

Hauntings

Stories written and read to spook attendees of the 20th annual AAWP conference 'Writing the Ghost Train' held at Swinburne University of Technology in 2015

Guest editor Rachel Le Rossignol

In The Eye of The Beholder

Mary Patricia Pomfret

Mary Pomfret is a writer who lives and works in Central Victoria. She has recently completed her PhD in creative writing at La Trobe University and her writing has been published in literary journals both nationally and internationally. Mary has published two collections of short fiction. I should acknowledge that an earlier version was published in a New Zealand journal *Takaha* 64, 2008.

My late father told the tale often and his Lancashire accent somehow seemed to add weight to his claim.

He would begin, 'Now, have I ever told you about the night that I saw the ghost?'

'Yes, Dad,' my sisters and I would reply, knowing that it would make no difference whatsoever.

One day our neighbour, Regina Ball, came to visit and sat listening with that smirk of hers all over her gossipy little face.

'Now, it were a cold November night and I were at home all by myself because yer Mam, God bless her, was at the hospital giving birth.'

'Yes, Dad, but you've already told...' I said, to no avail.

'Now, where was I?' Oh, yes, I was just on my way up to bed, feeling a bit tired like, and there she was... in a white billowing nightdress, long hair floating behind her, coming down the stairs towards me... '

'But, Dad...' There was no hope.

'For a moment I thought she were the Blessed Virgin, but I quickly realised that she wasn't because if she was she would've been in blue, would she not?'

If only he would've stopped there, but he never did. I heard Regina, the biggest gossip known to humankind, snigger.

'Well, so spellbound was I, that I reached out to touch her (he always dropped his voice here), and it was just like my arm went through a cloud of smoke.' He closed his eyes and stretched out his arm, just like he always did. 'A cloud of smoke.'

Dad usually let a few moments pass before he went on to the next bit, and this time was no different. In a hoarse kind of whisper, he went on,

'And then, like a bolt out of the blue, she socked me one. Socked me one fair in the eye. I can still hear the thwacking noise it made, just like this.' And with that he'd clap his hands together making the little ones jump. On the occasion of Regina Ball's visit this gesture seemed more theatrical than ever.

'Funny thing was, it didn't hurt a bit. Not a bit,' he'd. 'But, you'll never credit this. The next morning, when looked at myself in the mirror, I'd a dirty great black eye, as black as a black puddin' it were.'

I can still hear Regina Ball with her cronies, the next day at school, calling to me, 'As black as a black puddin'...ha, ha...as black as a black puddin'.

Of course, I had always disbelieved my father's story and had written it off as what my mother used to refer to 'one of your father's embroideries'. That was until one night I happened to be watching a documentary on urban Gypsies in New York. Well, ghosts are a common occurrence in Gypsy camps apparently. Yes, and it has been reported that on rare occasions they have been

known to give black eyes to those brave enough to look on them, the television commentator said.

My father has been dead for over a decade now, and how I would love to hear the only man I have known to see a ghost, tell his tale again and oh, yes, how I would love to see Regina Ball get black pudding' of her very own.

Inside The Ghost Mind

Mags Webster

Mags Webster's first collection of poetry *The Weather of Tongues* (Sunline Press) won the 2011 Anne Elder Award. She has an MFA in creative writing from City University of Hong Kong, and is now a PhD candidate at Murdoch University in Western Australia. Her work has appeared in various journals and anthologies in Australia and Asia.

One need not be a Chamber - to be Haunted

- Emily Dickinson [670]

I've seen her, bent

at work, her skull

a carnival of bees,

how she glows

in her pale moth body.

Her desk,

a square of lamplight,

faces west. At dusk,

she hems

the edge of day, pleats

each seed of syllable

deep—she keeps

her tinder wit

from cooling into shadow.

The curtains drawn,

she starts to lace

her thoughts

into corsets

and then gowns. Her

nib's a needle,

stitching lines

so tight they leak

no surplus words.

Night inspires

her lexicons, Darkness

is her muse. Truth

is salt, it seams

her words with terse

preservative. Inside

each phrase

she seals herself,

behind herself concealed.

She treads the rafters

of my brain—the blue

buzz of my mind.

She pauses behind

my retinas, I feel her cool

regard. Then her fingertips

brush past my brow,

and she slants her small

curved smile. *I'm Nobody* she

whispers—Who are You?

Stained By a Sad Dead Sun

Mags Webster

I live in the home
 of old ghosts,
their footsteps froth
 the hallway, their sad
hands stroke the walls.

They are the dangerous dead,
 they've not boarded
the boat of the sun
 nor been buried
according to custom.

They cannot feed
 like other souls
- they must eat
 from the world
of the living.

I do not understand
 their hunger,
only that darkness
 sharpens it.
Each night they feast

on mussels and honey

- and my sleep
is stained pewter
and gold.
Winter scrapes undead
knuckles on the gate
breathes corpse-breath
through the floor.
Outside the moon
is shackled to the trees-
such luminous fruit-
harvest long gone
yet still it ripens.
Frost has scratched out
summer, starched
the grass, now snow
lies soft and dead
upon the ground.
This house
won't let me go
it knows I've not arrived
by chance.
For I am growing old,
I mirror the flinching

clock, the ripening of lines.

In this night-blown

world, my bones

are stitched to ice, my spine

knuckled tight.

This house is where

the corpse-rust grows,

outside the glitches

thicken. I am shackled

by the roots

of a luminous snow,

stained by a sad

dead sun. When

those old ghosts

come to harvest their fruit

I'll taste both salt and sweet.

I do not understand my sleep,

its hunger of broken glass.

Old house you've buried

a dangerous soul, a dark

frost in the silence.

Leaf of Ectoplasm

Ariella Van Luyn

Ariella Van Luyn is a writer and lecturer in writing at James Cook University, Townsville. She holds a PhD in historical fiction and oral history from the Queensland University of Technology. Her manuscript was shortlisted for the Queensland Literary Awards 2012, and her work has been published in *Southerly*, *Overland*, *Voiceworks*, *Tincture Journal* and *The Lifted Brow*. Her first novel *Treading Air* will be published in July 2016.

The Albert Hall was thick with bodies and Maud regretted coming as soon as she arrived. A man with clothes-peg legs pincer up to the stage, took his place at the centre. Sir Horace Leaf. Maud had picked up a flyer from outside the church on Wickham Street. *Learn more about spirit manifestations*, it said.

Leaf began his lecture.

'Materialisations,' he said, 'are the temporary manifestations of spiritual entities, in the shape of the individuals as they were on earth. Experiments have been conducted by a number of scientific men, which revealed that during a trance, mediums exude a substance known as ectoplasm. This substance, this ectoplasm, then takes the form of individuals who have passed the veil.'

Maud thought of the times her dead brother had appeared at the foot of her bed. She'd wake to see him standing above her with his arms crossed over his chest, his hands tucked under his armpits, as he'd held them the Sunday morning he'd first complained of swelling. He sat down heavily at the end of the bed, leant forward, his head close to his knees, and groaned. He slid onto the floor. When she peered over the edge of the bed, she saw his two feet sticking out. He was wearing white socks, with the heels covered in black dirt. She covered the socks with one of her pillows. When she woke up in the morning, the pillow was still there.

Leaf said, 'There is strong photographic evidence to prove these manifestations.'

He nodded to a man behind the curtains, who pulled them open, revealing a white screen suspended from the ceiling. A picture appeared, but it didn't look anything like her brother. She could see his blackened armpits, a buboes erupting on his neck. Plague.

For months afterward her brother's death, Maud had dreamed of mounds of rats heaped up along the streets. A rat lifted its head up from amongst the pile as though about to speak, but a man bashed it with a shovel.

Leaf climbed down off the stage. Maud stepped back, and felt a toe under her heel.

'I'm sorry,' said Maud, turning around.

Leaf.

