a shaft of vibrant colour: Michael's warm gaze and the cracked unfamiliar smile left the old man and for one very lucid moment he felt alone; for the first time since he could remember he felt lonely. For once in his grizzly gnarled tree trunk of a body he felt the pang of something missing: a big one, something that got away.

It was a long way down. "The kid could drown. He could be unconscious."

"Bloody hell!"

Quickly his eyes scanned the wharf and there it was: the red and white ring. He moved stiffly but quickly toward it and grabbed at it with a muscular jerk. "Just as well those bloody young vandals hadn't got to it." His wiry eyebrows furrowed together: a pair of unkempt sun shields, wild and curly. "Bloody kids."

Michael was nowhere to be seen, a baseball cap floated serenely on the water, dipping with the tide and journeying with the current. The old fella scanned and suddenly up he came, like a buoy cut loose he bobbed to the surface coughing and spluttering. The ring was launched with the same deft hands that roped cattle, held a horse's neck and tossed a hay bale. It landed beside Michael with a flat-crack on the water's surface. Small arms encircled the ring and a tired head rested on hits rubbery-hard surface: a giant lolly tilting towards the hungry boy as they rested in the milky blue cellophane.

Off came the shirt, the dust-crust old hat. "I'm coming down. Can you kick ya way to them steps there?" Michael nodded. He finned his way to the steps. His sinewy frame and fine water-plastered hair gave him a look of an emerging sea creature, small and lithe and almost ashore. "You're OK," rasped the old fella as their hands met. For a moment they waited there in the barnacled magic of the wharf's underbelly. Slop. Slop. Slapped the water. The sea surface danced with lights bouncing off the metal structure. As his hand touched the living steps, Michael released his grip on the ring and the old fella's bulging forearms lifted him. Like a baby dripping in his father's hands, Michael dangled there looking at the watery blue eyes. The old fella slumped down onto the bottom step and sitting Michael beside him gave a tar-coated hack.

"I hate kids."

"I know," Michael replied. He placed his hand in the old fella's. "Whatcha looking at?"

"The water," said the old fella, as he swept his hair back across his head and then down a face salt-pocked with oceans and industry and tears.



## Footsteps

*Marion Townsend*

I follow your footsteps in the sand, wide at the top, splayed toes. The crooked toe on the left foot tells me that Muni is with your group. The imprint of the plastic sandals tells me that you have my daughter with you. You know exactly where you're going.

The tide is right out and I can see almost to the horizon. I can see the rocky headland where I know you will spend the next couple of hours picking shellfish from the exposed rocks. You will all look after Jennie, but I know that Muni will take special care of her. You will all show her which shells contain the plumpest flesh. You will all let her know that she must look very carefully at the rocks to ensure she does not mistake one of them for the deadly stonefish.

But it will be Muni who carries her on her shoulders when she becomes tired. Muni who sees that her little bucket has some choice shellfish to take home to her Mama. Because it was Muni who was given to me as a sister, and I to her. In the tribal way, we all had to 'belong' somewhere. Not only did I 'belong' to Muni, but my daughters also were her daughters.

We all take the relationships seriously, as they were intended, and as our knowledge of each other grows, so too does our affection.

I'll sit awhile on the beach, where I can watch you in the distance. The bright colours of your cotton shifts, black skin and curly hair create a dazzling contrast with Jennie's white skin and sunhat. So much contrast, so much the same.

The figures on the rocks return, the tide washes in, clearing away the last remnants of your footprints in a swirl of foam.

Tens of thousands of tides have come and gone since that day so long ago, when I was the watcher on the beach.

We were all young mothers, bringing up our children in the way of life we had each known ourselves, but with a sharing of our cultures too. Together we watched the children, released from school, running the few metres to the beach, discarding their clothes as they ran, then jumping into the water with shouts of glee.

How we all laughed when you took me with you into the mangroves to look for crabs and the long mud worms which were such a delicacy for you. You all skipped so easily over the exposed roots, while I floundered along behind you, trying to copy you, slipping off then stepping between the roots, getting thoroughly bogged down and needing your willing hands to get me going again.

But the biggest laugh was for when you retold my adventures that night around the campfire. Your miming of my awkward movements through the mangroves, my horror at the sight of a 40 centimetre worm being sucked into your mouth brought howls of delight from the rest of the tribe.

Jennie walks her own path now, with her own daughter by her side, she also a grown woman.

And I, an old lady, have come back to rest awhile and find again, my 'sister' and my friends of those long ago days.

There are not many footprints on the beach today, and I look in vain for the 'djarrpi luku', the crooked toe.

For many years we shared our families, our food and our laughter. But then because we had different needs, we took different paths, and they were not to cross again except in dreams.

I'm glad I've met you again, Junta. You know, I really wanted you to become the teacher who would follow in my footsteps. You were so good with the children, but sadly, the time needed in Darwin for your training meant a breakdown in your own family relationships, and you abandoned your education to come back home.

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I cried when I read in the paper about Clara and Bidy, dying in a drunken brawl while they were in town. They went in for medical treatment, but stayed for 'the good time', so finished up living in the 'long grass', and selling themselves for food and grog, embracing the 'Coolibah Dreaming', along with so many others.

And Sara, you told me, ran way with a 'wrong fella'. She didn't want to marry that old man she'd been promised to, but chose her own partner, so had to live away in town, because her family wouldn't have her back again.

But it's Muni I've waited so long to hear about. I've imagined her over the years her smiling face, her love of children. I've thought about her family, grown up now, as mine are. She, perhaps, even a great grandmother by now.

I've brought photos, so that I can show her my grown up family, as I long to hear about hers. But, you are telling me that Muni died, shortly after I left. She had tuberculosis.

She never saw her own children grow up. They were reared by an aunt. Muni, so full of tenderness and love, will remain forever young in my memory. I still carry the picture, in my mind, of her walking towards me on the beach, laughing, my chubby daughter on her shoulders, clinging for dear life to her curly black hair, home from an afternoon's 'hunting'.

And I cherish the memory of her sitting beside me in the shade of the great tamarind trees on the shore, showing me how to weave pandanus leaves into a basket.

Two pairs of hands, black and white working together, intertwining forever, the weft and warp of our lives.



## The Rent

*Carmel Williams*

We lived in Hillcrest, a housing commission slum for the working poor. Labor voters were on all sides and the enigmatic Don Dunstan held office. Once upon a time, I thought everyone lived like this; no cars, gardens were either well manicured or non existent, the squabble of kids, chatter of chooks in the neighbour's yard. Our house ran like a catholic Spartan army. It was a queer mix of prayers, priests, Sunday mass and hard laws, broken only by accident and punished severely. School was a serious business. We would make up for our parents lack of education if it killed us.

The weekend passed in welts, and bruises, tripping over unwritten rules, trespassing on no-go zones. Seemed like no one wanted to be there, including my parents.

They were Gods and monsters to me. I was small and still in the tight fold of not knowing any better. Father did the budget Saturday mornings, Mum at the baking and washing. I used to sit quietly somewhere, out of the way. The whole weekend depended on Saturday mornings, I never knew why. I'd watch Mum bake spinster's buttons, wondering why she made them. She never seemed happy when we ate them. Apples were rationed for school lunches and the only free stuff grew on the trees in our backyard, or hung serendipitously over the fence from the neighbour's.

There was a tribe of us, a *good Catholic brood* as Father Purcell would say. The seasons made the backyard our heaven; Satsuma plums, so heavy that limbs would break, oranges, lemons, grapes, mandarins, almonds. When a kid could eat until they got a belly-ache, and climb in the boughs of trees swimming in sweet fruity scents. This was where I met my God, somewhere in the mud puddles and the pungent spice of a forest of tomato plants. The confessional, beating the breast penances was where that other God lived. He was hard and dangerous.

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Dad, bent over piles of paper, groaning, gritting his teeth and otherwise letting everyone know that we were broke and it was their fault. He wrote neat cheques in a heavy deliberate hand. Our lives depended on the red cents he couldn't find.

One brother teased the dog, another tinkered with his mongrel bike, yet another studied in his room. The oldest girl was out, as often as she could and my other sister cut out baby photos for her scrapbook.

The rent book came out of the Clemetis tin and a cheque was pinned to its brown paper pages. Saturday was rent day. I had never been given the responsibility of paying the rent. One of my brothers usually did it. I always offered to do it, the way one does when you have many *sins* to make up for. My blackened soul weighed heavily on my mind, even then.

This particular Saturday, my brother was told to ride down on his bike. He said he couldn't because his bike was in pieces. I pounced. This time my mother said "Let her go". This was unexpected support. My father nodded, adding; "If you lose the cheque I'll break your bloody neck!" I believed him, I believed everything he said. I took the rent book in shaky hands.

I allowed myself to skip part of the way, past the rows of alternate sameness, past the weeds and peeling paint, past the smells of backyard burning and Saturday screaming kids.

The rent office was tucked away at the corner of the group. The glass door with its gold lettering "Housing Trust of South Australia", screeched as I swung it open. The adrenalin kicked in immediately. Inside, cigarette smoke and shuffling, wall to wall people, dusty floors, cigarette butts, babies with blue feet...crying.

I joined the queue that snaked arbitrarily around the small room. A fat, red cheeked man sat behind the counter. His black-rimmed glasses settling like a new piece of skull into the growth of his face. He bit and barked like a pug-nosed dog. One man argued about his back rent and was told that he and his "brats" would be evicted if he couldn't pay. "There are

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plenty of other bludgers to take your place!" Dad had told us about bludgers, free-loaders, that's what we kids were.

The door groaned with the comings and goings, sending shivers down my spine. The cigarette smoke was making my nose run and I felt sick. We were not like this. My father would never be behind in the rent, my hair was combed, my clothes clean.

An old woman with an ugly red mouth and a bad smell, stood in front of me. When she smiled at me her teeth seemed like the bones of a dead cat I saw once. She kept glancing at me, smiling, smoking, coughing up like an old drunk. I'd lose my place if I ran, so I watched and waited for her to get around to saying something. "How come you've got daisies on the hem of your jeans?" She smiled, sneered. I said nothing. "I reckon it's because your jeans are too short and your mum is trying to hide it." She laughed and coughed up her fun. I had liked those daisies until just now. My face burned.

When it was my turn I placed the rent book gingerly on the counter. The fat man took it roughly and didn't look at me. I watched...I was a *watcher*. Without looking up, it seemed, he said; "I haven't seen you before. How many little bastards has your old man got now?" I mustered all the courage I had to blush and say; "I don't know".

He stamped and scribbled and just as I thought he had finished, he held the book in his hands and stood up, looking down on me. "Why does he always pay by cheques – I hate bloody cheques, they take too long!" and he threw the book across the counter at me. I picked up the rent book from the floor and ran. I didn't stop running for a long time. But when I did, I threw the rent book in the dirt and rolled up the hem on my jeans.

The pages of the book flitted open in the hot wind. White receipts like waves on the beach, showing the pounding of hundreds of those visits. I cried. I couldn't say why. Suddenly I felt sweaty, dirty. I was a paint flake on any one of the houses. Soap and water would never be enough, no good grades would

ever make it any different. There was a dust storm coming-up over the hills.

The grey metal road seemed longer and I had no interest, even in collecting the pieces of pyrite that sparkled up from the foot path.

I went inside the house and placed the rent book on the table near my father. I did not look at him. He would know that I had found out something that I wasn't supposed to. "Have you lost the cheque?" he said, raising an eyebrow. "No I didn't lose the cheque," but I had lost something. I went outside, lay down on the grass and tried to look at the sun.





# Kadaitcha

*Bill Coburn*

Lie still small Napultja\*  
Lie close to the ground  
Skin pressed on skin  
Make never a sound.

The song men are singing  
Of death and of fear  
The bullroarer's roaring  
Kadaitcha is near.