'Don't worry, please.' Something happened in Leaf's face, a pulling together of the features into a smile. 'Are you part of the church?'

'No.'

'What made you decide to come?'

Maud showed him the leaflet.

'And what made you keep it?' Leaf's pupils were dilated, sucked the light in.

'I'm not sure.'

'Do you have someone on the other side?'

'Yes, my brother.'

'How sad. Has he spoken to you yet?'

'Oh, no. He hasn't said anything.'

'He will.'

Maud nodded. But none of the images Leaf had shown looked like her brother. There was no ectoplasm in her vision. The idea of it, associated with her brother, disgusted her. She knew when she got home, he would be crouching in the corner of the kitchen, silent and sullen; he wouldn't speak to her.

The Haunting

Elizabeth Bellamy

Elizabeth Bellamy is a Canberra journalist, writer and Creative Writing PhD candidate at the University of Canberra. She has had articles published in a range of newspapers and magazines, and fiction in several local journals. She is currently completing her first novel.

She leans at the bar, hips seeking an edge,
smooths the skirt,
pulls flesh into shape.

Behind her, a shimmer.

Her skin prickles.

But when she turns, looks hard, he's gone.

In her mind, she casts wide.

Seeks eyes to caress, hold, scald her

Until she can bear it no more.

She holds on to them, these ghosts.

Grinds the glass hard as if it will keep them.

Lifts it to look, the symmetry of circle.

Drains it.

Orders another.

Ladyswamp

Jo Scicluna

Josephine Scicluna is a poet and a fiction writer who collaborates with musicians, sound artists and scriptwriters to create performance works and recordings for radio broadcast, which have featured on RRR-FM, ABC Radio National, 3CR and Highlands FM. She has won several awards for her short fiction and her poetry, fiction and essays have been published in various journals including *Double Dialogues* & *In/Stead*, *Verandah* literary magazine, and the *Age*. She is a committee member of PEN Melbourne, the local branch of PEN International.

Originally published by Josephine Scicluna & Tom Kazas, 'Ladyswamp' in: Scicluna, J & Van Der Werf, P 2013, 'Under the Forest & Ladyswamp: a radio play and a sonic poem' *In/Stead*, Issue 4, Summer 2013, *Double Dialogues*, <http://www.insteadjournal.com/article/under-the-forest-ladyswamp-a-radio-play-and-a-sonic-poem/>

Author note: parts of this poem quote directly, or are re-workings of scenes, from the 1981 text *The Lady of Swamp* by Richard Shears. A list of citations with corresponding lines is provided at the end of the poem.

If my sense of place is formed along pathways

I form my place

my legs in the swamp

Motion underwater

Uncaptured

5

If my sense of place is formed along orientations

Then my eyes in the land are skipping

chora topos hedra

hinge place doubling place

The day I disappear

10

I leave my spear at the door

Autumn 1917

People speak of standing in the face of loss
but loss creeps, ineluctably
as weeds creep up from the river.

There is no face

15

We do not stand in ...

The river flats sweep wide
Wide as horizon of eyes cannot see
men who come from toppling trees.

Tribal fight

20

Badland

Tarwin

The rime of the mariner is of the sea
What ghosts have followed us?

Informed as we are

25

silt was once of seas

drifting inland

Our channels silt up

water, water everywhere

Look: the far lying paddock

30

'Has it been raining all night?'

No, only this morning

'I've been looking at our affairs'

We can't manage them

Look at this land we occupy

35

memory

A man

could have managed us

listen

In the ti-tree a wallaby froze

its nose lifted slightly

40

to a man with a gun, he inhaled

my wit and conversation.

He knocked the wallaby, sideways

hole in its side, bleeding entrails

caught on a branch, tearing out

45

as it plunged into the river (1981, pp.47-48)

He said I was a woman

Who could certainly grace

Any man's table (Shears 1981, p. 47)

I laughed.

50

What is grace? Now

'Don't touch me'

Accept this man as artifice

To breathe out love

Yet not have love only

55

the violent gesture of disconnection.

I shift my sword

to the other side of your sword

Tullaree we are bound for caveat.

I wade into the swamp

60

For firewood and the walk into Buffalo

silt 1799

channels and riverbeds

filled or choked up with sediment

to flow or drift

loose legs in the swamp

65

Age is also a gradual accumulation

to the time shall I occur

as a stratum in the soil

my insides

inside elongated

70

lost thousands/gained nothing

Yet, we occupy
swamp memory of a thousand
spears on the ground
You *know*, people vanish

75

1830 silt To cover *up* or *over* with silt

November 1919

The river flats the rich black soil
Tularee: We were perfect for grazing
Clear the tussocks
Lay out the flesh for ploughing

80

My brother came home from Gallipoli
He can't manage us
And we can't manage
the sides of the drains
or the soil becoming watergates.

85

1934

Thunder rolls on Tularee
the wind tore in and howled us -
us in our nightgowns
the drenched crinoline
cast each curve of our breasts and skin

90

Our skin, we are women in our fifties
on our knees yelling, god crawl out
of your ladies college locker room

Only poets can sort us out in the deluge.

'Water, water, every where, and all the boards did shrink'

95

The inside walls are waterfalls
a dream sentient vision
eyes skip land skips
A snake floats by and
hens squawk in the living room.

100

A sheep shudders on the dining room table
and the bullocks they've become
quite a crowd on the verandah.

Write to mother:

among the things we need

105

potatoes oatmeal

cheap tinned milk, tea and sugar and

I wouldn't mind

a cigarette now and then.

After the rain

110

We shall vanish beneath the sheets.

There are never any visitors, anyway

1944

listen

My brother knocked himself, sideways

He couldn't manage it

115

a bullet to the head

we plunged into the death of January.

ah, men you come from toppling trees

in fight for height

Well, you let the air in.

120

Internequine war

faring disease

robust men in the dust

with rotting penises.

From here to infinity

125

we sit on wicker chairs

and watch the flood rising

Up the legs

to the neck

of our misery cattle

130

Oblivious to decay?

We are not
We are deeply familiar
possessed obsessed
by Tullaree
and the silt will be
completely

135

Loss. First
Mother dies and mother dies
Letters stop and with them
140
all possibility of our virtuality.
We did not choose to live alone
Rather, solitude like the water
overcame us.

Place is a habit overcoming us.
145

Loss. What goes second?
All I did for your body.
I watch you, sister, under the sheet
legs filling from the inside with water
but I walk the swamp
150
my legs to osmosis unyielding.
My skin at perfect speed
has reached mutuality with water.

In old men's shoes, pole in hand

I am motion underwater

155

uncaptured

by history or men

who say this is decay

Rather than a return to matter.

My sister

160

they bore your body over the swamp

upon the water your body hovered

Three hours in and three hours out

the bearers swore softly

A crake calls

165

and suddenly I am cold.

This house seeps

and seven snakes sleep

in my bedroom.

The radio plays

170

the songs that do not play

on our Lipp, disused, grand piano.

Loss. What is left

to mark the utter absence

of your body?

175

Only swamp land

Gipps land/ land of complacent rain.

Your climate is the complacency of rain.

And my sister

since you left

180

the clicking of frogs

is innumerable

References:

Coleridge, S T 1798, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' in Allison et al. (eds) 1983, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 3rd edn, W.W. Norton, New York, p. 570.

Shears, R 1981, *The Lady of Swamp*, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne.

Line

30: p. 59

31: p. 59

32: p. 59

33: p. 60

52: p. 48

71: p. 60

77-79: p. 61

86-89: pp. 85-86

103: p. 87

109: p. 95

116: p. 108

130: p. 59

164: p. 1

165: p. 2

172: p. 7

Tremendous Jackson

JACKSON, a PhD candidate at Edith Cowan University, is the founding editor of Uneven Floor poetry blogzine, unevenfloorpoetry.blogspot.com. In 2014 she won the Ethel Webb Bundell Poetry Award. In 2013 Mulla Mulla Press published Jackson's second collection *lemon oil* and Fremantle Press a micro-collection. Her guest performances include the Tasmanian and Queensland Poetry Festivals. In 2009 Jackson founded Perth Poetry Club. The National Library of Australia archives her collected poems and online home Proximity, proximitypoetry.com.

I

dreamed

a large penthouse

apartment with

that

woman

inhabiting it

The one who expects

things of me

and then

gives me

hell

about them,

mocking me and

balling

her fists,

because
nothing is ever
good enough
for her
and because
the world
hurts her

The world hurts her because
she expects
everything
to hurt

She expects everything
to hurt because
something
she doesn't remember
was inescapable
torture

Why does she
inhabit
in my
dream
such a tremendous
apartment?

Ghost Poet

Quinn Eades

Quinn Eades is a researcher, writer, and award-winning poet whose work lies at the nexus of feminist and queer theories of the body, autobiography, and philosophy. Eades is published nationally and internationally, and is the author of *all the beginnings: a queer autobiography of the body*, published by Tantanoola. He is currently working on a psycho-geographical history of a body of water near his home in Melbourne. This piece is an excerpt from: Eades, Q. (2015). *all the beginnings: a queer autobiography of the body*. North Melbourne: Tantanoola.

My grandmother died two weeks ago. Her dementia spiked and she went for a walk in the garden without her frame, imagining, I think, that she was on 50 year-old legs. She was 97 when she fell awkwardly on the grass and broke her neck.. A fracture in C2, controller of breath and swallowing, flexer of neck. I imagine the time she lay there, on the couch grass, under the sun, before being found by a nurse and excruciatingly moved, as a time of peace. Maybe she felt the warmth of sun in her skin, the prickle of grass under her fingertips. After most of her life spent in gardens, it seems right that the earth reached up to take her, that she that fell on grass.

When I think about her, she is in her garden, a pair of secateurs in her arthritic hands, calling to birds, and eating the sun. She is not three children, the fifties, her husband just home from the war. She is not hunched under the windowsill, the children held tight, waiting for the yelling to stop.

He came back a broken poet, insomniac, raging in fits and starts, bi-polar before there was a name for it, destined to shoot himself in the head: a shot that echoes through the nerve endings of each one of us, still. Suicide cannot be contained. It is a reverberating thing: it stays.

My mother was 14. She could not go to his funeral. She stayed back, her lungs sifting salt from the Northern Beaches air, and tried to stay upright, to stand in front of the sea, to know in her body his going. She could not go to his funeral. She

thought that if she stood by his graveside, if she saw him, lowered in, a scream would throw itself from her, and that scream would never stop. She was terrified that she would live all of her life inside a howl.

John Quinn: grandfather, father, husband, poet-ghost, stretched over all of us, endlessly. His poetry collection *Battle Stations* (1944), a falling-apart yellowed flaking book, keens every day from the shelf that holds its desperate weight. That holds this:

Prayer

God,
If the long night should fall,
Then let it fall
Without pain's lurid sunset.

God,
Should the steel bite,
Then let it bite
Sharply. And I unknowing.

God,
If I must gain it,
With one blow let me gain it—
The vast freedom of the grave.

But God,
Do not let me lie,
An ugly broken thing. Lie,
Not dead, not living, bloody in the sun.
(Quinn 1944, p. 7)

And gain it he did. But the vast freedom of his grave is a single blow that ricochets through all of us, that keeps us in, that cycles us always towards the fear of madness, and death.

When my grandmother fell, was his prayer by her side? Did she meet him in the grass? Was the gunshot echo for her, finally, gone?

Reference

Quinn, J. (1944). *Battle stations*. Sydney: Halstead Press Pty Ltd.

Riding Parallel

Marion Campbell

Marion Campbell is a Melbourne writer whose most recent books, concerning the relation of language and revolution, are the novella *konkretion* (Crawley, WA: UWAP 2013) and the critical work *Poetic Revolutionaries: Intertextuality and Subversion* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014). She is currently Associate Professor of Professional and Creative Writing at Deakin University.

1.

I stole a freeze-frame
for my phone from the little film
embedded in her message & now
like after-shock months or is it
years later her image
jolts alive light-lashed
pixelated the dark eyes sweep -
wide pathways
 gathering photons
through the long nights between us

& her mouth begins to move
its gradual bow visited by a voice
below the voice a song
more tuneful & more
broken inside the song she walks
abroad the moor beyond
the moor the sentient immensity

of the *whacher* she also is

2.

I've been watching in the wee hours
Brown Bunny Vincent Gallo's indi film
through the riding accidents of process
the skidmarks of handheld shakiness
across forlorn suburbia
a motorbike rider pursues his own red glow
down phantomic streets of bungalows
their plots mad emerald napkins
of lawn & solid bush where marvels
crouch to hide & interiors yield
nothing at kitchen laminex
where a father rocks vacant
in distress for some receding grief
a mother's muffled answers
remain inscrutable to actor viewer director
all lurch up to the camera
& no one can remember
the boy Bud once was that neighbour kid
who liked their daughter Daisy
as ever since he's liked no one in the world
whose drizzling perception behind the wipers
of the travelling screen almost wipes clean
Massachusetts Ohio Nevada
who won who lost who roars a

motorbike on a salt lake wide
as Martian craters or as heartache
anticipated in love's drawn out exhaust
& so with this Bud's search for Daisy
through women sobbing at fast food
looking for a fix of crack cocaine
this one Rose this Lily this Violet
no one's ever Daisy expect in dead visitation
which proves a flickering figment of his own
traitorous onanistic imagination

3.

it doesn't matter watching in this guise
my love is also where & whatever
the trembling junkie
screens from him or coyote
rifling in the pavement bin
between raw ribs I feel her -

as if any film clip story lyric scrap
across this aching distance might
recapture the glimpses of
that strange acapella rapture
her soul-hungry nakedness (her
irony in brackets for a while)
the searchlight eyes the hoot of
boobook owl the Midlands lullaby

are in the hymn she sings on film
& in its swell the gift for joy the
strife-dissolving laughter -

4.

now we've become each for each
the open set of metonyms
where anything is liable to sound
the song below that hymn
or not she writes I write
the roads real & cruel
that shimmer & terrible
this mirage that roadkill
send fugitive flashes to our own
fires which may not synchronise
but it's as if each relayed pulse
in the travelling universe of stories
throws a line red or saffron yellow
to connect our own & so to slow
our passage through
these parallel trajectories

Third Night

Sophie Masson

Born in Indonesia of French parents, and brought up in France and Australia, **Sophie Masson** is the award-winning and internationally-published author of over 60 books for children, young adults and adults. Currently a PHD student in Creative Practice at the University of New England, Sophie also serves on the Boards of the ASA, the Small Press Network, and the New England Writers' Centre, and is co-director of small publisher, Christmas Press, www.christmaspresspicturebooks.com.

The first night, far from home, and a dream: a woman writing, at a desk in an old weatherboard cottage. The screen door creaks, and something hurtles into the room. A glimpse of a face, vivid in its sheer ferocity: a tiny thing, but deadly. The dreamer awakes in fright, to silence and friendly darkness, thinks on the dream, but does not understand.

Now it's the second night, another dream. Two travellers, a woman and a man, arrive at a lakeshore. The man strips, goes into the lake, and as he does so, the water turns his skin to bronze, he is becoming alien but doesn't seem to notice, while his companion cries out in fear. The dreamer wakes, heart pounding, into the friendly darkness, and still does not understand.

It is the third night, in a Sydney suburb this time. The dreamer is asleep. All at once, dogs bark. The staccato sound that tells you their hackles are rising, that something unexpected is out there. It is this that wakes the dreamer and gets her up to look out the window.