Your Ngalpa\*\* has left us  
His killer must pay  
The song of Kadaitcha  
Is the law and the way.

Close your ears small Napultja  
Hear the silence of death  
Kadaitcha is making  
His beard in his breath.\*\*\*

Don't look at Kadaitcha  
Till your spirit is strong  
When you learn of the power  
Of the men with the song.

Kadaitcha is stealthy  
Kadaitcha is strong  
Kadaitcha will make  
It right from the wrong.

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With the cut of the knife  
 And the rocks pushed within  
 His body will walk  
 No marks on the skin.

When he falls small Napultja  
 And lies there in shame  
 The power of Kadaitcha  
 Will go back where it came.

Lie still small Napultja  
 Close your mind to the pain  
 Skin pressed on skin  
 We are whole once again.

\* Napultja – *the name of a small child*

\*\* *Ngalpa is a manufactured kinship word to denote the important mother's brother relationship.*

\*\*\* *It was a common practice for old men to put the end of their beards in their mouths when performing certain important rituals.*



## One Child Two Child Wailing and Wild

*Ali Cobby Eckermann*

Urgent darkness hunts us south, while my stomach  
 churns with childbirth

He waits.

Foetal juices of Blood and Life baptise this child from  
 my womb

He waits.

I wash my child with sand of red, avoid newborn eyes of  
 Trust, with Love

He waits.

A feeble cry escapes the grave. I watch it enter Heaven

He waits.

Red Band, Black Man, Husband and Father gently holds  
 our other Daughter

He has watched mine; now I watch his back; survival  
 dictates our nomadic trek

We walk silent strong in single file fashion, stumble the  
 path to the mission

He waits

I bite and kick and scratch and scream “Don't steal my  
 baby from me!”

He waits.

I sit broken beside him. The darkness is no longer  
 urgent.



## Thylacine. Thylacine. Thylacine.

*Katy Harrison*

Your stripes preserved in paint  
so high on a cliff

Thylacine  
Your name whispered  
over and over and over

Thylacine  
But you appear so rarely  
in the vast Top End

Thylacine  
Where once those stripes hid you  
in ancient trees

Thy-la-cine  
Where once those 3 syllables  
conjured you from nothing

THYLACINE  
That repeated spoken identity  
has severed itself from your image

Thylacine  
By repetition removed from existence,  
in comprehension as in life

HYL I  
T AC NE  
Your common noun  
has broken free!

T. H. Y. L. A. C. I. N. E.  
Now floats without purpose  
not aligned to any substance.  
And you,  
formerly known as Thylacine,  
now unrecognisable.  
Except nameless and unreachable,  
on that stone,  
perhaps.



## My father

*Meg Mooney*

My father carefully pegs  
a row of medium size white underpants  
by their waistbands  
fronts facing towards him  
each peg holds the right end of one waist  
and the left end of the next  
to make loops of undies  
the way my mother taught him, and me  
saving pegs and time

my father was an accountant  
he's meticulous too  
with cleaning the toilet and bath  
getting down on his hands and knees  
to wash the concrete floor with a cloth  
the way my mother always has

she limps out past the tankstand  
to the rotary hoist on the back lawn  
briskly adjusts a peg or two  
no slow consideration about her  
she's not like that  
and she never had time anyway

now there's too much time  
my father's careful sweeping and dusting  
provide the small satisfactions  
my mother is familiar with  
but still don't fulfil the day

he enjoys the evenings  
out the front watering the roses  
chatting to neighbours  
I don't notice til my brother points it out  
the roses don't flower much these days

they've let some things go  
the garden bed next to the back door  
always full of brightly-coloured phlox  
is a neat rectangle of black dirt  
this year the hanging baskets  
along the shed wall –  
a post-retirement flourish –  
are empty, no longer overflowing with petunias

I wonder what will be the last to go  
the hydrangeas snug under their sun shelter  
mum says dad built like Fort Knox  
the strawberry patch, another retirement activity  
the roses we all chose  
after weeks checking out the parkland bushes  
the patch of statice and agapanthus  
for my younger brother's grave?

it's not lack of ableness entirely with my father  
nor my brother's death many years ago  
but there is a sense of sadness  
of something missing  
of needing to talk about it but not knowing how  
having stopped so long ago  
when he was a young boy  
who knew to keep out of the way  
while his mother scrubbed at the laundry tubs



## Black Cockatoos

*Jill Pettigrew*

camera shy  
 disguised in burn off  
 black on black  
 unseen, unheard stimulus  
 a magician's touch  
 ash and limestone dissolve  
 into a hundred scarlet fans  
 swept open, snapped shut  
 confident screech in flight  
 fearless now they  
 swoop low, settle in trees  
 hook nosed silhouettes  
 dominate, intimidate  
 smaller seed lovers  
 harsh, hoarse, half-strangled cry  
 calling the flock  
 ten, twenty, thirty respond  
 disappear back into the burn off  
 focused on food  
 no squabbles, no fights, no jealousy  
 harmony and communism  
 perfect altruism  
 or instinct driven obedience  
 genes shaped for survival  
 in a world where the price of a tail feather  
 makes men murderers



## Metaphor On A Face

*Samantha Sabaratnam*

Sunset on a blush  
 And lips the hinge of which  
 Everything hinges on  
 What is said / not said.

Hair a parted curtain  
 Tied back at the temples of worship.  
 The eye an egg the bird guards with her beak  
 And incubates with her belly  
 Kissing the silver worm of sleep  
 It must eat when awake.

Eyelashes, the bird's  
 Global warming wings  
 Sealing the nest of the lids,  
 Sweeping up the griefs  
 To leave the eggs glistening.

The bridge of the nose  
 A thumb print of some god  
 On the day of clay,  
 A ravine if you know what I mean  
 Between what the eye sees  
 And what will be translated –  
 Both a bridge and a gulf  
 A trap of shadows  
 A moon loom  
 So the mouth can bloom  
 Despite its stitches  
 And inarticulate breath.

The ear in darkness  
An innocent bystander  
A handle with no spout  
A partner so distant  
It has to shout!  
And cohabitate  
With a self it cannot see  
Blind faith worshipping a god  
Which may not exist but be  
Its own ego laughing  
On the other side of the face  
A face that can seal a fate.

The cheek bone turns so sharply  
The flood way, the highway of no return  
Guarding the eye jewels  
While diverting all attention  
To the mouth  
Perfectly designed  
To shoulder the pain.

The eyebrows two friends  
Destined to never meet  
Plucked from relative obscurity  
And destined to remain that way  
But plucked nonetheless  
They see the humour in their situation  
And pull the strings  
The ultimate revenge  
On the mask of all things.



# A View of Statehood for the Northern Territory Government and its People

*Heidi Becker*

This essay discusses the subject of statehood for the Northern Territory and looks at some of the issues related to becoming a state. It seeks to address questions that people may have and to give a greater insight into this subject.

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One challenge that faces the Northern Territory Government is the issue of Statehood. It is important to first determine a few facts about Statehood before deciding whether or not it is the right path to take. Many questions need to be answered. How is the Northern Territory different to other states? Will being a state be beneficial or is it better off remaining a territory? This essay seeks to address such questions. It also looks at the past events in the Northern Territory's politics up until today, and draws conclusions on the most appropriate steps to take in the future.

The Northern Territory has a long and interesting political history. Table 1: Political History of the NT, briefly indicates the most important achievements from the mid 1800s to today.

Year	Achievements
1863	Colonial Office of Great Britain secured the control of the NT in the Government of the Colony of SA
1901	Federation of Australia
1907	SA surrendered the control of the NT to the Commonwealth by passing the <i>Northern Territory Surrender Act</i> in 1907
1910	Commonwealth took on control of the NT by passing the <i>Northern Territory Acceptance Act</i>
1978	Commonwealth passed the <i>Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act</i> , which established a political body in the name of Northern Territory of Australia After this, the newly established government gained executive control and responsibility for its own finances and took over the bulk of state type functions such as education, health and judicial function

1988	NT financially treated as a state
1998	Referendum held on statehood for the NT and was voted down
2005	Statehood Steering Committee was established as an advisory committee on matters relating to the attainment of Statehood for the Northern Territory

Table 1: Political History of the NT (Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs 2005)

At Federation in 1901, the Northern Territory was part of South Australia. As a condition of joining the Federation, South Australia surrendered the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth accepted the land in 1910. This gave the Commonwealth authority over the Northern Territory. The Commonwealth exercised this control until 1978 when the Northern Territory was given a form of self-government with the Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1987. (Downing 1995)

As stated in Table 1, a Referendum on Statehood for the Northern Territory was held in 1998. This proposal was headed by Shane Stone, the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory at the time, who wrote a “monocultural constitution which sought to entrench a single party system” (Northern Land Council 2003, p. 5). Many people did not like the constitutional changes that were proposed for the new state. One controversial condition was a clause that allowed the premier to fire the new state’s Governor. Therefore, it was to the relief of many people that the Referendum was voted down. (Flynn 1998, Lateline 1998)

Since the Referendum in 1998, the Northern Territory has seen a change of Governments and it is now led by Clare Martin’s Labour Party. In 2003, Clare Martin announced her intention to proceed in the steps toward Statehood. “Ms Martin said that after 25 years of self-government, the Territory was ready to achieve statehood” (Charles Darwin University 2003). However, she sees no need to fast track the process if the time is not right. She promises full consultation with the community as it is a priority to secure the support of the people. (Charles Darwin University 2003)

The Statehood Steering Committee began in 2003 in order to determine what the Territorians want, to consult with them, and to seek admission as a new state. All Territorians must be educated and exposed to enough information for them to make their decision. If – after the public has been made aware of the Governments intentions – there is evidence that the majority of Territorians will support Statehood, then an approach will be made to the Commonwealth and a Referendum sought. (Statehood Steering Committee 2006)

For people of the Northern Territory to support the proposition of Statehood, the conditions must favour the people by ensuring equality, fairness and that there is no financial burden. Because there must be public support, the Cabinet has adopted three objectives of Statehood. These are as follows:

1. Attaining a status that provides constitutional equality with the other States and the people having the same constitutional rights;
  2. Political representation in both houses of the Federal parliament so the people of the Northern Territory have the same political consideration; and
  3. Settlement of secure financial arrangements with the Commonwealth.
- (Jull 2003)

Becoming a state would make the Northern Territory equal to those people living in the states of Australia. The Northern Territory is not yet equal to the rest of Australia, and this is evident in many Australian laws. For example, in a federal referendum, the Northern Territory votes are not counted when deciding whether there is an agreement by a majority of States. Statehood would ensure that Territorians are no longer ‘second-class citizens’. (Statehood Steering Committee 2006)

The Commonwealth has a certain amount of “control over the Northern Territory’s representation the Federal Parliament, whereas the States have a constitutionally entrenched right to representation” (Downing 1995, p. 1). Northern Territory is represented in the House of Representatives in proportion to

its population and has one Senator for every two members in the House of Representatives. There is also a proviso that they have at least two Senators. The original States of Australia are allowed a minimum of six senators and five members in the House of Representatives. If the Northern Territory was to become a state, it might possibly qualify for more Senators. However, the minimums that apply to the other states would not necessarily apply, as this law was made in relation to the original states and the Commonwealth would need determine the level of representation of the Northern Territory. As Section 121 of the Constitution states:

The Parliament may admit to the Commonwealth or establish new States, and may upon such admission or establishment make or impose such terms and conditions, including the extent of representation in either House of the Parliament, as it thinks fit. (Stone 2003, p. 5)

The Northern Territory should not expect to be treated as generously as the other states when it comes to the House of Representatives, as it has quite a small population in comparison. However, the Territory should be entitled to equal representation in the Senate. (Downing 1995, Hatton 1986)

Many people believe that Statehood will cause financial problems to the state and people. However, Statehood will bring no financial burdened to Territorians. The Commonwealth indicated that it would treat the Northern Territory as a state from 1988, so with or without Statehood, the financial situation will remain the same. (Hatton 1986)

Statehood would give the Northern Territory more rights about making decisions and laws. Currently, the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly has certain powers. However, even when new legislation is enacted, the Commonwealth can withhold consent or remove any law made in the Northern Territory. An example of this is the Euthanasia law that the Northern Territory intended to pass, which was turned down by the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth does not have this same power over the states. If the Northern Territory became

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a state, it would limit the interference of the Commonwealth with Northern Territory matters. (Downing 1995, Statehood Steering Committee 2006)

Statehood would give the Northern Territory the opportunity to create a modern constitution. It must be developed in an inclusive and collaborative way to consider all Territorians and to keep in mind the interest of the Indigenous. The Northern Territory contains, in general, two societies. One is made up of white Australians, who count for the majority and the other is made up of a scattering of Indigenous people. The intended constitution for the state of the Northern Territory must reflect the population by realising that two systems of law coexist here and that both deserve the highest protection that the society can provide. This new constitution would have the power to make or break intercultural interactions and relationships so it is important to get it right. (Jull 2003, Northern Land Council 2003, Statehood Steering Committee 2006)

Many people worry that becoming a state would mean that the Northern Territory would have to change its name and that it would lose its identity. Of over 1500 Northern Territory people surveyed by the NT Government, “around 90% are saying they do not want to change the name” (Statehood Steering Committee 2006). The current name reflects the Northern Territory’s history and identity, if people want to keep the name there is no need to change it.

People also wonder if Statehood would make a difference to the Nuclear Waste Dump. Due to Commonwealth law, the proposed facility could be placed on Commonwealth land, anywhere in Australia, as long as it stores waste generated from the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO). This means that it could be placed on land in any state and being a state would not mean we have more control to prevent this. However, states have an advantage if they want to prohibit radioactive waste not generated by ANSTO because they can enact laws to prevent this from happening in their state. (Statehood Steering Committee 2006)

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Another concern about Statehood is the issue of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. This act is an example of a Northern Territory law that has been enacted and is controlled by the Commonwealth. It affects a significant number of Indigenous Territorians because it relates to land and natural resources of about 40% of the Northern Territory. The Indigenous are concerned that there would no longer be Commonwealth protection for Aboriginal landholders and that the ownership of Uluru and Kakadu would be at risk as the new government could take control of the land. With Statehood, land rights would be administered by either a Territory new State law or a federal law relevant to all states. The Country Liberal Party Government argues that this law should be transferred to the state so it has power to appeal or amend the act. Quite obviously, 'the future of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* as either a Commonwealth or a Northern Territory Act is an important Statehood issue' (Statehood Steering Committee 2006) as there must be constitutional protection of Aboriginal rights to land and seas. (Downing 1995, Flynn 1998)

It appears that the Northern Territory is ready for Statehood. After having self-government since 1978 and being financial as a state since 1988, they have supported themselves on Territory issues. While there are some concerns about Statehood, the pros seem to far outweigh the cons. Statehood would give the Northern Territory an opportunity to create a new constitution, they would be able to create their own laws and they would have a greater voice in Parliament. There are many other issues that would need to be discussed, such as the Aboriginal Land Rights and the Northern Territory's representation in Parliament. Above all, it is most important to consider the people of the Northern Territory and their wishes. They must learn from the 1998 Referendum and not repeat the same mistakes by ensuring that people are in agreement with the conditions of Statehood and the new constitution. The current Northern Territory Government seems to be understanding of these requirements and the Northern Territory is well on the way to its coming of age by becoming a state of Australia.

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# The Singaporisation of Darwin

*Leanne Taylor*

This essay is about Darwin and change. Written in the first year of design studies, it evolved from a question of Nineteenth Century responses to the city and became a brief critique of Twenty First Century Darwin and responses to the built environment. The starting point of this essay draws a light hearted comparison of Darwin's planned future, referred to as the 'Singaporisation of Darwin', with the 'Haussmannisation of Paris'. It is at once a tale of the social and built construction of two cities and a critique of the sometimes false nostalgia for the past. It concludes that a tropical city, designed for the local people with an emphasis on retention and liveability, attracts tourists who come to see a different environment to that in which they normally live.

The City, as a construct in a particular time and space, is sometimes badged to differentiate itself from one significantly sized, centralised place of political, financial and cultural life, from the next. Just as the 'Big Apple' badge defines New York as a winner financially and culturally, the 'City of London that Never Sleeps' slogan promises visitors and locals an array of non-stop entertainment, while the pulse of its business and economic powerhouse beats steadily around the clock. This essay explores the benefits to Darwin of being badged, or symbolically tagged to the unique city of Singapore. It will do this by critiquing the 'Singaporisation of Darwin' with the 'Haussmannisation of Paris' (Rice, 1997, p.11).

Paris, renowned for its symbolic inclusion of lovers, was badged 'The City of Light' at the height of the Age of Reason, to honour the gas lighting installed during the Haussmannisation of this city (Rice, 1997, p. 11). This term refers to the urban redevelopment of Paris led by Baron Georges Haussmann from 1853, under the watchful rule of Napoleon the III (Frampton, 1997, p. 23). The plan turned an old, dysfunctional sprawling town into a capitalist city dedicated to the bourgeois to indulge

in "ostentation display and consumption" (Rice, 1997, p. 38). It was an unprecedented task on a massive scale, giving rise to the discipline of urban planning, which had a major impact on planning for the redevelopment of cities across both Europe and the United States of America (Frampton, 1997, p. 23).

While the frenzy of regulatory-supported urbanisation was strongly driven by, and in response to, the industrialisation characteristic of Haussmann's planning brief, the lessons from the past are useful according Walter Benjamin, to "illuminate the present" (Director History, 2006). Following this line of thought, this essay critically reflects on the redevelopment of Paris, as critiqued through the eyes of Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire, in order to view the future of Darwin City through alternative lenses. In this context, Darwin's future refers to the Chief Minister, the Hon. Claire Martin

MLA's vision for Darwin City planning announced in October 2006 (Channel 9, 2006), emulating the tropical ambience of the nation city of Singapore. The Territory government has badged the plan, 'A tropical harbour city' that boldly asserts to be creating Darwin's future' (Brochure, 2006).

The story of the Haussmannisation of Paris emerges from very different conditions for change than that of this futuristic Singaporisation of Darwin. In 1836, the population of Paris was nearly 1 million and by 1904, there were 4 million Parisian inhabitants. Haussmann, supported by a team of engineers and planners, is largely credited with the transformation of an old urban city in decay, through a renewal of Paris involving major redevelopment of commercial enterprise in apartments, shops and leisure activities as well as the creation of wide boulevards flanked by tree lined, light filled vistas with healthy green spaces and underpinned by a system of sewers and water systems (Rice, 1997, pp. 40-41).

The conditions for change were both opportunistic with the new legislative and financial methods available to support Haussmann's plans (Director History, 2006), but also driven by the exponential growth in cities spurred on by the economic

imperatives, labour market development and the rise and rise of manufacturing. The idea of providing Parisians with a liveable city that could transform the way they worked and played included both benevolent and strategic elements. The roads and avenues, the arteries and circulatory system were designed strategically to allow troops to travel quickly throughout the city and make it impossible for revolutionary barricades to be erected (Rice, 1997, p. 40), while the inclusion of open green spaces filled with light was partly in response to new laws in London, following from various epidemics, which sought to regularise the housing, burial of the dead, water supply and roads (Frampton, 1997, p. 21). In the eyes of the industrialists who were the modern revolutionaries of politics, machines and social order, this was progress!

However, notions of progress were, and continue to be, contested. This point in time was signified by the coming of consumerism and the new built environment of Paris encapsulated the offerings. Benjamin's 'Arcades Project', published posthumously, articulates the look and feel of glass, steel and beautiful things on offer to Parisians that were at once a spectacle of glitterati and symptomatic of oppression (in Rollason, 2006). Benjamin interprets this as a phenomenon of extreme cultural ambivalence (in Rollason, 2006). That is, the ideology of consumption masks a sinister exploitation of the poor and uses notions of progress, as some kind of God-sanctioned linear pull toward the future, to legitimise the will and the power of the bourgeoisie.

For Benjamin, the subversion of the worker runs deeper than Marx's exploitation of labour under capitalism. His reading of Paris follows on from the poet Charles Baudelaire, who sees the end of a period for the Parisians and for whose poor, life is never again clear cut and readable. In spite of the spectacle of the new street life that Haussmann's architecture afforded, the people were cast into "isolated cells" with multiple viewpoints and no common understanding that would normally link strangers with their social surroundings (Rice, 1997, p.37).

Although Charles Baudelaire was best known as a poet, he was a complex critic of the cultural, the political and the personal state of his time. His poetry is universal and timeless, dealing with the complexity and contradictions of the essence of being human which for Baudelaire, was an eternal struggle between the goodness and beauty versus vice and sin (Starkie, 1970, p. viii). Born in 1921, his life was a contradiction of comfort and pain. Although from a reasonably wealthy family, he expended his inheritance very early on in his life on prostitutes and idle living, and died at forty-six, with his final years lived in squalor (Richardson, 1986, p.9-17). Baudelaire may have been impotent as a result of contracting venereal disease and therefore it may have been the ideal, the imagined, the traces of emotional closeness brought about from smell, touch and spirituality that characterised his intimate love (Richardson, 1986, p.9-17). Understanding Baudelaire's social and emotional context helps to unpack his romantic nostalgia for the past, imagined as it may well have been, and his horror of the 'real' change affecting Paris in the last years before his death.

According to Rice (1997, p.8), there continues to be a false nostalgia for the Old Paris, perceived to be slower and some how more human compared to the traumatic rupture under Haussmann, which changed tradition and city spaces. Fate and the inevitability of change argues Rice, was seen by others, long before Haussmann took up office and Napoleonic III's plan would begin to transform Paris (1997, p.12). The photographer's images of the 1830s and 1840s capture crumbling stones in narrow passes in a city perceived by the Parisians at time to be dirty, dark, unhealthy and according to Maxime Due Camp that "after 1848, Paris was about to become uninhabitable" (in Rice, 1997, p. 9).

However, while Parisians were aware that their city was muddy, dark and dysfunctional, they were not psychologically prepared for the change that would propel them into modernity (Rice, 1997, p. 13). Haussmannisation therefore called into question the taken for granted meaning of the Old Paris and involved the

deconstruction and reconstruction of the urban environment, including the physical and the mental, the real and the imagined (Rice, 1997, p.17). This is key to understanding both Baudelaire and Benjamin.

Baudelaire expresses the individual, struggling to come to terms with this new and changing world in Haussmann's Paris, in his notion of the flaneur – a lonely stroller roaming streets full of faceless crowds (Benjamin, 2006). Rice analogises this Nineteenth Century archetypal voyeur to the Twenty-First Century street photographer (Rice, 1997, p. 38). We can imagine the flaneur, meandering through the then gas lit boulevards up to 100 yards across, capturing frames of nameless spectators whose gaze was on those who were there to look. There is no inherent or shared meaning by the gathering of throngs of people on the city but rather, each frame is a splintered piece of a story, interpreted according to the viewer as much as the photographer.

Urry (1990, p. 136) on the other hand suggests that the rebuilding of Paris created the conditions for the modern experience of the 'tourist gaze'. Unlike the lonely flaneur, the tourist gaze is actively constructing the self in contrast to the 'other', through the experience of difference in a specific set of circumstances in a particular time and specific space. The tourist gaze can be individual, but includes unification of the masses through the collective departure from work and established routines to indulge the senses "in stimuli that contrast with the everyday and the mundane". Haussmann's Paris created the conditions to see and be seen in cafes and boulevards, melting private experiences into the realm of the public, which Urry claims, draws the tourists to Paris to gaze upon the city, to re-construct and re-experience the pre-imagined love that has become synonymous with this city (1990, p. 137).