Outside, in the vacant lot next door, there is a man, standing in the moonlight, hair of black and silver, dressed in plain pale clothes—but exactly *what* colour are they? He looks quite solid, there is no translucence about him, and yet..He has one hand on his hip, the other held out with fingers parted, a silent message. Otherwise, he is still, more still than ever any

human can be: and his glance—what a cold, direct gaze!—is fixed at the wide-awake dreamer, standing transfixed at the window.

There is no fear. Don't think that. Only an eternal moment, suspended, the cold direct gaze, the silver glimmer, the silent calling.

Now the waking mind is rebelling, seeking to explain. There is an intruder! Something must be done. The dreamer rouses the household which stands there in its pyjamas staring bleary-eyed out at the night. The household shouts at the dogs, hoping to chase away the intruder. Then rubs its eyes, says, 'But he's not there! Look..' And in the place where the man stood in the vacant lot, the dreamer sees...a tree. A small, stunted grey eucalypt. The dogs have stopped barking. The household goes back to bed, shrugging.

But the dreamer stands at the window and stares out at the tree. I've heard the dogs barking before, gone to the window to shout at them, and seen that tree. But not *this* night. The dogs barked, and I saw something else, which the first two nights had prepared me for. Not a dream.

For yes, this was my own story. What happened was real: but I may never be able to understand it. It does not matter. For all of us move in the world's mystery as fish swim in water, because it is our natural element. Yet often without understanding, for fish are the last to know they live in water.

Tell Me What You See

Wendy J. Dunn

Wendy J. Dunn is an Australian author and playwright who has been obsessed by Anne Boleyn and Tudor History since she was ten-years-old. She is the award-winning author of two Tudor novels: *Dear Heart*, *How Like You This?*, and *The Light in the Labyrinth*. Born in Melbourne, Australia, Wendy is married and the mother of three sons and one daughter - named after a certain Tudor queen, surprisingly, not Anne. She gained her Doctorate of Philosophy (Writing) from Swinburne University in 2014.

'What do you see?'

'See? The cell is dark. I barely see anything.'

'You're not looking hard enough. Go on, move closer in, and look towards the window.'

'Oh - there's a cold draught somewhere...'

'Don't think about it. Are you looking towards the window?'

'The light is rather...all I can see is a haze- a shower of light. It hurts to look.'

'Listen carefully- try to look into the haze and tell me what you see.'

'It's cold-'

'Don't think about it. Just focus on looking.'

'Oh dear Lord!'

'Why have you stepped back? Did you see something?'

'I thought I saw...'

'Tell me.'

'I thought I saw a girl, sitting in a window-seat. But I can't see her now.'

'Come back beside me and see if you can see her again.'

'I'm frightened—'

'Don't be. I'm here. Come now — hold my hand.'

'All right. I'm ready.'

'Is she still there?'

'Yes. Oh yes. She's weeping...I can hear her!'

'Good! It's happening now...Can you describe her?'

'She's tiny. So young...I think, no more than fourteen. But wait...she's dressed like a matron; her hair's all covered. I think her clothes are Tudor. In fact, I'm sure they are. But she must be Protestant...'

'Why do you say that?'

'Her clothes — her black gown is unadorned by any jewels. So severe for such a young girl. She has a prayer book attached to her girdle. If I remember right, that's how Protestants dressed. But why is she weeping?'

'Perhaps if we found out who she is we would find the answer to that.'

'How do we do that? You know, she looks so real I could touch her...'

'Are you frightened now?'

'No — not any more. Just so very sad for her. But you haven't answered my question...'

'All in good time...'

'Oh — she weeps like a child weeps. So forsaken and alone. Can't we do anything for her?'

'No. Nothing. And —to be truthful— she's no longer here. You see but a moment in time scarred by such raw emotion that it remains with us forever.'

'So - her spirit really is at peace.'

'Of course. She was an innocent and God keeps her safe.'

'You know who she is, don't you?'

'Yes. But I want you to find the answer for yourself.'

'But I don't know how...'

'What else you can see. Describe the room.'

'It's more like a cell than a room - grey stone walls. But a comfortable cell. I think, more than one chamber. The window is thick lattice glass. She must have been some one important to be in a chamber with glass.'

'Yes - she was.'

'But such a young girl to be grief-stricken. Oh - she's stopped crying. I think I can hear her speaking...'

'Can you tell me her words?'

'No. She went too fast for me. Wait - she's speaking again... 'Live still to die...by death you...purchase eternal life.... There is a time to be born...a time to die...the day of death is better than the day of our birth''

'So, do you know who she is now?'

House Party

Jen Craig

Jen Craig is a Doctoral candidate at Western Sydney University, researching the Gothic, eating disorders, transgenerational transmission of trauma and abjection. Her short stories have appeared in various Australian literary magazines. Her libretto for the chamber opera *A Dictionary of Maladies* was performed in Europe in 2005. She has published a novel *Since the Accident* (2009) and a novella *Panthers and the Museum of Fire* (2015), which was longlisted for the 2016 Stella Prize.

As I thought about the house party at Sarah's wake, I found that what came to me first was a certain state of mind, and that mind in a landscape, a setting, with the words 'house party' spread over everything: this bizarre and inexplicable term 'house party', which I hadn't thought about in years. The setting: dark-leaved bushes, windows mostly obscured from the outside by the bushes, a path curving round, possibly of concrete, heavily overshadowed, and with one of those low, white skies from an agitated summer - white and yet dark, an indeterminate time of day. It was called a house party, I had said to my good friend Raf afterwards, knowing he had no experience of this, no experience at all, as I'd thought to my pleasure - it was called a house party but there were no houses that anyone could see, just cabins of the most depressing and flimsy kind. When I tried to bring to the surface of my mind any more detailed memory or direct impression of being at the house party, all I could bring was this indeterminate time of day and the dark, leafy setting - leafy, but when I actually thought of the leaves themselves, a crackling kind of leafiness, where the leaves were neither pliable nor healthy but brown and dry or, if still green, that deep, nearly black shade of green that was dusted underneath, on either side of the stem, on the pale underside of the blackish green, by a sooty mould that came off on your fingers as soon as you touched it. That this path, these windows and the sooty-leaved setting were also in a gully, as was my own house and Sarah's, seemed to go without saying, I had told him. It's

probably not surprising, too, given the setting I remember, that the state of mind I recall when I try to remember the house party that either Sarah or her sister had got me to go to when we were at school is also agitated and unclear, but this setting is important if you want to understand what the house party was about, as there was a decision that I had been pressed to make at that house party. I had learned, in this setting, that everyone in the world has to make this decision - that it could never be evaded - and if I did not say yes to God in this instance at the house party, it would be understood by God as no - there not being anything worse than the consequences of saying no to God. I could kill whomsoever I liked, I could smear blood from one end of a street to the other - the blood of children and cats and elderly, frail and helpless creatures - and I could say no to God, and each of the instances of murder would mean the same in the eyes of God - the murder and the rejection - or so I had been led to believe.

Haunted: Claws and Teeth

Lynnette Lounsbury

Lynnette Lounsbury is a writer, poet and lecturer in Communications and Ancient History at Avondale College of Higher Education. She is the author of *Afterworld* (Allen & Unwin) and *We Ate the Road like Vultures* (Inkerman & Blunt).

When she had been told the valley was haunted she had assumed several things, an air of self-righteousness foremost amongst them. Ghosts were the realm of old people and children and she was neither. There were other assumptions though. There was an expectation that apparitions must be human; lost wafting creatures with sad tales of hypothermia or a fall from one of the knives of red stone that slashed upwards all around her. Mixed with her scepticism was the warmth of knowing she would never have to test her convictions. Only a fool would try to cross that pockmarked, frozen wasteland at night.

Yet now it lurched before her, the trees wavering in ice wind, the edges of the red cliffs blurred by low cloud. Stupid. It was so unbelievably stupid to be stuck out here. The crystal threads running through the cold air made her skin twitch and there was a heart shuddering moment when she knew her assumptions were as foolish as her attempt to find the boy. She was not alone. Her rational mind she knew she had never been alone out here. There were possums bolting up the trees as she moved down the trail and a myriad insects squeaking and hissing their displeasure at her disruption. There were slitherings in the low black grass. But this was something else. She turned around quickly. Darkness. Darkness barely penetrated by her small torch. Pivoting back she looked down the overgrown trail. And it was there. Watching her.

A dog. Perhaps. A ghost certainly. Silvery, threadbare, not completely there. It was bigger than a dog though. As tall as her hip. Its face was sharper. And its teeth needles of light. It glowed, though not in the torchlight; from within. Her heart stuttered to a halt, winding down and then attacking her chest

wildly - get away from this thing! She couldn't. The boy was out there. Beyond.

The creature looked at her, turned slowly in a circle, like a wolf, its head low, eyes up. Could you be killed by a ghost dog? The adrenaline tearing at her veins told her she could. The side of its body took her by surprise. Thicker than a dog. A longer tail. In her muddled, frozen mind she felt a flicker of recognition.

The creature watched her and let out a low sound - a rumbling. Pulling back suddenly on its haunches, it lifted its front legs in the air, pawing at the air. The movement was strange and she stumbled back, off the path and into thick, sharp brush that held her in place. There was something odd about it, moving as it did - like a rat. Like a wallaby. It flicked its head quickly side to side and then turned to walk away, down the path. It wasn't going to kill her. Was she supposed to follow it? She mocked herself for the thought. Her limbs were losing sensation in the cold. It wasn't worse than being completely alone, was it? Unless it led her off a cliff. As she fell into step behind the apparition she saw the lines across its back and she knew it. It was a tiger. Thylacine. Only survived by its silver shadow.

The Light at the End of the Hall

Sarah St Vincent Welch

Sarah St Vincent Welch is a Canberra based writer, editor, writing teacher and DCA candidate at University of Technology, Sydney. Her practice-led research involves the representation of pregnancy in contemporary Australian women's fiction. Her fiction has been published in anthologies and journals and she writes about writing, reading, time and place at sarahstvincentwelch.com. She is writing a poem a day in 2016, in the poemcentric online Project 366 with poets, translators and visual artists.

If you were the last white coat at work in the Archive's basement there was a final inescapable task to perform after packing up, cleaning your film bench and writing the leaving time on your sheet. It was to turn the light off at the end of the hall. This then required walking back through the dark past 'the cage' and the sub-basement towards the glow of the exit sign. You were often there alone after hours, due to your late night, late-to-work habits, and this was the consequence.

Walking from your lab past the compacter, click off, click, then into the hall, click; darkness fell behind you. The exit at the double door was to the right, and the last light switch to the left. You turned. A row of encased fluorescent lights travelled down the ceiling towards the printing lab and that final switch.

As you walked past the lift it stirred, grinding on its pulleys, shifting. You paused, wondering for a moment if its doors would slide open. It settled. Breath held, you walked past the sub-basement (that staircase stepping down and round a corner, and then down again into a blunt low-ceilinged room), and you breathed out as its darkling fingers touched your heels, and you paced on. The basement workers agreed they didn't like to walk past it even during the day. The hall was lined with metal shelves stacked full with sound recordings. They shuddered to your footfall.

You were approaching 'the cage' and the shadows inside it. 'The cage' was a remnant of the Archive's previous role as The Institute of Anatomy. Even if you pressed your face against the wire and wrapped your fingers through its mesh it was difficult to see inside. It contained, it was rumored, the last of the remains to be housed in the National Museum's repatriation section. The robbery of sacred places, the stealing of human parts and their display, especially of Aboriginal people, was a trade and a science of the previous century. You walked past it, eyes down. You flicked the switch, turned around and placing one foot in front of the other, hands buried in your pockets, you walked back. The exit sign shimmered ahead.

At your feet, as always, a scrabbling, and then a rustling past the wire mesh and cold walls, but you kept your pace, and as someone moved aside in the dark you knew to just keep going, even as feet walked in time behind yours. They brushed your cheek with soft breaths. Never too afraid to be by yourself, you believed these specters were of those who came to stare and wonder at the rending of humanity, its display in pieces, this science of the past. And you knew yourself as a specter too, when you were the last white coat at work, as you imagined the past, looking, watching, listening.

A true story, from the 1980s, at the National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

The Man in the Boots

Sif Dal

Sif Dal is an Icelandic-Australian writer and PhD candidate living in Melbourne and studying at Deakin University. Sif has a background in Education and Creative Writing. Her current research focuses on the very short writing form known as flash fiction and its application in writing intercultural narrative identity. Sif has had flashes and poetry published in several anthologies and other publications in Australia and internationally.

Sigga drank the last of her milk, it never quite got rid of the taste of the little blue pill her grandmother gave her before nap time each afternoon.

'Are you finished?' grandmother asked without turning towards Sigga, it was always as if grandmother had eyes in the back of her head.

'Yes, Amma.'

'Well, then go and lay down on the ghost and don't come out of the parlour until I fetch you, do you hear?'

'Yes, Amma.' Sigga said and slid down off the kitchen chair. She knew better than the cross grandmother. On the occasions when her will got the better of her, Sigga had experienced her grandmother's sharp temper and she did not like it.

Sigga toddled into the parlour and clambered up onto the ghost. The ghost was a French provincial chaise lounge in forest green velvet with a mahogany scrollwork frame. Grandmother said the chaise had belonged to a French Colonel, and the ghost of the man still haunted the chaise. Sigga wasn't terribly fussed about ghosts, she'd seen many in her short life.

The chaise was comfortable and Sigga felt sleepy. Rosenkranz the cat jumped onto the chaise and curled up at Sigga's feet. Soon the warm sunlight streaming across the parlour and onto her small form lulled her and Rosenkranz to sleep.

Then she was awake again. It felt too soon to be awake - the house was quiet and Grandmother wasn't standing over her as she usually did when Sigga woke. Something moved.

Sigga squinted and pulled herself up to sitting. She wasn't sure if she was really awake or not. There was a man in the room. She didn't recognize him and he didn't seem to notice her. He paced in solitary formation - a soldier without a brigade.

He wore boots such as Sigga had never seen before. They went up to his knee, but were quite wide and loose, not like grandfather's gumboots. The man's pants were cream coloured and baggy, he wore a matching cream coloured waistcoat and a white shirt with the top buttons undone.

Sigga could hear he was muttering something, but could not understand his words. He kept repeating the same words over and over and they began to beat a rhythm in her head.

Sigga's head felt heavy and she lay down again.

'Sigga, it is time to wake up.' Grandmother's voice came from a distance. Sigga opened her eyes and saw her grandmother standing where the man in the boots had been pacing moments ago.

'Is the man gone?' Sigga said.

'What man, dear?'

'The man in the big boots.' Sigga sat up and slid down off the chaise.

'You must have been dreaming, dear child, there is no man in big boots here, just you and me and that silly old cat.'

'He kept saying something strange.'

'Oh, what was that, child?' Grandmother said as she walked out the room leaving Sigga to trail behind her.

'He said, 'Pourquoi tu ne me le fantôme d'appeler? S'il vous plaît ne me le fantôme remet pas.' What does it mean, Amma?'

Sigga's grandmother chuckled.

'It means, 'Why do you call me the ghost? Please do not call me the ghost!'

The Sandhope Lunatic Asylum

Stephanie Green

Stephanie Green is Deputy Head of School (Learning & Teaching) in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences at Griffith University. She has published fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, cultural journalism and scholarly works. Her books include *Too Much Too Soon* (2006), selected short fiction, and a biographical study, *The Public Lives of Charlotte and Marie Stopes*.