Returning to the Martin Government's plans for Darwin, it is suggested that in order to 'create Darwin's future', there first needs to be an ideal from which the gaze can be imagined. The Northern Territory Government's (NTG) vision for Darwin is

one of a tropical city that caters for recreation and lifestyle alongside economic development (NTG, 2006). The document promoting the plan emphasises harbour development and foreshore beautification along with streetscapes and tropical building design (NTG, 2006). It is argued that the image of Singapore is used to create the ideal, largely for tourism and developers.

While Urry locates the origin of the tourist gaze in particular histories, he suggests that the post designer of cities and attractions uses different techniques to cater for the tourist, who largely consumes his or her experience visually (1990, p. 120). Linking this to architecture, Urry (1990, p. 126) differentiates between the patrician postmodernism (returning to premodern such as classicism) and postmodern vernacular (localised, context dependant and particularistic) to make the point that the universal tourist gaze expects the senses to be pleased by a multitude of 'otherness'. Planning and architecture therefore needs to preserve a sense of the past, while creating a sense of the exotic, often achieved through themes and transference of a global notion of the 'other' from one context to the next. Disneyland, massive shopping malls, waterfront developments, animal parks and convention centres are examples of the contradiction of globalised particularism.

The NTG's proposal, which enunciates the elements that will 'create the future' plays on the twin extremes of preservation of parks and open spaces while proudly harnessing economic development to the ability of the harbour to support trade, gas on shore, and an explosion of pleasure and recreational activities on the shoreline. The use of tourism and heritage in the plan are underpinned by the celebration of war history and a defence hub, while the waterfront development and convention centre are the jewels in the crown. Indigenous culture and the arts are woven into the plan, sufficiently locating particularistic exoticism in the plan, but not straying too far from the universal construction of 'otherness'.

Contrast the NTG emphasis on the harbour, trade and gas to Singapore, which claims to be the busiest port in the world and a thriving centre of commerce and industry (Singapore, 2006). Badged as 'uniquely Singapore', its success is linked to its "strategic location, excellent facilities, fascinating cultural contrasts and tourist attractions, which contribute to its success as a leading destination for both business and pleasure" (Singapore, 2006).

The point of philosophical difference between Darwin and Singapore is that one is presently 'being' unique, while the other is in the process of 'becoming'. Marketers of Darwin City can therefore draw upon the constructed, universalised tourist construct of Singapore to articulate an imagined Darwin that is thriving economically and strategically in the tropical region, while differentiating its offerings from Melbourne and Sydney and thereby casting it unique in the 'where the bloody hell are you' global marketing context.

So why question the aspiration of a government to Singaporise Darwin, if the gains and bounty are plentiful? Rather than questioning, this critical analysis suggests that there are many ways to gaze and that there may be insights from the past that will guide us in the way we plan and aspire to become a successful city, economically, while preserving the current elements of lifestyle that are genuinely different.

The critics of the Haussmannisation of Paris, while looking back on the turmoil, upheaval and catastrophic change experienced by the city dwellers of that time, were also about looking forward and understanding the foundations of the modern world. The major rupture and destruction of Old Paris has scarred the French in a way that they have never recovered says Rice (1997, p. 19). The issue was not in as much, mourning for objects per se, as clearly, the new Paris, complete with functional sewers, new monuments, open spaces and easy access, was an improvement on the conditions before Haussmann. Rice says, it is a death of the past, deep in the psyche and explained by Walter Benjamin as a "sadness

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about what was and a lack of hope for what is to come (1997, p. 114) that troubled Parisians, very much like concerns held by some for the transformation of Darwin.

Haussmann had a systematic approach to planning and not only demolished old buildings, but also suppressed local colour and homogenised the appearance of lifestyles through the aesthetic conformity of building shapes and exteriors (Rice, 1997, p. 41). Straight lines, rectangular shapes that facilitated light and airy streets that terminated in monumental vistas replaced the winding, narrow but character filled and unique streets of the Old Paris. The shift was profound. The subject's viewpoint was suddenly cast from individual objects, streets and buildings to a motion filled 'whole' with an emphasis on the relationship between the parts and understood through its backbone, the circulatory system of roads, train lines and pathways (Rice, 1997, p.44).

Darwin harbour is likewise cast, not as much as a backbone but as the life giving blood, circulating around the body whole, linking trade, development and gas to a pleasurable, liveable city, which is symbolised and therefore differentiated from the South by its streetscapes and tropical architecture. The issue of tropical design is a thriving debate. While desirable in theory, in reality, Darwin, like modern Singapore, uses signs and symbols to create a sense of the past and the exotic rather than a style that can be read and understood as 'tropical'. Rice highlights the way in which formerly stable objects become floating signs and symbols in Haussmann's Paris (1997, p. 18). At the most basic level we observe around Darwin the use of stone walls to emulate the historic importance of the Administrator's office, palm trees flanking the Parliament House and the Supreme Court mixing power and the tropics, and a fleeting reference to the history of pearling including its rise on the world stage of consumerism and jewellery, used in the design of the convention centre. The harbour, by contrast, is a real gem and its unique linking capacity and living circulatory representation should be built upon in planning for vibrancy and liveability.

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Therefore, in order to create the future of a tropical harbour city, planning must have a deep respect for the past, and preserve the elements that make Darwin unique, by inserting more than tropical symbols into planning and architecture by creating linkages between the built and the natural environment.

Finally, the end point is to consider how we intersect with the built world. For Benjamin (1936), the companionate relationship between man and buildings is primeval with its place in the history of art more ancient than any other kind. This is an important point to understand the way in which architecture is appropriated: by both touch and sight, use and perception and therefore buildings “cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a building” (Benjamin, 1936). That is, buildings for Benjamin are to be experienced in order for meaning to be appropriated, and not merely signified in order to be consumed by the tourist gaze.

This illuminating insight from Benjamin points toward a greater focus on the parts of the NTG (2006) plan that will make people want to live, work and stay in Darwin. Lifestyle of residents and families becomes paramount. And, while Singapore is a worthy city to aspire to, Darwin must strive to be authentic. In turn, this draws the tourists to come and gaze upon the mundane every day life of the locals, which compared in a particular place in time and space to another everyday existence, casts Darwin as the unique other.

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# On Natural Selection and the Characteristic Qualities of the Greater Number of Sailors

*Nigel Turvey*

## The context

On returning to England in 1843, Lt John Lort Stokes completed eighteen years on board *H.M.S. Beagle* – unprecedented service in the Royal Navy. In the same year Charles Darwin completed six years of editing *The Zoology of the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle*. It was a momentous time for both men.

Since their voyage together on the *Beagle*, ending in 1836, Stokes had charted Bass Strait, Torres Strait and the northern coastline of Australia, and Darwin had written and published several books. Although Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was not published until sixteen years later, by 1843 his formative ideas on natural selection had germinated.

Here, both men meet in a fictitious reunion at Darwin's new residence, Down House in Kent, for Stokes to tell Darwin of the naming of Port Darwin.

The voice of Stokes, the narrator, is modelled on his *Discoveries in Australia*<sup>1</sup>, and Darwin's voice is represented by quotations from his contemporaneous writing. Inspiration also came from the writings of Alan Moorehead<sup>2</sup> and Stephen Jay Gould<sup>3</sup>, and the ancient coastline of northern Australia.

Charles Darwin: *Our old shipmates are squandered in the four quarters of the world – Osborne is gone with FitzRoy to New Zealand – Wickham & Philip King married in Australia. – I suppose we shall have the old Beagle at home again before long. – I should like once again to step on her decks.*<sup>4</sup>

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We were borne up the Thames on an incoming tide and a gentle south-easterly breeze which brought to us, from the marshes which flank the estuary, the familiar smells of home; as we sailed past the singular beauty of Kentish copse and meadow, thatched farmhouse and byre, my soul was filled with all those nameless feelings of home which such vistas are so well fitted to call forth. And I, Lieutenant John Lort Stokes, Surveyor and Commander of *H.M. Sloop Beagle*, led the company in a service of thanks to our Lord for delivering us back home, in good fettle and safe from harm. We proceeded round to Woolwich where the ship was paid off on and her pennant struck on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 1843.

*I have lately heard that the Beagle has arrived safe and sound in the Thames but I have heard no news of the Officers.*<sup>5</sup>

This was my last voyage on the *Beagle*, having lived within her ribs, boy and man, over three voyages and three Commanders. I sat a little while in the poop cabin – the timbers of which know me better than my own mother – and contemplated our eighteen years together. We sailed the uncharted coasts of South America and Australia, braved the perilous waters of Tierra del Fuego and Bass Strait, and on our second voyage carried all manner of plants, animals and rocks to further the scientific endeavours of 'our flycatcher' Charles Darwin. On our third and final voyage just ended, we were commanded by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to explore certain parts of the north-west coast of New Holland, and to survey the best channels in the straits of Bass and Torres; we are now returned with such fine charts as to vouchsafe the lives of all who sail in the waters around Australia.

Captain Beaufort and our Lords of the Admiralty keenly wanted news of my voyage, but I had a little time until they were to be gathered at Greenwich, so I determined to pay a visit to my old friend and shipmate, Charles Darwin, for I had fresh news, from our voyage just completed, of the naming of Port Darwin, in his honour. I penned a letter and sent it to him by the afternoon post, graced with a new penny black

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– a most welcome innovation which I have discovered since my return.

*Your best plan will be to start by the 3<sup>o</sup> 20' Croydon Train from London Bridge & stop at Sydenham Station & thence take a Fly on here, where you will arrive just at dinner time.*<sup>6</sup>

My rough seaman's clothes were a deal less than refined even for the inns of Woolwich for, although being made of stout navy stuff, they were worn to transparency and patched like a quilt. Of necessity I acquired a set of new clothes and a pair of fine shoes, at which my neck protested the chafing of fashion, and my toes protested my vanity. Thus decked-out I began my journey to the village of Down in Kent, to where my old friend had recently retreated from the congestion of London.

When Charles and I voyaged together on the *Beagle*, neither of us had attained our thirtieth year, but now he is married and the owner of the substantial residence, Down House. Charles and his young wife Emma greeted me on my arrival with such affection that it warmed my heart and drove the cold autumn fog from my bones.

*We like our new purchase of this place very well: it is not perfection, but there will always be drawbacks about every place ... Our removal has answered very well; our two little souls are better & happier – which likewise applies to me & to my good old wife.*<sup>7</sup>

The novelty of my arrival and the hubbub it prompted from Charles' children soon ceased, and we were seated for dinner. Charles was impatient to hear my news – he had visited the *Beagle* before we left England and he was sorely betwixt and between when he farewelled Captain Wickham and our crew.

*It appeared marvellously odd to see the little vessel – and to think that I should not be one of the party. – If it was not for the sea sickness, I should have no objection to start again.*<sup>8</sup>

He knew little of our colony on the north coast of Australia, so I began my narration in the waters of the Arafura Sea where England's proudest achievement is her settlement at Port Essington on the Cobourg Peninsular – named Victoria in

honour of our Sovereign Queen. It is from here we anticipate that the knot of fine young English stock will sustain a growing colony and their labours provide an excess for trade. With the advance of steam communication, Sydney shall be brought within just sixty days voyage of London; only then will the significance of Port Essington as a coaling station, and the settlement of Victoria as a centre of commerce in this northern region, be realised – a veritable emporium trading the riches of a hinterland, as yet *terra incognita*, with the wealth of the Indian archipelago – the portent of which is evinced by the Macassar proas which visit the Port, some fourteen in number this last season.

Charles was enthused by news of this vision-splendid, and paused in his dissection of the roast beef to extol the Empire.

*Australia is rising ... It is impossible for an Englishman to behold these distant colonies, without a high pride and satisfaction. To hoist the British flag seems to draw as a certain consequence wealth, prosperity and civilisation.*<sup>9</sup>

I continued my narration over the fine Wedgwood crockery placed before me – such a diversion from the habit of wooden platters put the fear of God in me lest I should break the ornament.

We left Port Essington on our mission to survey the northern coastline, and I took a small boat, crewed and provisioned to explore in detail. Towards nightfall we sighted a considerable inlet – we made landfall and scrambled with lanterns up a cliff, but had to wait until the first streaks of dawn when, from the cliff top, we saw a wide bay stretching far away between two white cliffy heads – a most agreeable vision. Mr Forsyth and I fell into such discourse on the unusual geology of the headlands that it brought to mind our old shipmate, Charles Darwin, who had tutored me, on our journeys in South America, in the classification of rocks. So on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> September 1839 the substantial body of water was named Port Darwin, in his honour.

Charles confessed that the naming by his old shipmates pleased him greater than all the fauna that had been anointed *Darwinii* by his scientific colleagues; he was deeply touched by the affection I carried with me from the crew of the *Beagle*, so that when we embraced he displayed more than a little lachrymosity, as if all the endured privations of his voyage had been washed from his memory.

I was glad indeed that I had made this journey.

I recounted that on the northern coast of Australia he kept adjacent company with a large river named in honour of Queen Adelaide, and a neighbouring inlet named after Mr Bynoe, the surgeon's assistant who tended to Charles when he was struck down with a fever in Valparaiso, and when he was incapacitated with sea sickness and '*had to take the horizontal for it*'<sup>10</sup> – which was not infrequent.

*... about sea-sickness ... the misery is excessive & far exceeds what a person would suppose who had never been at sea more than a few days.*<sup>11</sup>

I had completed my mission – we bade good night and I slept content in that knowledge.

Clear skies on Sunday morning tempted Charles and I, after Matins, into a brisk walk across the Downs – my motive was to share fond memories of the *Beagle* with my cabin mate, away from the distractions of the house. Charles' memory needed little prompting of the sloop's ninety feet of keel within whose space some seventy souls were habited together for our voyage, and he was always grateful for the small space that we shared in the poop cabin.

*I often have the most vivid and delightful pictures of what I saw on board the Beagle pass before my eyes.— These recollections & what I learnt in Natural History I would not exchange for twice ten thousand a year.*<sup>12</sup>

Our morning's meandering found us atop the Downs from where we looked out over the Weald and its patchwork of farmland, autumnal woods and hedgerows – the most English

of landscapes. The vista brought to mind a foreign hillside and another Middy, young Musters; he was a scion of Lord Byron and a great favourite with all on board. Sadly, he contracted a fever and died at Bahia, and on my last voyage I recited a prayer at his unmarked grave on a hillside of exceptional beauty and tranquillity.

*... poor little Musters; who three days before his illness heard of his Mother's death.*<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding all the excitements of adventure, such is the full bitterness of the price we pay for its hazards.

Not wishing to be late for luncheon Charles and I hastened home by the most direct route across the chalk and its clay which, moistened by the season, clung persistently to our shoes.

I can now confess a great disquiet about the health of my friend – when in pursuit of his science, on the pampas of South America, Charles glowed with rude health and vitality, but our short venture from Down made him very weary indeed. From my but brief observation it is clear that he is daily in much pain, and he administers himself such tinctures which I declare would bring a strong bo'sun to his knees.

*... I am sorry to say quite a different person in strength to what I was on board the good old Beagle.*<sup>14</sup>

Back at Down, Charles retired for a rest – I later joined him in his study. All around his quarters lay the spoor of the scientist: animal specimens in vials and glass bell-jars, plants in pots, drawings of the most peculiar fishes, birds, and other animals that inhabit the nether reaches of God's earth, numerous leather-bound volumes, a chronometer and barometer to reckon the time and weather for this little ship of science, a fine iron hearth, and good leather couches so he may continue his terrestrial voyages in comfort.

I then pressed Charles for his news and he showed me a leather bound volume, bearing his name as author, of the narrative of our voyage with Captain FitzRoy – confessing the publication

of which had inflated his vanity. And then a monograph on the formation of coral reefs – since I had played no small part in the substance of the volume I was delighted with its publication. But his crowning glory was the fifth and last part of *The Zoology of the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle* which he had just completed editing – the entirety of the task and its nineteen volumes had occupied Charles for the six years of my last voyage. I marvelled at the exquisitely coloured engravings of birds which transported me back to the Galapagos Islands, so perfect was the detail of their plumage and the vegetation – they were the work of Mr John Gould to whom Charles had entrusted our specimens for description and classification. It was Mr Gould who had discovered that a number of the birds we had collected on the Galapagos Islands – and which we thought to be of several different genera – were all species of finches, yet each bore marked differences in physiognomy.

*... in the thirteen species of ground-finches, a nearly perfect gradation may be traced, from a beak extraordinarily thick, to one so fine, that it may be compared to that of a warbler.*<sup>15</sup>

My friend then became suddenly animated and, speaking in a conspiratorial whisper, told me of a new theory of his – that each species of finch came about as the result of adaptation – the food available on one island led to adaptation of the finch's beak to exploit it, whereas a different kind of food available on another island might stimulate a quite different adaptation of the beak – each adaptation giving rise to a new species. His theory was that each new species of finch was created through a process of selection according to nature – a process he called Natural Selection.

*... I am almost convinced (quite contrary to opinion I started with) that species are not (it is like confessing a murder) immutable ... I think I have found out (here's presumption!) the simple way by which species become exquisitely adapted to various ends.*<sup>16</sup>

His announcement took me by quite surprise, but I did not dampen his enthusiasm – for I could not immediately grasp his theory of a process so at odds with the palpable evidence of

our Creator. My poor sailor's mind required time to consider its import.

But I was saved by Emma who interrupted our conspiracy and bade us take tea whilst she played for us on the piano – a skill in which she was tutored, when in Paris, by Mr Frederic Chopin. I had to confess that I had not experienced such blessed sweetness throughout my eighteen years at sea, my ears hearing none but coarse sailors' voices, squeezebox and hornpipe.

This morning, as I was leaving Down and at risk of missing my London train if I tarried longer, Charles bade me a fond farewell and conferred on me a grand compliment which assured me, lest I held any doubt, of our enduring friendship.

*... I have too deeply enjoyed the voyage, not to recommend any naturalist ... to start on travels ... the effect ought to be, to teach him goodhumoured patience, freedom from selfishness, the habit of acting for himself, and of making the best of every thing, or in other words contentment. In short he should partake of the characteristic qualities of the greater number of sailors.*<sup>17</sup>

On my journey back to Woolwich I fell to musing on the circumstance of my old shipmate. It seems that, over this past six years, we have been on separate voyages; mine to chart new coastlines, and Charles to chart new theories. On voyages across stormy oceans and around rocky shores we sailors have no recourse other than to believe that our Maker will protect us and our ship – no amount of danger will encourage us to adapt wings or fins to escape a watery grave – Natural Selection will not make better sailors of us.

But I entertain the thought that it is England's maritime circumstance that has naturally selected her to be a mighty sea faring nation, and that our small colony on the northern coast of Australia – dare I say a result of further selection – will multiply and prosper through adaptation to such adversities which have, until now, dogged our settlements there. With the riches of the archipelago to its north and of the interior to its

south, the resultant wealth and new settlements will doubtless be a beacon for scholarly pursuits and scientific endeavours in the region – as befits the name, Port Darwin.

This evening, after dining in the company of sailors in the tavern, my thoughts returned to the *Beagle* for I hold a great affection for the little ten gun brig, unfairly designated as ‘coffins’ in the service. So I was distressed to hear gossip that she is to be sent to moorings in the marshes near Foulness, where she will provide accommodation for Customs and Excise men and the felons they apprehend. She will do it well, for this little ship has never shirked from sheltering men and from keeping them as snug and dry as she may, but I fear she will rot away for lack of honest work in the dank confines of that marshy backwater.

As for me, until my next Commission, I will emulate those minds more eloquent and literary than mine, and put to record my recent voyages on the *Beagle*. But I will miss the sea and its perils, the excitements of imminent danger, the sweet delights of success, and the close-knit family of seafarers – such as I have lived amongst for more than half my born days.

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Moorehead, A. 1969 *Darwin and the Beagle*. Hamish Hamilton, London.

<sup>3</sup> Gould, S. J. 1980 *The Panda's Thumb*. Penguin Books, London.

<sup>4</sup> *Charles Darwin to John Edward Davis 15<sup>th</sup> September 1843*. The Darwin Correspondence Online Database, item 695. <http://darwin.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> *Charles Darwin to Syms Covington 7<sup>th</sup> October 1843*. The Darwin Correspondence Online Database, item 700. <http://darwin.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> *Charles Darwin to Richard Owen March 1843 – 15 May 1846*. The Darwin Correspondence Online Database, item 657. <http://darwin.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> *Charles Darwin to W. D. Fox 9<sup>th</sup> December 1842*. The Darwin Correspondence Online Database, item 654. <http://darwin.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> *Charles Darwin to J. S. Henslow 28<sup>th</sup> May 1837*. The Darwin Correspondence Online Database, item 356. <http://darwin.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

<sup>9</sup> Darwin, C. R. *Beagle Diary* September 25<sup>th</sup> 1836, p 777. The Complete Works of Charles Darwin Online. <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>

<sup>10</sup> Stokes, J. L. 1882. Letter to *The Times* 27<sup>th</sup> April 1882. The Complete Works of Charles Darwin Online. <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>

<sup>11</sup> Darwin, C. R. *Beagle Diary* December 29<sup>th</sup> 1831, p 41. The Complete Works of Charles Darwin Online. <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>

<sup>12</sup> *Charles Darwin to Robert FitzRoy 20<sup>th</sup> February 1840*. The Darwin Correspondence Online Database, item 555. <http://darwin.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

<sup>13</sup> Darwin, C. R. *Beagle Diary*. Rio de Janeiro 1832 June 4<sup>th</sup> p. 172. The Complete Works of Charles Darwin Online. <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>

<sup>14</sup> *Charles Darwin to John Edward Davis 15<sup>th</sup> September 1843*. The Darwin Correspondence Online Database, item 695. <http://darwin.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

<sup>15</sup> Darwin, C. R. 1839. *Narrative of the surveying voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle between the years 1826 and 1836, describing their examination of the southern shores of South America, and the Beagle's circumnavigation of the globe. Journal and remarks. 1832-1836*. London: Henry Colburn, p 475. The Complete Works of Charles Darwin Online. <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>

<sup>16</sup> *Charles Darwin to Joseph Dalton Hooker 11<sup>th</sup> January 1844*. The Darwin Correspondence Online Database, item 729. <http://darwin.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

<sup>17</sup> Darwin, C. R. 1839. *Narrative of the surveying voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle between the years 1826 and 1836, describing their examination of the southern shores of South America, and the Beagle's circumnavigation of the globe. Journal and remarks. 1832-1836*. London: Henry Colburn, p 608. The Complete Works of Charles Darwin Online. <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>



# Cultural Landscape of Mindal-ang-gwa (Mindil Beach)

*Linda Wirf*

## Synopsis

This essay examines the concept of landscape as a cultural construct rather than simply a physical entity. It takes a case study, Mindil Beach in the Northern Territory of Australia, and goes on to examine the cultural elements of this landscape, in particular the contested and conflicting nature of some of these elements. The privileging of particular cultural constructs over others is discussed and the effect that this can have on making some cultural aspects of the landscape invisible is highlighted. This essay seeks to challenge assumptions about the way landscapes are viewed and used and in particular to inform a culturally pluralistic perspective of the Mindil Beach landscape.