The city lay in a shallow cradle of land that sloped down to the sea. At its lowest point was the port, dishevelled after recent neglect, while at its highest was the Sandhope Lunatic Asylum. The yellow sandstone walls of the Asylum sat on a rise above a crowd of narrow wood and sandstone houses, where it could be seen from any position, like a church on a hill. At the bottom of the rise was the river that flowed, open-mouthed, past the line of unprotected coast against which Sandhope had built its name, into the sea.

Sandhope was an abandoned city. It was not abandoned in the way that a desert ghost town is abandoned, the husk of some brief mineral craze or environmental disaster. Sandhope was not bereft of its citizens. Its houses stood strong. Every day its streets filled and emptied with people and cars, but somehow the reasons for its existence seemed to have been forgotten.

The people that lived there knew Sandhope's moments of beauty. At sunset they saw billowing flags of silk, their colours pouring into the horizon. They saw the buildings blacken against the red and violet sky, the sand of its beaches washed to the palest gold. Early mornings in Sandhope they felt the mist coming up from the sea as it touched their faces with the salty perfume of oceans far away. The mist draped blue veils along the waterfront, blurred streetlights and made the rotting teeth of the harbour, the oily wreck of the dock, seem like a story from another age. By breakfast time the mist had burned away, its only trace the soft edges of the bright blue sky.

Summer filled the citizens of Sandhope with many longings, above all with a desire for rain. When at last they heard the clattering of gigantic ice diamonds upon their rooves, they knew this sound heralded the seasonal rains that, every year, they hoped would satisfy their longings. Every year when this happened, the parents sent their children scrambling out of the houses with bowls and hats and buckets to catch the opaque hailstones, but every year the rain came too quickly, falling relentlessly before the children reached the doors. And as the rain washed those ephemeral jewels away, the parents were already longing for summer.

Although it was a city of abandonment, people stayed in Sandhope, rarely travelling or going away. They were a people that had been blown to this place on the winds of history. They had come with the waves of two centuries of colonisation and migration. Being the children, the grandchildren, the great-grandchildren and great-great-grand-children of those who had wandered and drifted, who had fought or stolen, saved for a passage or stowed away, they were in no hurry to leave. Some stayed partly because Sandhope was such a great distance from other places, because there was a desert to cross in three directions and an ocean in the other before you arrived anywhere else, even though, in reality, the journey to other places took only a few hours by air. Some stayed simply because they had no reason to leave.

Sometimes the children left, when they were old enough but still young enough to be curious about the world. Later they came back again, in the way of all abandonments, missing the space of the desert before them, the intimacy of the ocean curling into their backs. But Sandhope was also surrounded by another kind of desert, a place that was rich and empty, a place that everybody who lived there knew was impassable, dangerous and unending: a place that can only be imagined.

In a way the people of Sandhope saw their city as a kind of oasis, the lost city, the true city, the city of all cities. They did not see their own loneliness, or if they saw it, they looked away again, believing that the nature of the place made them lonely because it was so far away from anywhere else. They

comforted themselves with the imagined memories of one of a dozen other lands left behind. They did not realise that the loneliness of Sandhope came, not from the place itself, but from its history, the history that belonged to even the most recent newcomers, but that even the oldest of them had forgotten.

Their first forefathers and foremothers were gamblers, desperados, prisoners and lunatics. The Sandhope Lunatic Asylum was the first major public building ever built in Sandhope. In the early days everyone who passed through the town had something to do with that place. They had either helped to build it, been locked up in it before there was a prison, or been confined there because they were crazy with poverty or sickness or loss or any other thing. Others who lived in its vicinity had stolen the sandstone blocks that were hewn for its walls to build their own homes. These are, of course, some of the most valuable houses in Sandhope today.

Once considered a piece of landmark colonial architecture, the Sandhope Lunatic Asylum was damaged by fire soon after World War II. Its design was the work of a famous architect, originally from Poland, who had made his reputation in the British colonies. Built under the reign of Queen Victoria the Sandhope Lunatic Asylum was an imposing monument to the nineteenth-century Gothic revival, but by the latter half of the twentieth century the building was no more than a shell. Its exterior was a hotchpotch of rigid lacework spires and miniature minarets, a parody of styles and influences, but no trace of its interior remained. Empty and damaged it became a local joke. Behind the fake cupolas, stone scrolls and the gargoyles of its façade, was emptiness. Its passageways, rows of little cells, its great dining hall were all gone, burned and broken down, the rotten walls taken away and all the evidence of its inhabitants and their stories removed. Only the solid walls remained, the golden husk of a one-time Sandhope edifice, monstrous and empty.

The Sandhope Lunatic Asylum had been examined by a succession of committees, by City Councillors and restorers, architects and engineers, by the State Heritage Office and the National Trust. It was considered to be too far gone to rebuild, its interior gutted, blackened with fire. Yet for many years

there was a reluctance to pull the standing walls down. The building was dramatic skyline feature, a place that people recognised, a part of the city as it always was. Nearly everyone knew someone or had some ancestor who had lived or worked there. People told stories about crazy patients that got away or sane people that had been held against their will. Tour guides took visitors to the ruin even though the only thing to see was the façade with its worn green grass carpet and the flower garden that ran wild just outside its walls. It was a favourite subject for watercolourists and photographers. Occasionally the overhanging ledges of its bay windows and arches gave shelter to drunks and runaways. But even the homeless would not stay there long. It was said that ghosts dwelt within its walls, the unhappy ghosts of the mad and other tortured souls.

Drawn to these stories, pagans and witches brought midnight candles and incantations. Revellers and wild children lit fires within its walls on drunken Saturdays, daring the ghosts to return. Lovers wandered through the overgrown ruins of its old gardens on safe Sunday afternoons. It seemed impossible to imagine Sandhope without the Sandhope Lunatic Asylum, even though, for some, it still retained the aura of a place of fear. For parents wanting to protect their children from danger the Sandhope Lunatic Asylum gave them something tangible with which to warn the children. It was a place to stay away from, in which all manner of unspoken evil was contained.

There was, however, the question of real estate value. Developers were interested. The City Councillors saw it as an opportunity for revenue. They were unsentimental. To them the present seemed more important than the past. They formed yet another committee, ostensibly, this time, to consider the questions of health and safety. They argued that the place was a danger to the community. It was not just the threat of crumbling walls and falling stones. Only a few years ago a child disappeared there and the parents had never recovered. Even if it were fenced off, they said, the Asylum would be a dead spot, dark and lonely, dangerous to women, a place where wandering children could be forever lost, where even the desperate would not choose to go.

Bunyip

Dallas Sutherland

Dallas Sutherland has a background in all things creative, with studies in Graphic Design, Fine Arts, Adult Education, Literature, and Creative Writing. His most recent novellas are published under the Noveletta Imprint, Custom Book Publications. He draws inspiration from myth, legend, and metafiction to create works of fantasy for middle grade readers. Dallas lives in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland, QLD.

From somewhere deep in bunyip dreams Bruno heard the call from the swamp. It was a long low-throated moan like a dying cow. But he knew it was not a cow. Bruno rolled out of bed, opened his bedroom door, crept into the hall, and tiptoed past Granny's room. He stopped to listen for a moment at her door. He could hear her breathing in, and then out like the long slow sigh of a kettle that had just been taken off the stove. The call of the swamp drew him on.

A few steps further and he had reached the back door. Bruno turned the doorknob and pulled the heavy door towards him. He made no sound. The only sounds came from outside - the chirping of insects, the hoot of an owl, and the swishing of the bat's wings as it flew in under the veranda roof and out again.

Down the steps he went, barefoot across the grass, around the bindi-eye patch and towards the swamp. He climbed through the barbed wire fence and continued on. The buffalo grass tickled the soles of his bare feet, and the dirty yellow moon lit up the fur on his arms and legs. Bruno tingled all over. His heart thumped in time to the song of frogs and cicadas. The bumps on top of his head itched and grew a little.