## Culture

In order to understand the concept of a cultural landscape it may be useful to define those aspects of human society that constitute culture. These are generally recognised as being the social meanings, transmitted knowledge, values, beliefs, customs, behaviours and material objects that constitute a peoples way of life or social reality. Concepts of material and non-material culture differentiate between the tangible objects and the intangible body of ideas and knowledge created within human societies. Culture can be seen as a social heritage that links past, present and future.

Culture is also associated with power relationships, and cultural meanings can be a subject of struggle between different cultural groups. Culture is influenced by the dominant groups within societies, who can use their power structures to perpetuate a cultural hegemony. In cross cultural contexts the dominant culture tends to positively sanction and reward those within

it and create negative responses that marginalise those outside of it (Maconis & Plummer 1998; Sargent, Nilan & Winter 1997).

Culture is dynamic rather than static, and culturally coded knowledge systems can be seen as situational and negotiated 'emergent phenomena' (Anderson 1996:129).

## Landscape as Culture

Landscapes are generally considered to refer to the physical world. The concept of a cultural landscape recognises that landscapes also reflect social, ideational, political and economic elements of human existence (Gill, Patterson and Kenedy 2001). Landscapes are culturally constructed through human impacts on environments and human interpretations of environments. The World Heritage Committee (UNESCO 1996 in Parks Canada 2000) define a cultural landscape as the 'combined works of nature and of man... illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal.'

Langton (1995) claims that there is no such thing as a natural landscape. Landscapes are created by people through their experience of, and engagement with, the world around them. Human perceptions also construct landscapes through meanings and values that are associated with elements contained within the physical world. As Meining (1976 in Parks Canada 2000) explains 'any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads'. Contemporary literature would add 'and within our hearts' to this analysis (eg. Anderson 1996; Howitt 2001). Concepts about landscapes are inherently shaped by human perceptions, values and beliefs. The ways in which humans perceive, imagine, conceptualise, verbalise, relate to and behave towards the natural world are a product of cultural conditioning (Seddon 1997:13).

Specific cultural constructions of landscapes are contextual and depend on elements such as time, place, historical conditions, gender, age and class as well as social and economic situations (Bender 1993). Morphy (1993) describes cultural landscapes as the place where values and emotions coincide. Physical landscapes shape human perceptions, while the ways that people read the physical landscape will impact on how they relate to it. There is an ongoing cyclic process in which landscape creates culture and culture creates landscape.

Memmot and Long (1998:10) point out that encoding places with knowledge and being able to differentiate places through the decoding of information are basic elements of human life and culture. Much of the knowledge that frames discourse around cultural landscapes, across a range of different cultural contexts, is encoded in metaphor. Indigenous societies have imbued natural landscape features with spiritual and metaphorical meanings that define sites, boundaries and tracks. In contemporary western societies organic metaphors have been replaced by mechanical cultural constructs (Morphy 1995; Rose 1998; Seddon 1997).

### Elements of Cultural Landscapes

It is the cultural constructions of a specific landscape that create a sense of place in human relationships with environments. Relph (1993 in Memmot & Long 1998:10) states that ‘ a place is a whole phenomenon, consisting of the...intertwined elements of a specific landscape’.

Head (1993) identifies four elements of cultural landscapes:

- The physical environment as transformed by human action
  - The material landscape as a social expression
  - Symbolic or textual readings of the landscape
  - Contestation of images of the landscape
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The last element suggests that the other three elements may have multiple or conflicting dimensions in the context of different cultural constructions of the same landscape.

Cultural landscapes may be encompassed within landscapes that have been designed and intentionally created, organically evolved landscapes or associative landscapes. The concept of associative landscapes recognises that cultural landscapes can contain invisible elements and properties. Places may be constructed through powerful spiritual, religious, artistic or ceremonial associations with natural elements, rather than material cultural evidence. The attributes of associative cultural landscapes include intangible elements such as scents, sounds and the natural movements of air and water, as well as visual elements. For many Indigenous peoples cultural landscapes can be constructed through shadows, marks on the ground, footprints, natural noises and meteorological phenomena. These cultural constructions include manipulation of these elements through ceremonial activity. Associative cultural landscapes accentuate the inseparability of natural and cultural values (Memmot & Long 1998; Parks Canada 2000).

### Cultural Mapping

Cultural mapping is a means of recording cultural landscapes and making the cultural elements of a landscape tangible. It seeks to provide a way of seeing landscapes that emphasises the relatedness and dynamic interactions between the human and natural spheres across time, compared with the static categorisation of cartographic mapping which represents only the tangible, physical and material aspects of the landscape locked into a specific timeframe. Cartographic maps simplify a complex cultural landscape into a static, single perspective physical representation (Hirsch 1995; Rundstrom 1993). Cultural mapping encompasses a range of different methods and media including recording stories, ceremonies, sacred and special places, natural and cultural resources, traditional names and mythological associations using audio, video,

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photographic, written and graphic data, often in linked or interactive formats.

### **Mindal-ang-gwa (Mindil Beach Foreshore) as Cultural Landscape**

Every landscape embodies a range of cultural constructs. There is no absolute concept of landscape, but rather a series of related, possibly contradictory, perspectives that construct landscapes within ongoing cultural processes (Hirsch 1995). Different cultural contexts may be layered historically within a landscape, or coexist in the present in varying states of conflict. The physical landscape of Darwin's Mindil Beach foreshore suggests that this area is a highly contested cultural space, or, as Deborah Bird Rose (1996) expresses this idea, 'a place with many places'. A cultural analysis of this landscape reveals a range of diverse cultural elements superimposed upon the physical environment, some compatible and some seemingly totally incompatible.

The name Mindil Beach is an English corruption of the traditional Larrakia name for the area, *Mindal-ang-gwa*. The Larrakia people are the traditional owners and native titleholders for this land, which has been appropriated by the settler population as part of the colonising process (Larrakia Nation 2001). The claiming and changing of the traditional name is symbolic of, as well as part of the actual process of claiming and changing the cultural landscape of *Mindal-ang-gwa* (Seddon 1997).

Visually the contemporary landscape is an incoherent jumble of elements that randomly impose a variety of cultural themes. A forest like planting of native tree species merges with a paved area where single feature trees are planted in circular brick containments. Lighting structures reminiscent of old London oil lamps clash with the 'tropical paradise' theme created by large coconut palms. A rusty old 44 gallon drum with a plastic funnel in the top sits amongst trendy, blue painted, plastic lined designer rubbish bins. Shiny metal seats cemented into

the paving are defied by groups of people sitting on the ground in the shade of the native trees. Plastic playground equipment seems incongruous with the play opportunities offered by a natural beach environment. The role of built shelters with user-pay barbecues is questioned by the evidence of small campfires further down the beach. The sounds of the ocean, birds and wind in the trees compete with constant traffic noise as cars negotiate the network of roads and parking lots that dominate the area. Despite the range of built elements and imposed meanings the ocean remains a very visible and powerful presence across this landscape.

A number of signs and fences impose various controls over the Mindil Beach landscape and bring it within a legislative framework that protects certain privileged cultural values (King 1996). Darwin City Council by-law signage warns of penalties for dog and camping infringements. The 'no camping' laws impact on Indigenous people, who claim a traditional right to live in this area but end up in jail because they are unable to pay 'camping' fines (Day 2001). Smaller signs promote safe swimming. Inconspicuous signs attached to power poles request that Larrakia sacred sites in the area be 'treated with respect'. A huge sign shows a large pictorial map designating various areas of the beach to specified recreational water activities. Fences are also used to impose order and control over the area. The whole foreshore is divided by a secure metal fence preventing access to the privately owned beachfront casino property, which remains a controversial issue with local people. The beach is fenced from the foreshore by a nominal fence designed to prevent dune erosion by restricting beach access to stabilised pathways, suggesting a conflict between recreational use and environmental conservation.

It could be argued that the dominant cultural force on the physical landscape of Mindil Beach is the Thursday night markets, which are evidenced by numerous electricity outlets scattered throughout the area, and the huge bare parking lot which seems disproportionate to the beach. Other infrastructure which seems excessive assumes relevance in the

context of the markets, which attract tens of thousands of people every Thursday night throughout the Dry Season.

An important feature of the Mindil Beach foreshore is the Pirryangua Memorial, which was erected in May 1992 as a response to the unearthing of ancient gravesites during excavation works. The memorial acknowledges that Larrakia people have used the area for burying ancestors, but fails to acknowledge Larrakia traditional ownership of the land. The memorial was designed by a traditional Larrakia custodian for the area, but its placement within the same circular brick structure as the tree containments lessens its power and impact, and suggests it may have been a tokenistic gesture by the Darwin City Council, who funded the project. The plaque on the memorial names the Chief Minister and Lord Mayor of Darwin at that time, but fails to acknowledge Larrakia elders. An explanatory sign under a large Darwin City Council logo represents Larrakia heritage as historical, rather than as a contemporary feature of the landscape. It suggests that Larrakia connections with Mindil Beach exist only in the past and that the traditional owners no longer use the landscape. However, recent ceremonies performed by Larrakia custodians at Mindil Beach, in association with the return of Ancestral remains from the Australian National Museum, testify to the existence of ongoing cultural and spiritual connections.<sup>1</sup> Larrakia people also continue to collect traditional sea foods and coastal plants at Mindal-ang-gwa.

Textual representations of landscapes play a key role in constructing meanings and reproducing cultural knowledge. The signs at Mindil Beach are all in English and reinforce dominant, non-indigenous cultural values. Tourist literature emphasises Mindil Beach's association with the markets and casino in a context of exoticism and entertainment. This euro-centric construction of Mindil Beach has implications for Indigenous people who want to continue to use the area for ceremonies, camping, collecting foods and social gatherings. Indigenous academic Jenny Panangka Fraser (2002) argues that such cultural constructions by the dominant culture are

not simply ignorance of other perspectives but are intended to claim exclusive use of the space. She explains that '(creating) venues of 'entertainment' (for the dominant European population) assist(s) police in the 'cleansing' of the premises and surrounds for the public eye'. It can be argued that the promotion of Mindil Beach as a tourist destination has set up a situation of conflict in relation to Indigenous people's use of the area and has resulted in a range of by-laws that empower authorities to restrict Indigenous people's activities, and in fact, their physical presence there.

There are a number of cultural conflicts within the Mindil Beach landscape, which are created by the different values placed on the resources within it. The various economic, ecological, recreational and heritage values present become mutually exclusive as a result of the different ways that they are constructed within Indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives. For example, the non-indigenous economic imperative of the Thursday markets or the casino make it impossible for Indigenous traditional owners to properly protect their heritage values. On the other hand, recognition of the Larrakia traditional cultural values would impact on existing and future development of the area.

The capacity of cultural elements within a landscape such as Mindil Beach to interact, influence and impact on each other is mediated by the fact that people appropriate and contest landscapes from differentially engaged and empowered positions (Bender 1993; Memmot & Long 1998; Seddon 1997). In other words, cultural values are imposed by the dominant or most powerful group within a society, to the exclusion of other equally valid cultural perspectives. Dominant cultural perspectives within society are linked to the organisations and bureaucracies that shape the cultural landscape. Dominant cultural values are privileged in the cultural construction of public spaces to the detriment of other values, which are consequently marginalised or rendered invisible. The contemporary landscape of Mindal-ang-gwa clearly records and reflects such cultural dominance as evidenced in physical

features and cultural constructions that privilege settler economic and social values over those of the local Indigenous population, even though Indigenous cultural values and constructions of this area precede European settlement by tens of thousands of years.

Post colonial and post modern discourses critique western society's claim to the truth of, and assumption of the superiority of, its own cultural constructions and world view. There is a strong argument that the imposition of western cultural values to the exclusion of other cultural values is counter to the reality of cultural pluralism, which acknowledges the existence of many equally valid world views. Within this paradigm there is an opportunity to renegotiate the cultural landscape of Mindal-ang-gwa on the basis of shared knowledges and respect for different values. Working collaboratively to find ways for different cultural values and perspectives to coexist within Mindal-ang-gwa could enrich the cultural landscape and create a sense of vibrancy and harmony within this space.

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## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Smoking Ceremony conducted by Larrakia Elders on 13 August 2002.





# Honey Ant Dreaming

*Kate Farrell*

*Yuwa*, I'm going to tell you a story. Not one of those pretend stories. No. I'm going to tell you a story about the Tjurrkurpa of this country, a dreaming story. This story was told to me, little bit by little bit, by different people. I'm only a Whitefella, so maybe this story is version of that one that you know.

You know this country – this big, red country? This country is your country. Your mother and your father gave it to you.

A long, long time ago, there were no people on this country. Everything was quiet. There were no aeroplanes, *wiya*. There were no motorcars either, back, a long, long time ago, everything was quiet. There was no yelling, no fighting, just the sound of the wind, as it went through the desert oaks. You know that sound, that eerie, hollow whistling sound?

Back in that time, in this country, there were ants. There were little ants and big ants, and even those honey ants, we might call them *Tjupi*. Back in that time, when those ants had all just got here, they had to build their first homes.

The little ants, those *minga*, they decided that they needed to build a big home, rising up above the ground, so they could watch for anything coming, and protect themselves from the big rains when they came. So they started working. They worked for a long time, and they built a nice, big home that they could all live in.

The big ants, they didn't need to build a high home, above the ground. They were good at climbing up things anyway. They built nests that spread out over the land.

Those honey ants, they knew, that when they filled up with the sweet nectar of the sap of trees, they were too fat to climb anywhere. They couldn't fight any other animal off if they came along and stood on their nest, or knocked their home over. No, they knew that they would have to dig deep, deep into the ground. They had to dig into the roots of the trees,

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so far down that no one else would be able to find them. So they began digging.

A long time after the ants had set up all their homes, one of the big honey ants had a dream. The next morning, a girl appeared. She was the first one on this country. She was round in the belly, like a honey ant.

That girl, she was your grandmother's grandmother. Maybe she was even older, I'm not sure. She was round in the belly with another one of your ancestors. One day, walking across the desert, came a man. He was holding a spear. He had a lizard tied around his waist. He gave this to the girl, and the girl took it.

The girl went, and she lit a fire. She made a hole in its belly, and pulled out long bits of pink, stringy guts. When the fire had died down to its coals, she threw that lizard into the coals. She waited, until the skin on the lizard turn black, and the tail had gone straight and hard. Then, she got it out of the coals with a stick. She peeled off the skin of that lizard, to reveal the white meat. She broke off the tail, and gave it to the man.

That man and that woman walked around the desert for a long, long time. They saw lots of things, and they gave them names. They found the best places to find water, and they figured out good ways to catch the lizards. They learnt about the ants, and their different houses, about those bees that make that sweet sugar bag, up in the trees. They learnt how to follow the tracks of the snakes, the bush turkey, and the bush rat.

They knew all about this country, and worked hard, every day, finding food, hunting, making spears and walking for long, long time, to the next water hole.

When the man and the woman were walking through some of this country, this big, red, sandy country, the woman must have been bitten by one of those big ants that built their nests over the ground. She went back to that honey ant country, and

again, she got round in the belly, like a honey ant with another one of your ancestors. She had that honey ant dreaming.

One day, when they were sitting down near a rock hole, the man and the woman heard something. They thought maybe it was some sort of monster coming to get them. The little children sitting with them (there were two now) got scared too, and they hid behind some of those big spinifex. When the noise had gone away, they still could not see what had made it. They cautiously came out from hiding, but were still scared when they thought about what it might have been.

The man and the woman were worried about what had made that noise. They wondered if it was something coming to get them. They didn't want to walk around too much, in case something or someone might see them. Maybe they were being hunted. They stayed hiding for a long time. But the children were hungry. The man and the woman were hungry too. So they all went out to look for lizards, and maybe find some bush tomatoes and any other *mungarra* that was around.

They were walking around, looking for that good bush tucker, when they saw a big cloud of smoke, a long way off in the distance. Someone must have been lighting a fire over there in the grass.

They didn't know anybody who might be lighting a fire in that grass, and were scared when they thought about who it might be. The man thought that it might be someone, but the woman thought that maybe it was that evil spirit man, that *Gudaitcha*. So they didn't light a fire to show where they were. That night, they didn't light any fires either. Usually, they lit six fires; one between each of them, and one at their heads, and one at their feet as they slept. But that night, they lay naked and cold in the desert. They didn't want any evil man or spirit finding them.

It must have been a little bit after that, maybe a few days, I don't know, when something else happened. The man and the woman, and the two children were sitting down, thinking,

getting energy up to go and find more tucker, when they heard a loud rumbling sound. It was a little bit like the sound of a thunderstorm, but not the same. Again they were scared. All of a sudden, just like magic, a great big thing appeared, right in front of them.

It was squashing all the grass, and was making a big noise, and had big eyes. The children ran and ran and ran.

The woman was too tired to move, so she stayed sitting down. The man stood up with his spear, and was ready to fight this evil thing that had come through the bushes.

Then, men started jumping out of this great big thing. The man and the woman didn't realise that it was a motor car. They hadn't ever seen one before. First, two men came out. They brought something with them. It was white, and strange. He was telling them that they should eat it, and at first, the man was suspicious. He watched the woman eat some first, then the man who was giving it to them. It was damper.

Those little children, they must have been watching from somewhere, maybe from behind some grass, or a rock or something. When they saw that everybody was eating, they came in to find out what it was, and to get some. Soon, everybody was sitting down, eating damper, and covering it with jam. It was really good, tasty. Their bellies were sore from eating so much, but the children didn't want to stop! It tasted so nice! It was very different from *mungarra*, it was nothing like the bush tucker that they had always eaten. And they didn't have to walk around all day to find it!

After talking for a long time, the man decided to go with the other men to the place that they had come from. There were lots of other people back there and lots more damper. He wanted to go and see what it was like before he took the woman and the children. The woman was good at catching lizards, and she was going to look after those two little *pippirri* while the man was away.

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*Yuwa*, that's what happened, a long, long time ago, before there was all these motor cars here, before there was this fighting. That was before there was the shop, before there was the policeman and the school. When there was only the sound of the wind in the desert oaks, in this big, red country, your country, that your mother and your father gave to you.



## Yellow-dress girl

*Oceana Setaysha*

It was a small town in the middle of nowhere. It blended into the blood red desert until all that set it apart was the shimmer of the tin roofs in the burning Australian sun. This town once had everything but now the water was dried up, and the people suffering. In a dry country like Australia, drought is a constant problem and when the water stops running very little can be done. So it was with this town. Now, with no water, all the townspeople could do was sit and watch their cattle die while they waited for the rain.

What was once happy now becomes sad. In this town the people's faces are lined with stress and worry. Many of them only stay because they had nowhere left to go. In a tin shack on the outskirts of town a girl is sitting on a balcony in a rocking chair. Back and forth. Creak and groan. It is very hot and dry, the sweat slides down her back and arms. Plop. Precious water evaporates off the sizzling wooden floors. The girl licks her dry, chapped lips and stands up, cringing in pain at the burning sensation in her feet. Looking out at the vibrant earth, being slowly cooked to death by a fierce golden sun, she suddenly smiles. Her entire face lights up and a small, almost undefinable giggle escapes the confines of her lips. She rushes inside.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, girl?" her mother asks as she avoids colliding with her coming out of the hall.

"Can't talk now mum, I've got an idea!" The words seem to explode in a rush from her mouth.

"An idea for what?"

"An idea for everything!"

Her mother smiles a sad smile at the excitement of youth as she watches her daughter disappearing into her room before sitting down at the kitchen table to battle the ever growing debt.

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The girl's room is dark, the thick curtains block out the sun. She stops for a second in the middle of the room and spins, trying to find what she's looking for. There! In the far corner, covered over by a mountain of clothes that no longer fit her is the old, wooden chest. Once it was covered in an array of hand-carved designs but after many generations of fingers being run along them they are reduced to nothing more than faint shadows on the once rich, brown wood. Kneeling in front of the chest she strains to lift the rusty metal latch and heaves open the heavy lid. She rummages through the rainbow of colours but what she seeks seems lost to her. A ray of light suddenly streams through her curtains, recently blown open by a freak wind, and bounces off a mirror mobile hanging from her ceiling. The reflected ray smashes head on into the wooden chest and ignites the colours like the dry bush is ignited by a bushfire. Finding herself having to squint to see into the chest, she is about to give up and close it when there, in the corner of the chest, almost totally enveloped in a sparkling midnight blue fabric, she finds what she is looking for.

Wrapping her hand around her prize she pulls. Swoosh. A beautiful, bright yellow dress appears in her hand as if it was placed there by a wandering spirit. It seems to radiate light and for a moment the girl loses herself staring into its depths. Running her fingers over the cotton that seems softer than the clouds, she inhales musk and roses, the smell of women now past. Taking only a split second to decide if she is doing the right thing, the girl slips the dress over her head. It is a perfect fit to the point that one cannot even notice that she is wearing clothes underneath. She smiles and gets a strange feeling inside. It's like trying to drink soda water in gulps straight out of the bottle. Glancing at herself for a minute in the mirror, she runs outside to change the world.

Bounding down the front steps without even bothering to put on any shoes, she begins to walk towards the centre of town. Her walk is relaxed, her arms swing, and small clouds of red dirt rise every time she puts her foot down. Her mother, glancing up after hearing a noise on the balcony, merely sees a sudden

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burst of yellow. Putting it down to her imagination she doesn't give it a second thought and gets back to crunching numbers. Outside, a couple of hundred metres up the road from the girl's house, a man is sitting on his balcony with a cigarette in his hand. Believing himself to be half blind, at first he can't help but stare at the girl in the yellow dress. Yet she only walks past him, apparently unaware of his existence. The man can just hear her humming a lively little tune. Every now and again she will do a little jig and sing a few lines before continuing on her way. He watches her as she passes by his house and moves on up the vivid red dirt road before conceding that lack of water is driving the world mad.

Two children are sitting on the dirt in the hot sun. Inside, their mother is sleeping. She is due to have her baby any day now and the children know better than to disturb her. In front of the children are drawings, etched in the dirt with thin, brittle sticks which have been occupying them for nearly an hour now. Sliding into the shade of the overhanging balcony the younger of the two children, a girl, begins to complain.

"Why do we always have to sit outside when it's so hot? It's not fair. I already told mum I wouldn't make any noise!"

"You might have told her that but you screaming and waking her up didn't do much to improve her mood," her older brother replies.

"You were the one who hit me in the first place!"

"Was not."

"Was too."

Knowing that this could go on forever the boy tries some reasoning.

"Look, it doesn't matter whose fault it is. We're both sitting outside and we're both hot!"

"That doesn't make it fair! If I made th..." the girl trails off, staring in awe at something over the boy's shoulder.

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Whipping his head around the boy too spots the girl. The first thing that comes to his mind is that she looks like a crazy person. Her hair is all over the place and she is covered in red dirt. Her dress is filthy as well and way too long for her. Glancing over at his little sister he grins at the look of awe on her face.

"What do you think she's doing?" the little girl asks in a whispered reverence.

"She's probably just gone crazy, don't worry about her. Do you want to play noughts and crosses?"

"No, look at her. She's glowing."

"What are you talking about, she's not glowing!"

"She is! You're not looking hard enough! Look really close."