The moan came again, followed by the splashing of water down in the swamp. Bruno stopped to listen. Where was it coming from - which direction should he take? Two kangaroos bounded past him.

'This way, this way,' he heard them say.

He turned left and went around the edge of the swamp, over to the other side where the big hill rose up out of the ground like a pimple. Everyone called it that - the Big Pimple.

Another moan - really close. A rustling near the edge of the swamp made Bruno jump. His hair bristled like an echidna. The rustling grew louder and then suddenly whatever it was crashed away through the bush, up the hill.

The full moon revealed nothing more. Before long, the thing had gone, and the night returned to the sound of the possums fighting and the frogs calling from the swamp.

Bruno stood still, listening and thinking.

He thought it could have been a kangaroo, only kangaroos did not moan like that and... surely, kangaroos were not supposed to say anything. Bruno listened harder. Behind the noises there were voices - the voices of animals.

He turned around and went back along the edge of the swamp, across the buffalo grass, through the fence, around the bindi-eye patch and to the back veranda. He sat on the steps listening to the sounds of the animals until the sun came up.

Bearbrass

Eloise Faichney

Eloise Faichney is a Master of Arts (Writing) student at Swinburne University of Technology. A spaghetti bolognese enthusiast, history nerd and future zombie apocalypse survivor, she writes because she tried not to, and failed.

In the face of low-level human suffering,

the everyday kind, I root my feet into the asphalt firmly, here and here. I take an exaggerated breath, leavened with that elemental necessity. This act:

“Being present,”

is exhausting. It can be medicated with intercourse, sucrose, discourse, alcohol;

none of which fully replace it; enhance and deplete it; complicate it. Let me hang in suspended animation, for you can never grasp a moment.

It flees. It flies away, chased by the fox

of distraction, by the spirit of what you couldn't say, left hanging in the staircase like an old tapestry, crawling with bacteria. In the corners, glances are caught of what

I could never find in

a father's pride, a lover's lap, a mentor's grasp. I didn't want to live here, in the industrial sprawl with its violent history,

but the River of Mists drew me back to the ever-flowing
font. If the pavements could

talk, they would complain

about my sharp heels, my many companions,

and my inventive clumsiness. St Helier

roams the backstreets, his severed head

in his hands. He's forgotten his healing spring; his bed
lies across an ocean. He wonders where the children

went, the ones who screamed and scampered

back to the nuns with their long robes to be hushed and
soothed. Those ladies in black, faces framed by white, vanished
thirty years ago. Time moved past them, forgetting

to take their sins.

Once the Flats, a migrant's paradise, now

they call this place "Zombieland". A pot

melting with crime and culture; a display of decay. The best
food is found in places where the earth has bled. Where the cook
has cried into the broth,

isn't that what they say? Wealth in spades,

and so much greed. Can any act of repatriation quell the
voices that echo across the Birrarung Marr? Capitalist empathy
withers impotently, and the war of the wattle thrashes on,
unquenched.

I crush a eucalypt leaf between my palms,

smell the shame *Australiana* up close. Young, brutal history
caught in the act of itself. Beautiful, chained to your own
freedom: Bearbrass, you own me. I will never leave you, not even
in the winter.

What he heard

Joshua Lobb

Joshua Lobb is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at UOW and a member of the Material Ecologies research network. His stories have appeared in *The Bridport Anthology*, *Best Australian Stories*, *Animal Studies*, *Text* and *Social Alternatives*. His plays have been performed at The Actor's Centre and Belvoir St Theatre. His novel, *Real Life*, won the LitLink Unpublished Manuscript Award in 2014, as well as two residential fellowships at Varuna, the Writers' House.

He was walking with his dog through the bush. The broken leaves of the undergrowth crunched underfoot. He was careful to sidestep the knuckles of eucalypt roots as he charted his way between the thin trees. Their bark was smooth, mostly: lavender-grey with purpling speckles. Every now and then his hand would brush against the rougher, splintery skin of an ironbark. He could hear the dog, sniffing, in the semi-darkness, tracing a line of scent. The treetops creaked in the rasping breeze.

And then he heard the other sound. A matted, murky noise, like snoring. No, like sobbing. The dog lifted his nose as if the scent had become airborne. The sound was too incoherent to be nearby and yet it felt close, like a heartbeat, thumping. Man and dog stood in the gloom: listening, sniffing. The sobs coagulated the air. Then the sound changed: from sobbing to wailing. No, one long wail. Shrill and jangling, it slapped against his skin. His instinct was to flee, to scamper away over the dirt and leaves. It was only the dog's rumbling growl and poised upraised paw that made him stay. Whatever was wailing was in pain. It needed his help. He listened to the strangling shriek more carefully. The wail was coming from a child.

He stumbled forward, following the ribbon call. He ripped his hand on the scratchy ironbark. The howl was always too far away, just beyond the next clutch of trees. It was definitely a child's voice. A girl maybe? Was she lost? Had she tripped in the gloom and broken a bone? Where had she come from? There were no houses nearby. The only structure was the old schoolhouse, just

over the ridge. But that had been abandoned years ago, a half-collapsed shell of pockmarked stone. The wail persisted: a long sireny scream of agony. He tumbled over a protruding rock. The thump of his knee in the dirt scattered the dry leaves. He lay on the earth, trying to catch his breath. The dog trotted back, licked his dusty face. Yes, it was definitely coming from the schoolhouse.

He made his way through the talon-scratched trees, listening to the lament of the child. It was difficult to know what it wanted. Sometimes it sounded like it was pleading, begging for something, or for something to stop. Sometimes it was the sound of deep sadness, the clamour of loneliness, the ache of fear. The wail was as abandoned as the schoolhouse, as beaten as the fallen stones.

And there it was. The old schoolhouse. On the edge of the copse of trees, looking out over the ridge into the expansive gorge. The wail was definitely coming from inside: sharp and urgent, yearning and terrified.

He felt compelled to step through the hungry space where a door used to be. But the dog hung back, clinging to his leg.

Lubra Creek, Kangaroo Island

Molly Murn

Molly Murn holds a Masters in Creative Arts, and is currently a PhD candidate at Flinders University. Molly is the recipient of a Varuna Publisher Fellowship with UQP for her novel *the Heart of the Grass Tree*. Her poetry has won several awards including a commendation in the *Overland* Judith Wright Poetry Prize for New and Emerging Poets. Molly's poems are also published in various *Friendly Street* anthologies, and in *Transnational Literature*.

For the Aboriginal women who were stolen

by sealers & whalers to live & work on KI

there is nothing that says you were here,
the mallee continues to grow in a tangle
with its gold-tipped crowns of green
and messy bark hanging down like scrolls,
that I wish I knew how to read

there is nothing that says you were here,
it is cool and muted as it was
the creek curving to a breathing sea
out and in
the mainland beckoning like a mirage

there is nothing that says you were here,
even though you were tied and lashed
for trying to escape across Backstairs Passage,
flesh sliced from your buttocks like a seal's-

the blood is all gone now

there is nothing that says you were here

but the mingka bird-messenger of death,

who cries overhead as its ancestors did before.

FOREST SHADOWS

Nerina Jones

Nerina Jones formerly trained as an artist at Monash Gippsland campus. She worked as a clerk for Vicpol to provide for her family as sole parent and grandparent. She later obtained an MA Writing at Swinburne online, was employed for a while as a sessional tutor and has subsequently undertaken a PhD in writing. As a first wave WWII boomer Nerina is curious to understand the changes happening in the world around her.