The boy takes another look at the girl, trying to see past the 'I belong in a mental institution' sign he had imagined on her forehead. Then suddenly, the girl stopped and looked at the sky, staring right into the sun as if she was challenging it. Then, she began to spin. Faster and faster she spun until she was nothing more than a yellow spiral, forever turning and spinning. It was at that moment that he saw it. She *was* glowing. It was an unmistakable vibrancy coming off her face, like a human light bulb she seemed to radiate light, not as a form of light but rather something else he couldn't explain. That's what it was! The girl was happy and there were no worries on her face. She was carefree!

"You saw it too, didn't you?" His sister broke him out of his trance-like state.

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"You were staring at her. You saw her glowing, didn't you?"

In a voice that was almost a whisper he replied, "yes, I did see her glowing. It was beautiful..."

Before he gets the chance to finish his sister gets up and runs towards the girl, calling as she goes, "yellow-dress girl, yellow-dress girl. Wait up!"

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The girl in the yellow dress turns around, sees the girl and stops. Running after his sister the boy grabs her arm and tries to pull her away. She shakes him off.

“Let me go!” she yells indignantly. “I want to ask her a question!”

“Don’t be silly, she probably doesn’t want to be bothered.” He tries to persuade her to move on but her young mind is set.

Reaching the girl in the yellow dress she looks up at her, puts on the most serious expression a 7 year old can muster and says, “Where did you learn to glow like that?”

The boy feels himself going bright red until he thinks he may be the same colour as the earth he is standing on. How embarrassing!

“I’m sorr...” His hasty apology is interrupted.

“Where did I learn to glow?” says the yellow dress girl. “I don’t think it’s really glowing, I’m just happy, that’s all.”

“How can you be happy? There isn’t a single drop of water to be had in this entire town!” The boy is surprised to find that the voice that speaks out is his own.

“People don’t need water to be happy, you know. This town has just given up but I can change that.”

“Really? How are you going to do that?”

“You’ll see,” says the yellow-dress girl mysteriously as she brushes past him and wanders on her way.

The boy’s sister stares from her brother to the yellow-dress girl as she struggles to get her young mind around what has just happened. Glaring at her brother she runs up to the yellow-dress girl and from where he is standing he just hears her say, “Can I come with you to change the world?” and sees the yellow-dress girl nod her head. Clasping the yellow-dress girl’s hand in her own they begin to walk.

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Unable to leave his sister with a seemingly crazed lunatic, the boy catches up to them and walks beside the pair, neither looking at them nor saying a word. His sister narrows her eyes before giving her brother a sound elbow in the ribs. Flinching at this he looks at his sister and finds that she is making some very extreme eyes movements, directing his attention in the direction of the yellow-dress girl. Raising his eyebrows in a questioning glance his sister moves her lips slightly, forming out the word ‘sorry’. Rolling his eyes the boy glances again at his sister who nods vigorously but stops when she finds that the yellow-dress girl is staring at her. Catching gazes, the boy and the yellow-dress girl stare intently at each other but the boy quickly drops his eyes, unable to resist the urge to look at the ground. With his head bowed, as if speaking to the dirt he says, “I’m sorry about before. I didn’t really mean it. I guess that people really do go a little crazy with no water.”

“That’s ok,” the yellow-dress girl replies.

“So what are you going to do to stop the town from giving up?”

“I can’t stop the town from giving up. They’ve already done that. All I can do is give them a little hope. Something to hold on to.”

Momentarily confused, the boy tries to get clues from the girl’s face but finds nothing. Accepting that he is in this for the long run he looks around, taking in his environment.

As the children walk slowly into the middle of town their moods begin to change and as if influenced by the girl in the yellow dress they smile and laugh. Soon they are dancing around, spinning and making miniature windstorms in the dust as they walk. Without realising it they are making a lot of noise and they attract the attention of other townspeople sitting on their verandahs. Other children rush to join them and before long almost all of the town’s small population of children form a parade with the yellow-dress girl as their leader. They dance and sing, clapping their hands as they celebrate all that is youth

while forgetting the troubles currently facing them. Reaching the centre of town the children chase each other around in circles and stamp their feet on the ground as they lift their sun-tanned arms up into the sky, apparently praising the sun. Adults begin to approach the mob of children, at first wary of their actions but quickly seeing that all that is happening is light hearted. Someone brings out a set of bongo drums and a guitar also appears. Children dance together to the sound of the music and they link hands. Joyful sounds that have been too long absent in the town are heard and more adults emerge, smiling at the antics of their children. It doesn't take long for adults to join the dancing and within minutes almost the entire town is out there, dancing, singing and being happy.

With everyone linking hands they begin to spin and like a human whirlpool the dust and dirt rise in a cyclone of red. There are smiles on every face and for once in a long time people don't think about their troubles and worries. Among the crowd the yellow-dress girl looks on and smiles before glancing up at the sky. For a minute she doesn't believe what she is seeing and she rubs her eyes in doubt. Around her the people continue dancing, unaware.

At first the people don't notice when the sun moves behind a cloud and the town becomes shady, then the music stops and looking around in surprise the people are shocked to see, finally, clouds. Dark, shadowy and full of rain the clouds bear down on the tiny town and seem to stop for a second. Time stands still and a rumble of thunder is heard. BOOM! CRASH! Lightning flashes and down comes the rain. The people can only stand in shock as the rain drenches them. Many raise their arms up to the sky and tilt back their heads, letting themselves become almost a part of it. The man who first spotted the girl, with his wet cigarette hanging limp out of the side of his mouth, falls to his knees, running the wet mud through his fingers. He starts to laugh. Others join him and hug their neighbours as they stare at the towering thunder clouds coming their way. The blood red dirt is quickly soaked and the children, at first as unbelieving as their parents, find newly formed puddles and

splash in them. The girl in the yellow dress smiles, swirling one more time and causing the water to whip off her dress, before running to join the children. The boy breaks through the crowd in front of the yellow-dress girl.

"How did you know?" he asks, "How did you know it was going to rain?"

"I didn't know," she replies. "It just happened."

"But you were so sure! If you didn't know why walk through town in that yellow dress? Why do any of the stuff you did?"

"Maybe sometimes people just need something to happen that will change the way they look at something. Maybe they changed the way they looked at the town and saw that there was more to what happens next than to die in a drought."

"So you're saying that you made it rain by changing the way people *looked* at things?"

"I didn't make it rain, silly!"

"Then who did?"

Taking one final look around at a town full of people with glowing smiles on their faces and children covered from head to toe in mud she laughs before replying, "Everybody did!"



## About the Authors

HEIDI BECKER grew up in South Australia, and moved to Darwin for tertiary study. She is attending Charles Darwin University, studying a Bachelor of Music and Education. She hopes to work as a music teacher in a rural or regional area.

BILL COBURN arrived in the Northern Territory in 1957. He worked as teacher, patrol officer and Superintendent of Settlements with Welfare branch and was later Deputy Secretary of the Department of Community Government. Bill is married with five children, and is battling Parkinson's disease.

ALI COBBY ECKERMANN is an Indigenous writer. She works at Titjikala as Art Centre Coordinator. Her writings are inspired by country and cultures and the truth that rolls off big red sand hills.

KATE FARRELL came as a volunteer to Kintore community and now works in aged care and child care at Ngintaka Women's Centre.

KATY HARRISON is a final year medical student 'hosting a fight between my scientifically trained brain and artsy-by-nature mind'. Both 'selves' live happily together most of the time, along with her loving partner, wonderful housemates and gorgeous dogs.

BRUCE HOCKING works as a general practitioner at Wurlu Worlinjang Aboriginal Health Service. His story began as a gift to them. Bruce writes as a hobby and has one story published in a local anthology.

MEGAN JACOBSON is now twenty three. At eight she won the Northern Territory Young Writer of the Year and at seventeen she was named the *Sydney Morning Herald* Young Writer of the Year.

JACK MANGUJI (also known as Luke Morcom) was born at Borroloola and became part of the Stolen Generation at one week of age. He was taken from his mother and sent to the Garden Point Mission, Melville Island, where his name was changed to Luke. His mother died shortly afterwards. Luke lived with his foster parents in Elizabeth, South Australia for many years before returning to Darwin at twenty-one to find his Aboriginal roots.

MEG MOONEY has lived in Central Australia for twenty years. She works on a land care project with remote community schools and has one day off a week to write.

ELLEN MARIA POCOCK (NABAJIN) was born in Darwin, a Cyclone baby. Now serving as a Northern Territory Police Officer, she is studying fingerprint identification and has the best family anyone could hope for.

PATRICK NELSON was born in Alice Springs and lives at Humpty Doo with four children who serve as a source of inspiration for story ideas. He worked as newspaper journalist in Alice Springs and Darwin for many years and is now a communications officer in the Northern Territory Public Service.

JILL PETTIGREW lives in limestone country outside Katherine with husband, god, wallabies, green frogs and black cockatoos.

SAMANTHA SABARATNAM has lived in Darwin for many years. She has two young sons and is passionate about poetry and painting.

OCEANA SETAYSHA has been a passionate writer since birth. She has spent her years travelling the world (in her head, of course) and using her experiences in her writing.

JANET SPARROW is British born and emigrated to Australia in 1996. She has spent the last eleven years in the Top End. Janet currently works as an English teacher.

LEANNE TAYLOR is employed with the Department of Employment, Education and Training. She is a long term Territorian, with a Bachelor of Social Science (QUT), a Graduate Diploma Legal Studies (NTU), and a Master of Public Sector Executive Management (NTU) and is currently undertaking a Bachelor of Design through Charles Darwin University.

MARION TOWNSEND has two books published, as well as many song lyrics, poems and short stories (Kiriow Publications). Born in 1937 in Victoria, Marion came to the Northern Territory in 1968, where she taught Aboriginal children for eighteen years. She is now retired.

NIGEL TURVEY is an environmental scientist and award-winning writer of non-fiction who tries to make science readable and entertaining for the wide non-scientific audience.

CARMEL WILLIAMS is an Alice Springs writer known largely for her poetry, which has been published in three anthologies, radio and journals. She has won several awards for her work.

LINDA WIRF has lived in Darwin for thirty-five years. She studied at Charles Darwin University as a mature age student after raising her two children. She now wants to travel overseas and experience different places and cultures.

## Winners and Finalists

### DYMOCKS ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WRITERS' AWARD

**Winner** Nabajin – *A Question of Identity*

**Finalist** Jack Manguji – *Free Me Country*

### DYMOCKS ARAFURA SHORT STORY AWARD

**Winner** Bruce Hocking – *Shrink*

**Finalists** Megan Jacobson – *Sunwords*  
Patrick Nelson – *The Jelly Beans' Picnic*  
Janet Sparrow – *Wharf*  
Marion Townsend – *Footsteps*  
Carmel Williams – *The Rent*

### DYMOCKS RED EARTH POETRY AWARD

**Winner** Bill Coburn – *Kadaitcha*

**Finalists** Ali Cobby Eckermann – *One Child Two Child Wailing and Wild*  
Katy Harrison – *Thylacine. Thylacine. Thylacine.*  
Meg Mooney – *My Father*  
Jill Pettigrew – *Black Cockatoos*  
Samantha Sabaratnam – *Metaphor on a Face*

### CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY ESSAY AWARD

**Winner** Nigel Turvey – *On natural selection and the characteristic qualities of a greater number of sailors*

**Finalists** Heidi Becker – *A view of Statehood for the Northern Territory Government and its People*  
Leanne Taylor – *The Singaporisation of Darwin*  
Linda Wirf – *Cultural landscape of Mindal-ang-gwa (Mindil Beach)*

### KATH MANZIE YOUTH LITERARY AWARD

**Winner** Oceana Setaysha – *Yellow-dress Girl*

**Finalist** Kate Farrell – *Honey Ant Dreaming*