Marigold escapes afternoon heat in the forest adjacent to the wedding venue. The forest lies below the escarpment along the edge of the plateau. On the forest boardwalk, insistent calls from invisible birds surround her: the crack of a whip with its answering tail; the ping of a bell hyphened to its reply; lyrebird whistles segued with fragments of children's chatter and snatches of violin melody. Memories revive of 'talking' to lyrebirds in the bush gullies of childhood as she rounded up the cows for milking: a deep breath, fingers to the lips, and blow a three-toned *Hel-lo-o*. Silence. *Hel-lo-o* Marigold waits. A reply: '*Hel-lo-o ... Hel-lo-o...*'

Laughing at this simple recapture of girlhood, Marigold moves on. Ah, what hopes and dreams she had of life, back then! Perhaps it is a condition of youth, the illusion that your life will succeed, however others might fail. Yet there is Sheila already blessed with one good marriage embarking on another of equal promise, while here she is ... but Marigold pushes the thought away. *One must live within one's own life*, she admonishes herself and looks out toward the trees, where pale, silken trunks shed torn petticoats of deep red bark. Giant ash and eucalypts trail windings of creeper, pin-pricked with yellow. Lower trunks host bold frills of red, purple and orange fungi. In rare clearings where light touches the ground, orchids raise tiny spiked blooms on fuse-wire stems. Where the sun cannot penetrate, buttressed roots of ancient trees are furred with moss.

The boardwalk ends at the edge of a gully so thickly shrouded in moss its depth is impossible to gauge. The very air is green, smelling faintly of rotting cabbage. Any bird calls now are a long way off. There is a hiss in the air which

Marigold takes as tinnitus which affects her hearing more often nowadays; just another irritation of age.

Yet it seems to Marigold as she peers into the extent of the gully, that the moss blanket rises in a wave, as if some presence underneath moves towards the platform on which she stands. At first fascinated by what she takes to be an optical illusion, she becomes alarmed when, as the wave nears, the hissing becomes louder and more rasping. Trained never to turn her back on threat, she instinctively backs off the platform and begins a sideways retreat along the boardwalk. A shadow of movement in her peripheral vision draws attention to a fast-moving slug, as big as a rat, pasting a trail in her direction. She sees another, then another, until they seem everywhere, swarming from supporting posts, climbing the rails. They are spilling onto the boardwalk when a wafting stench causes her to recoil sharply and hasten her retreat. Who knows what primitive life forms lurk in this primordial setting, attracted by the smell of warm blood or the tantalising yellow of her raiment.

The insect-filled warmth that flows round Marigold's escape from the forest is welcome. Picking a careful path back through crisp, sun-dried grasses a simple thought floats to the surface of her mind: *Predators lurk in Paradise.*

From the Novel *American Cancer*

Thom Controy

Thom Controy is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Massey University and a fiction writer. His historical novel *The Naturalist* (Random House) was published in 2014, and his next novel, *The Salted Air* (Random House), will be appearing in 2016. Thom's work has also appeared in various journals in Australia, New Zealand, and the US including, *TEXT*, *Sport*, *Landfall*, *New England Review*, and the *Alaska Quarterly Review*.

I awoke to a commotion. Voices, footsteps, what sounded like the bellowing of a beast. I slipped on my glasses and came to a sitting position. The embers of the fire I built earlier were still glowing, a few flames rising along the remains of the last bit of split log I had found in corner of the garage. The sounds that woke me were fading, or seemed to be fading, into the high space of the darkness surrounding me. I turned, saw my daughter's sleeping face in the light from the embers, sharp and almost deathly white, but even as I extended my hand to touch her, she turned away. On the other side of me, flat on his back, his nostril whistling, lay my son. The voices were gone, they had belonged to the dream, and it tangled my thoughts to try to find them again. The footsteps had sounded as if they had come from above, from the second storey, but I was unsure. I had still not climbed the steps yet. I looked overhead and saw the inlaid woodwork of the ceiling in the firelight, the zigzagging lines of it. As I was studying the fit of the boards, I heard the beast from my dream again.

I came to my feet and searched the shadows of discarded clothing on the floor for a pair of pants. I was pulling on the first leg when I heard the sound again—it was not a dream, but an urgent, frantic groaning that could not have not been human. But what was it? I threw down the pants I had picked up—they were my daughter's—and made my way in the dark down the pitch black central hallway and into the kitchen in my t-shirt and underwear. The floorboards creaked like ice as I crossed to the French doors, the wind shimmered the panes of glass and dull light

reflected across the walls, the glass front of the cupboards, the sloping beams of the ceiling. Before I reached the doors, the sound came again, and I smiled at myself. The sound was only a cow. Or a bull. Some kind of farm animal, at least, but even as I thought this another part of me doubted it, another part of me denied it and I thought again of the footsteps I had on the second storey.

Outside, the wind was sharp and the sky was closed in dark cloud. Only a gray spot high overhead, almost straight above me, indicated the position of the moon. I stepped into the cold grass, my feet and ankles immediately soaked with dew, and made my way toward the fence at the back of the property, a thick wooden fence that ran at eye level. There was another house behind this fence, I remembered. I had seen this house on Google Earth back in America. Although this house on the other side of the fence and mine were virtually side by side, the driveway for this other property was very long, starting maybe a half mile down the road Pieter had followed when driving us here that first morning. How strange, I thought, that it would take a half hour or maybe even forty minutes to walk down my drive, back along the road and up the drive to this house when the house itself was maybe thirty feet away from mine.

I came to the fence, stepped up on a horizontal board and flattened myself, my shirt soaking in the cold moisture from the wood. I saw the shape of the house next door, surprisingly close to the fence and just behind my two storey-garage. Suddenly, everything about my own house seemed different, and I felt deflated. It had been a mistake to purchase this house, I felt sure of this now. Perched on the wooden fence board and lamenting the house, I heard the bellow again. It was nearby, only a yard or so away, and this time there could be no mistake: *it was a cow*. I heard the exhalation of air and the smack of its gums, the small whine, like the turn of a hinge, at the end of each bay it made. Slowly, my eyes found the animal in the darkness. A hulk shifted and then stepped toward me. I hopped down from the fence, the hairs of my neck bristling. It was a cow, I thought, so why was I afraid? I could not have said, and yet I was afraid nonetheless.

Up to Our Knees In It

Willo Drummond

Willo Drummond is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at Macquarie University. Her recently completed Master of Research thesis examined the ethics of the lyric mode in Australian ecopoetics, and included a small suite of poetry from which the poems published in this issue originate. Willo's other writing is published, or forthcoming, in *Cordite*, *Meniscus*, *The Quarry*, *Australian Poetry Anthology*, *Mascara Literary Review*, and the NY based little magazine, *Yellow Field*. Further details at: www.willodrummond.com

We're up to our knees

in it, here on the flats

our feet

constantly wet

Black rims our edges

as we extrude reason, baking

on decks in seasons

new minted

while past the 'no fishing' sign

down at the front

cinema seats and soft drink cans

get down and dirty

with the kids

These kids can live anywhere,

beneath the hum of the highway

a constant, keeping mute

like a consonant

that suddenly stops the breath.ⁱ

Keep on running, eyes wide shut,
living life on a precarious angle
living local like a canon on a slow drip feed

The air is slightly sour
with it. No matter,
mangroves will take
our mishaps
down, turn them in to bluest carbon

And we'll keep dreaming
we're not sinking
as we strain toward the light

ⁱ Mary Oliver: 'A mute is a consonant... which... suddenly stops the breath...'

This season's out-welling

Willo Drummond

At this season's out-welling
post the mangrove moon
she sets her grief in a small seed pod
sends it out across the river

In waning luminescence
on the aqua-terrestrial shore
she trains her eye
to velvet vivipary
on very salty water

She's looking
for a future to
enframe the past
as it exceeds
it. Flickering familiar
like the pulse
of being needed

Here in the interstitial
here in the lyric tense
she stills to witness
each furred pod
gain its wild purpose
Her perfect body weightless
as flesh and thoughtⁱ are freed

where what cannot be

is

and is

and so must be

i Robert Adamson: "where flesh and thought are one" from "The
Details Necessary".